

ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*



SEXPLORATIONS

The *Thing* About  
*Cowboys*  
CIANA STONE

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



[www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com)

The Thing About Cowboys

ISBN 9781419919541

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

The Thing About Cowboys Copyright © 2009 Ciana Stone

Edited by Sue-Ellen Gower.

Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication February 2009

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

This book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the authors' imagination and used fictitiously.

# ***THE THING ABOUT COWBOYS***

**Ciana Stone**

### *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Google: Google, Inc.

Patron: Caribbean Distillers Corporation Limited

Styrofoam: Dow Chemical Company

Wrangler: DaimlerChrysler Corporation

## Prologue

"Sex that good isn't supposed to exist."

"Except in romance novels." Dee laughed and stretched her legs out in front of her. She'd never heard a woman sound as sated as her friend Fenny did at the moment. There was the unmistakable sound of complete satisfaction in Fenny's voice.

Dee shoved back that little niggle of envy and lifted her glass of wine from the coffee table as she wiggled to get more comfortable on the floor, reclining back against Fenny's sofa upon which Dini lounged. Fenny sat across from them in what Dee lovingly referred to as the queen's chair because no matter how many times Fenny insisted otherwise, it still struck Dee as somewhat throne-like. And Fenny was the kind of woman who'd look right at home on a throne. Not only was she beautiful and classy, but there was something regal about her. Maybe it was the musical British accent and that low throaty voice, or that timeless aura of elegance that seemed to hover around her.

"And we all know *that's* real," Dini added, earning a laugh from Dee and a high-five between the two.

"Honestly, it was the *best*," Fenny said with a slight flush rising on her face. "I can't wait to get some of that heat into a book."

Dee couldn't contain her laugh. Only Fenny could take one of most exciting sexual experiences of her life and cook up a tale around it that would be hot enough to set a bedspread on fire.

"I take it the words *hot as a match* and *smokin'* are applicable here?"

"You got that right. And his boat? Wheehaw!"

Hearing "wheehaw" coming from Fenny's mouth was enough to have Dee cracking up with laughter and Dini along with her.

"Isn't that 'woo damn'?" Dini asked.

Dee laughed. "Or 'har-ka-har, matey'? After all it sounds like the pirate did some mighty fine booty plundering."

"Dee!" Fenny exclaimed around a laugh.

"Sorry. Couldn't resist. Seriously, Fenny, I don't think I've ever heard this much excitement in your voice and I'm so glad you finally screwed up the courage to get out there and test the water. Now maybe you'll realize that you're still one hot babe and that...ratjerk—"

"Already used that one today," Dini cut in.

"Oh yeah, right. Sorry." Dee and Dini tried to keep a running list of all the labels they pinned on Fenny's ex-husband. If talking about someone really did make their ears burn, that poor bastard's ears were in flames.

"That *moron* ex-husband," she corrected herself, "was a total idiot. Luckily now you're shed of him and ready to let Fenny Whitfield discover what she's all about on her own. And you've got one damn fine young hottie to help remind you that you *are* all that *and* a bag of chocolate chip cookies."

"Tell it, sister," Dini added.

"At the moment I'm feeling rather good about that," Fenny said with a smile. "But that's enough about me for now—tell me what you've been up to?"

Dee's mood went from relaxed to edgy in the blink of an eye. "Work. You know, the usual."

"Usual, my ass. Your voice just dropped an entire octave. What's up?"

"Do I detect a hint of 'we need to open a can of whoop ass on someone'?" Dini asked.

"No. Not yet anyway. It's just this...guy. Cameron McIntyre."

"That name sounds familiar," Fenny commented, tapping her finger against the rim of her wineglass. "Where've I heard that name?"

"I know, I know!" Dini bounced on the couch. "He's that hotshot who's building that mega mall, condo, marina behemoth thing on the bay."

"You got it," Dee said after polishing off the rest of her wine, something she'd regret tomorrow since she fully intended on a big refill. "The magazine's doing a big spread on him and I drew the short straw to do a series of shoots."

"Right, I remember reading about it. So?" Fenny asked.

"So, he's this...this Texan." Dee wasn't ready to admit, even to her friends, that Cameron McIntyre had gotten to her.

"A Texan, huh? That's cool! He got that cowboy thing going on?" Dini asked.

Dee snorted. "Oh yeah, and he's convinced that it works for him."

"Does it?" Fenny asked.

"I need more wine." Dee stalled and got up to fill her glass. Thinking about Cameron McIntyre's 'cowboy thing' gave her more of a flush than a vat of wine. "You should have seen it," she yelled on her way to the kitchen. "I took one of the rookies, this gal Diana, with me on the first shoot. Damn woman nearly creamed her jeans. I'm serious. She was so worthless I had to send her back to the office. Swear to god, when he took her hand before she left I think she had an orgasm. I thought she was going to hit the freaking floor."

"And he was just totally amused. I could see it," she said as she returned and shoved Dini over so she could flop down on the couch. "For someone so little you take up a lot of room."

"Says the 'Attack of the Five-Foot Woman'," Dini quipped.

"Five foot *four and one half*," Dee corrected with a grin then continued, "This McIntyre guy. You should see it. People fawn over him like he's some flipping god on Mount Olympus."

Fenny raised one eyebrow. "Ouch! He pissed you off, didn't he?"

Dee should have known better. She could hide things from everyone else, but not Fenny. Fenny had her number.

“He called me *sweet thang*. *Sweet thang!!*”

“But you are a *sweet thang*, my friend. Very sweet.”

Dini cackled at the comment but not Dee. Her defense system, along with several other systems, had gone on red alert the moment she set eyes on Cameron McIntyre. But it was the defense system she was operating on. As long as she could hold on to some kind of annoyance or anger at the man, she wouldn't have to address the issue of his sex appeal.

“There's not one freaking *sweet thang* bone in me. And the nerve of that man, taking my hand when we're introduced and calling me that is...is totally unacceptable. And then to continue even when I politely pointed out that my name wasn't 'sweet thang' and if he had to address me to call me Ms. Jackson or Delilah since those actually were my names. But noooooooo, would he do that? Hell no. That...rat bastard switched to sugar. No, not sugar. *Sugah*.”

Now that she'd worked up a head of steam she went with it, even knowing that what she felt wasn't entirely anger.

“And if that isn't bad enough, he's about the cockiest, most full-of-himself...man I've ever met. Like he expects every woman he shakes hands with to turn into some pile of quivering female flesh that's cooing and fawning over him like – like...I don't know.”

She gulped down some wine. Dini opened her mouth to speak but closed it when Dee launched back in again. “And he's *the* biggest flirt in the freaking world and goes around with this look in his eyes like he's thinking *go on and pretend if you like but we both know you want me*.” I'll tell you what's the truth. If I hadn't been getting paid – Fenny? You're laughing. Dini! You bitches. You're freaking laughing!”

Dini had a throw pillow over her mouth but Dee could see her shaking with laughter. She snatched the pillow from Dini, whacked her on the top of the head and



threw the pillow at Fenny who caught it as expertly as a major-league catcher snagging a fast-ball from the pitcher.

"Hey. Whoa. Easy there, girl," Fenny said with a chuckle. "Give big Tex a chance, okay? I hate to make you eat your own words, but you nagged me to consider the possibilities. I did. And look. I'm smiling. Don't you think you should do the same? Just in case?"

"No."

"Dee honey, if a man can get this much of a rise out of you by calling you something obviously intended to be flirty, then you have to ask yourself why. You're the first one to let things like that slide off your back. And since it didn't this time, isn't that telling you something?"

Dee didn't want to admit that Fenny was right. She'd been working so hard to keep from admitting it to herself. Especially since she had three more shoots to do with the man. And more importantly since he'd tripped her lust-o-meter at first look.

She might be willing to take a chance with a guy she knew at first glance was easy to control, but not Cameron McIntyre. He wasn't one of those men a woman could lead around by the short hairs. There was something primal about him. All male and a dangerous one to boot. The kind of man that'd get under your skin.

In short, she wasn't sure she could play his game and come out unscathed.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have unloaded on you guys. It's just— God, I'm so embarrassed."

"He gave you girl wood," Dini said with a solemn nod.

"Major girl wood," Dee admitted. "He so got to me. Much as I hate it, one look and sparks flew. And I don't like sparks on the job. Especially with big, gorgeous Texans who have eyes that could melt a glacier."

"Big, eh?" Fenny gave her a wicked smile. "Well you know, they say everything's bigger in Texas."

That took the starch out of Dee's sheets. All the anger, or more accurately angst, disappeared. She laughed, mostly at herself. "Yeah, so I hear. And he really is something to see. It just gnaws at me that he knows he's as sexy as sin. I know women probably fall all over him everywhere he goes and he's probably got more notches on his belt than a junkyard dog has fleas. And...and I really don't want to be another notch."

"I know. But who's to say that's what'll happen? Like you told me. You've got to be willing to take a chance. Besides, if he can make you half as happy as Michael's made me then I'd say go for it. If it doesn't work we'll have Dini beat him up."

"With my most excellent nun chucks," Dini added.

"Well, hell, when you put it that way." Dee grinned at her friends. "Thanks. I really feel a little silly. I'm not used to a guy knocking me off my stride that way."

"You'll hit your stride with him. Just play the game your way and see what happens. You never know. Life is full of surprises," Fenny said.

Dee wondered what in the world was wrong with her. She'd always played the game her way. Why was this any different?

"Surprise is right. Okay, now that I've rained on your parade, I'm going to go slink into the kitchen and get that bag of chocolate-covered nuts I bought to console myself with. No sense in me being the only one to pack on the pounds."

"With wine?" Fenny asked around a shudder.

"Chocolate goes with everything," Dini commented.

"Says the size 0," Fenny replied.

Dee grinned at her friends. No matter what, they were always there for her. Even when she was acting like an idiot. She was pretty lucky. They'd helped her get back to thinking clear. And that's what she needed to deal with Cameron McIntyre. A clear head. Well, that and the equivalent of a libido lobotomy.

## Chapter One

"That's it. Oh yeah, right there. Yes. Yes."

Delilah's shutter was firing non-stop. Inside the luxury penthouse, Cameron McIntyre leaned against the open door to the balcony, smiling sexily.

At the sound of a boat on the water of the bay he turned briefly to look over the water. *Focus on the shot and not his ass!* Delilah scolded herself for the umpteenth time since she'd arrived to shoot the series of "at home" photos of the millionaire developer. She'd promised herself that this time she wasn't going to notice him in *that* way. It wasn't working.

"Sorry," he said and turned the full force of his smile on her as he resumed his position.

And the force of that smile was enough to make her wish he'd turn up the air conditioning. *Just focus*, she told herself. *You've shot men before. Famous men. Handsome men. Sexy men. Nude men. Get a grip.*

It'd help if he'd stop giving her that sexy smile and knowing look. The one that said "oh yeah, I know what you want and I've got it in spades."

Damn the man.

This was their fourth and final shoot for an article that was being done on him in an upcoming magazine. She'd been immediately impressed with his looks at first glance. He was one superb piece of manhood. And he'd proved to be quite the flirt, but in a low-key, playful kind of way, despite the account she'd given Fenny which might have been slightly exaggerated.

She'd been hard pressed not to respond during that first shoot. She'd resisted his charms and left feeling a bit unsatisfied. She liked to flirt as much as the next gal.

Each subsequent shoot had him turning up the dial on the charm-o-meter, making it even harder for her to maintain a professional demeanor. By the end of the third shoot she was ready to throw a rope around him, lash him to the bed and have her way with him.

Yeah, he affected her way too much for comfort. She'd hoped that today she'd be less susceptible to his charms. After all, she'd used that top-of-the-line sex toy twice last night in preparation. The way she saw it, if she was sexually spent he'd have no affect.

Wrong.

If anything, his appeal had grown. Delilah blew out her breath and tried to concentrate. Damn it all. He was built just the way she liked. Tall, lean and hard in all the right places. Including one that was ending up way too often in her viewfinder.

Shifting the camera up so as not to include that rather prominent portion of his geography in the photo, she fired off a few more shots. His position, leaning against the open door of the balcony with the light catching one side of his face and accenting his strong jaw, was perfect. This would look great in the layout.

There was no doubt about it. Cameron McIntyre was fine with a capital F. But he was also one of the cockiest men she'd ever met. It was clear he was accustomed to having women fall all over him. But however yummy he was, Delilah wasn't about to give him the satisfaction of being counted among those women who melted into a puddle at his feet.

"Sugah, I'd be willing to pay you hard cash to put that camera away for five minutes. I'm tired of smiling."

Delilah tried to suppress the delicious shiver that scurried down her spine at the sound of his voice. A slow drawl, his deep-timbered voice clearly revealed his Texas roots. His low sensual tone was one that made a woman think of intimacy and long, shuddering orgasms.

She lowered the camera to peer over the top of it at him. Why the hell did he have to be so freaking sexy? Those smoke-gray eyes of his were like something from a wet dream.

Well, she didn't have to puddle at his feet, but who said she couldn't play the game according to her own rules? Maybe it was time he met his match. A woman who wasn't such an easy target. Yeah, that was the ticket. As Fenny said, there was no law against having fun. And she wasn't breaking any rules of professional conduct.

"I think we've already established that my name isn't sugar, Mr. McIntyre."

His smile flashed bright and seductive as he straightened from his pose. "Honey, I'd bet the farm you're as sweet as cotton candy. And the name's Cam."

Delilah snorted and raised the camera to continue shooting. Actually it was to cover her face. No way was she going to let Cameron McIntyre know his affect on her could be likened to a nuclear meltdown.

"You get much with that line, Mr. McIntyre? Now smile for the camera so we can get this shoot wrapped up."

Cameron straightened and started across the room toward her. Damn, just watching him move was an erotic experience. She continued to shoot, grateful for the eight frames per second capability of her camera. Fenny would die when she saw this guy.

