

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

The Twelve Quickies of Christmas



Book 2

August Heat

Lora Leigh

AUGUST HEAT

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Prologue

May

The contractions began late that night, and they began hard. Marly awoke from a restless sleep, a pained gasp on her lips as her rounded stomach tightened painfully. Imperatively.

She reached for Cade, to awaken him, to warn him, but he was already there, his blue eyes filling with panic as he flipped on the bedside lamp and stared back at her.

"Oh shit." She had never heard that particular tone of voice from him before.

Marly blinked at him in surprise, torn between laughter and concern as his wide eyes went to the rippling motions of the contraction that seized her heavily pregnant abdomen.

"Now, Cade," she tried to soothe him as she scooted to the end of the bed, "don't panic."

"Fuck. Sam! Brock!" Marly was certain his demented scream rocked the upper level of the house.

Damn. They were all going to panic on her now. She did not need this.

"Dammit, Marly, where are you going?" Before she could throw her legs over the side of the mattress Cade was moving to her, his hands trembling as he gripped her arm to keep her in the bed.

"Cade August, I refuse to have this child at home," she snapped, staring at him like the lunatic he was. "I need to get dressed. For that matter, so do you. I need the hospital."

Marly hadn't thought he could have gotten paler. But he did. In an instant his swarthy complexion went snow white as he swallowed tightly.

"Oh shit," he seemed to wheeze.

The door burst open and Sam, Brock, and their wives rushed into the room. Sam had a gun and a hard-on. Brock was just sporting the hard-on. Thankfully, Sarah and Heather had thought to drag on robes.

Marly closed her eyes helplessly. They still hadn't completely managed to still the terror that had gripped them during the months she, Sarah and Heather had been stalked. Annie still haunted them all.

"Heather was so right last year," she sighed. "Only you guys would still have a hard-on, no matter the situation," she moaned as she shook her head in resignation.

Another contraction seized her body, tightening her abdomen and rippling the flesh convulsively.

"Oh hell. She's in labor," Sam seemed to choke then as both he and Brock paled alarmingly.

"I don't want to have this baby here," she moaned, more than worried at the suddenly horrified faces of the men staring at her, as though she were some sort of aberration. "Sarah. Heather. Do something, please."

Thankfully, they did. Marly wasn't certain how they managed to get everyone dressed, including herself, and into the vehicles heading for the hospital. She was just thankful they had. The contractions were coming faster than Doc had told her they would starting off, and though she fought to hide her fear from Cade, she couldn't hide it from herself.

She sat in the back seat of the Mercedes, Cade's arms wrapped around her, doing the Lamaze breathing and feeling like a panting dog as she tried to relax through the rapidly building pain. God, she was so thankful she opted for drugs for the delivery. This was not comfortable. Not comfortable at all.

"Babe, you doing okay?" Sam glanced back as he sped through the night, his worried face reflected in the dim interior lights.

"Watch the damned road, Sam," Cade snapped as he held Marly close to his chest, his gentle hands stroking her distended abdomen as it contracted harshly.

"I'm watching the road." He turned back quickly as Heather's softly whispered reminder of the upcoming curves of the road added to Cade's order.

"I love you, Marly," Cade whispered at her ear as another contraction gripped her stomach.

"Fifteen minutes apart, Marly." Heather timed her. "Sam, honey, you'd better pick up some speed."

He picked up speed. Marly closed her eyes instead of watching the night pass by at a rate that came close to terrifying.

* * * * *

The contractions were less than five minutes apart by the time they reached the hospital. Thanks to Heather's call, nurses, orderlies, and Marly's no-nonsense obstetrician were waiting at the ambulance entrance when they pulled in.

For Marly, life had turned into a minute-by-minute count between contractions as she tried to relax against the overwhelming pain of the labor. It had also turned into a kaleidoscope of memories.

As though her life were flashing before her eyes, Marly saw the impacting moments of her years with Cade, from the day she had arrived on his doorstep until now.

How he had taken her, a gawky, awkward child, and dressed her in the finest clothes, given her everything a child could have wished for. He had showered her with all the love, security and praise that he himself had lacked in his life. Brock and Sam had followed suit. Throughout her teenage years they had raised and protected her, sheltered her, and by turns had overseen each adventure in her life. Had overseen them, and had eventually become the

adventure. And now here they were yet again. The three of them, faces pale, voices hoarse, as the nurses worked around her.

Between contractions, preparation and the smooth transition from pain to woozy comfort, she watched the three men. They stood silently across the room, their gazes shadowed and worried, flickering with fear. But Cade looked tortured.

"I'm okay," she whispered, smiling for him as the pain receded. "We're both going to be fine."

He moved to her, careful to stay out of the way of the nurses until he could stand beside the hospital bed. Then he laid his head beside hers, his hands tangling in her long hair as he held her to him, his body convulsing with a hard shudder.

"I know," he whispered bleakly, his voice so haunted with pain it broke her heart. "Everything's fine. I know that."

But she could hear his fears. Fears that had only grown as the pregnancy progressed.

"He'll be as gorgeous as his daddy. And just as strong," she whispered, well aware of the fact that the child could be no one's but Cade's. She had made certain of it.

She had given each of them the illusion that they would be as much a part of the baby as Cade was, to keep that bond alive for them. But privately, she had ensured no other fathered the baby but Cade. He was her soul. Everything that mattered in this world to her.

As his hands tightened in her hair, his body trembling with emotion, Marly feared the changes that would soon come crashing into his life. She wanted her husband happy. Whole. The nightmares were gone, but she knew his fears still lingered. The fear of losing her. Of being alone, deep inside, once again. And she

swore to herself in that moment, for Cade, for their baby, she had to make him face the final demon that haunted him. Him, Brock, and Sam.

* * * * *

Brock sat nervously on the uncomfortable couch in the waiting room. He held his wife close to him and watched the clock on the wall across from them. It amazed him. She amazed him. In little more than a year, Sarah had managed to fill his life so completely that he knew he could never ask for more. Yet he had so much more.

Beside him, Sam held Heather as they talked softly. As they both worried about the woman and child Cade was with now. Alone. His brothers weren't with him. But that was how it should be, Brock thought.

Until this moment, they had shared damned near every minute of that pregnancy with Cade. Had worried with him. Listened to his fears, saw his concerns. And as much as Brock was nervous now himself, he knew this final step was being taken as it should.

His fingers twined in Sarah's hair, his eyes narrowing at the emotion that had been forming inside him for almost a year now. He could feel the change in the air. From the moment they rushed into Cade's bedroom after his scream had disturbed Brock's careful sensual torture of Sarah's body, Brock had felt it. It moved like a wraith, weaving careful streamers of knowledge through his soul. He sighed deeply. No regret. No sense of nightmare. No overwhelming need to be certain he was still a part of the family, the bond that had saved his life for so many years. He had Sarah. With her, he could survive damned near anything.

"You okay?" She looked up at him, those whisky-colored eyes of hers soothing him as few other things could.

As always, Sarah sensed his feelings, his desires and needs, even before he knew himself.

"Do you know I love you?" he asked her softly.

A smile spread across her lips, through her gaze. "As I love you."

His arms tightened around her. Change could come, as he knew it would anyway. But as long as Sarah held him, he knew he would survive.

* * * * *

Why didn't he feel isolated? Sam sat beside Heather, his arm around her shoulders as her head rested against his chest, and frowned at that thought. Why wasn't he going crazy, the need to be in there with Marly and Cade overwhelming him? He was concerned. Anxious. Sam thought of all the things that could go wrong, but he wasn't frothing at the mouth to be certain. To share in it, to be assured Cade wasn't alone. That he himself wasn't alone.

He smoothed his hands down Heather's arms, distantly aware of the softness of her skin, the warmth of her body. She was talking about her sister, Tara. He knew what she was doing. Trying to ease his mind. To give him something else to focus on. He frowned. She did that often. When the memories haunted him, it was as though she knew. She knew and she went out of her way to still his demons, to fill his heart.

Strange. He hadn't seen that before. He had been married to her for well over a year, and was only now just realizing that.

"I told Tara this new assignment was a bad idea." Heather sighed against his chest. "But she thinks she knows it all. Ryder's not as easy to handle as she thinks he is. And Rick is just acting damned funny."

There was a thread of suspicion in her voice. Sam could feel it, but couldn't put his finger on what it was.

"Rick will keep her safe." He wondered if that was really what she was worried about.

"Yeah. He will." He heard the amusement in her voice. "Just like Cade will keep Marly safe."

Sam frowned. "Of course he will. Cade wouldn't let anything hurt her."

"Then stop worrying so much," she chided him gently. "I know you want to be in the delivery room yourself to be certain, but everything will be okay."

