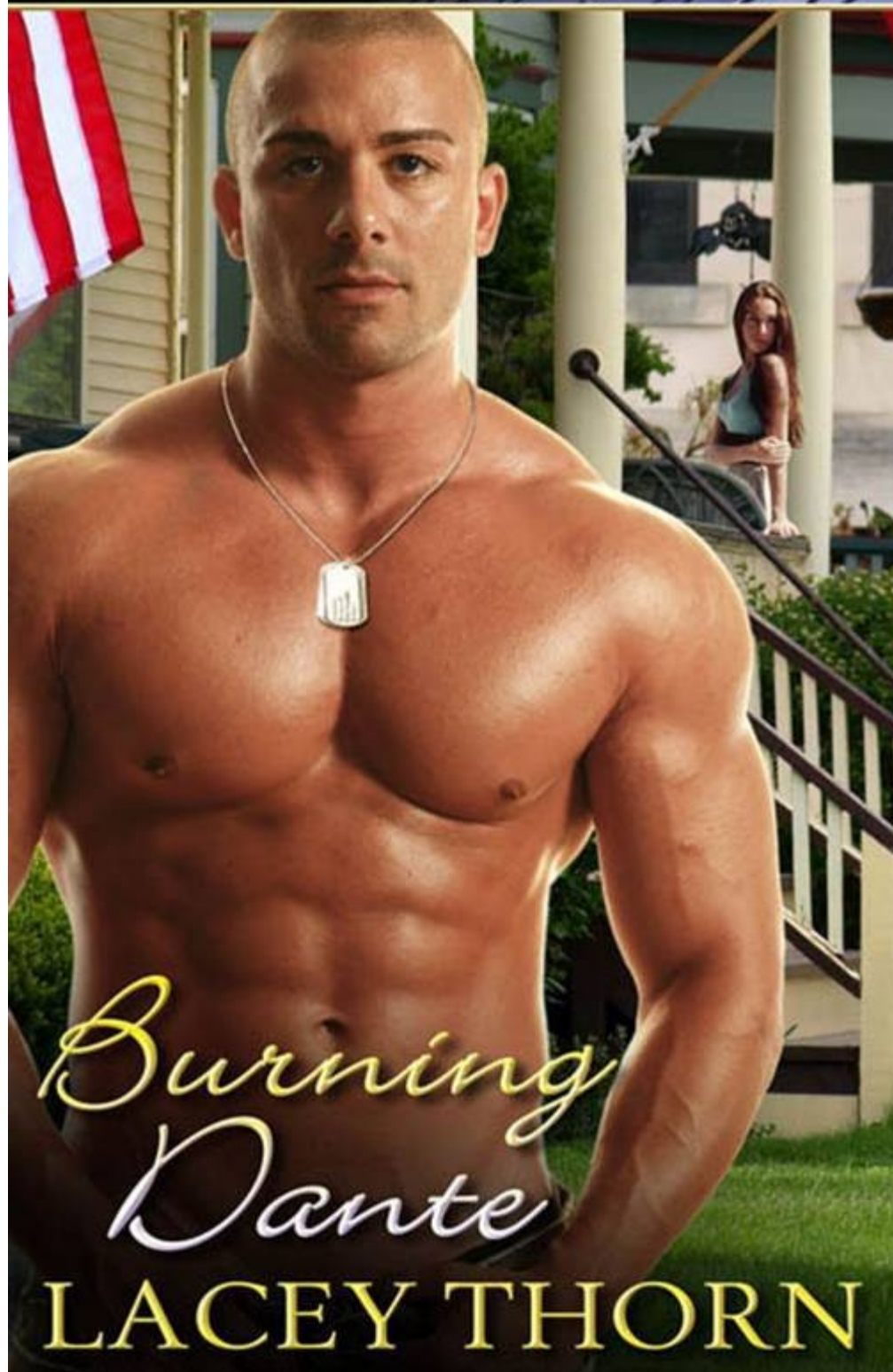


ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*



*Burning
Dante*

LACEY THORN

Burning Dante

Lacey Thorn

Phoebe has been in love with Dante Marquetti since before she lost her virginity to the man. She can't recall a time when he wasn't the star of all her sexual fantasies. Now Dante is heading back home and she's determined to have him one more time. She wants to make Dante burn the way she has all these years.

Dante arrives at his new apartment and is greeted by his neighbor out in the hall – naked. Welcome home! When he realizes it's Phoebe, he decides there's only one thing to do. He wants her in his bed...and tonight isn't soon enough.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Burning Dante

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BURNING DANTE

Lacey Thorn

This book is dedicated to the following people:

To the people behind the name Ellora's Cave...I appreciate all you do!

To the fans of Bare Love, thanks for reading and for all the email demanding more stories...you are the best.

To great friends who keep me smiling and moving forward no matter what...you know who you are and you know that I love you.

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Boy Scouts: Boy Scouts of America Corporation

Chapter One

She could feel the wool of the blanket under her bare thighs. The night sky was beautiful above them and it was only natural when Dante rolled over to fill her vision with only him.

"Isn't it beautiful," Phoebe whispered nervous and anxious at the same time. She knew what was coming, had been anticipating it since they had first started dating.

"Yes, you are," he replied and leaned down to kiss her softly on the mouth. His hand went to her waist where her shirt didn't quite meet her skirt and he traced the exposed skin there bringing tingles to her flesh. "I want to touch you Phoebe," he breathed as he kissed a trail to her ear. "I want to taste you."

"Yes," she breathed wanting the same.

His hand crept higher slipping beneath the shirt until he reached the bottom of her bra and began to trace around it. His lips were on her shoulder now and she didn't know what to do with her hands. Should she grab him and hold onto him? Should she cling to the blanket? What the hell was her role in all this, other than to feel the complete pleasure he was giving her? She had never been with anyone before and she wasn't quite sure of herself.

She felt both of his hands at the hem of her shirt lifting it up and she arched her back to help him. He lifted it off her until she lay before him with just her bra covering her breasts.

"Beautiful," he whispered again and bent to lick at the top curves that the bra left uncovered. She shivered in pleasure. She could feel his erection beneath the jeans he was wearing where he rested against the outside of her thigh. He was big and hard and she was a little nervous about the pain that she knew accompanied the first time a girl had sex.

But it was hard to remember what she had heard it would be like when her senses were filled with Dante and what he was doing. He unsnapped the front clasp of her bra and she was exposed to him and the cool night air. Her nipples were tight and achy and she just wanted his touch. She watched as Dante's head lowered, watched his tongue reach out and caress the tip of one breast. Her cry filled the air around them and seemed to ignite something in Dante. He wrapped his lips around her nipple and sucked greedily from it. She was arching and moaning her hands no longer useless as they clutched in his hair.

Back and forth he went between her breasts showering both with attention until she could feel the ache building between her thighs. She shifted her legs restlessly and moaned again. Was it supposed to feel this good?

His lips moved away and no matter how hard she tried to hold him to her breasts he moved down over her stomach and kissed and sucked at her flesh there. He took her hands from his hair and moved them to her breasts.

"Touch yourself, Phoebe," he told her. "Just do what feels good and I'm going to continue tasting just how sweet you are."

Did women really do that? Touch themselves while with a man? She felt his strong fingers reach under her skirt and grip the hem of her panties. She lifted her hips for him and then they were down and off. He moved so that he lay between her spread thighs and she was grateful for the dark night that surrounded them. He lifted her skirt and exposed her pussy to his eyes and the moonlight.

"You smell so delicious," he moaned and bent his head.

Thank God she didn't smell bad. She was mortified when she felt his tongue touch her there, but only for a moment. As his lips and tongue touched and explored she became too lost in the sensations to feel anything like embarrassed. His fingers spread the lips of her pussy and his tongue traced the inside of her pussy from the entrance to the quivering bud of her clitoris. She was so sensitive there and he seemed to know that.

He traced and licked, sucked and nipped but never stayed for more than a second at her clit.

One finger pressed against her and she felt a sharp sting but his mouth took that moment to wrap around her clit and suck. She felt her hips surge off the blanket, heard her cry fill the night once more. She prayed they were really as alone as Dante assured her they were.

His finger pressed inside. It was such a different sensation. She didn't have anything to compare it to. His finger surged deeper and deeper until she could feel the entire digit buried in her. She would take his penis next and it scared and excited her. She felt him add a second finger and it was a little uncomfortable. She could feel the stretch and burn of her passage.

Then his mouth was doing things to her again and she had to lie back and close her eyes. Something wonderful was happening. She could feel it building, feel it tightening inside her. He sucked and licked and fucked her pussy with his fingers. And she closed her eyes and let her senses drown in the pleasure. Her breath was coming in short gasps and she bit her lip to hold back the scream as she felt the first wave of orgasm hit her.

His fingers were moving easier in her cunt as she grew wetter and wetter with her release. If she thought about it she would probably be embarrassed but this was no time to think. This was a time to feel. Dante pulled his fingers out and used his tongue to thrust in and out of her. She could feel him licking the juice from her and it was unbelievable.

She could feel her body softening, feel the pleasure leaving her limbs loose and pliable. Dante came to his knees and as she watched he pushed his pants and underwear down and out of the way exposing the hard length of his cock. He was big and a tiny pearl of liquid gleamed on the crown in the moonlight. He was like an Adonis, hard planes and muscular perfection. She heard the rip of the condom wrapper and watched as he rolled it on.

He shifted, spreading her legs wider and she felt the press of his cock at her entrance. He wasn't going to fit. There was just no way and when he tried it was bound to hurt like hell. He must have seen the fear start in her eyes, or maybe he just knew what to say.

"I'll be as gentle as I can, Phoebe," he assured her and leaned down to kiss her again. His tongue rubbed against hers and the next thing she knew she was lost in his kiss again. Until she felt him press deeper.

She gasped for air. It was such a full sensation. As if her flesh were fighting to stretch and take this foreign invasion. It burned a little but not enough to make her demand he stop. It was uncomfortable at most.

Dante's head moved to her breast and he started sucking hard at her nipple again. One hand moved between their bodies and rubbed tiny circles around her clit. She could feel her body softening again, feel the moisture of her natural lubrication easing his way. Then with one final thrust he was all the way inside her. She wiggled her hips just a little bit trying to adjust to the pressure. He groaned and his hand moved from her clit to her hip to hold her steady.

"Just give me a minute, Phoebe, or this will be over faster than we want," he told her.

She could hear his breathing shuddering in and out of his mouth, feel the wash of it over her wet nipples. Then he was moving inside her pussy, slow and easy at first. Then with a groan he began moving faster, his penis thrusting deeper, feeling harder. Then his finger was back at her clit and she could feel another orgasm building inside. One leg automatically lifted to grip his hip and just that change in position was enough to send her over again.

With a cry she came again, only this time it was more than his finger inside her. She could feel her sex contracting around him gripping and releasing him. She wondered how it felt to him. She looked at his face and watched as he reached orgasm. It almost

looked like it was painful for him, the way his brow creased and his jaw tightened. The veins in his neck were popped out and his teeth were clenched.

And still he was beautiful. Perspiration shone on his face and she felt him stiffen just before he groaned. He surged deep and held there, his hips giving tiny pulses as he came and in that moment she fell head over heels in love with him.

There on a blanket under the stars she gave Dante not only her virginity but her heart. Without thought she wrapped her arms around him as he lowered to lie on top of her gasping for breath. She couldn't hold it in, had to share it.

"I love you," she whispered.

Dante leaned up and kissed her again before pulling away and out of her. She watched as he removed the condom and tied it off before righting his clothes and belatedly began dressing herself. She could feel a new tension between them only this time it definitely wasn't sexual.

She should have never said the "L" word. She knew it scared most boys. But Dante was unlike any other guy she had met. She couldn't see him afraid of anything.

She took a deep breath as she finally had her clothes back on and in place. Dante offered his hand and helped pull her to her feet. Now that the moment was over she felt what she had held at bay. Embarrassed and awkward. Was it like this for every woman on her first time?

"It's getting late," Dante said as he bent to grab the blanket and wad it in his arms. "I'd better get you home before your mom starts worrying."

It was a quiet ride home but Dante pulled her over to sit beside him in the cab of the truck and his hand was around her shoulders, his fingers playing in her hair. So maybe the tension was all on her part. After all she'd never experienced this before.

He dropped her at her house, walking her to the door and giving her a soft kiss goodbye. She smiled all the way to her bedroom. It took her hours to fall asleep, hours of reliving every moment they had shared. But nothing lasted forever.

Dante didn't call. He didn't stop by and then she learned that he had left to join the Marines. It was as if he took her heart with him. She didn't eat. She didn't sleep. Her mother worried about her and all of her friends stared at her as if they knew what had happened before Dante left.

So she ran, as far away as she could, leaving her devastated and confused mother behind, to live with her dad. And slowly she began to feel again.

Phoebe turned from the window of her apartment, which she shared with her best friend. It had been twelve years since she had given her virginity to Dante and in that time she'd never had sex with another man. The opportunity had been there. She'd had foreplay and she loved to kiss. But no one made her want to share her body completely the way Dante had.