He stopped in front of her and raised his right hand to push the camera down from her eye. "Tell you what. How 'bout we have a little wager?"

Delilah hoped the shiver that ran through her at his words and the near overpowering closeness of him wasn't evident as she looked up at him. "What kind of wager?"

"You give me one kiss and if it doesn't curl your toes then I'll be good and smile pretty for the camera."

She opened her mouth to retort that the suggestion was highly improper, even though something fluttery had appeared in her belly and she'd felt that sudden heat of perspiration break out on her skin.

But before she could speak, he put his finger over her lips. "And if it does, then you and me take the rest of today getting up close and personal without a camera."

*Oh god.* Not a ten-pound box of hundred dollar bills or a Pulitzer would have tempted her more. He was that potent. All six foot something of self-confident male with an air about him that promised he could not only talk the talk, but walk the walk.

But that was certain death to her career, not to mention her pride. There was no way she was going to be that easy, no matter how much she wanted to. Besides, there was something in those gray eyes of his that said he welcomed a challenge. She gently pushed his finger from her lips.

"Well, gee, Mr. McIntyre, as hard as it is to pass up an offer like that I'm gonna have to decline. I might kiss on the first date but never on the job. Besides, I'd hate to curl your toes."

Cam laughed in delight. Delilah Jackson was about the sexiest, most intriguing woman he'd ever met. Seemingly unaware of her beauty, she didn't dress to impress with designer labels or clothing that made a statement about her success. Her style was one he'd wager was her own, a "this is me, take it or leave it" fashion statement.

In a pair of worn jeans, old boots and a tank top that read "Focus is everything", she'd arrived with her long hair loose, but the moment the shoot started she'd pulled it up into a loose knot on her head and fastened it with one of those clips woman of today seemed to favor. His fingers had been itching to take that clip out and run his fingers through that long mane of dark-chocolate silk.

If she wore makeup then it was the most artful job he'd ever seen because it wasn't evident at all. Except maybe her lashes. Surely no woman had lashes that thick and lush without help.

It wasn't just her looks that made her appealing. She moved with graceful purpose, very fluid and sure in a way that was sensual without being overly sexual. And the way her big hazel eyes lightened and darkened...the expression in them. Those eyes spoke volumes. Those eyes could drive a man to desperation in an attempt to see them darken in passion looking up at him.

She fascinated him and he'd learned long ago that once fascinated he wouldn't be content until he'd fully explored the object of fascination. In depth.

The fact that she was a challenge made the game all the more fun.

"Fancy, you curl *my* toes and whatever you want is yours. 'Course if you're just plain scared of how worked up it's gonna make you —"

"Well, you're just full of yourself, aren't you, Mr. McIntyre?" she interrupted. "Okay, deal."

It wasn't what he'd expected, so her reply threw him off balance for a moment. But only a moment. His granddaddy had always said that the ability to think fast on his feet was one of his biggest assets. Before the defiant little tilt of her chin could lower as she had time to rethink, he moved in, put his fingers under her chin to tilt her head back. He wrapped his free arm around her to pull her up snug against him then leaned down and kissed her.

It was a slow, seductive kiss. Lips parting, inquisitive tongues probing. And potent enough to have things south of the belt standing up at attention. Her taste was sweet yet spicy, her lips full and soft. The small almost inaudible purr in her throat was enough to defeat his control. It took all he had to refrain from crushing her against him and plundering her mouth.

Reluctantly he ended the kiss. She wavered ever so slightly on her feet but recovered and grinned up at him.

"Those toes curling, cowboy?"

"They're damn sure doing something. How 'bout you, darlin'?"

Her smile was sassy. "Not bad. But my toes are still straight."

Cam recognized the tease. "Not bad? Well hell, sugar, let's give it another go."

Delilah laughed, taking another step back and raising her camera to fire off shots of him.

"Ah, Fancy, come on." He pursued her slowly. "Give a man another chance."

She continued to shoot, side-stepping as he closed in on her. She liked the fact that he was willing to play and tease. It made things more exciting and gave her a measure of control. Something she was pretty sure she'd need with him.

"Second chances are earned, *sugah*. Now let's get this shoot finished. Then maybe...maybe we'll talk about a second chance. But fair warning..." She paused to give him a smile. "That was just the PG version. For the adult-rated variety you might want to bring a fire truck."

The sexy grin that preceded his laugh told her that he was enjoying the game as much as she. And the look on his face was sexy enough that the shots she was getting of him would inspire fantasies of hot sweaty skin, flesh slapping and groans in the dark.

"You think it'll be that hot, darlin'?"

She laughed in delight. He wasn't about to admit that he didn't have the upper hand or that he believed for a minute she wasn't attracted to him. That was fine. That one kiss had proven there was chemistry. But it was still up to her as to whether she wanted to act on it.

"Five alarm, Mr. McIntyre. Five alarm."



## **Chapter Two**

Delilah sat on the sofa, her feet curled up beneath her Indian-style, her laptop perched on her legs and the phone lying on her laptop with the speaker engaged as she scrolled through the photos she'd taken of Cameron McIntyre.

"God as my witness," she said into the direction of the phone. "If I hadn't had to get that shoot done and I didn't have to guard against making sure he knew I wasn't one of the minions who'd succumb to his charms at first kiss, I'd have raped him on the spot."

A warm feminine laugh came from the phone. "The kiss couldn't have been that good!"

Delilah felt warm just remembering the kiss. "He curled my freaking toes, Fenny! Not to mention what he did to my panties. Holy crap! Not that I'd have let him know. He's sexy as original sin but so freaking cocky. I just can't resist trying to take him down a notch."

"So, what're you going to do? Are you going to see him again?"

Delilah grinned as she answered. "You're damn skippy. I offered to bring the photos over for him so he could choose which ones he wants used in the magazine article. We're doing it at his place Thursday night. Which means I won't make it over. Hope that's okay."

Delilah already knew what Fenny's answer would be. She was Delilah's closest friend. They'd met, ironically enough, in front of the romance shelves of a local bookstore six years ago. Not only was Dee thrilled to meet F. Whitfield, one of her favorite authors, but they'd formed an instant connection.

In the years that had passed they'd grown closer than friends. Fenny was Delilah's family, the one person she trusted above everyone else. She'd never imagined that

having a girlfriend would prove to be the richest and most cherished relationship in her life but that's what had happened.

"Doing it?" Fenny asked with a chuckle. "Well, honey, I'd forego the weekly huddle to do it myself. What're you wearing?"

"It sure as shit won't be the little black dress and heels he requested."

"That's my Dee. I suppose you're going to show up in ragged jeans and a t-shirt?"

Delilah laughed and moved her laptop off her legs so she could stretch out and lie back on the couch. She held the phone in front of her as she got comfortable. "Yeah, probably. Just to annoy him. Damn, Fenny, I really wish he wasn't so cock-sure 'cause there's something about him that does me. I wish...well shit, it's been so long since I had sex I might have forgotten how!"

"Oh darling, it's like riding a bike. Or in your case, a horse. And you know the old saying, be careful what you wish for."

"You might get it? Right. I could be so lucky. Oh god, what if I did get it?"

"Huh?"

"Fenny, what if I did get lucky. I'd have to get naked."

"Says the girl who runs more miles in a year than I put on my car and thinks weight training is exciting."

"Yeah, but still. Things aren't the same as they were ten years ago. The junk in my trunk has settled and perky isn't a term I'd use to describe my boobs. And then...oh my god, I'd have to shave!"

"Your legs?"

"No. My bush. Right now if the wind blew my skirt up someone would think I was hiding my pet ferret."

"Oh, that is too gross! You don't wax?"

"What the hell for? I haven't been on a date in over six months, and if you remember, Carl the bartender slash model was a little shy of neurons and thought women who liked clitoral stimulation were lesbians."

"Ah yes, Carl. But still. What'd you do, just let it grow wild?"

"Like the freaking national forest."

"Wax."

"I hate waxing. That shit hurts. And I hate, hate, hate going to have it done. Last time I did I got this freaking little bitch with glittery eyes. Every time she yanked that wax she got this orgasmic gleam and her face flushed. Freaked me the fuck out. And she was *not* gentle."

"You'd rather take a chance on something developing and having him pet the ferret?"

"Shit on a stick. No. Damn. Hey, it just dawned on me. Do we show age there? I mean do we get wrinkled or lose skin tone or something? What if I wax and it looks like some wrinkled up old prune or something? What if our labia is like a man's balls and the older we get the lower it droops and —"

She heard the chuckle that grew into a howl. "Fenny? Fenny!"

"I'm Googling, I'm Googling."

"Well?"

"Don't see anything that says a woman's genitals turn prune-like with age."

"Thank god!"

"Wax, Dee."

"Someone should develop a pill for that. Take one and the hair falls out."

"Along with what's on your head?"

"Okay, not a good idea. Maybe I'll just go buy the stuff and do it myself."

"Good luck with that. I cannot make myself do it."

"So who do you go to?"

"Enrico."

"A guy? You let a guy wax Ms. Puss? Fenny Whitfield, you tramp."

"He's very gentle."

"How gentle?"

"Very. And he serves a very nice glass of Chardonnay."

"Well hell, email me his number and I'll make an appointment first thing in the morning."

"You may want to trim a bit first. Enrico is quite sensitive. I'd hate for you to scare him."

"Well it's not like I'm a Yeti."

"You said national forest."

"Yeah, I did. Okay, fine. I'll trim and let Enrico wax."

"Good girl. And good luck with Big Tex. Keep me posted."

"Will do. Talk to you soon. Love ya."

"Same here, babe."

Delilah ended the call, put the phone on the coffee table and rolled over on her side to turn the laptop to face her. "Cameron McIntyre. Damn."

He certainly got to her and probably knew it. That was okay. She didn't mind that he knew she was attracted to him. She just didn't want to be another in what was surely a long line of pushovers, suckers for a good-looking man with money.

Men with money, particularly handsome ones, were usually trouble. They were smart enough to know that if they couldn't get a woman with their looks, their wealth would be a sure lure. She wasn't much impressed with money, and while looks were something that played a key factor in the initial attraction, a man had to have more than a handsome face or good body. There had to be that spark that ignited inside her when she was in his presence.

Cameron provided that in spades. Even thinking about him brought a flush to her skin. Was she just that lonely and horny or did he really have something special about him?

Sighing, she scrolled through the photos, wondering if Cameron McIntyre was really one of a kind or like many men she'd met. Only after a quick fuck so he could add another notch to his belt.

She wasn't going to figure it out staring at his photos. But Thursday night the truth would rise to the surface. Of that she was certain because she'd make sure of it. If he turned out to be looking for a quick lay, then she'd walk away without regret. If not...well, no use in thinking about that. One thing she'd learned in life was to never read too much into anything. That was a sure recipe for disappointment.

Shutting down the laptop, she got up and headed for the bathroom. Time to deal with the ferret.

\* \* \* \* \*

The only light in the penthouse came from a dim light on the desk and the glow of the laptop monitor. Cameron scrolled through the information again even though by now he knew it by heart.

Delilah Jackson was born and raised in Gauley Bridge, West Virginia, daughter of the sheriff of Fayette County and a mother who owned and operated the local beauty salon.

The youngest of six children, she was the only girl of the family. Apparently not one for girly things, by the time she was fifteen she was working for one of the local white-water rafting companies, taking tourists down the New and the Gauley rivers.

She graduated high school by the skin of her teeth and worked her way through college at the University of West Virginia, where she majored in journalism and took every photography class available.

Upon graduation she continued to work as a rafting guide and began freelancing as a photographer. When she was twenty-four, she was offered a job with a prestigious travel magazine as a photographer. That job ended five years later, three years after the affair she'd been involved in with the owner of the magazine ended. They parted as friends when she was offered a job with a high-profile men's magazine.

She continued to do some freelance, and began writing. Her career as a writer had proven successful and she'd developed a solid following writing erotic romance under the name of Dee Jax.

She took another job with a women's magazine that specialized in male nudes, but it didn't last long. Apparently she didn't find it to her liking and quit. For six months she was swamped with freelance work, and then took a job with the magazine that was doing a story on him and the development he was doing in the area.

There was no ex-husband in the picture and no children. She'd had a couple of lovers but had never been engaged.

Cameron leaned back in his chair and regarded the monitor thoughtfully. Delilah was an independent woman, accustomed to making her own decisions and mapping her own course. She'd not fallen victim to the lure of celebrity status in either her photography or writing career and spent more time with Fenella Whitfield than out dating and partying. Fenella was a well-known writer and apparently Delilah's closest friend and confidant. Delilah was quite private, favored pasttimes such a kayaking, horseback riding, and rock climbing. Her last vacation had been to Colorado for a week of snow skiing.

*A real down-to-earth kind of woman*, he thought. It almost seemed too good to be true. Could Delilah Jackson be half as unique and intriguing as she appeared? He intended to find out. Not via more research but through a more personal investigation.

Suddenly Cam found himself eager for the next evening to arrive. It'd been a very long time since he'd been eager for a date, but this was one he was really looking forward to.

Picking up the phone, he called and left a message for his executive assistant to make reservations for dinner at the most expensive restaurant in the city, order flowers and have the penthouse prepared for the evening. With that, he closed his laptop and walked outside to stand on the balcony. Would Delilah Jackson prove to be the woman who could hold his interest or be like all the others – a temporary diversion?

## **Chapter Three**

Delilah's pulse spiked when Cameron opened the door. Dressed in black slacks and a white dress shirt open at the neck, he looked good enough to eat. She saw his eyes move over her and smiled in amusement. Her outfit obviously wasn't what he'd expected, but the look in his eyes when they met hers told her quite clearly that despite her completely ignoring his dress directives, he liked what he saw.

