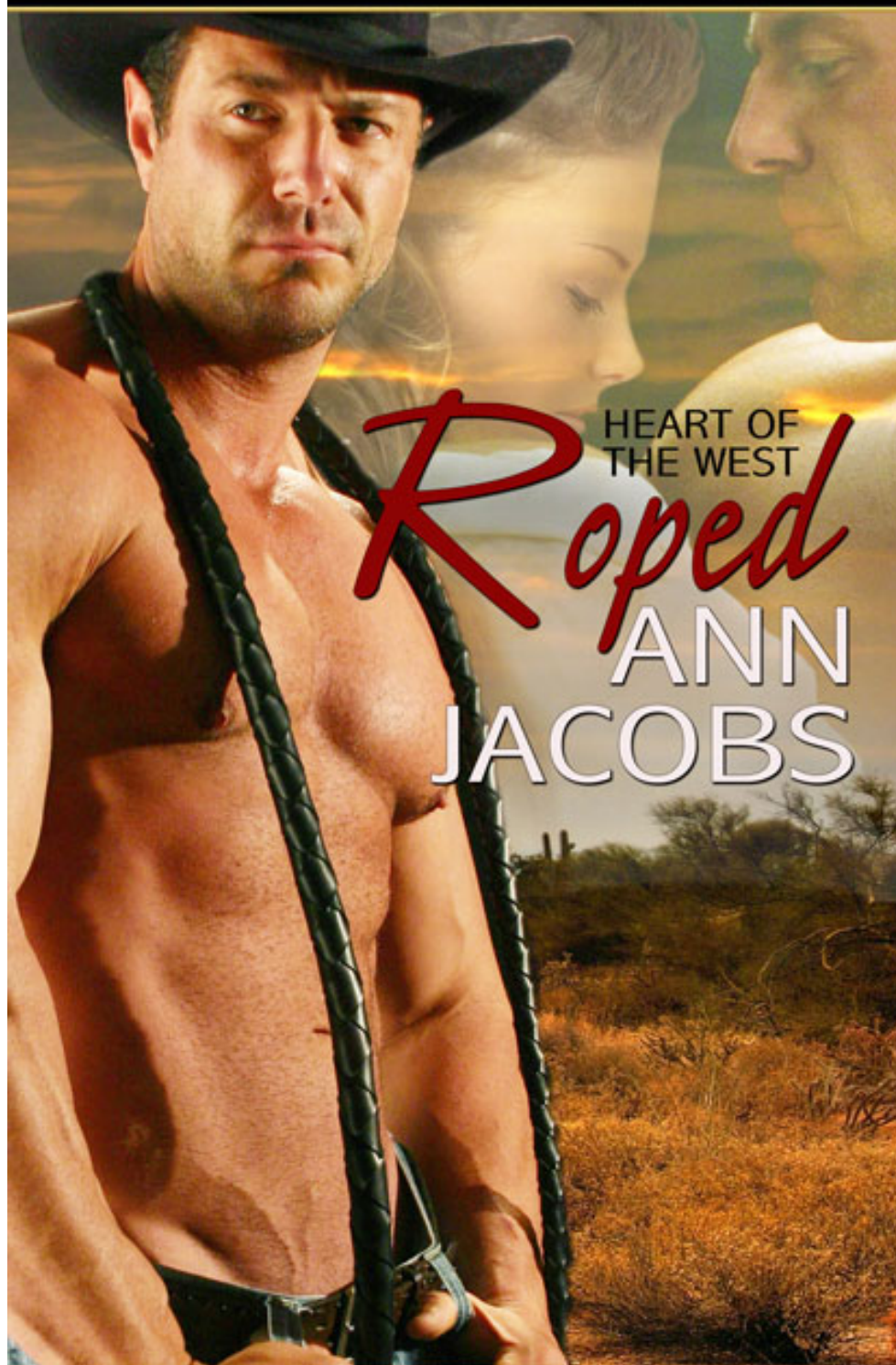


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Roped

ISBN 9781419912672

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Edited by Sue-Ellen Gower.

Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication September 2007

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HEART OF THE WEST:

ROPED

Ann Jacobs

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Chapter One

Water. Got to find water. Sand swirled around Jared McTavish, each individual grain pelting his hands and nose, the only parts of him not covered by the all-encompassing robe and headdress he'd stolen from the man he'd killed.

The man—an insurgent, one of the bastards he and his men had been searching for—had shot up Jared's Humvee and murdered his driver moments before this sandstorm had blown up on the western Iraqi desert. Jared shuddered when he recalled the explosion that had rocked the desert road ahead of them, and the resultant blood and broken body parts of the soldiers who'd taken the forward position on this hellish assignment.

Trying to ignore blinding pain in his legs, he stumbled forward—toward his platoon headquarters, or so he thought. He hunched his shoulders, his head dropped to his chin to keep the wind-whipped sand from blinding him for real. It seemed like he'd been heading toward nowhere for hours, praying for shelter...an oasis...anything but the desolate grave that had already claimed so many of his comrades.

Can't. Can't go on much longer. His throat parched, every cell in his body screaming from pain as well as thirst, Jared lifted his canteen, let the last precious drops of water dribble through his cracked lips. His whole body ached from the effort of moving against the forces of nature.

There. In the distance, barely visible over shifting dunes nearly as tall as he was, he spied some stately date palms bent nearly double in the wind. He redoubled his efforts, moved faster, his eye on his goal. *Shade. Water. Gotta make it, can't be far now.*

Jared clawed his way over a dune, the last impediment between him and life. On his knees now, for he was becoming too weak to walk, he crawled the last fifty yards, only to look up and see the palm trees disappear, the verdant vegetation turn to arid

wasteland. A mirage, he thought as he sank face down on the sand and took one last labored breath.

Blackness. A sensation of hot sand scorched the palms of his hands, his cheek. Then a halo of light. And a blessed breath of cool, soothing air swirled all around him.

Thank God. It hadn't been a mirage after all. Jared inhaled deeply, aerating his parched body, his dry throat. "Water," he croaked, sensing another presence yet too exhausted to open his eyes.

Soft hands cradled his head, tucked what felt like fat fluffy pillows beneath it. The sound of fluid hitting a container was music to his ears — ears that had last heard the cry of the wind as it tossed desert sand around him like a shroud. This was better, he thought, lying on a silken couch while a lusty *houri* tended to his bath. He'd turn the tides on her, ravage her in payback for the way she'd been caressing him. Jared rolled her beneath him, restrained her for his pleasure while she whimpered eagerly in an Arabic dialect he couldn't understand.

"Wake up, Captain, and open your mouth." The voice was female, the tone firm but still somehow seductive, the language English. "I've got some water for you."

A slow stream of cool water bathed his parched lips, wet his swollen tongue. "More."

If this was a dream he didn't want to wake up. Not now, when he had his lover tied hand and foot to the four posters on his bed. Not when he'd stroked her silky skin until she begged for more, and drunk his fill of her sweet-salty essence. Not as he'd listened to her whimpering his name and begging him to take her. And particularly not now, when he was on his knees between her thighs, set to sink his cock into her sweet pussy and fuck her until they both were wrung out and hung up to dry.

No, this was definitely not the time for anybody to tell Jared this was only a dream, that like the oasis he'd seen in the desert that had damn near killed him, the erotic interlude he'd been experiencing the past few minutes was only a mirage.

"Sorry to bother you, Captain, but it's time to change your dressing."

Opening his eyes reluctantly, he looked into the face he'd begun placing on the *houris* in his recurring dream. Nurse Ninia Barker. For the past few days she'd been his waking nightmare, bullying him into taking care of himself when he didn't really give a damn. But yet, in the dreams he'd been having lately, it was always her face on the woman who was tied, begging him to take her. Jared let out a string of curses that would have sent most women running for cover, but it didn't seem to faze Ninia. As if he'd smiled and said "Thanks," as though she didn't notice his hard-on tenting the blanket, she went about her business, folding back the sheets and baring the wound that had brought him here, to a small VA hospital in Cheyenne, not far from the home he'd left ten years ago when he'd opted for a military career.

He hadn't gone back to his squadron in Iraq or to his home base because the roadside bomb that had riddled his lower body with shrapnel and ended up taking part of his right leg had ended what he'd planned as a lifelong career in the Marines. They hadn't wanted him taking up space at Walter Reed once they'd done all they could and determined he'd never be fit enough to go back to his Special Force Reconnaissance Team. Part of him couldn't help wishing his second-in-command hadn't risked his own skin to come back and drag his miserable ass out of the desert, especially at times like this when he was lying more or less helpless, either pretty much in constant pain, or with the pain masked by drugs that also dulled his wits.

"Okay. Looks like another piece of shrapnel has worked its way out." The pretty blonde tyrant stood and motioned for an orderly to come help take him to the procedure room so they could fish out the tiny shard of metal. "What will this make?"

Jared shrugged. "How the hell would I know?"

"Don't get upset with me. I was just making conversation. Lots of you guys like to keep count of how many pieces of your Humvees have made their way out of your bodies."

"Well, I couldn't care less." He realized a lot of his irritability came from his situation, but part of it came from watching her, wanting her so much but knowing

there was nothing more pathetically cliché than a wounded soldier falling for his nurse. She tended him, saw all his weaknesses, while his cock hungered to show her it wasn't exactly helpless.

"You couldn't care less about a lot of things, right, tough guy?" Ninia reminded Jared of a particularly hot Domme he'd once observed in his brother's Laramie dungeon. Only thing was, that Domme had taken it easier verbally on the sub he'd watched her playing with than this nurse did on him and the other patients in the small post-trauma rehab unit at the Cheyenne VA Medical Center. "You got banged up a little, so the world's come to an end."

"What the fuck would you know about what's going on in my head?" Jared usually tried to be civil to the people charged with helping him, but Ninia was getting on his nerves. Not only because she'd just fucked up the best dream he'd had since coming back stateside, but because she'd been the main focus of it. "Or about what I've been through for that matter?"

Her lips went white underneath the pink lipstick she had on, and all of a sudden she got so quiet Jared felt like squirming, especially when he noticed dampness gathering in the corners of her big blue eyes, a barely perceptible tremor in her usually steady hands. Still he wasn't ready to cut her any slack. "Well?"

When she lowered her gaze, he saw the pain in her expression. "I lost my husband," she said. "In the fighting in Afghanistan. I'd have given everything I own if he'd come home no more battered than you."

He reached out, ashamed he'd taken out his frustration on her and chagrined that she'd had to remind him the whole world was filled with people who'd lost their dreams. Mostly he felt bad for hurting her just because he wanted her so damn much. Jared noticed how her expression softened when he grasped her hand, so he tightened his grip, taking a chance she'd think he was coming on to her like any other pathetic bastard in the place. "I was being an ass. I didn't mean to take my annoyance out on you," he told her, moving his thumb over her palm.

She didn't move for a moment. Then her hand tightened somewhat on his, and he thought he saw the pulse in her throat speed up. For a moment, he forgot he was in a hospital bed again. He wanted to tug her closer and see if he could taste her there, make her...

"It's all right." She pulled her hand away, her cheeks slightly flushed. Damn, he'd flustered her. But he was also a fucking cripple, helpless to get off that bed and pursue her under his own steam. The jarring reminder made him turn away when she spoke, her irritating composure restored. "Come on, let's get you into this wheelchair and down to the procedure room. The sooner this piece of shrapnel's gone, the sooner you'll be able to get up on your feet."

"Don't you mean foot?" He swung himself into the wheelchair the orderly had brought. It had become second nature for Jared to correct his caregivers when they referred to his prosthesis as though it were part of him instead of a bunch of plastic and titanium. Not that it didn't work surprisingly well, but nothing could hold a candle to the real thing. Ninia looked stricken, though, so he made himself grin. "I'll start thinking of feet in the plural when I can actually put the other one back on," he said, gesturing toward the lower portion of the stump where shrapnel had been coming to the surface lately, requiring removal and keeping him from using his new state-of-the-art prosthesis while each tiny fresh wound healed.

"Fair enough. Come on, let's make that happen ASAP. We need to get you out of here and free up your bed for a guy who really needs it." She managed a smile, and it seemed to have as much effect on his libido as that erotic dream. Man, did he have it bad.

* * * * *

Nurse Ninia stuck in his mind, even now, a week after he'd been released from her inpatient ward to get his physical therapy three days a week at the outpatient clinic. Jared closed his eyes and envisioned the bossy blonde as he half-listened to a sports announcer on TV going on about the Broncos' chances in the upcoming NFL season.

If it hadn't been for his leg hurting him like hell, he'd probably have fallen asleep in the living room, but it did, so he grabbed his crutches and made his way into bed where he could elevate the stump. The noise from the TV gave the illusion that he wasn't alone, lulled him off to sleep.

Sand dunes white as the snow back home on his Wyoming ranch stretched as far as he could see, past date palms swaying in the hot, dry desert air. A soothing breeze bathed his cheeks when he pulled the flap back and looked outside the luxurious tent where he'd awakened moments earlier.

He must have died and gone to heaven. Jared could think of no other explanation. The last thing he remembered was crawling, clawing his way across the Iraqi desert in a blinding storm, struggling to reach an oasis. An oasis that had only been a mirage.

He remembered that. Remembered gasping for air, taking in sand instead. But apparently he'd been wrong. Apparently just past his line of vision the oasis had been here after all, and God had helped him find the way.

This was no mirage, but a miracle. He closed his eyes, said a silent prayer this wouldn't all be gone when he looked again. Relief washed over him when he saw the same welcome scene, when he turned back and found the tent still there.

And the woman. Ninia? Blonde hair like spun silk swaying loose against her tanned shoulders, sky-blue eyes made more compelling because they were set off by the veil that showed just a hint of her full, red lips, a chin with a dimple that softened its stubborn set. Voluptuous, smiling, graceful, she'd danced for him. Bathed his sunburned body with cool, fresh water. Dipped her fingers ever so slowly into the cool, clear liquid then held them just over his lips so it slid drop by drop between his parched lips and down his throat. Now she beckoned to him with outstretched arms, temptation beyond anything he could resist.

Tired. He was so tired. Back inside the tent now, he found the silk-draped sleeping couch, paused only for a moment before letting his unfamiliar Arab garb drop to the floor. He stretched out, naked, against cushions soft as goose down. Foreign sounding music, dissonant to his American ears, soothed him – yet it aroused him too, for it conjured pictures in his mind of dancers undulating to its haunting rhythm.

Dancing – for him. The woman who'd been tending him sat on the floor beside his feet, gently massaging the bruised, blistered soles, his toes...his ankles. Her fingers moved in time with the music, making him aware of her female heat – her desires.

His desire too. Rolling over, he started to lift her in his arms, only to wake up hard and sweating...and once again, alone.

He blinked, disoriented for a moment until he recognized the bedroom of the Spartan apartment he'd rented when he first arrived in Cheyenne for outpatient therapy. "Closer to home," the brass had told him when they'd tossed him out of Walter Reed three weeks ago and sent him here. Well, he'd seen precious little of Cheyenne so far, since he'd freaked out during his first visit to the VA hospital three blocks down from this apartment complex.

