



HIGH SCHOOL REUNION

KIMBERLY DEAN

R  UGE


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About the Book

Roma Hanson is having a crisis: her ten-year high school reunion is fast approaching, and she's not ready. As shallow as it sounds, she wants to wow her old classmates. She's got a good job and is financially secure, but she needs the whole package if she's going to make a killer entrance. That would, of course, include an awesome car, a killer body and a mouthwatering guy on her arm.

A course of hard training begins, with Roma keen to impress her personal trainer, Jake Logan - a spine-tingling, knee-weakening hunk with whom she cannot resist flirting. She just has to find a way to convince him to be on her arm when the boasting at the reunion begins...

Rouge romance - the best erotic romance novels, perfect for fans of Sylvia Day's *Crossfire* series.

About the Author

Kimberly Dean is a well-known US author of contemporary romance novels, who has enjoyed great reviews.

HIGH SCHOOL REUNION

Kimberly Dean



Chapter One

Get out of the car, Roma.

No.

It's easy. Just open the door and step out.

I don't wanna.

I'm losing my patience. Get your butt out of the car!

Bite me.

The argument inside Roma Hanson's brain had been going on for the last fifteen minutes. Although it reminded her vaguely of an argument she'd had with her mother when she was six years old, it showed no signs of waning.

Move it!

Make me!

She scanned the building in front of her. Nobody else seemed to be having a problem going inside. In the short time she'd been sitting watching, dozens of people of various shapes and sizes had entered the place. Several, in fact, had even had – get this – *smiles* on their faces. Young, old, fat, thin ... They'd all just walked up to the door and stepped inside, easy as pie.

Pie.

Mm, now that sounded good. Distracted, she glanced around at her surroundings. There was a bakery just two blocks down the street ...

Oh, no, you don't! That's what got you into this predicament in the first place!

Taking a deep breath, she tried again to work up her courage. Her gaze ran hesitantly over the sign declaring JAKE'S GYM. It sounded so ... so ... *Rocky-ish*. Visions of sweaty

men with tattoos filled her head. Maybe this wasn't the place for her.

Then again, sweaty men with tattoos? That didn't sound too bad.

She stared at the plate glass windows, trying to see inside, but the reflection of the sun hid the club's activity. She really didn't like unknown quantities. Maybe she should try Workout World or Spa City. Surely they would suit her just fine.

But they don't have trainers, her brain insisted. Not real ones. You know a pimply faced college student trying to earn beer money won't keep you motivated.

'Ah, crud,' she muttered in defeat. Self-discipline had never been her strong point. If she went to another gym, she'd last three days. Tops. She couldn't let that happen. She needed to see results, and she needed to see them quickly. Procrastinating had only made matters worse. It was crunch time.

Before she could change her mind, she opened the car door and hopped out. Her heels skidded on the slick surface of the parking lot, and she grabbed the car to regain her balance.

Winter. The evil troll still had its grip on the city. Even though it was March, there were no signs that spring was on its way. Shivering, Roma wrapped her heavy coat more tightly around herself.

It's too cold. You can come back tomorrow.

'No!' Her eyes rounded when she realised she'd spoken out loud. Quickly, she looked around to make sure that nobody had heard her. Fortunately, the parking lot was empty.

She faced the building and braced herself. She'd never get up her nerve again if she left now. Her devious brain would find some other excuse to keep her away. She'd made it out of the car; she was going in. After all, this problem wasn't

going to fix itself. Her high school reunion was only three months away, and she had thirty pounds to lose. Thirty!

She slammed the door, turned and marched determinedly towards the building. What was the worst that could happen anyway? She'd never been inside a real gym before, but she doubted that people would turn and stare at her. It couldn't be that evident that she was a newbie.

Just act like you know what you're doing. Just walk into the place and ask somebody about the training programmes. Easy.

It should have been easy.

It *would* have been easy if it weren't for a hidden, mischievous patch of ice.

The whole thing happened so fast, Roma didn't know what hit her. One moment, she was walking along confidently. In the flash of a millisecond, everything spun out of control. The smooth soles of her pumps lost their traction and, suddenly, her legs began churning like Roadrunner's in those old Saturday morning cartoons.

