

CRAZY FOR YOU, AGAIN

by

Margaret Marr

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This story is totally fiction, based on these two little words—
what if—with that said, there wasn't a kiss, but there was a darkroom...

If you have the overwhelming urge to don several bangle bracelets and
dance around the room while listening to Madonna, have at it. I won't tell!

*What I'm dying to say,
is that I'm crazy for you...*

*...you'll feel it in my kiss
because I'm crazy for you.*

~ Madonna ~

CHAPTER ONE

Madonna's "La Isla Bonita" exploded into the quiet, country night of Hayton County North Carolina. Marci Grant rose up with a gasp, dumping a water-stained paperback copy of *Gone with the Wind* onto her lap. For several seconds her sleep-addled mind tried to grasp the sound, not quite sure what she heard. Finally, her brain kicked the fuzzy intruders out of her mind, and she snatched up her cell phone and flipped it open. With a glance at the radio alarm clock, she mumbled. "Hello."

"Don't tell me you were asleep, oh queen of I-never-fall-asleep-before-three a.m."

"Nate?"

"Who else calls you at this hour of the night?"

"Morning."

"Huh?"

"Technically it's morning," she grouched.

"Are you still asleep?"

"Does it sound like I'm asleep?"

"Don't be so anal."

Marci scooted down, plumped up her pillow, and let out a big sigh. "Shouldn't you be sleeping, seeing as it's your turn to open the store this week?"

"I don't sleep worth a damn, you know that."

She glanced at the digital numbers again. "It's pretty darned close to three. What's up? Something wrong?"

"Naw—just worried about you."

"Me? Why?"

"You're in your forties, and you've still not remarried."

"Jeez! Is that why you woke me from a delicious dream involving Hugh Jackman and the backseat of a car?" Marci flopped over onto her back. "And thanks for pointing out how old I am—a gal just *loves* to be reminded of that."

"Sarcasm is ugly on you, and I can't believe you're more worried about your age than finding someone to spend the rest of your life with."

"Not everyone can find marital bliss like you and Navi." She yawned and scratched her head. They'd had this conversation a million times since her divorce. But every time she looked at a potential new love interest, she started thinking about getting used to his quirky weirdness and dealing with the inevitable pouty, hateful moods when he didn't get any. And she always managed to pick men who possessed the emotional equivalent of a fire-poker.

I'm too old and jaded to put myself through that kind of crap again.

"Guess whose back in town." Nate's voice took on a sly tone.

"Gee, I don't know, but I bet you're gonna tell me."

"Terry."

Marci held the phone in front of her and frowned as if Nate could see her expression. She brought it back to her ear. "Is that supposed to mean something to me?"

"Come on, Marci, how many Terry's did we go to school with?"

An electric thrill zinged through her veins. "Oh. That Terry." *The Terry who kissed me and disappeared twenty-four years ago.*

“Hmmm. I expected more of response than that from you.”

Marci stretched and yawned again, hoping he couldn't hear her heart bashing around in her chest like ocean waves pummeling rocks. “We were best friends, and he didn't bother staying in touch with me after we graduated.”

“Only because you were so gaga over that idiot you married, whom, I might add was married to someone else.”

“Would you stop throwing that mistake in my face every time we talk about this? I goofed. Okay? Get over it.” Who needed a husband, when she had a friend like Nate who never buried the hatchet?

“Terry and I were best friends, not girlfriend boyfriend.”

Nate guffawed on the other end. “I bet he wanted more than that. Remember the darkroom incident?”

“A teenage boy acting like a teenage boy. He was just messing around.” Marci growled and glared at the ceiling. “I should've never told you about it.” She picked a long strand of light brown hair from the bedspread and released it to the floor where her vacuum cleaner would suck it up. Eventually. “Besides, I heard he's gay.”

A hoot of laughter followed by a thump and scrunching sounds assaulted Marci's ear. “Hello? You still there?”

“Sorry. Dropped the phone.” He muffled another laugh, then finally cleared his throat. “Well, if he is gay, it's because you rejected him.”

Marci snorted. “I rejected you and you didn't go back-door bobbing.”

