

COMING HOME

Book Two of The Friends & Lovers Series

By PE KAVANAGH

Chapter One

A bit of melted Cheddar oozed out between crisp slices of bread, burning the corner of Ramona's mouth. She flicked out her tongue and caught the errant piece of deliciousness. The sharp tang, tempered by something earthy and creamy, pushed a satisfied groan up from the very bottom of her belly. This was a whole body eating experience. She wiped out that piece with one more bite.

She looked up from the other half of the sandwich, cut into a perfect triangle, crusts removed, to see Lucas' gaze intent on her. "I'm glad to see that even your grilled cheese sandwiches have improved. Even though they were always amazing."

He leaned forward, forearms on the expanse of the stainless steel worktable. "Thanks. Glad to see my extensive culinary education wasn't a complete waste of time."

She picked up the remaining piece and paused, deciding to exercise the tiniest bit of self-control and not put the whole thing in her mouth. "No. I think you picked right. All this scrumptious food would have been wasted on a bunch of stuffy lawyers."

A shrug accompanied a dimple-enhanced grin. "Except those stuffy lawyers are my main customers."

"Lucky them." She took one more bite and licked each of her fingers, uninterested in manners. After all, this was Lucas, the boy who'd been by her side for the first half of her life, and what he was feeding her was much too delicious to hold back.

He pulled a champagne bottle from the industrial-sized refrigerator and refilled her glass. "I still can't believe you're here, in my kitchen. After all this time."

"I'm so glad my brother told me to come. Connor's been nearly impossible to reach lately, but he made sure I knew how to find your restaurant. I don't do airplane food." Ramona wondered how much her brother had told his best friend, Lucas, about her over the years. Did he know how much time she spent on planes and her refusal to touch any of that food?

"How come you got in so late? He told me you'd be here by eight or nine."

"Oh, sorry." She gave him what she hoped expressed remorse. When your life depended on air travel, getting anywhere on time was always risky. Besides, she liked having the restaurant, and the chef, all to herself. "There was *weather* in San Francisco, as always. And we hit a bunch of traffic as we approached downtown D.C."

"Did you give your driver the shortcut?"

She shook her head. "How would I know a shortcut?"

He laughed. "Right. I keep forgetting how you never come home anymore."

This hasn't been home for a really long time. "Anyway, I really appreciate your staying open so late and cooking me all my favorites. I didn't mean to take advantage."

"Mowgli, I can't think of any way I'd rather spend this night than feeding you."

She didn't want to linger on the smile he was giving her. "Speaking of which, can you make me another grilled cheese?"

"But you haven't even finished this one. And I have a few more things for you to try tonight."

Ramona squirmed on the cold stool. Why did everything he said sound like an innuendo? "It's for tomorrow. For breakfast."

"That's a terrible idea. It's going to be inedible tomorrow. You can just come back and I'll make you a fresh one."

"Uh, I'm going to be a bit busy tomorrow."

He grimaced. "Right. I forgot. Sorry."

She emptied her glass in one gulp. "No worries."

Lucas pulled a towel from a hook and turned around to wipe along the edge of the cooktop. His broad shoulders shimmied as he worked a particular spot,

dark brown curls grazing the top of his chef's jacket.

Ramona sucked in a breath, trying not to ogle the remarkable sight. He definitely didn't look like he'd been partaking of his rich, restaurant food. All his chubby softness had transformed into a rock solid wall of a man.

He turned just as her gaze hovered around his bottom. Her eyes didn't move nearly fast enough to play it off. It was impossible to know if he knew that she was staring. And what she was staring at.

He shook the towel out. "What's up, Mo?"

"It feels like no time has passed. Like we're kids again."

His smile broadened. "Except that instead of being noon, it's midnight."

"And we're in your phenomenal restaurant, instead of my mom's kitchen."

He looked down and swiped a crumb from the counter. "And I've learned how to clean up after myself."

"Looks like you've learned a lot of things. Including how to grow facial hair."

He stroked his close cropped goatee. "Yeah, I've had that one down for some time now. Speaking of growing things, I see all those prayers for boobs finally paid off."

Ramona's mouth opened with a dramatic gasp, heat blazing her cheeks. "That is completely inappropriate!"

"Oh, come on, Mo. I was the first one to ever touch them, if you remember."

It wasn't possible to keep pretending to be offended. "There was nothing there to touch."

"Oh, there was plenty. Trust me." He tilted his head and looked up toward the open pipework of the ceiling. "It was the highlight of my boyhood. Maybe of my entire life."

