



Shades of Gray: A KGI Novel

By Maya Banks

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The Kelly Group International (KGI): A super-elite, top secret, family-run business. Qualifications: High intelligence, rock-hard body, military background. Mission: Hostage/kidnap victim recovery. Intelligence gathering. Handling jobs the U.S. government can't...

P.J. and Cole were sharpshooting rivals on the same KGI team and enjoyed a spirited, uncomplicated camaraderie. Until the night they gave in to their desires and suddenly took their relationship one step further. In the aftermath of their one-night stand, they're called out on a mission that goes terribly wrong, and P.J. walks away from KGI, resolved not to drag her teammates into the murky shadows she's poised to delve into.

Six months later, Cole hasn't given up his search for P.J., and he's determined to bring her back home where she belongs. Bent on vengeance, P.J. has plunged into a serpentine game of payback that will make her question everything she's ever believed in. But Cole—and the rest of their team—refuse to let her go it alone. Even if it means sacrificing their loyalty to KGI, and their lives...

Also includes a never-before-in-print KGI novella exclusive to the mass market edition!

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the books of *New York Times* Bestselling Author Maya Banks:

"Incredibly awesome...If you haven't read this series yet, you totally should. I love Maya Banks and I love her books."--Jaci Burton, *New York Times* bestselling author

"An intriguing mix of military action and sizzling romance."--*Publishers Weekly*

About the Author

Maya Banks is the *New York Times* bestselling author of contemporary and historical romances.

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“PILLOW TALK” from *FOUR PLAY*

Praise

Also by Maya Banks

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P.J. Rutherford cocked back her chair and flung her boot on top of the table in front of her. She adjusted her straw cowboy hat so her eyes were barely visible and stared over the smoke-filled room to the band setting up along the far wall.

The waitress thumped a bottle of beer on the table next to P.J.'s boot and then sashayed away, her attention reserved for the male customers she flirted with and chatted up.

P.J. wasn't a chatter. She'd never spoken to anyone in all the time she'd been coming here. She couldn't be called a regular, but yet, in all her irregularity, she was.

This was her place to unwind between missions. It wasn't what most would consider a place of rest and relaxation, but for P.J. it worked to throw back a few beers, inhale some secondhand smoke, go deaf from listening to bad cover songs and watch a few bar fights.

She winced when the guitarist riffed a particularly bad chord and then ground her teeth together when the mike squealed. These guys were amateurs. Hell, it was probably their first live gig, which meant she was going home tone-deaf and popping ibuprofen for the headache she'd be sure to have.

But it beat spending the evening alone in her apartment with jet lag. Although she wasn't even sure it could be considered jet lag. She'd been three days without sleep, so truly she could sleep at any time, but she was wired and still buzzed from adrenaline the last mission had wrought.

She was wound tighter than a rusted spring and there was no give in her muscles tonight.

The big, happy mush fest that had gone on at the Kelly compound, complete with double weddings and enough true love and babies and bullshit to make her green around the gills, hadn't helped.

Not that she was a cynic when it came to romance. She had her romance novels and she was fiercely protective of them and against anyone giving her shit over reading them.

But sometimes the Kelly clan was a little overbearing in the sheer sugary sweetness of all that unconditional love and support. Did no one ever get pissed off and start a fight?

The truth was, she just felt out of place, which was why she'd rather stick to her own team, let Steele take the

orders from Sam or Garrett Kelly and she'd follow her team leader. The day Steele became embroiled in all that happy, bubbly shit was the day she hung up her rifle and called it quits.

She liked Steele. She knew where she stood with Steele. Always. He didn't sugarcoat shit. If you fucked up, he called you on it. If you did your job, you didn't get any special accolades. Not for doing your fucking job, as he put it.

And she liked her team, even if Coletrane was one giant pain in her ass. But he was a cute pain in the ass and he was harmless. Plus he was a perfect target for cutting jokes and egging on. Easy. Too easy. He rose to the bait on too many occasions for her to count.

She was the better marksman. She knew that without false modesty. But it didn't stop a healthy rivalry between her and Cole when it came to sniper duty.

It pushed them both, made them better at their jobs and made the relationship between them easygoing and casual. Just the way she liked it.

The current song ended, and she sighed in relief. The band looked to be taking a short break, but her ears were still roaring from the deafening sounds of just moments earlier.

She was reaching for her beer when she saw a group of three men walk through the door. Her hand shook, nearly knocking the bottle over. Her stomach plummeted like a rock, and she briefly considered making a break for the restroom.