Yeah. He'd made a real ass out of himself, letting the sight of a badly burned soldier set off a full-scale panic attack. Besides the fact his action had embarrassed the shit out of him, it also resulted in him spending more than a week back in a hospital ward. And meeting a nurse whose face now showed up in damn near all his dreams.

Jared glanced around his darkened bedroom, looked out the window at the clear surface of a small lake illuminated by a fat new moon. The throbbing in the stump of his right leg made him want to scream, but he refused to give in and take more of the pain medications that dulled his mind.

Sooner or later he'd have to figure something to occupy himself with or he'd go fucking nuts. Not now, though. Now he was struggling, trying to accept that his plan to spend thirty years in the Marines was history. He hadn't even begun to wrestle with the concept that he was no longer well-equipped physically to enjoy the BDSM lifestyle that had been the cornerstone of his personal life.

Would the take-charge, sometimes bossy Ninia surrender to a Dominant male? Jared couldn't help imagining her melting in his arms, giving over control to him the way she never had when he was her patient. He'd stroke her soft skin, pillow his head on her full breasts, nibble at her nipples until she squirmed and begged him for more.

Stop it, idiot, or you'll be taking another cold shower. Sex with your nurse is the last thing you should be thinking about, because it ain't gonna happen.

Jared didn't have the foggiest idea of what he might do, professionally or personally. Not that he needed money—his grandfather had left him and his sister and brother a prime piece of southern Wyoming ranch land near Tie Siding, along with enough money to live on comfortably for the rest of their lives. As long as the stock market didn't crash, the principal would keep on growing even if the oil wells should dry up. What he needed was to find something to do with the rest of his life.

And a real live woman to put this recurring dream to rest. Be damned if he wanted to keep fucking a mirage, and only in his dreams. As if there was a chance in hell he'd find a sub to love the scarred-up has-been Master he was now.

No chance he'd sleep any more tonight.

He sat on the edge of the bed and transferred himself into the wheelchair they'd lent him at the hospital when he refused to take a prescription for one of his own. Rolling it to the patio doors that led to a balcony overlooking the courtyard, he let the cool mountain breeze bring a small measure of relief to his heated flesh.

* * * * *

There he was. Jared McTavish. Captain, United States Marines until his medical discharge had come through last week. Her patient. Ninia had no business on earth staring out her bedroom window at the man whose battered body she'd tended...would likely tend again when more shrapnel was ready to be removed. She had no right whatever to be imagining him wanting to pleasure a woman under his will as a Master.

Across the courtyard with its small man-made lake, she watched him stare out at the night. The light of a silvery moon reflected off the water, accentuating the rugged planes of his face and making her want to caress him there with her fingertips, bring him peace from whatever demons kept sleep at bay for him tonight. *Ninia, he's your*

patient. You must be insane, fantasizing how he'd master you...how his rough, rugged hands would feel when he touched you. How it would make your body sing when he claimed you the way a Master would.

But she couldn't help it. Jared McTavish fascinated her as no one had done in the four years since Earl had died. There was something about him...the way he looked and talked, the way he mumbled arousing, erotic orders in his dreams...

Once, when she'd leaned over him to soothe him as he cried out in one of those dreams, he'd reached his hand out, closed it over her throat. He'd caressed her, made her want to drop to her knees when he mumbled the order for her to do so, his voice hoarse, intense. She'd imagined then that if she'd complied he'd have clasped her head between his two big hands, guided her to his cock, ordered her to take him in her mouth and suck. God how she'd wanted to do just that, to encroach on his sleep and taste the massive male flesh she hadn't been able to ignore.

Captain McTavish was a wounded male. From the moment he'd surfaced to consciousness in her ward, even before that from the things he'd muttered in his sleep, she could tell he was used to controlling all aspects of his life, commanding those around him. Not only did that part of him make her weak with desire in spite of her fiercest admonitions to herself to remain professional, it made her want to be the one to help him reclaim that self-confidence...and perhaps claim her. God, she'd lost her mind. Maybe it had been pure accident that she'd glanced at his address on the hospital record and noticed he lived in her apartment complex, in the unit directly across the courtyard from hers. Or had it been fate? Ninia had never been one to discount destiny. She couldn't lie to herself. She wanted more than to make Jared well. She wanted him. Perhaps it was impulse. The beauty of the night sky. Maybe it was the ache of her lonely body. She didn't care and wasn't going to take the time to analyze her actions.

Lifting off her sleep shirt, she stood naked in front of the open patio door, using a vibrating dildo to massage her breasts the way she longed for him to do. She skimmed

her hands down her body, spread her legs apart, pretended the gentle breeze was his breath on her pussy, his fingers on her aching clit.

She kept her gaze on him, so she knew the moment he saw her. His gaze drifted past the open door then snapped back. Her face was mostly in shadows, but he could clearly see her body as she loosened her hair, let the breeze lift it as she stepped out on her balcony. His eyes were on her, scorching her flesh. She wished he were sitting here, within reach of her eager arms as she displayed herself for his pleasure, showing him in every way that she was his for the taking. Even with the distance of the courtyard between them, she offered herself as if that were the case. Tendrils of hair curled around her breasts, her waist, caressing her bare skin as she bent and braced one hand on her side balcony rail and the other against the frame of the patio door, giving him a birds-eye view of her damp, swollen pussy.

See what you could do to me? She braced herself with one hand on the rail, used the other to reach between her legs with the dildo. A cool night breeze caressed her swollen flesh when she rubbed the toy along her slit. The heat from his gaze made her hotter, so hot she plunged it into her pussy, balls deep. The vibrations sent shivers through her, but no more so than the knowledge that *he* was watching. Watching and wanting.

He'd be hard as stone, hot and throbbing as he sat across the balcony watching her do herself. He'd be doing himself too, jerking his long, thick cock in his left hand — she'd noticed when she tended his wounds that he was left-handed — and cupping his balls in his right. His face would be flushed, and his tongue would go out to moisten the thin but sensual lips she longed to kiss. He'd be imagining eating her pussy, ramming his cock hard into her cunt, her ass...

Or maybe he'd order her to suck him off. Her mouth watered at the thought of going on her knees, taking him in her mouth, serving him that way and any other way that would bring him pleasure.

Ninia turned up the vibrator, let sensation wash through her, bringing release of the sexual tension but not the desire. Maybe it was time to go back, find a Master to fill the empty spot in her heart that losing Earl had carved out.

Maybe...

* * * * *

What the fuck?

He lived across the courtyard from a female exhibitionist? Jared should have rolled his chair back inside and crawled back into bed. Instead he stayed and watched. It might have been his imagination, but he could have sworn he smelled her coming. No question about it, he'd seen the waves of ecstasy undulating through her naked body. Damn, he'd come all over himself before he realized he'd curled his fingers around his cock and mimicked the rhythm she'd set with her dildo.

He wished to hell he could have seen her face. Her body was dynamite, all slender curves with just enough meat on them for a man to get a hand-hold. When the new moon darted out from behind the clouds, he saw she was pale, with long light hair that cascaded around her, caught the moonlight. She'd gotten herself off with a dildo at the same time he was getting himself off with his hand. Before that, she'd been a surreal shadow, like the oasis in the desert that looked so deceptively real in his dreams.

She looked so much like Ninia, Jared imagined... Fuck, he was a fool, imagining anything happening between him and the woman who'd nursed him through panic and pain, seen him at his worst. He had to forget her. Once no more shrapnel could be removed he'd be gone and she'd be nothing but a memory. And that was all the better, because he was going to end up embarrassing himself, asking her out or imagining for a moment that he might pursue a relationship with her, like a hundred other guys who she'd helped through the pain of rehabilitation. She'd probably have patted his hand, given him a sympathetic smile if he approached her. But then he remembered that flush on her cheeks. *No. Don't be an idiot.*

Dawn was breaking in the eastern sky. Soon it would start getting light. He'd be able to see her then...except that now she'd gone back inside her apartment, closing the drapes against his prying eyes. Damn, he'd better get his ass inside as well, or the cops would be paying him a visit. Wouldn't do if he got caught on the balcony staring at a window across the courtyard and salivating over a neighbor whose pussy he could describe in more detail than her face.

* * * * *

Showered and shaved now, he checked his legs, proud of himself because he hardly winced anymore when he looked closely at the below-knee stump. Good, the latest wounds where they'd taken out more shrapnel seemed finally to be healing. Satisfied that infection wasn't setting in, Jared pulled on boxers and jeans, pulling the right jeans leg up over the knee of his stump.

He didn't kid himself that his body had shed the last of the hardware. Seemed he had half a fucking Humvee inside his lower body in minute bits and pieces, mostly concentrated in what was left of his right leg. It had pissed the hell out of him when he was flying commercial for the first time after his injury, realizing he made airport metal detectors go bonkers when he passed through. Recognizing the pity in strangers' eyes when they noticed his wheelchair, or the crutches he'd still needed even when he was wearing his prosthesis. He hated it. Hated them for their sympathy that reminded him he was a fucking cripple.

He eyed the stump, wondered why he hadn't let them re-amputate the leg at mid-thigh, the way the orthopods at Walter Reed had suggested. They'd have gotten most of the metal fragments, and by now he'd have been up and running—or at least walking fairly well if he'd applied himself as hard as he had when he'd been trying to pass the fitness tests so they'd let him stay on active duty. But returning to his unit had been a possibility with the below-knee amputation. He'd known fellow officers who'd done it, had been certain he'd be able to overcome this disability as well. If not for the shrapnel

his body kept rejecting piece-by-piece, he'd have succeeded. He'd have been a man, doing a man's work, not the object of anybody's pity.

In any case, he wouldn't put up with stares today. After re-bandaging the two wounds that would come in contact with his prosthesis, he rolled on two stump socks and snapped the stump into its custom-made socket. Getting carefully to his feet, he put weight on the prosthesis, found the pain bearable. More bearable than having people try so transparently not to stare at the empty space where his lower leg should have been.

He winced as he took the last of six steps from the bathroom to his closet where a selection of his shirts hung neatly in a row. The damn wounds weren't as healed as they looked. Choosing a burgundy print shirt he'd bought two years ago while on R&R in Hawaii, he shrugged it on, then gave in and picked up the forearm crutches he'd sworn he'd never use again. Better to use them than to end up passed out on Cheyenne's famed Greenway Path and somebody have to carry him back here.

Shoving his wallet and keys into his pockets, Jared made his way to the elevator, ticking off his plans as the outside-mounted cab made its way down the twelve floors of apartments to the ground. He'd take it easy, walk a little way along the pathway lined with fragrant evergreens and an occasional massive cottonwood tree, enjoy the wildflowers and the animals that always reminded him he was home. Maybe this time he'd make it to that spot where his neighbor kept saying he could enjoy a spectacular view of distant mountains that still had small caps of snow, even now, in midsummer. If not today, he'd make it there someday soon.

Chapter Two

She shouldn't have done it. But what the hell? Almost four years now, and she'd never stopped mourning for Earl. Until last night. Until she'd obsessed about the tall, rugged cowboy-soldier with all the pain in his eyes, to the point she'd consciously exposed herself to him. For him.

Ninia was about to do something equally stupid, if not more so. She stood in the office of Boundless Pleasure, the dungeon where she and Earl had played, waiting for the dungeon master to prepare an invitation.

"You sure he's a Dom?" Marshall Wallace asked, his gnarled fingers hesitating as he handed her the form. "If he's not and if he doesn't care much for our lifestyle, this could get us in a world of trouble."

She met the dungeon master's gaze, saw grief there for his friend who'd been almost like a son. Marshall's compassion for her had kept her stable in the months after they'd learned about Earl's death. "A submissive knows," she said, remembering the snippets of dreams Jared had verbalized in his sleep, his bitterness that seemed to go deeper than the death of his dreams for a career in the Marine Special Forces. "Besides, he mentioned he'd gone to a club in Vegas – a dungeon I visited once with Earl."

Never mind he'd talked about it in his sleep, and not, as far as she could tell, in the context of a D/s encounter he'd had in the place. Ninia just knew.

"Okay. It's on you if you're wrong." Marshall's frown morphed into a smile when he handed her the envelope inviting Jared McTavish to visit the exclusive dungeon where Ninia hadn't played since before Earl had left with his squadron to fight the War on Terror. "It's about time you stopped mourning and started living again. I assume I'll be seeing you here again, as well."

"Maybe so." While her intention—at least her conscious one—had been to shove Jared kicking and screaming back into the world she sensed he thought he'd forever lost rather than joining him in his rediscovery, that was before something had compelled her to strip naked and masturbate for his viewing pleasure. "I'm still afraid the memories will hurt too much, but I believe it's finally time for me to move on."

Marshall took her hand, massaged her palm with his callused thumb. "Good girl. Earl wouldn't have wanted you to bury yourself along with him, and that's what you've been doing."

No, Earl had been as generous as any man she'd ever known, never satisfied until he'd brought her pleasure. No way could she imagine him looking down from Heaven and faulting her for celebrating life. "I know, Marshall. But it's taken me a long time to tell him goodbye."

"Sure. I understand. Bring yourself on over here tonight. Play with your wounded Marine. Master Chad has booked the room with the observation dome for some suspension bondage play. Should be interesting—nobody else around here is better at rope bondage than Chad."

Earl had been better, at least at *Karada*, or net bondage. Many a day she had worn the confining ropes beneath her clothes, felt the arousal he'd intended when he put them there. But Earl was gone. The reminder didn't hurt Ninia the way it usually did. "That should be interesting, watching Chad do his magic. I don't imagine that demo would appeal to McTavish, though. Unless I miss my guess, his tastes in rope play will be pretty much limited to tossing lassos and restraining his partner."

"A basic sort of Dom, then." Marshall smiled then glanced out at the public room, where a member was working his flogger with less skill than Ninia was accustomed to seeing here in the club. "Go on. That guy just joined last week. Looks like I need to teach him how to flog his sub without doing her serious bodily harm. Don't be a stranger any more. We've missed you."

Ninia had missed this too. The arousal that came from being controlled, being forced to shed her inhibitions and experience the ultimate in sexual pleasure. Lured by a black leather corset with pink side lacings on a kneeling dummy in a display window, she stopped in the dungeon's toy shop. If she was going to get back in the dungeon scene, she'd need some new trappings.

What would turn Jared McTavish on? Earl had always wanted her to wear pastel colors, lots of lace and satin. Girly-girl stuff, he'd always said, and he'd brought her home something new every time he came back from a trip. Something made her believe Jared would prefer seeing his subs in leather and denim. A cowgirl outfit, complete with curled brim hat and knee-high boots to go with the denim short shorts and plaid shirt that tied below the breasts, caught her eye, so she laid it on the counter along with a slender riding crop she hoped he'd use on her.

Hmmm. She trembled slightly when she eyed a cat o'nine and imagined Jared wielding it with exquisite skill. It cost a bit much, considering her nurse's salary, so she decided that if he wanted one, he could buy it for himself. After perusing the selection of sex toys, she came back to the counter and bought the outfit she'd picked out, along with a length of silken rope whose royal blue color made it impossible to resist. Her pussy creamed at the thought of wearing it tonight. Wearing the rope bondage to honor Earl's memory, and later on the cowboy fantasy outfit for Jared's pleasure.

