



# The Heat is On

Elle Kennedy

  
SAMHAIN

It's all about the thrill...

*Out of Uniform, Book 6*

As a Navy SEAL, Matt O'Connor specializes in Bad Boy. At least, that's what he thinks...until he finds himself face down on the floor during a bank robbery, arguing with a sexy, bad-girl blonde who wields her sharp tongue with surgical precision.

Just like that, Matt begins to wonder if maybe the idea of settling down with one woman isn't as crazy as he thought.

Savannah Harte is addicted to first kisses and whirlwind romances. Once the thrill is gone, though, she's outta there. She's eager to follow the adrenaline rush she feels with Matt into the nearest bed, but when tangled sheets begin to feel like tangled heartstrings, her first instinct is to cut him loose. There's only one problem: Matt's not going anywhere. And not even a steamy threesome seems to dull her growing feelings.

Which leaves Savannah having to decide what she wants more. The casual thrill of now...or the scary thrill of forever.

Warning: This title features a hot threesome with explicit sex, a bad-girl heroine, and two Navy SEALs guaranteed to make you sweat.

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# The Heat is On

*Elle Kennedy*

## Dedication

This one is for all the fans of the Heat series—I hope you enjoy Matt’s story as much as I do!

# Chapter One

“Everyone down on the floor!”

Matt O’Connor always knew there was a reason he hated banks, but it wasn’t until this exact moment that he figured out why: Money made people go insane. And a building full of it? Well, apparently that made people turn into idiots.

Yup, idiots. That was the only word he could use to describe the three morons who bounded into the lobby of San Diego Savings and Loans with pantyhose covering their faces. They wore ill-fitting camo outfits that they’d probably picked up at a discount army surplus store, and the way two of them held their older-model handguns revealed that handling weapons wasn’t their strong suit. The third guy, whose long black hair stuck out from beneath his ridiculous pantyhose mask, held his 9mm with ease, but aside from the fact that he knew how to grip a gun, he was as inept as the others.

Several female patrons in the brightly lit lobby shrieked at the sight of the robbers, immediately face-planting themselves on the beige tiled floor. An older gentleman took his time lowering himself down, while a couple of others just stood frozen in place as if they couldn’t figure out if this was for real or if they were being punk’d.

“This is a bank robbery!” Black Hair shouted.

Matt rolled his eyes. First of all, no shit. Secondly, didn’t robbers say something like “this is a hold-up?” Who used the words *bank robbery* during a bank robbery?

“You! Yeah, you, shaved head!”

Huh. They were talking to him, Matt realized. He turned slowly to find the barrel of a gun pointed at his face, this one wielded by a guy with a huge hooked nose that the hose couldn’t hide. “I said down on the ground.”

With a sigh, Matt bent to his knees. Then, when the gun waved in front of his eyes, he reluctantly lay on his stomach. He could probably have taken down this trio of morons in less than ten seconds, but didn’t want to do anything rash, not until he got a better feel for these guys. Chances were, their weapons weren’t even loaded, but he still decided to let it play out. He was tired from the grueling workout he’d just put his body through on the SEAL obstacle course back on base, and besides, he was kinda curious to see how these robbers planned to carry out their heist.

Hook Nose moved away from Matt and situated himself at the door, pointing his gun at the overweight security guard whose only attempt at stopping this robbery had been squeaking “I’m a security

guard!” when the three men barreled into the bank. The robber in the bright red sneakers paced the lobby, watching the patrons lying on the floor, while Black Hair headed for the nearest teller and said, “Where’s the manager?”

Matt heard tentative footsteps from behind the counter and then a woman with a faint Indian accent said, “I’m the manager.”

“Listen here,” Black Hair yelled.

“Okay, we can all hear you,” an annoyed female voice mumbled to Matt’s immediate left. “No need to keep yelling.”

He shifted his head, surprised when he noticed the blonde hottie lying on her stomach a couple of feet from him. He hadn’t noticed her when he’d come in, and since he could describe each and every last detail about each and every last person in this bank, he deduced that Blondie must have come in when he was talking to the teller. Because he definitely would’ve remembered seeing her. He could tell she was tall, judging by the long, lithe body stretched out on the floor, and her hair was the palest shade of yellow, falling into a pair of big gray eyes. The most distinct thing about her, though, was that she didn’t seem frightened, upset or panicked in the least. If anything, she looked bored by this entire situation.

Spotting him peeking over at her, Blondie rolled her eyes and whispered, “Do you think they bought *Bank Robbing for Dummies* to prepare for this caper?”

“Nobody is going to get hurt!” Black Hair was shouting at the bank manager. “We just want the money.”

There was the sound of paper crumpling, and when Matt tilted his head, he saw Black Hair handing the teller a brown paper bag. Oh for Pete’s sake.

“They couldn’t even spring for a duffel bag?” he muttered under his breath.

Beside him, Blondie coughed to smother a snort.

A register dinged open, followed by four others, as Black Hair moved to each teller’s wicket to collect his hard-earned cash. When he finished, he tossed the bag over to Red Shoes, then turned back to the manager and ordered, “Now we go to the big safe.”

A beat of silence. “You mean the vault?” the woman asked cautiously.

“Yes, the vault, *bitch*.”

“Oooh, someone’s getting upset,” Blondie whispered.

Matt choked back a laugh.

“Nobody here has the combination to the safe,” the manager said. “Only the branch manager can access it.”

“You said you were the manager,” Black Hair snapped, sounding irritated.

“I’m the assistant manager,” came the meek reply.

Silence.

“Uh-oh,” Matt’s new favorite person muttered. “This sure is a conundrum.”

“How will they ever open the big safe now?” he whispered back.

“Shut up!”

The sharp yell came from Red Shoes, whose pacing had brought him to their vicinity. Matt didn’t even flinch as the gun barrel jammed into the nape of his neck. Right, because this idiot was really going to shoot him. These guys couldn’t be older than twenty, twenty-one tops, and they obviously had no clue what they were doing. Matt’s shoulders tensed as he debated whether to wrench the gun from this imbecile’s hands. His muscles relaxed. Naah, no point causing trouble. His interference might make these guys trigger-happy and Matt had no desire to see anyone get hurt. This heist couldn’t last much longer, and no doubt these losers would be arrested the second they exited the bank.

And anyway, this was just starting to get fun.

As Matt and the blonde fell silent, Red Shoes clucked his tongue in approval, lifted his gun, and paced off. At the counter, Black Hair was forcing the manager to dial the branch manager’s home phone number.

“Speakerphone!” he barked.

Matt really wished he could see what was going on above him, but he had to settle for just hearing it. The assistant manager’s cell phone resonated a loud busy tone.

“I guess the branch manager is too cheap to invest in call waiting,” Blondie murmured.

“Maybe he can’t multi-task when it comes to communication,” Matt pointed out, fighting a grin.

“Quiet!” Red Shoes barked at them.

“Call his cell phone,” Black Hair ordered.

This time they got a dial tone, only to be replaced with a booming male voice that announced, “Lewis Templeton, San Diego Savings and Loans. Leave a message.”

More silence.

Obviously Black Hair and his crew of misfits had no idea what to do now that they’d been barred access to the big safe. Across the room, a woman whimpered.

“You’re lying,” Black Hair finally said, anger in his voice. “You do know the combination to the vault, don’t you?”

“I really don’t,” the manager protested.

“Liar!”

“I changed my mind,” Blondie whispered. “I thought they had the IQ of first-graders, but I’ve demoted that down to kindergarten.”

Matt laughed, only to receive another harsh reprimand from Red Shoes, who was beginning to look frazzled by this entire mess. He kept glancing at the enormous window, then at the confused people standing outside the bank door wondering why they couldn’t get in.



“Someone’s using their cell phone out there!” Red Shoes said, sounding frantic. “I think they’re calling the cops, Billy! We should split!”

Billy, the robber formerly known as Black Hair, spun around in fury. “What did I tell you about using our real names, you fucking idiot? Stick to the codes.”

“I bet one of them is *eagle*,” Matt murmured.

“Sorry, Eagle.” Red Shoes sounded humbled. “But we need to split, like, *now*!”

From the corner of his eye, Matt saw the red sneakers making their way to the wicket. The two robbers huddled together, mumbling to each other about their next move.

A streak of impatience shot through Matt, and a little alarm went off in his head. All right. This had gone too far. The guys were panicking now, and idiots plus panic plus guns could only equal trouble. Someone could actually get hurt here.

He glanced at Blondie. “Stay down,” he said in a low voice.

Her gray eyes widened, her mouth parting to protest, but he was already on his feet and springing to action. It took two seconds to disarm Billy and Red Shoes, and two more to land an uppercut on Billy’s jaw that had the guy slumping unconscious onto the floor. Without even breaking a sweat, Matt wrenched Red Shoes’s arms behind his skinny back, getting him in an iron hold that had the guy gasping in pain. Then he raised one of the guns he’d confiscated from the robbers and pointed it at Hook Nose, who looked like a deer caught in headlights over by the door.

“Drop your weapon, or this idiot dies,” Matt called cheerfully.

Hook Nose hesitated for all of a second, and then his handgun clattered to the floor and landed next to the foot of the security guard. “Now get on the ground, hands on your head,” Matt ordered, and the guy dropped down like a bowling pin, just as the wail of sirens filled the air.

Matt glanced over at the security guard, who was staring at him with shocked and grateful eyes, and said, “You’re welcome.”

The cops didn’t keep the patrons in the bank for long. After slapping cuffs on the idiot robbers and carting them into the waiting police cruisers out front, the three officers gathered everyone’s statements and collected contact information should they be called in as witnesses for the moronic trio’s trials. The officer who questioned Matt looked about nineteen, and listened in awe as Matt described how he’d taken out the robbers. He explained he was a Navy SEAL, which got him another dose of awe and a bunch of questions about the Navy, but Matt was only half paying attention to the conversation. Ten feet away, Blondie was speaking to a female police officer who was scrawling things down in a little black notebook.

Now that he had a better view, he realized Blondie was even hotter than he’d thought. Tall, as he’d suspected, but with the figure of a centerfold. Tiny hips, big tits, and the roundest, perkier ass he’d ever

seen. His mouth watered just from looking at her, and a burst of irritation went off inside him when he noticed the officer close her notebook and gesture that Blondie could leave.

Interrupting his own officer mid-sentence, he said, "Can I go now? I've kind of got somewhere to be."

The young cop looked down at the notes he'd made. "Yeah, you're free to go. We'll contact you if there's anything further."

"Good. Great." Matt was already heading toward the double doors, which his sassy blonde had just waltzed through.

He caught up to her just as she reached the small parking lot next to the bank.

"Hey!" he called.

She stopped, glanced over her shoulder, and a wide smile spread across her lips. "Oh, it's you. The big hero."

"Don't bother hiding it. We both know you were impressed with what I did back there," he said with a cocky grin.

Those gray eyes twinkled. "Yeah. I guess that was pretty impressive. What are you, a superhero?"

He shrugged. "I'm a Navy SEAL."

"Oooh, a soldier," she teased, running a manicured hand through her long, blonde hair. "I guess I'm lucky I decided to cash my check today. And to think we never would have met if I did it yesterday." She tilted her head. "Then again, if I did it yesterday, I wouldn't be late for work right now. Good thing I'm my own boss, because I don't think 'I was caught in a bank hold-up' would fly as an excuse for being late."

He grinned at the sarcastic note to her voice. "Yeah, I don't think my team commander would accept it either." He paused. "I'm Matt, by the way."

"Savannah," she replied, sticking out her hand.

He shook it, and a tremor of heat went through him the moment their palms touched. This woman was extremely hot, and definitely amusing. He had a date tonight, with a waitress he'd met last night at a club, but suddenly he had no desire to hook up with the voluptuous brunette. He was far more interested in this leggy blonde in front of him.

"Savannah," he echoed, hearing his southern drawl rear its head. Damn accent always seemed to get stronger when he was flirting. "Your parents like the South or something?"

"No, they like eco-systems."

He blinked. "Huh?"

"My dad is a geography professor at Stanford. He's a big fan of grasslands."

For the life of him, Matt couldn't figure out if she was joking.

"I'm not joking," she said, as if reading his mind. "He teaches an entire unit on the tropical savannahs of Northern Australia."

"Oh. Wow. I honestly don't know what to say to that."

“Yeah, most people don’t.” She tossed her hair over her shoulder, then lifted an electronic car remote and clicked a button. Two sharp honks came from the shiny red Toyota parked a few spots away. Savannah took a few steps toward it. “Okay, gotta run. Thanks for saving us from the bank robbers.”

“Wait,” he cut in.

She stopped. “What?”

He suddenly felt awkward. He wasn’t used to women being completely indifferent to his charms. Though in his defense, he hadn’t been giving her his A-game. That eco-system thing had thrown him off.

“Do you want to get together sometime?”

She seemed to think it over.

To *think* it over.

Since when did women need to mull over the idea of a date with him? The other members of his SEAL team, including his best friend Ryan, were either married, engaged or in serious relationships, but Matt was still carrying on the tradition of hot hook-ups and no-strings flings. He loved women, and he had no desire to settle down with just one. Where was the fun in that? There were so many gorgeous females out there, and he’d spent the better part of ten years sampling each and every one. He was twenty-eight years old and he always got what he wanted in the sex department—and right now, he wanted Savannah.

“Naah, I think I’ll pass,” she finally said, then had the nerve to give him a sympathetic smile.

He returned the smile, but his was loaded with heat. “Are you sure? You were just caught up in very dangerous situation—I think you might need some comforting.”

She gave an unladylike snort. “Comfort sex? Seriously, you’re offering me comfort sex?”

Matt faltered. Again. This woman was totally throwing him off his game here.

He pushed aside the disconcerting thought, gathering up every ounce of charm and confidence he possessed. “I think you might need it,” he said solemnly.

She just raised one dark-blond eyebrow. “I think I need to get to work, actually.” She took off walking again.

Matt hurried after her, catching up as she reached for the door handle of the Toyota.

Ah, a challenge. Okay. If she wanted to play hard to get, he was all for it. But he knew this attraction definitely wasn’t one-sided. He had plenty of experience with the ladies, and he *knew* when one liked him.

Didn’t he?

“Take it easy, Matt,” she added as she opened the car door and slid into the driver’s seat.

“I know a great Italian place,” he persisted. “Just me, you, a bottle of wine...”

“Yeah, Italian’s not really my thing,” she said, cutting him off. Then she leaned out of the car and pointed to the sky. “Hey, I think the Bat-signal’s calling you.”

He fell for it. And when he turned back, she had reversed out of her parking space, giving him a sassy wave of the hand before she peeled off.

Savannah Harte was smiling as she drove away from the bank and headed toward Market Street. Despite herself, her body was still reacting from the encounter with Matt. Her heart was doing little flips, and her palms were actually a bit damp. Weird. She flirted with sexy men all the time but something about Matt the Navy SEAL aka Bank Savior had totally and instantly turned her on. Maybe it was the shaved head. Or that unbelievably hard and appealing body. Even his awkward pick-up lines had succeeded in making her all hot.

But as appealing as he was, she hadn't been about to blow off Jake for a total stranger. She didn't play by many rules in her life—rules just sucked the fun right out of things—but there was one strict guideline she followed: one man at a time.

She wasn't the kind of girl who dated a whole bunch of guys at once. That just seemed tacky and insensitive to her. And at the moment, she was seeing Jake, the tall sexy surfer she'd met on the beach last week. Not that she'd be dating him for long. She had no interest in committed relationships. Commitment only led to ruts, and she didn't want to be falling into any ruts. Like her parents. Jeez, talk about boring. She loved them both to death, but growing up, she'd decided she wanted nothing more than to *not* follow in their footsteps. Their life was so monotonous it made her want to shake them by the shoulders and say, *This? This is what you always wanted from your lives?* Sitting on the couch every night taking turns with the remote. Weekly bridge games with their neighbors. The same old Sunday brunch at Applebee's.

Nope. Definitely not for her. She lived for the thrill of first kisses and whirlwind romances, and once any hint of comfortable domesticity entered the equation, Savannah Harte was outta there. No thank you.

But she did have some code of ethics, and seeing two or more guys at once was where she drew the line.

Too bad, though. That Matt... He really had been cute. And the way he'd taken down those three idiots at the bank—she'd actually felt a streak of arousal watching him do that. Rare these days, finding a man capable of kicking total ass.

"Ah well," she murmured to herself, steering the car toward the end of the street, where her corner flower shop was located.

She pulled in around back and parked in the miniscule lot, then hopped out of the car, grabbed her purse, and headed into the shop from the rear door. Fortunately, when she walked into the bright, sunny main room, she saw it was void of customers. Savannah's new assistant, Chad, stood behind the narrow red counter, and his brown eyes filled with relief when he spotted her. He'd only been working with her for a couple of weeks, not long enough to leave him in charge of the store, which got busy this time of year. No comparison to Valentine's Day or Mother's Day, of course, but September was also a peak time. For some

reason, parents liked to buy their college kids flowers to celebrate the new school year, or the *new life journey*, as many of her customers liked to harp.

“I’m sorry,” Savannah said as she reached the counter. “I swear I didn’t abandon you. Some people decided to rob the bank while I was there.”

“For serious? Are you okay?”

She appreciated Chad’s concern. She liked the guy, in spite of his tendency to say things like “for serious”. “I’m fine,” she assured him. “Was everything okay while I was gone?”

He pushed his sagging wire-rim glasses up the bridge of his nose. “It was fine. I sold a wreath, and three dozen roses.”

“Any problematic customers?”

“No. They were all pretty nice. Oh, but you did get a phone call.” Chad rummaged in the drawer underneath the counter and removed a pink message slip. He handed it to Savannah. “It was an event planner. She’s planning a wedding and was interested in a quote.”

Savannah glanced down at Chad’s neat block writing. *Annabelle Holmes, Prestige Events*. She’d never heard of either Holmes or the company name, but Savannah liked the idea of doing flowers for a big event. She’d only recently started handling parties and weddings, and the money they brought in was pretty appealing. She didn’t have another wedding scheduled until the end of the month, so hopefully she could squeeze this event in for some extra cash flow.

“I’ll give her a call,” she said absently, tucking the message into her pocket. She glanced at Chad with a sudden grin. “So, are you ready to learn how to arrange centerpieces?”

Her new assistant brightened. For a twenty-year-old man, he was oddly interested in flowers. Not that she blamed him. Flowers were her livelihood. There was nothing that brightened her day more than a bouquet of pretty, colorful flowers.

Well, that and sex. But she’d have to wait for tonight to experience that particular joy. She had a date with Jake later and was already imagining all the naughty things he would do to her body. For a second, though, the image of Jake’s dark eyes and dimpled cheeks was replaced with the one of Matt’s green eyes and chiseled features, but she quickly banished the thought. Matt had been cute, sure, but it wasn’t like she would ever see the guy again.

