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Faking It

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FAKING IT

Pam McKenna

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Chapter One

"This isn't an Ingres, babe."

The words slammed Britt Munro like a freight train, but her only outward response was a raised eyebrow.

Jack Canaday turned from the large painting he'd been examining and faced her directly. He set down his magnifying glass. "It's, like, a fake."

Britt felt a sudden need to toss back the contents of her champagne flute, but she didn't dare reach for it. Her trembling hand would give her away in a heartbeat. She crossed one leg over the other and smoothed her slinky sundress with a moist palm. "That's not funny, Jack."

"Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres did not paint this." Jack addressed the other man in the airy beach-house living room. "Dude. I can't let you buy this from her. It's a fake." His amiable expression never faltered.

Neither did Garrett Harvey's. Garrett had been lounging on an easy chair—fingers linked behind his blond head, long legs stretched out on the bleached-wood floor—as his friend and art advisor examined the painting Britt had presented. Garrett reminded Britt of a male lion, all imperious indolence and golden charm. Now he sat up and lifted the bottle of Veuve Clicquot from its bucket. "Well, that's a disappointment. It's an exquisite painting—I was hoping to add it to my collection."

His Southern drawl was as buttery as Britt remembered from last night, when they'd met at Club Infinitee, Southampton's premier night spot. Earlier today, during the long drive out from her loft in Brooklyn to the Hamptons—playground of the blessed and Botoxed—she'd half convinced herself that Garrett Harvey's leonine beauty and yummy accent were figments of her third mojito.

They weren't. Too bad. It wasn't her habit to mix business with pleasure, and today's little visit was all about business. Worse, when she'd arrived here a short while ago, she'd found herself confronted with not one stone hunk, but two.

Jack's hunkitude was of a darker, earthier, variety. He was a tad shorter than Garrett, though both topped six feet, easy. Jack's ink-dark hair was pulled back in a ponytail. His snug black T-shirt revealed well-developed arms covered with tribal tattoos. He was in his mid-twenties, a good deal younger than Garrett— younger than her, too, by several years. Which did nothing to diminish his appeal. Altogether a delicious masculine package.

Jack here is an expert on Neoclassical art, Garrett had told her by way of introduction. *An authority on Ingres, as a matter of fact. He's here to keep me from losing my head over a beautiful, flame-haired art dealer,* he'd added with a charming wink.

Britt had practically choked on her tongue. She'd had Garrett Harvey pegged as an easy mark. Get in, get the money, get out.

An authority on Ingres. Good God almighty.

Don't get your hands dirty. It was what she'd always told herself. *Don't get greedy. Always keep someone else between you and the mark.* In her case, that someone was Oliver Burke, a crooked art dealer in SoHo who kept a hefty share of the selling price in exchange for taking care of the business end of things. All Britt had to do was what she loved to do more than anything— paint.

She'd discovered Ingres as a young teen when her parents had taken her to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan. Ingres was most renowned for his portraits of French aristocrats, but he didn't restrict himself to faces. His paintings featuring the female form were exquisite, displaying an appreciation of voluptuous womanly beauty and refined eroticism that Britt found mesmerizing.

Most art lovers were familiar with his harem paintings. *Le Bain Turc*, or *Turkish Bath*, featured dozens of naked women lounging around a pool. The subject of *Grande Odalisque* reclined on her side, her bare skin a sensual contrast to the fluid drapery and

her peacock-feather fan. But Britt's favorite Ingres was *The Source*. The painting reminded her of a Greek statue, the standing nude tilting a water pitcher from her shoulder, all fluid grace and feminine perfection.

Britt had always felt a special connection to that painting and to Ingres himself, though he'd died a century and a half ago. She identified with the females in his harem paintings, with their unashamed sensuality and lush curves. Like them, she was all woman and proud of it. It was only natural, as she developed her own skills as an artist, to emulate his distinctive representational style. She'd copied several of his paintings as part of her art education, earning high praise from her teachers.

But making a living as an artist was a bitch, no matter how talented you were. Several years ago, when Britt had been on the verge of bankruptcy and homelessness, Oliver Burke had come to her rescue. That was how she'd thought of it at the time. Oliver had taught her how to imbue each faux Ingres with age and authenticity. It was complicated, but she was a fast study, and poverty a potent motivator.

For his part, Oliver knew how to create a convincing provenance, select a suitable buyer and sell the hell out of her fake masterpieces. Britt was able to pay her overdue bills and eventually move to a huge loft in Brooklyn with a sun-drenched painting studio.

Oliver proved to be a demanding business partner. What started as a lucrative if illegal sideline grew to take up more and more of her time. She loved Ingres, but she wished she had time to work on her own original pieces, to hone her own distinctive style.

If not for that and her pesky conscience, the arrangement would have been the perfect revenue stream. She suffered stabs of guilt every time she delivered one of her forgeries, every time Oliver counted out her share of the dirty money. With each canvas she completed, she told herself, *This is the last one. After this, I'm going legit*. Even if it meant selling all her possessions on eBay and eating spaghetti seven nights a week. But

the money, and fear of Oliver's legendary temper, always managed to weaken her resolve.

Until now. As she'd worked on this painting, her beautiful odalisque reclining by the bath, she'd vowed that this would be her final fake Ingres. Oliver would have to find himself another starving artist. After this, the revenue stream would dry up for good. Who could blame her for wanting to maximize the payout by cutting Oliver out of the deal?

Britt and Garrett had both been with other people when they met at Club Infinitee last night. But the chemistry between them could not be ignored, and they managed to slip away from their dates for a quiet chat. It turned out he was the independently wealthy heir to a frozen-foods empire, up from Austin, Texas, for a couple of weeks of Hamptons-style R & R. The instant Britt smelled money, she had to ask. Did he like art? Absolutely—he was an avid collector.

That was the turning point, the moment when her goal evolved from ditching her date and ending the night in Garrett's bed—God, but he was hot!—to draining his well-padded wallet. What a coincidence, Britt told him, and explained that she was the assistant to an art dealer and that a spectacular canvas had recently come to light. An Ingres. The painting, of an odalisque by a Turkish bath, had been sequestered for decades in a private collection and was being offered for sale to satisfy estate taxes. Was he interested?

He was indeed. Garrett arranged this meeting at his rented beach house. Here was her chance to sell this one final fake on her own and keep one hundred percent of the selling price—a financial boost to help her start over as a legitimate artist. Oliver need never know. How could she have anticipated that Garrett would bring in a ringer?

"More champagne, Britt?" Garrett proffered the bottle, which he'd uncorked in anticipation of adding a genuine Ingres to his personal collection.

She swallowed a dry lump of dread and stretched her lips into an imitation of a polite smile. "Uh, no. No, thank you, Garrett, I have a long drive home."

"Don't run off in the heat of the day," he drawled. "You just got here."

"I'll take another hit." Jack held out his glass as Garrett poured. "Once it's opened, you've got to finish it, am I right?"

"Um...to get back to the Ingres." Britt took a deep breath. "I don't doubt Jack's expertise, but I want you to know this painting has been thoroughly authenticated. I have the certificate right here." She reached into her shoulder bag and produced the phony-baloney document with its impressive-looking gold seal.

Garrett glanced at the paper and handed it to Jack, who said, "As fake as the painting. I could tell right away Ingres had jack shit to do with this canvas."

Britt's paintings had fooled plenty of experts. Jack Canaday didn't resemble any art historian she'd ever met—and he certainly didn't, like, speak like one. Nevertheless, he was obviously the best in the business.

She straightened in her seat. "Are you accusing my associates and me—"

"No, no, no way." Jack waved off the suggestion.

So did Garrett. "You say the painting was part of an estate? Possibly the previous owner didn't even know it was a fake. It could have been painted anytime since Ingres' death. Have some more champagne, Britt." This time he didn't wait for her to acquiesce but refilled her flute.

Britt permitted herself a deep, relieved breath—along with a deep, restorative gulp of bubbly. She was getting off easy. Still, she couldn't relax, couldn't take her eyes off the painting. It was perfect. Perfect! How could Jack possibly have known?

Garrett was speaking to her. Something about a couple of porterhouses in the fridge, and a small-batch bourbon that had to be tasted to be believed.

Britt dragged her eyes from the painting. She gave herself a mental shake. Was he inviting her to stay for dinner? "Thanks, Garret, but I'm afraid I really must be—"

"Unfortunately, Jack won't be able to join us." Garrett gave his friend a pointed look. "He has a prior commitment."

Jack offered a mischievous smile. "Nothing I can't weasel out of, G. How many of those steaks did you say you had?"

Garrett met the other man's eyes and jerked his head toward the front door, wordlessly ordering him to make tracks.

"What's wrong with it?" Britt heard herself say.

The men looked at her.

"The painting. The...the Ingres." She leapt up from her chair and stalked to the framed canvas, propped on a dining chair. The concubine in the picture wore only a loosely wrapped turban and a gold necklace. She reclined by a Turkish bath, trailing her fingers through the water. "I want to know what's wrong with it."

"As a work of art, nothing at all is wrong with it," Garrett said, coming to stand beside her. "It's outstanding. I can't take my eyes off her. Well." He smiled down at her. "Except when I'm looking at you."

"You know what I mean. What's wrong with it as an Ingres?" She folded her arms across her chest. *Shut up*, her inner voice commanded. *Thank the Goddess of Greedy Forgers they haven't accused you of anything and get out now!*

Garrett turned to Jack, who'd joined them. "It's, you know, technically proficient," Jack said.

"'Proficient'? Just 'proficient'? Look at it." Britt tossed her hand toward the canvas. "It's goddamn perfect. The colors, the subject, the technique, everything. Look!" She pointed to a plump, painted thigh. "Not even the hint of a brushstroke. Pure Ingres. And the textures. He was a master of textures." She pointed to the turban, the water, the gleaming Turkish coffee service sitting on a little rug.

"You're understandably disappointed." Garrett placed a hand on her waist. "Why don't we have a nice walk on the beach and we can talk about it. I guarantee when you see that sunset over the —"

"I don't want any goddamn sunset on the beach. I want to know what's wrong with my picture!"

Garrett and Jack exchanged a look. Heat crawled up her throat, scalding her cheeks. The curse of the redhead – a complexion that telegraphed everything.

"Not *my* picture," she hastily added. "You know what I mean. My...my art dealership's picture."

"I only did a, you know, cursory inspection," Jack admitted. "I'm not going to start spreading the word that you're trying to sell a fake Ingres, if that's what you're worried about, babe. Go ahead and get, like, a forensic workup, then you can call me a liar." He checked his watch. "Wow! Look at the time. Enjoy those steaks, you two."

Britt didn't ask herself why Jack was suddenly in a hurry to take off – she had more pressing things on her mind. She grabbed his sleeve before he could take one step. "You're not going anywhere until you tell me what tipped you off. I mean – God! You've got me so turned around, I don't know what I'm saying. Just tell me, Jack."

He stared at her for a few interminable seconds during which she felt her face heat like a griddle. Those dark eyes were too damn knowing. What the hell was she doing? Before she could think how to backpedal, he spoke. "You're Oliver Burke's assistant?"

Britt swallowed hard. "Isn't that what I said?"

"Sure is." He produced his cell phone. "So if I call Burke, he'll tell me you work for him."

Britt stood mute, feeling the blood drain from her head as fast as it had surged in.

"And," Jack flipped open the phone, "that he asked you to peddle this painting."

Garrett frowned. "Jack, what are you doing?"

Britt found her voice, but she barely recognized it as her own. "Please don't call him."

She watched Jack's expression morph from *gotcha* smugness to awe as he looked from her to the painting. "Incredible," he said, as if seeing it for the first time. "In-fucking-credible."

Garrett threw up his hands. "Is someone going to let me in on this little drama?"

Jack shook his head in wonder, still staring at the reclining odalisque, then gave his friend a lopsided grin. "She painted it."

Hearing the words, Britt felt her stomach drop.

"What are you talking about?" Garrett demanded. "The Ingres?"

"It's not an Ingres," Jack reminded him.