She had moved back to their hometown when her mother had a scare with her health a few years ago. She'd taken over the little clothing boutique her mother owned and ran, and made it her own. And now Dante was coming home. Twelve years and suddenly she felt like that young girl who'd given her body and her heart so long ago.

She wouldn't lie to herself and say she didn't plan to see him, to bump into him. He had been a Marine and was now a cop like most of his brothers and his father. Had he changed? Was he single? Would he still be able to set her afire with just a look?

Maybe seeing him again was exactly what she needed to finally get over him and move on. She was a grown woman now who was comfortable with her body. She had some confidence now. She was a successful businesswoman. Strong and capable. She could handle seeing him again. She knew what she would wear, how she would do her hair and makeup and what she would say. She would make him want the woman she was now. She would make him burn with desire for her. Then she would decide if she wanted to fuck him or leave him panting.

Chapter Two

"You're killing me here Angelo," Dante muttered to his younger brother over the phone. "I'm begging you to hold off for a bit before telling Ma your great news."

"No can do, my man." Angelo's voice sounded smug and filled with glee. "Gotta tell her I'm getting married before baby sister does."

"Why would Gianna or Bella tell Ma you're engaged?" Dante asked.

"Bella," Angelo murmured. "And because she watched my apartment for the week's vacation Cara and I took to celebrate our engagement before officially announcing it to everyone. And I wasn't talking about her spilling about my engagement."

"What?" Dante muttered but he knew the answer. "Bella finally got Sampson, huh?" He had to grin at that one. Seemed she'd been chasing Angelo's best friend since they were just kids.

"Yeah she finally got him." And the bastard sounded smug over that detail as well. Dante laughed thinking he should seriously reconsider moving back to his hometown. With two siblings down in the marriage pool his mamma would be looking his way. Honestly, he could be a cop anywhere, but he'd get a kick out of working with his brothers, three of whom were cops. Only one member of the family, Cristiano, had bucked tradition choosing the life of a firefighter instead.

Five sons and two daughters and even as adults their ma still ruled them all with an iron fist. The woman would make his life hell when two of her children announced their impending nuptials. As the oldest he should have been the first wed. But a ten-year stint in the Marines didn't allow for wife-hunting. Now the sex from women who just wanted "one of the few, the proud" was top notch.

"So you bringing Cara over this weekend then for my welcome home?" Leave it to Angelo to be the angel their mother always said he was. "You can't hold off one more weekend? Just let me get into town first?"

Angelo laughed, the bastard. "Nah, I timed this just right. Ma's going have all the single ladies lined up around the block for you to look at. I wouldn't postpone that for anything."

"You suck," Dante grunted but in truth he would have done the same thing. They had been fighting for the rights as Ma's favorite since birth. Hell, probably from the womb. And the truth was that he had missed all this while he was away. It had been a tough decision not to stay in the Marines. He'd made friendships there that would never disappear. You just couldn't do the things they'd done and not become like brothers.

"Now where did you say this place is at?" Dante asked as he finally pulled into town. It was both nice and weird to be home. He'd always enjoyed visiting when he had leave. It had almost killed his mom when he'd got out two years ago and not come home permanently. But he wanted to make it in the civilian world on his own first. And he had. Of course it helped that he'd managed to obtain his degree online while still in the service. Two years as a beat cop in the big city handling all kinds of crap and he was ready for the life of a small-town cop. Plus it just so happened that one of the officers was retiring and he had managed to slip into that slot. He had no doubts it was his name as much as his record that had got him the job.

Three of his brothers were also cops. Angelo was a detective in another town nearby along with his best friend, Sampson. Cristiano was a firefighter. Stephano worked for the state and now Dante was back and joining the local police department. He had to grin. It seemed all his siblings had entered into a career that was very similar. Nico worked for the sheriff's office and Isabella was just finishing her nursing degree. The only one who had bucked the tradition was his sister Gianna and she'd been doing that since birth.

"It's just down from the post office on Sixth," Angelo answered him interrupting his thoughts. "You can't miss it. It's the new apartment building they just put up a few years ago. You're up on the third floor, only two units to a floor. Really nice open loft is what I hooked you up with. You'll love it."

Dante laughed. Angelo was entirely too smug today. He'd have to see if he could knock him down a notch. Damn, it was good to be home.

"Just pulling in," Dante said. "I'll catch you later at Ma's."

"Later," Angelo agreed with a chuckle. "And Dante?"

"Yeah," he murmured already scoping out the building he'd be living in and the surrounding area.

"I'm glad you're home," Angelo said and hung up before Dante could reply.

Dante just grinned. He'd missed his brothers as well. There was barely a year between him and Angelo, then only fifteen months between Angelo and Cristiano and Stephano. At least mom had taken somewhat of a break after the twins. It was almost a full two years before Gianna had come. Then a year later Nico had arrived. And finally eighteen months later Isabella had come. And that had been it. Their father Salvatore must have put his foot down because they stopped at seven and Ma was always saying how she would have had a dozen.

Being that close in age, they'd all grown up close to one another. They'd had other friends, sure, but no one came between the familial bond. Of course being Italian and having Belinda for a mother had a lot to do with it to, Dante thought. The woman ruled with an iron fist, at times a wooden spoon, and always with a big heart that overflowed with love for her children. The Marquetti family was the one that everyone wanted to be a part of and their home was always filled to the rafters with people.

He shut the door, grabbed his rucksack and headed toward the building. One other thing about moving home was that it was already done for him. He'd sent all his stuff ahead and his Ma and family had his apartment already set up for him. He should really feel guilty about that but after a twelve-hour drive he was ready for a long hot

shower and a cold beer before heading over to the house and the chaos that was sure to be there.

The building was secure requiring a key to enter the main door, a key which Angelo had sent to him. The entryway was nice and big with mailboxes along one side, stairwell entrance off to the left and elevator on the right. Third floor so he opted for the elevator this time. Had to make sure it was working right. He leaned back and closed his eyes for a brief minute and took a deep breath. Good or bad he was home now and a new chapter in his life was ready to begin.

No ding to announce the floor but he heard the slow slide of the doors and opened his eyes to the most beautiful sight he'd seen in a good long while. A woman stood in the hallway in nothing but a very short towel. Her long hair was dark though it might lighten as it dried and hung in wet curls down to her waist. Her legs were long and toned and would look real good wrapped around his waist. He moved slowly out of the elevator not wanting to startle her. She reached toward the top of the door on her tiptoes, her fingers just barely missing the ledge. His eyes instantly glued to the nice view of her bottom cheeks that her move revealed. The woman had a hell of an ass.

She was in front of the door just across from his so he headed her way. It was easy to be quiet, he'd had years to refine the art. Just as he got close enough to say something she kicked the door. It must have hurt because she instantly yelped and hopped around. Her hand lost its grip on the towel and he was delighted when it fell to the floor at her feet.

"Great," she huffed still oblivious to his presence. "Just great!" Then she turned as if she suddenly sensed she wasn't alone. She took one look at him and shrieked. He held his hands up but before he could say anything she'd launched herself at him, totally naked. He caught her in his arms dropping the rucksack to the floor and struggled with his control as she wrapped her legs around his waist and clung to him so that he could feel every gorgeous, wet, naked inch of her pressed tightly to him.

"Dante," she screamed. "I've missed you!" And then she leaned in and kissed him full on the lips.

What the hell was he supposed to do? Full breasts pressed so tight against his chest that he could feel her nipples. Strong legs wrapped around his waist and snug at the small of his back. Her hot little cunt pressed full into his raging erection and if she wiggled against it one more time he just might come. Then her lips on his. Firm and warm and just silky enough to make him want to taste them. Without thought he cupped that sweet ass and held her tighter against his cock. His tongue tasted her full lower lip and then slid inside for a better sample. She was sweet, so sweet and familiar. He'd tasted this before.

He pulled away and looked at her again. She had changed in the years he'd been gone. Grown up and filled out in all the right places. He remembered their first date at the end of his senior year. She'd been younger, new to the school and he'd been infatuated with her. He'd taken her to dinner and then out to park to look at the sky. It had taken him three months to talk her out of her pants and two weeks before he left for the Marines he'd taken her virginity on a blanket under the stars. She'd been sweet perfection and he'd seen the loss of his every dream in her dewy gaze. Then she'd told him she loved him and he'd kissed her and taken her home. He hadn't spoken to her again. Two weeks later he'd left. And now here she was and obviously not holding a grudge against him.

"Phoebe?" he asked already knowing it was her.

She just grinned and laughed. "You're probably used to women greeting you in the buff and riding this big erection of yours," she giggled as she wiggled against said erection. He groaned and she laughed again. "I wondered which one of the Marquettis was going to be my neighbor and my roommate refused to tell me. Lucky me, it's you."

With that she leaned in to kiss him again. Just a quick smack of her lips before she was unwrapping those legs and wiggling once more only this time to get off him. He made his fingers release her even though he didn't want to. She bent and snagged the

towel giving him a gorgeous view of her pussy in the process and then just held the towel in her hand as she turned again to face him.

"I don't know why my roommate insists on putting the key on top of the door frame because he knows I can't quite reach up there in my bare feet," she said with a grin. "Can you get it for me?"

"Sure," Dante said automatically stepping forward and reaching for the key. His eyes watched the way her breasts bobbed and swayed as she moved and his mind was a little slow but finally catching up as he handed her the key. "Roommate? He?"

She slid the key in the lock and pushed the door open with ease. "Yeah, he's great. I needed a roommate and he was willing to live with a woman as crazy as I am." She laughed again and it was the most beautiful sound he'd heard in a long time. "I'm so glad to see you Dante," she gushed. "Of course I'll see you in just a bit at the house anyway."

"You're coming to the house?" he asked.

"Your ma would kill me if I didn't show up," she laughed. "I've been going over for dinner every Friday since we moved in together." She grinned up at him. "I'm practically family."

"We?" he asked again and was sure he wouldn't like the answer.

She looked at him with confusion for a minute. "Didn't anyone tell you that Cris and I lived across from you?"

"You live with Cristiano?" Dante thundered, using his brother's full name.

Phoebe just grinned again. "Well, duh. Trust me there are perks to having a firefighter as a roommate." And she did that giggle again that made his cock jump. "I'll see you later," she promised and the door shut in his face.

He took a deep breath and slowly turned to unlock his door. Three things went through his head. That shower he wanted was going to be a cold one. The beer better be

ice cold and waiting in his fridge. And if his brother was sleeping with Phoebe, then Dante just might kill him.

Chapter Three

Phoebe shut the door, flipped the lock and ran for her bedroom chanting, "Oh my God," under her breath the whole way. With a squeal she launched herself onto her queen size bed and buried her head in her pillow to smother a moan of pure embarrassment. She had planned exactly what she would be wearing the first time she saw Dante again right down to how she would have her hair fixed. And instead this. Only her life could be such a clusterfuck.

If she ever found Cris' stupid cat she would probably finally kill the damn thing. The man had to have the fur ball and she had opened the door to peek across the hall and *flash!* The stupid cat had streaked out the door. She'd run after him but the only thing she'd accomplished was getting herself locked out in nothing but a towel.

She groaned again. Her hair was a wet tangle down her back, no makeup to hide behind and Dante had just seen every inch of her totally naked body. How did she live that down? How did she get him to want her after she practically mounted him in the hall? He'd been as hard as a rock, his cock pressing up into her and she'd definitely wanted him stripped naked too. But what guy wouldn't be aroused when a naked woman jumped on him and wrapped her legs around his waist? She wanted him to want her for herself, not for what had just happened.

She groaned again when the phone rang but reached for it anyway. "Hello," she answered.

"Hey girl," Cris' voice rumbled over the line. "You'd better get that sweet ass over here soon or Dante will already be here."

Cris knew that she still was in love with Dante. "Phoebe?" Cris' voice broke into her thoughts and had her groaning again.

"It's too late, Cristiano," she groaned dragging out his full name to let him know how unhappy she was. "I've already seen him and believe me it was a meeting that neither of us will ever forget."

Cris' sexy laugh washed over the phone line and for the hundredth time Phoebe wished she could have fallen in love with this Marquetti brother instead. Cris was a woman's sexual fantasy rolled up into a good-guy package. She couldn't see him willingly hurting a woman for any reason. "What happened?" he asked her.

"Your stupid cat is gone," she said and braced herself for his explosion. For some reason he loved that damn demon cat.

"What!" he thundered right on time. "What happened to Cleo?"

"She streaked out the door when I opened it," Phoebe stated. "I went after her but you know she doesn't like me."

"Now that's just because she senses that you don't like her," Cris said. "Cleo is a very clever kitty cat."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Phoebe replied more than used to hearing about how wonderful precious Cleo was. "The door shut behind me Cris, leaving me locked out."

"You know where the key is," he said.

"I was in a towel," she said between gritted teeth. "I couldn't reach the top of the door frame."

"Okay," he seemed to drag the word out as if he was trying to figure out what she wasn't saying. "So how did you get in?"

"Big brother showed up," she said.

Cris laughed. "There you go, Dante to the rescue. Can't get much better than that."

Phoebe groaned again. "Well there is the fact that by the time I even knew he was there I'd lost my towel and was completely naked."

Cris laughed harder and she wished he were with her so she could smack him silly. "It is so not funny, Cris."