In Savannah’s life, cute guys, after all, were always in constant supply.

## Chapter Two

“Would you quit sulking?” Annabelle Holmes grumbled as she steered the olive-green Jeep down a street littered with little boutiques and a vast number of coffee shops. “So you got rejected. Big deal. Actually, it’s about time. I feel comforted knowing that even sluts like you strike out every now and then.”

Matt just glared at her. Normally he enjoyed Annabelle’s endless sarcasm, but he wasn’t in the mood for it today. It had been almost two weeks since the encounter with Savannah at the bank, and he still couldn’t fight his disappointment that she’d turned him down. He’d even gone so far as to try and track her down, but all he had to go on was her name. He’d typed Savannah into Google, hoping maybe he’d get lucky, but he got over six million results. He’d tried Facebook too, but there was a ridiculous amount of Savannahs registered on the site, and he’d given up after scrolling through the first ten pages of photos.

So yeah, Annabelle was right. He did have to quit sulking. Obviously he was never going to see Savannah again. He knew that. But Annabelle didn’t have to gloat about it.

“You’re being very insensitive about this whole thing,” he grumbled back, then lifted the straw of his McDonald’s cup to his mouth and sucked the last drops of Dr. Pepper from it. Setting the empty cup in the holder between their arms, he added, “And I’m not a slut.”

Annabelle hooted, her big brown eyes lighting up in delight. “Yeah freaking right. You are *so* a slut. You had sex with me less than an hour after we’d met.”

“You wrote up a sex list,” he shot back. “So who’s the slut, hmmm?”

“I was exploring my sexuality,” she said in her defense. “You, on the other hand, finished exploring years ago. Now you’re just a man-whore. Wait, I think this is it.” She squinted. “Yeah, it’s here.”

A two-story corner shop came into view. Hanging on the storefront was a big purple sign that read *Harte to Harte* Flowers. He rolled his eyes. How cute.

“Besides,” Annabelle said as she executed an unbelievably impressive parallel parking job across the street from the shop, “you don’t know, maybe you’ll run into her again. If you’re meant to, you will. Fate makes things happen.”

“I don’t believe in fate.”

“You should.” She grinned. “I mean, look at me and Ryan. He slid into my bed in the middle of the night thinking I was someone else, and now we’re in love. Fate.”

“Luck,” he corrected.

“Stop being such a Negative Nancy.” She killed the engine and yanked up the parking brake. “All you have to do is snap your fingers and you can get laid. Why don’t you call up your new BFF Aidan and set up a pub crawl or something, you know, have a three-way or fourgy or whatever it is you guys do.”

“He’s not my BFF,” Matt grumbled. “We just hang out sometimes.”

*Because all my friends are in love*, he wanted to add, but didn’t because he knew Annabelle would just accuse him of being jealous. He wasn’t, though. He was happy for his friends, he truly was, but their no-longer-single status made it hard for Matt to find a wingman for a night on the town. A few months ago he’d gone for beers with Aidan Rhodes, who worked in Naval Intelligence out on the base, and the two men had instantly hit it off. Aidan was a couple of years younger, and like Matt, was always up for a good time.

And though he wasn’t going to admit it to Annabelle, he and Aidan did have a threesome last month, with a hot redhead visiting from Kansas.

“I don’t want a fourgy,” he added with a frown. “I want some good, old-fashioned one-on-one with the hot blonde I met. Is that too much to ask for?”

“Stop whining. It’s unattractive.”

“That’s not what you said the night I rocked your world.”

Annabelle didn’t even have the decency to blush. Instead, she just laughed again. “You rocked my body. There’s a difference.”

Was there? He always felt oddly uncomfortable when Annabelle, or any of his friends, for that matter, tried to explain what love felt like. Sure, he loved people—his mom, Nana O’Connor, his four older sisters. But *love* love? He had no clue how that felt. If he weren’t constantly surrounded by happy couples, he wouldn’t even believe it existed.

He and Annabelle got out of the car and headed for the door of the flower shop. He walked ahead, opening the door for his friend’s girlfriend like the southern gentleman he was. A bell chimed as they entered the store, and almost immediately, the heady and powerful scent of flowers filled his nostrils. He breathed it in, reminded of the yard in his mom’s Nashville house. The O’Connor women loved to garden.

His gaze took in the elaborate arrangements and baskets of fresh-smelling flowers practically overflowing the shop’s small space.

“So pretty,” Annabelle murmured as she admired a vase containing bright yellow tulips intermingled with curly white willow and white shasta daisies. That he knew the kind of daisies they were boggled the mind. Apparently he’d picked up some gardening knowledge over the years without knowing it.

The sound of footsteps came from behind a green curtain separating another doorway from the main room. “I’ll be right with you!” a muffled feminine voice chirped from back there.

“I like this place,” Annabelle whispered to him. “It’s the perfect combination of charm and elegance. Think Holly will like it?”

“How the hell would I know?” he mumbled back. “This is why you should have brought *Holly* and not me.”

“Holly was busy. And you’re my friend. Friends do this kind of stuff for each other.”

He pretended to brood, but he wasn’t annoyed that Annabelle had dragged him along on her errands. He liked spending time with her, and he was actually proud of her for what she was trying to accomplish. She’d left behind a successful job at one of the top event planning firms in San Francisco just so she could be with Ryan, and Matt fully supported this new venture. Together with Carson Scott’s wife, Holly, Annabelle had started an event planning business of their own, and the two women had already planned and catered some seriously ritzy parties. Matt helped out at one of their wedding receptions, and had been floored by the results.

The footsteps from the back room grew louder. Matt swung his head toward the curtain in time to see a very familiar face.

Recognition dawned in her gray eyes at the same moment.

“Seriously?” Savannah said with a sigh.

“I know what you’re thinking,” he blurted out, “but I’m not stalking you.”

“Uh, I *wasn’t* thinking that. But *now* I am.”

A flush crept into his cheeks. His peripheral vision caught Annabelle giving him a perplexed look. Well, no kidding. He was usually way smoother than this, but yet again, Savannah brought out his inner stammer.

An awkward silence descended, which Savannah ended with an impatient frown. “Usually when someone comes into a store, they have some sort of purpose. To buy something, to ask about an item... In this case, it would be flowers.” She gestured to a vase on the counter. “Are you here to buy flowers?”

Matt was suddenly tongue-tied. Fortunately, Annabelle took pity on him and flashed Savannah a big smile. “I’m Annabelle Holmes, from Prestige Events. We spoke on the phone this morning?”

Savannah’s face relaxed. “Oh. Right.” She stuck out her hand, which Annabelle shook firmly. “It’s nice to meet you.”

Matt finally found his voice, feeling the weird urge to clarify why he was there. “I don’t work for Annabelle.”

Both women shot him a strange glance.

“And we’re not dating either,” he found himself adding. “I’m here as a friend. We’re friends. Me and Annabelle... We’re...”

“Friends,” Savannah finished. She furrowed her brows. “Uh, yeah, so should we talk about what Harte to Harte flowers can do for you?”

The question was directed at Annabelle, who was now staring at Matt as if he’d grown a bushy mustache. “Matt, why don’t you...browse or something?”



In other words, *go away*. As much as he didn't like being banished, he desperately needed to regroup here. Drifting over to a display case filled with intricate wreaths, he took a calming breath and tried not to kick himself in the shin. Okay, this was getting ridiculous. Somehow he ended up turning into a blubbling imbecile when Savannah was around. But he was just so surprised to see her here.

Annabelle's comment about fate blazed through his mind. Was she right? Had fate actually placed Savannah in his path again? And if so, how could he make sure she didn't go sprinting in the other direction? As far as first impressions went, he'd blown it. His second impression wasn't much better, either. What he needed to do now was channel his innate hotness, will up some confidence, which he usually possessed in spades, and get Savannah to agree to go out with him.

After he convinced her he wasn't a total loser.

Savannah shook hands with Annabelle Holmes again, pleased with the agreement they'd reached. Apparently Annabelle and her partner were in search of a florist they could use on a regular basis, and Annabelle had agreed to hire Savannah for an upcoming wedding. Savannah was determined to impress Annabelle. This was a test of sorts, which, if she passed, would lead to a possible stream of income she could totally benefit from. She'd been thinking about opening a second location for almost a year now, and working with an up-and-coming event company would be good for business.

"So the bride and I will come over on Wednesday to discuss what she's looking for," Annabelle finished. "You can come up with some ideas and designs, and we'll go from there."

"Sounds good," Savannah said. "Thanks for thinking of my shop."

Annabelle smiled. "I had a good feeling about it when I browsed your website. I really think—"

A loud clatter interrupted her sentence. Savannah turned to see Matt bending down to retrieve an empty plastic bucket he'd knocked off a stool near the rose display. The sight of his taut behind sent a rush of warmth to her body. Lord, the man filled out a pair of jeans really, really nicely. She'd been trying to ignore him during the entire discussion with Annabelle, but her gaze had floated in his direction every few moments, admiring the view.

He was just as sexy as she remembered. And still equally adorable.

She got the feeling he was usually pretty smooth when it came to chatting up girls, yet he blushed and stammered when she was around. Kind of a turn-on, watching this big, gorgeous man get all tongue-tied around her. Definitely a nice ego boost.

And now that Jake was out of the picture...

"He's really not usually so pathetic," Annabelle said in a low voice, snapping Savannah from her thoughts.

She glanced at Matt again, who now stood near the door with his arms crossed across his muscular chest, as if he was afraid to touch anything else.

"I think you make him nervous." Annabelle's laugh held a note of admiration. "To be honest, I've never seen him all blushy and weird around a woman."

Savannah shrugged. "I tend to have that effect on men," she joked.

That got her another laugh. "Well, put him out of his misery, will you?" Before Savannah could object, Annabelle called Matt over. "Savannah wants to talk to you, stud. I'll wait in the car."

Just like that, Annabelle's curvy body hurried off, her brown hair bouncing over her shoulders as she left the store. The bell over the door chimed, then tinned away into silence.

Matt slowly walked over to her, a rueful grin on his face. "Annabelle's not very subtle," he remarked.

"Not really."

He rested an elbow on her counter, an action that drew her gaze to the impressive bicep of his forearm. He instantly noticed where her eyes had landed, and his grin widened. "You think I'm attractive," he said, sounding delighted.

Savannah rolled her eyes. "Sounds like *you* think you're attractive."

A pained look flitted across his face. "Show some mercy already. For some reason I act like a total moron when I'm around you. The least you can do is admit this attraction isn't one-sided."

A smile lifted the corner of her mouth. He had a point. Maybe he did deserve some leniency. Besides, she really had no reason not to see him again, now that she'd ended things with Jake. Alas, her sexy surfer ended up being kind of boring and a bit of a jerk.

Matt, however, didn't look boring at all.

"Fine," she said. "I find you attractive."

"Thank Jesus. Now will you agree to go out with me or what?"

The words were gruff, completely unpolished, but he seemed pleased with himself that he'd finally said something right.

"I'm not looking for a relationship," she admitted. "And now that I'm doing the flowers for that wedding, I won't have much time to date anyway."

"You can make time for one drink." His green eyes glittered playfully. "I promise, I'll make it worth your while."

"Do people still use that line?"

"Yup. So what do you say?"

Another smile tickled her lips. "I guess I can squeeze in one drink after work."

His entire face lit up like a little kid's on Christmas morning. "What time should I pick you up?"

For the first time in his life, Matt was actually nervous about a date. As he stepped out of the shower, dripping water all over the bathroom mat, he suddenly wondered if he should ask Annabelle to come downstairs so he could ask for clothing advice. Jeez. What the hell was wrong with him? He could seduce the panties off a nun, for fuck's sake. Women freaking loved him. If he was the kind of guy who ticked off notches in his belt...well, he'd be on his tenth belt by now.

But Savannah made him feel like an anxious teenager again. It wasn't just her looks that captivated him, though her smokin' body did make his mouth water. She was just so...self-assured. She seemed to know exactly who she was, completely comfortable in her own skin, and her easygoing attitude and sharp wit were a total turn-on. He didn't usually think beyond the first date, but with Savannah, he already wanted more, and they hadn't even gone out yet.

Which was why he couldn't have sex with her tonight. As much as he wanted to, as much as his body throbbed with arousal at the mere thought of her, he needed to force himself to keep his hands off her this evening. It was messed up, but he feared that if he slept with her so soon, this fascination would disappear, and he wasn't ready for that to happen yet.

Another first—he wanted to get to know a woman before he screwed her.

God help him.

Deciding to forgo calling Annabelle—he wasn't in the mood to be ridiculed—he strode into his bedroom and threw open the closet door. As he dressed, he marveled at the silence in the apartment. Ever since Ryan moved upstairs into Annabelle's place, Matt was living solo. Made it easier to bring chicks back here without worrying about keeping Ryan up, though he didn't do it often. He didn't like having women over. They always wanted to stay when he only wanted them to leave.

Clad in a pair of jeans, a black T-shirt and an open blue button-down, he grabbed his keys from the basket on the hall table and left his second-floor apartment. He took the stairs two at a time, suddenly eager to get going and see Savannah again. The black Dodge four-by-four he'd just signed the lease on had decent speed, and he made it to Savannah's shop in less than fifteen minutes. Shutting off the engine, he took a deep breath and hopped out of the SUV. There was a separate entrance to Savannah's upstairs apartment, with a small intercom mounted on the wall. He buzzed, then waited until her chirpy voice said, "Come up."

Uh-oh.

She wanted him to come upstairs?

That wasn't part of the plan. He'd hoped to wait down here for her, then drive her to the classy bar he'd researched on the web. He was kinda scared to be alone with her. At least with other people around, he wouldn't be able to rip her clothes off and devour her body the way he so desperately wanted to.

Gulping, he opened the door and climbed the narrow staircase up to the second floor. Savannah's door was painted a bright yellow, and it swung open the moment he reached the landing. She appeared in the

doorway, wearing a pair of tight black yoga pants and a loose red T-shirt that didn't hide the fullness of the breasts beneath it.

"Hey," she said with an easy smile. "I figured we'd stay in, if that's cool with you?"

Another gulp. Crap. Looked like he needed to conjure up some willpower. Pronto.

In a strained voice, he said, "Sure."

Savannah gestured for him to come inside, and when he stepped into the apartment, he immediately saw her personality splashed all over the place. Mismatched furniture, some modern, some antique, filled the spacious living room. Colorful abstract paintings hung on the wall, with the occasional breathtaking landscape sandwiched between them. A small kitchen was tucked off to one side, and the living area was separated from the sleeping area with a see-through Japanese screen that featured bright pink cherry blossom trees. He caught a glimpse of a large futon with a bright magenta bedspread, but tore his gaze away. He couldn't focus on the bed. Beds meant sex. And he was determined not to sleep with Savannah Harte until he figured out why he liked her so much.

"I like your place," he said, turning to meet her silver-gray eyes.

"Thanks," she said simply.

"Have you lived here long?"

"About eight years now." She headed to the kitchen and pulled open the fridge, appearing a moment later with a six-pack in her hands. "I moved in when I bought the shop."

They headed over to the plump brown sofa. Savannah flopped down, removed two beer bottles from the case and held one out to him. After a second of hesitation, he joined her on the couch and accepted the beer. At least three feet of space separated them, but it was still too damn close for comfort. Her sweet scent wafted over, surrounding him in a lust-crazed cloud. Of course, she smelled like flowers. Roses and lavender, with a hint of minty soap thrown in.

He unscrewed the cap of the bottle and took a long swallow of beer, hoping the cold liquid would ease the burn in his groin. But then Savannah reached up to untie her ponytail, letting her pale blonde hair fall loose, and the burn deepened. Fuck, he wanted to run his fingers through that silky hair, feel it tickling his pecs as she straddled his naked body, riding him...

*No sex*, a little voice ordered.

Right, no sex. He took another sip of beer, then set the bottle down on the coffee table.

"So," he started. "Your dad teaches at Stanford... Does that mean you're from Palo Alto?"

"Yeah, I grew up there. I moved here after I dropped out of college."

He grinned. "You're a college drop-out?"

"Sure am. I was never a school person. I wanted to work with flowers, so I moved down here to work at a nursery one of my mom's friends owns. When this store came up for sale, she went in on the deal with me. We were partners until about three years ago, and then I bought her out."

Matt was impressed. Savannah couldn't be older than twenty-seven, twenty-eight, and she already owned her own business. A successful one, judging by the fact that she'd been able to buy out her partner.

"Where are you from?" she asked him.

"Nashville. Well, just outside of it. My family owns a cattle ranch."

She laughed. "You're a cowboy, huh?"

"Naah, I wasn't cut out for cowboy life. I left home at eighteen, joined the Navy, and now I live here full-time."

"Too bad." Her gray eyes darkened to smoky silver. "Cowboys are extremely sexy."

He swallowed. Fuck, why did she have to look at him like that? Like she wanted to lick him up. He was normally the one dropping the loaded remarks, while his date steered the conversation to more wholesome topics. He found this role reversal totally disconcerting.

Savannah slid closer and rested her hand on his thigh.

Matt nearly jumped off the couch. Her hand was warm, her fingers teasing as she ran them along the denim seam of his jeans.

"How do you like owning your own business?" he blurted out, desperate to ignore the searing bolts of heat moving from the tips of her fingers to his suddenly throbbing thigh.

Savannah let out a sigh. "Are we really going to do this?"

"Do what?"

"Carry on with the idle chitchat when we both know what we *really* want to do?"

His cock jerked, strained against his zipper. She instantly noticed the reaction, a small smile spreading across her lush pink lips.

"Look, I don't like relationships," she said bluntly. "They don't interest me. But I am interested in flings. Fun, casual flings, no strings, no promises, just a good time and great sex."

He wanted to ask *why*. Why did she hate relationships so much? But his vocal chords had gone numb. She was using his own lines on him. Fun, casual, good time, great sex. He couldn't even count how many times he'd uttered those exact phrases.

And as much as he wasn't sure he liked being the recipient of his own speech, the moment the word *sex* slipped from her luscious mouth, all he could think about was shoving his cock deep inside her.

"So if you want me—" her gaze moved to the bulge of his crotch, "—and I think you do, what do you say we just skip the tell-me-about-yourself and get to the fun part?"

## Chapter Three

Savannah knew she was coming on strong, but blunt had always been her style. From the moment Matt had walked into her apartment, she'd wanted to tear his clothes off. So why shouldn't she? Life was too short, wasting time pointless. If you wanted something you might as well take it. Well, some things. She wasn't about to rob a bank to score some extra cash, but when it came to men, why not take what was right in front of you?

She slid closer to Matt's suddenly tense body, seeing the reluctance in his piercing green eyes. Since he didn't strike her as the kind of man who did the whole romantic dates and chaste kisses thing, his hesitation confused her.

