

# DOUBLE DELICIOUS

A photograph of two shirtless men standing side-by-side, showing their muscular torsos and arms. The man on the left is wearing a dark belt and the man on the right is wearing light blue jeans. The background is a plain, light color.

CHRISTIANE  
FRANCE

Double Delicious  
*by Christiane France*

**Amber Quill Press**

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## **CONTENTS**

[Also By Christiane France](#)

[DOUBLE DELICIOUS](#)

[Christiane France](#)

[Amber Quill's Rewards Program](#)

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Double Delicious  
*by Christiane France*

DOUBLE DELICIOUS

By

CHRISTIANE FRANCE

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## **Also By Christiane France**

Amorous Intentions

Bad Boy Blues

Blame It On Fate

The Butterfly Girl

Ciao, Ciao, Bambina

Inseparable

Just One Look

A Moment of Madness

Satisfaction Guaranteed

Something To Talk About

Time Shift

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **DOUBLE DELICIOUS**

If anyone had asked Suzie Nield what she knew about the two guys who lived in the gorgeous ranch-style house on the other side of the street—the two very hot and hunky males; one dark-haired and dark-eyed, the other sun-streaked blond and blue-eyed, with their dazzling white teeth, brilliant smiles, perfectly honed and tanned bodies, who exuded raw sex and looked as good if not better than most cover models—she would have to say that, much as she might otherwise wish, she knew nothing about them at all.

Except, of course, for a couple of interesting tidbits she'd picked up from a neighbor, and the fact they were the tastiest looking duo she'd seen in a dog's age. Just thinking about them and the possibilities the pair represented made her hornier 'n hell—the kind of hot, exciting possibilities she'd explored and enjoyed back in her college days, but had not had the opportunity to partake in since.

Suzie still remembered the first time she'd seen two guys kiss. It had been her first year in college. She'd heard rumors about the boys in the next room, but hadn't believed them until the night she discovered their door wasn't properly closed and she'd peeked through the crack. The pair had been completely naked and, as they kissed, they'd stroked one another. She also remembered the effect it had had on her. She'd been so wet, so excited, she'd tossed and turned for hours ... until her fingers had slid down her belly to her pussy and ... she'd gone off like a rocket on the Fourth of July.

The men across the street looked to be in their late twenties or early thirties and, the first time she saw them, she'd wondered if they were gay. If she was honest, she still wondered. But Betts, the chatty, sixtyish widow who lived a couple of houses farther up the street had soon disabused Suzie of that notion. "The boys," as Betts called them, weren't ready to settle down and, like all red-blooded young bucks, they were still busy playing the field and having fun. And the reason Betts knew this was because not one of the young women the boys had brought home in the time they'd lived there had lasted more than one or two dates, and most of them just the one. If one-night stands was what they were into, that was fine by Betts. In her opinion, it was much kinder than leading the girls on and letting them get their hopes up for nothing.

Betts had also told her the men's names were Mike Hanes and Matt Porter, they owned a company specializing in upscale home renovations, and they had a fancy office in that new steel-and-glass building near the courthouse. A couple of times Suzie had been outside in her yard when the men were either coming or going, and they'd given her a friendly, "Hi, how're ya doin'?" smile or wave, but despite her responding in the same friendly fashion, they'd never exchanged even so much as one word.

As far as Suzie was concerned, it was up to the men to welcome her as a new neighbor. But they'd never crossed the street to pass the time of day, or comment on the weather, offered to loan her a cup of sugar, or given her even the slightest bit of encouragement to approach them. In fact, she

was fast coming to the conclusion they were either shy, which she did not believe for one minute, or that they just preferred not to get involved with the neighbors. Which was fine with Suzie if they were, as Betts had described them—the kind of men who were more interested in putting notches on their bedposts than they were in developing adult relationships.

Of course, that was before she really got to know Mike and Matt. Before Friday The Thirteenth. The day when everything that possibly could go wrong did go wrong, and managed to do so in the grandest of styles.

It all started early in the morning on Friday The Thirteenth when Suzie's eighteen-year old, almost blind, tabby cat, Sam, who'd always believed himself to be a whole lot smarter than he actually was, had somehow slipped out of the house and taken a stroll down the middle of the street. She had no idea how he'd gotten out, let alone what had possessed him to attempt such a dangerous feat. Sam was a dyed-in-the-wool housecat who'd never crossed the doorstep anywhere else they'd lived. And, as it turned out, that first attempt was also his last because poor Sam got himself killed by a speeding car.

Losing Sam was the absolute worst as far as Suzie was concerned. She and Sam had been together since Suzie was ten and Sam just a few weeks old. She'd found the abandoned kitten tottering around her parents' backyard on wobbly legs and, with her Mom's help and an eyedropper to deposit milk into his greedy little mouth, they'd managed to save his life.



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Since then, Sam had been her best friend, her constant companion, and the one she could turn to whenever things went wrong. Sam had been there when she'd lost her parents, he'd comforted her after all her romantic disasters, and suffered through two previous cross-country trips necessitated by Suzie's job as a radio talk show host and announcer. With Sam gone, Suzie was completely and totally on her own.

After arranging for Sam's last rites with the local vet, Suzie had dried her tears, made a promise to herself to adopt another furry friend at the earliest opportunity, and continued on to the local radio station to do her regular noontime show—only to discover the station owner had taken advantage of the three-month trial clause in her contract to say she wasn't suitable and to dispense with her services. The insensitive jerk had even had the audacity to tell her he'd given the job to his brand new girlfriend—a blonde bimbo who wore skirts about as long as the width of a wide belt, had the brains of a pea, and the irritating, high-pitched laugh of a hyena.

As a result, not only was Suzie out her best friend and housemate, she was also unemployed in a town where she had a nasty suspicion nepotism was alive, well and undoubtedly flourishing, and vacancies for jobs that offered benefits and advancement were few and far between.

It should have been more than enough for one day. But Suzie knew bad luck almost always came in threes, so she shouldn't have been too surprised when she returned home to the house she'd bought because she was so sure Woodland

was the kind of small town where she wanted to settle down and found herself almost ankle-deep in water.

The house had started out as a one-family dwelling, but somewhere along the way the second floor had been converted into a self-contained unit. The woman who'd rented the upstairs portion of the house less than a month ago said her teenage daughter had attempted to dispose of an empty tissue box by flushing it down the toilet. Suzie would have thought anyone with a single brain cell should have known the thick wad of cardboard would form a blockage and cause the toilet to overflow. But not this particular teenager. According to her mother, the girl was in crisis over the loss of her boyfriend to another girl and had been sobbing her heart out for days.

After apologizing profusely for what she maintained had to be the fault of outdated plumbing, the woman said she had no money and no insurance, and if Suzie expected payment for the water damage, then she was, to put it in the plainest language possible, out of luck. In any event, as soon as they could rent a truck and make the necessary arrangements for a new place, they were leaving, and she was hoping it would be sometime later that day. The woman then went on to remind Suzie that she'd paid a month's rent in advance and lived in the apartment for less than three weeks, so Suzie could consider the unused portion as a bonus.

At least Suzie had her own insurance and a kind, considerate insurance broker who, within an hour or two of receiving her call, had arranged for a claims adjuster to attend and assess the damage.

When questioned by the claims adjuster, the upstairs' tenant had been coy and evasive about the length of time it had taken her and her equally brainless daughter to quit trying to flush the problem away and call for help. However, it was clear just by looking at the damage that enough time had passed since the toilet first overflowed for the water to spread between the floors, drip through the main floor ceiling in a dozen different spots and soak just about everything Suzie owned. Even so, all the woman would admit to was flushing the toilet a time or two more in the hope the water pressure would remove the blockage. And when that hadn't worked, she'd decided it was the fault of the plumbing and a leaky connection pipe she'd just noticed the night before and intended to tell Suzie needed fixing. Of course, as luck would have it, Suzie wasn't home at the time, so there had been no one there for her to tell.

By the time had Suzie rented a wet/dry vacuum and cleaned up what water hadn't drained away by itself, returned the vacuum to the hardware store, and made appointments to get estimates to fix the damage from a couple of local contractors, she was exhausted. With no electricity and the water turned off because of the leaky connection between the main water pipe and the toilet, the upstairs tenants had packed their belongings and left while her back was turned. At that point, Suzie no longer cared. As far as she was concerned, she hoped that wherever they'd gone, they'd just keep on going. In the meantime, with the exception of the dining area of the kitchen, the rest of her home was a mess—the bed was too wet to sleep in, the living room sofa in

similar condition, and for a while, the linen closet had been doing a great imitation of Niagara Falls.

Suzie knew her insurance would have paid for her to spend a few days at a hotel until the house was restored to livable condition, but it took only one call for her to find out there was a convention in town and every available bed had been booked months ago. She could have asked Betts to take her in, but Betts had left a few days ago to spend a month out west with her daughter and the new grandbaby. And she hadn't lived in Woodland long enough to know anyone else she could ask for help.