"I know, we've established that. You're not saying..." Garrett frowned at Britt.

"Britt doesn't work for Burke," Jack said, "except to supply him with fakes to pawn off on gullible collectors. You were like a lioness defending her cubs," he told Britt. "You've got to cultivate a little, you know, emotional distance to make a scam like this work."

"Is this true?" Garrett swung her around, forcing her to meet his angry green gaze. "Did you paint it?"

"G, settle down." Jack reached for Garrett's arm, only to be brushed off like a fly.

"Answer me." Garrett gave her a little shake. Gone was the flirtatious charm. This was one cranky trust-fund baby.

A dozen responses had been tumbling through her head, from outright denial to a plea for mercy, but Garrett's ire cut through to Britt's core. Her spine turned to titanium. "Get your hands off me. Unless you intend to *beat* it out of me?"

Garrett's fingers tightened on her arms for just a second before he pushed her from him. His expression was incredulous. "You tried to rob me."

"This is news?" She tossed her hand toward Jack. "Your art advisor here saw right away it wasn't a real Ingres, though I still don't know how. I'm damn good."

"You're amazing," Jack agreed. "Not to mention, with balls of steel to come here and try to pull off something like this."

"I assume that's a compliment," Britt said. "Thanks."

He returned her smile, and Britt realized that if she'd run into Jack at that club last night instead of Garrett, she'd have lost no time culling him from the herd. Jack's dark hunkiness complemented his friend's golden-god perfection. She couldn't decide which man was sexier.

Unfortunately, she'd never find out.

"Can't blame a girl for trying." She retrieved her shoulder bag from the floor and lifted the painting.

Garrett glared at her. "You're not going anywhere."

"G, it's over, in case you hadn't noticed." Jack turned to Britt, his eyes bright with mirth. "You can breathe easy, babe. We're not—"

"Yes, we are." Garrett's upraised palm told his friend to shut up. "I have every intention of reporting Britt to the authorities."

Jack was on the verge of objecting, Britt could tell, but something in his friend's implacable expression stopped him.

"You're...you're not really going to do that." Britt's fingers tightened on the picture frame. "Are you?"

"My first call will be to the police." Garrett wrenched the painting out of her hands and set it back on the chair. "I imagine they'll be very interested in every supposed Ingres that's passed through your friend Burke's hands."

"Oh my God," Britt groaned. "Oliver." She slumped onto the sofa. If the crooked art dealer didn't kill her—both for trying to cheat him out of his cut and getting him arrested—she'd probably wish he had.

Garrett stood over her, arms crossed. "You tried to rob me, Britt. You tried to make a fool out of me."

"What the hell, G?" Jack spread his arms, as if asking where this was going. Garrett ignored him.

Britt stared up at him, a plea in her eyes and quavering voice. "There...there must be some way we can avoid involving the authorities. And—" Her voice cracked. "And Oliver." She was about to offer money but remembered. Garrett Harvey, frozen-foods heir, had more money than God.

His imperious expression began to take on a new dimension, as if he'd been waiting for that very question. His southern accent seemed to deepen. "I don't know, Britt. Is there?"

She and Jack got it at the same moment. Jack's eyes widened. "Dude," he chuckled.

"Wait a minute." Britt rose on shaky legs. "Are you suggesting...? You pig! You pompous trust-fund *pig!*"

"I didn't suggest anything." Garrett shrugged. "Why? What do you have in mind?"

Britt's jaw sagged. "Is that what you think? That I'll *prostitute* myself to buy your silence?"

"Did I say that?" Garrett turned to Jack, now chortling at his friend's audacity. "Did you hear me suggest anything of the sort, Jack?" He faced Britt again. "Now, if you were to propose some sort of compromise, what the heck, I'd listen. I'm not an unreasonable man."

Britt pulled herself up to her full five seven and a quarter. "Go to hell."

Garrett shrugged again. "Suit yourself."

She stalked toward the painting, but he stopped her with a curt "That stays here. Evidence."

Evidence. Would she go to jail? Would Oliver kill her? Take out a contract on her?

It took all Britt's concentration to make her way to the front door on stiletto heels that seemed to have grown several inches. She grasped the doorknob, her fingers slippery with sweat.

"Think about it, Britt," Garrett said behind her. "There are worse punishments than spending a few days at a swanky Hamptons beach house playing hide the knockwurst with a clean, disease-free, pompous trust-fund pig."

"Two clean, disease-free pigs," Jack said. "I want in on this."

"No way, man," Garrett said. "I'm not sharing."

"If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't even know she tried to rip you off." Jack was adamant. "It's a three-way or I go to the cops myself."

"A *three-way*?" Garrett asked. "You're kidding, right?"

"*Ménage à trois*," Jack said. "Don't knock it 'til you've tried it."

Britt turned to face them, her hand still on the doorknob. This conversation was starting to get interesting. The two men faced off like snorting bulls, ignoring her.

"We do her one at a time," Garrett said, "and I get her first. When the hell did you do a three-way?" He raised two fingers. "Follow-up question—two girls or two guys?"

Jack raised one finger. "College. Duh." Another finger. "Two girls. It was *awesome*."

"Well, I'm not doing a two-guy three-way," Garrett said. "No way."

Britt spoke up. "Afraid it'll turn you on?"

"The hell kinda question is that?" Garrett said. "I'm a hundred percent straight."

"Because you didn't seem like a guy who's insecure about his sexuality," she said. "You know, when we met at the club."

"Do not try to play me with that 'insecure' crap," Garrett said. "And speaking of last night, you wanted to do me as badly as I wanted to do you, before we got on to *that*." He tossed his hand toward the faux Ingres. "You going to deny it?"

"No." Britt released the doorknob. She propped her fists on her hips and regarded the two superlative specimens of manhood who were standing there arguing about who would get to fuck her and in what order. She tried to remember why she was supposed to feel outraged.

"All right," Britt said. "I'll stay here with you guys for three days."

Jack shot his fist.

Garrett said, "Ten days."

Britt quirked an eyebrow. "Let's split the difference. One week."

"Done," Jack said, and sent his friend a silent command, easily deciphered as *Don't push it, we're getting a week.*

"And if it turns out you're into some sick shit," she said, "I walk, prison be damned."

"No barnyard animals or sharp instruments." Garrett raised a palm. "Scout's honor."

Britt assured them she was on the Pill and, like them, disease-free. She refrained from mentioning that as soon as she got home to her laptop, she intended to Google the hell out of these two.

"This is so cool." Jack stripped off his T-shirt and spun her around, inspecting the back of her form-fitting jersey dress. "No zipper on this thing?"

"Ah, romance," she said. "Don't I at least get to go home and pack a few things for my stay?"

"Later." Jack stepped out of his flip-flops and dropped his jeans. He'd gone commando—no undershorts to block Britt's view of a proud billy-club hard-on. She pulled the stretchy dress over her head and tossed it onto a chair, leaving her in matching peach-colored lace thong and demi bra. Not to mention the four-inch, pony-patterned stiletto sandals.

"Guys." Garrett glanced at the open windows. "A little discretion?"

"Jesus, woman." Jack circled her, staring unashamedly. "You are fucking gorgeous."

Britt smiled her thanks. Nothing she didn't already know, but it was always nice to hear it.

"Let's take it to a bedroom," Garrett said. "And, Jack, I told you—I go first."

"No, I'm liking the sound of that three-way thing," Britt said while Jack pressed close from behind, caressing her bare midriff as his erection nudged her bottom. "I've never done that," she added. "It sounds fun."

"You're not calling the shots here," Garrett told her. "In case you forgot."

"Lighten up, G." Jack's big hands cupped her full breasts, his thumbs teasing the nipples to points under the lace. "And no one's peeking in the windows. We're isolated here. Private beach, remember?"

"Yeah, but people still wander through."

"Don't be a grump." Britt gave Garrett her most seductive smile as she stroked a hand down her well-rounded hip. "There's enough here for both of you."

"Now, *this* is a woman!" Jack squeezed her generous butt. "You better hurry, G, or I'll eat her up all by myself."

"I like the sound of that." Britt reached behind her to stroke Jack's hot, satiny cock.

Garrett wanted to hold out, she could tell, to prove he was the one in charge. To call the shots, as he'd put it. But judging by the tent pole straining the fly of his khakis, she knew it was a losing battle. She was right.

"Aw, fuck it." Garrett kicked his deck shoes clear across the room and tore at his clothing as he stalked to her. His moss-green eyes flashed with mingled ire and arousal.

Oh yes, Britt thought as he hauled her away from Jack and ground his mouth against hers, holding her tight to his warm, bare flesh. If anything, her imagination had not done him justice. He was broad-shouldered and athletically built. A light furring of tawny chest hair arrowed southward over his sun-kissed six-pack, pointing the way to an erection of impressive proportions. As if a cock like that needed a road map.

Garrett held her still, tangling his tongue with hers. Britt groaned into his mouth, squirming against him, feeling the hunger build. Good Lord, but this man knew how to kiss.

“Dude,” Jack said with his usual good humor, “don’t bogart the hot naked chick.” He pulled the elastic tie off his ponytail and shook his head, letting his thick black hair settle over his shoulders. Jack was swarthier than his friend, deeply bronzed from the summer sun—even on his lean hips and tight little butt. A nature boy. His body hair was darker, too, a nice complement to the full-sleeve tribal ink. Britt could almost believe he was some ancient warrior who’d taken her captive to serve his carnal needs.

Was that how Jack and Garrett saw her? As their own private sex slave? Britt would be lying to herself if she claimed the idea didn’t send a wicked thrill through her, and she wasn’t one for self-delusion—especially where sex was concerned. She was a sensual, experienced woman who knew what she wanted and wasn’t shy about going after it.

Nevertheless, what she’d told these men was true. She’d never been with more than one sex partner at a time. She grew dizzy trying to calculate all the delectable permutations.

Britt chuckled around Garrett’s tongue as Jack deftly unhooked her bra. He pushed the straps down her shoulders and struggled to extract the garment from between their groping bodies.

“All right, boys and girls,” Jack said, “time to come up for air.” He pried them apart and lifted Britt into his arms before Garrett could mount a counterattack.

“Where are you taking her?” Garrett demanded as Jack strode toward the sliding door at the back of the house.

“It’s too nice to stay cooped up inside.” Jack paused by the door, which Britt obligingly slid open. A brine-scented breeze greeted them, and the shrill cries of gulls wheeling overhead.

Garrett followed them onto the sprawling ground-floor deck, his nervous gaze scanning the beach, the sand dunes corralled by serpentine fencing, even the choppy ocean, sparking with late-afternoon sunlight.

“Uh-oh.” Britt pointed. “Submarine periscope.”

"Where?" Garrett squinted toward the horizon.

"Dude, you have got to chill," Jack advised as he carried his well-nourished cargo with flattering effortlessness past the pool and hot tub built into the deck to a cluster of cushioned chaises.

"Speaking of chilling," Britt said, "did I hear something about a small-batch bourbon?"

"Why don't you go on and get it, G." Jack's grin was devilish as he deposited Britt on a chaise, her back raised at a forty-five-degree angle. "We'll start without you."

"Right, that'll happen," Garrett said. "I'm not fetching any damn bourbon. Let her go get it—she's here for our pleasure."

"*She's* here to fuck you silly," Britt reminded him, "not to play housemaid. I'm still your guest, and that's how you'll treat me."

"Okay then, get on your knees and blow me, *guest!*"

Britt said, "That must be that Southern hospitality I've heard so much about."

Jack glared at his friend. "You say one more thing to spoil the mood, I'm going for that bottle myself, and you're not going to like where it ends up."

Garrett wanted to argue further, Britt could tell, but he bit his tongue and retreated into the house.

"I take mine straight up with a splash," she called after him.

"And bring the rest of that champagne," Jack added.

"He always this charming?" Britt asked as Jack sat next to her. He lowered the top of the chaise so she was lying flat.

"G's a good guy," he said. "He just gets a little prickly when he's out of his element."

"Ah." She stretched luxuriantly, arms overhead. "A control freak." Britt tucked away that tidbit for future reference. Control-freak tendencies could be put to interesting use in the sack.