Sam frowned. "No. No, I don't." He hated the streak of selfishness that often filled him. "If it were you, I'd want it to be just us, Heather. Together."

He hadn't been jealous when Brock or Cade touched her, loved her. It filled him with a sense of security to know she would always be loved, always cared for if something happened to him. But sometimes...sometimes he wished he didn't have that need.

"It will be just us, Sam." She rose from his chest, turning to him, her green eyes dark with love, with dreams and life. "I promise you that. Just us."

His heart clenched. Something in his soul seemed to shift, though he wasn't certain what it was.

"I love you," he whispered.

She smiled that smile. The one that never failed to heat his blood, to mend his heart.

"As I love you, cowboy," she said gently, leaning forward, her lips touching his. "Always, Sam. As I love you."

Chapter One

October

"Look. If you put the damned thing there it's going to throw the whole room off." Marly's voice was irritated, aggravated.

"It will make the room appear unique," Heather argued. "It looks perfect there."

"It's not even centered," Sarah piped in. "Really, Marly, that picture isn't going to work."

The picture in question was an aerial view of the house grounds. Unfortunately, Marly didn't want to move the large, older map-styled picture of the ranch from over the fireplace. It had been hanging there for as long as the ranch house had stood on that spot. She wanted both pictures.

"You could hang this one in the dining room," Heather argued. "It would look good there."

"I want it in here."

"It's not going to work."

"Only if you center it."

And the argument was off again.

Cade escaped through the doorway with a growing sense of male horror and split a direct path to the kitchen and the coffee he prayed was waiting there for him. He found the coffee. The coffee and Sam and Brock, heads lowered, resignation marking their faces.

"What the hell is going on in there?" Cade questioned the other two men. "They act like they're ready to tear each other's hair out."

"No, that was this morning. When the picture first arrived," Brock sighed. "They've been crazy ever since Marly had Drace. You gotta do something about this, Cade."

Cade crossed his arms over his chest and stared at Brock in no small amount of surprise. "And you expect me to do what?"

Drace was nearly six months old and growing daily. Cade had never known such a sense of love, of responsibility, as he did when he stared at his infant son. Nor such a sense of terror. How to protect him? No matter his age. To instill in him the strength of a man, the acceptance and the honor it would take to survive in the world.

"Hell if I know," Brock mumbled. "Those three women have gone crazy. I swear they have."

"Yeah. And they're wearing panties again, too," Sam bitched. "What's with that shit? I touch Heather and she pats me on the head like I'm Drace's age and goes about her business."

They were horny. They were all horny. Not that they had been cut off...exactly. Just seriously restricted. Cade hadn't anticipated this. Drace was his pride and joy, but there were days he exhausted Marly. And during those days, being with Sarah or Heather wasn't the answer, either. The shift in the family dynamics had come about slowly, but it had settled like a comfortable shirt across their shoulders.

"I feel like I'm a fucking kid again," Sam sighed. "Trying to seduce my favorite girl. Heather's worse than a virgin some days."

They were bitching about it, but Cade could hear a thread of amusement, feel the slowly building tension and anticipation growing in them all. He shook his head and headed for the coffee pot. He'd be damned if he knew what the three of those women were up to, but he knew it was something.

"And they keep mentioning presents," Brock pointed out. "What do you buy them? Hell, I can't think of anything they don't have that we can afford."

"I offered Heather a trip." Sam sounded more than bemused now. "Anywhere she wanted to go, for however long. Thought she was going to cry. And not because she was happy, either."

Uh oh. Cade turned back to them slowly.

"Yeah. Same with Sarah." Brock shook his head. "I took her to look at new cars, and she acted like I broke her heart."

Cade had tried several different suggestions with Marly. She smiled. Acted enthusiastic over each but there was no missing the sadness in her eyes. Christmas was only weeks away now. There wasn't much time left and he had no idea what the hell she wanted.

"Has Sarah even given you any hints?" Sam asked Brock desperately. "Hasn't Heather mentioned anything to her?"

"Not a damned thing," Brock griped. "I even asked her what the others wanted. She told me to stop being a man and to figure it out." Insulted male ego echoed in his voice. "How does one stop being a man?" he grunted irritably.

"By being a woman," Sam snickered. "Want us to buy you a thong for Christmas, bro?"

Brock hurled a biscuit at his cackling brother, hitting him in the forehead even as Sam tried to duck. Crumbs rained down as it broke apart, littering Sam's broad chest with the baked flour.

"Cut it out. Both of you." Cade grabbed for one of the few remaining biscuits. Heather had made them, obviously. They were light and flaky, damned near melting in his mouth when he bit into one.

"How about a housekeeper?" He frowned as he thought of all the extra work involved in the house now. "Someone to just come in through the day."

They all stilled. At any given time during the workday, they could sneak in for a few minutes of heated, lusty sex wherever they found one of the women. Cade sobered at that thought. Or at least it used to be. He frowned. He hadn't touched Sarah or Heather since Drace's birth. He was spending too much time trying to get into his own wife's pants. Like the other two, she was as hard to seduce these days as a nervous virgin.

"Yeah, maybe that would be a good idea." Sam straightened in his chair. "Hell, Heather gets out of bed too damned early to fix breakfast anyway. I never get to touch her in the morning anymore. That could work."

"At least we don't have to worry about a housekeeper walking in on anything anymore," Cade said wearily. "Damned if I want any more talk circulating around town about our lives. I'd like to see it settle down a bit before Drace is old enough to go to school."

The other two sighed. They had talked about this before. They had never given much thought to what those in town gossiped about. They were careful of their wives' reputations, and were feared enough that nothing was said or done to hurt the women. But they knew how cruel and thoughtless other children could be. It wasn't something they wanted Drace to suffer for.

"Might be a good idea," Sam said slowly. "Thanksgiving is coming around. We could have a big dinner. Maybe let the girls invite some of the friends they've made. The best way to ensure Drace's future is to make certain he has the loyalty needed to overcome anything that gets thrown at him."

Everyone had hated old Joe so badly that torturing his boys had been a favorite game. Cade would be damned if he would see his son tortured that way.

"Okay." Cade breathed in slowly. "I'll call Marie and see if she can find us someone."

Marie had been their housekeeper while they were growing up. She was retired now, living comfortably on the fund Cade had set up for her years before.

She would be more than willing to help. They were still her favorite boys, she claimed each time they drove over to make certain she had groceries, medicine, whatever she needed.

“Good plan. But that’s not going to fix Christmas for us,” Sam warned him. “A housekeeper is not a good enough present.”

Cade shook his head. “Damned if I know yet. I’ll see if Marly is any more forthcoming tonight than she has been in the past weeks. We might get lucky.”

Chapter Two

She wasn't. Cade stared at Marly in the privacy of their bedroom after putting Drace to bed, a frown on his face.

"You don't want a housekeeper?" he asked her, confused as frustration flashed in her expression after he made the offer.

"A housekeeper is fine, Cade." Oh, he hated that tone of voice. Where the hell had his sweet, passionate little wife gone?

"Then what was with the look?" He faced her, hands on hips, his eyes going over her overly dressed body. "And what's with the clothes? What happened to your dresses, anyway?"

She frowned darkly. "It's getting cold, Cade. I like my jeans."

"Not that damned cold, it's not." He felt like a sulky child and he was certain he looked like one. "Dammit, Marly, you look good in the dresses."

But she looked damned fine in the jeans, too. They molded her body like a second skin, smoothing over her slender legs, emphasizing her small waist and flat stomach.

"I like the jeans for now." She shrugged. "We'll discuss dresses when it gets warmer. Unless you want me to freeze to death, that is." She arched a brow in question.

Cade's eyes narrowed.

"Fine. This room is plenty warm anyway. Wear the jeans outside it, but at least take them off while you're in here."

Her eyes rounded as though she were scandalized. "What if Drace cries? I'm not trotting into my son's room naked."

Cade wanted to roll his eyes. "He's a baby, Marly. You breastfed him, for God's sake."

"That doesn't mean I intend to run around naked in front of him." She crossed her arms under her breasts.

Cade's mouth watered at the sight of those soft mounds beneath her light sweater. His cock throbbed. He was walking around in a nearly constant state of arousal.

"Then put a robe on." He forced the words past his gritted teeth. "Marly, baby, you're pushing a desperate man here."

What was that glimmer that flashed in her gaze? As though she were stilling a flare of anticipation. How long had it been since he had paddled her ass for playing games with him? He hid his smile. Let her keep playing. He couldn't wait to watch those tender curves redden; hear her screaming for release.

