

# ***THE CAJUN***

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*Dedication*

*To the Hurricane Katrina Survivors*

*Author Note*

Dear Readers – This novella was started in August 2005, just days before Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf coast. Without a second thought I put writing aside to head south and give whatever aid I could. The experiences I had changed my life forever and these brave survivors taught me so much more than I ever imagined.

*Thank you for saving my life.*

## **Chapter One**

When Rachel made the last minute decision to pay her parents a visit, getting caught in a tropical depression wasn't quite what she'd had in mind.

Her grip tightened on the steering wheel until her fingers went numb. Rachel strained to see the marsh road through the blinding rain though her headlights barely made a dent in the storm. Even though she knew the road as well as her own face, the car barely crept along the road. Shrouded in sheets of rain and buffeted by strong southeast winds, what was once familiar was now alien territory. One false move of the wheel could send her little car plummeting into the marsh.

Under normal circumstances she enjoyed a swim on a hot summer day. She'd been born and raised in the heart of bayou country in southern Louisiana and she knew how to handle herself outdoors. Her father was a third-generation shrimp boat captain and her brothers had followed in his footsteps, each of them running his own boat and crew. Their house where she had grown up was less than thirty feet from a large bayou and consequently she felt there wasn't much out here she couldn't handle.

But it didn't mean she wanted to be driving through the marsh in the middle of a fierce storm.

Rachel slowed her rusty compact car, taking a quick moment to rub her tired eyes. She'd worked late and Mama had woken her to make sure she knew about the incoming storm. She hadn't wanted her only daughter to drive out to Dulac in bad weather. But it was her father's fiftieth birthday and she didn't want to miss it. It had never occurred to her that she'd get caught in the storm—she'd thought there was more than enough time to get home.

How wrong she was.

A blast of air slammed into her car causing it to shake. For the first time, fear nipped at her toes. When she got within an arm's reach of her papa, he'd give her an earful then paddle her butt with a quickness.

Anyone who'd grown up on the bayou knew better than to go outside during a big storm. In southern Louisiana the water table was so high it only took a few inches of rain for the area to flood. In a ferocious storm like this, the roads would be flooded out in less than two hours and on the marsh it would take even less time.

When she'd left her apartment in New Orleans, she'd thought the storm was still several hours away. By the time she'd reached Chauvin, darkness had fallen and the steady rain increased enough to slow her progress. It was when she reached the final drawbridge before the marsh road, all hell had broken loose.

The rain diminished visibility to less than fifteen feet, making for a miserable drive. It had been a while since she'd passed anyone on the road. Squinting through the windshield, she tried to get a frame of reference to indicate how much farther she had to go. The unrelieved darkness made every twist and turn a sheer nightmare. Though it had been several years ago that the road had been paved, it was rarely used. It was the only route through the marsh and in good weather it was an easy drive. Roughly nine miles long, some sections of the road weren't even a foot above sea level. No one with any sense could live out here as it flooded with any decent-sized storm.

As kids they'd come out here to fish, raise hell, drink beer and get kinky in the backseat of their cars. It was a beautiful, wild place she loved with all her heart though tonight she wished she were anyplace else but here.

Through the gray veil of rain, her headlights faintly illuminated a wide spot in the road. Each side sported boat docks and she was familiar with this place as it was a great spot for shrimping or fishing. This was also the only area for direct access between the marsh and lake.

"Damn," she muttered. "I'm not even halfway yet."

The wind, as if hearing her curse, slammed into the car and she yelped, quickly counter-steering the wheel to the left. The car shuddered and the engine coughed. For a moment she thought it might die on her.

"Not now," she groaned. "You need to hang in there for a little while longer."

Her car was in dire need of a tune-up and she'd hoped that Jimmy, her younger brother, could oblige her this weekend.

She couldn't see the end of the dock on the lake side as it was already submerged. The gravel lot where they used to park their cars was flooded to within a foot of the road. On the marsh side the water was being blown onto the road to flow in a steady stream into the lake.

This was not good.

Creeping past the docks, they faded quickly in her rearview mirror. Judging from the condition of the gravel lots, the road would be flooded within the next half hour or so. With the water at that level, the lowest points of the road would already be flooded. One of the first lessons she'd learned when her father taught her to drive was to avoid standing or running water.

*It only takes two inches of running water to shove a car off the road.*

She bit her lower lip. Her car wasn't exactly the sturdiest thing on the road and lately it would act as if it were going to stall every now and then. As long as she could keep it running she should be okay. Turning back was no longer an option, not when she'd come this far. Her parent's house was almost within reach.

*You were a damn fool to try this, Rachel girl.*

"Thanks, Papa, I realize that now."

A dark lump loomed out of darkness and it was blocking the road. Screaming, she slammed on the brakes and the worn tires slid on the rain-slicked pavement. Her blood ran cold when the rear slid to the right toward the lake. In a desperate attempt to remain on the road, she wrenched the wheel and instead of correcting the skid, she oversteered and flew across the road. Her heart plummeted when she saw the oak trees. Still in a slide, the driver-side rear slammed into one with a jarring crunch. Even with her seat belt engaged, she cracked her head on the driver's window.

For a few moments she sat there stunned, her ears ringing. Her temple hurt from coming in contact with the window. After a few moments the ringing dissipated and she turned her head very slowly, relieved when she didn't feel any pain.

"Well, I think my brain is still intact."

Her voice was shaky and she quickly took an accounting of her body to make sure everything still worked. Other than an ache in her temple, she'd survived without any lasting damage.

Through the rapidly beating wiper blades, the steady rain continued. Her car was resting at a tilt which meant she had one or more wheels off the road. Her lips twisted. If she wasn't in trouble before, she definitely was now.

Slamming the gearshift into park, she strained to peer through the rain, trying to get her bearings. She sucked in a noisy breath when she saw the lump in the road had moved. As if in slow motion, its massive head turned toward her and golden eyes glinted in the murky light from her headlights.

This was one big alligator.

It was hard to judge exactly how large the creature was but it was about ten feet in length. Their gazes met and a shock wave ran through her. If she weren't mistaken, the alligator was smiling at her. She blinked and the creature turned away. With a slow lumbering walk it headed into the marsh. She wasn't fooled by its seemingly lazy movements—alligators could be incredibly fast when they were in pursuit of a meal. When they were kids they'd stand on the bank of the bayou and bark like dogs to see if any of the beasts would make an appearance. Alligators couldn't resist a tasty puppy snack.

The gator vanished into the water just as the back of the car shifted just enough to set her heart pounding. There was no way she could stay here any longer. It was only a matter of time before the water would sweep the car into the marsh and she'd become the catch of the day for all sorts of critters.

Her hands shook as she located a flashlight on the floor of the back seat. Muttering a small prayer that the batteries still worked, she grinned wide when a bright light came on. Reaching for the door handle, she braced herself to face the storm.

First she needed to assess her car. If it was drivable then she needed to figure out how to get it back onto the road. If not, she would have to come up with a Plan B. Unfortunately that would involve walking and she didn't want to consider that possibility quite yet.

*One thing at a time, girl.*

Pushing hard against the door, Rachel struggled to get out of the car. Gritting her teeth, she stumbled to her feet, dismayed to realize her flashlight was about as useful as high heels on a goat. The wind and rain was fierce and the light was swallowed up less than a foot away.

Clinging to the car, she stumbled forward, shining the light on her rear tires. The wind tore at her clothing and tossed her hair from its usual sloppy twist. Wet strands slapped at her face when she bent to inspect the damage.

Her tire looked okay but somehow she'd managed to get lodged with a large tree limb in front of the wheel. Water lapped at her ankles and she grabbed the branch, the bark digging into her palms when she tried to dislodge it. Grunting and cursing under her breath, she soon realized that her car was immovable.

She was stuck.

Soaked and shaking, Rachel stumbled back into the dubious safety of her car. The wind tore the handle from her hand and she fell into the front seat, face first. She yanked her feet in just before the wind slammed the door.

Huddling against the steering wheel, Rachel's breathing was harsh as she pondered her options. In retrospect, taking this trip in the face of a storm was a stupid move. The worst mistake of all was that she hadn't notified anyone she was headed home and in this case, the consequences could be dire.

Serena, her coworker, would figure it out in the morning as she'd left a note with the opening cash drawer for the store, but that was a few hours away. She glanced at the illuminated clock on her dash. Make that many hours away.

The only reason she hadn't notified her parents was because she didn't want her family to worry about her. As it was, they worried all the time. Her mama believed that a single woman living in New Orleans was fresh meat for the slaughter. Little did her mother guess that she'd find herself in far more danger less than ten miles from home.

Propping the flashlight on the dashboard, she reached for her purse. Maybe, just maybe her cell phone would work. Pulling out a slim silver phone, she flipped it open. Her gaze was glued to the screen and she held her breath as the phone searched for a signal. *Network Unavailable* flashed on the screen and her shoulders sagged.

That was another problem with the bayou area, inconsistent cell service.

She tossed the cell phone onto the passenger seat then propped her elbows on the steering wheel. The rain showed no signs of slowing, and with every minute that passed the water rose. With her car in such a precarious position, she had only one option left.

She'd have to walk and try to find help.

It was suicide and she knew it. Her best bet could be to find a sturdy tree and lash herself to it. The water would rise but she'd never seen the trees be completely swallowed—uprooted yes, swallowed, no. She winced when a pain ran through her

head. She touched her temple, surprised when her fingertips were smeared with blood. When she hit the window she must've cut her head without realizing it.

Grabbing a tissue, she wiped her fingers then tossed it onto the passenger seat with the useless cell phone. Just the thought of trying to walk in this storm was enough to make her nauseous. A gust of wind hit her car and she felt the rear of the car rise then sink, coming to rest at a level lower than before. Her heart stuttered and she grabbed her purse and looped the strap over her neck and shoulder. Staying in the car was no longer an option. A few more moves like that and her car would be in the marsh with the fish.

Shoving the phone and keys into her purse, an image of the alligator flashed in her mind. She just couldn't shake the idea that the creature had been smiling at her as if amused at her plight.

"Wish I'd killed the thing. Too damn many alligators 'round here anyway."

Picking up the flashlight, she said a silent prayer then opened the door, allowing the storm to sweep over her.

Staggering against the wind, she gasped when the marsh water reached several inches above her ankles. Holding onto the car, she stumbled around the front end. The lights were still on though they made little difference. Ducking to create a smaller target for the storm, she scrambled over to the tree she'd hit. Now that she was on the other side of the car, she could see the extent of the damage. The rear tire, at least the part that wasn't underwater, was bent at an odd angle and the quarter panel was smashed in. Even if she could've removed the branch, the car wasn't going anywhere soon.

After muttering another small prayer, she faced west and walked into the storm. Rain slashed at her body and the wind and water threatened to sweep her off her feet. Keeping to the marginal shelter of the trees, she made her way along the edge of the road, desperate to keep her footing against the water sucking at her legs.

She'd only walked a few yards when she heard the shriek of tearing metal. The water had lifted the rear end of her car and it almost looked as if it were trying to suck the car into the marsh. Slowly, the back end descended, coming to rest against another tree at a hair-raising angle.

A wave of water crashed against the car and the headlights flickered then dimmed. Panic struck Rachel and she took a step without hanging onto the tree. Water slammed at her legs, knocking her to the road, and the flashlight slipped from her grip. The light went out and she realized that trouble had arrived in spades.

Struggling against the pull of the water, she grabbed at the tree, using it to haul herself onto her feet. Shaking the damp hair from her eyes, she surveyed the hostile, watery world.

If she remembered correctly, there was an old house less than half a mile away on the Marsh side. The great-grandparents of a childhood friend, Etienne Broussard, had lived there for many years. His great-grandmother was a healer or *traiteuse*, who lived in an elevated house in the heart of the marsh. The house had been built in the 1920s

and it had survived many storms much worse than this. If she were lucky, it would still be standing.

Her knees felt wobbly and the water sucked at her legs. Judging from her current circumstances, luck was in short supply.

Pushing all thoughts of fear or discomfort from her mind, she set herself to the task of walking through the storm. The strain of the storm was taking its toll and very quickly her senses went dead. The fight to walk was taking all of her resources and nothing else existed around her.

She had no idea how long she'd walked, the steady rain and growing darkness had served to confuse her already muddled senses. Her cheap watch wasn't waterproof and it had stopped the moment it had gotten damp. Weary to the bone, she felt as if she'd been walking for days though in reality it hadn't been even an hour. The urge to grab onto a tree and sit for a few minutes was strong but that wasn't an option. Rachel was afraid that if she sat down she'd never get up again.

