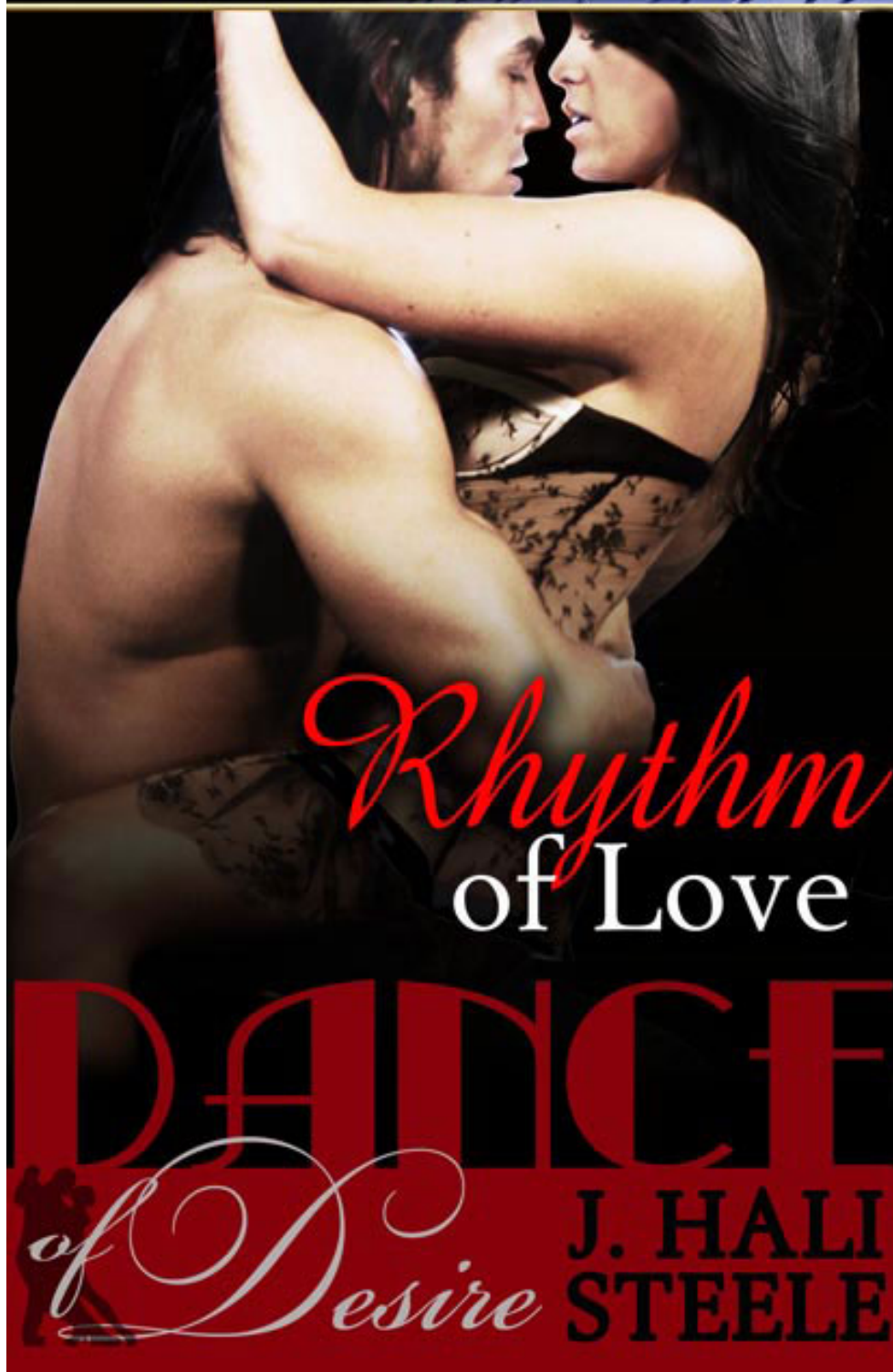


ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*



Rhythm of Love

J. Hali Steele

Carter Gates, amateur Latin ballroom dancer, is ready to make a move on his sexy new assistant. Bree intoxicates him and her lithe body makes it hard to keep his hands to himself. But Carter has one rule—hands off the staff. His body isn't listening.

Bree's no better off. She has a taste for her new boss, one she can't quench. Hiding the fact she's best friends with his dance partner, she slips into a revealing outfit and his arms...just for one night of sexy, hot competition and a highly erotic tango that gives new meaning to "going up in flames".

Bree's friend has other ideas—she wants to keep Carter for herself. However, after spending a passionate evening in Carter's arms, and his bed, Bree wants more. And she's determined to get it.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Rhythm of Love

ISBN 9781419924330

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Edited by Sue-Ellen Gower

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication February 2010

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RHYTHM OF LOVE

J. Hali Steele

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Chapter One

This was a problem. Damn if he knew what to do about it. He'd needed help in the office—bad. He hadn't counted on a bigger headache. Or the constant hard-on he struggled to hide since the *problem* arrived.

Bree Jenson was hot, and Carter Gates was bothered.

He entered the office to the delicious aroma of her perfume.

"Hey, bossman," greeted his smiling foreman on the way out.

"Morning."

The other guys were in and out of the small construction trailer more than usual. Sniffing around, flirting, finding reasons to touch her. He'd had enough and decided to ask her not to wear the alluring cologne. As though that would make a difference, but it's what his mind zeroed in on today. Now how the hell to say it? He settled behind his desk, shuffled a pile of invoices and swiped at a nonexistent spot of dirt.

"Ms. Jenson, we work in very close quarters and your perfume is—"

"I'm sorry, is it too strong? I can stop wearing it, and please, call me Bree." Her eyes lifted from the papers she held to look at him, and a hand fluttered to her slender throat to touch the spot below her ear she'd probably dabbed with scent. He wanted to bury his nose there, taste her.

"Thank you." Too easy. No woman would agree that quickly. At least not the type he'd kept company with. Perhaps now was the time to ask her not to wear the clingy shirts or the skirts that molded to her ass like a second skin and drove him nuts.

Even though Carter owned the small pre-fab construction company, he dreaded working in his office, never could stay put behind a desk and be the boss. Using his hands and watching a project take shape brought a feeling of accomplishment. The last

week he'd been hard-pressed to leave the space, and he damn sure wasn't getting anything done.

A willowy, raven-haired vision of loveliness occupied every thought. The nipples of her high, firm breasts peeked at him through her tops and were a constant distraction. The sweetest-looking ass topped long, shapely legs. She had hard, toned muscles like a dancer, the kind he found irresistible as hell.

Like the men he employed, he had touched her every opportunity he got. Her skin was warm and smooth as silk. Thank God he was sitting, because his cock picked then to come alive. It jerked in his jeans and he did the manly thing—used his hand to rearrange it.

If only he hadn't hired her. Too late now. He considered staff off limits and as it turned out, she was the best damn assistant he'd ever had. Already she had the hang of how his office worked. No question about his men liking her. To keep things professional he called her Ms. Jenson, but over the last few days he'd said Bree many times in his mind as he envisioned having her on the desk. His and hers.

Yeah, this was a problem. Shit.

The door opened and in walked the foreman. Again. Jeez! It seemed the guy had taken up residence here.

Carter barked, "Bill, what do you need?"

"I got mail."

"Where the hell is the mailman? He taking the day off like you seem to be?" Christ, he hadn't meant to sound so sharp. Bill was not only his foreman, but a good friend as well. Both single, they'd worked together a long time and Bill would suspect something if he continued like this. "I'll take it." He stretched his arm out to receive the pile of letters.

"What's up, Carter? You sound out of sorts. Feeling okay?"

"Don't you have something to do?"

“Scuse me for being helpful.” Bill eyed him with suspicion, then winked before he turned and left. Bill would keep his hands to himself now. He’d most likely warn the other men too. How had he let this happen?

“I’ll take that, Mr. Gates.” Jesus, now he was going to have to smell her up close and personal. Watch her gorgeous hips sway from and to her desk. *Good job, asshole.*

His cock began to stiffen like the concrete form he’d poured this morning. When she reached for the envelopes, their fingers touched. He gazed into her sparkling brown eyes and let the electric current flow ‘til it landed between his thighs. He stood up, not caring about the swelling in his pants. Her tongue flicked across pink-painted lips, moistened them and sealed his fate.

He leaned over the desk and was a hairsbreadth from her mouth when he heard the door squeak open. Straightening up, he looked to find another of his employees holding out a package.

“Mailman forgot this,” he said.

Bree reached for the small box, took it and hurried back to her desk.

Hell and damnation, he’d almost had her. He should thank the man who’d saved him from making a huge mistake. One he knew for certain he’d make anyway.

“Thanks.” The croak from his throat sounded loud in his ears. “Would you let everyone know we’re in a meeting and don’t want to be disturbed?” Nodding, the young man scurried out the door faster than a rabbit diving for cover.

Carter walked to where she stood at the desk using an opener on the package. It slipped from her hands and the package’s contents skittered across the floor. The checks he’d ordered. He bent to gather them and plopped the pile behind her.

She glanced up and their eyes met. His skin felt hot, the bulge at his crotch thrummed with desire. Could she read what he wanted in his eyes? Wrong as two left feet, he was going to kiss her. Breasts rose up and down in time with her short, erratic breaths. Warm air brushed his face and her heady smell captured him.

