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**Excerpt-The Marlboro Man**

**House of Rosenorn**

The Marlboro Man

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A lone floor lamp illuminated the entryway, casting a romantic glow over his rather worn and minimalist living room furniture. The amber light caressed Gabriella, making her look like an angel standing before him. An angel on a mission, he’d guess if the determined set of her jaw was any indication, and he had a feeling he knew what the purpose was for her visit.

“Why did you kiss me?” she asked the second he shut the door behind him.

Yep. He was right.

Now, what would be the best way to answer without him getting him decked for saying something inappropriate? Really, he had no right touching her in any way, shape, or form. If anything, he should apologize for being so forward.

But one look at her face decided his answer. “Because you’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen.”

Her lips fluttered into a brief smile before they pressed into a thin line. “Is that the only reason?”

“No. It’s because,” he blew out a breath, “because I like you. A lot.”

Several tense moments passed, and with each second the frown on her forehead deepened. “That’s all? You think I’m pretty and you like me. That’s it?”

“Yes. No. It’s—I…” He blew out another breath and ran his hand through his hair. “I—I couldn’t go another second without feeling your lips against mine. Okay? I know it was wrong. I’m sorry.”

Her shoulders lowered, and a delighted smile replaced her frown. “The only wrong about that kiss was that it was over far too quickly.”

“And happened far too soon. I shouldn’t have invaded your personal space that way. Again, I’m sorry.”

She shifted and took a step toward him. “Thank you for your apology. I greatly appreciate it.” She took another step closer, boxing him between the door and her body. “I have a confession to make, Mark. I like you too. A lot.”

“Yeah?” The smolder in her gaze felt as if it raised the temperature of the room at least another twenty degrees and turned the floor beneath him to quicksand, pulling him under fast. “Is that such a good idea?”

She let out a little laugh. “Now that’s the question I’ve been asking myself all day. But you know, I’m tired of doing what I’m supposed to. It’s time for me to do what I want.”

He swallowed against the lump in his throat and suppressed a shiver when she pressed her breasts against his chest. “And what’s that?”

“I want to kiss you.”

Well hell, why didn’t she just strip down to bare skin and throw herself in his arms. The effect on his senses would’ve been the same. “Ah, Gabriella, you are far too tempting. I don’t want to take advantage of you.”

“Who says you’re taking advantage of me?” She planted her hands onto her hips and he saw a hint of the Latin fire that burned within. “I came here knowing full well what might happen.”

“And what might that be?” he asked, his throat tight. His fingers clenched at his sides to keep from reaching out for her.

That siren’s smile winked at him again. “Whatever we want. However we want. And as many times as we want.”

He closed his eyes. “Jesus, Gabriella.”

“Kiss me, Mark.” Her hands came up to grip the sides of his waist. The heat of her palms burned him through his shirt. “Pretend that we’re in the dining room back at the house and we’re all alone. Kiss me like you wanted to kiss me.”