

*The Cost
of
Commitment*

By
Lynn Ames

THE COST OF COMMITMENT

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CHAPTER ONE

Bob, can you get a better fix on what caused the incident at Sing Sing? I've got reporters breathing down my neck and pretty soon they're gonna start making up their own version of events."

The uniformed correction officer struggled to match the long, graceful strides of the woman walking alongside him. "Sure thing, Kate. We're working on it. Should have an answer to you within the half hour. They're just interviewing the last inmate now." He continued down the corridor, and Kate peeled off to the left as they reached the door marked Katherine Kyle, Director of Public Information, New York State Department of Correctional Services.

"Kate?"

The tall, raven-haired woman turned inside the door to face her beleaguered assistant. "Yeah, Marisa, what is it?"

"The commissioner wants to see you."

"Great. Tell him I'll be right there." She continued moving through the suite and into her office, where the phone already was ringing. The readout on her phone said "incoming call." That meant the call originated outside the state government system. Although she couldn't be positive who it was, Kate felt confident. "Hi, beautiful."

There was a second's hesitation on the other end of the line, followed by a surprised chuckle. "What if it hadn't been me, love?"

"Ah, but it was."

"Yes, but..."

"Well, if it had been someone else, I guess I would've had to offer to take *her* to dinner and make mad, passionate love to her afterward."

"Grrr."

"So, I guess it's a good thing it was you, eh?"

"One of these days, Kyle...if you keep this up, I'm not gonna share the three rare Captain America comic books I found for you today."

"Oh, that is so far below the belt, Jamison Parker. You wouldn't dare—"

“Do you want to find out?”

Kate cleared her throat and sighed. “Um, Jay, honey, sweetheart?”

“Yes?”

“I’ve missed you so much today. Can I take you out to dinner someplace nice and then make mad, passionate love to you afterward?”

“I’ll think about it and have my people get in touch with your people.”

“Hey!”

“Well, Stretch, the offer sounds wonderful. It’s your delivery that needs work.”

“Everybody’s a critic.” Kate smiled. God, it felt so good to be able to tease each other without reservation again. It had taken nearly all of these past three months to reestablish their equilibrium and get beyond the hurts caused by both circumstance and each other.

As sometimes happened these days, Kate found herself mentally cataloguing the improbable events that got them to this point—the explosion at the capitol that brought Jay back into her life, the cover story in *Time* magazine, the tabloid pictures of her kissing Jay, getting fired from her anchor job at WCAP-TV, dropping out of sight to protect Jay’s identity, Jay’s anger and hurt, their reunion and, after they returned home, the media’s incessant hounding of Kate in an attempt to uncover the identity of her lover.

All things considered, Kyle, three months isn’t so bad.

“Earth to Kate, come in, Kate? You are still on the phone with me, right?”

“Sorry. Right here.”

“How’s your day going?”

“Not too bad. The usual mix of mayhem. Inmates beating each other over the head, officers breaking the law, reporters making up their own stories. You know. How’s your day?”

“Better than that, I guess. I only have to contend with corporate officers who won’t speak on the record.”

“Ah. Which train are you catching to Albany? Will you be home tonight in time for dinner?”

“Looks like it right now. How about you?”

“I’m hopeful. It would be the first night this week and it’s already Thursday.” Kate got serious. “I really do miss you, Jay. We live in the same house, and still it feels like I haven’t been able to spend any time with you lately.”

“I know, honey. I miss you too, but we both knew when you took this job it wasn’t going to be easy. Don’t worry. We’ll make it work.”

“Thank you for being so patient and understanding. I promise I’ll be home in time to take you to dinner at seven thirty, okay?”

“It’s a date.”

“See you then. Right now the commissioner is waiting to see me. Until tonight, babe. I love you.”

“I love you too, Kate. Bye.”

Kate tipped back in her chair and surveyed her surroundings. Governor Charles Hyland took a huge risk politically when he called to offer her the PIO job. After all, she had just been fired as WCAP-TV’s lead anchorwoman after the *Enquirer* outed her as a lesbian. She would always be grateful to him for hiring her despite the media storm that ensued. It started with headlines ranging from factual to inflammatory: “Former TV Anchorwoman Turns Spin Doctor,” “Hyland Hires Disgraced TV Personality,” “Governor Goes for Gay Girl,” and, in one ultraconservative newspaper, “Pervert to Speak for Prisons.” Subsequent editorials called into question the governor’s judgment, morals, ethics, and commitment to follow the will of his constituents. Still, the governor stood by Kate, even when she offered him a way out.