Dreaming of warm blankets and steaming hot chicory coffee that her papa made, she stumbled and almost fell down. An unfamiliar noise sounded and she snapped to attention.

Was that an engine?

She spun around and the storm seemed just a shade lighter. Six high-powered lights were mounted on the roll bar of a pickup truck and it was moving toward her. She gave a wild shout of joy.

"I'm saved!"

Moving to the edge of the road so as not to be run over, she raised her arms and began screaming at the top of her lungs. If this person tried to drive past her, she'd throw herself into the back if she had to—she'd do anything to get out of this storm.

The engine grew louder and she began to jump up and down to gain the driver's attention. When the lights grew closer and she could make out the grill of the truck. Rachel leapt and came down hard on the edge of the road. The water-damaged asphalt gave way beneath her feet and she fell.

Her scream was cut off in mid-note as she was catapulted into the marsh. Water filled her nose and mouth and she was pulled under by the strength of the current. Her exhausted mind didn't know which way was up and she clawed at anything within reach. Images of bodies floating in the water flashed before her eyes.

She was not going to die like this.

\* \* \* \* \*

Etienne Broussard drove slowly along the marsh road with heavy metal music blaring from the stereo speakers. For the thousandth time he asked himself what the hell he was doing. He was supposed to be in New Orleans with his twin brother to



celebrate the opening of Jacques' art gallery, instead he was headed back home for no good reason whatsoever.

He'd left the house well over two hours ago and he'd have been in New Orleans if he hadn't been forced to turn around. Just before he reached Petit Calliou he'd had a flat tire. That in itself was puzzling enough as his tires were new and there'd been nothing in the road that he'd seen. After changing the tire he'd headed north when an obstacle prevented him from going any further.

A large alligator had climbed out of the bayou and was stretched across the road blocking both lanes. Having grown up on the bayou, Etienne didn't worry about the alligators. They were basically lazy when it was warm and they came out to play in the early evenings. In a storm they liked to lie on the road as the cement would still be warm from the sun.

But this creature had been different.

From nose to tail it had almost covered the road from shoulder to shoulder. The most interesting quirk was that when Etienne had tried to drive around it, the old rascal had moved, preventing him from going any further. As he contemplated his next move. It was as though he'd been struck with an overwhelming urge to return home.

Now, he wasn't a superstitious man, but having been raised in a Cajun community and he'd been surrounded by superstition all of his life. Even he had to admit that something otherworldly seemed to be at work with this animal. The alligator had kept his eye on the truck and when Etienne decided to turn back, he could've sworn the animal winked.

But why in the hell was he driving through a storm to get back to an empty house?

It was only by sheer luck that he was driving the truck today or he'd be unable to get back to the house at all. His work truck was two feet off the ground and he could drive through a lot of water before it would have any effect on it mechanically. His personal car was a sports car, and while it was a great machine, in a big storm it was like driving a toaster on a patch of ice.

One of his favorite songs came on and he increased the volume. He loved his great-grandparent's home, and when Ms. Emma had passed away she'd left the property to him. Soon he'd graduated college with a degree in nature conservation then took a job with the state monitoring the effects of weather and pollution on the Gulf Coast. After spending months remodeling the house, it was now his favorite place in the world.

It didn't get any better than this.

Reaching a dip in the road, he wasn't surprised to see the water level had risen enough to create a runoff from the marsh into the lake. Coming to a stop, he shifted into the lowest gear and the big engine dropped to a deep growl. Carefully he maneuvered through the newly created river where a road had been only hours before.

Rain slashed at the windows and he continued at a slow speed as he sang along to the thundering music. The wipers were making very little dent in the deluge but he wasn't terribly concerned as he knew this road with his eyes closed.

Etienne glanced at the dashboard clock. It was only nine p.m. and if the storm hadn't ruined the evening the sun would be setting soon. This weather would probably ruin his brother's opening so the possibility of Jacques coming out in the morning for a fishing trip as they'd originally planned was slim to none. He grinned. Then again, with all this rain they just might be able to fish from his front porch.

Rounding a bend, he touched the brakes when his headlights illuminated a small car half on and half off the road. His lip curled. Obviously some fool had thought they could navigate the marsh road in that little tin can and survive.

*Idiot...*

Etienne maneuvered his vehicle as close as possible to the other. Grabbing the handle of the spotlight mounted on his truck, he flicked it on and pointed at the car. It was empty. The car hadn't been there when he'd left so chances were whoever owned this car was out wandering around in the storm...which meant he'd have to go looking for them.

"Fuck."

After turning the spotlight to illuminate the road ahead, he took his foot off the brake. So much for stretching out on the couch and listening to the rain fall. He scowled. It seemed like lately something was always happening to destroy his plans. If another alligator appeared on the road, he was going to give up and visit the voodoo priestess who lived in Cocodrie.

"Fuck," he muttered again.

When he got his hands on the driver, he would give them a right hook that guaranteed they'd be unconscious for at least a week.

The road was narrow and twisty though the parish had paved it several years ago. He guessed they got tired of dumping gravel after every major storm only for it to be washed away with the next.

Straining to see the road, Etienne carefully guided the truck along the road. Of course it would be a major problem if the driver had left the road and wandered into the marsh. If that were the case the authorities might find their clothing next week as they'd be crab bait already. It would be easy to get lost out here if one didn't know the area.

Every year at least one or two people made the mistake of thinking the beautiful marsh was good walking and they'd have to be rescued. More often than not the ground beneath their feet was a flottant, an island of grass and dirt that floated on the marsh water. It looked solid but it really wasn't. He'd lost count of the times he'd fallen through while surveying the marsh, but he always carried equipment to rescue himself.

It was only a few years ago a man had lost his life when he'd been swimming in the marsh. A cranky gator had caught the man and stowed his body under a flottant to keep him fresh. Several weeks later all that had been found was his shredded swim trunks.

Such was the life on the bayou.

A movement on the side of the road caught his attention and he slowed. Turning down the radio, he cracked his window just in case someone was out there screaming for help. Using his spotlight, he checked the area. Other than raging water and sodden marsh grass, there appeared to be nothing amiss.

Closing the window, he turned off the spotlight and continued on his way, humming along with the music.

## Chapter Two

Clawing her way through the marsh grass, she began to cry when the red taillights vanished into the storm. Rachel propped her forehead on her arm, her breathing reduced to gasping sobs. The scent of marsh mud and rain was strong in her nose but she lacked the energy to move. She felt utterly defeated.

A few minutes passed and her breathing calmed. Though she felt shaky, she had to get up whether she wanted to or not. How many times had her parents pounded that into the heads of their offspring.

*Life doesn't always hand you a fishing pole and bait, sometimes you just have to do things the hard way, on your hands and knees.*

They were certainly right about that. Rachel struggled to her knees and climbed onto the roadway. Luckily it was still warm from the day's sun and she lay down to soak some of that heat into her body.

For the first time ever, she knew her life was in serious danger.

The temperature was in the low eighties but her body didn't realize that. She was chilled due to her prolonged exposure to the elements and her thinking wasn't exactly clear. On top of that her body was on the verge of total collapse. Her swim in the marsh had cost her a great deal of strength—fighting the water filled with mud that had been stirred up by the storm was no easy feat. After lying on the road for just a few moments she already felt better and soon she might even be able to get up.

In that moment, she knew only one thing, there was no way she was going to lie down on this road and die.

Several years ago when her great-grandmother had passed away, she'd decided that was the way she wanted to go, at ninety-two in her bed surrounded by family and friends. There was no way in hell dying on a roadway in a storm figured into her death plans.

Gritting her teeth, she forced herself to her knees then to her feet. Her head swam and she staggered to a road sign, clinging to the metal post for balance. Counting under her breath, she'd reached thirteen before realizing she wasn't going to go headfirst onto the pavement. With clenched fists and jaw locked, she released the pole and began to walk.

Left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot, one step at a time.

Time faded to a blur and she paid little attention to her surroundings. The water was getting deeper with every twist and turn she walked. When she reached a dry section, she counted herself lucky as this signaled she'd reached the highest section of the marsh and she was close to Ms. Emma's old house.

Buoyed by the knowledge, her step picked up and she was just off power walking by the time she reached the muddy drive. Leaving the road to walk in the grass, her feet sunk into the mud. The ground was saturated to the point her feet sunk into the grass making walking all that more difficult. Swearing at Mother Nature, she struggled up a slight incline until she reached the top, then her heart sank.

The sound of rushing water told her everything she needed to know. The drive descended into a little gully and the house sat on the other side. Sliding down the hill, she heaved a sigh of relief. The gully was full but there was maybe only a foot of water. She should be able to traverse this obstacle as long as she was careful.

When she looked up, a flickering light caught her eye.

The house!

Even from this distance she could tell it was still standing. Never in her life had she seen anything quite so welcome. With her gaze locked on that small beacon, she crawled through the water on her hands and knees, trying not to grimace when confused fish bumped into legs.

By the time she reached the other half of the drive, the light in the window of the cabin was more distinct. Still crawling, she reached the porch steps with a sob. Grabbing the handrail, she hauled herself to her feet then staggered up the steps only to fall at the top. She barely noticed the pain when her shin connected hard with the edge of the step. Three words kept repeating in her mind.

Safety.

Security.

Rest.

She crawled to the door and wished she had the energy to leap with joy but she didn't. Leaning her cheek against the wooden door she heaved a sigh of relief. Just being out of the driving rain was a slice of heaven. If she wasn't so cold she could fall asleep here. Instead she knocked on the door.

"Is anyone home?" When there was no answer, she pounded harder. "Hello, I need help please."

Without even thinking she dropped into the language of the bayou.

*"Donne moi voir de aider."*

Nothing moved inside the cabin.

"This cannot be happening," she muttered. "Only I would make it to the house and it would be empty."

Sheer determination got her to her feet. She grabbed the doorknob and wrenched, surprised when it opened easily. Stepping through the doorway, she paused to listen. With the exception of the storm, the house was quiet.

"Hello? Is anyone at home?"

A gust of wind whipped in the doorway, bringing with it the rain. She shut the door and her hands shook when she reached for the light switch, not surprised when

nothing happened. At the best of times electricity would be sketchy out here, if it was even available at all. Hurrying over to the window, she picked up the battery-powered lantern. Judging from the light sensor on the top it probably came on when the sun went down.

At first glance it was obvious that someone lived here. In the center of the large room was a double-sided fireplace and a fire had been laid on the grate complete with tinder. In a flash she was across the room searching for matches. Unfortunately she'd lost her purse in the water—she'd had a lighter in there. Finally she located them on the mantel and lit one with shaking hands. After applying the flame to the tinder, within moments a low fire was eating the dried twigs and marsh grass, gradually gaining in strength.

Satisfied the logs would catch, she went in search of a bathroom. When she was a child she'd been in this house on several occasions. Etienne's great-grandmother baked fresh cookies every Tuesday and Friday afternoons. In the summertime she and her siblings along with the Broussard kids could be found on Ms. Emma's porch drinking ice-cold colas and munching on the batch of the day. Ms. Emma had been a lovely lady.

The floors gleamed with a high shine and she was surprised to see the kitchen had been totally refurbished. The ancient woodstove was gone, replaced with sleek silver appliances, though she was pleased to see the handmade kitchen table and chairs remained.

Maybe one of the Broussard's lived here now?

The wide window that looked out over the marsh was shuttered and a cooking island had been added near the stove. The counters were clean save for an alligator-shaped cookie jar.

Two doors opened off the kitchen, one the pantry and the other was the bathroom. Ms. Emma had grudgingly sacrificed a large portion of her pantry to have the washroom added on when Rachel was a child and she'd carried on like a cranky old thing. Secretly Rachel knew she'd been pleased as she was always asking the kids if they had to go to the restroom just so she could show it off.

After making quick work of the facilities, she removed her sodden clothing then grabbed a thick towel. She was so cold her skin felt like raw chicken and she rubbed hard in an attempt to bring the circulation back. Binding her hair in the towel, she found a large man's flannel shirt behind the door.

Even though it felt very odd to wear a stranger's clothing, she donned the soft shirt, shivering when the owner's scent wrapped itself around her along with the flannel. A mixture of male skin and the outdoors caused a spark of arousal to flare in her breasts. Stunned, she clutched at the neckline.