"He'll come around, once he realizes what a gift he's been given." Jack stroked his hand up her torso to fondle a breast. "So. You're a real redhead."

She glanced down at her lace-covered crotch. "You haven't seen the carpet yet, just the drapes."

"Don't need to. These yummy titties tell the whole story. I happen to be a nipple connoisseur, and this particular shade of pink belongs to a gen-yoo-ine carrot-top."

His touch was featherlight. She let out a long, slow exhalation. Her eyes half closed and she unconsciously arched into his touch.

A little growl rumbled up his throat. "You like this."

"My breasts have always been crazy-sensitive," she breathed. She found it hard to lie still, and he hadn't even touched the tingling peaks.

"Good to know." His other hand joined in the fun. "Don't want this one to get jealous."

Britt's breathing quickened. Automatically she reached for him, running her hands over his hard shoulders and inked arms, curling her fingers into his springy chest hair. Her legs moved restlessly as he teased her. At last he lowered his head and closed his hot mouth over her nipple. She cried out and would have lifted off the chaise if he hadn't held her down.

Britt was a mass of panting, whimpering need. Jack suckled her. He tongued the ultrasensitive flesh and scraped it with his teeth. His long hair draped her chest, ticking her. She closed her eyes, giving herself over to the erotic sensations, as he divided his attention between both aching nubs. He was in no hurry.

Jack Canaday was indeed a connoisseur of nipples—the best she'd ever met. A tingling heaviness settled between her legs. She writhed, her hips rising of their own accord. If he kept this up, she'd come in about a minute.

Without warning, her thong came off. She opened her eyes and saw Garrett toss it over his shoulder. She'd been too distracted to notice his return. A tray sat on the side table, with glasses, bottles and an ice bucket.

"Well." Garrett's attention was on the auburn landing strip between her legs. "At least we know you're a real redhead."

Jack squeezed an ample breast. "That's not all that's real." He moved off the chaise to kneel next to her.

"If you guys are finished inspecting the goods," Britt said, "I could use an orgasm right about now."

"Just one?" Sunlight glittered in Garrett's honey-colored hair and illuminated his smiling green eyes from within. He jerked her butt to the end of the chaise, and she gasped. She gasped again when he tugged off her stiletto sandals—muttering something about lethal weapons—and wound up for the pitch.

"Don't throw them, they're Jimmy Choos!" she screamed.

He raised a placating hand and with exaggerated delicacy deposited the shoes under the table. Then he knelt between her knees and she forgot all about six-hundred-dollar designer footwear.

She sighed as Garrett's fingertips parted the auburn curls, and moaned when they stroked her drenched opening.

"You are a wet dream come to life, Britt." Jack's voice was thick as he watched Garrett fondle her pussy. His hands on her breasts had become rougher, more urgent. "I could shoot my load just looking at you."

Garrett slid his fingers into her, and she cried out, her back bowing. She matched the cadence of his thrusting fingers, rocking against his hand. He paused to lift her knees onto his shoulders, and the next thing she felt was his sinewy tongue tasting her clitoris. She reveled in the feel of his strong, lithe lips, of his hot breath searing her. This man really knew how to eat pussy. She chewed back a smug grin, realizing his mock command had gotten turned around. *Get on your knees and blow me.*

Not that the idea didn't appeal. Jack's position kneeling next to her put his splendid cock at face level, an invitation she couldn't resist. A low growl rumbled through his chest as she ran her tongue up the shaft and teased the little slit. His fingers fisted in her hair and she took him into her mouth, sucking him as Garrett worked his magic on her.

"Oh yeah, babe, that is excellent." Jack's chuckle sounded pained. "You're too good—I'm trying to last."

Britt let Jack pull away, and not just to keep him from finishing too soon. Her own orgasm was coming on hard and fast. Sexual multitasking was fine, but it was time for her to concentrate on her own pleasure. Actually, all three of them concentrated on her pleasure. Jack seemed to know just how hard to pinch and pluck her nipples as Garrett subjected her clitoris to a barrage of tongue-flicks that splintered her mind into white-hot shards of happy.

She screamed as she came, her pussy clenching around his driving fingers. Jack's brawny arms wrapped around her, grounding her, as Garrett worked to prolong her climax.

She was left limp and shaken, her chest heaving. Jack kissed her mouth, a thorough, serious, champagne-scented kiss that brought her sweetly back to the here and now. Garrett, meanwhile, pressed his lips to her thighs and belly, and lightly teased her with his fingers. Within seconds her desire flamed anew. She gave a shuddering sigh. Her hips jerked upward as he deposited one long, lingering kiss on her swollen clitoris.

Garrett's face was flushed with passion, his eyes hard and bright as emeralds. He seized her ankles, spread her legs high and wide, and drove his thick cock into her in one long, steady plunge.

Britt screamed again, the pleasure nearly too much to bear. Each snap of Garrett's hips wrung a cry of delight she was helpless to restrain. She was grateful for Jack's strong hands anchoring her arms to the chaise overhead. Veins stood out in Jack's neck. His eyes darkened to obsidian as he watched his friend ram into her, as he watched her breasts roll and jiggle with each jackhammer thrust. At that moment, as Jack wrestled

with his unappeased hunger, he looked more than ever like the ancient warrior she'd likened him to.

"All right, it's time." Jack positioned her face so he could enjoy her mouth. Eagerly she sucked him, worked him with her tongue, the taste of him an aphrodisiac. She had two fine, big cocks in her, a dizzying glut of riches.

Jack was anything but shy about expressing himself. He growled, he chortled, he hollered with sensual abandon. He praised Britt's skill, her beauty, and how awesome she looked getting fucked by his pal.

Garrett, who had professed zero interest in a three-way, couldn't seem to tear his gaze from Jack's rod sliding in and out of Britt's mouth. The sight must not have been too disturbing. His own cock turned into a baseball bat inside her, which he wielded with the skill of A-Rod. She moaned her appreciation, the oral vibes triggering an answering groan from Jack, who announced that the moment of reckoning had arrived.

He tried to pull out of her mouth. A gentleman—how quaint. Britt didn't want a gentleman, she wanted the take-no-prisoners warrior of her fantasy. She wanted it real, she wanted it raw, she wanted every last drop of her tattooed tribal chieftain. She dug her nails into his hard ass and sucked him back in, stroking his balls as his orgasm erupted.

"Fuck yeah!" Jack hollered, startling a nearby cluster of seagulls squabbling over a crab carcass. His back arched like a bowstring, hips pumping as he jetted into her mouth. When finally he pulled away, he announced, "You are a goddess, woman."

The goddess appreciated the sentiment, but she was still getting it hard and fast from Mr. I Get Her First, and her own climax hovered on the horizon. Garrett still held her legs in a wide V. Jack slid his fingers down Britt's belly and introduced himself to her clitoris.

She sucked in a breath. "Oh yeah, that's it, that's perfect." The horizon suddenly got a lot closer.

Garrett never broke stride as he leveled a dark scowl at the other man. "No need for that, friend, I've got it covered."

Jack laughed. "You know you're way high on G's shit list when he calls you 'friend' like that." His talented fingers alternately circled and stroked Britt's most sensitive spot. Her body tensed, climbing the peak, as her own breathy cries filled her ears.

"Move your hand away, man. I mean it." Garrett was fucking her faster now, his body glistening with sweat. "Go have a drink. Get lost."

Jack said, "Why don't we ask Britt if she wants me to stop?"

She clamped her hand over Jack's, holding it there for dear life.

"Looks like we have our answer." Jack offered that little devil's grin.

Britt's orgasm detonated in the next instant. Garrett released her ankles and seized her bottom in a punishing grip as her internal muscles pumped him. He let himself go then with a full-throated roar, pounding into her, his handsome features contorted in ecstasy.

It seemed to go on forever, reminding her why simultaneous orgasms get such good press. Finally they collapsed together on the chaise, lying more or less side by side in a tangle of sweaty limbs. They gulped air, hearts beating like a pair of bongos. She glanced around and found Jack reclining serenely on the chaise next to theirs. When had he removed his hand? Probably at the moment his buddy started to come. There was such a thing as being too friendly, from a hetero male's point of view.

Jack looked over at them, his face wreathed in a big, goofy grin. A chuckle burbled up his throat, building momentum until he was guffawing. His glee was contagious. Britt didn't even try to resist, and soon the two of them were seized by helpless laughter.

Garrett refused to join in the merriment. He shook his head and muttered, "You idiots," but Britt could swear she saw him biting back a grin as he raised the back of the chaise and turned to the drinks tray. He turned back with a crystal glass half-filled with

bourbon. “Yes, I remembered the splash.” He also handed her a tall glass of iced Pellegrino, which she downed without pausing for air.

“Hey,” Jack said, “what about me?”

Garrett passed him the champagne bottle, from which he took a long, thirsty pull. Only then did Garrett settle back with his own drink. The three of them stared at the setting sun. Garrett hadn’t lied. It was a spectacular sight. After a moment he tilted his head and pressed a tender kiss to the tip of her shoulder. It was a subtle movement, too subtle for Jack to notice – something meant to be shared by just the two of them.

Britt allowed herself a little smile. “So. Who’s going to make me that steak?”

Chapter Two

Jack strolled out of the house as Britt's silver Audi convertible rolled to a stop on the crushed-shell drive. He wore Hawaiian-print board shorts and was working on a hot dog.

She popped the trunk and let herself out of the car. "Feel like playing bellhop?"

He grinned and hammered back the last of the dog. "I can play any part you want, babe."

She smoothed the car wrinkles out of her clingy, plum-colored sundress. "Try not to scratch the Vuitton. It's new."

"Jesus, woman." He hauled the first of four suitcases out of the trunk. "You did say *one* week, right?"

Britt pushed up her sunglasses and watched Jack stack the heavy luggage, watched the muscles bunch and ripple under his swarthy skin. It was a diverting show, made all the more so by the fact that she was horny as hell. She'd entertained herself during the long drive from Brooklyn by mentally replaying yesterday's unprecedented three-way fuck-fest. That couldn't be safe, two hours of squirming at highway speeds.

She left Jack to juggle her bags and let herself into the big, modern beach house. Reflexively she glanced toward the dining area where she'd last seen her painting, and felt her stomach lurch. It wasn't there. Her gaze darted wildly around.

"Relax." Garrett's voice came from the doorway to the kitchen, where he was positioning a portable chin-up bar. He nodded toward the fireplace, and there was her naked odalisque, propped on the mantel. "Didn't want her to get knocked over." He jerked on the bar, testing its strength.

Like Jack, Garrett wore only loose swim trunks. Unlike Jack, his were plain black. Apparently satisfied that the bar would hold his weight, he wrapped his fingers around

it and executed a perfect chin-up. He ignored Britt as she sauntered toward him, her heels clicking on the hardwood floor.

He continued to ignore her when she stood directly in front of him, watching him exercise. The air left his lungs on a soft grunt each time he pulled himself up.

Britt didn't like being ignored. She reached down and cupped his crotch. "I thought so." The man sported serious wood. So much for pretending she wasn't there.

"Knock it off," he said. "Save it for later."

"I don't think so." She hooked her thumbs in his trunks, yanked them down his hard thighs, and tossed them over her shoulder. Even then, the stubborn man refused to release the damn chin-up bar. No problem. She bent at the waist so her lips would be in just the right spot when he pulled himself up.

His cock slid into her mouth, and he nearly lost his grip on the bar. "Goddamn it, can't you wait five minutes? You're messing up my count."

"Dude." It was Jack, depositing Britt's luggage at the foot of the stairs. "Did you just say don't blow me, you're messing up my count?"

Garrett cursed his friend and continued to do chin-ups, reluctantly fucking Britt's mouth with each upward pull. His breathing grew ragged as his cock swelled to princely proportions.

Talk about incentive to exercise! If her personal trainer added pussy-licking to his usual duties, she'd have buns of titanium in no time.

"Hey, Britt?" Jack leaned into her field of vision so she could see him raise his hand. "If Garrett doesn't want his blowjob, can I have it?"