Yes, given everything that transpired, it was hard to believe she was sitting here.



“Kate, c’mon in.”

“Good morning, sir. Something I can do for you?” She stood expectantly, notebook at the ready.

“Sit down, Kate. No need to be so formal.”

She took the seat nearest the massive cherry desk, noting once again that, despite his lean physique, her new boss’s presence pervaded the room. Brian Sampson was neither loud nor overbearing. Rather, he projected a quiet, calm confidence that indicated his comfort with the seat of power he held. “We’ve certainly been keeping you busy, haven’t we?”

Kate smiled. She liked this man. He was both honest and honorable, rare qualities in a politician. “You could say that.”

In fact, Kate’s first ninety days as sole spokesperson for the third-largest prison system in the country had been a blur. With 67 prisons, 47,000 inmates, and 35,000 employees, there was never a dull moment. So far, she’d managed one full night’s sleep in three months without being awakened by either a reporter writing a story or the command center letting her know about an incident.

It had taken her a while to get used to her phone ringing at all hours of the day and night, but it was customary for the officers in the command center to alert her any time an incident took place anywhere in

the system. She needed to have that information so she could stay one step ahead of the media.

“Sir, this job makes being a journalist on deadline seem like a walk in the park.”

Commissioner Sampson tipped his chair back and laughed. “As I recall, the governor warned you that being the DOCS public information officer would be a challenge.”

“Yes, he did, and he was right.” Kate smiled wistfully.

“I’ve been impressed with your work so far. You seem to have little trouble grasping the nuances of this business, and your ability to deflect negative publicity is uncanny. In short, you’ve caught on quickly and stopped our image from hemorrhaging any further. It’s nice to have a spokesperson on board who can get along with the press.” Here he smiled, and Kate could clearly hear the unspoken phrase, *unlike your predecessor*. “I just wanted you to know that I’ve noticed, and that I am awfully happy to have you here.”

“Thank you, sir. I’m glad you feel that way.” Kate was somewhat at a loss. She was pretty sure her boss hadn’t called her in just to inflate her ego.

After a moment’s hesitation, he went on. “Ah, Kate, I don’t know if you’re aware of this, but the governor’s been under a lot of pressure lately.” At her raised eyebrow, he explained, “Seems the boys from the DNC aren’t crazy about some of his positions. They see him as their meal ticket to the White House next year and they’re afraid of him alienating middle America.” His tone was derisive.

“What you’re saying is the Democratic National Committee wants him to take no real stand about anything meaningful, accomplish nothing, and just *pretend* like he’s governing for the duration, right?”

“Charles is right about one thing—you are perceptive and not shy about telling it like it is in the appropriate company.”

“Sir, I’ve never been one to subscribe to the ‘tell them what they want to hear’ theory. I believe people like you and the governor rely on me to offer the unvarnished truth. It’s that kind of advice that has real value. I’m afraid I’ll never be a good yes-person.”

“Thank God, Kate. Thank God.”

“Sir, I’m sure there’s a reason why you’re telling me this now.”

He sighed. “Yes. I want you to know that there’s going to be increased scrutiny of everything we do here. You know what a hot-button issue crime and corrections is for a Democrat. We’re going to have to make sure we dot every *i* and cross every *t* for the next year. You, in particular, are going to be in the hot seat. Are you all right with that?”

Kate favored her boss with a cockeyed grin. “Respectfully, sir, been there, done that.”



In the luxurious private study at the exclusive Fort Orange Club in Albany, three Democratic power brokers were in a heated discussion. Robert Hawthorne had been selected the year before to take the helm of the Democratic National Committee. He recently retired from the U.S. Senate, where he had served four terms. Michael Vendetti, press secretary to Governor Charles Hyland of New York, was the most powerful spin doctor in the state. David Breathwaite, uber-PR person or “super flak” of all New York law enforcement agencies, had made himself indispensable over the years by unearthing all manner of damaging information on important figures on both sides of the political aisle.