*Down, girl. That's what got you in trouble the last time.*

Still shivering, she hurried out to the living room relieved to see the fire was gaining in strength. Grabbing an afghan from the couch, she sank onto a lush flokati rug with a happy sigh. The lantern flickered out and she put it to the side.

Her last relationship had been a disaster even though Peter had been a nice guy in the beginning. They'd met at college and had a great deal in common. They both loved music, art and the nightlife of New Orleans. They were in many of the same classes and he'd never failed to make her laugh.

The only major drawback had been that he was, at best, mediocre in bed though his lack of experience was supplemented by his enthusiasm. The relationship had lasted about six months then he broke up with her because he'd decided she was a pervert for wanting to be tied up.

How in the world did he ever figure that out if he didn't experiment?

Rachel had made it a policy to never lie about her sexual needs. She was an experienced woman who enjoyed sex and needed plenty of it. Her favorite indulgence was bondage and role-playing, both of which Peter had absolutely no clue. Whenever she brought it up his canned response was that she should be turned on by him, not by the game playing.

Poor boy, he never really did understand what made her tick.

She reached for the towel and began to dry her hair. It didn't take a great deal to turn her on. A little soap, a shower and bam, she was so there. Her sexual hobbies weren't about the inability to be turned on; it was about a change of pace, a giving over of her mind, body and soul.

Both activities were about the fantasy, an escape from reality. The role-playing fed her creative side and allowed her to explore her sexuality in ways that both frightened and fascinated her. Bondage was the sensation of giving up the ultimate control, though it was an utter illusion. The person being bound was the one who held the power, not the other way around.

Rachel began to finger-comb her damp hair. She was pretty sure he'd taken her to his bed only because she was a slightly older, more experienced woman. She snorted. The reality of dating a serious college student who also worked full-time had quickly lost its appeal. On the first day of the summer break she'd awoken to a hastily written good-bye note and that was the last she'd ever seen of him.

Lucky her! It was pretty sad that she considered her vibrator a step up from a living, breathing man. For the past year she'd concentrated on school, she was within nine months of graduation and nothing was going to get in her way. She was about to be the first person in her family to accomplish this feat. No matter how horny she was, she wasn't about to let herself become distracted by wild, adventurous sex, no matter how much she craved it.

A wave of sleepiness washed over her and she gave up on her hair. Curling up on the rug, she pulled the afghan over her exhausted body and the stranger's scent tantalized her nose.

What if it were Etienne who lived here?

She grinned. In high school she'd had the biggest crush on him. He was so good-looking that all the girls wanted him which made him all that much more unattainable.

He'd never looked at her, not once. That was the lot of a gangly sixteen-year-old with braces and pimples.

An image of a handsome nineteen-year-old with olive skin and dark brown eyes surfaced. He'd played football in high school then received a scholarship from Louisiana State University. For a Cajun he'd been quite tall, topping out at six feet even. Thanks to his athletic ability he'd been built like a wall and his six-pack had its own six-pack.

He was hot.

The best, or worst part depending on how she wanted to look at it, was Etienne was best friends with her brothers. The Broussard and Thierry boys were the bad boys of the school and all the girls wanted to date them. Etienne and his twin, Jacques, had been linked to more girls than was humanly possible.

She wondered what he was doing now. She'd lost contact with him after he left for college. Matthew had stayed close though he hadn't mentioned Etienne lately. She'd have to remember to mention him when she got home.

The fire wavered before her eyes and sleep staked its claim. Around the house the storm continued while inside, Rachel slept.

\* \* \* \* \*

Etienne was exhausted by the time he made it home. He'd driven the length of the marsh road and into Dulac in the hopes of finding the owner of the car. The yards were already flooding and the roadsides were crammed with cars in an attempt to avoid the encroaching waters. In the lowest areas the houses were islands surrounded by rainwater moats. The bayous had already flooded onto the roads with a continuous river of water pouring in from the bayous on one side and into the yards of the houses on the opposite. Some would lose everything in their houses tonight.

Pulling into his drive, which resembled a mud pit, the tires slipped and slid in the muddy soup. It was past time to have the drive paved and to build a bridge over the wash. Damn thing flooded any time a decent rain paid a visit and he was tired of ruining a pair of boots every year.

Cresting the tiny hill, he slowed to survey the damage. The wash wasn't running hard, but it was a good two feet deep. The truck would make it but unless the rain stopped soon, he'd be trapped in his house like those in Dulac.

Then again, there were worst places to be trapped.

Putting the truck in gear, he eased down the slope and into the water. Aiming the nose of the vehicle away from the house, he made it through by using the angle to compensate for the pushing of the water against the much lighter back end.

And to think, right now he could be sitting in his brother's gallery with a stupidly sexy woman in his lap, a martini in one hand and a breast in the other, as he contemplated just how to get the woman tied up in his hotel bed.



Some women could be funny about things like spankings and leather restraints.

Reaching the other side without incident, he drove behind the house and straight into the garage. Located near a stand of trees behind the house, his great-grandfather had been a wise man and he'd worked like a dog to bring in enough earth to create the hill for his home. Both structures were on the highest land around for miles and it had never flooded.

Knock on wood.

Exiting the car, out of habit he left the keys in the ignition. If there was any fool moving around in this weather and they wanted to steal his truck, they could have at it. Though chances were he'd end up rescuing them from the wash.

Standing in the open door, Etienne watched the rain slash through air. In the past hour or so it had gotten steadily heavier and with it came stiffer winds. A mighty crash of lightning turned night into day for seconds and he knew it was going to be a very long night.

According to the last weather report, they were facing the remains of a strong tropical storm. It hadn't stayed in the gulf long enough to gain hurricane strength but this was bad enough. The area was in for many hours of wicked weather and damage come daylight. He wasn't overly concerned as he'd grown up in this area and his family had been foolish enough to bed down through Hurricane Betsy in the sixties and Katrina just a few years ago. Cajuns were tough stock.

Another bolt of lightning flashed and the thunder reverberated through the air leaving only a whiff of ozone. Now, if Mother Nature were truly merciful, the driver of the little car would be a plump redhead with skin the color of milk and a mouth made for sucking. He'd walk into his house and find her naked on the rug before the fire with the handcuffs and paddles at the ready.

It was too bad that Mother Nature was a fickle bitch.

Ducking his head he dashed through the storm to the kitchen door. Upon entering the house he realized he wasn't alone. A low fire crackled in the fireplace and the house was overly warm. Without thinking he removed the shotgun from over the door then checked to see if it were loaded. With the gun at the ready, he crept toward the living room and was shocked at what he saw.

A woman lay on the rug by the fire but she was no redhead. Her long dark hair hid her face and she'd kicked off the afghan in her sleep. She wore his shirt and it had ridden up to expose her wide hips and shapely legs. Even though he knew he shouldn't do it, he couldn't help but look at her pretty pussy. The hair was neatly trimmed and sweat broke out on his upper lip.

She looked good enough to eat. His shirt covered her belly but the neck gaped to expose one perfect, ample breast. Her skin was the faint olive color of a Cajun and her nipple was dark, deep rose. Etienne's mouth began to water and he licked his lips. He would've given everything he owned to take that nipple into his mouth and tease it into awareness.

This woman had the body of a siren, lush and curvy with the type figure that never failed to turn his head.

In one word, she was sweet.

Another clap of thunder shook the house and the rain was coming down harder now. The chances of them getting stranded were a given at this point and it looked like he and Sleeping Beauty would have lots of time to get to know each other.

## Chapter Three

When Rachel awoke, she wished she hadn't. Every inch of her body ached and her head throbbed in time to her heartbeat. Getting beat up in the storm was bad enough, and sleeping on the floor had not helped the situation.

After taking a mental accounting of her condition, she rolled to her side to hold her head in her hands. The worst of her pain was her head and in her shin. What in the hell had she done to her shin? The last time she'd been hurting this badly was when she'd been playing volleyball – she dove for the ball and all of her brothers landed on top of her. They thought she'd played like a girl and they didn't want to miss the shot.

"I feel like I've been tackled a thousand times," she moaned, "by elephants."

"Aw, can't be that bad."

The deep male voice shocked her out of her fetal position. From her position on the floor, his jeans-clad legs seemed to be at least a mile high. His white T-shirt hugged every inch of his broad chest and wide shoulders. His face was shadowed by dark hair and there was something very familiar about him.

"W-why not?" she asked.

"I played football for ten years and let me tell you, that's pain."

*It can't be...*

Sitting up, she stared hard into his handsome face. He had coppery skin, high cheekbones and black eyes with a glint of mischief.

*It is!*

"Etienne Broussard, is dat you?" Without thinking she reverted back to the heavy accent of her childhood. "I'd know that mouth of yours anywhere."

His face went blank and his eyes narrowed. How she loved that slightly confused expression.

"Rachel, Rachel Thierry?"

"That's me."

Without warning her eyes began to sting and her lip trembled. This man was a huge part of her childhood and even though he'd teased her mercilessly, she'd always felt safe with him.

"What's up, girl?"

Etienne sank to the rug and pulled her into his lap. Clutching at his arms, she sobbed into his shirt while he continued to stroke her hair. After what seemed like an eternity, her tears subsided.

"Was that your car on the road?" he asked.

"Yes." She took a deep breath and closed her eyes, comforted by the sound of his heart. "I never thought I would get caught in the storm."

"Yeah, well, the marsh claims its own when we let our guard down." His voice was a soft rumble in her ear. "Remind me later when you're feeling better and I'll kick your ass."

"Be nice, I'm traumatized."

"Yeah, right. You're just plain tired. Them stupid brothers of yours spoiled you to death and made you into a girly girl."

"Hardly," she snorted. "When I was five they tossed me in the bayou and I thought they'd let me drown."

"The water wasn't even two feet deep in that spot."

"Yeah, well, to a five-year-old that was deep."

He chuckled and gave her a squeeze. "Point taken."

He released her to look into her eyes. Her stomach did a flop. What the hell? This was Etienne, her childhood friend, not some man to get all moony over.

"I think you need to take a bath and relax," he said.

Well it wasn't exactly wine and roses...

"Yeah, I probably stink." Self-conscious, she pushed her ratty hair away from her face.

"Marsh mud, smells like home to me." His grin was wide. "Besides woman, you were born beautiful and you know it. A little mud on you would be a new fashion in the city."

She laughed. How little this man knew about her life now.

"Since the electricity is out you'll have to take a bath the old-fashioned way."

"Tin tub?"

"You've got it." He released her and rose, helping her up as well. "I kept all of the contingency supplies Ms. Emma had."

"I remember those days. We would live for months without hot water if Papa had a bad season."

"Been there."

"So how did you end up living in the middle of the marsh?"

"She left me the house when she passed a few years back. She knew I was the only one who would appreciate it for what it is."

"That and no one with any sense would live out here," she retorted.

"That too," he chuckled. "I've always loved the marsh, and I wouldn't want to live anywhere else."

Walking into the kitchen, he opened a cabinet under the sink to pull out two metal buckets.

"You always said you'd never leave the marsh, even when you were a kid."

"I meant it."

Next to the sink was the old hand pump. Setting a bucket in the sink, he began pumping water into it.

"I played football for four years and got my degree in forestry and conservation from LSU, then I took a job with the state. I really lucked out as I'm based out here."

"Was that after you bedded half the women at the college?"

His brows shot up. "Where the hell are you hearing stories, woman? Matt been running his mouth again?"

"Lucky guess. Since you and Jacques were born, your names have been linked to woman after woman."

"Most of which was an out-and-out lie." He grabbed the bucket and headed toward her.

"That you perpetuated. Not once did you step up and say that you hadn't been with so-and-so."

Damn, the man looked hot carrying a bucket of water!

*This is Etienne, I cannot be turned on by him...*

"Yeah well, back then I felt I had to maintain a certain image." He brought the bucket to the fireplace and hung it on the metal hook Ms. Emma had used for cooking pots.

"You did not need to help. The girls talked about you all the time and they had some pretty serious imaginations."

"Most women do."

Rachel rolled his eyes. "Sexist."

"In your dreams."

"Honey, you don't know anything about my dreams. You aren't nearly old enough and they would corrupt you."

Etienne laughed and it was a full belly, bent-double laugh and she couldn't help but smile. One of the many things she'd loved about him was his ability to throw himself into any situation without restraint. Just the sound of his laugh was enough to awaken the sleeping tiger in her belly.

"Are you through?" she asked.