She yelped as momentum threw her forwards.

Her hands swung up to brace herself, but her luck being what it was, they landed against the one unstable thing she could find. With her nose plastered against the JAKE stencil on the front door, she went hurling into the gym.

She stumbled, gained momentum, and charged across the room in front of the reception desk. Her body was nearly parallel to the floor, her face only three feet above it, as she tried to recover. Like a duck out of water, her arms flapped wildly. Her purse connected solidly with ... something.

One more step and gravity finally won the battle. Sprawling face forwards, she executed a perfect swan dive.

'Ummmph,' she groaned as she came to a slithering stop.

At first, stunned silence greeted her. Then a deep voice rang out from somewhere overhead. 'Lady! Are you all right?'

Lady? Oh yeah, she felt real ladylike right about now. She kept her head down. Maybe she could get on her hands and knees and crawl backwards out of the place. If she kept her face hidden, nobody would ever be able to recognise her. She'd burn her coat and ditch the purse before it could be identified.

'Are you OK?' the voice repeated.

'Peachy,' she mumbled. Suddenly, the urge to laugh seized her. *No, they won't stare or anything.* Giggles shook her body, and she tried to hold them back.

'Oh God, she's convulsing!'

A hand settled on the back of her head, and Roma knew that there would be no crawling. A big body crouched down next to her, and she felt it loom over her.

'Don't move,' the voice instructed. 'Help will be here soon. Somebody dial nine-one-one!'

Oh, wouldn't that just be perfect? Call the fire engines. Bring on the ambulances. Nothing like a little more unwanted attention.

'No, no. Don't do that. I'm fine,' she insisted as she pushed herself back onto her knees.

Now what? she wondered. Just how in the heck was she supposed to get herself out of this mess?

Act like nothing happened, the devious side of her suggested.

Don't even look at me, replied the angel on her other shoulder.

Staring intently at the floor tiling, she mumbled, 'Um, I'd like to talk to somebody about joining the gym.'

The man with the deep voice chuckled with surprise. 'Sure, Goldilocks, if you're sure you're all right.'

A helping hand appeared in front of her face, and she grabbed it. The man pulled her up to a standing position, but she still couldn't bear to look at him. Instead, she took great care in dusting off her skirt.

‘I apologise about the ice out there. This is our fault. Are you sure you’re not hurt?’

He began to help her brush off her coat. His hand swiped down her back, and Roma let out a whoop when his touch curved around her bottom. ‘Hey! Watch it!’

Unintentional or not, he’d goosed her.

Spinning around, she lifted her gaze and found herself facing a full house. Suddenly, she realised that the room was absolutely silent. Nobody had moved since she had entered – well, *flopped* – onto the scene. Everywhere she looked, eyes were wide and mouths were agape.

A groan slipped from her lips. There was absolutely no graceful way out of this situation. Deciding to go with the flow, she lowered herself into what she hoped was a graceful curtsy.

Across the room, somebody coughed. The sound was quickly muffled, but it was enough to snap the tension. Laughter and applause broke out in waves. She smiled hesitantly and bowed again.

‘Tito, bring me some ice and salt that sidewalk before somebody really gets hurt.’

Roma whirled around at the sound of the increasingly familiar voice. Would he just let it go already? She just wanted to leave in peace. ‘Really, I’m fine,’ she assured. ‘You don’t have to –’

Her air caught in her throat and wheezed through her lips. Holy samoly! Electricity zapped backwards from her eyeballs and short-circuited her brain. If she’d taken the time to look at him before, she might have done something stupid.

The man connected to the voice was a Greek god. She fought the urge to lick her lips as she gave him the once over. Sandy-blond hair. Dark-blue eyes. And those muscles ... Oh my, did he have muscles. She nearly asked him to pick up something heavy just so she could watch them strain.

‘The ice isn’t for you, it’s for me,’ he said. He held his cheek with one hand, but a broad smile split his face. His eyes twinkled as he looked at her. ‘You clobbered me with your purse.’