Nate let out a howl of laughter that Marci knew *her* neighbors could hear. “Hush! You'll wake up Navi and the girls.”

“Okay, I'll leave it be for now.” He let out another chuckle before regaining control. “See you at noon, Marci girl.”

Marci smiled at the pet name only Nate called her. He was a good guy, and Navi a lucky gal, but she'd never felt that spark for him. Disgusted with herself, she rolled her eyes toward the ceiling. No, she never sparked until a married man came into range. *God, I'm so sick of attracting married men—and being attracted to them.* She set her phone on the bedside lamp stand and pulled the covers up to her shoulder.

Maybe some day someone great—and unmarried—would come along....

CHAPTER TWO

At ten a.m., the alarm clock beeped like an insane robot and jerked Marci out of a dream about a white-haired man on a motorcycle wearing a red, black and green shirt two inches too short for him. He'd found her wandering around in a cave.

Marci sat on the edge of the bed and didn't even want to contemplate what a white-haired man chasing her through a cave said about her life. At least, Hugh Jackman was normal.

Why couldn't I go back to the Hugh Jackman dream?

Lately, the only time she'd had any fun was in her dreams—especially when they were about Hugh Jackman.

Enough with Hugh Jackman, already! Besides aren't you sick of men? Oh, but Hugh Jackman didn't count—he served as a fantastic fantasy.

With a jaw-popping yawn, she pushed off the bed and headed for the bathroom.

Refreshed, and ready to tackle another day, she hopped-skipped down the steps to her car. Slipping behind the wheel, she cranked it and drove toward town.

Despite the fact she had no one to share her life, she still felt blessed. Who needed a man anyway? Especially one that did nothing but cheat and lie—which seemed to be the only kind she could attract. *No, no, no! You're not going to ruin a perfectly good day by putting yourself into a foul mood thinking about men of all things.*

The fall scenery, trees cloaked in reds, oranges, and yellows, never failed to boost her mood. Chimney smoke wafted through her Ranger's vents, kicking her smile up a notch. Damn, she loved this time of year.

She pulled into the discount market lot that housed her business and parked. Once outside she drew in a deep breath and let it out, determined to have a happy day.

With one last sniff of the crisp clean air, she smiled and entered *Twice Upon a Time*—the used bookstore she co-owned with Nate. She inhaled deeply and twirled around. “Man, I love the smell of a good book in the morning.”

Nate looked up from the counter where he sifted through a box of used books. “Technically it's no longer morning.”

“Now who's being anal?”

He pulled out a used copy, in good condition, of *The Host* by Stephenie Meyer. “And I can think of better smells to greet me each morning.” He waggled his eyebrows.

“Ewww! You better be talking about coffee.” She wandered over to the fireplace. “Do you think it's chilly enough, yet, to light it?”

“Maybe, but I'm not feeling particularly cold right now. Besides you'd better get the gas company to look it over, or you might blow us all to Heaven with one match.”

“Would Heaven be so bad?”

“No, but I'd like to see what else this life holds before I get the keys to my mansion in the sky.”

Good point. Marci slipped off her jacket and hung it in the coat closet next to the supply room behind the counter.

“How's the new evening girl...” he snapped his fingers...”what's her name?”

“Sari.”

“How's she doing running the juice and snack bar?” Nate asked. “She appears to be a bit preoccupied with her Blackberry, if you ask me.”

“Yes, she does spend a lot of time texting on her cell phone, but she multi-tasks like a happy robot with ten hands.”

Nate gave her a blank look.

“Juice bar sales are good.”

The door clanged like a cow with a bell around its neck in route to dinner, letting in a sweep of cool October air and the scent of banana nut bread from the bakery across the street. The potential customer ducked and threw up his hands as if to ward off a stampede.

“We need to get rid of that dang bell,” Marci whispered.

“No, it’s great,” Nate said with a grin stretched clear across his face. He looked like a deranged joker.

“It’s too freaking loud,” she shot back.

“It’s hilarious.”