"Not even close." He was still grinning when he vanished into the pantry and returned with the tub. "Who knew you'd be such a funny woman?"

"All the boys in high school?"

"Did you even date? I don't think I noticed."

"You noticed," she chuckled. "When I went out with, hmm, what was his name, Eldon? I thought you were going to choke to death the night you saw us at the diner."

"I don't remember that—"

"I do. You were there with Crystal what's-her-name but you didn't seem to be paying much attention to her."

"Well it was hard to when Eldon was staring down your shirt," he shot back.

"So you do remember." She sauntered toward him, well aware that her shirt was unbuttoned to her navel. "Well, my breasts are pretty spectacular."

He grunted and her gaze locked on his face. A muscle ticced in his jaw, and was that sweat on his lip?

"Did the boys ever talk about me in the locker room?"

His gaze darted away. "Not that I ever heard." He headed back to the sink.

"Liar." She rose and walked over to him, her hands crossed over her chest. "What did they say about me?"

"Nothing—"

"You never did lie worth a damn, at least not to people who really know you." With her index finger she poked him in the chest, hard. "What did they say?"

"For crying out loud, Rach. The only boy who dared to say anything about you in the locker room got his ass kicked by your brother. After that every guy in school was afraid to ask you out."

"Yeah, Matthew ruined my high-school dating experience. You know he's getting married in the fall, I may have to stuff his suitcase with anal lube."

"You're evil." He chuckled.

"You have no idea."

"Obviously not." He retrieved another bucket and began filling it. "So I hear you're doing well in college."

"I am. I'll graduate early next year."

"Congratulations. What else have you been doing?"

"Learning how to spank very naughty men." If she hadn't been watching him, she never would've seen him fumble the bucket.

"Nasty girl," he said.

"Yeah, well, a girl has to have options, you know."

"And spanking men is one of them?" He poured the bucket of water into the tub.

She shrugged. "Whatever works."

His gaze bore into hers and she didn't have a clue what he must be thinking.

"You've changed, little girl," he murmured.

"Mm, I'm not very little anymore."

His gaze moved over her body coming to linger on her breasts.

"So I noticed. But you're still my best friend's little sister."

"Baby, I'm nobody's little anything."

She propped her hip on the table and reached for her shirt, surprised when he stopped her. Holding her hands, he looked down into her eyes and she was stunned by the naked hunger reflected back to her.

"You're exhausted and it's been a very long time since I've had a woman." His voice was low. "Right now you need to get cleaned up, I'm going to warm up some dirty rice, and after you eat, I think you need to take it easy for a while. You've had quite an adventure —"

"You sound like my father."

"Good, because he'd slap your ass if he heard the things you been saying to me."

She laughed. "Not hardly. How do you think he and Mama hooked up?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Etienne sat in the living room while Rachel splashed around in the tub. It wasn't that he was trying to watch her as it was only after he sat that he realized he would catch glimpses of her through the fireplace.

Pervert.

*Yes I am!*

The sound of splashing water and flashes of wet skin were enough to set his body on full alert. There was something undeniably erotic about the sounds of a woman bathing. The scent of soap, the mental image of a soapy cloth over her breasts, over the curve of her belly, down her legs, up her thighs to the slick flesh in between —

"Etienne?"

He had to clear his throat before he could speak. "Yeah?"

"I'm going to need some help rinsing my hair."

*Yeah, right. Like I'm going to fall for that.*

"Dunk your head in the water and you'll be good to go."

"It's dirty."

"Rachel —"

"Etienne, I cannot go back to bed with my hair still cruddy. All you have to do is bring me a bucket of water," she sighed. "You'd think I was going to jump on your bones."

*From the way you were acting earlier...*

"Fine, just stay in that tub then."

He walked into the kitchen and he was relieved she had listened to him. The only body parts visible were her knees and soapy head. Still, his body didn't care if she were respectably covered, all his dick knew was that there was a naked woman in the vicinity and his dry spell had been way too long.

Stalking to the sink, he grabbed the bucket and began pumping water into it.

"This won't be very warm," he said.

"That's okay. I can take it."

Bucket in hand he turned and almost swallowed his tongue. Rachel stood nude in the bathtub, her body gleaming with moisture and rivulets of soap. Seeing her fully nude for the first time gave him an appreciation for just how beautiful she was. She had the classic violin shape and her breasts were full and her nipples large. She didn't have the flat belly that most women seemed to think was attractive and her hips were ample just the way he liked them.

With her dark bedroom eyes and a mouth made for sin, Etienne knew he was in serious trouble.

"Hello, Earth to Etienne. What 'cha doing with the water?"

Her breasts jiggled when she waved her hands to gain his attention. His cock threatened to bust out of his jeans and his control was held by the merest of threads. Catching the amusement on that angelic face was the final blow. He stomped over to the tub and dumped the water over her head.

"Etienne!"

Ignoring her dismay, he dropped the bucket by the tub and stomped out the kitchen door to cool off.

\* \* \* \* \*

He wanted her.

Rachel couldn't wipe the grin off her face as she brushed her hair. He was outside in the garage doing anything he could to avoid her. It was rare that she set her sights on a man and tried to seduce him but Etienne would be her exception. There was something forbidden about him. Maybe it was a hangover from her puppy love that she'd felt for him since the time she was nine. It had always seemed like he was open to dating any girl in school except for her.

In retrospect she understood. Her brother would've kicked his ass if he'd dare to lay a finger on his sister. But they were grownups and no one outside of this cabin would ever have to know what happened between them.

In reality, it was the perfect situation. Her life was firmly entrenched in New Orleans while his was here in the marsh. There would be at least sixty miles between them so it wasn't like there was any possibility of a real relationship. Her stomach twisted.

Besides, he was hot and judging from the rumors she'd always heard from her brothers, Etienne Broussard was a man who knew how to pleasure a woman. Right now that was exactly what she was looking for. After Peter, having monkey sex with a big horny man was a pretty hot fantasy –

"Ouch!"



Rachel dropped the brush and touched her forehead. It was damp and her eyes widened when she saw the blood on her fingertips. Vaguely she remembered hitting her head when she wrecked her car and obviously she'd cracked her head but good.

She rose and headed for the bathroom. The electricity was still out and she peered in the mirror, unable to tell how much damage had been done.

"Damn it, where is that lantern?"

After checking the kitchen and living room she had to admit defeat. She'd have to call in Etienne and have him dress her wound.

"You didn't tell me you were hurt."

Etienne dabbed her wound with an alcohol wipe and her swift intake of breath told him it stung. He blew a gentle breath over the wound to soothe the ache.

"I didn't realize I was hurt until I brushed my hair."

"Well..." He alternated dabbing the wound then blowing on it. "You probably should have stitches but there's nothing I can do about it. My sewing skills aren't up to your standards."

She giggled and the lilt of obvious pleasure put a wide smile on his face. Her laughter was infectious.

"Yeah, you'd probably use a shrimp net hook and some baling twine," she sneered.

"Naw, fishing line is all the rage."

Her headshake was minute and for some reason it brought his attention straight to her breasts. She was the only woman he'd ever seen who could make a simple bath towel look like a party dress. Her breasts strained against the cloth and the part had gaped open, exposing a mouth-watering length of her thigh.

Damn, when did she become so uninhibited?

"All I can do is put some bandages on it. When the water recedes you'll need to pay a visit to your doctor. He'll probably have to put you on antibiotics as well."

"Yeah, who knows what diseases are growing out there."

"I do," he chuckled. "That's why you need the antibiotic."

"Ah, I feel so much better now."

"Better safe than sorry."

"Yes, Papa."

Etienne dropped the bandage wrappers and took her chin, tilting her head back. His gaze bore into her surprised one.

"Trust me, I am not your father nor do I have any remotely fatherly feelings toward you."

Her mouth formed an O and her eyes went wide. For the first time she seemed to be speechless. Dropping a hard kiss on her forehead, he grabbed a bucket and dipped it into the tub then carried it outside.

That woman was going to send him over the edge.

Etienne threw the water in the direction of the wash. It was too bad he wasn't a smoker as he needed a smoke very bad. It had been at least seven or eight years since the last time he'd seen her. Then she'd still been thin and a little gawky as if she wasn't quite sure what to do with her arms or legs. He grinned. She'd always been a beautiful girl, even with braces and pimples.

Beautiful wasn't a large enough word to describe her. With her figure, that smile and her wicked sense of humor, the men in New Orleans must love her.

Hell, he didn't even know if she was seeing someone.

He was struck with a sense of discomfort. She'd always been a little sister to him. Someone to tease, put critters down her shirt and he was the first to kick ass if someone had hurt her feelings. In all his years he'd never imagined that he'd be sexually attracted to her. Then again he'd never guessed she'd grow up to be so hot. He could only hope that when she woke up her wicked streak had passed. He'd really hate it if Matthew showed up on his doorstep to kick his ass.

## Chapter Four

Even when he was asleep she wanted to touch him.

Rachel slipped into bed beside Etienne, taking care to not disturb his sleep. Her gaze slipped over his delicious body. Well, at least one question was answered.

Boxers.

In repose he didn't lose any of his masculinity like some men did. His mouth was softer which only served to increase her desire to kiss him. His hair was tousled, shadowing his eyes, and that made him look all that much more dangerous. One arm lay by his side and the other was over his head.

What was it about the exposed skin of a man's inner arm? It had always turned her on. Maybe it was the vulnerability of that pale skin with no hair? It was the polar opposite of the outside of his arm.

Etienne was the kind of man women easily fell in love with. He was intelligent, attentive and had an innate instinct to protect those who were weaker. Not to mention the fact he was possibly the sexiest man she'd ever seen. What woman wouldn't want Etienne Broussard?

*How about you, Rachel?*

All of her life she'd loved him with the adoring puppy love of a child, but she was a woman now. Would her adoring love take a more womanly form after she seduced him?

She leaned forward, and her tongue snaked out for a tender taste of his skin. He stirred and she held her breath, thrilled with the game of teasing him in his sleep.

Once he settled, she moved to his shoulder, kissing the warm curve before working her way down to his breast. A simple flick of her tongue over the flat nipple caused him to jerk but not awaken. A silky purr escaped her mouth and she covered him, her tongue teasing him into hardness –

She squealed when a thick male arm caught her around the waist and flipped her onto the bed, flat on her back. Etienne lay on top of her, his eyes blazing with frustration.

"You're playing with fire, little girl," he snarled.

Rachel slid her right leg from under him to wrap it around his hip. "Lead me not into temptation, for I can find it myself."

Grabbing his head she brought it down for a kiss. Their lips met and in barely the blink of an eye she went from the hunter to prey.

Their mouths came together in a kiss that was part need and part frustration. Their tongues dueled while their hands engaged in combat to see who could expose every inch of skin first. Her T-shirt was shredded by the time he broke the kiss.

With urgent, hungry noises he laid claim to her breasts. While he suckled and nipped one, his hand was stroking and teasing the other. Rachel let her eyes drift closed and her fingers tangled in his thick hair. His erection nudged her thigh, sending a shaft of excitement through her. Now this was how a man seduced a woman.

Every inch was warm, heated by his body and the anticipation of what was to come. She shifted her other leg to wrap both around his waist and lock her ankles. The slide of his teeth of her nipple sent a dart of exquisite pleasure pain to her pussy. Tilting her head back, she groaned long and loud.

He soon repeated the movement, from one nipple to another, until her pussy ached and she needed to come hard and fast. She tightened her thighs and tried to urge him into giving her what she craved.

"You're beautiful," Etienne whispered in Cajun French.

"As are you."

"I need you to touch me."

Rachel reached for him, her hands sliding over hot, male flesh. His chest was thickly muscled as was the dense column of his neck. His skin was living silk over firm, thick muscles and she enjoyed the silky steel feel. She enjoyed his scent, a mixture of clean skin and a faintly woody fragrance combined with an underlying scent of male arousal.

Sliding her hands up the column of his neck, she twined her fingers in the long locks, trying to urge him back to her mouth but he wouldn't have any of it. He nipped her chin then placed an open-mouthed kiss on her throat. Purring like a cat, she released his hair to tease his flat nipples.

"Your body is like a drug," he hissed. "Heady. I want absorb you into my skin, my body, my soul."

Her head swam with his potent images and damp warmth flooded her pussy, readying for his possession. His leg moved, bringing her pussy into direct contact with his hot, hard thigh.

"Yes," she hissed through clenched teeth. "Please—"

"In time," he chuckled. "We're in no hurry."