So hard not to check out her own boobs, make sure everything was full and lofty. "I would have hoped you'd made some more substantial memories than my non-existent teenage boobs."

"I appreciate your confidence in me, but you seriously underestimate how great they were. Small, but perfect."

She shook her head and laughed, keeping her eyes straight ahead. *Don't*

look down, Ramona.

“Uh... not small anymore.” He wasn’t trying to keep his eyes away.

“Okay, you seriously have to stop talking about my breasts. You’re acting like you’re fifteen again.” She stopped herself from crossing her arms in front of her chest, afraid it would bring even more attention to the area.

“I feel fifteen again, with you here.”

Time to regain control of this conversation. “It’s great to see you, Baloo. Really great.” Too great, maybe. “And I would love if you could get on with making whatever else you intend to feed me. I’m still hungry.”

The left side of his mouth quirked upward in the grin she would know anywhere, even though the face it was on wasn’t one she’d seen in a very long time. “Glad to see the bossiness hasn’t changed.”

“Haven’t quite outgrown that one, I suppose.”

He turned on a burner and slid a shiny pan over the flame. “Good.”

She looked over the entirety of the bright kitchen trying not to stare at him while he prepared her next goodies. It was useless. She dropped her chin into her palm and just let herself enjoy the view.

Two plates slid toward her, piling with colors as vibrant as the cover of any cookbook. Tomato salad and bright green dumplings brought her closer to satisfaction, but not completely. She looked up from the empty plates with a sheepish grin.

Without a pause, or even a hint of judgment in those hazel eyes, he cleared them away. “Okay, Mo, I’ve got one more thing.”

It looked like he had quite a bit more than *one more thing*. “Great. I need to use the loo, though.”

“Use the one in my office, and I’ll bring the final course in there.”

“Perfect.”

Ramona used the bathroom quickly, averting her eyes from all the mirrors. She was having thoughts she wasn’t supposed to be having and a look into her own eyes might sour all the fun of it. Lucas hadn’t yet arrived in his office, so she

walked in a slow circle around the space. It was oddly shaped, with almost no parallel walls, several of which were glass to give him a panoramic view of the kitchen. A wide bookcase held ancient-looking cookbooks, and an entire wall, behind a modern white lacquer desk, was graced with framed diplomas, certificates, and letters. She pushed the desk chair aside to examine his awards.

It was impressive. Accolades from two different culinary schools and various specialty programs around the world. Articles about his first restaurant, and now this newer one. Awards for being named a top young chef three years in a row, and pictures with two presidents. He walked in as she examined the row of five framed letters clearly different than all the rest. They were handwritten and adorned with pencil and crayon drawings. They were all addressed to Mr. Chef Lucas.

She turned to see him put down a large tray on the bench against the back wall. He had brought another bottle of champagne, as well as several plates with desserts that looked like pieces of art.

Her eyes swept over the assortment and her mouth watered. "Holy shit, Baloo. Is that all for me?"

"For us." He poured a flute of champagne, which made her wonder what had happened to her previous glass. "Start with this."

"Spectacular."

"And now this." He put something the color of mocha into her mouth. It melted almost instantly into a sweet, spicy, brandy-tinged bolt of utter mouth happiness.

She walked back over to the desk. "That's a pretty impressive wall over there. Much more so than a silly law degree."

"Says the woman who actually finished law school. And passed the bar."

That seemed so long ago. "Not that I'm practicing law, either."

He swept the hair that had fallen across her forehead over to the side. "You know, I can see that you've been getting proper haircuts, Mo, but it still seems to fall over your eyes."

"Well, it's fashionable now."

He kept his palm on her cheek. "I still can't believe I'm looking at your face."

More beautiful than ever.”

His finger grazed her jawline and lifted her chin. The perfect start to a kiss, had they been different people.

Ramona turned around to face the award wall, mostly to compose herself and certain she could not hide how very much she wanted him to kiss her.

She pointed to the hand-written letters. “Tell me about those.”

He moved directly behind her, his body pressed into back. She placed her palms on the desktop to steady the nearly imperceptible tremor that was developing in response to the pressure of his body on hers.

He exhaled next to her ear. “Oh, my kids.” A sweet sigh followed. “They’re from Chisholm elementary, on the southside. A couple of times a year I go over there and do a cooking class, and we talk about healthy food. I love those kids. Sweetest, smartest, most alive people I know. And some of their lives – beyond disastrous. And yet, they are amazing.”

