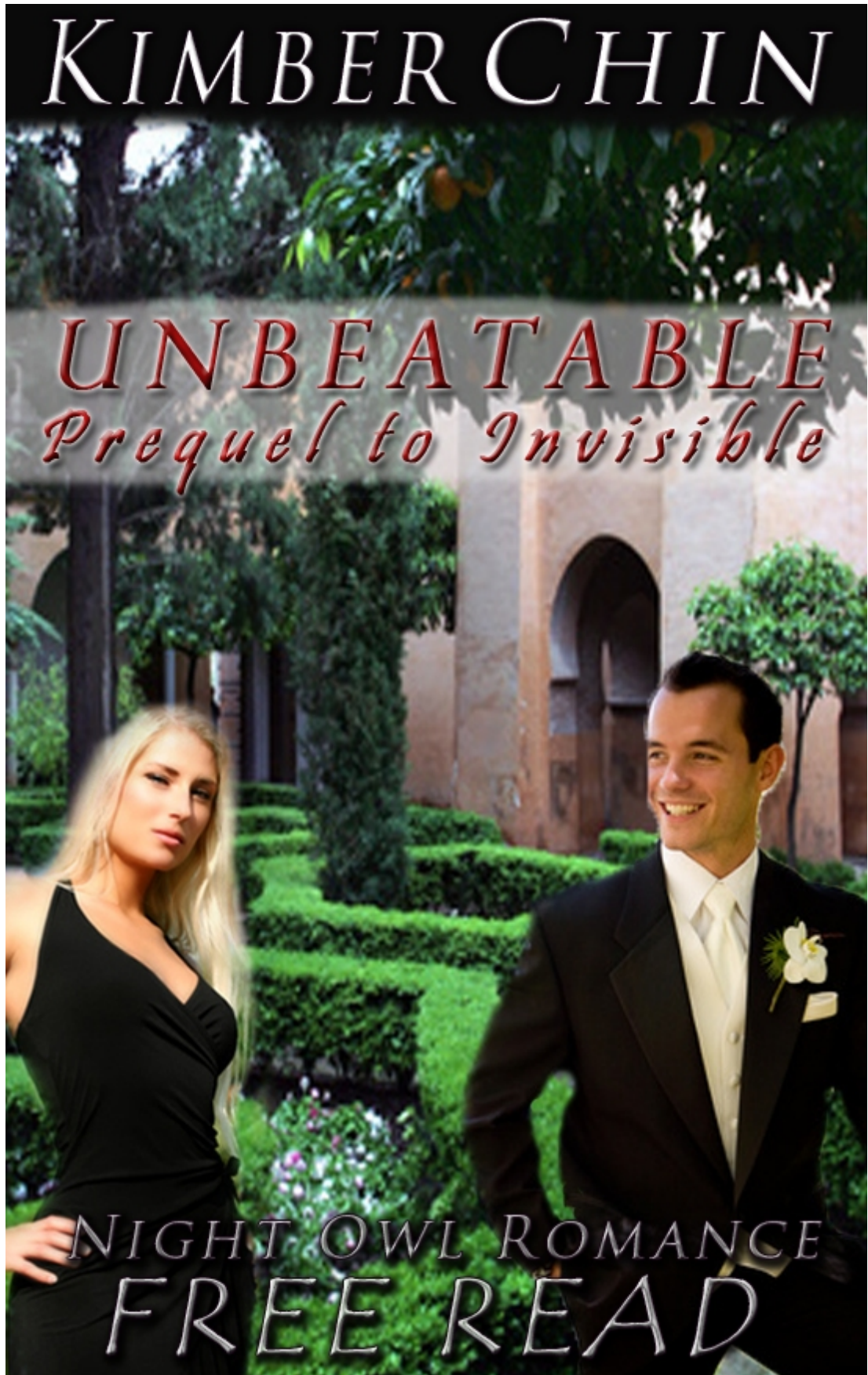


Kimber Chin/Unbeatable



Kimber Chin/Unbeatable

This is a work of fiction. All places, events and characters are crafted from the author's imagination and any resemblance to currently alive or passed people and events are coincidental.

Title: Unbeatable

Copyright © 2009 Kimber Chin

Cover art by Tammie King (TammieKingWebDesign.com)

Kimber Chin/Unbeatable

Unbeatable by Kimber Chin

Prequel to Invisible

"R...r...remind me to f...f...fire you on M...M...Monday." Ryan ended the call with that empty threat. Tamra, his assistant, wasn't coming. After insisting he go to this charity thing, she had deserted him. What now? He surveyed the room filled with well-dressed strangers. Should he leave or extend the pain?

