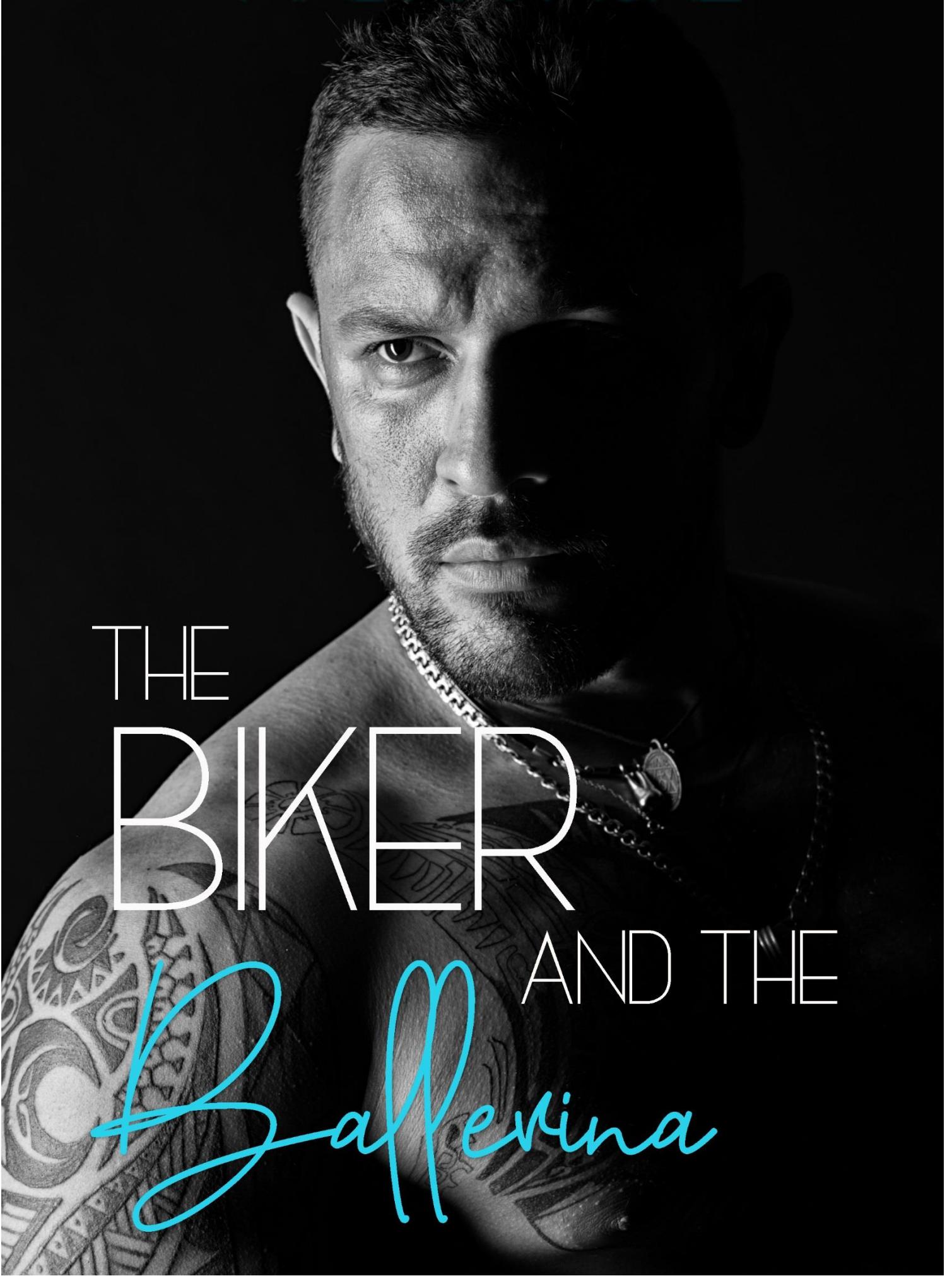


ANDRA ASHE

A black and white close-up photograph of a man's face and upper torso. He has short, spiky hair and a well-groomed beard and mustache. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. A thick, dark chain necklace hangs around his neck. His right shoulder is visible, showing a large, intricate tattoo of a dragon or similar mythical creature. The lighting is dramatic, casting deep shadows on one side of his face and shoulder.

THE
BIKER AND THE
Ballerina

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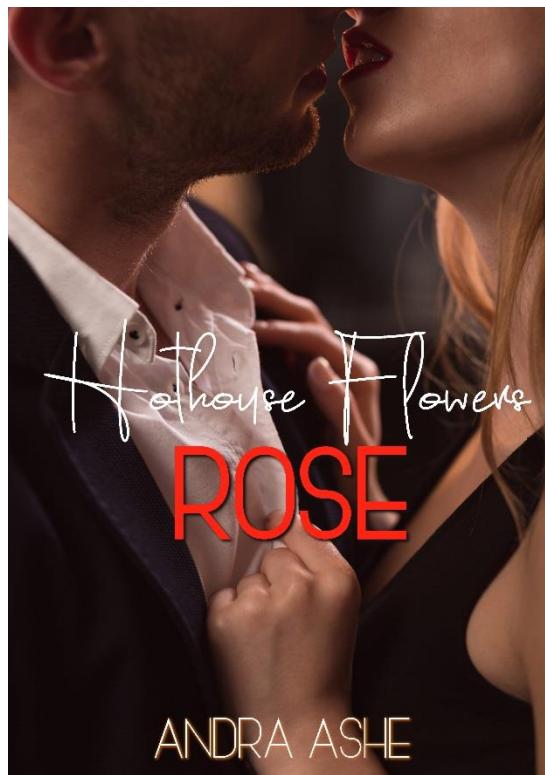
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ACT 1

Cara took a sip from the now warm water in the plastic bottle and leaned her head back on the gum tree. The road was isolated but not abandoned. Someone would show up eventually. Fate might want her to change her mind about joining the dance company, but surely not by threatening her with heat exhaustion or dying of thirst.

She prised off her flats, flexing and stretching her hot feet. If she was dancing Sleeping Beauty there'd be a prince to come and rescue her, but the road was still and quiet in both directions. Princes were obviously in short supply today. She sighed and closed her eyes. There was nothing to do but wait.

~* * * ~

“Are you ok?”

Someone was shaking her. Cara struggled out of a hot, sweaty sleep.

