

FROSTING  
on the CAKE 2:

Second Helpings



karin  
kallmaker

Lambda Literary Award Winning Author

Frosting on the  
Cake 2:  
Second Helpings

by

Karin Kallmaker



2010

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## About the Author

Karin Kallmaker's nearly thirty romances and fantasy-science fiction novels include the award-winning *The Kiss That Counted*, *Just Like That*, *Maybe Next Time* and *Sugar* along with the bestselling *Substitute for Love* and the perennial classic *Painted Moon*. Short stories have appeared in anthologies from publishers like Alyson, Bold Strokes, Circket and Haworth, as well as novellas and short stories with Bella Books. She began her writing career with the venerable Naiad Press and continues with Bella.

She and her partner are the mothers of two and live in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is descended from Lady Godiva, a fact which she'll share with anyone who will listen. She likes her Internet fast, her iPod loud and her chocolate real.

All of Karin's work can now be found at Bella Books. Details and background about her novels, and her other pen name, Laura Adams, can be found at [www.kallmaker.com](http://www.kallmaker.com).

## Acknowledgments

Without readers, none of this would make any sense at all. Thank you for the support, the love and the willingness to let the journey take you wherever it goes.

In memory of Pam Butler, super fan, super woman.

*Twenty-four and there will be more.*

**Also by Karin Kallmaker**

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Above Temptation  
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Maybe Next Time  
Substitute for Love  
Frosting on the Cake  
Unforgettable  
Watermark  
Making Up for Lost Time  
Embrace in Motion  
Wild Things  
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Paperback Romance  
Touchwood  
In Every Port

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To the Reader—

Revisiting my characters is a journey of love and I was delighted when I undertook this project. It also gave me a chance to gather eight short stories I'd written in the years since the first *Frosting on the Cake* collection and then write nine more. Some of the previously written stories were designed to fit a theme in an anthology, so these versions have additional material or changes so they stand on their own in this collection. *Happy New Year, Too* was originally released as a gift to readers, so this is its first time in print.

As with the first volume, the section at the end represents my notes about the manuscripts, answering many of the questions I routinely receive about where a character or plot came from.

The information given after each story's title tells roughly how much time has elapsed since the end of the novel. These stories are presented in the order that I felt would be the most enjoyable when reading the book cover to cover. You can decide if you want to read in that order or go directly to the story(ies) from your favorite novels. When it comes to cake there are no rules.

—Karin

# **Above Temptation**

Published: 2010  
Characters: Kip Barrett, private fraud investigator  
Tamara Sterling, owner Sterling Fraud  
Investigations  
Setting: Seattle, Washington

*Squee! O Glee! We are Twenty-Three!*



# Snap Judgment

(6 months)

“This is so cool!” Tam had to shout in Kip’s ear. From their backstage vantage point, they had a prime view of the musicians. Tam was more than happy with her view of the AeroFlight drummer.

Drummers had amazing shoulders and PZDash, wearing skin-tight laser-blue leather vest and pants, was no exception.

Kip, standing on tiptoe, yelled in Tam’s ear, “Roll your tongue back into your mouth!”

Tam spread her hands in a helpless gesture. What was she supposed to do? That was a fine specimen of lesbian musicality and wasn’t it her sisterly duty to ogle? “The way you did at the Brandi Carlile concert last month?”

Grinning, Kip gave her a playful smack on the arm.

Her new job had certainly led them to new opportunities. Freelance financial fraud and security consulting for musicians was proving busy and lucrative, and Tamara Sterling was downright proud of her wife. Starting over wasn't easy, but Kip clearly loved the work. Kip was delighted to be *persona non grata* with several managers now and to bask in the undying love of a number of musical acts. AeroFlight would be her biggest to date, if they signed her to do an audit of their financial arrangements and advisors.

It wasn't all fun for Kip, though. While Tam had been watching the mesmerizing drummer—the whole show, really—Kip had been walking through the audience of the entire Pike's Dome, casually asking people for their ticket stubs. Some people wouldn't part with them, but with a clipboard and a copy of the latest *Rolling Stone* under one arm, her explanation that she was doing research for the band meant a number of people would give them to her, and answer a few questions.