"Okay, okay." He managed to stop for a minute finally. "What happened?"

"I shrieked and jumped on him," she mumbled.

"Totally naked?" Cris asked and then started laughing again.

"Stop laughing at me," Phoebe demanded. "I don't think I'm ever leaving this apartment again."

"Yes you are," Cris said without missing a beat. "And I'm laughing at what I can visualize of my brother's reaction."

"Yeah," Phoebe groaned. "It was a memorable first meeting."

"You want me to come get you, kiddo?" Cris asked her, and she knew that he would, in a heartbeat. He was her best friend in the whole world. He knew she was in love with Dante. He'd seen her at her worst and held her when she cried. And she'd been there for him through his ups and downs as well.

"No I'll be okay," she sighed and sat up in bed. "I'll just get dressed real quick and head over." It was her turn to laugh now as something else occurred to her. "Besides you might want a large group of people around when you see your brother."

"Why is that?" Cris asked.

"Did you know that he had no idea we were living together?" she asked innocently. "He was really surprised when I told him."

"Ahh, shit," Cris breathed and Phoebe laughed again. "Hurry up and get here you little troublemaker or you might find yourself short one roommate."

"Dante would have to care to do anything to you, Cris," Phoebe said suddenly getting serious. "And we both know he doesn't. After today I'm sure he wants to have sex with me. Then he'll walk away only this time we'll both still be in the same town. I'm not sure I can do that."

"Sure you don't want me to come home?" Cris asked and his voice was low and filled with concern.

"No," Phoebe said with a sigh. "I'll be on my way in half an hour."

"Call if you change your mind," Cris said and then they hung up.

Phoebe moved to the bathroom to start drying her hair. She would never forget the way her heart had broken in two the day after her night with Dante. No call. Nothing from him. It was as if she didn't exist once he got what he wanted. She had cried for days, worried her mother silly, and when she'd finally got the nerve to go out of her house it was to find that Dante was leaving for the military. With not even a goodbye. He had certainly shown her what she meant. Her greatest personal gift and he had taken it and walked away.

So why did she love him even all this time later? Because she had seen a different side of him before that night. She'd seen a Dante that she doubted few others had ever seen. He'd talked to her, shared his dreams, his hopes, his fears. He'd treated her like the most precious person in the world. He'd been soft and tender as he'd loved her doing his best to not make her first time uncomfortable. Then she'd committed the ultimate sin. She'd told him she loved him and he'd run as far as he could to escape her. In short she'd scared the hell out of him. She'd known that even back then.

She wouldn't make that mistake again. This time she'd be the good-time girl he wanted. No words of love or commitment would cross her mouth. She'd take what she could get and maybe this time she would be able to move on from him when it was over. She had tried before, tried and failed miserably. No man held a candle to the boy Dante had been. And after today she knew that no one would compare to the man he had become. It seemed she was doomed to live her life in love with the one man who didn't seem to want her for anything other than sex. And God help her if he left after the first time again. This time she had nowhere to run.

She looked in the mirror. But then she was different this time as well. She was no longer the naïve girl she had been. She was a woman grown and she knew her body very well. No, this time it would not be her left in the dust. This time she was going to make Dante burn with desire. And when the time came to walk away? Well, she would deal with that much better this time around.

Dante felt like a fool. It had taken a few minutes for his brain synapses to connect and for him to realize that Phoebe was headed over to his ma's house too. Plus she was obviously freshly showered. So instead of the cold beer and even colder shower he had imagined, he'd rushed through a quick but thorough shower and dressed as quickly as possible. Now he stood at his door listening so that he could time it just right to enter the hall when she did and convince her to ride over with him. He felt like a teenager. He felt like a fool.

Thank goodness for his excellent hearing or he would not have heard her. Now wasn't it interesting that she seemed to be trying to sneak out without him knowing? He grinned and started whistling as he opened the door and let his gaze land right on her. And damn she looked fine even in clothes. Her hair was a deep shade of his favorite treat, caramel. Her eyes were a light sky blue and her shirt matched the shade perfectly. She had on sandals that showcased her toned legs to perfection and added to her height, which he would guess around five ten or so in her bare feet. A nice pair of short shorts and his mouth was back to watering. He hoped he wasn't drooling.

"You look fabulous," he told her as he pulled the door shut behind him.

"So do you." She smiled but he could see something in her eyes, some trace of uncertainty. Best to start like you mean to finish, or at least that was one of his Ma's favorite expressions.

"Any reason why I can't kiss you again?" he asked as he moved toward her. She moved back against the door she'd closed and he boxed her in as best he could.

"Reason?" she breathed and he could see her pulse in her throat. He wanted to lick and suck on that beating flesh.

"My subtle way of asking if you are with my brother?" Dante said as he leaned so that their lips were just inches apart. "Or with anyone else for that matter."

Her lips tilted softly. "I'm my own woman," she said, which was no answer at all. Then she leaned in and just let her lips skim across his before ducking under his arm and heading toward the stairs.

He shook his head and caught up using his longer legs to make short work of the distance. "That wasn't really an answer."

She looked up at him and smiled as she started down the first flight of stairs. "Actually I should be offended that you would even ask. But you've been gone for a while and so I'm going to forgive you." She turned then and he felt the full power of those amazing eyes with just a touch of anger brimming in them. "When I decide to be with a man, whoever that man is, I do not greet others in the buff, no matter the circumstance." She turned back and her descent picked up speed.

And there was his answer. She was single and available and he planned to make sure she was with him by night's end. But with her clothes seemed to come some type of barrier she had erected between them. Interesting.

"I was just making sure," he said as he caught up and put his hand to the small of her back as they left the stairwell and entered the lobby.

"And if I had said that Cris and I were more than roommates?" she looked up at him with one delicately arched brow lifted high.

"I would have done my best to respect that," Dante said.

"Well we are more than roommates," she said and turned once more to leave the building. "He's my best friend and I can't ever see him as not being a part of my life."

Dante nodded. He knew the importance of friends and had to admit at least to himself that he was curious why she would have a man for a best friend. "I can respect that."

"Good," she said and smiled again. "So any particular reason you asked?"

"Because I have a strong desire to have you in my bed before this day is over," he admitted and his cock jumped and pulsed when she giggled again.

"Then you have your work cut out for you," she said and automatically headed toward the passenger side of his car. She opened the door before he could get to her and was already settling into the seat. Her eyes moved up the length of his body before sinking into his. He felt that look like a lover's caress. "I'm no longer a virgin, Dante. This time it will take more than a smooth line and a star-filled night."

He felt the challenge of those words all the way to his toes. He shut the door and moved around the back of the car to get into the driver's seat. He couldn't contain the grin that pulled at his lips. Man it was good to be home.

Chapter Four

The ride was way too short and Phoebe seemed content with small talk so he let it go. He had two days before he had to show up at the station. He planned to have Phoebe in his bed by then, more than once. Hell the way she made him tingle from head to toe with just a glance, he might want her for a hell of a lot longer. But he was getting ahead of himself and as he pulled in front of his mom's house he knew that there was a lot more he would have to deal with.

"It looks like half the neighborhood is here," Dante grumbled taking in the flow of people in and out of the gate at the side of the house.

"Don't look now but I think that might be fear in the big, bad Marine's eyes," Phoebe laughed and patted his arm setting his pulse soaring again and giving rise to the semi-erection he'd been sporting since the cold shower.

"Nothing can compare to my mother," Dante stated and Phoebe let that laugh go again. Damn he loved that sound.

"I'm sure she has every single woman she knows here for your inspection," Phoebe said as she reached for the door handle. "As well as any friend you had from preschool on."

Dante grinned. "She's glad I'm home."

Phoebe turned back to him, the door open behind her. "She's beside herself to finally have you home. That's how mothers are."

He took a moment to grab her hand and bring it to his chest. "What about you, Phoebe? Are you happy to have me back?"

He watched the play of emotions across her face but it was so fast that he had no clue what all she was feeling.

"Yes," Phoebe said with a smile. "I'm happy that you are back home. Now let's go face the music." And with that she turned and left the car with him hurrying behind her.

With all the people there was no way to keep up with her. She made her way easily through the crowd and he gritted his teeth as he watched more than one man turn his head to watch her. She was beautiful and he was feeling territorial. What the fuck? Where did that feeling come from? Man he had it bad.

Everyone and their brother had to stop him and offer a handshake, a hug, and some of the ladies were more than willing to plant a kiss on him. There were some cute ones, some that would have pulled his attention if he hadn't had a handful of the most perfect woman in all her naked glory less than an hour earlier. He made his way as smoothly as he could to the back patio where he knew his dad and brothers would be and to the kitchen just beyond where his mother would be.

He finally moved so that the patio was in sight and his heart stopped for just a moment. Phoebe stood there among his brothers laughing and looking as if she belonged there. She was so at ease, so natural. She stood between Cris and Stephano and Dante had to remember that though he had spent time with her she had been in their class in school. And was even now living with Cristiano. He watched his brother bend to say something in her ear and the way she threw her head back and laughed.

It was something watching them. They were so at ease with one another but Dante wasn't blind. There was no lust in his brother's eyes. They genuinely seemed to be best friends. So it looked like Cris would be able to live after all. That would make his mamma happy.

Angelo saw him first and gave a whoop before jumping the low railing around the patio and moving toward him. They whooped and hugged and yelled things at each other that only a brother could get away with. Angel hadn't changed much and that was good to see. Dante had been a little worried when his brother had called to tell him about Cara, the woman Angel planned to marry.

Soon Cris, Stephano, and Nico had joined them and it was just like the old days. He'd missed his brothers. No one got you the way your brothers did. He remembered when they had all been kids barely big enough to leave the yard and now they were all men grown, towering over most people around them. Nico was the tallest at six foot seven and Stephano the shortest boy at six foot one. But then their dad still stood tall and proud at six foot two and their mom was five foot nine inches.

He glanced over and there they were. His parents, Salvatore and Belinda Marquetti. Tall and proud and with tears in their eyes. It brought moisture to his own eyes to see it. They were so happy to have their family home, all their boys at least and he could see the joy of it written all over their faces. He was home. Everyone seemed to move out of the way as his parents came toward them. His dad grabbed him first and gave him a big kiss before getting him in a crushing bear hug. The man shook and Dante remembered when he was little and wanted to cry but thought he shouldn't because of what his friend had said at school about real men not crying.

Salvatore had brushed that aside with a laugh and said that real men felt real emotions and were unafraid to show them. It was okay to laugh, to yell, and even to cry in their house. The only thing his dad had made sure his boys knew was that it was never okay to hit a girl or woman, to treat her with anything but respect. After all every woman was someone's sister, someone's daughter, and maybe someone's mother and how would they expect others to treat their mother and sisters. It was a lesson they had all learned and retained. Salvatore would have had it no other way.

When his dad finally moved back he wiped his face with his hand and his dad did the same. His mother grabbed him then, stepped into him and hugged him no less tightly than his father and brothers had. She still had her thick black hair though it was spotted with silver here and there. Her blue eyes crackled and shone with the tears she held in. He felt her tremble and gathered her closer whispering in her ear.

"I'm home, Mamma. I'm home."

She responded in Italian so low he couldn't quite make it out but then his mamma had always fallen back on Italian when her emotions were high. Some things never changed.

"You are home to stay," she said and though it wasn't a question he nodded anyway. He was home to stay.

She pulled back and cupped his face in her hands, just cradling it. She looked deep within his eyes, making him feel as if she was searching his very soul before patting his cheeks and stepping back.

"Good," she said with a nod that was all business now. She turned to the crowd and said what they had all been waiting to hear. "Let's eat."

* * * * *

It took too long for him to finally find a few minutes alone with Cristiano but Dante managed it. He cornered him as he was coming out of the upstairs bathroom and they went to the loft that the five boys had once shared. The room was still big with four windows all along one wall but now it held exercise equipment and a computer desk. It was so easy to close his eyes and go back to how it had been before when it had been filled with bunk beds and sports equipment, books and backpacks and dirty laundry in every conceivable corner. They had one hell of a childhood.

"Yeah," Cris said as if he were reading Dante's mind. "I can still smell the aroma of your football uniform after a Friday night game."

They laughed. Dante and Angelo had played football. Cristiano had run track and cross country. Stephano went to college on baseball scholarship and Nico was an All-American basketball scholar. The kid could have gone NBA if he'd wanted but for some reason he came home and took up the life of a cop. All his brothers had their own stories and he was just realizing that he didn't know everything about them like he once had. He didn't regret his time away but he planned to remedy some things now that he was back.

"I remember those sexy track shorts you wore that showed all that long leg," Dante said and wiggled his eyebrows.

Cris just grinned. "The ladies certainly liked those shorts."

"I just bet they did," Dante said. "So seeing anybody now?"

Cris just laughed. "You mean am I more than roommates with Phoebe?"

Dante just looked up and he and Cris laughed again.

"Dude, I must have called as soon as she got in the apartment and she told me about meeting you," he doubled over laughing and had to catch his breath before adding, "in the buff."