There was a hand on her knee. A strong, tanned hand. With the claws of some sort of black reptile inked onto each finger, the body snaking its way up the arm. She pulled away, shuffling sideways on her behind to shake of the hand.

Then she saw the boots. Black, scuffed with a metal ring and studded strap around the ankle. Worn, dusty jeans. And beyond him, on the side of the road next to her car a hulking, black and chrome motor bike.

Oh God. The sudden, hard thump of her heart spurred her to action and she stood up, backing away with her eyes on her car and wondering if she could make it there before he caught her.

Sharp pain jabbed the sole of Cara's foot as she stood on a stone and lost her balance. A tight grip on her arm steadied her against a body that was hard and, despite being dusty and hot, smelled fresh and tantalisingly masculine.

“If you’re going to do a runner, then it’s advisable to put your shoes back on,” a deep but soft voice said somewhere above her ear. He let go of her arm.

So why wasn’t she running, hell for leather, to her car?

Because something in the tone of his voice told her she wasn’t in danger. Cara stepped away so she could get a look at this contradiction of tattoos, leather and a voice as smooth as melted dark chocolate. But all she saw was the top of his head with its thick, dark hair.

He was on his knees?

“Lift up,” he said, tapping her foot. Too stunned to reply, Cara lifted her foot only to lose balance and grabbed his shoulder to steady herself. When on stage she could hold a perfect arabesque, but now she couldn’t lift her foot six inches off the ground. Wow, his shoulder was broad and rock solid.

“Steady there.” He circled her ankle with his hand. With the other he slid one shoe on. “Other one.” Cara obliged and she slipped both her shoes back on. “There you go, Cinderella,” and he stood up.

She knew she was short. What ballerina wasn’t? But he was a Titan. His chest, his wide, muscled chest which strained against a tight black t-shirt, was at eye level. And so was the outline of tight nipples. Cara swallowed hard and looked up.

“Brody Hall.” Full, sexy lips smiled a slightly crooked smile. A smile that urged one in response and Cara obliged.

“Cara Daniels,” she said, stepping back to make a space between them, not only so she could see him better but so she could breathe. Since when did tattooed bikers have perfect bone structure and designer stubble that didn’t look passé?

The bike, the boots, and the tat had painted an image in her mind, a clichéd image, but clichéd bikers didn’t smell delicious or smile like a heart-breaker movie star. Or make her want to run her hands under the black t-shirt, over the hard planes of his chest to find those hard nipples.

“How long have you been out here alone?” the concern in his voice sounded genuine.

She looked over to where the sun was now beginning to sink towards the horizon. “A couple of hours I think. Car’s dead.” “Well I didn’t figure you were just taking a siesta. Are you ok? You’re probably dehydrated. Wait here.” And he was striding back to the bike. Cara stared after him at his long, muscular legs encased in the body-hugging dark denim that moved like a second skin across an arse as tight and toned as any professional dancers.

She smiled. There any resemblance to the men shed had in her life over the past ten years ended. Dark ink shaded both his arms in what looked like a Celtic design, black against tanned skin, which disappeared under the short sleeves of his t-shirt. The cotton fabric stretched tight over tanned biceps and clung damply to broad shoulders and back as he reached into a cooler strapped to the back of his bike and drew out a bottle.

Brody walked back to her, dangling the bottle between his fingers, a prince riding to her rescue. But while ballet princes were clean-cut and generally not that much taller than her, this one was rugged and dusty with height that could have been intimidating, but instead created a strange sense of protection.

“Here.” He handed her the icy bottle. “Get some of that into you and then we should get out of here. Weather’s gonna change soon and you don’t want to get caught out here in a downpour.”

Ahh, there it was. The macho dominant biker behaviour. As a dancer she was used to being told what to do and how to do it, but this wasn’t a rehearsal hall. She was also too hot and too frazzled to argue. Unscrewing the bottle top, Cara drank deeply as his dark blue eyes followed her movements.. Goosebumps which skittered along her arms were surely a reaction to the chilly liquid, not his disarming gaze.

“Thank you,” she said, handing back the empty bottle. “And thank you for stopping.”

“No problem. You heading to the city?”

“Yes. Well I was before the car decided to die.” “Well I can’t take you that far, but I can take you to the next town where you can probably get a mechanic, or a tow.”

“Take me? On that?” She pointed to the bike. “Can’t you just have a look at the car? It’s probably just something simple.” A prince riding to her rescue was one thing, but carrying her off on his chrome steed was not on the agenda.

“Sorry,” he said, the half-smile drawing attention to his luscious mouth. “You’ve got the wrong guy for that. I’ll let you into a secret.” He leaned in and whispered, “I’ve never driven a car.” His breath brushed her cheek and this time she couldn’t blame a cold drink for the goosebumps.

Cara sighed. “Fine,” she said as somewhere in the distance thunder rumbled, and instantly regretted her resigned tone. “Sorry, I’m not ungrateful. I’m hot and late and grumpy.” He didn’t need to know that she was also disconcerted by how his closeness played havoc with her body.

More thunder echoed. “That’s getting closer. Lets get this show on the road.” He strode off towards the bike again. “Do you need anything from your car?” he called over his shoulder. “And you’ll need to wear something a bit more substantial than those,” he waved a hand at her shorts and tank top.

He had a point. Brody was pulling on a leather jacket despite the heat, so he was looking after her safety, not just taking an opportunity to catch a glimpse of her half dressed. She pushed aside the thought that if she came off the bike, a layer of denim wasn't really going to protect her too much. Unzipping the bag in the front seat, she pulled out a pair of jeans and a light jacket. The open car door screened her as she shed the shorts and top. Brody, astride the bike, took no notice of her as he fastened his helmet.

Grabbing her bag, Cara locked the car and walked towards the bike as it growled into action. The rumble sent a tremor through her body, which pooled between her thighs and brought her to a halt. Crazy. The heat must be getting to her.

Brody turned and handed her a helmet. In black from head to foot, with the rumbling bike between his legs, he exuded a masculinity Cara had never encountered before. The tension between her thighs became an aching need.

Pulling the helmet over her ponytail, Cara buckled the strap, slung her bag over her shoulder and straddled the bike behind Brody, her thighs either side of his leather-clad hips. Talk about being up close and personal.

"The road's quite rough, you'll have to hang on," he said, barely audible through his helmet and over the thrum of the engine. As if the feel of Brody against her body, and the vibration of the bike wasn't enough. Once they moved off and picked up speed, the surprising exhilaration pushed her into sensory overload

She slid her arms tighter around his waist, her breasts now pressed into his back. The heat that penetrated her jacket had nothing to do with the scorching temperature. Neither did the sweet ache where his ass nestled against her.

