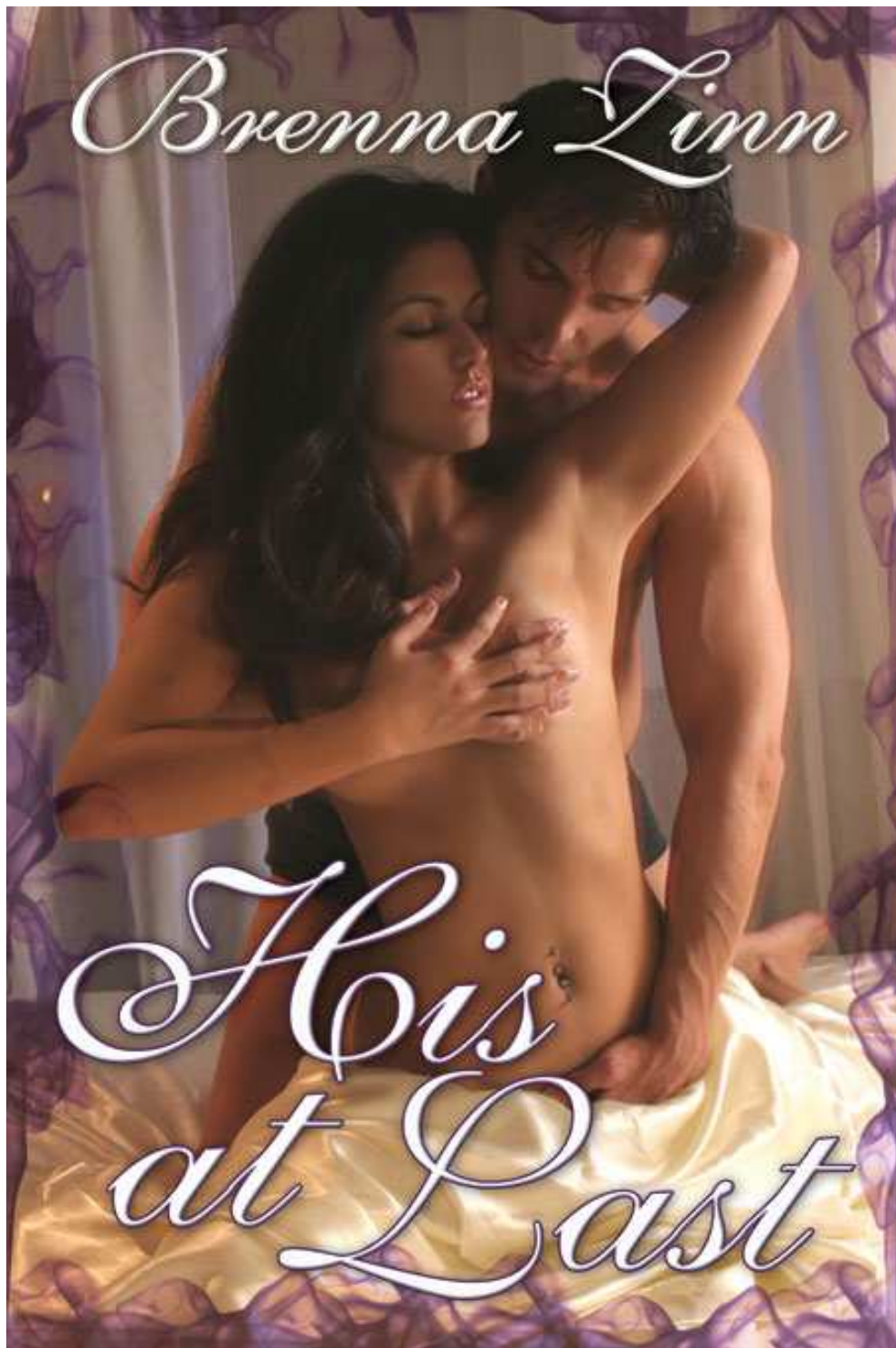


Brenna Linn

*His
at Last*



His At Last

by

Brenna Zinn

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

His At Last

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Dedication

To Desiree, Allie, and Cerise.
The three of you are the inspiration
for this story. I adore you all.

PRAISE FOR AUTHOR

Brenna Zinn

AND HER BOOKS

HIS AT LAST

“His At Last is a very entertaining read. Well Written. It’s a story that will heat up your night and warm your heart.”

~Desiree Holt, author of Do You Trust Me?

MI TORO

“This sexy, short story had me on the edge of my seat from the start.”

~Aster, Whipped Cream Reviews

“The sex is blistering hot, low-down and dirty...”

~Cocktail Reviews

His At Last

The front door to his building opened easily at Carter Lang's light tug. At seven p.m. on a Friday night, it definitely shouldn't have. With a security system rivaling Fort Knox, the entrance not only should have been locked tight, the alarm should have been set. Anyone who had a mind to thievery could easily break into the office and strip the joint clean. Today might have been his last official day before retirement, but he'd damn well make sure the person responsible for leaving the office wide open would regret doing so come Monday morning.

Already pissed he'd left his briefcase in his office—*former office*—finding the building unlocked and vulnerable only added fuel to his ire.

This place will go to hell without me.

Carter trudged up the stairs to the offices, unlocked his office door, and immediately located his briefcase. Leaning on the side of his oversized mahogany desk, the black leather case hadn't been touched since he came in that morning. Why had he even bothered to bring it in?

Sighing, he bent to pick up the case, then took one good last look around. Sadness and relief warred inside him. He'd miss this place and the maddening schedule he used to maintain. He'd miss the lively interaction with his partners and his clients. Most of all, he'd miss Leslie Brighton.

He closed his eyes, letting the memory of her lovely face and quiet composure wash over him. She was the sunshine in the morning, even when the skies were gray. She was the laughter that made each day worth living. She was also the temptation

that plagued his dreams and barred his heart from considering any other woman.

As much as he secretly loved her, he'd never be able to have her. Though he was only forty-eight, Leslie was still fifteen years his junior. Even though she was in her thirties, she was much too young and sweet for a man who'd been around the block more than a few times. His retirement and her leaving for Chicago was probably for the best.

If only the situation had been different. Had she not been his secretary and so much younger, he would have attempted to make her his years ago. But here he was, loveless and on the verge of starting a new life as a retired man, all alone. No matter how much wealth his business had provided him, money certainly couldn't fill the empty space in his heart or help warm his bed at night.

Briefcase in hand, Carter closed his office door for the last time and made his way down the dark corridor. A sound, soft and airy like a kitten's meow, caught his attention. He turned toward the unexpected noise and noticed light framing the partially closed door to Leslie's restroom.

Not for the first time, he smiled to himself as he thought about her private powder room. When he and his late partner designed this new building, the only request Leslie had for her work area was a private restroom. Since they had moved in nine years ago, he'd seen the inside of the room maybe three times. Though a soft spoken, gentile young woman, she guarded the sanctity of her powder room like a hungry Rottweiler protecting a bone.

"Hello. Anyone still here?"

Another quiet murmur, almost a moan, again floated in from Leslie's restroom, breaking the absolute silence in the empty hallway.

Carter tilted his head toward the sound and picked up a light buzzing noise he hadn't noticed

earlier.

What in the hell is that?

He put down his briefcase. With careful, silent steps he walked toward the powder room. His hands clenched into fists. If there was an intruder in the building, the son of a bitch wouldn't know what hit him.

As he got closer, the buzzing became louder, the moans more distinct. Just outside Leslie's restroom, Carter halted. Preparing for the worst, he slowly peered around the door.

Leslie lay on the powder room couch, eyes closed and auburn hair spread around her head like a copper halo. Other than a set of headphones, the only thing she wore was a yellow skirt hiked up over her hips. With the heel of one foot pushing deep into the seat of the couch and the other foot firmly on the floor, she had spread her long legs wide. Reaching between them, she rubbed a golden vibrator over and around her glistening pussy.

The unexpected, erotic sight stole his breath. Unable to speak, his mind racing, Carter stumbled back until his ass hit the hallway wall.

I should leave. I shouldn't see this.

Like a caveman mesmerized by fire, he tried to look at something else, but simply couldn't. Leslie was the bright flame, the object of his desire, and his vision fixated on her, unable to pull away. Even from his current position, he could still see her as she manipulated the whirring toy atop her manicured mound. Her firm breasts, two creamy swells with dusky peaks, rose high on her chest as she arched her back.

Heat scorched the blood pumping through his veins. His cock, awakened by the scene, hardened to painful stone. His balls tightened with an almighty ache.

He'd wanted to take her in his arms and show

her the ferocity of the love he'd hidden from her for so long, but coming to her now simply wasn't an option. He couldn't embarrass her. He couldn't embarrass himself. All he could do was watch as her lively body accepted and roused to the vibrator she wielded in her hand.

For Leslie's sake, I have to leave.

He swallowed hard, his mouth and throat as dry as sand, and screwed up his willpower to go. He was about to turn and retreat down the hallway, when she placed a hand over one pert breast and kneaded the fleshy globe until her nipple contracted to a rosy pebble. She placed the bud between the pads of her finger and thumb and squeezed. In that moment, he thought he'd go mad from desire.

A man possessed, he unzipped his jeans, pulled his stiff dick from his briefs, and leaned his head back against the wall. With an unsteady hand, he stroked the length of his cock, his gaze focused on Leslie's every movement. The constant hum of her vibrator an erotic, ambient noise.

Swaying from side to side, then rocking her hips back and forth, Leslie continued to rub the golden toy on her clit. When she slipped the shiny vibrator into her pussy, his body involuntarily spasmed. If only he could glide his hard cock into her, feel the heat of her creamy juices and the pull and push against her tight walls. The thought of fucking Leslie, right then and there, caused his penis to jerk.

The speed of Leslie's movements increased. She leaned her head back into the overstuffed sofa, her sweet lips parting as though preparing for a lover's kiss. The muscles of her firm legs flexed and strained as she thrust the drenched nub of her clit against the vibrating toy.

Carter's hand, slick with pre-cum, slid faster and faster over his throbbing cock. Knowing he was about to come, he pulled a handkerchief from his

pocket, then pressed his back against the wall for support.

Toes pointed and back arched high off the couch, Leslie cried out. The sound nearly ripped Carter's soul from his body.

Biting his bottom lip to keep himself from moaning aloud, his entire body convulsed as hot cum shot from his cock. For several moments his hips bucked as he continued to stroke his dick, releasing every bit of pent-up lust for his former secretary.

Immediately, he glanced at Leslie. Eyes still closed, she lay quiet and sated on the sofa.

His chest tightened. He couldn't be discovered watching as she masturbated in her private restroom. Despite his deep feelings for her, he'd never be able to explain that he simply lost his mind at finding her naked and fondling herself. He had to leave. Now.

He also couldn't let things end like this. He couldn't simply let her leave for Chicago without somehow letting her know he cared for her and desired her like no other.