Oh, no. That had been the thud she’d felt on the way down. Good Lord, she’d just brained this gorgeous stud. Her wallet, keys, hairbrush, calculator and a million other things lived in her purse. In all, the bag had to weigh about ten pounds. ‘Ohmigosh! Are you all right? Is anything broken?’

She fluttered about, not knowing what to do. How did one apologise for hitting such a sumptuous hunk of manhood – and a seemingly nice guy, at that?

‘I’m so sorry. I just lost control,’ she stammered.

‘No kidding.’ The man started to laugh, but bent over with a groan.

That did it; Roma lost it entirely. Hopping from one foot to the other, she charged towards him. He flinched at her sudden move, and she skidded to a halt. Carefully, she reached out and touched his cheekbone. A tingling sensation shot up her arm, and she pulled back as if burnt. Frantically, hands waving wildly, she looked around the room.

‘Somebody get this man some ice!’ she bellowed. She spun back towards him. ‘How’s your vision? Can you see me?’

Bent over as he was, his eyes were level with her chest. He let out a long breath. ‘Oh, yeah. I can see you.’

‘Am I clear?’

‘There’s supposed to be two, right?’ Grinning, he stood upright and held out his hand. ‘I’m Jake Logan.’

Jake – as in Jake’s Gym. Roma winced. She’d just done a belly flop in front of the owner. And she’d managed to belt him on the way down! ‘I’m so sorry. My clumsiness gets the best of me at times. I’ll pay for any damage I’ve done.’

She reached for her purse, and tried not to take offence when he instinctively moved out of harm’s way. Quickly, she

searched through the contents of her bag – forever forward known as the ‘blunt object’. She finally found a business card, and she pushed it into his hand.

‘I’ve got insurance. I’ll pay for any medical care you might need.’

‘There’s no harm done.’

‘No harm?’ Her eyebrows shot upwards. ‘Are you blind? I just bashed you. You might have a concussion. You could *go* blind for all we know.’

Tito appeared with an ice bag, and she literally ripped it from the kid’s hands. She reached for Jake, but hesitated when he braced himself.

Guilt racked her. Of course, he’d be leery of her touch. She’d nearly knocked him out.

Disappointed, she turned her hand over and offered him the pack.

She went still when he caught her hand.

Quickly, she looked up at him. The humour in his eyes was surprisingly intimate – as was his touch. His callused fingers felt blistering hot in contrast to the ice pack. Her breath caught when the heat ran up her arm and settled in her chest. She watched, mesmerised, as he lifted their joined hands and pressed the ice pack against his cheekbone.

She cleared her throat. ‘Better?’ she asked.

‘Oh, yeah.’

His gaze dropped to her opened coat and centred again on her chest. She nearly gasped aloud when her nipples stiffened instinctively. The heat. It was pouring into the sensitive tips, making them nearly burn.

She let out a quick puff of air and pulled her hand back. Surreptitiously, she began creeping towards the door. ‘Well, I’m sorry for the intrusion. You’ve got my card, feel free to contact me.’

‘Whoa, Goldie. I’m contacting you now.’ Before she could escape, he reached out and grabbed the hood of her coat. ‘I thought you wanted to talk about joining.’

Damn! The blow to the head hadn't affected his memory.

'This was a mistake,' she stammered.

A huge mistake. She'd come here to get in shape, not make a fool of herself in front of dozens of people. He was too much of a distraction, anyway. If she worked out here, she'd spend half her time panting after him and worrying that she was nipping out. Jogging bras didn't hide that kind of thing.

He laughed and swung an arm around her shoulders. 'Just keep that purse away from me, and we'll get along fine.'

Roma hung her head. 'I can't believe I did that.'

'It's no big deal.' He finally looked at her business card. 'Roma ... Oh, you've got to be kidding me. Roma *Grace* Hanson?'

Her face flared. 'Rub it in, why don't you?'

'Well, it's a pleasure to meet you, Roma Grace. Come on into my office. I'm dying to hear what brought a woman like you to my humble gym.'

'Must have been temporary insanity.'

His lips twitched. 'Some of my best friends are insane.'

