

On Her Doorstep

As Stacy Rutherford pulled into her driveway after a particularly stressful day at work, her cell phone rang. Temporarily distracted by thoughts of killing her cell phone, along with the caller, she missed seeing her dog sitting on the front porch. She also missed seeing the kitten dangling from her dog's mouth. Although she had a good idea who was calling, she still checked the caller ID, and then shared a few choice words with the ringing phone. She'd already spent most of the week dodging calls from her soon to be ex-friend, who was trying a little too hard to set her up on a blind date. *So what if I haven't had a date in a year. I'm not that desperate...yet.*

The phone had stopped ringing by the time she entered the kitchen and kicked off her high heels. With a sigh of relief, she wiggled her toes. She hated high heels almost as much as she hated the panty hose and monkey suit she'd been forced to wear at the corporate offices. "Thank the Goddess, that's over for another year," she said, shimmying out of the dreaded panty hose. Too bad the summer outdoor burning ban was in place, or she would have burned them in effigy.

She'd almost made it to her bedroom when she realized something was missing. "Tas!" Usually her three year old Great Dane was right by the door, ready to greet her. She quickly made her way to the deck overlooking the fenced-in back yard. "Tas. Where are you boy?" Stacy leaned over the railing and scanned the yard for her beloved companion. "Come on, I promise I won't get too upset at whatever you broke this time," she cajoled after a minute of

silence. As big as he was, Tas was a scaredy-cat—especially when he thought he was going to get punished. “Okay, I’m going back in. Come in when you’re ready,” she called over her shoulder and entered the house, muttering about the mess awaiting her.

Can this day get any worse? In answer to her question, someone began knocking on her front door, and her cell phone rang. She glared at the white living room ceiling. “It was a rhetorical question!”

Stacy snatched up the cell phone, turned it off, and for good measure, stuffed it under a sofa cushion. Then she waited a minute, hoping the knocking would go away. No such luck. “I’m coming!” she yelled and hurried to rescue her front door from a sound beating. Yanking the door open, she was ready to blast her unsuspecting visitor to somewhere far away. Whatever she meant to say was swept from her mind as she was drawn into a web by warm, chocolate eyes. While she struggled to catch her breath, some part of her brain noted the high cheek bones, the button nose, the lush lips and the light brown skin. *Stunning. Absolutely stunning.*

“Hi, I’m here about the kittens.”

“Uh...yeah?” was all Stacy could manage under the onslaught of a dangerously sexy smile.

The smile faltered. “If I’ve come at a bad time, I can always come back.”

“No! I mean, come on in.” She stepped back, took a deep breath and was surprised at how fast her heart was racing. “Hey, I’m Stacy Rutherford. What can I help you with?”

“The kittens,” the other woman repeated slowly. “I want to take two of them. I assume they *are* still up for adoption. I’m Jaydn Oliver, by the way.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Jaydn,” Stacy said with a big smile. Her fingers itched to release Jaydn’s dark, wavy hair from confinement and... She reigned in dangerous thoughts, realizing Jaydn was waiting for a response. *What were we talking about? Oh yeah, kittens.*

Stacy decided then and there if Jaydn wanted kittens, she'd figure out a way to get some kittens.

“Do you have to have them right away? It might take me a couple of days to get my hands on some.”

Jaydn cocked her head to the side, pursed her lips and studied Stacy carefully.

Stacy ran her fingers through her short, auburn hair, suddenly wishing she'd taken her sister's advice. The spikes probably did clash with the smattering of freckles across her nose.

“Did I say something wrong?”

“I'm trying to decide if you're pulling my leg, or you really don't know about the box of kittens on your front porch.”

“What?” In her haste to get to the porch, Stacy all but pushed Jaydn aside. She found her missing Great Dane, with a kitten dangling from his mouth, and a box full of kittens sitting beside him. “Tasmanian Devil, you have some explaining to do,” she said sternly, putting her hands on her slim hips.

Tas immediately placed the gray-striped kitten on her bare foot, stretched out on his stomach, covered his eyes and started to whimper. The kitten, seemingly happy with Stacy's foot, began purring.

“I guess we have to go with not knowing about the kittens, then.” Jaydn made no attempt to hide the amusement in her voice. “In his defense, it looks like Tasmanian Devil has been a very good sitter.” She watched as another gray-striped kitten climbed out of the box and raced toward them. With a gentle smile, she picked it up and held it close.