"You may as well give it up, Britt," Garrett said through gritted teeth. "I'm not going to come."

Gee, he'd show *her*. She reminded herself that this man was a control freak. It wasn't the pleasure he objected to, but the fact that it was happening on her terms, not

his. Yet his pride wouldn't let him simply stop and push her away. Withholding his orgasm was his way of reasserting control.

She couldn't make him come, huh? They'd see about that. Britt pulled out all the stops, treating him to a first-class hummer as she caressed his balls.

Jack slipped behind her and flipped her skirt up to her waist. He pressed his big, hot hand between her legs. She moaned, pushing back against him.

"You are so fine, woman. And so wet." Jack eased her lace bikini panties over her hips and her Ferragamo jade-green, peep-toe pumps. Cool air kissed her drenched flesh. "And so fucking beautiful. Just look at that gorgeous pussy."

He kicked away her panties and his trunks, then kned her legs apart. "You don't mind, do you, babe?"

Mind? Britt chuckled around Garrett's cock and arched her back in invitation. Jack planted his legs and grabbed her hips. She whimpered as the smooth head of his penis parted her labia, then gasped in delight as the hard, thick length of him rammed past the tight opening and stretched her to overflowing.

Jack fucked her in long, mind-liquidating strokes until she could barely concentrate on the task at hand—or rather, mouth. At some point the chin-ups had ceased. Well, there was a limit to how many of those a guy could do, even when he wasn't being subjected to an uninvited BJ. Garrett stood with one hand wrapped around the bar and the other fisted in her hair, guiding her movements.

Abruptly he pulled out of her mouth. He couldn't be serious! She made a grab for him, but he seized her wrists and made her hold on to the doorframe on either side, ordering her to be still. Her dress buttoned down the front. His hands were rough and impatient as he unfastened the bodice and pushed her bra down, scooping out the gals to sit high and crowded above the cups.

Which, as it turned out, was perfect for what Garrett had in mind. Just when Britt thought she had this irritating man figured out, he went and surprised her. Not that she was complaining—her breasts were made to be fucked. He worked his cock between

them while she treated him to plenty of tongue action on the upstroke, keeping everything lubed.

Jack never paused in his skillful swordplay as he pulled Britt's hair aside and peered over her shoulder. "G, you dog." He laughed in appreciation. "I thought you had your imagination surgically removed. Guess you showed me, huh?"

"I could do this all day," Britt said in between licks. "Good thing he's not going to come."

"Shut up, both of you," Garrett growled, and she knew he was about to prove her a liar. His climax rolled over him like a tidal wave, and he barely kept his feet under him as his warm seed spurted onto her breasts.

"Whoa!" Jack was gleeful. "The money shot!"

Garrett collapsed against the doorframe, lungs pumping, as Jack pulled out of Britt and helped her to straighten. "Babe," Jack said, "how's your back holding up?"

"It's holding up just fine. Yoga." She turned and grabbed his sequoia of a cock. "Don't you dare stop."

"You're kidding, right? Let's just get rid of this." He undid the rest of her buttons and flung the dress over a dining chair. Britt reached behind her back to unfasten her bra, but Garrett beat her to it. He tossed the bra over her dress and wiped down her chest with a damp paper towel. He must have stepped into the kitchen when her back was turned.

"Sorry," he muttered. Britt blinked. Was he *blushing*?

"Dude," Jack said. "You do not apologize for coming on a woman's tits. It's, like, a compliment. Tell him, Britt."

Good grief. Did all young guys nowadays get their sex education from porn films? Money shot indeed. She cupped Garrett's cheek and gave him a tender kiss. "It was a first for me too." She looked him in the eye. "I liked it."

They held each other's gaze for a long moment before Garrett reminded himself he didn't like her. "Fine." He turned back into the kitchen with a scowl, hurling the paper towel into the trash. "As long as you don't start whining about being abused."

Her lips quirked. "You'll have to try harder." The chin-up bar still spanned the upper doorway, goading her imagination. She grabbed it with both hands and struggled through a chin-up. She'd do well to stick to yoga.

"Hot naked workout. Excellent!" Jack's dark gaze sparkled—she wore nothing but the sexy shoes. "You look, like, totally illegal, Britt."

"Come here." Still grasping the bar, she raised her legs and trapped Jack in a pincer movement worthy of General Patton. She hauled him to her, locking her ankles behind his waist, angling her hips to invite him back into the fold, so to speak. He seized a double handful of her ample bottom, supporting her weight as he reestablished his rhythm.

"Sweet baby Jesus!" she cried as Jack pistoned in and out of her. "I have got to get me one of these bars."

Jack dipped his head and sucked a nipple into his hot mouth, groaning in appreciation when her internal muscles responded with a happy little squeeze. Britt was vocal in her pleasure, making no effort to restrain her yelps, gasps and moans of delight.

"You guys." It was Garrett, speaking over her shoulder. "I'd like to get out of here?" They'd blocked the doorway, trapping him in the kitchen. "Move."

"No way, G—not now." Jack hammered away at the sweet spot, bringing her ever closer to release. "Go out the side door."

"Through the *garage*?" Garrett said. "Buck-naked through the garage to, what, the front door? Which is locked?"

"G, shut the hell up!" Britt's hips rocked in rhythm with Jack's thrusts, her knuckles white on the chin-up bar.

"You do not get to call me G," he told her. "You haven't known me long enough."

"I'd say we've made up for lost time," she said. "Now, if you can stop playing big swinging dick for a minute, an intriguing idea just came to me."

"Yeah?" Jack features brightened. "What've you cooked up in that dirty little cranium of yours?"

She aimed a seductive smile over her shoulder. "You have any butter in that big, fancy kitchen, G?"

Garrett frowned, but his friend got it right away. "Outstanding!" Jack crowed. "Get the butter, man."

Britt watched awareness dawn in Garrett's moss-green eyes. Jack supported her weight, allowing her to reach behind and take hold of his friend's cock, already semi-erect. "You with the program?" she asked.

She assumed the answer was yes, judging by how swiftly he came to full attention in her hand. His body was indeed with the program, but his mind, as usual, mutinied. He glowered at Jack, who'd eased off on the throttle, the pace of his strokes now languid while they discussed the next course on the menu.

"Tell you what." Garrett nuzzled past her hair to bite the tip of her ear. It was like an electric jolt that went straight to her core. She purred. "You finish up here," he said, "then I'll take you upstairs."

"Just the two of us," she said.

"Yeah, I know." He fondled her bottom. "Pretty radical."

"Dude, I do not believe what I'm hearing," Jack said. "This is, like, a golden opportunity. When are you gonna get another crack at a sandwich? And it was her idea!"

"I'm curious," Britt said. "I have to admit, the idea's always turned me on."

"Fuck, yeah!" Jack hammered home his point with, well, his point. "G, get the fucking butter before she changes her mind."

Garrett ignored his friend. His Southern drawl kicked into high gear as he reached around to caress her breasts. "I'll give you the ride of your life, darlin'. Just you and me." He nodded toward the ceiling. "In private."

"Thanks. Some other time," she said. "But you know what? It's just as well. About the sandwich thing. I'm having second thoughts anyway."

"G, goddamn you!" Jack looked even hotter with his hackles up. "Now see what you've done."

"The more I think about it..." Britt offered Garrett a regretful little smile. "Well, it's a little scary, you know?" She turned her attention to Jack, looping both arms around his sinewy neck. "Let's get out of G's way."

"You have not heard the last of this," Jack told Garrett as he made room for him to pass. "I thought you were my friend."

Garrett didn't move from the doorway. "What do you mean, scary?"

She waved him off. "It's all right. Something like that takes a lot of trust on the part of the woman. I won't ask it of you again." To Jack she said, "Aren't your arms getting tired?"

"You kidding? You weigh what?" He hoisted her up and down on his cock a few times, the tribal tattoos bulging. "A hundred ten?"

Maybe when she was eleven. She laughed at the blatant flattery. "I'm in love."

"Trust. Meaning what?" Garrett demanded. "You think I'd hurt you? Like I don't know how to do it right?"

"It's just, you know...the double penetration thing," Britt said. "It must take a lot of, well, skill on the part of the guy in back. Or it could be a lot less fun than it sounds—for the woman. That's all I'm saying."

"Because I know my way around the back door," he said. "That's not what this is about."

"I'm sure you do," Britt said, as if soothing a toddler's hurt feelings.

"I don't like to share is all," Garrett said. "But you talk about skilled—I'm skilled. I'll show you when we're alone."

"Could you please go one way or the other?" She wagged her fingertips, urging him to move from the doorway. "I want to get to that bar again. You'll have to tell me where to get one of those."

Garrett stood his ground. "I just don't want you thinking this is about proficiency."

"We get it," Jack said. "You're the ass-fucker of ass-fuckers. Now move out of the way so I can give this fine woman the howling orgasm she deserves." He carried Britt into the doorway, causing Garrett to stumble back into the kitchen.

Britt took hold of the bar once more, and the two of them went at it with a vengeance. Howling orgasm, huh? She liked the sound of that. The bar gave her the leverage she needed work herself on Jack's fine, upstanding rod. Her body flexed and bowed, pumping him, forcing him deep and deeper, nudging her clitoris with each jackhammer thrust. She'd never been shy about noisy sex, and she didn't hold back now.

"That's what I'm talking about!" Jack hollered, his body sheened with sweat. "That's what I'm fucking talking about! You have got the sweetest little pussy, woman."

Garrett's long arm came around her waist as the fingers of his other hand slipped between her ass-cheeks. They were slippery.

"G?" She looked over her shoulder. His color was high, his nostrils flared.

"Butter's too cold—it's in the fridge," he said. "Will olive oil do?"

Britt chewed back a grin of triumph. A little reverse psychology went a long way. Men could be so simple.

"Yes!" Jack pumped his fist. "I knew you wouldn't let us down. This is going to be awesome."

Jack continued to fuck her while Garrett caressed her anus. His other hand teased and plucked her nipple as he pressed kisses to her shoulder and throat. She gave a little

shudder when his finger penetrated her. He worked it in and out of the tight opening, adding a second finger to stretch her. Every so often he reached for the cruet of olive oil on the nearby granite counter. Garrett hadn't been fibbing. He really did know a thing or two about the back door. She'd tried anal sex with a few men. Most of them had no idea what they were doing.

Britt sighed his name on a moan of pleasure. Her head rolled back and he kissed her temple.

"You like that?" he whispered, twisting his fingers a little higher. His warm breath teased her ear.

"Yes," she sighed. "Yes...ohhh..."

He cupped her jaw, tilting her head toward him. His mouth touched hers and she opened for him, welcomed his lips and tongue—drank him in as she writhed unashamedly.

It felt amazing to have one man's cock in her pussy and another man's fingers driving into her ass. How would it feel when she had both men's rigid cocks inside her? The truth was, she felt a prickle of apprehension, but it was eclipsed by a deep, churning need that gained strength by the second.

Garrett reached for the olive oil one more time, and then she felt the slick head of his penis where his fingers had just been. He tipped her head again, making her look him in the eye. "You still want to do this?" he asked.

"Yes," she breathed, and kissed him. "Only because it's you. I trust you."

He held her gaze for long moments and something passed between them, something that had nothing to do with control or threats. Something that made her wonder how she would feel when the week was over and she packed up her Vuitton and drove away from this house for good.

Britt shook off the unwelcome thought and took a deep, calming breath, willing every last speck of tension from her body. Garrett took that as his cue. He started to

press into her, slowly, patiently, watching her carefully and responding to her body's signals.

"Whoa." Jack, fully seated in her pussy, grinned. "That feels —"

"Shut up," Garrett said. "Keep it to yourself."

"Awesome." Britt finished his sentence. "It feels awesome." She gasped and panted as Garrett made headway with a series of short strokes. It was strange and novel, being impaled front and back, her body indeed sandwiched between solid walls of warm male flesh. No inanimate dildos could ever duplicate the reality of two live, throbbing cocks being driven by the sexiest men she'd ever met.