He gave her a quick squeeze, and Roma felt her body press against warm hard flesh. Incredibly hard flesh – the kind she'd like to test with her fingernails. She nimbly extricated herself from his hold. There were people around and most were still watching her. 'This cold pack is meant for your cheek. Would you please put it there?'

'Don't worry about me. I've got a hard head.' He lowered himself into the chair behind the desk, but obediently settled the ice pack against the side of his face. 'OK, why don't we start from scratch? What can I do for you?'

Roma's eyebrows lifted. Do for her?

She could think of quite a few things. Fun, naughty, impulsive things.

Nothing, her sensible side insisted.

This wasn't going to work. Did the Fates need to shove another neon sign in front of her face? Thirty pounds,

shmirty pounds. So she'd be a little chunky at her reunion. It wasn't that big of a deal. She'd been pudgy in high school; nobody would even notice. Except her, of course.

'You mentioned that you were interested in joining the gym,' he said patiently. 'Can I answer any questions?'

She shook her head quickly. 'You must have heard me incorrectly – what with the blow to the head and all. I said I was looking for ... uh ... a "john in the gym".'

She pushed herself to her feet. 'Can you direct me to the ladies' room?'

He let out a snort. 'Nice try, but no.'

'No?' she sputtered. 'But ... But what if I really had to go?'

'Then I'd show you to one.' He laughed. 'As it is, I have very good hearing, notwithstanding "the blow to the head and all". I distinctly heard you ask for information about *joining* the gym.'

Roma fidgeted where she stood, but that watchful gaze of his didn't even blink. She couldn't get away from that intense blue stare. She could see amusement swirling in the fathomless depths of his eyes, but there was something more. Something hotter and deeper. The enigmatic expression made her nervous. 'I need to lose thirty pounds in the next three months,' she blurted.

His laser look intensified, and his eyebrows lowered. 'I don't think so.'

Disappointment filled her. It couldn't be done. She should have known. She'd waited too long to get started. This man said it wasn't possible, though, and he obviously knew his business. Just look at him.

Sigh. Just look at him.

'You don't need to lose that much.'

She blinked. She couldn't have heard him right. 'But I'm soft.'

'Soft can be a good thing.'

His gaze ran down her body so slowly, she could practically feel it caressing her skin. A tingling sensation

started between her legs, and she pressed her thighs together hard. How could he do that? She was wearing a winter coat and a professional-looking blouse and skirt. That piercing look of his made her feel like she was naked.

He sat back in his chair. 'You haven't got that much to lose. Maybe ten to fifteen pounds. When you add muscle back, though, it will only be about five.'

Her jaw dropped, and she looked at him as if he'd just grown a second head. Was he insane? She knew her body. 'I jiggle,' she argued.

'I noticed.'

God, had he noticed. He'd have to be blind, deaf and dumb not to notice. Jake still felt thrown off-centre by the way this blonde whirlwind had crash-landed in his gym, but he wasn't stupid. He knew a good thing when he saw one.

And she was more than a good thing. He'd had a hard-on ever since she'd reached out and touched his cheek.

With her hand, mind you. Not the purse. That damn thing had nearly cold-cocked him.

He let his gaze run over her leisurely. She was curvy, all right, and in all the good places. He wrapped his fingers around the cold pack to keep himself from reaching out and grabbing her. There was nothing that scared off a woman more than jumping past the get-to-know-you stage right into the heavy petting.

He shook his head to clear the urge from his brain. 'All it will take is some weight and cardiovascular training to get you toned. I won't sugar-coat it, though -'

'No sugar?' she said with a pout.

The stupid grin on his face wouldn't go away. 'It will be hard work, but you'll like the results.'

So would he.

She sat down with a plop, and he had to hide his disappointment. He couldn't see her so well when she hid behind his desk.

‘You’re serious,’ she said, disbelief colouring her tone.

‘As a heart attack – which, by the way, exercise can help prevent.’ He leant forward and tried to peek over the edge of the desk at her legs. He’d gotten a good view of them when she’d skidded across the floor with her skirt nearly up to her waist. ‘But what’s your rush? What’s happening in three months?’