His big hand covered her breast, teasing her nipple into a hard point and sending a wave of heat to her belly. His body shifted, bringing her underneath him. The weight of his body sent her arousal into overdrive. His mouth brushed the tip of her breast, the rasp of his faint beard made her tremble.

"I want to taste you." He was kissing his way down her belly. His hand touched her knee, sliding upward toward her weeping pussy.

Her breath was coming in pants and her fingers dug into his resilient flesh. Her head was spinning. Never had she been so utterly and completely aroused from her head to her toes. This man's mouth played a symphony on her body, every nerve tuned to even the slightest touch.

She wanted to scream when he covered her pussy with his palm. Instead, she stifled the noise by clenching her lower lip between her teeth. Her groan was throaty and he chuckled against her lower belly.

"Let it out, *belle chérie*. I need to hear you, how you feel when I touch you."

Parting her pussy lips, he stroked the damp flesh, coming close to the hardened flesh that ached for him, but not quite touching it. Her breathing was harsh and she grabbed his hair with both hands.

"You're making me crazy," she moaned.

"Good."

His tongue licked at her flesh and she felt as if her body had become electrified. Arching, she screamed, her fists holding his hair even tighter. His mouth closed over her clit and he began to hum. The gentle waves of sensation were enough to make her grind her hips into his mouth. Moaning, she struggled for more but the tones were gentle like the licks of a feather against her flesh.

"More, I need...harder."

"Mmm."

She tried to push his head away but he refused to budge. The tickling sensation continued then he gave her the faintest of licks. Her body jerked in response to the painful, sweet touch. Spreading her thighs as wide as possible, she placed her legs over his shoulders.

His hands came up to grasp her hips and he set to work. His tongue moved over her clit in long, firm licks. With each one she whimpered, her hips beginning to move in time to his licks. Lights swirled behind her eyelids and her heart threatened to burst from her chest. Release beckoned, her fingertips tingled with sensation.

Orgasm washed over her at the same moment lightning stuck somewhere close. The wildness of the storm outside combined with the magical touch of this man's tongue made her feel wanton. She was one with the storm, waves of release washing over her again and again. Her sobs were loud and uncontrolled, her muscles turning to liquid.

When he removed his mouth, she couldn't move. Her entire body tingled with relaxation and her mind was on fire. He spread her legs and his big body moved over her. When he lay on top of her, she received him with open arms.

"That was fantastic," he whispered.

"I'll say."

Her words sounded slurred to her own ears and she couldn't help but giggle. She felt as if she'd been on an all-night drunk, utterly and totally relaxed, but without the headache the next day.

"I can tell you feel good." His mouth touched the rim of her ear. "You're so wet, so soft."

He shifted his hips and brought his erect cock into contact with her pussy and her eyes flew open.

Oh MY.

Shuddering with need at the feel of his long, hot cock against her, Rachel wished with all her heart that she could see his erection. It had been a while since she'd had sex but it felt as if he were a foot long.

"I'm a big man," he said.

She gazed up into Etienne's dark eyes and a sense of unreality washed over her. His features were shadowed by his long hair and the flickering firelight, but his voice was more than enough to coax her into keeping her panties off. Rich with the Cajun accent, it was a rich, deep voice, the kind a woman dreamed of hearing when having wild sex.

"I can imagine," she responded. Without conscious thought her hips moved restlessly.

"I don't know if you can take me." His voice was a strained whisper, firelight gleamed on his sweaty skin. "A lot of women can't—"

"Shh." Her fingers touched his lips, stemming the flow of words. "Slow, just take it slow." She hooked one leg over his hip, bringing them into closer contact. "I want to feel you inside me."

He groaned when her fingers encircled his thick cock. Her eyes slid closed and she began to stroke his massive erection. Pausing only seconds to dip her hand into her wet pussy, she spread the moisture over him.

"I won't be able to take much more of that."

"And that would be a shame," she whispered.

Guiding the head of his cock to her pussy, they both groaned when the head touched her aching slit. Slowly, tentatively his hips pressed forward, spreading her aching flesh, sending a river of desire through her gut.

"Yes," she breathed.

Grasping his shoulders, she held on tight when he entered her just enough to stretch her pussy. Rolling her hips, he slid in a few more centimeters, the sensation part pleasure and pain. Never had she experienced such a sensation and if anything it made her hungry for more.

Capturing his hips with her legs, she pulled him in farther, the movement sending intense sensation dancing along her nerve endings. Her indrawn breath sounded like a hiss.

"I'm hurting you."

"No," she said. "You're not hurting me. I love the feel of you inside me, I'm so...full, stretched..." Her gaze met his. "I want you to fuck me," she panted. "Now."

He needed no further encouragement. His arms braced his upper body, his cheek touched hers and his hips thrust. She wrapped around him like a vine and reveled in the sensation of being filled. Her hips met him thrust for thrust, her body doing anything to ensure her release. All too soon the peak beckoned and with no effort from her, his thrusts pushed her over.

Starlight danced against her closed eyes and he increased his thrusts. Low growls sounded from his throat and she gave herself over to him. She'd ceased to exist, morphing into a vessel for his pleasure. Wave after wave of release broke over her, and she was a mindless creature clawing at his flesh and begging for more.

His body grew taut and the roar of his release echoed through the room. His massive cock jerked and strained in her pussy like a separate living being. After long, drawn out moments of sensual excess, he collapsed over her.

Numb with exhaustion and numerous releases, Rachel closed her eyes and was soon fast asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

Etienne stared up at the ceiling. The feeling of unreality had overtaken him and he was numb from head to toe.

What in the hell had just happened?

Beside him Rachel made a soft noise in her sleep. Her backside wiggled until her butt was pressed against his hip.

He should've kicked her out of the bed...

*She started it.*

He rolled his eyes at the childish response in his head. For crying out loud, he was a mature man who should've had the willpower to refuse a hungry woman's advances –

*She tasted of sin.*

It didn't matter that it had been five months since he'd broken up with his latest partner. At this time in his life he had no desire for a serious relationship, there simply wasn't time for a woman in his life.

*Then your dick should've stayed in your boxers, boy.*

Irritated, he rolled onto his side to spoon with Rachel. Even now he could hardly believe she was here, in his bed. When they'd spent a lot of time together in school, he never paid attention to her at all. It wasn't until his senior year when he'd seen her with Eldon that he realized she'd grown from a gawky girl into a lovely young woman.

To this day he couldn't say why he felt the way he did but it had taken all of his willpower to not knock the boy's teeth into the back of his head for being anywhere near Rachel.

His mama, grandmother and great-grandmother had always hoped they'd hook up, but he'd done everything in his power to avoid her. Teasing her unmercifully until she disliked him had been the hardest thing. The summer he'd noticed she'd grown up was when he'd decided to do everything to stay away from her. If that included destroying the look of utter adoration he'd seen in her eyes, then that was that.

He'd been so good at it that when he left for college, she hadn't attended his going away party. He'd never told anyone but he'd spent that entire night waiting for her and she never showed.

That's what he got for being mean.

All of this was in the past and what mattered now was she was in his bed. Of course the next issue was, now that he had her here, what would he do with her? If her father ever got an inkling that they'd been together, Etienne knew he'd find himself standing before a judge with a shotgun pressed into his ribs. Rachel wasn't a virgin but that wouldn't matter to John Paul Thierry, her father.

Etienne winced at the thought. Not to mention the fact that her eldest brother had been his best friend since second grade. Matthew was a hothead and he loved a good fight. He'd take great pleasure in pounding him into the ground for touching his sister, not that he didn't deserve it.

"Fuck," he muttered.

Rachel stirred, her warm flesh against his and his cock took notice. It hardened and he gritted his teeth. There was no way they could do this again. Sliding out of bed, he took great care to not disturb her. Once was bad enough but the images of her tied to his bed wouldn't fade and it just might be enough to send him to confession on Sunday.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some hours later Rachel woke slowly, feeling toasty warm and incredibly relaxed. Keeping her eyes closed, she stretched, her eyes flying open when a cramp hit her in the leg. Rolling to her side she stumbled to her feet only to stub her toe into the footboard on the bed.

Gasping, she hobbled around the room to realize she was still in Etienne's bedroom. In that moment, everything came back to her in a stomach-wrenching rush.

The alligator.

Her car.

The nightmarish walk on the road.

Falling into the marsh.

Finding Etienne's home.

Safety.

Seducing her brother's best friend.

"Damn."



Rachel sat down hard on the bed, her mind reeling. Had it really happened? Her hands flew to her chest and belly to realize she was naked.

Bedroom.

Naked.

Oh yeah, they'd had sex all right. Wild monkey, hanging from the chandelier sex. The kind of sex that women in romance novels had every day. That thought was enough to send Rachel bolting across the room to dig through his drawers. Locating a pair of running shorts and a T-shirt, she hastily pulled them on.

What had she been thinking?

*Of getting laid by a real man.*

Her libido had definitely led her astray this time. If anyone in her family ever found out, they'd both be in big, big trouble. Maybe she could get him to agree to a mutual partnership. What happens in the marsh, stays in the marsh.

That would certainly solve a lot of their problems –

"Rachel, are you awake?" Etienne's voice sounded outside the bedroom door.

"Yes."

"Good, dinner is on the table."

Her stomach growled and she couldn't help but laugh. It would appear she was hungry.

"Coming."

By the time she walked into the kitchen she was feeling marginally calmer. Etienne had lit two lanterns, one sitting on the table and the other on the counter. A portable propane stove sat on the counter beside it and a pot bubbled away on top.

"How long will the power stay out?" she asked.

"Hard to tell. This road is down on the totem pole as far as the electric guys are concerned. It could be a week, maybe two. If the state sticks their nose in and asks them to step it up, it could be shorter."

"Why don't you have a generator? Papa has two in the shed."

"Yeah well, I do have one but," he chuckled and if she weren't mistaken, he was blushing. "I used the gasoline last week when I went fishing."

She gave him the look she always gave her brothers when they did something to mess up a situation. "So you used your emergency gasoline to fish in the marsh where the catfish probably have more toxins than the bayous?"

"Hey now. The catfish in the lake here are perfectly safe. The marsh has been scrubbed clean what with the storms we had."

"Hell, Katrina scoured everything down to dirt."

"Amen. Did you stay in the city or come down here for that storm?"

Rachel sat at the table where he'd placed a stack of paper napkins and some plastic silverware.

"I stayed in the city. My apartment is on high ground in the quarter and it never really occurred to me to leave. My family has never left for a hurricane so why should I?"

"I'll bet you will next time."

"Well, if New Orleans is in the path of the hurricane then I will probably come back home. With Katrina it wasn't the storm as much as what happened afterwards."

"I hear you." He retrieved bowls from the cupboard. "This is some of Mama's Gumbo."

"Fab, I haven't had Ms. Mamie's gumbo in ages."

"She does make the best."

"That she does."

"What does your mama and grandmother think of you living out here all by yourself?"

"They've never said anything. I think, deep down, they like knowing someone in the family is keeping the place up. The last three generations of Broussards all played in this house, had seafood boils in the backyard and we all learned to swim in the lake. It is our home."

"Yeah, I hear you. We still own the land my grandfather lived on though now it has turned more into swamp than land. Papa is thinking about turning it into a fishing camp," she said.

"Sad, isn't it? Every thirty-eight minutes the Louisiana coast loses one football field of land to erosion."

"Yeah. In about ten to fifteen years the marsh might be completely gone." He carried two steaming bowls to the table. "That's what I'm trying to work against."

Rachel picked up her spoon then paused, giving him a smile. "Thank you, for the work you do."

His brow shot up. "You're welcome."

"Most people don't realize how necessary the coastlines of the gulf are and they're too precious to let the sea reclaim them."

"True." He brought two more bowls. "We've reached the point of no return and if the conservationists and government don't step in soon, all of this could be gone in a hundred years."

Rachel stirred her bowl, her throat tight at the thought of the place she loved lost to the gulf.

"But, on a brighter note, I do have some cold potato salad for the gumbo."

Rachel laughed. "How did you keep it cool?"

"I have an emergency propane cooler in the panty. I got damned tired of replacing everything in my refrigerator every other month."

"You're very prepared."

"Do you need some rice?"

"What more could I need?" Rachel inhaled the rich scent of homemade gumbo. Only the people of the bayou could make a proper gumbo.

"A cold beer?" Etienne put a steaming bowl of rice and another of potato salad on the table.

"If you have one."

"That's my girl."