Garrett pushed the final distance and went still. He groaned so long and so deep, she felt the vibrations through her back. "It's indescribable." His voice was hoarse. "Christ, you're so hot, so tight..." He made an obvious effort to collect himself, murmuring, "Are you all right, Britt?"

She answered with a long, shuddering moan. "I never knew anything could feel like this," she said, breathless. There were now four strong hands under her thighs and butt, supporting her weight. Using the bar, she pulled up a little and ground her hips back down, prompting Jack and Garrett to begin moving.

Veins bulged in Jack's neck. He looked hungry, primitive, thrusting high and hard. Garrett moved with greater care, his strokes long and slow and utterly brain-melting. Britt felt the unreleased tension in his body, felt him holding back for her sake. The men's movements were out of sync, which only added to the erotic thrill, though she couldn't say why. She didn't want to think right then, had no desire to analyze the experience—she only wanted to feel.

And Lord knew there was plenty to feel, being opened and stretched and penetrated in the most sensitive parts of herself. She gyrated on their cocks, using the chin-up bar for leverage. She was sweating, moaning, throwing her head back and shouting from the raw, wicked pleasure of it. Her climax began to build and she deliberately put it off, riding that fine line, keeping herself from tipping over the edge.

“Ohhhh...” she groaned, as her fingers slipped from the bars, “oh God, I can’t stand it, it’s so fucking good...”

Garrett was drilling her harder now, faster, whether because her body was ready for it or he just couldn’t help himself, she didn’t know. She started when he bit her neck, a gesture so feral and untamed, she almost came in that instant.

Before long he and Jack found a rhythm, moving in tandem. Britt hadn’t thought it could get better, but now her mouth opened on a silent scream, the pleasure so intense she feared for her sanity. It was all she could do to hold on and ride it out.

Her orgasm was no longer under her control. It swooped down, tearing into her like a raptor. “G!” she sobbed. “Hold me—!”

Garrett’s strong arms banded around her, grounding her as she came apart. Her climax tossed her like fresh prey, but he held her tight, his head tucked against hers. Her body pumped both cocks, squeezing them with startling force, making them seem almost painfully enormous.

Garrett’s hips became a jackhammer. He shouted, a hoarse, agonized sound that reverberated through the house. Britt felt a warm spurting deep within. In the next moment, Jack bared his teeth and threw his head back, bellowing his pleasure as he came.

Britt sagged in Garrett’s arms, shaking uncontrollably, whimpering like a kitten. Jack framed her face in his big hands and kissed her. He opened his mouth to speak, then just shook his head, chuckling. For once, he was at a loss for words. She barely managed to rasp out, “Thanks for the howling orgasm.” He gave her a little salute.

A cell phone in the dining room started playing Abbot and Costello’s classic “Who’s on First?” routine. Jack staggered to the sideboard, glanced at the caller and cleared his throat. He gave Britt a furtive little glance and turned his back. Abbot and Costello went silent. “Hey, you.” Jack’s voice was husky. He cleared his throat again as he headed toward the back of the house. “No, I was just...dozed off, I guess—too much

sun. No, no, that's okay. What's up?..." His voice trailed off as he stepped onto the deck, sliding the door closed behind him.

Garrett lifted Britt into his arms and carried her into the living room. She clung to him as he sat on the loveseat and settled her on his lap. He grabbed a chenille throw from the back of the seat and spread the downy material over her, holding her close as her trembling ran out of steam.

"You okay?" He brushed errant hairs off her face, trying to look at her.

She nodded, tucking her face against his chest, unwilling to meet his eyes. Unwilling to expose the maelstrom of feelings whirling inside her head.

She told herself it was the sex. It threw her for a loop, that was all. She'd never experienced anything like that—hadn't been prepared for the explosion of sensation, the intensity of her climax. She pulled in another ragged breath and relaxed against him, feeling his heartbeat slow. He was dragging his fingers through her hair, over her scalp, a soothing gesture that melted her bones.

"What's this?" Garrett touched her throat, and it took a second for Britt to remember the bite. He went still. "Did I do this?"

"You were kind of distracted at the time." She felt his pulse leap and smiled up into his handsome, frowning face. "Don't you dare apologize."

He blew out a gusty sigh. "I've never done that before."

"Another first." She traced his lips with a finger. "I'll just tell everyone my new lover's a vampire porn star."

Her new lover. The instant the words were out of her mouth, she wished she could call them back. Whatever Garrett was to her—extortionist, temporary fuck-mate—it had nothing to do with love. She could not afford to lose sight of that fact.

Her gaze settled on the painting propped on the fireplace mantel. Her painting. Her lovely odalisque casually trailing her fingers through the water, not a care in the world. Staring at her, Britt couldn't help but wonder if Garrett really would have turned her in

to the authorities as he'd threatened. She'd had no choice but to take him at his word. Of course, there was nothing to stop him from calling the cops at the end of the week after she'd fulfilled her part of the bargain. She could only pray he had more integrity than that.

That thought made her turn from the painting in self-disgust. What right did she have to judge anyone else? If she had a shred of integrity, she never would have become an art forger in the first place.

Garrett seemed to sense her mood. He held her closer and pressed a tender kiss to her forehead. He did not, however, ask what bothered her. Britt suspected he had a pretty good idea and didn't want to discuss it. She couldn't blame him—she didn't want to either.

Instead he said, "This place has five bedrooms. Jack and I are using two of them, so that leaves three for you." He nodded toward her mountain of luggage. "I hope that's enough space for all your crap."

"Tell me one of those rooms has a walk-in closet."

He nodded. "With lots of those shoe-cubby things."

"God, I *love* this place!"

"You'll keep your stuff wherever you like," Garrett said, "but you'll spend the nights with me or Jack. We'll alternate."

"Wait a minute." She tipped her head to look at him. "I'm supposed to fuck and suck all the livelong day and then get it all night from one of you guys?"

"That's the deal."

"That is not the deal. I need my solid eight hours, G. Eye mask. Earplugs. Face cream. Don't even ask about the hair." She was embellishing this part, but judging by the look in his face, he got the message. "It's called a beauty rest. You don't want to know what I'd look like after seven days without it."

"Jesus." Garrett rolled his head back. "So sleep in your own fucking room. If I want you, I'll come get you."

"No, if I wake up horny at three a.m., I'll come get *you*." She shrugged. "Or Jack. Depends what I'm in the mood for."

He frowned. "What's that supposed to mean? A dick's a dick."

And you're the biggest dick here. "It means am I in the mood for the jolly tribal chieftain or the surly control freak."

"The jolly what? No, never mind." He waved away the question. "I don't want to know. And for the record, I am not surly."

"Not when you're getting what you want," she agreed.

"Other people do not have a problem with me," he said. "I get along with everyone."

"As long as they do what you say."

"Have you been talking to Jack?"

"Yeah. Our conversations go like this. 'You have the sweetest, juiciest pussy, babe.' 'Oh! Oh! Don't stop, Jack!' 'Here comes the money shot.' 'Ah! Ah! Ah! I'm coming—!'"

Garrett clamped his hand over her mouth. "This could end up being the best week of my life or we could be talking your basic murder-suicide. My money's on that second thing."

Chapter Three

Britt rolled over and looked at the glowing digital clock on the nightstand—2:17 a.m. She'd been lying in bed since midnight, too wound up to sleep. Bits and pieces of the past three days since she'd arrived at the beach house kept jostling to the forefront of her mind. Not the sex, though that was pretty unforgettable. During the occasional break in the action, when things were calm and no one was sticking anything into anyone else, she and Garrett actually had some decent conversations. They talked about the things any two people just getting to know each other might discuss—music and books, movies and current events. As for politics, they'd found both enough common ground and enough disagreement to make for spirited debate. Britt sometimes felt she could listen to Garrett's silky southern drawl for hours.

These were not group discussions. Once the in-and-out was over, Jack didn't hang around chewing the fat. He couldn't be still for long—it made him antsy. He'd go for a swim or a run on the beach. As if he didn't get enough exercise with Britt and Garrett. And then there were Jack's extended telephone conversations with the mystery woman. It was definitely a woman. Britt recognized the sappy tone of voice he reserved only for her—not to mention the way he invariably slunk away for privacy, the phone glued to his ear. Britt had tried to pump Garrett for information, but he was a loyal friend—she got nothing out of him.

Britt hated the thought that she might be fucking another woman's man. Of course, the other day when Garrett had spelled out her "punishment" and Jack had forcefully horned in on it, she hadn't exactly been in a position to say, *Listen, I need to know if either of you guys is in a committed relationship, because enabling cheating bastards is so not my style.*

Britt salved her conscience by telling herself the mystery woman was just a friend. A really close friend who had to talk to her good buddy Jack a dozen times a day.

She only hoped Garrett didn't have a friend like that.

Britt stopped duking it out with sleeplessness and threw off the covers. A cool, briny breeze fluttered the curtains, drawing her to the open window.

Earlier this evening, instead of barbecuing or going out to eat as the three of them had done since her arrival, they'd made use of the spacious, beautifully appointed kitchen for an indoor clambake. Corn and potatoes from a roadside farm stand. Seafood from the nearest fish market—clams, mussels and live lobsters so massive Garrett declared them to be mutant “lobstrosities”. Britt taught the men how to dispatch the lobstrosities the humane way with a sharp blade between the eyes, then everything went into the Biggest Pot in the Universe over a bed of steaming seaweed. They spread newspapers over the table on the deck and tore into their food like famine refugees.

Afterward Jack abandoned them to run off his dinner, leaving Britt and Garrett to clean up, which they did with the choreographed familiarity of an old married couple. As Britt stood at the sink washing nutcrackers and lobster picks, Garrett came up behind her and began massaging her shoulders. Until that moment she hadn't realized her muscles were stiff, but somehow he had. The tenderness of the gesture made her eyes sting and she was grateful he couldn't see her get girlishly misty over a simple shoulder-rub.

Then it was their turn to steam in a big pot of water, specifically the hot tub that adjoined the pool on the back deck. Garrett threw together a pitcher of après-clambake martinis and they stripped down for a relaxing soak—which, somehow, did not lead to sex. Instead, they talked. And watched the sun melt over the horizon. And had themselves a thumb-wrestling tournament as the sky went from bruised to black and a dusting of stars winked on overhead. Had she ever seen Garrett laugh before? Britt warned herself not to soften toward him, reminded herself that this man was a ruthless, manipulative prick who'd coerced her into sexual servitude. The fact that she was enjoying the hell out of that servitude was beside the point.

Jack had trotted back after about forty minutes, sweaty from his run and intent on a shower. He hadn't reappeared, which told Britt he must have settled down for a long, mushy confab with the mystery woman. That was the only thing that would have kept him from joining them in the tub and turning their intimate soak into a boisterous fuck-and-suck session.

She stood at the window in her darkened room now, taking the ocean air into her lungs and listening to the surf break onshore. The crescent moon revealed little, but as she peered into the inky blackness, a movement in the distance caught her eye. That was all it took. Her pulse quickened, her breathing accelerated. He was out there. She couldn't make out any detail, couldn't have said why she knew it was Garrett strolling along the shoreline and not Jack. Perhaps he couldn't sleep either.

Britt padded barefoot down the staircase and let herself out the sliding glass doors. The breeze lifted the hem of her nightgown, a long column of sheer ivory silk with a wide V neckline and two thigh-high slits on the front. Wooden steps led down to scrubby grass, which gave way to white sand.

Garrett's back was to her as he stared at the horizon, black against watery black, spangled with shards of moonlight. He wore only thin gray athletic pants, now soaked at the hems. She saw the instant he sensed her presence, just as she'd sensed him from her bedroom window. He turned and watched her close the last few yards that separated them. The sand was cool and wet underfoot. Frigid water rolled over her toes.

Britt fought the impulse to slide her arms around his waist, to press against his warm back and breathe in the now-familiar scent of him. That wasn't what they were about, she reminded herself for what seemed the thousandth time. A romantic gesture like that would only invite some cutting remark on his part—or worse, an awkward silence as he carefully disengaged himself from her embrace.

"You ever go swimming at night?" she asked as she joined him.