Which was where Mike and Matt came into the picture.

Early that evening, she was sitting on the porch steps, surrounded by stuff she figured would dry faster outside than in, drinking a soda, and trying to decide if the ratty lounge left by the previous owner would serve as a temporary bed, when the pair of hunks who lived opposite returned home from work.

After parking their truck in their driveway, they glanced across the street at Suzie surrounded by most of her worldly possessions, hesitated for a bare half second, and then came over.

"What's going on?" Mike, the dark-haired one, asked. Suzie knew he was Mike because the name-tag on the pocket of his navy work shirt said so. "You have a flood or something?"

Suzie quickly explained what had happened, while blond-haired Matt poked his head in the front door to see the damage for himself.

"Better watch yourself with that," Matt observed, pointing upward to the hall ceiling from whence a couple of thin streams of water still continued to trickle. "Damp plaster's a bitch. Could stay up there and be fine once it's dried out. Could let go and land on your head."

"Yes, I know. The adjuster and the building contractor both warned me to be extra careful."

"Good advice. Place is old, so the wood up there may not be in good shape. Some of it could even need replacing."

"Yeah. I know that, too."

"So, you have somewhere you can go temporarily?"

"Not exactly. But..." Suzie pointed to the lounge and the blankets drying on the porch rail. "I can't get a hotel room because they've all been taken for a convention in town this week. But that's okay. It's summertime. The forecast is good for the immediate future, and this is a quiet street. I figure I can manage out here for a day or two, until things dry out sufficiently for me to move back in."

"Water turned off?" Mike asked.

Suzie nodded. "There's a connection that needs replacing in the upstairs apartment. And, since the pipes are old like the house, the plumber said he'll come back tomorrow to fix that and also check on the condition of the other pipes just to be sure before it's turned back on."

"What about the electricity?"

"That, too. Once I'd cleaned up as much of the water as I could, the adjuster told me to turn off the main switch, just in case. The plumbing isn't the only thing that's old, the wiring also needs to be checked."

"How will you manage for eating and bathing and toilet facilities?"

Suzie frowned. "No problem finding somewhere to eat. There are lots of restaurants within walking distance. But with no electricity or water the rest of it could be ... a problem that is."

"Not necessarily," Matt chimed in. "We have a spare room you're more than welcome to use for as long as you want. Right, Mike?"

Mike nodded. "Right. Just grab whatever you need and put anything you don't want to lose inside the house, then come on over. We'll leave the side door open, so don't bother knocking."

"But I can't..." Suzie's vision suddenly blurred. She'd had one hellacious day. She'd lost everything she loved and cared about—everything that was important to her—including the use of her house. And now here were two total strangers offering her a temporary home, no questions asked.

Mike sat down beside her on the step and put his arm around her shoulders. "No, buts and no tears. Want me to help you pack?"

"No, it's okay. I can manage," Suzie said in a strained voice. "But I can't dump on you like this. You don't need a stranger invading your privacy."

"You're not a stranger, you're a neighbor, and neighbors are supposed to help one another in an emergency," Matt said, sitting down on Suzie's other side and joining in the group hug. "I'm Matthew Porter, and the guy on your other side is my longtime buddy and business partner, Michael

Hanes. Your name's Suzie, and you do the noontime show at Radio Woodland, right?"

Suzie sighed. "Yes and no. My name's Suzie, but I no longer work at the radio station. However, that's a whole other story."

"Jack fired you and gave the job to his girlfriend?" Mike said with a sympathetic but knowing smile.

"How do you know that?"

"Because she sometimes hangs at a bar we often go to. Ever since Jack hired you, she's been telling everyone who'd listen that you wouldn't last. All she had to do was twist Jack's arm a little bit harder."

"Nice," Suzie muttered, wishing she could twist Jack's neck. Twist it right around so hard he'd be looking down at his butt. And the bimbo's, too, come to that.

"Can you sue?" Matt asked.

"Only in my dreams. Jack-baby did it all up nice and legal. Waited until a few days before my three-month trial period was up, and then whammo! Nothing wrong with my work, I'm just not quite right for the new image Radio Woodland wants to project. Sorry 'n' all that, sweetie," she added, imitating Jack's high-pitched, nasally twang. "But I'll pay you to the end of this week, which will complete the three months we agreed on. And you can use the next coupla days to find yourself something else." She sighed deeply. "Like what? Stocking shelves in the supermarket? Or working at that new car wash?"

"Sorry to disappoint you, but that new car wash is one hundred percent customer driven," Matt said glumly. "Put your money in the slot and do all the work yourself."

"I think this calls for a drink. A stiff one," Mike interjected. "Now, where's your cat? I know you have one because I've seen him sitting up here on the porch."

In all the confusion of the flood and everything else that had happened during what felt like the longest day of her life, Sam's untimely demise had been pushed to the back of Suzie's mind. But at the mention of her beloved pet, the floodgates opened and tears poured down her face. "Sam's dead," she blubbered, realization setting in big time. "He was killed just this morning by a car. It was my fault. He couldn't see properly, and I should've kept a better watch on him. He somehow got outside. I miss him so much. I don't know what I'm going to do. He was the only family I had left. Betts is away, and I don't know anyone else that well here in Woodland because I've only been here a few months. To tell the truth, I'm so damn miserable right now, I just want to die."

"No, you don't," both men insisted.

"And what do you mean about not knowing anyone? You know us," Matt said, dropping a kiss on her hair before standing up, pulling her to her feet and holding her close for a moment. "We may not be family, Suzie, but I promise we'll do our very best to help get you through all this."

Suzie scrubbed away her tears with the hem of her T-shirt, and after Matt and Mike helped her to pack a few essentials,



she locked both the back and the front doors and followed them across the street to their house.

From the outside, Matt and Mike's split-level ranch looked to be as well-maintained and cared for as most of the other homes on the street. The interior, however, looked like something from a home decorating magazine—a mix of polished pine flooring interspersed with cream rugs, dark brown upholstery, and turquoise throw cushions in every shade, from the lightest to the darkest. On the walls were a few brightly colored abstract paintings and metallic accents of gold and copper had been used in what Suzie guessed to be one-of-a-kind abstract sculptures and wall decorations.

"This is gorgeous," she said with a sigh, wondering if she'd ever get to make her own home look even half as attractive. "Did you do it yourselves?"

"It's what we do," Matt replied with a proud grin. "Complete makeovers. This place was a mess when we bought it. Hadn't been lived in for quite a while, not since the octogenarian owner died, and it looked as if it hadn't been given a lick of paint since Nixon was first elected president."

"And what year was that?" Suzie asked, smiling.

He winked and his grin grew broader. "Who knows? Way before our time. But it's what one of my teachers used to say. Come on and let me show you the guest room."

The same basic color scheme of brown and cream continued down the hallway and into the bedroom at the far end, although here, instead of turquoise, the cushions and decorative pieces were in various citrus colors of tangerine, lime and lemon.

As Matt dropped Suzie's bag on the bed, he said, "I'll leave you to get settled while I fix some potatoes and make the marinade for the steaks, then we can have a swim and relax for a bit before dinner. Sound like a plan?"

"Sounds great, but I didn't bring a swimsuit. I don't even know where it is."

"No problem. Check the drawers," he said, tapping the side of the dark pine dresser. "We keep a couple of spare suits in there for guests. There should be something that'll fit you."

There were, in fact, two suits in Suzie's size—one in fire-engine red and one in sunshine yellow and both the two-piece string-bikini style. The red suit didn't go well with her light chestnut hair, so after a quick shower to rid herself of the dirt and dust of the day, she put on the skimpy yellow suit, which actually showed off her body a little more than she was used to, and made her glad she used her exercise equipment rather than allow it to gather dust. After moistening her lips with a dab of apricot gloss, she found her way back to the kitchen.

"Hey, lookin' good," Matt observed, shooting her a couple of admiring glances in between covering the marinating steaks with plastic wrap and putting them in the refrigerator. "Swim first, drink later?"

"Sounds good to me? Where's Mike?"

"He had an errand to run." Matt washed his hands at the sink and dried them on a handful of paper towel. "Ready for that swim?"

After doing a couple of lengths of the pool, Suzie declared herself too tired for that kind of energetic exercise and

flopped, face down, on one of the padded loungers. "I am soooo done," she said with an exaggerated sigh. "I think maybe I should forget about dinner and sleep out here tonight. I swear this thing is more comfortable than my bed at home."

"I know the perfect thing to make you feel better," Matt said, sitting down beside her on the edge of the lounge and pouring a trickle of something cool and sweet-smelling on her back. "Just relax, and I'll massage all your cares away."

"Just like that?"

"You'll see."