Just as quickly, anger replaced the sudden panic. What the hell was she contemplating hiding for? She hadn't done anything wrong. Her ex-lover and his buddies had hung her out to dry. Not the other way around.

She forced her gaze away, pretended interest in an object across the room and hoped they wouldn't notice her. From her periphery, she saw the moment Derek looked her way and recognized her.

He went completely still and then he nudged Jimmy and Mike and pointed in her direction.

Fuck. They were walking this way. Just what she goddamn needed on a night she just wanted to be left alone.

She was still staring ahead when Derek stepped in front of her, blocking her vision. She slowly looked up, making sure her expression was cool and unruffled.

"So is this where you're hanging out now, P.J.?" Derek drawled. "Didn't figure you one for trolling this kind of place."

The insulting tone grated on her nerves.

"Get out of my space, Derek."

He lifted an eyebrow and quirked the corner of his mouth up in a sneer. "That's not what you used to say. Of course that was before you decided to shit on your team. Where are you working these days, P.J.? Surely not here. You don't quite have the body to pull this gig off."

The old P.J. would already be in his face and would have knocked him on his ass. The new P.J. . . .

Fuck it. There was nothing wrong with the old P.J.

She rose from her chair, tipped back her hat and leveled a cold stare at the three. Back in the day they'd been tight. All four of them. She and Derek had been lovers for two years. They'd hooked up almost immediately after P.J. had joined the S.W.A.T. team and they'd managed to keep their relationship a secret, hiding behind friendship. Friendship they genuinely shared with Jimmy and Mike.

Derek smirked, almost as if he figured she'd turn and walk out. Because that's what she was good at. Running.

Not this time.

She pulled her hand back and slugged him right in the nose.

His hand flew up as his head whipped back and he staggered backward several steps.

His fingers came away bloody and he charged forward. She held her ground, refusing to be intimidated by the asshole.

“What the fuck was that?” he roared.

“Something I should have done a hell of a long time ago,” she said calmly. “Listen up, pencil dick. I don’t have time for your bullshit. I don’t give a shit about you or your lame sidekicks, so do us both a favor and leave me the fuck alone.”

“Once a bitch always a bitch, huh, P.J.?” Mike said with curled lips.

“You think what you want, Mike,” she said in a calm, measured voice. “I walked away with a clear conscience. Can you say the same?”

He flushed red, and anger bristled visibly from him. He started toward her but Jimmy stuck out his arm.

“What the fuck, Mike? You going to start a fight in a public bar with a woman?”

“Feel free,” P.J. said sweetly. “I’m more than happy to kick his ass.”

“What happened to you?” Derek demanded. “You didn’t used to be so cold.”

“Forgive me for not rolling over and taking the ass fucking you gave me so well. I wasn’t the one who was dirty. That’s on you and your buddies. You expected me to look the other way, and when I didn’t, you hung me out to dry. Fuck that and fuck you. Now get the hell out of my space.”

She was so focused on her former teammates that she didn’t notice the newcomer until a strong arm wrapped around her waist and hauled her up against his side.

“Sorry I’m late, darlin’,” Cole drawled. “Who are your little friends?”

She stiffened in shock, her mouth falling open. Cole covered her lapse by pressing his lips to hers and giving her a long, lingering, toe-curling kiss.

She was so flustered and flabbergasted over his sudden appearance that she could do little more than stand there while he ravished her mouth.

What a silly word. She’d read the word a lot in her old-school romances, and when she was a teenager, she’d

giggled over the idea of being ravished, but holy hell, there was no other word that came to mind as he thoroughly tasted every inch of her mouth.

He drew away, amusement sparkling in his blue eyes. His hair had gotten a little longer than his normal neat cut, so it was spiky on top, aided no doubt by what looked like hair gel. She'd have to give him shit over that later. Right after she found out what the hell he was doing here in her bar when he was supposed to be across the country in Tennessee.

When he pulled away, she got a better look at him and nearly laughed out loud. He was still dressed in fatigues, black shirt and his combat boots. He looked like he'd come here straight from the last mission, and, well, she supposed he had, since he was here and not in Tennessee.

She had to admit, he looked like a total badass. He dwarfed her and was a good two inches taller than Derek, who was the tallest of his trio. And his biceps bulged and strained against the tight short sleeves of the T-shirt.

She couldn't have planned this any better. His timing was impeccable.

"Cole, this is asshole number one, two and three."

Cole lifted his brow and his eyes gleamed with amusement. "Is there a problem, gentlemen? Because the way I saw it across the room, you didn't look friendly. In fact, it looked very much to me like you were trying to intimidate someone much smaller than yourselves, and a woman, to boot."