Not wanting to regain his senses, he gripped her by the shoulders and brought her closer. His lips pressed down on hers. Not hard. He moved slow, giving Bree time to pull away. She didn't. His tongue pushed between her lips, tasted heaven.

Her body shuddered beneath his touch. He stopped kissing her long enough to whisper, "I've wanted to do that for days." His mouth covered hers again. This time her arms encircled his waist, her hands carrying fire along his spine as she caressed up and down his back. His muscles jumped and bunched under her fingers.

A moan escaped her throat, drove him on. He moved his hands from her shoulders and stroked her arms. Reaching around, he grabbed hold of her round, firm ass and pulled her against his crotch. His erection pounded between them.

She broke the kiss and rasped, "Mr. Gates..."

"Carter. Say my name." He'd thought hers so often, he wanted to hear his tumble from her kiss-swollen lips.

"Carter, don't stop."

That was all the encouragement he needed. He brought his hands up to smother her breasts, tweak the nipples that had baited him from the moment she'd arrived. He groaned with delight against her lips. His tongue stabbed and swirled, exploring the sweetness in her mouth.

She nudged her pelvis tighter into his groin. His cock leaked as it writhed in his pants, searching for a way out. The pain of it trapped behind the material drove him on as he ground into her stomach. Damn, he wanted to get inside her.

"God, I want you."

"Not here."

"No one will come in." The scared youngster would deliver his message to anyone who darkened the office steps.

"Are you sure?" The hesitancy in her voice made him nervous she'd stop kissing him. He wouldn't allow that. One hand was moved to the back of her head and tangled

in the mass of soft, dark curls. He devoured her mouth again, nibbled at her lips, sucked them. She quivered against him, his dick grew harder and the ache traveled from his balls to the pit of his stomach.

Her hands swept his back, stroked his flanks, urging him on. She wanted him as much as he wanted her. He thought of unbuttoning her shirt, sucking on her nipples, but that was for another time. Mentally, he kicked himself for knowing he'd do this all over. Employee or not.

"I'm sure." He moved his other hand to the hem of her skirt and inched it up. Heat penetrated the tips of his fingers as he stroked the inside of her thighs. "Christ, you're hot." He buried his face in her neck and drew in her scent. He continued to work his way up to the vee between her legs. Her thong was drenched.

He pushed past the elastic and fondled the moist crevices of her pussy. Slick and wet with desire, she levered herself down on his hand. He found the little nub and rubbed it, teased it with his fingers. Pinching the bump softly, he felt her buck forward.

"Oooh, please," she begged, rocking on his hand. The rhythmic motion of her hips was like a dance. A forbidden, grinding motion that grasped and pulled his fingers into her core.

"Bree..." The sharp jangle of the phone caused them to spring apart. "Shit."

She pulled away, straightened her skirt and ran her hands down the buttons of her top. Her face was stained with color. "I should get that." Embarrassment laced her voice and she wouldn't make eye contact with him.

Bree answered the phone and moved behind her desk.

God damn it.

Holding the phone tight to her ear, distanced from him, she'd watched as he walked to the restroom. Close. Bree had come so close to losing it in his arms.

She'd seen him before coming to work in the office a week ago, though he didn't know her. She was his dance partner's roommate and best friend. Every day since she'd been hired, she intended to tell him.

"Bree, you there?" she heard Cara's nasally voice through the earpiece.

She waited to make sure the bathroom door shut. "Hi, let me call you back on my lunch break."

When her friend told her Carter needed an assistant, Bree applied immediately. Her last position ended with the cutback of office staff. She hadn't expected it, and she found herself job hunting.

"Don't forget." Cara was becoming more and more obnoxious and pushy. She'd suggested they not tell Carter the truth until Bree had proved how indispensable she was. She didn't like it one bit and wanted to get it out in the open.

The men were rambunctious in the beginning, but Bree handled it. She'd emphatically let them know she didn't fool around on or off the job. Yet every time Carter entered the room, her insides melted, leaving her panties wet.

Pitch-black hair hung to his shoulders when it was loose. A little gray in the temples softened the hard line of his jaw, which always seemed to be covered with a five-o'clock shadow. She swooned over his sensuous lips each time he opened them and her nipples puckered at the idea of being drawn into his mouth.

She'd caught him looking at her sometimes and she'd looked back once or twice. Not a good situation to be in—attracted as hell to the boss. Not when you really needed the job. The sexual tension in the air tied her stomach in lustful knots and caused Bree's body to react whenever she was near him. Determined to remain professional, she called him Mr. Gates. But oh lordy, she loved the way Carter rolled from her tongue when she allowed herself to whisper it, wondering how his sensuous lips would feel pressed to hers.

She hadn't felt so alive in a long time. Today she'd planned to come clean about who she was. She didn't like the deception hanging between them. He'd treated her professionally and with respect. Bree liked him.

Then the kiss happened.

It was what she'd wanted since the first time she'd seen him, the day Cara left her sitting in the car while she ran in to talk to Carter about missing practice. Her roommate always swore nothing had happened between them but Bree knew her friend, given the opportunity, would jump at it. She'd use Carter in a minute to further her career.

She'd watched them come out the door of the office she now worked in. She could tell they were arguing and his mouth was drawn in a tight line. His lips, even when he was angry, were to-die-for sexy.

The restroom door opened and she peeped over her computer to see Carter walking back to his desk.

Nervous, she licked her lips. "I'm going to pick up a sandwich from the corner deli, Mr. Gates. Would you like me to grab something for you?" She felt silly as hell calling him that now.

"No, I'm fine, thanks." He never looked up and the breath she'd been holding in slipped out on a sigh. Shoot, now the tension was even worse. She had to tell him or it could mean her job. She phoned Cara on her way to the deli.

"What's up, Cara?"

"I'm teaching a class this evening and I need you to tell Carter I called to cancel. I don't want to hear his bullshit."

"Cara, don't do this to me."

"I need the money, Bree. Just tell him I called and left a message while he was out or something." Her appetite was suddenly gone and she slumped against the wall of a building. "Damn it, do this for me," pleaded Cara. "Please, I won't ask again."

"I've got to tell him I know you."

“Not yet, give it a few more days. Look, hon, I gotta go. I’ll see you tonight. Don’t forget.” The click of the disconnection sounded loud in her ear. She turned and headed back to her office.

Carter stood talking to the foreman and looked up when he heard her heels clack across the pavement. His brow lifted quizzically but he didn’t say anything as she walked by. She entered the trailer, closed the door and leaned against it to catch her breath. This had to end. She couldn’t keep up the pretense of not knowing who he was much longer.

She went to the restroom to splash cold water on her face, hoping it would revive her. Coming out, she bumped into Carter. When had he come in? Bree scolded herself for not paying better attention. She worried he’d know she was lying if she told him now that Cara had just called. *Oh hell.*

“Umm, Cara called. She wanted me to let you know she can’t make it tonight.”

“Thank you.” Did he look at her strangely? He stared at her a long time, too long, before he turned and went out the door. Bree had to tell him. Cara had been a bitch lately but this was the final straw.

Her plan to get it all out in the open never happened. Carter didn’t come back to the office.

The next day, he called and said he’d be off-site for the day. She went through her daily routine like a robot. Glad he wasn’t there – wishing he was.

* * * * *

The following morning she arrived and he was already talking with the foreman. She sat at her desk and took care of the mail, checked invoices and typed routine correspondence. She placed the work on his desk and turned to find him coming through the front door.

It was now or never.

Carter's gray eyes pierced her as he walked to where she stood. Bree knew the look in his eyes, and her body trembled in anticipation. "Carter, I need to tell you—"

"I need to tell you something. I thought about you, the smell of your perfume, all night. Don't stop wearing it." His fingers stroked her face. "You work for me, it's wrong, but damn, I can't get you out of my mind."

He pulled Bree into his arms, and when his lips touched hers they were demanding and hot. His tongue slipped sweetly into her mouth and she moaned, throwing her arms around his neck.

She was nudged back against the desk and he raised her butt onto it. He ground between her legs, his jeans-covered cock pushing against her, setting her on fire. Every rational thought left her mind.

One hand shoved up her skirt and ripped at the crotch of her panties. "Oh God," she murmured against his mouth. His fingers forced their way into her vagina and she squirmed to the edge of the desk, wedging her body closer to his.

His fingers pumped in and out of her, moving her toward the quickest orgasm she'd ever experienced. His roughness and his tongue sweeping through her mouth only served to make her want more. She tried to break their kiss to beg for more, but his hand behind her head held them locked together.

Heat built in the pit of her stomach, coursed down through her pelvis, and liquid flowed from her canal as an orgasm washed over her. He stroked her pussy, his hand bruising her thighs each time he jammed his fingers inside. Her breath came in shallow gulps when he released her nape and buried his head against her neck. She bit into his shoulder and keened softly while her core clenched and released more of her juices.

She barely registered the sound of someone trying to enter the office. Carter must have locked the door when he came in.

"Christ, Bree." He kissed her neck, brought her head up, brushed his lips across her cheek. "I'm sorry." He attempted to tug her skirt down before she stood on wobbly legs. "I didn't mean to do that."