"How do things look?" Tam asked. It was getting harder to be heard as the band entered the finale of their last set. The bass was painfully loud and she felt the vibrations through her shoes. Her heartbeat was trying to match the drums.

"Exactly what I thought."

"Really? That's so...retro."

"An oldie but a goodie. This can't be the first time this venue contractor has pulled this, and I of course have to wonder if someone is getting paid not to notice."

"If someone in band management is in on it that would explain why they're not playing Key Arena. Publicly owned—all those county auditors and annoying safeguards."

"I'm betting the whole band uses the same accountant and tax accountant for their personal finances."

Tam nodded. It was too loud now to answer. She felt so old, but she absolutely had to cover her ears—and she was

to the side of the biggest amplifiers. She couldn't imagine being in front of them. The musicians wore ear jacks with noise reduction to spare their hearing, plus they got filtered playback of their own part of the performance.

Looking very smug, Kip fished in her suit pocket producing a set of ear plugs which she offered to Tam.

She mouthed "I love you" and was glad it was easy to lip read. Kip answered with a wink. Standing close together, they enjoyed the finale, the pyrotechnics, then two encores. At one point, Tam gestured at the towel behind the drummer, soaking up the perspiration running off the ends of her long, tight dreads. Before coming backstage with Kip at concerts Tam had not been all that aware of the demands of performances, but now she knew it was physically very draining. The bottles she'd figured were booze were actually full of Gatorade, and there were roadies charged solely with keeping them full. She thought that the number one reason some performers reached for drugs was exhaustion, plain and simple. AeroFlight was different in that they had their act together—a personal chef was backstage with a post-performance dinner that was as finely tuned as a pro athlete's training diet.

They'd have their act together even more if they hired Kipling Barrett. Since Kip had said so, Tam had no doubt that one of the oldest tricks in the book was costing each member of the band piles of money every time they went out on stage and literally sweated buckets for the crowd. She also had no doubt that Kip had a solid idea of who was getting the money instead.

Goodness, but she really loved the woman. She was suspicious, tenacious, ethical and determined to make sure no-good people got what they deserved. All that, plus Kip was a cute little fireball of energy and life. And all hers.

Standing backstage, Kip pushed her ear plugs deeper, eager for the show to be over. Maybe some day she'd be sanguine about landing clients and able to enjoy the shows. She didn't blame Tam for watching the drummer—she was riveting. All those broad shoulder muscles, the deep mahogany skin and the light glinting off her sticks when she twirled them made for a gorgeous image. But Kip was focused on the assignment at hand and her stomach knots were a little too tight to completely yield to the music. She was really glad Tam was enjoying herself.

All the reviews of prior performances said the band never added another encore, so she was reasonably sure they were about done. She'd been asked to make her pitch while the band members cooled off. She was trying very hard to be more of a night owl, but it was tough locating her tiptop professionalism and razor-sharp presentation skills at eleven p.m., especially when her potential clients were strung out on adrenaline and would, in less than an hour from the last note, be comatose with fatigue. It could be a very short meeting.

She had her standard recommendations to help them be more confident that their affairs were being handled honestly. She also had proof they were being ripped off at this venue. If it was happening here, it had probably happened elsewhere. It helped her flagging energy that the sheer mediocrity of the skimming scheme made her mad. Really, she wouldn't be surprised to learn it had been lifted right out of an accounting 101 textbook from the chapter "Stupid Things that Auditors Will Catch So Don't Even Think About It."

The moment the last encore was over she pulled out the ear plugs. She hated the way they made her inner ears feel—kind of slimy. The band members, soaked to their skins, poured backstage, already talking shorthand to roadies and each other about tonight, tomorrow, dinner, how tired they were, all of it salted with basic and heartfelt adjectives that

would put a sailor to shame.

Tam gave her a quick hug. “See you at home later. Wake me if you need to—I want to hear how it went.” With a little purr she added, “Wake me anyway.”

The tingle all down her spine was distracting but wonderful. “Okay. Be safe.”

“You too.”