This wasn't the time or the place.

But he'd see her next week at Jeff O'Brien's wedding.

Carter slipped down the hallway and quietly made his way to the front door. He would put all his cards on the table and see if he could change both their futures, forever.

His last opportunity was slipping away.

Carter didn't need to look at his watch to know he was running out of time. If he didn't get some kind of sign soon, any kind of sign, Jeff and Claire's reception would be over and that would be that. After tonight, Leslie Brighton would begin her new job in Chicago and he'd permanently move to his restored Victorian house on Galveston Island to live

out the rest of his retired life.

The fact he might never know the taste of Leslie's lips or feel the touch of her supple body against his was inconsequential. Whatever outcome happened tonight was for the best. He had to believe that was true. Fate had always guided him to the right path throughout his forty-eight years and never let him down before. Never. All he could do was wait, watch, and hope.

"You doing okay, Carter?"

He glanced up to see Philip O'Brien standing next to him.

Philip shook Carter's shoulder. "You look too serious for a wedding guest."

Carter forced a smile. "Not at all. It's a great wedding. And your brother sure snagged himself a winner."

"Don't we all know it." Philip shook his ass as he did a fast two-step, then waggled his thumb toward the dance floor. "Come on. The music's great. Find a partner and enjoy the party."

I know the partner I want, and she's out of reach. That's the problem.

"I'll consider it. Go on. I know you have best man duties to take care of instead of worrying about me."

"Okay, but I'll be keeping an eye on you."

As Philip walked away, Carter looked around the banquet hall. At the crowded table next to his, a woman in a black cocktail dress tapped her water goblet with a silver spoon. Though music played over many speakers and a multitude of private conversations were taking place around the room, the *ting, ting, ting* of resonating glass somehow cut through the deafening din. Properly cued, the throng of well-dressed wedding goers called for the groom to kiss his bride.

"Give her a good one, Jeff," someone called,

slightly slurring his words.

“If I had someone that hot I’d be kissing him all the time,” a woman giggled.

Jeff and Claire looked at each other, grinned, and exchanged a kiss with gusto. When Jeff finally broke away and looked to the crowd for their approval, Carter briefly made eye contact with the newlywed and smiled. He was leaving his company in good hands with Philip and Jeff O’Brien. He had no doubt the sons of his deceased partner would run the construction company with intelligence and even tempers, just as he and Sean O’Brien had.

Too bad I don’t have an heir to pass along the company business like Sean did.

Carter quickly tossed the sentimental notion away. He simply hadn’t found the right woman to love and start a family with yet. That was all. Once he did, he’d have plenty of children and would let them share the portion of the company he still possessed. In the meantime, the brothers were fine substitutes for his own children. Though Philip was a modern day playboy and Jeff was a bit of a straight arrow, both were good men. Carter couldn’t help be proud of them. Claire, a woman with a spirit as free as an eagle’s, would help Jeff find his fun side. And Philip? Well, hopefully the charming Don Juan would eventually find a woman who would make him want to settle down.

The smile on Carter’s face waned as his gaze scanned the wedding party perched at the front of the banquet room. Leslie still wasn’t there. Carter sat straighter, using his height to better peer over the many people sitting at the round tables scattered about. When he spotted her slipping into the room from one of the back double doors, he realized he’d been holding his breath.

A heart stopping vision in a sapphire blue gown with her hair swept up in a loose bun at the nape of

her elegant neck, Leslie Brighton could easily be the most beautiful woman at the wedding. Holding herself with the effortless poise and grace of someone born into royalty, she made her way to her seat with the rest of the wedding party and chatted with Beckie Daniels, another attendant to the bride.

From his vantage point, Carter could see he wasn't the only male in the room taken by Leslie. Several men held forks laden with food suspended in front of their faces as they stared at her with open-mouthed admiration. Anger churned in Carter's gut.

I'd like to beat the shit out of each of those overly attentive bastards.

Instead, he reached for a water goblet, tipped the glass back, and drained it. Two fingers of fine Scotch served neat would suit his mood better, but he wouldn't drink just yet. He had to stay alert. Not paying close enough attention could mean missing his sign. Making the task more difficult, he wasn't exactly sure what he was looking for. He would simply know when he saw it.

Seeing Leslie sit with the wedding party sent pang of melancholy through Carter's heart and a sense of frustration gripped him.

If I don't get some kind of sign pretty soon, how will she ever know how much I want her? Care for her?

Hell, he had since the moment Leslie had taken the job as secretary to himself and Sean O'Brien ten years ago. How could he not want the auburn-haired enchantress? He would have hired her on the spot whether or not she could type a lick if for no other reason than to watch her every delicate move. Just having her around the office made him feel alive. Her incredible body, long and lean like a colt, and her infectious smile made him want to do little more than hold her until she melted in his arms.

But he had to protect his company. A boss

making a play for the beautiful secretary in today's business climate was an invitation to a sex harassment suit and a visit with an attorney.

Carter snorted.

Who am I kidding? The real reason I've stayed away from Leslie is her age.

At thirty-three, he was fifteen years her senior. Way too old for the likes of her. Leslie needed a man her own age to sweep her off her feet, not some grey-haired man who also happened to be her boss.

At least he had thought so until the day he retired.

He shook his head and thought for the hundredth time how he could have handled that situation differently. Spying on Leslie had been the last thing on his mind when he'd returned to the office to retrieve the briefcase he habitually forgot under his desk. Considering the late hour and the fact neither of them ever planned to walk through the construction company's front doors again, she really shouldn't have been there.

Yet, she was, and watching her masturbate in her private bathroom had been the hottest sight he'd ever seen.

Despite his inability to pull himself away from her shocking but erotic display, he'd at least had the good sense not to take advantage of the situation by throwing himself at her. Not that he didn't want to. Every muscle in his body had screamed to take her. But he had held back, too afraid she would reject him because of strands of white in his hair and his aging body. Though he was in decent shape for a forty-eight year old man, he certainly couldn't compete with some guy Leslie's age.

Now, after having replayed that fateful scene over and over in his head, he was prepared to throw all caution out the window tonight if he caught the right sign. The moment he did, he would sweep

Leslie off her feet and take her up to his hotel suite for a night neither one of them would ever forget. Hours of music cued, candles on every available surface, and a nice variety of sex toys were ready and waiting in his suite. He had no idea how to use half of what he had bought, but surely Leslie would know. If the array of gadgets he'd seen lying around her private bathroom at the office was any indication, he couldn't ask for a better teacher.

The notion of using even one of those toys with Leslie caused the already hot fire in his gut to spread down his groin. His dick twitched then swelled without mercy.

Rolling his eyes at his own ridiculous reaction, he picked up his napkin, casually wiped his mouth, then placed the linen square over the growing tent in his lap.

If he didn't get his sign?

Carter rubbed a hand over his face, not wanting to think about the possibility. There simply would be no rest until he'd kissed every inch of her soft skin and explored the curves and swells of her body.

In his mind, he could still see Leslie reclining on the overstuffed sofa in her private restroom, her skirt raised above her bare hips, revealing a manicured pussy glistening with wetness. Even the whirring sound of the vibrator she used to rub her clit lingered clearly in his memory. Usually quiet and reserved, he never suspected Leslie capable of owning such things, let alone using them in the office. The image of her arching her back and pinching her nipples as she climaxed was forever imprinted in his brain.

Leaning forward, Carter pressed a hand against the uncomfortable bulge in his pants, willing himself to regain composure before embarrassing himself.

His jaw clenched and ground his teeth. He was a successful businessman, for Pete's sake. Women

were constantly throwing themselves at him, some even younger than Leslie. Why couldn't he get over the hurdle he'd placed in his mind about his secretary?

To hell with my age! I'm a man, damn it.

The urge to pound his fist on the table to make his point was strong, but he held back. He could handle a little rejection and the possibility of a slap in the face. Years of wondering what could have been with Leslie was far worse than risk of failure. Tonight he would make his move, regardless of any damned sign or the chance of being humiliated.

The abruptness of his decision mirrored the sudden end to the loud music. A hush fell over the room as wedding guests quieted their talking and turned their attention to the head table. Stacy Thomas, the maid of honor, stepped out on to the parquet dance floor holding a microphone in one hand and leading Claire with the other. The rest of the bride's attendants, including Leslie, trailed behind.

"All right, ladies. You know what time it is." Stacy's high-pitched singsong voice teased the guests. "I need every single woman to come to the dance floor. The bride is going to throw the bouquet!"

Instantly, a roar of excited chatter filled the air. In a matter of seconds, a throng of giddy women of all ages and shapes popped up from their chairs and navigated their way to the bride. By the time the last woman padded up in stocking feet to the action, not an inch of the large, wooden square that served as the dance floor could be seen.

Carter shifted in his seat and craned his neck, searching for Leslie among the bedlam. He found her skirting around the crowd, her back to the bride, looking as though she wanted nothing to do with the proceedings. Generally a happy person, distress now haunted her every feature.

Silent alarm at Leslie's unusual behavior had Carter out of his chair and onto his feet before he realized what he was doing. Long, determined strides had him halfway to the dance floor when Claire tossed her bouquet high in the air. A stampede of shrieking women in colorful evening gowns rushed toward the flying flowers.

Leslie turned to see the mayhem. The sad look on her face turned to wide-eyed horror as the bouquet arced then began its decent in her direction. Frozen in place and hands held out defensively before her, the arrangement of miniature white roses landed into the cradle her arms. They might have been calmly placed there by the bride rather than aimlessly tossed.

Momentum carried the rush of flower-crazed women directly at Leslie. She tried to escape the oncoming push of bodies, but her feet caught in her long dress. Her balance lost, she reached one hand toward a chair while holding the bouquet in the other and fell backward.

Carter caught her in his arms and pulled her in between two tables. The women chasing after the flowers cried out in dismay while the remaining guests clapped.

Mouth parted in surprise, Leslie gazed up at him with big brown eyes. Carter's gut twisted at the sight. How many times had he envisioned holding her like this?

He bent his head over hers, prepared to capture her full lips with his, when he remembered where he was. He pulled back but held her firmly in his embrace. "Are you hurt?"

Her expression morphed from fear to relief. "No. I'm fine." She shook her head and graced him with one of her bewitching smiles. "Those women are crazy. I can't believe I didn't get trampled."

"Looks like you're the lucky lady tonight."

Carter nodded toward the bouquet still held tightly in Leslie's hand. "Guess this means you're the next one down the aisle."

As though just realizing what she was holding, Leslie brought the bouquet closer to her face, then sighed. "If you believe in miracles."

Before he had a chance to ask what she meant or even suggest she come see him that evening, she was pulled away by the maid of honor. The absence of Leslie's warm body left his arms empty and cold.