"Well, I'm glad you find it so funny," Dante said and he didn't give a shit if his brother could hear how close he was to being pissed-off from the tone of his voice. Cris sobered up and looked Dante straight in the eye. "That is what Phoebe does, Dante. Things happen in her life and she picks the phone up and calls me. I do the same to her. She is literally my best friend. And yeah I mean best friend. I would have never thought it was possible to be that way with a woman but Phoebe proved me wrong. She doesn't want anything from me and she is always willing to listen to me and give me a woman's take on things. I do the same for her."

"You give her a woman's take on things?" Dante asked but this time Cris just shook his head.

"No smartass," Cris said, and he was more serious than Dante had ever seen him. "I was here when you left. I saw how hard she took it. So hard that she moved away and finished out high school with her dad. When her mom got sick a year ago she came home and took over the boutique. Not everyone was happy with the changes she's made. But Phoebe doesn't balk, she doesn't back down from conflict. She is the best woman I've ever met." Cris turned to the window giving Dante his back. "I've seen her cry. I've seen her at the bottom. And I've seen her laugh in a way that lightens the very air around her." He turned to Dante and seared him with a look. "If all you want is a lay then there is a yard full of willing women, Dante."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Dante asked.

"It means that Phoebe isn't one for you to play games with, brother," Cris said. "It means that if you hurt her again I'll take it very personally."

Dante had never known his brother to care this deeply about anyone other than family, most especially their rebellious sister Gianna. So he just nodded.

"I don't plan on hurting her," Dante said. "But I do want a chance with her. I'm not saying that I'm looking for forever right now," he was quick to add. "But I can tell you that I'm tired of waking up alone."

"Just as long as you understand that I can't be on your side this time around," Cris said and it was like a blow to Dante's chest to hear those words from one of his brothers. He had definitely been gone too long. "You have everyone, Dante," Cris added seeming to want to make Dante understand. "Phoebe really only has me."

"Then take care of her," Dante said. "But know that I plan on making her turn to me for those needs soon."

"As long as this isn't a game to you," Cris said. "Phoebe has been through a lot."

Dante wanted to ask but he did know his brother well enough to know that whatever she had shared with Cris would remain with Cris. He'd just have to corner Angelo and see what he knew about Phoebe.

"I won't hurt her," Dante vowed. "At least not intentionally."

"It's the unintentional that destroys the most," Cris said and with a much dimmer smile he turned and headed out of the loft.

Dante would have to see what Angelo knew about Cris as well. He had a lot to make up to his brothers for all the time he had been away. And he would. He walked over to the window and looked at all the people overflowing his parents' yard. It appeared as if the Marquetti house was still the place to visit. He smiled as his gaze took in his family. He'd never seen Angelo so happy. His fiancée, Cara was not what he would have pictured for his brother but she was certainly gorgeous and curvy. And

Angelo was glued to her side. He laughed as his brother once more reached over to touch Cara while he was talking to his best friend Sampson about something. She automatically brushed her fingers over his chest before linking her fingers with his, never once turning from listening to whatever his mother was saying.

He felt a catch in his heart. He wanted that. He wanted a woman to respond to him like that. Did that mean that he was ready to settle down and get married and have kids and all that? He shook his head when “no” didn’t leap to his head immediately. Instead he thought of Phoebe and his gaze moved to where she stood with Cris and Stephano. She blended in with the family so well.

He watched as Stephano said something that made her throw her head back and laugh. Her face was so beautiful, lit up as it was with laughter and happiness. He wanted to be the one to put that look on her face. Man, he had it bad. What the hell was wrong with him? It was like he’d stepped back into the past when he’d crossed into the city limits. It was too soon to be thinking the things he was thinking about a woman he’d known when he was just a kid on the brink of manhood. And yet, somehow it felt right.

He saw the way Cris was attentive and watched the casual touches between his brother and Phoebe. But they weren’t the same as the ones Angelo and Cara or any of the other couples shared. It was almost like looking at siblings picking at one another. They had a deep friendship that was easy to see. And if asked he was sure they would say that they loved one another, but looking at them Dante was confident that it wasn’t a romantic love. He wanted to find out as much as he could about the person she was now. He wanted to find the chance he’d thrown away once and this time see where it led him. And if he could persuade her to have sex with him again it would be more than once. He wasn’t leaving this time. Now he was coming home.

He turned to head down the stairs and almost ran into his dad.

“All these people for you and I find you hiding upstairs looking out the window.” His dad shook his head and joined him. Dante smiled. His dad had probably come

inside to hide for a few minutes from the crowd. Salvatore loved people, most especially his family but their dad had always been an observer. Perhaps it was all his years as a cop or perhaps it was just a part of who his dad was.

"Do you miss it?" Dante asked, referring to the police force and job his father had retired from.

"Not so much," Salvatore said and Dante watched as his dad's eyes rested on his mom. There was a glow about his dad that shone even when he was looking at the woman he loved. "The bar keeps me in the loop."

Dante laughed. His mom had been so happy when Salvatore had retired. She'd thought they'd spend more time together now, maybe travel and wait for the grandbabies to start arriving. Instead his dad had bought a bar and made it the place to hang out for off-duty cops and firemen. His dad loved it and when it came down to it his mom did too. She had decided they needed to serve some food and cooked it herself. Dante knew it was just so that she could be with Salvatore. His parents had been together thirty-five years and as far as he knew they had always been happy.

He could remember his mother getting mad about this or that when they were growing up. And his parents had fought over things. But they had always worked it out and their house had been filled with love. Belinda liked to say that strong people had strong emotions, that yelling was just was just another way of saying "I love you", only when you were being stupid about something.

"Angelo's going to marry that gorgeous woman he's with," Salvatore said into the silence.

"They seem happy," Dante said.

Salvatore nodded his head. "And Bella finally caught Sampson," he said with a laugh. "Your mother is down there trying to talk them into a double wedding."

Dante laughed and shook his head. That sounded like his mother. "So when did Ma decide the wedding would be?"

Salvatore laughed again. "Cara politely told her no. Seems she and Angelo decided to have a very small ceremony. Cara said they might be willing to do it in the yard but only close family and friends will be invited."

"Damn, Angel got a hell of a woman if she can hold her own against Ma," Dante said.

Salvatore just grinned ear to ear. "I like her. She'll fit well."

Dante nodded and let his gaze move to Phoebe again. She had moved away from everyone and was talking a mile a minute on her cell phone. He wondered who she was talking to and wished it was his business. She bent at the waist to dust something off her shoe and he almost swallowed his tongue at the view of her tight ass. Man he wanted to grab her hips and slide his cock into her from behind. He wondered if she'd let him slide it in her tight ass and take her there.

"She'll fit well, too," Salvatore said breaking Dante out of his lustful thoughts. He turned to see his dad turning back toward the stairs.

"Who?" Dante asked.

"Phoebe," Salvatore said. "And you might find it easier if you went down and spent some time with her instead of standing up here watching her. Hell you didn't even do this when you were a boy."

Dante laughed. No the Marquettis were known for going after what they wanted. That was just what Dante was going to do.

"Then I guess we better get back down there, Dad," he said as he followed Salvatore down the stairs. It was time to start showing Phoebe just how interested in her he was.

Chapter Five

Phoebe felt her phone vibrate and excused herself to step away and answer. It could only be one of two people calling her today. Her mom or her business partner. She glanced at the ID displayed and smiled as she answered.

"Hey Gia, what's up?" It had only been a year since she'd really gotten to know the black sheep of the Marquetti family but Gianna, Gia, had turned out to be a rare gem of a person. She was smart, savvy and dependable. She was a Marquetti after all. Phoebe still didn't understand the reason Belinda Marquetti was so upset with her daughter but then it really wasn't any of her business.

"More designs," Gia's voice boomed over the phone. "I've just finished designing a new line and I'm going to have the prints faxed to you. Go by and pick them up tonight if you can. I can't wait for you to see them. I think I can have some ready for display and order by the end of the week, beginning of next for sure. I think these will fly like hotcakes."

"Wow," Phoebe said. "I can't wait to see them. I'll stop by on the way home and get them. Oh shoot," she added as she remembered that she had come over with Dante.

"What?" Gia demanded.

"Nothing," Phoebe said. "I didn't drive over tonight but it doesn't matter. I'll still go by and pick them up."

"Yeah, just have Cris stop there on the way back." Phoebe didn't correct Gia about thinking she was with Cris. The last thing she wanted was a lecture from Gia about big brother Dante and how he had already hurt Phoebe once. "How is the welcome home for the prodigal?" Gia asked and Phoebe wondered if the other woman realized the pain her tone conveyed.

"Great," Phoebe said. "It looks like the entire town is here."

"Yeah, I'm sure Ma pulled all the stops out for Dante," Gia sighed and it struck Phoebe once more how lonely Gia sounded. "I gotta go. Plane's leaving in another hour and I've got to throw stuff in a bag and be on it."

"Where to this time?" Phoebe asked.

"Somewhere in the Caribbean," Gia said already sounding distracted. "Another bikini shoot. Get those tonight and let me know if there is anything you think needs changed or if there is a color you think will look particularly great."

"Okay," Phoebe said knowing that there would be no changes needed. Gia was as big a perfectionist as Phoebe had ever met. "And try to have some fun, Gia."

Gia's laugh was quick. "I'll try. I really will."

Phoebe shook her head. Gia had more on her plate than any other one person could handle. She had no idea how the other woman managed it all. But Gia did. It was almost like she was running from something. Phoebe had never asked and Gia wouldn't say. In fact most of their close girl talks surrounded Phoebe's life and Gia's job. Only Cris knew for sure what the struggle his sister waged was about and Phoebe knew how well he kept secrets. She just hoped that whatever was keeping Gia from her family was resolved soon. That girl needed to slow down and take a few moments to enjoy life before she worked herself to death.

"I'll talk to you later then," Phoebe said.

"I'll call you," Gia said. "When I get a few moments between shoots. We'll discuss numbers and stuff then. Bye Phoebe." And Gia hung up.

Phoebe didn't know how long she stood there before she felt the presence of Dante behind her. She couldn't say for sure how she knew that it was him and not someone else. Only that she did. Perhaps it was the way he smelled of musk and sex and man. Or maybe it was the way his presence just seemed to soak into her pores. Whatever it was there was no mistaking him for anyone else. Ever.

"What are you doing over here all by yourself?" he whispered in her ear and she wondered if he sensed the stares turned toward them. She had been careful to stay

away from him most of the party not wanting to start any gossip on his first real day back. But she doubted anyone was missing the way his hand circled her waist or the dip of his head so that his lips were right by her ear.

"I had a phone call," she said not offering anything more than that.

"Hope everything is okay," he said and his breath caressed her ear sending a chill down her spine.

"Yes," she whispered not having the air to say much more. The man was generating some serious heat and she was melting on the spot. A cool breeze might send her into ecstasy. "I just have to stop at the shop on the way back to the apartment and pick up some faxes."

"Well, let's head out then," Dante stated. "Maybe I can talk you into coming back to my place for a private welcome home drink?"

Oh she could tell quite well that he had more than a drink in mind, and she was honest enough with herself to admit that she did too. He wanted her and heaven help her she was about to spontaneously combust with her desire to feel him skin to skin. But would it be the right thing to do? Jumping right back into bed with him. Or would it turn into just a one-night stand? She wasn't sure she could handle living next door to him and watching him bring woman after woman home with him. Not if she slept with him again.

His hand caressed her cheek and he leaned to place a soft kiss on her lips. "I'm not sure what you're thinking so hard about, Phoebe, but I promise you that it can just be a welcome home drink if that is all you're ready for."

"Just a drink, huh?" She smiled at him. She just couldn't help it.

"Scout promise." And he held his fingers up.

"Where you ever even a scout, Dante?" she asked with a laugh.

"Well, I don't think any of us lasted more than a year but still." He paused to cup her face and turn it so that her face was lifted up to his. "I promise that I won't hurt you this time."

"You shouldn't promise things you can't keep, Dante," she said with a sigh.

"I mean to keep this one," he said and she could hear his determination in his voice.

"We don't usually mean to hurt people," she said. "Sometimes it just happens."

"I was young and stupid back then, Phoebe," he sighed and ran his free hand through his hair. "I was full of myself. I had things to do and nothing was going to make me stay in this pissant town."

She laughed. "And yet here you stand."

"Yeah," he agreed. "But there were things I had to do before I could come back here and be happy."

"And you think you can be happy here now?" she asked.

"I think that I'd like to try," he offered.

"I hope you can too, Dante," she said with a smile. "It would break your mother's heart if she lost you again."

"And what about yours, Phoebe?" he asked softly.

"My heart isn't yours to break anymore," she said and turned to walk toward where Cris stood talking and watching her. No, the only person to blame if she got hurt this time was herself. Which meant if things went farther than a drink tonight, and she was pretty sure they would, then she had to be okay no matter what the outcome.

She joined Cris and Stephano before Dante could say anything in response to her comment and for that she was grateful. She wasn't sure she was ready for him to say anything about caring about her just yet. She wasn't sure she would believe him.

"Hey sexy lady," Stephano said. "I was wondering when you would head back my way."

She laughed as she joined them. There was always banter between her and Cris' twin. But somehow she thought this time was more for Dante's benefit than routine.