The baby's nursery was on the other side of the bathroom. Pretty much protected from the sounds of her arousal and completion. He checked the monitor at the side of the bed. It was on. No danger. His hands itched to touch her. Hell, it had been before the baby was born since he had sunk his cock up her tight ass. He could take her, show her the dangers of pushing him so far. Hell, that was most likely why she was pushing him. She loved it as much, if not more, than he did.

"A desperate man," she snorted softly, her eyes filled with warmth and amusement. "Really, Cade. You act like you haven't been touched in months."

His eyes narrowed at the deliberately provocative sound of her voice. Her nipples were hard. He could see them beneath her sweater.

"Days," he growled.

She gave him a moue of false pity. "Poor baby. But I'm sure things will settle down soon."

Cade knew she was more than aware that he wasn't about to go to Sarah or Heather, so he wasn't exactly certain what the hell she was up to. And from his conversation with his brothers earlier, the other two women were no more forthcoming than his own wife was.

"Is this about Christmas?" he finally asked her point blank, wondering what the hell was up with the subtle little game he sensed was being played. "Am I supposed to be catching hints that I'm missing about presents?"

He saw it then. A flash of fire in her eyes. Almost a sense of frustration or anger. Okay. So this was about hints.

"Marly, tell me what you want," he chided her gently. "I'm not good at the hint, baby. You know that."

"I don't know what you're talking about." She shrugged, but he could feel a sense of hurt involved.

She knew damned good and well what he was talking about and she had no intention of enlightening him. Something tightened in Cade. A sense of fear. Could he be wrong? Maybe this wasn't about Christmas after all. Was he losing her? He had heard horror stories of the changes in women after the birth of a child. Marly was young. Had she really been too young to know what she wanted? To understand the commitment it had taken to love him? Had he destroyed it all?

He tried to still the rush of agony that resonated through him at the thought. The need to take her, hard and deep, to make certain he still held at least that part of her. He tightened his body instead. Steeleed himself against the nightmares that rose inside his soul.

She had lost everything he had tried to give her from the moment she had been brought to him. Her innocence. Her fairy tale dreams of love and marriage. Her fantasy of her mother and a mother's love. It would be enough to destroy anyone. Especially someone as gentle, as filled with love, as his Marly.

"Look at you," she sighed. "You're closing up on me. Freezing me out, just like you always do. I hate it when you do that, Cade."

He watched her quietly. He saw love in her eyes. They were soft, shimmering. But there was something more, and that unknown quality had the potential to be his worst nightmare.

"What do you want, Marly?" He kept his voice cool, kept a tight rein on the emotions clashing inside him.

Her gaze flashed with anger. "I want you to stop expecting the worst," she snapped. "Any time you don't understand something going on inside me you lock up. Like you expect me to start spouting hatred and judgmental accusations. It's like, even now, you can't accept just how much I do love you."

The pain in her voice robbed him of breath.

"Marly, no." He strode to her instantly, his heart breaking at the tears suddenly shimmering in her eyes. "Baby, you can't cry," he whispered desperately. "Whatever you want, I swear, you can have it. But you have to tell me."

She surprised him by shaking her head, moving away from him.

"Not this time." She breathed in roughly. "This time, Cade, you have to figure it out."

He blinked in surprise. "Figure what out, Marly? Dammit, I'm not a mind reader."

"Too bad." She shrugged.

"Too bad?" he asked her softly, his lust rising sharply at the deliberate challenge he could feel pulsing in the air now.

"Figure it out, Cade." She wasn't angry, but she wasn't far from it.

He watched as she paced over to the window, staring out at the wintry night, tucking her hands into the pockets of her jeans, refusing to say anything more. Refusing to acknowledge him.

Cade realized then that she had been doing this a lot lately. All three of the women had been. Distancing themselves in very subtle ways, making him, Brock and Sam crazy as they fought to figure out the problem. He'd had enough. Since Drace's birth he had tried to be gentle, tried to be the lover a young, innocent woman should have. Tried to make up for the way he had taken her, pushed her, in the beginning of their relationship. She might not tell him what the hell she wanted, but he was damned sick and tired of trying to guess, trying to make up for something he wasn't totally certain anymore that she regretted.

"The hell I will," he muttered, jerking his shirt off, determined that if he wasn't going to get answers, he was at least going to get that tight little ass she was driving him crazy with. First she would submit, then he would get answers.

She turned back, her eyes wide as he stripped. Shirt, boots, pants. His cock was like a length of hot steel, driving him mad with the lust sweeping through his body. And there she stood, her gaze surprised. As though she didn't know what he was pushing her toward.

"Cade." Her voice was hesitant. "The baby..."

"Is asleep," he growled, the fingers of one hand going to his cock as he watched her. Damn, he was going to explode just watching her. "Strip."

"Excuse me?" He would have laughed at the offended shock in her tone if he didn't know damned well that was lust glittering in her eyes rather than fear.

"Now!" He kept his voice hard, visions of her naked, on her knees, his cock tunneling between her lips suddenly driving him insane.

"I don't have time for this, Cade. I'm tired."

"Damned good thing I'm not." He walked to her, grabbing her close, his lips grinding down on hers as he ripped the sweater in half.

She groaned beneath the kiss, but her lips opened, her tongue tangling immediately with his as the pent up violence of his need swept through them both. God, how long had it been since he had taken her like this? Since he had driven them both crazy with the hunger building inside him?

He divested her of her jeans just as quickly, certain the zipper had been stripped with the heavy hand he used to part the material. Fuck it, he thought, one less pair of the bastards for her to tempt him with.

"Cade." Her voice was sharp with the denial that her body contradicted.

His hand caught in her hair, dragging her head back as he stared into her eyes.

"Take the panties off." He bared his teeth, fighting the need to throw her to the bed and pound inside her with a force that would send them both screaming into release.

"No." Her eyes narrowed, her breasts heaving, the hard points of her nipples raking his chest with lashes of fire.

"No?" He released her hair, hooked his fingers in the elastic band of the scraps of lace she called panties and jerked them down her legs as he pushed her back on the bed.

In less than a second he had her gloriously naked, her legs spread. His body tightened at the sight of glistening female cream on the bare mound between her thighs. The small lips pouted, parted, revealing her swollen clit, the tiny entrance to her tight pussy. His cock jerked as she tried to close her legs.

He let her fight. He remembered clearly the excitement that whipped through her when he pretended to let her struggle. She kicked free, turned and attempted to jump across the bed.

Cade pushed her flat to her stomach, moving between her thighs, spreading them, one hand holding her back to the bed, the other moving between her thighs.

Their groans shattered the room as his fingers raked along the little slit of her cunt, circled her clit and moved down, parting the silken folds until they could delve into the hot recess of her body.

Silken muscles tightened on two plunging fingers as her vagina convulsed. Cade was mad with lust now. There was no time for foreplay, no time to prolong the exquisite agony. His fingers gathered the satiny juices lying thick and wet on her pussy and spread them back, opening the little bud of her anus, preparing it for the invasion of his finger.

He positioned his cock at the entrance of her vagina. Teased the opening to her hot ass. In the next second he invaded both with a forceful thrust that had her screaming out beneath him.

God. It was so good. Hot. The muscles of her cunt clenched with biting force around the thick shaft of his erection. Her anus convulsed around his finger. Both channels milked at his flesh as his scrotum drew tight and hard against the base of his cock. He was only seconds from release. Thankfully, so was Marly.

With one hand he held onto her slender hips, watching the penetration of his finger into the ultra snug anal opening and began to fuck her with hard, deliberately powerful strokes.

Perspiration poured from his tense body as he fought the need to come fast and hard. He wanted to pour himself into her. Mark her forever. Make her scream her satisfaction. Just as she was screaming his name, begging him for more.

Her vagina rippled around his cock. It convulsed as he thrust into her hard and heavy, relishing the tight grip, the building heat. She tightened on him like a fist, her grip desperate, causing each entrance to forcibly part the spasming muscles, making her scream from the biting pleasure/pain as he groaned from the building pressure in his cock.

"Take me. All of it." He clenched his teeth against the pressure tightening in his scrotum, the exquisite agony of holding back, feeling her tighten around him, plunging inside her until her cries rose, whipping around him, filling his soul until she exploded beneath him.

"God! Marly!" He buried his finger deep inside her ass as he plunged every inch of his tormented cock inside the erupting volcano of her pussy and released his control.

His back bowed as heat arced from between his thighs, up his spine, burying in his mind and exploding with lightning-fast sensation through his body.

He could feel his semen rushing from the tip of his cock, vibrating inside her spasming pussy, and couldn't hold back his own cry. It poured from his soul. Desperate. Filled with his dreams, his needs, his fears.

Spurt after spurt tore through him until he collapsed against her weakly. She was trembling, as was he. Fighting for breath as the storm slowly passed.