"Not yet." Garrett gave her a wry smile. "I've seen *Jaws*."

His gaze traveled over her body. His hand followed, one long, searing stroke from throat to thigh over the thin silk, which transmitted the heat of his hand and gathered it deep within her.

Britt's breathing accelerated. Garrett noticed. His movements were calculated but unhurried as he seized a fistful of the flimsy silk under her breasts, accentuating them, teasing the nipples into even sharper peaks. A sensual heaviness thrummed between her legs. She would have thought that after all the sex they'd had during the past three days, it would start getting old—but not with this man. It was as if she could never get enough of him.

His eyes were bottomless, as focused as a hawk's. He dragged his gaze to hers and something passed between them, a silent acknowledgment, bold and unashamed. *This is what we do to each other. This is how it will always be for us.*

Except that in their case, "always" had an expiration date. Four more days. Ninety-six hours.

Britt pushed that thought from her mind. Reality would intrude soon enough. Her hands moved of their own accord, skating over his shoulders and chest, a purely masculine landscape of shadow and frost in the moonlight. He pressed her hand to his chest, to the hammer blows of his heart. Then he slid it past his hard abdomen to the erection straining against his pants. He curled her fingers around it and held them there as his eyes slitted and tendons stood out in his neck. Even through the cotton fabric his cock felt impossibly hard, twitching like a wild thing fighting the leash.

Garrett's other hand came around her neck, holding her for his kiss. It was a deep, demanding kiss, ruthlessly thorough. It was a kiss that said whoever and whatever she'd been in the past or would be tomorrow, right now at this moment in time she was his.

An icy wave broke over their ankles, stealing her breath. Garrett backed her onto warm, dry sand, never taking his voracious mouth from hers. His tongue opened her,

claimed her, his hands rough and possessive on her body. Her skin felt feverish, ultrasensitive, despite the cool breeze.

Garrett's hands found the slits in her gown. He grabbed her ass and pulled her hard against him, against the unyielding ridge of his cock. Britt moaned into his mouth, writhing shamelessly, her need so sharp and relentless she could barely take in air. He slid his fingers lower in back, reaching under to fondle her slippery pussy. She gasped, her back bowed. "Garrett—!" His fingers pushed into her, thrusting in the age-old rhythm. She whimpered, entirely at the mercy of her raw, grasping hunger.

She yanked blindly at the drawstring of his pants. He kicked them away, then lowered Britt and himself to the sand, with her on top. The position was a surprising choice for a control freak, she mused, before reminding herself this man was, at heart, a Southern gentleman. No way was he going to subject a lady and her delicate parts to all that gritty sand.

She tried to straddle his hips. "No." He pulled her forward. "Come here." He made her kneel across his shoulders and pull up the hem of her gown.

"G, I need you," she half-sobbed.

"I know, darlin'." His breath was hot on her drenched flesh as his thumbs slipped between the lips, opening her. "I need you too."

She cried out as his strong, lithe tongue stroked her pussy, now flicking, now thrusting, now circling her swollen clitoris. He exerted heroic patience, bringing her to the brink of orgasm, then backing off, twice, three times, until she thought she'd lose her mind if she didn't come in the next second.

Finally he scooted up in the sand to align their bodies and impaled her in one hard, swift stroke. His growl of pleasure turned into a full-throated roar as Britt climaxed, her muscles contracting around him. His fingers dug into her hips as he fought for control, fought to keep from joining her too soon.

He sounded winded as he asked, "Was it worth waiting for?" All she could offer in answer was a breathless chuckle.

Garrett started rocking into her once more, guiding her movements with his strong hands. This was one time she didn't mind his controlling nature. Everything about the way he fucked her—the depth, the pace, the angle at which their bodies met—was calculated to enhance her pleasure.

He moved his hands to her breasts, caressing them through the sheer silk, thumbing the stiff tips and showing his teeth when her pussy clenched his cock in response. He jerked one strap of her nightgown down her shoulder to expose a breast and pulled her toward him to suck the nipple into his scalding mouth.

He played with her roughly, tugging and nipping the tender flesh as he pinched the other nipple through the thin silk. He seemed to know just how hard to push her, how to keep her on that magical plane where pleasure and pain coexisted.

Garrett never paused in his sublime fucking, not even when Britt, detecting a whiff of cigar smoke, looked up and squinted at the distant house, the beach-facing windows now glowing with light where they'd been dark moments earlier.

"Is he out there?" Garrett asked.

She nodded. Jack's silhouette leaned on the deck railing. Another insomniac. The firefly glow of a lit cigar flared briefly as he took a puff. He indulged in a smoke outside most nights. It didn't bother Britt—as long as he shared. She enjoyed an expensive cigar herself now and then, and that was the only kind he bought.

Garrett said, "Can he see us?"

"Yes." There was just enough moonlight.

"Does it look like he's going to join us?"

"No."

"Good." He swirled his thumb over her clitoris. "'Cause then I'd have to kill him."

Garrett's possessiveness tugged at a primitive place deep within Britt, a politically incorrect place that wanted a man to want her, to stake his claim to her. She reminded herself that his proprietary attitude was as temporary as it was inconsequential—

merely the latest manifestation of his controlling ways. Nevertheless, she couldn't deny the thrill his words engendered.

Just as she couldn't deny that if it were Jack lying under her on this fine summer night, she wouldn't care what dirty nonsense issued from his mouth as long as he was drilling her like a stallion. She shouldn't feel differently toward the two men, considering her enforced role in this weeklong fuck-fest. As Garrett pointed out, a dick's a dick. Yet she'd be lying to herself if she pretended she thought about them both the same way.

"Oh yeah..." Garrett stared at her, his expression as intense as she'd ever seen it. "You're about to come."

She could only moan in agreement.

"Come on, darlin', you're right there..." His voice was a smoky Texas drawl. His thumb still teased her clitoris. "Let me see you come, let me feel it..."

Britt's climax struck with blinding force. Her cries rang out in the cool night air. Even then Garrett denied himself release, through an obvious effort of will. Only after he'd given her a third orgasm did he permit himself to come. His hips snapped hard against her as a deep groan rumbled up his throat.

She slumped on top of him in a boneless heap. He wrapped his arms around her. They lay like that, chests pressed together, while their heartbeats slowed and the breeze cooled their sweat-dampened skin. Britt couldn't have said how much time passed – ten minutes? an hour? – before they roused themselves and shuffled back to the house, hand in hand.

Chapter Four

Britt trudged barefoot through the hot sand, scanning the beach for some sign of her housemates. She spied Jack off to the east, perched on the elevated seat of the old, abandoned lifeguard stand. He saw her, too, and waved.

"Where's G?" she called.

He pointed to the ocean. Shielding her eyes from the brilliant midday sun, she searched the expanse of grayish green, finally spotting a lone swimmer out beyond the surf. Even at this distance, she could only marvel at the raw power in Garrett's shoulders and arms as he propelled himself through the rough water, swimming parallel to the shore.

Britt was a wimp. She was willing to wade and splash at the shoreline, maybe even body-surf a little in her braver moments, but she did her actual swimming in pools. Ocean currents scared her. And then there was the legendary riptide, which could drag you miles out to sea before you could even scream for help. Or so Mandy Schulman had told her in the third grade, and Mandy had never steered her wrong. Well, except for that time in seventh grade when she told Britt that cute Tom Flynn had a crush on her. Britt screwed up her courage to approach Tom, only to be informed that he wasn't into "fat chicks—no offense". None taken, once Britt had administered an atomic wedgie that made him walk funny for days.

She set her straw beach tote next to the long-disused lifeguard stand, a simple wooden structure that predated the house and sported twenty coats of white paint, easy. She wondered when it had last been used for its intended purpose.

"Another sexualicious suit," Jack said, staring down at her from the lifeguard's seat. "Did you actually pack all these bikinis or are you, like, conjuring them out of thin air?"

This was the twelfth swimsuit the guys had seen her in since her arrival seven days earlier. Well, it *was* a beach house, for heaven's sake. "You like it?" She stroked her hands over the cranberry-and-yellow two-piece, consisting of a cleavage-pumping halter top and low-slung boy shorts that did amazing things for her ass. A matching gauzy pareo was tied low on her hips.

"No, I hate it. Can't you tell?" He shook his head in wonder. "I'll just say this, babe. I never thought one woman could get me so hard so often. I come like a fucking geyser when I'm in you."

"Gosh, you say the sweetest things."

Garrett trotted up, wringing wet in a pair of plain forest-green trunks. He pushed the sodden hair off his face and grabbed a bottle of beer from the cooler chest sitting in the shade of the lifeguard stand. His appreciative gaze traveled over her, but he refrained from commenting. To Jack he said, "You ought to go in—the water's perfect."

"I'm thinking about it." Jack stood and pounded his chest, hooting like a gorilla. He wore army-green shorts and yet another snug black T-shirt. Britt had decided he must buy them by the gross. And why not? He looked totally hot in them. He launched himself from the seat, lithe and graceful as a panther, landing in the sand not six inches from her. "Come in with me, Britt."

"I don't do ocean. You should know that by now."

Jack slid his hands around her waist and squeezed her bottom. His voice was a seductive murmur. "I'll protect you." He nuzzled her breasts, pulling her against his twitching erection. "You think I'd let anything happen to you?" He shifted his mouth to nibble a stiff peak through the clingy fabric of her halter top, eliciting a gasp of pleasure from her.

She yanked the elastic band off his ponytail and pushed her fingers through his loosened hair. "I forgot the question," she breathed. "Could you please repeat it?"

The buzz of his chuckle went to her head like a shot of tequila. Jack lifted his face. "I said, how would you like me to throw you down on the sand and lick that delicious slit of yours until you beg for mercy?"

"Oh no," she deadpanned. "Anything but that."

"Then I'll have to get G to hold you down." His fingers slipped under the edge of her bikini bottom. "What do you think about that?"

"Oh, that reminds me." Britt extricated herself from Jack's groping hands and located her tote bag. She dug past the contents to the bottom of the bag, where her fingers closed around cold steel. "I found the most intriguing thing in Garrett's room." She produced a set of handcuffs, holding them up and giving them a merry jingle.

She watched the men carefully. Wary surprise replaced smoldering horniness as Jack glanced from the handcuffs to Garrett, clearly wondering how his friend intended to handle this. Garrett stood staring at her, soaking wet, his muscles still pumped from his swim. He didn't scowl or glare. He simply stared, his eyes paler and colder than she'd ever seen them. Never had she imagined he could look so dangerous, and for an instant she regretted goading him like this.

But only for an instant. She jingled the handcuffs again. "Nice," she said. *Jingle jingle*. "Heavy. These are the real deal, G. Not like something you'd pick up in a novelty store."

"You went through my stuff."

"Oh please," she said. "You dropped a sock on the way up from the laundry room. I figured I'd be a nice person and put it away." And go through his stuff. Britt knew he wasn't buying it, and she didn't much care.

"From now on, you'll have to mess with Jack's junk. My room stays locked." Garrett put out his hand, a wordless command. Britt ignored it.

"Hey, no problem." Jack popped the cap off a beer, his dark eyebrows wagging. "I like it when she messes with my junk."

A vein pulsed in Garrett's temple. "You find any other 'intriguing' items while you were putting away my sock?"

"No," she said. He started to take a swig from his beer until she added, "Unless you mean the gun." Idly Britt latched the handcuff around her left wrist. "I didn't touch that. Guns scare me."

Jack emitted a gust of surprised laughter. Garrett, however, looked anything but amused.

"I'm kind of curious." She wagged her hand, admiring the wicked-looking steel dangling from it. "What does a trust-fund baby on holiday need with handcuffs and a gun?"

The men shared a look, but neither spoke.

They didn't have to. Britt knew the answer, had known it since day one. The first thing she'd done when she'd driven home to pack was open her laptop and type Garrett's and Jack's names into a search engine. Garrett had told her he was the scion of a frozen-foods conglomerate visiting from Texas, but in truth he hadn't lived there for years. His folks owned a small barbecue joint on the outskirts of Austin. They had zero to do with frozen foods unless you counted the bags of fries they dumped into sizzling grease all day.