Marci blew out an exasperated breath. *Never go into business with a man who finds cowbells amusing.* She pasted a smile on her face. “Welcome to *Twice Upon a Read*. If you need any help . . .” she trailed off in shock when familiar dark brown eyes met hers—eyes she hadn’t stared into since graduation night. “Terry.” All the blood drained to her toes, and she had to clutch the counter when her body swayed dangerously too far left.

“Marci.” He inclined his head toward her. “You’re looking well.”

“Umm . . . yeah, you too.” *Older, but still good-looking.*

She ducked below the counter and pretended to look for something while her face burned, and an irrational sense of pain seared her heart. *God, how can he still affect me that way?* They used to be the best of friends—she could tell him stuff she never dreamed of telling anyone else. Now it appeared as if they’d never known each other, like two strangers stuck together on a long trip, hoping they’d eventually break the awkward silence with something interesting to talk about.

Nate tugged on her hair. When that didn’t work, he grabbed the collar of her shirt and attempted to pull her to her feet. “Get up here,” he whispered out of the corner of his mouth and gave her shirt another yank. Finally, he ducked down next to her. “What’s the matter with you?”

“I can’t talk to him.”

“Why on earth not?”

“It just feels weird.”

“Would you quit acting like a backwoods hick?”

“I am a backwoods hick.” She hissed like an angry snake. “You and I were never smart enough to leave this itty bitty town.”

“Yeah, well, I happen to like this itty bitty town.”

“Everything okay down there?” Terry peered at them over the counter.

Marci slowly rose, laughed and covered it with a nervous cough. “Yep. We’re just trying to decide...to decide...”

Nate popped up, “Which size bags to use today?”

Terry looked from one to the other in confusion. “Don’t you use all different sizes depending on the size of the purchase?”

Nate scratched his head. “No wonder we couldn’t decide.”

Marci discretely grabbed his thumb and bent it backwards.

“Shi...yeow! I’ll just go put something on the jukebox.” Nate cradled his thumb and scurried to the juice bar area. He ran his finger down the length of titles before dropping money into the machine. The jukebox was Nate’s quirky contribution to the bookstore, and it held mostly 80’s

tunes. Turned out to be a good idea. Teens, nowadays, loved anything vintage. It still freaked her out that they listen to the Beatles—music their grandparents probably rocked-out to.

When Madonna’s “Crazy for You” began to play, Marci inhaled sharply, and strangled on her own spit. Doubled over in a coughing fit, she turned around and slid to the floor, totally embarrassed beyond belief.

Terry appeared at her side and whacked her on the back. “Hey, you okay.”

Marci nodded, and coughed again, as she wiped moisture from her stinging eyes. She prayed to God her face didn’t appear as red as the heat radiating off it.

Terry slid down next to her, just like old times, and inclined his ear toward the song. “Wow. I haven’t heard that song since ...”

Marci couldn’t look at him. She knew the night he spoke of. They’d wandered away from the camping group celebrating graduation with beer and tons of junk food. Someone had put in a Madonna CD on the portable boom box, and when “Crazy for You” began to play, Marci and Terry danced beneath the starlight. Somehow their lips had migrated together like a refugee boat and a sandy stretch of land, and they’d kissed as if their lips were glued together and would stay that way forever.

Later that night Terry vanished—though she’d heard bits and pieces about him over the years, she hadn’t seen him again—until now. And after all this time the kiss still hung there as lost and confused as Marci had been and still was.

She scrambled to her feet and swung around, shooting Nate a glare meant to knock him through the wall. “What the hell is the matter with you?” she mouthed.

Nate shook his head in all innocence—that big, mischievous, joker-grin covering his face again.

Marci regretted confiding in Nate with that particular story, too. Why had she told him her secrets? Simple. He’d become her best friend over the years. And he never abandoned her. Thank God Navi understood.

“Turn it off!” she mouthed.

The grin slid from his face and was replaced with a scowl. He marched over, grabbed her by the elbow and dragged her into the coat closet. He yanked the door closed, squashing them together like two shirts in an overstuffed suitcase.

Marci smacked a jacket out of her face. “What are you doing? Let me out of here. We look like idiots.”