She straightened her disheveled clothes and hurried to the restroom while he went to open the door.

How was she going to tell him now?

Chapter Two

Fit was perfect, snug but elastic enough to move in. He jutted his hips forward, hands on his waist, and gyrated to the left. To the right. Leaned in and swept back. It felt damn good. Yeah, it couldn't be better than this.

Friday night, and Carter was ready to dance.

Two towns over they were holding a competition and he'd been prepared for weeks. He didn't have to work on a tan, his job took care of that. He loved working shirtless outdoors and his skin was sun-kissed brown. A smattering of dark hair dusted his chest. Unlike the others, there was one thing he refused to do—wax. That was going too far.

He swept his discarded clothes from the floor to toss in the hamper. Bree's musky scent clung to his shirt and filled his nostrils. His erection was instant. Her not wearing what had fast become his favorite perfume never happened and he was glad. Briefly, he wished she did dance and that it'd be her on his arm tonight. Hell, like that could happen after what he'd done earlier. *You ripped her underwear, jerk!* He'd be lucky if she even showed up at work tomorrow. Carter shook his head, tried to clear thoughts of the tall, dark-haired beauty from his mind.

Only room for one idea tonight. Winning. His partner could outperform any woman he'd ever danced with. They'd both been primed for weeks. He hoped her mood was good but more often than not, Cara could be a bitch. Something he'd have to deal with, and soon. He'd had it with her snotty attitude and her constant pushing for him to go professional.

One more cursory glance in the mirror and he smiled. The pseudo tux looked awesome on his taut, muscled frame. Grabbing keys from the dresser, he left his bedroom. He ignored the red light blinking on his answering machine as he went

through the living room. The cell phone vibrating in his pocket went unanswered. He was too excited to bother with either.

* * * * *

He'd reached his destination and the rhythmic strumming of the guitar exhilarated him. The melancholy beat caused his heart to race. Carter spoke to a few contestants, glancing around to see if his partner had arrived. Sometimes they met in a quiet corner by the bar to discuss their routine. He shoved through the swaying, gyrating sea of people and grabbed the last stool available. He ordered Tanqueray, straight up. Not nervous about Cara showing up yet, he looked over the room. It was a good crowd.

A head of wavy hair moving through the throng caught his attention. Familiarity washed over him. Hell. He'd know her anywhere, and his dick immediately became engorged. What was Bree doing here? Caught totally off guard by her appearance, he started to sweat. The thing with the underwear blared in his mind along with the fact his employees weren't aware he had a penchant for dance. If they found out, the guys would laugh, rib him for the tight outfits and fancy shoes, something he didn't want to deal with. Christ.

He watched her come closer. A smile curved the corner of her very kissable lips and he remembered how sweet they were. His chest tightened with jealousy when he watched a stranger hug her. The man's hands rested lightly on her hips. How did they know each other? Carter wanted to do exactly what the guy did, take her in his arms, feel her pressed tight to his crotch. Damn if he liked watching someone else do just that. Heat flared in his crotch.

She hadn't noticed him yet, but she was moving his way. After being stopped twice more, she stood only feet from him talking to a female contestant. Her head turned to where he sat, almost as if she knew he was there. He almost choked on the gin he'd swallowed when their eyes met.

"Carter, it's good to see you." Bree's throaty, sexy voice slid down his spine, wet the tip of his penis. Relief washed over him that she didn't seem upset about what happened between them. He'd waited for her to come from the bathroom at the office as long as he could, but had to leave for a meeting.

He gazed up and down her body, his eyes stopping at the split in the icy blue satin dress that clung to every curve. It ended just below her thighs and made him think of the hot, wet spot he wanted to feel again. Damn if she didn't look dressed to dance. The high heels made her taller and her body looked even better than he remembered from only hours ago.

When she leaned to speak to someone, a swell of breast peeked at him from the side of the strapless concoction. He saw the thin invisible strap around her bare back. He let his eyes travel to where the pale blue material picked up again right above the crease of her ass. He wanted to put his hand there, feel the heat. Go down further and cup her cheeks. Let his tongue slide through the velvety warmth. *Jesus!*

The scent of musk trailed around his head, pulling him in. Christ, this woman had his cock tied in a knot. His slacks grew snug, but the swell would barely be noticeable. He couldn't perform a single step if he had to right now. Good thing his partner never affected him this way. Bree looked back at him and a smile lifted the corner of her mouth.

"Bree. Didn't know you hung out here. Can I buy you a drink?" The music roared in his ears. Carter hoped he hadn't spoken too loud. He salivated as his gaze remained glued to her plump lips and he almost missed her answer.

"Gin, straight up," she said.

He grinned. Lifting his drink, he moved it slowly to her pink lips. She opened and ran her tongue around the glass's edge. She touched his hand, tilting it enough to take a swallow. He pulled it back, his eyes never leaving hers. "Umm, that's good."

"You dance?" He envisioned dragging her into a dark hallway and taking her while the music pulsed against the walls.

"As often as I can." Brown eyes shimmered at him. He wanted to dive in, taste her. All of her. "Latin is my favorite."

"Hmm. Who's your partner tonight?" His heart banged along with the drums from the dance floor. He didn't want to know. Anybody holding her in an embrace so close, so hard, steamed him. Some lucky bastard would feel her grind against him. Tease him to the point of pain.

"You."

"What?"

Damn it to hell. Bree felt her face flame with embarrassment. Cara had promised she'd tell him. "I suppose Cara didn't reach you?" She saw myriad expressions cross his face, one being pissed off. She'd done enough amateur competitions to know how important they were to some entrants. Unlike her roommate, she just loved to dance. Winning wasn't important.

He pulled his cell from his pocket, pushed a few buttons and placed it to his ear. She smoothed her dress and waited, anxious now. What if he refused to partner her once he found out the truth? She hoped not. Sure, he was her boss, but she'd wanted to feel his body against hers since the first day she'd seen him, and she'd finally gotten the chance. A few times. She might lose her job, but no way was she turning down the opportunity to be held in his arms. The man was sinfully gorgeous and tasted better than a fine wine.

And Bree had come to like and respect him. He treated his men fairly and worked hard right beside them.

It had been hard trying to remain professional, especially when he'd take his shirt off. She had smiled the first time, thinking about the famous soda commercial. He would have been a much better candidate for that part than the actor they used.

She would peer at him through the small windows of the portable construction trailer. Every inch of his six-foot-one frame was hard. Muscles rippled across his

abdomen when he stretched with his nail gun. His back often glistened with sweat and her mouth watered to taste him. The raw, musky smell of man when he entered their small work space made her cream with lust. Since he'd made a pass at her, not once but twice, professionalism be damned. She'd probably lose her job anyway, might as well reap some benefit.

Tonight, Bree intended to have all of Carter Gates.

Motioning in front of him with her hands, she mouthed the words, "Ladies' room." No need to wait here. If he said no, so be it. She'd go freshen up and try to relax. Close proximity to him had an undesired affect on her. *Or desired.*

Her lipstick looked good, but she added a bit and brushed powder across her cheeks. The blue outfit had been borrowed from Cara. They were the same size and it fit perfectly, its color glowing against her tanned flesh. She'd taped all the places she didn't want slipping. She'd chosen this one because it stuck to her butt like glue and showed the sweetheart shape of her behind. Her breasts mounded just the right amount over the top of the material that otherwise clung to her chest. The wispy, scalloped edging flowed around her legs and showed off calf muscles she'd developed dancing. She kept her body tight and in shape.

Shoot, she'd forgotten to ask him what number they were in case he wanted to go through with the competition and if he wanted her as a partner. Throwing her stuff back in the slender fake designer clutch, she put the thin chain over her shoulder and left the restroom. This wasn't one of her favorite clubs, the hallway always seemed too dark. She supposed the closed doors to her left and right along the hallway were storage rooms or offices.

Hurrying, she glanced at her bag to make sure everything was stuffed in. Her body hit a hard wall of flesh and it shocked the hell out of her.

"Excuse —"

"Come here, beautiful." He pulled her hard into his chest. "Let's finish what we started at the office."

Carter's gravelly voice zoomed straight between her legs. His mouth touched hers in a kiss that started soft and quickly turned hard, demanding. His tongue forced its way between her lips, tangled with hers. She melted against him, enjoyed his flavor. God, the man was delicious. She pulled back and tried to gain some perspective.

"I've never felt like this." He gazed at her. "I don't do this every day, Bree, but I can't stop with you."

"Carter, I can explain about the job...I—"

"Shh, I just want to taste you."

"Here?"

"Everywhere."

Hands clamped over her breasts as his tongue found its way back into her open mouth. She let him take her in a searing kiss, wanting to take a different part of him into herself. His cock nudged hard at her abdomen and heat simmered in her core.

She felt one hand leave an aroused nipple, sweep a tingling path along her waist and move behind her. His fingers feathered down her spine, his hand breaking the tape at the top of her butt as it pushed inside the dress. He cupped her ass and raised her body enough to slide against his hard-on. Shit, he felt good. To hell with the competition. The only dance she wanted to do right now was the horizontal mambo.

He broke the kiss and said, "God, you've gotten under my skin. I want you. Right here."