His statement sent a wave of warmth to unfurl in her stomach, surprising her. After Katrina hit the Gulf Coast she'd learned some life-changing lessons. No longer was she squandering her time waiting for the next big thing to happen in her life, now she was out making it happen. When her time came she didn't want to die with regrets and she was determined to wring every ounce of experience from every minute of the day.

It was also very possible that Etienne was to be her next life experience.

He returned with two bottles of cold beer and gave her one before taking his seat.

"So, you found my car on the road?"

"Yes, about a mile from here." He picked up the bowl of potato salad and began spooning it into the gumbo.

"My poor car." She sighed. "Was it submerged?"

"No." He gave her a sympathetic smile. "But it's probably been washed away by now. You went off the road at one of the lowest points in the marsh."

"Well I didn't go off the road willingly."

"What happened?"

"Almost ran over an alligator. I came around that bend and a damned gator was just chilling in the middle of the road."

"No kidding."

She stirred in some hot sauce then took a bite of the gumbo. "This is fantastic."

"Thanks. So when you saw the gator, did he do anything?"

She looked at him and saw he was still stirring his gumbo. "Not really." I tried to avoid hitting him and my rear end hit a tree and got caught up. He just sat there for a few more moments then took off into the marsh."

"Was he a big one?"

"Huge."

Rachel concentrated on her food though after a few moments she realized Etienne seemed preoccupied.

"Why are you so quiet?" she asked.

"Just thinking."

"About what?"

"Superstitions."

Rachel was surprised. As a people, the older Cajuns were superstitious but she never imagined Etienne would be.

"What kind?"

"Animals. Did you know the Native Americans assigned a spiritual sign to each animal? It is said that the one representing you will show itself when it's time."

"I did know that. My grandmother is a big believer in the animals carrying messages, especially the crows. I can't say I know much about it but it did seem to me that the crows did seem attracted to her."

"And you saw an alligator."

"You're being very strange, Etienne. You of all people know that the gators will emerge during storms, they do all the time. Seeing him doesn't mean anything."

"But what if he did, what if the alligator was a sign?"

"Then he needed to speak up because I didn't hear anything," she said dryly.

"Rachel."

"Etienne." She dropped her spoon. "What if he was a message or totem? They've been around for millions of years so they are very intelligent, they stay alone, coming together only to mate, they digest their food very slowly and they eat only when necessary. What message would one get from that?"

"That slow and easy is the way to go." He shook his dark head and grinned. "I was just thinking out loud."

Rachel gave him a look and somehow she didn't think that was the end of the story but she decided to let him have his way.

"So, let's talk about sex," she announced.

Etienne juggled his spoon then glared at her. "I think we have enough problems already, don't you"

"Not hardly. We could be here for a few more days, how do you propose we...amuse ourselves?"

"We could chop wood. I have a ton of things I need to take care of around here."

"Hmm, I'm sure my wood chopping skills are pretty rusty. I'd only hurt myself."

"I don't think you need to be doing much of anything. That's a pretty nasty cut you have on your head."

"I've had worse. Remember when you and John whacked me in the head with that little *Popierre* net? I had a welt for a week."

"Yeah, sorry about that. Your brother and I weren't quite as prepared to shrimp with that thing as we'd thought."

She polished off the rest of her gumbo and pushed away the bowl.

"I used to think you were looking for Lafitte's treasure."

He chuckled and a soft, sticky warmth awoke in her belly. He had the sexiest laugh and it alone was enough to get her all hot and bothered. Now that her belly was full, her mind taking a fast U-turn to another hunger to be appeased.

"We did play pirate quite a bit when we were kids."

"No kidding. Ya'll would tie me to the tree and pretend I was the prisoner and you left me there a few times. If it weren't for Mama coming out ya'll would've found me weeks later after the birds had picked out my eyeballs."

"Trust me, we would've come back for you."

"Only when you remembered me." She rose from her seat and instantly his gaze moved to her tight shorts. "How many times did you forget me, Etienne?"

He didn't speak for a moment, his gaze glued on her thighs. "Um, what?"

She smiled. "I said, how many times did you forget me, Etienne?"

He blinked and she knew he wasn't paying full attention to her words. It wouldn't take much more to get him into bed and deep inside her.

"I'll take that to mean you didn't," her voice dropped. She walked toward him and he pushed away from the table as if he were going to escape her. She perched herself on his knee. His burgeoning erection was heavy and hot against her hip. "I never forgot you, either. I think I fell in love with you my sophomore year. You were so handsome and all the girls wanted you."

"You had a crush on me?" He seemed stunned.

"Why are you so surprised?" She looped her arm around his neck, dipping her head to taste his neck. "I wasn't any different than the girls you dated. I had feelings," her teeth grazed his jaw and he tipped his head in response, "I had urges."

"Urges?"

"Oh, yes." She nipped his earlobe. "Urges. I would lie in my narrow virginal bed at night and think of you. My white cotton panties would get all wet." She breathed into his ear and she felt him tremble. "My pussy would be aching and I didn't know what to do about it then other than yearn for you."

"Rachel –"

"What? Are you going to tell me that my feelings for you were those of a child and I should put them aside and be sensible?" She shook her head. "I stopped being sensible when Katrina destroyed the coast. I stopped being sensible when I realized that one minute you're there and the next, you're gone. Life isn't about being sensible, certainly not for me."

She put her hands on her shoulders. "I want you to love me. To touch me." She caught his hand and placed it over her breast. "I want to feel beautiful, out of control, wild."

Her hand covered his and she pressed it tight against her breast. "Feel me, how my heart beats for you. How my nipple grows hard –"

"I'm going to have to spank you, aren't I?" His voice was husky and in the depths of his eyes there was an answering fire, a hunger that matched hers.

"Yes." She dipped her head and nipped his forefinger. "Spank me, tie me up, fuck me." As she spoke she guided his hand down her belly then between her thighs. "Do you see how hot I am for you?" she murmured.

"You're wet." He slipped his fingers from hers and began stroking her gently. "Are you asking me to make you my submissive?"

The rush of arousal was so strong that she didn't trust herself to speak. Instead she nodded, her breathing slowly turning into pants.

"And you'll do as I command?"

She licked her lips. "Yes."

"No talking back."

"None."

"And no one will ever know of this, especially your family."

"Especially my family," she whispered.

His big hands caught her shoulders and pushed her away. "You will get on your knees and suck me, now."

For a moment Rachel could hardly breathe, her arousal level had reached the point where thought was incredibly difficult. Her gaze locked with his and it was obvious he was highly aroused by the thought of her on her knees. For her it was the thought of his massive cock between her lips that was enough to drive her to her knees.

After grabbing the padded seat cushion from the kitchen table, she dropped it on the floor between his feet. As gracefully as she could manage, she sank to her knees and reached for the straining placket of his taut jeans. The sight caused a deep tingle of arousal deep within her pussy. It may have been a long time since she'd seduced someone but after only one round of sex, she was as hot and damp as a summer day in the bayous.

He lifted his hips to help her remove them. His thick cock sprang forth and her eyes widened at the sight of the thick, heavy member. Never had she seen anything this big on a man before. Easily he was nine inches in length and thick enough around that her fingers didn't touch. Sucking him off would not be easy but she was more than willing to give it her all.

Leaning forward, Rachel inhaled the scent of his cock and the thick hair at the base was enough to cause a wash of arousal through her pussy. Closing her eyes, she sank into the morass of sensuality.

With long strokes, she licked every inch of her master's cock. The musky flavor of his aroused flesh wove a tapestry of sensuality around her mind and body. Wrapping her hands around the thick base, she squeezed him gently in time with her strokes. Her tongue licked across the wide head and his indrawn breath was music to her senses.

She was doing this to him!

Her mouth covered the head and she took him as deeply as she could. Slowly she began to fuck him with her mouth, her hands moving up and down his shaft in time. His hands landed in her hair and he began whispering encouragement, instructing her to touch him here and lick him there.

“Rachel, you will stop.”

Ignoring him, she continued her assault on his cock. All too soon his fingers dug into her scalp and he was balanced on a knife’s edge. Keeping her mouth over his head, she released one hand to cup his balls.

“Rachel.”

The warning in his tone was obvious and she chose to ignore it again, giving them a gentle squeeze. He came with a roar. His cock spasmed, shooting his release deep into her throat. After the tension left his body, she slowed her movements, opting to lick him like an all-day sucker. With great care, she cleaned all evidence of his release before letting go of him.

Sitting back on her heels, she felt a little smug and boldly met his gaze.

“Rachel, I said you could suck me, but I didn’t say anything about bringing me to release.”

## Chapter Five

It was hard for him to just sit here doing nothing. Just knowing that Rachel was in the living room, naked and posed on the rug before the fire was enough to make his blood run hot.

Etienne sat in the kitchen listening to the crackle of the fire and the storm outside. Even though he'd had two powerful releases in the past few hours, anticipation hummed in his veins. If he weren't mistaken, the storm was weakening. Probably by morning it would have blown itself out, but for now, the scream of wind and the pounding rain only served to create a cozy little nest for them.

Through the double-sided fireplace he saw that Rachel hadn't moved an inch. He'd created a pallet by the fireplace and she was on her knees upon the comfortable pile of blankets. The firelight gleamed on her olive-tinted skin accentuating her long, toned body.

Rachel was, in four words, a work of art.

Her long dark hair fell to the middle of her back. Her form was womanly, her breasts large and her hips ample. She was built the way he liked his woman. Her laugh set his nerves on fire and when she smiled, it was as if all were right with the world. She was self-confident, at ease with her body and he couldn't wait to touch her again.

*Hold on, Broussard, you barely know this girl anymore.*

Somehow that didn't bother him. They might not know each other well but there was time. Their bodies recognized each other and they communicated on a level much deeper than mere conversation.

Spiritual?

He shied away from that idea. No, he wasn't ready to investigate that further, not yet anyway. She was but ten feet away, waiting for him to possess her again. His blood quickened at the thought of spanking her plump buttocks.

And there was no time like the present.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Etienne's footsteps approached, with every second that passed her body grew more aroused. She didn't know how long she'd been kneeling on the pile of blankets, fifteen minutes, maybe twenty. Anticipation was the best way to begin game playing in her opinion. It was the buildup that guaranteed a rocking good time.

The fire was warm on her skin and a light sweat had broken out shortly after he'd positioned her here. Closing her eyes, she could imagine herself in the past, a man and



woman living in the marsh at the time of Jean Lafitte, the notorious pirate. It was the late eighteenth century and she was but a slave girl freed by the man who now approached.

Her breath caught.

What would he do with her? He'd fed her and allowed her to warm herself by the fire. Surely he wouldn't just toss her into the elements, would he? Was there something she could do to ensure she would remain in the house for the night?

Rachel touched her chest, allowing her hand to dip to the tip of her breast. Her nipple, already aroused, ached when she gave it a gentle pinch. An answering ache sprang to the fore between her thighs. Would he find her desirable? Men usually did though her previous master had let none touch her, only him.

She shuddered. He'd been a small man with beady eyes. He had been kind to her in bed though he'd had no regard for her pleasure, only his.

"Did I tell you to touch yourself?"

The rough Cajun words came from the darkness. Her hand stilled and she looked in the direction of the voice.

"No."

"Master," he ground out.

"No, master." Her voice was little more than a whisper.

"Remove your hand, I wish to see you naked before me."

Etienne stepped into the firelight, the sharp bones of his face seemed to be etched in wood. His pants clung to strong muscular thighs and his feet were bare. He'd removed his shirt and the golden light kissed the honed muscles and illuminated the sprinkling of dark hair. He had a tattoo of thorns around his upper left arm.

Rachel did as he bid, allowing her hand to drop. Sitting back on her heels fully nude and exposed to his hungry gaze, she tilted her chin up and met his gaze defiantly. This man might possess her body but never her soul.

"You are exquisite," his voice was hushed.

With haste he removed his pants and his massive cock sprang forth and she couldn't help but gulp. He was, in a word, magnificent.

On the pallet in front of her, he sat, his legs straight out in front. "Come, sit on my knees."

A trickle of arousal burned in the back of her throat. Without a word she rose to her knees and came forward. Spreading her thighs to bracket his, she sat back on his knees.

"Closer."

He grabbed her knees and pulled her forward until she was within inches of touching his torso. Their eyes were on the same level and a dark, sensual fire burned in his black gaze. Something tightened in her lower gut.

"Do you know what I will do to you?" his voice was low.