“I’ve spent the years since we graduated watching you sink lower and lower. After some asshole, I wouldn’t waste a good mouthful of spit on, broke your heart, I’ve dragged your butt out of bars where you were too drunk to sit, let alone stand. And then you’d go right back to choosing all the wrong men instead of waiting for the right one to come *back*.”

“Are you crazy? He’s probably married by now and gay to boot.”

“Well, you’ll never know if you keep acting like a ninny around him.”

“He’s the one who kissed and ran.” Tears sprang to her eyes. “This is so stupid.” She pushed him aside. “What? Are we still in high school? Let me out of here.” Even after all these years, that kiss still had the power to bring on a fresh wash of pain. Why had he just left? Had she been that bad of a kisser? Maybe she wouldn’t have married that “idiot” if Terry had stuck around. *Don’t go shifting responsibility. No one forced you to marry Stanley. You knew he belonged to someone else, yet you ignored it, and look where it’s gotten you.*

A sudden knock at the door startled a yelp from her. She jerked and stepped on Nate’s shoe.

“Crap.” Nate shoved her back. “Get off my foot.”

“Everything okay in there?”

“Yeah, we’re just looking for some toilet paper,” Nate called through the door.

“Nice.” Marci elbowed Nate in the stomach, causing a muffled oomph to explode from his mouth.

Silence for a few seconds on the other side, then, “Um, I think you two might be in the wrong closet.”

How the hell would he know?

Marci opened the door and stepped out, humiliated enough for one day.

Nate followed and winked at Terry. “No wonder we couldn’t find any,” he said and headed for the supply room.

Marci went to the counter and busied herself with restocking bookmarks.

“Listen, I have a job interview at two, but I’d like to come back and look around some, if that’s okay.” Terry caught her gaze and held it.

He’s looking for a job in this pathetic excuse for a town? “Yeah, sure. We’re open until ten p.m.” *Does that mean he’s back for good? Oh, God.*

Terry glanced around. “Looks like you’ve done well for yourself, Marci.”

She stared back at him, afraid to speak lest the wrong words burst out. Had he expected her to shrivel up and die after that kiss and moon over him for the rest of her life? She broke eye contact first. “I couldn’t have done it without Nate,” she mumbled.

“You two look happy together. Though I have to admit I never thought you’d fall for the spaz.”

Marci’s jaw dropped. “I...I...uh.”

“I’ll see you later, Marci.”

The cow bell clanged as he disappeared out the door. She doubted he’d be back, especially now that he thought her and Nate were married.

CHAPTER THREE

The afternoon flew by in a flurry of rambunctious teenagers, who had chosen Marci and Nate's bookstore as a favorite hangout. Senior citizens grumbled about the rude girl behind the counter who couldn't stop texting long enough to serve them a simple cup of coffee without that mocha crap mixed in it. And one guy wanted to know what was up with all the fake pumpkins—obviously he'd never heard of Halloween.

Nate fixed the texting problem by snatching the phone out of Sari's hand and telling her she could have it back tonight at the end of her shift.

"You're killing me here, Nate." She groaned and banged her head on the counter. "Now what will I do to pass the time?"

"Oh, I don't know, Sari. You could try serving coffee, Halloween cookies and maybe some juice." Nate patted her on the head as if she were a naughty, but cute puppy.

Every time the cow bell jangled, Marci looked up, a hitch in her chest, hoping to see Terry.

"He'll come back," Nate whispered near her ear.

"Who?" She refused to let Nate see how much Terry's reappearance in town had tilted her world out of balance.

Six o'clock rolled around and Nate grabbed his keys. "Another day another dollar," he said. "Time to go home to meatloaf and mashed 'tators."

"Sounds yummy."

"Want me to bring you back a plate?"

"No, thanks. I'll pick up something across the street in a little bit."

"See you tomorrow, then."

The hectic pace slowed down around nine, and Marci let a grateful Sari duck out early. The teenager snatched her phone from Marci's hand and headed for the door, her thumbs already in motion.

Marci loved the last hour of work. Though it wasn't exactly a healthy state of mind, she craved solitude with the quiet books. She could live quite content on a deserted island as long as it contained a fully stocked library.