"Oh, my God, Leslie. I can't believe you caught the bouquet. Come with me so we can show everyone." Stacy led Leslie back up to the front of the room. After grabbing the microphone from the table, Stacy lifted Leslie's hand in the air, striking a triumphant pose. "Okay, all you single guys out there, take a good look. Leslie's the next eligible woman who should be hearing wedding bells soon."

Even in the dim lighting, Carter could see Leslie's lovely olive complexion turn a bright shade of pink. Alarm registered on her face as she tugged against Stacy's restraint.

Tempted as he was to pull Leslie away from the spotlight she clearly didn't enjoy, Carter held his ground. Any move on his part right now would cause a scene, which he wanted to avoid. The focus of attention should be on Jeff and Claire, not the old guy making a play for his secretary.

Unwilling to wrestle his way back to his table through the throng of disappointed women returning to their seats, Carter stood and watched as one of the groomsmen carried a chair on to the parquet floor. Claire, beaming as though an inner light poured from her body, followed closely behind.

Jeff, already standing in the center of the dance floor, spoke into the microphone. "Single guys, it's your turn. Time to fight for the garter. Come and get it while it's hot."

Claire cocked her head at her husband, eyebrows high on her forehead. "Jeff!" she chided as she half-heartedly punched her new husband's arm.

The groom fell several steps back as though Claire had hit him hard, then shrugged his shoulders in an exaggerated show of confusion. "What did I do?" Jeff asked into the microphone.

A roar of laughter filled the large banquet hall. Someone tapped a water glass. The *ting, ting, ting* sound was quickly followed by dozens of others from around the crowded room.

"A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do." Jeff's voice echoed through each speaker. He tossed the microphone to one of his groomsmen, pulled Claire into a low dip, and kissed her.

"Hey, Carter." Philip O'Brien walked with dogged purpose in Carter's direction. His untied bowtie bounced at the neck of his unbuttoned dress shirt with every step. "Don't even think about slipping away, buddy. I promised Jeff and Claire your ass would be on the dance floor when Jeff tosses the garter."

Before Philip could get any closer, Carter put his hands up to ward him off. "Not no, but hell no. I stopped doing that kind of nonsense years ago."

The best man saddled up next to him and whispered in his ear. "I know this isn't something you want to do. But I promise you, those two will kill me if I don't get you up there." He leaned back and pointed toward the couple. "Look at them, Carter. Do you really want to let them down?"

Carter took in the sight of the two newlyweds. Jeff and Claire were good friends, practically family, and they looked so happy together. His shoulders fell in defeat. How could he say no? "All right. But don't expect me to run after the damned thing."

"Whatever works, buddy." Philip thumped Carter on the back. "As long as you're there, I'm off

the hook. I believe my work here as the best man is almost done.”

“The car? Have you tied the cans and old shoes to their car?”

“Actually, they’re driving off in a limo.” Philip headed toward the dance floor. “But don’t worry, the other guys and I are going finish everything up as soon as the garter is caught and the lucky bastard who catches it puts it on Leslie’s leg.”

Shock rooted Carter’s feet to the carpet. “What the hell are you talking about?” He pulled Philip’s arm to stop the best man’s forward march, but with a little more force than he’d intended. Caught off guard, Philip stumbled backward.

“You know...” Philip righted himself and brushed off his tuxedo jacket. “It’s that old wedding tradition where the guy who catches the garter puts it on the girl who caught the bouquet. Leslie caught the flowers, so whoever ends up with the garter gets the honor of pulling up her dress and sliding the garter up her right leg.” He waggled his eyebrows and nudged Carter on the shoulder. “And all of this goes on in front of the entire party, who seem to think this kind of thing is okay. Go figure.”

Carter cut his gaze to the dance floor. At least twenty men, most in their late twenties to mid-thirties, milled about, waiting for their chance to grab the garter. The thought of any of those—those boys touching Leslie or rubbing their hand up her thigh caused Carter’s blood pressure to skyrocket.

He pushed Philip out of his path. “Step aside. I’ve got work to do.”

“Show them how it’s done, Carter,” Philip joked. “You da man.”

Fueled by the need to claim Leslie as his own, at least in front of the over-dressed jackasses, Carter marched through the assembled men. He didn’t stop until he stood beside the groom who was down on

one knee next to a seated Claire. Jeff held Claire's shoeless foot in one hand. The other hand was poised to make its way up her leg.

Carter bent forward and spoke directly into Jeff's ear. "I'll write you a check that will cover your entire honeymoon if you make sure that thing," Carter pointed at the sapphire blue garter clinging to Claire's tanned leg, "ends up in my hand after you toss it." He leaned back and looked Jeff directly in the eye. "Do we have a deal?"

Jeff frowned. "I don't know, Carter. It's hardly fair to these other guys." He gestured to the men standing around the dance floor. "Plus my honeymoon is going to cost about twenty grand. Flying first class to Bora Bora and staying two weeks in a bungalow ain't exactly cheap."

"I'll give you thirty thousand." He tamped down his desperation. "You and Claire can get massages every day or spend an extra week there. Just make damned sure that garter finds its way to me."

Jeff stared at up him, curious. "You really serious about this? That's a lot of money for a garter."

"I've never been more serious about anything in my life." Carter patted the breast pocket of his suit jacket. "Just give me a pen to sign the check."

A deep furrow formed between Jeff's brows, and he narrowed his eyes. "Carter, I don't want your money. If you want the garter, it's yours."

Glancing up at his former secretary, who stood next to the other bridesmaids on the far side of the parquet floor, Carter took in Leslie's lovely face. Her calm, elegant composure that usually put him at such ease suddenly caused his chest to tighten and robbed him of the ability to breathe.

I've never wanted a woman as much as I want this one. Ever. Hell, I'm hard as a rock just looking at her.

Without having to give a second thought to his actions, Carter nodded at Jeff. "I want it."

Jeff's gaze shifted from Carter to Leslie then back again. A mischievous grin spread across the young man's face. "Then you've got it."

Still bent on one knee next to his new wife, Jeff took Claire's leg and brushed his hand over her skin until he reached the garter. "All right men, here we go."

Placing a finger under the elasticized blue material, Jeff started to pull it down to her knee but then stopped. Without warning, he bent his head, grabbed the garter with his teeth, and proceeded to pull the small, elastic band with his mouth all the way to her ankle. Then he ran a finger up her bare foot, making her squeal, before removing the garter entirely.

After planting a kiss on her foot, Jeff stood and raised his hand in the air, twirling the garter around his finger. A loud cheer was punctuated by several raunchy remarks. Strutting around the dance floor like professional boxer, Jeff displayed his prize for everyone to see. After completing a full circuit, he stopped and grabbed the microphone.

"All right, guys. Take a good look at the beautiful Leslie over here. She's the one you'll be putting this thing on if you catch it."

Standing as still as a Grecian statue, Leslie looked up at Carter. He could have sworn he saw a mixture of nervousness and longing swirl within the depths of her hazel eyes. Seeing her look so anxious tore at his heart. The tightening in his chest intensified, becoming a sharp burn.

What if I just picked her up and carried her out of here? Took her upstairs? Ripped off her clothes and plunged my cock deep inside her tight pussy?

My god, what was happening to him? Since seeing her masturbate, he'd lost control of his

thoughts. No. He'd lost his fucking mind. He needed to get hold of himself. With a deliberate effort Carter turned his attention back to the groom.

As though preparing to send a giant rubber band flying across the dance floor, Jeff situated one finger inside the garter, then pulled the other side until the elastic was taut, teasing the crowd.

I'll pummel any man who so much as lays a finger on her. She's mine, damn it. Mine. Why have I been such a stupid ass as to waste all these years?

Jeff completed a one-hundred-eighty degree turn on the heel of his patent leather shoe and released the stretchy garter into the air. The flimsy piece of sapphire blue material hit Carter's shoulder and he automatically reached for it, catching it as it tumbled toward the floor. He looked up and narrowed his eyes, almost daring the other men to attempt to clam it.

No one took a step in his direction.

Instead, he heard a loud chorus of "Carter! Carter! Carter!" The chanting grew louder as more people added their voices. The air in the room and the wood dance floor almost vibrated with the intensity of sound.

Jeff and Philip grabbed Carter's elbows, manhandling him until he stood in front of Leslie, now sitting in Claire's recently vacated chair. A blush bloomed on her cheeks and she bit her lip. She was just adorable. That was it. Along with everything else, she was adorable.

"On your knees, man," Philip directed. "This is the best part, and you damned sure don't want to miss a thing."

An electric shudder of anticipation rippled down Carter's spine, threatening to shatter his composure. Finally, he'd found his sign. No doubt about it. He would move forward with his plan without reservation or doubt. Being with Leslie tonight was

meant to be.

And Philip was more right than he could ever know. Carter didn't want to miss a thing. Not a moment of it. He'd spent more afternoons than he cared to remember consumed with her smile, her soft spoken demeanor, and her incredible ass. Fantasy was a fingertip away from merging with reality. The notion of touching Leslie's velvety skin and tracing the outline of her shapely leg sent his pulse surging. The swell of his cock inside his slacks confirmed his heart rate wasn't the only thing rising.

He knelt on one knee, propping the other knee as a resting place for Leslie's delicate foot. As he prepared to lift her leg, the room suddenly became too stuffy and warm. Uncomfortable heat radiated from his groin and spread through his body, a fine sheen of sweat broke out on his skin. He was afraid if he didn't take off his jacket, he'd suffocate. He shrugged out of it quickly and tossed it onto the floor. Still feeling way too hot, he loosened his tie. After sliding it over his head and pitching it on top of his jacket, he unbuttoned the first two buttons of his starched, white shirt.

Leslie's mouth curved in a coquettish smile. When she lowered her gaze and bit her lip, Carter came undone. She looked just as she had the last time he'd seen her, pleasuring herself. Except the last time she hadn't known he was watching.

If someone had told her Carter Lang would one day run his hand up her dress with over two hundred people watching, Leslie never would have believed the prediction. Yet, here she was, sitting on a chair in the middle of a dance floor with her bridesmaid's gown hiked up to her thighs and Carter tucked between her legs for everyone to see.

Could anything be more erotic?

Not wanting her former boss to see her

excitement, she looked away and bit her lip. A wave of hot juices rushed over her pussy and dampened her flimsy panties. She wanted to reach down and rub her clit, but didn't dare. Tempting as the notion might be to behave inappropriately with Carter watching, she couldn't live out this particular fantasy.

Not here, not now. Not with all these people watching.

Later, she told herself. If she could just convince Carter that spending the evening in bed with her was a good idea, she most certainly would make her fantasy reality. She was leaving for Chicago in two days. What did either of them have to lose?

One time. Just one time. Surely he can give me that.

For now, she sucked in a deep breath to quiet her racing pulse. Traces of Carter's spicy cologne teased her senses, enveloping her like a warm embrace. Unfortunately, the familiar scent also increased the ache of unfulfilled desire for the man she'd called boss for the last ten years.