"Fuck this," Derek snarled. "You're welcome to the fucking ice queen. She nearly froze my dick off."

"What dick?" she asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

Cole's arm was still around her and he didn't seem inclined to remove it anytime soon.

"Fuck you," Derek said rudely. "Come on. Let's get out of here. I can't stomach being around a rat fink."

The three men headed for the door and P.J. blew out a deep breath. That could have gotten ugly, and in this joint, there wasn't much in the way of security. The one bouncer was balding, middle aged and had a beer gut that made him slow and clumsy. He wouldn't be much help in an altercation.

"You can let go now," she muttered.

Cole let his arm fall and then pulled a chair out at her table and sprawled into it, waving to the waitress at the same time.

The waitress wasted no time hurrying over. She gifted Cole with her best flirtatious smile and hovered a lot closer than necessary, affording him a prime view of her cleavage.

"Bring me whatever you have on tap, sugar," Cole said with a wink.

P.J. rolled her eyes as the waitress all but fell for that fake charm. Cole was easy on the eyes for sure. Muddy blond hair, a newly grown goatee, which P.J. had to admit looked damn good on him. Blue eyes that could be mean as hell one moment and twinkling and carefree the next.

He was the total package, not that she'd ever tell him so. It suited her purposes to keep him down a few notches. Wouldn't do to have his ego blow up on her. She did have to work with him, after all.

“What the hell are you doing here, Coletrane?” she demanded after the waitress had left. “This isn’t exactly your neighborhood.”

He shrugged. “Can’t a guy come in and check on a teammate?”

Her gaze narrowed. “Sure. There’s Dolphin, Baker and Renshaw, and you could always look in on Steele. I’m sure he’d looooove the company.”

“Maybe you’re just special,” he said with a grin.

“Lucky me,” she muttered.

But she couldn’t control the peculiar butterflies floating around her belly when he turned all that charm on her. Hell, she was acting like a damn girl.

The waitress returned and he tipped back his drink, taking a big gulp before he thumped it back down on the table. Behind him, the band struck up another ear-piercing song and Cole visibly winced.

“Holy shit, Rutherford. I thought you had better taste than this. What the hell are you doing in this shit hole anyway? Shouldn’t you be at home catching some R and R? You haven’t slept in what, three days?”

She cast a baleful look in his direction. “I could ask you the same question. At least I’m within a few blocks of my bed. Last time I checked you still resided in the great state of Tennessee. That’s a long-ass way from Denver.”

“Maybe I like your company.”

P.J. snorted.

For a long moment they sipped their beer in silence while the music clanged and more smoke filled the air. Cole’s eyes suddenly widened when two girls in either corner hopped up on an elevated step and began to do a slow striptease.

“Rutherford, are you a lesbian?”

She choked on her beer and then sat forward, letting her feet drop off the table and onto the floor with a clunk. She tipped back her hat so she could look him square in the eyes.

“What the hell kind of question is that?”

He gave her a quelling stare. “You’re in a strip joint. What else am I supposed to think?”

“You’re an idiot.”

He gave her a mock wounded look. “Come on, P.J. Throw me a bone here. Tell me you aren’t a lesbian. Or at least crush me gently.”

“You’re ruining my downtime.”

“Well, if this is downtime, let’s do it up right. Want to do some shots? Or are you afraid I’ll drink you under the table?”

Her brows went up. "You did *not* just challenge me."

He gave her a smug smile. "I believe I did. First round's on me."

"They're *all* on you since this is your idea."

"Okay, but I'm guessing you can't get past three."

"Blah, blah. I'm hearing a lot of talk and no action."

Cole held up his hand again and the waitress walked up to the table.

"Can you set us up with some shots?" He turned to P.J. "You got anything against tequila?"

"I've only got something against bad tequila. Don't cheap out on me, Cole. You better get the good stuff."

"You heard the lady," Cole drawled. "Give us a setup of the best tequila you have."

The waitress looked dubious but she nodded and headed in the direction of the bar.

P.J. studied him from underneath her eyelashes. Despite her initial annoyance, Cole was intriguing her. What was he doing here? And why? She could swear he was flirting with her, and the weird thing was, it was a rather delicious sensation.

A guy like Cole wouldn't have to look far to get laid. No way he came all the way to Denver just for a piece of ass.

"So who were the clowns giving you a hard time?" he asked, breaking the silence.

P.J. grimaced. "Just some people I used to know. A long time ago."

"Apparently they aren't as taken with your charm as I am."