* * * * *

A few hours later Jared returned from his walk on Greenway Path, sore but feeling good that he'd managed pretty well with his prosthesis on the uneven terrain. The burger and fries he'd eaten at the restaurant across from his apartment complex had hit the spot, along with a longneck bottle of Blonde Ale. One good thing about being close to home, he thought – his favorite locally brewed libation was readily available.

When he stepped inside the door, he saw it. A large, cream-colored envelope with nothing but his name scrawled on it in bold, masculine print. Setting aside his crutches and bending carefully – a motion that was damn tricky to make on one gimpy leg and a

prosthesis—he picked up the thing and made his way to the nearest chair, a leather recliner.

Fuck. It was an invitation to a dungeon. Who the hell around here had guessed he'd been into the BDSM lifestyle? *Had been* being the operative word.

He searched his memory, trying to figure out who might have contacted this guy Marshall Wallace at a Cheyenne club called Boundless Pleasure. It had to have been his older brother Brad, who owned the club in Laramie where Jared had been a frequent visitor before enlisting and when he came home on leave. Nobody else Jared could think of was likely to have known his sexual tastes as well as his present location. Pulling his cell phone off the waistband of his jeans, he put in a call.

Nope. It wasn't Brad, although he'd been glad to hear Jared had gotten hooked up with what he'd heard was the best run dungeon in Cheyenne. Jared looked at the invitation again. It didn't matter who'd sent it, he wouldn't be going. Brad had apparently forgotten he wasn't the same guy he'd been a year ago. The Dom in him was gone, left somewhere on a windblown desert in western Iraq with his career...his future.

If he ever went out looking for a woman now, he'd be in the market for a nurturer, not a sub who needed nurturing. A strong woman, not one who'd look to him for strength and pleasure. When he'd first been discharged from Walter Reed and come home to Wyoming for further rehabilitation at the hospital where Ninia worked, he hadn't imagined he'd ever reach the point of wondering if a woman existed who'd take him as he was, love him for whatever he might have inside and not for the battered outside wrappings. But being close to home, getting a little more mobile every day, he was beginning to think about his future. To imagine someday there might be a woman who'd want him as he was.

Jared's gaze drifted to the expanse of glass that led to the patio. Wrong vantage point, but still he remembered as clearly as though her image were etched on his brain. Moonlight and a mystery woman as lonely as he, pleasuring herself on her patio for his

entertainment. His arousal. A woman who might be able to drive the recurring dreams with Nurse Ninia out of his head, even though he'd put Ninia's face on her when she aroused him.

Could his captivating neighbor have been the one who arranged this invitation? The more he thought of it, the more he figured maybe she had... Maybe he'd figure out which apartment his mystery woman lived in, find out who she was. Maybe he'd even go to her, offer her his cock instead of her dildo...

Would she like him to restrain her, pleasure her beyond anything she'd ever known? Damn it, he had no business fantasizing about an encounter that never would take place. Setting aside the invitation that had started his mind to wandering in a world of make-believe, he heaved himself out of the chair and limped off to bed. He'd rest a while, then maybe if he felt up to it, he'd check out the place called Boundless Pleasure.

So what if he found himself standing on the sidelines, observing other Doms pleasuring their subs? He figured there was nothing like a rude awakening to keep him focused on how his life had changed and reminded that since his injuries, some people inevitably would look at him not with desire, but with thinly veiled pity for what he'd lost. Figuratively as well as literally.

Chapter Three

Would Jared come tonight? Ninia hung out in the dressing room at Boundless Pleasure as long as she dared, counting goose bumps on her nearly naked body and toying with the full-face mask she was trying to work up enough courage to leave in the locker with her street clothes.

Four years. That's how long it had been since she'd come here with Earl the night before he shipped out. He'd shown off a new pattern of rope bondage he'd learned just for her, or so he'd whispered when she'd reached that delicious level of pleasure-pain that had her on the edge. As if it had been just yesterday, she felt the roughness of his hands, his callused fingertips. He'd caressed her throat, her back, everywhere but the spots he'd known would send her tumbling into a haze of Nirvana. A state he'd granted her—finally—by giving her his cock and fucking her before a dozen pairs of eyes, glowing like predators in the forest, attracted by the sexual energy he'd roused in her and himself. By giving her permission to come in his gruff, beloved voice when she'd thought she couldn't hold out a minute more. Then he'd untied her, tenderly, tugged on the slim gold chain he'd put around her neck the day they'd married. And ordered her to wait for him until he came home.

But a Taliban insurgent's bullet had come between them, kept him from keeping his promise. Ninia shed the mask, wiped a tear off her cheek. Her usually steady hands uncharacteristically clumsy, she fumbled with the elaborate clasp that undid the slender chain, letting the gold links slide through her fingers like tears of farewell.

She'd endured four years of loneliness and grief, but the memories weren't so painful now that she couldn't consider living...satisfying another Master's needs, taking pleasure from giving pleasure to him. It was almost as if Earl were there, guiding

her, lifting her hand and placing it in Jared's. His deep voice rang in her ears, almost as if he were beside her. *This was mine, but now I'm gone. Now she's yours to care for.*

Would Jared find the *Karada* bondage she'd decided to wear in Earl's memory arousing? She closed her eyes, imagined Jared tightening the confinement she'd always loved. He'd caress her with calloused hands the way he'd touched her last night with hungry eyes. Her mouth watered when she pictured him, still hard-muscled despite the ordeal of surgeries and recovery.

No, she shouldn't have surreptitiously managed to be the one accompanying him to the physical therapy rooms. But she had, and she'd nearly crumbled emotionally when she'd watched him working out his upper body so fiercely, as though he were still fighting insurgents. How he'd struggled, how he'd pushed those muscles he obviously had deemed too weak. She'd felt his determination in every grunt, each droplet of sweat that dotted his brow...in the tight set of his mouth as though he'd force the still-working parts of his body to be more powerful than ever or be damned trying.

He hadn't seen her watching. Hadn't known how much she'd wanted to tell him then that he wasn't weak. To whisper how he made her wet just looking at him, imagining him claiming her, taking her. To show him he was perfect in her eyes.

She visualized his long, thick cock, imagined as she had so many times when tending him in the hospital how satiny it would feel in her hands. Her skin tingled when she thought about the way he'd explore her body with his callused fingers before ordering her to take him in her mouth, her cunt, her ass.

Her pulse raced. Her heart pounded in her chest. She wanted a Master tonight—not just any Dom who might hit on her, but Jared. The wounded soldier who'd come to dominate her dreams. When she stepped into the main dungeon, she saw him.

Gorgeous. Bare-chested, with a light dusting of dark hair over well-developed pecs and impressively muscular arms, he wore low-riding black chaps over snug black jeans...and cowboy boots. Her gaze settled on the coiled black leather whip he clutched in his left fist. She'd guessed right—the cat was his specialty. Made sense, with him

having come from the rugged Wyoming ranch country near the Colorado border, as he'd mentioned the first day while she filled in the blanks in his patient history after he came onto her inpatient unit at the hospital.

Jared stood in the entryway to the main dungeon, not yet certain if he'd stay. Then he spied a familiar face. Ninia.

Not that he hadn't pictured her in a dungeon like this. But he'd imagined her decked out in black leather and stiletto-heeled boots, whip in hand. Not like the submissive angel who stood, eyes downcast, decked out in loosely tied *Karada* bondage that drew his gaze to her naked breasts and pussy.

There was something more seductive than plain bare skin about the intricate pattern of royal blue rope against her pale, creamy body. He watched her eyelids flutter, her full lips curve upward in a shy smile. Her eyes remained downcast, as a good sub's should, yet he sensed she recognized him, that she'd singled him out somehow even before he'd noticed her. Like the woman across the courtyard last night, she wore her blonde hair loose, trailing down her back, soft curls caressing each womanly curve. Who had wrapped the intricate pattern of blue nylon rope? Apparently not her Master, for she waited with the other unattached subs for an invitation to play.

Jared figured he might fit the role of submissive better now that he wasn't all he'd been, but that thought didn't set well. He'd planned to say he was just here to observe tonight and not commit to either preference, but when the dungeon master had asked him his chosen role and orientation he'd answered automatically, "Dominant. Heterosexual," as he'd done countless times in dungeons around the world.

Old habits died hard. Real hard.

Making a conscious effort not to limp, he made his way across the room, not realizing until he stopped in front of Ninia that he'd been headed for her all along. It shocked the hell out of him because she already knew his physical limitations when the other subs wouldn't have seen them right away. He'd assumed his nurse, who'd seen

him helpless and battered, would be the last one he'd want, for fear it would be a pity fuck. But it was as if his recurring dream had become reality. She had his cock rock-hard, his balls aching. There was no other woman in the room he could see past her.

"Without your uniform you are one hell of a beautiful woman," he told her, reaching out his hand in invitation. "Come with me."

When he noticed her eyes glistening with tears, he remembered she'd lost a serviceman-husband. Undoubtedly a Master, since she was obviously a practiced sub. He met her gaze and knew. This was her first venture into the world of BDSM in a long, long time—most likely since before her husband had shipped out for the last time. Would Jared, limited as he was by his injuries, be able to wipe out the pain he'd glimpsed so briefly in her eyes? He didn't know, but there was no way he could turn away, deny her whatever pleasure he could give her.

As though she sensed his doubts, she smiled, her tongue darting out to dampen her lips in shy invitation. "Yes, Master Jared." He could barely hear her, but he saw the longing in her eyes. "What can I do to please you?"

If he'd told her all the things he'd fantasized her doing to him, she probably would have run, so he stroked her satiny arm the way he might gentle a skittish mare. "Many things, but first I'd like to know I'm not stepping onto another Dom's property. Who tied your *Karada*?"

"I did, Master. My husband taught me how, and I thought of doing it because Master Chad is presenting a demonstration of the art tonight for everyone to view. The binding is loose, so if it pleases you, you may tighten it."

If it pleased him? He couldn't remember feeling as alive—as whole—as when he felt the softness of her skin beneath his fingers, the rhythmic pulsing of a delicate vein. Jared reached out, traced the intricate pattern of rope around her slender neck, down between her breasts, around and down past her hipbones over her downy mound. She'd done this to seduce him, and knowing that made him feel a Master's responsibility to bring her pleasure. "I'm not an expert in the art of Japanese rope

bondage, so I will think of this as merely an arousing wrapping for an incredibly erotic package. I want to shave you here. I like eating a smooth pussy.”

“Whatever gives you pleasure. Master.” A tiny tremor went through her body, made him wonder...

She was being too damn compliant, even for a sub. Suspicion washed over Jared — suspicion she might be doing the Good Samaritan bit for a Dom who couldn’t dominate without his sub’s overt consent. “I may want to fuck your ass.”

Her nipples hardened noticeably at his bald declaration. “That would please me immeasurably.” Those words slammed into him, got his heart to pounding, his mouth watering to taste those rosy nubs. So what if she was in it for a pity fuck? He wasn’t about to question her motives, not when she was here and she was hot. The heady smell of her sex already filled his nostrils, and he’d barely touched her. His balls throbbed and his cock pressed painfully against his zippered fly. “Come then, I’ll get us a private torture chamber.” He wasn’t ready to strip in front of between twenty and thirty strangers. Not yet. Maybe not ever.

* * * * *

One on one. Ninia wasn’t surprised Jared wanted to play their scene between just the two of them, but she found herself craving privacy too, needing to go into this one step at a time. Yes. She’d enjoyed group scenes with Earl, found it exciting to have strangers watching him play her body like a fine violin. It had aroused her when he’d allowed his fellow Doms to join him in their sex play, sometimes even to take whatever holes he wasn’t using at the time. But this was different, a first time with a new Master. She sensed it was Jared’s first scene since his injury, as well. When she heard the heavy door close with a thud, she took in a deep breath, felt the heat of Jared’s dark eyes burning into her from behind.

"I'm going to unwrap my present now," he told her, his deep, mellow voice sending chills down her spine as he laid his hands over hers and splayed their fingers over her belly. "Help me."

In those two words she sensed his doubt. His vulnerability. His determination to give her what she wanted in spite of the emotional baggage obvious from the way he'd dressed to cover the evidence of his loss. And she wanted to heal him, give him back...

But then he pulled her close, stole her thoughts with pure sexual sensations. The heat of his body, the rasp of his leather chaps and jeans against the backs of her legs, the woodsy smell of a light cologne, the powerful aura of a Master surrounded her, reassured her, made her feel lightheaded as she glanced around the chamber he'd chosen.

Big enough for a group scene, the paneled room reminded her of a bedroom in the bordello in an old-West movie she'd once seen, with its roughly hewn four-poster bed, matching washstand, and a mirrored wardrobe conveniently placed beside the big bed. One of the wardrobe doors was ajar, showing off an array of toys that seemed somehow incongruous with the antique furniture. Her heart beat faster when she noticed a sturdy spanking horse centered on a red frieze carpet beside the bed and imagined Jared restraining her across it, using that cat o' nine to flick at her tender skin.

The room suited him. Suited them. Her hands moved beneath his, found where she'd tied the rope and loosened the knot. "Here, it's loose now, Master. Do you want me to unwrap it?"

"No. I want to see how it's done, because I intend to learn how to wrap the rope myself." Very slowly, gently, taking his time to free her from the silken rope, he bent and nuzzled her neck. His warm breath heated her, made her want him to hurry, take her, force her to unleash all the restraint put on her by a long-ago promise that could never be fulfilled.

Earl had bound her as surely as if he'd been the one to tie the *Karada* in the dressing room tonight. Now Jared was releasing her, symbolically. Releasing her so he could

take her and make her his, for tonight. Maybe longer. She absorbed his heat, his strength...the desire that surrounded them as the rope slid gently off her body onto the floor.

He reached out, took her hand, led her to the bed and laid back the red brocade coverlet. "Stand here a minute." Limping now but looking no less powerful because of it, he moved to the washstand, grabbed a towel and came back to spread it on the edge of the bed. "Now sit down and spread your legs for me."

"Yes, Master." When he sat beside her and drew one of her legs over his thigh, she felt his erection and wished she dared to touch him there. But she didn't. It felt so good when he lathered up her pussy and began to shave her, following the razor with his fingers to be sure he'd made her completely smooth. Moisture gushed, slickened her flesh so his fingers glided over it. God, it had been so long. She needed to come, prayed he'd order her to do so. But he didn't. Her clit hardened, elongated, throbbed with anticipation as he worked the razor around her ass. "Oh, yesss."

"There, that's the way I like my pussy." He set the razor down then stroked along her slit, slipping one long finger up her pussy before moving back and working it gently up her ass. "So soft. So wet. So fucking tight. I'm going to have to stretch your rear so it can take my cock."

"Please, Master." Had he always been so considerate, or had the horrors he'd endured tempered his Dominance, made him go easy, shield his partner from the rough edges Earl had always exhibited not only in public D/s scenes but also when they'd been alone, like this?

She loved the way Jared caressed her with his gaze. "Relax. Your pulse is racing already and we've barely begun. I want you so hot you're screaming for me to let you come." Lifting her leg and setting it on the bed, he stood, looked at the selection of toys and chose a bright blue anal plug from a shelf in the wardrobe. A shadow of pain crossed his face when he shifted his weight to the right, and the nurse in her longed to

have him sit, remove not only the jeans he now was unzipping to free his long, thick cock but also the prosthesis she was sure must have been hurting him.