Starting at her shoulders and then moving down the entire length of her back, he found all the little knots and tight spots and, in no time at all, massaged them into extinction. By the time he reached her waistline, Suzie felt more than relaxed, she felt boneless and liquid, like half-set jelly. This felt so good, she didn't ever want Matt to stop what he was doing.

Straddling the lounge, he pressed a kiss just beneath her right ear, then continued the massage over her butt, her thighs, and all the way down her legs to her feet, where he proceeded to give each one of her ten toes the ultimate in TLC.

When he finished massaging the last toe, he turned her onto her side and lay behind her, so her butt pressed hard against his crotch and his hands lightly stroked her belly.

"Feel any better?"

"Much." Suzie gave a little groan of ecstasy and snuggled her bum hard against his aroused cock—just to let him know that she knew, and if he was interested, then so was she.

Fact was she hadn't made love with a guy in so long she'd almost forgotten the moves—the thrill of being in a man's arms, the feeling of anticipation, the tightening of muscles, the need to be touched ... in all the right places.

Plus there was something about Matt that made her forget he was a virtual stranger—made her want to throw caution to the wind, dispense with the formalities and just get down to business. And if Mike just happened to turn up in the middle of whatever happened...

As if Matt could read her mind, his tongue explored her ear, sending shivers of excitement rippling through her body, while his inquisitive fingers moved down to the juncture of her thighs and, after the briefest hesitation, under the edge of her bikini bottom. She closed her eyes and moved her legs a little to give him better access.

His finger stroked her pussy for a moment, then moved between her lips and touched her clit, a gentle, tentative touch that made her catch her breath with delight. She opened her legs a bit wider, feeling her juices flow as he slipped a finger into her heat and moved it slowly back and forth.

She wanted to touch him, too, but when she tried, she realized their current positions made that impossible.

"Just relax and let it happen," he whispered against her hair. "This is for you. We can get to me later."

To feel Matt's erection pushing inside her right now was what Suzie wanted, not vague promises about some unspecified time in the future. "When will later be?"

His finger moved in deeper. "Ssh. Come on, babe. Just let yourself go."

But before she could do that, she heard the bang of a door closing inside the house and then Mike's voice calling, "Hey, guys. Where are you?"

"Out here by the pool," Matt replied.

Annoyed with herself for wasting time with questions instead of going with the flow and enjoying the moment while she'd had the chance, Suzie forgot her earlier wish about Mike joining in their game and got up off the lounge. "What happened to that drink you promised me?" she asked, aware her current state of frustration had lent a slight edge to her voice as she ran her fingers through her still-wet hair.

"You okay?" Matt asked.

She gritted her teeth and forced a smile. "I'm good. At least, I will be in a minute."

"Wine or something stronger?"

"Whatever you're having is fine with me."

He came over and pulled her close for a hug. "I thought I was having you. But maybe we can get to that later, okay?"

"If you say so."

His hands slipped lower and he squeezed her ass cheeks, hard. "Don't worry. I'll make sure it's well worth the wait."

"Promises, promises." Suzie sighed, then she smiled and moved the tip of her finger down the front of his swim trunks and over his still-aroused shaft. Contrary to what she'd hoped, maybe they weren't interested in sharing. Maybe they were totally conventional and only liked it one on one. In which case, how could she and Matt accomplish a couple of

rounds of hot and heavy sex with Mike in the house. Would Matt come to her room later, or would he expect her to go to his? Or would Mike clue into the fact she and Matt had something going on and disappear for a few hours so they could have the place to themselves?

Just then, the screen door to the patio opened and the object of her wonderings came out with an old-fashioned cocktail shaker in his right hand. "What're you guys drinking?" Mike asked.

"We didn't get around to deciding yet," Matt replied. "What you got in there, my man?"

"There's a bottle of red wine to go with the steaks, but I felt like a martini first. You both want one?"

"Suzie?" Matt asked.

Suzie nodded. Maybe a strong drink would make her relax and stop thinking about that intriguing bump in Matt's trunks. Problem was the mere thought of that deliciously hard and delightfully thick cock sliding up inside her was difficult, if not impossible, to dismiss. "Sure, sounds good to me."

"In that case, I'll go find us some glasses." Mike put the shaker down on a small table and went back inside the house.

The drink did help—a lot. By the time she'd finished the first martini and Mike had poured her a second, the events of the day had caught up with her. She was ready to forget about everything and fall asleep. But then Matt decided he needed her help to cook the steaks.

"How do you like yours?" he murmured provocatively, using one hand to turn the steak and the other to revive Suzie's passions by stroking and squeezing her butt.

"Right now? Anyway I can get it," she whispered back, hoping they were on the same wavelength. "Think Mike would notice if we slipped inside for a minute or two?"

"I meant your steak. Medium-rare? Well done?" he said, turning his head slightly and giving her an innocent wouldn't-melt-butter look. "What did you think I meant?"

She returned his look with an innocent one of her own. "Medium-rare is good."

Dinner was a simple meal of barbequed steak, baked potatoes and tossed salad, followed by ice cream and canned peaches. And, since Matt had prepared the food and done the cooking, Suzie volunteered to help Mike with the clean up.

"I realize you've had a lot to deal with today," Mike said as he wiped the salad bowl dry and put it back in the cupboard. "But have you given any thought to what you're going to do about finding another job? What I mean is, we only have the one radio station here in town, and to say the opportunities are limited is putting it mildly."

"I know. And I'm already starting to panic." She leaned back against the counter with a sigh. "I guess it's only human to start panicking about what to do next the moment you lose your job. For starters, I should've just rented the house instead of buying until my trial period was up. But it was such a great bargain, I couldn't resist. And my job was working out so well it never even occurred to me Jack would pull the plug the way he did. Anyway, I need to find another job right away. Whatever I can get to keep the roof over my head while I look around. Right now, I'm not sure if I even want to stay in broadcasting."

"Why's that?"

"I sort of fell into my first job. My dad worked for a small radio station in California. I'd done a stint as DJ for my school radio station, so when Dad first got sick, I filled in for him. After Dad died, I took over the job full-time. I'd probably still be there if the station owner hadn't run into some tough financial problems and been forced to close down."

"So then you came here to Woodland?"

"No. I had my own call-in afternoon show at a station just outside of Boston—one of those chick-chat things for the modern woman. I was there for almost four years—until they hired someone new to take over programming and he axed my show. He said it didn't have a big enough audience."

"And did it?"

"Who knows? The guy was a sports fanatic. If a program didn't involve sports, he found a way to get rid of it. Then I was in Portland, Oregon for a while. It was an okay job, but I'd broken up with my boyfriend and the one here in Woodland sounded better, so I took it." She sighed. "If only I'd known."

"If not broadcasting, then what? You have other options?"

"I have a degree in business management, and between school and Dad getting sick, I worked for a bank in L.A. The degree plus the work experience should look good when I start sending out my résumé. I also took a few classes in interior decoration and design last winter, which is why I put what money I had into a house that needed work. I figured my job here would be long term, and I could use what I'd learned by fixing the place up in my spare time."



"With a view to selling it?"

"I never got that far in my thinking. I've only been in Woodland for a little over three months. I started off by renting my house on a month-to-month basis, but then the lawyer who represented the owners said they'd changed their minds about renting and wanted a quick sale. I guess they were in urgent need of money because they accepted my first offer, and before I'd finished unpacking my stuff, the legalities were completed and the house was my mine."

"The woman who lived there before you had a heart attack, and we heard she died shortly after the ambulance got her to the hospital," Mike said, looking a little sad. "She lived alone and never seemed to have many visitors. If she had kids, they never came around."

"The lawyer didn't say who the beneficiaries were, just that they didn't live here and didn't want the responsibility of maintaining a house needing so much work. He arranged for the best pieces of furniture to be removed and sold, and left me with everything else to keep or get rid of as I saw fit. I swear the previous owner hadn't picked up a duster or a mop in a year or more. In fact, I'd just got the place halfway clean and tidy and rented the upstairs apartment to help out with the mortgage when the flood happened. And now, with no job and no tenant to help with the expenses, I ... I..."

Suddenly, everything that had happened welled up inside Suzie and hit her like a tidal wave. One minute her world had been as close to perfect as she figured it was ever going to get and then, in the space of a few short hours, she'd lost it all. It wouldn't have been so bad if she still had Sam, but...

As her eyes filled with tears, Mike wrapped his arms around her. "Hey, come on. Nothing's happened that can't be fixed, so no crying, okay?"

"We can't fix Sam."

"True. But Sam was pretty old, yeah?"

"He was eighteen."

"That's a good age for a cat."

"I guess. His eyesight wasn't good, and I know it was better for him to go fast like that rather than get sick and maybe linger on for months. But knowing all that doesn't help at all. I miss him so damn much."