She watched Tam walk away, feeling that very familiar appreciation of the way jeans hugged her backside. There was also a twist of immediate longing for Tam to come right back, right this instant, and be close to her again. She hoped the feeling never went away. It had been a risk to love Tam, to leave her challenging and beloved career on the chance of so much more, and every bit of the risk had been worth it.

Journalists and bloggers were crowding around with questions, fans who’d won contests were being introduced and she knew the chaos would swirl for a while longer. She moved out of the way, waiting patiently near the dressing room corridor where a burly, grim-faced security guard checked anybody who wanted to get by him. She was hoping to catch the eye of her contact, PZDash, a.k.a. Pam Zannuck, to make sure she didn’t have any trouble getting to the dressing room area.

Assistants must have received some kind of signal from the band manager because the energy abruptly changed. The musicians moved decidedly toward their dressing rooms and everyone else was unceremoniously herded toward the exit, even though some were still calling out to the band members. One enthusiastic young woman kept yelling, “I love you JD! I love you JD!”

Okay, Kip thought. Not exactly the romantic overture she would call promising. John Duffy, the lead singer, didn’t turn around—nor did she expect him to.

She was just about to get left behind, so she stepped

forward and firmly called out, “Ms. Zannuck!”

The drummer turned, gave her an “Oh yeah” nod of recognition. “Hang on guys—we have to do the accountant thing tonight.” She waved at Kip as she gave Kip’s name to the guard, who scribbled it on his papers.

“Is that tonight?” Kip couldn’t see the speaker.

“Yes it’s tonight. I reminded everyone before the show, remember?”

“That was two lifetimes ago,” someone else said. “I can’t think.”

“I can come back—”

Zannuck waved her to silence. Over her shoulder she said, “It’s now or eight o’clock tomorrow morning.”

“Bitch.” It was fondly said, but Kip still didn’t know who was speaking.

“Come on,” Zannuck said to Kip.

They were immediately stopped by the band’s manager, Steven Selcer. Like most men in rock and roll, he was tall, handsome and self-assured in black jeans and a black band T-shirt. Older than the band members by at least fifteen years, if not more, his “discovery” of AeroFlight had cemented him as a star maker. “It sounds like John really doesn’t want to.”

“He never wants to, Stevie. But we have to. Kip is totally highly recommended and she’s based here in Seattle.”

Selcer gave Kip a wary look. He earned no points with her by taking just a moment too long—as if it were an effort—to look all the way down from his six-two or six-three to meet her five-two gaze. “I’m not convinced there’s anything to be gained.”

“Give me ten minutes to convince you. All of you,” Kip added, nodding at Zannuck.

Zannuck slouched her way past Selcer, gesturing at Kip to follow. “Everybody is tired, but we’re wired too. Now is as good a time as any.”

Aware of Selcer following close behind, Kip stayed close to Zannuck. The farther they got from the stage, the less glamorous the surroundings. She was on their turf, and the rules of business meetings held in board rooms where introductions and résumés were shared, business cards handed round and a PowerPoint presentation whirred on a projector didn't apply here. These performers weren't just wealthy, they were living eccentric lives way outside of the 9-to-5. Their hours were late, and the barrage of manic worship from fans was endless, as was the long line of hands out for some piece of the action. Kip was just another hand out—she had to prove to them that her services were worth every penny.

“John, Richie, Cal,” Zannuck said, pointing her introductions as they entered the green room. The three other musicians all gave a small but not exactly enthusiastic wave. “This is Kip Barrett, the woman I told you about. Bill and Cheryl recommended her.”

Dinner smelled delicious, and Kip hoped her stomach didn't growl. A basic, functional kitchen had been set up in the rear of the room. A chef busily whisked something in a bowl while microwaves hummed and two pots bubbled on hot plates.

The rest of the room wasn't exactly shabby, but the two long sofas and half-dozen chairs were worn and sagging. A repaired section of jaundice-colored wall suggested someone had partied way too hard, and not that long ago. She was glad of the aromas from the cooking; these sorts of spaces had an old building funk.

“A pleasure everybody. It was a stunning show. Thank you so much for letting me experience it.”