With a loud grumble, her stomach reminded her that she'd forgotten to eat, so she grabbed a witch-shaped sugar cookie from the juice bar and munched on it as she cashed out.

Five minutes before ten, she started to turn the open sign over to closed when Terry appeared out of the night, hands in his faded jeans pocket, looking kind of sheepish.

The urge to be held in strong male arms hit her with the force of a sledge hammer. Drawing in a ragged breath, she opened the door and gestured for him to come on in.

"You don't mind?"

"No. You can look around while I finish closing up." She smiled and moved away from him, determined not to let it show just how nervous he made her feel. He'd never affected her in that way when they were teens—well—maybe a little. But they'd never crossed the line of friendship—except maybe in the darkroom.

That first and last kiss between them had just been too damned memorable. The darkroom had apparently opened a door that couldn't be shut—until Terry left.

"Still into photography?" she asked to distract her from wayward thoughts that led down a road already traveled.

"No. I left that dream behind in high school."

Much like you left me behind? “That’s a shame. You were really good.” Not that she remembered any of the pictures he’d developed. All she could remember was her giggling, and his hands, mostly on her body, feeling around in the dark. She yanked her mind away from that memory.

“I still like to shoot, though. It relaxes me, especially when I capture nature—nothing but me, the trees and furry little critters.”

“At least you had a dream. I didn’t know what the heck I wanted to do back then.”

“Except Stanley.”

She grimaced at the reminder of her boyfriend, now ex-husband.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that.”

She waved it away. “Water under the bridge.”

“What happened with him?”

“The princess woke up and realized the frog never changed into a prince.” She shoved a wad of cash into the bank bag. “Though, the romantics will never admit it, the prince, more times than not, turns into a frog, rather than the other way around.”

Terry laughed. “You and Nate seem happy...well...when he’s not jerking you into a cramped closet.”

“We’re not married.” She gestured around the shop. “We’re business partners only. He’s extremely, happily married to someone else.” If he were anymore happier, she’d have to bash him over the head with a ball bat to jar him back to reality. If they could siphon marital bliss from Nate’s system and put it in pill form, someone would be wealthier than Bill Gates or that Viagra doctor. And the world would be a happier place.

“Oh.” Terry pulled a book from the shelf and flipped through it. With a sigh, he shoved it back between two other books. “I don’t know what I’m doing here.” He headed for the door and pushed it open only to be shoved back inside by a man in black clothing and a black ski mask.

“Both of you behind the counter and into the closet.” When neither of them moved, he shoved a gun in Terry’s face, and yelled, “Now!” He swung the gun in Marci’s direction and motioned for her to move.

A cartoon bat etched into the side of the gun, caused Marci to shudder as the unknown assailant shoved them into the supply closet and slammed the door. Wait a minute. Hadn’t she seen that gun somewhere else before? Wasn’t one of Nate’s daughters into the whole Batman craze? Could it be? No. Surely not. There had to be thousands of those fake guns with a bat on them. In that case, she was being robbed by a goon toting a toy gun. Crap!

A jangle of keys and the door locked them inside.

The cash register dinged shut.

The light under the door blinked out.

The cow bell jangled, followed by the click of another door lock.

Then silence.

“What kind of thief turns off the lights and locks the door behind him?” Terry asked.

“That little runt! I’m gonna kill him.”

CHAPTER FOUR

“Who? What?” Terry’s rapid breathing fluttered her hair—and heart—but she was too pissed to give it much thought.

“Nate.”

“Who?”

“Nate did this.”

“He robbed his own bookstore?”

“No. He locked us in here on purpose.”

“Why?”

“He thinks I . . . we have unfinished business.”

Terry fumbled around, bumped into her a few times as he shuffled along the wall.

“What are you looking for?” *My boobs. Oh God, I can’t believe that thought crossed my mind.*

“Light switch.” He bumped her again and then shouted, “Eureka!” Only to groan when the room remained dark.

“He took the light bulb out.” Marci pressed her back against a shelf and sighed. “It could be worse. He could have locked us in the coat closet.”

Terry ignored her, frantic for some light. “We’ll just put another bulb in.”