"I can't catch a break, damn it." A feminine voice muttered behind him. "One single break." His waist was grabbed. "Hi there." A blinding smile. "You here solo?" He nodded dumbfounded. Who was she? "Good. Then I'll be your date tonight." The most intriguing woman he'd ever seen informed him. Face-to-face. She was as tall as he was.

Although it wasn't a question, he answered anyway, "O...o...okay."

"Finally, something goes my way," said under her breath. The mystery lady smoothed down her full skirt. There were scratches on her bare legs. "Here's the situation." Her voice was just loud enough for him to hear. "See that woman over there, in the black." He wasn't sure which one she was referring to. Many of the women including his newly acquired date were wearing black evening dresses. "With the nasty scowl heading our way. She's the organizer and she doesn't like me very much. She's going to try to bounce me. You won't let that happen, will you?" Grayish blue eyes pleaded with him.

He picked a twig out of her blonde hair. "N...n...no." Because invited or not, her being here meant he was no longer alone.

"I didn't think you would." An approving smile. "You're a true sportsman. I pegged you as one right away, and I should be here, you know." Not a breath taken between subjects. "My family made a donation, we should get an invite, but no- oh, hi Michelle." Fake cheerfulness. "Another great turnout I see."

"Yes," the red headed woman purred. "There are even people attending who weren't invited."

"Imagine that." A nervous laugh from his date. "You two have met, of course." A casual introduction. The only one that could be made because he doubted she knew his name.

"R...R...Ryan M...M...Murphy." He offered.

"Michelle Vanderbright." She gave him that disdainful little sniff rich folks had perfected. "Ryan Murphy, I don't recall seeing your name on my list."

Implying he was also a party crasher. That he didn't belong. Ryan straightened, looming over the woman.

"It's a common name, Michelle." Another nervous laugh from the woman by his side. "And there are hundreds of people here. Ryan's on your list, I guarantee." A quick look to him as though for confirmation. He nodded. "I mean how else would he get in? Jump the hedge? Enter through a loading dock?" She waved a hand. "Who'd be that desperate?"

"Yes, who indeed." A thinly plucked eyebrow rose. "This must be a first date." The organizer's cold smile turned on him. "We all know Caja doesn't have second dates."

Kimber Chin/Unbeatable

Caja. A name as exotic as she was.

"Wrong again, Michelle. Ryan and I have known each other forever." Caja hugged his arm, pressing it against her breasts. "We're practically engaged."

Practically engaged?

"Practically doesn't count, darling," venom oozed from the endearment. "No ring means no engagement."

Caja stiffened. Ryan placed a restraining hand on her hip. "It's being sized," she spat. "And I'll have you know it's fantastic."

No longer practically engaged, he mentally updated their ever-changing relationship status. Now they were officially engaged.

"I look forward to seeing that ring, Caja." And this Michelle creature would check up on it. Ryan knew her type well. "I should attend to my invited," stress on invited, "guests. Congratulations, Ryan, or should I say my condolences?" With that dig in, she was off.

"S...s...she h...h...hates you." He didn't like that, feeling strangely protective of his mystery woman.

"She has forever." A dramatic sigh. "Since grade school, when I broke her nose. But." Caja held up one well manicured finger. "I only did that because she insulted my baby brother. She called him ugly, can you believe that?"

She was a scrapper, his date. "I...i...is he?" Hard to believe any relative of Caja's could be ugly.

The blonde looked sheepish. "It doesn't matter." Telling Ryan the ugly label was justified. "You shouldn't call people names. It isn't nice. I guess," a twist of her mouth, "you wouldn't understand, being one of those good looking guys." He was a good looking guy? "But it's hurtful, you know? Not that I meant to break her nose." Regret in that beautiful face. "I just got so mad and pow." Her fist struck out, almost nailing a passing server.

He covered that fist with his callused hand. Her skin was soft. "C...c...careful." He pressed her hand against his chest. Their eyes met and his breath caught. She was beautiful and witty, so not a woman who'd normally look at him twice, and he wanted to kiss her, right here, with the who's who of Chicago society swirling around them.

"Caja Rayner, is that you?" squealed at eardrum bursting levels.