There was a sort of group nod. John Duffy, ripped jeans and soaked T plastered to his lean form, was almost prone on the closest sofa. Richie Merrick and Cal Fuentes, guitarists, looked exactly the way Kip looked after an all-nighter as they

slouched in their respective chairs. Selcer took another of the chairs and Zannuck chose to lean over the back of the sofa Duffy was sprawled on.

“I know you’re all tired, so I’ll try to be brief.”

Duffy lifted one eyebrow. It eloquently expressed, “Yeah, right. Everybody says that.”

“I’m not an accountant. I’m a fraud specialist,” Kip began. “I’m extremely suspicious. I see conspiracies, collusion and incompetence everywhere. I ask rude questions. I’m mistrustful of answers. I’m a hard ass—”

Merrick’s laugh was skeptical. He had just completed a flicked-glance survey of her small, slender frame.

She gestured at herself. “Deceptive packaging, I agree, which is useful sometimes. I’m a short hard ass. But guaranteed I will let you all off the hook. Hire me, empower me to poke into your financial affairs and if someone complains, tell them it’s out of your hands. Blame that totally competent but really bitchy specialist. So that’s the top of the list—I’m on your side and nobody else’s. I work for the four of you. Everybody else is possibly a lying, cheating, thieving rat bastard.”

“Okay,” Fuentes said, after a transparently impatient glance toward the kitchen and its awaiting delights. “You’re a hard ass. What does this get us?”

“When’s the last time you had an independent tax advisor review the band’s and your individual tax returns for appropriateness, completeness and proactive tax planning?”

“Haven’t a clue,” Zannuck said. She shifted from leaning on her elbows to resting a hip on the back of the sofa. “When was it Stevie?”

Kip waved a hand as Selcer started to speak. “I don’t need an answer. Not right now. But that’s an example of the kind of questions I’ll be asking of you and your manager and your tax advisor. They can tell me whatever they want, but I will examine everything for you. I will verify that you got what

you were told you got, that the services were correctly paid for, that the person who did the review was independent and reputable.”

Selcer bristled. “That’s really offensive. You have to trust people you work with. Otherwise this business stinks.”

“Told you, I’m suspicious. And unfortunately, from what I’ve seen, this business stinks regardless. There’s too much money flying around to blindly trust anyone. Money brings out the worst in people and what’s more, it makes you suspicious. But because you don’t want to look untrusting, you don’t ask questions when you should and your suspicions can’t be resolved, even if they’re groundless. Every so often, you need someone like me to ask those questions. If all is well, everybody sleeps at night.”

She paused, but no one said anything. “Then there’s the tedious stuff. I can sit for hours tracing a transaction, verifying lists, picking apart reports for their sources. I know full well that the single most tedious thing on the money side of the business is reconciling the box office. I’ll audit that it’s being done properly because I know it falls to the very bottom of everyone’s To Do list.”

“We don’t have to worry about those.” Fuentes crossed his legs and stretched, muscles rippling all along his chest. She had wondered why all four of them had been in a *VHI* feature titled, “AeroFlight: No Time for Ladies.” Their rocket-to-stardom careers hadn’t left any of them time for serious dating, according to the article. But it wasn’t because there weren’t plenty of women looking for the honor. They all dripped that sexy, power rocker vibe. She’d given Tam a hard time for ogling PZDash, but she had the vibe just as much as the guys did.

Merrick added, “All the box office is paid to Selcer Productions, then transferred to AeroFlight Limited, and then we get our cut. So we get out of having our own accounting

people, thank God.”

It might be almost midnight, but they were all reasonably alert and engaged. And as casual as their poses might be, they weren't uninterested. Clearly, none of them realized that giving complete control of the accounting to someone else without a verification loop of some kind was an open door to theft. She understood that they didn't have time. She had to make them see and understand that they urgently needed someone like her making sure other people were doing their jobs.

She paused long enough for a server to circulate through offering lemonade and iced tea. Kip declined. The men all had tea. Zannuck had lemonade.

“I'm not a tax accountant, but I will vet one for you. I'll randomly audit box office so no one knows when the laser beam scrutiny will be there. I'll make sure the people you trust are trustworthy.”

“This is going to piss people off. Some venues don't allow it, either.” Selcer casually draped an arm over the back of his chair, pulling his black tee tight across his chest. “This is all over the top.”