The minute he asked the question, he regretted it. Ah, shit. Was she getting married? Needles prickled at the back of his neck. He’d already started to get fascinating ideas about her. A fiancé would complicate things. Still, that didn’t rule out the possibilities. He’d never shied away from a challenge before.

His gaze shot down to her left hand. No ring. That was a good sign.

‘It’s my ten-year high school reunion,’ she replied, her lips twisting in distaste.

A reunion. The needles relaxed their pinch. Things were looking better and better. ‘Looking for a little revenge?’ he asked.

She smiled impishly. ‘I’ve heard that it’s sweet.’

That smile kicked Jake right in the solar plexus. God, she’d grabbed him by the cock with her looks alone. Add personality and a sense of humour, and he didn’t stand a chance. ‘So priority number one is a “killer bod”?’ he asked, clearing his throat halfway.

She shrugged. ‘I’d settle for a “nice figure”.’

He gaped at her. Was she out of her mind? Had she looked in a mirror recently? ‘Been there, done that. I’ve got clients that would kill for a body like yours.’

She flushed right up to her cute little ears.

He shook his head in bemusement. ‘So a reunion, huh? I assume you have a suitably impressive car to take you to the event?’

Another shrug. ‘It’ll do, or I’ll rent one.’

He thought back to his own reunion the summer before. Idly, he rolled a pencil between his thumb and forefinger. 'What about the boyfriend and the career? I've heard that they both score big points on the reunion scene.'

A funny look crossed her face, and she nervously reached up to try to straighten her mussed hair. 'I'm an accountant. It's not that impressive, but it's a respectable occupation.'

Jake pounced on the half-answer. No fiancé and no boyfriend. Things were definitely looking up. As to her career, it intrigued him more than she could know. He might be able to use that.

'I just want to look nice,' she said.

She already looked nice. Better than nice. Still, he knew what she was getting at. She wanted to be a drop-dead, stop-'em-in-their-tracks, bombshell blonde. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

She didn't have far to go.

'I can help you with that,' he said.

She nibbled her lower lip, causing his thoughts to scatter completely.

'I'll probably need more help than most,' she admitted. 'My willpower is nearly nonexistent.'

'You need instant gratification.'

Her flushed face turned nearly fuchsia.

Jake was feeling a little hot under the collar himself.

Business, he needed to concentrate on business. Get her in the door as a client first. Then he could coax her into doing other, more interesting things with him.

'You need a trainer,' he said bluntly. Over the years, he'd seen thousands of people like her. Correction. None of them had looked like her; they were just in the same situation. They all wanted to lose weight and get into shape, but although they started out with good intentions, they quickly dropped out when they discovered how difficult the process was.

She flicked aside another invisible speck of dust from her skirt. 'How expensive would that be?' she asked.

The casual tone didn't fool him. He knew she was still looking for an excuse to leave. Well, she wasn't going to get one from him. 'We'll discuss that later. Let me show you around the place first.'

He put down the ice, stood, and circled the desk. She looked hesitant, but she shrugged out of her winter coat. A funny look crossed her face, though, when she stepped towards him.

Jake went still. He knew what that surprised look meant. He'd seen it when she'd crashed through the front door.

His gaze was suddenly drawn downwards. He watched in fascination as one of her stockings slid down her leg. It pooled around her foot like an invitation, and every muscle in his body clenched.

'Damn!' she hissed.

He couldn't have said it better himself. He looked at her helplessly. He wasn't a saint.

'It snapped during the fall,' she said with embarrassment. 'Could you turn around?'

Not likely.

She twirled her finger. 'Just for a minute?'

Stiff-legged, he faced the door – only to find her reflection in the window. Jake nearly groaned aloud. She'd lifted her foot and planted her high heel on the chair. The pose was something right out of a seedy strip club, only she was dressing herself. Somehow, it was just as erotic.

The clinging nylon slid over the curve of her calf, and his hands clenched when she smoothed the sheer material over her knee. Only women could move so sensuously. They did it instinctively, not even realising how it could jumble up a guy on the inside.