She sputtered and choked on her laughter. She missed the camaraderie and constant ribbing when she was away from her team. It used to be like that on the S.W.A.T. team before Derek had to fuck it all up. P.J. had been certain she'd never find another position that was better than the early days with S.W.A.T. when she'd still been riding high on landing the gig as a female and had been wrapped up in her relationship with Derek.

But she'd been wrong. Going to KGI had opened her eyes to what loyalty to the team and one another was all about. The men she worked for were deeply honorable, but she'd always been careful to keep her distance. Especially from Cole. After Derek, she'd sworn off ever getting involved with someone she worked with.

The waitress returned, carrying a long board that had ten shot glasses. She set it on the table, took Cole's credit card and then looked at them both as if to say have at it.

Cole picked up one glass, handed it to P.J. and then took another for himself. Then he held it up in a toast.

"To another successful mission."

P.J. could drink to that. She tipped her shot glass against his and then they both downed the alcohol.

She nearly coughed as fire burned down her throat. Hell, it had been a good while since she'd had anything

stronger than beer. She'd sworn off the hard stuff after her stint with S.W.A.T. and the aftermath of her leaving the unit.

She brought her glass down on the table with a thump and then stared challengingly at Cole. He grinned in return and then scooped up another glass. She leaned forward to take her own, but this time they were a bit slower to down them.

The music seemed to grow louder and the smoke got thicker. Her eyes watered, whether from the tequila or the smoke she wasn't sure. Cole was right about one thing. This was a sucky place to spend her first evening back home.

"What do you say we finish up our five shots and head to my place?" she said before she could change her mind.

She couldn't believe she'd taken the plunge after being so set on never allowing this sort of thing to happen. Chalk it up to the alcohol or her shitty evening. Either reason constituted one mistake, right? She just knew she suddenly didn't want to be alone.

He frowned, and her heart sank. She hadn't read him right at all, and now she was going to make a giant fool of herself. She was already preparing to excuse the invitation away with casual indifference when he spoke.

"If we're going back to your place, one or both of us needs to stop drinking now. How about I get us a bottle and we'll finish up there."

She let out a sigh of relief that she hadn't even realized had welled up in her chest. She stood, pushing back from the table.

"You get the bottle. I'll meet you in the parking lot. You can follow me back to my place."

* * *

COLE went to the bar, motioned for the bartender and, a few moments later, left with a bottle and two shot glasses. Not that he intended on needing or wanting either, but he was going to make it look good.

He sauntered out to the parking lot, wondering if P.J. would even be there as she'd promised or whether she'd taken off.

She was a hard-ass. Hard to get close to. Hard to get any information from. He knew next to nothing about her personal life. She never slipped up and dropped hints. When they were on a mission, she had single-minded focus. And when the mission was over, she was always the first to bug out. No chitchat or social hour for her.

It had been surprising as hell to discover that she hung out in this joint. He would have guessed she hated people and that she'd never go out of her way to actually hang out in a place infested by them.

He didn't feel one iota of guilt over slipping the GPS chip into her backpack before she'd left Tennessee. She carried that damn thing with her everywhere, and it had led him to the parking lot of the bar.

To his surprise she was standing by her jeep, leaned back with a cool expression on her face. Her eyes were unreadable as she stared up at him.

He held up the bottle and flashed a grin in her direction.

She gave a half smile in return then threw her thumb over her shoulder. "Follow me and try to keep up."

Saucy little heifer. She had to make everything a challenge or a dare. It was okay, though. It wasn't worth it if it was easy.

He climbed into his truck and quickly maneuvered onto the highway behind her, making sure she didn't lose him. After a mile, she turned right into an apartment complex that looked like it dated back to the seventies. It was clean and seemed quiet, but Cole didn't like how dark it was and that there were no security gates.

How the hell did a woman whose job was all about security and protection live in a place like this?

He pulled into the parking spot beside her and slid out. She was already on the sidewalk waiting for him, and before he could catch up to her, she turned and walked up the pathway to her front door.

He grimly surveyed the area, and when she opened the door, he frowned harder because the door wouldn't withstand a simple kick. He walked through and then paused as she closed and secured the door. Not that it would do any good if someone really wanted in.

When she turned back to where he was standing, she frowned as she stared down at his hands.

"You forgot the tequila."

"I didn't forget anything."

Before she could react, he backed her up against her door, his body pressing in close, and he did what he'd been dying to do ever since the day he'd first laid eyes on her.

He kissed her.

And this time it wasn't some act he was putting on for the assholes giving P.J. a hard time, nor was he stopping anytime soon.

FOR the second time that evening, P.J. found herself completely flustered and unable to think straight. Damn but the man could kiss like a dream.