Kip said smoothly, her gaze moving from musician to musician, “It'll be up to you, a decision you all make and carry out. The foundation of your financial affairs' security is independent examinations. Someone with a suspicious mind who works only for you making random checks on systems you trust to other people. Someone who'll say ‘If the venue won't agree to me showing up in the middle of the show to look at their books, don't perform there.’”

Their attention span was wavering. The chef had ceased his flurry of activity, obviously waiting to plate and serve.

“One last thing,” she said as she pulled the substantial stack of ticket stubs out of her small zippered portfolio. “Hire me, and I'll find fascinating stories like this to tell you.”

It was awkward to bend over the coffee table in front of the sofa, but Kip had no other choice. She set the stack on the table and carefully spread them out, like a magician fanning out multiple decks of cards.

Duffy, who had slid almost entirely onto his back, struggled upright on the sofa. “This is a story?”

“It’s the sort of story I find fascinating. And you will too.”

“Ticket stubs?”

She looked him in the eye. “You see ticket stubs. I see the story of financial transactions.” She gestured at the long row of card-stock rectangles that were left over when the ticket taker tore off the main ticket. “These are arranged in the venue’s seating order. On my left is the orchestra, dress circle, box seats. On the far right we’re up in the nose bleed seats.”

She waited for it, hoping someone bit. If no one did, they weren’t going to hire her.

Fuentes had risen from his chair, a frown creasing between his eyebrows. “Why are some of the stubs white and some yellow?”

Bingo.

“I’m guessing the box office will say they had two different rolls of card stock, and used up one color before starting the next.”

They were all frowning, but it was Duffy who proved he had been listening in math classes. “If that were the case, why are there more yellow tickets for the cheap seats and white ones for the high end ones?”

“That’s a question I’d ask for you. If the colors meant nothing, they wouldn’t be telling us a story.”

“It’s a story that doesn’t make sense,” Zannuck said. “I hated statistics, but isn’t that like, well, improbable?”

“Yes.” Kip was aware that the manager had gone very still. She wasn’t surprised. Selcer was smart. He’d have spotted this right off and nixed it—if he wasn’t the one to suggest it or

hadn't been happy to go along with someone in the venue's office.

"Wouldn't the cheap seats sell first?" Merrick looked a little out of his depth, but he was clearly intrigued as he got up to lean over Duffy's shoulder.

Duffy shook his head. "They don't, remember? The first tickets are always down front, then front of the upper circle, then the middle of the first floor."

"Like I said, the color is telling us a story. And so is this." She carefully slid the stubs back into the stack without messing up the order. Turning the stack over, she fanned it out again, making her black, blue and green Sharpie marks visible.

"Green means the person who gave me the stub didn't know the answer to my question. Black means the ticket was bought with a credit card. Blue means cash. The box office didn't accept checks."

"Son of a bitch." Zannuck snorted. "You have got to be kidding me."

Merrick was shaking his head. "So why are all the yellow stubs marked with blue? Well, most of them—some are green."

"None are black," Zannuck said, pointing. "The fucking yellow stubs are tickets bought with cash. The box office is tracking cash and credit sales separately."

"There may be a perfectly honest explanation," Kip said. "It would be my job to ask the hostile, awkward, rude questions."

"They're skimming cash on us," Zannuck spat. She grabbed several of the stubs, turning them back over. "Look, they have different codes completely from the white. It's just like the mom-and-pop food joints we all used to work at. One receipt book for cash, the other for credit cards. Remember those days?"

Fuentes nodded, "Sure. If I wanted to keep the job I recorded half my hours and they paid me the other half in cash. So instead of the IRS, *we're* the ones getting ripped off

by cash we never knew existed. The box office pockets it—never even tells us those tickets were sold.”

“If they are indeed underreporting sales to you, this would be a very simple way to do it. It’s also a simple thing to spot. Now it’s true that cash sales have overall dwindled for concerts,” Kip said. “But it’s still also true that the younger crowd, the ones who are buying the cheap nose bleed seats, don’t have credit cards, and so they pay cash after standing in line all night. Again,” Kip added, “I am a suspicious person. I think you are owed answers and reassurance.”