It also made her all the more determined to seduce him.

Running her fingers up his thigh, she leaned toward him and murmured, "Kiss me."

Desire flooded his gaze, but the reluctance didn't dissipate completely. "Don't you want to get to know each other better first?"

"Not really." She moved her hand up his chest, her heart doing a little flip at the feel of his rippled abdominal muscles. Jeez, he was rock-hard. Not an ounce of fat on the guy.

She grasped the sides of his open button-down and slowly pushed it off his shoulders. After a beat, he helped her out, sliding his arms out of the sleeves and tossing the shirt aside. She saw his throat working as he visibly swallowed, but he didn't protest when she reached for the hem of his T-shirt and peeled it off his chest.

Her breath lodged in her chest. Man oh man. His bare chest was spectacular. Almost completely hairless, save for a dusty line of dark hair that arched down to the waistband of his jeans. His pecs were huge, stomach flat and boasting a delicious-looking six-pack. She couldn't help herself—she had to touch. The moment her fingers grazed the tight muscles of his belly, he sucked in a breath then cursed loudly.

"Fine," he said with a groan.

She grinned. "Fine, what?"

"I'll have sex with you. Is that what you want to hear?"

"Yep." She suddenly narrowed her eyes. "You're not going to cry rape afterwards, are you?"

A laugh burst from his chest. "No. Are you?"

"No." She paused. "Now take off your pants."

He raised an arrogant brow. "Do it for me."

Savannah fought another grin. A challenge. She liked it. Scooting closer, she found the button at his waistband and undid it, then dragged his zipper down. She tugged, but when the material didn't budge, she hopped off the couch and knelt before him, getting a good grip on his jeans and pulling them down a pair of long, muscular legs that made her pulse race. His boxers came off with the jeans, leaving him gloriously naked on her couch.

Savannah's entire mouth went dry as a desert. Clothed, this man was gorgeous. Naked? Out of this freaking world. His skin was a golden brown, hard and sleek, and his erection was enormous, jutting upwards and nearly reaching his naval.

Her previously arid mouth filled with moisture. Her gaze zeroed in on that impressive erection, her head dipping forward as if drawn in by a magnet. Her lips hovered over his tip.

"Are you just going to kneel there and do nothing?" he ground out.

"What do you want me to do?" she teased.

"What the hell do you think?"

Her tongue darted out for a quick taste, a fleeting swipe across his engorged head. "That?" she asked, pasting on an innocent look.

His features looked tortured. "Among other things."

"Oooh, intriguing. What kind of other things?" Before he could respond, she took him deep in her mouth and sucked hard. Then she moved her mouth away and offered a tiny smile. "Something like that?"

He groaned in reply.

"Or maybe this?" she said helpfully, wrapping her fingers around the hard length of him and pumping slowly.

His hand lowered to cup her head, long fingers threading through her hair and guiding her back to his groin. "All of it," he choked out. "Do it all and quit teasing me."

A laugh bubbled in the back of her throat, only to be cut off when he thrust his cock between her parted lips, stealing the breath from her lungs. Deciding she'd teased him enough, she went to work on him, sucking softly, then dragging her tongue up and down his shaft. His hand fisted her hair, as his ragged moan echoed in the room. She relaxed her jaw and took him in deeper, alternating between long sucks and the sharp pump of her hand. When she felt his tip throb against her tongue, she lifted her head and grinned up at him. "You're not allowed to come yet."

His voice came out rough, but she heard the teasing note to it. "Says who?"

"Me." Standing up, she quickly removed her pants, T-shirt and underwear, pleased when she noticed his eyes smoldering at the sight of her naked body.

"You're incredible," he hissed out. "I want to eat you up, Savannah."

"Yeah? Get started then."

It was meant to be a joking remark, but he immediately slid off the couch, sank to his knees and brought her mound to his waiting mouth. Sparks of pleasure ignited inside her, heating her skin and making her sag against his lips. He took advantage of the loosening of her legs, spreading them wider as his mouth honed in on his intended destination. She moaned at the first brush of his tongue over her clit, the raspy feel of his stubble against her inner thighs, the warmth of his breath against her core.

He licked her again, once, twice, and then her legs were yanked out from under her and she found her butt colliding with the couch. Matt dove back in, proceeding to bestow her with the most mind-blowing oral sex she'd ever experienced. He captured her clit between his lips and suckled, then licked the swollen bud over and over again, until pleasure gathered in her belly and sizzled in her bloodstream like a drug. At the feel of his finger prodding her opening, she lost complete and total control.

Orgasm ripped through her like a wildfire. She lifted her mound to Matt's mouth, taking everything he had to offer. When the climax finally ebbed, she felt exhausted. Winded. Jeez. She couldn't recall ever coming that hard.

Her heart still thudding erratically, Savannah slid off the couch and fumbled with the purse she'd left nearby. She came back with a condom that she swiftly rolled onto his massive erection, and then she lay on her back and pulled his big body on top of her, placing his cock between her legs.

"Fast or slow?" he said roughly. "What'll make you come again?"

"Fast," she ordered, her pussy throbbing in anticipation. God, she wanted him in there.

He swiftly obliged, driving his cock into her soaking-wet channel and sending her body into another tailspin. His hips pistoned as he moved inside her, the muscles of his gorgeous chest tight with arousal. Savannah clung to him, her fingernails sinking into his back, and raised her hips to meet each frenzied thrust.

They exploded at the same time, letting out matching groans. Tingles spread through her body as she felt Matt shudder inside of her, as he buried his face in the crook of her neck and licked her fevered skin then sank his teeth into it. Finally they both grew still, just lying there for several long moments, as Savannah tried to catch her breath and waited for her heartbeat to steady.

When she met Matt's green eyes, she saw them glimmering with residual heat. Even though he'd just pulled out and removed the condom, she could see his cock beginning to harden. Wow. Apparently he wasn't just Superman, he was the Energizer Bunny too. But it wasn't the new dose of lust in his gaze that worried her; it was the flicker of amazement she saw there.

Fine, so the sex had been much better than average, but she could already see his handsome brain working, classifying this wild sweaty encounter as something unbelievably special.

Normally she ended things when the men in her life got that look on their face, but she wasn't ready to say goodbye to Matt just yet. After the sex they'd just had, how could she?

Still, she needed to make sure they were on the same page here.



“Just a fling, right?” she said warily.

Matt slid closer and nibbled on her bare shoulder. “Nothing more,” he assured her. “I just want to see you again after tonight.”

“No strings?”

“No strings. Just fun.” He solemnly brought his hand to his heart. “I promise.”

“Fine.” She jumped off the couch, reached for his hand and tugged him to his feet. “Let’s move to the bed. If we’re going to see each other, we might as well have sex again.”

His shoulders shook with laughter. “Might as well,” he agreed.

Savannah’s head was bent over a yellow legal pad when Matt strode into her flower shop two days later. They’d gone through several more rounds of out-of-this-world sex last night, but today he was determined to launch what he’d dubbed Operation Wholesome. Yes, Savannah drove him wild in bed, but the brief moments of laughter and conversation they’d shared in between hot naked time were equally addictive. He might have promised to keep it casual, but deep down, he knew he wouldn’t live up to that promise.

He wanted to get to know Savannah Harte, and damned if he’d let her stop him from doing that.

As he headed for the counter, he tried not to question his actions. This need to spend time with Savannah outside the bedroom was disconcerting enough already. He was living the dream, after all. Hooking up with a woman who wanted nothing more than some fun between the sheets? Normally his idea of heaven. The fact that he wanted more was too perplexing to examine deeper at the moment.

“Hey,” Savannah said absently as he approached. “I don’t have time to get jiggy right now, Superman. I’m going over this list Annabelle emailed me about the wedding.”

He grinned at the nickname she used, which she’d come up with after he’d described some of the rescue missions he’d been involved in. He couldn’t discuss most assignments, or offer many details, but Savannah had been curious about the life of a Navy SEAL. Since she hadn’t been displaying much interest in him aside from the sexual kind, he’d jumped on the opportunity to bond. And now his heart did a dumb little flip each time she called him Superman.

“I’m not here to get jiggy,” he replied cheerfully. “I’m here to take you to lunch.”

She lifted her head from the notepad, pale yellow tresses falling into her eyes. “I can’t. I’m busy.”

“Tough.” He crossed his arms over his chest. “You need to eat. And you can bring your work with you if you want. I can help you come up with ideas for the centerpieces.”

She gave a throaty laugh. “Oh, really? You’re going to talk centerpieces with me?”

“Why not? Every female in the O’Connor family has a green thumb. It’s in my genes.”

Although she looked dubious, she still pushed back her stool and hopped off. Pleasure jolted through him as he realized she'd accepted the invite. As much as he enjoyed seeing her naked, the thought of having lunch with her—with both of them fully clothed—held a huge amount of appeal.

Again, the reaction troubled him. What the hell was going on? Normally he wholeheartedly agreed with Savannah's views on relationships—who needed 'em? Yet here he was, nearly coming in his pants because this sassy woman was going to eat lunch with him.

"We need to go somewhere nearby," Savannah said as she grabbed an oversized green canvas purse and slung it over her shoulder. "I want to come back and finalize the orders for the centerpieces."

"No problem," he said easily.

He waited for Savannah to summon Chad from the back and ask him to watch the store, then walked ahead to hold the door open for her, admiring the way her filmy floral-print skirt swirled around her knees as she walked. He'd scouted the area on the way over and noticed a small pizza café with an outdoor patio, which he now suggested. Savannah nodded in agreement, and they made their way down the sidewalk. Ten minutes later, they were seated on the cobblestone patio. After ordering beers and a pizza to share, Savannah pulled her notepad from her purse and said, "Okay, let's see your flower expertise."

"Hit me," he said, leaning back in the wrought-iron chair.

"The bride wants, and I quote, 'something blue and white and sparkly, but natural looking'."

Matt burst out laughing, getting a frown from Savannah as a reward.

"Do you see why I'm so frazzled?" she said with a sigh. "I mean, can you get any *less* articulate than that?"

Sensing her frustration, he went serious and asked, "So what are you thinking?"

Her straight white teeth sank into her bottom lip, an action that sent a rush of heat straight down to his cock. The memory of those teeth nibbling on his own lips was still fresh in his mind. Quickly, he forced the thought aside.

"Blue orchids," she finally said. "Natural birch branches, crystal bowtie vases, and something white... Calla lilies?"

He shook his head. "No way. Too fancy. Lilies will draw the attention away from the orchids. Go with white hydrangea."

Surprise filled her eyes. Then she started to laugh. "Jeez, you really do know flowers."

He smirked. "Told you."

"That's a good idea," she admitted. "I didn't think of hydrangea." She paused in thought. "Yeah, it's really good actually. I'll get started on that today."

"See how easy that was?" He flashed a charming grin. "Centerpieces, done. What's next?"

"Backdrops for the head table. The bride wants blue and white again, feminine and elegant."

"Easy," he replied. "Blue and white silk panels with floral accents."

That got him another laugh. “Will you marry me?”

He knew she meant it as a joke, but something inside him shifted. If any other woman said that to him, joking or otherwise, he’d be running out the door right about now. Marriage was not something you kidded about, not in his life. As much as he loved his family, he couldn’t stand the constant smothering. Not just toward him, but to their partners. His mother and father’s marriage had been so overly loving it made him uncomfortable, and all four of his sisters were happily married, constantly gushing about their husbands. Ever since he was a kid, he’d felt uneasy around the constant shows of affection. Couldn’t really explain it, or put his finger on it, but he’d known even back then that he didn’t want that much love in his life.

Having another person know him inside and out, digging into his psyche, finishing his sentences?

It was too damn intimate, and his intimacy ended with sex.

So why didn’t Savannah’s off-hand remark scare him to death, the way it should?

The waitress arrived with their pizza before he could analyze the strange reaction. He and Savannah quickly dug in, polishing off the entire pie in no time. Afterwards, they both leaned back in their chairs, quietly sipping on their respective beers. He didn’t feel the need to fill the silence, and she didn’t seem to either. It was nice.

When she finally spoke, she caught him off guard. “Why are you single?” she asked curiously.

He shrugged. “Why are you?”

“I asked first.”

Setting down his beer bottle, he clasped his hands together on the table. “Relationships seem like too much trouble,” he admitted.

“How so?”

“I don’t like the idea of sharing my entire being with another person.”

She cast him a mischievous grin. “Commitment-phobic. I get it.”

“And you’re not scared of commitment?” he shot back.

“Nope. It just bores me.” Her gray eyes took on a faraway glint. “You know that feeling you get when you kiss someone, when you sleep with them, for the first time? That...*thrill*.”

“Yeah...”

“I think I’m addicted to it,” she confessed. “I’m addicted to firsts.”

“Seconds can be just a good,” he pointed out.

“Sure, but eventually the thrill goes away. So that’s when I go away.”

Matt opened his mouth to ask her if that’s what would happen with them—would she simply go away? But before he could speak, a male voice interrupted their discussion.

“Savannah?”

A thirty-something guy with messy blond hair had stopped by the railing separating the patio from the sidewalk. He wore a pair of long orange shorts and a white muscle shirt, and he was staring at Savannah as if she were his long-lost love.

“Hank,” she said in surprise. “It’s good to see you again.”

At her casual, impersonal words, Hank’s entire face fell. “Where’ve you been?” he asked, a plaintive note entering his voice. “I haven’t seen you in months.”

She shrugged. “I told you, I’m busy with the store.”

Hank’s dark eyes shifted to Matt, and a suspicious cloud floated across his face. “You don’t look busy.”

Savannah held up her legal pad. “This is a working lunch.”

“Oh.” The guy seemed to brighten slightly. “Do you have time for dinner this week?”

“Sorry, I can’t. I’m doing the flowers for a huge wedding and will be working non-stop until then.”

That got her another “Oh”. Hank fidgeted with his hands. “Okay, then. Give me a call when you’re done with the job?”

“Sure.”

The noncommittal tone of her voice was unmistakable. Despite himself, Matt felt a pang of sympathy for the dude. He also experienced a wave of unease, watching the expression on Hank’s face. Was that how *he* looked when he was around Savannah? All lovelorn and pathetic?

Jeez, who was this woman? It was like a scene out of *There’s Something About Mary*. Did every man who met her fall head over heels for her?

“Well...I gotta go,” Hank mumbled. With an awkward wave, he strode off.

Matt fixed a rueful look at Savannah. “You could have let him down more gently.”

Irritation flickered in her gray eyes. “I did let him down gently. Four months ago. We went out a few times, and sure, he’s cute, but he’s not exactly the sharpest tool in the shed. Holding a conversation with the guy was painful.”

“Did you sleep with him?” Matt couldn’t help but ask, then cringed at the possessive twinge to his voice.

“Yeah, I did.” She studied his face. “Oh brother. You’re jealous.”

“I’m not jealous,” he protested instantly.

She laughed. “Oh yes you are.” Her irritation returned, only this time, it was directed at him. “Don’t go all crazy on me, Matt. I’m sure you’ve slept with dozens of women, and I’m not the least bit jealous about it.”

Which bothered him almost as much as *his* sudden encounter with the green-eyed monster. He got the feeling Savannah wouldn’t even bat an eyelash if he ended things between them right here and now. He

wasn't sure if her borderline-scary casual attitude was legit, or simply a cover for serious commitment issues she refused to admit to. He decided to believe the latter—only way to preserve his ego, after all.

Still, the jealousy coursing through his blood at the appearance of Hank only grew stronger as he imagined Savannah in bed with the guy. Damn it.

“Let's get out of here,” he said gruffly, reaching into his back pocket for his wallet.

Savannah must have seen the look in his eyes, because her eyes widened slightly, and then a slow smile curved her mouth. Matt dropped a few bills on the table, reached for her hand, and practically dragged her back to the flower shop. At the sight of her scrawny assistant behind the counter, he hooked a thumb at the door and barked, “Take a break, Chad.”

The kid gulped, nodded and took off.

“I'm thinking I might like jealous Matt,” Savannah laughed as he flipped the sign on the door from “open” to “closed”, locked up and moved toward her with predatory strides.

He took her hand again and pulled her behind the curtain into the back room. Before she could say another word, he covered her mouth with his and kissed the hell out of her.

Savannah gasped against his lips, her hands reaching up to twine around his neck. Matt had no idea what had come over him. Something hot and primal spiraled down his body and grabbed hold of his cock, hardening it to a level he hadn't thought possible. It was almost painful, the throbbing erection straining against his zipper.

Coming up for air, Savannah bent close to his ear and murmured, “He really didn't mean anything to me. You don't need to go all caveman, Superman.”

“Let's not talk about Hank,” he ordered, his hand seeking the hem of her skirt and bunching it between his fingers.

He shoved the material up to her hips, tore off her bikini panties, and placed his palm on her pussy, rubbing it slowly.

Savannah let out a little sigh. “God, that's good.”

He kept stroking, running his finger up and down her damp slit, then dipping into her opening and plunging deep. She sagged against his chest, moaning, moving her hips to meet each lazy thrust of his finger. Matt's entire body went taut with lust. Fuck, he wanted this woman. He could probably come just from the feel of her slick wetness coating his finger.

As a red haze of desire fogged his vision, he hurriedly undid his jeans, covered his dick with the condom he'd tucked in his pocket, and angled himself between Savannah's firm thighs.

“You sure it doesn't make you jealous?” he found himself taunting. “The thought of me doing this to someone else.” He teased her clit with the tip of his cock.

Her gray eyes went glazed. “Nope,” she murmured. “Doesn't make me jealous at all.”

“You sure about that?” He slid one hand underneath her shirt, shoved it under the left cup of her lacy bra and squeezed her breast.

She gasped.

“It really doesn’t drive you crazy, knowing I’ve done this to countless other women?” He found her nipple and pinched it between his fingers.

Savannah let out a soft moan. “How many is countless?”

“*Countless*,” he emphasized in a cocky tone.

He could have sworn he saw a flash of something in her eyes—actual jealousy?—but it disappeared quickly.

“No, doesn’t bother me,” she muttered.

She tried to reach down to encircle his shaft, but he sidestepped, letting his hand drop from her breast. Taking a step back, he fought a grin at the sight of Savannah’s flushed cheeks, parted lips and lust-filled eyes. Oh yeah. No matter how unaffected she tried to act, she was totally into him. She fucking craved him.

“Okay,” he said with a shrug. “Then I guess I’ve got nothing to prove.”

Her face flooded with shocked disappointment as he removed the condom and tucked his cock back into his boxers. “What the hell are you doing?” she complained.

“Not being childish.” He smothered a laugh. “You’re right, seeing one of your exes got me a little crazy. I figured if I brought you back here and had my way with you, I’d prove to myself I don’t give a damn about that loser you slept with because he could never fuck you the way I do. But you’ve shown me the light.”