What a relief! Along with that wax job, which had her cursing like a drunken sailor, she'd treated herself to a facial, cut out the carbs, called a moratorium on chocolate and worked out like a mad woman. Not that she expected to transform herself into a new woman in a couple of days, but at least it made her feel better about herself.

Which was unusual in and of itself. She didn't normally give much thought to whether she was pretty or slim or young or sexy enough. She'd always had the "take it or leave it" attitude. Why it was different this time was still a mystery.

But it was, so she'd even chosen her outfit with care. A gypsy skirt that rode low on her hips, a tank top with sparkling text that read "I feel a Sin coming on" that stopped just short of her navel and an old leather jacket. She wore her hair loose and opted for a pair of sandals to complete her outfit. Bohemian, Fenny would have described it.

He smiled at her. "Well, I see you dressed for the occasion. I suppose I can cancel those dinner reservations."

The humor in his voice allayed any misgivings she might have had about screwing up his plans but she wasn't eager to end this phase of the game just yet. She pulled a DVD from the pocket of her jacket. "If I remember correctly the reason I'm here is to deliver this and find out which photos we're going to use in the article."



The look he gave her was heated enough to ignite a fire in her belly. He ignored the disc, took her by the wrist and pulled her inside the penthouse. "Darlin', I could give a hoot which picture you use and we both know the reason you're here is this —"

With that he took her in his arms. Everything in her screamed for her just to let go, give in to the sinful temptation his eyes promised and the delicious feel of his hard body against hers. But she suspected he was every bit as much into the flirtatious game as she, and so just before his lips met hers she raised her hand and covered his lips with her fingers.

He didn't release her, but did straighten, letting one of his hands drift down her back to slide across the swell of her ass. She stepped back, forcing him to drop his hands.

"So how're those toes today, darlin'?"

"Threatening to curl, Cam."

His eyebrows rose a moment before his smile. "Cam? Does that mean we're friends now?"

Delilah smiled and reached up to trace her fingers along the side of his face. "No, but I think we're going to be."

Standing on tiptoes, she slowly brushed her lips across his. He made no move to take control of the moment which pleased her. Her tongue snaked out and his lips parted to allow her access. It was a slow, long kiss with nothing of their bodies touching except their lips. Finally, just before she ended the kiss, she leaned in, grazing his chest with her breasts.

When she moved back he reached for her but she stepped away, leaning against the door.

"A kiss like that makes promises, Delilah. Wet, hot promises."

Wet and hot was an apt description of how she felt. "I like it hot."

He moved too fast for her to evade, taking hold of her upper arms to pull her to him. "Then darlin', you're gonna love this."

His mouth crushed down on hers, one hand fisting in her hair as the other moved to cup one breast. It was electrifying. Every nerve ending in her body went into high gear, sensation screaming through her from his touch. When his thumb tracked over her nipple, she fought to stifle a groan and was only partially successful.

He lifted away from the kiss, a cocky smile on his face. "Those toes fully curled, honey?"

His tease brought her back to the game, allowing her to establish some measure of control over her traitorous body that was screaming for her to rip his clothes off and fuck his brains out there in the vestibule. She stepped away and circled him. "Getting there. But we have business to attend to. Where's your laptop?"

Cameron groaned. The last thing on his mind was looking at pictures. What was on his mind was touching and tasting every inch of her. But like his granddaddy always said, "You can chow down on that ice cream cone or lick it slow and savor the taste as long as possible." That was a pretty smart old fella as far as Cam was concerned. So he gave in. Prolonging the anticipation and taking it slow only made the having that much sweeter.

"Over here." He went to the deck and got his laptop, watching as she moved across the room.

She had the look of a fictional gypsy about her, that colorful shirt hanging low on her hips and its irregular hem giving glimpses of bare legs. She'd worn her hair loose and done nothing to tame the gentle curls. She shrugged out of her jacket, tossed it over a chair then kicked off her sandals and took a seat on the sofa.

He placed the laptop on the coffee table. She inserted the DVD, accessed the files and turned to look at him as the images displayed. "See anything you like?" she asked.

"Oh yeah." He definitely liked what he saw. Like the way she bunched her skirt up between her legs so she could sit cross-legged, Indian-style, baring her thighs. And the way her tank top clung to her breasts. And those big hazel eyes going a shade darker when they met his. He most decidedly liked what he saw.

She rolled her eyes at him. "Come on."

"Okay, okay." He turned his attention to the laptop. "Never have been keen on looking at myself. Which do you like?"

She scrolled through the pictures, unaware that he was watching her instead of the computer. He liked the way her brows drew together slightly as she studied the images, and how her eyes narrowed fractionally. Not to mention the sexy way she pursed her lips. Damn if this woman wasn't a breathing hard-on.

"This one," she said.

He looked at the computer. "Really? Why?"

She cocked her head to one side as she studied the screen. "You look relaxed and natural. And the angle is very flattering, accenting your strong jaw and cheekbones. And your eyes have a great expression. Like you're pleased with what you're seeing."

"I was lookin' at you, darlin'."

She cut him a sassy smile and then turned her attention back to the computer to scroll through the images more. "You're such a flirt. Here. This is the one. This is my favorite."

"Looked at these a lot, have you?"

A stab of something akin to anxiety lanced through her. Was she that obvious? She turned to look at him, and when their eyes met all the air in the penthouse seemed to have been sucked out. Locked in a vacuum of desire, she could only stare.

"You striking the match, honey?" he asked. "Cause if you're not, you've got to stop looking at me like that."

It took all the control she could muster to tear away from his eyes. It wasn't going to take much more for her to fall victim to his appeal and she so didn't want to be making a huge mistake. "God almighty, you're a flirt. And I bet you bat a thousand. But I'm curious, Cam. Do you always move this fast?"

"I go after what I want."

"Yeah, that's obvious. But the question was, do you always move this fast?"

"Only when the situation calls for it."

She laughed and shook her head. "Okay, and I'm supposed to translate that...how? That you feel a *hankering* for a quick roll in the hay and I look like a likely candidate?"

The frown that appeared on his face surprised her. He reached out to take her hand and tug on it so that she angled to face him.

"Listen up, darlin', 'cause I only plan on saying this once. I don't do quick rolls in the hay. If I was so inclined there're more than enough willing women out there. But I've passed that stage and don't have any interest in a quick fuck and a see-you-later. I don't meet many women who intrigue me. But you? You do."

Nothing could have surprised her more. Had she nailed him completely wrong? Assuming he was just another guy looking for a quick slap-and-tickle who would immediately move on to the next candidate?

"Why?"

"Because you've got fire—but there's wariness about you. You don't trust easy and you keep a tight rein on what's inside. You're brilliant, one of the most talented photographers I've ever seen and..."

"And?"

A slight flush rose on his face along with a grin. "And your books keep me awake at night."

She felt her eyes fly open wide at the shock. "My...what makes you I have any books? I'm a photographer."

He laughed. "Honey, I've been around the block too many times not to check out the folks I associate with. I knew who you were before I agreed to do this magazine thing. Hell, it's one of the reasons I agreed. No way this ol' boy's gonna pass up a chance to meet Dee Jax in the flesh."

Delilah was flabbergasted. She kept her writing persona very private. "Well...well, I'm flattered. But don't confuse me with the characters I write, Cam."

He pulled her closer, reaching up to run one hand through her long hair. "I know the difference between fantasy and reality, honey. Just like I know there's got to be one hell of a fire inside someone for them to be able to communicate the kind of passion you write.

"And yeah, maybe this is fast, but the truth is I've been thinking about this since I was first contacted by your magazine. Now that we're here together I sure as hell hope we're not going to waste it. 'Cause you can take it to the bank, darlin', that if you let me, I'll take you where you've never been before."

"Promises, promises." She tried to tease but was largely unsuccessful. At the moment she was feeling completely overwhelmed.

He shook his head. "Iron-clad guarantee."

For a few moments they just sat there. She searched his eyes and then succumbed to the lure and took the bait. Hook, line and sinker.

Cam watched her eyes, waiting for her response. Was he about to get shot down? He hoped not. Something inside him said that she just might be the woman who could match him. Not just in verbal sparring, brains and talent, but in passion.

Relief flooded through him when she rewarded him with a sexy smile. "You do know how to tempt a girl. But it'll take a bit more than words to get me saddled up."

"How 'bout this?" he asked before lowering his lips to hers.

She didn't back out of the kiss, but didn't deepen it either. She gave him the reins and he took it at his pace, slow and gentle. Her hands moved to press against his chest. Not pushing him away, just there, warm even through his shirt.

When one hand slid up to the back of his neck, exerting gentle pressure, he ramped up the heat of the kiss, pulling her more firmly against him. She made a small sound in her throat that made his pulse spike and his dick throb. Christ on a crutch, she was potent.

His hand worked down her back, finding the warm skin exposed between her top and her skirt. When his hand moved around her side and up her torso to cup her breast, she made that sound again, this time louder and wound both arms up to circle his neck, arching against him.

It'd been longer than he cared to admit since he'd made out on a couch and he sure had never experienced anything as exciting as Dee. Their lips parted and his worked down to the top of her shoulder then around to the hollow of her throat, feeling her pulse in that soft depression.

She pulled him back to her, this time dominating the kiss, her mouth slanting on his and her tongue working its own kind of magic.

Cam lost track of time, forgot everything but the feel and taste of her, the hunger that was threatening to take control. When her hand glided down to his crotch and stroked over his erection, he damn near jumped, the sensation was so electric.

"Honey, you're killing me," he whispered into her mouth.

She pulled back to look into his eyes and for a few moments they simply stared at each other. Was she about to tell him to take a hike?

Then she gave him an impish grin. "Well hell, Cam. When you put it like that..."

Before he knew it, she'd grabbed his shirt in both hands and ripped it open. Buttons flew this way and that as she bared his chest. He had time to do little more than smile before her mouth was on his chest and her fingers were working on his belt buckle.

Lust overrode reason and he pulled her to him, claiming her in a kiss. Her hands abandoned their task of unfastening his belt to snake up around his neck, fisting in his hair and returning the kiss with passion hot enough that the thought crossed his mind how right she'd been with her teasing statement. It was as hot as a five-alarm fire. And the blaze had burned south of the belt way too quick for comfort.

He wasn't accustomed to instant heat, the kind that made you lose your mind and revert into a primitive male with only a single thought. Get in and stroke hard. But that's where he was and there was no sense fighting it.

Still locked in the kiss, he pressed her back onto the sofa, his hands tugging at the rolled waist of her skirt. She raised her hips, allowing him to slide the skirt down her legs.

He ran his hands down her sides, traveling over the curves, feeling the reaction when her thighs tightened. God she felt good. Firm muscle beneath the soft skin. The return journey was every bit as good, moving up her sides to take hold of her tank top and pull it up over her head.

Her hands loosened in his hair when he tore away from the kiss to let his lips roam down the length of her neck to the hollow of her throat where her pulse hammered through the soft skin against his tongue.

*Thank you, God, for creating women,* he thought when he reached her breasts. Soft, round mounds that filled his hands, topped by a perfect pair of dusky nipples that screamed to be licked, sucked, bitten.

Delilah's fingers tightened in his hair when he captured one of those perfect nipples in his mouth, flicking his tongue across the taut nub then sucking it into his mouth. His dick jumped in excitement when she arched up, pressing against his mouth, a small exhalation of pleasure escaping her lips.

That sound stirred a side of him he wasn't ready to reveal. The side that few people knew. Secreted away within was a man who needed to dominate. To know that his woman was his to pleasure at his leisure, to propel her to the edge of madness with

wanting, then stop her from crossing so that he could carry her toward release time and again, until at last she achieved pleasure beyond her dreams.

As he abandoned her luscious breasts, he couldn't help but wonder if Delilah would be able to manage that. His mouth traveled down her body toward the lacy triangle that covered her sex. Seductive, uninhibited and strong, she was everything he'd visualized. But was she strong enough to submit?

When his mouth covered that small patch of lace, she bucked up against him, her fingers tightening almost painfully in his hair.

"Oh god. Damn. Cam, no. Wait."

That was the last thing he expected to hear. She pushed him away and he sat back on his heels. Delilah sat then moved onto her knees, running both hands along the tops of his shoulders to his neck.

"Sorry, cowboy, but it's been a while. My fuse is a little short. Need to slow it down a notch."

A wave of relief washed over him. She wasn't backing out, just slowing down. That he could do. Maybe. Now that he had a look at her, kneeling naked and flushed in front of him, her hair spilling around her shoulders in a wild riot of waves and curls, it was hard for his little head not to feel disappointed that he wasn't tossing her back on the couch and burying himself inside her.

Cam's chuckle sent relief flooding through Delilah. She hadn't been lying. If he'd done so much as move his lips against her clit she'd have exploded like a bottle rocket on the fourth of July.

She pressed into him, thrilling at the feel of his firm chest against her breasts and the tingle that danced over her skin as his hands moved to play over her back and down to her ass. His lips were eager for her kiss.



And boy, could he kiss. Long and deep, just the right amount of pressure, and tongue technique that could win an award. Add to that the mounting stimulation of his hands circling around her hips to the junction of her thighs, lightly stroking her sex, and it was almost enough to have her forgetting the foreplay and going straight to the main event.

But this was a man she didn't want to rush with. She moved out of the kiss and lowered herself down inch by inch, her lips and tongue enjoying the feel and taste of him as her hands worked to unzip his pants and slide them down his lean hips.

*Hey now. Everything really is bigger in Texas,* she thought as she wrapped both hands around his shaft. Long and thick. It was almost intimidating.

When she began to stroke, she heard him groan slightly. His body tensed and his hands tangled in her hair. Slowly she stroked, increasing the strength of her grip a little at a time and watching him close his eyes and lean his head back. God almighty, he was sexy. She'd love to have lapped at the bead of precum that sparkled at the tip of his cock, but not even something as sexy as Cam could make her throw that much caution to the wind.