“Stevie,” Zannuck said, “what do you think is up?”

They don’t have a clue, Kip thought. There really was no telling how long it had been going on, then.

Without deigning to look at the stubs, he answered, “I think there’s a reasonable explanation for it. This is an old theater with old methods. I’ll ask tomorrow.”

Kip started to shake her head in warning, but Duffy forestalled her objection. “No, I think Kip is going to ask.”

“Now, John, let’s not jump to conclusions...”

Four pairs of eyes, in unison, shifted their gazes from the ticket stubs to their manager. Kip had seen that kind of bond before. They had been a band since they’d been seniors in high school, gigged together all the way through college, and hit the big time three years ago. They performed together with such frequency, and with such intimate passion and energy, that there was a tangible bond that resembled that of siblings. When Pam Zannuck had come out in the first year of super stardom a hate group had picketed their next show. The three guys had opened the show with a rap to the protesters where many two-and four-syllable words rhymed with *truckers*.

The foursome would bicker, tease, even fight, but woe to the person who tried to hurt any of them. Selcer was a fool if he didn’t understand that. There was no divide and conquer, no making them feel like ingénues who didn’t get the business.

Stevie Selcer might be unemployed soon, Kip thought. And Buck, her go-to guy for all things involving background checks and information ordinary mortals couldn't wring out of cyberspace, was going to be a busy fellow for the next couple of days. The money had gone somewhere. Somewhere maybe where she could even get at least some of it back.

There was a long, harsh silence while the musicians stared at their manager. Then Fuentes and Merrick returned to their previous chairs.

"Do you have a contract?" Duffy asked Kip.

"I do. I would want all four of you to sign it. I would work for all four of you. Your equal interests would be my concern. My arrangement is a retainer. I will use that for time and expenses. I hire highly trusted contractors for part of what I do, and I will pay them." She pulled a multipage document from her portfolio. "Copies for each of you. We would all sign each copy so everyone has an original."

Duffy turned to the last page. "Got a pen?"

Kip put her hand over the signature blocks. "Not now. Have some dinner. Talk it over. If you still want to sign, I'll be backstage to answer your questions. If you don't, just tell me, and I'll go on my merry way, no worries." She gestured at the ticket stubs. "You can keep those, regardless."

"Kip's right," Merrick said. "We need a band meeting before we decide about anything."

"Well, that means you all want to be alone," Selcer said with a congenial smile that didn't fool Kip at all. "I think this is all much ado about nothing, but you all decide what you want. I'm going to go make sure everything is battened down out there and the next security shift has arrived."

Moments later it was awkward that she and Selcer were on the same side of the green room door at the same time. She heard the hubbub of voices break out behind the closed door and moved purposefully toward the backstage area to avoid

any appearance of eavesdropping.

“That was an impressive display.” Selcer’s expression was coolly bland. “I really think there’s a simple explanation, and you’ll be completely satisfied by their answers at the box office.”

He thinks he can fix it before I get there, Kip thought. If he does then they might not hire me, but he’s probably still fired. It wasn’t an ideal outcome, but part of her would be satisfied. “It’s an old scam, and an obvious one. Why didn’t you see it?”

“I don’t have to answer your questions. They haven’t hired you yet.” He didn’t say “bitch” but she could practically hear him thinking it.

They weren’t destined to be friends, so she asked, “I’m just wondering if it was laziness, incompetence or collusion that kept you from spotting it.”

“Who do you think you are? You want a piece of it, fine.”

“I want to put a stop to it.”

He ignored her. “How much do you want? Ten percent?”

Kip paused deliberately, then said, “What would that amount to?”

He smiled at how easily she appeared to be capitulating. “Six figures. One time offer.”

So casual, so practiced about it...“Before I came here I did my homework. I already suspected there was something to find. I even thought we might be having this conversation.”

“And?” He glanced at his watch.

“You didn’t do your homework, did you? You really don’t know who I am.”

“You’re an accountant. You—”

“You *have* heard of Sterling Fraud Investigations, haven’t you? The people who nailed Joseph Wyndham and his band of embezzlers? And those nasty stock portfolio derivative frauds from last year? Until a little over a year ago I worked

for Sterling.”