"I know. It hurts. Losing a pet hurts a whole damn bunch." Mike continued to hold her close, press kisses on her hair and rub her back. "When I was a kid, I got a puppy for my birthday one year. A fat little chocolate lab I named Fudge. One day, Fudge was playing outside in the yard and then he just disappeared. I thought he'd somehow managed to get out, so my mom helped me put up notices and check with animal control and all the usual stuff. But right away my dad figured someone had stolen him, and they probably did because we never saw Fudge again. I just know I bawled for that dog every night for months."

"Hey, you two, what's going on in here?" Matt asked, poking his head around the kitchen door. "Something wrong?"

"Suzie's feeling bad about losing her cat," Mike explained

"Losing a friend is always tough," Matt agreed, "but look at it this way, Suzie. You may have lost one friend, but now you've gained two new ones."

Smiling through her tears, Suzie reached for Matt's hand and pulled him close for a group hug. "You guys really are the best, you know that?"

"We try. And on that note, why don't we go back outside and finish what's left of the wine?"

"Go pour it, and we'll be there in a second," Mike instructed. Cupping Suzie's face in his hands, he added, "We're here for you, Suzie. So, whatever it is you need, a cup of something you forgot to buy or a hug because you're feeling sad, just let us know, and we'll do whatever we can to make things better."

Suzie knew Mike was going to kiss her, so she closed her eyes and let it happen. The first tentative touch of his lips on hers, then the velvet glide of his tongue parting her lips and slipping inside, and she melted, molding her soft curves to his hard body.

His arousal was obvious, pressing firmly against her belly, and as their tongues tangled and explored each other's mouths, she wanted him to lift her up onto the counter and take off her bikini bottom. She wanted to feel him tonguing her until she was ready to explode, then she'd wrap her legs around his waist and hold on tight as he pushed his rod into her heat. She was so wet, he was so hard, and he'd ride her like—

Her temperature way up and her heart beating like a mad drummer, she managed to pull herself out of the kiss and rest her head against Mike's shoulder before things got out of hand. *Hell! Things were already way out of hand.* She'd thought she wanted Matt—she still did—but Mike was hot and

just as big a turn-on. Truth was she liked them both the same. She was sexually attracted to both of them, too. And as for why she'd feel this way about two guys she'd just met ... maybe it was because she hadn't had sex in so long and now she was verging on desperate.

She had to stop fantasizing about sex, most of all about threesomes, and how delicious it would be to have...

God! What on earth was the matter with her? She'd had more than enough disasters in one day to last the whole year. She needed to take a step back and think, not jump into bed with the first hot hunk she came across, or even the second. And the absolute last thing she needed to get herself involved in was group sex—that was for college kids, bored yuppies, and the terminally disenchanting.

Okay, so she was a paid-up member of that last group. She was tired of jobs that didn't work out, boyfriends who couldn't commit beyond promising to cook breakfast, and traveling back and forth across the country like an itinerant farm worker. She'd have one last glass of wine, thank them for dinner, and then say, on second thoughts, she'd decided to go home to sleep, just in case. In case...

In case of what? The two of them ganged up on her and loved her senseless?

As if the dynamite kiss they'd shared was nothing out of the ordinary, Mike let her go and opened the patio door. "Ready to help Matt with the rest of the wine before it's all gone?"

Matt had already split the balance of the wine among their three glasses and, as Suzie sat down in one of the chairs, she

picked up hers and took a tiny sip. Swirling the dark red liquid around her glass in time with her whirling thoughts, she half-listened to the two men talking about a problem they needed to deal with the next day, while she tried to come up with a reasonable and believable excuse to leave.

But she was tired and the wine was making her eyes feel heavy, and the next thing she knew, Matt was shaking her awake. "Hey, sleepyhead, it's almost midnight. Time to hit the sack."

\* \* \* \*

"So what do you think?" Matt asked as Mike turned on the shower in their cream-tiled, ensuite bathroom and the two of them stepped inside the cubicle, closing the frosted glass doors behind them.

"About Suzie?"

"Pretty hot, huh?" Matt smiled as he put his arms around Mike from behind, nibbled his neck lovingly and then lathered their favorite woodsy shower gel over Mike's chest and belly. He loved Mike more than anyone else in the whole world, and he knew Mike felt the same way about him. They'd been together since meeting in a video arcade as teenagers.

Matt had never known his parents. According to one of his caseworkers, he'd been left in a gas station washroom just off the freeway when he was about two years old, and the attendant hadn't had a clue how he'd got there. He'd told the cops he hadn't even noticed a child in any of the cars that stopped by the station that afternoon.

Mike laughed softly, reaching behind him to stroke Matt's dick. "Love you, man. You know that. But just thinking about those big eyes and nice full breasts makes me hard."

"No kidding. I could practically hear you licking your chops with anticipation."

"And you weren't?"

"Yeah. Me, too."

At the time of his first meeting with Mike, Matt had been living in the latest of a string of temporary homes where the foster parents were more interested in the money they received than they were in the kids they were supposed to be caring for. Mike's life hadn't been much better. His parents had been the innocent victims of a bank robbery gone wrong when he was only eight years old and the following years had been spent being handed back and forth among grandparents and other family members.

Six months before he and Mike met, Mike's life had taken a real downturn following his grandma's death. No one else would take him in, so he'd been doing his desperate best to adjust to life with his dad's unmarried, career-oriented sister, who'd made it clear she was only doing what she considered to be her duty. She neither wanted nor needed a teenage boy screwing up her perfect life and home. From what Mike told him, Matt knew she was the kind who threw a fit and confined Mike to his room if he brought even one tiny speck of dirt indoors. And heaven help him if didn't ask her permission before he took a soda from the refrigerator or a cookie from the jar.

"Suzie's super sexy, but she's really sweet, too," Matt added. "If you hadn't come back when you did, well ... what can I say?"

"Sweet?" Mike chuckled and wriggled his butt provocatively against Matt's erect shaft. "I can't say the same about you. I thought you showed pretty lousy timing when you came slammin' into the kitchen while we were doing the dishes. Another few seconds, and I know for damn certain things would've gotten a whole lot more interesting."

As an orphan himself, Matt had recognized Mike's need for friendship and emotional support—he'd needed those same things himself—so he'd taken Mike under his wing. He'd always been the leader and the protector in all their boyhood adventures, but despite his own bad home situation, Mike had been the practical one. In fact, Matt owed Mike big time for everything that his life was today. If Mike hadn't taken him in hand after he left high school and forced him to enroll at the local community college, he'd have drifted from one low-paying job to the next. In other words, with no direction to his life, he would have done whatever it took for him to survive and probably ended up in prison or worse.

But Mike had made sure that didn't happen. They'd both gone to college and earned degrees in interior design and home renovation. Matt was the elder, so he'd graduated the year before Mike, and started the business that now supported the two of them. Mike was his family.

They were also best friends, housemates, lovers and business partners, and, while they were one hundred percent committed to one another, they still had room in their

relationship for the fairer sex, too. Especially a sassy, independent woman like Suzie who'd made it clear she enjoyed sex and male company. If she was interested in joining them, either now or at some time in the future, Matt would be the first one to make sure the welcome mat was taken out, dusted off and put in place.

Matt closed his eyes and began to stroke Mike's cock with his soapy hands. "For sure Suzie's hot. And I don't need to have my eyes checked to see she's in need of a whole lot of TLC. Think she likes to party?"

"Hard to say."

"Maybe she's just hoping one of us will pay her a visit?"

"Maybe so. But if we wait, she may come looking for us and we'll get to share."

"That would be great. But what if she doesn't?" Just thinking about Suzie's curves and cute ass made Matt's stiff prick throb with need. And that mouth of hers. It was all too easy for him to imagine those full, rosy red lips wrapped around his dick, sucking him all the way to paradise and beyond.

"Why don't we wait for a bit and see? I wouldn't want to scare her off."

"Me either. And in the meantime..." Matt laughed as he spread Mike's butt cheeks and pushed the head of his cock into his lover's anus. "You and I can have a little playtime of our own."

\* \* \* \*



Suzie knew she'd slept for no more than an hour max out on the patio, but it had been just enough to give her a whole new lease on life. She felt refreshed, energized, and ready to party the night away. Except Matt and Mike had gone to bed and by now were probably snoring their handsome heads off, leaving her alone and wide awake to twiddle her thumbs and scratch an itch she preferred not to scratch by herself.

She flopped back against the pillows and surveyed the room. She needed something to redirect her thoughts. She knew some people always carried a book in their purse for emergencies, but she'd never felt the need and there was nothing to read in here. Except for the furniture, a collection of glass animals on the bureau and a few pictures on the walls, there was nothing in the room in the way of a diversion.

Putting on the cotton robe she'd brought with her, she slipped out of bed and headed for the door. She'd noticed a pile of magazines on the coffee table in the living room when she first arrived. Maybe a handful of those and a glass of cold water would do the trick.