She hated a man who was hesitant and unsure in his movements, and Cole was anything but. She loved strength. Confidence. But not an arrogant asshole.

Cole had the perfect combination. Confident. Convinced. He came across absolutely certain of himself.

She ran her hands up his chest between them and splayed her fingers out over the rippling muscles of his chest. Hard and so drool worthy. He'd starred in more than one of her erotic dreams, and now she had the real thing standing in her apartment, his mouth fused to hers like they were permanently attached.

His tongue swept sensuously over hers, stroking with velvety softness. She could taste the tequila they'd both consumed, but it was mixed with the strong, masculine taste of him as well.

She slid her hands back down and tugged impatiently at his shirt to free it from his pants. Then she placed her palms over his abdomen and he sucked in his breath, breaking raggedly away.

“Bed or couch?” she asked huskily.

He stared down at her, his eyes glittering hungrily. “Depends. How big is your bed?”

“King.”

“Perfect.”

He kissed her again, backing her away from the door as he did and farther into the living room. She was pulling at his shirt and he was yanking at hers.

“You got condoms?” she asked.

“Does it make me an asshole if I say yes?”

She laughed softly. So he *had* been planning to get into her pants. “Aren’t you military boys supposed to be prepared for anything? You never know when you’ll need to have end-of-the-world sex.”

“Hmm, now there’s an idea. Let’s have sex like the world’s going to end tomorrow.”

She pulled him down in a hot, mind-numbing kiss. “You talk too much.”

Her fingers were working the fly of his pants, and he was making quick work of her shirt. She pulled her hands away long enough for Cole to pull her shirt over her head, and then she unzipped him while he unzipped her.

“Bedroom,” he rasped out. “And be getting out of those jeans on the way.”

Clad in her bra and jeans that had the fly wide open, she led the way to the bedroom, working her pants down her hips as she went.

As soon as they entered the bedroom, she heard the clunk of one boot. She turned to see him hopping on one foot while he was taking the other boot off. They’d left a trail of clothing all the way from the living room, and now he was making fast work of his pants.

“Get the light,” he said.

“I like the dark.”

“Hell no, I’m not missing a single moment of this. Do you know how long I’ve fantasized about seeing you naked? That’s like denying a dying man his last wish.”

She smiled and reached for the light switch. When the room flooded with light, she saw that Cole was completely naked and she sucked in her breath, holding it until she was light-headed.

Holy crap. The man was gorgeous. Absolutely lickable. Broad shoulders, muscled biceps, a lean, very toned abdomen and my oh my was he stacked in all the right places.

“Jesus, P.J., quit staring. You’re going to give me a complex.”

She barely managed to drag her gaze upward to meet his. Unable to resist, she moved forward and pressed her hand to his bare chest, enjoying the feel of the light smattering of hair right over his heart. Then she let

her fingers glide downward until they touched the tip of his cock.

Her fingertips danced along the length, teasing as he grew harder beneath her touch. Oh yes, there was no doubt this man was going to satisfy her.

“A man who looks as good as you do should never get a complex,” she murmured.

Satisfaction burned in his eyes, and then he surprised her by sweeping her into his arms. He carried her over to the bed and dropped her onto the mattress. She bounced once and then he yanked her jeans down her legs, tossing them over his shoulder.

“I would have never imagined you in this kind of lingerie,” he breathed.

She arched one eyebrow and sent him a quick frown. “What do you mean by that?”

“It’s positively sinful. Black, lacy. *Girly*.”

He said the last almost accusingly.

“I wear it on all my missions. Not that I’m superstitious or anything, but if it works I’m leaving it alone. I consider them my good luck undies.”

She grinned because now he’d never be able to go on a mission with her without thinking of what she had on underneath.

He leaned down and she immediately went quiet, breath held in anticipation of what he’d do. When he’d touch her. *How* he’d touch her.

He slid his palms up her legs to rest possessively on her hips and then he bent lower to press his mouth over her navel.

The simple action sent a cascade of chill bumps dancing across her skin. The crisp hairs of his goatee brushed over sensitive flesh and heightened her awareness even further.

Such a simple gesture, but it was like opening the flood gates. Every nerve ending in her body was on high alert.

Then he hooked his thumbs in the band of her panties and pulled down, untangling them from her feet and tossing the wispy piece of lace in the direction her jeans had gone.

“No tan line,” he murmured. “Oh, the images that conjures for me. I’d love to know where the hell you sunbathe in the nude. I think I need a membership.”