The sub in her kept quiet, concentrated on the cold, wet sensation of the lubricated plug as he worked it into her ass...and the delicious sight of his huge, rigid sex, already glistening wet at its purple-veined tip, beckoning her touch. Her tongue. "Master, may I..."

He stepped up to her, gave silent permission. She leaned forward, tasted him, took his cock head in her mouth and swirled her tongue over the pulsating, velvety flesh. He caught her head between his hands, guided her to take him deeper. "Swallow it, honey. Take it all. Oh yeah, suck me, like that." His words dissolved into a moan when she bent her head back and took him deep. He tasted good. Clean, a little salty. When she reached and weighed his heavy seed sac in both hands, he leaned closer, encouraging her.

She liked the smooth feel of his balls and around his anus, wondered if he'd been thinking of her when he shaved all but the thick, trimmed nest of dark hair that surrounded his cock. She swallowed around his cock as she ran a finger slowly around his asshole.

His cock twitched against her throat, and he shuddered when she started to work that finger against his anal sphincter. "Stop or you'll make me come," he ordered, stepping back and depriving her of his cock. "Get up and stretch out over the spanking horse. It's obvious you need some punishment."

Now he sounded like a Dom, certain of what he wanted and what he expected of her. She liked that, liked that for the moment he'd apparently forgotten everything but what they were doing...what he intended to do to bring her pleasure.

Completely naked other than for the butt plug that stretched her tight rear entrance, she was feeling especially vulnerable as she moved from the bed. A delicious shiver of anticipation tinged with fear surged through her as she bent over the padded device, resting her belly against the red leather-covered top. A shiver went through her when

he came up behind her, bent, spread her legs and secured them to the closest sawhorse uprights with Velcro straps. Anticipating his next move, she gripped the uprights on the other side with both her hands.

"That's a good sub," he said when he came around and found her waiting for him to fasten the cuffs. "Is your naughty pussy ready to take some punishment?"

Her pussy was throbbing, the tissue swollen with arousal. Her own juices flowed over her denuded skin, heightening the feelings. More than that, her emotions peaked at the prospect of him driving out the guilt, leaving her with nothing but the ecstasy she'd hardly realized how much she'd missed over the lonely years since Earl... "Yesss, Master, I've been a bad, bad girl. Please whip your naughty slave." She felt his hands on her shoulders, moving lower, caressing her bare flesh with searching fingers until he reached her butt cheeks and massaged them in a circular motion. He bent, a little shakily she thought, and nipped at the sweet spot just below the hairline at the back of her neck. "Mmmm."

He stepped back, out of her line of vision. Her breath caught in her throat at the thought of having the cat o' nine peppering her skin with its metal-tipped tendrils—of having her Master provide her the punishment she needed to find release.

Craccckkkkk. She'd been anticipating the bite of Jared's whip against her naked flesh. Instead she felt only air rushing by when the whip missed her by less than an inch.

He chuckled. "Guess this is one skill that hasn't gotten rusty. Next one's for real. I can hardly wait to soothe your pretty bottom after I redden it with this."

The next crack preceded a sharp series of stings as the ends of the cat made contact with her tender flesh. Again. And once more, she experienced the sort of pleasure-pain she'd almost forgotten, sensation that had her pussy wet, wanting...

"So wet. I like that." Jared stroked along her damp, swollen pussy lips with his right hand. Then he set aside the whip and traced the burning ribbons where it had marked her ass cheeks, his touch incredibly gentle. Incredibly arousing. "We'll go slow. You're so damn soft...like silk. Does this feel good?"

It felt good, yes. And he looked good enough to eat, naked now but for his boots and chaps. Seeing his cock curving upward toward his flat belly, watching a vein on its underside throbbing rhythmically, made her mouth water. His balls had drawn up tight against his body, a dead giveaway to the height of his arousal. The taste of him was still fresh on her tongue...salty and sexy and... "Oh, yes." It had been so long, too long, since she'd felt a Master's touch. Too long since she'd paid a lover homage with her hands and mouth. "May I service you now, Master?"

"In good time." He seemed in no hurry, stroking her first with one hand and then the other, as though learning her by Braille. She held the position, hands and ankles restrained, loving the anticipation, enjoying the slow arousal, Jared's seeming fascination with the pulse points behind her knees, the exaggerated curve of her spine. When he bent and blew along the length of her newly shaved slit, the sensation triggered waves of tiny shocks she felt deep in her belly. "Don't come," he warned, giving her a sharp slap on the backside with the flattened palm of his hand. "Not until I give you permission."

He wanted her more than he'd wanted water when he'd been lost in the desert, more than he feared she'd reject him when she saw his scars, the functional but ugly prosthesis his boots and chaps couldn't quite hide. No, wait a minute, she'd already seen those scars. She'd seen his naked stump with blood oozing from the spots where the goddamn metal fragments kept working their way out. He ran his palms along the length of her firm, slender thighs, was rewarded with a soft moan that sounded a lot like "Jared."

When he ringed her pink asshole with a finger and jostled the plug, she squirmed and whimpered. "You like that, don't you?"

"Oh, yesss." She drew out the word so it sounded like an ecstatic sigh. Realizing her dead husband must have taught her every kink in the book aroused him yet sent a tiny twinge of jealousy through his brain. *Come off it. You're no virgin, either, and the last thing*

you'd want would be one who'd have to get over screaming at your scars before she'd let you teach her.

Bending, he unfastened her bonds, pausing on the way up to caress the firm flesh of her inner thighs. "Get up on the bed now. Lie on your back and spread your legs."

She lost no time complying, and he wished he had as much confidence in her motives as he did in her need to be fulfilled. "Like this, Master?" Her lips were moist, slightly open, begging to be kissed—or wrapped around his cock, sucking out his climax. In another time and place he'd have obliged her, stood motionless while she knelt at his feet, arms wrapped around his calves while she gave him head. But not tonight. Tonight he'd fuck her until she screamed for mercy, and then maybe he'd let her taste him coming in her mouth.

He moved between her outstretched legs. God, but she was wet and swollen, so tempting to his starved libido. So trusting, so ready to take whatever pleasure he chose to give. "Yeah. Just like that. Relax and don't move." As he'd done a hundred times before in another life, he lifted the silk scarves tied to each of the four posts on the bed and laid them across her wrists and ankles. He didn't tie them, instead relied on her obeying his order to stay still, flex her knees outward, let him in.

It suddenly hit him that being a Master wasn't all about physical compulsion, that much of being a Dom involved emotional control. Still, he couldn't get it out of his head... "Are you doing this because you feel sorry for a beat-up soldier?" he asked as he withdrew the plug from her ass.

She lay there for a minute, her expression reflecting hurt, amazement...and anger inappropriate for a sub to express toward her Master. Then she moved, her motion deliberate, sliding off the bed and onto her knees before him. "Don't you dare think that! Do you have any idea how long I've dreamed about you taking me? About you letting me taste you this way? When you were in the hospital, you dreamed. You commanded someone to her knees. When you did, I got wet." Cupping his aching balls in both her soft, warm hands, she bent and licked away the drop of lubrication in the

slit of his cock. Then she looked up at him, the burning desire evident in her gaze. "I had Marshall send you the invitation..."

"How did you know I'd be into this lifestyle?" Right now he didn't care. Her hands were on his thighs, her pretty head resting against his belly as she looked up at him with those big blue eyes. But he had a feeling she needed to tell him, so he threaded his fingers through her hair and made her look him in the eye. "Tell me."

"When you were sleeping, you'd dream. And say things that made me know you're a Master. Lots of times you'd cry out in your sleep and I'd come stand by you. You'll never know how much I wanted to crawl into that bed with you, comfort you."

He bent and lifted her. He let her feel the strength of his arms when he held her tight. His mouth came down on hers, hard, and he tongue-fucked her the same insistent way he intended to fuck her wet, hot cunt. "Lie back down and spread your legs for me," he growled.

This time he knotted the silk ties, holding her helpless for his pleasure – and hers.

"Yesss, Master. Please fuck me."

"All in good time, my naughty little slave." Leaning over her, he took her mouth again, using his fingers to play with her tight little nipples. When she whimpered with pleasure, he raised up, giving the rosy nubs a farewell twist as he stood and moved to the wardrobe again.

As she moaned with her arousal, he squeezed lubricant onto his index and middle fingers before slowly working them past her tight anal sphincter, stretching her, readying her to take the larger plug he'd selected. Someday he'd fuck her ass, but not tonight, not until he'd stretched her enough so she could take his cock without pain. He withdrew his fingers, replacing them with the plug until its flared base rested against her tight, inviting rear entrance.

"I want you to wear this for me when you're home," he said when the last and largest of the three sections slipped inside her. "Imagine it's my cock in you, stretching you, fucking you." When she whimpered his name he added, "Soon enough, I will fuck

your pretty ass." It didn't escape his lust-driven mind that he'd just assumed this was to be a long-term situation. That deep in the back of his mind lay a growing feeling that Ninia was the woman over whom he'd like to exert full ownership. That realization didn't make him pull back, the way it had when he'd thought it with countless women in his past.

Before, he'd been just passing through between assignments in different ones of the world's hotspots. Anbar Province. Afghanistan. Before that, Serbia and the Philippines. None of them places to take a woman. He hadn't had time or energy to think of home or commitment, or even taking a slave for much more than a few nights' pleasure. Now he might be battered, but he was free. No longer a willing slave to the Marine Corps but a free man. Free to take a lover other than the Corps. Free to fall in lust and love, to commit himself to his woman's pleasure.

She squirmed against her bonds. Her mouth was tight, as though she was trying not to cry out, not to beg him to ease her arousal. His balls tightened at the sight of her nipples, distended, tight, beckoning his hands and mouth. He dared not look at her cunt because, if he did, he was afraid he'd come on the spot.

No. He had more self-control than that. Staying on his feet, he stroked the length of her body, catching her nipples between his fingers and twisting them until she moaned. He soothed the welts the cat had made on her sides and her thighs, inhaling the sweet musk of her sex and pinching her impudent little clit that poked temptingly from her satiny labia. "Feel good, sweetheart?"

"Oh, yesss. Fuck me now, Master, please." She sounded tortured, as if forming her words took too much concentration. "God, I need to come."

So did Jared. He wasted no time shedding his boots and chaps and rolling on a condom. Moving onto the bed and settling on his knees between her legs, he rubbed his cock along her wet, hot slit, found her cunt and sank inside. "Oh, yeah. You feel fantastic. So hot and wet. So tight. I could fuck you all night long. Squeeze me, baby." She worked her inner muscles on him. His balls drew up, preparing...

Too soon. He didn't want it over with, not yet. Not until she wanted to come so much she'd scream with frustration when he told her no. Deliberately he slowed the pace, rocking in and out, first shallow then deep, grinding his pelvis against her satiny mound, resting his hands on her ribcage and tugging at her rigid nipples. He tried to ignore the incredibly erotic feelings, the persistent pressure from the plug through the thin layer of her flesh that separated her two welcoming holes.

Pressure built inside his balls, his cock twitched. "Come for me now!" he ordered, fucking her hard, closing his eyes and pounding into her G-spot until she arched her hips to his and screamed. Her cunt contracted around him like a vise, drawing out his own shuddering climax.

When he opened his eyes, he fully expected to find her gone, to discover she was only another torturous dream.

Chapter Four

But Ninia was beside Jared, straining against the ties that bound her. She wanted to touch him, feel the tremors that still rippled through his big body. Her heart still pounded in her chest as she fought to catch her breath.

"Thank you, Master," she said when he bent over her and began to loosen her bonds.

"Thank *you*, sweetheart." His grin was feral, the look in his eyes that of a sated male who'd just staked his claim. "Since you like Japanese rope bondage so much, we'll go watch this Master Chad demonstrate it if you wish. I'd be remiss if I didn't learn an art that so obviously brings you pleasure." Standing, he stepped back into his boots and strapped the black chaps low on his waist.

But Ninia had seen him hesitate before leaving his jeans on the chair beside the bed, and she sensed his reluctance to leave the safety of their private cocoon. "If you'd prefer it, I could show you how. Here. Now." Sensing that was what he wanted, she rose and stood before him.

"I'd like that. You have no idea how incredibly sexy you looked, bound that way." He gestured toward the pile of royal blue nylon rope he'd unwrapped. "I figure there must be seventy feet of rope here. Plenty to net you nicely."

"Sixty-five feet to be exact, Master. The wrapping's not as complicated as it looks."

His dark eyes glittered with barely concealed desire. "Show me."

"First, you fold the rope in half and put the loop around my neck."

He did it, his fingers brushing the spots just below her ears, sending shivers of delight along the sensitive nerve ends there. "Okay. Now I knot it, right?"

"Right. The first knot needs to be here." She reached up and showed him the spot, above the upper end of her breastbone. "Now make more knots every seven inches or so. Don't pull them tight now, that way you'll be able to adjust them later to the exact positions where you want them."

"Got it. Now the doubled rope goes between your legs, up your back, and..." He shot her an inquisitive look.

"Now you pull the ends of the rope through the loop around my neck. Careful. Don't pull it too tight."

"Never." He ran a finger around her neck, slowly checking to be sure there was enough slack. The gesture made her feel cherished—protected, as much as she could remember ever having felt under a Master's hand. "What next?"

"Next you thread the ends of the rope through the loop between the first and second knots. Run both ends to the back again, pull them through the first loop on the back, and back again to the front, into the loop between the second and third knots. Keep going until you get to the last loops at the bottom, and tie off the loose ends."

Jared took a step back, admired his work and grinned, as though he thought he'd performed some great feat. "How'd I do, my pretty submissive?"

"Very well, Master." Ninia presented her back. "You need to adjust the knots here so they're not right on my spine. Right or left, it doesn't matter, but when you tighten the net, the pressure on the spinal column gets painful—even dangerous—if the knots are on the spinal column."

He wasted no time moving the knots, meticulously settling them the way she suggested, stroking the skin around her, making her crazy with need. The delicious pressure of the rope on her tender flesh increased as Jared tightened her bonds. "Your safe word is 'nurse'", he whispered as he made one final adjustment. "On your knees, now. I want to feel your sweet mouth on my cock."

She wanted that too. Each knot of the *Karada* pressed against her throat and breasts when she went back on her knees. With every motion, her bonds reminded her of his

power, her helplessness. He loomed large before her, his erection jutting proudly from the dark nest of curls between his thighs. A powerful phallic symbol, living, throbbing, framed once again in those black chaps that had the not-unpleasant smell of leather fresh from the tannery.

She stuck out her tongue, tasted the drop of lubrication at the tip of his smooth, plum-shaped cock head. "Oooh." Salty, slightly bitter, deliciously male. Her lips went slack, and she took him in her mouth. Tilted her head back and swallowed, consuming him, giving him head as pressure from the net reminded her of her enslavement and made her pussy ache for him to fuck her.

"You like sucking cock, I can tell. Jesus, your mouth feels like heaven." He knotted his fists in her hair, holding her steady to take the rhythmic thrusts of his hips against her lips. "Yeah. That's it, make me come if you can."

Yes. She liked it. Liked him. Liked the feeling of being alive again, of giving pleasure to another human being...a man who'd been through hell and survived to come home. "Jared," she murmured, though the word was lost but for the reverberations of sound that rippled through her throat, his cock and balls.