He rested his chin on the top of her shoulder.

“Looks like they love you back, Mr. Chef Lucas.”

In an unprecedented display of boldness, she took his arm and wrapped it around herself. His palm landed on her belly, and she slowly slid it up, over her ribs and finally grazing over her left breast, where she kept it.

When his fingers squeezed softly, a scratchy breath escaped him. She placed her palms back on the desk and used the leverage to press back into him, eliminating any space between their bodies.

His hand moved up to her throat, then down again, this time inside the deep opening of her dress. He cupped her breast while the other hand slid down her outer thigh, over her skirt, then back up underneath it. She stepped her legs further apart.

“Ramona...” His fingers slid beneath the front of her thong.

Before she registered that his hand was between her legs, both of his hands flipped her skirt up and pulled her thong down, returning to graze her wetness.

She reached behind her to find the bulge beneath his zipper. Even through his pants, it was evident he was rock hard. She clumsily tried to singlehandedly

undo his belt buckle while drowning in the sensation of the finger that had just entered her.

He completed the task of removing his pants, which she could only confirm by the metallic clink of his belt hitting the floor, and then the feel of his cock where his finger had been. She had not touched him, had not even seen him, but knew there was something significant between his legs. She willed herself to relax, to let him enter her, even as her entire body wanted to contract with the craving for him.

He pushed inside her in successive strokes, each time Ramona believing that he had fully entered. She thought she might burst with the fullness of him, and that would be a perfectly acceptable way to go.

And then he stopped. "I need to see you."

He pulled out of her and spun her toward him, immediately taking her mouth in a fierce embrace and preventing her from catching a glimpse of his cock before it disappeared between her legs again. She perched her bottom on the edge of the desk and opened herself for him. He entered her in a graceful stroke. The wetness dripping from her and having coated him gave him ample lubrication to plunge into her.

She grabbed his face and kept his mouth on hers while he wrapped his arm around her back and kept her from falling back. With each stroke she groaned louder and grew closer until that familiar build up in the deepest part of her belly. The need for a breath pulled her away from his lips and brought her face down to the top of his shoulder, which she bit in matching intensity to the orgasm that cascaded over her.

He slowed as she did.

"Don't stop. Please."

"I'm going to-"

"Yes." Her hands moved to his buttocks and pressed him deeper. His hand slapped the wall when a growl escaped his throat. Each pulse of his orgasm sent a jolt up her spine and she held on for dear life.

"Holy shit." His body continued shaking as she took his face in her hands

again. She ran her tongue along the thick edge of his lower lip and then stuck it in between. The ferocity of their desire had given way to something much more tender and intimate. They kissed like that, as they might have as teenagers, until the cold desk created a shiver up her spine.

She pulled away to catch her breath. He loosened the grasp around her waist and gently pulled out.

“Ramona...”

There was nothing she could possibly say.

He stared into her eyes. “Are you okay?”

His semen ran down the inside of her leg. “Yes. Of course.”

She wanted to get to the bathroom but each move sent another trail of cum farther down, now into her shoes. But he didn’t let go.

She gave him one more kiss before moving him gently away.

He helped smooth her dress after he had put his underwear and pants back on. “I now have one less item on my bucket list.”

“Fucking someone on your desk?”

“No. Being with you.”

“Having sex with me was on your bucket list?”

“Since I was eleven.”

“Wow.” Her teenage mind had had no idea.

“That’s not really how I imagined it, though. A bit less fast and furious, maybe.”

“I need to go clean up. I’ll be right back.”

She stood in the bathroom for longer than was necessary to clean up what they had created. This time, there was no avoiding all those mirrors.

She had just fucked her childhood friend. The boy she thought she’d always love but hadn’t seen in fifteen years. She threw cold water on her face. She’d gotten through some sticky situations before, but this was a whole different type of challenge.

He was looking down at his hands when she stepped back into the office.

God, this was awkward. “It’s getting late.”

“Let me take you home, Mo.”

“Sure, thanks.”

They sat silently during the car ride across town. She hoped her father had kept the door unlocked, as she had requested.

He took her hand after parking in her father’s narrow driveway. “I know this is awkward. But it doesn’t have to be. It’s still just me... Baloo.”

“That’s what makes it awkward.” She reached over and gave him a small kiss. “Good night, Lucas.”

“See you tomorrow.”

The deep smile on his remarkable face was nearly enough to hold down her rising dread about the day that would begin in only a few more hours. “Yes. See you tomorrow.”