Britt turned to Jack. "Did you bring the tools of the trade on vacation, too, or is it just your buddy here who can't leave the job at home?"

"Babe." Jack spread his arms, the living embodiment of innocence. "I honestly do not know what you're talking about."

During the past week she'd occasionally initiated conversations with Jack about art, just to watch him squirm. Invariably he'd danced around the subject until he could distract her with his patented brand of high-energy fucking. When Britt wanted him to really turn on the juice, all she had to do was mention Jacques-Louis David or Anton Raphael Mengs or some other prominent Neoclassicist—Jack's supposed specialty. The result was orgasms you could measure on the Richter scale.

"You played your part to perfection, Jack," she said. "The professional 'art advisor'. The 'Ingres specialist'. Tell me, did you even know who Ingres was before last Sunday?"

"Britt, come on..." Jack looked to Garrett, who offered nothing but surly silence. "Why would I pretend to be something I'm not?"

"Why?" She'd had time to figure it all out. "Because your buddy Garrett asked you to. Why? Because he met this hot art-dealer chick at Club Infinitee and fed her a heaping helping of sure-to-get-him-laid horseshit about how he was this zillionaire art collector, and she was coming over the next day to sell him an honest-to-God Ingres, whatever the hell that was, and he needed an 'art advisor' to declare the painting a fake so he'd have a reason to turn it down. Then you were supposed to get lost so G could soothe my ruffled feathers and proceed to ball my brains out. Any of this sound familiar? Don't look at him," she added as Jack cut his eyes to Garrett, seeking guidance. "G's not going to admit anything. That's not his style—is it, G?"

Garrett continued to stare stonily at Britt. She laughed. "See? The funniest part, the part that really tickles me, is that you guys actually believed you had a genuine Ingres sitting in your living room. An authentic nineteenth-century masterpiece. And you'd still be thinking that if I'd kept my big mouth shut instead of letting my stupid pride get the better of me. I can see you don't get the humor in that."

"Hey." Jack raised his palms. "I wanted to let you in on our little, you know, joke as soon as we found out you painted that picture. G wouldn't let me."

"Of course he wouldn't," Britt said. "I tried to *cheat* him. I tried to make a *fool* out of him. His ego couldn't handle that. Right, G? You had to punish me, make me think I was headed for jail. What I didn't know at the time? While I was scamming you two, *you* were scamming *me*. I'm telling you, this thing just gets funnier and funnier." Britt wasn't laughing.

"Let me guess." Garrett set his beer bottle in the sand. "You Googled me. When you went home that first night."

"I Googled both of you. Wanted to know if I was about to spend the coming week fucking a couple of ax murderers."

"Why did you wait all this time to rub our noses in it?" Garrett lifted the end of the handcuffs dangling from her wrist and held on to it. "Tomorrow you're out of here."

Britt took a calming breath, willing her voice not to quaver. She looked him in the eye. "Maybe I was hoping you'd decide to come clean on your own."

Jack said, "Babe, I wanted to—"

"Yeah, you said that," Garrett growled. He turned back to Britt. "You think I owed you honesty after you tried to rip me off? You're kidding, right? You should be grateful I offered a way out of doing time."

"Your altruism leaves me speechless." Britt thought about all the tender moments she and Garrett had experienced during the past week. Their long conversations, talking about everything. Well, everything that didn't touch on who he really was and how he made a living. She and Garrett shared a connection that went deeper than the sex. It was so obvious to her—he had to sense it. She'd kept expecting him to open up, to let her in on the joke, as Jack had put it. But he never did.

"So I lied to you. So your little feelings got hurt." Garrett tugged on the handcuffs, pulling her hand up. "That didn't give you the right to search my room."

"What are you going to do about it? Turn me into your live-in sex slave?" She met his hard gaze without flinching. "Oh wait—been there, done that. You'll have to think of something else. Tell me, how does a bounty hunter normally handle this sort of situation?"

"Bail enforcement agent," Jack said. "That's, like, the correct term. BEA for short."

"Yeah, but 'bounty hunter' sounds so much hotter. The thing I couldn't figure out," she said, "is this vacation rental—how a couple of guys in your line of work were able to afford your basic Hamptons dream house. The rent must equal half a year's income."

"It belongs to my great-aunt Hildy," Jack said. "She's loaded."

Britt had thought it must be something like that. She jerked her handcuffed wrist, but Garrett wasn't letting go. "So you've got a real-deal pair of police handcuffs sitting in your dresser drawer and never once in the past week do you take them out to play. Maybe Jack's right. Maybe you did have your imagination surgically removed."

"If you believe I have a limited sexual imagination," Garrett said, "then you haven't been paying attention."

"We can play with mine." Jack raised his hand. "Want me to go get 'em?"

Garrett had been a bounty hunter for nine years, according to Britt's online research, chasing bail jumpers in Austin before moving to New York three years ago. He and Jack worked for the same bail bondsman in the Bronx and often partnered on jobs.

"I don't believe this is all you took from my room." Garrett's voice was low, almost menacing.

"Oh, will you give it a rest?" She rolled her eyes and tugged on the handcuffs. "And let me have my hand back?"

"I think you made off with something else of mine." His green-ice gaze traveled down her body, with glacial slowness, and up again. "And I intend to find it."

Was this guy serious?

Britt started to ask him just that, but something in his expression made her ponder the answer for real. She studied him carefully – the secret half smile, the impish light in his eyes – and bit back a surprised grin.

Hallelujah. Never again would she accuse Garrett of being sexually unimaginative.

"I told you, asshole," she said, getting into character, "I didn't take your stupid gun."

"Right. Guns scare you." With his free hand he gathered her hair in his fist and pulled, forcing her to look him in the eye. "What about me? I don't scare you?"

"You're nothing but hot air." She tried in vain to wrench free of him—or pretended to. The more he restrained her, the more turned on she got. "Go ahead. Search my tote bag. You won't find anything."

Garrett turned to his fellow bounty hunter. "Dump the bag."

Never slow on the uptake where sex games were concerned, Jack didn't miss a beat now. He upended the straw bag. They watched her towel, water bottle, sunscreen and paperback romance novel fall to the sand.

"There," she said. "Satisfied?"

Garrett's response was a smile so deliciously wicked she felt it in her core. "Not yet. Tell me, Britt—where's the key to the handcuffs?"

"The...?" *Oops.* He probably kept the key in the same drawer, but it hadn't occurred to her to look for it. "I don't have it."

"Bullshit. You're hiding it." He gave her the once-over again. "Somewhere on your person."

Britt glanced down at her clingy bikini. "You wouldn't dare."

Jack grabbed her arms from behind, handcuffs jangling, as Garrett released her. "This'll go easier for you if you cooperate."

"A simple pat-down," Garrett said, "then we'll let you go."

God, I hope not, she thought. He reached for her and she lashed out with her feet, forcing him to hop back or take one to the nuts.

"So that's the way it's going to be, huh?" He cocked his head toward the lifeguard stand, and Jack propelled her toward it.

"No!" she yelled, grateful for Jack's immense strength. She could fight him like a demon with no risk of actually breaking free. "You bastards! Let me go!"

The sides of the lifeguard stand were straight A-shapes, the back was a sloping X, and the front was open. Jack forced her against one of the A's, facing out. He pulled her arms up, drew the other end of the handcuffs behind the top of the A where the

wooden struts crossed just below the lifeguard's bench, and shackled her other wrist. Her arms were now immobilized over her head, rendering her spectacular cleavage even more spectacular.

Britt screamed and cursed. She kicked out at Garrett and Jack, who stripped off his T-shirt, grabbed her right leg, and used the shirt to tie her ankle to one leg of the A. Garrett whipped off her pareo and secured her other ankle. Then they stood back and admired the spectacle of Britt bound hand and foot to the old lifeguard stand, legs spread wide.

Her heart drummed as she fought her restraints. Her pussy throbbed with a pulsing heat. Being at the mercy of these two off-the-charts-sexy men excited her beyond measure. "You pricks—you can't do this to me."

Garrett approached her. "I figure that key must be on her somewhere, don't you, Jack?"

"Damn straight." Jack walked through the front of the lifeguard stand to take up position behind her. "Girl doesn't fight like that unless she's got something to hide."

"Don't worry." Garrett planted his palms on the stand. He leaned in close to her and murmured, "We'll find it."

Britt gave a surprised squeak as Jack's hands slid from the back of her halter top to the front. He took his time, patiently feeling her breasts through the stretchy fabric. His warm breath tickled her ear as he said, "She likes being frisked, G."

"No." She shook her head.

Jack chuckled. "You can lie to me, babe, but these can't." He plucked her stiff nipples. She gasped.

"Where's the key, Britt?" Garrett asked. "If you give it up now, we won't have to strip-search you."

"You don't want that, do you?" Jack purred near her ear. He rolled her aching nipples between his fingers, grinding his erection against her bottom. Her eyes drifted

shut as she savored the sensations. "Can you imagine how humiliating that would be—stripped naked and tied to this thing for as long as we decide to leave you here?"

Please do that. "Please don't do that." Her voice was a strained whisper. She could come just from Jack playing with her like this. "I don't have the key. I swear."

Garrett placed his big hands on her hips. That simple act sent a zing of sensual awareness arrowing straight to her pussy. Jack stepped out from under the lifeguard stand to get a better view of the action. "She's so stubborn." He shook his head.

"Isn't she?" Garrett held her gaze as he ran his hands around back and squeezed her bottom. He leaned in close again, his voice a velvety drawl. "You know we're going to find that key, one way or another."

Britt's breathing grew ragged as Garrett fondled her buttocks over her swimsuit, a leisurely, thorough "search". He slid one hand around front and, without warning, pressed it directly between her thighs. She jerked.

"Wherever it is, I'll find it. You must know that." He stroked her weeping pussy over the swimsuit, up, down, up again. His fingers molded themselves to her intimate contours. They traced the seam of her sex, his touch firm and bold. "You can hide nothing from me."

Britt moaned, squirming against her bonds, which magnified the eroticism tenfold. She reminded herself to stay in character. "Why won't you believe me?" she cried. "Why are you doing this?"

"You can stop it anytime by giving me what I want." Garrett gave her clitoris a little pinch over the stretchy fabric. She bit her lip, stifling a moan of pleasure. "I think she requires a little more incentive to cooperate," he told Jack, and nodded toward Britt's halter top. "Take it off."

"Gladly." Jack unfastened the garment and dropped it to his feet, leaving her in nothing but the low-slung boy shorts.

Garrett stared at her breasts. Gently he dragged his fingertips around the side of one and watched the nipple pucker even tighter. Then he stepped back and delivered a stinging slap to her breast with the flat of his hand.

Britt gasped. She stared wide-eyed at him and he returned her gaze, an unspoken question lurking behind the calm green eyes. He was leaving it up to her. If she objected, he'd drop his hand and take their play in a tamer direction—the control freak ceding a bit of control to her.

Her initial shock dissolved on a wave of desire and sensual curiosity. This was new to her—perhaps another first for Garrett as well. She swallowed hard and let him read the answer in her eyes.

His mouth quirked in a gratified little smile—he got the message. He started spanking her breasts in earnest, lightly at first, then harder as it became clear she was getting off on it.

“Dude.” Jack gave them his devilish grin as he took in the spectacle. “That is the rockiest titty action I have ever seen. Look how red they’re getting. Fuck!”

“I hate you!” Britt screamed as her pussy pumped with hunger. “You’re nothing but a big bully!”

Garrett responded, predictably, with a volley of solid smacks, concentrating on her burning nipples.

She shrieked each time his palm touched down. “You evil fucking monster!”

He rewarded that with a burst of spanks on her now-searing breasts. He was breathing hard, his color high. Britt knew it wasn’t from the physical exertion. The front of his shorts was stretched so tight, it looked like his cock was trying to hammer its way out.

He sounded breathless. “Where’s the key, Britt?”

“Fuck you!” she hollered. “If I knew where it was, I wouldn’t tell you.”