The very slightest hint of concern crept into his still smug expression.

“Now I’m married to Tamara Sterling. Do you think I have any interest whatsoever in your hundred thousand dollar bribe?”

There was a gasp and Kip turned to see Zannuck standing in green room’s open doorway.

“Fuck you, Stevie!” She put her hands on her hips and fire seemed to lance out of her eyes. “Your ass is fired.”

Kip couldn’t have said it better herself.

Tam felt as if she was floating out of a good dream. Whoever invented beds should be canonized. Surely it had been a woman because sheets and warmth and pillows were divine. The new bedroom set she and Kip had acquired on their anniversary had proven a luxurious, decadent investment that encouraged oversleeping...and other pleasurable pastimes.

The shower was what had probably woken her. She rolled over to find Kip’s side of the bed undented. Dawn was peeking around the drapes. She’d just gotten in?

The shower turned off and after a minute the light coming from under the bathroom door winked out. Soft footsteps crossed the carpet and then the covers on the other side of the bed rustled and the bed shifted slightly.

With a little murmur she feigned sleep as she flopped over onto the deliciously nude Kip.

“I woke you, didn’t I? I tried not to.”

She laughed. “It’s okay—you were up all night?” Tam propped herself up on one elbow to peer at Kip in the dim light.

“It was a bloodbath. Sometimes things work out beautifully.

The manager offered me a bribe and a band member overheard him do it. So I spent the rest of the night doing the box office on the spot with the sexy, famous John Duffy watching. Pam and Cal made sure Stevie left the premises and the roadies and security knew where their paychecks were really coming from. Richie crashed so he could be up at six to call their attorney and see about freezing assets held in common before Selcer cleans the accounts out. Hey, I recommended Luke as a temporary manager for the rest of their stay here in Seattle while they try to secure a new one with the experience they need. They need someone on point and Luke can bring in some buddies he trusts.”

“Jen will go on being your best friend because that’s a nice bonus with their second baby on the way.”

“I owe him. He got me my first lead.”

Tam smoothed Kip’s still damp hair, loving the silky feel against her fingers. “So did you get to spend any time with Pam?”

“Not really.” Kip smiled up at her. “Yes, she’s gorgeous. But darling, she’s not my type.”

Trying to hide a smile, Tam pretended to be hurt. “Gorgeous isn’t your type? What does that make me?”

“Any woman who isn’t you isn’t my type. And that makes you mine.” She arched up to feather kisses along Tam’s jaw. At the same time, one hand found Tam’s breast. “I love it when you’re all soft and melted and sleepy.”

“Not so sleepy now,” Tam whispered. Her body felt as if it had just burst into flames. A light brush of fingertips along her hip drew a moan deep from her throat. In a sudden fever, she found Kip’s mouth and shared a kiss full of impatient intentions.

She loved Kip’s hands. They were small but strong and very sensitive. Her experience was limited, but she had never been touched by anyone with such precise care and such

attention to shades of sensation, who watched her face for every responsive nuance. In what seemed like only heartbeats she was straddled over Kip, her face in the pillow above Kip's shoulder, panting desperately while Kip's fingers found and woke up every last nerve between her legs.

"I love you," Kip whispered. "And being inside you when you're like this is incredible. *Please.*"

The plea touched her in places only Kip's voice ever reached. She gasped, then rocked back with a plea of her own.

It took a minute for her to realize that, as she had drifted in a very pleasant frame of mind, Kip had fallen asleep.

She was pretty sure the sun was up now, and she studied Kip's profile, wanting to kiss the lips that were lightly curved in a relaxed smile. Her love needed some rest though. It occurred to her that if she got up now, she could get a great deal of work done while Kip slept, and that would give them Sunday afternoon together.

Congratulating herself on a fantastic plan, she carefully slithered out her side of the bed. Her knees felt deliciously weak. She took one more long look at Kip and decided that she had even more fantastic plans for the afternoon. And the evening. She had so many fantastic plans it would take a lifetime to try them all.

*We hope you enjoyed this  
Bella Appetizer.*