"No, master."

"I want you to touch yourself, pleasure yourself before me."

Hesitant, she reached for her breast.

"No, not like that."

He caught her hand and drew it down to her pussy, plunging her fingers into the damp, needy flesh.

"Stroke yourself and tell me of your pleasure."

Her cheeks burned and her gaze darted away. He was very forward.

"Close your eyes."

She did as he bid and her vision faded to black. Suddenly the world around her emerged. The crackle of the fire and scent of wood burning, the sound of his breathing, the storm outside, the scent of his aroused male flesh.

Without her command her fingers began to move over her puffy, wet pussy. Parting the lips, she stroked the delicate inner lips, centering on her clit. A sigh slipped from between her lips and he made an encouraging sound.

Her mouth parted and her hand continued its dizzying dance. Stroking and teasing her flesh into submission. Her breathing changed to soft pants and her fingers increased their pace. Her hips began to rock and she realized that when she moved forward the back of her hand touched his burning cock. She did it again and his indrawn breath was ample reward.

"I'm so hot," she whispered. "I can't, I don't—"

"You will." His voice was firm. "You want to please your master, do you not?"

*Yes, oh yes...*

Moving forward, she was shocked out of her rhythm when his tongue came to touch the valley between her breasts. Her eyes flew open and his teasing gaze met hers.

"Nectar. That is the taste of angel sweat," he said.

She moved again and he gave another long, leisurely lick, causing her to shiver. Her eyes closed and she felt her body sinking into the pool of liquid heat. Inexorably she began the climb to the peak, doing anything she could to take him with her. Shivering and on the edge of a blinding release, she paused, her fingers half in and half out of her pussy.

"Master, please."

"Ah, but I have made my wishes clear, slave. I do not wish you to find your release, not just yet. Already you have displeased me this evening and you must receive your punishment. Do you wish to have two spankings instead of one?"

*Yes!*

Reluctantly she pulled her fingers out of her pussy, the final touch enough to send shivers through her body.

"Good girl," he said. "Now, you will lie across my lap and present me with your buttocks."

For the first time she felt a jolt of apprehension. Talking about it was a very different thing than performing the act itself, and now that the moment was upon her, she was feeling a touch of trepidation.

"Are you having second thoughts?"

Her gaze met his and she was pacified by the tenderness reflected there. She would be fine, this man would never hurt her.

Shaking her head no, she removed herself from his lap and together they shifted so that they were far away enough from the fire to be comfortable. Laying her body across his lap was an odd experience though not unpleasant. He'd gotten her some pillows so that her head was even with the rest of her body. The funny thing was that with her backside exposed like this, she felt even more vulnerable than she was sitting face to face.

How odd was that?

His big hands came down on her buttocks, and he squeezed and plumped the resilient flesh.

"You have the perfect ass. Plump and well rounded. I shall enjoy this very much." He sounded breathless.

Judging from the jut of his cock against her hip, he was more than enjoying himself now and he'd barely laid a hand on her yet. He began to rub her ass with strong, sure strokes then, without warning, he parted her cheeks.

"What a sweet little mouth," he whispered. Gently he pressed his finger against her anus and her hips arched automatically. "I can see you enjoy that, my slave. This pleases me very much. Have you had a man in your ass before?"

"N-no, master."

"Ah, perfect then. I will look forward to plundering this sweet place."

She gulped at the thought of his massive penis trying to enter her rear, though she was strangely turned on at the same time. Would it hurt? Part of her hoped not while another part, the darkest and most secret part hoped it would ever-so sweetly.

Her thoughts were shattered when he reached between her thighs and parted the lips of her pussy. Her hips arched higher and he chuckled and gave her a sharp slap on the buttocks.

Her breath was sharply indrawn and she was shocked at the rush of pleasure she'd received from that sharp pain. Was she sick in wanting this?

"Wanton," he said. "Someone has trained you well. That said, I will have to train you to anticipate my desires."

His hand fell on her buttocks again while his other hand continued the slow finger-fucking. Her butt clenched then relaxed when he began stroking it.

"So, lovely."

His hand fell again and she had to shove her face into the pillow and scream with pleasure. The spanking continued and reality faded for Rachel. Her entire being was focused on her lower torso, the hand tormenting her ravenous pussy and the other spanking her for the impudence earlier. Pleasure numbed her senses and her body became one big nerve, every stroke and spank setting her on fire.

"Master," she panted when she could stand it no more. "May I come?"

"No, not yet. I have one more delight in mind for you."

She groaned when his hands left her though within a second they were back. She heard a squirting sound then her buttocks were parted and cool gel was applied to her anus. The contrast between the gel and the warmth of his finger was welcome. He worked the slick gel into her anus and around the outside until she was slick and every nerve was on edge.

His slick fingers slid inside her anus, stretching her, preparing her for his entry. Her nails dug into the pillows and her breathing was reduced to pants. Straining against his hand, her hips slapped against his, the edge almost within her grasp.

"Master —"

"Come for me."

In that moment, his fingers entered her anus giving her an amazing sensation of fullness that was enough to send her over the edge. She screamed and her body tightened around his fingers. Waves of pleasure rocketed through her, draining, dazzling until all she could do was collapse.

Etienne assisted her off his lap and onto a pile of pillows. Numb to the point of being sluggish, it barely registered when he spread her legs and the hair on his thighs caressed her legs. She heard the crinkle of tearing foil then his hands covered her ass and parted her cheeks. The broad head of his cock rubbed against her anus, eliciting a whine from her mouth. Pressing backward, her breath caught when the tight little mouth opened to take only centimeters of him.

He groaned and began rocking his hips, the slide of his erection against her ass mesmerizing. Arching her back, she adjusted the angle so the next time he pushed forward, the head of his cock entered her anus.

Both were frozen.

"Rachel?" His voice was barely a whisper.

"Slow, easy."

He moved his hips, his cock sliding inside another few centimeters. They were locked in this tentative embrace, their bodies straining and slowly he pushed inside her until Rachel felt full.

"That's enough," she hissed.

He pulled back then thrust again, the movement bringing a gentle wave of sensation that wasn't unlike vaginal sex. It felt more dangerous, more...forbidden.

Rachel bit her lip and groaned when he pressed forward. She pushed back, allowing him in just a tiny bit more. Her body sang when he reached around her hip to slide his hands into her pussy. The first touch of her clit sent her mind racing. His movements remained slow and controlled while her need for release spiraled higher.

The rhythm of his fingers increased and suddenly she was thrust out into the wilderness. Her body soared and she screamed with her release. Still inside her, he remained still, his grip on her hip harsh as he jetted his release deep inside her anus. Completely spent, Rachel was limp on the pillows.

Now that was what she'd missed!

## Chapter Six

"I think the storm is moving away,"

Her silky voice roused him from the sated wonderland he'd been floating in. His arm tightened around her waist, his body spooning hers. The feel of her flesh against his, his cock nestled against her buttocks and he didn't want to move.

"Yeah. It isn't the storm you need to worry about, it's the flooding." He nuzzled her shoulder. "The storm may end tonight but you may not get out of here for a day or two. It all depends upon how deep the wash is."

"Do you have a boat?"

He chuckled. "Are you in that much of a hurry to get away from me?"

"No." She relaxed into him. "I didn't want my parents to worry about me."

"If the storm has blown out in the morning, I'm sure we can come up with a plan. I'm very resourceful."

She chuckled and he nipped the curve of her neck and inhaled her intoxicating scent. While he'd always been extremely protective of Rachel, he'd never been sexually attracted to her before now. In his mind she'd always been his little sister, someone to kid around with and tease unmercifully. Now, ten years later, to be lying with her, cuddling her in his arms was surreal.

"I'll bet."

Her body smelled of musky sex and rainwater. Arousal nudged his cock and a slow tingle awoke. Etienne wanted her sprawled on their pallet, her body open and receptive to him, as he pounded into her.

Rachel turned in his arms and their gazes met. Her eyes were so dark and it felt as if he'd fallen into her eyes. Leaning forward, their lips met and she made a hum of pleasure. The kiss was leisurely, a mix of playful and greedy, and he wanted more of her.

Then her kiss changed. She leaned into him, her body curling to embrace his. She made a hungry noise and he thought he'd lose his mind. Her slim hands touched his cock and she stole his breath. Her legs parted and she draped one over his hip, bringing her pussy into contact with his cock.

They fit so well together. He was taller than her but not by much and they were lips to lips, breast to chest. It would take so little to remove her hands and slide inside her sweet body and fuck them both into oblivion.

Instead he slid his hand between her thighs, parting her labia to plunge into the sweetness inside. She felt like oiled silk against his fingers and the soft, gasping noises she made into his mouth were sweeter than pralines. He entered her vagina with his

fingers and slowly began finger-fucking her, enjoying the slick feel of her body preparing the way for him.

He circled her clit and she made a keening sound that sent a wave of lust straight to his cock. Her hands were soft and she continued stroking him in a leisurely way that wasn't meant to bring him to a peak, rather to maintain the sensations he already felt. He withdrew his hand from her pussy then added a second finger to the first. She nipped at his lower lip and he growled. Pressing her thighs farther apart, he began finger-fucking her in earnest.

With a noisy gasp she broke the kiss, her sigh deep and earthy, her hands tightening on his cock. He stroked the hard clit and her hips moved in time. Removing his hand, he pushed her onto her back then moved between her thighs.

Her dark eyes watched him, her lips glistened from his mouth. She drew her legs up, bringing him closer. Her hand, still around his cock, led him to her pussy and without hesitation, he thrust into her body and they groaned simultaneously. He braced his arms against the floor and she wrapped around him, like a warm kitten.

Intoxicated with her, he began to thrust, reveling in the feel of her body, the scent of her skin and the taste of her mouth. He nipped at her throat and she cried out, her nails digging into his back. All too soon she came, her body arching into him, the slip and slide of their bodies igniting the slow tingle in the back of his calves. Racing up his legs, the sensation coalesced into his groin and he came with a roar. Each wave was deeper and more intense.

Exhausted and sated, he rolled to his side, bringing her with him. Still buried deep in her sweet flesh, he closed his eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

"How long will it take for the water to recede?" Rachel asked.

Etienne dropped into the porch swing next to her. The day was sunny and warm, the first good day since the storm.

"That's hard to tell. See that post in the water there?"

"Yes."

"That's how I measure the water. There are only two lines visible and that means we have six feet of water in the wash. Usually it would take about two days for that to recede."

"Why do I feel a 'but' in there?" Rachel snuggled her head on his shoulder.

"It was a pretty good storm and Chauvin, Dulac, Montague and Houma were flooded in the low-lying areas. The chances are they're pumping their floodwater into the bayou and all that water comes straight down through here."

"Which means the level will stay even for a few more days."

"Exactly. We probably have the better part of a week, four days at the least before we can get the truck through."

"Damn. That means I can't get word to my family for a while yet."

He hugged her. "If the electricity doesn't come on today then we'll see about swimming the wash and walking down to the outpost. They have backup generators and a shortwave radio. We can contact one of the bridge operators or maybe a shrimper and get word to them."

"Okay, if that's the best we can do. I just don't want them to worry."

"Me, either." He kissed her hair. "Besides, if they find out you're missing they will head out here to get my help to look for you."

Rachel laughed. "Yeah, you always did have the knack of finding me when I didn't want to be found."

"You mean like the time you ran away in fifth grade?"

"That would be it."

"Rachel, you only made it down to Tricia Ramos' house—that wasn't too hard to figure out. Her mama made the best chocolate chip cookies in the parish."

"Yeah, I'm still addicted to chocolate chip cookies. Only now I run to the bakery across from work. They aren't quite as good as Ms. Ramos' but they run a close second."

He laughed and began stroking her shoulder. "Do you like living in the big city?"

"I do. There's always something to see and do, always someone to talk to and I have access to some of the best restaurants in the world. What's not to like?"

"Not being close to nature."

"I'm in the quarter, I can walk to Riverwalk."

"No boat, no open water."

"That I do miss."

"No quiet."

"No dancing out here, or jazz bands."

"The crime rate."

"They find bodies out here too," she pointed out.

"But they are rarely ever residents. Most of them are people from the city who are murdered and dumped out here to feed the crabs."

"Point taken. What are you trying to convince me of?"

"That you miss it, this place, your home."

"Well I never said I didn't miss home. I love the bayou and I'll always love it. Chances are once I get my degree and a good job, I'll move back here at some time. I don't like being far from my family." She leaned her head back, their mouths mere inches apart. "What about you, Etienne Broussard, do you miss the city?"