Growing bolder than she thought she was capable of, at least in such a public gathering, Leslie opened her legs wider, as though making enough room for Carter to pull the lacy little garter over her calves and up her thigh. The moment she did, he uttered a groan, barely audible over the raucous crowd's chanting of his name.

His reaction was a pleasant and unexpected surprised. She raised her gaze to his, noting the golden amber of his irises darken with sexual hunger.

Wow!

She'd seen that smoldering look many times in the years she worked for him, but for all her trying to get him to act on his basic carnal impulses, he hadn't ever so much as touched her.

Why? What's been holding him back?

Tonight she wouldn't stop taunting him until he finally gave in. She simply couldn't leave Houston for good without knowing the feel of his cock deep inside her or the weight of his body on hers after he'd thoroughly satisfied both of them. She'd pull out every sexual gun in her arsenal if she had to in order to make him give in.

A small bead of perspiration trickled over the sexy crinkles around the corner of Carter's eye and slid down his cheek. His chest heaved as though breathing was a tremendous effort. Though he'd practically taken off every piece of clothing he could and still remain decent, he still looked flushed and overheated. As if his internal furnace had gone completely haywire, warmth radiated from his body, making the inside of her thighs even hotter.

Carter raised her foot from his knee. With an unsteady hand, he placed the garter over her toes, then pushed the elastic garment down her foot and midway up her calf. There he stopped.

"Am I the only one dying here?" He exhaled a raspy breath and wiped his face with the cuff of his dress shirt. "Is the air conditioning in this place on?"

She had to be getting to him. Usually self-possessed and in control, Leslie had never seem Carter look so flustered.

Good. Maybe we're getting somewhere here.

Apparently aware of his own nervousness, Carter relaxed his shoulders and allowed a boyish grin to spread across his face. "Don't worry," he placed two fingers beneath the garter, "I *will* finish this before Claire and Jeff start having kids." Slowly, he pulled the shiny blue accessory until it slid several inches over her knee. Finished with his task, Carter stood and exhaled.

"Knew you could do it." Philip handed Carter his discarded suit jacket and tie, then slapped him on

the back. "Well done, old man."

The smile on Carter's face drew down to a scowl as he folded the jacket over his arm and stuffed his tie in his trouser pocket. He said something to the best man, but the loud chatter of the partygoers drowned out the sound of his voice.

Leslie may not have heard what Carter said, but she could read his lips easily enough. His mouth had perfectly formed the words, *kiss my ass*.

A chuckle, light and effervescent like bubbles floating up a flute of champagne, rippled through her, stirring her already mixed feelings about moving to Chicago. She was crazy about Carter, always had been, but he had too busy running his business and dating sophisticated women to take any notice of her. After ten years of hoping he'd show the least bit of interest, she could no longer avoid the writing clearly written on the wall. She had to accept the fact that she simply wasn't refined enough for him. Of course that's what had held him back. She was from the wrong side of the tracks for such a distinguished and wealthy man. She should have known that from the beginning.

Time I gave up and headed out to start a new life somewhere else.

Once she was gone, she'd never come back to Houston. Too many memories and heartache here. Most likely she'd never see Carter again, either. The chances of him popping up in Windy City were about as remote as finding a polar bear in the Sahara desert. She knew all too well if he had his druthers, he'd never take a step outside of Texas, except for the occasional trip to Italy. She'd made enough of his travel accommodations to know the romantic city of Rome was the place he took the woman he seriously dated.

Before she left Houston though, she would seduce and take her pleasure with him. She might

not leave with much more from Carter than a final paycheck and ten years worth of Christmas gifts, but at least she'd have memories of this evening. That would have to be enough.

Carter offered Leslie his hand. "Let me help you up before they come up with some other kind of tradition involving innocent guests and members of the wedding party."

She placed her palm in his, once again noting his long, aristocratic fingers and the warmth of his touch. He had the hands of a true Southern gentleman. Soft and gentle, yet strong. Leslie lifted herself from the chair and the tucked up material of her blue gown tumbled down her legs with a light caress. The garter she now wore gripped the flesh of her thigh as the muscles there flexed with her movements.

She couldn't suppress a sad smile. She would have the garter as a small memento of him, as well.

"Here you go." Claire handed back the bouquet she'd been holding for Leslie while Carter did his thing with the garter. A grin the size of Texas lighted up her face. "And don't plan on leaving the party just yet. There's still the dance you two have to do. You did catch the flowers and the garter after all."

"What is she talking about?" Carter asked of no one in particular.

The lights in the banquet hall dimmed and a hush settled over the room as everyone left the dance floor and found their seats. Several small spotlights affixed to the ceiling turned on, their colorful beams aimed at the disco ball hanging over the middle of the parquet floor. Like brilliant sparks bursting from a colorful fire, reflected light bobbed and twirled all around the darkened room.

A slow song started playing over the speakers.

Carter smiled apologetically and drew Leslie

into her arms. "Did you know this was next?"

Leslie shook her head. "No. Do you know how to dance?"

He winked. "Do I know how to dance? Are you kidding?"

He pulled her forward then dipped her so low she was certain her head would graze the floor.

"I'll have you know I'm a graduate of the Arthur Murray Dance Studio," he teased. With a graceful arch, he lifted her back up then whirled her around. "I can waltz and do the Hustle with the best of them, my dear."

Leslie glanced at Carter's feet, trying to mimic his steps. "Who is Arthur Murray and what in the world is the Hustle?"

He cocked his head back, his eyebrows raised. "Please tell me you're kidding."

Embarrassed by her naiveté, she could do little more than shrug her shoulders. "Sorry. No."

Her stomach rolled. Here she finally was, dancing with Carter Lang, possibly the sexiest man she knew, and she had no idea what he was talking about. No doubt the classy women he was used to would not only know who Arthur Murray was, they probably socialized with the guy at their high society parties.

"I'll be happy to Google it when I get back to my table though," she hastily added. "My Blackberry is in my purse. I should be able to download the information in seconds."

He laughed. "Google it. How the hell did that phrase ever become a verb?"

"I know you're not crazy about using the Internet, but it can be fun."

A misstep on Leslie's part landed her foot on his. Carter didn't flinch. Instead, he winked and twirled her around again. Frustrated with her inability to keep up with his elaborate dancing, she stiffened her

spine.

“Surfing the web is a great way to get information and keep up with friends.” When her words came out a bit harsher than she had intended, she mentally scolded herself.

“I don’t suppose just making a call to your friends would work, would it?” Carter extended his arm, pushing her out, then brought her back. “What you seem to forget is the only surfing I really care to do is with a short board at South Padre Island.”

She tamped down a very unlady-like snort. “Don’t tell me you’ve never surfed the net for porn. Every man does that. I’ve even done that.”

Carter stared at her, stumbled, momentarily out of sync with the rhythm of the song. He lowered his gaze to hers, staring. “You’ve watched porn? Did I hear you right?”

His eyes, the color of whisky in sunlight and just as intoxicating, seemed to bore through her. His male essence, a seductive blend of spice and man, surrounded her and permeated her body. Her legs seemed to melt and her knees felt as though she would crumble at any moment.

Sucking in a deep breath, Carter resumed his complicated dance moves. He shuffled her to his left and to his right before bringing her in close enough to brush her breasts against his broad chest. “Do tell me more.”

He whispered directly into Leslie’s ear, his voice filled with curiosity. His breath lingered on her neck, the sensation like a shower of icy-hot rain that sent shivers of lust down to her toes.

Leslie gulped for air and searched for courage. This was the perfect time to make her pass at him. If she didn’t do it now, she might not have another opportunity. Just being this close to him made her nipples harden into tight points and liquid arousal soak the crotch of her panties. A pulse deep inside

her cunt set up an insistent throbbing.

And if the press of his engorged cock against her body was any indication, he was as turned on as she was.

Trying to look as casual as possible, Leslie took the lead from Carter. She released her hands from his and draped her arms around his shoulders, then pressed herself closer as she forced him to slowly shuffle along with the beat of the song. Bending her head toward his earlobe, she prepared to share her dark secret.

But before she could utter a single word, inspiration struck. Leslie spent only a moment debating the sanity of her next move. She stroked her tongue against the side of his neck, tasting the sensitive skin, shocking herself with her boldness yet reveling in it. "Carter?"

"Mmmhmm?"

"I have every imaginable sex toy known to man locked away in my bedroom closet," she whispered on a breathy exhale. "Every night I choose a new toy to play with. I lie down on my bed, close my eyes, and pretend you're lying naked beside me. The only way I can make myself come is when I fantasize about you making love to me."

Carter's feet stopped moving. His chest heaved. Through his dress shirt and jacket she could feel his heart pound like a hammer hitting steel beneath his ribs.

He pulled her back and examined her face. "What did you just say?"

They were stopped now in the center of the floor. Taking a wary glance around the room at the wedding party following their every movement, Leslie's resolve started to flee like a rabbit being chased by a wolf. "Carter, these people are staring at us. We have to keep dancing."

She pushed him forward, then rocked him side

to side, trying to get him to move. Carter refused to budge. He just stood there and continued to stare at her as though she'd just turned him to stone. A tiny thread of fear wound through her. Had she made a mistake here? The intensity of his scrutiny made her want to eat every word she'd just said.

"Please, don't stop dancing." She nudged him again.

Her former boss shook his head. A lock of his glossy salt and pepper hair escaped from its careful combing and fell onto his forehead.

"I don't give a damn what these people think," he said a little too loudly, then lowered his voice. "Leslie, listen to me. I hadn't planned to ever tell you this. I'm almost ashamed to admit it." Carter slid his hands down the curve of her body, landing firmly on her hips. "I saw you in your private bathroom at the office on our last day at work. I didn't mean to eavesdrop. I would never intentionally watch you do anything that might embarrass you, but I just couldn't look away."

He lifted a hand to her face and outlined her cheek with the back of a finger. "There has been nothing but you on my mind since that moment. You've managed to consume my every thought while I'm awake and haunt my dreams at night. I can barely eat or drink for thinking of you."

His statements, spoken so earnestly, caught her off guard. Her heart leapt, jarring a fathomless well of feelings for him she'd spent so many years filling but never dared to draw from. She felt her legs give way and leaned against Carter to keep herself upright. Unable to prevent a tide of strong emotion from crashing through her defenses, she bowed her head and let tears fill her eyes.

"Wait a minute. What's this?" Carter cupped her chin and raised her face to meet his. With his free hand, he pulled a white handkerchief from inside his

jacket and dabbed at her wet cheeks. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I never should have said anything."

Leslie choked back a sobbing laugh, her body shaking with the effort. "Oh, Carter. You haven't upset me at all." She hiccupped. "You always forgot your briefcase when you left the office, and I knew you'd come back for it." A fresh wave of tears streaked down her face, washing away ten years of pent up longing with each drop that fell. "I hoped you'd find me, Carter. I wanted you to see me. I wanted to make you want me as much as I've always wanted you."