“God damn it, David, you promised she wouldn’t be able to handle the job.”

The former director of public information for DOCS answered, “Relax, Michael, you know you’re not supposed to get excited. Imagine what that’s doing to your blood pressure.”

Vendetti, impeccably dressed as always in a finely tailored suit, sat across the table from him and snarled. It was clear that he regarded Kate’s predecessor and the current czar of criminal justice PR as the human personification of a weasel.

David continued mildly, “You’re the governor’s press secretary. It’s not my fault he prefers her advice to yours.”

Vendetti rose so quickly that his ornately appointed high-backed chair toppled over backward, landing with a resounding bang on the hardwood floor. “You little—”

“That’s enough. Both of you.” Hawthorne leaned forward in his seat. “It won’t do us any good to fight amongst ourselves. We can’t afford to lose sight of the objective here. We need our boy Charlie in the White House—”

Under his breath David mumbled, “That’s only because you couldn’t get yourself elected dog catcher last time around, *Mr. Senator*.”

“And that Amazonian dyke is standing in our way.” If Hawthorne had heard the cutting remark directed at him, he chose to ignore it. “She has entirely too much influence over our boy. She goes to dinner with him every few weeks and all of a sudden he’s making dramatic policy announcements that have nothing to do with our agenda. Not only that, but we’ve got a wild card in the form of a commissioner we can’t control. I don’t like it.”

“Bob, it’s too early to be concerned. She’s only been in the position three months. We said we’d get her out at six months.” Breathwaite

never looked up as he chewed on his cuticles. "Give her time, she's bound to screw up. If not, we'll help her."

"Yes, well, I'm not leaving anything to chance here, so I've asked an old friend of mine to join us." Hawthorne rose from his position at the head of the table and went to an inner door. "You can come in now, Willie." To the others in the room, he said, "Gentlemen, I'm sure you know my good friend William Redfield, executive deputy commissioner of DOCS."

David Breathwaite visibly blanched. "Bill. I didn't realize you and the senator were on such friendly terms."

Redfield smirked. "There are a lot of things you don't know, David. Bob and I went to college together. He called me recently and filled me in."

"Yes, I thought it was important that we have someone on the inside."

Breathwaite protested, "We have someone on the inside already."

"Yes, David, that's true, but so far I've been less than satisfied with the results we've been getting from our source. We need someone with a little more pull, someone who can make things happen, if you will." Hawthorne smiled thinly. "Please, Willie, have a seat."

Redfield selected the fourth and last available seat at the table.

"Michael, how did our boy Charlie take my discussion with him today?" Hawthorne asked.

"As you might expect, he was less than overjoyed at having you come in and dictate political strategy and policy positions to him."

The veins in his neck bulging, Hawthorne thundered, "For Christ's sake, he's running around like he's actually his own man. He belongs to this party. He belongs to *us*, and we're gonna make sure he gets elected president in spite of himself. I don't give a rat's ass whether or not he's happy as long as he sticks to our agenda!" Adjusting his tie, he added more quietly, "Michael, you'd better keep him in line. Will, I'm gonna need your help here. Kyle has got to be out the door in three months, no ifs, ands, or buts. Can you make that happen?"

"You've got nothing to worry about, Bob."

"Good. I knew I could count on you. David, for God's sake, try to stay the hell out of the newspapers and keep your head down. How are we going to reinstall you in Kyle's place if you keep creating controversy?"

In truth, Hawthorne hated Breathwaite as much as everybody else at the table, but the man had a remarkable knack for finding weak spots and exploiting them. He had certainly found Hawthorne's, blackmailing him when he discovered the chairman's scheme to use Governor Hyland as a puppet to gain control of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. He was a valuable asset to have...and a very bad enemy.

Unfortunately, when the idiot created a swirl of controversy and a host of enemies in the press, he nearly got himself fired as DOCS PIO by the governor. Hawthorne and company had to scramble to get him out of the line of fire for a time. Why he wanted to go back to DOCS so badly was a mystery, but Hawthorne didn't care. If that's what Breathwaite wanted, that's what he would get. They needed him on the team.