“Huh?”

This time he had to laugh. Poor woman looked so dismayed he almost kissed her again. “You obviously don’t care about my past, so I shouldn’t care about yours. Which means there’s no need to play macho games with you.”

Savannah bit her bottom lip. “So you’re just going to...go?”

“Uh-huh.”

“But...” she sputtered.

“You said you had work to do,” he said innocently.

“I do...but...”

He hid a grin as he zipped up his pants. Heading to the wastebasket by the door, he dropped the almost-used condom into it and glanced at Savannah over his shoulder. “Call me when you have time,” he said cheerfully.

He waltzed through the curtain and headed to the door, though walking was an impressive feat considering the enormous boner poking into his jeans. His cock throbbed so badly he almost turned around, marched back to Savannah and screwed her brains out. But he forced himself to keep walking.

Operation Wholesome was in full gear, and if he gave in now, everything he'd accomplished today would have been a waste. She'd agreed to a lunch date. She'd displayed a real, non-casual reaction to his taunt about his past girlfriends. And he'd left her wanting more. Wanting *him*.

All in all, a successful afternoon.

## Chapter Four

Matt's arms burned as he hauled himself up the cargo net portion of the base's obstacle course, one of the toughest in the country. He was nearly forty feet off the ground, clinging to a net that consisted of vertical and horizontal ropes strung along a frame, and he still had to get to the other side. No big deal, though. He and the others had trained hours upon hours on this thing back when they were trainees. He could do this course in his sleep.

Ryan Evans, his best friend and former roommate, had already climbed the net and was nearly off the frame, prompting Matt to pick up speed. When his feet finally collided with the hard ground, he let out a breath and grinned, knowing without being told that he and the guys had done the course in record speed. Today's exercise was meant to show the new trainees that finishing the course with a decent time wasn't something that would happen overnight. Apparently a cocky recruit had passed out from exhaustion yesterday trying to conquer the course, after being ordered to call it a day. The commander had asked Matt and some of the other members of SEAL Team Fifteen to put on a little demo for the newbies this morning, show them what they could look forward to after they completed the training.

The small group of young men broke out in polite applause when the demo ended, but Matt could see several faces gleaming with determination. Those were the ones who'd end up making it through the program. He'd worn that same expression on his face when he first joined up. The others...well, most of them would burn out, or quit long before their training ended.

"You were slacking," Ryan said as he tossed him a bottle of water.

Matt unscrewed the cap, took a couple of swigs, then poured water on his face and neck. "Yeah, I know. Sorry, man. I was a bit distracted."

"Nice time," another voice remarked.

Matt turned and greeted his buddy Aidan Rhodes with a grin. "Hey, man, didn't realize you were allowed to leave the desk."

"Hey, I might have a desk job now, but I can still kick your ass on that course," Aidan shot back. "I had the best time in my class."

The two men shook hands as Aidan said, "Want to hit a club this weekend?"

Matt hesitated. "Not sure yet. I might have plans. But I'll shoot you a text and let you know at the end of the week."



“Cool.” Aidan ran a hand through his close-cropped brown hair. “I should head in. Keep in touch, bro.”

As Aidan strode off, Carson Scott and John Garrett approached, using towels to wipe the sweat from their faces. “Beers?” Carson suggested.

Matt grinned. “It’s eleven thirty in the morning.”

“Shit, you’re right. Better make that coffees then.”

The four of them wound up leaving the base and driving over to Shelby Garrett’s bakery, which also doubled as a coffee shop. They planted their asses on the chairs out on Shelby’s small patio, while the part-timer, Amy, brought over some coffees.

“Shel’s not working today?” Matt said, watching as the young employee headed back inside.

Garrett shook his head. “Penny’s colicky. Little bugger kept us up all night, so I encouraged Shel to stay home and relax.”

Matt smiled at the mention of Garrett’s six-month-old daughter. The squirt was pretty damn adorable, with her father’s dark hair and mother’s sparkling blue eyes. All the guys on the team had instantly fallen in love with the kid, though Will Charleston’s new baby, Lucas, was pretty freaking cute too. It seemed like everyone around him was popping out babies. Jane, the wife of their lieutenant Thomas Becker, was due to deliver next month, and he’d even overheard Carson’s wife, Holly, mention to Annabelle that she wanted to try for a baby soon.

“Tell them the other news,” Carson spoke up, sounding edgy.

Matt and Ryan eyed Garrett uneasily. “What other news?” Ryan asked.

After taking a long sip of his coffee, Garrett set down the mug and said, “I’m going off active duty next month.”

Silence.

It took a few seconds for the words to register in Matt’s head, and when he realized he’d indeed heard them right, he shook his head in shock. “You’re off the team?”

Garrett nodded. “I took a position with a security firm in San Diego. I’ll still be in the reserves, but no more missions for me.”

Ryan looked flabbergasted. “Why the hell not?”

“Because I’ve got a wife and kid to worry about now. Look, boys, I’ve done a hell of a lot to serve my country. Now it’s time to focus on my family.”

The second silence that followed dragged on for longer. Matt couldn’t believe what he was hearing. He’d figured John Garrett would be career navy. Guy had enlisted at the age of eighteen, went to officer school, worked to make it to junior grade lieutenant. And now he was getting out?

“It’s time,” Garrett repeated, his voice quiet.

Matt was the first to snap out of his surprised trance. “Are you sure about this, man?”

“Oh yeah. Trust me, when you get married, you’ll understand. My two girls come first now.”

Carson suddenly smirked. “Oh, I think Matt understands. Rumor has it he’s found the woman of his dreams.”

Matt’s eyebrows shot up. “Where the hell did you hear that?”

“Holly and Annabelle were gossiping about it yesterday.” Carson wiggled his eyebrows. “According to Annabelle, you’re in love with a woman named Georgia who has really nice tits.”

“First, her name is Savannah,” Matt said coldly, “and second, her tits are none of your business.”

Both Carson and Ryan hooted, while Garrett’s mouth lifted in a wry smile.

“Shit, it’s actually true,” Ryan said gleefully. “I figured Annie was exaggerating when she mentioned it, but that possessive look on your face...fuck, you really are into this girl.”

“How big are her breasts exactly?” Carson asked with a curious tilt of the head.

Matt jabbed a finger in Carson’s direction. “Like I said, none of your business.” He glanced at Ryan. “And Annabelle *is* exaggerating. I’m not in love with anyone. Savannah and I are just having a little fling.”

“If it’s just a fling, then you should have no problem sharing the juicy details,” Ryan pointed out, a wide smile on his face.

Matt faltered. His friend had a point. In the past he’d had no qualms discussing the measurements of the current female in his bed. For some reason, though, he felt guilty objectifying Savannah in that way. Sure, she was a knockout, but that wasn’t the only reason he liked her. She was smart, unbelievably funny, sarcastic...stubborn. Yeah, definitely stubborn. He’d left the ball in her court after their encounter in the shop two days ago, and she still hadn’t called him. A part of him feared his taunting had only annoyed her, and that she’d washed her hands of him and went after some other dude. Like Hank.

“Still want to convince us it’s just a fling?” Carson said when Matt hadn’t answered for more than a minute.

“It is,” he finally replied. “She’s fun to be with. And she has no interest in anything serious, so it’s, you know, perfect for me.”

Had they heard the tremor in his voice during those last three words?

Shit, they had. All three men were staring at him as if he’d slathered on lipstick or something.

“You want more,” Carson accused.

“No,” he said quickly. “No way.”

“Fuck, you totally do. I know the feeling, man,” Carson added with a sigh. “When Holly and I first hooked up, she insisted she didn’t want a relationship. It took me weeks to convince her to give us a chance.”

“I don’t want to convince Savannah of anything,” he objected. “Like I said, it’s just a casual thing. I don’t plan on—” His cell phone, which he’d placed on the table, began to vibrate. Matt’s heart did an involuntary lurch when he noticed the caller ID. “Hold on. I gotta take this.”

He was out of his seat and moving to the other end of the patio in nanoseconds, while Carson and Ryan burst out laughing from behind. "Say hi to Georgia!" Carson the five-year-old called.

Matt clicked the talk button and lifted the phone to his ear. "Hello?"

"You're playing hard to get," was the greeting he received. "I don't know how I feel about that."

He grinned at the petulant note to her voice. "I'm doing no such thing."

"I don't like games, Superman."

"Neither do I." He paused. "Except Scrabble. I'm pretty good at that one."

A heavy sigh echoed in his ear. "Are you waiting for me to beg, is that it? Because I don't like begging. I've always thought I'd be a terrible beggar, sitting there on the sidewalk, holding out a tin can. I think eventually I'd get bored and go look for a job."

Laughter rolled out of his chest. "I'm not sure, but that comment might have been politically incorrect."

"I don't like politics either," she said breezily. "Now, what'll it take to get you to come over?"

"Who says I want to? Maybe I've grown bored of having sex with you." He smiled to himself, proud that he was finally back on track. All the charm he'd perfected over the years had dissolved during those first few encounters with Savannah, but he'd slowly begun regaining ground here, and the outrage in her voice confirmed it.

"You have not. I am unbelievably good at sex."

"You're okay."

"Uh-uh, no way. I'm awesome. So level with me, what do I have to do to get you to see me again?"

"For sex?" he clarified.

"Well, duh."

He pretended to think it over, then said, "A date."

She balked. "I told you how I feel about that."

"Those are my terms, take them or leave them. One date for every round of sex."

"You're an awful person."

"Is that a no?"

There was a long pause, followed by a soft curse. "No, it's not a no."

"Then it's a yes?" he prompted with great amusement.

"Yes, it's a yes." Another pause. "Where are you now? The store's pretty empty so I can leave Chad in charge for the rest of the day."

"I'm in Coronado. We were doing a training demo at the base." An idea entered his mind. "Why don't we go to the beach? You mind driving over here?"

He expected another protest, but to his surprise, she sounded enthused. "Sure, I'll head over to you."

They arranged to meet in an hour, and Matt was smiling again as he hung up the phone and wandered back to the table. Of course, his friends immediately honed in on the smile and proceeded to harass him.

“Was that Georgia?”

“Is her ass as nice as her boobs? Annabelle didn’t mention.”

“Wanna baby-sit Penny to prepare for the baby you’ll have with your future bride?”

“Ha ha,” he said, rolling his eyes as he reached for his coffee. It had grown cold, but he still swallowed a mouthful of the lukewarm liquid so he wouldn’t have to dignify any of their juvenile questions with a response.

Savannah’s heart skipped a beat when she got out of her Toyota and found Matt sitting on the hood of his SUV. They’d arranged to meet in the gravel parking lot near the beach, and the entire drive over she’d tried convincing herself she was pissed off at Matt for sex-blackmailing her into a date. But the moment she laid eyes on him, she realized just how glad she was to see him, and how *un*-pissed she was.

He wore a pair of camo pants, a tight olive-green T-shirt and aviator sunglasses, looking like the hot military man he was. She’d been thinking about him non-stop since he’d strolled out of her shop the other day. She wasn’t sure if there was an equivalent for blue balls when it came to women, but after he’d teased her into oblivion and then left her in the lurch, her body had ached so badly she’d had to go upstairs to her apartment and make herself come to stop the throbbing pain.

“Where are your swim trunks?” she asked as she headed over to him.

He jumped off the hood. “Got some in the trunk.” Moving toward her, he planted a quick kiss on her lips then popped the trunk of his car and bent forward.

Savannah couldn’t help but check out his sinewy back and firm ass. Heat seeped into her cheeks when she heard him pull down his zipper. “You’re getting changed out here?” she said in surprise.

“There’s no one around. I’ll only be a sec.”

He kept his back to her, and her gaze was glued to him as he dropped his pants and boxers in one swift motion. And then there he was, in all his bare-assed glory. Cotton lodged into every corner of her mouth. She could barely swallow as she stared at that taut behind. How was this man *this* sexy?

She forced herself to look away. She couldn’t jump the guy in public, no matter how badly she wanted to.

He turned around a moment later, a pair of sky-blue swim trunks hugging his trim hips. Two beach towels were tucked under his arm and a smile graced his sensual mouth as he said, “Ready?”

She gulped. “Uh-huh.”

They headed down the concrete staircase and made their way to the beach. Savannah instantly kicked off her flip-flops, sinking her bare toes into the warm, white sand. In the distance, she spotted the

commanding shape of Coronado's Naval Base. "What kind of demo were you doing over there today?" she asked curiously.

"Obstacle course." He cast her a cocky smile. "We were showing some of the new recruits what we've got."

"Your arrogance makes my heart go a-flutter," she said sweetly.

"What about my ass? Does that make your heart flutter too?"

"No," she lied.

He just laughed.

The beach was completely deserted and they had their pick of spots to spread out their towels. Once they were settled, Savannah peeled off her bright green sundress and shoved it inside the oversized beach bag she'd brought. She pulled out a tube of sun block and innocently held it out. "Do my back?"

He visibly swallowed. "No."

"What do you mean, no?" She couldn't help but feel a little insulted.

"I'm not putting my hands on you," Matt said cheerfully, plopping down on his towel. "I know exactly what you're trying to do. You're tempting me with your goddess body in the hopes that I'll be so overwhelmed with lust that I'll cut the date short so we can fuck like bunnies."

"I am not."

Okay, so maybe she was trying to tempt him. Truth was, she hadn't hung out with a guy in ages. A dinner or two before getting naked, sure, but once sex entered the equation, she made sure to keep it that way. For some reason, though, Matt was determined to spend time with her.

What was wrong with him?

She unscrewed the cap and squirted a glob of sun block into her hands, proceeding to slap it across her skin in frustration. Really, what *was* the matter with him? Here she was, offering him wild, no-strings sex, something most men dreamed of, and he wanted to *get to know her*. Didn't he realize that—she sucked in a breath. Oh Lord, he'd taken off his shirt.

Uncontrollable lust slammed into her at the sight of those sleek, golden muscles. Her body went into sexual overdrive.

"So tell me about your parents."

The awareness sizzling through her veins fizzled with a *pop*. "Why do you want to know about them?" she asked immediately.

Matt let out a laugh. "Relax, darlin', I'm not going to track them down and murder them. I just want to know what they're like."

"Okay, you want to know what they're like? They're perfect," she said with a sigh. "And boring."

"With you as a daughter, I doubt they're boring."

Savannah fixed her gaze on the calm waves lapping against the shoreline. She breathed in the clean scent of salt, suddenly wishing she'd tried harder to seduce him right out of this "date".

"They're just so predictable," she finally admitted. "They finish each other's sentences, laugh at all the same jokes, do all the same things. It's...well, like I said, boring."

She felt Matt's gaze burning into her skin. When she glanced over, his green eyes revealed a perceptive glint. "What's the real reason?"

She swallowed. "What real reason?"

"Why you're so bothered by their relationship."

"I'm not...I'm not bothered by it."

"Sure you are. So why?"

Uneasiness swirled in the pit of her stomach. "I don't know."

"Of course you know." He tilted his head. "What is it about them that troubles you so badly?"

She grew silent.

"Come on, tell me. I'll even make you a deal. If you tell me, I'll tell why I'm bothered by *my* family."

His offer sparked her interest. Despite her reluctance, she found herself trying to put her feelings into words. "I guess it's... They're just...still so in love," she burst out. "After twenty years, they still act like newlyweds. Their relationship is so solid I can't make sense of it."

Matt's forehead creased. "Why not?"

"Because every relationship I've ever had has died a fiery death. I just don't get how they're still together. How they made it work." She was momentarily puzzled, despite the fact that she'd wondered about this for years. "Seeing them just makes me glaringly aware that I'm different."

"Why did your previous relationships fail?" he asked curiously.

She shook her head in confusion. "I honestly don't know. One minute everything was great, and the next they just ended. First with my high school boyfriend Rick, then in college with this guy Kevin, then Greg. Either I get bored, or they get bored, or both of us do—no matter what, it always ends."

"So you've decided to prematurely end things instead?"

She shrugged. "Why not? Obviously I'm not cut out for relationships. Which I'm totally fine with." She changed the subject before he could question her again. "Okay, your turn. Tell me why your family bugs you."

"They express their emotions so easily," he said without hesitation. "I don't get it."

Savannah had to laugh. "Uh, you express your feelings pretty easily too. You've made it more than clear you're interested in me."

Now he seemed to falter. "That's different. I'm talking about...love, I guess. They're so quick to gush about how much they love each other. For me, it's always been more difficult, telling people how I feel about them."

A short silence stretched between them. Discomfort roiled inside her. This was the most honest, disturbing conversation she'd ever had with a man, and the need to flee rose in her chest, tingled in her legs. Abruptly, she jumped to her feet and said, "I'm going to take a quick dip."

Without waiting for a reply, she nearly sprinted across the flour-soft sand. The water that swirled around her ankles was warm, soothing. Taking a breath, she dove in, submerging herself in the ocean and swimming out a dozen yards. When she finally came up for air, she glanced at the beach and saw Matt still lying on the towel, propped up on his elbows. She couldn't see his expression but she imagined he looked as confused as she felt. What on earth was she thinking, telling him about her parents' marriage, her past relationships?

She was treading in dangerous territory here. Having honest heart-to-hearts with a guy? She hadn't done that in years, not since she'd decided to focus on the thrill of firsts and avoid the pain and heartache that came from messy break-ups. Evidently she needed to regain her footing here, remind herself that her time with Matt was temporary, the way it always was in her life.

Collecting her composure, she took another deep breath then smoothed her wet hair off her forehead. She kicked off in a leisurely stroke, and by the time she emerged on shore, she felt calm and centered and determined to lead this affair with Matt back in the direction it belonged.

To the bedroom.

## Chapter Five

Matt groaned softly as Savannah's head bobbed up and down his hard length, her tongue gliding across the sensitive underside of his shaft. Savannah's blowjobs continued to amaze him. She gave them a hundred and ten percent, focusing all her delicious attention on the task at hand. She used her hands and tongue and mouth and even teeth, until he could barely remember his own name when subjected to her ministrations.

She sucked his tip gently before taking him almost to the back of her throat. Groaning again, Matt cupped her head and gave an upwards thrust. She moaned, the sound vibrating through his cock. She'd had his clothes off the second they stepped into her apartment, and as irritated as he'd been then, he felt none of that irritation now. Instead, he leaned his head against the headboard of her bed and closed his eyes, losing himself in the remarkable sensations she produced in his body.

His eyelids popped open when her mouth left him, but she didn't leave him in the lurch. She just shimmed up his naked body, rolled a condom on his stiff shaft and lowered herself onto him. The moment her wet heat clamped over him, he wrapped his arms around her slender form and pulled her toward him.

"I need to taste you," he muttered hoarsely.