Carter hesitated for only a moment before tipping back her head and covering her lips with his. He wrapped his arms around her waist, and she lost herself in his kiss, indulging in the sweet taste of his tongue as he explored her mouth. She pressed harder against the firm feel of his long, muscled body, the thickness of his cock, and tightened her hold around his neck. This was a moment she'd waited so very long for. She never wanted to let him go.

Whoops of delight and cheers erupted from the crowd in the darkened room. She was so engrossed with Carter she'd forgotten where they were or that they had even been dancing, let alone the center of attention.

Leslie reluctantly pulled away from Carter's embrace. Looking all around the room, she noticed people standing near their tables, clapping and hooting. At the head table, Philip and Brian exchanged a high-five, their elated faces stretched with exaggerated smiles. Stacy offered a napkin to Claire, who openly wept. Despite their fifteen feet of separation, Leslie could see the tracks of tears rolling down Claire's cheeks.

Like an old-fashioned knight in shining armor,

Carter bent and placed an arm under Leslie's knees, shifted the other further up her back, and swept her off her feet. Surprised at his move, she let out a yelp and held on to him for dear life.

Without a word or a sideways glance at the enthusiastic audience, he walked off the dance floor and crossed the ballroom until he paused at the double doors. Throwing up his leg, Carter kicked the long metal exit bar with his foot. The door flew opened and crashed against an adjoining wall. Before it could swing back, he marched through the open entry way. At the elevator he pressed the up button with an elbow.

The situation too unreal to make sense of, Leslie let herself go and burrowed herself deeper into the cradle of his arms. She nuzzled the curve between his broad shoulder and his neck, drinking in his spicy scent.

"What are you doing?" Even to her own ears her voice sounded faint and dreamy as though coming from a drifting cloud far, far away

He lightly kissed her forehead, then rubbed his cheek against the top of her head. "Something I should have done years ago."

"And that would be?" Leslie allowed the statement to trail off.

The elevator doors slid open and soft music spilled into the hallway. Carter carried her into the small space, turned, and pressed the button for the top floor, the Presidential Suite. This time with his nose, making Leslie give a hiccupping laugh.

The door closed, and the elevator lightly jerked as it made its way up through the hotel's many stories.

Carter brushed aside her hair with his cheek, exposing her ear. He bent and nibbled on her earlobe. "I'm going to make love to you until you beg me to stop."

Carter carried Leslie down the hallway as though she weighed nothing at all. His arms didn't strain, his breathing was normal, and veins didn't pop out from his neck. Instead, he seemed to have an actual bounce to his step, making the trip from the elevator to the suite's doors shorter than she'd expected.

By the looks of the hallway, they had stepped into a slightly more elegant world than the people on the lower floors. Huge crystal vases filled with brightly colored, exotic flowers stood like sentinels on ebony tables. Oversized chandeliers dripping with cut crystals hung from the high ceiling, and thick cream carpeting muffled Carter's footsteps. A set of double doors at the end of the short corridor were the only signs of entry into a room.

Nothing like the hallway where Leslie's room was. The differences reminded her once more of the complete social and financial gap between them. For a crazy second, as he fumbled in his pocket for the keycard, Leslie debated asking him not to open the door. In that brief moment, panic welled up and she wanted to leap out of his arms and run away. But she tightened her arms around his neck, thought about the night ahead, and the moment passed.

Being carried around by her former boss, inhaling his familiar scent, and snuggling up against his wide chest was the closest thing to heaven she'd ever experienced. When the doors were opened and he stepped over the threshold, he'd put her down. The thought of not having those strong arms holding her nearly caused a lump in her throat. She'd spent so many years getting to this exact place she didn't want the feeling to end.

But when he eased her to her feet, he took a moment to cup her face with his hands and brush his lips against her.

"I never allowed myself to dream we'd be here like this," he murmured.

"Neither did I."

With the exception of the city lights shining in through a wall of windows at the other end of the room, the suite was completely dark. Leslie could make out the major pieces of furniture placed around the expansive space. Almost shapeless in their appearance, the couch and various chairs were large, inky-black spots silhouetted against the brightness of the indirect lights from outside.

Carter slid his hand along the wall, looking for the light switch.

"No." Leslie placed her hand over his. "Don't turn them on just yet. I want a good look at Houston first from way up here."

"Whatever you like." He drew her fingers to his mouth and kissed them so lightly his lips felt like butterfly wings against her skin. "Consider this room yours."

Whatever I like. We'll certainly have to see about that.

Careful to avoid bumping into any objects hiding in the dimness, she gathered up the bottom of her bridesmaid's dress and made her way to a window. More and more of downtown Houston revealed itself the closer she got to the end of the room. At forty five floors, The Lone Star of Texas Hotel wasn't the tallest building in the city, but certainly offered some incredible views.

Leslie placed her cheek against the cool glass, straining to see the action on the streets below from the dizzying heights of the Presidential Suite. The crazy idea the glass might come loose from its hold and of her falling so far to the ground scared the living daylights out of her, but she lingered there anyway. She would only be in this room once and didn't want to miss a thing.

A random thought hit her with such force she immediately stepped back from the window. Only an unsophisticated, unworldly woman would carry on with a view of Houston like she was. Her naiveté practically screamed with her every action. If she had any plans to impress Carter on their first and only night together, she would simply have to behave with more style.

Leslie turned and just made out Carter laying his jacket and tie over the backside of a chair. His open shirt revealed a broad, hairless chest that caused her stomach to tighten. He struck a match and lit a candle on a coffee table in the middle of the sitting area. The flame burned brightly and cast the large room in a golden glow.

“There are several more candles I could light, but I think I prefer just this one for right now.” He blew out the match and tossed it into a small glass bowl. “Something about the shimmer of this one flame makes you look like an angel standing over there. You’re almost too radiant to touch.”

His words, so beautiful, so complimentary, were like rare and precious jewels. If only she could somehow box everything he said, she could pull those words out on cold Chicago nights when she was all alone and missing him.

But no, she was again being silly, thinking only of the future when the man she wanted stood so close. She needed to be bold and daring. There was no room for sadness or hesitation. Tonight she would lay her very soul out and give him something to think about after she was gone.

Lifting her hands to her hair, she removed the bobby pins from the loose bun at the nape of her neck, letting each pin fall where it may. When she discarded the last one, Leslie shook her head and her long hair to tumbled down her back and over her shoulders.

Carter stared in rapt attention. While he watched, she unzipped her gown. The silky frock slid over her bare breasts and the curves of her hips. The fabric cascaded to the floor and puddled around her feet in a near silent whoosh of material. Besides her four-inch stilettos, only a small blue thong and the garter remained on her body.

“Sweet Mother of Mercy,” Carter said on a moan. “You’re even lovelier than I imagined.”

The lack of clothing and the excitement of the moment sent a chill over Leslie’s skin. She fingered her nipples as they contracted to hard pebbles, enjoying the exquisite sensation. In response, a surge of hot juices filled her pussy. Her womb ached with need.

She stepped out of the gown and walked slowly through the maze of furniture, feeling the creamy moisture of her arousal between her thighs. She was ready for him to take her any way he wanted. Now. Tonight.

Carter tore off his shirt and tossed it to the floor as he made his way to her. He pulled her into his arms, the force stealing her breath. His hips ground into hers, leaving no doubt of his desire. Hard as a steel rod, his cock protruded from the confines of his pants and pressed into her side. Like a man who hadn’t eaten in days, he ravaged her mouth, plunging and stroking, taking as he pleased.

Leslie reached for the top of his trousers, searching for his belt buckle. He had to be naked so each part of his body would be accessible. Hungry for a taste of him, she craved the opportunity to lick every inch of him and savor his incredible flavors.

He placed his hand on hers, preventing her from unfastening the buckle. With unspoken intention, he moved his fingers lower, brushing against the tender flesh of her abdomen and into her panties. When he reached her clit she jerked in response, and his body

momentarily went rigid.

Tearing his mouth from hers, he gasped. "My god. You are so incredibly wet."

Two fingers slid over her sensitive nub and into the slick folds of her pussy. Spreading her legs, she silently welcomed him to explore further.

Carter needed little prodding. He glided his entire hand inside the tiny scrap of silk covering her mound and cupped her while parting the interior lips of her cunt with the pads of his fingers.

With a swell of primal lust, her body took over, acting without the consent of her brain. Her knees dipped and her hips swayed against the incredible feel of his touch. Over and over again, she bore down on his hand, silently pleading him to plunge his fingers even further into her hot channel.

"I've got to taste you, Leslie." Carter nipped her neck with his teeth. Nudging with his legs, he guided her to the couch and pressed her body against the length of the sofa's back. In one swift, practiced move, he slid her thong down her legs. "If I don't eat your pussy right now, I think I'll go mad."

His confession sent confidence surging through her.

He wants me. And badly.

That was clear. But she wanted more from him. She wanted to push him over the edge of his desire. Fly with him someplace neither of them had ever gone before.

Leslie wiggled her ass in the plush softness of the sofa, making herself comfortable. Ensuring Carter wouldn't miss a thing, she lifted a leg and bent it at the knee before placing her foot on the arm of the couch. Using the underside of both arms, she pressed her breasts together, then stretched her hands down to the moist cleft between her thighs.

"Is this what you want?" Boldly, Leslie spread the lips of her pussy wide, then began fingering her

clit. She'd never done this in front of anyone before, but now here was this opportunity with the man she'd had erotic dreams about for so very long. Arching her back, she raised her chest and heaved her breasts high, incited by her own daring.

"Oh, we are going to have a wonderful time tonight, I can tell already. I've got so much in store for you." Carter adjusted the twitching bulge in his slacks. "Right now, move those hands and let me get to business."

She did as he asked, placing her arms over her head and clutching her hands together. He was going to do it. In a moment she'd feel the mouth of the man she'd loved for so long right *there*. When he bent over her, the moist heat of his breath against her clit caused her already sensitive body to writhe with anticipation.

"Hmm, you smell like sexy candy." The rumble of his voice tickled the inside of her thigh. "I wonder if you taste as good."

Before she could form an intelligent comeback, he stroked his tongue over her nub. A current of electricity, shocking and powerful, spiked from her pelvis to her chest. She jerked, her body not fully prepared for intense jolt of pleasure.

"Did I hit a nerve?" he asked, rubbing his cheek along her leg.

"Something like that." Leslie leaned her head back, her breasts jiggling with each labored draw of air she took. Her heart raced with excitement.

"Well, then." His low, sexy voice rumbled. "Let's try that once again, shall we?"

"Ohhhh," she drew the word out, nearly grinding it into a groan. "Please. Please."