He parted her legs then lowered his head. He nipped at the inside of her thigh, barely grazing the flesh with his teeth. It sent a delicious shiver all the way up her spine.

Using his thumb and index finger, he spread the lips of her vagina. His hot breath blew over the exposed skin, and she closed her eyes just as his tongue made contact with her clit.

It was like a sudden surge of electricity.

Her legs shook and her nerves tingled from head to toe. The man was an expert at going down on a woman.

He wasn't rough or in a hurry. He knew just how much pressure to apply and just where to touch.

He alternated pressing delicate kisses and stronger swipes of his tongue. The lighter touches were driving her insane. She was balanced on a razor-sharp edge ready to plummet at any second. Just a little more . . .

He lifted his head, and the breath she'd been holding escaped in a long sigh. If he'd touched her one more time with that delicious mouth, she would have gone off like a rocket.

"Can you get your bra off or do you need my help?"

She reached for the clasp in front and grinned as she unhooked it. A moment later she angled so she could get it all the way off and then sent it flying toward the pile of clothes on her floor.

Cole climbed up her body, sliding between her legs until their noses were a breath apart. His body was pressed to hers, his heat enough to scorch her.

"Damn but you have a gorgeous body, P.J. I could look at you for hours."

"I'd much rather you touch," she said impatiently.

He grinned and lowered his mouth to hers, kissing hard and deep until she forgot everything but him and this moment. Their tongues met and tangled. She returned his passion in equal measure. Never before had she felt such an urgency when having sex. She couldn't wait for him to get inside her, to feel his strength in the very heart of her.

"I'm planning to do a lot of touching," he murmured as he pulled away.

His mouth slid warmly down her neck and then to her chest. Her breasts were small, but he didn't seem to mind. He palmed one soft mound, caressing and molding until her nipple was turgid and straining upward.

Finally he lowered his mouth and licked a circle around the puckered nub. She let out a long sigh of appreciation. This man seemed to know all her sweet spots. Knew just how to pleasure her. He couldn't have done better if she'd given him a handwritten manual on what did it for her.

"You like that?"

"Mmm hmm."

He sucked the peak between his lips and applied rhythmic pressure until she was squirming beneath his body, restless and aching.

His hands were everywhere. He stroked and caressed her body like he was appreciating something of great beauty. She was no less enthralled. Her hands slid over every inch of his skin she could reach, exploring the contours, the hard muscles and the feel of his hair-roughened flesh, so different from her own.

When was the last time she'd been in such heaven over a sexual partner? Or maybe she and Cole had just let the tension between them go on for too long. Maybe they should have blown off some steam and had hot monkey sex long before now.

Maybe now they could stop driving each other crazy all the time. Or maybe this would make things a lot worse.

She refused to dwell on the future now. Not when she wanted him with every breath. It was stupid and irresponsible to give in to the growing attraction between them, but she wasn't about to call a halt at this point. Whatever happened afterward, they'd just have to deal with it like adults and not let it interfere in their jobs.

"I don't know if I can wait this first time," he said hoarsely. "I've got to have you, P.J. I'm dying here."

She smiled and tugged him upward for a long, breathless kiss. "What do you need, an engraved invitation? Fuck me, Coletrane. Foreplay is nice, but sometimes it's overrated. Let's get to the good part."

"I love a woman who knows what she wants."

He rolled off her long enough to get a condom and within seconds he was back, sliding up her body to position himself.

"You want top or bottom?" he asked.

She reached down to grasp his erection and positioned him at her opening. "I want both, but right now, I like you just where you are."

"Oh hell, so do I," he groaned.

"Take me, Cole," she said. "I want it hard and fast."

The muscles in his arms and shoulders coiled and bunched. His jaw was tightly clenched as he pushed into her.

They both let out a slow moan when he was all the way in. For a long moment he rested there, his eyes closed as if he were trying to retain what little control he had left.

She slid her hands down his back to his ass and wrapped her legs around him, trapping him against her. Then she lifted her head, hungrily meeting his mouth.

He growled and she swallowed up the sound as he pulled back and thrust hard.

"Yes," she whispered. "That. Just like that. Please, Cole."

He needed no further urging. He began thrusting harder and faster until the entire bed shook with the force of his movements.

Their mouths and bodies were fused. There was such a sense of rightness that it overwhelmed P.J.

He gathered her in his arms, buried himself deep and then rolled, taking her atop him as he landed on his back.

"Now this is a fantasy that's haunted my dreams a lot of nights," he said as he stared up at her. "You, on top of me, having your wicked way with me. It's your turn, P.J. You fuck me now."