Savannah cupped her breasts and brought them to his mouth. He devoured one, then the other, licking and sucking her pearly-pink nipples while she rode him in a slow, lazy rhythm. Her skin tasted like saltwater, and the still-damp hair streaming down her shoulders had a slight curl to it. She was the most beautiful fucking woman he'd ever seen, and a fresh dose of arousal flooded his groin.

"See how much better this is," she murmured, bending down to kiss him. "Who needs dating?"

If he weren't on the verge of losing control, he would've been annoyed with the throaty remark, but as it was, he couldn't concentrate on anything but the feel of that tight pussy squeezing the hell out of his dick.

"Faster, darlin'," he said, gripping her hips. "Make yourself come before I explode."

With a sexy little smile, she did what he asked, grinding her lower body against his in a suddenly reckless pace. His breathing became labored, a tense knot of impending release coiling in his body. Savannah rode him hard and fast, but still he held back, watching the hazy desire swimming in her gray eyes, waiting for the moment her lips parted to let out a wild cry. Her inner muscles gripped his cock as she lost herself in orgasm, and the knot of tension in his groin snapped apart and pleasure seized his balls. His climax seared into him, the incredible burn spreading through his body until every muscle, every limb was infused with pleasure.



Savannah collapsed on top of him. Her hair tickled his chin. He could feel her heartbeat hammering against his chest.

“Why does it just seem to get better?” Her breath moistened his shoulder.

He was wondering the same damn thing. As much as he didn’t like Savannah’s “first thrills” mentality, he understood it. After half a dozen times, he got bored of the woman in his bed. The sex just lost some of its passionate appeal after a while. But not with this woman. With Savannah, each time felt like the first time.

“Maybe it’s a sign,” he said gruffly.

She lifted her head to peek up at him. “A sign of what?”

“That you should be more open-minded to this dating thing.”

Her hand slid between their sweat-coated bodies to squeeze his condom-covered dick. “I’m more open-minded to *this* thing.”

Making a disapproving sound with his tongue, he reached down and firmly moved her hand. “No way. You don’t get the little soldier again until after the next date.”

She burst out in gales of laughter. “You have a nickname for your penis?”

“No,” he lied.

Her laughter died, replaced by a groan of frustration. “You’re seriously sticking to this ridiculous plan?”

“Yep. One round of sex for every date.”

“You’re a sadist.”

“Yeah, but you still like me.”

Savannah sat up with a thoughtful look. Pink splotches covered her breasts, chafed from his stubble. He kind of liked the sight, knowing he’d marked her this way.

“If we order Chinese food, does that count as a date?” she inquired.

He mulled it over. “Sure.”

“And then afterwards we can do this again?”

“That’s the rule.”

“Fine.” Her arm shot out to the cordless phone sitting on the bedside table. “Let’s have some dinner so I can play with the little soldier.”

“This is *perfect*,” Annabelle exclaimed, marveling over the sample centerpiece Savannah had created. They’d agreed for Annabelle to come by the shop at ten in the morning in order to approve or ask for a redo of Savannah’s work. Approval seemed to be the conclusion. So far, Annabelle loved everything, including

the sketches Savannah had done of the orchids twining around the delicate white birch archway that would serve as the altar.

Annabelle pulled out her Blackberry and snapped a few photos of the centerpiece, then clicked a couple of buttons. "I'm just sending these to Jeannine. She was happy with the description I gave her, but I'd like to give her a visual so she can suggest changes if she wants."

As it turned out, the bride agreed with Annabelle's assessment, quickly texting back *PERFECT*.

Savannah experienced a burst of pride. She'd worked hard on the arrangement, and she was glad her efforts had been successful. She'd dreaded having to redo the centerpiece, particularly because of the vague details the bride had described. Now she wouldn't have to.

"Did you order the silk for the head table panels?" Annabelle asked as she tucked her Blackberry into the pocket of her loose brown Capris.

Savannah nodded. "I'm holding on to all the receipts and invoices like you asked."

"Thanks." With a faint smile, Annabelle leaned against the counter and added, "So how are things with Matt?"

Her guard instantly shot up. She knew Annabelle was dating Matt's best friend, and a part of her wondered if Matt had put Annabelle up to this. Was he fishing for information? After his whole date-for-sex trade, she wouldn't put it past him.

But although she wouldn't admit it to him, she really was starting to enjoy their dates. Yesterday they'd gone for lunch at a fish and chips place near the harbor, and when he picked her up after work that evening, they'd seen a new horror movie playing at the Royal, an old-style cinema house near San Diego's East Village.

The talking wasn't bad either. She loved hearing about Matt's family and he never ran out of stories to tell about his four older sisters. Apparently they fussed over their baby brother like mother hens. His mother and grandmother sounded sweet as hell, though she could understand why he felt smothered by them sometimes. Who wouldn't, when your mother insisted on sewing nametags with bright red fabric hearts into every piece of clothing you owned?

But she knew she couldn't keep letting it happen anymore. All the dates, the long talks...way too close to relationship territory here, and she knew from past experience just how bad she was at those. Back when she'd actually cared to find someone to share her life with, she'd only ended up broken-hearted. Now she knew better, and no matter how much she liked Matt O'Connor, she needed to put some distance between them before anything got too serious.

Sensing Savannah's hesitation, Annabelle's smile widened. "He didn't ask me to ask, I swear. It's just that we haven't seen him around the building the past week, so I figured he was hanging out at your place."

"Yeah, we've been hanging out," she said carefully.

“Does he make you melt in bed every time he calls you *darlin’*?” Annabelle mimicked Matt’s faint drawl, then laughed. “I just about did.”

Savannah’s eyebrows shot up. “Wait—you slept with Matt?”

Looking sheepish, the other woman nodded. “Yeah. I figured he’d tell you.”

“Oh. He didn’t.”

The icy jealousy coursing through her veins came out of nowhere. For some reason, her claws were out at the revelation that Matt and Annabelle had slept together. She tried to stop the annoying reaction, but it only intensified when she unwittingly pictured Matt and Annabelle naked together.

“It was just a one-night thing,” Annabelle added. “Ryan was there too.”

Savannah pasted a bright smile on her face, but she suspected Annabelle could see right through it. The other woman’s cautious tone had spoken volumes. “I’m sure it was fun,” she said, cringing at her overly cheerful voice.

Annabelle let out a laugh. “You’re jealous.”

“And you’re laughing about it,” she grumbled. “Aren’t you nice.”

“I’m not laughing at *you*. Well, I guess I am, a little, but that’s just because you’re totally busted.” Annabelle’s brown eyes shone with delight. “You keep acting like you don’t care about Matt one way or the other, but this proves that you do.”

Savannah eyed her suspiciously. “Did you...you purposely told me about having sex with Matt, didn’t you? You wanted to see my reaction.”

“Yep,” Annabelle said, making no move to apologize. “I just know he’s really into you, and I wanted to make sure you felt the same way. Obviously you like him more than you’re willing to admit.”

She wanted to protest, but couldn’t bring herself to do it. Annabelle probably wouldn’t believe her, anyway, if she insisted she didn’t have deep feelings for Matt.

But she *didn’t* have deep feelings for him. She liked him. She loved having sex with him. That was as deep as her feelings ran.

*Surrrre*, said the mocking voice in her head.

Gritting her teeth, she ignored the internal taunt. Even her own consciousness was trying to convince her she was in love with the guy or something. Which she wasn’t. She didn’t do pesky emotions like love. Apparently she liked Matt O’Connor enough to experience a spark of jealousy at the thought of him with another woman, but that did not mean she liked him enough to have a relationship with him.

She suddenly realized she needed to make it clear to him where she stood. Matt and Annabelle believed there was some love connection happening between them, and who could blame them? Here she was, going to movies and lunch dates with the guy, listening to his funny family anecdotes. No wonder Matt and his friends thought this whole fling was turning into something more.

Maybe it was time to set them straight.

Matt knew something was up when Savannah suggested they go to one of the busiest bars in San Diego for their next date. The past week, they'd gotten closer than ever, and he'd started looking forward to their non-sex moments. He usually did most of the talking, but eventually he'd gotten Savannah to open up and tell him more about her life. She even confessed about her cheerleading days, which he teased her about mercilessly. Somehow he couldn't imagine her doing cartwheels and shouting "B-E aggressive!" to a crowd of high school football fans.

Each time she revealed something personal, though, she immediately pulled back, and this morning, when they'd made plans to meet up tonight, he'd heard the unmistakable distance in her voice. He knew Annabelle had been at the shop earlier in the afternoon to go over some wedding details, and he wondered if Annabelle had done something to upset her. Somehow he couldn't imagine that happening. In fact, he was pretty sure he knew exactly why Savannah was acting the way she was.

They were getting too close for her comfort.

Pushing the thought aside, he focused on Savannah, who was sipping on a vodka-cranberry cocktail and laughing at the antics of a few younger guys arguing over by the pool table. Again, he knew why she'd suggested the Sand Bar for tonight's date. The place was loud and always filled to capacity, offering pretty much the opposite of an intimate atmosphere. This bar was one of his favorite dives—he came here often with the guys—but it wasn't the place to have a real conversation, which was something he'd been looking forward to all day. He knew this was Savannah's way of distancing herself, though. She'd been doing it ever since the beach. The sex was still as hot and passionate as before, but the emotional barrier Savannah kept in front of her heart had only seemed to grow higher.

"I'm in the mood for something different tonight," Savannah announced, a sensual smile curving her mouth.

Matt's guard shot up. "What kind of different?" He had to raise his voice over the din.

Her gaze swept over the throng of bodies in the bar. She lingered for a moment on a tall, blond-haired guy wearing a Chargers football jersey. "Him, maybe? What do you think, is he good in bed?"

Uneasiness washed through him. "What are you suggesting, darlin'?"

She shrugged, and the loose wide-necked shirt she wore slid down, revealing her bare shoulder. "Might be fun to have some company tonight."

A threesome. Christ, she was actually suggesting a goddamn threesome.

His first instinct was to shout "hell no". Not that he was a prude or anything. He and Ryan had indulged in plenty of threesomes. So had he and Aidan Rhodes. Yet Savannah's proposition absolutely floored him. Especially since he knew it was just another part of her plan to push him away. She probably expected him to balk at the idea, storm out in disgust.

Or...maybe she was actually serious.

He couldn't deny that he'd met his match in the form of Savannah Harte. She loved sex just as much as he did, and she was always quick to initiate a fun way to spice things up. Like the other night, when they'd ordered that Chinese food and she proceeded to lick low mein noodles off his stomach. She definitely knew how to have a good time.

So did he. Usually. But right now...shit, was she serious or should he call her bluff?

He decided to test the waters first.

"You want some random guy to join us tonight?" There was a sharp edge to his voice.

Her gray eyes twinkled. "Why not? According to Annabelle, you're no stranger to threesomes."

"Annabelle told you about that night?"

"Yup. And she also said it wasn't an isolated incident, for you, anyway." Savannah leaned forward with a teasing expression, and the neckline of her shirt sagged lower, revealing her creamy-white cleavage.

Trying not to look at those mouthwatering tits, Matt kept his gaze on her face, studying her. "Threesomes can be entertaining," he said neutrally.

"Exactly. So let's do it."

Before he could respond, a familiar voice sounded from behind, and then Aidan Rhodes strode up to their table. "O'Connor," he said, raising his beer in greeting. "What's going on, bro?" He noticed Savannah and grinned, the dimples in his cheeks popping out. "Who's your beautiful friend?"

Interest flickered across Savannah's face as she appraised Aidan. Matt wondered if she found Rhodes attractive. He wasn't into guys, but even he had to admit that Rhodes had it going on. Six feet tall, strong jaw, perpetual stubble, and of course, those dimples. Annabelle had once told Matt that women *loved* dimples.

"This is Savannah. Savannah, this is Aidan," Matt introduced, then gestured to the empty chair at their table. "Have a seat, man."

Aidan sank down and took a long swallow of beer. "I'm not interrupting anything, am I? I came here with a few other guys from base, but two of them have already hooked up with total strangers and the third might be throwing up in the bathroom."

"Your friends left you all alone?" Savannah mocked, laughing softly.

Aidan's dark eyes swept over her, zeroing in on the cleavage Matt had been trying to avoid. "They sure did. Good thing I found some new friends."

Matt sipped his own beer, watching the casual interplay between Savannah and Rhodes. Nearly an hour passed, and although Matt had been an active participant in the conversation, cracking jokes with Aidan, his mind was somewhere else the entire time. He watched Savannah and Aidan interact, wariness creeping up his spine. Neither one was outright flirting or anything, but he could tell they each found the other attractive. His chest squeezed at the thought, but at the same time, he liked and respected Aidan. He

was a good guy, really truly decent, and if they were seriously going to have a three-way tonight, better with Aidan than some slimy stranger.

Matt almost choked mid-sip as he realized where his train of thought had taken him. Fuck, was he actually considering this ménage idea?

"I'll be back in a few." Aidan's voice made Matt lift his head. His friend had stood up and was already heading toward the restrooms.

Matt noticed Savannah's gaze focus on Rhodes's behind as he strode off.

"I like him," Savannah remarked. "How come he's not a SEAL like you? He's just as ripped, physique-wise."

"You like his body?" he said darkly.

"Sure." She reached out to rub the palm of his hand with her fingers. "It's obviously not as super-duper sexy as yours, *darlin'*, but you've got to admit, he's a hottie." She suddenly cocked her head. "Have you ever had any threesomes with him?"

Matt gave a reluctant nod.

She raised one blonde eyebrow. "Really. How were they?"

"Pretty damn good," he admitted.

"So what do you think...?" She tilted her head again and flashed him a sexy smile.

Matt clenched his teeth. "Do you really want to do this or are you trying to..."

"Trying to what?"

"I don't know." He felt frazzled. "Get me to break up with you or something."

"Breaking up implies we're in a relationship. And we're not. I just want to have a good time, Superman. It's all I've wanted from the start. And I like this Aidan character. He's really cute."

"Cute enough to fuck?"

A brief flash of indignation blazed through her eyes. "Yeah, actually he is. And considering you've seen him naked while the two of you screwed who knows how many random chicks, I don't see how you can be upset with me for bringing it up."

She did have a point. Matt hated hypocrisy, yet here he was, getting pissed that she'd suggested something he and Aidan had already done a few times before.

"You *really* want this?" he asked, studying her intently.

Savannah's expression never wavered. "Yes."

"Fine then." From the corner of his eye Matt spotted Aidan returning from the men's room. Just as Aidan reached the table, Matt stood up and clapped a hand on his friend's arm. "You want to get out of here?" he asked roughly. "Savannah and I were thinking of heading back to her place."

Surprise creased Aidan's features. "You want me to join you?"

Matt lowered his voice. "My girl's in the mood for some extra company."

Aidan slanted his eyes at Savannah, looking more than a little intrigued. “You want some company, honey?”

Savannah’s cheeks turned a shade of pink. “You’d be into that?”

“I’m into a lot of things,” Aidan said with a husky laugh. He glanced at Matt, who was seconds away from wrapping his fingers around his friend’s throat and squeezing. “You cool with this?”

Matt forced a nod. “Definitely. I’m all about making Savannah happy.”

## Chapter Six

Savannah's apartment was dark when they walked in twenty minutes later. Aidan had driven over in his own car, while Matt and Savannah took the SUV. The whole ride over, Matt wondered if the gorgeous blonde beside him would call this off, but she didn't say much during the ride, save for a few flirty remarks about how it had been ages since she'd done something this crazy.

So here he was, still calling her bluff, still riddled with doubt that she'd actually go through this. Not that the idea of a threesome freaked him out or anything. He was a healthy, red-blooded male who never had any inhibitions when it came to sex. Hell, his cock was already semi-hard, and nobody was naked yet. If Savannah truly wanted to get it on with two men at once, he had no problem helping her live out the fantasy.

But he *would* have a problem if it turned out this whole three-way thing was simply a ploy to put some more distance between them. He'd never pegged Savannah as the type to play games, and he sincerely hoped that wasn't the case now, but considering her abrupt decision to invite a third player into the mix, he had to wonder. Especially since this bright idea had come days after she'd revealed some personal, emotional details to him, which she evidently hadn't liked sharing.

Savannah Harte was scared of relationships. He had no doubt about that anymore. He just hoped that fear wasn't driving her right now, that it wasn't a way for her to push him away.

When they entered her apartment, however, pushing him away was not at all what she did. Instead, she moved closer and kissed the hell out of him, her tongue sliding into his mouth. He was gasping for air when she finally pulled away, surprised by her take-charge attitude. As he watched, she turned around and stepped toward Aidan, placed her hands on his shoulders and leaned up to brush her lips over his.

White-hot agony sliced into Matt's gut.

He knew he had no right to be upset, or even angry. He'd agreed to this stupid idea. But somehow he'd expected her to back out at the last moment. Looked like backing out wasn't on her agenda. His stomach clenched as Savannah deepened the kiss with Aidan, who responded without any hesitation.

Despite the aching of his heart, Matt's body reacted the way it always did when the promise of sex hung in the air. His cock hardened, muscles tensed, skin heated. When Aidan's hands slid down to cup Savannah's ass, Matt's erection twitched involuntarily. He hated that he was able to get aroused by this, that another man's hands on Savannah could get him going. He didn't want to share her with anybody else, but what other choice did he have? She'd made it more than clear that she wanted some variety tonight. If



he'd said no, she might've picked up some random stranger and fucked his brains out, and he couldn't let that happen. At least here, he had some semblance of control. Aidan was a good buddy of his and Matt knew he wouldn't do anything to hurt Savannah.

"We need a bed," Aidan rasped against Savannah's lips, breaking the kiss.

With a little smile, she gripped his hand and led him toward the screen separating the living area from her bedroom. She paused to grasp Matt's hand too, her hips swaying as she led the two men toward the bed. She really wanted this, Matt realized, and conflicting emotions warred inside of him.

On one hand, he admired her confidence, how in tune she was with her sexuality. She knew what she wanted, went after it, and had no regrets. She was his perfect match, sexually at least, a rare woman who had zero reservations in the bedroom. She held the same enthusiastic outlook about sex that he normally did.

Funny, how the tables had completely turned on him.

Aidan paused at the foot of the bed, his dark eyes smoldering with heat. Matt noticed his friend's cheeks were slightly flushed and he had that careless swagger that indicated he was probably a little buzzed from the alcohol he'd consumed tonight.

Savannah glanced from one man to the other, shooting them each a coy smile. "Come on, boys. Strip."

Aidan grinned at Matt. "I like her."

"So do I," he answered roughly.