"Stop. Now." If she didn't, Jared was going to explode, and despite what he'd told her, he didn't want to. Not yet. Not until he took her every way, claimed every orifice. Not until he drove away the loneliness, the doubts, the fear that when he opened his eyes Ninia would be gone, another mirage sent from hell to tease and taunt him.

But right now she was real. Beautiful and beautifully submissive in the *Karada* bondage she'd taught him to apply, caught like a flitting butterfly within a net of her own design. Jared lifted her to her feet, loving her responsiveness, the fine sheen of perspiration that made her pale skin glisten. "Shall I open the curtain to the observation window?" he asked once he'd pulled down the coverlet and settled her on her back on the bed.

"Only if you wish to, Master Jared."

At the moment he didn't care if the whole fucking world saw his scars, not if having observers would enhance her pleasure. But he sensed her reluctance, imagined she might have played out similar scenes here with her late husband and might feel awkward if other members were to watch her putting his memory to rest. "We'll leave them closed this time."

He sat beside her and traced the blue net, soothing the small angry marks made where the knots abraded her tender skin, the light welts he'd put on her with the cat. "You're beautiful." And so responsive. Her nipples beaded at the mere brush of his fingertips, and when he pinched them, she let out a high-pitched whimper that spoke more of pleasure than pain. "I want you to have these pierced."

"Yes, Master." From her quick response he surmised she realized he wanted to own her long-term. It pleased him immeasurably that she didn't spit out her safe word and run for cover.

He bent his head, took a nipple in his mouth and sucked it, hard. When he did, he felt her hand in his hair, a caress more than an effort to hold him to her breast. Soothing yet incredibly arousing, it was a lover's touch however fleeting it might be. Her giving made him want to give back, show her pleasure beyond this D/s scene, beyond a night.

Unconfined but for the rope net, Ninia held a position of submission, arms outstretched, legs apart, open for his inspection and use. Jared stroked her inner thighs, assuring himself by touch as well as sight and sound that she was here and she was real, awaiting his pleasure.

When she stirred and lifted her hips in blatant invitation, he removed the butt plug, untied the *Karada* bondage he'd tied moments earlier and unwound the silken rope from her lush body. "I want your arms around me, your gorgeous legs wrapped around my waist when I take you."

He wanted her to want him. Not just as a convenient release from sexual tension, not only for whatever satisfaction a sub found by relinquishing control. He wanted her

to desire Jared McTavish the man, with all the emotional baggage he carried, all his scars.

For a moment it seemed she hesitated, but then she smiled and laid a hand against his cheek. "It will be my pleasure, Master. My greatest pleasure."

So, with the curtains drawn in a private room at Boundless Pleasure, Jared had the most satisfying sex in his thirty-two years of living. Plain vanilla sex, more or less missionary position. No toys and no kink. Just him and Ninia wrapped in each other's arms, their bodies locked together in ecstasy.

Reality. No posturing, just a sharing like he'd never known before. *God, let it last. Let this be real.* For the first time in his life he wanted to fall in love, not just in lust.

* * * * *

Later on, when he waited for a cab to take him home, he clutched the folded paper Ninia had given him along with a shy promise that if he'd join her at her place the next night, she'd fix him a home-cooked meal. When he recognized her address as being in the same apartment complex as his, he wondered... Could she have been the one who'd given him the show of his life last night? Time would tell.

Chapter Five

Ninia hummed the next morning as she prepared the yogurt and granola she ate for breakfast. She could barely wait to be with Jared again. Every move she made, the plug he'd ordered her to wear brushed against the tender flesh of her anus, reminding her last night had been real. Very real.

Not that she needed a reminder. With his careful mastery, he'd managed to imprint himself on every cell of her body. Her nipples tingled, her pussy wept, and her skin remembered every skillfully laid welt, each knot in the *Karada* he'd tied a little clumsily but with incredible care for her well-being and pleasure.

She had an appointment at ten to follow his orders and have her nipples pierced. Crossing to the patio door where she'd exposed herself to him, she looked across the courtyard, hoping to get a glimpse of him. No luck. He was sleeping, she imagined, rolling her nipples between her thumbs and forefingers and wondering what kind of jewelry he'd want her to wear in them. She'd never thought of body piercings before—Earl hadn't cared for them on females even though he'd sported one of his own, a thick curved barbell that entered his cock on its underside and exited through the eye in its head. Now the idea of piercing her intimate flesh for Jared had her panties damp, her heart pounding with anticipation.

She'd get gold hoops, she thought, simple and elegant. Imagining him hooking a finger through them, twisting them until she moaned with the pleasure-pain of it, had her practically panting with anticipation. He'd want to use them to tug her until his lightly furred chest brushed her nipples. Then he'd bend and catch a ring with his teeth, tugging the captive nipple into his mouth. She could hardly wait until she got the piercings and healed. Imagining him looking at them, knowing she'd pierced them for him had her pussy swollen and wet with anticipation.

Oh, yes. She could barely wait to feel the sharp bite of the needle as it pressed through her nipples, experience the unfamiliar weight of the hoops hanging from that sensitive flesh. Fingering her hairless mound and recalling the care with which Jared had shaved her there last night, she decided she'd go one step farther and have her entire body waxed smooth. Jared would like that, she was certain. The rest of the day she'd spend preparing, not just for dinner but in every way she could think of that would turn her lover on. Her Master, if she had her way.

* * * * *

The sun was close to its zenith when Jared opened his eyes and looked out the window. For the first time since his injury, he'd slept a full eight hours. He grinned as the events at Boundless Pleasure last night flooded his memory – and let out a big sigh of relief when he reread the dinner invitation Ninia had handed him before sliding behind the wheel of her car and driving away late last night. After limping back from the parking lot to the door of the club where he'd waited for a cab, he'd read it. Her words, penned in neat, rounded letters had practically obliterated the pain that had kept trying to remind him he shouldn't have stayed on his feet so much.

Suddenly he felt as if he needed to get his life moving. As if he had a future worth looking forward to. He looked around the sparsely furnished apartment, realized it was time to move along. Time to go home and put the Special Forces behind him. Picking up the phone, he called his brother Brad and arranged to have someone go clean up the big log cabin his grandfather had left him on his part of the family's nine-thousand-acre ranch.

His stump hurt like hell, but he didn't care. If he was going to take Ninia home, he needed to buy a car or truck. Somehow the idea of asking the dealer to equip the vehicle of his choice with hand controls didn't seem quite as embarrassing as it had been at first. He'd balked at the requirement soon after arriving in Cheyenne a few weeks earlier, after a hard-faced woman at the Wyoming Department of Motor Vehicles had insisted he'd have to have "handicapped assist" controls if he wanted to drive.

Several hours later, Jared was even sorer. He was also the proud owner of a shiny, black Honda Ridgeline pickup, and the dealer had assured him he'd have the console-mounted hand control installed on it within two days. Damn it, he'd never liked an automatic transmission, especially in country like this where snow was pretty much a constant seven or eight months of the year. Since the DMV required it, though, that's what he'd have to live with. What he'd be fucked if he'd do was hang out a handicap placard for everyone to see. He could make his way from a regular parking spot just like everybody who hadn't lost a limb. And nobody better dare try to tell him he couldn't.

* * * * *

After firing up the gas grill on the patio and setting out a pair of T-bone steaks to come to room temperature, Ninia scurried around her condo, dusting here, moving a photo of Earl off the mantel and settling it in the drawer of a side table. "You'd like Jared," she said, caressing the glass covering her husband's smiling face, certain as she looked at his silent image that he'd given his blessing last night in the club when she'd removed the chain he'd used to collar her and stored it figuratively into the spot in her heart where she kept her most cherished memories.

She was alive. And so was her new Master. She started a pot of coffee then remembered Jared had always asked for tea at the hospital and put the teapot on the stove. The activity helped her ignore the stinging in her newly pierced nipples every time the hoops swayed as she moved—and the growing arousal that had her anxious for Jared to arrive and put out the fire.

She'd been hot ever since she left the piercing parlor, and the body waxing she'd had done afterward had fanned the flame. A whole day preparing to serve her Master, down to a thorough internal cleansing done before her bath, had her focusing on her body and all the delicious things he'd do to her—even before she'd lubricated and reinserted the plug he'd ordered her to wear. Before she'd dried herself, taking frequent looks in the mirror to watch her new gold hoops dangling merrily from her sore,

puckered nipples, to check her buttocks and see the slightly raised welts he'd given her. Finally she'd put on a midriff top and a skirt that barely covered her ass, and tied her hair back in a high ponytail that bared her newly waxed hairline for a lover's pleasure and her own. She could hardly wait to feel Jared's hot breath on that sensitive skin, the rasp of his teeth and the rough callused surface of his fingertips as he held her to him for a deep, hard kiss. Unable to resist, she reached up and stroked that strangely erogenous spot at the base of her skull until her nipples swelled against their new rings and her inner thighs grew wet.

Now all she had left to do was calm her frazzled nerves. And wait for Jared to show up for the dinner she'd promised. She watched him coming out of the glass-walled elevator across the way, noticed he was limping badly. His stump had to be hurting. He'd worn the prosthesis all night last night. She understood why—stupid male pride—but now he obviously was paying the price in pain. Damn it, he didn't even have his crutches!

His stump was going to be a bloody mass of pain. Making a detour to her bathroom, she grabbed a first aid kit and set it on the coffee table on her way to answering the front door.

When she opened the door he strode by her, slid open the patio door and looked out over the courtyard. Then he turned back, stared at her framed in the doorway, an intense look on his face. Seizing her and dragging her hard against him, momentarily driving any thoughts of nursing him from her head, he practically torched her with the intensity of his gaze. "It was you," he growled, laying his hands on her shoulders and holding her at arms' length. "My little temptress on the balcony. When I saw your address last night I wondered... God, I can't believe it. You're the one who gave me one hell of a show the other night."

She wouldn't even try to deny it. "I also was the one who got you the invitation to Boundless Pleasure. I don't know why I want a Master who's too stubborn to take care of his body so he can enjoy having me pleasure him, but I do. Come here."

Before she could stop him, he'd scooped her up in his arms. "My body's doing just fine. Aching to fuck you until you can't stand up, right after you feed me." He jostled the butt plug, shot her a self-satisfied grin. "It pleases me that you've followed my instruction." When he set her down, he was grinning, but she saw the pain in his dark, expressive eyes and realized what his act of bravado had cost him.

"Go sit down. On the couch. I saw how badly you were limping when made your way across the courtyard."

For a minute he stared at her, his expression transforming from desire to anger—or bitter disappointment. He looked as though he might walk out, but instead he moved to the couch. "Sorry, sweetheart. I'm not angry with you. It's this that disappoints me when it won't do what it's supposed to do." He gestured toward his leg. "Kind of hard, being a Dom when I can't get past the fact of this. But the soreness is nothing. Just a little swelling in the stump. Happens all the time."

"I imagine it does, especially when you don't use common sense. No, don't sit just yet. Let me get these pants off you."

His grin was absolutely feral—and a bit nasty. "Eager, are you?"

She wished she dared wipe that smirk off his handsome face. "Right now I'm eager to see how badly you've hurt yourself. Don't you know you don't have to pretend this didn't happen to you?" As she dragged his khakis down, she rested a hand on the socket of his prosthesis, then slid it up onto his scarred thigh. "Now sit."

"Hey, who's Master here?" His smile turned to a scowl, and he made a move to heave himself up off the couch. "I came for dinner. I can get TLC at the hospital when I go for my therapy."

Ninia kept on, slipping off his shoes and stripping him down to his plain white boxer briefs before looking up at him and issuing a challenge. "Right now we're nurse and patient, not Master and slave. Let's get this thing off and see what damage you've done."

"If you insist." He reached down to loosen the prosthesis, unapologetically brushing his fingers over her breast on the way. "Damn it, don't you understand I don't want my lover having to take care of me like this? I want to be a Master for you, not a pathetic cripple who needs tending."

So that was it. Ninia stopped what she was doing and looked him in the eye. "You don't get it. You don't see it, you dense cowboy. Being a Master has nothing to do with physical ability, although you've got plenty of that. It's something bone-deep, some quality I recognized in you the first time you came onto my ward." She paused, took a deep breath, formed the words in her head before saying them aloud. "You look at me, just look at me with those intense brown eyes, and I get wet. I want to get on my knees like this and take your cock in my mouth. I want to feel you taking me over. But I can't do that if you kill yourself."

"I'm not going to kill myself." As though daring her to argue, he slid the prosthesis off and peeled back the stump sock, revealing his swollen flesh and a couple of raw, red spots where the doctors had worked out more pieces of shrapnel a few days earlier.

She could barely control the fury that he'd treated himself this way. "If you're going to keep doing this to yourself, you might as well grab a gun and do it the easy way," she snarled, pointing at his inflamed leg. "How the hell did you stand to walk over here with your leg swollen like this? Why did you? All you'd have needed to do was look, and you'd have known you ought to have left the prosthesis off and used your crutches."

"Calm down, would you?"

"No. I won't calm down." She took some sterile antiseptic wipes from her first aid kit and started to cleanse the stump. "By not taking care of this, you're weakening yourself, destroying your own spirit by refusing to accept who you are. A wonderful, sexy Master who happens to be missing part of his leg." She thought of Earl, tried to stop the tears from spilling onto her cheeks. "I can't bear to lose another..."

He caught her face between his hands, wiped away the moisture she couldn't hold back. It was as if her tears had washed away his anger, left only a gentle caring in his eyes. "You won't, honey. You won't. It wouldn't look this bad if I hadn't spent the better part of the day tromping around car dealerships to find me a new truck." Bending his head, he took her mouth for a long, hard kiss. "Now do your worst so I can show you I'm very much alive."

"All right." She reached for the first aid kit and began working on his leg again. "Promise you'll take better care of yourself, okay?"

"Okay. Ouch, damn it! I'm into dishing out punishment, not taking it," Jared said while she dabbed more antiseptic on the raw wounds. "Easy there." She heard the apology in his tone, if not in the growled complaint he made.

No way was Ninia going to let him put that limb back on—not now, and probably not anytime before this time tomorrow, if then. "Well, you've done it, Master. You're here for at least twenty-four hours because you were too macho to bring along your crutches. There's no way I'll let you try to walk on this until it's had time to heal a bit. You sit here while I fix our steaks."

* * * * *

Jared tried to be pissed, but staying mad was impossible when Ninia had just handed him the best meal he'd had since he couldn't remember when. She'd cooked his steak rare, the potatoes soft and buttery. His salad had been drenched in some delicious kind of dressing that had him scraping the last lettuce leaf off the bottom of his wooden salad bowl. The final course was a hot fudge sundae, complete with real whipped cream and a cherry on top.

It had taken him halfway through their dinner to get over the embarrassment of sitting there in his underwear, the swollen stump of his right leg hanging out for her to see every time she walked by. Now, as they topped the meal off with a pot of hot tea, he found himself wanting to appease an appetite of a different sort.

Come to think of it, she'd fed that appetite too, sashaying around in that short skirt that rode up every now and then, giving him a nice view of her baby-soft pussy...and a midriff-baring halter top with a tie at the neck that looked as though it would be a cinch to unfasten. He could hardly wait to visually inspect the brand-new nipple rings he'd seen outlined through the thin cloth. It had his cock rock-hard, knowing she'd gone right out and followed his order to pierce them. For him.