She leaned forward, allowing his hands access to her breasts. He rolled the nipples between his fingers and caressed the soft flesh.

She rocked forward, lifting and then coming down hard, taking him deeply. Her knees dug into the mattress

and she braced her hands on his broad shoulders, fingers digging into his flesh.

She alternated rhythm, slowing and then speeding up. She'd feel him swell and tighten, knowing he was close, and then she'd slow again, not wanting it to end just yet.

Leaning lower, she licked over his chest, eliciting another strangled sound from him. Then she nipped and bit at his flesh. The urge to mark him was strong. She liked the idea of him having bruises where she'd sucked at his skin. Something to remind him that she'd owned him every bit as much as he'd owned her tonight.

He gripped her hips, his fingers as hard against her skin as hers were against his. She'd probably wear those fingerprints for days to come. Then he started to take more control, holding her in place while he arched his hips to push farther into her.

She was nearly to the very edge of her own release when he shifted again, rolling her underneath him once more. But this time, he turned her with rough, impatient hands and she found herself facedown on the bed.

He spread her legs, lifted her hips just enough to get the right angle and thrust into her from behind.

It was like he couldn't get enough of her or her of him. Their breathing was harsh and erratic and the sound of skin against skin was loud in her ears.

Harder and harder, he pounded into her until she was screaming his name. Her orgasm wasn't a sweet, pleasurable thing. It was more like a grenade going off. Explosive. Volatile. Nothing like she'd ever experienced before, and she had no way to stop it, not that she would in a million years.

It was frightening in its intensity. Never before had she been so out of control. Never had she allowed someone else as much control. It should have scared her, but she trusted Cole. With him she could be herself. She could let go.

She heard Cole's hoarse cry through the fog of her own release and then felt him lower himself, covering her body with his. He was still buried deep inside her as they both lay, chests heaving, desperately trying to catch their breaths.

Then he kissed her shoulder. A soft, affectionate kiss that sent butterflies through her chest.

He laid his cheek over her back and they rested that way, him blanketing her, their legs tangled and his cock still swollen and hard inside her.

P.J. lay in the hollow of Cole's arm, her head rested on his chest. Lethargy had her in its firm grip and she was okay with that. She was loose and limber and extremely satisfied. She hadn't felt this good in a long time.

His fingers stroked idly up and down her arm and she liked the sensation of those light touches.

Never in a million years would she have guessed when she got up this morning that she would have had mind-blowing sex with Cole and then be snuggling with him afterward like an old married couple.

It defied logic.

“Why didn’t we do this a long time ago?” she asked.

Cole’s grip on her arm temporarily tightened. “It certainly wasn’t for lack of desire on my part. I figured you’d have my balls if I ever suggested it.”

She pushed upward so she could face him, and his hand fell down her back to rest possessively on her ass.

“So why now? You didn’t come all the way to Denver just to say hello, so you obviously planned this.”

“I wouldn’t say I planned it,” he corrected. “I hoped. I was tired of wondering whether this preoccupation was one-sided. I finally said fuck it and got on the plane. The worst you could do is tell me to fuck off and mock me for the rest of my life.”

She laughed. “Would I do that?”

He cupped her breast with his other hand and rubbed his thumb across her nipple. “You most certainly would.”

Her breath hitched as he continued to toy with her nipple. It was a stiff peak straining toward him, begging for his touch. Her entire body was begging. It scared her because this was one man she would never be able to get enough of.

It was like putting a ten-pound Hershey bar in front of a chocolate addict and expecting the person to stop after one bite.

“So who were the guys at the bar?” Cole asked.

She went from being deliciously mellow to instant agitation at the mention of Derek and company.

“That bad?”

She glanced at Cole, who was studying her curiously.

“Not people I really want to talk about.”

“Throw me a bone here, P.J. I know next to nothing about you and I have to admit, I’m not in the habit of going to bed with women I barely know.”

She lifted an eyebrow.

“You don’t believe me? Do you think I’m some kind of man whore?”

She smiled at that. “Maybe not a man whore, but I’m sure you get your share of action from the ladies. There’s not a whole lot wrong with you.”

“Somehow you make what seems like a compliment sound more like an insult.”

She sighed and sat up, crossing her legs so she could sit next to him. He remained lying down so that she was looking down at him, her knees just touching his side.

“It’s complicated.”

“Aren’t most things?”

She couldn't argue with that.

"They're from the S.W.A.T. team I was on. I was . . . involved with Derek."

"Is that the guy you decked?"

She winced. "Saw that much, huh?"

"Kind of hard to miss. Pretty impressive swing, by the way. He's much bigger than you and you nearly flattened him."