Knowing it was too damn late to back out of this now, Matt bent down to unlace his boots and kicked them aside, then unzipped his pants and let them drop to the floor. Shirt, boxers and socks came off, until he finally stood naked in front of Savannah. His cock jutted out, begging for her attention. Aidan's dick was at full salute too. Heat suffused Savannah's gray eyes, darkening them to metallic silver. With methodical movements, she pulled her shirt over her head, shimmied out of her jeans and panties, and stepped closer to Aidan, fully naked. Then she slid down to her knees and wrapped both hands around his friend's shaft.

Matt clenched his teeth. When Savannah's lips parted to wrap around Aidan's tip, simultaneous jolts of arousal and jealousy struck him. He didn't want to be turned on watching Savannah blow someone else, but he was.

Lowering his hand to his throbbing erection, he stroked himself slowly while Savannah worked on his friend. Aidan groaned in approval, rocking his hips to meet Savannah's lips. He moved backwards toward the bed, slipped out of her mouth and sank onto the mattress.

Savannah promptly climbed up too and continued to lick at him eagerly. After a few seconds, she lifted her head and turned to Matt. "Are you just going to stand there?" Her voice came out in a teasing drawl.

Still gripping his shaft, he walked over to the bed and stared at her enticing bottom. The way she was bent over Aidan left her most secretive areas fully exposed to him. Matt's mouth went dry as he stared at her moist pink slit and the puckered ring of her ass. He moved toward her as if pulled by a magnet.

Savannah squeaked in delight when she felt his hands on her cheeks, spreading them wider. Using the tip of his index finger, Matt stroked her pussy, groaning when moisture coated his fingers.

Savannah thrust her ass out even higher. "Please." The pleading note to her voice made him smile.

"Don't be cruel," Aidan laughed from the bed. "Give her what she wants, bro."

Sinking to his knees, Matt leaned forward and dragged his tongue along her damp flesh, eliciting a desperate whimper from Savannah's mouth. It came out muffled, what with Aidan's cock deep in her throat. Forcing every drop of jealousy from his body, Matt focused on pleasing his woman. He licked her up like an ice cream cone, then thrust his tongue deep inside her. As he started suckling on her clit, he pushed two fingers into her and fucked her with them. When he felt her muscles clamp around his fingers, he quickly withdrew. She deserved to be teased a little.

On the bed, Aidan let out a ragged moan and gently moved Savannah's head away. "Not yet," he ground out. "I want to come inside you, honey."

Savannah let Matt give her one more swipe of the tongue, then sat up and turned to meet his eyes. The expression on her face sent a bolt of desire straight to his cock. Her cheeks were pink, her lips wet from sucking Aidan, and her eyes glazed and heavy-lidded.

"Are you having fun?" he couldn't help but taunt.

She nodded slightly. Her gaze traveled to his erect cock. "Come here," she said in a throaty voice.

He stood up and moved toward her. She took him into her mouth and he almost keeled over from the sensation. Aidan slid up so he was sitting behind Savannah, wrapping his muscular arms around her so he could cup her firm breasts with his palms. As Savannah's tongue danced along his shaft, Matt's eyelids fluttered. He forced his eyes to stay open, to watch the way Aidan's fingers played with Savannah's rigid nipples. Fuck, that was hot.

His reluctance was slowly dissolving like a teaspoon of sugar in water. This wasn't as painful as he'd thought it would be. Aidan knew how to please a woman, and judging by Savannah's muffled moans she obviously enjoyed the way the other man fondled her breasts. Matt was as hard as a rock, eager to fill Savannah's ass with his cock at the same time another man penetrated her tight pussy.

Savannah nibbled on his tip and another groan slid from his mouth. No, this encounter wasn't awkward or painful at all. Here he was, with a good friend of his, the woman he loved, and the chemistry between the three of them was out of this—

*The woman you love?*

It was a miracle his dick didn't go soft at that moment. The appearance of the L-word in his brain shocked the living hell out of him. Was he in love with her? How was that possible? His gaze swept over

her flushed face, those perfect breasts and tanned skin and tousled blonde hair. He loved seeing her arousal, loved the little sounds of pleasure she made in the back of her throat. He wanted her to feel good. He wanted to make her happy.

A woman's happiness had never mattered to him before. He hadn't cared about long discussions, or movie dates, or dropping by a woman's place of business to take her to lunch.

But he cared about all that now.

Fuck, he was actually in love.

The newfound emotion brought a rush of pleasure to his body. Suddenly he needed to be inside her, some primal urge to claim her taking over. Pulling his dick out of her mouth, he strode over to the bedside table, yanked open the drawer and grabbed the box of condoms he'd stashed in there the other day. He took out a tube of lubrication too and set that down on the bed, then removed two square packages from the box, tossed one to Aidan and ripped the other open so he could sheath himself.

"Who do you want in your ass?"

Savannah had been caressing Aidan's balls as he put on the condom, and she looked up in surprise at Matt's gruff inquiry. At her obvious hesitation, he shot her a mocking smile. "This is your show, darlin'. Tell us what you want."

Her face pink with excitement, Savannah answered his question with actions rather than words. Straddling Aidan, she lowered herself onto his waiting erection, moaning as she fully seated herself. Matt's chest tightened with pure heat as she bent forward and pushed her ass up in the air in invitation.

He didn't need to be asked twice.

Coming up behind her, he widened his stance, then picked up the lube and squeezed a generous amount onto his hand. As Aidan thrust upwards to meet Savannah's frenzied movements, Matt slathered lube on his shaft then squirted more in his palm and got Savannah nice and slick. When his tip rubbed her tender opening, she cried out in delight and wiggled against him.

"Slow down, honey," Aidan murmured huskily, planting his hands on her slender hips to steady her. "Let him work his way in."

Matt's entire body burned with red-hot lust as he eased into that tight rosette. He reined himself in, gritting his teeth to stop from coming right there and then. It felt like an iron fist squeezing his cock. His head lolled to the side. Fuck. So good. No way was he lasting more than a minute.

While Aidan kept Savannah still, Matt moved in and out, slowly going deeper at each lazy drive of his cock. When his entire length was buried inside her, all three of them groaned. And then they started to move.

Savannah wondered if it was possible to die from sheer ecstasy. She'd been with two men before, but Matt and Aidan were by far better endowed than her previous lovers. She felt unbelievably *filled* as their

cocks slid in and out of her. Her pulse hammered in her ears, her breathing growing labored as she rode Aidan. Behind her, Matt kept to an excruciatingly slow pace. She knew he was allowing her to get used to the sensations, but his languid movements drove her crazy.

Twisting her head, she met his eyes and issued a breathy command. "Faster. Please."

His features taut with desire, he offered a quick nod, then plunged into her so hard she cried out with pleasure that bordered on pain. Beneath her, Aidan's dark eyes glimmered with unrestrained heat. "That's it, honey, fuck me harder."

It was too much. Every muscle in her body was coiled tight, like a rattlesnake ready to pounce. She needed to come so badly she could barely breathe, definitely couldn't form any coherent thoughts, either.

"Rub her clit," came Matt's hoarse demand.

Savannah's vision went hazy as Aidan reached between them and captured her clit between his fingers, rolling it gently. She sagged forward, nearly drowning in the incredible waves of bliss pulsing through her. Aidan's cock stretched her aching core, while Matt was buried so deep in her ass she didn't know where she started and they ended. In the back of her mind, she realized it was not Aidan, but Matt she was more focused on. She was listening to *his* labored breathing, feeling *his* hands digging into her hips, groaning each time *his* erection slid into her. Aidan's fingers between her legs felt incredible, his hard body beneath hers was pleasurable, but only when she focused on Matt did she feel the ripples of impending orgasm dance low in her belly.

Since now wasn't the time to question that revelation, she closed her eyes and lost herself in the moment. Her muscles tightened, contracted, coiled again and then seemed to snap apart as release crashed into her. Every inch of her body tingled with little pulses of heat. Pleasure sizzled through her veins, infusing into the tips of her nipples, her clit, her core.

As she came apart, she felt more than heard each man lose control. Aidan's cry was huskier, more restrained, while Matt gave a guttural groan that sent shivers through her. She was nearly panting as the two men shuddered inside her, as Matt tenderly caressed her hips and Aidan continued to brush his fingers over her clit.

"Holy shit," Aidan swore when their heavy breathing finally grew quiet. One hand touched Savannah's chin. "Honey, that was first-class."

She managed an exhausted smile. "Right back at you."

Her body suddenly felt empty as Matt pulled out of her ass, followed by Aidan's gentle withdrawal. She rolled off Aidan, smiling again when she watched him hop off the bed and fumble on the floor for his clothes. "I should get going," he said absently.

Evidently he wasn't a cuddler. She admired the attitude, though. He'd gotten what he wanted and now he was taking off. Right to the point. She liked that.

"Thanks for coming over," she murmured.

He laughed softly. "I should be thanking you. You were amazing." He glanced over at Matt, who was slipping into his boxers. "Thanks for having me, bro."

Matt just shrugged. "Anytime."

Anytime?

Savannah wondered if that meant he wanted Aidan to play with them again. The thought made her stomach a little unsettled. Aidan was insanely cute and definitely talented in bed, but during those last few moments before her orgasm, Matt had been the only man on her mind, the only one she'd been concentrating on. She wasn't sure why that happened, or how she even felt about it.

"I'll walk you out," Matt said to his buddy.

With another dimpled grin, Aidan offered a cute "Later, Savannah" and followed Matt toward the front door. She heard the door open, close, then lock, and when Matt appeared at the foot of the bed a moment later, he had a wry expression on his handsome face.

"You okay?" she teased. "Or did we wear you out?"

"I'm fine." He cleared his throat awkwardly. "So listen..."

A startling combination of hope and disappointment clamored inside her. He was going to break it off with her. This threesome had evidently been too much for him. He'd only been pretending to enjoy it, but now that his friend was gone, he was going to tell her that he didn't want to be with someone as slutty as she was. Awful as it was, it was what she'd been trying to achieve by suggesting this little ménage, yet a part of her was a tad disappointed that it had been so easy, childish as *that* was.

"Savannah, I think I'm falling in love with you."

Even though she was lying down, she almost fell over. "What?"

"You heard me," he said gruffly.

"You...I...of course you're not." She sat up abruptly. "That's silly."

Anger flashed in his eyes. "Why exactly is that silly?"

Panic spiraled through her body like a relentless tornado. How was this actually happening? This damn threesome was her way to try and put some distance between her and Matt. All those dates and talks and the staggeringly amazing sex... It scared her. After the fierce jealousy she'd experienced when learning that Annabelle had slept with Matt, Savannah had realized just how close she was to developing real feelings for this man. It was like she was falling off a cliff and had two landing options—the water, which meant being safe and happy but alone, or the jagged rocks, a relationship that, like all the others, would end in heartbreak.

She didn't want to crash into those rocks. Her first priority had always been herself, and so she'd tried pushing Matt away by bringing another man into their bed.

And he'd liked it!

She'd seen the passionate fire burning in his eyes when both he and Aidan had been fucking her. And now he was telling her he loved her?

"You can't actually mean that," she burst out. "And is this really the time you want to declare your love, after I just slept with your friend?"

"It was just sex," he said with a shrug. "But you and me...that's more than sex, Savannah. I think you know it but you're too freaking scared to admit it. We get along—"

"So?" she cut in. "I get along with my dentist—that doesn't mean we love each other."

"We laugh together," he went on, ignoring the interruption. "We like the same shitty horror movies, we have mind-blowing sex, we never run out of things to say to each other." Looking aggravated, he put on his T-shirt, then buttoned up his jeans. "So yeah, all those things make me think this is more than a damn fling."

She bit on her thumbnail, reverting back to an old nail-biting habit she only turned to when she was seriously panic-stricken. He couldn't really mean any of this. Or at least, the love part of it. They'd known each other two weeks, a month if you counted the first meeting at the bank. That wasn't enough time for him to fall in love with her.

She didn't *want* him to fall in love with her.

Matt released a ragged breath. "Why does it not surprise me that you're reacting this way?"

She bristled. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means you're a coward, Savannah. You act all tough and confident, like you don't care about anything but having a good time, but we both know that's a big fat lie. You *want* a relationship—you're just too damn scared."

Her lips tightened in offense. "I told you, I'm not a relationship person. They never last for me."

Matt barked out a humorless laugh. "Because maybe you haven't found the right man, ever thought of that? If you're not meant to be with someone, obviously the relationship will end. But when you find the right person..." He let the comment hang.

"And I suppose you're the right person for me?" She scoffed. "We've known each other a couple of weeks, Matt. Besides, it won't work out between us."

He raised one dark eyebrow. "Do you have psychic powers I'm not aware of? How do you know it won't work out?"

She raked the fingers of her left hand through her hair in an aggravated gesture. "Because it never does. Not for me, anyway. Something always ends up going wrong."

"Maybe it won't this time," he said quietly.

"And maybe it will." She stuck her chin out stubbornly. "I made the decision a long time ago not to take that chance anymore. I don't want any more broken hearts. And I'm tired of the awful sense of boredom and sadness I feel when the thrill ends up dying out."

Realizing she was still naked, she scrambled off the bed and angrily rummaged on the floor for her clothes. She shoved on her jeans without bothering with underwear, threw her shirt over her head, and crossed her arms. "Look, I really do like you," she said, softening her tone. "Enough that I don't want to come to the point where I *don't* like you anymore, or where you don't like me."

"And what if we never reach that point?" he challenged.

Her shoulders sagged wearily. "I always get to that point."

Frustration creased his forehead. "So you're just planning on living the rest of your life in fear, avoiding anything good that comes your way? Because damn it, Savannah, *we* are good. And you're a fool to throw it away." His voice hardened. "I told you how difficult it is for me to talk about my emotions, but I was willing to take the risk, to tell you how I feel."

Pain circled her heart. "Matt..."

"Whatever," he muttered darkly. "Obviously you can't take a risk of your own."

"That's not fair," she protested. "I've made it clear from day one what I wanted out of this. I never lied to you, or misled you."

He released a heavy sigh. "You're right. You didn't. But things have changed since day one. We have the potential to be really good together, and you're too scared to give us a chance."

To her dismay, tears stung her eyelids. But the fact that she was about to cry only brought a spark of anger to her belly. Why was he pushing her? She'd told him her feelings about relationships. Just because he'd suddenly decided he was in love with her didn't mean she was going to launch herself into his arms and profess her undying love.

Unbearable silence hung between them, until Matt finally cursed under his breath and took a step back. "Forget it," he mumbled. "I'm not going to beg you to have a relationship with me. I'm not that guy. But I'm not going to pretend this is just a fling either."

She blinked, trying to stop the tears from falling.

"So here you go," he said in a tone lined with resignation. "You've got your wish. A couple of weeks of casual, no-string sex. Hope you had fun."

Without another word, not even a goodbye, he turned his back on her and left the apartment.

## Chapter Seven

“Are you *drinking*?”

The shrill and outraged female voice jolted Matt from his catnap. Cranking open one eyelid, he saw two pretty faces hovering above him. His fuzzy eyesight recognized Annabelle, but it took a few seconds to register the petite brunette beside her as Holly Scott, Carson’s wife. He wasn’t used to the haircut yet. Holly had recently chopped her long brown hair into a chin-length bob, which emphasized her emerald green eyes and the delicate angles of her face.

Propping himself up on the couch cushion with his elbow, he glanced at the half-empty beer bottle on the coffee table and mumbled, “It’s from last night.”

Annabelle planted her hands on her hips. “I can see the condensation dripping down the side. This was just opened.”

Holly rolled her eyes. “It’s ten in the morning, Matt. That’s so pathetic.”

No, what was pathetic was telling a woman he loved her for the first time in his life only to be shut down big-time.

But he decided not to say that aloud.

“Since when did you two become my mother?” he grumbled, sitting up with a tired yawn.

“Since you promised you’d let us borrow your SUV for the wedding today,” Annabelle snapped. “I texted you about it last night and you texted back *yeppers*. I took that to mean you’d help out.”

He straightened up, rolling his shoulders to get the kinks out. He’d been lying on the couch for about three days now, only dragging himself up to get a beer or use the john. Empty pizza boxes were stacked on the floor and he wrinkled his nose at the stale odor of old beer emanating from the empty bottles littered all over the room.

“Shit, I forgot about that,” he said, shooting them an apologetic look. “Do you just need the keys or am I driving you over to the banquet hall?”

“There’s a ton of stuff to carry in,” Holly said, “so it would be cool if you can come and help unload.”

“You don’t have to stay for the wedding obviously,” Annabelle added.

He lifted his arms above his head and stretched. “Okay. Let me hop in the shower and then I’ll take you.”

Leaving the two of them in the living room, he headed to the bathroom, where he took a quick shower, brushed his teeth, and shaved three days’ worth of stubble off his face. Holly was right, he realized



as he stared at his tired eyes in the steamy mirror. He *was* pathetic. So things had ended with Savannah. Big fucking deal. It only went to show that his initial decision to stay single had been a smart one. Love made people go nuts. His sisters had turned into mushy, sappy idiots, and so had he, the night he'd told Savannah how he felt about her.

He was better off alone. Better off reverting back to his old lifestyle, making sure things stayed light, and keeping his damn feelings to himself.

After dressing in jeans and a T-shirt, he reentered the living room to find that it was now spotless. In the ten minutes he'd been gone, Annabelle and Holly had carted off the pizza boxes, gotten rid of the beer bottles and even wiped down his coffee table. The flowery scent of air freshener hung in the large space, and both women were sitting on a couch now cleared of the random items of clothing previously strewn on it.

"Jeez, you really are my mother," he muttered.

Holly looked over at him with sharp green eyes. "What happened with Savannah? Did she dump you?"

"No." He set his jaw. "I dumped her."

Two pairs of wide eyes.

"Why would you do that?" Annabelle demanded.

"None of your business." He swiped his keys from the little basket on the table by the couch and jiggled them. "Do you want a ride or not?"

He could practically feel the curiosity radiating from them, but to his extreme surprise, neither female pushed him for details. He chalked it up to the wedding they were heading to, knowing that if the two weren't occupied with something else right now, they'd be all over him, prying information from him like a dentist extracting teeth.

"We need to stop by Shelby's bakery," Holly said as she slid into the backseat of the SUV. "We stored all the food there."

Annabelle slid into the passenger seat, and she buckled her seatbelt and shot him a sideways glance. "Thanks for doing this. Ryan was going to lend me the Jeep but it's still in the shop."

Matt wrinkled his brow. "He wrecked it?"

"Jeez, were you in an alcohol-induced coma for the past three days? He called you the day before yesterday to tell you about it. A dog ran right in front of his car and he had to swerve to avoid hitting it. He crashed into a tree, remember?"

Matt had a vague recollection of Ryan's voice bitching in his ear about a dog or something. Fuck, how much had he drank in the last seventy-hours?

"He's okay, though, right?"

She sighed. "He's fine."

Shoving his aviator sunglasses onto his nose, he focused on driving to Shelby's bakery. The shower had helped clear his head, and the two beers' worth of alcohol he'd consumed this morning were starting to leave his bloodstream. He felt alert now. And pissed off.