He pulled her into his arms and dipped her low, bending with her. "When am I going to convince you to drop the firefighter and take on a real man?"

She laughed. He did this all the time. It was a running thing between him and Cris.

"Hey, firefighters bring the heat, man," Cris said with a chuckle.

"Yeah, but cops pack a big gun," Stephano said wiggling his eyebrows.

She laughed again. They were just too cute. And honestly the routine never got old no matter how many times they did it with her.

She heard Cris start laughing and glanced up to take in the glower on Dante's face. He really looked put out that she was in Stephano's arms. Stephano pulled her back up and put his arm around her shoulders holding her close to his side.

"You running in the morning, Phoebe?" he asked with a grin.

"Always," she said knowing that he already knew that. She was always faithful with her morning runs no matter how late a night she'd had. It was her "me" time to just lose herself in the music from her iPod and feel the day starting around her.

"I might join you," he said with a grin.

"You'll have to keep up with me then," she laughed.

Dante had crossed his hands over his chest and didn't look happy with the camaraderie between her and his brothers. Perhaps he was even a little jealous. That had to be a good sign, she hoped.

"We were just coming over to say our goodbyes," Dante said. "Phoebe needs to stop by the shop before heading back to the apartment building."

Cris immediately looked at her and she knew he wanted to ask if the call was from Gia or not. She just nodded her head hoping he would understand that she would tell him about it later. He worried so much about his little sister. Whatever had happened had affected him as well and he seemed to carry a lot of guilt over the rift between her

and his mom. She worried about him as much as she did Gia. They needed to deal with it, so that they could both get on with their lives.

"I can take you, Phoebe," Cris offered but Dante nixed that right away.

"Phoebe came with me and I promised to take her to the shop on the way back," he said and she found her hand in his and him tugging her to his side. "Stay and enjoy the party, Cris."

"As if." Cris shook his head. "Nah, with you leaving it should break up soon enough. I'll just head back to the apartment." He turned to Phoebe. "I'll see you at home."

"Phoebe might be a little late getting back tonight," Dante added.

"Is that so?" Cris asked and Phoebe could feel the testosterone fill the air around her.

"Yeah," Dante answered. "You might not want to wait up."

She just looked at Dante. The idiot was basically telling his brother and everyone who was eavesdropping around them that she would be sleeping with him tonight. And even if that was true she didn't care to have everyone know it just yet. She opened her mouth to say something but a subtle headshake from Stephano had her holding it back. There seemed to be some silent communication going on between Dante and Cris and obviously Stephano didn't want her to interfere with it.

Finally Cris nodded to whatever he and Dante were silently discussing and turned to her. "I'll be home when you get there."

She knew he was worried about her, worried that she would be hurt again. And she couldn't help but love him for the true friend he was. He was letting her make the choice and silently letting her know that he would be there no matter what the outcome.

She smiled and went into his arms. He hugged her close giving her an extra squeeze.

"I love you," she whispered and wasn't surprised when he whispered it back to her. They did love each other. They would never be in love with each other but theirs was a bond that nothing could change. And that made him one of the most important people in her life always.

"Feel free to crawl in with me if you need to," Cris said and she almost laughed out loud. That comment was definitely for big brother's benefit.

"Absolutely," she agreed playing along. They had both fallen asleep on the couch before and they had slipped into one another's bedrooms to talk before but nothing like he was trying to imply.

She could see Dante seething and figured it was time to get him out of there before the Marquetti boys put on a show that would make their mother madder than hell.

She turned back to Dante and took his hand in hers. "Let's go," she said.

He let out a deep breath and pasted a smile on his face. "Good idea," he said and Stephano laughed.

They turned and went to say bye to his parents. He was held up for a few minutes of hugs and kisses from his mother and the same from Salvatore. Then it was her turn for a hug and kiss. His mother whispered something to her just as his dad said something to Dante. She prayed they were totally different things.

It took what felt like forever to get through the crowd to Dante's car but finally he was opening the door so that she could slip inside.

"The store is still the one your mom had right?" Dante asked as he eased behind the wheel.

"Yeah," she agreed surprised. "You remember where it is?"

"Yep," he agreed and, starting the car, pulling out and heading in the direction of downtown.

She was just wondering how long it would take him to start asking her more questions when he surprised her with a blunt one right away. No subtlety for him.

"Have you ever slept with Cris?" he asked.

She should be pissed that he would ask but all she could do was laugh.

"Yes," she answered and could see him clench his teeth and jaw. She should let him sweat it out, let his own thoughts torture him. But she wasn't quite that mean. "Now if you want to know if I had sex with him then the answer is no."

Dante turned his head to her and his hands clenched on the wheel before he turned his attention back to the road. "You knew what I meant, Phoebe," he sighed.

"Yes, I did," she agreed.

"But it is really none of my business who you have slept with since I took your virginity," he added.

"No it isn't," she agreed. She could tell him that there had never been another man for her. That no matter how hard she had tried she just couldn't let another man take her the way Dante had. She'd had some heavy petting and offers for a lot more. But she just couldn't go through with it when it came right down to it. She had plenty of toys though and she knew her body so well from years of self-pleasure. But those were secrets she didn't want to share just yet. Maybe never.

"I'm sorry," Dante said into the silence.

"For what?" she asked coming out of her thoughts.

"For too many things to go into right now," he replied and she could see regret on his face. "But right now for asking questions that I have no right to."

"We can't go back and change things, Dante," Phoebe said. "And to be honest we shouldn't want to. They led us to where we are right now." She slipped her hand over to his thigh and rubbed up and down before giving the tensed muscle there a squeeze. "And I kind of like where we are right now."

She watched him swallow but when she went to move her hand away he dropped one of his down and linked their fingers together. "I'm not going to lie to you Phoebe," he said his eyes on the road. "I'd like nothing more than to take you back to my place

and fuck you in every way imaginable." He glanced over toward her and she knew she must be flushed. She could feel her heartbeat accelerating at the images his words put in her head.

"But I also want you still in my bed when I wake up in the morning," he added.

"So you want me to sleep over," she said with a smile.

"Yeah, I really do," he said.

"I'd like that too," she said as they pulled into the parking lot of her shop. "I'll only be a sec," she said but he was already getting out of the car and moving around to open her door.

"I hear you've made some changes to the shop," he said as he took her hand and helped her stand. "I was hoping you'd let me sneak in with you and take a look around while you get your papers."

She laughed. "Sure, come on in with me."

He stopped her beside the car and turned so that she was between the still warm vehicle and him. "I have to do this first."

She'd opened her mouth to ask what, when he dipped his head and slid his tongue inside. It was soft and slow and everything she'd dreamed of. He took her under with little effort. She'd had her fair share of kisses. She loved to kiss. But no one had ever managed the sensuality that Dante was with this kiss. She felt that kiss in every pore of her body, felt it as if it were his hands caressing her. But his hands were cupping her face and it was only in her mind that he caressed her flesh. For now.

He broke the kiss and leaned his forehead against hers. "We're going to burn the sheets," he whispered and it was nice to hear that his breathing was as uneven as hers.

"That's optimistic," she panted.

"Oh, we'll definitely start a fire," he whispered.

She gave a breathless laugh. "Oh, I wasn't referring to that. I meant your thinking we would actually make it as far as the bed."

He groaned and she pulled away to head to the side employee entrance. When he stepped inside she flipped the lights and then turned to relock the door behind them. "I'll only be a sec," she said as she moved toward the office. She pointed toward the hallway that led to the store floor. "Have a look while I gather the papers I need."

He nodded and headed away. She wondered what he would think of their newest line of "Sinfully Yours" products.

Chapter Six

Dante took a few deep breaths and tried to slow his breathing down. She had him so hot and bothered that he prayed he didn't embarrass himself when he finally managed to get her naked. He couldn't wait to see how hot they were together.

He finally took in the clothes on display in front of him, if that was what the scraps of material could be referred to as. He swallowed again. It was pure sex on display. The material couldn't cover much of anything on the body and damn if he wouldn't love to see Phoebe in something like that. There was one number in particular that he liked. It was a bra and panty set in black that was barely there. The way they would hug a woman's curves was pure sin. And if it was in red and on Phoebe he just might swallow his tongue.

"So what do you think of our newest line?" Phoebe asked from beside him and it said a lot that he hadn't even heard her enter the room. He was in way too deep when he lost his sense of hearing, something that had saved his ass more than once.

He had to swallow twice before he could reply. "Yeah, I love it."

She must have followed his gaze to the black number. She stepped right up to it and let her hands run sensually down the mannequin's side. If he had done that it would have made him look like a dirty pervert but watching her run her hand that way was as sensual as hell.

"You like this one?" she asked him with a smile.

"Yeah." He nodded.

She laughed and he thought again about how that laugh seemed to wrap around his balls and cock.

"I'm glad you like that one," she said as she turned to head back down the hall to the side door they'd entered through.

"Why is that?" he asked and his heart almost stopped when she answered over her shoulder.

"Because it's the one I'm wearing." She pushed him through the door in front of her with another laugh. There was no way they would make it back to the apartment before he had to have her.

She turned and grinned up at him taking his hand in hers and leading him toward the car. He'd lost feeling in every part of his body except his cock, which was throbbing like an aching wound. He fumbled her door open and held it as she slid into the seat her shorts riding high on her thighs.

"I hope you like red," she said.

"What?" he asked.

"Red," she said and shook her head at him.

"Red," he repeated and realized that he sounded like a damn bird.

She laughed again. "Yes, red," she said. "I'm wearing that lingerie you liked only in red instead of the black."

Sweet merciful heaven he thought as he groaned and shut the door. It would be a close call to get back to the apartment. But she was right about them not making it to the sheets just yet. They would be lucky to get the door shut before he had her against the wall with those long legs wrapped around him. The precious seconds it would take to get a condom on would be all he could spare before he sank so deep into her pussy that they both died from the pleasure.

His only thought was not to get a speeding ticket before he even officially joined the police department. The guys would never let him live it down. But as he took in the profile of the woman sitting next to him, he knew she would be more than worth it. He turned his attention back to the road and tried to focus on getting them there as quickly as he could. Finally the lot was in sight and he was pulling in.

He slid the car into park hoping that it sat between the lines but not really caring. He hurried to get her door and almost ran her to the building and the elevator. She was as breathless as he was and he could feel the excitement pulsating between them. As soon as the doors shut he had her cornered with his lips on hers sucking and tasting her. She was like a narcotic that he couldn't get enough of.

The doors opened and he reluctantly pulled away from her. Taking her hand he led her toward his loft apartment. She was on him as soon as he had the door closed behind them. Her hands were everywhere and he wanted to strip and feel them on his flesh. But first he had to get the condom. If he was naked with her hands on him he was seriously afraid that neither of them would remember protection. He tried to pull away but her hands wrapped around his neck, her fingers buried deep in his hair holding him to her.

"I told you we wouldn't make it to the sheets," she murmured huskily.

He groaned enjoying the feel of her heated cunt riding his rigid thigh. He wanted her riding something else. Condom, condom, condom. It was like a safe-sex mantra in his head. "Condom," he muttered giving voice the reason he was struggling to remember in his head.

"Right here," she whispered and pulled one from the pocket of her snug shorts.

He swallowed and bent to take her mouth once more giving rein to the hunger that raced through his veins. His hands gripped the hem of her shirt and he broke their kiss only long enough to pull it over her head. Her breasts were full and firm held high in the sheer red material. He bent and took a nipple into his mouth sucking it through the cloth. His hands slid lower slipping her button free and tugging the zipper down. He couldn't wait to slide them off her so he just slipped his palm into the material to cup her pussy. It was hot and the material of her panties was wet with her desire.

He had to do this right by her, had to take care of her. He wanted her to desire him, to crave more than just this one night. He slid his hand back out and gripped the sides of her shorts easing them down as he moved his mouth to her other nipple. Her hands

dropped from his hair and then he felt the give of the material as her bra came loose. She pushed it off while he took care of her shorts leaving her in just sheer red panties and high-heeled sandals. Sweet merciful heavens, she looked good enough to eat. And that was just what he planned to do.

He pulled back and let his hands run over her flesh. "You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen," he whispered, and in all honesty she really was. Perhaps it was because there was more than just lust in his eyes when he looked at her. Not love, not yet. But he definitely wanted more than one night, one encounter. Perhaps it was even a shared past, or the simple fact that he had taken her virginity so long ago.

She reached for his shirt and he helped her rid him of it but before she could reach for his jeans he dropped to his knees in front of her and gripped the sides of her panties. He buried his face in her while the material was still in place, flicking his tongue out just for a taste of the sweet smell. He didn't know who groaned louder. With a tug he had her panties at her ankles. He lifted one foot to free it from the material and pulled that leg up over his shoulder spreading her for him.

There was no waiting. He used one hand to spread the puffed lips of her glistening cunt and ran his tongue from the tasty opening to the engorged bud of her clitoris. She tasted better than anything he'd ever had. He'd missed this the first and only other time they'd been together. Hell, had he tasted this before he might have never left. He wrapped his lips around her clit and sucked gently at it.