Instead she ran her thumb over the bead, circling the head with its slickness. In doing so she discovered one of his hot buttons. Obviously the head of his cock was quite sensitive because his hands tightened in her hair and his cock jumped.

She continued until he groaned and pulled back. "Now it's my turn to plea a short fuse."

"Nothing short about your fuse," she countered with a smile as he stood and stepped out of his pants.

She lay back on the sofa, watching and admiring. "I wish I had my camera."

He chuckled and lay down, covering her body with his, nuzzling her neck and earlobe. "Darlin', this ain't no spectator sport."

"Not this, you perv. You. You're gorgeous, Cam. Really gorgeous."

He rose up, his hand on either side of her, arms braced. "Thank you, sugar, but the real beauty is lying here under me."

Delilah snorted. She hadn't been fishing for a compliment. She knew she wasn't the ugliest woman in the world, but neither was she the most beautiful. In her own estimation, she was average.

"You got me naked, cowboy," she said, running her hands up his strong body. "I don't need compliments."

Cam's smile faded. "This isn't sugar-coating, honey."

She shook her head in dismissal and let her hands drift down to the point where their bodies met, rubbing at the head of his cock pressed against the length of her belly.

"I appreciate the gesture, Cam, but really it isn't necessary. I'm a photographer, remember? I know what beauty is. What sexy is. I'm no bow-wow, but — Hey!"

Cam was on his feet, pulling her up. "Come."

"I thought that's where we were —"

"Seriously." He tugged her to follow him down the hall and into the bedroom. They stopped in front of the dresser. Cam put his hands on her waist and positioned her in front of him.

"Look."

Delilah met his eyes in the mirror's reflection. "I see."

"No, look," he said and moved her hair to one side to nuzzle her neck. "Watch. I want you to see what I see."

Something shot through her. Something hot and erotic. It wasn't so much his words but the way he spoke them. Something almost commanding but in such a sexual way that there was no sting from the issuance. She remained silent, unsure of what she would say if she chose to respond.

His lips traveled up her neck to nip on her ear while his hands moved around her body to cup her breasts. His thumbs moved over her hard nipples, creating pulses of

sensation that had her struggling not to wiggle. It felt too good. She couldn't help it. She wiggled her ass against him and leaned her head back, closing her eyes.

Cam almost let it go. But wanting something badly sometimes had a way of promoting boldness even when it was unwise. This might be one of those times, but his need was strong and this would be a test to determine if she could learn to be the woman who could fulfill those needs.

"Don't close your eyes. Look, Delilah. I want you to see what I do to you."

She opened her eyes and met his in the reflection. He saw no anxiety in them, or unwillingness to follow his lead. Instead, he was almost certain he saw curiosity.

"Put your hands on the dresser and spread your legs."

She complied, bending forward slightly with her hands on the polished surface of the dresser, her legs shoulder-width apart. The position served to spread her ass, exposing her pussy and anus, something the miniscule thong didn't hide.

He ran his hand over her ass, up the cleft and over to the thin elastic strap of her thong. One tug and it gave way. He tossed it aside, smiling at her in the mirror. She cocked one eyebrow at him and gave him a little half smile that sent a sizzle through him hot enough to melt titanium.

He lifted his left hand to her breast, toying with the nipple, rolling it between thumb and finger. Her eyes left his to watch his hand. With his right hand he lightly trailed down her back and over her anus to cup her sex.

She gasped as his fingers parted her lips, working aside the hood of her clit. Her lips parted slightly in a soundless gasp.

"I want you to stand on the balls of your feet, slightly bend your legs and arch your back. Open up for me."

Bingo. He saw her eyes go dark. A thrill shot through him as she complied, the position spreading her wider. Rubbing his thumb down her sex, he penetrated her. She

gasped and pressed back into his hand, her hands on the dresser curling as if to dig into the polished wood.

He stroked inside her, each stroke causing his fingers to rub across her clit. It wasn't long before she moaned and her felt her pussy start to contract.

"Cam...I...god...oooh." Her last syllable was drawn out and breathy as she shuddered in climax.

Her neck arched, head tilting back and body trembling, lowering so that her forearms were pressed on the dresser. And the whole time her eyes were glued to his.

It excited him. Intoxicated him. And shook him.

Before that last realization could fully hit home, she blew out her breath and turned to face him.

"Right now I'd love to go down on you," she said. "But I'm not that much of a risk taker."

"I'd give you my word I'm clean but somehow I don't think that'd be enough."

"Sorry," she said and reached out to fist his cock. "Tempting as it is, I tend to err on the side of caution. However, I can think of other things we could do with this bad boy."

Cam grinned. He couldn't help it. Delilah's honesty and straight-forward approach was refreshing. He pulled her to him, claiming her lips.

Delilah kept her hand wrapped around his shaft, working her free hand around him to grab his ass. Christ, he had a nice ass. Nice everything actually. And the orgasm he'd just given her had her primed and ready.

As if sensing her thoughts, he started moving backwards, still locked in the kiss. He worked free of his shirt, letting it fall to the floor. When he fell back on the bed, it broke the kiss. She fell on top of him, laughing. Cam reached over and pulled open the drawer of the night stand.

When he pulled out a condom, she took it from him. "Allow me."

He lay back and she straddled his legs and worked the condom onto him. Then she slid up, trapping his cock between them and rocking back and forth on it. Damn if he didn't look sexy lying there, those grey eyes of his darkened to the color of a thundercloud. She'd have to be really careful. It would be way too easy to fall for him.

"Darlin', you ever heard the term *ride the wild bull*?" he interrupted her thoughts.

She laughed and tossed her hair. "Why honey, you're talking to the West Virginia mechanical bull champeen three years running."

Cam let out a whoop and pulled her down into a kiss. Damn. He was really something. Just a kiss from him could turn her mouth into one of the most erogenous zones on her body. The way his tongue caressed, explored and teased, then plundered as the heat increased, teeth nipping and hands moving to hold her face immobile.

It had her squirming against his cock, trapped between them and pulsing against her belly. Her sex had a pulse of its own happening. No, make that a throb. As if sensing her need, he released her from the kiss. She sat up, perched on her knees, and reached between them to take his hard cock in hand and rub it against the wet opening of her sex.

Even as excited and ready as she was, he was a lot to accommodate. When she lowered onto him she couldn't sustain a gasp. It'd been a while since she'd had a man inside her, but she'd never had one with quite as much...size.

"Go slow, baby. You're gonna have to loosen up to take it as hard as I'm gonna give it."

His croon was fuel for a fire that was already raging alarmingly high. Her eyes went to his, and in the space of a heartbeat something happened. Despite her being positioned on top of him and initiating the penetration, he was in control. Of that there was no doubt.

The miraculous part of that was that it excited her in a way nothing else ever had. She wanted to impale herself on him in one swift stroke, to ride him hard and fast. But she resisted the urge, working herself slowly onto the length of him.

His hand moved to her clit, stroking just firmly enough to have her tingling and flushing wet and hot. She closed her eyes as sensation started to build, anticipating the onset of orgasm.

"Open your eyes, Delilah. Look at me."

His eyes imprisoned hers. "I want to see you come."

She couldn't even muster a word. Sensation rioted through her. His finger on her clit, his hard cock inside her pushing deeper as his pelvis rose and fell in a slow steady rhythm. Her hands moved to her thighs, steadying herself. She was about to go. Her clit was hard as a rock, burning at his touch and her pussy was already clenching against his cock.

"Not yet," he commanded softly.

"I can't..."

"You can. Let go, Delilah. Give yourself to me."

Abandon control. Submit. That's how his words translated in her mind. For a split second she was seized with indecision. But there was something in his eyes, a promise that was too seductive.

"Yes."

Cam smiled.

He had her. The sheer excitement of it had him tempted to just flip her over on her back and ride her like a stallion taking a mare in heat. Fast and hard. But no. The payoff of that might be instant gratification but paled in comparison to what she'd just offered.

"I'm going to stop moving. I want you to sink down on me. Take all of it. Don't move anything but the inner muscles of your pussy. I want you to squeeze and release. Nice and steady and slow."

Her eyes never left his as she complied. The first contraction around his dick sent a thrill of sensation spiking straight to his balls, making them tighten almost painfully. His fingers continued their assault on her clit, slow and easy.

It wasn't long before he felt a vibration in her body. Her eyes had developed a hooded look, pupils dilated and irises darkened to the color of a forest in twilight.

"Cam...I...god..."

"Not yet." He eased up on her clit, giving her time to recover, then started again. Her pussy continued to clench around him, creating delicious waves of sensation that had him as needy as she.

But he wouldn't give in to that need. Not until he was satisfied that when he let her come it would rock her to the core.

Over and again he took her to the edge, only to slow. Both of them were slick with sweat, bodies tense with need.

"Please. Cam, please."

Her breathy plea cinched the deal. He increased the pressure on her clit and bucked up inside her. Her body trembled, pussy tightening in quick contractions on his dick. And her scream was the sexiest sound he'd ever heard.

Before her climax could fully crest he flipped her over on her back and rammed home. Her legs moved to circle his body, heels locking against the small of his back as he rode her.

"Yes, yes, yes."

Her gasps added sparks of excitement that had him pounding hard. Her legs tightened, heels drumming his back as she met and matched his pace. Breath came hard and fast, words mere gasps and partial syllables.

Her orgasm lasted much longer than he'd counted on. This woman was amazing. He was straining not to come. When her body finally began to relax, he slowed his pace until he was still inside her. Neither of them moving except their chests and bellies heaving for air.

"Fuck me," she breathed. "That was...incredible."

"That was just the beginning, sugar. If you've got more in you."

She grinned up at him, her pussy clenching around him. "Bring it on, stud."

He did.



## **Chapter Four**

Delilah opened one eye. Light filtered in through a small gap where the drapes over the window didn't quite meet. For a moment her brain was a little fuzzy. This wasn't home. Then both eyes popped open wide. She was in Cam's bedroom.

Thoughts of Cam and the night they'd shared created a heat that had her rolling over onto her back and tossing away the sheet. And discovering herself alone in bed. That wasn't much fun.

She got up and went into the bathroom. Damn, the man had affected her ability to walk. There was definite tenderness in her pelvic area. Which came as no surprise. He was a very well-equipped man and their sexual adventure had lasted for hours.

There didn't seem to be a spare toothbrush in any of the drawers in the vanity. Well, they'd swapped enough spit that it shouldn't matter if she borrowed his toothbrush. Morning breath was about the least sexy thing on the planet.

After brushing her teeth, washing her face and running her fingers through her hair to dislodge the worst of the tangles, she went back into the bedroom. She needed something to wear and her clothes were probably still on the floor in the living room.

Cam's discarded shirt from the night before was draped on a chair. She slipped it on and rolled up the sleeves. No way to button it. She'd made sure of that when she ripped it open last night.

Oh well, it wasn't like he hadn't seen her naked. She padded down the hall to the living room. Not there. On to the kitchen she went and found him sitting at the table, reading the newspaper and sipping coffee. He was bare-chested, wearing a pair of tie-string cotton pants.

Cam looked up as she entered. "Morning, gorgeous."

Delilah walked over to him, throwing one leg over his lap to sit, straddling him. She took his face in both hands and planted one on him. A long, slow kiss. When she pulled back he grinned at her.

"Mmmm, minty fresh."

"Hope you don't mind. I borrowed your toothbrush."

"What's mine's yours, sugar. Sleep well?"

"Like a baby."

"Hungry?"

She smiled at the tone of the question and wiggled on him, feeling his erection hard and strong beneath her. "Starving."

"Me too."

She giggled as he stood, supporting her with his hands firmly gripping her ass. She wound her legs around him as he walked to the wide island in the center of the kitchen. He sat her down on it and claimed another kiss. One that had her very aware that she was getting the smooth countertop wet. She fumbled between them for the tie of his pants. One swift jerk and the knot released. Thank god for brothers who were boy scouts and taught her how to navigate her way around knots.

The pants slid down and her hands moved behind him to squeeze his ass, scooting closer to the edge of the counter to press her wet sex against him. "Condom," she groaned against his mouth.

"Too hungry," he replied and lowered her back onto the counter. His lips left hers and started a slow trek down her body, moving the shirt aside to bare her breasts so that he could feast on them.

By the time he reached her clit she was humming like a high-tension wire. God, it felt good. Then reality reared its ugly head. She pushed him away. "Cam, no. You can't."

"I can." He pulled her back and went for her again but she covered her sex with her hands.

"Unprotected. You're exposing yourself to the risk—"

He took her hands and moved them aside, pinning them on the counter above her head. "You're clean, right?"

"Yes."

"That's good enough for me."

Delilah searched his eyes. Sure enough there was trust shining there. "Me too," she whispered.

"Don't move."

He released her hands and worked his way down her body again, stopping at her breasts to torment them with lips and teeth and tongue until she was squirming and arching, grinding her sex against him.

When he finally resumed his journey down her body, her nipples throbbed, almost a pain but not quite. It was more of a turn-on than anything. And an effort to keep her hands above her head and not grab hold of him.

His fingers parted her pussy, gently moving aside the hood that cloaked her clit. One lap of his tongue across that sensitive nub and she moaned.

He raised his head and took hold of her legs just below the knees to bend her legs and push them back toward her chest. "Grab your shins and pull your legs toward your chest, but spread them as wide as you can."

Came saw one of her brows arch at his command. She hesitated for a split second then cut him a sexy smile and complied. He knew it was a surrender. The position left her very exposed and very much under his control.

Just the way he wanted it. Just seeing her like this was enough to have his dick throb in anticipation. And his mouth water.

She twitched when his mouth closed on her clit, capturing it to flick his tongue over it. When he ran his tongue down the length of her and dipped inside her pussy, she moaned. A sound that drove him to give her more, take her higher.