"That's all for now, gentlemen. Keep the contact and conversation to a bare minimum, and we'll meet back here in a month or two. I'll be in touch when it's time."



"Kate, sweetheart, are you home?" Before she had time to put her briefcase down, Jay was accosted by seventy-nine pounds of bouncing blonde fur. "Hey, buddy! Hey there, Fred. How was your day?" She bent over and scratched the golden retriever lovingly on the hindquarters as he marched in place between her legs. "Where's your mommy, huh, guy? Is she here yet?"

As if in answer to her query, Kate shouted from a distance, "Hey, Jay, I'm up here. C'mon up!"

"On my way, as soon as Fred is done practicing his marching band routine." Jay looked down again, "Let's go, big guy, I can't wait to see your mom."

She bounded up the stairs to the second floor of the house Kate designed prior to their relationship, impressed, as always, with how comfortable and how much at home she felt here. *Well, it is my home now.* The notion sent a thrill through her, as it never failed to do.

At the top of the stairs, Jay was enveloped in a strong, but sensual hug. She glanced up to find twinkling eyes gazing lovingly at her and a smile on her partner's face. Kate ducked her head and welcomed Jay home with a slow, sweet kiss.

"Mmm, I love coming home to this."

"And I love you."

"I love you too, Kate."

They stayed like that a few heartbeats more, just savoring the moment, until Fred made his presence known once again. They both smiled indulgently as Kate made eye contact with the spoiled beast.

"Yes, doll, we know you're here. No group hugs for you, though. Right now, this beautiful woman is all mine."

"Kate, we'd better hurry if our reservation is at seven thirty. Where are we going? What do I need to wear?"

"Dressy tonight, babe. Something elegant and strapless, I think."

"Oh, what's the occasion?"

“Does there have to be one? Now go on, get moving.” Kate swatted Jay on the rear end, pushing her gently down the hall in the direction of what once had been the guest suite but now was Jay’s personal space. The blonde affectionately referred to it as “the place where my clothes live in a world by themselves.”



Kate retreated to the master bedroom, where she hastily dabbed on some Shalimar, her perfume of choice, and finished dressing. She slipped into a pair of high heels that matched her dress perfectly and hurried down the stairs, calling, “You’ve got about ten minutes, Jay. I’ll meet you downstairs.”

She hustled to the side door and opened it to admit three men in waiter’s uniforms. “Hurry, guys, we only have a few minutes.”

Behind the servers came two women dressed in chef’s outfits. The first one stopped and kissed Kate on the cheek. “Hiya, beautiful. Don’t be so nervous. I promised you everything would be perfect, and so it shall.”

“Barbara,” Kate hissed, “Jay’s gonna walk down the stairs in less than ten minutes expecting me to take her out for an elegant evening. Everything has to be in place before that happens!”

“Tsk, woman, it’s a wonder you don’t have an ulcer already. Have I ever not delivered on a promise to you?”

Sighing in exasperation, Kate answered, “No.”

“Right, and I’m not about to ruin my reputation now. I didn’t get to be a world-renowned doctor by folding under pressure, toots.”

Kate had to laugh. She was right. Barbara Jones was a well-recognized physician, a master gourmet chef, and a wonderful friend. Heaven knew she had seen Kate—then Kate and Jay together—through some rough patches.

Turning to the waiters, Barbara pointed past the kitchen. “Okay, boys, the dining room’s that way. Work your magic.”

At Kate’s upturned eyebrow, Barbara laughed. “Honey, these boys know more about presentation and style than any woman I’ve ever met. What is it about gay men that gives them such a sense of panache? I assure you, you’re in the best hands possible. In less than five minutes, your dining room is going to scream romance.”

“You’re the best, you know that?”

“Yeah, that’s why you keep me around, I presume.”

“That and the fact that I can’t seem to keep myself out of harm’s way.” Kate winked as she made her way to the bottom of the staircase to await Jay’s arrival.

It didn't take long. Five minutes later she looked up to see a vision that robbed her of breath and speech. Jay paused at the top landing, her short blonde hair shimmering in the light from the chandelier, the emerald green, strapless, knee-length dress accentuating her lithe form and toned muscles to perfection. As she descended, Kate watched Jay's smile grow wider in answer to her own.