"Yes." She heard the sound of a door open behind him and he pulled her into a dimly lit room. Her eyes focused on what looked like a workspace. His foot closed the door and he pushed her back against it. The sensuous, blaring music rocked the walls, sent a ribbon of excitement sliding through her. Her pussy clenched, hot and wet with need. "Now," she whispered.

His mouth locked on hers. Pulling from her, he grasped her lower lip and nibbled there. He swept his tongue to her ear, down the side of her neck where he tasted and

sucked on the skin covering her pulse. *Damn, he's giving me a hickey!* It made her core leak.

"Mmm, Carter, give me something else," Bree pleaded.

"What? Tell me what?"

Her back pressed to the door, he raised her dress, slipped a hand between her legs and stroked the inside of her thighs, made her knees buckle. His other hand quickly moved to her ass and held her up until she circled his neck with her arms.

She could barely form the words to answer him. "You, I want you inside me."

Finding the string of underwear she wore, he ripped it from her.

"You smell good," he rasped in her ear. "I want to fuck you. Hard."

"Stop talking about it." His chest vibrated against her with a chuckle. Thick fingers invaded her channel, made her cry out, "Ooh." He pushed and pulled them through the slickness, rubbed her clit. She circled her hips on them, grabbing nothing but pleasure.

"Your pussy is so tight. You like what I'm doing?"

"Yes." Bree wanted to come, fill his hand with the hot liquid he coaxed from her. Like a thrill ride, she reached the top and fell, floating over the edge. "Carter...coming...mmm," she moaned. Her head fell against his chest, her breath coming in rapid puffs.

"I need to taste you." His hands spanned her waist and he knelt between her legs. Bree heard him inhale, the air whooshing from him to hit her swollen nether lips. Her back slammed on the door behind her and her hands jammed into his hair.

His tongue touched her and sent her spiraling toward another climax. He dove into her pussy, stroked and suckled the now-swollen nubbin. His teeth grazed her, killed her. She knotted his hair in her fist and rode against his mouth, ready to explode. He pulled away from her.

"Yeah, baby, give it to me." It made her wild with abandon when he blew cool air onto her moist lips. His tongue lapped the folds, caressed and teased her. She couldn't

take any more. She bucked on his face and couldn't stop. Juice poured from her, slid into his waiting mouth.

"Carter," she crooned.

"So damn sweet," he murmured.

Chapter Three

Shit. What had he done? Bree was his assistant, an employee, but Carter couldn't help himself. He'd watched her ass switch away from him at the bar while he listened to Cara's message. His cock grew so hard it was unbelievable. He wasn't happy finding out his assistant and his partner knew each other. He was more pissed Cara wasn't showing up. This was supposed to be his night.

Suddenly, other things occupied his mind. There would always be another competition. Right now he wanted Bree. The woman had aroused every sense he had the day he met her. Could she dance?

He'd admired her firm body and he wanted to be buried inside her bad. The pulsating sound of drums, the rhythmic chords of a guitar pushed him right across the floor. He was going to find her. Take her here in the club like he'd envisioned earlier.

When she bumped into him coming from the ladies' room, he was a goner.

Now he stood over her, straightening her clothes, and he damn near succumbed to throwing her back against the wall, taking more of what he wanted. Their turn on the floor must be close and he needed to pull himself together. His cock throbbed with pain, and he felt the head of it dampen with desire.

Should he apologize as he'd done earlier at the office? He wasn't sorry and she wanted him as much. Hell, what a precarious position. He tugged at his jacket and bent to brush at his knees. The look in her eyes when his finally met them forced another drop to threaten the tip of his penis. Bree looked hungry.

"Damn, you tasted good." That wasn't the right thing to say, it was all he could think of.

Her fingertips touched his warm lips, and he nibbled the tips of them. "I want to know how you taste," she whispered.

The groan escaped his throat unbidden, ricocheted around the small space. Christ, Bree had him right where she wanted him. He loved the sight of her ass as she turned and repaired the tape at the top of her butt.

“Dance with me.” He pulled her from the room, down the hall. They were pretty far down the list but would be called to the floor shortly and announced. Reaching the table, he wasn’t shocked to find out they were up next. “You ready?” She looked so desirable with her lips puffy from kissing. Her smell, her taste – she rattled him in ways he hadn’t expected.

He’d already decided what he would do with her. No plain Latin tonight. Gotan Project’s *Whatever Lola Wants* played over and over in his head. Tango. He leaned back to the guy at the table and gave him the instructions. Most clubs accepted tango as a Latin dance. This one was pretty relaxed and the couples on the floor barely registered the music change. They were all amateurs there to have a good time. Hell, he had looked forward to winning. When did that idea vanish? He watched her shove her purse beneath the registration table.

He tugged her along behind him and wrapped his arm around her back, pulled her to him.

“Uhh, this is Latin, right?”

“Relax, you’re mine tonight.” He did a few steps in place, allowed her to feel the music. No way he’d let her get away. Not until he had all he wanted from her. “You’re going home with me.”

He held her in the close embrace, felt her glorious body next to his. Carter was pleased so few dancers were on the floor. He stepped forward, she moved back, and another step back. Their eyes were locked. Hers glittered. He promenaded her to the side and she followed better than he’d expected. Bree was good.

“I knew you could dance with me. Let’s show them tango, baby.” The music’s rhythm picked up, moved faster, and he guided her across the floor. She surprised him with a gancho – hooking her leg over his thigh. Dropping low, she followed him, her

leg extended beautifully. Their eyes locked in a heated gaze, Bree rose with him, slowly sliding sensually up his body. Never wanting to let her go, he held her tight. Her breasts touched his chest as her body bowed sensuously forward. Carter edged her back until she stood straight and was drawn in his embrace once more.

Music, beat, rhythm clashed around them as they captured the floor in hard, sure movements. Each time he brought her close, he filled his lungs with her scent. His cock rubbed her when she rode up or down his body. She kicked, he parried, they moved in slow motion across the parquet.

"I will take you tonight."

"I will give you everything," she breathed back at him as she threw her leg in a high kick. She went on her toes and he spun her in a quick circle. Face-to-face, she gripped his waist and moved behind him. Her back was to his as she shimmied slowly down, then came up even slower. He turned and grasped her hips, brought her full onto his hardness.

Taking her hands in his, he said, "I can't wait to be inside you."

"I want you there."

He slid sideways, one leg bent and she splayed her body across his knee, her chest rising and falling with each breath. He snapped her up and into his body. She hooked her leg up and around his waist. Her musky odor, the scent of her sex, assailed him, made him weak. He lunged forward, pushing her back leg out farther until she hung against him.

"Mine."

"Take it."

When the music stopped and the clapping began, Carter remembered they weren't alone. *Shit!* He pulled her from the dance floor, wedging through the crowd gathered on its edge. He didn't plan on hanging around for the individual free dance. She reached for her purse and he heard someone say they had to be the winners. He didn't

care. He wanted to take her to his house, to his bed. He felt like his cock would burst at any minute.

"Your coat?"

"I checked it." He watched impatiently as she dug in her small bag for the ticket.

"Wait here." As he walked away, he adjusted his erection. It had painfully lodged against the front of his slacks. Christ, he'd never been so hard.

* * * * *

"Bree!" She turned at the sound of Cara's voice in the entrance. The tall blonde moved toward her. What was she doing here? She should have been in Santa Barbara.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Her friend's brow lifted in puzzlement at the sound of disappointment in Bree's voice.

"My sister called at the last minute. She didn't need me this weekend." Her sister was a single parent and Cara kept the kids when she went away on business. "Carter wasn't too upset was he?" Her laugh was shakier than her smile.

"Why don't you ask him yourself?" She spun with Cara at the sharp, angry voice behind them. "I didn't *miss* you at all."

"I'm sorry, my sister thought she had to leave town."

Bree watched him and his eyes never left hers. She wasn't looking forward to the conversation to explain her part in their deception. "Like I said, I didn't miss you. Why didn't you tell me you knew Bree?"

"She needed a job. I was afraid you wouldn't hire her if you knew we were friends."

"I see."

"Look, we were going to tell you once you got to know her and saw she could do the job. Tonight just happened."

"I see."

"Shit, Carter, say something else, please." Cara's thin, nasally voice inched an octave higher. She lived to dance. They'd met taking classes together a year ago and became roommates and friends even though they circulated in different social circles. Her friend hung with a crowd that had dreams of bigger, better things and she often told Bree she thought Carter could help her attain what she wanted. She'd been unable to coax him into Los Angeles for the bigger contests where she might be noticed by someone important. Cara made all the rounds to cattle calls for dancers, complaining she never had the right partner to show her off. She thought Carter was the one.

There was a different look in Cara's eyes tonight and her cheeks were enflamed. A look Bree saw more often than not lately – she was angry. Exactly how many times had her roommate come on to her boss? He hadn't taken her up on the offer. Yet. But she knew how persuasive her friend could be, had seen it many times.

Her nipples ached, moisture beaded between her thighs and she'd be going to her own apartment. Alone. She couldn't go home with Carter now. She didn't want to upset or disappoint Cara.

"Look, we'll talk later. Bree and I were on our way out." Bree's heart pounded. Cara sucked in air, but before she said anything, another dancer came over to congratulate them. Kevin, who had a really bad crush on Cara.