"Now, tell me what the fuck is going on," he growled at her ear. "Any more games, Marly, and I swear, I'll tie you up and torture the truth out of you."

Actually, he thought that might not be a bad idea. As soon as he managed to catch his breath, that is.

Chapter Three

November

"This isn't going to work like this," Sarah muttered as she, Marly and Heather sat in the hot tub in an enclosed grotto and relaxed after a night of exhausting sex.

The house had echoed with all their screams the night before and they hadn't even been in the same room. It seemed the men were growing tired of trying to guess. And the women were growing tired of their thick heads refusing to take a hint.

"God, I'm so tired." Sarah had her head thrown back on the padded edge of the tub, eyes closed. "Brock is going to kill me at this rate."

Strangely enough, they had yet to attempt to gang up on them. If they did, Sarah had a bad feeling this little plan of Marly's was going to go from sugar to shit real fast.

"Have faith," Marly murmured as she sipped at the cool wine she had poured for them all earlier. "Enjoy the moment's respite. You have no idea in hell how hard it was to steal it."

For two weeks Cade, Brock and Sam had waged a steady, ever growing sexual war against their wives. The wives gave the clues; the knotheds ignored them and demanded answers. Sarah sighed. Brock was going to keep ignoring the clues long enough to piss her off and she would end up giving the game over to the men. She wasn't much for games anyway. It was her idea to just lay the law down to them and have it over with. Marly and Heather were certain that wouldn't work. Sarah needed some sleep. The idea was looking better to her every day.

"How bad do we want this?" Marly asked them.

Sarah lifted her head and sighed heavily. "Pretty damned bad," she muttered.

"The idea's a great one," Heather answered wearily. "The execution of it is just getting tiring as hell, though."

"Then we finish it." Marly's will was a hell of a lot stronger than Heather had given her credit for.

When she first met Marly McCall, she had never suspected that beneath that sweet smile, the wicked glint in her eyes and gentle demeanor, existed a backbone of steel. She was proving differently, though. She had outlined the plan while still in the hospital after giving birth to Drace. Her voice had echoed with determination then. It was steel-hard with it now.

"How do we finish it?" Heather asked curiously. "They aren't taking the hints, Marly. As you can see."

"They will." Marly seemed to have more confidence in the men than Heather did.

"At least you have a baby as an excuse to rest," Sarah grumbled as she sipped from her wine. "Brock is killing me, Marly."

Marly snorted. "Oh, is that pain I keep hearing in your screams then?"

Heather laughed. Sarah wasn't above begging loud and hard once Brock got started. She always did say Brock was the most patient of the three men. And it wasn't that it wasn't enjoyable, Sarah thought wearily. It was just getting harder and harder not to give him what he wanted.

"Bite me," Sarah said tiredly as she leaned her head back again.

"Uh oh. Brock," Sarah heard Marly mutter as the sliding door whispered open and a step sounded behind them.

Sarah's head raised in alarm as she turned around slowly. And there was Brock. Gloriously naked, his erection straining, throbbing heavily, as he caught her gaze and moved slowly toward her. Oh hell. She licked her lips in anticipation, feeling the moisture flooding from between her thighs.

"Brock, you were supposed to help Cade." Marly sounded more than nervous now.

"Drace is sleeping fine, Little Bit." There was no smile. He didn't break his gaze from Sarah's. "You can go check for yourself or stay and wait until Sarah takes care of this little matter she caused earlier."

Sarah had a feeling she was going to pay for teasing him only seconds before leaving him with the other two men to watch the baby. Drace usually stayed up for hours in the evening.

He stepped into the hot tub, his cock, thick and delicious, at level with Sarah's face now.

"Your choice," he growled.

Sarah shivered deliciously. She opened her mouth.

Instantly she was filled with the thick male flesh pulsing so demandingly. Her lips closed over it, her tongue flickering against the head teasingly as her hands rose to grip his thighs. She was aware of Marly and Heather moving from the hot tub, fleeing from the sexual tension beginning to build in the grotto.

Brock's hands gripped her head as he began to thrust in and out of her mouth. This was his retaliation. He always gave her the choice to begin with. She could ease the demands of his body, which she usually teased to a fever pitch, with her mouth or between her thighs. She always tried to stay in control. But she knew damned well what would happen next if she wasn't extremely careful.

"Such a hot little mouth." His words washed over her, spurring her own lust. "So tight and wet. That's it, baby. Lick my cock. Just like that."

She normally loved how very vocal he could get in his hunger for her. He never failed to tell her how much he enjoyed her touch. How hot her mouth was. How very good her tongue felt.

"There you go, baby. Suck me. Suck me harder, Sarah." Her lips were wrapped around the turgid heat, suckling deeply, drawing him as far into her mouth as comfortable. She was quite adept at nearly taking him to her throat and then swallowing almost convulsively.

She did this now. Allowing the head to sink to the entrance of her throat, working desperately to swallow his flesh as he groaned in delirium. Oh, he loved that. His thighs trembled, pre-come leaking from the tip of his cock, salty and sweet at the same time. Then she drew back, savoring the taste that exploded on her tongue as pearly liquid dripped from his cock. He was close. So close, she could feel it.

His balls were tight against the base of his shaft, his breathing loud in the grotto, almost strangled with pleasure as he drove as deep as he dared into her mouth once again. Her fingers cupped his scrotum, caressed it as her other hand stroked the remaining length of his shaft not buried in her mouth.

"Fuck. Yes, baby," he groaned. "Swallow my cock, Sarah. God, it's good. Too fucking good."

He was muttering his pleasure constantly now. A litany of scattered explicit phrases that had her flushing with heat, her vagina pulsing with need. She was already pleasantly tender from his lusty play hours before. She had a feeling she would be exquisitely sore before it was over with.

"Sarah. I'm going to come." He always warned her first. Gave her the chance to pull back, to let him finish in the depths of her pussy rather than spilling his seed in her mouth and making him harder, hungrier, for the flesh between her thighs.

As always, by now, she was craving the taste of him, nearly demented in her need to feel the hard wash of semen blasting down her throat. Like a favorite dessert, she couldn't deny herself. Her lips tightened on him, her stroking hands intensifying the pleasure as his hand buried in her hair, fingers clenching, his hips thrusting harder, faster into her mouth.

The burst of his release had her groaning in pleasure. The tart taste of his semen washed over her tongue. His cock stroked over it spilling the rich essence as she tried to swallow the flesh coming so close to her throat.

Hard, liquid pulses of pleasure accompanied by his throttled shouts of release washed through her. Sarah wanted to cry out at the depth of her own satisfaction. Even without her orgasm, knowing she brought her husband to the point of such pleasure never failed to heat her entire body. Never failed to keep him hard, make him hungrier than ever before.

He pulled from her mouth with a lusty growl, his hands gripping her waist, pulling her up until she sat on the padded edge of the hot tub. There were no preliminaries. He spread her thighs, bending her back, then watched as he sank every hard, hot length of his cock deep inside the slick portal awaiting him there.

"Brock," she cried out, as helpless as always to still her own vocal enjoyment of the act.

"That hot little mouth is like an aphrodisiac," he growled as his head lowered, his tongue licking at the hard point of one nipple. "I can't fuck you enough, Sarah. I can't get enough of the pleasure, baby. I can't come hard enough to ever sate the need I have for you."

She almost climaxed at the power of emotion echoing in his voice. He always hungered for her. She knew that. Reveled in it. Loved it. Her cunt tightened convulsively around the thrusting shaft, her clitoris throbbing with each stroke of his pelvis against it. He was destroying her. Stroke by stroke, by each whispered entreaty, each earthy vow.

"Harder," she cried out at the carefully paced strokes. She needed him now. Needed him to take her hard and fast before she poured out every secret he demanded that lay in her soul. "Please, Brock. Fuck me harder. Now."

He chuckled against the curve of her breast. "You know better than that, baby."

She groaned. "Please, Brock. Please."

"Give me what I want, Sarah." He burrowed deep and hard, parting the muscles of her vagina with a shatteringly slow thrust, stroking each nerve, each tissue, with destructive pleasure. "Come on, baby. I promise I won't tattle."

She knew better. Knew if she dared voice the need he would never be able to keep it to himself.

"Now, Sarah." He stroked inside her harder, deeper. Then pulled back with such exquisite hesitation her back bowed as she fought to end the sensual torture.

"No. Please, Brock, please take me harder." She shook her head, tightening on him, her flesh spasming with the need for release. Hot, liquid desire spilled through her vagina, gushing around the pulsing shaft as she begged for more.

"Anything you want, baby," he crooned an instant before he slammed inside her, hard and fast. "Tell me, Sarah."

She could hear his control weakening. His cock pulsed, throbbed inside her.