He wanted to take back the control she'd made him relinquish. Yeah. He didn't mind Ninia playing Nurse Domme once in a while—especially when his stump hurt like hell, the way it had before she insisted on taking his prosthesis off. But he needed to remind her who was Master. "Take off your top, sweetheart. I want to see your new nipple rings."

Smiling, she undid the halter and bared her breasts. "Hope you like plain gold hoops. You didn't specify."

"Oh, yeah. I like 'em. And I like looking at you and knowing you obeyed me without delay. He reached over, brushed his fingers very gently across first one bare breast and then the other. "I think once you're healed I'll hang a chain between them, tug on it whenever I want to grab your attention."

"Mmmm. Sounds kinky, Master."

"I like seeing your nipples red and swollen. Can hardly wait until the piercings heal so I can play with them."

"You could have used clamps. That way you wouldn't have had to wait for the piercings to heal." From the small frown lines that appeared at the edges of her lush mouth, he imagined her experience with the devices hadn't been altogether pleasant, and that made him want to reach beyond the grave and punch out the one who'd hurt her that way.

Very gently, he touched one of the rings. "I know. But I don't like using nipple clamps. It's too easy to get carried away and hurt your sub with them. Come here. Flip

up that sexy little skirt and ride me. Ride me the way you rode that dildo out on your balcony.”

“I was hoping you’d come when you saw me doing that.”

He laughed as he drew down his underwear and freed his erection. “I did, sweetheart. But coming that way doesn’t feel a tenth as good as it does coming inside your hot little cunt. Now reach in the pocket of my pants and get me a condom.” When she did, he rolled it on then grasped her at the waist, lifted her and guided her down until he was buried inside her to his balls. “Oh, yeah. Nothing feels better to my cock than a hot, submissive pussy. Squeeze me.”

She took his mouth, tongue-fucked him, ground her ass up and down, around and around, clamping hard on his cock with her inner muscles, milking him. Damn, he was going to come, and there wasn’t a fucking thing he could do about it. “Come, baby. Come for your Master now.”

When she dug her nails into his shoulders he slammed her down on his cock, absorbed her cries in his mouth as he let go, filling the condom with burst after burst of his hot come. “Sorry to have hurried it,” he murmured against the pale mass of her hair. “Help me into your bed, and we’ll start all over again.”

* * * * *

Jared lay in the dark. Without his prosthesis or crutches, he was nearly as helpless as he’d been when his lieutenant had found him in the desert, but he didn’t care. Ninia was sleeping in his arms, her even breathing against his chest welcome proof that she was real — that the explosive lovemaking they’d shared was no illusion.

He raised his upper body up on one elbow, watched her as she slept. Yeah, he wanted her. He’d lusted after her from the minute he’d wakened in her ward and gazed into her big blue eyes. But he was feeling more than desire. More than lust.

Love? He hadn't thought much about that, hadn't considered what love meant although he'd had the vague feeling he'd know when that emotion came up and bit him in the butt. He guessed it had just bitten him. Hard.

For the first time in his life Jared was thinking collars and rings...a home on his part of the family ranch...and if they were lucky, a kid or two. Sure, the mental picture he drew lacked the adrenaline-raising excitement of rooting out insurgents who'd vowed to destroy everything he held dear, but he found he liked the idea. He tossed back the covers to feast his eyes on his lover, tried to look at his own damaged body without bitterness.

Actually he found he couldn't dredge up any rancor even when he deliberately stared at the empty spot where his lower leg should have been or at the angry-looking stump. How could he, when Ninia had told him in every way but words that she desired him just as he was? When she'd shown him she wanted everything he had to give, but would ask for nothing beyond his ability to provide.

"Master?"

Her voice, husky with sleep, seduced his heart, not just his sex. "Yes?"

"Please hold me. I'm cold."

"Here." He felt a slight tremor in her body when he pulled her up against his chest, experienced the incredible softness of skin she'd had waxed smooth because she'd thought he'd like it. He did. A lot. Not just her baby soft cunt and ass, but her legs and arms and even the back of her neck where he'd quickly learned the simplest touch of his hand or mouth could get her squirming and whining for him to let her come. "I want you to wear my collar." *My ring too*, but it was too soon for that. "Be my slave...my lover...my everything."

Reverently, he traced the marks where he'd put the rope around her neck last night. "Will you?"

She reached up, framed his cheeks between her hands. "Twenty-four, seven?"

“Yes.” It surprised him to realize he wanted that, not merely a committed Dom/sub sexual relationship. “Every day, all day. And all night. Especially all night.” Mindful of her new piercings, he drew her gently to him, burying his face in the fragrant mass of her loosened hair.

“I’d like that.” Shifting, she opened her legs, making a place for his thigh against the moist heat of her swollen pussy. “Except...”

“I want you to quit your job. I can support you,” he added, realizing she might think all he had to offer financially was a disability pension from the VA. “I want my own private duty nurse to keep me from doing something stupid and hurting myself again.” He surprised himself by saying that, but he realized it was true. While he welcomed Ninia’s sexual submissiveness, he also yearned for the sort of loving care she showed him earlier—the nurturing he once would have rejected as a sign of weakness, an admission of his own vulnerabilities. “And I want to give you everything you need, all the pleasure you want.”

Jared found that was true too. While it undoubtedly would test his bruised self-confidence, he’d willingly risk a little embarrassment to provide her every kinky pleasure available to them in the BDSM clubs. After all, it was a master’s duty to see to his slave’s pleasure—and he found himself looking forward to arranging scenes that would fulfill her streak of voyeurism and more.

Ninia laid a hand between his legs, cupped his balls. “I’ll be your slave. Gladly. So long as you promise you’ll take care of these.” She slid her hand up the length of his cock and gave it a squeeze, loving the way he seemed to be learning to cope emotionally with his disability. She wondered if she dared hope some of his acceptance had to do with them having become lovers.

Jared silenced her with a kiss, a deep, hard kiss that took her breath away. “On all fours, sweetheart. As soon as you’ll let me up, I’ll go shopping for your collar. Meanwhile, I’m going to get rid of this plug and claim your pretty ass.”

Slowly, gently, he prepared her, first with one finger, then two. "Oh, yeah. I can hardly wait to take you here." Pausing, he put on a condom then lubricated it and her rear entrance. "I hope I don't lose my balance," he commented as he positioned himself on his knees behind her, his arms braced on his hands at her sides. "Tell me if this is too much. I don't want to hurt you."

All she wanted was his hot flesh buried in her aching body. And he obliged her. The pressure of his thick cock head against her rear entrance made her take a deep breath, relax her inner muscles when they tried to tense up. She loved the way he entered her so carefully, an inch at the time, stretching her...filling her...claiming the only part of her he hadn't already taken. It hurt, but then love often did, and on the way to pleasure was a sea of pain to travel. Ninia held her breath, and as she did the discomfort eased, leaving her with a warm glow...and an exquisite climax she'd never forget.

* * * * *

Time passed quickly, and almost before she realized it, July was gone. Ninia had worked out her notice at the hospital. Now Jared settled her in the passenger seat of his new truck, and she had nothing more to do than enjoy the smell of the beige leather seats and the luxurious feel of it against the backs of her legs—and wonder what kind of goodies he had stashed in the cooler on the backseat for their picnic lunch. Her buttocks stung deliciously, reminding her of her Master's skill with the long whip he'd used on her again last night at Boundless Pleasure, after they'd picked up the results of the lab tests he'd insisted they both get, for her protection. When she turned to look at him, he was frowning, his right hand resting on the state-of-the-art hand control mechanism he told her he'd reluctantly agreed to have installed because he failed to pass the dexterity test required for driving using his prosthesis on the accelerator and brake.

"You know, you can take the test again once your leg has completely healed," she said, sensing his disgust at the reminder of his disability.

"Yeah. But with this I can also drive if I decide not to wear the damn prosthesis some time." He wove expertly through traffic onto the on ramp to Interstate 80 and patted the knob on the hand control. "It's not so much that I mind having this thing. It's actually a pretty cool device I might have ordered on my own. It's just that being told I had to have it made me feel like a cripple. I so don't want to come off that way to people I care about."

"You could never make me think of you that way, my darling Master." Reaching around the device, which looked a lot like an oversize gear shift lever mounted on the console between the two seats, she laid her hand on his thigh, was rewarded with a smile. "Tell me where we're going," she said, curious since all he'd said was to take clothes for a few days in the mountains—and the cowgirl outfit she'd worn for him at the club last night. He'd gruffly ordered her to wear the butt plug so she'd keep her mind focused on the fucking they were going to enjoy once they got to where they were going. Just thinking of it made her pussy clench, her newly healed nipples swell against their rings.

"I'm going to show you where I grew up. Where I want us to live once I've finished up with getting therapy."

"You're from Laramie?" The highway they were cruising along with a convoy of semis and the occasional car or pickup truck was a nearly straight stretch of asphalt that stretched the fifty some-odd miles between the two southern Wyoming cities.

He paused, shot a grin her way. "Close, but not quite. Tie Siding. Ever heard of it?"

Ninia thought a minute, couldn't recall having heard of the unusually named place. "'Fraid not."

"I'm not surprised. All it is is a post office inside a beat-up flea market on Highway 287, about eight miles from the Colorado line. But it's where Grandpa got his mail. Where we'll get ours if we decide to move to the land he left me. About an hour's drive from Cheyenne on a good day, fifteen minutes max from Laramie except when it gets snowed in during the winter."

"I'll bet it's beautiful." Especially on this gorgeous summer day, when the sun was high in the sky and the trees along the road were dressed in green, from the light-green leaves of cottonwoods and various shrubs to the dark blue-greens of towering spruce trees. "Why did you decide to leave?"

"I wanted excitement. Danger." He paused, shook his head. "Got plenty of that, didn't I? Never mind, don't pay me any attention. It's a beautiful day, I've got my beautiful slave by my side, and I'm happy to be going home."

"Really?"

He moved his hand from the control, flipped back her skirt and gave her upper thigh a reassuring squeeze. "Really. I'll always miss the rush I got in the middle of a firefight. But I won't miss getting shot at. Did I tell you we're going to check out my brother's dungeon in Laramie?"

Ninia squirmed when Jared slid his fingers under her silk thong she wore to tweak her clit. "No." She doubted, even if she'd been drunk with lust the way he kept her most of the time, that she'd have forgotten a piece of information like that. "You told me you have a brother named Brad and a sister, Diana. Both older than you. But I don't remember you saying anything about him sharing our lifestyle."

Jared cleared his throat as he withdrew his hand. "They both do. There's a closed campground about a mile down this road. We'll get out of the truck and have some lunch, and I'll tell you more about the McTavish family."

Chapter Six

As he figured it would be, the campground was deserted except for some fat squirrels cavorting in the trees. The smells of evergreens and female musk swirled around him as he helped her out of the seat. "Look. I fixed up a spot so your backside won't get sore," he said when he set the cooler on the ground and opened the truck bed cover. The inflated air mattress he'd stowed inside looked mighty inviting, but...

"Sit there on the tailgate and let me feed you. I owe you one," he told her, surprised he was able to recall that first meal they'd shared without embarrassment.

Her smile hit him like a sledgehammer, and when she lowered her gaze to his crotch he could barely resist ordering her to lie down and spread her legs. But that wasn't in his plan. After all, they both had to eat, and he'd gone to the trouble of assembling a portable feast—nothing that required a fork or spoon. He'd envisioned feeding her strawberries and pineapple and thin slices of roast beef and ham, filling her in on his ranch and siblings as they ate.

But he wanted her now, didn't understand what had happened to the iron control he maintained over his own desires as well as hers. His cock throbbed painfully inside his jeans as she looked at him, oblivious to his plan to eat and talk now, fuck later.

The hell with eating. They could do that afterward. They had the place to themselves, Ninia was wet and ready, and Jared had the feeling she wouldn't have cared if the campground had been filled with a hundred gawking tourists. "I'll feed you later. Now lie back and spread your pretty legs. I'm hungry for your sweet pussy."

"Yes, Master." Stripping off her sopping thong, Ninia lay on the edge of the truck bed, legs held apart in silent invitation, a hungry look on her pretty face. For a minute Jared just looked, his cock swelling and pressing painfully against his jeans. Then he laid a hand over her incredibly soft, smooth mound, rubbed his thumb over her hard,

swollen little clit. Her moan of pleasure fed his determination to bring her pleasure in every way.

“So soft. So beautiful. Such a sweet little slut, but it’s all for me. Isn’t it?” He’d learned she wasn’t averse to threesomes, even to group scenes. But he’d found himself holding back, keeping her to himself when they’d joined scenes at Boundless Pleasure. “One of these days I’m going to...” He couldn’t say it, couldn’t promise her he’d share her with other Masters, wonder if it was his cock or someone else’s making her scream with orgasmic delight.

Instead he bent his head, opened his mouth over her sex, licked and sucked her clit, lapping at the little bud until she came. Then he found her cunt, tongue fucked her there, took her whimpers of pleasure and clutched them in his mind like lifelines. When he straightened up, pulled her ass to the edge of the truck bed and freed his cock, he growled, “I’m gonna fuck you now. Hard and fast, the way you like it. And I’m not using a condom.”

“Oh, yesss.” When she lifted her hips to take him deep, he thrust forward. God, but she felt good, all wet heat and slick lubrication with nothing between them to blunt the feeling. A warm breeze played along his balls as he drove into her time after time, kissed his fingers where he dug them into the taut flesh of her buttocks. “May I please come, Master?”

“Not yet.” He slowed the pace, lifted her to change the angle of his penetration. “Imagine it’s not that plug you’re wearing, but another cock sliding in and out of your ass while I’m fucking your wet, hot cunt. Put your fist in your mouth and pretend you’re taking another one there. Make believe it’s not squirrels watching, but a room full of Doms and subs doing each other and wishing they could join in and pleasure you.”

Her cunt clamped down on him so hard it almost hurt. Yeah, his slave got off on group scenes. “When we go to Laramie, I’ll set up a scene like that. But nobody else gets to put his cock here.” Thrusting hard now, his balls banging against her satiny slit while

he fucked her, he held back his own orgasm as long as he could. "Come now, honey," he ground out as he sank in as deep as he could and came, burst after burst jetting from his cock against the mouth of her womb as her flesh spasmed around him.

When he could move again he shoved his cock back in his jeans, zipped them...and bent to lick every last drop of the salty, slick fluid that glistened around her cunt while she trembled with the aftereffects of her climax. Then he sat on the air mattress beside her and took her hand.

"You know how hard it's going to be for me to share you? How I..." His words trailed off and he stroked the back of her hand with his thumb.

Ninia knew it. Knew Jared had held back during their scenes at Boundless Pleasure. She just didn't know whether it was because he wasn't into group scenes or voyeurism...or if it had to do with his reluctance to display his body to virtual strangers in a dungeon. "You don't have to, you know. You're all the Master I need." She sat up beside him, looked into his troubled gaze.

"No. I've seen the longing in your eyes when I've passed on chances to share you, even to open the curtains and let others watch. I'd be a lousy Master if I didn't give you everything you need. Come on, let's walk over to that scenic overlook and I'll tell you a little about my family."