"You are the most magnificent woman I have ever laid eyes on, Jamison Parker."

"And you, Katherine Ann Kyle, are the sexiest creature on the planet."

Kate wore a rich navy sheath that hugged her form, the material reaching over one shoulder, leaving the other, and most of her upper back, bare.

"May I?" Kate reached for Jay's hand, and guided her down the last steps and toward the dining room.

"Um, Kate? I may not have a great sense of direction, admittedly, but even I know that the garage is that way." Jay pointed in the opposite direction.

"It is? Damn, they must have moved it on me again." But she continued moving in the direction she intended.

"Okay, Kyle, what are you up to? Spill it."

"Oh, I love it when you get that authoritative tone in your voice."

"I mean it."

"Who says I have to be up to anything?"

"I know you've got something cooked up here. You've got that cat that ate the canary look on your face."

"Moi?"

"Yes, you, Miss Innocent."

They had reached the entrance to the dining room. Kate moved ahead slightly, wanting to block Jay's view in case everything wasn't ready yet. She needn't have worried; the room was transformed. Candlelight sent a warm glow throughout the spacious area, highlighting the dark richness of the mahogany table and chairs and painting interesting shadows on the Oriental rug. Fine china and silver glinted in the low lighting, while soft music played in the background. She stepped aside.

"Oh, Kate..." Jay looked up questioningly.

"I hope you like it, sweetheart."

"But...why? Am I missing something here?"

Kate took her lover's hands in her own and forced eye contact. "I know I've been really busy with the new job, but I want you to know that no matter what else is going on, every day, I thank whatever power exists in the universe that brought you back into my life. I love you, Jay, more

than life itself, and I just wanted to find a special way to show you how I feel.”

Tears flowed down Jay’s face. She buried her face in Kate’s chest. “Oh, sweetheart, that is so beautiful. You are the most incurable romantic. It’s one of the most amazing things about you. And I love you so much.”

Kate bent her head and kissed Jay reverently on the mouth. “C’mon, the food’s getting cold.”

“But—”

“You’re wondering if I’ve learned to cook overnight. Nope.”

“Then what...how...”

Kate smiled indulgently. “How about if you just sit down and all will be revealed to you.”

Jay grinned sheepishly and accepted the seat Kate offered.

“Gentlemen, I think it’s time.”

The waiters, who had been standing at a discreet distance inside the doorway to the kitchen, moved with efficiency and grace into the room, carrying serving plates. The first server bowed slightly at Jay’s side. “Would you care for some French onion soup?”

She smiled at him. “I’d love some, thank you.” To Kate she said, “Um, should I ask how you pulled this off and who these fine gentlemen are? Or where, exactly, the delicious food is coming from? I mean, it smells like it’s coming from our kitchen, but...”

“Very observant, my dear.” Kate said nothing more.

“That’s it? *That’s it?* You’re not going to tell me how dinner is getting to our table?”

“What does it matter as long as you like it?”

“Stretch, you know how I am when my curiosity is aroused.”

Kate grinned evilly. “I know how you are when *you* are aroused.” Her gaze dropped to Jay’s breasts.

Jay blushed. “Don’t change the topic. You know what I meant.”

“Okay, if you must know, I brought in a master chef to cook for us this evening. Are you happy now? Satisfied, Miss Snoop? No wonder you make such a good reporter.”

“Thank you for answering me.” Jay leaned over and kissed Kate, a long, slow, sensuous joining of the lips that lasted for several moments.

“If I had known *that* would be your response, I would have answered you sooner.”

“Brat.”

Kate gazed deeply into Jay’s eyes, which were accentuated by the combination of candlelight and the emerald color of her dress. “I will never tire of looking at you, you know that? You are the most beautiful

woman in the world, and I still have to pinch myself to make sure this isn't all a dream."

As Jay opened her mouth to respond, Kate's business phone rang.

Annoyed, Kate snapped, "*That*, on the other hand, is a nightmare. I'm sorry, love, I have to get that."

"I know. Go ahead, don't worry. I'll wait for you."

Picking up the phone in her office, Kate barked, "Kyle."