"Oh God, Brock. You're so thick. So hard." She shook her head, so immersed in the pleasure, the need to climax, that she was reaching her own breaking point.

"Sarah," he groaned, fighting for his own control. God help her if he ever found out how weak he made her. How much she wanted to give him what he asked for.

"Tell me." He retreated until only the head of his cock remained inside her. "God, Sarah, don't you know I'd give you the universe itself if I could? Just tell me what you want."

Desperation and pain filled his voice. Sarah's eyes opened, and she stared into the dark depths of her husband's tortured gaze.

"I love you, Sarah. More than my own life." His hands clenched on her hips. Sweat glistened on his face as his expression drew into lines of painful need. "Please, baby. Please don't hurt anymore."

And he knew. Tears filled her eyes. It wasn't just a game. He knew how desperately she needed, he just didn't know what she needed, and she could see the pain that caused. A pain she wanted to ease, yet she knew that the revelation in words could cause more harm than good.

Her fingers lifted to his cheek, trembling as tears spilled down her own cheeks. She loved him. She needed him. But she needed him whole.

"My heart," she sobbed, unwilling to hold it back any longer. Her hand fell to his chest, flattened over his heart. "Mine, Brock. My soul and my life. That's all I want. All of you." It was as much as she could give. But was it enough?

Brock stilled. His eyes widened. She felt his hands tighten with bruising strength on her hips as something glittered in his eyes.

"Always yours," he whispered. A second later he was plunging so hard and deep inside her, so fast and desperate, she felt her soul soaring from her body as she erupted around him a second before his climax exploded inside her.

Deep, hard, pulsing spurts of his seed vibrated deep inside her, throwing her higher as her womb erupted in an orgasm that had her screaming, her head falling back, her pleasure filling the air as her thighs tightened on his, holding him deep, taking every drop of ecstasy he spilled.

They collapsed on the heated wood surrounding the hot tub, their breathing rough, ragged.

"You have a lot to learn about me, Sarah," he whispered breathlessly. "And there's a hell of a lot you're not seeing. Now, baby, ask for what you want. If you dare."

She watched as he raised his head, staring down at her, his expression, for once, closed, cool.

"Brock?"

He moved away from her, watching her, his expression dark, controlled.

"If you can't trust me that far, Sarah, trust me enough to give me your every dream, then you can't trust me to love you, either. Can you?"

She shook her head, her chest tightening in pain. "I know you love me. I love you, Brock."

"Do you?" He rose to his feet, his eyes never leaving hers. "If you did, then that trust would be there. You would open your eyes as you expect me to open mine, and see what's right in front of your face. When you can do that, let me know. We can talk then."

Chapter Four

"This isn't going to work." Sarah tried to still her panic as she faced the other two women the next day. Brock had been too silent the night before. He had watched her too intently, too knowingly. He knew, and the very fact that he hadn't said anything was scaring her to death.

"Settle down, Sarah." Marly moved to the living room door, checking the dining room and entry hall before closing the door quickly. "We don't need the housekeeper to hear us."

"Not to mention the men." Heather paced the room. "This is getting too damned difficult. We're only weeks away from Christmas, Marly."

"What happened, Sarah?" Marly asked as Sarah sat down heavily on the couch.

"God, this is such a mess," she groaned. "I did my best, Marly. I swear I did. I was nice and vague, just like we agreed, but I think he guessed. He guessed and now he's madder than hell that I didn't just tell him. I knew this was a bad idea."

She glanced up as Heather and Marly shared a worried look.

"What?" she asked warily.

"Cade isn't speaking to me, either." Marly was wringing her hands, her blue eyes wide, upset. "He came to bed last night and just gave me this really strange look before he kissed my forehead and rolled over and went to sleep. He didn't say anything. He always talks to me before we go to sleep."

"Sam was acting strange, too." Heather pushed her fingers through her already rumpled hair. "God, this is such a mess. And it shouldn't be this damned hard. We shouldn't have to play games like this, Marly."

"Do you have another suggestion?" Marly was growing increasingly frustrated now. "Dammit, both of you know how we tried to talk to them before. It didn't work then. Why would it work now?"

They were all silent. Sarah frowned as something Brock had said the night before continued to haunt her. That the answer to what she wanted was right before her eyes. Her heart had slammed in her chest then, and it did again now.

"Marly?" She raised her eyes to the other woman. "They've stopped."

Marly shook her head as she stared at her in confusion. "What?"

Sarah frowned as she considered the past nine months. "Think about it. Admittedly, we haven't given any of them much of a chance to try, but they don't try, either. They've stopped."

Heather and Marly stilled. "We realize that, Sarah." Heather sighed. "But it has to continue this way."

Sarah shook her head demandingly. "No. Listen to me. Think about it. It's completely stopped. No little butt pats. No hot little looks. The whole nine yards. It's stopped."

Marly and Heather both watched her in bemusement. Had they somehow gotten what they were fighting for, without fighting for it? Had the men not paid any attention to their careful avoidance of being alone with any of them, other than their chosen husbands, out of choice?

Marly sat down slowly. "She's right," she whispered, looking at Heather in surprise. "I know Cade. All the avoidance in the world wouldn't work if he got horny enough to go after it. They've stopped on their own."

They had been so concerned with their subtle maneuvers to be certain there was no opportunity for the three men to catch one of them alone, or to try to seduce them into their erotic, heated play. They hadn't realized that the men weren't trying to do so.

"Now what?" Heather asked softly. "How can we be certain they won't want to try to reestablish those relationships later?"

Sarah breathed in roughly. "I'm certain, Heather. Brock is madder than hell right now." The very thought of that terrified her. "He pointed out to me, rather coolly, that maybe what I wanted was right in front of my eyes and I had refused to see it. I think he's right. We've been so concerned with protecting them, with trying to feel our way through this for the past year, that we haven't noticed the change in them." And that broke her heart. "We didn't see that it wasn't our machinations, but their decision to stop themselves."

She watched the other two women pale. "God. We're in some deep trouble here." Marly swallowed tightly. "A pissed August male is not a good thing."

Heather snorted. "What are they gonna do? Divorce us?" she asked them both in irritation. "Okay, so we fucked up. They were a little less clueless than we imagined. But they still haven't figured out exactly what we want. I say we tell them straight out and see what happens."

Marly and Sarah both shot her a look of incredulity.

"Get real!" Marly snapped. "That might work with Sam, and you can go for it if you think it will. But not Cade. You forget his sense of responsibility. His determination to keep this family together. This will break his heart if we do it your way, Heather. I won't risk that."

"It's not like we want to move to another state, Marly," Heather argued. "For God's sake, he would be able to see the house outside his bedroom window. Dammit, as much as I love you and Sarah, and the other brothers, I want my own home. I want my own family, too."

There was a wealth of pain, of growing despondency, in the other woman's words. There was the dream they all held. Their own homes. Their own families. The freedom to bring children into a full, productive family unit rather than the unconventional lifestyle they had lived.

It had been different when they married. New to the sexual excesses the men provided, they had been flying on sensuality and the freedom to give into the more extreme fantasies they all had at one time or another. But now, with Marly's pregnancy and Drace's birth, they had found a core of need inside them that terrified them all. Possessiveness. They wanted their husbands to themselves. They wanted their own homes. Their own families.

"So what do we do?" Sarah asked them both softly. "We can't destroy them. We can't hurt them for our needs. Where does that leave us?"

"Damned if I know," Marly finally sighed bleakly. "But we have to do something now. Because sure as hell they're all three onto us, and they won't wait long before they hit us with it. We have to be prepared."

Damn. Sarah had a feeling the next few days were going to be less than pleasant.

* * * * *

"They're plotting again." Cade looked up from the baby he held securely in his arms to Sam as he walked into the nursery.

Brock was already there. He stood at the window, silent, morose. He was letting this affect him too deeply. Feeling too guilty over something that could be fixed. And Cade was certain it could be fixed.

Drace cooed in delight as Cade continued to rock him, his drowsy blue eyes staring up with an innocence that could only be found in a child's eyes. Eyes so much like Marly's. Drace's features more like his father's. It made Cade wonder what their daughter would look like. And he was damned determined he wanted one. A fiery little bit of temper and beauty like his Marly, driving them all crazy with her less than logical ways. And his Marly could definitely be less than logical.

He smoothed a finger over Drace's cheek, smiling as the baby giggled and latched onto his fingers. He was already crawling. Put the little imp on the floor and he would be off and struggling to find some kind of adventure that was less than safe. He looked like his daddy. Acted more like his mommy.

"Did you hear me, Cade?" Sam stood by the closed door, and Cade knew his brother's eyes would be glittering with anticipation and amusement.

"What now?" He winced as Drace bit into his finger, the small, barely visible teeth stinging the hard pad of flesh.