Slowly making his way up the inside of her thigh, Carter lightly bit her skin, then soothed the flesh with licks and kisses. When he reached the cleft of her legs, he placed his mouth on her clit and

flicked his tongue up and down, back and forth, all around the hard kernel.

Leslie wriggled under him, reveling in the mind numbing thrills his mouth offered.

Carter placed his hands on her hips, stilling her movement. He pressed his lips harder on her tingling clit and added more force to the strokes of his tongue. The more she tried to thrust her hips forward, meeting each of his velvet-like licks, the harder he pushed, reinforcing her restraint.

The cadence of his delicious torture accelerated. Leslie dug her fingers deeper into the couch's cushions, her muscles straining for relief. As her release broke over her, she arched off the sofa, grabbed Carter's head, and dragged her nails over his scalp.

"Carter. Oh, god, yes, Carter."

Her cries seemed to reverberate off the walls and hang heavy in the air around them. The sound of her voice calling out his name rang in her ears as her body convulsed with pleasure. Trembling from her curled toes to her eyebrows, Leslie fell back onto the couch, gasping.

When Carter gave one final flick of his tongue, a last involuntary spasm rippled over her. He righted himself, unbuckled his belt, and drew the narrow piece of polished leather out of the hoops in his trousers. He threw the belt off to his left where it landed with a sharp thud against the wall.

"Wait a minute." Leslie pulled herself up. Still incredibly sensitive, the slight movement ushered a trickle of cream from her pulsing pussy. "I want to do that. Please let me." She felt both shy and bold at the same time. She was going to make her big pitch tonight and let the chips fall wherever. She gave him a slow smile. "And when I'm done taking off your pants, I'm going to rock your world, Mr. Carter Lang. Expect to see me drop to my knees and suck

you until you can't take it anymore."

"Under normal circumstances, I would gladly let you do that. I've dreamed about having your mouth around my cock. More times than I can tell you." With a hand not quite steady, he pulled out his wallet from his pants pocket and removed a small packet. "But this is definitely not a normal circumstance. I have to be inside you right now." He brushed his mouth against hers. "I'm a desperate man, Leslie. I feel as if I've waited for this forever."

Leslie grinned at the packet in his hand, excited as well as relieved. Ever present of mind and prepared for every situation, Carter had remembered to bring along a condom.

Holding the edge of the foil packaging between his teeth, Carter continued undressing. He pulled off his pants and tossed them over the couch, then grabbed the elastic top of his skin tight briefs and tugged them down over his lean hips. The instant his underwear reached mid thigh, his dick, swollen with arousal, sprang from its confinement. Stepping out of the tighty-whities, he left the underwear where it lay and moved to the end of the couch.

He kissed her again and traced her mouth with his tongue. She could taste herself on him and lust shot through her like a lightning bolt.

"I promise you, the next time will be much slower, and I've got a few surprises waiting. But right now, I've got to have you."

Carter ripped open the condom's wrapping and rolled the sheathing down the long shaft of his penis. Without further ceremony, he grabbed her ankles and pulled her down the length of the sofa's back until her hips were arranged to the perfect angle. He held his cock with one hand and directed its circumcised tip just above her clit.

"Please forgive me, Leslie," he uttered on a ragged breath. "I've dreamed about this for so long, I

don't think I can be gentle."

Thrilled to heights she'd never known, Leslie nodded. She leaned forward and stroked her cunt again, her eyes locked on his. Her slick folds were drenched with her juices. "It's all right, Carter. I don't think I want you to be gentle."

Carter maneuvered the rounded head of his cock over her mound and across her tender clit then thrust home. Leslie couldn't hold back a gasp as his thick shaft filled her, driving its full length deep inside her pussy.

He placed his hands on the outside of her thighs just above her knees and raised her legs and ass off the couch. The new position provided the perfect angle and leverage to drive himself down, plunging into her with one forceful thrust.

The rhythm of his long, pumping strokes pulling and pushing against the tight walls of her pussy grew steadily faster. Despite the cool air in the room, a light glaze of sweat covered him, making his skin glisten like wet diamonds in the candlelight.

Wanting to heighten his pleasure as well as her own, and past the point of any shyness, Leslie cupped her breasts and lifted them. With slow, orchestrated movements, she kneaded both breasts then tugged and rolled her nipples between two fingers. Exquisite pain, sharp yet intensely pleasurable, drew the constricting flower of her areola into a hard pebble.

"You are too much," he said, leaning over and taking one taut nipple between his lips. Carter sucked, his mouth a new instrument of erotic gratification. Over and over, he bucked his hips, driving his cock harder and deeper with each thrust. "You are so fucking tight. I can't stop. I'm going to come."

He flung his head back and gripped her legs, slamming into her pussy with one shattering ram of

his magnificent penis. As he exploded a second orgasm rushed through her, shaking her to the core. For several seconds, his muscles convulsed and his body shook with the force of his release. After filling his lungs with air, he collapsed on top of her and rested his head on her chest just below her chin.

Minutes passed before either of them moved. As far as Leslie was concerned, they could stay that way the rest of the night. Though, perhaps having their legs entwined and her arms around him would be better in a bed.

But, honestly, what did where they lay together matter? He was here with her, their sex had been beyond incredible, and her dream—this—had finally become reality. She had opened herself to him, fucked him to the best of her ability, and satisfied her curiosity.

If only there was more time before having to leave for Chicago, maybe they could mold this new-found relationship into something more. Maybe they could even date. She could cook him gourmet meals, and he could...he could take her to Rome.

Maybe, if all the stars aligned in just the right way, he would eventually fall in love with her.

She was already in love with him.

Yeah, right. But what does he feel about me? Did he just want great sex and goodbye?

The sting of believing this to be a one-sided relationship with Carter Lang hurt more now than it ever had before. Could this one-night-stand end up being a mistake? Would she only want to kick herself in the morning, wishing she'd just left Houston without knowing him so intimately? You couldn't miss what you hadn't had, right?

She had to face facts. It just wasn't possible that tonight could change things between them. From the first time she'd met Carter she was well aware that she was an unsophisticated secretary who grew up

in a middle class family. Carter was still the wealthy boss, albeit former boss, with a penchant for classy women who trolled in his level of society. Great sex wouldn't change that situation.

Carter lifted his head and gazed at her. The candle flickered, making his whisky-colored eyes shimmer like liquid gold. If only that was at least affection she saw shimmering in there.

If only.

Much too soon he pulled himself up, gently removing his cock from her as he found his feet. His weight gone, she could breathe again, but she'd rather he'd stayed on top of her, even if she had to go without air.

He offered his hand and helped her off the back of the couch.

"You are amazing." He brushed a wayward strand of hair from her brow, then let his finger drift down the side of her face. "I had no idea that sex—that included me," he chuckled as though the comment was an afterthought, "could be so erotic. So fulfilling."

"Oh, I'm sure you say that to all the women."

Her words were only partially teasing. He couldn't possibly be speaking the truth. Most likely he was just being kind. After all, what else did she expect him to say after just fucking her silly? Thanks, hon. You were good, but I've had better? No, he was too much of a gentleman for that.

Quit thinking Leslie. Just enjoy the moment.

Suddenly feeling self-conscious at her nakedness and her earlier wanton behavior, she turned to look for her clothes. Best she leave before the hurt that sat inside her like a stone got any worse.

But Carter yanked her back to him and turned her to face him, wrapping his arms around her waist. Their bodies, already warm from their exertion, seemed to smolder from a hidden fire.

A deep crease formed on his forehead and the corners of his lips curved down. "No, Leslie. I don't say that to all the women I have sex with. And I don't want you to think that I do."

Leslie shook her head. "Carter, I'm not naive. You're forty-eight years old and a man of the world. You don't need to stroke my ego."

"I'm well aware of how old I am." He slid his hands down and cupped her ass, drawing her closer. "I'm the one who feels like his ego is being stroked. I'm naked as a jaybird, holding quite possibly the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. As far as I'm concerned, I one incredibly fortunate man."

Really? Could he mean it?

"Well, then," she stood on her tip toes and kissed him on the nose, "I guess we'll just have to call it an ego stroking draw."

"Speaking of stroking..." He waggled his eyebrows. "I have a little surprise set up for you in the bedroom. Give me just a second. I need to make sure everything is ready."

"For me?" Her voice sounded startled, even to her own ears. "How could you possibly have known I'd be here with you tonight? I haven't even seen you since our last day at the office."

"I hoped, Leslie." He brushed his mouth against hers. "This was going to be my last chance to suck up my courage and let you know how much I wanted you." Another soft kiss. "Let's just say while I wasn't sure you'd end up in my room, I hoped fate would provide me this one rather special favor." Carter headed toward the bedroom door but stopped mid-stride. "At the reception you said that you wanted me to see you playing with yourself in your private bathroom. *Why* did you want me to see you?"

A frigid chill prickled her spine, turning her blood cold. She couldn't tell him. Doing so would only make her look, well, pathetic. So terribly

unsophisticated.

I thought if you saw me and we had sex, you would realize you're in love with me. Then we could live happily ever after.

Oh, no. She would only humiliate herself if she even hinted at the truth.

But what could she say?

Her heart pounded in her chest, nearly drowning out every other sound. The loud thump of each beat sounded like a voice speaking as it thrummed in her ears. *Coward, coward, coward*, was the only word the voice seemed to know.

Leslie's mind suddenly flash-forwarded to a year from now. How would she feel, sitting alone in her Chicago apartment knowing she'd passed up the one opportunity to finally tell her former boss the truth? Did she want to live her life full of regrets? Was her pride more important than embarrassment?

"I'll tell you everything before I say good-bye this evening, I promise."

Hopefully this answer would suffice. And she *would* reveal everything, even if telling him she'd loved him for years and then turning around and letting him go was the hardest thing she'd ever done. Later, much later, when she picked up the pieces of her broken heart in Chicago, she would do so with her head held high.

"I'll give you your surprise then, too," she added. "I think you're going to like it. It's something I think will always remind you of me."

"I'm genuinely intrigued." Carter grabbed the box of matches off the coffee table. "Are you ready for your surprise?"

"I'm always ready for surprises."

"Good." He walked to the bedroom door and held on to the handle. "Here's what I want you to do. Count to one hundred, then come into the room. Got

it?”

Leslie nodded. After he let himself into the bedroom, she counted out loud. When she reached one hundred she stepped to the door and knocked. “Are you ready in there?” She pressed her ear to the wood door and heard music, soft and sexy, on the other side.

“Yes. I’m ready. Come on in.”

The flickering glow of candlelight spilled out of the bedroom the moment she cracked open the door. Inside, at least twenty candles burned brightly at various spots all around the large bedroom. The turned down bed was covered with rose petals. The powder pinks and blood red of the petals looked like confetti against the snowy white of the bedspread.

Candles and rose petals weren’t the only things scattered throughout the space. On one nightstand were two dildos in velvet cradles, three vibrators of different sizes, a set of fur-lined handcuffs and two tubes of lubricant.