The subject of ménage was obviously closed, at least for him. For her, too, although she shoved it gently to the back of her mind. Sliding down from the truck bed, she smoothed the wrinkled skirt of her sundress, offered him her hand and matched her pace with his. Once they reached the rail that fenced off a deep sandstone gorge, Jared stopped and gestured toward a plateau on the other side. "This looks pretty much like home. Like the place on the outskirts of Laramie where we all grew up."

He paused, as though remembering Ninia had grown up an orphan and not wanting to hurt her with too much reminiscing about the joys of having parents and siblings. It stung her more, having her Master holding back from sharing the anchors of

place and people that had made him the man he was. "Go on, please. Tell me about your skinned knees, your first pony. Your fights with Diana and Brad, and the spankings you got from Mom and Dad. After all, I bored you with stories of how I shuffled from one foster home to another, never finding a real home."

Leaning his backside against the rail, Jared rested his bad leg on his left boot. Then he looked at Ninia and shrugged. "I don't remember Dad all that well. He died when I was just five years old. An accident out at Grandpa's ranch, or so we were told. After that, Mom pretty much fell apart. She moved us into town, and she died when I was ten. Diana was only eighteen at the time, but she took over, practically raised Brad and me. We all finished school in Laramie. Brad went on the rodeo circuit as soon as he finished. After I graduated and went away to college, Diana moved out to her share of Grandpa's ranch. Guess all that responsibility made her want some peace and quiet—while having her watch over us like hawks sent Brad and me out seeking excitement. And learning sexual dominance was a turn-on to us both."

The picture Ninia got as Jared looked back on his childhood was one of three hardheaded kids, anchored on each other, all determined to find satisfaction in ways they'd been denied when they were children.

"Come on, let's see this piece of Wyoming you call home." It didn't matter what had shaped Jared or why he felt as he did. She put her hand in his and let his warmth surround her as they made their way back to the truck.

* * * * *

The rugged foothills of the Rockies rose in the distance, a panorama of sandstone boulders and gnarly shrubs surrounding them in every direction from the large, old log cabin at the end of a winding road through the property Jared had inherited. Fields stretched out for what seemed like miles, fallow fields dotted with massive cottonwood trees like the one that shaded the cabin. Jared sat on the porch, a step above her, toying with Ninia's hair and pointing out places where he'd played as a child when he and his

siblings had visited. "We lived in Laramie because Mom wasn't very much for the great outdoors, especially after Dad got killed in that freak accident up in the high pasture."

That was too bad, Ninia thought, because her Master obviously felt at home in these rugged surroundings. She liked them too—the sense of peace, the silence broken by a rustling breeze or the squawk of a bird on some branch of the sprawling tree. She imagined living here with Jared, bringing up children far away from the city and its temptations. "I love it here." *I love you.* She'd say it, but he hadn't uttered the words and it wasn't a slave's place to put her Master on the spot.

"I'm glad. Lift your hair for me." When she did, he reached in his shirt pocket and drew out a thick, gold collar set with a large, faceted topaz. Reaching around her, he held it for her inspection then settled it around her neck. "It looks like a piece of jewelry, but it's not. Once I close the clasp, it won't come off unless somebody saws it in two."

He paused, his hands still at the back of her neck. "You still want me as your Master? If not, you'd better tell me now."

"Yes. I still want you." How could he think otherwise? Couldn't he tell the only thing she wanted was to belong to him, body and soul, claim him as her Master in front of God and everybody on this earth? "I want to wear your collar so everyone will know I'm yours."

The gold felt smooth, cool. Its weight was a welcome reminder that she, like it, was the treasured property of her beloved master. She reached up, touched the precious stone above the leash hook, liked the way its weight made the front of the collar settle at the base of her throat. "Fasten it, Master, please." She wanted to hear the finality of the metal being joined, to know she belonged to the solemn man who'd stolen her heart long before claiming her body and soul. "I want more than anything to be your slave."

"And I want to be your Master." She felt his warm breath against the sweet spot on the back of her neck just below her hairline, trembled when he bared his teeth and nipped her there. "I want you to come when you hear my collar snap closed."

The feel of his knuckles as he fumbled with the locking mechanism was as arousing as if he'd been tonguing her clit, and the power of his suggestion had her growing wet between her legs. The warm breeze carried her scent and his, heady and arousing as it swirled around them. Her pussy clenched, the flesh apparently as eager as she to relinquish control...to entrust everything—her sexual satisfaction, her well-being, even her life—to Jared McTavish. To her Master.

The collar closed around her neck, its sound metallic. Final. Ninia's belly tightened. Her pierced nipples hardened and her clit began to throb. Her pussy started to spasm, and her ass contracted around the plug she wore at her Master's command. When she started to shake all over, he wrapped her in his arms. "I'll take care of you, sweetheart. Always."

* * * * *

The inside of the cabin was much as Jared remembered it, and a lot like the private chamber he'd taken that first night at Boundless Pleasure. He and his new slave had shared a picnic supper on the porch then come inside, where he'd built a small fire to ward off the chill that always came in the mountains after nightfall. After they'd come inside he'd stripped down and ordered Ninia to shed her clothes, and it was his duty to see she didn't catch a cold. The firelight cast a glow over her beautiful body and made her collar and nipple rings sparkle in the near darkness. "Come here, my sweet slave," he said, motioning for her to join him on the red leather-covered couch in front of the fire.

She'd given him the riding crop earlier. Now he balanced its leather-wrapped handle on one palm, considered how the braided leather could easily bruise her tender skin. "Why is it you get pleasure from being hurt?" He'd often wondered but had never cared enough before to delve that deeply into the heads of the subs he'd pleased.

"I'm a bad girl who needs to be punished." She stared at the fire, her fingers moving along the smooth gold surface of her collar, as if she was considering his question—and the answer she'd glibly given. "Seriously, I'm not sure. It's hard for me

to let go of control. Always has been, even when I was a child. *Karada* bondage, the touch of those metal tips on your cat o'nine...wearing a plug or dildo at my Master's command. All these things remind me I'm helpless to your will. That I'm not responsible for the pleasure you make me feel."

"Does wearing this make you feel out of control?" He ran his finger under her collar, deliberately reminding her she'd accepted permanent sexual slavery. Twice. "Did wearing his collar make it feel safe for you to let go?"

"Yes, Master."

"You're one of the strongest women I've ever run across, strong enough to stand up to some of the meanest, nastiest soldiers on earth. Hell, you stood up to me when you thought I was being stupid about this." He rapped on the socket of his prosthesis. "Take this off me and come straddle my lap."

When she did, he didn't feel the sense of helplessness that usually followed when he went without the limb somewhere other than in bed, and he knew that was because she was there. Because he trusted her the way he'd never trusted any woman, the way he'd trusted the other members of his Force Recon team to protect his back, same as he'd done his damndest to protect theirs. "Ride me. Milk my cock with your hot, wet cunt. Do it well and I'll try out my present on your delicious ass cheeks." When she clamped down those strong inner muscles he felt the plug in her ass, imagined it was another man's cock pleasuring her. "Open your mouth," he growled, and when she did he plundered it with his tongue. She sucked it hard, as if it were yet another cock filling the last of her holes. Grasping the crop in his left hand, he laid a light blow, then another. Her cunt clenched around his straining flesh as she took him deep.

When he came in long bursts that seemed to go on forever, she shattered in his arms, her incredibly soft skin slick with sweat. He wrenched his mouth away from hers. "Come, baby, come with me. It's okay. God, but I love you, just the way you are." It didn't matter. If she wanted a ménage, he'd arrange one even if it meant stowing his own insecurities.

A Master's job was to take care of all of his slave's sexual needs, he reminded himself later that night when he spoke with Brad, told his brother how he wanted the dungeon's observation room set up the following night so he could pleasure Ninia.

"Tomorrow night we're going to play a scene at Roped and Lassoed," he told her later, stroking her naked body as they lay in bed in the light of a bright, golden moon. "You'll be the star attraction...to me and the others I've invited to watch and share my precious slave. You won't have a hole left empty, or an inch of your sweet body left untouched by hungry eyes. Hands." He stroked her cheek then inserted a finger in her mouth. "You've been dreaming about ménage. Don't deny it."

She wriggled her ass cheeks against his erection, sucked his finger and stroked it with her tongue. "Mmmm."

Jared couldn't resist her blatant invitation. Rolling her onto her back, he rose on his knees and joined their bodies. "That's it, sweetheart. Wrap those pretty legs around my waist and squeeze my cock. Love me." *I want more than your lust, more than your submission.*

"I do." Her arms went around his shoulders, holding him close, dragging him down on her until they couldn't get any closer. Her cunt throbbed around his cock, milking him, holding him in her as though she'd never let him go. It felt good. So fucking good, this closeness he'd never yearned for before. And when he came in her, she gave him the words he needed to hear, words that let him set aside the fear she'd find him lacking compared with the ones he'd recruited to enhance her pleasure.

"I love you, Master. Only you."

* * * * *

God, but I love you. The words he'd said last night still echoed in her ears, warming her heart. She'd said the words too, but in the heat of passion. She wanted to say them now, when her mind was clear.

"I love you." Ninia bent and nuzzled Jared's neck while he finished off his second cup of tea. When he turned and shot her an intense look, she tried to distract him before he had time to question her simple declaration. "What's on for today?" she asked.

"A visit to the bedroom if you don't stop that," he growled, capturing her chin in his hand and giving her a long, hard kiss.

"Is that a threat or a promise, Master?"

"A promise. But later. By the way, sweetheart, I love you, too."

"Mmmm, I just thought you might. But tell me, what are we going to do today?"

"I want to show you around the ranch. After all, you're a city girl, and you've got a right to see what I've got in store for you. You ride me like a champ," he said, a sexy grin on his handsome face. "But I'm wondering. Can you ride a horse?"

"I haven't, not for a long time, Master. But I can probably manage to hang onto the saddle horn if the horse is tame."

"We'll take the truck, then." He gave in too quickly, she thought. Then she figured he probably wasn't all that anxious to take his own first ride since his injury and have to watch out for a novice like her. "Come on."

"Okay." He'd come a long way in a short time toward accepting his physical limitations. She was glad, because she'd have hated to spoil the moment by pointing out that he shouldn't have even been thinking about riding a horse again until he had some sessions with his physical therapist on how to compensate for the lack of weight balance the amputation had created.

"Since we'll be driving most of the time, I think I'll take off my leg and use crutches. I'm not anxious to get the stump sore."

That last remark had her speechless. Jared never went out without the prosthesis, and he rarely consented to using his crutches in public no matter how sore and swollen the stump became. "Uh—"

"We're going into Laramie tonight to play. I figure I'll need to be in top form then, or you may toss me over for one of the cowboy Doms."

"Oh." Unable to come up with a good reply to that, she watched him roll up his jeans and pop off the artificial limb. He was about to roll down the jeans when she found her voice. "If you leave it uncovered, the air will help heal the sore spots."

It surprised her that he did just that, leaving his jeans rolled up over his knee and letting the stump hang out as they drove around the ranch. A very impressive ranch, she thought when he showed her high pastures dotted with what seemed like thousands of red cows with white faces. And dozens of oil wells. "That's where the money comes from," he said when he noticed her staring at the pumping equipment that dotted the boulder-strewn fields with about the same frequency as huge, green cottonwoods where the cows seemed to congregate under the trees' wide canopies. "Diana says the cattle operation barely breaks even."

She hoped Jared's sister would like her as they neared a rustic stone ranch house near what must have been the opposite side of the ranch from Jared's log cabin. "You said Diana is into our lifestyle too?" she asked, fingering the collar no one in the BDSM community could possibly mistake for a plain old necklace.

His frown wasn't something Ninia could have missed. "Yes. She's a sub." He paused, his expression darkening further. "The collar she wears is leather, and most of the time it's attached to a leash. Don't be surprised if she's got a shaved head. Brad said she told him she'd done something yesterday that pissed Gareth off, and that's usually how he punishes her." He paused, as though deciding whether he should say more. "Gareth Bender isn't the sort of Dom Brad or I think much of, but as long as Diana's happy..."

He stopped the truck and turned to her. "With any kind of luck he'll be out with those wranglers we saw chasing mustangs in the canyon. Diana had to raise Brad and me when Mom sort of fell apart. Guess Diana had so much of having to be strong that she wanted to be under the total control of somebody else. Now Brad and I are

different. Between Mom and Diana, we never had the chance to act on our own, so I guess that's why when we grew up we wanted to exert a little of the discipline we got onto our lovers." He paused, reached in the backseat, grabbed his prosthesis and put it on.

"I'm glad. Glad you want me to be your slave. If you ever want to, you can shave my head. Earl did it once, or rather he took me to a barbershop around the corner from Boundless Pleasure and had the barber do it. But it wasn't a punishment. He wanted to see if my scalp was as sensitive as this sweet spot just below my hairline on my neck." She fingered the spot, got wet when she recalled the rush she'd gotten as she'd felt the clippers buzz off her hair. She'd practically come when the barber applied a hot towel then brushed fragrant hot lather over her head. The best part had been the razor, the sound of it mowing down the short bristles the clippers had left—and later, feeling Earl's rough fingers against her scalp, holding her bald head to his crotch while she serviced him.

"Was it?" Jared stroked the back of her neck, sent shivers all the way down her spine. "You don't need to answer, I can feel it in the way you tremble when I touch you here, smell your arousal. Do you want me to shave you sometime?"

"Would you?" In spite of his expertise as a sexual Dominant, Ninia thought of Jared as being essentially conservative, not the type who'd want his slave parading around making such an obvious statement about their lifestyle.

"If it gives you pleasure, sure. If I can wear an artificial leg in public, you can certainly wear a wig if it turns you on to have me shave you bald and play with your bare scalp." He grinned then drew her to him for a hard, hot kiss. "We can explore this fantasy of yours, but later. We'd better get on down to Diana's house or we'll miss our lunch. My sister may be a complete submissive to Gareth, but she's not to me or Brad. I learned how to use the cat o' nine just to keep her and her hickory switch at bay. "

* * * * *

Damn it, Jared hadn't been able to shake the feeling Diana wasn't happy, but she hadn't been willing to talk about it. She hadn't talked about much of anything for that matter. That wasn't like his sister. Neither was the way she'd refused to meet his gaze, or her failure to joke about her recently shaved head or the welts no one could miss noticing on her arms and legs.

When he and Ninia stepped through the swinging doors of Roped and Lassoed, Brad's dungeon on the highway outside Laramie, Jared was still fuming. Normally he'd have stopped downstairs where cowboys dropped in for a beer and burgers after work, and exchanged pleasantries with guys he'd grown up with. Not tonight, though. Barely acknowledging the chorus of friendly greetings, he herded Ninia past the dungeon master and up the stairs to the second floor. "Go on, get changed for our scene," he told her gruffly, gesturing toward the dressing room.

She put a hand on his arm, a strangely soothing gesture he couldn't shake off. Then she pressed her lips against his throat. "Please, Master. When Diana's ready for help, she'll know she can count on her brother. "

"And how do you know that?"

"Because there's no one I'd trust more with my safety and well-being. " When she reached up and stroked his cheek he caught her hand and brought it to his lips. She was good for him, better than he deserved.