“We don’t have another one. They’re on back order.” *I should have never told Nate about the darkroom.*

Terry froze and, if not for his over-worked breathing, Marci would have thought she was alone. “Why does he want us in the dark?”

You probably know why just as well as I do. “Your guess is as good a mine.”

“Well, how do we get out of here?”

“Are you afraid of the dark?”

“What? No. I just don’t want to be stuck in here all night. Tomorrow is my first day on a new job.”

He got the job! She wanted to jump up and down in happiness. *Jesus what’s wrong with you, girl?* Instead, she said, “Really?”

“Yes.” He didn’t elaborate. “So, how do we get out of here?”

“We don’t. Nate will let us out when he arrives for his shift tomorrow morning.”

“Tomorrow? What the hell do we do in the meantime?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Sleep, perhaps? A pack of toilet paper might make a good pillow.”

“As if I could actually sleep in the same room as you,” Terry mumbled.

What was that supposed to mean? Could the rumors be true? Could Terry be gay? Marci started laughing and couldn’t stop. How ironic would that be?

“What’s so damn funny?”

She choked on another laugh or two before she took a deep breath and said, “My life.” She slid down to the floor and stretched out her legs.

After a moment, Terry joined her. “Remember the last darkroom we were in together?”

How could I forget? She sniffed a laugh. “Yeah. You were all hands.”

His turn to laugh. “Just being a typical teenage boy wanting to grope a boob if I got the chance.”

“Even if it was mine?”

“Hey, we may have been just friends, but it didn’t mean I never thought about it.”

“If I remember correctly, you groped a whole lot more than that. I thought we were going to land up ...” She’d almost said kissing.

“I’m surprised the librarian let us go in there together,” he said.

“Well, we were straight A students and never caused trouble. A teacher never had to pull us out of a dim corner where we were...” She’d almost said kissing again. *Damn it! Can’t I get that blasted word out of my brain?* Where was Hugh Jackman to dominate her thoughts when she needed him?

“Yeah, and I guess she was too old to remember what teenage boys were like.”

They fell silent for several minutes, and then Marci asked in a soft voice. “What were the pictures of?”

“Hmm?”

“The pictures you were developing.”

“Oh.” He stayed quiet for so long, she thought he wasn’t going to answer, then he said, “You,” so soft and quiet she thought she’d imagined it.

Her heart fluttered, then bam-bammed against her chest. “Me?” Why on earth would he take pictures of her? And when? She’d never noticed him doing it.

He shifted, and she felt his leg rise up next to her; his hand brushed her thigh as he lifted it to rest on his knee. “I still have them tucked back in a photo album. Somewhere.”

“Really?”

“I try not to look at them.”

Dry mouthed, she whispered, “Why?”

“Your beautiful blue eyes—they used to drive me crazy.” He let out a frustrated sigh. “I came here to convince myself that after all these years I’d finally gotten over you.”

Marci’s breath caught.

“But the truth is your eyes still have the power to make me lose my cool factor.”

Oh God. Oh God. Oh God. What was she supposed to do with that? “Aren’t you gay?” she spluttered out.

“What?” He shifted away from her. “No! Jeez, where did you hear that?”

“Oh, God, I can’t believe I said that.” She started searching her pockets, frantic to find her cell phone. “Do you have a phone on you?” She had to get out of here before she lost her sanity, never mind her coolness, and begged him to grope her. In the dark. Again.

“No.”

“We need to get out of here.” *Before I end up crazy for you, again.*

His fingers brushed her arm, and she nearly shrieked. She’d probably faint if he touched her in an intimate place.

“Don’t worry. I didn’t come back to town to start anything with you. I just ... I don’t expect it after such a long time—and after the way I just up and left.”

Oh, boy, Nate’s going to be disappointed as all hell.

“Do you remember graduation night?”

She glanced heavenward. *Please, please strike him with amnesia, Lord.* Something like yes must have pushed past her lips, because he answered in a quiet tone.

“Me too.” He shifted again and his shoulder rubbed against hers. “I’ve thought about that night just about every damn day since I left town.”