"In some ways." His voice was hushed. "I miss the energy, the nightlife, hot jazz and the beautiful women."



"I'll bet you do. Just how many words does it take you to remove a woman's panties?" she teased.

"I don't know, how many did it take to get yours off?"

"I wasn't wearing any." Her tongue snaked out and licked his jaw.

"Are you now?" He bent his head and gently rubbed his bristly cheek against hers.

Silent, she shook her head.

"Mm, I like the idea of you sitting here beside me, no panties on and I can touch you at any time."

Rachel's cheeks colored and she looked around as if she expected someone to pop out of the bushes at them.

"Here? Now?"

"Why not? The road is probably still flooded on both ends so we're safe enough." He slid his hand down the inside of her left leg, lifting it over his. "Does it bother you that someone could see?"

"I may be uninhibited in bed but I'm not into the public watching me."

He ran his fingers up the pale, silky skin of her thigh. "That's too bad. The possibility of getting caught can be very...stimulating."

Rachel laughed. It was a throaty laugh of arousal. "Naughty boy."

He nibbled the way down her throat, each taste of her flesh inched his arousal higher. Parting the v-neck of her shirt, he released a few buttons until the top gaped wide enough to slide over her shoulders, leaving her breasts bare to the fresh air.

Instead of aiming for her nipples, he kissed her. His mouth covered hers and he was rocked by her taste. With every kiss it was as if it were the first. Warm woman and a hint of gumbo, what more could he want from his woman?

Rachel made a silky sound of acquiescence, her tongue tangled with his, teasing, darting back and forth. Her fingers tangled in his hair and he was amused when she tried to take charge of the kiss. There was no way he would allow that.

Breaking the kiss, he nudged her off his lap then stood. His cock was as hot and hard as a steel beam in the sun but he ignored his discomfort in the face of things to come.

"Go to my bedroom."

Her mouth opened and he thought for sure she'd object. Instead her gaze dropped to her toes.

"Yes, Master."

He followed her into the house. Her bare feet made little sound on the shiny wood floors. Halfway through the living room, her shirt fell from her hips to end up on the floor. Her perfect ass bounced a little when she walked and he thought he'd come right there.

Entering the bedroom, she started to climb onto the bed when he stopped her.

"You will undress me," he commanded.

Without a word she turned to him and her hands zeroed in on the button at the placket of his jeans. She loosened them, straining over the part which covered his cock. He made no move to help her, enjoying the brush of her fingers over his erection. With his jeans around his ankles, she removed his boxers before having him step out of the clothing.

"Now fold them."

Surprise registered in her eyes and her brow shot up. A slight smile twisted her lips and she did as he bid. Neatly she folded his jeans and boxers, leaving them on the dresser. Turning, she faced him and waited for his next command.

Rachel could hardly stand the build-up of sexual arousal. Etienne stood before her, nude, his body bathed in afternoon sunlight. His cock rose in a thick, long arrow from a dark patch of hair at his groin. He really was magnificent, his beauty spellbinding. How she wished she could paint, capture that wild male essence in canvas or clay.

"Get on the bed."

She did as she was bid. Climbing onto the bed, she moved to the middle to kneel, her eyes down and her hands in her lap. While she might appear to be submissive, it took every ounce of willpower to not throw herself on him and hump his leg like a dog.

Etienne climbed onto the bed and lay down beside her. His erection prodded her in the thigh.

"You will touch me now."

Rachel needed no second request. She lay down beside him, her fingers encircling that heavy cock. Stroking him, every now and then she'd give him a gentle tug and his eyes would widen slightly. Using both hands now, she alternated the stroke, never leaving his cock or balls untouched.

"Spread your legs."

Lying on her side, the best she could do was bending her leg at the knee and pressing her foot behind her other leg. He placed his big hand over her pussy, one finger dipping inside, and her hands jerked in their caresses.

"Sometimes it takes time for a woman to become aroused. A considerate lover always makes sure his woman is properly prepared before fucking her." He slid his fingers into her damp, heated pussy. "I see you're already wet."

"Yes, sir."

"It doesn't take much to turn you on, does it, Rachel?" he whispered.

"No, sir." Her lower lip trembled.

"I think I will taste you, slowly."

She seemed stunned when he released her and her breathing was harsh.

"On your back."

She rolled onto her back and he produced some pillows to place under her hips. The position left her more vulnerable than before. Her hips were about eight inches off the mattress with the weight balanced on her shoulders.

"Now spread your legs wide."

Her gulp was audible when she did as he said.

The hair on her pussy was brown and neatly trimmed. He opened her pussy, first the outer lips, then the inner ones. Her flesh was the color of a rose in bloom. A thick layer of shiny arousal painted her flesh and the aroma was knee weakening.

His mouth covered her, his tongue prodding at her slick warmth. Instead of entering her with his tongue, he danced around her pussy, caressing every inch of her from the clit to the perineum. With each pass her thighs grew tighter and her hips began to dance. He smiled against her pussy, his tongue savoring her hot, sweet taste.

He sucked her clit and her body arched as much as it was able. She was more than ready for him, though he was enjoying teasing her more than fucking her. With one final lick, he moved back and got to his knees.

"I think I'm ready to fuck you now," he said.

He took his cock and directed it to her vagina. Her dark gaze was fixed on his but when he gave a tentative thrust, a shudder rocked her body and he withdrew. The head of his cock was damp with her arousal. He ran his finger over the tip of his cock then tasted it. Her taste mingled with his and his teeth came together with a click.

Slowly he entered her. There was no stopping this time. His cock slid into place and she made to wrap her thighs around him only to unbalance herself.

"No slave, you are only to receive me," he commanded. "You will remain in place and take what I give you." He pressed her legs back into position, spread wide and vulnerable to him.

Once she was settled, he slowly began to fuck her. Each thrust was slow, dreamy, his cock dragging against her skin. It was so delicious, so bone tingling that he tipped his head back and gave a loud, earthy groan. Keeping his pace even, slow, the build up of arousal was like walking through caramel rather than skating over ice.

Rachel moved beneath him, her back arching ever-so slightly and his cock sunk into her pussy that much deeper. A hiss sounded between his teeth and he kept his eyes closed. Never had he experienced such joy in a woman's body as he was with her. The slow buildup to a teeth-jarring release was almost more than he could bear, though he was determined to not race through sex this time around.

He wanted it to last.

The silken in-and-out glide of his cock was brain-numbing and he reached for her plump breasts. Her skin was soft and her nipples hard in his fingers. Giving them a gentle twist, Etienne reveled in the sound of her scream.

Her pussy convulsed around his cock and he gritted his teeth. He grabbed her hips and tried counting backwards from twenty to keep from his release. Slowly she settled and he opened his eyes.

Her curvy body was covered with a light sheen of sweat, her eyes were dilated and held a dreamy look of a satisfied woman. Sunlight played across her body accenting her rose nipples and the pale caramel of her skin.

He thrust gently and her eyes widened.

"Do you feel me," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"We're special together, Rachel." He rolled his hips, his cock sliding inside then out again. "We should be together."

She moaned and her hands caught his. "If we're meant to be together, we'll receive a sign," she panted.

"Like the alligator?"

Rachel frowned and when he thrust again, her expression went into orbit.

"Alligator?" she hissed.

"The one that stopped you on the road."

"Y-yes?"

"I was on my way to New Orleans." His cock slid into her pussy, her flesh clenching around his. "I wasn't supposed to be here."

"I don't understand —"

"I was stopped in Chauvin by a large alligator in the road." He released one of her hands and grabbed her hip.

"Really?" she hissed.

"Really." He began to increase his thrusts. "I tried to get around it, and it wouldn't let me. Damned thing kept moving and blocking me. I had to come back."

Her eyes were slits and her thighs were tight to his hips. "And this was a sign?"

"Wasn't it?"

He launched himself over her, their lips meeting in a wild tangle of heat and emotion. Rachel's hands landed on his spine, her inquisitive fingers grabbed his buttocks in a firm, high grip.

Together they battled, her arms yanking him to her, his thrusts deeper than ever before. It took only two more thrusts for Rachel to reach her release. She wrapped her body around him like sticky tape and her pussy milked him for all she was worth.

Her wild screams of release drove him over the edge. He covered her with his big body, his hips low and tight to hers. Coherent thought was impossible at this point. His body was intent upon mindless orgasm and nothing would stop him from gaining his pleasure.

He threw his head back and howled, his body emptying into hers, his hips spasming and all sense of coordination was gone. Muttering incoherently, he buried his face in her neck, wondering if all his sense had exited his body through his cock.

## Chapter Seven

"Do you really think the alligators were a sign?" Rachel sat on his lap in the swing. Even when she was wrapped only in a bed sheet, Etienne made for a comfortable place to sit.

"What do you think?"

"I think we are in the bayou and you can find an alligator about every thirty yards 'round here."

He chuckled. "Ever had one smile at you?"

Rachel froze, the image of her alligator flashed in her mind and the eerie sensation that the creature had been smiling at her.

"Did yours smile at you?"

"It sure looked like it," he said. "Damnedest thing I'd ever seen."

"I'll bet." Her voice was faint.

Her mother was a sensible, levelheaded woman and she'd raised her daughter to be the same. Her grandmother, on the other hand, was very superstitious. In her eyes this would definitely be a sign that someone wanted them together.

"Well, I just don't know what to think about this," she said. "I think I need to chew on it some more."

He grinned and reached for a bottle of water. "You do that. In my book it is a sign and I don't know what else you'd need to change your mind."

"Well, if it is meant to be then it's meant to be —"

The sound of an engine coming at a fast clip had her sitting up.

"Sounds like a boat." Etienne nudged her toward the door. "Get some clothes on."

The sound grew louder and Rachel ran for the door. In his bedroom, she rifled through his dresser until she located a T-shirt that came within two inches of her knees. Outside the engine cut out and she heard Etienne speaking. She ran for the door and almost tripped when the electricity came back on. Every light blazed but that wasn't enough to deter her.

From the window, she peered outside to see who it was. Her father and three brothers had the mud devil and were in the boat in the wash.

"They found her purse and her driver's license," her father yelled to Etienne. "I need your help to search for her."

"John Paul —" Etienne started.

Rachel ran out the door and came to stand by Etienne. The look on her father's face was absolutely priceless.

"Papa!!" she called.

"Rachel?" her father said. "Is that you?"

"Yes, sir." She started down the steps then stopped when their faces changed from relief to anger.

Her father grabbed a shotgun and had it pointed at Etienne before she could draw a breath. "What you got to say for ya'self, boy? You been messin' wid my girl?"

Stunned, Rachel turned toward Etienne. His expression was bemused.

"I told them you weren't here because I didn't want them knowing we'd spent all this time together, alone," he said to her.

"I—"

"Boy," her father roared.

Rachel danced up the steps and placed her body in front of Etienne's.

"Daddy, you can't just shoot anybody who touches me," she yelled. "Just because we had sex doesn't mean anything."

Behind her, Etienne sighed.

"Now you did it," he muttered.

"Boys, get the rope." Her papa's voice was louder.

Forcing a bright smile on her face, she faced Etienne. "Hey, you're the one who said them damn gators were a sign."

He smiled. "And you said let's wait and see if anything else happened." He nodded toward the boat. Her father now stood in the bow, his shotgun pointed at Etienne. Her younger brother Jimmy held a push pole like a weapon while Matthew walked toward them with a rope and a glint of anger in his eye.

"Don't let them force you into anything," she started.

"Too late. Your brother is coming to kick my ass and the only thing that will save me is your hand in marriage."

She gaped at him. "What?"

"Marry me."

"I..." She looked from her brothers to her father then back to Etienne. "I think I need time—"

"You have about thirty seconds, your brother has a rope and I don't like the look on his face."

"I—"

Etienne's mouth came down on hers and she melted into him.

Dimly she heard her family whoop with delight.

"Damn, Daddy, we're havin' a weddin'!"

## About the Author

Dominique Adair is the pen name of award-winning novelist J.C. Wilder. Adair/Wilder (she chooses her name according to her mood—if she's feeling sassy and brazen, it's Adair; if she's feeling dark and dangerous, it's Wilder) lives just outside of Columbus, Ohio, where she skulks around town plotting her next book and contemplating where to hide the bodies (from her books, of course—everyone knows that you can't really hide a body as they always pop up at the worst times).

Dominique welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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