“Different flavors,” Carter explained, pointing to the lube. “I couldn’t decide between them, so I got both.”

On the other nightstand was a cock ring, two different size butt plugs, and a set of nipple clamps lying in a box on a bed of velvet. Pools of blue satin binding sashes and condoms, nestled next to them.

The *coup de gras*, a long and curvy love lounger, complete with shiny silver buckles dangling from its sides, waited in front of the bed.

Leslie’s jaw dropped. “You got all this for me? All of these things? You went to a store and bought them?”

A flash of unease washed across his face momentarily. “Please tell me I didn’t overstep any boundaries. After I saw you, I realized you might enjoy using other toys. And since that night, I’ve been planning this evening and hoping against hope

we'd end up here like this. Did I do the right thing?"

"Oh, yes." She threw her arms around him. Maybe he only wanted her for sex, but it was going to be damned good sex.

Carter handed Leslie a flute of champagne. "You have no idea how hard I've been all night, knowing what was up here. I couldn't help wondering if I could entice you to join me, but I felt nervous that you'd think I was overstepping."

Stunned, she could do little more than take a deep drink of the bubbly liquid and peer around the room. "I'm overwhelmed that you went to all this trouble."

He placed a finger on her chin, directing her gaze to him. "Please tell me I haven't upset you. I only want to make you happy, not end up being the creepy old guy with the room full of vibrators."

Leslie took another long sip of champagne, emptying the glass. The alcohol settled through her in a sensual way, warming her from the inside out. Her shoulders relaxed and her muscles melted until she was loose and relaxed, yet at the same time erotically energized. She couldn't remember the last time she'd been so happy.

She placed the crystal champagne flute on a nearby chest of drawers, then took Carter's glass and also set it aside. Grasping both of his wrists, she drew him to her until her breasts crushed against his chest, making her nipples contract. She wrapped his arms around her waist. His hot skin molded against hers, arousing her senses. A trickle of creamy excitement wet her pussy.

"This has to be the best present I've ever been given. I can't wait to try it all out." Encircling his neck with her arms, she raised her lips to his and covered his mouth with several light kisses. "Would you like to play with me?"

His response, already firm and throbbing,

pressed into her abdomen as Carter pulled her closer for a deep kiss. She parted her lips and his tongue swept around her mouth, finding hers. He tasted of the champagne they'd been drinking, sweet and intoxicating.

When he broke the kiss, her knees wobbled. She swayed, enjoying the warm effervescent feeling that permeated throughout her core. "Where would you like to start?"

"Honey, my experience is limited, so you're going to have to show me the way." He tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "If you are a willing teacher, I promise to be an eager student."

What to do for the beginner?

Biting her lip, she glanced around at the assortment of items, considering her options.

"Since you've not played with toys much, let's start off slow and easy. When you're comfortable with what we're doing, we'll move on to other things." She looked him in the eye. "What's most important about using toys with another person is good communication. Let me know if you enjoy pleasuring me or watching me pleasure myself. We've got a huge variety of things here. We don't have to get hung up with anything we aren't both enjoying. Okay?"

"Okay." A sly smile drew up the ends of his mouth. "But I have a hard time imagining you doing anything I won't like."

Breaking from his hold, Leslie took in a deep breath to steady herself and walked to one of the nightstands. She picked up a rabbit style vibrator, nipple clamps, a butt plug, and a bottle of lube. With the exception of the clamps, she placed the toys on the floor next to the sex lounger. "For right now, you're going to help me with these," Leslie dangled the delicate silver chain of the clamps in front of Carter. "Then I just want you to watch. Would you

like that?”

His eyes burned into her. “Would you?”

“Oh, yes,” she murmured. “More than I can tell you.”

He removed the chain from her grasp and examined the tweezer-like clamps. “I feel like a dolt telling you this, but I’ve never been in a relationship long enough to try using these with a woman before. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t. But would you be more comfortable knowing how they feel?”

He nodded. “Yes, I think so.”

“All right, then.” She bent slightly, placed her mouth over one of Carter’s nipples, and sucked. When her tongue detected a hardened pebble, she gently scraped and bit his nipple with her teeth.

Carter groaned. “That feels pretty fucking good.”

“Yes, it does,” Leslie said as she stepped back. Taking both breasts in her hands, she massaged the areolas until the tender skin gathered into twin peaks. “Now put my nipples between the rubber ends of the tweezers and push down the bar until I tell you to stop.”

Placing his palm under the weight of one breast, he squeezed until he’d placed her nipple between his thumb and index finger. He pinched, then slid on a clamp and lowered the tightening bar. At once, an acute yet thrilling streak of pain shot to her pussy.

“That’s good.” She reached for his cock. Plump and at the ready, his dick already had a tear of cum welled at the tip. She smeared it down the length of his shaft. “I see you like this, too.”

“Careful.” His warning came out with a moan. “I can barely wait to get on with these toys so I can bury my cock inside you again. You feel so damned good.”

When he’d fastened the other clamp, Leslie opened the lubricant and motioned for Carter to put

out his hand. Could she convince him to do what she had in mind?

"You may want to enjoy yourself while you're watching. I would love to see you play with yourself, too. I can't tell you how sexy I think that is." She poured a large dollop on his palm.

"Then consider it done." Carter smoothed the gel over his cock, which grew even more at his touch. Cupping his fingers into a loose fist, he began stroking up and down the thick shaft. The hooded lids of his eyes fell slightly as a look of bliss spread across his face.

Her gaze fastened on Carter while he stroked himself. Leslie lay back on the chaise and scooted around, allowing her ass to sink more comfortably into its deep curve. She positioned her knees over the elevated hump and opened her legs. She had waited a long time for this, and it might be all she ever had. She wanted Carter to see her every move.

Though wet already, when she turned on the vibrator, the toy's familiar and soothing hum caused her juices to flow and her pussy to contract with a keen eagerness to proceed. Using two fingers, she spread the slippery cream around her clit and then placed the Rabbit's pulsating tip on her swollen nub.

The instantaneous agitation on her aroused mound was almost too much sensation to handle. Trying to avoid coming too soon, she slid the undulating toy in her pussy, letting the fluttering tickler that rose from the base of the vibrator stimulate her clit. She leaned back against the sex chaise's supportive curve and glided the dildo in and out, over and over, reeling slightly as the oscillating beads inside the toy's shaft caressed the walls of her cunt.

She glanced up at Carter. The high color on his cheekbones and the steady rhythm of his hand sliding over his dick told her how aroused and into

this he was. Encouraged, she decided to move on to the next toy. If she was going to be bold, she'd go for it all. A little ass play was next, and she wanted to be good and wet.

Digging her heels into the cushion of the lounge, she lifted her ass and spread her thighs a little wider. She pulled the vibrator from her pussy and sank its head to the tight pucker of her anus, spreading her dripping cream all around. To test if she was ready, she lowered her bottom back onto the chaise. Raising and opening her legs until they formed a perfect V in the air, she sucked a finger, covered it with saliva, then reached between her legs and over her throbbing mound until she found her target. The tip of her finger easily slid into the tight space of her rectum.

"Mind if I help you?"

She was so occupied with her fun she hadn't even noticed Carter. He was on his knees with a purple butt plug in hand. Golden candlelight reflected off the shimmering lubricant already spread over the small toy as well as the lube on the fresh condom he had on his dick.

"Of course." A spark of excitement flickered in Leslie's chest. This is what she'd dreamed of—her, Carter, and a roomful of toys.

Rather than scooting to the end of the lounge, as she'd expected, Carter came to its side. He removed the vibrator from her control and simultaneously placed the pulsating head of the Rabbit on her clit while he rubbed the tip of the plug around her anus.

Lust surged through her, gripping her in its erotic fist. The muscles in her cunt quivered, and her pulse beat with intensity.

"Oh, Carter, that feels incredible." Leslie wiggled hips, drowning in sensation. Nothing existed except the need clawing through her. "I want you to

put that toy up my ass right now. I'm so ready for it."

No sooner than the words left her mouth, he obliged by carefully inserting the plug a little at a time in her tight hole. "Is this good?"

"Yes. Yes, yes, yes." Her head fell back on the chaise, drawing the chain of the nipple clamps taut. Wave after wave of erotic tremors rolled over her. "The only thing that could be better is having your cock up my ass."

"Is that an invitation?" he asked, slowly easing out the purple plug.

Her heart nearly flatlined. This whole evening was just a fantasy come true for her. A feast of sexual delights with the only man she really wanted. Lusted for. If only the dream didn't have to come to an end.

"No, this is." She took the vibrator from Carter, turned it off, and placed it on the floor. Turning over, then sliding her stomach over the lounge's high curve, she waggled her ass, barely able to control herself. "Go to town, boss."

Carter positioned himself behind her and grabbed her hips. "God, Leslie. I've always admired your beautiful backside." He manipulated his fingers and thumb over the curve of her ass to spread her cheeks wide. Leaning forward, he used his other hand to rub his lubed cock down the valley between her ass, then back up again, stopping at her puckered hole. "I just never dreamed I'd get to fuck you here."

Leslie drew in a breath as he pressed into her. She closed her eyes, wanting to focus on nothing other than his big cock inching deeper in the tight chamber of her anus. Slow and steady, he eased into the narrow alley, filling and stretching the delicate muscles until her ass burned with pleasurable pain. The intense heat and pull of his shaft in her small

hole nearly caused her to cry out in ecstasy.

“You’re so tight,” he gasped.

Desperate to drive his thick shaft so deep that his velvety balls bounced against her exposed pussy, she pushed herself against him and strained to take in even more of his steely length. He responded by pumping in and out, each stroke a long pull and powerful thrust.

Her eyes flew open. “That’s it, Carter. I want it hard.”

Leslie slammed backward over and over again, unable to help herself. She wanted more, more of the fire his rock-hard cock blazed within her as it scraped against her sensitive walls.

Easing a hand between her spread thighs, she found his balls, tight against his body. At the place where his scrotum fell from just beneath his cock, she made an O ring around the fleshy top of his sac and squeezed.

“Oh, shit. What are you doing to me?” he panted. “I’m going to come.”

He rose up and rammed his cock home, sending shards of exquisite pain scattering through her core. They climaxed together, shattering her world into a million smoldering pieces of blistering desire. Carter continued thrusting as hot cum filled his condom, setting her narrow channel on fire.

At last, spent and breathing hard, he folded himself over her. “I don’t think I’ll ever be able to move again.”

Leslie was having enough trouble breathing herself, but she managed a breathy little laugh. “I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“You should.” He slowly raised himself and removed his cock. “It’s been a while since I’ve come twice in such a short time.”

“Well,” she said as she turned over and stretched her arms wide over her head, “we’ve got a

lot more toys to have fun with, and I can play all night long.”

When Carter didn’t immediately respond, Leslie looked up and noted the valleys furrowed between his brows. His eyes, their deep amber usually sparkling in the light, now looked dull.