Hurt feelings resurfaced, washing over Marci in a flood. “Then why did you leave without saying goodbye?”

“Scared, I guess.”

“Why? We were best friends. We could talk about anything.”

“Not about that kiss.” She heard him swallow hard. “Not about how badly I wanted to do it again. Still do.”

Oh crap! Marci gave up on breathing.

“But you were hung up on Stanley. The sun rose and set in him, apparently.”

Not that night. Not while in your arms with your lips on mine. Couldn't he feel it?

“I could never convince you that messing around with a married man would only lead to heartbreak. All I wanted to do was kill the son-of-a-bitch. Or, at least, break that perfect nose of his.”

Marci laughed. “Spoken like a true redneck.”

He went on as if she hadn't said a word. “Especially when he skipped out on you and went to the beach with his wife.”

Stupid me still stuck around after that betrayal.

“You were too young to be mixed up with a married man.”

“I know, but he did leave his wife for me.” *If I could go back with the wisdom I have now...*

“What finally ended your marriage to Stanley?”

“We grew apart, and one day he came home, packed his bags, and left me for a younger woman barely out of her teens.” *Poetic justice, I might add.*

“Did you ever remarry?”

“No, but he did ... three more times.”

“That must've hurt.”

“Nope. Not really. I was glad to see him go.”

“How come you didn't take the plunge again?”

“Another string of married men not getting at home what I was so willing to give.” *And I was stupid enough, each time, to believe things might turn out differently. But not now—not ever again.* Maturity had arrived, but much too late, and with a hefty price her heart had to pay.

When his arm brushed hers, her heart kicked into high gear, making her feel as if she were back in that darkroom from so many years ago. *Technically, I guess we are in a darkroom now.*

Terry shifted to his hands and knees and crawled around on the floor.

“What are you looking for?”

“Think Nate left us anything to eat and drink? I'm starved.”

Marci climbed to her feet. “I might can rustle up some candy bars.” She attempted to step over Terry, but her foot caught his side, and she splattered across the floor. “Ouch! Crap!”

“You okay?”

She rolled over and accidentally kicked Terry in the face.

He jerked, hissed in pain, and grabbed her ankle. “Ouch. Watch it.”

“Sorry.” She eased her leg out of his warm grip.

He rose up, groped for her hand, and pulled her to her feet. “Have a clue where they might be?”

“Where what might be?” Then she remembered they'd been searching for something to eat. “Near the back.” They moved down the line of shelves each searching on opposite sides. Marci found them on the top shelf and managed to dump the entire box of Milky Ways on the flooring, along with a stack of toilet paper. As everything bounced and slid off her head, she groaned. “I'm making Nate clean up this mess,” she said, then burst into laughter. *This is so not like the darkroom of my teen years.*

Terry stumbled forward, tripped over a roll of toilet paper and slammed into Marci. The shelves dug painfully into her back, but she couldn't stop laughing. "We might not make it out of here alive," she said between bursts of laughter. "Death by toilet paper!" She hadn't had this much fun since the last time she was ... in a darkroom ... with Terry.

"If Nate doesn't let us out of here soon, we're going to look like we took one too many turns in a mosh pit," Terry said.

"Or, like we had wild, monkey, movie sex all night long—rolling off the bed and knocking over lamps." They both collapsed in laughter.

Terry took a breath and gulped back another laugh. "Try not to step on the candy bars, Little Miss Klutz."

She snatched one from the floor and poked him in the stomach with it. "Here. This one doesn't feel smooshed."

They returned to their place next to the door and ate a couple of candy bars in silence. Terry pushed a button on his watch and checked the time. "Just after midnight."

"We've been in here two hours already?"

"Looks it."

"Sleepy?" he asked.

"Nope. You?"

"Nope."

"What else can we do?"

Kiss. Marci pursed her lips together until she was sure that word wouldn't pop out like it had been trying to do all evening. "Well, we can't sit in here eating all these candy bars or they'll need a crane to pull us out through the roof."

Terry bumped her shoulder. "You could always make me laugh."

"Do you remember the only girl you dated in high school?" Marci asked. "The one you thought should buy her own French fries on a date?"