Especially one who wasn't supposed to be watching.

He couldn't help it. He was entranced as she hitched her skirt up high on her thigh. Lust hit him hard when he saw

the dangerous curves. Her skin was lily white and smooth as silk. She worked the stocking up to nearly her crotch before she attached the garter belt, and he focused so hard on the little pink triangle of her panties, his eyes went dry.

Bless that loose catch, he thought a little desperately.

She smoothed her skirt back over her hips, and it was all he could do not to turn around and whip it back up. God, he wanted to touch her.

'I'm ready,' she said.

So was he.

He cleared his throat. 'This way,' he said as he opened the door.

He couldn't look at her. If he did, she'd see the bulge at the front of his exercise pants. He lowered his clipboard to try to hide it from the rest of the club. This was one muscle group he didn't have control of.

But it sure as hell was getting its exercise today.

His teeth ground together as he led her to the aerobics room. He needed to start thinking with the head on top of his shoulders. She was ready to bolt, he could tell, but there was no way he could let that happen. He had to find a way to keep her around.

This was one beauty he wasn't going to let get away.

The wheels in Roma's brain began to whirl as she followed Jake out of his office. Could anything else happen to embarrass her in front of this man?

She ran her hand over her skirt and felt the garter belt underneath. She'd been torn between taking off her hose entirely or putting her faith in the loose catch. She hoped she hadn't made the wrong decision. With the way he was looking at her, the more clothes she had on the better.

She stopped abruptly when she nearly bumped into him outside a classroom window. Her hip brushed against his clipboard, and he let out a harsh cough.

‘This is our aerobics room,’ he said in a voice that sounded strained. ‘We teach around thirty classes weekly, so you should be able to find a time that fits into your schedule.’

She’d gotten too close. She could feel his heat radiating towards her, and the scent of clean soap and tangy aftershave filled her senses. It pulled her even closer. Only the clang of a weight stack brought her back to reality.

She quickly turned her attention to the activity in the aerobics room. A step class was in full swing. Her eyes rounded with amazement. A bouncy brunette was directing a roomful of people through precise, drill-team-like movements. The different combinations of stepping onto and off of the boxes made her head spin.

Jake cleared his throat. ‘Uh, maybe you should save the step classes for later.’

Like when she could walk in the door without doing a face plant? She scrunched her nose. ‘Good point.’

‘Come over here and take a look at our weight room.’

She followed as he guided her through the rest of the gym, making sure she kept a better distance between them. She was nervous about facing her audience again, but she was relieved to find that everybody was friendly. And she had to admit that she liked what she saw. The equipment seemed to be very high tech, although she had no clue what it all did. She just liked the way everything glistened.

He’d conveniently evaded her question about the club’s rates, though. Joining would be expensive.

There’s your excuse, her devilish side told her.

But what’s more important? the other side asked. *An excuse or a tight butt for reunion night?*

No question. A tight butt.

‘How does personal training work?’ she asked when they returned to the office. He’d succeeded in piquing her interest.

He sat down and put his clipboard on the desk. She’d noticed that he’d kept it with him the entire tour, but he

hadn't taken any notes.

'We tailor workouts for each individual,' he said. He folded his arms across his chest and rocked back in his chair. 'We'd start by putting you through some preliminary tests to determine your current level of fitness.'

Uh-oh. She didn't know if she liked the sound of that. 'What kind of tests?'

'You'd start with a strength test and a flexibility test. Then, you'd get on the treadmill so your heart rate could be monitored. Of course, we'd take some baseline measurements so we can track your improvement over the weeks.'

We? Just what did he mean by 'we'? And what exactly were these measurements?

'Let me assure you that we keep everything confidential. Your file will be locked here in my office.' He pointed at a filing cabinet in the corner of the room. 'Believe me, I've learned that disclosing a woman's weight or dress size is an offence punishable by death.'

'I should think so!' She'd rather get a bad perm than let somebody know her weight.