"Well, at least they know we're onto them." There was laughter in Sam's voice. Only God knew how that lightened Cade's heart.

Drace yawned, his little eyelids drifting down as he gnawed contentedly on Cade's finger.

Cade snorted. "I was onto them days ago. Sarah just affirmed it." Brock had been furious with himself when he came to Cade and Sam and revealed the nature of the women's wishes.

"We should have seen it sooner," Brock murmured.

"We did, Brock," Cade reminded him of their conversation months after Marly's pregnancy had been confirmed. "It was our decision to stop. We just didn't know how far they wanted to take it."

A year ago, it would have killed something in him to see his brothers and their wives leave his home. They had been a part of each other for so long, he didn't know if he could have survived it then. Drace had changed that, though. The thought of the other children Marly had talked about wanting had cemented the decision. He didn't give a damn what the townspeople gossiped about, but he couldn't face the pain it could bring his children. Couldn't face the thought of raising them in any way that wasn't conventional.

He wanted to take them to Sunday school. He wanted to join the fucking PTA, for God's sake. He could never do that comfortably as long as their lifestyle

continued as it was. Besides, he wanted his wife to himself. As much as he loved his brothers, as exciting, intense, and filled with eroticism as their sex lives had been, he no longer needed that affirming bond that had saved them over the years. He needed Marly. He needed their children.

"She could have said something." Cade could hear the regret in Brock's voice. "I should have let her know she had the freedom to do so."

Cade looked up as Sam snorted. "Come on, Brock, they love driving us crazy. You know it and I know it. And we love it. I've called the contractors and they'll be out here next week. Let's let them have their fun while they can. Then they can make it up to us for not trusting us as they should have. As soon as I show my sweet little honey what a bad girl she's been, I'm sure she'll do just that."

Cade hid his smile as he looked up from his sleeping son to his brother's smug expression.

"I think we should push them just a hair bit further." He leaned back in the rocking chair, lifting Drace to his chest, his heart clenching at the gentle weight of his son resting against him. His hand smoothed over the baby's back.

"Yeah?" Sam would be all for the game.

"How?" Brock was always more suspicious.

"We make them ask." Cade kept his voice low. He had no desire to disturb the baby's slumber.

Brock moved from the window until he could face his brother.

"And we do this how?"

Cade watched the other two men. The changes in them all in the past two years were amazing. They laughed. They even hugged sometimes. They had even found a way to discuss the events that had nearly destroyed them so long ago. They had healed. And it was the tender acceptance and fiery love of their

plotting wives that had sealed the open wounds in their souls and allowed them to live again.

"Easy." Cade smiled. He had been planning this one all day. "We force it out of them." He looked over at Brock. "You know what makes Sarah the wildest. Stop having mercy on her and playing with her. Let her know the game is being played in earnest now. If she wants something, she has to trust you enough to ask for it." His voice hardened, as did his own resolve.

He loved Marly more than he loved his own life, but like Brock and Sam, it bothered him that she hadn't realized how he had drawn back from touching the other women, how he no longer needed any touch but hers. He didn't like the thought that she felt she had to lead him through a decision this important. He wouldn't allow her to play with their lives that way.

"When?" Sam was, of course, the most amused by the whole deal.

Cade shot him a chiding look. "You're enjoying this too much, brother."

"Of course I am," he chuckled. "I've not had this much fun out of Heather in months. It pisses me off she wouldn't come to me, but I figure once it's all said and done, she'll realize the error of her ways."

Cade winced. He had a feeling if Sam wasn't careful his little redheaded wife would be waving her gun under his chin. Damn, she could get mean when she wanted to.

"Tonight," he decided, rising to his feet to place Drace in his crib.

The baby was spread out in innocent abandon, chubby little legs sprawled, his arms thrown back above his head. He refused to sleep on his stomach any longer. Cade drew a light blanket over the sleeper-covered body and swallowed past the knot of emotion building in his throat. His son. It never failed to amaze him that he was a part of anything so perfect.

“Now.” He changed his mind as he smoothed his finger over Drace’s cheek once again. He was as perfect as his mother was. But unlike his mother, a hell of a lot easier to manage. For now.

Chapter Five

Heather knew trouble was brewing when the door to the living room opened and the three men walked in. Damn. Separately, they were too good looking for any woman's peace of mind. But together they were dangerous. Tall, dark-haired, bodies built like sin and gazes as wicked as hell itself.

Dressed in jeans, scuffed boots and T-shirts that showed their perfect muscles in stark release, it was enough to send her body humming. But when she looked at Sam, it kicked into overdrive. He was hard. They all were. But that hard-on was for her. She could see it in his eyes; in the way his gaze went over her body, lingered at her breasts, her thighs, then moved back to snare hers.

They stopped just inside the doorway, arms crossed over their chests, staring back at them with cool, arrogant expressions. Confidence seemed to vibrate around them. Control. Resolution. Hell, she had a feeling her, Sarah and Marly were in a shitload of trouble now.

Cade shook his head as he tsked at them softly. "Ladies," he sighed patiently. "I can see we've evidently not been keeping you well occupied."

Heather's brow snapped into a frown. Oh, she really didn't like that tone of voice.

"And you figured this out all on your own?" She almost winced at Marly's confrontational tone.

Cade shot his wife a chiding look. "Beloved." His grin was wolfish. It made all of them nervous. "You are, I'll assume, the ring leader in this little farce."

Marly snorted. "You know what assume does, babe. Makes an ass out of you and me." The cliché was delivered with more than a little heat.

Cade's gaze flared with lust. Hell, Marly was going to be screaming louder than the rest of them would be.

"Bad move, girlfriend," Sarah muttered from Marly's side.

Brock's brow lifted sardonically. Usually not a good sign. His gray/blue eyes were glittering with lust, a hint of anger, and a possessive glitter that should be curling Sarah's toes.

"Nothing to say, sweetness?" Heather's attention was caught by Sam's sardonically voiced question.

Heather shrugged lightly, fighting the grin that curled her lips. Hell, it wasn't like he would divorce her. Right?

"Oh, I have plenty to say, hotshot," she murmured as she let her gaze heat and drift over his body. He was one damned fine looking man, she thought. It never failed to amaze her just how she had managed to gain this man's love. "I've just been practicing patience."

Sam grunted. It seemed he wasn't buying that one.

"You ladies ready to state your demands yet?" Cade asked them, his voice hard, his gaze hot as he watched his wife. "The game is getting old."

"Says who?" Marly was definitely fired up now.

Sexual tension thickened in the room, making Heather shiver with the anticipation of what was to come. They had all settled rather well into married life. The sex was great, but the past year or so had been lacking in some of the kinkier aspects of sexual play between herself and Sam. She realized now that it wasn't just something she had missed; it was something that had begun to fill her with a fear she had refused to acknowledge. The fear that Sam was growing bored with her. That he no longer needed her as he had before.

That revelation caused her chest to tighten painfully. They did have, to an extent, exactly what they had been fighting for and they had been too frightened of the changes in their lives to see it.

"Says me, Marly." Cade moved into the room, advancing slowly on his wife as she became increasingly more nervous. "You should have known the game came with a price, baby."

Heather glanced at the other woman. Her eyes had widened in surprise. Punishment had normally been the exquisitely sensual torture of the three men driving her insane with pleasure. Heather frowned. Surely the men didn't think they were going to resume the sharing to placate their tender feelings? After more than a year of shying away from it, Heather wasn't about to allow it.

She stepped in front of Marly, surprising them all.

Cade stopped. His brows lowered ominously. He intimidated the hell out of her, but she wasn't about to let him know it.

"No sharing." She was tired of the game herself. Her gaze went to Sam, desperation welling up inside her as she met his hard gaze. "I mean it, Sam. No more."

"Are you saying you didn't enjoy it, Heather?" Cade asked softly, his voice suspiciously bland.

Fear, pain, and not a little regret rose inside her. "You know we all did," she snapped furiously. "But enough is enough, Cade August. It's finished."

"It was finished over a year ago. You ladies were just too damned stubborn and determined to have it your way to notice it." A spark of hurt, of anger, tinged his voice.

"You didn't say anything," Heather argued forcibly. Hell, how were they supposed to know? They were avoiding the men during that time as much as possible.

"Say anything?" Brock snapped. "Damn. Why would we? We weren't trying to fuck you, Heather. That should have been enough."

Exasperation laced his voice but filled all their expressions.

"Well, excuse me for not noticing you weren't getting hard-ons for all of us." Heather threw her hands up helplessly at that point. They were men. Dammit. She knew better than to argue with one of them. "It's not as though you informed us of this bright idea at the time."