"You guys were *hot*," he gushed. "Where's everybody heading? Hope you don't mind if I tag along?" His voice wavered, pleaded. He'd do anything to be with her friend.

Cara grabbed Kev's arm. "We'll hang out with you."

Bree sighed, her plan for the rest of the evening shot to pieces.

"We're going to my place. Join us if you like," Carter said. She stiffened in shock. She'd been positive he wanted to be alone with her. Damn it all to hell, what had happened? It didn't matter, she'd probably lost her job anyway and he didn't want to be alone with her when he fired her.

Carter's voice jolted her back to the present. "Follow me in your car, Bree."

"Sure."

"Cara can ride with me," Kevin added.

Bree parked behind him in the driveway of a nice house off Ventura Boulevard in one of the better neighborhoods. She frequented a Latin club not far from here and she wondered why she'd never seen him there.

"Do you ever go to the club over on Canoga?" she asked as he showed her into his house. Kevin and Cara hadn't arrived yet.

He closed the door and pushed her against it. "I don't want to talk about dance right now. This is what I want." He wriggled her dress up and stroked between her legs. She hissed in a stream of air. His fingers slid into her pussy. "Mmm, you're so hot." His lips smothered her face with burning kisses. His tongue pushed at her mouth, seeking entrance. She broke her lips from his.

"Why did you ask them to join us?"

"I need to tell you about your friend." His fingers continued to play inside her. He pulled out, pinched her clit, eased slowly through her wet folds. Brought her near orgasm. She moved up and down on his hand for the second time tonight. Cream poured from her and puffs of air left her body through pinched lips. Cara, her job, everything became a distant memory.

"Carter, yes," she whispered in his ear as he nibbled on her neck. "Don't play with me."

The knock on the door made them jump. She quickly pushed her dress down, straightened it as best she could.

"Shit," he grumbled against her ear. "We'll talk later, I promise." She moved to sit on the sofa as he answered the door. Would they smell sex permeating the entranceway? It filled her nose and at this point, Bree didn't give a damn. She wanted to clear the air with Carter, and she hoped he'd still want her as much as she wanted him.

Her friend meant a lot to her, but this was ridiculous. She wanted this man, they were single, and Cara'd had her chance.

"Hey," Kev said, flopping beside her on the couch. "Thought we lost you guys. Good thing Cara knew where you lived, man."

"Yes, she's been here before."

Bree grew warm and uncomfortable. Had her friend been completely honest? What did he mean earlier when he said he needed to tell her about her friend? *Had* something happened between them she wasn't aware of? Damn it. She glanced across the room where Carter mixed martinis for everyone, and caught him glaring at Cara.

"Where's your ladies' room?" She needed to escape for a minute, pull herself together. He pointed toward the hall.

"Second door on your left."

"I'll be right back." Bree walked down the hall and opened the door. She must have misunderstood because she found herself in a sumptuously appointed bedroom filled with masculine oak furniture. Everything was blue and white. The California king-sized bed rested against a wall near the window. The breeze at night would be wonderful. She stared at the paisley design on the coverlet thinking what it would be like to lie there with him.

"It's nice, huh?" The sound of Cara's voice chilled her. Had she slept with Carter? It shouldn't matter now, but it did. Hell, he was her boss and she'd danced with him one night. *You did more than dance, my girl.* Lord, she wanted more, but if he'd been with her friend, things were different.

"Yes, it is." She spun on her heels and brushed past Cara. "I opened the wrong door. Which one is the bathroom?" Cara gestured across the hall. "Thanks." She disappeared inside, stood by the counter and peered at her reflection. Her lips still had that just-kissed look and her pussy remained wet from his touch. What the hell should she do? *Just ask him.* As soon as she got him alone, she'd do that. Bring an end to the misery and turmoil her mind had fallen into.

When she came from the bathroom, Carter was waiting by the door.

"I thought you got lost." Where had Cara gone? Her head twisted both ways and saw nobody. The bedroom door was closed. She tried to move by him and he grabbed her hand.

"Come back here." He tugged her to him, his hands covering her ass. "I want to finish what we started. Feel this." He moved her hand to his crotch. The bulge was big and hard. Unable to resist, she pressed it, kneaded his balls and ran her fingers up the length of him through his pants. A whimper escaped her lips as she leaned into him.

His lips crushed hers and his tongue prodded her mouth open. He'd jostled her toward his room, turned the knob and pushed her inside. Using his heel, he kicked the door closed and nudged her back to his bed until her knees hit and she stopped. His mouth moved down her neck, his tongue flicking the sensitive spot where her neck joined her shoulder.

"I can't do this."

He lifted his head and pierced her with a hot stare. "Why not? What did she say to you?" His eyes grew dark.

"Nothing. I'd like to go home."

"Not until you tell me what happened. I saw her in the hallway. What did she say about me?"

"Look, if you've been with her, it's not my business. But she's my friend and I won't hurt her." Her body trembled when he pushed her away. He left her rooted to the spot and strode to the door. He yanked it open with such force it slammed the wall.

"Cara," he bellowed as he stepped into the hall.

Oh shit, what had she said wrong?

Chapter Four

Carter stormed down the hallway, his erection softening with each step, wondering how things had gotten to this point. He wanted Bree. Hell, for the first time in a long time, he wanted to keep somebody around. He could picture her mussed hair in the morning. Smell her next to him. Feel her ass rub against him. *Jesus, don't get hard again.*

He'd gone to retrieve Bree's coat, and when he came back, low and behold, his errant partner stood there, wondering if he was upset. He'd proceeded *to* upset, fast. In fact, he'd nailed her with a look that should have warned her to back off. He wanted to leave and take Bree with him.

Cara was a damn fine dancer, one of the best. The group they ran with were all good. They often told Carter he should try out for bit parts. He wasn't interested. He was a weekend warrior—that's all. Over the years they'd danced together, she'd come on to him numerous times. Showed up unannounced at his house and always wangled a sleepover. He locked his bedroom, afraid she'd wander in by mistake. A gorgeous girl but someone he never became interested in. She was needy and a pain in the ass. She'd made a few bad mistakes when she'd seen him out with someone, or when she appeared on his stoop and he did have a lady over.

His hackles rose and he rubbed his neck thinking about what she might have told Bree. He'd never known her to lie outright, but the woman had a way of twisting the truth that was unfuckingbelievable.

He'd thought to diffuse the situation by inviting her and Kevin along. The man had one hell of a crush on Cara. God knows why. Two peas in a pod. Kev was a better-than-average dancer and the two of them would make a great pair. They were both still young and taught part-time together at a local dance studio. Tonight he'd meant to

push things in that direction. He had no intention of letting Bree escape. He'd deal with the fact she was an employee later.

He hadn't counted on Cara following her friend to the bathroom. What the hell had she told her? Everything had been fine until then. Christ, Bree had been so hot for him earlier, he almost came as he fingered her at the door. Now she was absolutely cold and hell-bent on leaving.

He entered the living room and saw Cara standing by the bar.

"What the hell did you say to Bree?" She looked at him with her baby blues like he'd lost his mind.

"I don't know what you mean."

Through clenched teeth, he asked, "Kevin, do me a favor and take Cara home, please."

"Sure." The smile lighting the guy's face was pathetic. Carter almost felt sorry for him. He couldn't believe it when Cara argued with him.

"I'm not ready to go home." Her chin obstinately jutted forward.

"Yeah, you are. At least you're leaving *here*."

"Carter, you're *my* partner." Her mouth turned into a pout. Her face became a mottled red and her body shook. He wondered how he'd survived her this long.

"No, Cara. I *was* your partner. Not anymore. Goodbye."

"That bitch. She had no right. She was only supposed to take my place for one night." Her hands curled into fists.

"This has been coming for a long time. You're possessive, spoiled and mean. I've watched for years as you manipulated people to suit yourself, but not anymore. Not with me. Get out. Kevin, take her out of here, *now*."

"You'll be sorry. She's not nearly as good as I am."

"You still don't understand, do you? It's not about dancing. It's about being a lady."

He watched her shift under Kev's slight pressure to push her toward the front door. He wanted to see her gone. For good. He'd had enough of her mood swings and bullshit.

He filled his lungs with a deep breath of relief and sighed when the door shut behind them. Now he had to make Bree understand how much he wanted her. It was more than that, he felt like he needed her. She hadn't come from his room yet. Sure she must have heard the nasty things her friend said, he gave her time to gather herself.

He mixed a fresh batch of martinis and waited. He thought about his life.

Carter grew up wanting to be a dancer. In high school he took all the necessary classes, belonged to the drama club. But he became hooked on woodworking. Building things with his hands always soothed him. It's what he excelled at. He kept up with dance only as a recreational outlet. He'd wondered sometimes if he could have been a pro, but it never ate at him. It was enough to enjoy it when he could. Lately he'd become lonely and thought a lot about settling down, starting a family. Until now, he'd never met anyone he wanted to do that with.

An hour passed and he couldn't take it anymore. He crept down the hall to his bedroom. The door was slightly ajar. He pushed it open and was taken aback by what he found.

Bree lay curled like a baby, fast asleep, in the middle of his bed. He moved closer and saw the tear stains through her makeup. His heart wrenched at the sight. Goddamn Cara for hurting her. A protective feeling like nothing he'd ever felt before overwhelmed him.