But enough with this 'we' stuff already. He didn't expect her to hire *him* as her trainer, did he? She'd never be able to concentrate if he was hovering around her all the time, watching her, pushing her. *Tempting her*. That 'we' was more of a congregational term, right? We - as in his staff. Preferably another commiserative female.

Roma shifted uncomfortably in her chair. 'That aerobics teacher looked competent. Is she a personal trainer?'

He settled his elbows on the desk, and she couldn't help but be preoccupied by the way the muscles bunched up in his arms.

'Missy teaches a few classes a week to help pay for school. She's getting her master's degree.' He looked as if he were fighting a smile. 'I had someone else in mind.'

He paused, and Roma's heart tripped over itself. *Please don't say what I think you're going to say*, she silently begged.

'I thought I'd train you myself.'

'Oh.' Her brain flew in a myriad directions. Working with him would be so personal. He'd touch her. His big muscled body would loom over her. He'd see her sweat. 'Can't somebody else do it? I mean ... Hmm. Well, you must be very busy. I'd hate to put you out. I'd be more than willing to work with one of your employees.'

He leant closer, and her breath hitched.

That mysterious smile still hovered on his lips. 'No can do. It's me or nobody.'

'Excuse me?' she choked.

'I'd like to discuss a trade.'

Her belly clenched. The glint in his eye was unmistakable. Was he talking about what she thought he was talking about?

He swivelled in his chair and pointed at a stack of papers. He sighed heavily and admitted, 'I need help with that.'

Roma looked at him dumbfounded. *What?*

OK, so he hadn't been talking about what she'd thought he'd been talking about. The paper. She looked at it incomprehensibly.

'I need help with the club's books.'

Dismay gripped her. 'Don't tell me,' she whispered.

He looked around his office as if he had gotten so used to the mounds of paper, he didn't even see them any more. At least he had the decency to look sheepish.

Roma's body sagged. His office was an accountant's personal version of hell. Some of the stacks stood so high, they looked like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Worse yet, she knew it was probably just the tip of the iceberg.

He ran a hand through his blond hair. 'I need an accountant. A good one.'

Like a zombie, she stood and walked over to look more closely at the mess. There were receipts, copies of cheques, and electricity bills just in the handful that she grabbed. She looked through more slips of paper and nearly moaned. There were debits mixed with credits. Receipts shuffled between invoices. Cheques that hadn't been cashed. And here was even a birthday card from someone named Liz. She turned on him. 'You need a miracle worker. You do realise that taxes are due in just over a month.'

He grimaced. 'I'd heard something about that.'

She rolled her eyes. Taking a calming breath, she gestured at the room. 'This is your filing system?'

He shrugged. 'I had a full-time bookkeeper, but she left me about a year ago. Her husband got a job in Chicago. I haven't found anybody willing to take on the job since she quit. The staff and I do our best, but numbers really aren't our thing.'

'Can I see your accounting system?' she asked with dread.

'You mean the books?'

Oh, God. He didn't have things computerised yet? 'Whatever you have.'

He opened the bottom drawer and passed a ledger to her. More loose sheets of paper fell to the floor when she opened it. Her frown deepened as she looked over the entries. 'Let me see your personal training rate sheet.'

He picked up the phone book and found the information sitting underneath it. He pushed the paper under her nose. Her eyes bulged.

'That's why nobody else could train you but me,' he explained. 'My trainers get a commission. I refuse to ask any of them to take a pay cut so the club can have an accountant.'

'Oh. I see.' It was the most intelligent response Roma could come up with. She chewed her lower lip. She hadn't thought that the rates could be high enough to make all this

work worth it. Unfortunately, he'd just proven to her that the trade would indeed be a fair one.

She glanced over at the imposing stack of papers again. There was a lot that needed to be done there. Still, she had lost Mr Dubcek's account just two weeks ago. He'd sold his men's clothing store for a healthy profit, but the new company had an accountant on staff. She had the time to do the job that Jake was proposing, but did she have the patience?

Her gaze flitted back to the rate sheet. Even if she did find another qualified trainer in town, she doubted that their prices would vary much from what he was showing her. Vaguely, she wondered if she was about to make a big mistake. 'You promise you can make me skinny in three months?'