"Sam." Cade's voice was carefully controlled now. "Would you come collect your wife so I can drag mine from behind her? Might be a good time to prove you don't need help handling her."

Sam's throttled laughter had anger surging hard inside her. She clenched her fists, braced her body. She would be damned if she would be treated like a child.

"Heather?" Cade caught her attention by simply cupping her jaw with his larger hand and turning her head to meet his gaze again. What she saw there had her stilling in surprise. Warmth. Kindness and caring, but the spark of lust that glowed there for his wife wasn't there when he gazed at her now. "You will always be my sister. Always loved by me. Always a part of me, just as Sam is. Nothing, and I mean nothing, means more to us than your, Sarah and Marly's happiness. No matter what you want. No matter your needs. If it's ours to give, then it's yours."

The vow, made so simply in a voice hoarse with emotion, had tears filling her eyes.

"But Sam's still going to make you think twice about playing games with us again." His wolfish smile was followed by her gasp as Sam moved in from the side, gripped her arm and began to pull her away from Marly. Brock was behind him. Sarah was thrown over a broad shoulder as she gasped in surprise. When she protested, a large calloused palm slapped her vulnerable rear lightly.

Heather wasn't certain what happened to Marly. But the other woman was laughing. Not that she thought laughter was entirely appropriate under the circumstances.

The look on Sam's face was unnerving. His eyes damned near glowed with lust, with love and an intent determination. Heather had a feeling the holidays were definitely beginning to look up.

Chapter Six

Sam dragged Heather from the living room. She gave him just enough to appease her sense of pride. She wasn't going to just lie down and let him have whatever he wanted. That might spoil him. Or her. She wasn't certain which. One thing was for sure, he was a man unwilling to take no for an answer.

He pulled her through the entryway and up the curving staircase. Each step was deliberately paced, as though he were holding onto his control by a thread. His expression, the few times he glanced back at her, was a study in sensuality. He wasn't going to go easy on her. But quite frankly, she'd had enough *easy* in the past year to last for a while. She wanted her man back. Hard driving. Demanding. Dominant. She loved the gentle Sam. But she craved the bad boy sex he had seduced her with in the beginning.

He pulled her into their bedroom, slammed the door behind them, then ripped her shirt from her back. She stared down at her bared breasts in surprise and shock. He had never ripped her clothes from her before.

"Do you have any idea how hard it's been to treat you gently? To show you how much I love you? How much you mean to me?" His low, hoarse voice had her eyes widening in surprise. Was he hurt? Had she hurt the one person she would rather die than to wound?

"Sam?" She reached out for him, then gasped in surprise when he gripped her wrists, anchoring them behind her back before his lips lowered to hers.

His kiss was pure carnal delight. His other hand gripped her jaw, forcing her mouth open for the smooth penetration of his wicked tongue. Once inside, he became rapacious. Starving. Bending her backwards as he pressed his jeans-

covered erection into the hot vee of her thighs, his lips, teeth and tongue forcibly seducing her with lustful intent.

Heather cried out, her fingers curling into her palms as she fought to rub the hard nipples of her breasts against the rough fabric of his cotton shirt. She moaned at the electric thrill that shot through them, arcing between her thighs, dampening her pussy further at the pleasure.

He held her securely as he backed her through the room. Each step was rife with anticipation, building in sexual tension as she waited for the feel of the bed behind her legs.

Heather had only a second to realize she was at the edge of the mattress before he pushed her down, his hands moving quickly to the snap and zipper of her jeans. Releasing them, he jerked the material down her legs then ripped her panties from her hips.

"Look at you," he growled as he stripped hurriedly, staring down at her, his face flushed, his lips heavy with sensuality. "So damned tiny my lust for you terrifies me at times. Each time I watch my cock burrow into you, I'm amazed you can take me."

There were times it amazed her.

"Sam." She was panting with excitement now.

"I hope you're ready for me, Heather," he said softly as he freed the heavy, thick flesh of his cock from his jeans.

She licked her lips nervously. He was raging hard. The plum-shaped head pulsed in demand, the skin over the steel-hard shaft stretched tight.

"Turn over." Her gaze flew to his as he muttered the order.

She knew what he wanted. In that second, she was well aware that the bad boy she had missed so desperately was back. And he was back with a vengeance.

"I haven't..." She shook her head quickly. She wasn't ready. She had stopped preparing herself for it when his lovemaking had become more tender, though no less hungry or demanding.

He smiled tightly. "That's when it's better, baby. So tight and hot I know my head will come off when I shoot my come inside that sweet ass. When I hear you scream, because you don't know if it's pleasure or pain."

His jeans were discarded, his shirt thrown to the floor as he turned and removed the tube of lubricating gel from the bedside table.

"Turn over, Heather. Don't make me tie you to the bed."

She shivered at the demand. At the thought of being tied down.

"Like that thought, do you?" Several silk ties were snagged from the drawer then. "Let's see how much."

She fought him. She wasn't about to give in without a fight. She struggled and cursed his easy strength as he dragged her up the bed, held her down and restrained her wrists to the slats of the headboard, spreading her thighs as he positioned himself between them. She was spread out for him, thighs spread, her cunt so hot and wet she could feel the juices lying thick along the tender lips.

"Damn, I could almost come just looking at you." He leaned forward instead, his lips covering a painfully hard nipple as Heather cried out, arching against him, helpless now, wary of the streaking excitement that flashed through her blood stream. She liked it. Liked being vulnerable, tied down for his pleasure.

"Sam." She bucked against him, so desperate for his touch now she knew she would go insane if he didn't hurry and fuck her soon.

"Uh uh, baby." He raised his head, his lips wet from his ministrations at her breast, his eyes dark, ravenous. "It's time to see what you're tempting. Next time you play games with me, Heather, you'll think of this."

Oh yeah. That was really going to scare her, she thought. Then he pulled one of the toys that had gone unused from the table by the bed. Her eyes widened as he pulled it from its protective package.

The thick, supple dildo was nearly as large as his cock. He smiled wickedly as her eyes widened.

"I haven't shared you all these months, Heather, for a reason," he informed her silkily. "We made the decision. Me. Cade. Brock. No more sharing. Do you want to know why, baby?"

She shook her head, her breath catching as he pushed several pillows beneath her hips, elevating her, lifting her to give him better access to the small entrance she knew he was determined to take now. After arranging her as he wanted, he squeezed a thick row of the lubricating gel on his fingers.

"Yes, you do." His voice was soft now, dangerous in its completely sexual intent. "I'm going to tell you anyway. Because when I do this..." His fingers tucked into her anal entrance. "And hear this..." He pushed two into her slowly, surely, as a long, tremulous cry tore from her throat. "I want to know it's all for me."

Heather's back arched as he filled the small opening with his fingers, stretching her, sending a fiery pleasure streaking through her body so destructive she feared she would never survive it. Her cunt pulsed, gushed, sending its slick juices to mingle with the lubrication he was applying to the small channel, making his entrance that much easier. But it had been a while since he had taken her there. She was unprepared, the muscles tighter, exquisitely sensitive.

"Damn, Heather." He grimaced with anticipation as she watched him. Watched as he tracked each move his fingers made in and out of her gripping channel. "Baby. It's going to be so good." He glanced up at her then, smiling wickedly as she trembled from head to toe.

His fingers thrust inside her slow and easy, parting the muscles, stretching them, preparing her as she cried out at the heat and pleasure/pain assaulting her body.

"It's been so long," he growled, his voice tight with anticipation. "I've been dying to burrow back inside your sweet little ass, Heather. Starving for it. I won't wait any longer. And I'll never wait again."

His fingers plunged inside her again. Deep. Wide. Heather dug her heels into the mattress, lifting closer to him, bucking against each entrance to drive him deeper. She was drunk on the sexuality thickening around them, damp with perspiration, with the heat raging through her body.

"Ready now, baby?" he crooned, his voice dark, anything but soothing, as he lifted her closer, raising her legs until they rested on his wide shoulders, and positioned his erection for entrance.

"Sam..." She stilled as she felt the broad head of his cock beginning to part the tender opening.

"I love you, Heather." The softly spoken words, so filled with emotion, with hunger and need, washed over her. "You are my life. You are the only bond I need. The only love I crave. Only you, Heather."

She screamed as his cock pushed slowly, relentlessly, into her anus. Not with pain. With streaking pleasure so intense it burned her alive, sent flames flickering through her pussy, her womb, making her insane with the combination of carnal delight and emotional excess.

As he pushed with hot deliberation into the ultra-tight channel, his fingers weren't still. His thumb raked her clit. His fingers played with the bare lips of her pussy, sliding in teasingly as he made a slow advance into the hot grip of her ass. She was dying with ecstasy. Heather bucked against him, trying to drive him deeper, gasping then crying out at the biting streaks of pleasure as her body

accommodated the thickness of his cock, until he was seated in fully, every throbbing inch buried in her backside as the muscles convulsed around it.