A sound of protest came from her when he abandoned her pussy. The sound turned to a gasp when two fingers filled the void his tongue had created, going straight to that one spot he'd discovered that drove her wild.

"Fuck!" She gasped, her neck arching and eyes closing, fingers digging into the flesh of her legs as she held herself open for him. "Cam!"

He went straight for her clit, his tongue working over and around it, all the while stroking her with his fingers.

"Cam," she moaned a split second before started to come.

He grabbed her legs and pulled her to him, impaling her with one fluid stroke. He had to fight not to let a climax stop him as she pushed herself up and wound around him like a python, legs squeezing and lifting her hips in time with his thrusts while her hands worked into his hair and pulled his lips to hers.

She licked his lips, sucked at his bottom lip then invaded his mouth, her tongue demanding, as aggressive as the motions of her lithe body. He wasn't quite accustomed to the speed and skill with which she assumed control but was also excited by it.

Damn if she didn't know how to work it. His balls were on fire from need and his dick felt like it was about to explode. But there was no way he was going to come before she came again.

She pulled back from the kiss and whispered in his ear. "Take it, Cam. Hard. Fast. Now."

That was the straw that broke the camel's back. He could no more turn down that lusty demand than he could will his heart to stop beating. With his hands firmly fixed on her ass he backed away from the counter and turned, slamming her back against the stainless steel refrigerator.

She cried out but not a sound of pain. It was of wanting. And that sound matched the force that coursed through him, demanding and hot. He pounded into her, curving his pelvis to get better penetration. She gasped, screamed his name and started to shudder in climax.

And totally destroyed what control he had left. A momentary thought crossed his mind. *Pull out.* It was too late—already he was caught in a climax that had his knees threatening to buckle.

“Dee,” he breathed against the side of her face as he pressed into her, leaning his forehead against the refrigerator.

“Cam.” She kissed the top of his shoulder, unwound her legs from his waist and slid into a standing position, her arms looped around his neck and her face pressed against his chest, listening to the steady thump of his heart.

For a few minutes neither of them moved, then he pushed back and looked down at her. “A man could get addicted to you fast, darlin’. Real fast. The kind of addiction that makes you feel...proprietary.”

His words caught her by surprise. Last night had proved that what she felt about him wasn’t just sexual. But she didn’t expect anything in return. “Don’t, Cam. I don’t expect anything from you. We had some great—”

He silenced her with a kiss that was tender and lingering. When he pulled away, his expression was as tender as the kiss. “Like I told you, sugar, I’m not looking for a one-night stand. I’m interested in you, Delilah. And not just because you can damn near make me come with a look. This isn’t a quick fuck and see-you-around. There’s something happening here. Unless I’m way off base?”

The moment felt...unreal. Thrilling and exciting but completely unreal. Could feelings blossom so quickly and be something to count on, or was this simply infatuation-generated feelings that would fade as quickly as they’d appeared?

Regardless, she owed him honesty. "No, you're not. There is...something. I don't know what. But something."

"Then we owe it to ourselves to find out what that something is, don't you think?"

"Yeah, I do," she agreed then paused. She wasn't ready for this kind of discussion. She needed time to process. And the best way to get that time was to divert attention away from the emotional content and back to the physical.

"But right now, I need a shower. And someone to wash my back."

Cam grinned and grabbed her hand. They'd nearly reached the kitchen door when his cell phone rang. Both stopped and looked at one another. She shrugged and he backtracked to the table and picked up his phone.

"McIntyre."

His expression darkened as he listened. "Yeah, as a matter of fact she did. We'll drop off the disc after breakfast."

Delilah felt a sick feeling take hold in her gut. Cam's eyes were pinned on her and his expression puzzled. "Around ten," he said into the phone. "See you then."

He put the phone on the table. "We need to deliver the photos to your editor."

Her editor. He knew she was with Cam. Shit, shit, shit. She didn't know what she'd prefer. To have a sudden coronary or have a freak asteroid suddenly drop onto the building. Either way it would put her out of her misery fast.

"You told my editor I spent the night with you."

"No, I didn't."

"Well, you might as well have. Shit, Cam. He's gonna have my ass—and probably my job."

Cam gathered her into his arms, kissing the top of her head. "Honey, he isn't going to fire you. You did your job. That's all that should matter. What happens between us off the job isn't his business. And you won't lose your job. You have my word on that."

She pulled back to look up at him. "Yeah, like you can control what my managing editor does?"

He laughed then kissed the tip of her nose. "Hell, yeah. If he doesn't play nice I'll just buy the magazine."

Delilah blew out her breath and shook her head. There it was, that cockiness. The man was just full of it. "Anyone ever tell you that sometimes you're way too full of yourself?"

Cam laughed and hugged her. "Nope. Or if they did I didn't pay any attention. Now what was that about a shower?"

Delilah couldn't help but chuckle. Nothing about her original assessment of Cam was wrong. He was cocky, full of himself and the most self-assured man she'd ever met. But damn if it wasn't good being with him. So what the hell. What would happen would happen, but right now she had a few ideas on how to make getting clean a lot of fun.

## Chapter Five

"Breakfast ala Delilah," Nadine said with a laugh and raised her coffee cup in a toast. "You go, girl."

Dee and Fenny both laughed. It was amazing how quickly Dini had become part of their family. Even though they'd only known her a short time, she'd already earned their trust and love.

And the woman had a sense of humor to rival Fenny's. Which made it all the better as far as Dee was concerned. Finding women who could laugh at the shit life tossed at them and the stupid mistakes they made along the way was the rarest commodity on earth. The fact that she had two such friends in her life made her feel pretty blessed.

Dee looked over at Fenny who was smiling. "Okay, go ahead. Say it."

Fenny waved her hand gracefully in a dismissive gesture. "No, no."

"Yes, yes," Dee argued. "You were right. You told me so. And dayum!! I sure am glad I did. Damn that man's...addictive. Well, sort of. Once you get over the two-day case of 'oh my god, I think he bruised my uterus'."

"Everything's bigger in Texas," Dini said in a deadpan tone, which threw them all into a fit of giggles.

"So what's next?" Fenny asked. "You're seeing him again, aren't you?"

"Yeah. Tonight. He's coming to my place. I'm fixing him dinner."

Fenny paled a bit and Dini looked at her in concern. "What's wrong? Caffeine indigestion?"

Dee laughed. "More like, *oh my god, Dee's cooking.*"

"That's not what I was thinking."



"Sure it is," Dee said good-naturedly then directed her words to Dini. "See, I'm not what you'd call a world-class cook."

"World class?" Fenny asked around a laugh. "Does the phrase 'burn water' remind you of anyone?"

"Okay, okay." Dee gave in. "When it comes to cooking, I suck. Loud. I cooked for Fenny once and tried this Chinese dish that didn't go well."

Nadine looked at Fenny who shook her head. "She attempted to fix chicken and broccoli in garlic sauce."

"And?" Nadine asked.

"I sort of overdid the chili oil."

Fenny sputtered. "You think? She used the entire bottle. I couldn't even get the fork to my mouth before my eyebrows started smoking."

Nadine laughed and so did Dee. Fenny was right. It had been truly horrible. "Well, luckily I have the Golden Dragon on speed dial," Dee said.

"Oh, I love that place!" Nadine said enthusiastically.

"Me, too," Dee agreed.

"And they love you, too, honey," Fenny added. "Why, I think you've sent at least two of Mr. Chen's kids through college."

"Yeah, probably. Oh, did I tell you—" Her phone rang, cutting her off as she checked the caller ID. "Damn, it's my boss."

She answered the call. "This is Delilah."

The screaming that came across the line had her holding the phone at arm's length from her ear.

"This is a fucking disaster! Disaster! You have any idea what something like this could do to our reputation? Get your ass down here now. And I mean right now!"

Fenny's eyebrows shot up and Nadine's eyes widened. Dee returned the phone to her ear. "I'll be there in half an hour. Bye."

"What the hell was that?" Nadine asked, while Fenny intoned in a good imitation of a science fiction character from the past. "He's on about something, Jim.

"To put it mildly," Fenny added. "Didn't you say he liked the photos?"

"Yeah, everything was cool when we delivered them."

"So what's going on?"

Dee shook her head. "Beats the hell outta me but I better take off. Ya'll gonna hang out? If so, I'll drop back by after I see what's up."

Fenny looked at Nadine who shrugged. "Yeah, sure. I can hang out for a while. Unless you've got something you need to do."

"No, nothing pressing." Fenny turned to Dee. "Come on back and give us the lowdown."

"Will do."

Dee headed out. She'd only heard her boss Dave Simpson that upset once, when the managing editor quit and they were in a mad scramble to find a replacement. If that was it then she was glad she'd finished up the shoot with Cam and didn't have another assignment on her plate yet. She could be the invisible photographer until things settled down.

And maybe have a bit more time with an all-too-sexy and satisfying Texan.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dee nearly wrenched the door off her Wrangler when she got out of it at Fenny's. She stomped to the door, shouting the moment she crossed the threshold, "I'm going to kill him!"

"Dee?" Fenny ran out of the kitchen, nearly colliding with Dee.

"I'm serious. I'm going to fucking kill him!"

"Okay, who and why?" Fenny backed up into the kitchen.

"Cam! He's dead meat." Delilah growled and yanked open the cabinet to grab a bottle of Patron. "Road kill. Dead. Tag-on-the-toe dead. In the morgue, cold on a slab—"

"Hold on," Fenny cut in. "Take a breath and tell me what happened."

Dee blew out her breath and pulled the cork from the bottle. "I just got reamed a new one. Cam shot off his mouth when the editor, Jack, called his penthouse about needing the photos for the article. So naturally after we delivered the photos, Jack shot his mouth off to my boss Dave, who called Cam. And Cam tells him to stick it where the sun don't shine, has his attorney contact the owner of the magazine and makes him an offer he can't—no, wait—doesn't *want* to refuse.

"And in less time than it takes to put on mascara, the ink is almost dry on the papers and I'm being told that I'm a slut who fucked my way into a job promotion and I hope I'm proud of myself."

"You're not serious?" Dini finally spoke up from where she sat at the table, wide-eyed.

"As a heart attack." Dee turned up the bottle and took a long slug. "I swear to God, I thought he was kidding. When Cam said he'd just buy the magazine, I thought he was just trying to pacify me so I wouldn't stress about being in hot water. But hell no. He goes and does it and now everyone there thinks I'm some freaking...whore, who capitalized on this rich guy, fucked him six ways from Sunday and got myself a fat raise and promotion."

"Only six ways from Sunday?" Dini asked.

"How fat?" Fenny asked.

"Damn, ya'll!!" Dee yelled

"Sorry. But how fat?" Fenny asked.

"Yeah," Dini added. "How fat?"

"Six fifty a year plus stock options."

"Six hundred and fifty K?" Dini gasped.

"Plus stock options?" Fenny asked. "Whoa!"

Dee sucked down another swallow from the bottle and blew out her breath. "Whoa is right. I'm going to strangle him. Cut off his balls and stuff them down his throat."

"Well, that's one way of handling it, I suppose," Fenny said and pulled out a glass to extend it to her. But maybe you need to stop and —"

"No. Don't." Dee ignored the offered glass and paced around the kitchen. "I mean it. Don't be reasonable and say something that makes perfect sense and makes me change my mind. He was wrong. And cost me the job. There's no way I can stay there having people think I was bought. I can't. I quit. No notice. Nothing. Just, I'm gone."

Fenny looked from Dee to Dini who just shrugged. "Dee, that's pretty rash," Dini said. "I know you can make it without the paycheck but still, it may not look good professionally for you to leave that way."

"Too late, it's done."

"It's not too late to call and say you'll work out a two-week notice," Fenny suggested.

"Nope." Dee took another healthy swallow and slammed the cork back into the bottle. "I'm going to Cam's."

"You just sucked down the equivalent of six shots of tequila," Dini pointed out.

"I'm fine."

"Right, of course," Dini agreed. "No motor skills impaired. Thinking with perfect clarity."

Dee shot her a heated look but Dini just shrugged. "Sorry, babe, I call it like I see it. Besides, before you see him, shouldn't you know what you're going to say?"

"Exactly!" Fenny agreed. "Let's hash it out and once you've decided what you want to say you can go —"

"Nope, I'm going," Dee said and turned to march out of the room.

"You sure that's smart?" Fenny followed on her heels with Dini two steps behind.

"Hell no." Dee whirled around so fast that she and Fenny collided. Fenny reached out to take Dee by the arms to steady both of them.

"I have to do this, Fenny." Dee fought to keep the emotions at bay, to quell the tears that threatened. "My gut's on fire and I can't just suck it up and pretend like I'm not mad as hell."

"The burn's probably from the tequila," Dini said. "But you're right."

"I am?" Dee wasn't expecting anyone to agree.

"Hell yeah. You shouldn't suck it up and pretend that you're not mad. He crossed a line. Now he might have done it because he felt like he was partially to blame. Seeing as how you didn't hold a gun to his head and say fuck me or die."

"And since he was the one to make the mistake on the phone with your editor," Fenny added.

Dee didn't want to hear that. Didn't want to consider that maybe Cam had acted in an attempt to make up for what he considered his mistake. A little voice in her head had been screaming those tidbits of reason but she didn't want to listen. It was easier to just be mad.

"Well, if he felt like it was his fault, he should have just told me and let me decide how to handle things. But he didn't do that. Instead he created this giant cluster-fuck and put me smack in the middle of it to look like some—some bought and paid for slut that—that—"

"Well, okay," Fenny jumped in. "But let me ask you just this one thing. What exactly is it that makes you so mad? That he bought the magazine or that people have the wrong impression?"

"Both. It makes me feel cheap. Okay, I screwed up. I slept with someone I shouldn't have. Bad me. If there're consequences, I'll take them. I'm a big girl. I don't need someone rescuing me. Especially from myself. I'm not stupid. I knew it was a risk.