"Um, Kate, this is the command center. Sorry to bother you."

"That's okay, John." She made a conscious effort to take the bite out of her tone. "What's going on?" *After all, Kyle, it isn't his fault the job can be damned inconvenient at times.*

"Two inmates got into a fight in the mess hall at Auburn. One of 'em pulled a shank and stabbed the other. He's gone to the hospital. Last word was he was in critical condition. They don't think he's gonna make it."

Kate was taking notes. "Okay, I'm going to need names, crimes they're in for, sentences for each, whether they had any history together before tonight, race, how the officers responded, where the perp is now, and if this was just a one-on-one thing or part of something larger."

"Yes, ma'am."

"John, that was, what...the third incident at Auburn in the last week that involved a weapon? What's going on there? I need to know if there's any hint of a connection between the events. I'll tell you right now that the reporter for the paper out there is pretty sharp. It won't take him long to put two and two together and wonder if he's got four. Are we going to lock the place down and do a cell-by-cell? If so, word's going to get out in a hurry."

"I'll get right on it and get you answers ASAP, Kate."

"Thanks, John, I appreciate it."

Back in the dining room, Kate kissed Jay on the shoulder. "I'm sorry about that. Now, where were we before we were so rudely interrupted?"

"Everything okay?"

"Yeah, just murderers killing murderers. Another day in paradise."

"So it's going to be a long night for you."

"Only if the reporters find out about it. For now, I'd much rather concentrate on you."

"Mmm, that's okay with me."

The rest of dinner was uninterrupted. They managed to eat their way through the salad for two, the petit filet mignon, lobster tails, asparagus tips with hollandaise sauce, and twice-baked potatoes without much difficulty. Except, that is, when Jay missed while trying to feed Kate some of the potatoes. To make up for her gaffe, she licked the overflow from Kate's chin. The transgression was quickly forgotten.

Apparently unable to decide between the fresh apple cobbler and the homemade strawberry cheesecake, Jay opted to sample both. When she had polished off both desserts, she pushed back from the table.

“Sure you’ve had enough?”

“Well...”

“Ugh. It’s a wonder you don’t weigh three hundred pounds. I can’t fathom where you put it all.”

“You’re just jealous, that’s all.”

“Yep, you’re right. How did you know?”

“I’ve seen the type before.”

Again, the business phone forestalled further conversation. “I’ll be right back, sweetheart. I’m really sorry about this. I wanted tonight to be perfect.”

“It is perfect, Kate. Don’t worry about it...it’s not as if it’s something you can control.”

Actually, at the moment Kate was contemplating how long it would take her to fly out to Auburn to finish both inmates off herself. However, recognizing the impracticality of that solution, she opted to answer the phone instead. “Kyle.”

“Hi, Kate, it’s John again, in the command center. I’ve got your answers for you. Unfortunately, the poor slob died a half hour ago. Here are the particulars...”

She listened and asked more questions for the better part of a half hour, taking notes and formulating strategy. Then she hung up and glanced at the clock over her desk—10:02 p.m. Jay was right—it was likely to be yet another long night. Sighing, she made her way out of her office and stopped in the kitchen long enough to thank Barbara again for her services.

“Oh, you know me, Kate, I’m a sucker for a good romance.”

“And I’m grateful, my friend. Good night.”

“You better get going before she goes to bed without you.” Barbara turned and made her way out into the night, the waiters and sous chef having preceded her.

Kate found Jay in the family room picking out music. Sneaking up behind her, she tilted her head and nibbled on the side of Jay’s neck. She felt the shiver even as Jay’s head tipped back to give her better access.

Given the invitation, Kate wrapped her long arms around Jay from behind and pulled their bodies into close contact. She continued to taste and lick her way up to Jay’s earlobe, sucked it into her mouth and bit down lightly.

Jay groaned, and Kate could feel compact abdominal muscles contracting beneath her hands. Jay turned in the circle of Kate’s arms, placing feather-light kisses on her collarbones and chest.

“Um, sweetheart, before we get too carried away here, I have something for you.”

“Love, you *are* something for me,” Jay purred as she licked her way across to Kate’s bare shoulder.