"Debbie?" He laughed again.

"I felt like the oh-so-famous third wheel, so I stayed away and let you have time alone with her." Marci smiled at the painful memory. "But I used to sit in the library and look up at you two where you stood at the wall, trying so hard not to cry. I wasn't jealous—not in the traditional sense."

"Really?"

"I just missed my best friend."

"Then we broke up and I told you that you'd always be my number one gal."

Marci turned her head toward him. "Am I?" Her heart stuttered at the boldness of her question.

She heard the sharp intake of his breath. "Are you what?"

"Still your number one gal?"

Terry's hand slipped into hers. "Always."

As if on cue, "Crazy for You" ghosted through the air.

"That little snot!" Marci said.

Both jumped to their feet and banged on the door.

"He never left." She pounded on the door again. "Let us out of here, so I can fire your ass, Nate."

Laughter from the other side. "You can't fire me. I own half this joint."

Terry's hand slipped around her waist and turned her toward him. "Let's just slow dance," he whispered and pulled her snug against him. "I'm tired of fighting these feelings." He inhaled the scent of her hair. "Been doing it for twenty-some years."

Marci gave in and melted into his arms, transported back to a warm spring night, the smell of a campfire, the North Carolina stars above, and the taste of his mouth as it moved over hers.

Except they were no longer seventeen groping around in the dark looking for teenage thrills any old place they could find them. They would savor this journey anticipating where it might lead them—hopefully to a happily-ever-after. Marci muffled a snort at such sappy sentiments she'd left behind, along with her heart, back at Hayton County High School.

A thought struck her, and she pulled away from him. "You aren't married, are you?"

His breath expelled on a laugh. "No, I've always been crazy for you." His lips brushed her ear as he whispered, sending pleasant chills throughout her body.

Okay, so maybe I can, for just this one night, react like a teen experiencing her first real kiss.

CHAPTER FIVE

Six months later ...

Marci's cell phone rang, and she snatched it up before it woke Terry. She stared down at him and a rush of tenderness flooded her heart.

"Stop staring at Terry and say hello," the tinny voice on the other end said.

She smiled again and kissed his eyelids before she scooted off the bed and headed for the bathroom. "Hello Nate. Do you realize what time it is?"

"Some time after midnight, I imagine."

"Is everything alright?" Nate had stopped calling late at night unless he just needed to get something off his mind. Or had had a fight with Navi and needed advice on how to apologize. "You and Navi didn't get into it again, did you? Not that I didn't get a kick out of the peanut butter incident."

"Really? You thought that was funny, huh?"

"Yep."

"Wait till you and Terry get into a fight about peanut butter and see how funny you think it is."

"Naw, we'd end up doing something interesting with it on the kitchen table."

"Marci!"

A long quiet pause.

"Nate?"

"I don't think I ever said I was sorry for locking you and Terry in that closet."

"No need to. Things turned out good. What you should be apologizing for is waving that fake Batman gun in our faces."

"Yeah, that too."

"What if Terry had been packing? He might have shot you."

"I know. I just couldn't think of anything else. It was a dumb thing to do. But I did stick around in case the building caught on fire."

"Why did you really throw us together like that?"

"I saw you two."

"You saw us?"

"Graduation night."

Marci stiffened. She'd never dreamed someone had witnessed that raw moment of passion. "And?"

"And, right at that moment, I knew I was never going to win your heart, so I let you go and found Navi. Best thing that ever happened to me. I just wanted you to find again what I saw on your face when he kissed you."

Marci swallowed the lump in her throat. "You were a heck of a lot more mature for seventeen than Terry and I." *We ran away. Or, at least, he did. I just didn't bother to try and find him.*

"I never saw you that happy again, not even with Stanley. Until now. You deserve it, Marci girl."

"Thanks, Nate. You're forgiven. Always."

"Good, now crawl back in bed and make up for lost time."

Marci closed her phone and smiled as she hummed “Crazy for You,” and slid in next to Terry. He mumbled with a drowsy voice, pulled her hand tight against his chest and held it there as he returned to sleep.

Tomorrow they would make up for lost time and every day after that just like everyday before.