He kicked his shoes off and removed his socks, pushing them beneath the bed. The buttons of his shirt almost popped as he quickly undid them. His pants were pushed from his hips in no time. He scooped them from the floor, aimed for a chair across the room, and missed.

He tried not to wake her as he slid softly behind her. He wrapped an arm around her, and just held her. His cocked jerked against her ass. It felt so good.

"Carter, I'm sorry."

Damn, he woke her up.

"You have nothing to be sorry for." He pressed his lips to her shoulder.

"She's a good dancer. You enjoyed partnering her."

"Not so much anymore. Cara...has problems, Bree."

"She wants stardom so bad," she sniffled, "she thought it was possible with you."

"Cara needs to get her head on straight. She's young and can still make it."

"What'll I do now?"

"You let me make love to you."

* * * * *

Bree had stood slightly outside the living room doorway and listened to the venom in her friend's voice. She'd known for some time Cara had a mean streak a mile long. She was the bitch yet she'd glared at Carter with fire in her eyes and had called Bree one. Poor Kevin. He was so hooked on her, his life would be hell.

She'd retreated back to the safety of his room and climbed in the big bed. She'd intended to rest for a minute, pull it together, but she cried herself to sleep. At least Carter had never touched Cara. It should have been a consolation, still, she was sad for her friend.

When he crawled in bed and held her, she felt so relieved. She wanted this man so much.

"I want you to make love to me." She turned her body to face him. His gray eyes were crystal clear as they looked at her. She ran her fingertips down his face. He had a five o'clock shadow and it made him more handsome than ever. "I've wanted that since the first day I laid eyes on you."

He ran his hand down her side, over her hip. She shuddered under his touch. "Take your dress off."

She came to a sitting position, and pulled the flimsy material over her head. She wore no bra—one was built into the dancer's outfit. She smiled, remembering what had happened to her underwear.

"What?"

"You owe me a pair of panties, mister."

"Tell me what size and color. I'll buy them tomorrow."

She burst out laughing. "Size four, they were blue, and I shop at Victoria's Secret." She couldn't picture him rifling through the lacy undergarments, no matter how hard she tried.

He brushed his hands up her thighs, moved them to her ass and pulled her tighter into his body. "Blue it is." His grin sent shivers down her spine. "Bree, I want you." His head dipped to a peaked nipple and he swirled his tongue over it, drew it between his lips. Sparks shot straight to her core. He nipped at it with his teeth, pulled it into the heat of his mouth. When her body trembled, he pulled back and gazed at her. "You like that?" He bent back to the other bud and tortured it in the same fashion. The moan that slipped from her mouth echoed with need.

Bree reached between their bodies and grasped his erection. She tightened her hand around it, ran up and down the length of his hard, hot shaft, and it jerked with a spasm in her hand. She traced the engorged veins with her fingertips as she swept toward the head. She collected pre-cum with her palm, moving down his penis to massage the cream into his balls until he expelled her nipple from his mouth and sucked in a lungful of air.

"Damn, baby."

She loved the power she held over him at that moment. "I like everything you've done to me so far."

"I haven't done nearly what I've wanted to."

"Tell me what else you want to do?"

"This." His tongue swished between her breasts, down her stomach, laved her bellybutton. "And this." He rose up and lifted her enough to turn her over. She groaned, a sound that came from her toes and traveled up, when he stroked her back with butter-soft fingertips. He moved down to the top of her butt. His fingers splayed out and he circled the base of her spine with his thumbs. "Most of all, this." He traced her cheek with one hand. He squeezed and massaged her butt until she bit the cover of the bed. He pushed a finger into her pussy from behind, her hips lifting automatically. She cocked her head to the side so she could see him.

He withdrew it and took it to his lips. "So hot," he rasped before it disappeared into his mouth. He pulled it out and said, "And so sweet." He came back to her ass, parted her cheeks and touched the warm, wet tip of the finger to her anus.

"Aarrghh, Carter, please." Her body was a mass of nerve endings. "Do it." When she felt it sink past the rim, she relaxed her muscles. "Yes." She lifted more, so he could penetrate her further.

"Oh sweet baby." He wiggled his finger into her dark hole and pushed deeper. She flattened her body on the mattress, ground her pelvis into the bed. "You want more?"

"Yes." Her channel clenched when his finger left her.

He pulled a pillow from the head of the bed and shoved it beneath her belly. He pumped his erection through the moist folds of her pussy while his hands held onto her waist. When he pulled back, she squirmed, raising her ass up, trying to get him back. The broad head of his penis pressed at her drenched opening and he slid in. His cock slowly filled her up.

"Oh Carter," she murmured, her face buried in the bedding.

"You want more?" His warm breath whispered in her ear. She rose up on her knees, opening wide for him to continue his assault. "That's it, baby, let me in."

He started a rhythmic stroke inside her. Slow then fast. In and out with such force, his balls smacked against her. The wet sound of their loving drove her crazy. She couldn't get enough of this man. Her ass jutted back each time he pounded forward.

Her sheath convulsed, trembled and leaked around his hardness. Her pussy clenched, pulling him farther into her core. She squeezed and milked his shaft, wanting to feel it go deeper.

A wave built inside her, ready to crash from her, drown him. "I'm going to come." She rocked back on his cock, taking more each time he drove into her. "Now," she cried out.

"Here it is, baby. I'm going to come in your tight pussy, fill it with cum."

She felt his seed spurt deep inside her. He continued to plow into her with fast, hard strokes. His hands tugged on her hips, pulled her back each time he plunged forward.

"You're mine. I can't let you go," he groaned as he slowed and shortened his lunges in her canal, emptying his balls. He rolled to the side and took her with him, his cock still pulsing inside her. He curled her into his embrace and held her snug with an arm over her stomach. "Oh, Bree, I want to keep you here."

"Carter, we didn't use protection. I'm on the Pill..."

"I haven't touched a woman in over six months. My last checkup, I got a clean bill of health. I'd never do anything to hurt you."

"I haven't been with a man in over a year. Dancing, working, I didn't want anybody."

"Nobody's going to touch this again." He ran his hand through the wetness between her legs, gently playing with her swollen clit. It shuddered back to life at his touch. "It belongs to me." He continued to stroke her mound, caress her love-soaked nether lips, coaxing more cream from her pussy. She mewled at the attention he lavished on her and rotated her hips against his groin, felt his penis quiver.

"Mmm, yes, that feels so good."

"Tomorrow, bring your things here."

She lay quietly in his arms. Bree wanted nothing more than to be with him for as long as she could. But not like this. She didn't want him to feel like he had to take her in out of charity. When she didn't answer right away, she felt him stiffen, pull away from her.

"Bree?"

"I can't."

Chapter Five

Had he heard her right? Carter's heart sank. He'd never asked a woman to live with him. He was nearing forty, but age had nothing to do with it. He'd just never found the right one.

Bree was it.

"Why?"

"I just can't."

"Is it because of Cara?" His palms sweated. Christ, he had to come up with a plan. And fast. "I need a new partner. Are you at least interested in that?"

"I guess we could dance together. It won't affect our work, will it?"

"It'll probably make it better. I won't be afraid to touch you anymore." Her body trembled. Hell, she was laughing at him!

"I wanted to touch you too."

"Is that all?"

"I want to taste you."

She moved out of his embrace and rose to her knees beside him. Her eyes mesmerized him. They brimmed with longing. Her scent exploded around him. His dick jerked to life. Her tongue flicked out and swept her lips, wetted them.

Her head lowered toward him and he flattened on his back, moving his hands to the bars at the top of the bed. Tremors racked his body as he waited for her to take him in her mouth.

She licked the tip. He arched up for more, but she moved away.

"Shit, babe."

She chuckled loudly. He settled his hips onto the bed.

Again, she whisked her tongue across the head, blew warm air on it.

"Christ, you're killing me."

"Shh, or I'll stop."

He clamped his teeth together, afraid she meant what she said.

Suddenly, her lips enclosed him, took him all the way in, drew his length to the back of her throat. Carter bit back the groan that gurgled its way into his throat. His hands gripped the headboard so tight he expected to hear the wood splinter. She drew up then slid down on him again. He couldn't hold it any longer.

"Jesus, yes," he bellowed.

She pushed his cock from her mouth. "You're so hot," she whispered. She took him in her hand and slid the taut skin up and down. Using her nails, she raked the tender underside while she used her other hand to fondle his moist sac. His body bowed up, hips gyrated, forcing his penis in and out of her fingers.

She moved back over him, her lips devouring and sucking down his hard length. Over and over, she swallowed him. Her tongue caressed his cock. Each time she came up for air, she nibbled the tip, planted kisses down to his balls. She greedily lapped at the sac that had grown so tight, he was afraid he'd spurt all over her face.

He released his hold on the bed and cradled her head, pushing in and out of her mouth. He'd had all he could take. He sat up and moved back against the headboard. Grabbing her arms, he brought her on top of him. He watched as she lifted herself, grasped his cock and guided it between her legs. When the broad head disappeared, he waited to feel it touch the entrance to her vagina. She worked the hardness through the hot liquid-drenched folds, and his dick slipped deep inside her.