Chapter Two

The roar of the engine and the blur of road disappearing beneath the wheels of the bike always took him to another place. A place where he could just live in the moment, the physicality. The freedom.

Having Cara's arms around him, her hands splayed across his belly, blew all that usual tranquility out of the water. All he could think about was the press of her thighs against his and the way he fit so snugly between them. How they would feel wrapped around him, naked, urging him into her warm, wet flesh.

This was bad. Not only was it dangerous to have less than full concentration on the road, women weren't a distraction. They were interesting and fun, and those who chose to share his bed were usually exciting. But he never took them on his bike. This was his domain and one he didn't readily share.

But he couldn't, wouldn't, leave her stranded out here alone so now not only was he unable to give the road his full concentration, his cock was uncomfortably hard inside his jeans.

Under other circumstances she would never have caught his attention. Pretty enough with an elfin face, but with her hair simply pulled back and her petite figure she had a youthful innocence. He preferred his women voluptuous and just a little bit brash, but for some reason Cara's slender body wrapped around his had the blood pounding in his veins as much as the exhilaration of bike beneath him.

Her grip wasn't one of fear. Firm, but not desperate. He'd never had a woman pressed up against his back except when it was morning in his bed. Cara's slim body curled around his, her hand cradling his cock.

The bike jolted over a bump, the handlebars shuddering in his hands and Brody swore to himself. That was one reason not to have women as a permanent part of his life. They had a way of

creeping into your mind. And into your heart. And wreaking havoc with both. He tightened his grip, eyeing the darkening sky.

Before long large drops of rain pitted the dust on the road and splattered off Brody's helmet visor. He shook his head to remove the water. They'd be back on the highway shortly, but riding in low visibility was even more dangerous when there was traffic, and soon they'd both be soaked to the skin.

By the time they reached the town, the rain was a solid sheet of water. While Brody had ridden through worse, he felt a responsibility to keep Cara safe. He pulled the bike into the kerb outside of the town's only hotel. Unsure of how she'd take to his decision to stop here, but knowing they had no choice, once they were off the bike he took her hand and they ran to the shelter of the hotel's wide timber veranda.

Cara shivered as she unstrapped her helmet and he hoped she was more interested in getting warm and dry than getting to her destination in a hurry. But whether they stopped or kept going was his call. They shrugged off their wet jackets and left them outside the door with the helmets before stepping inside the door marked "reception".

The hum of voices and raucous laughter from the adjoining bar drifted through to the tiny office, which was unattended. Brody banged the bell on the bare desk.

"I'm not sure they'll have a mechanic. I'm pretty sure the pub is all that's here," Cara said, shivering again and wrapping her arms around herself.

"Even if they do, I doubt anyone's gonna go back to your car in this weather. That rains not easing off anytime soon." Even as the sound of footsteps approached, his gaze was drawn to the way her crossed arms emphasised the wet fabric of her tank top outlining small, pert breasts. At that moment any wet t-shirt winner he'd ever seen faded into insignificance.

"Hi folks, what can I do for you?" a short, grey-haired man with the weathered face of a true country dweller bustled into the office.

"Do you have a mechanic in town? We have a dead car out on the River Road."

"Sorry mate, what you see is what you get in Beaufort."

Cara compressed her lips and fished her phone from her back pocket.

"Reception's dodgy, love. You can use the land line, but," he said, checking his watch, "it's just gone five so garages will be shut."

She sighed and met Brody's gaze. "So, what now?"

He looked outside at the unrelenting rain, the bedraggled woman with a puddle forming at her feet, and then the old guy. "Do you have rooms?" "Yup, we got rooms. Nothing too glamorous though. One room or two?" He looked from Brody to Cara.

"Two." "One?" They said simultaneously. She glared at him and he suppressed a smile, and a sigh. So the sensations that had coursed through his body as she'd squeezed up against him on the bike had been one-sided. And the tension she'd created in his body would torture him until he was alone in his bed like an adolescent schoolboy.

A night of uncomplicated sex would have been fun, but with the scorching heat of the day and then the treacherous ride in the rain, his stamina was most likely depleted. Besides, for all he knew she was attached or not into casual encounters. He stole another glance at her, but she was rummaging in her bag.

Since she was momentarily distracted he also stole a glance at her nipples, budded tightly against the soft fabric. Of course it was because she was cold, but that didn't stop him wanting to take one between his teeth and wait for her response.

"If you want to park your bike out the back, I'll organise your rooms" their host said, moving to where half a dozen keys hung on a pegboard behind the desk.

"Sure thing." Brody met Cara's gaze briefly as he went back outside to move the bike. He suppressed the urge to wink.

Even spending a night with only a wall between them was playing would play havoc with her mind, and her body, Cara knew this was the right decision. She needed a hot shower, a good meal, a dry bed and some distance between herself and Brody. Her rescue had been a necessity, an exhilarating, unsettling, arousing interlude but now she needed to concentrate on getting to her destination in a fit state to start rehearsals.

If the guy behind the desk did the paperwork quickly enough, she could take her key and be upstairs before Brody was back. She doubted the pub did room service, but coming down to eat among the rowdy locals wasn't appealing. If there wasn't some sort of vending machine in the foyer, shed just have to sleep through her hunger.

"Here you are, miss." He handed her a key. "Up the stairs." He indicated over his shoulder. "Yours is first on the left. You got your own bathroom."

Cara gratefully took the key. If her room had a half decent bed, she'd be in heaven.

The stairs creaked and the carpet had seen better days and not a vacuum in a while. Small pubs like this survived on local drinkers, not random overnight guests, but beggars couldn't be choosers. As a ballet student shed shared some pretty seedy digs. All she needed was hot water and clean sheets.

The last of the days light slanted through the blinds and across the wrought iron bed with its fringed chenille bedspread. The pillows looked plump and in the bathroom there was a large old-style showerhead. Within moments Cara had the water streaming over her upturned face, rinsing the stress of a day gone wrong from her body. Of course there were no fancy little shampoo bottles so she had to make do with the lavender-scented soap.

She luxuriated under the water until it started to cool. Wrapped in a scratchy towel, with another around her hair, she hung her soaked jeans, panties, and t-shirt hung on a hard-backed chair. Fishing in her copious shoulder bag, she was glad she always carried a crop top and leggings in case something happened to her rehearsal clothes.