She'd thought he'd smile. He didn't. Instead, his hot gaze slid slowly over her body.

'The men will be sweating in their beers, and the women will be green with envy.'

Roma felt a sharp thrill run through her. It was politically incorrect and very shallow of her, but she wanted that *bad*. She wanted all her male classmates to see what they'd missed out on, and she'd just love to see Ellie Huffington gape at her sleek and fit form.

But was it worth all this work?

Oh, yeah. No doubt about it. Watching Ellie eat crow would definitely be worth all the pain and suffering. 'You've got yourself a deal, Mr Logan.'

A smile broke out on his face. 'Jake. Call me Jake.'

He leant forwards across the desk and firmly gripped her outstretched hand. Little shocks of electricity hissed up Roma's arm at the contact, and her nipples tightened painfully. Her gaze flew to his, but he was looking strangely at their interconnected hands. He could feel it too, she realised. Slowly, he let her go. His fingers glided across her skin, and the friction made a fire start deep in her belly.

‘When do we start?’ she asked, her voice unsteady.

‘Tomorrow.’ He sounded a little winded himself. ‘Definitely tomorrow.’

Chapter Two

The next day, Roma pulled into the gym parking lot. Her right foot itched to gun the gas, but she forced herself to find a spot and park. She'd been changing her mind all day long about the deal she'd made. Even on the drive over, she'd turned around twice to go home. Something, though, had made her turn back.

That something was those darn fifteen pounds.

Jake's assurance that she only needed to lose such a teeny-weeny bit of weight had her hooked.

And he didn't help matters.

That chest. Those arms. Those dark-blue eyes.

She felt an electric shiver shoot down her spine. No red-blooded woman could walk away from that.

Before she could change her mind again, she grabbed her gym bag from the passenger seat and got out of the car. She hefted it up over her shoulder, but nearly unbalanced when she saw Mr Hunk waiting for her. Jake stood outside the gym, casually leaning against the plate glass window as if he expected her to chicken out. His gaze caught hers from halfway across the parking lot, and Roma felt her knees go weak.

Stop it, Spaghetti Legs. The last thing she needed was to do another pratfall in front of him. Her pride was already wounded enough.

She carefully picked her way across the snow-covered parking lot. When she reached the kerb to the sidewalk, he quickly offered her his hand. Probably for insurance reasons. The sidewalk looked as if it had been extra salted today.

‘I wasn’t sure you’d come,’ he said as he efficiently relieved her of her gym bag. No doubt it would pack an even bigger punch than her purse.

‘Neither was I,’ she admitted. She looked up at him, ready to make an excuse to fall back upon just in case today didn’t go well, but the lie never reached her lips. ‘Your face!’

Oh, his beautiful face.

A dark bruise slashed across his cheekbone and shadowed his left eye. The colours of the rainbow were all there, right along with the puffiness. He looked as if he’d gone ten rounds in the ring. She felt a pang in her stomach. All he’d gotten was a sucker punch from her.

‘I’m so sorry.’ Impulsively, she reached out and cupped his cheek. She bit her lip as she gently caressed his bruised skin. ‘I’m such a klutz.’

He didn’t flinch under her touch. If anything, he leant his head down closer to her. ‘You’re sexy enough to make up for it.’

The husky compliment didn’t help. Roma felt miserable. She let her thumb run across the puffiness under his eye. ‘Does it hurt?’

His blue eyes glittered, even the one behind the purple and yellow eyelid. A dangerous smile crossed his lips. ‘Like a son of a bitch. Want to kiss it and make it feel better?’

The pang in her chest slid lower, and she quickly backed away. Oh, he was a devilish one. ‘I’m afraid I’d do more harm than good.’

He smoothly slid an arm about her waist. ‘I’m a glutton for punishment.’

Roma jumped when she suddenly found herself trapped. His presence enveloped her as he pulled her closer. He was just so big. Her thighs brushed against his, and she braced her hands against his rock-hard chest.

She looked up sharply at his face. His blond hair was mussed, and his smile was cocky. Too cocky.

Had she said devilish? The man was a rake.