Concerned, she rolled off the chaise and came up behind Carter, pressing her breasts against the broad span of his back. She wrapped her arms around his waist and pulled herself up on her tip toes to whisper in his ear.

“You all right?”

He nodded. “Yes. Just a little tired.”

Of course he was tired. She mentally smacked her head. What was she thinking? Just because she was so jazzed she felt like the Energizer bunny didn’t mean Carter felt the same way.

Take what you can get, Leslie, and be grateful for it.

“So am I,” she lied and feigned a yawn.

A quick glance at the clock showed it was only 10:30. She could easily go on until the sun came up. But this was her first and only night with Carter. Doing little more than sleeping next to him was infinitely better than being without him.

“It’s been a long day with the wedding and all. I’m surprised I haven’t fallen over already.” Leslie strode to the bed and pulled back the covers. “What do you say we get a little catnap in? When we wake up, we can put some more of these toys to use?”

Carter sauntered toward her. He tipped her chin back and covered her mouth with a kiss that was as sweet and gentle as love’s first blush.

“You’ve always been so good to me, Leslie,” he said a little breathlessly after pulling away. “And now...after tonight...life is going to be so colorless without you.”

“Shhhh.” She placed a finger over his lips, her

heart breaking for the thousandth time. “No more talk. Just take me to bed and hold me in your arms.”

Carter awoke with a start. Something was very, very wrong.

He patted the bed until his fingers reached the edge of the mattress. The sheets, cold and bare, still smelled of Leslie’s perfume. Closing his eyes, he sucked in a deep breath, letting the light floral scent fill his senses.

How would he ever get over not having her around, adding color and fun into his mundane existence?

Unfortunately, not only was she leaving for Chicago in a few days, she was already gone from his bed and, evidently, had been for some time.

He was a rational man. No need to jump to any conclusions.

But the situation looked familiar and it didn’t look good. He should know, he’d committed the love’em and leave’em act several times in his long career as a bachelor. Slip out before the situation became awkward.

Most likely there would have been some uneasiness if they woke up together. After ten years of working in the same office and knowing each other on a level that comes after that much time of nearly daily interaction, how could an evening of sex, especially sex with all these damned toys, end any other way?

His cocked reared its head. The sex had been fucking awesome.

Damn him for conking out on her.

Leslie, the tireless young woman that she was, had been ready for more after he’d taken her the second time. He, on the other hand, needed a few hours rest before being *up* for anything else.

He was a goddamned embarrassment.

Little wonder she had already left. She would probably laugh about his lack of stamina all the way to Chicago. Sure, he was good while he lasted, but after that, don't count on anything but a good night's sleep.

A mournful groan resonated in his chest. Despite his longtime love and desire for Leslie, the fact he was just too old for her was undeniable. She could never care for an old guy like him. Like taking a knife to the gut, the realization sliced deep and hurt like hell.

Opening his eyes, Carter fumbled in the dark for a lamp. When the light turned on, an involuntary grimace stiffened his muscles. All the unused sex toys he'd bought and laid out were still scattered around the room, silently mocking him.

He had to get the hell out of this place.

His cell phone sat near the fur-lined handcuffs on the bedside table. The thought of reaching over the gadget to pick up his phone had his stomach turning over, but he had no other choice. It wasn't midnight yet and his chauffeur was still on call. If he didn't call his driver now, he'd be stuck in this room until morning. He'd fucking walk home before he let that happen.

Twenty minutes later, the loud *ding* of the elevator announced his arrival at the ground floor. The doors slid open, revealing dozens of chatty well-dressed people filing into the hotel's brightly lit lobby from the outside. Bird seed littered the marble floor all the way from the front desk to the huge glass front doors and beyond.

Carter shook his head and rubbed his stubbled face. The night was getting worse by the minute. Not only had he royally screwed up his fantasy evening with the woman he loved and had probably lost forever, he'd also missed seeing Jeff and Claire off for their honeymoon.

Damn it all!

If he ever thought about leaving his future to fate again, he'd take a long walk off a short Galveston peer.

Hanging his head low, he crept from the elevator to a large potted ficus tree, then out a side door leading directly to a parking lot. Outside the Houston humidity, thick and damp, enveloped him like a wet Army blanket. Within minutes of waiting under a lamp post on the hotel's sidewalk, his shirt was molded damply to his skin.

"Carter?"

He turned as the sound of Leslie's questioning voice cut into the night. Dressed again in her bridesmaid gown, she stood near the edge of the parking lot on a small area of grass and trees. Carter blinked, trying to make out what she carried in her arms. Whatever she held was small, dark, and wiggling.

"What are you doing out here?" She hiked up the bottom of her dress with her free hand and walked toward him.

Just behind her, a black Lincoln sedan pulled into the lot. His ride.

The cool clamminess of the night air made his breathing difficult. His blood pounded like an out of control drum in his temples. The crack in his battered heart threatened to give way, breaking it into a dozen pieces.

Leave now. Leslie had her fun with her old ex-boss and left. Well, what else did you expect?

He knew if he didn't go right this moment, he might say or do something he'd only regret. He raised his arm and waved. The driver of the sedan responded by flashing the car's bright lights and pulling up to the curb where Carter waited.

The uniformed chauffeur opened the driver's side door, made his way around the front of the

Lincoln, and nodded toward Carter after opening the rear passenger door.

"Wait!" Leslie's sped up her approach, hugging the dark blob in her grasp.

Carter started toward the open door of the car, then stopped and took a hard, second look at the object she carried.

Was that a puppy? What the hell was she doing with a puppy at a wedding?

Leslie stopped directly in front of him, breasts heaving, her eyes as wide as a frightened deer's. A thin veil of perspiration shimmered on her skin. Moisture welled at the corners of her big brown eyes.

"Are you leaving me, Carter? Just like that?"

Am I leaving you? Wait a minute, you left me.

Carter frowned, thoroughly confused. He stood with one foot already on the floorboard of the back seat, trying to make sense of what she had just said and why she held a bluish-gray puppy tucked in the fold of her arm. Her pained expression made his stomach lurch.

Had he screwed up yet again?

"Leslie, I think I've made a huge mistake." Carter swallowed hard, barely moving the terrible lump caught in his throat. "When I woke up, you were gone and I thought...well...I thought *you* had left *me*."

"No." Her lips curved into a smile as a tear rolled down her cheek. "I just went down to my room to check on Blue. Then I got caught up with the wedding party when Claire and Jeff were leaving." She raised the little Great Dane and stroked along the puppy's back. "I was coming right back."

"A puppy? Blue?" Carter choked, his head spinning. "Leslie, why do you have a puppy at the hotel?"

"Blue is your surprise. She's for you." Leslie moved around the car door and held out the

wriggling puppy. "Now that you're retired and moving to Galveston, I didn't want you to be alone, so I bought her for you. I thought, since the wedding would be the last time I saw you, I'd give you something blue to remember me by."

If there had ever been traces of doubt about his feelings for Leslie, they all evaporated at that moment. He rubbed the top of the puppy's head, unable to stop grinning. Then, giving into the incredible feeling of happiness flooding his mind, body, and spirit, he abruptly pulled Leslie and the puppy into his trembling arms.

"I'm such a fool. I've lost ten years of my life building up the courage to tell you this." He rubbed his face into her auburn hair, taking in her glorious scent, then tightened his hold. "I'm in love with you, Leslie. I have been since the moment I first saw you."

"I love you, too," she whispered, her own body shaking.

"You do?" Unable to believe his own ears, he gently pushed her back to examine her face.

Tears streamed down her cheeks, leaving tracks of dampness. She grinned at him and nodded.

Overcome with emotion, Carter placed his mouth on hers and kissed her, his tongue licking her lips and plunging into the welcome heat of her mouth. Despite the protesting puppy squirming between them, he drank from her like a man dying of thirst. She met his thrusting tongue with her small one, accepting the erotic duel, giving back to him as much as he gave to her.

Relief poured through him and an unfamiliar lightness surged through him. Had the puppy not started to yip in protest he might not ever have let her go.

"Leslie, I don't want you to go to Chicago," he said a little breathless. "I want you to come to

Galveston with me. Stay with me and watch the sun rise over the Gulf of Mexico from my bedroom balcony. I want to walk the beach with you and teach you how to really surf.” He brushed a soft kiss against her lips. “I want to do everything with you.”

Her eyes widened. “You do?”

He put his mouth close to her ear. “And I want to fuck you senseless every single night.” Then he chuckled. “Of course, I’ll need some rest now and then.”

Leslie let out a soft laugh. “I think that could be arranged.”

Carter pulled the handkerchief from his front pocket and wiped the tears from her beautiful face. “I want to have children with you and watch them grow up to be fine people.” He reached down and took her free hand, entwining his fingers with hers. “Most importantly, I want you to be with me forever.”

He gazed into her enormous brown eyes, hoping beyond hope she felt the same way, wanted the same things. Like a powerful magnet, those liquid eyes seemed to draw him in and offer him refuge.

“Forever?” she echoed. “Forever, Carter?”

A sense of calm came over him, and Carter knew exactly what he had to do. He brought her hand up and kissed it, then got down on one knee, right there in front of the hotel.

“Leslie, will you marry me? Please? I promise to love, honor, and cherish you until there’s no longer life in my body. I’ll do anything and everything to make you happy, if you’ll consent to be my wife.”

“Oh, Carter.” A fresh wave of tears fell from her eyes. “Yes,” she said on a sob. “Yes, yes, yes!”

“Yes?” Joy surged through him, erasing the last vestige of uncertainty. He stood up, his legs not quite steady, and pulled her and the still protesting puppy back into his embrace.

“Come with me now,” he murmured. “Right now. I don’t want to let you out of my sight for even a minute.”

“A-all right. But I don’t even have any clothes except this gown.”

He smiled at her. “That’s all right. I’ll send someone later to gather our things. Besides, since I’ve had my nap I don’t think you’ll be needing your clothes for quite a while.” Only then did he notice his driver waiting on the curb, grinning like an idiot.

“Ross,” Carter called out to the chauffeur. “Take us home.”

“With pleasure, sir.”

About the Author

Equally at home camping in the mountains of Montana or shopping on the Champs-Elysees in Paris, Brenna's journey through life has taken her all over the United States, as well as many places throughout the world. Using her travel experience as a guide and peppering in interesting characters she's met along the way, she loves nothing better than artfully weaving erotic tales of romance and leaving readers yearning for adventures of their own.

Brenna loves to hear from her readers. If you've read her stories, let her know what you think.

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by

Lynne Roberts

Trisha is tired of tame, tired of predictable. After years of playing the supporting role, she longs for one night of unrestrained sensuality, a night of passion to reawaken the woman she once was. Can she step out of her comfort zone and into the arms of a stranger for a single taste of erotic abandon?

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