In dry clothes and her hair loose to dry, she went out into the corridor in search of a vending machine. The sound of running water came from the room across the hall. Brody, no doubt. At least she wouldn't bump into him. He was too busy soaping that hard, tanned body. Water cascading over those broad shoulders and what she had no doubt was a taut, round ass.

She explored the corridor where it turned a corner, but no vending machine. There was a door at the end which had a glass panes and no number. Peering inside revealed a large, almost empty room with timber floor and tables and chairs stacked along one side under wide, uncovered windows. Obviously a function room of some sort, but no sign of a vending machine. It reminded her of rehearsal halls from her childhood where ballet classes shared a hall with bingo nights and scout meetings. It also reminded her that she hadn't done a class in a few days.

Back in her room Cara found some soothing Chopin on her Ipod, and with the buds in her ears she returned to the hall. Used to working her body every day, she craved to stretch and move. With the music in her ears and the glow of a rising full moon shining through the tall windows, she used the edge of a chair as a barre and did a quick, basic warm-up.

It was rare that she could put her body through its paces without someone commenting or correcting, and she relished being able to just enjoy the sensations of her body moving to her will, the way her back stretched and arched, her feet pointed, her arms creating delicate circles.

Once her muscles warmed, she moved to the centre of the dusty floor and as the strains of another familiar piece began, Cara began to move. With the movement came the inevitable euphoria filling her body, making it one with the music.

When she danced for an audience she was Cara, ballerina. When she danced for herself she was just Cara. It wasn't often she had the freedom to interpret the music her own way and she let it take her to a place where nothing else existed.

ACT 2

Through the glass in the door Brody watched, transfixed by the vision of Cara with her hair loose and flowing past her shoulders, barefoot, in leggings and a crop top, her slim, lithe body moving in silence. By no stretch of the imagination was he a fan of ballet—he knew nothing about it—but he did understand the degree of training and discipline that it would have taken for her to achieve the artistry and emotion her body exuded. It was beautiful. She was beautiful. And totally and utterly fuckable.

His cock stirred and he couldn't help but wonder whether she had the same abandon and passion in bed. Not to mention the things she could probably do with that flexible body. Turning the handle, he pushed the door slowly open and slid inside to stand against the wall.

Now that he was closer he saw the Ipod buds in her ear, and smiled. No question that her selection of music was a world away from his heavy metal tastes. That her whole life would be a world away from his. But opposites obviously attracted because his desire to circle her tiny waist with his hands and feel her bare skin under his fingers was making his cock strain uncomfortably against his fly.

As he watched from the shadows she executed a perfectly controlled, slow turn on one foot, arms raised above her head, then effortlessly lowered her heel to stop the turn and pulled the buds from her ears.

He stepped from the shadows and clapped. "That," he said, "was amazing." She jerked her head towards him, eyes wide with surprise. "Geezus, do you make a habit of sneaking up on women?" As she came closer he could see the light sheen of perspiration on her throat and above her breasts, and he wanted to taste the salty wetness.

Brody could see no smooth way from here to having Cara naked in his bed, but he had nothing to lose. As she came closer he reached out to take her hand. In that first moment of contact, he felt no resistance and pulled her into him, folding her arm behind her, holding her against his chest. The warmth and dampness of her body seeped through his t-shirt. Still no resistance.

Her head barely came to his shoulders. So petite, like a little bird... but he could feel her strength. He liked that contradiction. So did his cock, which now pressed unashamedly against her.

When she slid her other arm around his waist under his t-shirt and lifted her face to his, he closed the distance between their lips in an instant. A whimper of desire followed the touch of his tongue against hers and her nails bit into his back.

Brody groaned. She'd found one of his kinks and was not so completely absorbed in her own arousal as to not notice his response, because she dragged her nails down the length of his spine. Arching harder against her as desire shuddered through him, he slid his free hand under her waistband to cup her ass. Her bare ass.

Dear Lord. The soft skin of her naked, rounded butt that fit his hand so perfectly almost had him coming. Crazy. He wasn't trigger-happy. He relished the thrill of anticipation, but for some reason she had him wanting to strip the clothes from her and take her now. Hard and fast up against the wall.

Reluctantly he pulled his mouth away from hers, brushing a gentle kiss on her lips and releasing her arm so he could slide his other hand to her ass, pinning her against him. He ignored the ache in his cock. "I really want to bang you," he squeezed her butt, "right here and now."

They both knew where this was going. There was no point in mincing words. He didn't take her for a tease—it was so easy to get caught up in a moment, but if she wanted out, that was fine.

His earthy language shocked her but only momentarily. It wasn't coming from a sleazy try-hard, but a man merely speaking his mind. The rawness of his words had her willing him to slide his fingers inside her. She wanted Brody. She wanted the primal maleness he exuded and the hard cock that pressed against her belly.

"Used to getting your own way, are you?" she tried not to let the erratic pounding of her heart reflect in her voice.

"Yes, but only when it's what you want too."

"Oh I want," she slipped her other hand under his t-shirt, dragging her nails down his back again. He shivered and Cara smiled. She was going to enjoy finding out what else would make him shiver. She'd had good sex before. Great sex even. But she somehow knew that getting up close and naked with Brody was going to be something else altogether.

"Well as much as standing here with my hands down your pants is getting me hot and bothered," he pulled her tighter against his cock, "I think you'd rather I did something more constructive with them." he slid his hands over her hips and down her thighs, taking her leggings with them. When he reached her ankles and she lifted her foot, again she couldn't balance and had to grab his shoulder. This time she was in no doubt as to why she had no equilibrium and she wanted his bare skin under her hand, not his t-shirt.

His breath brushed the skin of her belly as he rid her of the leggings. He traced a path back up the inside of her thighs. As his fingers approached her pussy Cara parted her legs, anticipating his touch. Craving it. A feather-soft brush along the cleft of swollen, damp flesh released a gush of moisture, his fingers now slicked with her wetness. Brody sat back on his heels, looking up to meet her gaze.

"Beautiful. And delicious." He licked her juices from his fingertips and before Cara could respond, he grasped her ass, pulling her to his mouth, honing in on her clit with his tongue.

Her grip on his shoulders tightened as her only awareness centred on the all-consuming pleasure from the flicking tip of his tongue.