The house was dark and silent, but before she'd taken more than two or three steps along the hall, she heard a burst of laughter from behind one of the closed doors. She paused, listening. She could hear talking, but the words were mumbled and indistinct.

Figuring one of the men must be on the phone, she waited until the talking ceased and then she tapped on what she hoped was the right the door. She had no idea whose room

this was, and it didn't really matter, provided she got the welcome she was hoping for.

She waited for a few seconds, but no one answered, and she was about to continue on her original quest for magazines and a glass of water when the door opened a crack and Matt peeked out.

"What's the problem? Can't sleep?"

"No. I tried, but..." She shrugged and fiddled with the belt of her robe. "You know how it goes sometimes."

He smiled. "Matter of fact, I'm having the same problem myself. Maybe we need something to settle us down."

"You figure?" She gave him a flirty smile and ran the tip of her tongue along her upper lip. "And just what do think might accomplish that?"

"I might have a couple of ideas." The smile turned into a lascivious grin, and he opened the door wide. Suzie went to step inside, then paused and sucked in a quick breath when she realized not only was Matt completely naked, he wasn't alone. Mike was lying, spread-eagled, on the king-sized bed, naked as the day he was born, with his eyes closed and the loveliest erection jutting straight out from his crotch that she'd seen in ... considerably longer than she cared to think about. She drew in another, deeper breath and let it out slowly. Was this an invitation to party? Or was this what she'd thought they were into the first time she saw them?

"You wanna join us?"

"Join you?" She hesitated, positive there must be something wrong with her hearing. If the guys were gay, gay men didn't ... or did they? Although, bearing in mind the way

each of them had come on to her earlier, maybe they swung both ways. "I ... umm ... I don't know ... I ... Betts ... you know the lady who lives up the street, she said you weren't, that you were ... Oh, shit! But now I see she was wrong and that you are. I'm really sorry. Please excuse me for barging in like this. I didn't know. Just forget I was here. I ... I'll go find that glass of cold—"

Matt grabbed her arm before she could take off and turned her around to face him. "It's okay, Suzie. No big deal and nothing to be embarrassed about. Mike and I live together, and yes, we love one another, but that doesn't mean we don't also enjoy making love with women, because we do. And sometimes, when the right girl happens by, we like to do everything all together."

Suzie forced the word out. "Together?" She hesitated. Her dreams never came true ... or did they? Suddenly, the itch to watch them kiss and pleasure one another, and then to feel their hands on her and inside her grew by leaps and bounds, until it encompassed her whole body. She desperately wanted to touch them, too. Earlier, she'd have settled for either man. Now she was being offered the opportunity to enjoy both Matt and Mike at the same time. At least, that's what it sounded like. "Meaning?"

Matt's big hands slid down her body and squeezed her ass, and she felt her bones turn to jelly and her insides melt. "As in you, me and Mike. But if you're not in to that and would feel more comfortable with just one of us, then that's okay, too."

She wrapped her arms around him and did a little squeezing of her own. It had been so long since she'd made love, let alone done anything this wild and adventurous, even so ... "The three of us together sounds good."

He gave a soft, sexy chuckle that set her juices to flowing and did weird things to her knees. "That's what we hoped you'd say."

"You did?"

"You bet. You're gorgeous and you're hot. And we figure you're in dire need of some topnotch loving."

"Topnotch?"

"Of course. After the day you've had, I'd say you deserve nothing but the best."

As he bent his head and captured her mouth with his, Matt pushed the robe off her shoulders and let it to fall to the floor. Then, without breaking the kiss, he picked her up and they joined Mike on the bed.

Suzie's previous knowledge of threesomes was limited to uninhibited, beer-guzzling college students with high testosterone levels and a thirst for adventure, and the mechanical, emotionless sex she'd seen on late night TV. But she knew the aim of a threesome like this wasn't always just the woman's pleasure—sometimes the woman got to watch while the men made love, and she had a feeling that was about to happen here. And to be included in that kind of pleasure party with Matt and Mike—whom she suspected knew exactly what they were doing—was beyond exciting.

"Just relax and leave it to us for now," Matt murmured as he transferred his attention from her mouth to Mike's.

Suzie licked her lips and feasted her gaze on the rapturous expressions on the two men's faces as Matt groaned softly and dipped his tongue into his partner's mouth. Watching the two of them kiss was a thousand times more erotic than what she'd seen those boys do back in college. This was the real thing. These guys loved one another. As their hands came into play and they began to stroke and fondle one another, her excitement grew to the point where her body began to react. She slid a hand between her legs. She was wet, and her vaginal muscles were having a fit, demanding attention. She made a sound deep in her throat. She knew was on the verge of coming, but it seemed Matt knew that, too, because he turned quickly and began to kiss her breasts. Before she could wonder where Mike was, he moved in, spoon-fashion, behind her and began to gently, but insistently stroke her pussy until she parted her legs to allow him access.

While Matt continued to lick and suck her breasts until she felt the sensations travel all the way down to her groin, Mike inserted a finger into her slit and rubbed it back and forth over her nub until she groaned with pleasure.

"Feel good?" Mike whispered in her ear.

"Feels fabulous. But you guys are doing all the giving here."

"We figure you need a little pampering, so just move over onto your back, raise your knees and let yourself go, okay?"

Mike moved out from behind her, and after she'd done as he instructed, he opened her legs wide and positioned himself between them as he slipped on a condom. "Now close your eyes."

Again, she did as she was told.

The moment Matt moved up and slid his tongue into her mouth, she felt Mike's hot breath on her pussy, then the velvety slide of his tongue and the sharpness of his teeth as he began to lick, suck and bite. This was so much better than those experiments at school. These guys knew all the moves. In no time at all, she went into sensory overload and before she could stop it, the first orgasm hit her like the explosion of a heat-seeking missile. A moment later, the second orgasm arrived in a shower of shooting stars as Mike replaced his mouth with the impressive length of his hard cock and began to ride her.

Then Matt straddled her chest, and she felt his erection bob against her mouth. Desperate to show she was just as good at giving as she was at taking, she grasped his shaft in both hands, helped him put on a condom, and took him into her mouth. When she'd taken as much of him as she could accommodate, she began to squeeze his balls and suck him hard until she felt a shudder run through his body and he pulled free.

Moving behind her, he pulled her up into a semi-sitting position with her back against his chest. While his mouth nuzzled her neck, he opened her legs even wider so he could rub her clit as Mike began to stroke faster and faster.

She felt her inner muscles tighten, and knew she was on the edge again. However, she'd never climaxed three times in one session, and she didn't think she could do it now, but...

But then the whole world erupted in flames. She came and then Mike came, and as the shock waves receded and the

steam went out of them, Mike gave a triumphant whoop of joy as he gathered Suzie in his arms and rolled onto his back with her on top of him and Matt beside them.

Suzie let her breathing and heart-rate settle down, then she raised herself up a little and smiled as she regarded the two men. "That was pretty spectacular stuff, guys."

"Think you'll be able to sleep now?" Matt asked.

"No."

"No?" the pair repeated, phony expressions of dismay on their handsome faces.

"No. I'm not letting you off that easy. I'm kinda hot and sweaty, and I need a shower." She lowered one eyelid in a wink, then followed it with a wiggle of her butt and a sexy laugh as she left the bed and picked up her robe. Returning to the bed, she twirled one end of the belt in their faces like a stripper in a nightclub. "Anyone care to join me?" she invited in a fair imitation of the husky voice of an old-time movie actress.

"Umm..." Matt leaned over and kissed Mike, then made Suzie catch her breath as he reached down and slowly ran a finger up and down the crack of Mike's ass. "What do you think, man? Someone has to make sure this chick washes behind her ears, right?"

"Right. And how will she know whether or not her neck is clean unless we're there to check it out."

"Good thing there's lots of room in our shower." Matt jumped off the bed and led the way. "After you, ma'am," he added, sliding open the glass shower door with a flourish and a broad grin, indicating Suzie should step in first.

When the three of them were all inside the cubicle, he began fiddling with the faucets and dials. "How do we want it? Cool, warm, hot? Light massage, medium, or hard?"

Suzie poured a little shower gel on her hands and began to stroke Matt's softened dick back into action. The moment he responded to her ministrations, she turned her attention to Mike. "How about we hold the cool water for a minute and leave the massaging to me?"

Once she had both men aroused, Suzie poured more gel into her hands and began to soap their bodies with leisurely strokes, until she noticed Matt biting his lips and Mike's hands tightening into fists.

She stopped what she was doing, tried to hide her inexperience with a smile, and then said, "Come on, guys, help me out. I want us to all come together, but I don't have a lot of experience in these things, so I'm not sure how to make that happen."

Matt grinned, a sparkle of mischief in his blue eyes as he grabbed the tube of shower gel from Suzie's hand. "We take it very slow, very easy, and one step at a time. Okay?"