She squealed above him and pressed her hips closer to his lips. He pushed a finger inside and groaned at how tight and hot her pussy was. His cock might last just long enough to get all the way in that firm channel but it wouldn't take very many strokes to put him over. He pushed a second finger in and let his tongue flick around her clit before giving hard licks to the nub. She was fucking his mouth now, her hips pumping on his fingers. Her hands had a death grip in his hair and she alternated between holding him close and trying to tug him away.

He wasn't going anywhere. He increased the tempo of his fingers and tightened his lips on her clit sucking soft and then hard. She gave a keening cry, her hips pressed flush to his face, and came with an intensity that he could feel rippling through her body. He moved his mouth and lapped at the sweet juices that ran around his fingers. He eased her down, finally pulling his fingers from her pussy and licking them clean.

She remained leaning against the wall seeming to need its support to hold her up. It made Dante grin to feel the tremor in her legs. That said more than words ever could. He stood up and undid his jeans as quickly as he could shoving his underwear down with them. He'd remembered to snag the condom from the floor where he'd dropped it before he started eating her pussy and made quick work of rolling it on.

"Hold on, honey," he said and bent to grab her so that her knees draped over his elbows her panties fluttering free to puddle with the rest of their clothes. Her hands flattened against the door holding her balance as he lifted her high. Before he could shift his hand she had hers between them guiding his cock to her.

He could feel the sweat on his brow as his cock got its first taste of that tight little hole. He groaned and tried to hold himself back so that he wouldn't hurt her. But the little minx seemed to have a mind of her own. She was wiggling and moving trying to impale herself on him.

"Hold still," he grunted. "You're so tight. I don't want to hurt you."

She looked him in the eye and pressed her hips down again using her body weight to try to take him. "Fuck me, Dante. I want all of you buried deep inside me when I come again."

"Fuck," he moaned and bracing his hands on the door he pulled back so that just the head was in. With one hard stroke he buried himself to the balls in her wet heat. He groaned and she cried out. Her hands gripped his shoulders and she seemed to turn wild in his arms. She leaned in and let her mouth have free rein of his neck and shoulders. He was glad she didn't kiss him. Not that he didn't love kissing her but he

didn't have the oxygen capacity right now. He rode her hard slamming his hips against hers letting his cock tunnel in and out of her at a fast and furious pace.

He was close, so fucking close. He could feel the tightening of his balls, the tingle at the base of his spine as the orgasm raced toward him. He gritted his teeth struggling to hold it back to make sure she reached it with him. But there was no need. She was already there like a live wire in his arms. She cried out. His name. And it was like a jolt of electricity to him. He pumped twice more and gave a cry of his own. She sank her teeth into the muscle on his chest and he exploded. The feel of her sharp teeth on his flesh was as erotic as hell. He held her there even when her nipping turned to licks and soft sucks. He would have a red mark, her mark, but from her it turned him on.

She leaned her head back and he leaned his beside hers on the door, both of them gasping for breath. His legs were shaking now and he was sure she could feel it. She wiggled and he slowly released her legs from his arms. As she lowered with his cock still inside her it pressed him deeper making them both moan.

Reluctantly he pulled free fearing the condom might break or leak or something. He turned to head toward the bathroom and she slapped him on the ass with a laugh. He turned around with a jolt to see her grinning from ear to ear.

"Not bad, Dante," she said as she bent to undo her shoes and step free of them. She was as naked as when he'd seen her earlier but this time he knew how it felt to have his cock inside her.

He watched as she bent to her purse and stood up holding a roll of what looked like at least ten more condoms. "How many of these do you think we'll get through tonight?" she asked with a devilish light in her eyes.

He pulled the other condom off quickly as he felt his cock stirring back to full mast. He tied it off and threw it in the trash in the kitchen really enjoying the open loft his apartment was. He could stand anywhere and still see her in all her naked splendor.

"I'll do my best," he said as he headed toward her.

She walked back until she must have felt the bed behind her. "Well now I know one thing is true," she said with a wiggle of her brow.

"What's that?" he said coming up to stand in front of her, his hands automatically reaching out to cup her hips.

"Cops do pack big guns," she said.

He laughed and scooped her up making her giggle. He tossed her on the bed and joined her quickly. He had a lot of condoms to work through.

Chapter Seven

Dante was amazing. His body was toned perfection and she wanted to run her tongue over every inch of it. She couldn't believe what he had just done to her with his tongue or the way he had held all of her up against that door and pounded the hell out of her until they both came apart. She had felt him tremble with his release. Though he had all the control that first time she had felt powerful when he trembled.

He lay beside her on the bed on his side with one hand tracing a pattern of circles on her stomach. His finger would go up and around her nipples making them tighter and tighter without ever really touching them. Then he would skim back down over her abdomen to just where her curls started. He'd pause for a moment and then head back up and around.

The thing was, she had dreamed of Dante naked in bed with her for years and she had too many fantasies to count in her head. None of them contained her lying passive on the bed while he touched her. And she wasn't going to let reality continue this way either.

She took his hand in hers and guided it up past her breast to her mouth opening up and sucking the digit in. He groaned and his eyes seemed to flare. She knew that this action was supposed to make him think of her mouth on his cock and the appendage in reference was certainly up to it. She moved sitting up beside him so that he was forced to lie flat on his back. She kept that finger in her mouth alternating between sucking and licking it.

She moved again this time straddling his stomach so that his cock just brushed her buttocks while the wet heat of her pussy touched the taut muscles of his abs. The man was seriously rippling with muscle. All those years in the Marines had been good to him. She let his finger slip free and leaned her head back rotating her hips against his

flesh. Her hands came up to cup her breasts and give them a squeeze. He groaned and she smiled before looking down at him.

She let her hands slide down her body until they slipped from her to him. She took them up over his abs to his broad chest and shoulders and just caressed the flesh she encountered. She continued until her chest was against his and her hands were by his head on the bed. She felt him cup her hips and lift into her but she was careful to keep her pussy just out of reach of his cock. She caught his eyes and bent low to nip at his bottom lip and around his jaw to his earlobe.

"It's my turn now, Dante," she told him and he groaned again. She hoped she made him feel as good as he had made her feel.

She eased back down him, letting her body slide along his as she tasted every bit of him that she could. He had a slight love mark where she had bitten him when she came earlier and it made her feel positively possessive, like a goddess. She nipped over it again and felt him jump beneath her but he didn't tell her to stop. Slowly she moved from it to the flat disc of his nipple hidden in the crisp hair of his chest. She loved the curly dark hairs that covered his chest and ran in a line down to his stomach and farther to his rigid cock. Though she could tell he didn't mess with his body hair on his chest, which was refreshing in an age where more and more men seemed to shave their chests, she could tell he groomed his pubic area. She was really going to appreciate that when she got her mouth on him.

Reluctantly she moved from his nipple, now red and lifted from her suction, and glided down to his rippling abs. She let her tongue run over each new muscle and then dip inside his bellybutton before moving lower so that she was poised just above the bobbing head of his cock. She could smell the musk of him mixed with her and the scent of their sex. It was intoxicating.

She leaned her head down, bypassing the shaft and instead running her tongue in the groove where his thigh connected to his hip. Next she slid it just under his tight ball sac and around to the other side where she explored the groove there. Her body was

centered between his legs now which he had willingly spread as she moved farther down his body. Her hands were braced beside his hips and she looked up at him just as she finally ran her tongue up the shaft of his cock and over the head.

He groaned again and she felt like grinning. Apparently she was doing it right. She wouldn't tell him that this was the first time she had ever done this. She'd read about it, basically learned how to from the erotic novels she loved to read. And she'd even watched a porn movie or two here and there. She could smell the latex of the condom and maybe even taste it a bit on his shaft but it just served to remind her of what they had just shared.

Holding his eyes, which she had read was a huge turn-on for a man, she let her lips cover the head while her hand gripped him around the base of his shaft. His eyes widened and his nostrils flared and she thanked the Lord for her curious mind and love of erotic reads. She sucked gently with just the head in her mouth and let her tongue find the sensitive ridge and explore it. He groaned and his hips flexed a little lifting him off the bed. She let her hand start moving up and down his shaft, slow and easy.

Slowly she let her mouth follow her hand up and down his shaft sucking and licking along the way. She swirled her tongue around and around tightening and releasing her fingers as she worked him. She moved so that her other hand could rub and fondle his balls and the skin that surrounded them.

One big hand reached for her and she felt his fingers stroking her hair. His eyes closed and she almost sighed. She had been struggling to maintain the connection with him but she really wanted to just close her eyes and savor the moment herself. She really loved having him in her mouth.

She loved the feel and taste of him, the control she felt. She loved the softness of his skin and yet at the same time enjoyed how firm and hard he was under that skin. She loved the way the head flared just a bit wider than the shaft, loved the way it filled her mouth and had her lips stretching to take it all in. He tasted like sin, sex, and man and it was a taste she wanted to experience again and again.

She moaned around his flesh and she could feel his fingers tightening in her hair. His hips pumped and she moved with them giving the sensation that he was fucking her mouth as he had just fucked her pussy. She tightened her fingers, firmed her lips and sucked harder. She could feel her body trembling and was amazed to realize that she was probably just as close to orgasm as he was.

Next thing she knew he was lifting her head from him. Her eyes popped open and she took in the flushed skin on his face the darkened blue of his eyes and the lift and fall of his chest as he struggled for air. His hand grabbed at the condoms she'd dropped earlier and he made quick work of opening and sliding one on.

"I want to feel you around me when I come," he whispered and helped her back up so that she straddled his hips. "I want to watch your face while we both explode from the pleasure."

"Yes," she sighed and let his hands guide her hips. She reached down and wrapped her hand around his shaft holding him steady so that she could sink down on him.

She couldn't stop the shudder that raced through her or the cry that left her lips. He filled her in this position, even more so than before. God, it was as if she could feel him in her stomach when she finally sat flush against him. She couldn't move. Her eyes drifted shut again and she felt as if one tiny move would send her over the edge.

"Ride me, baby," Dante's voice urged her.

"Help me," she whispered and there was something in his eyes more than lust though she couldn't place just what it was.

"Lean forward," he urged. "Brace your hands on my shoulders."

She did and he immediately lifted his head and tugged at a nipple making her groan with pleasure. His hands firmed on her hips and he helped her to rise and fall on his shaft guiding but allowing her to find her own rhythm. And she did. She wasn't sure when his hands moved but soon they were on her breasts and his mouth was sucking on her nipples while she rode him.

Each downward stroke had her clit rubbing against him and her crying out with the pleasure. She'd never really fantasized about this position, probably because she wasn't that confident in herself sexually though she thought she hid it well with her brazen attitude, but that didn't matter now. She loved this, loved the control Dante gave her over them both. It was up to her if it was fast or slow, deep or shallow. And she did it all.

Soon his hips were lifting to meet her, his hands back at her hips holding her, pulling her into a new rhythm that was sure to send them over the edge. She leaned closer to him needing his kiss this time, wanting his tongue stroking hers as she came. He gave it to her. One hand cupped her ass while the other lifted to cup her head. And he rolled them so that he was on top now. She lifted her legs to grip his hips and he rode her hard pressing deeper and deeper until she broke their kiss to scream his name. He groaned her name and she felt him join her, felt the throb of his release.

He leaned to the side so that he lay beside her with their hips still attached. They were both feeling aftershocks of pleasure.

She said the first thing that came to her mind. "That's two down." She meant it with awe. She honestly hadn't expected to use more than one condom with him.

Dante laughed and rolled so that they were no longer joined. He stood to his feet and pulled the condom free and tied it off. "You might have to give me a little longer this time," he said as he turned and headed across the open loft toward what she thought was the bathroom door. "But I'll do my best not to disappoint you."

As if he ever could. But she would let him do his best the rest of the night. She closed her eyes with a sigh and never heard when he came out with the washcloth to clean her up. She was sound asleep and dreaming of the man whose arms she would be sleeping in tonight.

Dante took one look at Phoebe curled up asleep on his bed and felt his heart turn over. He wanted her like he had never wanted another woman. He'd had plenty of sex

and not once had he been the one to leave the room and come back with a cloth to clean his lover up with. And never had his affairs been at the place he temporarily called home.

But this wasn't temporary. This was home. And his first night here he had Phoebe in his bed with him and he planned on keeping her there all night long. Hell he wanted her there again tomorrow and the night after that. He might even be falling in love with her. Which was wild considering they'd really just met again. She would think he was crazy. Hell, he probably was. But he wanted to see where things could go between them. He wasn't plotting forever just yet but the thought was definitely there.

He cleaned her as gently as he could making sure not wake her up and then lifted her to place her under the covers. She murmured a little in her sleep and he thought he might have heard his name. But she snuggled as soon as he pulled the comforter over her. He put the cloth in the laundry, checked the door and plugged his cell in to charge before joining her in the bed. He spooned up behind her snuggling into her lush ass and wrapping an arm around her waist to rest just under her breasts. He gave her a squeeze and a quick kiss to the top of her head and closed his eyes to join her in slumber.

Phoebe woke the next morning to the slow glide of Dante's cock in and out of her pussy. She was on her side facing away from him with one leg lifted up and over his hip. He had one big hand on her belly holding her and his lips were at her shoulder licking and nipping. It was an incredible way to wake up. He pushed his hips a little deeper and she moaned. His husky laughter washed over her.