The orgasm engulfed her without warning, a primal growl erupting from her throat. It was only the grip of Brody's hands on her butt that stopped her legs from giving way under her. His tongue slowed as she fought to draw breath, but as soon as her grip on him relaxed a little he increased the pressure again.

The wave of pleasure, which had begun to recede, now swept over her with an intensity she didn't think she could survive. She'd never screamed during sex before, but then she'd never been half naked in a semi-dark room with a man on his knees and when had she entwined her fingers in his hair?

Brody tilted his head up and caught her looking at him. He smiled. She slid her hands from his hair to his face. Taking one wrist, he brought her hand to his mouth and kissed her palm. A shudder rippled through her.

His mouth had just explored her most private place yet the brush of his lips on her palm was somehow so much more intimate. Before she could examine that contradiction Brody was on his feet, holding her hand against his hard cock.

Cara sank to her knees, undoing his zip and wrapping her fingers around his hard length. He more than filled her hand.

He gasped as she circled the head of his cock with the tip of her tongue, then arched against her as she took him into her mouth. She circled him with her thumb and forefinger, following the movement of her lips as she stroked him, up and down, his sharp, shallow breaths the only sound in the room.

"As wonderful as that feels," he said, stilling her gently with his hands, "I want to feel more of you than just your mouth. Stand up."

She stood, and as she did he pulled his t-shirt off over his head. Even the faded light couldn't disguise the beauty of his body. She couldn't help but touch him, splaying her fingers over the hard contours of his chest and the ridges of his abs. Brody caught her wrists just as she was about to slide the denim over his hips.

Shed never been a fan of tattoos but the black ink on Brody's bronze skin was almost elegant. The sleeves of black pattern and the broad eagle wings that sat low on his belly on either side of the soft hair was now visible where shed unzipped his fly, not merely decoration but a part of him, of who he was. Right now he was hard, for her. And she was wet for him. A perfect match. She smiled to herself

Brody skimmed his hands across her midriff, hooking under her crop top and sweeping it up over her breasts and arms. As if it was the most natural thing in the world to press her naked body to a naked stranger, Cara slid her arms up around his neck and closed the gap between them.

He wrapped his arms around her, pressing her hard against him. Being skin to skin brought every nerve ending into hyper-awareness, as if her whole body might erupt in orgasm. She'd never felt so vulnerable but so alarmingly aroused, or so completely engulfed in a steel embrace.

~* * * ~

Cara was warm and soft against Brody, but where his cock nestled against her belly it was pure heat. His body just wanted to savour the feel of his hardness enveloped between the two of them. The one rational thought he had left told him she most likely wouldn't appreciate him humping her belly like an adolescent who wasn't allowed to "go all the way".

While she felt small and fragile in his arms and he had some ridiculous primeval urge to keep her safe there, he knew her body was strong and didn't doubt her spirit was the same. He also knew she was passionate and sexual—and wanted him, now.

He couldn't reach her lips without moving away to lower his mouth. Cara groaned her frustration when their bodies separated but then groaned again with desire at the touch of his lips on hers. She opened to him, her fingers moving to the back of his head, entwining in his hair, her mouth as warm and soft as he knew being inside her would be.

She stood on tiptoe so she could nudge his cock with her sex, urging him to slide easily between her thighs, slick with her wetness. A moan vibrated through her kiss as his cock massaged her clit. She tore free to first gasp then emit a guttural growl as wetness soaked his cock.

With her head thrown back, eyes closed, lost in her moment of bliss, she was beautiful. She slowly opened her eyes, not yet able to focus, a smile tilting the corners of her mouth. He wanted to see that look again. Wanted to be the cause of it.

Brody clasped his hands beneath her ass and lifted her. Cara wrapped her legs around his waist. She weighed nothing and he carried her a few steps to where he could press her up against the wall.

'Back pocket,' Brody half whispered, half groaned and Cara reached around and found the foil packet.

The moment she was securely wedged between him and the wall Brody took a step back and Cara sheathed him, then grasped his hair, dragging his mouth down to hers. If his lips weren't busy being ravaged by hers, he would have smiled that such a small package held such fire. While he unashamedly enjoyed the thrill of the chase, he got an equal rush from a woman who blatantly took what she wanted.

As if reading his mind, she thrust against him, urging him to manoeuvre until his cock could finally slide into her. Her mouth went slack against his, a sound somewhere between a moan and a sigh vibrating against his lips.

Still supporting her with his hands, Brody buried himself deeply, luxuriating in her wet heat as he moved her up and down. She tightened around him as a low cry built in her throat.

Brody stilled.

"Not so soon, lovely," he murmured against her lips. She was so obviously multi-orgasmic but if she came right now, that would be the end of it for him. For reasons he didn't have the focus to think about at this moment, this petite bundle somehow stole all his self-control.

"No fair," she murmured back, squirming against him.

He kissed her softly, denying the urge to lose himself in the feel of her tongue stroking his. She gave a soft kiss in return and a smile, and it was his undoing. It seemed whatever she did had the power to destroy his self-control.

Brody thrust into her, then again. Harder.

"Yes," she growled.

From sweet to siren in a heartbeat. She was intoxicating, and she was coming again. This time Brody gave up any attempt to hold back as she locked her legs behind him and pushed against him, as if she wanted to impale herself as deeply as she could. Her guttural cry echoed in the dark, empty room and his cries joined hers as he exploded in a rush. With his one grain of remaining logical thought Brody remembered to keep hold of Cara as her body relaxed and her legs slipped from around his waist. Together they slumped to the floor.

ACT 3

Sometime during the night the downpour had stopped and now soft dawn light shafted through the window and across their bodies as Cara curled against Brody's bare chest. She stole a glance at the darkly-inked arm that gently draped over her, then to the strands of dark hair fallen over his forehead.

Tattooed and tousled and so not her type. Not that she'd had enough relationships or even liaisons to determine a type, but neither was she a nun. Dancers weren't known as "gypsies" for nothing. She was on the move too often to maintain any sort of relationship with anyone outside her career and gravitated more to men she met through her career.

This was the man who'd not only somehow managed to give her multiple orgasms all night long, but had her feeling completely natural when acting like some sort of porn star with a relentless appetite for sex, for him.

They'd barely slept since going back to her room but now he dozed while Cara couldn't. The surreal turn of events since her car sputtered to a stop the day before danced through her mind now that Brody didn't have all her attention.

It wasn't as though she'd never had casual sex before or had a guy spend the night in her bed. What she hadn't had before was regret that soon he would be gone.