Yup, still pissed off at Savannah for being so damn stubborn and so damn scared.

But what could he do about it? No way was he going to beg. He was way too proud for that. Besides, what would it achieve? Savannah wanted to live in her heartache-free world of first kisses and whirlwind thrills, and who was he to force her into a relationship?

Best thing to do was move on.

Put her out of his mind, find a new, cute female to strike up a thing with and proceed to fuck the love he still felt for Savannah right out of his body.

Savannah examined her reflection in the mirror, wondering if the low-cut violet dress she'd chosen was too sexy for a first date. The silky material fell down to her knees, so it wasn't too indecent, but her breasts practically poured out of the bodice. After a second, she shrugged and moved away from the mirror. Whatever. You could never go wrong with sexy.

Her arms ached in protest as she lifted them up to adjust the artfully messy twist of her hair. She was still sore from yesterday. She'd gotten up at six in the morning and spent seven hours getting the flowers ready for the wedding. She'd driven around town like a maniac, first to the Rose Room, the banquet hall where Jeannine and her husband-to-be Henry were holding their wedding reception. Along with bringing Chad, Savannah had hired a few temporary workers to help her set up all the tables, chairs and wall panels. She'd left half of the workers to finish up, then went with Chad and a couple of others to St. Augustine's Chapel to get the aisle and altar ready for the actual ceremony. She'd left Chad in charge, headed back to the banquet hall, then back to the chapel, back to the hall, and so on, until she found herself ready to collapse by the time noon rolled around.

During one of her trips to the Rose Room, she'd had a moment to chat with Annabelle and her business partner, Holly, who mentioned Matt had just left. Apparently he'd given them a ride and stayed to help unload supplies. Savannah had just missed him, and she hadn't been sure whether she was happy or sad about that.

His parting words had been buzzing through her head like angry wasps for three days now.

*Hope you had fun.*

He hadn't sounded cruel when he said them. Just sad and resigned. She almost wished he'd been cruel. At least then she could feel better about the way things ended. If she hated him, then she wouldn't have to miss him.

Unfortunately, she didn't hate him.

And she totally missed him.

Good thing she had a solution for that.

The wedding had gone off without a hitch, the flowers were a success, and Prestige Events wanted to work with her again. To celebrate, Savannah was going on a date with Tony, the tall, dark-haired hottie who'd waltzed into her shop yesterday evening to buy flowers for his newly engaged cousin. The two of them had flirted for several minutes, until he finally gave her a sexy smile and asked if she wanted to have dinner with him the following evening. She'd said yes immediately.

Tony was just the kind of guy she liked spending time with. Gorgeous, easygoing, and not looking for a relationship. He'd told her he worked long hours at the law firm at which he was a junior partner, and didn't have time for anything serious.

Exactly the way she liked it.

A flicker of guilt went through her as she left the apartment. She felt kind of sleazy, going out with someone else when the dust of her time with Matt had barely even settled. But so what. Tony would be a nice distraction. A way to put Matt out of her mind for good.

Downstairs, she stepped onto the sidewalk in front of her shop and found a sleek black BMW waiting at the curb. The passenger window rolled down and Tony's cute grin greeted her. "Hop in."

Despite herself, she was a tad irked that he hadn't gotten out to open her door for her. Matt always did, even if they were just going for a quick cup of coffee. His southern gentleman manners, as he always said.

*Don't think about Matt*, a sharp voice ordered.

She decided to heed the voice's advice. She was going out with Tony. Tony, not Matt. So there was no reason to think about anyone other than Matt—shit, Tony, anyone other than *Tony*.

"Hey," she said as she got into the car.

Tony's dark eyes studied her appreciatively. "You look amazing."

"Thanks."

He moved the gearshift and added, "I made reservations at the Italian place around the corner. Is that cool with you?"

"It's great."

They didn't say much more as he drove to the restaurant. Savannah normally excelled at first date chitchat. She had no problems asking questions or dropping a few flirtatious remarks, maybe even innocently brushing a guy's arm to make that first contact.

But she didn't do any of that tonight, and when they were finally seated at a secluded corner table with a red and white checkered tablecloth, she almost felt nervous.

"So," Tony said, reaching for the menu, "how do you like being a florist?"

She fumbled for her own menu. "It's great."

“Cool. Did you always want to work with flowers?”

“Uh-huh. Flowers are...well, they’re great.”

She tried not to cringe. She’d uttered the word “great” like fifty times already and they were ten minutes into the damn date. Drawing in a breath, she pretended to study the menu, all the while gathering up confidence. Enough was enough. She was acting like a total loser here. She was in her element, for Pete’s sake. These first encounters, the exciting, flirty moments leading up to fun between the sheets—she lived off them, damn it.

Savannah picked up the water glass on the table and took a long swallow. “What about you?” she asked smoothly. “Have you always wanted to be a lawyer?”

With an enthusiastic nod, Tony began explaining how law was his biggest passion, only to be interrupted by the arrival of their waiter, a twenty-something-year-old guy with spiky brown hair and hazel eyes.

“Are you ready to order?” he inquired.

Savannah noticed the waiter had glued his gaze to her cleavage. She suddenly wished she’d brought a cardigan or something. The way this kid checked her out was almost criminal.

“No, we need a few more minutes,” Tony said.

The waiter turned to Savannah, but his eyes never reached her face. He just kept ogling her tits like a horny teenager. “Something to drink then?”

“A few more minutes,” she echoed.

With one last lingering look, the waiter walked off, while Savannah rolled her eyes and said, “I hope he doesn’t roofie my drink. I’m not in the mood to be sexually assaulted tonight.”

Tony gave her a blank look. “What? Why would he put drugs in your drink?”

She grew flustered. “He wouldn’t. He was just looking at my...I was making a...whatever.”

Her date was looking at her in such confusion she almost laughed out loud. But then Tony’s face brightened and he continued his recitation of all the reasons he’d chosen to become a lawyer.

Savannah tuned him out, still thinking about how he’d completely missed the sarcasm in her tone. Matt would have appreciated the sardonic remark. Like the day they’d been lying side by side on the bank floor, when he’d laughed at her whispered barbs. They’d joked back and forth that day as if they’d done it for years. She still couldn’t believe he liked—and got—her sense of humor.

Her mind drifted, the memory of his childhood anecdotes coming to the surface. She’d loved hearing those stories, mostly because it had been fun picturing big, tough Matt O’Connor as a little kid fussed over by all the females in his family. She liked hearing his voice too. Deep and gruff, and so deliciously husky when he was turned on.

She smothered a groan. Why couldn’t she stop thinking about him already? They’d had a few fun weeks together, and she’d gotten out just in time. He’d told her he was falling in love with her! How could

she stick around after that and risk another painful breakup? She'd been through too many of those. Like when Kevin dumped her after she burned yet another dinner. He'd gone on and on about how much he valued marriage and how he didn't think she would make a good wife. Asshole. The words had stung back then, but eventually she'd accepted the truth to them. Men didn't want to settle down with someone like her. She was too forward when it came to sex, too sarcastic, and not at all domestic, unless you counted her affinity for flowers.

Matt might be a bit of a commitment-phobe too, but she suspected he secretly did want the kind of loving relationship his sisters had. He would want a wife someday, and like an asshole once told her, she wasn't wife material.

Or maybe it would have ended the way things did with Greg, her last serious boyfriend. The routine they'd fallen into had been so boring she'd wanted to tear her own hair out. So she'd broken up with Greg, hurting him deeply in the process. She didn't want to hurt Matt, which would no doubt happen if the chemistry between them decided to fizzle out.

The sharp clearing of a male throat jerked her from her thoughts. She blinked, finding Tony watching her in concern. "Huh?" she said.

"I asked if you were ready to order. You've been staring at the menu for five minutes. And you ignored me the four times I asked you what you wanted."

Five minutes? She'd spaced out for that long? And she hadn't even noticed him talking to her. What was the matter with her?

A startling thought sliced into her consciousness.

*She wasn't having a good time.*

Here she was, on a first date with a seriously cute guy who she'd normally be incredibly attracted to, but the thrill wasn't there.

She didn't want to feel Tony's lips on hers for the first time. Didn't want to undress him and find out what lay beneath his black trousers and navy-blue suit jacket.

She felt zero enthusiasm about starting a casual fling with this man.

Because she still wanted Matt O'Connor.

Because she'd *fallen* for Matt O'Connor.

Swallowing hard, she met her date's now-annoyed eyes and said, "How about we call it a night?"

"God, your chest is rock-hard," the little brunette in Matt's arms purred, tightening her arms around his neck. "No wonder you're so good at this game."

Matt decided not to point out that hard chests had nothing to do with a game of pool. Precision, maybe. A steady grip. But not a damned chest.

Smothering a weary sigh, he slowly ducked out of the woman's embrace and reached for the cue he'd rested against the side of the table. "Let's finish the game."

Her brown eyes flickered with irritation as he moved to the other side of the pool table and pretended to study the placement of the balls. Fuck, why had he bothered coming here tonight? The Sand Bar was always the place to go when you wanted to find a warm, willing body to spend the night with, but for some reason, the mob of bodies and the scent of sweat and perfume made him nauseous. And the loud reggae music blasting from the speakers was giving him a headache.

He shouldn't have come here. The idea of sex with a total stranger held absolutely no appeal for him right now.

"Actually," he said, setting down the pool cue again, "I think I'm going to head out. I feel like I'm coming down with something."

The brunette whose name he hadn't even asked for gazed at him in disappointment. Then, without another word, she sauntered off, her firm ass swaying at each step she took. Not even the sight of a nice ass could lift his spirits.

Finally releasing that sigh lodged in his chest, he maneuvered through the crowd of people. Two blondes with heavy makeup shot him come-hither smiles but he ignored them, intent on getting the hell out of there. He also ignored a throaty "What's the hurry, stud?" and a teasing "Hey, baby" from two other females.

When he stepped into the balmy night air, relief swam through him. Fuck. It was like a feeding frenzy in there. Hungry female piranhas after his body. Usually his ego would inflate from all the attention, but right now, he just felt sleazy that he used to spend so much time in a place like that.

"Hey."

At the sound of yet another female voice, he clenched his fists, ready to shoot the chick down—and probably not in a gentle way.

And then he turned around and the irritated words of rejection got stuck in his throat. Savannah was standing by the entrance of the bar. His eyes ate her up, taking in the little violet dress and silver open-toed sandals she wore. Her hair was tied up in a complicated-looking twist and subtle makeup emphasized her beautiful features.

He cleared his throat, searching for his voice. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you," she said simply.

There was about ten feet separating them, but Matt didn't make a move to bridge the distance. Wariness circled him like an uneasy scavenger examining a carcass. What was she doing here? After the way they'd left things, he hadn't thought he'd ever see her again.

Savannah took a step toward him, then stopped awkwardly. "I went by your apartment building but you weren't there. Annabelle was on the balcony and told me you came here, so..." Her voice trailed off.

“Why are you all dressed up?” he asked guardedly.

“I was on a date.”

Pure agony slammed into him. She’d been on a date? Though it didn’t surprise him, it still elicited an unbearable wave of jealousy.

“Did you have a good time?” he muttered.

She took another step. “No.”

Matt put on a neutral tone. “Sorry to hear that.”

“Me too,” she admitted.

Straightening her shoulders, she kept walking, this time making it all the way over to him, pausing when their bodies were a foot apart. Her familiar feminine scent floated into his nostrils. He forced himself not to inhale.

“I was really looking forward to having a good time tonight,” she went on. “I got all dressed up, as you can see, and I wasn’t even averse to the idea of going to bed with him. Don’t usually do that on the first date, but you know, desperate times...”

Every muscle in his body ached. He felt like he was undergoing serious torture here. Along with the pain, anger collected in his gut, slowly spreading through his bloodstream. Was she purposely trying to hurt him? He knew she always spoke her mind, but this was borderline cruel.

“I have to go,” he choked out.

Before he could move, a soft hand touched his arm. “I’m not finished,” she said quietly.

“I don’t want to hear the rest.”

“Really? Because I was just getting to the apology part.”

He eyed her dubiously. “Didn’t fucking sound like it.”

She sighed. “I had all of these plans for tonight, Matt, but I couldn’t go through with a damn thing. The date was awful. Not because of Tony. He was cute and nice and sure, he didn’t get my humor, but that hasn’t stopped me from getting involved before. There was one problem, though.”

“Yeah, what’s that?” he said irritably.

“He wasn’t you.”

Matt refused to react to the soft-spoken confession. “Sorry to hear that,” he said again, shrugging her hand from his arm.

Savannah let her hands dangle at her sides. Something that resembled vulnerability entered her gray eyes. “I was wrong, Matt. I always thought it was better to have fun and focus on all those first little thrills, but I don’t want that anymore. When I was with Tony, the only time I felt anything remotely thrilling was when I thought about you.”

He averted his gaze. Didn’t want to listen to any of this. “Fuck, Savannah,” he spat out. “Do you actually think I’m going to get back together just because you had a bad date with *some other guy*?”

“No, but I’m hoping you’ll want to do it because I’m in love with you.”

He didn’t even blink. “Four days ago, I told you the same thing and you dumped me.”

“I was an idiot.” Her voice shook. “And you were right, I was scared. I’ve always believed I can’t hold a relationship, because all my past ones failed, so I avoided them. But I can’t keep avoiding. You were right about something else too—when you meet the right person, it *can* work. And you’re the right person, Superman.”

His heart shifted at the familiar nickname. Feeling himself soften, he curled his fingers into fists again, determined not to give in to her. He’d told her he *loved* her, for chrissake. Put himself out there, only to get shot down like a fighter jet.

“You’re the only man I’ve ever met who enjoys sex as much as I do,” she continued, and though he wasn’t looking at her, he could hear the smile in her voice. “You’re the only man I’ve held more than ten minutes of conversation with, the only one I talked about my work with, the only one I went to bed smiling about. You’re the only one, Matt.”

Another squeeze of his heart. Shit, if she kept going like this, he was totally going to cave.

Reading the expression on his face, Savannah reached for him again, circling her fingers around his forearm. “Please give me another chance. I know I walked away from us, but I’m asking you not to do that. I promise you, I’ll spend every second of every day proving to you that I mean everything I’m saying.”

He slowly looked at her, and the sincerity shining from her features floored him. He might have brushed it off as a lie, if it weren’t for the naked shards of vulnerability moving in her eyes. Savannah Harte didn’t do vulnerable. She didn’t expose her emotions, same way he didn’t like to expose his.

“You’re serious,” he said gruffly.

“As a heart attack,” she whispered.

“You’re in love with me.”

“Yes.” She bit her bottom lip. “And I hope you still feel the same way.”

God help him, but he did. From the moment he’d met Savannah, she’d gotten under his skin in a way no women ever had before. She’d made him laugh during a bank robbery of all things. And her enthusiastic attitude toward sex had blown him away. After three weeks, he hadn’t tired of her, the way he always tired of the females he hooked up with.

But she’d also broken his fucking heart, another thing no other woman had ever done.

Sensing his hesitation, Savannah reached into the small purple purse hanging off her shoulder. “I brought you something. I stopped by the shop to get it before I came here.”

Matt fought his curiosity as she stuck her hand in the purse. He furrowed his brows when she held up a flower about three inches long with delicate white petals. “You brought me a flower?”

“It’s a white violet.”

Taking the fragile flower from her hands, Matt studied it for a moment, then couldn’t help but smile.



Savannah's mouth curved in an answering smile. "You know what it means, don't you?"

He nodded.

"Say it out loud," she murmured.

He spoke through the lump in his throat. "It means let's take a chance on happiness."

They both went silent, as Matt sifted through the emotions swimming inside him. He knew how difficult this was for her. She tried so damn hard to be fun and breezy, to keep everything surface-level, but she was laying everything out there right now. She was giving him her heart.

"Okay," he said, his voice rough.

Her head shot up. "Okay?"

"Let's give it another try."

The joy that lit up her eyes told him he'd made the right decision, especially since it mirrored the happiness that lightened his own heart. He'd met his match in Savannah Harte. From day one, she'd intrigued and excited him. She'd made him laugh and turned him on and showed him that staying with one woman could be as exhilarating as any casual fling.

With a grin, he yanked her toward him and dipped down to kiss her. The second their lips met, the sense of sheer *rightness* infused into his body. He pushed his tongue through her parted lips and deepened the kiss, until they were both panting by the time they broke apart.

"What if you get bored of me?" he teased, brushing his lips along the sweet curve of her jaw.

"I won't." She tipped her head to meet his eyes. "What if you do?"

"Impossible." He nibbled on her earlobe, then bent closer and whispered, "Trust me, when it comes to the two of us, darlin', nothing can *ever* be boring."

## About the Author

A RITA-award nominated author, Elle Kennedy grew up in the suburbs of Toronto, Ontario, and holds a B.A. in English from York University. From an early age, she knew she wanted to be a writer, and actively began pursuing that dream when she was a teenager. When she's not writing, she's reading. And when she's not reading, she's making music with her drummer boyfriend, oil painting or indulging her love for board games.

Elle loves to hear from her readers. Visit her Web site [www.ellekennedy.com](http://www.ellekennedy.com) or send her a note at [elle@ellekennedy.com](mailto:elle@ellekennedy.com).

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### *Coming Soon:*

Welcome to Paradise

*When the heat is on, anything that can happen...will.*

## Heat of the Night

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*Out of Uniform, Book 5*

When her long-time fiancé breaks off their engagement, saying he needs to “explore other avenues”, Annabelle Holmes has no trouble reading between the lines. Bryce thinks she’s a prude. Funny, since when it comes to acting out sexual fantasies, he’s always been the squeamish one.

Determined to prove him wrong, she sublets an apartment in San Diego, grabs pen and paper, and lists all her sexual fantasies. Intending to surprise Bryce with it as soon as possible. Only the list winds up in the wrong hands—or are they the right ones?

Navy SEAL Ryan Evans is expecting a little impromptu fun with his always-willing, blonde-and-leggy neighbor. But when he slides into her bed, he finds horrified, brunette-and-curvy Annabelle instead—along with her naughty list.

Embarrassment doesn’t begin to cover it when Annabelle realizes where her list has ended up. But then Ryan makes her a delicious offer: The chance to check off every last wild, wicked item—with the help of his equally hot SEAL team buddy, Matt.

A harmless fling is easy to add to her list. Then something unexpected happens that’s not so easy to cross off...