"Slow and easy. Hmm ... okay, I guess." Suzie hid the desire to giggle with a frown. "But I think you're gonna have to give me a hands-on demonstration. I wouldn't want to mess up or do the wrong thing."

"I mean real slow, like this." Putting the tube of gel back on the shower caddy, Matt hooked an arm around Mike's neck and pulled him close for a long, leisurely kiss, that involved a lot of tongue, a lot of groaning, and sent an anticipatory shiver of excitement running down Suzie's bare back. For one



insane second, she wanted to push them apart so she could get in on the action.

But then Matt released Mike with an affectionate slap on his butt, and picked up the tube of gel. After squeezing a little of the gel on to his hand, he gave the tube to Mike, and crooked a finger at Suzie, beckoning her forward. "Now, it's our turn," he said softly. "If you wanna do her front, Mike, I'll take the back. Gotta make real sure that neck is super clean."

Suzie soon found out that Matt's idea of washing her neck included a lot of kissing and biting, and Mike's idea of cleanliness revolved around soaping, then sucking her breasts until the nipples stood out in hard peaks. She was so aroused, she wanted to touch them, too, but when she tried, Matt slapped her hands away. "No touching 'til we're done," he warned. "Otherwise..."

"Otherwise, what?"

"We may have to punish you."

"Really?"

"Really."

Mike laughed, sending another shiver of excitement shooting through her veins as she pondered what form that punishment might take.

As Mike's attention wandered from her breasts to her navel and then on down to her bush, Matt's big hands began to soap her ass. Then, parting her cheeks, he slipped a finger into her anus and pushed it slowly back and forth. "You okay with this?" he asked. "You said you don't have a lot of experience with this kind of action, and we wouldn't want to upset you or scare you off..."

"I'm fine. I had anal sex with my last boyfriend, so that's not a problem. But I'm sure there are things I don't know, so I really like this one step at a time approach."

She closed her eyes and held her breath as Mike began to play with her pussy. It didn't take more than a few thrusts of his fingers over her clit and up inside her, and he had her right on the edge—except she didn't want to come just yet. Then she heard one of the men whisper something, and she opened her eyes to discover they were using their free hands to arouse one other. She swallowed hard, listening to Mike's soft moans and watching the expression on his face and the vein throbbing in his neck as Matt's clever fingers made his lovely big cock grow even bigger.

After a moment, Matt stopped what he was doing to Mike, wrapped his arms around Suzie's waist and nipped the soft skin just below her ear. "You ready for the next step?"

"That the one where we all come together?"

Matt took a couple of condoms from the shower caddy and handed them to Suzie. Once she'd helped sheath both him and Mike, he said, "We'll try this one first."

He bent over a little and Suzie licked her lips, feeling her pussy twitch with impatience as Mike slathered some gel onto his stiff shaft, parted Matt's ass cheeks and pushed the head into his hole. "This feels so good, bro," Mike said with a sigh as he began to stroke slowly and kiss and nuzzle Matt's back at the same time. "So damn good, d'ya think Suzie might like to share a little more loving with us?"

"Dunno, bro? Maybe you'd better ask her."

Suzie was turned on by what Matt and Mike were doing and by the dreamy expressions on their faces. They so obviously loved and cared for one another, and she so badly to be part of what was happening, a combination of nerves and excitement was making her shake. "What do you want me to do?"

Matt chuckled. "Whenever you're ready just turn up the shower a little, hold onto the rail there, and bend over, my little chickadina."

The moment she finished doing as Matt asked, she felt his hands caressing her butt, and she just melted. Then, something cool and wet touched her skin as he lubricated her butt hole with what she assumed was the same stuff Mike had used. He entered her very slowly and gently, and once he was inside, his hands came around the front of her body and began to play with her pussy.

"You still fine, Suzie?"

"You betcha."

"Good," Mike put in. "Because if you guys feels the same way I do, then this is where things have to stop being slow and easy."

For Suzie, it was the ride of her life. Gradually, the thrusts became stronger and more powerful, but she hung on tight to the rail. And as she started to climax in a series of short explosions, she got her wish because she knew it was happening for the guys, too.

She felt Matt's body sag, and as he released her and Mike turned up the water pressure even further, she lifted her face to the stinging, invigorating needles of the spray. By the time

they'd all finished soaping one another and rinsed themselves off, she felt better about herself than she had in a very long time.

She'd had a horrendous day, but she'd met two really great guys. And while her house was a mess, and, with no job, her future was one big question mark, at least she was in one piece. She would survive.

"Ready for sleep now?" Matt asked with a tender smile as he wrapped her in a big fluffy towel and carried her back to the bed.

"I will once I've had something to drink. That kind of heavy exercise makes me thirsty."

"Soda? Wine?" Mike inquired.

"I'd rather have some water, if that's okay with you."

Mike brought her the requested glass of water, but after a couple of sips, Suzie put down the glass and was soon fast asleep.

She awoke once in the night, to find Matt facing her and Mike tucked into her back with his arm wrapped securely around her waist, but the next time she opened her eyes, the sun was high in the sky and she was alone in the big bed.

When she finally made her way to the kitchen in search of coffee, she found a note.

*'Morning, sunshine,*

*We had to leave for an early appointment with a client who's going out of town. So, make yourself at home. Coffee's in the container on the counter, and there's plenty to eat in the refrigerator. Just help yourself to whatever you want, and we'll be back around four.*

Suzie smiled and put down the note. It had been signed with two big kisses, and a key for the front door had been left beside it.

She didn't believe in love at first sight, so it would be crazy for her to say she'd fallen in love with two guys she'd known for less than twenty-four hours. But how else could she explain the way she felt about them? She felt like she'd known them forever instead of less than a day. They were so loving and caring, so supportive, and the three of them just went together perfectly like strawberries laced with sugar and cream, or her favorite hamburger topped with bacon and cheese, or...

She sighed and pulled her head down from out of the clouds. Once the flood damage was fixed, she'd be returning to her own house—that was a given. But maybe the three of them could remain friends and visit back and forth. Maybe have sleepovers? At least, that's what she was hoping would happen.

The day was warm, but the thought of going back to her solitary existence at the house across the street sent a cold shiver skipping over her bare arms. After last night and with Sam gone, she didn't want to be by herself, she'd much rather stay here and—

*You can't, so forget it!*

Matt and Mike were an established couple, for heaven's sake. While they might enjoy the odd female distraction once in a while, that was all. They weren't about to alter their lives to include her full-time. Anyway, she needed to concentrate all her resources on solving more important problems, such

as fixing her house and finding a new job. She'd just made the mortgage payment for this month, and next month's payment was sitting safely in the bank, but even so, she couldn't afford to spend time sitting around feeling sorry for herself.

She had no idea what her chances were of using her business degree to secure a well-paying, long term job here in Woodland. Being a small town, they probably weren't that good, and checking the situation out could take time. While she was doing that, she would have to find something else—delivering pizzas, or working in a fast food restaurant—anything that would bring in enough money to cover her day-to-day expenses and allow sufficient time for her to fix the house up a little, just enough to make it attractive to prospective purchasers. Then, if the job search here didn't work out, she would sell it, hope to make herself a small profit, and move on. Maybe go to a larger city where there were more opportunities in both radio and business.

Turning on the faucet, she filled the tank of the coffee machine up to the two-cup line, added the required amount of coffee grounds to the filter and pressed the on switch.

She'd used her savings and the money left to her by her parents to put a substantial down payment on the house. The place was old-fashioned, badly in need of an update, but at least nothing had needed doing right away. She'd figured she could replace the windows and doors and do all the other major renovations, such as a new kitchen and bathroom, over time.

If she was lucky enough to find a decent job, she could still do all that and more. The house was in a nice area on a well-kept street and the neighboring properties were all in great shape. And, thanks to Betts and her font of local information, she knew if she was able to stay and do a complete upgrade the way she'd planned, her house would eventually be worth close to double what she'd paid for it.

The ready light appeared on the coffee machine. She filled a mug with the dark, aromatic brew, added a teaspoon of sugar, and took it outside with her to the patio.

At least she had the best part of two months to try and turn her luck around. If she couldn't find a suitable job here in town, there were two other larger towns within easy access, and she had an almost new car. It wouldn't kill her to commute for a while.

Or maybe she'd fire up her computer which, thankfully, she kept in a part of the house unaffected by the flood and play the game she'd learned from a friend about finding a need and filling it. She could cook and bake, she could sew, and she loved gardening. There were lots of things she could do without having to spend money to set up in business. She could hire herself out as a house cleaner, or a cat sitter, cater small dinner parties, bake cookies and cakes and sell them at the farmer's market. People were always looking for someone to do the things they either couldn't or didn't want to do themselves.