She traced the curving black design on his bicep and looked over to the dusty buckled boots lying on their sides in the middle of the room and smiled. A far cry from the arty types a theatrical career usually brought her way.

In the few drowsy conversations they'd managed to have in the lulls between dozing and sex, Brody had talked about being an itinerant jack-of-all-trades. But while he shared her simple, transient lifestyle they were both en route to completely different places, and his life was a world away from hers.

As a member of a dance company she was an integral part of a team, dependent on others and depended on. All Brody owned fitted onto his bike's saddlebags and he was only answerable to himself.

Yet it was that difference that somehow drew her. Yes, physical attraction was off the Richter Scale but it was more than that. Cara sighed. So what? She had a job to go to. An obligation. He had the call of the open road. A road that he obviously enjoyed travelling alone.

Brody stirred beside her. As soon as he was awake he'd take her to the mechanic and they'd go their separate ways with just the memory of an erotic interlude. She stretched luxuriously and his arm tightened around her. She ran her hand over his chest and under the sheet. She pushed it down and wriggled out of his hold, down to his enticing hard cock. May as well make the most of the time they had left.

She took him into her mouth.

~* * * ~

In his half-wakeful state Brody hoped this dream didn't clear too soon as he reached down to finish what his imagination had started. But the wet mouth stroking him was no dream and the reality of the sexy, hot woman he'd spent the night with rushed back.

"Mmmmm, good morning to you too." He stroked her cheek then arched against her as she grazed him gently with her teeth. His cock hardened even more at the hint of a smile on the lips that encircled him.

She'd played up to his kink for pain, as the slight sting from the scratches on his back reminded, and bite of her nails into his butt now had him drawing in a sudden sharp breath. Even

though common sense told him it was ridiculous, he still found it incongruous that someone so elfin-like was really a kinky vixen.

The women he usually hooked up with were pretty much “what you see is what you get”, which worked for casual encounters. No expectations and no surprises.

But Cara was a continual surprise, perhaps because there’d been no premeditation, no tease or anticipation. He’d simply held out his hand, she’d taken it and the heat was immediate and incendiary. He never would have imagined the woman he’d found dozing under the gum tree, looking like a wilted English Rose, on her knees in a darkened empty room giving head to a stranger.

He was reluctant to admit that she had all but exhausted not only his supply of condoms but his stamina with her night-long appetite. His cock might be willing but getting out of bed was going to be an effort, let alone fucking her the way he knew she wanted. His dilemma was short-lived though as Cara moved to straddle him. He smiled, both at the impish look on her face and that the relief that he wouldn’t have to expend any energy.

Brody brushed his fingers along the edge of her thighs, so light against his own. Her days and nights spent inside, his outdoors. Having watched her dance the night before, he knew her body was a finely-tuned instrument, but seeing it up close and personal he’d gained a full appreciation of her womanly softness and her strength.

Shed only balked when he had wanted to suck her toes, embarrassed by the callused skin and enlarged joints but he saw them as evidence of years of dedication to her passion.

And that passion extended beyond the stage, he mused as she lowered herself onto him with a ragged sigh. He cupped her ass as she rode him, slow and easy, teasing with short, sharp thrusts as she hovered with just the head of his cock inside, then plunging down to engulf him completely. All the while she watched his face, gauged his reactions and tailored her movements to whatever he responded to the most.

But her attentiveness to his needs certainly wasn’t at the expense of her own pleasure. She leaned forward, hands either side of his face, finding the exact position so that his cock found the right spot. He knew it was just as difficult for her not close her eyes and lose herself to the sensation.

She looked into his eyes as she rocked her hips and when he gasped, covered his lips with hers, sucking gently on his tongue, inviting it into her mouth.

She tortured him with her slow, tantalizing fucking for what seemed like an age. Not that he minded—her knack for bringing him to the edge, then dragging him back, was both torture and bliss.

Then she increased her pace and pulled away from his mouth, sitting up with her head thrown back as she undulated her hips. No longer concerned about his pleasure, Cara rode him with singular purpose, caressing her own small, pert breasts, tugging on their pebbled nipples.

Watching her was a short-lived distraction. As her breathing shortened to throaty gasps and she tightened around him, Brody surged towards his own release.

At the soft caress of her palm against his cheek, Brody opened his eyes—and there was that look yet again. That look, the sated half smile, the half-closed eyes.

In one fluid movement she was by his side and he drew her close.

“That,” she said, idly tracing the ink that curved over his hip, “was delicious.” “Yes,” he agreed. “And we’d better savour it because there was no mention of breakfast with the room.”

On cue, Cara’s stomach rumbled and they both laughed. “I don’t know about you,” she said, “but I need food.”

“You’re not on your own there,” he said. “I hold you entirely responsible for my state of starvation.”

"Oh really? Well, then I'll shout you breakfast. There's bound to be a café or a roadhouse on the way to find that garage".

"Deal," Brody didn't argue. He wasn't one to get caught up with macho bullshit about who should pay. "As tempting as it is to ask you to join me in the shower, we really should get moving. Otherwise I can't see us getting out of this bed anytime soon," he brushed a strand of hair from her face, "and we both have places to be."

Life had taught him that all good things come to an end eventually and there was no point in putting off the inevitable. He reluctantly let Cara slide out of his embrace. His cock stirred watching her tight ass as she walked, unashamedly naked, to the bathroom. Time for his own shower. A cold one.

~* * * ~

An hour later Cara slid her arms slowly from around Brody's waist. This time she knew intimately the hard muscle and tanned skin that lay beneath the leather jacket. As he killed the motor and the rumbling vibration beneath them stopped, she was tempted to dip her hand into the front of his low-slung jeans and see if he was as horny as she was. But what was the point? As he'd said, they both had places to be.

They'd stopped at a roadside café for a quick breakfast and now were outside a rundown country garage where an equally dilapidated, middle-aged man in greasy overalls walked towards them.

"Ms Daniels?"

Cara nodded.

"Frank. I'm your lift back to your car. From what you said on the phone I'm thinking I can get it going."

"That would be wonderful. I'm already a day late, so the sooner the better."

"I'll bring the Ute around. Just wait here," and he was heading to the back of the garage.

"Well," Brody's voice came from behind her as she pulled her helmet off. "I guess this is where our crazy little interlude ends."

"It was a bit crazy, wasn't it?" She turned to give him the helmet. "But I'm all for crazy. I don't get much of it in my life." "You took to crazy like a duck to water." Brody grinned, and she wanted so much to kiss that sexy mouth.