That made her grin. Cole was just . . . comfortable. She liked being around him. He was easy to talk to even if she rarely talked about anything personal. Maybe it was why she was careful not to broach those kinds of topics with him, because he was so easy to talk to that she'd no doubt find herself blurting out everything.

"Yeah, that was Derek."

"So I take it the breakup wasn't exactly amicable."

She sobered. "Not at all."

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She'd never told anyone about what had happened, even though she knew her current teammates were curious as to why she left S.W.A.T.

"Derek was dirty and I refused to look the other way. He was stealing drug money and later even drugs themselves when S.W.A.T. was called in to assist in drug busts. Instead of logging everything, he'd pocket stuff from the scene when things were still chaotic. I don't know how long it had been going on. But one night I saw him pocket cash along with a bag of marijuana. When I called him on it, he basically told me to shut the fuck up and forget I ever saw it."

"Upstanding guy," Cole said in disgust.

"Maybe I was naive and too idealistic. I mean, to me, when I took the oath as a police officer and when I joined the S.W.A.T. team, it meant something to me. I had a very clear vision of right and wrong. Everything was very black-and-white to me with no gray area. But even being that way, I wanted to give Derek the benefit of the doubt and I was reluctant to turn him in because, like an idiot, I thought I was in love with him and I felt loyalty to him because we were lovers."

Cole frowned.

"Yeah, tell me about it," she muttered. "You aren't thinking anything I haven't said to myself countless times since. I was young and an idiot. To make a long story short, I confronted him and told him that if I ever caught him doing it again I'd turn him in."

"I'm guessing that probably didn't go over too well. Is that what caused the breakup?"

Her lips tightened. "No. And no, he didn't take it well. Told me he didn't take threats and that I needed to butt out. At that point our relationship cooled in a major way, but I figured he'd get over it and that my threat would dissuade him from doing it again. I'm still pissed at myself that I even gave him that second chance. It wasn't the right thing to do, but I was thinking with my heart and so I went against everything I believed in. I hated myself for that."

“Damn,” Cole murmured. “Don’t you think you’re being a little too hard on yourself?”

“No,” she said bluntly. “I wish I would have been harder. Two months later, we assisted in another drug raid. This was a big one. Several police officers went down, and Derek, the asshole, instead of worrying over his fellow officers, was more concerned with taking money from the scene. I went to my commander the next day and told him what I saw.”

“Oh shit.”

“Yeah, exactly. Internal Affairs got involved. It was a big, messy investigation. Derek was smart, though, and he didn’t leave any sort of trail. No deposits to a bank account. No change in spending habits. He’d planned long term and was apparently stashing the money where it couldn’t be found and was going to use it at a later date or maybe quit and then move off somewhere and spend the cash. I don’t really know what his plan was, but whatever it was, it certainly didn’t include me in the picture.”

“So they didn’t have any evidence on him?”

“No,” she said softly.

“Is that why you left then? Because you couldn’t work with him any longer?”

She hated this part. It still had the power to unravel her even after all this time.

“P.J.?”

She looked up, not really wanting to continue the conversation at this point.

His gaze was intense. Peeling back layer after layer until she felt bare and vulnerable under his scrutiny.

“What aren’t you telling me?”

She drew in a long breath and then let it out. “What I left out is the fact that my two best friends, or rather Derek’s best friends who I thought were my friends too, along with Derek hung me out to dry.”

Cole slipped his hand over the knee closest to his reach and squeezed gently. “What happened?”

“Up to this point, Derek and I had kept our relationship secret. It was against policy for members on the same team to fraternize, a rule, mind you, that didn’t exist before I joined because I was the first female on that team. But Derek went to our commander, along with Jimmy and Mike to corroborate his story, and told him that Derek and I were lovers and that he broke things off with me and that I’d launched my accusations out of revenge. Jimmy and Mike backed up his story by telling him a bunch of made-up shit, like that I’d threatened to ruin him when he broke up with me. And then they leaked that story far and wide until there wasn’t a police officer in the precinct who didn’t know that I was a crazy ex-girlfriend who’d tried to fuck over a fellow officer.”

“What a dickhead,” Cole said in disgust.

“I didn’t have a friend left in that department or on my team. No one *wanted* to believe that one of their own could be dirty, so it was far easier to believe his made-up bullshit. And there was also the fact that not everyone on S.W.A.T. was overjoyed that a woman had joined their ranks anyway, so Derek didn’t have to work hard to discredit me in their eyes.”

“Wow,” Cole said, shaking his head. “That is some fucked-up shit.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Anthony Chan:

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