"I was wondering if you were going to sleep forever," he whispered.

"No wonder I was having such a good dream," she returned and he laughed again.

"We only made it through two last night so I figured I had my work cut out for me today."

It was her turn to laugh now. "We don't have to rush through them, Dante."

He glided in and out at the same slow, steady pace. "Who said we were rushing?" he breathed into her ear.

She turned her head and didn't care about morning breath. He apparently didn't either as he took her mouth with his and kissed her just as deeply as he had the night before. His hand dipped low on her belly and she felt the brush of his thumb over her clitoris. She moaned and arched into his hand. His other hand found her breast and began pinching and tugging at her nipple. She was on fire. It was like going from zero to sixty in less than a minute. Only faster and quicker. She was already on the brink of orgasm.

"Dante," she breathed his name on a long moan.

"Yeah," he said. "You feel so good, Phoebe. I want to wake up like this every day, go to bed like this every night."

If only he meant it. If only it wasn't sex talk. Because it was exactly what she wanted too. The pressure of his thumb increased and she cried out his name again.

"Let go," he told her. "I'm right here and I'm not going anywhere."

No he wasn't. And neither was she. That would make it all the harder if she fell in love with him again. Hell, who was she kidding? She'd never stopped loving him. And that wasn't fair to either one of them. They were adults now, not the kids they had been back when they first met. They were different people now. Both of them.

"Let go," he whispered again and she did. She let the thoughts and doubts clouding her mind go and just felt. Felt the rub of his cock over sensitive tissue, the rough texture of his fingers on her nipples, and the brush of his lips against her skin. And she let the orgasm wash over her. She moaned low and long and Dante increased his pace. She could feel his breath grow heavier and knew the moment he joined her. He pushed deep and held there giving small jerks as he came.

They lay there for a minute afterwards with his arms wrapped around her. He kissed her neck and whispered, "Good morning," to her before slowly pulling away. She felt him leave the bed and suddenly just felt sad. Man she needed that run more

than ever this morning. She needed to clear her head. She needed to stop thinking for a bit. She was going to ruin this thing with Dante before she even figured out what it was. Because she had a feeling one night wouldn't be enough for either of them this time.

She watched him step into the bathroom and smiled as she heard him start whistling. Then she jumped from the bed and started looking for her clothes.

Chapter Eight

Dante stepped out of the bathroom after a quick shower only to be greeted by silence. Phoebe was gone. He hadn't even thought about her leaving. Hell, he'd hoped she'd join him in the shower. He threw the towel off his hips with disgust and grabbed some clean clothes from his rucksack. He left his shoes off and headed across the hall to her apartment. She had to have headed there. He pounded on the door a little louder than he needed to and thought it was a good thing that there were only two units on this floor.

The door was flung open but it was the wrong person standing there. His brother stood there in nothing but a pair of sleeping pants and Dante felt his temper flare. His brother walked around half dressed in front of Phoebe?

"You always run around like that?" Dante said as he pushed into the apartment.

"Hell you're lucky I pulled my pants on before answering the door," Cris said and Dante turned around quickly and almost reached for his brother. But he saw that Cris was intentionally pushing his buttons and moved across the room instead.

"Where is she?" Dante asked.

"Already piss her off did you?" Cris said.

"None of your business," Dante said, because he honestly didn't know why she ran on him.

"I told you that I would take her side if you hurt her," Cris said and crossed his arms over his chest.

Before Dante could answer Phoebe stepped out of a door and glanced between the two of them. She was dressed in a snug pair of shorts and a t-shirt and was carrying a pair of tennis shoes in her hands.

"I don't need you to take my side," she said and moved to sit on the couch to put on her shoes. "Dante didn't do anything. I'm just going for my morning run."

There was something in her eyes, something that said she needed a little time alone to deal with whatever was going on in her head.

"I'll get breakfast while you run," Dante said. "Join me when you get back?" He made it a question but wanted to demand it.

"Sure." She nodded and rose to her feet.

"How do you take your eggs?" he asked.

"She doesn't eat eggs," Cris said and Dante wanted to punch his brother for knowing all the things about Phoebe that he didn't. Yet.

He had the satisfaction of watching Phoebe glare at his brother before turning back to him. "I don't usually eat eggs," she said. "But a nice pot of coffee would be great."

"You still eat pancakes?" he asked remembering her telling him when they were in high school how much she loved pancakes.

Her face lit up with a smile. "You remember that?"

"Yeah." He smiled.

"I love pancakes," she agreed with a smile.

"I'll have it ready when you get back."

"I usually run for about an hour," she said.

"No problem."

She turned to Cris and took in his brother from head to toe. "Another call?" she asked softly but Dante heard her. He watched his brother nod and saw the way Phoebe immediately softened. "I'm sorry I wasn't here," she said.

"I'm a big boy, Phoebe," Cris said but suddenly Dante could see what he must have missed earlier. His brother was hurting and Phoebe seemed to know what it was all about.

"Even big boys need their best friends every now and then," she said with a smile. "We'll watch a movie tonight and eat a gallon of ice cream."

Cris laughed and nodded. "It's a date," he said.

Dante gritted his teeth at the choice of words his brother used. If he wanted to pursue anything with Phoebe he would have to accept the fact that she and his brother were friends. Cris pulled Phoebe in and hugged her close, kissing her on top of the head and Dante felt like his molars were grinding together. Lord this wasn't going to be easy. He'd never been jealous in his life, least of all where when of his brothers was concerned. But seeing Phoebe in Cris' arms was doing something to him.

"Thanks, Phoebe," his brother said and Dante let his breath out. They were only friends. He had been able to tell last night that it had been a long time since Phoebe had been with a man. Hell he would have thought her a virgin if he didn't know for sure that she wasn't. The woman had a lot of untapped passion though and he intended to help her utilize it.

She moved away from his brother and headed to him. She stepped right up to him and leaned up to kiss him on the lips. He put his arm around her to cup her hip and deepened it just enough to remind them both of what they had shared. She pulled back and he watched her eyes glide slowly open, watched her smile. He loved that look in her eyes when he knew she was thinking of nothing but him and the love they had made. Love, not sex. Phoebe was more than sex.

"I'll see you when you get back," Dante said and Phoebe just nodded and turned. He watched her walk out the door and turned to his brother.

Cris was standing once more with his arms crossed over his chest glaring at him.

"I'm not going anywhere," Dante said. "I like Phoebe a lot and I want more than just last night."

"It's not me you'll have to convince," Cris said.

"Not just you anyway," Dante said.

Cris let out a sigh and shook his head. "I'm being a prick this morning and honestly I don't mean to be."

"It's okay," Dante said. "Heard Phoebe say something about a call. You need to talk?"

It hurt when Cris just shook his head and turned toward the kitchen. "Nah, I'm good."

"I meant it when I said that I'm not going anywhere," Dante said.

Cris nodded. "I get that," he said. "But some things are just too complicated to get into."

That hurt and Dante had no one to blame but himself. He was the one who left. He was the one who had sometimes let months pass before he had gotten in touch with his family. He had a lot to make up for. "I'm here if you need me," he told Cris.

Cris just nodded and turned to the fridge. "Thanks," was all his brother said.

"I'm heading to the grocery real quick," Dante said. "You need anything?"

"Nah, man, I'm good," Cris said and his brother seemed to dismiss him as if he wasn't even there.

With a slow shake of his head Dante left and headed back to his apartment for shoes and his cell phone. He had voice mail. He played it while he toed on his shoes and heard his mother's sunny voice telling him to come over for breakfast. He would have to make the time to stop in. He had a lot of making up to do.

He grabbed his keys and headed out the door. He needed to call Angel today also and see what his brother knew about Cris. And maybe they needed to plan a boys' night out sometime soon. It had been too long.

He pulled up in front of his parents' house and smiled. It really was good to be home. His mother greeted him at the door with a smile and a kiss. He wondered if this morning's breakfast invite was because she was afraid he wasn't staying this time either. He let her lead him into the kitchen and laughed when he saw the stack of

pancakes already on the table and batter still in the bowl. He wondered if she still cooked as if all her kids were home.

"She does," his dad said as he entered the kitchen. Dante looked up and his dad grinned. "She cooks as if an army still lives here." He watched his dad go to his mom and slip his arms around her from behind as she worked at the stove. His mom turned her head and accepted the kiss with a soft sigh. It amazed him that they were still so deeply in love. As far as he knew there had never been another for either of them.

"That's why I had to put her to work at the bar," his dad quipped as he turned and headed toward the coffee pot.

"As if those guys of yours don't devour my pizza and sandwiches," his mom scoffed as she flipped more pancakes.

His dad set a cup of coffee on the table for Dante and nodded for him to sit. "So what are you up to this morning?"

"Actually I was on my way to the store to get the stuff for pancakes," Dante said with a laugh. His dad joined him.

"You wanted pancakes," his mother said with a nod toward the table. "A mother knows these things."

He caught the twinkle in his dad's eyes and just shook his head. "Actually Phoebe wanted pancakes," he said just to see their reaction. His dad grinned bigger and tried to hide it behind his coffee mug.

His mom turned and pulled some type of container out of the cabinet. "You want batter or fresh cakes?" she asked.

So his parents were okay with him and Phoebe. "Some of your fresh cakes would be great, Mamma," he said. He wasn't stupid. No one cooked like his mother.

"Phoebe is a good girl," his mother said as she placed pancakes on plates and turned to give one to him and one to his dad. There was bacon and sausage on the plate as well. Turning once more she took the warm syrup out of the oven and placed it on

the table with a pot holder to use to pour it. Man he had missed the little things that it seemed only his mother did. Like warm syrup from the oven.

His mother finally turned and joined them at the table with a plate of her own. It was only then that he and his dad reached for their forks and started eating. No one ate until she joined them. That was the way it had always been at their house.

"It's good to see you and Phoebe together again," his mother said. "It nearly broke her mother's heart when she left the summer you did."

Dante cleared his throat and didn't say a word. It wouldn't do him any good anyway. If his mother had something to say it was best to just let her.

"She took over her mother's business now," his mom continued. "Started running this new lingerie line out of there and business has really picked up."

"It's some amazing lingerie," Dante said.

His mother reached over and smacked him upside his head just as his dad kicked him under the table. "What?" he said rubbing his head and pulling his legs closer to him. "I had to run her by there last night and she let me come in and look around."

"Hmmm..." was all his mother said. No way would he be telling his parents just how good Phoebe looked in that lingerie. Particularly his favorite color, red.

"I'm just saying that she is a part of the community now and we're damn lucky to have her," his mother continued.

"I'm not leaving," Dante said for what felt like the hundredth time.

"Of course you aren't," his dad said. "You'll be starting at the station on Monday. Might want to run in tomorrow just to see where your desk will be and all that. Familiarize yourself."

"You want to take me?" Dante asked knowing how much it would mean for his dad.

His dad smiled and teared up a little. It touched Dante.

"I'd like that," his dad said. "We'll head there after church tomorrow."

"As long as you are here in time for dinner," his mother said. Sunday dinner. It was a big deal at his house, always had been. His mother went straight to the kitchen after church and they had a big meal about one thirty. She would leave stuff out and you could keep eating on it as the day went on. There was always plenty. He'd missed those days when he'd been gone.

He turned to his mother and wondered how she had survived him being gone, sometimes in situations too dangerous to tell anyone about. And yet his family would have known just by where he called from. When he had called. There had often been two or more months between phone calls when he had been in the Marines and he hadn't been much better when he'd gotten out. Even then he hadn't come home. It must have broken his mother's heart. But she just let him do it without the guilt she could have made him feel, the guilt he was feeling now.

"I'm sorry, Mamma," he said softly.

She looked up and smiled. "For what? What have you done now?"

He just shook his head. He knew his voice would be thick with emotion but he had to say it. "For taking you for granted. For not calling more. For leaving and staying gone so long. For a lot."

Her smile softened and she reached out to touch his cheek. "A mother raises her children knowing that soon they will leave and take on the world on their own. We teach as best we can and pray. You had things to do, Dante. Places to go. I couldn't hold you back. No one could. I just had to trust in how we raised you and pray for God to watch over you. It is what a mother does."

"I love you, Mamma," Dante said.

"*Mio neonate*," she whispered and he knew her emotions were high if she slipped back into Italian, calling him her baby boy just as she had when he was little. "I have never doubted that," she promised. She patted his cheek and sat back in her chair. "Now finish eating and I'll get some for you to take back to Phoebe. She should be back from her run soon."

He shook his head. Phoebe was already a member of his family. His mom knew her schedule just like she did everyone else's in the family. He was glad to be home. And after talking to his mother he didn't feel as guilty about his time away. Now he was glad Phoebe had gone for a run instead of getting in the shower with him this morning. He had needed this time as much as she had. He glanced at his watch and smiled. But he was still counting the minutes until he saw her again.

Phoebe pounded the pavement but today she couldn't clear her mind like she normally did. No she was still thinking of Dante. She had wanted to make him burn for her, to make him want her so much that he couldn't walk away. Instead it had backfired. She was the one burning for him. She was the one who wouldn't be able to walk away, not until he made her. She would take every moment he offered her and relish them. Heaven help her but she was already starting to fall for the man she had first loved as a boy.