Stacy took in the tender moment and almost smiled until she remembered she was stuck with kittens. She threw back her head and raised her hands to the sky. “Why me?” She dropped

her hands when she heard Jaydn's muffled laugh. "It's not funny. This is the nuts on top of a very crappy day," she said with a playful pout.

Jaydn's throaty laugh sent shivers down Stacy's back. "Shouldn't that be cherries?"

"No. Since I don't like those sweetened things they try to pass off as cherries, it's just nuts on top for me, thank you."

"Pity," Jaydn said, her glance skimming down Stacy's lithe body, "I hadn't pictured you for a nuts kind of woman."

It took Stacy a second to catch on but when she did, she started to laugh and didn't stop until she was bent over holding her stomach. Once her laughter was finally under control, she wiped her eyes and said, "Thank you. I needed a good laugh. Which of my crazy friends sent you? My money's on Cass."

Jaydn arched an eyebrow and frowned at Stacy from her two-inch height advantage. "Now I know you're pulling my leg. If you weren't going to give the kittens away, you shouldn't have put the sign on your mail box."

Stacy reached out a hand to stop her from leaving. "I swear I don't know anything about a sign, kittens, anything! I've been stuck downtown trying to talk sense into a bunch of stuffed shirts all day." She pointed to her suit. "Look, I haven't even had time to change out of my monkey suit. Believe me, I usually don't dress like this. Maybe we could start over?" she asked, holding out her hand in a plea for understanding. "Hi, Jaydn. I really am glad to meet you"

Jaydn took Stacy's hand in hers and held it. "Hi, Stacy. I'm really glad to meet you, too. So, tell me, are you a nuts only woman?"

"Not by a long shot," Stacy said, gazing into Jaydn's eyes. This time, she noticed the golden flecks surrounding Jaydn's pupils, and her pulse raced. For a crazy moment she felt like they

were silently calling out to her. And for an even crazier moment, she felt like she answered. She blinked rapidly and broke the link. “Uh...what about you? Are you a nuts kind of woman?” The dangerous smile made a reappearance, drawing Stacy’s attention to Jaydn’s kissable mouth. A small flame unfurled in her stomach and she wondered if the full lips would feel as soft against her lips as they looked.

Jaydn shook her head emphatically. “Not by a long shot. I go for something entirely different.”

“Yeah?” Stacy swallowed hard, because in her mind she heard, *I go for you*. Did she dare? “Well, then maybe—” She broke off with a startled yelp when the kitten used her foot as a scratching post. Jaydn’s hypnotic eyes and kissable mouth had made her forget about the kittens, her dog, everything. “Hey, let’s not do that, okay.” She scooped up the kitten, then turned her attention back to Jaydn. “Where was I? Oh yeah. Would you maybe—” She was interrupted again, this time by a mini-van that roared into her driveway and came to a screeching halt. Her gray eyes widened as a young child stepped out of the side door. “I swear I don’t have any kids!”

“Relax, you.” Jaydn shifted the kitten and gave Stacy’s shoulder a quick squeeze. “Maybe it’s the owner of the kittens,” she suggested softly, her eyes on the harried looking woman marching toward them, dragging an obviously reluctant and muddied child by the upper arm.

“Go on, DJ.” The mother pushed the child forward. “I think you have something to say.”

“My mom says I hafta ‘pologize,” the young girl said. “I shouldna left the kittens with your dog. That was wrong.”

Stacy's lips quirked as she shared a quick look with the girl's mother. "Thank you for coming to apologize. I know that must have been hard." She had to work hard to keep from laughing when DJ's head bobbed up and down furiously.

"Thank you for being so understanding," the mother said. "I still haven't figured out why my child and her friends thought it would be a good idea to have your dog give away the kittens." She sighed. "I hope we haven't caused you any trouble."

"It's been no trouble." Stacy's eyes darkened as she looked at Jaydn. "No trouble at all."

Jaydn smiled, nodding in agreement. "Actually, I'm interested in adopting two of the kittens if you're still giving them away," Jaydn said, and glanced down at the kitten sleeping in her arms. "I've gotten attached to this one already."

"That would be great." The mother looked first at Stacy, then the kitten in her arms. "Then we only have one more to give away."

"Oh, no." Stacy shook her head for emphasis. "I don't need...I mean, Tas likes being an only child."

Tas, as if to refute her statement, jumped up and nuzzled the kitten in Stacy's arms. Then he sat on his haunches and looked up at her pleadingly.