*Warning: This title features a sassy heroine, a Navy SEAL hero, and a sex list—being organized has never been so much fun! Be prepared for hot sex on the floor, in public, and even with someone watching...*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Heat of the Night:*

No matter how hard she tried, Annabelle couldn’t get her late-night visitor out of her mind. She spent the morning answering emails and trying to not think about Ryan, but every five seconds, the memory of his gorgeous face and drool-worthy body would float into her mind like a piece of driftwood. Hands down, he was the hottest guy she’d ever met. She still couldn’t believe he was even real. When she’d woken up to find those playful blue eyes on her and that lean, muscular body pressed against her, she’d thought she was dreaming.

During their entire exchange, she’d been fighting little sparks of desire. That spot between her legs had ached in the strangest way and her breasts had felt so heavy and tingly she’d had to cross her arms over her chest. If he’d stayed for even five more minutes, she probably would’ve jumped him.

*So why did you throw him out?*

Uh, Bryce? she reminded the voice in her head.

*You mean the guy who dumped you?*

She ignored the taunting reply and headed for the bathroom to get a towel. Fine, so maybe she didn't owe anything to her as-of-two-days-ago ex, but she wasn't the type of girl to hop into bed with a stranger. She was Annabelle Holmes, for Pete's sake. Her parents had raised her to be a perfect lady, and ladies didn't have sex with random men, no matter how appealing they might be.

She found the towel and slung it over her shoulder, then left Christina's apartment and walked downstairs. The courtyard was empty when she stepped out into the hot afternoon air, and the pool looked so inviting she had her shorts and tank off before she even reached the deck. Tilting her head, she let the sun's rays heat her face. Beads of sweat formed between her breasts, but she welcomed the heat, and she was happy to finally get a chance to wear this teeny yellow string bikini. It never got this hot in San Francisco, and the change of scenery was refreshing. Kicking off her flip-flops, she moved to the edge of the pool, took a breath, and dived cleanly into the deep end.

The cold water engulfed her, feeling like heaven as she swam underwater for a few moments. God, what a gorgeous day. Despite the fact that she missed her job, she was looking forward to a few weeks of downtime. Doing nothing but swimming and tanning and exploring San Diego. She closed her eyes and floated on her back for a while, relishing the solitude, but her me-time was cut short at the sound of footsteps.

Her eyes popped open just in time to see Ryan approaching the pool deck, his sexy blue eyes seeking her out and dancing playfully.

She was so surprised she sank in the water like a stone. Sputtering, she broke the surface, droplets dripping from her hair and into her eyes. "You," she squeaked.

"Me," Ryan confirmed.

She was suddenly grateful to be submerged in cold water, because the sight of Ryan made her extremely hot. He wore blue surf shorts and a sleeveless basketball jersey, and his chin was dotted with dark stubble. God, why did men look so good when they were all scruffy? Bryce never sported any scruff—the guy shaved like three times a day just to make sure his aristocratic face remained pretty-boy smooth. But Ryan...oh boy.

Putting on an indifferent voice, Annabelle raised a brow at him and said, "Didn't we say everything we needed to say last night? You know, when I asked you to leave?"

He shot her a lazy smile. "You may have said what you needed to, but I have one more thing to say."

"Oh, really? And what's that?"

"Yes."

Treading water, she shoved wet strands of hair off her forehead. "Yes what?"

Slowly, he reached into the back pocket of his shorts and removed a wrinkled piece of paper. Annabelle's eyes widened at the familiar scrap of yellow. No. That couldn't be the same sheet she'd been using when...shit. Shit, where had she put the list? She searched her brain, finally remembering she'd

tossed the fantasy list on the floor before she went to bed. The floor...on which Ryan had dropped his clothes before he'd crawled into bed with her.

"Yes to this question," he said pleasantly, holding up the paper. "I'm Up For This. Are You? Well, babe, *yes*. I am definitely up for it."

Horror climbed up her spine, mingling with the humiliation scorching her cheeks. Scrambling up the metal ladder at the edge of the pool, she hauled herself to her feet and shot a wet arm in his direction, trying to grab the list. Grinning, he held it out of her reach. "Finders keepers," he said mockingly.

"What are you, five? Give it back. That's personal property," she snapped.

Rolling his eyes, he obligingly handed her the list, which got soaked the second her wet hand clutched it. The ink began to smear, and for some asinine reason, she fanned the sheet to stop the smearing. What was the matter with her? A total stranger had just become privy to all her secret fantasies and she was trying to *preserve* the words? She ought to be burning the damn thing.

"Don't worry," Ryan said graciously. "I memorized it."

She set her jaw. "You had no business reading that."

"Maybe not, but I did, and now it's branded into my memory." He sighed. "It kept me up all night, you know. There I was, tossing and turning, wondering where we should go to take care of number four. A park? Out here in the pool? The back alley of a bar? Damn, the possibilities are endless, Annabelle."

Number four? What was he—her cheeks burned. *Sex in public (preferably a place without security cameras)*. Oh God. She couldn't believe he'd actually memorized it. The last time she'd been this embarrassed was back in the third grade, when her frenemy Joan poured water on Annabelle's crotch and proceeded to tell the entire class she'd peed her pants.

"We are not going anywhere," she said stiffly. "I, on the other hand, am leaving now." Her back was ramrod straight as she stomped toward the chair where she'd dropped her towel.

She felt Ryan's eyes on her as she dried off, and she knew he was ogling her tiny bikini. A sick part of her was even a little flattered, but the embarrassed part overruled it, pushing her to dry off faster and wrap the towel around herself.

"So is that a no?" Ryan asked, cocking his head casually.

"Huh?"

"You won't let me help you?" he clarified.

She frowned. "Help me do what?"

"Cross out all those dirty items on your dirty list." He offered a charming smile. "Look, it's obvious you can't carry out some of those, uh, activities, alone. I'm just offering my services, babe."

"Again with the babe?" She huffed out a breath. "I don't want or need your help. That list was intended for someone else."

He paused. "You've got a boyfriend?"

“Yes.” She hesitated. “No. Well, maybe.”

“Which is it, yes, no or maybe?”

She fought a wave of exasperation. “All of them, okay! I have a boyfriend, a sort of fiancé, but we’re on a break right now. Not that it’s any of your business.”

“A sort of fiancé?” he echoed.

“It’s a long story.” She grabbed her clothes from the chair, then slipped her wet feet into her flip-flops. “You are the pushiest guy I’ve ever met, you know that?”

A thoughtful expression flitted over his face. “I’ve never been called pushy before. Endearing, sure. Charismatic. Drop-dead gorgeous. A real-life Michelangelo’s *David*. But never pushy.”

A laugh slipped out of her throat before she could stop herself. “A real-life Michelangelo’s *David*? Wow. You are so full of yourself, I don’t even know what to do with that.”

“You could do me,” he said glibly.

Her thighs quivered. Just a little. Oh, for Pete’s sake. She needed to get away from this guy. He was too freaking tempting, and right now, she needed to avoid temptation. She’d left San Francisco to think about her relationship with Bryce, not jump into a fling with a guy who had major over-confidence issues.

“I won’t even dignify that with an answer,” she said, taking a step toward the lawn. “I’m leaving now.”

He shrugged. “Suit yourself.”

She was halfway across the grass when he called, “Annabelle!”

Reluctantly, she turned. “Yeah?”

“If you change your mind, I’m in 2B.”

*Taking turns was never their strong suit...*

## What She Needs

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*Cape May, Book 3*

Devon Mason and Con Walker are sexy, honorable, loving, and completely devoted. In other words, everything Tory looks for in a relationship. But what's she supposed to buy her two lovers on V Day? Chocolate? How average is that? Their little love triangle is anything but average!

When Con surprises her with a weekend in Cancun, just the three of them, Tory is all over it—until she realizes Con forgot to include Devon in the package. Now their little love triangle is suffering, thanks to a couple of hard-headed men who both want to be numero uno.

Con was content to let Devon take control at Christmas, but now it's his turn. A weekend in Cancun seems the perfect place for a romantic getaway—then Devon says he's planning to surprise Tory with a trip to Aruba, and Con's possessive instincts kick in. He'd always been happy to share Tory with the guy he cares for like a brother. But the deeper Con falls in love, the harder it is to keep from ripping Tory away from Devon.

Sooner or later something—or someone—is going to give.

*Warning: This title contains lots of steamy, explicit sex. Hot, jealous men in need of a strong, intelligent woman. And a warm, loving ménage à trois relationship.*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for What She Needs:*

“What the hell is wrong with you?”

Con looked up from his desk to see Devon striding into the room. By the looks of him, he was good and pissed. Damn. Con had known this was coming and he'd dreaded it. “If you're here to bitch at me, then get to it. I'm busy.”

Devon crossed the room until he stood on the other side of the desk, fists clenched at his sides. “Bitch at you? You upset Tory, Con. You booked Cancun without talking to me. And unless I'm mistaken, you looked ready to land a fist in my face this morning when you came out of the bathroom. So, I repeat, what the hell is wrong?”

Con scrubbed his hands over his face. He was frustrated with Devon and pissed at himself for being a complete ass. The hell of it was, Devon had it right. “I don't know what to tell you, Dev.”

“Don't give me the same bullshit you fed Tory this morning. I know you. You were jealous when you saw the two of us together on the bed. What I want to know is, why?”

Con stared back at his friend, his best friend. They'd been through some serious shit together. They'd both grown up on the wrong side of the tracks, but they'd worked their asses off and it'd paid off. They



were successful and in love. What could be better? *To have Tory all for myself.* No, that wasn't right. What Devon and Con had with Tory was good. It was whole. Wasn't it?

Shoving that nagging question aside, Con said, "You're right. I was jealous. I'll deal with it."

Devon frowned and crossed his arms over his chest. "Will you? Because from where I'm standing, it looks as if you'd be as happy as a fucking clam if I were out of the picture." Devon planted his hands on the desk and leaned close. "I love Tory as much as you. I'm not letting her go."

For a moment, Con was too shocked to speak. He could count on one hand the amount of times Devon had gotten up in his face about something. Hell, the man was always so friggin' calm it bordered on annoying. "Christ, relax, will you? I never asked you to do anything. It was just a momentary lapse. I'm over it."

Devon pushed away from the desk and took two steps backward. "You're over it, huh? Then you won't mind if I surprise Tory with a trip to Aruba for Valentine's Day?"

Every muscle in Con's body tensed. "What did you say?"

"The three of us in Aruba. I'm thinking of booking the trip today. In fact, maybe you should go ahead and cancel the trip to Cancun. Or go alone. Take your pick."

Con shot to his feet and moved around the desk, a red haze of anger flooding his brain. "I already told you and Tory this morning. The flight is booked. The room is reserved. We're going to Cancun."

"And I told you it wasn't your call alone to make. Tory isn't yours. She's ours. Get that through your thick skull."

"So, what, now we're going to make her choose between your trip and mine? That's juvenile, damn it!"

"All I know is that I'm damn tired of seeing that look on your face when it comes to her."

Con threw up his hands and shouted, "What look?"

"You want her for yourself. It's so obvious it's not even funny."

Jesus, he really was transparent. "I never said that," he hedged.

Devon pointed a finger at him. "You want me away from her," he ground out. "Admit it, God damn you!"

Fury had Con speaking without thinking. "Fine! I want her for myself! I see you with her and my blood boils. I see her touching you and it makes me want to hit something. Are you happy? Is that what you want to hear?"

Devon shook his head. "No, Con, I'm not happy."

Con cursed. He'd seen that look on his friend's face only once before. They'd been nineteen, working dead-end jobs and trying to make ends meet. Con had come home to their shit apartment in a bad mood one night. Hell, he couldn't even remember what had set it off. He'd taken it out on Devon, though. The final

straw had been when Con had punched him in the face. He'd broken Devon's nose. Devon had looked hurt—and not just physically.

“Look, man, I'm sorry,” Con muttered. “I'll get my shit together, I promise.”

Devon didn't look convinced. “You know this can't work if we're not both in it one hundred percent, right?”

Con shoved his hands into his pockets, feeling like the biggest jerk in the world. He was wrecking everything. Con Walker, always the screw-up. “I know, I know.”

“So, maybe we should do like we did at Christmas.”

Con stiffened. “What do you mean?”

“We leave the decision to Tory.”

“You really want her to choose between us? That's not fair to Tory, and you know it.”

Devon shook his head and looked down at the floor. Con found himself holding his breath. When Devon's gaze came back up to meet his, he could swear his eyes were a little too bright, a little too watery. “I'm not trying to get all sappy here.”

“But?”

“I care about you. Like a brother. That will never change.”

“Same here, Dev.” Con stepped forward, a sense of foreboding skating down his spine. Devon put up a hand in warning, effectively stopping Con in his tracks.

“I know you, Con. You aren't going to get over this.” Con started to argue, but Devon rode right over him. “You want Tory and you want me gone. I can't walk away. I can't give her up—not unless it's what *she* wants.”

How had things gone from great to shit so damn fast? This was a new record for him. “I wouldn't expect you to.”

“Then we need to figure out a way to make this work. For all of us.”

Con had racked his brain trying to think of some way to get over his growing possessiveness toward Tory—and he'd come up blank. “Got any suggestions? Because I'm fresh out of ideas here.”

Devon quirked a brow. “Actually, I do have a suggestion.”

For the first time in weeks, Con felt a spark of hope. “I'm all ears. Spill.”

“Not yet.”

“What the hell do you mean, *not yet*?” Con cursed under his breath. “My life is spinning out of control and you want to play twenty questions?”

“I'll tell you and Tory at the same time. She should be kept in the loop here. We can't make decisions like this without her.”

“Christ. Just give me a clue here. I'm drowning.”

“No, you can wait and hear my idea when Tory gets home. But, I can tell you that I’m not going to book the trip to Aruba.”

When Devon turned to leave, Con had the sinking feeling he’d lost something. Something he might never get back. “Devon,” Con called out.

Without turning around, Devon asked, “Yeah?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Me too,” Devon mumbled. Without another word, he left.

Con wasn’t sure how long he stood in the middle of the room, staring at the empty doorway. When he heard the front door open and close, it pulled him out of his misery. He crossed the room and sat in the brown leather couch adjacent to the desk. Was he really going to have to choose between the woman he loved and his best friend? No. Devon had figured something out. Whatever it was it would be a solution that would benefit all three of them. Devon was good at fixing things. Con was good at fucking up.

When they’d hatched their little plan to finally make Tory their own, it’d seemed so perfect. They’d both wanted her. Both knew, even then, that they were in love with her. At first it’d been bliss. Making love to her, sharing their nights wrapped around her. Waking up with her nestled between them. Even her snoring made him smile. There had been a few bumps in the road, but nothing big, nothing life-altering.

He wasn’t even sure when the first spark of jealousy had appeared. Not that it mattered, because it was a full-on blaze now. The only question left unanswered: Could he really choose between the love of his life and his best friend?

*Loose ends have a way of tripping you up...*

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Years ago, a law school graduation weekend in Vegas had been part of Lily MacPherson's plan. Waking up next to a naked Adonis with a ring on her finger was not. After a quick annulment, she relegated Caleb Anderson to her late-night fantasies—and very short list of mistakes—until his voice on the other end of the phone asks a favor that could shake the foundations of her neat and tidy future.

Caleb is still haunted by Lily's horrified expression that morning in Vegas. At least it had made it easy to set her free...except they aren't. The papers were never filed. And when the nosy patroness who could launch his painting career insists on meeting his "wife", does he confess, or call Lily? He calls Lily.

When she steps off the plane, Caleb's determination to play tour guide disappears in the San Francisco fog. Lily thought she could keep up the pretense for one weekend, cut the last tie to her past, and move on. But their chemistry still pops and sizzles, finally exploding into passion at Caleb's studio.

It's everything they remember...but so is the yawning chasm of differences that, in the end, could once again drive them apart.

*Warning: Contains balmy ocean breezes, coffee as seduction, the creative use of melted chocolate, and naughty shower lovin' that gives new meanings to the term "shower head".*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Creative License:*

Lily swallowed. A predatory light had come into Caleb's green eyes. Her fingers paused on a button. What was she doing? "Caleb, I..." She breathed in as his lips brushed the skin above her collarbone. His breath warmed her flesh. Her legs trembled and she knew without his support, she'd sink to the ground. And isn't that where she wanted to be? On the floor with Caleb thrusting inside her?

His lips found hers again, possessing, demanding. A surge of heat traveled through her body, leaving an ache of hunger. She made a noise low in her throat as Caleb finished unbuttoning her shirt and dropped it to the floor. They were adults, consenting adults. Hell, they were married adults.

Caleb trailed kisses down her neck to nuzzle behind her ear. Her body sizzled from the contact. Her skin absorbed his caress, his feather light touches driving her to a fever pitch need for more. She leaned against his hard body, the length of his erection unyielding against her hip. She wanted to feel his skin, run her hands along the smooth length of him.

Caleb searched her face as she lowered her zipper and tugged her jeans down her hips. "No strings, no regrets, just me and you?"

He nodded, but something shifted in his eyes before they closed when her hand brushed his erection. In a heartbeat, she was in his arms. He carried her to the couch and laid her on the cushions.

He stared at her body for a moment. "You are so damn beautiful."

Before she could respond, his lips descended. She opened her mouth, welcoming his tongue, knowing it was only a taste of things to come. Lily reached for his shirt, tugging it over his head, revealing his smooth, golden skin. The nerve-endings in her fingers hyper-charged as she explored hard muscle under the warm, satiny flesh. Wild, he delved deep, stroking her mouth with his tongue and fueling the desire already raging through her body. He kissed down her throat to the lace of her bra, his breath hot and moist against her skin.

With care, he unclasped the bra and released Lily's breasts. His sharp intake of breath cooled her skin before his mouth descended, licking and kissing around her nipple but not touching it. Arching her back, she urged him to take the hardened nub in his mouth. Caleb smiled against her flesh and flicked her nipple with the tip of his tongue. A surge of moisture further dampened her panties. She threaded her fingers around the back of his head and pulled his hair free of its queue. It spilled around his face and she buried her fingers in its silky strands and guided his mouth back to her breast. Caleb took the nipple in his mouth and suckled. His hands roamed her body, leaving her skin heated and aching for more. The coil of pleasure deep inside her tightened. Lily moaned.

Caleb gently blew on the puckered nipple and shifted to the other one. His hands snaked down her stomach and he ran a finger over her moist panties. "Mmm, this seems rather uncomfortable." His voice rumbled against her skin.

"Terribly." The word turned into a gasp as he reached the lacy edge and ran a finger under it, down between her legs.

"Poor baby. Should I take them off for you?" Caleb's hand disappeared further under the pink lace and his forefinger slipped inside her wet core.

She arched her hips and moaned. "Please."

His soft gasp tickled her breast and sparked a series of involuntary shudders. She was so close. "Take them off," Lily demanded.

Caleb kissed slowly down her stomach, lightly dragging his teeth over her hip bones, taking his time as though she weren't about to explode beneath his touch. When his lips reached lace, he pulled them down her hips. "I live to serve."



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