Thank goodness for Fiona. She prevented Caja from making a complete fool of herself. Because she was about to kiss Ryan Murphy, a complete stranger, in the middle of the Annual Pink Ribbons Gala. And that would have given Michelle all the excuse she needed to bounce both of them.

Caja held onto Ryan's hand tightly as she chatted with Fi-Fi, not letting him get away. Not that he acted like he wanted to get away, standing there silently beside her, a half smile on his handsome face.

"This girl of yours," she told him once Fi-Fi wandered off, "is a fool, Ryan. If I were her, I wouldn't let you out of my sight."

He stared at her in that intent way that made her mind go mushy.

"A...a...assistant."

The stutter was clearly a sign of intelligence, his brain too quick for his mouth.

"Well, that makes more sense because you don't want to date stupid women, Ryan." She liked saying his name. "One of them is bound to catch you and then what, you're stuck

Kimber Chin/Unbeatable

with stupid children." She shook her head. "That would be a shame, a dumbing down of the gene pool."

"A...a...aren't w...w...we engaged?" A little boy grin.

She grinned back. "Yes, sorry about that but she made me so mad and the words just came out of my mouth." She had been tempted to break the woman's new nose. "It'll only be for tonight. One of the shorter engagements on record." Why did that make her sad? "Then you'll never have to see me again." And he wouldn't. Michelle was right. She never got second dates with men.

"A...a...and i...i...if I w...w...want to?" His brown eyes glowed.

Damn. There was that urge to kiss him again. "Do you?" She pressed up against him, chest to chest. She was in heels and he was refreshingly the same height. No need for flats. "Because if you-

"Ryan Murphy," boomed over her shoulder. She turned. The approaching man was short and broad, built like a square. "Babs," a head twitch to the bird like woman following him, "said it was you but I told her no, you don't go to social events, not ever, yet here you are, making me out to be a damn liar." The men collided, slapping each other on the backs, a primitive display of raw masculinity. "And who is this?" Ryan's friend looked her over thoroughly.

"I'm Caja Rayner." She held out a hand.

"Bruce Nongers." Instead she was pulled into a thankfully milder hug. "This is my wife, Barbara." She was passed along to the woman. "Can't talk now. We're heading out. Babs has a headache." Not surprising considering every word the man spoke was yelled at top volume. "But we'll see you tomorrow at the picnic. Caja, you're going, right?"

A picnic. Caja loved picnics. Hamburgers and three legged races and grass between her toes. "I wouldn't miss it, Bruce." She beamed. Ryan simply stared at her again, his mouth open.

"Good, good." More back slapping between the men. "See you then. Don't keep him up too late, Caja. My money's on him to win the Trashcan Toss."

Caja watched the man barrel through the crowd, his wife flitting along behind him, apologizing. "Trashcan toss?" That was a different event to have at a picnic.

Ryan's jacket bunched up as he stuck his hands in his pants pocket. "I...i...it's the T...t...trash C...c...collector T...t...triathlon." His cheeks streaked with red.

The Trash Collector Triathlon. She'd done a triathlon before. There'd been no tossing of anything. "Really?" He nodded, glaring down at his shuffling feet. "Can I compete, Ryan?" She hugged his arm. She excelled at sports. She could win. "Tell me I can compete. Oh, this is going to be so much fun."

~ * ~

"You really don't mind that I'm going tomorrow?" Caja, a woman so out of his league he couldn't get tickets to the game, fretted in the passenger seat of his truck, a truck she gushed over, saying she always wanted one just like it. "I've never tossed a trashcan before, Ryan." And she wouldn't tomorrow, at least not a fully weighted one. He couldn't allow her to hurt herself. "And," a shattered breath, "this will be a second date. I don't often..."

Kimber Chin/Unbeatable

Get a second date. He didn't know why. Those society boys must have a screw loose. "I...I...I w...w...want to see y...y...you again." That she wanted to see him, a man who took an hour to stutter out six words, amazed him.

"Good. So you'll pick me up here," here being a nice house in a middle class neighborhood, a welcome surprise, giving him hope, "at ten o'clock." That was the plan. "I won't keep you waiting, I promise." Even if she did, he wouldn't mind. She was worth waiting for. "Will you be driving the truck again?" He nodded as she played with his lapels. "Good. I'll look out for you so you don't have to come in." She leaned into him, pouting adorably.