"Who knows, I may even try it again sometime," she said in a tone that was a lot more upbeat than she felt. She knew she would never be as uninhibited with anyone as she had been with Brody. Was that regret she saw in his eyes?

"Ok, time for me to get moving." He reached out and drew her to him. He was hard.

"Me too," Cara said, resisting the urge to press against him. But she did want to kiss him one last time and tilted her face up to his.

A dusty and rusted Ute rattled towards them, and Brody gently pushed her away. He kissed his forefinger and pressed it to her lips, then turned, and walked back to his bike.

ACT 4

Brody sat in the middle of the back row of the theatre, grateful for the darkness as the lights dimmed. While he'd polished his boots and exchanged his leather jacket for a black sports coat, he felt conspicuously under-dressed among the theatre-going crowd.

The program for Electra Dance Company lay on his lap. He rested his fingers on a black-and-white image of Cara in a short, wispy dress and bare feet, poised on one leg, arms extended, head tilted, her eyes filled with longing.

He'd hardly recognised this Cara, so different from the one he'd known only briefly. But this was who she was in her life and he'd given in to his burning desire to see this side of her, to try to understand it. Even though she hadn't told him the name of the company, it had been an easy find online. The avant-garde company was supposedly the next big thing in the dance world.

A hush spread over the audience as music welled and the heavy curtain slid silently upwards to reveal a bare stage. When dancers began to fill the stage, Brody strained to find Cara, but with all the women in the same costumes and make-up and the constant movement it was impossible. Then there was a slow building crescendo in the music and the dancers parted to reveal a single figure.

Cara.

Brody was oblivious to the music and the other dancers as he watched her. She moved with the same fluid elegance as the night in the hotel, but there was a subtle difference that he couldn't put a name to. It didn't matter—he was enthralled both by the emotion she exuded and how she commanded the attention of a theatre full of people. As someone who rarely put himself in any sort of public arena, he added admiration to the list of what attracted him to her.

Cara featured in another two numbers and Brody's heart thumped in anticipation until she appeared again. He knew he should have been admiring the artistry or following the story, but all he could see was the woman who'd drawn him to travel two hundred miles and the body that had invaded his dreams every night since they'd parted. That she was showing expanses of bare skin and what costume she was wearing did little to stop his cock from hardening.

Too soon the performance ended and she stood, hand in hand with the male lead dancer, taking a deep curtsey. The crowd rose to its feet, as did Brody. The applause finally died and he joined the crush as they exited the theatre.

He paused at the entrance of the alleyway, which led to the stage door. What if she wasn't happy to see him? He didn't know what to tell her about why he was there. She lived her life on the road and so did he. She had a schedule of where she needed to be. He was free to decide for himself. He drew a deep breath.

~* * * ~

A short, sharp knock rapped on the dressing room door. Cara turned away from the mirror, make-up streaked tissue in her hand. Cast and crew didn't knock, and she wasn't expecting anyone else. Putting down the tissue, she stood and tightened the tie of her silk robe.

"Come in."

Brody stepped through the doorway and no words came to her. So many thoughts competing to make sense of what she was seeing. He was clean-shaven and gorgeous in dark denim and a black jacket over his trademark black t-shirt. She'd loved the rasp of his stubble, his tousled hair and dusty clothes. The things shed come to think of as Brody. Had he tidied himself up because he thought that was what he needed to do to visit her in her world?

And how on Earth did he know where to find her? Had he been in the audience? Why was he here?

"I will always prefer your private performance," he said, shutting the door and closing the distance between them, "but tonight was pretty incredible. You're incredible."

She remembered that "I'm gonna kiss you, hard" look. Her body remembered too and wetness slicked between her thighs. Then his arms were around her, one hand possessively on her ass, the other entangled in her hair.

The feel of his mouth on hers was imprinted in Cara's mind but the reality of his soft but demanding lips was something she hadn't thought she'd ever have again. Opening her mouth to him, she pressed the length of her body against his and brushed her fingertips over the smooth skin of his cheek.

Cara pushed him gently so that he backed up against the door and she could reach past him to snib the lock.

"You," she said, stepping away from him, "have questions to answer." But when he opened his mouth to reply, she shushed him with her finger on his lips. "Later. I have other things in mind for this mouth." And she undid the tie around her waist, the robe falling open. Cara shrugged it from her shoulders. The silk pooled around her bare feet and she stood naked in front of him.

Whatever it would be; breathless, mind-stealing, just another erotic interlude, a sensually intoxicating memory. Or something more, it was more than ok with her.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A sensualist and a romantic, Andra is a self-confessed genre-hopper with her sexy romances spanning historical, contemporary and paranormal.

When not arm-wrestling her Muse over plot lines, or who gets to wear the stilettos, Andra can be found wielding a paint brush at her latest renovation site. She sees renovating as a lot like writing; you start with something that's rough around the edges and pummel it into submission.

Andra lives in Melbourne (Australia) with her wonderful man and her never-ending TBR pile and hopes her adult children aren't too traumatised by having a mother who writes smutty stories.

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COMING 1st JULY

‘Mistletoe Kiss’

When Holly James, restaurant manager and temporary Christmas elf, is stranded with Ryland Maxwell and his young daughter she's confronted with two things she's worked hard to avoid.

A man who arouses her body *and* her heart - and a family.

Since his wife died, Ry has kept his heart closed, and his amorous adventures away from home and his daughter.

Until he kisses their unexpected guest under the mistletoe



SNEAK PEEK

Bah humbug. Scrooge had it right. Holly Jeffries hoisted up one of her striped over-the-knee socks, adjusted her elf hat, and cringed at the never-ending line of kids waiting to see Santa.

As soon as Santa took his seat and she unhooked the red rope, it would begin. Little faces, smiling with anticipation. Parents, some excited, some clearly there under sufferance. But they were there.

No one had ever brought her to see Santa.

Holly fluffed up her short, Christmas-red skirt and set a smile on her lips. It wasn't that she didn't like kids. They were okay. It was the whole Christmas thing. Celebration. Family.

For most of the year, she didn't mind being on her own. You couldn't avoid the whole in-your-face family vibe at this time of the year, so she always hightailed it to somewhere quiet and remote to ride out the festivities to avoid reminders of the life she'd never had.