Someone could find out. Fine. I took the risk and got caught. And I didn't deny that I'd had sex with Cam when Dave asked. It happened. I'm not ashamed of it, but I'd understand getting fired for it. What I can't handle is Cam swooping in like some great white knight and saving me when I don't want or need to be saved."

Fenny tried to steer her back toward the kitchen but Dee broke away. "Why would he do something like that?"

"To impress you?" Dini asked.

"Impress me?"

"Yes," Fenny agreed. "Be realistic, Dee. Most women—hell, men—would jump like a flea on crack at the chance to make that kind of money."

"Yeah, that's bank, baby," Dini added. "Maybe he thought you'd be excited about getting that kind of offer."

"Then he sure as hell doesn't know me!"

"Exactly," Fenny said.

Dee opened her mouth then closed it. Fenny had a point. Cam didn't know her. They'd flirted, talked a little and had a lot of great sex but he didn't know her. How was he to know that she'd look at what he'd done as an insult?

Her nice little anger balloon started to deflate, leaving in its place emotions she wasn't adept at dealing with. Tears welled up in her eyes and she brushed them away. She refused to suffer hurt feelings because he misjudged her or to whine over the people at the magazine getting the wrong impression. She was stronger than that. She had to be.

But right now it was damn hard to suck it up and not give in to a little emotional wallowing.

"Ah, honey," Fenny said softly.

"Don't," Dee warned her. "I mean it. Don't say anything nice or I'll lose it."

"I have an idea," Dini announced. "And chocolate to fuel the brain cells. Dark-chocolate-covered raisins. Sweet, plump raisins covered in delicious dark chocolate that melt in your mouth and make your taste buds swoon in ecstasy."

Fenny's brows rose slightly at the luring tone in Dini's voice. Dee didn't even try to fight the smile that rose. "How much of this chocolate goodness you packing and what's your idea?"

"Three bags."

"And the idea? He might have meant well, but I still want him to suffer."

"You did say you were cooking him dinner."

Dee grinned. "Dini, did I ever tell you that I love the way your mind works?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Delilah took one last look around as she went to answer the door. Candles burned on every table and stand lending a romantic warm glow, while her favorite incense burned on the hearth, sending a plume of fragrant sweet smoke into the room.

She opened the door and her breath caught in her throat. Damn it was going to be hard to exact revenge on a man who looked this good in a pair of jeans and a shirt with the sleeves rolled up to mid-forearm.

"Sugar, you look good enough to eat," he said around a smile, and stepped in to grab her around the waist and pull her up against him.

"Ditto," she replied a moment before his lips descended on hers.

*Damn, damn, double damn.* How was she going to pull this off when all she wanted to do was rip his clothes off and ride him 'til the sun rose?

When Cam lifted his head from the kiss, he looked around. "Nice place. Looks like you. Bohemian."

"Bohemian?" That's a word Fenny could use and get away with. But then Fenny knew what bohemian really was.

"Yeah, you thumb your nose at rules and go for what you like. It's kind of...eclectic. Reminds me of trees and rocks and water. Different but really striking."

*Oh fuck!* How could she do what she had planned after such a nice compliment? Not just a nice compliment but a clear indication that his powers of observation were astute.

"Thanks," she said, feeling like a traitor wearing a smile. "Are you hungry?"

"Starved." He leaned in for another kiss but she broke away. "I'll get it on the table. Take a load off while I set things up."

Hurrying from the room, she went into the kitchen and pulled things from the oven where she'd been keeping dinner warm. Holy shit! The chili pepper was strong enough to make her nose run.

Maybe she shouldn't have taken Dini's advice and fixed her famous broccoli and chicken in garlic sauce. She'd used an entire bottle of chili oil. One bite and more than Cam's pants were going to be on fire.

Then again, maybe this was the right thing to do. He'd screwed things up royally for her job. Make that her ex-job. Thanks to him she was jobless. Not destitute but still, being on the hunt for a nice place to hang her professional hat was a bitch.

Her resolve firm, she served two plates and placed them on the small dining room table where candles burned. A bottle of wine and it was ready.

"Come and get it!"

Cam walked in and took a seat. "Looks good. What is it?"

"This Chinese dish I'm kinda famous for. Fair warning. It's a bit spicy."

Cam laughed. "Can't be too spicy for me."

Delilah bit back a comment and poured the wine. When he lifted a forkful to his mouth she held her breath.



He chomped down and his eyes flew open wide then started to water. His face turned beet red and then he spewed. Literally. All over the table. A half-chewed hunk of chicken splashed down in her wine glass.

Cam was coughing and wheezing like an old locomotive. If it didn't look so painful it would have been extraordinarily funny. And the perverse part of her personality had to admit that there was a bit of satisfaction in his discomfort.

He jumped up and ran for the kitchen, still hacking and trying to catch his breath. Delilah followed to find him with his head in the sink, gulping water from the faucet.

"Oh hey!" She grabbed his arm and pulled him back. "Hold on. That only makes it worse."

She grabbed a loaf of bread from the pantry and dug him out a slice. "Eat this."

"Can't—" he wheezed.

"Do it."

He stuffed half the slice in his mouth and chewed, his throat still working in spasms. One swallow, then two and he sucked in a deep breath. "Fucking hell, Dee. What'd you put in that shit?"

"Fucking hell, Cam, why'd you buy the magazine and make everyone think I was some slut who'd fucked her way into a promotion?"

He stared at her in complete shock. "What?" He shook his head. "What?"

"You heard me. You totally fucked things up for me."

"I..." He turned and stuck his head back under the faucet then faced her. "I fucked things up? You got an offer that most people—"

"Correction," she interrupted, feeling the fire of anger ignite. "People who screw their way into jobs or promotions. I didn't ask for it and don't want it."

"Why? It's a chance for you to run things in the art department, to show people your skill and—"

“Bullshit. I don’t care about that crap. I’m happy as a photographer. Well, I was. Now I have the entire staff of the magazine thinking I’m some...cheap tramp who saw an opportunity to capitalize on a rich guy to get myself ahead.”

Cam stared at her for a long time then his posture drooped a bit. “Dee, I swear to god that I never for a second thought that —”

“That’s the problem,” she interrupted again. “You didn’t think that maybe I can take care of myself. That maybe I don’t need someone to rescue me. That maybe I’m capable of handling things myself.”

“You’re right.”

“And what’s more — What?”

“I said you’re right. I was out of line. I’m sorry. I fucked up.”

That took the wind right out of her sails. How could you be pissed at someone who was admitting they were wrong?

“Dee honey, honestly, I’m sorry. When your editor got his briefs in a bunch and then your publisher called and raised hell, all I could think was that I couldn’t let you take the fall. Hell, you’d never have slept with me if I hadn’t pursued you. It was my fault. I could have waited until the deal was done then made a move on you but I let what I wanted get in the way.”

“I don’t expect you to take the blame or responsibility. I knew I was running a risk. It wasn’t just you, Cam. I didn’t sleep with you because you pursued me. I did it because I wanted you.”

“I guess that’s a thing of the past, huh?”

She smiled and shook her head, moving to wrap her arms around his waist. “Cowboy, problems are something to be overcome, or run over in your case. I just need you to know that I don’t need a white knight. I’m not looking for someone to rescue me or try to smooth the way when I fuck up. And for the record, I don’t give a shit about

power and money. I'm happy the way I am. So if you can accept me for who I am, and let me take care of my life, then we're good to go."

"Good to go?"

"Absolutely."

"As in out to dinner to get something decent to eat?"

She laughed. "How about we call for delivery?"

"That works."

"Chinese?"

He shuddered. "God no."

"How about pizza?"

"I can do pizza. Better make it a large. No, wait, two larges."

"Good god, two?"

"I'm gonna need my energy," he said around a grin, and ran his hands down her back to cup her ass.

"Well in that case, two extra large with the works," she chuckled and reached for the phone on the counter.

Ordering proved to be a challenge, considering the fact that Cam had her undressed by the end of the call and his face buried in her crotch.

"Damn! Give a woman a chance," she said and felt for support as her knees were feeling decidedly weak.

"Hell no," he mumbled and continued his assault, his tongue working at her clit with enough skill to have her always half way to a climax.

"Christ on a crutch," she groaned and gave in.

In moment she was shuddering in climax. Cam smiled up at her then worked his way up her body, all tongue and teeth. When he latched onto a nipple, she moaned in pleasure. One orgasm and she was primed and ready.

"We need to get you outta those clothes, cowboy."

"Anything for you, sugar. But how 'bout we take this to a more comfortable location?"

"Follow me," she said with a grin and headed for the living room.

"Oh yeah," Cam said from behind her, and when she cut a look over her shoulder at him, he grinned. "Darlin', it's a pure delight just to watch you walk."

She stopped at the arm of the sofa. "And it's gonna be a pure delight to watch you peel off those clothes."

He laughed and bent to pull off his boots and socks. When he straightened and unbuttoned his jeans, Delilah's eyes tracked the motion of his fingers and the slide of the zipper.

She'd seen every inch of him but it was still a thrill, seeing him strip. He unbuttoned his shirt and peeled it off, letting it fall to the floor. Her fingers itched to run across the broad expanse of his chest, to follow the trail of hair that bisected his abdomen and disappeared into the top of his jeans.

When Cam slid his jeans down over his hips and stepped out of them, she felt like cheering the state of Texas. Damn if he wasn't something special. She fell back on the sofa, her legs hanging over the arm.

Cam grabbed her hands and pulled her to her feet. Their lips met in a kiss that was what women dream of. Not the typical male plundering, but an act of union, lips joined, tongues exploring, twining and tasting.

All the while his hands roamed her body, firm but gentle, remembering how and where she liked to be touched, stroked and fondled. Damn if the man wasn't better than a drug. And twice as addictive.

When he released her and turned her around to bend her over the padded arm of the sofa she offered no protest. She did, however, shiver in delicious anticipation at the touch of his hands stroking with a featherlight touch up the inside of her legs.

It was amazing that hands so big could deliver caresses so light. He traced his fingertips along her labia, spreading her, and then dipped one finger inside her. She pressed back against him when another finger joined in and he started to stroke in a slow steady beat.

Give the man a gold star for finding her G-spot in less time than it took most men to utter the word. She was so close to exploding that being still was an impossibility. With hands braced on the seat of the couch, she pushed back against him, feeling the onset of a climax start to vibrate inside.

Just as the vibration escalated into a full-fledged tremor that had her gasping, his thumb, slick with cum, circled then plunged into her anus.

She lost it. Tumbled freefall into a riot of sensation that had her crying out, bucking and twisting.

"Damn if you don't do that well," Cam murmured when she went limp. He pulled her back against him, his hands moving to cup her breasts.

Delilah turned to face him. At the same moment there was a knock on the door. They both looked at the door then at each other. Cam snatched up his pants, jerked out his wallet, peeled out a handful of bills then tossed his wallet and pants on a chair.

She smothered a laugh and dove behind the couch when he opened the door. The pizza delivery girl's eyes rounded like saucers when she got a look at Cam, naked and sporting a champion hard-on. He shoved the money at her, took the boxes and closed the door.

"Now, where were we?" He asked, setting the boxes on the table by the door.

Delilah emerged from her hiding place and walked over to him.

The interruption had not cooled the fire. He could smell her hunger. God, she was potent. Her femaleness called to something primitive and wild inside him, making him long to take her, stake a claim on her. Brand her as his.

Those kinds of feelings were new and dangerous. Making it all the more exciting. Her skin felt hot and moist to the touch. Guiding her backwards he lay her down on the sofa, positioning himself above her to run his tongue up the center of her body, beneath her breast and up. She arched her back and gave an appreciative growl when his tongue flicked over her nipple.

When he captured it between his teeth, she moaned. Spurring him on. It wasn't long before she was writhing beneath him, pressing forward and thrusting her breast against his mouth.

Damn she made it hard on a man. His dick was shouting at him to get inside her. But he wanted more than mere release. He wanted to drive her mad with need, to take her so deep into lust that when he did take her, she'd ride a wave unlike any she'd ever experienced.

He knew it was partly ego. That didn't matter. He just needed to be the best she'd ever had. Maybe the best she ever would have. He slid down her body, kissing her stomach and running his tongue down the center of her belly to her mound.

She spread her legs wider as he ran his hands under her to grip her ass and lift her hips up to meet his face. Just the smell of her was intoxicating, like a promise of passion that had him eager for her taste.

Delilah murmured words of encouragement, her fingers running through his hair to pull his head tighter to her. His tongue found her clit swollen and obviously sensitive due to the recent orgasm. She gasped and arched against his mouth as he sucked the hard nub into his mouth, his tongue circling the sensitive flesh.

Tension built in her body, signaling Dee's oncoming climax to Cam. Just as she started to shudder, he slid up, sinking the length of his cock into her warmth. Her inner muscles tightened around him. He gritted his teeth at the need that shot down his cock to his balls, making him fight to go slow.

She ground against him, urging him on with whispered pleas of "Yes, yes, now." Cam bit back a groan. It took every ounce of control he possessed to hold back. Keeping

his rhythm slow, he'd pull out almost completely before sinking back in. She groaned and pumped at each stroke, nails digging into the flesh of his shoulders.

"Cam, now. Please." She arched up, stretching her arms above her head to dig into the fabric of the sofa. Christ. It was so totally female, so abandoned that it threatened his control to near breaking point. He couldn't resist the lure. Stroking hard and fast, he thrilled to her cries and gasps, each sound driving him faster and harder until his control started to fade.

He was too close. He had to slow down. Lowering onto her, he captured her lips in a kiss. At first it was slow, in line with the slower pace he'd set. Their hips moved in unison, her meeting each thrust, breathing little gasps and moans into his mouth that made his dick throb with need.