After finishing the last of her coffee, she went back to the kitchen and as she rinsed out the mug, she noticed a shirt belonging to one of the men had been left hanging on the

back of one of the chairs. She picked up the garment and pressed it against her face, inhaling the scent as she thought back to last night. In spite of her inexperience, it had been good for all of them. So good, she hoped there would be a second time, but if there wasn't, she'd survive. Betts had said the guys were only into one-night stands. And maybe that's how it worked for them. They were a family, and like families everywhere they needed the occasional treat to spice up what she could see was a strong and committed relationship.

Putting the shirt back where she'd found it, she continued on through the house to the guest room to get ready to go out.

There was an employment agency in the same block where the radio station had its offices, so she'd give them a try first—if nothing else it would give her an idea of the job situation locally and what, if any, opportunities might be available. After that she'd check the newspaper, and if she struck out in both places, she'd consult her computer for advice.

She added a dab of color to her pale cheeks and smiled at her reflection in the mirror. She'd had enough of moving around the country. She liked Woodland and small town life, and, after meeting Matt and Mike, she wanted to stay. All she needed was to find the kind of job with decent enough pay to make all that possible.

\* \* \* \*

By lunchtime, Suzie realized her chances of finding any kind of job in or around town were slim at best. It was



summertime, so the lower paying positions had all been snatched up by the high school and college kids, and what few vacancies there were for better paying jobs required specialized training she didn't have and couldn't acquire overnight.

The counselor at the agency was sorry, but apart from suggesting Suzie leave a copy of her résumé in case something turned up, there was nothing she could do.

Suzie also dropped off copies of her work history at her bank and a bunch of other places, but from the standard, we'll-let-you-know-if-anything-turns-up and the polite don't-hold-your-breath smiles, she knew she was wasting her time. Woodland was a small town and, like most small towns, she could almost guarantee when a vacancy did occur you needed to know someone who knew the right person who would put in a good word on your behalf.

At least her house was drying out a lot faster than she'd expected. Contrary to what she'd been afraid of, the ceiling had not collapsed, and according to the plumber and the electrician who arrived together in the middle of the afternoon and completed their inspections, the pipes and wiring all appeared to be in good shape. In other words, everything was okay for her to move back in.

As she was trying to put the living room back into some semblance of order, she heard a knock on the open front door and Matt walked in.

He had dirt and plaster dust in his blond hair, a smudge of blue paint on his chin—the exact same blue as his eyes—and

he was giving her a killer smile that made Suzie go weak at the knees.

"Hey, babe, how was your day?" He strolled over and gave her a hug and a kiss on the nose. "I see your ceiling didn't fall down after all. You're lucky."

"I guess."

"Did you miss me?"

She loved Matt's male scent and the feel of his hard body against her soft curves. "Of course."

"What about me? Did you miss me, too?" Mike wanted to know, his sexy dark eyes reminding Suzie of the previous night, as he followed Matt into the room and joined in the hug.

She smiled as she reached up and pressed the tips of her fingers against Mike's mouth. "Yes. I missed you, too. You guys have a good day?"

"Yeah. But it was unbelievably busy," Matt said as he let her go and flopped down on the sofa. "Mike works me like a dog. He's a regular slave driver."

Mike laughed as he wrapped his arms around Suzie from behind and rested his chin on her shoulder, giving her hopes she suppressed before they could take serious hold. "I have to. If I don't keep an eye on Matt, he's always goofing off, or chatting up the chicks."

At the mention of chicks, Suzie experienced what she knew was an unreasonable stab of jealousy. They were men, and she knew that's what men did—they flirted and flaunted their assets around women in exactly the same way women strutted their stuff for the enjoyment of the male species.

Even so, she felt her muscles tense. These were *her* guys and she didn't want to think about them doing things like that with other women.

"It's okay, relax," Mike, who apparently read minds, whispered in her ear. "Today, Matt did nothing much except walk around dreamy-eyed and talk about you. I think he's smitten."

"Smitten?"

"According to my grandma, it means he's fallen for you big time. At least, he's acting like he has. Matter of fact, he's been behaving that way for ages. Ever since you moved in here."

"You're putting me on."

"No way. He's been spending all his time trying to come up with the perfect excuse to come over and say hi."

"So why didn't he?"

"Must be shy, I guess."

Positive Mike was putting her on, Suzie turned her head and tried to catch a glimpse of his face. "He is not."

"He is so."

A wash of color spread up Matt's neck and into his face. "Okay, so I'm an idiot," he admitted. "I thought you might be feeling lonely. But Mike said you'd probably think I was being pushy and slam the door in my face. I didn't want that to happen. And I know Mike didn't want that to happen either."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm pretty sure he's just as smitten as I am, and he was worried I might mess things up."

Suzie relaxed against the solid safety of Mike's broad chest. "You think?"

"I know so. He said we should wait and give you time to settle in. So we did, and hey, as far as I'm concerned, it was well worth the wait."

"It was?"

"You bet. We had a great time last night."

The hopes she'd had a moment ago resurfaced, and she snuggled her butt tight against the juncture of Mike's thighs. Just maybe they were interested in more than a one-nighter. "Yeah. I did, too."

"Wanna stay over at our place again tonight?" Mike asked. Her heart skipped a joyful beat. "Can I think about it?"

"What's to think about?" Matt grinned as he pushed himself up and off the sofa. "We'll have a swim first, then I'm making spaghetti and meatballs for supper, and you're invited. Deal?"

"Depends on what you're having for dessert," she said, trying to leer and not spoil it by laughing.

Matt's grin turned a little wicked as he threw her a mischievous glance over his shoulder. "Let's do dinner first. We can always figure out something sweet for dessert later. Maybe something with whipped cream?"

"And strawberries?" Suzie wanted to know.

"Have you ever tried it with bananas?" Mike inquired with a not-so-innocent grin. "Whipped cream and bananas! Oh, yum!"

"And butterscotch sauce?" Suzie added. She could feel herself melting already.

"I bet chocolate's even better," Matt teased.

Suzie laughed with delight. "We'd better stay with the whipped cream. Butterscotch and chocolate tend to be a bit messy."

Matt came back, picked her up in his arms and whirled her around. "Getting messy is the best part, my little *chicadina*. Right, Mike?"

"Sure is." He waggled his dark eyebrows and tried to look evil. "What do you suggest, Matt? That we stripe her from top to toe in butterscotch, chocolate and whipped cream, tie her hands behind her back and make her plead for us to clean her up?"

"You wouldn't dare," Suzie said, laughing with delight as Matt swung her around a second time.

"Want to double-dare us?"

\* \* \* \*

Later in the evening, as they relaxed by the pool, Mike said, "So what did you do today, Suzie? Besides clean up the mess from the flood."

"I printed out my résumé and went looking for a job."

"And?"

"Absolutely nothing at all. The job situation in this town is non-existent. I left my application at a whole bunch of places, but I'm afraid none of them looked even slightly promising. I imagine there'll be a few minimum wage jobs after the schools re-open in September, but that's about it. In fact, the way I see things, I have two choices: I can open my own business and do housecleaning, yard work or dog-walking or

anything else that doesn't require a fortune in start-up capital, or I can check out some of the neighboring towns and, if I find something worthwhile, resign myself to the idea of commuting back and forth. If neither of those ideas work out, my only other option is to sell my property for whatever I can get and either move back to California or go to the nearest big city."

"Yeah, that's what Matt and I figured about your job prospects here," Mike said with a sigh. "If you're not born here and aren't related to the mayor or anyone with influence, it can be damn tough if not impossible to find anything. So we came up with a brilliant idea."

"You want to hire me as your housekeeper?" she teased.

"You said you have a degree in business management. Right?"

Suzie nodded.

"How would you like to manage our business?"

For a moment, Suzie stared at Mike in shock. "Me, work for you guys? You have enough jobs in a town this size that you need to hire a full-time manager?"

"We have an office downtown, and we don't do renovations just here in Woodland," Matt put in. "We have a waiting list of at least a dozen confirmed projects within a fifty-mile radius, with more bookings coming in every day. And it wouldn't be just ordinary, everyday office work like bookkeeping and tax returns. Our accountant does most of that. We need someone to do the scheduling and the buying, and generally keep everything organized."

"Matt and I will buy the main basic building materials. But our current workload keeps us so damn busy, we don't have time to search out the fiddly stuff like a certain shade of paint or type of fabric, or the perfect ornament for the client's new hall table. And we don't have hours to spend on the computer researching new wall finishes or new decorating trends the way we did when we started out. We need help."

Suzie's head was in a whirl. The job sounded really intriguing. She loved to shop, and she'd always been careful to keep her own life well organized, so she couldn't see how taking care of the administration side of the business would prove to be that big a deal. "You design all these makeovers yourselves?"