"Bree." Her name rolled in a whisper past his lips. He arched up into her and began to punish her with a fast, hard rhythm. She met every stroke with one of her own. His hands spanned her waist, held her tight as they thrust together.

She leaned over him, her hands placed on the frame at the top of the bed. Her breasts bounced over him, teased him. He raised his head and latched onto a hard nipple and sucked at it each time she pushed low. Twisting his head, he caught the other peak, tugged and bit at it.

A whimper escaped her. "I want to come, make me come," she pleaded. He rose faster, harder. Slammed every thick inch into her pussy.

His toes curled into the bed as he forced his hips against her, letting her clit rub against him just like she wanted to. "Take it, take what you want." She pressed into him with short bursts of movement and convulsed around his cock.

"Oooh, Carter," she murmured as her orgasm pulsed from her and drenched him in cream.

"That's my baby." He bucked up and into her with a few short strokes and semen jetted into her core. "Yeah, Bree, that's what I want." He continued to pump inside her until he was satiated and she collapsed against him. He caressed her back, stroked her ass until their breathing slowed. She'd buried her face in his neck and planted wet kisses along his collarbone.

"I like how you taste," she whispered in his ear.

He rolled her over onto her back, covered her mouth with his and kissed her long and hard. He plunged his tongue into the hot recess and tasted his own exotic flavor. He pulled away and sprinkled her nose, her brow with tiny kisses. Damn, this woman got to him in a way no other ever had. He scooped her into his arms and spooned behind her, his hand over her stomach, lavishing her with his touch.

"I don't know if I can let you go." When she didn't respond, he thought she'd fallen asleep. He intended to do everything possible to keep her. He'd come up with a way.

Carter was used to getting what he wanted.

* * * * *

The sun felt warm on her face. Bree opened her eyes, a little disoriented. *Shit!* Carter. She was still in his bed. And late for work. Thank goodness they only worked 'til two on Saturday. She untangled from the covers and turned over.

He was gone.

A note lay pinned to the pillow.

I like how you taste too.

She smiled. Damn. Why couldn't she say yes to him? There wouldn't be much to move. Some clothes, a few keepsakes. She'd lived sparsely over the years. Always with a roommate. Things she'd kept in storage were long gone.

No way though could she live with him just because he thought she had nowhere else to go. She had an apartment and she intended to go home. To hell with Cara. They'd had arguments before, though nothing like this had ever happened. Her friend would stay pissed a long time about losing her dance partner and she'd blame Bree.

Oh lord, she had nothing to put on but the crumpled dress lying across the chair. Dang, what a way to greet the day. At least a shower would make her feel better. For the first time she noticed his bedroom had a master bath. She stood, stretched and went through the door. Lying on the countertop was a towel and cloth. Beside the linen was a pair of navy sweats and a white tee with another note.

Don't wash them before you return – I'll need something with your smell on it to help me through the days without you.

She looked in the mirror. Her eyes sparkled and her lips were curved in a smile. Laughter erupted from her when she saw the big hickey on her neck. Bree glowed with happiness.

"I love you, Carter Gates," she whispered. She did something she hadn't done since she was a teenager. She drew a great big heart on the mirror with her finger and wrote inside *Bree loves Carter*. She giggled as she stepped into the shower.

Her shower was so quick the room didn't even steam up. She threw the clothes on, remembered to lock the door, and sprinted down the drive to her car. She'd go home, put on makeup and a decent outfit. She couldn't wait to see him.

She parked in her normal spot by the boss's sport coupe. An ear-to-ear grin split her face. She opened the office and her heart dropped. He wasn't there.

The day's mail stood in the center of her desk. She got to work on it right away. She printed out a few invoices that were due and placed them in a neat pile for his signature. She kept one eye on the clock and one on the phone, hoping it would ring. A little before noon she decided to walk to the corner deli for a sandwich.

Starved, she finished her turkey wrap in no time, drank her iced tea and went back to the office.

Still no Carter. No messages.

The next hour dragged on forever. She straightened things in her workspace and left for home. Her eyes stinging, she held the tears at bay. What the heck, she'd had one great night.

She pulled into her spot at the apartment and saw Cara's car. Hell and damnation. She didn't feel like dealing with her. Might as well get it over with.

"Hey."

"You have some nerve coming back here. Traitor."

"Cara, I live here and this is not my fault."

"The hell it isn't. Look, I can't talk to you now. I'm really disappointed you thought so little of our friendship." She stormed out the door and Bree followed her.

"Cara?" she called as the elevator slammed shut. "Shit."

Dance, that's what she needed to unwind. She wasn't up to her usual three-mile run. She'd shower and go out, maybe to the spot on Canoga. She'd never seen Carter there and wouldn't have to face him. She decided to go to the mall, have a salad and arrive at the club early.

* * * * *

She nursed her second gin, tapped her foot. Bodies swiveled and gyrated to the sensuous thrum and rhythm of guitar and piano. If she had a partner she would have already taken to the floor.

"Bree." Kev headed her way and thank God he was by himself. "How are you?"

"Good."

"Where's Cara? She didn't show up for lessons?"

"I'm probably the last person you should ask." She sipped her drink.

"Hey, she'll come around. You know Cara." He ordered a drink and plopped on the stool next to her. She hoped he was right because looking for another roommate was not something she looked forward to.

She heard the melancholy strains of Nina Simone's *Take Care of Business*. She loved it and felt like moving. "Wanna dance, Kev?"

"Sure." He polished off his drink and sat the glass on the bar, pushed a hank of flaxen hair from his forehead. "Let's dance our troubles away."

They moved into the mix on the floor. Taking her hand, he spun her once, twice, and pulled her tight with her back to him. She swayed against him until he stepped her out and into a pivot, bringing her close, their bodies moving as one. He pushed her away and she circled him, swinging her hips, her back rubbing sensuously against his. When she turned back to face him, it was Carter who pulled her tight to his chest.

"Thanks, Kevin, for taking care of my baby." Her breath caught in her throat. He looked so freaking good. His cologne wafted in the air, excited her beyond belief and caused moisture to collect at her core. "Dancing without me, partner?"

"I needed to get out. Cara..." She stopped, not wanting to give him more ammunition against her friend.

"Why didn't you call me?" he asked.

"Why didn't you call me? Your car was at the office." Her voice faded. "I thought you were busy."

"I needed to visit another site. Sorry, I should have left a note." He held her arms out and she slid down the front of him. He pulled her around in a low pirouette and brought her back up.

"How did you find me? I'm sorry, I shouldn't be asking you questions. You don't have to account to me."

He snapped her tight to his body and ground into her. She felt his erection press into her stomach. He was hard as hell. She smiled, liking the effect she had on him.

"You talked about this place last night, figured you might be here." He spun, wrapped her in his arms and swayed across the floor with her. "I like accounting to you." His boyish grin broke the last defense she had. "Did you miss me?"

"Yes."

"Good. Come home with me tonight? I've got a surprise for you." She wiggled her hips smoothly in front of him. "God, I love the way you move your ass."

The music ended and he held her close. Bree was lost. Nothing could be done about it. This man held her heart in his hands. Would he run the other way if he knew what she felt? She gazed up into his eyes and her knees grew weak at what she saw. The gray smoldered with fire, pierced and burned her. It was as though he tried to read her mind.

He circled her waist with his arm and guided her back to the bar where Kev sat nursing his second drink.

"No Cara tonight?" Carter reached for her purse hanging from the back of the chair. He draped it over her arm.

"Haven't heard from her since I dropped her off."

"She'll be fine. The lady's a survivor if nothing else."

Kev's eyes clouded with sadness. "Yeah, guess you're right. I really like her."

"Well, I hope it works out for you. Bree and I are going to take off. Did you drive?"

"I'm with some friends." He nodded his head toward the other side of the bar.

Bree felt bad for him. "Kev, I'll see you later."

Carter hustled her toward the entrance. One hand rested on her shoulder, the other stroked her ass.

"Hey!"

"What?"

"Don't touch my butt in public."

"Baby, I'll touch your ass any time I want." He leaned close to her ear and ran his tongue around the edge. Shivers danced down her spine and her vagina clenched. Christ, he made her wet with just a touch.

She reached behind her and grasped his cock, running her hand the length of it through his pants. She gave his balls a squeeze.

"Witch."

She stopped and turned to face him. She planted a soft kiss on his lips. "I can touch your cock anytime I want." Her tongue darted out and tasted his lips.

"Shit, I need to get you home." He edged her around and stayed close behind her all the way to the door. Once they were outside, he released her hand and stepped back. "Look what you do to me." He nodded toward the region of his erection.

Bree laughed with joy.

Carter was horny as a toad he wanted Bree so damn bad. He swerved into his drive and came to a sudden stop. *Shit*. Every light in his house was on. Cara's car sat dead center at the top of his drive. He'd forgotten to remove the spare key he'd leave for her when they planned a practice session.

He got out, closed the door and went to intercept Bree.

Holding her by the shoulders, he looked in her eyes and he said, "I always left a key and she's used it. I don't know what she said to you last night or what she's planned. Bree, I. Never. Touched. Her. You have to believe that."

"I do."

Thank God. He didn't want to have to fight that demon. Trust, or lack of it, could tear a relationship apart. *Shit, I'm in a relationship.* She'd looked at him with such adoring eyes. How the hell was he going to get her friend out of his house without someone being hurt?