She was the one to step things up a notch, fisting his hair and turning the kiss into one of demanding teeth and tongue. Her legs wrapped around his waist, pulling him deeper into her. Her body started to quake and her pussy started to clench around him. Her head arched back, eyes closed in ecstasy

"Look at me, honey," he whispered. "I want to see you come."

Her eyes opened and locked with his. Two strokes later they both fell victim and plunged together in a shared climax that left them spent. Delilah rolled over onto her side, pulling him down to spoon around her from behind.

"Cam," she whispered as his arms circled her. The sound of her voice was tender and filled with emotion. She might be one controlled, independent woman who didn't give in to emotion easily but when she did, it was definitely worth the effort. And that was a first for him.

\* \* \* \* \*

The feel of a big warm body pressed against her back roused her from sleep. Dee opened her eyes, smiling to herself. Last night Cam had shown her what a man was

capable of in terms of patience, attentiveness and passion. It'd been near dawn before they'd climbed beneath the sheets of her bed and fallen asleep in each other's arms.

And slept like the dead for six hours. Now she was wide awake and energized as if she'd already sucked down a couple of cups of coffee. Amazing what good sex could do for a woman.

Careful not to wake Cam, she slid out of the bed. Twenty minutes later she emerged clean from the shower. She threw on a pair of comfortable, worn jeans and a tank top and went into the kitchen to start coffee. She thought about calling Fenny but decided against it. She didn't want to disturb Cam even if it was half past nine.

"Shit on a stick!"

His roar had her heading for the bedroom. "What's wrong?"

"Where's my pants?"

"Well good morning to you, too."

"I'm sorry, honey, but I have a video conference at eleven and I've got to get back and read over the notes my attorney sent on the deal, shower and —"

"No need to explain." She hurried out of the room in search of his clothes. Business demands were something she could understand. He followed and dressed in the living room.

"Good to go?" she asked

"Pit stop," he said and headed for the bathroom. Delilah used the time to fix a cup of coffee.

"Come with me," Cam said as he appeared in the kitchen door.

"Love to, but you have business."

Cam took the cup from her hand for a sip and grimaced. "Damn, you like a little coffee with your cream and sugar, honey?"

"Just a splash."



"Seriously, come with me to the penthouse. After the conference I have the rest of the day and there's nothing I'd rather do than spend it with you."

She considered it for a moment. It wasn't like she had anything else to do, being jobless at the moment. Well, there was that edit that she was finishing up, but she was ahead of schedule on it.

"Please?"

"Well hell, you know I can't refuse a plea like that. Okay, let me grab my bag. By the way, do you have an attorney here?"

"No, why?"

"I know a real whiz. Specializes in corporate law. Acquisitions and mergers and that sort of thing."

"What's his name?"

Dee dug into her shoulder bag for her card file. She kept business cards from everyone. "Here." She gave the card to Cam. "Michael's the best."

"I'll get up with him then."

"Cool."

It was nearly half past ten when they arrived at Cam's penthouse. He headed straight for the shower and she headed for the kitchen to brew a pot of coffee.

Just as she was pouring the first cup, there was a knock at the door. Delilah frowned. Shouldn't the doorman have called to say Cam had a visitor? She pulled open the door to find herself face-to-face with a woman. A young woman. Blonde hair that cascaded over her shoulders in loose, artful waves, flawless makeup, an outfit intended to reveal as much as it covered and still remain within the bounds of good taste, and breasts that sat way too high to be real considering the fact that the woman's nipples were clearly visible beneath the thin silk top.

"Who're you?" the woman asked, or rather demanded.

"Who's asking?"

“Collette Hammond, Cameron’s fiancée. Are you the maid?”

Delilah couldn’t find her tongue. Hell, she almost couldn’t get her brain to function. All she could see, think or feel was rage. That rat bastard! Without a word she turned her back on the woman and stomped into the kitchen to retrieve her shoulder bag.

Collette followed. “Is that coffee I smell? I’m dying for breakfast. An egg-white omelet, fresh fruit and – Hey where’re you going?”

Dee brushed by her without comment and marched out of the penthouse. Once on the street she kept walking. Damn him. How could he lie to her like that? Make her feel that he was interested in something with her while he was engaged. To a woman young enough to be his daughter, or at the least his very much younger sister.

She felt like a total fool. He’d played her but good. Got under her skin, crept into her heart and then slammed her. And boy did it hurt.

## **Chapter Six**

"Thanks for making time for me this morning, Michael," Cam said as he walked into Michael Shannon's office.

"My pleasure," Michael replied with a smile and a handshake. "What can I do for you, Cam?"

"Help me find Delilah," Cam said as he took a seat.

Michael's smile vanished. "You know I can't do that. Fenny would have me drawn and quartered."

"I need to find her, Michael. To explain."

"The way I hear it your fiancée explained it pretty well when she showed up."

"I already told you. Collette isn't my fiancée. Well, she was. For about a week. A drunken week in Cabo. Soon as I sobered up I called it off, told her to keep the ring and got as far away from her as I could. Hell, I came here."

Michael regarded him for a few moments in silence before speaking. "Look, I don't know you all that well. We've been working together what, three weeks? I believe that you're genuinely sorry about what happened with you and Delilah, and I even believe the story about Collette. But the fact remains that Delilah doesn't want you to know where she is, and I'm involved with her best friend who would cut my cock off and serve it to me in an elegant stew if I revealed Delilah's whereabouts."

Cam blew out his breath and slumped forward, his elbows on his knees and hands raking through his hair to hold the back of his head. Shit on a stick, he was screwed. If Delilah hadn't rushed out that morning he'd have been able to explain. Hell, she'd have seen him give Collette the boot. But she took off like she was jet propelled and disappeared.

The fact that it bothered him so much told him what he'd suspected was true. There was something between them. Something special. He'd had his share of women walk out on him but it'd never bothered him. There'd always be another to come along and fill the void.

Not this time. Delilah left a hole as big as Texas. And not just in his bed. His heart was damaged in a way that he'd never thought possible.

"It seems to me that a smart man such as yourself would use the knowledge you possess to figure out where she's gone." Michael's voice had Cam lifting his head.

"You want to elaborate on that?"

"Just consider what you know about her."

Cam did just that. She was independent, strong and didn't let herself get too emotionally involved. Her closest emotional relationship was Fenny Whitfield. She wasn't at Fenny's. He'd already had her place put under surveillance, as well as Nadine Summers'. And he'd gone to see both women, only to be told in very different yet very similar ways to take a flying leap off the closest bridge.

"I know she's not with either of her friends which is where she usually goes. And she's not that close to her family. She's not that close to anyone, really."

"Maybe it's not a person she'd run to."

Cam frowned at the statement then it hit him. "Yeah. You're right. If she's going to run and lick her wounds it'd be a place she feels attached to. A place she knows and is comfortable in."

He felt a smile forming on his face. "She's gone to ground in West Virginia. On the river."

Michael smiled. "How fortunate that you were able to piece that together."

Cam rose and extended his hand. "Thanks, Michael. I owe you."

"I didn't go anything, remember?"

"Oh, yeah. Right. Well, I'll be seeing you."

Cam left the office and hurried to his car, his cell phone already at his ear. "Get ready to roll, Dan. I'm on my way to the airport now. I want us to be wheels up in less than two hours. Destination? The closest airport to Gauley, West Virginia."

\* \* \* \* \*

Delilah watched the last of the rafting group trudge up the hill to the waiting bus. Today's run had been pretty much the same as the day before and the day before that. People who'd never experienced white water, out on an adventure, leaving the river a bit in love and a whole lot exhausted but with tales to tell when they got home.

She smiled and looped her backpack over her shoulders. It was a good hour's hike to her campsite and the light was fading. Waving goodbye to the other two guides who'd tied off the rafts and were headed for the bus, she turned and started working her way along the riverbank.

The last three weeks had been good for her. Gave her space to clear her head and consider where she would go from here. It went without saying that she'd eventually go home, resume her writing career and find a photography gig. That was her life and she wasn't going to let it go because some Texan had played her and broken her heart.

Thoughts of Cam brought a wave of fresh pain lapping at the shore of a heart she was trying really hard to shield. She still felt like a fool. How could she have not seen that he was playing her? How could she have let herself fall for him?

Try as she might, she couldn't wipe those thoughts from her mind. She was still wallowing in them when she neared her campsite. Alarm bells started clanging in her head. There was a fire burning. Someone was there.

*Damn!* She was in pretty good shape, but she wasn't eager to get into a confrontation with anyone. And anyone who'd squat on someone's campsite had to be less than honorable. What the fuck did she do now? It was too far to hike back to the lodge. That'd take hours. And the terrain wasn't friendly for night hikes.

Maybe she'd just scout out the area and see if she could get a look at the trespasser. She worked her way around the campsite, moving as quietly as possible. Just as she reached the opposite side, a man strode into view carrying a load of wood in his arms.

Her heart thumped, her blood pressure spiked and her hands went clammy. It was Cam! Fuck! No way in hell she was sharing a campsite with him. She'd sleep in the cold.

Which is just what she did. Backtracking to the launch site, she turned over one of the rafts, made herself as comfortable as possible, spent a long night fuming over the fact that he'd shown up and wondering why he had.

Dawn broke, bringing her out of a troubled sleep. Tired, hungry and out of sorts, she rolled over, trying to find a more comfortable position. No point in getting up now. It'd be several hours before the bus arrived with the tour group.

She drifted in and out of sleep, her dreams and her waking moments troubled with thoughts of Cam. She wished the tour would arrive. At least being on the river and keeping an eye on her group would take her mind off things.

When she heard the rumble of the bus, she rose, stretched, and awaited the excited group of newbies eager for their white-water adventure. She set about turning over the rest of the rafts and getting things ready.

"You're here early," Eddie, one of the other guides commented as he approached.

"Is that coffee?" She eyed the Styrofoam cup in his hand.

"Yeah."

"I'll give you today's pay for it."

"Roughing it getting old?" he asked with a chuckle and handed over the cup.

"Something like that." She sniffed appreciatively then sipped. Liquid heaven. Ignoring the tourists and the other guides, she sat down on the end of her raft to enjoy the coffee.

The sound of voices washed over her without capturing her attention. People were being assigned to the different rafts. Voices drew closer to where she sat and she gulped down the rest of the coffee. Time to get the show on the road.

She rose and turned and went stone-cold dead in her tracks. Cam stood with seven other people on the other side of the raft. *Shit on a stick!* She couldn't start a scene in front of the tourists. Sucking it up, she put on her best smile.

"Hi, my name's Delilah and I'll be your guide today. Do any of you have any experience in white-water?"

No one raised their hand or offered an affirmative so she launched into the safety precautions, rules of the river and itinerary. "Any questions?"

After answering a couple of questions she dragged the raft into the shallows and had everyone board. Cam chose to sit at the back on the right, directly in front of her position at the rear of the raft. She ignored him and ordered everyone to start rowing.

She struggled not to look at his broad back as he pulled on the oar, and turned her attention to the others in the raft. It'd be a quarter of an hour before they hit the first set of rapids.

This year the Gauley was running high so some of the rapids were Class Fives. She loved it when it was fast and furious but it did mean she had to pay close attention and put her skills to use.

"Why does the brochure call the river the Beast of the East?" Cam asked over his shoulder.

"When the Summersville Dam opens in the fall, it releases thousands of gallons of water per second," she replied in her best tour persona. "As the water makes its journey to the sea it drops over six hundred and fifty feet in twenty-six miles, churning over thousands of boulders and creating sheer drops and massive holes. There are over one hundred rapids on the river and quite a few of them in the upper class."

"Can you explain the classes?" a woman in the middle of the raft asked.

"Sure." Delilah went through the explanations of Class One to Class Six rapids, explaining the features of each such as the small drops in the Class Two, to the rocks and hazards, huge drops and hydraulics in the Class Six.

"What's a strainer?" Cam asked.

Delilah cut him a look. How the hell did he know to ask that question? "Strainers are when you have something blocking the passage of larger objects but allowing the flow of water. Kind of like a food colander. Strainers could be fallen trees for example. They're dangerous because the force of the water pins the floating object, like a body against the strainer, and then the water piles up and drives the object, *or body*, down under the water."

Cam arched one eyebrow at the way she emphasized the word body and she knew he'd gotten the message. "If you're swimming, you want to avoid a strainer. But if you can't you need to swim as hard as you can towards it to get as much of your body up and over it as possible."

"Are there any of those here?" the woman in the middle of the raft asked.

"Nothing to be concerned about," Delilah assured her.

"What about hydraulics?" Cam asked.

*Christ on a crutch! Did he Google white-watering or something before he showed up?*

"Hydraulics are sometimes called holes or stoppers. They form when water pours over the top of something submerged, like a boulder. That causes the surface water to flow back upstream toward the object. Imagine the water pouring over the rock, hitting the bottom of the river then pushing back up against the rock. A swimmer caught in a strong hole can be rolled around pretty good and not be able to escape."

"What about pillows?" he asked.

Delilah had spouted off before she realized it. "Damn, Cam, get a book for Christ's sake!"



Everyone in the raft stared at her in surprise. Except Cam. He was grinning. "I just wanted to know the dangers, sugar. And if you've got what it takes to get us safely —"

"Bullshit! What the hell are you doing here anyway?"

"Why, just enjoying a white-water adventure, honey."

"My ass! I know you squatted my campsite, you shit. Why're you here, anyway?"

"Well, if Mohammed won't go to the mountain —"

All professionalism fled her mind. Rage boiled up hot and bitter, making her act without thinking. She dug in with one oar, sending the raft into a sideways slide, turned it rapidly and sent Cam and three others over the side.

*Oh fuck!* What had she done? She steered the raft toward the three wet passengers. "Help them in," she directed two of the dry men in the raft.