She was usually gone by Christmas Eve, but Rusty, her rust-bucket car, had blown a head gasket and her getaway budget. Thankfully, she'd found a short-term job as Santa's elf and in four hours she'd be on the road to a secluded AirBnB cottage.

"Hi, Santa," a chorus of eager young voices erupted as Santa, aka Donny Nelson the town's perennial Father Christmas, took his seat on the red and gold throne. Holly moved to the head of the queue and unhooked the security rope.

Between wrangling fractious toddlers, escorting the munchkins to Santa, and taking their photos, time flew. "Just a short break," Holly reassured the disappointed faces when she re-hooked the rope in front of the queue. She tried to ignore the eye-rolling and frustrated sighs of the parents.

Two more hours.

"Where did Santa go?" The next girl in line tugged at Holly's skirt.

"He might need to pee," the child's father stage-whispered, and the child giggled. His eyes met Holly's over his daughter's head and he smiled.

A team of butterflies flew acrobatic formations in Holly's belly. Yum. His movie star looks stood out like a beacon in the sea of ordinary. She figured their interaction was justification enough to keep looking at him without it being considered blatant gawking.

It didn't take more than a few moments to absorb the gorgeousness of classic chiseled cheekbones, sapphire eyes, and a luscious mouth. A walking cliché, maybe, but oh so easy on the eye.

"You're pretty." The child tugged at Holly's skirt again.

"Yes, she is Jenna," he replied, and those butterflies went into a barrel roll.

Walking away would be bad customer service, so she knelt down to the child's level. Carefully, because the short, full skirt wasn't made for anything other than standing. "So are you, Jenna." So was her dad, and she hoped he wasn't checking whether the fluff-trimmed skirt still covered her butt. "And your bunny is pretty cute too." She tweaked the ear of the scruffy blue toy clutched to her chest.

"Mummy gave him to me." She hugged him tighter.

"That makes him extra special." Holly stood and met those blue eyes. Eyes which now glistened.

"Santa's back." A young voice from the crowd drew Holly's attention back to business. Donny took his seat and Holly unhooked the rope.

"Your turn, Jenna." She led the girl to the throne, lifted her onto Santa's lap, and took her place behind the camera.

As Jenna talked earnestly to Santa, Holly stole a glance at the father. He stood, hands in jeans pockets, eyes on his daughter, his face unreadable. Santa reached into his sack and gave Jenna a small, wrapped gift, then directed her to smile at the camera.

Holly snapped the shot and another, then Jenna slid from Santa's knee.

By the time Holly reached the next child in the queue, Jenna and her dad had disappeared into the crowd of shoppers. No hunky dad accompanied the little boy jiggling on the spot, waiting his turn. As Holly handed him over to Santa, she noticed something blue peeking out from beside the throne. Jenna's bunny.

She picked it up and tucked it into her camera bag. Nothing she could do about it now. Maybe they'd come back when they noticed it missing.

Two hours later, in the quiet seclusion of the tiny admin office, Holly emailed the day's photos. Her last elfin task and she'd be on her way.

She clicked to the next image and Jenna on Santa's lap filled the screen. Holly eyed the bunny who now sat on the desk, propped against the file tray. She should let them know in the email that she had the rabbit.

But a vision of Jenna's angelic face, crumpled in tears, niggled. Her own Ted sat at home, a reminder of how he'd been her only comfort when things turned to shit at home. What if Jenna needed the bunny? Tonight. What if she couldn't sleep without him?

The shop would be closed in a few minutes. If they didn't come back, it would be a couple of days until they could get him back. Holly drew a deep breath and opened the *Maxwell Construction* website

Slick and professional, but only a landline phone number. The only address a corporate office in town.

Holly tapped her fingers on the desk, then checked for R Maxwell in the local phone directory. Bingo. An address some miles out of town. She punched the landline number into her phone.

Busy. She finished emailing the remainder of the photos, then tried again. Still busy.

She had no more time. Her AirBnB hosts were expecting her in four hours and outside the sky darkened ominously. She had to get moving. Everton wasn't too far out of her way, she'd just deliver the bunny en route.

Bunny in hand, bag over her shoulder, Holly closed the office door, called goodnight to the security guy, and went out to the car park. Snowflakes scurried around her face and chilled her bare thighs. No time to change, and she'd be in her warm car shortly. She couldn't be late picking up her keys.

Rusty already had a thin coat of snow and Holly hoped the engine would start in the cold. Once he got going, he'd be fine.

She walked across the white-coated asphalt, flakes clinging to her face and elf hat. Goosebumps hatched along her thighs and a sudden gust of wind sent her skirt flapping around her butt. She brushed the snow from Rusty's windshield and thankfully sank into the driver's seat.

She held her breath as she turned the key. A small hiccup then Rusty rumbled into action. "Good boy." She patted the dashboard. "Now just get me to Pine Valley."

The car's engine might be unreliable, but the top notch heating soon blew blissfully warm air to defrost the chill in her body. She let the engine idle while she typed the address into her GPS app, then turned onto the highway.

She knew the road out of town and after a few miles, the annoying map voice told her to take the next left turn. Holly slowed, looking for the road sign through the now thicker snowfall. She almost missed it, a side road not much wider than Rusty.

Just as well it was Christmas and not Halloween, because the narrow road with its overhanging trees would have been decidedly spooky. But the wild flurries of snow, which were becoming worryingly more ferocious, gave her a niggling fear which had nothing to do with ghosts and everything to do with smothering snow drifts.

A gentle right turn brought Holly to a clearing and an open wrought iron gate with a wide, paved drive. And a house right out of a Christmas card. Two stories of stone and tall windows shining with warm light. A tall portico outlined with flickering fairy lights.

She pulled up as unobtrusively as possible, against a tall hedge. As she opened the door, a barrage of snowflakes blew into the space and landed on her bare thighs. No time now to pull on some sweat pants, which she'd have to resurrect from the depths of her travel bag.

Holly grabbed the rabbit, slammed the door shut, and in an inelegant sprint, headed towards the stone steps and the shelter of the portico. A voluptuous wreath of real greenery and red baubles surrounded a brass doorknocker. She banged it, and waited in the pale light from the transom over the door. Footsteps echoed behind the door.

The door opened and delicious dad, backlit from the entry hall and surprise doing weird stuff to his eyebrows, looked at her, wordless.

“Ummm, hi.”

“Yes.”

He obviously wasn't going to make this easy, but she didn't blame him. An unexpected elf at your front door wasn't exactly what families wanted on Christmas Eve.