"There, sweet baby." He was breathing hard, fighting for control.

Heather stared up at him, dazed, her anal channel on fire, filled, stretched, awash in such stinging pleasure she feared the coming orgasm.

"Now," she gasped, moving against him, trying to force him to begin the deep hard thrusts that would eventually send her spinning into her climax.

"Not yet, baby." He picked up the dildo then. "I won't share you anymore, but I'll be damned if I'll do without that certain little cry that pierces my soul when you get fucked like this."

"Sam. I can't stand it," she cried out as he rubbed the firm head of the fake cock against her vaginal entrance.

He stretched her anus so tightly, filled it so deeply, that she feared what would happen to her own state of mind if he pushed that dildo up her pussy. She was already poised on such a peak of sensation it was mind destroying.

She had done this with his brothers. Felt their cocks straining in her body, her mouth, and hadn't known this intensity of sensation.

"Too bad, baby," he whispered gently. "Because here it comes."

She could feel every thick inch, every manipulated ridge, every damned nuance of the fake cock as he began to work it slowly into her already tight pussy. She thrashed in his arms, screaming out as the pleasure tore through her body with bursts of heat so blinding it nearly took her breath.

When he had the device firmly, deeply, embedded within her, he began to move. Oh God. It was too much. He pushed her legs back, coming over her, bracing his arms at her side as he stared into her eyes.

"Now." He pulled back, his cock nearly sliding free of her snug anus before he pushed back in a long, smooth stroke that had stars flashing in front of her eyes.

The dildo buried in her pussy moved with each thrust. Slow, shallow strokes that caressed nerves rarely exposed to such sensation, rarely stretched in just such a way. Her head tossed. Her muscles tightening on him as he groaned in pleasure and lost the last bit of control. She loved it when he exploded in just that manner.

He began to fuck her in earnest then. Each hard thrust inside her anus, each rasping of the dildo up her pussy pushed her higher, turned her into a creature of sensation, hungering, craving each second of the countdown to ecstasy. And he was driving her to it. Hard, blistering thrusts up her ass that kept her poised on that edge of pleasure, of pain, left them both gasping, moaning, desperate.

Her pussy rippled and she knew he felt it in the desperately stretched tunnel he was powering into. Over and over. Fierce, desperate thrusts as she felt her body tighten, her womb clench, her pussy spasm.

"Now." She tried to scream as she strained against her bonds, feeling her orgasm building, surging...destroying.

Unconsciously, the muscles of her anus clamped harder on his thrusting cock, her pussy clenching on the dildo as every nerve ending in her body exploded. Seconds later, she cried out again as she heard Sam's ragged groan, felt his cock throb, expand, then the hard, heated jets of his semen blasting into her anus, triggering another, deeper orgasm and taking her breath along with it.

"Love you. Love you. Oh God, baby. How I love you." Sam collapsed against her, raining kisses over her face, her lips, as his body jerked, trembled, his own release rippling through each muscle and tendon.

Heather fought to catch her breath, but the aftershocks of the orgasm stole it each time. She shuddered beneath him, her own voice husky, ragged, as emotion rushed through her.

"I love you, Sam." Tears dampened her cheeks, wet her lips. "I love you so much. But I need our own home." The dam had broken inside her. "I need our own family, our own babies. Dammit, I want my own picture over my own fireplace."

She was sobbing now, barely aware of him pulling free of her, removing the dildo and gathering her gently in his arms as he released her bonds.

"I want it all," she cried into his chest. "I want all of you."

She would never regret the time she had spent with his brothers, the sexual escapades, or the wildly erotic knowledge that she could have one or all, whenever it pleased her. No recriminations. No guilt. But she no longer wanted that. Had never truly wanted it for longer than it had lasted. She had what she wanted, what she needed, right now in her arms.

"Shh, baby." His lips stroked over her cheek. "It was always yours, Heather. Always. All you had to do, baby, was tell me. All I needed was to know."

"But you needed your brothers." She shook her head, hating her own tears. "You needed that bond."

"Heather." He pulled her head back and she was amazed at the depth of emotion she saw in his gaze. "This, with you, is all I've ever really needed. Without this, no bond on earth could save me, baby. My soul would wither away and die. You saved me, Heather. I'm so sorry you didn't feel you could come to me. Didn't feel you could trust me with your dream. The wounds healed slowly, baby, but you healed them. I'm all yours. Always."

The truth of his words glistened in his eyes, in the single tear that tracked down his cheek.

"Our own home," he whispered then. "Our own picture over our own fireplace." He placed his hand on her abdomen. "Our own baby." His voice lowered, becoming reverent, awed. "I want our own baby, Heather."

In his voice, in his eyes, she saw the need, the dreams she was afraid he would never have.

"Our own baby." Her hand covered his. "I love you, Sam."

"And I love you, Heather. Forever, baby. Forever."

Epilogue

Christmas, One Year Later

There were three houses where once there had been one. Within sight of each other, front yards facing the center of the main ranch yard. Each different. Each distinctive of the couple who resided within.

Cade stood at the large window of the suite of rooms he and Marly had renovated to allow them a view of the other houses. The bedroom was larger, filled now with Marly's gentle, sometimes whimsical, tastes. But despite the feminine touches, it still retained the more dominant flavor that the old room had. Heavy dark furniture, large chairs, a wide bed. Not that he ever let her get far from him.

It had been a year since she and the others had plotted and planned the final downfall of the August men. Cade smiled. Being taken down had never been so good.

"Aren't the lights pretty?" Marly moved beside him, snuggling against him as he wrapped his arm around her waist.

The lights were indeed pretty. Each house had been strung with a multitude of festive colors. Lighted icicles dripped from eaves, while candy cane colors wrapped around porch posts, and multi-colored blinking confections surrounded windows. It was a winter wonderland of holiday delights. Drace had loved each and every minute of the sight of them. And soon, there would be a baby brother or sister to share the excitement.

He ran his hand over Marly's distended abdomen, amazed at the life he could feel pulsing beneath it. Twins. It terrified him. Heather was expecting as well. Sarah had just given birth to Brock's newborn daughter. A golden-haired

little heartbreaker they would all be hard-pressed to keep the beaus away from later. The ranch was filling with life. With laughter. With love. With dreams he never thought would be his own.

“Thank you.” He pressed a kiss to his wife’s riotous curls.

She looked up at him, her brilliant blue eyes misty with emotion.

“Thank you,” she whispered. “For both our dreams, Cade. For daring to dream with me.”

Their arms surrounded each other, their gazes returning to the view, and the future stretching ahead of them.

Authors Note

Be watching for more news of your favorite August family coming in the sequel series, *The Men Of Madison*, beginning with *Tina's Temptation*. It's the story of an August relative, and our tough-as-nails Madison County sheriff, Joshua Martinez. Hey, sheriffs have handcuffs. This could get interesting.

On another note. I've received many emails both for the sharing to continue and for a final healing with the August Brothers. This is the healing. So why did I wait? Because at the time of the completion of *Heather's Gift*, the August Brothers, I felt, weren't ready to let go of that final security line that had helped them survive a brutal, destructive past. They had survived. Perhaps not as you or I would have, but they survived. They had to realize themselves, for their own peace of mind, that the past was over and that dreams really do come true. They had to repair that final bond themselves, and learn how to be brothers again. Something that cannot be done overnight.

I hope you have all enjoyed the series. I hope you saw what I felt as I wrote these books. The strength of these men who had survived, who were strong, enduring. Men who had faced their worst nightmare and eventually overcame the obstacles that their very survival had put in their path. I hope you saw the love, the innate gentleness, and the underlying craving for the love of the women they had set their hearts on.

Love comes in so many forms. So many different faces and so many elusive ways, that who's to say what it can ultimately conquer?

God Bless you all this Christmas Season. And I hope you have enjoyed this Christmas addition to the August Family. May you all stay safe, happy, and most of all, loved.

Lora Leigh

About the author:

Lora Leigh is a 36-year-old wife and mother living in Kentucky. She dreams in bright, vivid images of the characters intent on taking over her writing life, and fights a constant battle to put them on the hard drive of her computer before they can disappear as fast as they appeared.

Lora's family, and her writing life co-exist, if not in harmony, in relative peace with each other. An understanding husband is the key to late nights with difficult scenes, and stubborn characters. His insights into human nature, and the workings of the male psyche provide her hours of laughter, and innumerable romantic ideas that she works tirelessly to put into effect.

Lora welcomes mail from readers. You can write to her c/o Ellora's Cave Publishing at P.O. Box 787, Hudson, Ohio 44236-0787.

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