Fortunately everyone but Cam who'd been dunked thought it was a great adventure. He just glared at her and stripped off his wet shirt, tossing it into the bottom of the raft.

Dee smiled at him. "Sorry, gang. Now we're about to come up on the first set, so everyone get ready to dig in with those oars."

For the next several hours her attention was on getting the raft through the rapids. The passengers assumed they were the ones doing the work, but in reality it was the guide who was steering the raft.

She and Cam exchanged no more words and she hoped the others would forget the earlier outburst in their excitement. The river was running fast and high, making for a pretty exciting run. By the time they stopped for lunch, the people in the raft were in high spirits, excited and chattering about what they'd just experienced.

The site where they landed was one used daily. A large flat ledge of stone where people could sit, eat and dry out, with an easily scaled cliff that led to a small plateau of trees in case anyone needed to relieve themselves. It also featured a prime tourist

attraction. A boulder that soared fifteen feet above the water, jutting out to make the perfect jump-off spot.

This was where Delilah headed as soon as she'd moored the raft. Everyone else was busy eating, talking or climbing up for a pee break. She needed some space. Cam showing up had thrown her off stride. Made her act rashly. Dangerously. She had to get a grip.

She stood on the edge of Jumping Rock as the guides called it and stared out over the river.

"We need to talk." Cam's voice came from behind her.

"Got nothing to say." She refused to turn and look at him.

"Dee, look at me."

She didn't budge. His hands closed on her arms from behind, trying to turn her to face him. "No!" she snarled and jerked away, circling so that he was between her and the edge of the rock. "Leave me alone."

"Damn, Dee. Quit acting like a bull-headed —"

He never got to finish the sentence. All the hurt and anger flooded through her like the dam opening. She lunged at him, shoving hard. And over the edge he went. She saw him hit, feet first and submerge. Served him right. A little cold water never hurt anyone.

Her eyes scanned the surface of the water. Where was he? He'd gone in feet first. He should be fine. Where the fuck was he?

*Oh shit!* She leapt off the rock, plunging into the water feet first. The water was too deep to get a push off the bottom, but she kicked to the surface, looking around. When she didn't spot him, she dove, searching beneath the surface.

Rising for air, she looked again. No sign of him. Oh god, had she killed him? Fear spiked high and fast, driving her to suck in air and dive again. She had to find him.

Just then something tugged on her ankle, pulling her down. Right in front of Cam's face. Grinning through bubbles of escaping air at her. She jerked away from him and kicked to the surface.

"Rat bastard!" she hissed at him as he surfaced in front of her.

"You pushed me in."

"You lied."

"I did not."

"Did."

He reached out with one hand to touch her. "You're pale. Damn, Dee. You're shaking."

"Am not."

"Yes, you are. It scared you."

"Hardly."

"Now who's lying?"

"Get the fuck away from me, Cam. I mean it. I don't want to talk to you, look at you or hear your voice. Just stay the fuck away from me."

She kicked away, swimming to shore. It had scared her. When she thought he might be in danger she'd felt sick with fear. Proving something she didn't want to be true. Her feelings for him hadn't diminished in the three weeks she'd been here.

God, what the hell was she going to do? Well, climb up on the rock, eat and dry out, then finish this run. That's what. She'd shut him out, focus on the others and make it through the day. Then she'd get as far away from Cam as possible.

With that plan firmly in mind, she climbed up on the rocky ledge, grabbed a sandwich and bottle of water, and joined the members of her raft. It wasn't long before Cam appeared and took a seat, joining in the conversation as if nothing had happened.

That was fine with her. She just needed to make it to the end of the run.

\* \* \* \* \*

The afternoon seemed to drag on longer than normal. Probably because Cam was parked right in front of her in the raft, his bare torso a source of attraction for the other three women in the raft, not to mention tormenting her. By the time they reached the end of the run she was mentally exhausted. She smiled and posed for photos with her group, wished them all well and asked the other guides to take care of her raft.

While Cam was busy talking with the others from her group, she grabbed her backpack and high-tailed it to her campsite. Tossing her pack in front of the tent, she set about gathering wood for the night.

Once a nice fire was going, she checked the food cooler. There were still several chicken breasts, a cleaned fish and vegetables she could roast. Stripping off her wet clothes she hung them from the makeshift line near the fire to dry and slid on a pair of jeans, a tank top and a hooded lightweight jacket. It was cooling down pretty fast.

She'd just popped the top off a beer when she heard him.

"We really need to talk."

"Would you please leave me alone?" She took a seat in front of the fire, choosing not to look at Cam.

"Just hear me out, and when I'm done, if you still feel that way, I promise I'll never darken your doorstep again."

She looked up at him, seeing what looked like misery stamped on his face. "Fine."

"Got another one of those?" He indicated the beer.

"Like you don't already know. Squatter. Have at it."

He got himself a beer and sat down beside her. "That woman isn't my fiancée, Dee. At least she wasn't that morning she showed up."

"Could've fooled me. Had a big ol' sparkly rock on her finger."

Cam blew out his breath and took a long drink from the beer. Then he launched into his explanation. When he finished he fell silent. Delilah finished her beer, rose and

started preparing a meal. Part of her believed him. The hurting side of her didn't want to.

"God as my witness, it's the truth," he added when she remained silent.

She looked over at him. "Maybe it is. But I don't know that I can handle it, Cam. How many other women are out there sporting a diamond they earned from a drunken weekend or a momentary fancy you took to them? I don't know about you but I'm not looking for drama in a relationship, and that seems to be the dominant theme here. Me letting you in, trusting you then getting slapped."

"There aren't any more. I swear."

"Yeah, well you're not batting a thousand in the trust department right now, cowboy."

"What'll it take to prove it?"

She shook her head and rose from a crouch by the fire, the meat and vegetables sizzling in a pan over the fire. "I don't know that you can, Cam. I think it's best if you just accept that it's over."

"No, it's not." He rose to take hold of her arms, his grip tight. "Today when you thought I was in danger it scared you. And not the kind of scared you'd feel for a stranger. You have feelings for me."

"I never said I didn't."

"And I have feelings for you, Dee. Deep feelings."

"Sometimes that just isn't enough."

"Then what is?"

"Trust."

She could see his jaw tighten and his eyes narrow. "My word is my bond, honey. It's rock solid and dependable as sunrise. I give you my word right here and now that there's no other woman that means a shit to me. The only woman I'm interested in is standing right here in front of me."

Delilah studied his eyes for a long time. God, how she wanted to believe him. Maybe part of her did. But the part that was afraid of getting hurt was kicking up a ruckus inside, prompting her to run, to drive him away, to not let herself be vulnerable to the kind of hurt he could deliver.

"I'd never hurt you, Dee," he whispered.

"You already have." She cursed the tears that escaped her eyes but refused to back down from his gaze.

"God almighty," he groaned and gathered her to him. "Forgive me, honey."

Dee hated the way her arms wound themselves around his neck and the way her face buried so comfortably in the crook of his neck. Hated the way her body melted against his and the way her heart softened at his words.

"Oh, Cam," she sighed. "I don't want to be mad anymore. I don't want...don't want to shove you away, but you...you make me feel things that leave me open to hurt. I'm not good at dealing with hurt."

"There won't be any," he whispered against her hair, then pulled back to put his fingers under her chin and tilt her face up. "I promise. Just don't walk away, Dee. Give us a chance."

It was probably a huge mistake, but for the first time in her life, her heart won out over her head. "Okay."

His lips descended on hers and suddenly nothing else existed but the feel and taste of him. Emotion welled inside her, unfamiliar and powerful. How had she gotten here? How had he managed to breach that barrier she kept so firmly in place around her emotions?

Dee clung to him, overwhelmed by the onslaught as that dam burst and the feelings she had for him were fully released. It scared and thrilled her. Love wasn't something she had a lot of experience with. She wasn't even sure she understood the full meaning of love but knew that what she felt for Cam was unlike anything she'd ever experienced. It was big. So big that it emotionally slayed her.

Cam pulled back from the kiss and held her close. "You won't be sorry, Dee," he whispered into her ear. "I swear. I'll make you happy."

"You don't have to make promises," she replied out of force of habit, then corrected herself. "Well, except that you'll be honest with me."

"You got it. Full disclosure."

She couldn't help but chuckle and drew back to look at him. "Sounds kinda business-like there, cowboy."

He laughed at the comment. "Sorry. Habit, ya know. How 'bout this? I promise to always be honest, to love you more than you dreamed possible and make you so happy you want to burst with joy."

Something tightened in her chest, constricting her breath and making tears threaten. It wasn't his words. It was the look in his eyes. It shocked her speechless. All she could do was stare at him and fight the emotions that threatened to turn her into a weak, sobbing woman.

He smiled at her. "That sound okay to you, *sugah*?"

That one word saved her. She was able to restore control and smiled back at him. "Well, you did leave out one important thing, cowboy."

"Yeah? What?"

"The part about you pleasuring me 'til the cows come home and turning me into a Cam Sex-Addict."

"Well hell, darlin', I thought that went without saying."

"You're right. I'm more of a show-me kinda gal."

He laughed and pulled her even closer. "Then get ready, honey, 'cause tonight is going to be a real record breaker."

She gave him a sassy smile. "Bring it on, stud. Love me 'til I scream 'mercy'."

Cam's expression sobered. "I'll never stop loving you, Dee. And that you can take to the bank."

She reached up to stroke the side of his face. "Cam." It was all she could manage. There weren't words to express what was going on inside her.

His lips met hers in a kiss that had every nerve ending in her body tingling. When his hands moved to strip her shirt away, not even the chill of the night air could cool the need that had her eager to feel him against her, inside her.

Dinner burned on the fire, night fell, the moon rose and set, and dawn broke. And all that she was aware of was the joining of their bodies, the pleasure they gave one another and the promise of what was to come.

Maybe the mountains and river had healed her after all.

\* \* \* \* \*

"So things are okay between you and Cam?" Fenny asked as she poured coffee.

"For the moment," Dee said and accepted a cup. "Except I refused to work for him."

"So what're you going to do?" Dini asked, loading sugar into her cup.

"Hey, don't hog all the sugar," Dee complained. "I don't know. Got feelers out. Something'll turn up. So what's been happening here? Anything juicy?"

"Besides Fenny cutting Michael a new one for leading Cam to you?" Dini asked.

Dee's eyebrows rose. "Made him pay royally, did you?"

Fenny smiled over her cup. "Let's just say I made him suffer a bit."

"My heroine," Dee said with a grin. "So what about you?" she asked Dini.

"SSDD," Dini sighed. Same shit, different day.

"Girl, you need to get laid."

Fenny laughed. "Oh god, watch out. That's what she said to me and look what happened."

Dee laughed along with her but Dini shook her head. "The studar hasn't registered anything interesting in so long I think it's broken."



"Studar?" Dee asked.

"Stud radar."

"Ah, yes. So maybe you just need to get out and take a look around. Hell girl, Mr. Rock My World could be right outside your door."

"I wish. Oh, I didn't tell you. I met Eden Morell."

"No shit? The Eden Morell who writes those to-die-for medical thrillers with zip?"

"Zam and zowie," Dini said with a grin. "And no shit. I was researching herbal remedies for my work-in-progress and found a listing for a shop here in the city. Took a ride over there and found out she owns it. She's so cool. We had lunch last week. You guys would love her."

"I'd love to meet her."

"That's what I said," Fenny remarked. "Why don't you call her, Dini, and set up a lunch or drinks?"

"Cool. So, back to you, Dee. You think you and Cam are going to make it?"

Dee smiled. "God, I hope so. That man sure has wormed his way under my skin. I've never felt this way before. It's kind of scary. But exciting as all get out. No one's ever made me feel this way...or have thoughts about a future.

"Hell's bells, would you listen to me. I sound like a character out of one of my books, all smitten and starry-eyed over a cowboy."

Fenny chuckled. "Nothing wrong with that, honey. "

Dee shrugged. "Thanks. I'm still a little new at this whole love thing. Guess I just don't know how to trust it. It all happened so fast. But hey, I gotta say it's the best thing since chocolate."

"Comparable to chocolate?" Dini gasped. "Now that's big."

"Yeah, I guess it is. And who knows. Maybe I am on track for the happily ever after. Sure feels that way."

A burst of excitement at the possibilities had her suddenly energized and happy. And with happiness came the inevitable need to tease and have fun with her friends.

“But...” she added in a playful tone. “If not then I still have you guys.”

“And if we swung that way we’d kiss you,” Fenny replied with a knowing smile.

Dee grinned and lifted her cup in a toast. “Well, you never know, hot stuff. You never know what tomorrow’s going to bring.”

## About the Author

Ciana Stone has been reading since the age of three, and wrote her first story at age five. Since then she has enjoyed writing as a solitary form of entertainment, and has just recently come out of the closet to share her stories with others. She holds several post graduate degrees and has often been referred to as a professional student. Her latest fields of interest are quantum mechanics and Taoism. When she is not writing (or studying) she enjoys painting (canvas, not walls), sculpting, running, hiking and yoga. She lives with her long-time lover in several locations in the United States.

Ciana 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).

### *Tell Us What You Think*

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at [Comments@EllorasCave.com](mailto:Comments@EllorasCave.com).

## **Also by Ciana Stone**

An Unwanted Hunger

Hot in the Saddle 1: Chase 'n' Ana

Hot in the Saddle 2: Molding Clay

Hot in the Saddle 3: Scout 'n' Cole

Hot in the Saddle 4: Conn 'n' Caleb

Mind Games

Riding Ranger

The Hussies: A Taste for Jazz

The Hussies: All in Time

The Hussies: Maxwell's Silver Hammer

The Hussies: Sin in Jeans

Wyatt's Chance

*Also see Ciana's release at Cerridwen Press ([www.cerridwenpress.com](http://www.cerridwenpress.com)):*

That Which Survives



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com) for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

[www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com)