She'd had everything planned from the moment she found out that Dante was moving back to town. She would find out from Cris where his brother was hanging out and just happen to stop in. She would be dressed to the nines, hair and makeup perfect, clothing set to entice him to want to see more. Instead she had been stark naked when they'd first met again and then to make matters worse she had jumped on him. And then on his first night in town she had been the one in his bed. His rucksack had still been packed, she'd noticed it the night before.

Now she was planning on breakfast with him. She should let him settle in, let him adjust to being home again. But she couldn't. After one night with Dante she realized that her memory had nothing on what they'd done last night. The man was more amazing than the boy. And Dante had made losing her virginity a happy memory. So happy that it had sustained her all the years in between. In all her twenty eight years she had only dreamed of one man. Dante.

Her mom's health scare had brought a lot of things into focus for Phoebe. She had learned to quit running from life for one thing. And she had learned to take a chance, at least when it came to business. That gamble had paid off big. She was here to stay. And now Dante was here to stay as well, or at least she hoped he was. She could hold back for fear of scaring him by moving too fast, too soon. Or she could take another gamble and just let herself love him even if it was too soon to say the words. Too soon for either of them.

Bottom line was that sometimes life could be short. You never knew what the next day held. As her mother had been saying since she'd started taking dance lessons in her fifties, you could play it safe or you could learn to dance. Phoebe planned on learning to dance.

Her feet pounded the pavement and her pace picked up as she rounded the corner. The apartment building was in sight and she could see Dante leaning against his car watching her. He was waiting for her. She stopped beside him and walked around the car a few times catching her breath and letting her heart rate slow down.

Dante held up some containers and she could see pancakes in one and what looked like bacon and sausage in the other. "Hope you're hungry," he said as he moved to walk to the building with her. "Mamma cooked this morning and it is the best."

Oh she was hungry all right. But pancakes were the last thing on her mind.

"I'm starving," she assured him and smiled as they headed up together.

Chapter Nine

Phoebe rushed through her shower. Dante had told her to go ahead while he heated everything up and started the coffee. She appreciated it. She had just the outfit to wear. One of those she had originally picked out to wear when she saw him. The skirt was short and flared just a bit when she walked. Her top was cropped a bit, enough to give glimpses of her belly as she walked. And her sandals were high enough to put her closer to his six-foot-five height. She had blow-dried her hair and put on just a touch of makeup and some lip gloss. The whole process had taken less than half an hour. Sometimes it paid to be a low maintenance girl.

With a deep breath she headed across the hall to Dante's door. She would have knocked but the door was ajar so she just pushed it open and walked inside. The smell of coffee greeted her first. Dante was at the counter doing something and she walked right up to him and hugged him from behind. If you were going to jump in you might as well just jump!

He turned and took her in his arms taking her mouth in a soft sensual exploration. Her arms went up around his neck and his slid down her arms until they finally rested on her hips. He pulled her close and she could feel the hard length of his erection. He wanted her. She wanted him too.

She rubbed herself against him, loving the hard planes and ridges that brushed against her. His hands slipped up her skirt and she heard the groan as he encountered the tiny lace panties that she was wearing. Another set from her store, in red. She leaned farther into him letting her nipples brush his chest. It was hard to believe that she could still be this horny after the sex they had shared the night before. Plus her run should have cooled her off some. But there was no cooling off where Dante was concerned.

He pulled his lips from hers and trailed them down her throat. Soft scrapes of his teeth followed by the gentle flick of his tongue left a damp trail of fiery heat on her skin. She moaned and lifted one leg to ride up and rest along his hip. The hand under her skirt slid over to caress the skin of her inner thigh, so close to her pussy that he had to feel the heat of her. She felt as if she were burning.

"Hungry?" he asked as he moved to the curve of her shoulder.

"Starved," she whispered back her fingers buried in his short black hair.

"Food is warming in the oven," he said against her skin. "It should be ready by now."

She rubbed wantonly against him. "It's not food I'm hungry for right now, Dante."

She felt the warmth of his breath as he chuckled. "What is it you want, Phoebe?"

"You," she said and gasped as he scooped her up in his arms and headed across the room to his bed.

The covers were still rumpled from when they had woken up and the condoms were still conveniently placed right on the bedside table. He stood her beside the bed and just stood back and looked her up and down.

"What?" she asked running her hand down her torso to make sure everything was in place and okay.

"You are so beautiful, Phoebe," he breathed. "I don't deserve you."

"It's just sex," she whispered more to remind herself than him. But her words seemed to make him mad.

"Don't do that," he said.

"Do what?" she asked.

"Don't cheapen what we have here as just sex," he replied.

She was thrown. "What we have?" she asked. "We've had sex, some conversation. What more is there?"

"I don't know," he answered softly and seemed confused. "I don't know what we have but I do know that it is way more than just sex."

"We just met again," she stated. "How can it be more?"

"I don't know," he said again and she could see that he was frustrated. "There is just something about being with you that really makes this feel like home. I know that it is too soon for something more but I have to say that I want more than just sex."

"Like what?" she asked almost afraid that her questioning would have him changing his mind, have him okay with nothing more than the amazing sex they shared.

"I want a chance I guess," he said and nodded his head. "I want a chance to see if there can be more between us. I want to know that I will see you every day, talk to you, make love to you. I want to know that you will be with me and only me while we explore what is happening between us."

She grinned. She couldn't help it. "Are you asking me to go steady?"

He laughed. "I guess that is one way to put it."

"And what if you decide to leave again?" she asked giving voice to the fear of the abandoned girl who still lived inside her.

Dante stepped to her and cupped her face. "I'm not leaving again," he vowed. "I'm not that boy. I know where I belong now. There is no more running and searching. I'm home to stay this time."

She nodded knowing that the only choice she had was to have faith and believe in him. If she was going to take this chance then she had to believe.

"I won't move in with you," she said. "I plan to stay living with Cris. He is my best friend and I won't change that. Not even for you."

She watched him closely but he just nodded. "Cris is lucky to have you and I would never try to break your friendship." He grinned and waggled his eyebrows at her. "But don't think I don't plan to have you in my bed every night that I can."

She laughed. There were so many things she should tell him, like the fact that his sister Gianna was her business partner. Only Cris knew that. But then if they were going to try for a relationship then there would be lots of things for both of them to share and learn about one another. There was no hurry to deal with it all right now. There was only one thing she wanted to share with him, one thing that she thought he would appreciate knowing.

"I want to tell you something," she whispered and took a deep breath. "On that long ago day when you took my virginity you took something else from me as well." His eyes held hers and she could see questions in his eyes. "It was the most perfect moment of my life. You made me feel special in that moment and when you did that you claimed my heart as well. I've always fancied myself in love with you." She took the hand he held out to her. "I'm not saying that I love you right now. We've only met again and we are two very different people now. But I wanted you to know that there was a time that I was head over heels in love with you and it was that memory of the boy I loved that kept me from ever having sex with another man."

"You've never been with anyone else?" he whispered and he seemed awed by that.

"I've dated. I've shared a kiss here or there but the only person to ever hold a candle to the boy I loved was the man he turned into," she said. Technically a bit more than just a kiss or two but Dante didn't need to hear exactly what she had done. God knew she didn't want to hear all about his sexual exploits.

"I don't deserve you," he said and pulled her to him.

"Probably not," she agreed and they both laughed. "But I'm willing to let you convince me otherwise."

He reached for the hem of her shirt and slipped it up and over her head. "I'll give it everything I have," he vowed and then groaned as he saw the sheer red material barely covering her rock-hard nipples. "I love these little things you wear."

"I love that you appreciate them," she said as his lips moved down to cover one nipple and suck it through the material. She arched into him and moaned. This was exactly what she was hungry for.

Slowly he removed all her clothes taking the time to lick and taste every inch of flesh that he revealed. When he pressed her back onto the bed she was more than ready. But he stood back up and began slowly removing his clothes. She watched him taking in the Adonis body as it was revealed. He was all hard muscle and broad planes. She loved the sprinkling of dark body hair on his chest, loved the way it felt when he was flush against her nipples.

When he was finally naked he rejoined her on the bed. She rolled onto her side to face him and once more he took her under with the most perfect kiss of her life. It was everything she'd read about, dreamed about, or maybe it was just the man. He made her feel like the center of his world in that moment and she realized that he had always been that way. Maybe that is why she had never been with anyone else. No one had ever made her feel as important, as integral to his life, as Dante did.

She closed her eyes as his mouth trailed down to her chest. She loved that wicked mouth of his, loved the way he sucked and nipped at her nipples. He made her even hotter and hungrier and he knew it. He licked over one nipple, then blew his breath over it. She cried out feeling it grow tighter. He wrapped his lips around it and sucked greedily at it.

One strong hand slipped down between her thighs and his fingers traced the slick folds of her pussy. She shifted her legs opening them for him and heard his chuckle against her breast. But he didn't touch her like she wanted. He just kept stroking up and down her folds, teasing them both.

He moved to the other nipple and gave it the same lavish treatment as the first one. She undulated under his ministrations, craving more and more and more. She had wanted to make Dante burn yet she was the one always on fire.

She must have voiced her thoughts because Dante groaned and answered her.

"You do make me burn, Phoebe," he assured her. "Just looking at you makes me so hot I'm in fear of spontaneous combustion."

She laughed and he chose that moment to slip a finger inside her. The laugh choked off to be replaced with a long low moan of pure pleasure.

"So hot and wet and tight," he crooned. "And all for me."

"Yes," she agreed. "All yours."

His eyes moved to her face and there was such heat there, such desire and lust. But there was a look of possession as well. "Mine," he said.

She reached down and gripped his rigid shaft in her hand. "Mine," she stated.

"All yours," he agreed.

She let her finger trail over the head brushing the drop of pre-cum and rubbing it over the taut skin there. He was as slick with need as she was.

"Now," she breathed.

"Now," he agreed and she felt him move long enough to grab a condom. He tore it open and slid it quickly in place.

He moved above her spreading her legs wide with his hips and placing his cock at her opening. She was every man's fantasy. Long limbs, high firm breasts and the tightest pussy he'd ever had. But it was the look in her eyes that got to him most. Well that and the knowledge that no other man had ever had this with her. She might say that she didn't love him yet but he knew that it would be very easy for her to. Probably just as easy for him to fall in love with her as well.

There were so many things he needed to share with her. He knew his buddies would be stopping in soon and he wanted to prepare her for their sometimes cruder sides. He couldn't wait for the guys to meet her, to meet his family. His mother would love the ragtag group that had become his family in the Marines. But all of that was for another day. This moment was all about the two of them and nothing else mattered.

He bent and took her lips as he pressed his cock into her sweet channel. Such hot, wet heat could kill a man but that man would die with a smile. Her legs came up to clamp onto his hips and he loved the way it opened her up to him. He pressed deeper filling her with all of him and holding himself deep for a long moment. She wiggled under him and moaned his name and he thought he would never grow tired of this feeling of being joined with her.

He took her slow and easy, not giving in to the need they both had for a harder, faster pace. He wanted to draw the moment out, to make it last as close to forever as he could manage. He touched her body with his hands though he felt it was more like he was worshipping her. This woman was more than he could ever hope to deserve but he would do his best. He knew she feared that he might decide to leave again. He'd done that to her once before. But he made a vow to himself that he would never do that to her again.

"Dante," she breathed his name and leaned up to run her tongue over the muscle of his chest. He shuddered and finally gave in.

He picked up the rhythm fucking her with strong steady strokes that sent them both closer to the edge. He pushed one hand between them and ran his thumb over her clitoris. She bucked beneath him and cried his name again. He wondered if she knew what that did to him. If she realized how erotic it was to hear his name on her lips while she was climbing higher and higher toward her pleasure. He felt like the most powerful man in the world. Or perhaps just the luckiest bastard that ever lived.

Harder and faster he thrust inside her, pressing his thumb down on her clit. Her nails bit into the back of his shoulders. Her teeth found purchase on his pectoral muscle and sank in. He felt her tighten around him, her flesh wrapping so tight that it was almost painful to keep thrusting. But it was a pleasurable pain. He felt his balls swell, felt the tingle at the base of his spine and knew he wouldn't be long behind her.

Three more hard thrusts and he was spilling into the condom. Her legs had ridden up to just under his arms and he cupped her ass and held her close as he jerked with

orgasm. She released the muscle of his chest, smoothed her soft fingers over the grooves she'd left in his shoulders and shuddered beneath him. He helped her slide her legs down and moved to slip to the bed at her side. Yeah this was the woman he could see himself loving.

Dante was finally home and he was realizing it was always where he had belonged.

About the Author

Lacey Thorn spends her days in small-town Indiana, the proud mother of three. When she is not busy with one of them, she can be found typing away on her computer keyboard or burying her nose in a good book. Like every woman, she knows just how chaotic life can be and how appealing that great escape can look. So toss aside the stress and tension of the never-ending to-do list. For now, sit back, relax and enjoy the ride with Lacey as she helps you to unlace and unleash the woman inside.

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

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