"Come on. I'll get rid of her."

"No you won't. I will." She walked ahead of him into the house. The living room was empty but he smelled Chinese food. He peered into the kitchen. No sign of Cara. Just a couple of takeout cartons on the table. They turned at the sound of steps coming down the hall.

"Oh, hey, Carter. I got your favorite. Pepper steak with lots of hot sauce."

"Cara, why are you here? I made it plain—I'm *not* your partner anymore." His tone was hard, devoid of feeling.

"You're just upset, you'll feel different in a few days." He watched her walk past Bree without a word and into the kitchen. Dishes clinked together as she pulled them from the cabinet.

"Cara, I..."

"Carter, let me handle this." Bree walked behind her friend. The jangle of the door bell surprised him. He opened it and Kevin stood there looking like a lost lamb.

"You may as well come in."

"Is she here?"

"Yeah, she's in the kitchen with Bree."

"Hell, that can't be good." Kevin's brow lifted in surprise.

"Tell me. What gets into her, man?"

"She wants so much. I know I'm good for her. She needs to trust me, Carter."

"Well, for now I'm stuck here with you. Bree wants to handle this. Want a drink?"

"Sure. Should one of us go in there?" Kevin moved to sit on the couch, while he went to the bar to mix a batch of martinis.

"You want to go in?" He handed Kev his cocktail.

"Hell no."

They each drained their first glass, Carter poured another and Kev accepted a second round. "I don't usually have this much but I may need it tonight. Bottoms up."

The sound of glass crashing to the floor snatched his eyes to the kitchen door. He twisted from the bar and took two steps in that direction when it flew open, banged the wall and Cara barreled through. Bree hot on her ass. The look on both women's faces said, "Shut the fuck up." He didn't open his mouth.

"To hell with you both," Cara said. "I don't need either of you."

Poor Kevin glanced back and forth, unsure what to do. Carter knew what he wanted. He walked to the front door and opened it. "Have a nice evening, Cara."

"Screw you. Kev, let's go. Now."

"Let me finish my drink."

"I said now!"

"And I said wait. Or you can leave in your car." She sputtered and shifted foot to foot. Kev had barely touched his second glass. Taking only a small sip, he sat it on the bar. "Now, *I'm* ready." He followed her to the door, spun around, hunched his shoulders and winked at Carter.

Good for him. Cara had been put in her place twice tonight. Might be hope for her yet.

Bree's cool-as-ice voice reached him. "No need in wasting a good meal. You hungry?" She stood straight, her shoulders back, her chin tilted defiantly in the air. Her mouth curved just a little bit at the corners.

"Yeah, I am." He wasn't sure what had happened in there, but it must have been settled between the two of them. They ate in silence. Curious about her and Cara's conversation, he wondered when she'd tell him. He didn't push. She'd open up when she was ready.

"You can leave the dishes. I have a lady come in every afternoon to clean and straighten things up."

"Oh."

He stood and went behind her chair. He lifted her wavy hair, bent and planted a kiss on her neck. He traced down her shoulder with his tongue and felt her shudder. He straightened and began to massage her arms and neck. He ran his hands down her back, kneaded the muscles along her spine until she moaned.

"Feel like a hot shower?"

"Uh-huh." She followed him to his room. A bag sat in the center of his bed. Victoria's Secret. "You didn't?" Her face glowed, tears shimmered in her eyes.

"I told you I would." He walked over and emptied the bag. Over a dozen pair of string bikinis fell out. He'd bought one in every color. The women shopping in the store had all smiled at him and tried to offer assistance as he carefully selected each pair. He'd turned them all down.

He pulled her into his arms and planted a kiss on the tip of her nose. "I keep my word." He took her hands and backed into the bathroom, pulling her along.

He unbuttoned his shirt and removed it. She watched. He kicked off his shoes and undid his pants. He stared at her as he eased the zipper down. Her eyes moved with his hand. Shit, the way she gazed at him made his cock come alive. He'd have trouble getting his slacks past it. He shoved them over his hips and the painful erection. They ended in a puddle with his socks at his feet. He almost came when her pink tongue poked out and wet her lips.

"I need you, Bree."

Her insides fluttered wildly as liquid pooled at the entrance of her core, soaking her panties. His shaft jutted in front of her. She wanted to fall to her knees and worship it with her tongue.

When he turned to the shower and started the water, she ogled his tight behind. Her palms itched to run along his flank, caress his hard butt, sweep down his strong thighs. He turned to face her.

“Undress for me, baby. Real slow.”

Tonight she’d worn a simple, short, copper sheath that shimmered in the light. Its hem rested only inches below her cheeks. She reached down and started to pull it up. She moved her hips side to side, letting the silky material slide over her butt and up her stomach. It sent a sensuous tremor through her when she saw the familiar fire smolder in his gray eyes. His fists clenched and released at his sides.

Bree pulled the dress over her head and shook out her long curls. The room had grown steamy from the hot shower. Beads of sweat glistened on his chest and a rivulet ran down and across his ripped abdomen. She envisioned her tongue capturing it, laving his navel. She wanted to trace a line along the thin trail of hair leading to his penis. The tip of it was shiny with a drop of pre-cum. It teased her as it slipped down the shaft.

Her knees buckled and she planted her hand on the wall beside her when he grasped his cock and worked the skin back and forth. He pinched the smooth dark head, squeezed another pearly dot of liquid from the slit. She groaned, a sound that leapt from the walls. She moved closer to him, put her hands on his chest and ruffled her fingers over the dusting of dark hair there.

Bending forward, she stabbed a hard nipple with her tongue. She pulled it into her mouth and suckled. She drew lazy circles around the nub and kissed it. Not done, she nibbled on the other bud, bit hard enough to make him tremble. He pushed his cock

between her legs. He continued to stroke it with his hand until he nudged it into her wet folds. Her hips spiked forward and she lost control of her body. It belonged to him.

"Shit." He gripped her around the waist and yanked her hard against him. She wrapped her arms around his neck as he lifted her and stepped into the shower. His mouth crushed hers. She opened to receive him, taste him. Their tongues danced together. He was so sweet.

As soon as Bree's feet touched the porcelain, he clutched her breasts, plucked and pinched her hard peaks until she ground on his erection. She rocked up and down on the stiff length, wanting penetration. He flipped her toward the wall where the hot water cascaded down her back. He shoved a hand between her legs and plowed through the hot, swollen creases of her pussy.

"Oh yes. More, Carter, please," she begged.

When his shaft prodded between her cheeks, air wheezed from her lungs. His arm encircled her belly, pulled her back and gave her room to bend. His knee wedged her legs open wider and his cock slipped inside her.

"Sweet Lord, you're so wet," he moaned in her ear. He nipped at her shoulder as he stroked deep inside her. His free hand played with her clit. She shoved back each time he plunged forward. Her hands braced on the wall kept her from losing her balance as he plundered her channel. She could feel his balls touch her. "I want you to come all over my cock, baby."

Forward, back, deep and shallow. Hard, soft, fast and slow. He fucked her like there was no tomorrow and she reveled in it. Prayed tomorrow took its time. She gave as good as she got. The wave of pleasure rode up on her so fast she thought she'd die from the sheer force of it. Her canal tightened around his thick penis and milked him, pulled him farther inside.

"Carter, come with me. Now," she yelled, the sound echoing around the stall. He pistoned inside her, then slowed to short, jerky strokes. He came. The hot spurt of seed

met her flow, dousing the fire in her body. Her knees gave way and he held her with her ass tight against him.

"Bree. Bree, baby." Her name was a guttural rasp bitten out between clenched teeth. He continued to pump her with his cock until his balls emptied. "I can't get enough of you." He straightened her body, but still held onto her.

She'd found heaven in this man's arms. Didn't want to lose it. Ever.

He helped her from the shower, resting her with her butt pressed to the counter. He used a plush towel to dry her, pushing it gently between her legs. She shuddered at the feel of the rough terry cloth on her sensitive lips. He kissed her while he took care of her. He grabbed another large cloth and ran it through her hair, wrapping it around her head.

"Stay with me, Bree."

"Carter...I..."

"You want to, I know it. Don't leave. Be with me always."

"Can we make it work? Living together, working and dancing together. We'd see each other every day, all day."

"You're right." His brow puckered in a perplexed look. "Bree, you're fired."

"What?"

"Now we don't work together." The dark stubble on his face barely hid the flush of color there. She reached up to touch his jaw, pushed his dark hair back and smiled at him.

"Guess I'll have to stay with you then. But only because I don't have a job anymore." She laughed.

"And you love me."

"Who says?"

He turned her to face the mirror. The steam in the room lay on every surface but had left a very distinguishable shadow of the oily print she'd put on the glass this morning. The shape of a heart and her words stared back at her.

Bree loves Carter.

"I love you too, babe."

About the Author

J. Hali Steele currently lives in Southeastern Pennsylvania but her dream is to return to the high desert of California. She shares space with four furfriends (cats) and enjoys spending time with family and friends. Her passion has always been reading romance novels, especially those with vampires and happy endings.

A multi-published author, J. Hali is a member of the RWA and its Passionate Ink chapter. When she's not writing, she can be found snuggling in front of the TV with a good book, a cat in her lap and a cup of coffee.

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

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