Mike nodded. "We talk to the client and agree on the basics of what they want done, and then we take it from there. I had plans to be an architect, but they didn't work out. Takes too long to qualify. But we both have degrees in interior design. We also have a carpenter and a guy who can do plastering and turn his hand to just about anything working for us full-time, and qualified people on call for the plumbing and electrical. Everything else, we do ourselves. But it's now reached a point where we either cut back on the number of jobs we accept, or we hire someone to keep everything organized and also look after buying the specialty items for each project."

"What do you mean by specialty items?"

"Clients are always asking us to match paint and fabrics to the exact blue of their wife's eyes, or the same shade of pink as the baby's first birthday party dress. It can be a

frustrating, time-consuming job, but it's what our clients have come to expect, and it's what brings us repeat business and word-of-mouth recommendations. So, what do you think?"

Suzie sucked in a deep breath. "I'm not sure what to think."

"Mike said you know a bit about interior decorating and that's why you bought a house that needed work," Matt said.

"I took a few classes, but I haven't had much time to put what I learned into practice—apart from painting the upstairs apartment. I've been told I have a good eye for color, but I think that applies to choosing colors for myself. I don't know about working for you guys, though. You're professionals. I wouldn't even know where to start when it comes to finding one-of-a-kind or unique anything, never mind decorating items. And as for fabrics, I know the difference between chintz and microfiber, but I'm no expert."

"At least you have some knowledge of the business we're in. And what you don't know about the shopping aspect can always be learned," Mike said as he picked up the wine bottle and refilled their glasses. "It's not difficult. We'll show you the project, tell you what we have in mind, and give you a shopping list. After that, all you need to do is keep the project details in mind while you're doing the actual buying and be sure whatever you buy is returnable in case the client doesn't like it. One of us can go with you until you're confident enough to do it on your own."

"What do you say? Think you'd like working with us?" Matt asked.



"Sure I'd like working with you. At least, I think I would. But what if I screw up?"

"We'll deduct it from your check."

"Really?"

"No, of course not. Come on, say yes."

"We have a little something for you if you do," Mike added. "You can call it a signing bonus or incentive or whatever."

"What kind of something?" Suzie chuckled, then touched her forehead with her closed fist. "Oh, right. I bet it's a hard hat or a carpenter's apron."

"No."

"What is it?"

"You have to say yes, first."

"And if I say no?"

Matt laughed. "In that case, Mike'll have to take it back, since it was his idea."

"Okay, I hate surprises and the suspense is killing me. Yes. I'll come work for you. I'll stand on my head if that's what it takes. What did you get me?"

"Close your eyes," Mike instructed, "and I'll be right back."

Suzie closed her eyes. A few seconds later, she heard the patio door open and close and then something warm and soft was laid in her lap.

She knew at once what it was, but she kept her eyes tightly shut, partly to hang on to the surprise a tiny bit longer and also to stop the tears from pouring down her face.

She felt the soft touch of a small paw on her arm, then there was a faint meow, and she opened her eyes, unable to stand the suspense for another second.

The kitten was a tabby like Sam. Greeny-gold eyes, a bright pink nose and a thick, short coat, but the grey markings were more pronounced and he had a sparkling white bib and front paws. "Oh, he's gorgeous," she said, cuddling the kitty up close. "You guys are really too much. Where did you find him?"

"A little girl brought him over to the place where we were working early this morning," Mike explained. "She said some neighbors left him behind when they moved, and since she already had two cats herself, her mom thought they should find him a new home. He's about six months old and his name is Charlie. We checked with the girl's mother, just to be sure. She said he was a stray the neighbors had been feeding."

"And I guess she figured we looked like a prime pair of suckers," Matt added with a smile.

"So he hasn't had his shots?"

Mike shook his head. "The mother said as far as she knew he hadn't been fixed or had his shots, so Matt took him straight over to the vet's and left him there to get checked out. He's still young, so the op was no big deal, and since there were no complications, we were able to collect him on the way home."

"And the reason we didn't give him to you right away was because he was sleeping off the anesthetic," Matt said, using his forefinger to pet Charlie's head. "Still is by the look of things."

"He's so sweet," Suzie crooned, stroking the tiny animal's soft fur. "I just love him."

"Told you it was a bad idea," Matt said, rolling his blue eyes and emitting a long, drawn-out sigh. "That cat's going to get all the attention around here, and we'll be left out in the cold. Just you wait and see."

"I guess he can use Sam's litter pan and sleeping basket. And I have both dry and wet food he can eat," Suzie said, while trying to think if there was anything else Charlie might need that she didn't have. "But we'll need to get kitten vitamins."

"It's okay," Mike said, standing up and plucking Charlie from Suzie's lap. "The tech at the vet's gave us a list of everything he'll need. I picked it all up while he was having his surgery, and I've made him his own space in the laundry room. Come and I'll show you."

Suzie followed Mike into the house and carefully inspected the blue plastic pan half-filled with unscented litter, the unused portion in a bag beside it, and the brush and comb, kitty shampoo, vitamins and laxative that were all set out on a shelf. Then she glanced down at the floor at the wicker basket lined with a soft blue blanket and the catnip mouse sitting on the edge and thought about the way Sam had always curled up beside her on the bed. "You don't really expect Charlie to sleep on a cold tile floor, do you?"

"Why not? He'll be perfectly safe," Mike said, looking a tad confused. "And he has a nice new blanket in his basket to keep him warm."

"That's not the point. He's only a baby. What if he wakes up in the night and finds himself locked in here?"

"What about it?" Matt asked, looking just as confused Mike. "Where do you think he should sleep?"

Suzie picked up the basket and headed in the direction of the master bedroom. "With us, of course. Where else?"

Matt looked at Mike and started to laugh. "Know what, bro? I do believe we've got ourselves a couple of major additions to our family."

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Christiane France

Christiane truly believes that love makes the world go round, so she likes stories with both happy and bittersweet endings. Christiane has been writing romance for the past twenty years and lives near Niagara Falls with her husband and The Boys—two black and white Persian cats.

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Don't miss *Inseparable*, by Christiane France,

available at [AmberHeat.com](http://AmberHeat.com)!

*When Alison Palmer flees to England to escape the financial mess left by her late, philandering husband, she is, to use her own words, plain flat on her ass. With no money and no job training of any kind her future looks pretty grim—until she gets a job house-sitting Foxton Hall and meets handsome Nick Berringford and his deceased, identical twin brother, Nathan.*

*Nick and Nathan's parents once owned the Hall, and the twins were planning to buy it back. But before that could happen, Nathan was involved in a freak accident and died. Now, rumor has it Nathan's ghost not only haunts the bedroom where he died, but the ghost is gaining a reputation for making love to any woman who happens to sleep there.*

*At first, Ali thinks she's having sexy dreams about the live twin, Nick, until Nathan introduces himself, and Ali realizes*

*she's as much in love both the ghost and his twin, and the trio are quickly caught up in a ménage a trois.*

*Nick knows Nathan's spirit is trapped in the Hall and that's why he's also never left the village—he won't desert his brother. They are, in fact, inseparable. But what will happen if Nick's bid to buy back the Hall is successful? Will Nathan's unfinished business cause him to disappear out of their lives for good?*

\* \* \* \*

Don't miss *The Powers Of Love*, by J.M.Snyder,

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*With his shaved head, piercings, and tattoos, the muscular Vic Braunson isn't one who falls hopelessly in love at first sight. But when he meets swim instructor Matt diLorenzo at the gym, sparks fly ... despite the fact that Matt is dating Vic's co-worker.*

*Then a chance encounter months later brings them together. When they finally consummate their relationship, there's no denying the energy between them. But the next morning, Vic awakens to find his mind crowded with a myriad of thoughts, none of them his own. After their second night of making love, Vic is filled with unparalleled strength. Oh, and now he can fly.*

Double Delicious  
by Christiane France

*Suddenly Vic is filled with questions he doesn't know how to answer. First, just what exactly is going on here? And how does he tell Matt without alienating his new lover or ruining their budding relationship? Or does Matt know something he, himself, is only now discovering?*

\* \* \* \*

Don't miss Soul Obsession by Amy Wolff-Sorter,

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*A story blazing with reluctant passion, bitter betrayal, ghostly retribution and the battle for a man's very soul...*

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*Daniel Grogan is at the top of his game as he prepares to marry a wealthy socialite. But something goes wrong on his wedding day and his path takes a crazy turn toward strange visions of mountains and oceans, and a growing obsession about a woman he's never met face to face.*

*A rebellious rabbi...*

*Peggy Witwater entered the rabbinate to serve her people. When congregational politics deal her a vicious blow, she fights the tide of change while trying to help Daniel; not realizing her actions could ignite her own deeply buried obsessions.*

*Passion and vengeance from beyond the grave...*

*As the two are drawn toward one another, they fall under the shadow of a vengeful spirit who will stop at nothing to claim Daniel. To win the battle for his soul, Daniel must*

Double Delicious  
*by Christiane France*

*acknowledge past wrongs, or risk falling into an eternal—and fatal—enchantment.*

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)



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