"Looks like Tas is ready for a sister or brother," Jaydn said with a pleading look of her own. "And you'd probably be getting poor DJ out of trouble."

"Yeah, please?" DJ did a remarkable job of looking pitiful.

Stacy sighed and buckled under the barrage of pleading eyes. "Okay, Tas and I will take the kitten."

“Thank you so much,” the mother said, relief evident in her tone. She dug in her bag and pulled out two sheets of rumpled paper. “Here’s the information on the kittens. I really appreciate you taking them. And if you change your mind, my number’s on there.”

“I won’t,” Stacy and Jaydn said simultaneously, then looked at each other and shared a warm smile. Once again, Stacy almost forgot how to breathe. “Do...do you need something to take the kittens home in? I have an old carrier in the basement.”

Jaydn nodded. “I could drop it off later, you know, once I didn’t need it any more.”

Stacy grinned. “You can return it anytime. I’ll be right back, okay?”

“I’ll be here,” Jaydn replied with a soft smile.

Stacy placed the kitten in front of Taz, told him to “Watch,” the raced downstairs as fast as she could. By the time she got back, the mini van and its occupants were gone, and the three kittens were climbing over Tas. “I hope you don’t mind a little dust. This carrier hasn’t been used in awhile.”

“It’s fine.” Jaydn reached for Stacy’s free hand and tugged. “A box would have done, but then I wouldn’t have a reason to come back and return it.”

Stacy didn’t need any further encouragement to get closer to Jaydn. “I can think of a thousand reasons for you to come back.” The pleasurable burn at the base of her belly was but one.

“A thousand?” Jaydn asked with a teasing smile.

“Okay, nine hundred and ninety-seven.” Stacy’s gaze zeroed in on Jaydn’s lips. They looked even softer now. “But I’ll start with one. Brunch tomorrow?”

Jaydn moved closer until their bodies were touching. “How can I resist? Will I get the rest of the list then?”

“I can do better.” Stacy framed Jaydn’s lean face with her hands. “Here’s number two. Your lips against mine.”

“Good one,” Jaydn agreed before lowering her head and bringing their lips together. The kiss quickly deepened and threatened to get out of control. Jaydn was the first to pull back. “That was a very good one, but we’re on your front porch,” she breathed shakily against Stacy’s ear.

Stacy blew out a sharp breath and buried her face against Jaydn’s shoulder. “Are you sure? I think we’re in heaven. And just so you know, your lips are even softer than they look.”

“You’re sweet, but I think yours are softer.” Jaydn nipped at her ear. “And just so *you* know, your monkey suit fits you nicely. I especially appreciate the length of leg exposed by the short skirt. I could add that having the top three buttons of your blouse undone is distracting, but I won’t. I’m trying to think pure thoughts.”

“Now who’s being sweet? I like that in a woman.” She tilted her head to the side and shivered when Jaydn’s lips played with her tender neck. “Make a note, I like that, too.”

“Then it’s locked in my brain.” Jaydn gave her a tight squeeze before taking a step back. “I should go. I have to get stuff for the kittens.”

“I don’t like it, but I understand.” Stacy put a hand on her arm, almost afraid to let her go. “But I’ll see you tomorrow, right?”

Jaydn nodded and gave her a quick kiss. “I’ll pick you up at ten, okay?”

“I’ll be here,” Stacy said, knowing she would have agreed to just about anything. “Waiting impatiently to see you again.”

“That’s all I can ask for.” Jaydn wrangled her new kittens in the carrier and gave a quick wave.

Ooh, nice butt, Stacy thought as she watched her walk away. *Tomorrow can't come soon enough*. "Wait! I don't have your number. What if something comes up?"

Jaydn turned around, a big grin on her face. "Answer your cell for a change. Laura's been trying to give it to you for almost a week."

Stacy's eyes grew wide. "Don't tell me you're the old friend she's trying to set me up with," she said, shaking her head. "The one who would be perfect for me." When Jaydn nodded, she groaned. "I said don't tell me. Any chance you'll accept a plea of insanity?"

"Depends. Are you prepared for a lengthy sentence?"

"Absolutely, Your Honor. I'm ready to start tomorrow."

"Good. Then you get a reprieve." She put the carrier in the passenger seat and blew Stacy a kiss.

Stacy waited until Jaydn's car was out of sight to raise her head to the sky. *Thank you. Could this day have been any better?*