Ryan took those offered lips, kissing her, not a gentle first kiss, but a possessive branding. She was his. If only for the moment. And he'd make the moment last. She moaned, tasting like apple martinis and chocolate covered strawberries and surrender. He slid her over the middle console, onto his lap. She wiggled, rubbing her ass against his already hard body. It felt so good, it felt-

The passenger door opened. "Caja, get in the house!" An angry roar. Not to be taken lightly. The man roaring had the smashed in face of a boxer.

"Hagen," Caja protested as she pulled her skirt back down, covering those long legs.

"Now, Caja." The man hauled her over. Fabric ripped.

"W...w...wait a m...m...minute." Ryan reached out. No one touched Caja like that.

"It's okay, Ryan." Caja reassured him, squeezing his hand. "Ryan, my baby brother." She indicated the newcomer. THIS was the baby brother Caja defended? The man had the size and build of a front loader. "Hagen, Ryan. Be nice to him, Hagen, we're engaged."

"Hell no!" Another roar.

"Yes, well, not really." She smiled up at her brother unconcerned. "But we could be. We're going on a second date, you know, and if that goes well, I just might keep him." A wink his way. "So be nice to your future brother-in-law. See you at ten, Ryan. Don't forget about me." A happy wave, a swish of skirt, and she was gone.

Leaving him with the monster. Baby brother Hagen hung on the passenger seat door, his ugly face peering through the open window. "Come out and fight me like a man, Ryan."

If that was the way it had to be... Ryan slammed the door behind him, unbuttoning his tuxedo as he rounded the front of the truck. "L...l...lets d...d...do it." He dropped the jacket to the ground.

The massive man, leaning casually against the truck, cocked an eyebrow. "You that ready to die? You don't have to, you know. All you need to do is walk away from Caja, swear never to see her again and I won't kill you."

Ryan knew Caja wouldn't last the day tomorrow, a society girl at the Trash Collector Triathlon. He was also prepared for an embarrassing scene once she realized there'd be no cute little cucumber sandwiches or chocolate covered strawberries for lunch. He didn't care. He had every intention of seeing her again. "N...n...no."

"No?" A laugh of disbelief. "Why? You think you can beat me? Look at these hands." The brother fanned out his sausage-sized fingers. "I'll tear you apart."

Kimber Chin/Unbeatable

"L...l...likely." Especially as he couldn't fight back, not if he wanted a chance with Caja.

"You're slow, aren't you?" A common misconception due to his stuttering. He wasn't, having earned his way to an Ivy League School, unlike many of his silver spoon sucking classmates. "Or desperate. How much is it going to cost me for you to go away?" The big man took out his wallet.

A sissy, an idiot, and now he was being labeled a money grubbing gigolo. Enough was enough. Ryan drew himself up to his full height, his fists clenched. "G...g...go to h...h...hell."

"I would, gladly, to prevent someone like you," Hagen's top lip curled up as he glanced back at the vehicle, "from seeing my sister."

"B...b...because I d...d...drive a t...t...truck?" Or wore the wrong animal on his shirt? Or earned his tuition honestly by hauling waste?

"No, damn it." The brother pounded the door. "Because no one dates Caja for her money."

Of course she had money. When he saw the house, he hoped... but no, she was one of those society girls, through and through. "I...I...I don't w...w...want her m...m...money."

An ignorant snort. "Right."

Ryan glared at Hagen. Hagen glared back. The brother was angry. Why was he so angry? Because he was trying to protect Caja, the woman Ryan cared for.

"F...f...fine." Ryan picked up his jacket, searched through the pockets. "H...h...here." He passed over a business card.

The man scanned it. "You're the vice-president of a waste disposal company, so what? Caja--"

"F...f...family," he blurted out as best he could. "O...o...own it." That was why he had to do the social thing. It was part of his family's responsibilities.

"You don't need her money." Speculation darkened those gray eyes. "She's still too good for you."

Ryan suspected the brother thought no one good enough for his sister. In this case, however, that assumption was correct. "Y...y...yes." He wasn't.

That drew a slow smile. "You really would have fought me?"

"Y...y...yes."

The smile spread into a wide grin of appreciation. "You must not be able to get a word in edgewise. Caja likes to talk." Ryan nodded. He liked listening to her talk. "Okay." Big hands swept through blond hair. "We'll take this one day at a time. You can see her again tomorrow but if you hurt her..."

"I...I...I w...w...won't." Tomorrow was all he needed. Caja wouldn't want to see him after that.