Kate pushed away just enough to give herself room to maneuver. Reaching inside her bra, she extracted something shiny.

“Hey, I could’ve done that.”

“Yes, and I hope you will...later.” Again, Kate had to still Jay’s wandering hands.

“This is for you, because you are the most brilliant gem in my life.” She gently grasped her lover’s arm, turning it over so that the palm faced up. She kissed the sensitive skin there before concentrating on the task at hand. Stepping back slightly, she waited as Jay examined her wrist.

“My God, Kate, you didn’t have to do this. It’s gorgeous!” On her right wrist sparkled a three-carat diamond tennis bracelet.

“I love you, Jamison.”

“I love you too, sweetheart.”

Kate kissed the top of the fair head she cherished so much, then eyelids, nose, cheeks, and finally, the perfect lips that beckoned her. She felt Jay’s nipples harden through the thin material of her dress as she deepened the kiss, sucking gently on Jay’s tongue before releasing it.

They continued to kiss as Kate guided them up the stairs to their bedroom, with Fred trailing behind, used to this behavior from his humans. She slowly lowered the zipper on Jay’s dress, kissed and caressed every inch of newly exposed flesh, let the material slide to the floor, and helped Jay step out of it. Slip and pantyhose followed close behind, until finally, the only remaining barriers were a strapless bra and very sexy, lace bikini underwear.

Kate returned to Jay’s mouth momentarily as she released the catches on the bra, freeing creamy white breasts and painfully erect nipples. She kissed and licked along the underside of the left breast and then the right while sliding her hands up the inside of Jay’s thighs.

“Argh, please. I need you so much.” Jay tried to back up to the bed, but Kate held her fast.

“No, babe. I want you to stand.” This she said as she ran her tongue around the rim of one nipple.

“Sweetheart, I’ll fall over.”

“No, you won’t. I’ve got you. Just hang on to me.”

“Ah!”

Kate’s hand was following the outline of Jay’s panties as her other hand traced a line up Jay’s body from her abdomen to her breasts.

“God, I’m so wet for you. Please, I can’t take it anymore.”

Kate knelt and slowly removed Jay's panties. Kate quickly swirled her tongue in the warm wetness that awaited her. She closed her eyes and savored the taste with the same sense of wonder she felt every time they were together this way. She wasn't quite ready to linger there, though. There was so much more that she wanted to do. She continued on her journey, her mouth tracing her lover's bikini line, stopping to nibble on the insides of her thighs as her hands caressed the soft, but firm flesh in place after place. "You are so, so very beautiful."

Jay was barely able to stay upright, and her cries of urgency increased with every stroke of Kate's tongue. She clutched at Kate's shoulders in an obvious effort to ground herself. "Please."

Hearing the desperation in her cry, Kate relented and returned to Jay's center, gently stroking her first, exploring her folds, tasting her clitoris, slowly drawing the moisture from her, before increasing the pressure and driving Jay over the top.

Kate held on tight as Jay trembled, aftershocks rolling through her body like waves to the ocean's shore. When they passed, Kate guided Jay onto the bed, and removed her own clothes before joining her. She wrapped Jay in her arms and softly stroked her skin.

"My God, woman, I think you just tried to kill me!"

"Nah," Kate smiled, "If I was trying, I'd have succeeded."

"Hmm. I'm tough to kill, ya know."

"Oh, yeah, I would suspect as mu—"

Kate's words were cut off when Jay inserted a leg between her thighs, rolled her over and pinned her to the bed. She brushed lips and fingers over Kate's ribs, then up her breastbone to her shoulders, and finally back down to her aching breasts, all the while rocking against her wet center.

Kate arched up off the bed as Jay ran one hand down into her moist curls, entering her slowly while continuing to exert pressure with her thigh. When Jay bit down lightly on her nipple, Kate came with a sharp cry.

The two women spent long, languorous hours loving each other before pulling up the covers and falling into a blissful slumber.

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An award-winning former broadcast journalist, former press secretary to the New York state minority leader, former public information officer for the nation's third largest prison system, and former editor of a national art magazine, Lynn Ames is a nationally recognized speaker and CEO of a public relations firm with a particular expertise in image, crisis communications planning, and crisis management.

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