"Wait, sweetheart, I want you to meet Brad." No matter how steamed he was over the abuse he was certain Diana must have been enduring, he'd promised Ninia this scene. Where had his manners gone, shunting off the woman he loved? "Then I want you to go change into that cowgirl outfit that sends my libido through the roof. I've been thinking about you in those short shorts and boots all afternoon."

Standing back to let her precede him through Brad's open office door, Jared took a couple of deep breaths to keep his anger in abeyance. "Ninia, this is my brother. Brad, meet Ninia. Notice the collar before you get any ideas," he said, trying to sound jovial.

"Hey, Ninia. Jared tells me you're into rope bondage. Welcome to Roped and Lassoed. My baby brother has arranged one hell of a scene for you tonight." When Brad kissed her hand and shot her the sort of grin Jared had seen make the most reluctant subs melt, Jared had to restrain himself from stepping between them.

"Yes, he told me. He also told me I need to go change, so I'll say goodbye for now." As if she knew seeing her interacting with other men—even his brother—made Jared feel uneasy, she went up on tiptoe and laid a quick kiss on his lips before lowering her gaze and backing out of the room.

"Women's dressing room's the third door at the end of the hall," Brad called out. Then he turned to Jared. "What's wrong?"

"Diana's what's wrong. Son-of-a-bitch Gareth's hurting her." Jared clenched his fists so hard the nails bit into his palms. "She's too fucking stubborn to admit it."

Brad rubbed the bridge of his nose as though hearing that information had suddenly given him a headache. "You know she likes it rough."

"Yeah? Ninia likes to feel the sting of the cat. And she gave me a flogger to use on her. But I whip her for her pleasure, not to hurt her." It had been all Jared could do not to scoop up his sister and drag her away from Gareth when he'd noticed the deep marks on her arms and legs.

"Bastard broke her nose last year when you were in Iraq," Brad said, his fists clenched at his sides. "I sent the sheriff out to drag him off to jail, but she insisted it was an accident, part of one of their scenes."

"We've got to get her away from him whether she wants us to or not. Do you do it, or shall I?"

Brad shrugged. "I've tried. Nothing will stick as long as Diana's there, saying Gareth has never done anything to hurt her."

"Are you saying the only way we can help her is have her committed for some treatment?" The idea of forcibly putting away the woman who'd always been there for

him and Brad stuck in Jared's gut. "I'd hate doing it, after all she did for us when we were kids."

"If we don't do something, he's likely to kill her one of these days. Bastard." Brad met Jared's gaze, his expression uncharacteristically serious. "Maybe if we go together and try to talk some sense into her..."

Yeah, that might work. Meanwhile Jared had his own slave, and he'd promised her an evening of unlimited pleasure. "By now Ninia will be wondering where I've gone. Feel free to observe, if you'd like. She's into showing off for an audience." A picture came to Jared's mind of Ninia standing on her balcony in Cheyenne, pleasuring herself for his arousal before they'd connected with each other the following night. His anger faded, replaced by lust that had his heart pumping, his balls drawing up with anticipation, his cock hardening painfully against his zipper.

Chapter Seven

When Ninia stepped into the observation chamber wearing her cowgirl outfit and Jared's collar, her hair secured in a knot atop her head as Jared had ordered, there he was, waiting. He wore the same chaps and boots he'd had on that first time at Boundless Pleasure, only without the jeans. Already wet with anticipation, she looked at him and his hard cock curving almost to his navel, and every nerve in her body started tingling with arousal. "Do you trust me?" he asked, that rough, deep voice as much an aphrodisiac as seeing him, remembering what he'd told her he'd be doing to her tonight.

"Yes, Master, I trust you," she said, her gaze meeting his before she went to her knees before him, her eyes downcast as a good slave's must always be. "May I service you now?"

He grasped his cock, held it to her lips. "Kiss me."

He tasted a little salty, a little sweet, that delicious drop of lubrication nestled in the tight slit of his cock head. She'd have sucked the plumlike head of him but he quickly pulled back.

His motion a little clumsy, as though her kiss had cost him some self control, he bent, drew her to her feet and fastened a padded blindfold over her eyes. "They say if you can't see, you feel more. And if you can't touch or speak, you respond more fully to your Master's touch. His orders. Open your mouth."

When she did he kissed her hard then inserted a leather-wrapped ring gag and secured it in her open mouth. Its straps pushed against the back of her head, reminding her of the erogenous zones she'd discovered there long ago and making her long for Jared to let her experience that pleasure again. "I'm taking your clothes off now. So you can service me and my friends," he whispered, once more thrusting his tongue into the

center of the gag as he slid off her skimpy garments, his big hands ever so gentle on her body. "God but you're beautiful naked." He hooked his forefingers through her nipple rings and twisted them. "It's time for the chain. It pleases me that you've healed so well. Hold still."

She'd never been blindfolded before, but he was right. Not being able to see or speak enhanced the sensations when he tugged on her nipple rings, as the weight of the chain pulled gently on them, as a small object centered on the chain bounced against her ribcage. She squirmed, and that unordered motion earned her a hard jerk on the chain that sent rivulets of pleasure-pain radiating through her breasts.

"No coming until I say so. What I'm doing now is putting you in a sling. Don't worry, it's sturdy enough to hold a slave three times your size." The sling smelled of oiled leather, felt soft as he worked her arms into sleeves. "Be still now while I thread the front of it through your nipple chain."

He talked her through each step, his gravelly whisper as arousing as the feel of the sling pressing her flesh at the shoulders, waist, arms and thighs, reminding her of her helplessness, showing her she was completely subject to his will. His hot breath against her throat sent a shiver of desire along her nerves, and when he laid an open-mouthed kiss just below the collar he'd given her, it was all she could do to follow his orders...to let the sexual tension build inside her until he granted her permission for release.

She heard a door open, felt a cool breeze. "My friends will hoist you up. They're eager to taste you too." Jared spoke into her open mouth then bathed it with his tongue. "Very soon you'll take all three of our cocks. I know you'll like that, my precious slave. You'll like Eli's fat pierced one, it's just the right size for your mouth. John's is long, not too thick. Perfect to fill your tight little ass. They'll both wear condoms, because I want you protected." He paused a minute, and she felt his hot breath against her lips. "Your cunt is mine." He moved away, and she felt herself being lifted, turned, hoisted into the air.

Her ass was slightly higher than her head, and her forehead rested on the padded device that kept her head held back. Her arms were confined close to her sides while her legs were swung wide apart, her cunt and ass open for the invasion. She tensed, waiting, felt nothing for a moment then the sensation of being stroked on her cheek by a feather...on her back and ass cheeks with the talons of a light flogger...on her inner thighs with somebody's hands. Not Jared's callused ones but softer hands with slender, long fingers that brushed her clit and cunt lips with every practiced, arousing movement.

The flogger stilled. So did the feather and the hands that had been teasing her pussy. One hissing stroke, then two, then three had her wanting to cry out with the pleasure-pain of the cat o'nine's metal tipped strands. Jared. No one could wield the cat the way he did, making each strike almost a caress. When he stopped she wished she could beg for more.

Then a huge cock—Jared's she was sure—slid between the edges of the ring gag, filled her mouth. When she swallowed, she felt his cock head fill her throat. Then she felt another cock, Eli's, she guessed, because it was pierced. The smooth surface of a ring brushed against the skin of one cheek. It felt warm, smooth as it rubbed along one corner of her mouth. The third man—John, she recalled—joined the others, using his rigid cock head to stroke her other cheek. Its warm, damp head pressed against her stretched lips...against Jared's hot flesh that moved ever so slowly in and out of her mouth. Jared's flesh stretched her throat painfully, yet she wanted to serve him, needed to take them all because that was his command.

And because every cell in her body ached for the triple invasion, the punishment from the cat and flogger that would make wanting this okay. For the mind-shattering release that would be her prize for serving her Master and his friends.

The heat of the three Masters, the heady mix of their male musks filled her senses, made her wish she could talk and beg them to take her, to leave no hole unbreached.

"Soon now, sweetheart." As if he felt her need, he knotted his fist in her ponytail, held her head steady while he moved deeper, breached her throat with the blunt head of his cock. "That's it, relax." She swallowed reflexively, breathed through her nose that now pressed firmly against the base of her Master's cock. Hands explored her back, soothing the little stings that would be the least bit red and angry by now, carefully laid marks made moments ago by her loving Master. Other hands played with her exposed nipples, flicking them, tugging at her Master's rings.

When the three stopped, she felt lost, but only for a moment as the sound of condom wrappers being torn open filled the silent room. The pierced cock, now encased in a condom, moved into her mouth. The man who'd been stroking her other cheek moved to the end of the sling, resumed stroking her thighs, then moved in close and smeared something cold and slick around her rear entrance. When he breached her anal sphincter with a heavily lubricated finger, he spoke, his voice smoother, but not as deep as Jared's. "Relax and enjoy this. I'm gonna fuck your ass. Your Master says you like it. Oh yeah, baby, you're tight."

Warmth emanated from beneath her. Jared. His heat as he stretched out on the adjustable table beneath the sling made her want to angle her body down, find his hot cock and impale herself on it, had her panting for more. For the depth of sexual fulfillment only he could bring her. He grasped her waist, held her steady, positioning his cock just within her outer lips as that other cock pressed lightly against her rear hole.

"Now," he growled as he found her pussy and thrust home. Eli framed her cheeks in his hands and moved in and out of her mouth while John slowly reamed her ass and her Master claimed her pussy. And her heart. They both belonged to him.

The others were mere adjuncts, tools Jared had brought to force her ultimate arousal. To fulfill the need he sensed in her to be punished for her desires so she could finally soar free. Three men fucking her, yet only one commanding her pleasure. Pressure built inside her. Every small welt stung deliciously. Eli's pierced cock tickled

her throat. Chad's stretched her rear, his rhythm in tandem with her Master's as he slid balls deep in her swollen cunt then withdrew, only to claim her again. Faster. Harder.

Her flesh burned when she sensed hot eyes burning into her, witnessing her ultimate surrender, watching her service her Master and his two friends. Seeing the sheen of sweat on her body and theirs, knowing how much she needed to come, how hard she was struggling not to.

"Soon, my darling little slut," Jared growled from beneath her as he reached up and laid an open-palmed slap smartly against one ass cheek. "I feel John fucking your ass. Feel your naughty pussy starting to spasm around my cock."

Please, Master, let me come. The sensations bombarded her, made her tremble in her captivity. Her passion-overloaded brain registered it wasn't the others she begged for release even though they too were contributing to this arousal that was becoming too painful for her to bear. She held on, silently begging Jared. Only her beloved Master.

"You may come. Now." His command was little more than a series of grunts as his cock began to twitch inside her, as each of the Doms plunged deep. As hot spurts of Jared's climax bathed her spasming pussy, concentrating the feelings there. Around him. Only him. He was all she needed—all she wanted. Chad and Eli might as well have been animated sex toys.

It was Earl, not me, who'd thrived on the group scenes I thought I'd been missing.

But Jared was her Master now. Ninia barely managed to wait until he'd freed her and removed the blindfold and gag to say the words she somehow knew he'd been waiting to hear. "I love you, Master. Only you. I don't need what we just had to find fulfillment."

The look on his face was priceless. One she'd remember the rest of her life. When he held up the chain he'd put between her nipple rings, she saw the weight—a large, perfect diamond set in gleaming gold.

"Marry me," he said, a huge grin on his face. "If I have anything to say about it, you'll never want for anything again. In bed or elsewhere."

Epilogue

The following year, at Roped and Lassoed BDSM Club, Laramie, Wyoming

“I never knew you to be so possessive,” Brad commented as he and Jared changed from the costumes they’d worn for a group scene at Roped and Lassoed. “Don’t blame you, though. Your wife’s one mighty hot chick to have a gimp for a Master.”

Jared popped off his prosthesis and wiped out the socket. “Gimp, hell. Gotta change the suspension sleeve. I always sweat when Ninia and I demonstrate the art of karada. Tell you the truth, I’m scared shitless every time we do it that I’ll get something wrong and hurt her.”

It struck Jared that before Ninia, he’d have been ready to fight if anybody had said anything to him about his injuries, except for when the comments had sent him into a blue funk of self-pity. Now, though, he could not only laugh at good friends’ ribbing, but also laugh off more thoughtless comments made by strangers—and actually mean it. “Seriously, it feels good to be home.”

“Never thought I’d hear you say that, little brother. Of everybody we went to school with, you were the one who couldn’t wait to get out and conquer the world.”

Brad was right. Jared had yearned for excitement, exotic places and the adrenaline rush that came from risking his neck for a cause. Until Ninia. “Now I consider myself lucky to be able to conquer my wife.”

He loved her and loved living on the ranch. Together he and Ninia had built a home and planned the dude ranch operation they’d be opening in the spring. Meanwhile, winter in Wyoming offered plenty of opportunities to cuddle before a fire...

Just last week he’d fulfilled his wife’s fantasy and taken her hair, but only after they’d flown down to Denver, gotten her a short haircut and had a wig made from most

of her blonde locks. The wig covered her baldness nicely – and he had to say he found massaging her satiny scalp while she was servicing him orally almost as erotic an experience as she apparently enjoyed when he clipped and shaved her every other day. Only time it bothered him seeing her bald was when he thought of Diana and the way her ass of an almost-ex husband had often shaved her head for punishment before he and Brad had taken the reins and had Gareth sentenced to three-to-five for spouse abuse.

So far, no one had even noticed Ninia was wearing a wig. It looked exactly like her own hair, a hell of a lot more real than his prosthesis. But Jared didn't care. Life was great, as long as he had her and she had him – and they had a warm fire, a soft bed and the everlasting dose of hot passion that had brought them to this. "Gotta go, man. Ninia will be waiting. I'll go over to Diana's next week and see how she's doing, now that she's finished with her therapy."

"Come back. My dungeon is your dungeon. You're always welcome. Both of you."

"Thanks." Whistling, Jared made his way outside the dressing room...to Ninia.

It had been a long time, a blessedly long time since he'd had the dream that used to plague him. Instead, all his fantasies now were about his wife – and when he reached for her, she was always there for him. No more mirages, just a flesh-and-blood woman Jared loved with all his heart, who loved him in return.

The End

About the Author

Ann Jacobs is a sucker for lusty Alpha heroes and happy endings, which makes Ellora's Cave an ideal publisher for her work. Romantica®, to her, is the perfect combination of sex, sensuality, deep emotional involvement and lifelong commitment – the elusive fantasy women often dream about but seldom achieve.

First published in 1996, Jacobs has sold over forty books and novellas, some of which have earned awards including the Passionate Plume (best novella, 2006), the Desert Rose (best hot and spicy romance, 2004) and More Than Magic (best erotic romance, 2004). She has been a double finalist in separate categories of the EPPIES and From the Heart RWA Chapter's contest. Three of her books have been translated and sold in several European countries.

A CPA and former hospital financial manager, Jacobs now writes full-time, with the help of Mr. Blue, the family cat who sometimes likes to perch on the back of her desk chair and lend his sage advice. He sometimes even contributes a few random letters when he decides he wants to try out the keyboard. She loves to hear from readers, and to put faces with names at signings and conventions.

Ann welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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