~ * ~

Caja spotted his truck, that beast of a vehicle, as soon as it turned the corner. He came. She bounced down the walkway. They were going on a second date, on a picnic of sorts. She waved, climbing up into the passenger seat.

"Good morning, Ryan." She leaned over, shamelessly puckering up for a kiss. The one she received was as lip tingling as last night's. "I didn't know quite what to wear." She pulled at her white ribbed tank top. She opted for casual, shorts and sneaks.

Kimber Chin/Unbeatable

"I've never been to a Trash Collector Triathlon before." Was it too casual? He wore jeans and one of those worker shirts with his company's logo on it. She traced his nametag. "Will I get a shirt like this today? So I can be part of your team?" She'd like that.

His eyes narrowed. "S...s...spare b...b...behind the s...s...seat."

"Really?" She felt around, pulled out cloth, shook it out. "But this is your shirt." The thought of wearing his shirt... her toes curled. "I couldn't." She was a disaster when it came to clothes. "I might stain it up." No might about it. She would. And then his boss would be mad.

"Y...y...yours to k...k...keep."

A part of him to keep forever. "In that case." She put it on. It was extremely wide so she tied it tightly in a knot at her waist. "Except," she frowned down at the nametag, "people are going to be calling me Ryan all day. There are girls named Ryan, you know." She went to school with a female Ryan. "Not that anyone would ever think YOU were a girl." No, he was all man. "Is it truly mine to keep?" He nodded. "You have a marker?"

"G...g...glove c...c...compartment." His eyes on the road, he reached over and opened it.

She searched, found the marker, and then wrote 'Property Of' in big block letters above the nametag. "There. What do you think?" she asked, patting her left breast, feeling proud of her simple solution.

One glance her way and Ryan swerved to the side of the road.

~ * ~

"We like her, son," his mother shared, his dad standing silently by her side. They watched as Caja flung herself headfirst into the dumpster. "I wouldn't want to do her laundry but we like her."

"Y...y...yes." He liked her too. Ten hours later and she was still in great spirits. Even now her head popped out from inside the dumpster, the token triumphantly held high. Three of his collectors fought to be the one to help her out, whatever she said to them making the men laugh. She touched her left breast.

'Property of Ryan', Ryan stood a little taller. There was no confusion over whose date she was.

"Did you see that, Ryan?" Caja rushed up to him, a proud smile on her face. "I didn't get the winning time but I was close, wasn't I?" She included his parents in on her excitement. "All I need is some more practice and I'll beat it." His dad chuckled.

Ryan picked a piece of shredded paper off her shoulder. "N...n...not t...t...tonight." The organizers were packing up. "T...t...time to g...g...go."

"Oh." Her grayish blue eyes widened. She leaned close. "Good," she whispered into his ear. Good? She was happy they were leaving? "Mr., Mrs. Murphy, so nice to meet you." She hugged his mom and dad. "I now knew where Ryan gets his sense of sportsmanship."

That was the second time in two days she mentioned sportsmanship. He waited impatiently as his parents fussed over her. Was her chipper attitude today due to genuine enjoyment or some distorted sense of fair play?

He walked with her, his hand on her hip, back to the truck. "Y...y...you w...w...wanted to l...l...leave?"

Kimber Chin/Unbeatable

"For hours." She grinned at him, unaware that her happy words tore his hopes apart. "Since the trashcan toss. Sure," she patted his chest, "I know you didn't win but I think you could have. You let Roger get first place, didn't you?" No, he hadn't thrown the competition. He had wanted to impress her by winning. "It meant a lot to him." He opened the passenger side door for her. "He was so proud." She climbed in. "Him and his family." He shut it behind her. "It's a nice evening, isn't it?" She was still talking when he filled the driver's seat. "Too early to go home." Her eyes bright.

Too early? "Y...y...you w...w...wanted to l...l...leave."

"Of course," she explained as though she made perfect sense. "We can't very well have sex on the picnic tables, can we? Though I heard at the last triathlon..."

"W...w...what!" His brain caught up with her mouth.

"It's true." She bobbed her blonde head. "Or at least I was told it was true. No one would tell me who it was so I couldn't confirm for sure but I heard the couple sneaked away during the Dumpster Dive and-"

"N...n...no." His fingers cramped from his death grip on the steering wheel.

"A...a...about us."

"Having sex?" she finished. Him. Completely. "I hope so. If you want. I'm not going to force you. This isn't a date rape situation. Though the way you were tossing those trashcans." She put her hand on his upper thigh. He turned off onto a dirt road leading to the lake, his condo too far away. He wouldn't last. "You got all hot and sweaty and that made me think of..." Them all hot and sweaty. His foot lowered on the gas pedal. "But if you don't want to, I'll understand."

"I...I...I w...w...want. B...b...believe me. I w...w...want." He slammed on the brakes, gravel spraying up behind them.

"This is lovely." She clasped her hands together in appreciation of the view.

"The sunset reflecting off the lake, all those colors and..." He opened her door, reached up and lowered her to the ground, her body sliding against his. "Are we taking a walk?"

"N...n...no w...w...walking." He released her long enough to grab the blanket from behind the seat. He used it when he slept in his truck between long shifts. Tonight it'd be used for a different purpose.

"Oh." Her face lit with understanding. "You ARE a smart man."

Ryan didn't feel smart. He felt like an idiot. He'd delayed leaving the picnic site, hoarding every minute there, certain he'd never see her again. All that time, she waited patiently for this, for him.

He spread the blanket out on a patch of grass, softer than the pebble beach, but not the mattress she deserved. He crouched, reaching to straighten a corner. "Got you." She jumped onto his back, legs around his waist. She smacked a noisy kiss on the nape of his neck. "Now you have to take off a piece of clothing."

He looked back at her smiling face. "I...i...is t...t...that how it w...w...works?"

"Yes." She nodded gravely, still perched on top of him. "For every unique spot kissed, clothing comes off. Those are the rules."

Those were great rules. He undid his top two buttons and pulled his shirt over his head, Caja helping. "M...m...my t...t...turn." He flipped her over and tasted the soft skin under her right ear. She wiggled under him, her fingertips skimming his bare chest.

Kimber Chin/Unbeatable

"I see you've played this game before." No, he hadn't but he was a fast learner. Her shirt joined his. Then she pulled off her tank top also. "That was a bonus spot," she explained. Her bra covered breasts brushed against him.

She kissed his nipple. He kicked off both shoes. "S...s...shoes c...c...count as one." And he kissed between her breasts.

She held him there, breathing heavy, while he stroked the hollow with his tongue. She tasted salty, wild. "Another bonus spot." Caja released him. Sneakers went flying. Her bra slingshot over his shoulder. She was in a rush. He was too. They kissed and sucked and stripped until the only article of clothing worn was her lacy thong. "I won!" She sat on his stomach, arms flung up in triumph. "I am the winner!" she crowed. "And I will claim my prize."

He caressed her breasts. "P...p...prize?"

"Stay still, prize," she ordered. Caja stood, a veritable Amazon in her near naked glory, the last colors of the sunset dancing across her body, and removed her panties. "You will honor my victory." The super hero pose she then struck would be permanently imbedded in his brain. "And I will claim my prize." Without hesitating, she lowered herself onto him.

Hot damn. His eyes rolled back in his head. She felt so good, so tight, so hot. "Consider yourself claimed, prize." Caja grinned down at him, her blonde hair framing her flushed face. He kissed her. She laughed exultantly and started to move. Up, down, up, down, faster and faster. He held onto her hips steadying her as her thrust upwards. It felt so right, this, them. He gritted his teeth, hanging on until she arched her back, flung back her head, and called his name out into the air. Only then did he let himself go. One more thrust upwards and her name joined his.

She collapsed into his arms. "I love this game," she huffed against his bare chest.

"R...r...rematch t...t...tomorrow?" And the day after that and the day after that. She was his. Ryan would never let her go.

Caja nuzzled under his chin. "Why wait until tomorrow?"

Kimber Chin/Unbeatable

Author's Note

Unbeatable is a prequel to my full length release **Invisible**. Many readers wanted to know more about Hagen's secret sharing big sis. As she is an action taking, no hesitation type of woman, I knew it wouldn't take Caja 300 pages to settle things with the man of her dreams. That made a Night Owl Romance exclusive short perfect for telling Caja's courtship story.

Why a waste disposal specialist for Caja? She might joke that there's a nice synergy between Ryan's waste disposal business and Hagen's auction houses. Anything Hagen can't sell, Ryan can deal with. I also believe that a man excelling in his career of choice, in whatever industry that happens to be, is the ultimate in sexy, be that as a garbage man or an astronaut.

This short is, as always, dedicated to my dear hubby (the garbage man in our household). I'd also like to thank Candace Morehouse for encouraging me to write about a garbage man hero. You rock!