"Face it," Jack told Garrett. "This isn't working." He knelt by her left ankle and untied it.

"You're right." Garrett released her right ankle.

Wait a minute! she wanted to yell. *Don't stop now!* She'd never been this aroused, her entire being one giant, explosive orgasm waiting to happen.

Jack smiled at her panicked expression. He hooked his thumbs in her bikini bottoms and hauled them to the sand. Then he and Garrett spread her legs and retied her ankles.

She was now stark naked under the glaring sun, secured in a stunningly vulnerable position, while her two captors stood there, if not fully dressed, then at least decently covered despite the conspicuous bulges. Never had she felt this exposed.

"See?" Jack brushed his fingertips over her swollen sex. She sucked in a breath. "I told you she likes being searched, G. And punished. Look at this dripping pussy."

"She can't help herself," Garrett said, "can you, Britt? You're just about the horniest woman I've ever met. You know what I think we should do, Jack?"

"What's that, G?" Jack touched a finger to her famished opening, inflaming her.

"I think we should call Mike and Steve and a couple of our other bounty-hunter buddies—get them over here for a party." Garrett flicked one inflamed nipple and she yelped. "We could start right here with her handcuffed to this thing. She'll take one guy in her ass and one in that hot cunt of hers like when you and I sandwiched her."

"No, Garrett, don't call them," she pleaded, confident she could throw herself into the role without fear of being taken seriously. She knew if she really wanted to be released, they'd do it in a heartbeat. Just as she knew he had zero intention of inviting his friends over. "Please," she added. "I'm begging you."

"Steve should get her asshole," Jack suggested. "Guy's got a salami between his legs—according to his ex. That, I'd pay money to see."

Garrett said, "After that we'll get her down on all fours so she can suck each guy in turn while another one gives it to her doggie style. I know a couple of them are going to

want to fuck her tits, too, once they find out how much she likes it. Think they can satisfy that hungry little snatch of hers?"

"Let me go," she wailed. "You can see I don't have your goddamn key."

"Oh I don't know about that," Garrett said. "There's one place we haven't checked."

"Well, two places really." Jack pinched her slippery labia. "But we'll start here."

"No!" Britt fought against her bonds, her desire surging with every gyration of her body. "You're animals, both of you!"

This time it was Garrett's turn to step into the lifeguard stand. He clamped one sinewy arm around her from behind, pressing the small of her back to the crossbar of the A.

With her hips now immobilized, Jack was able to make this part of the search a leisurely affair. He spread her pussy lips, staring avidly. "I better keep clear of that sweet little button," he told Garrett. "Looks like she'll go off if a breeze hits it."

"Don't let her come," Garrett growled, his breath hot on her ear. "We're not doing this for her pleasure."

Like hell they weren't. Britt repressed a grin. Then Jack burrowed two fingers into her and her mind emptied of all thought. There was only pure animal sensation as she fought Garrett's restraining arm, instinctively straining for greater contact.

Jack's fingers twisted inside her and she groaned with agonized pleasure, maddened by how close she was to release. He was indeed careful to avoid contact with her clitoris. It was as if he and Garrett were determined to keep her on the teetering brink for as long as possible, knowing that when they finally let her come, it would be volcanic.

"Please..." she breathed, struggling against Garrett's steely hold. "I can't...I can't wait any longer."

"We have no intention of letting you get off," Garrett said, "and you'd better stop trying. 'Cause you don't even want to know what your punishment will be if you do manage to come."

Jack continued to fuck her with his fingers, slow and teasing.

"That's a pretty tight little pussy," Garrett told him. "If you haven't found the key yet, I'm thinking it's not in there."

"You can never be too careful." Jack pressed a third finger into her. "I'm a thorough kind of guy."

Thank God for that, Britt thought, squirming on his fingers. She only wished he weren't deliberately keeping his thumb tucked out of the way of her clitoris. Every time her climax got close, he sensed it and backed off a little.

"Well then, take your time," Garrett said. "We need to be absolutely sure." His other hand came up to fondle her breasts, which were exquisitely tender after their maiden spanking. He seemed to know just how hard to stroke and squeeze them, how firmly to pinch the reddened nipples—how to maximize the pleasure-pain experience.

"Her skin is so hot here," he told Jack, lifting one full breast in invitation. "Check it out."

Jack's fingers never slowed as he bent his head and closed his lips over her nipple. He sucked it deep into his mouth, caressing it with his lithe tongue, scraping it with his teeth.

She cried out at the glut of sensation. Her breasts had always been sensitive, but now, after the spanking she'd endured, they were almost unbearably so.

"Mmm...you're right, G." Jack finished with one long, lingering lick on the pinkened skin of her breast. "She's burning up."

He straightened and withdrew his hand, only to reposition it with two fingers in her pussy and one nudging her anus.

"Stop! Not that!" she yelled, trying to make it sound convincing. "Haven't you done enough to me, you bastards?"

"You have no choice," Garrett murmured into her ear, "so you may as well relax and take your medicine like a good girl."

"You selfish fucking pricks—let me go! *Oh!*" she gasped as Jack's slick finger breached the little opening and forced its way in. "I hate you," she said. "I hate what you're doing to me."

"Why do I find that hard to believe," Garrett said, "when your juices are running all over Jack's hand and you're about to come just from being searched?"

"She's lying," Jack said as his fingers thrust and retreated, skewering her front and back. "I'm thinking she needs to be punished again."

"No!" Britt begged. "I'll be good."

"After this you will be," Garrett said, and landed a hard spank on one round ass-cheek. She shrieked and cursed as he treated her to a string of sharp whacks, still holding her tight to the crossbar. With every blow, her internal muscles pumped Jack's fingers. With every blow, her elusive orgasm inched that much closer.

"Now your ass will match your tits," Garrett said, and finished up with a trio of fiery spanks. *Whack! Whack! Whack!*

"Dude. A fashion statement," Jack said, and dropped to his knees. "Sorry, G, but I have got to taste this yummy little clit."

"Oh God yes," Britt groaned, half out of her mind with unappeased lust. "Please yes God just do it." *Finally!*

Jack spread her open and leaned in close. His humid breath curled over her needy, slippery flesh. She braced herself for the initial contact—

Jack's cell phone rang, Abbot—or was it Costello?—demanding, "*Who's on first?*"

"Don't answer it!" she screamed as he dug it out of his pocket and checked the name of the caller. "Jack, I will kill you if you stop now!" But he was already stumbling to his feet, flipping open the phone and shushing her.

"Perfect," Garrett chuckled, watching his pal jog down the beach, the phone glued to his ear. "That is absolutely perfect."

"Tell her to call back, you're eating!" Britt called at the top of her lungs, but Jack was no longer within earshot.

"You!" she barked over her shoulder. "Get. Out. Here. And. Fuck. Me. *Now!*"

"Yes *ma'am.*" Garrett slathered on the Texas charm as he strolled around the lifeguard stand and dropped his trunks. The sight of his proud ramrod cock was almost painful, she needed him so badly. "I'd say you've suffered enough." He squandered precious seconds untying her ankles while she yelled at him to just do it, do it, do it, goddammit.

Finally—*finally!*—he grabbed a double handful of Britt's tender, punished bottom and drove into her in one long, mind-blowing stroke. They shouted in unison and she felt the thrilling pre-climax spike that told her she'd passed the point of no return. He retreated and pressed home and the spike went from glowing red to white-hot. One more full-bore thrust and she came with such ferocity she was afraid the creaky old lifeguard stand might collapse.

Britt had waited too damn long for this orgasm and had no intention of holding back. Her screams rang out over the ocean—they probably heard her back home in Brooklyn.

Without warning, a hand clamped over her mouth. "Quiet! Shh!" It was Jack, winded and wild-eyed. They'd been too preoccupied to notice him tearing back down the beach toward them. "She's here."

"The fuck are you doing?" Garrett said. "I'm warning you, friend—"

"Carolyn," Jack stage-whispered. "She's at the front door. Ringing the bell. She called me when no one answered. Ow!" He snatched back his hand, now sporting teeth marks.

So that was the mystery woman's name. Carolyn.

Garrett's eyes bulged. "Carolyn's *here*? Shit." He pulled out of Britt despite her protests and grabbed his shorts. "I thought she was in Italy with her folks."

"Came back early." Jack looked shell-shocked. "Wanted to surprise me."

"I think you might have her beat in that department," Britt said, standing naked with her wrists bound over her head.

"Hurry up," Jack said. "Pull yourselves together and get in there. We'll tell her...something." He ran to the house and let himself in the sliding-glass door.

Garrett hurriedly stuffed his drooping erection into his pants while staring fretfully at the house. "Come on, Britt, get dressed."

"Uh, G?"

"What?" he snapped.

She waited patiently for him to look at her, then cast her eyes upward to indicate the handcuffs.

"Fuck! The key." He dragged his fingers through his hair. "Fuck fuck *fuck*. Wait here." He sprinted toward the house.

"I hope that was a joke," she yelled after him, not caring who heard.

Chapter Five

"Well, I'm no match for a couple of cardsharps like you." Britt laid down her cards and pushed away from the table.

"Sharps are cheats." Garrett corralled the pile of clay chips in the center of the table and hauled them close.

"We're just *good*," Carolyn said with a grin, and fondly patted the tall stacks of chips in front of her. She was a pretty brunette with a quick wit and a ready smile. She was in her mid-twenties, a high-school chemistry teacher from Queens.

Jack had gone bust after trying to bluff with a pair of queens. Carolyn knew him too well to buy the lame act and got him to bet every last chip before trouncing him with a full house.

Garrett and Carolyn, the two poker fiends, would now go toe-to-toe for who knew how much longer. In truth, Britt could have stayed in the game. She deliberately threw her pot at a losing hand so she could be alone with Jack.

Earlier, Garrett had left her standing naked on the beach for what seemed like forever while he ran into the house, said a quick hello to their guest, and slipped upstairs to retrieve the key to the handcuffs. Meanwhile Britt had strained her eyes peering up and down the shoreline, praying no one would come ambling by. Yes, the beach was private, but once in a while someone did pass through.

With her swimsuit and wrinkled pareo back on, she entered the house with Garrett and introduced herself as his girlfriend. The only dicey moment came when Carolyn noticed patches of red skin showing around Britt's halter top. The men were struck mute, but Britt laughed it off.

"Isn't that always the way?" she said. "You try to get the sunscreen everywhere, but you always miss a spot."

"You should put something on that," Carolyn advised.

Britt was tempted to reply, *Besides your boyfriend's tongue?*

But that would have hurt Carolyn, and she wasn't the one who deserved to suffer.

After the obligatory tour of the house, the four of them had driven to Southampton's hottest new café for lunch, then returned home and lounged by the pool with pitchers of margaritas. The men had whipped up grilled tandoori chicken for dinner, and afterward Garrett produced a deck of cards and a rack of poker chips. All the while, Britt had observed Jack and Carolyn—the gooey looks they shared, the tender gestures, the mutual teasing that was just another excuse to touch each other before they could retreat later behind Jack's bedroom door.

It was now around ten p.m. Britt asked Jack, loud enough for the others to hear, "You have any more of those good cigars left? Let's go out for a smoke while these two duke it out."

On the deck, she kicked off her stiletto sandals, plucked the cigar from his mouth and told him they were going down to the beach—"for privacy". His smile was unadulterated devilment as he let her lead him by the hand across the beach grass to the moonlit sand.

"Clever Britt." Jack made a grab for her. She batted away his hand and gave him a battering-ram wallop to the chest, knocking his ass to the sand.

He stared up at her, dumbfounded. "What was that for?"

"Do not get up." She shoved him again as he tried to stand. "You stay down there like the dog you are."

His features melted into contrition. "Listen, I was going to lick your pussy, honest, but—"

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" she asked. When he only sat there, dumbstruck, she tossed her hand toward the house. "I'm talking about that woman in there, you idiot."

Jack offered a dopey smile. "Isn't Carolyn great? I think she's the one."

She let out a strangled scream. "Will you listen to yourself? Will you listen to what you're saying to the person you've been fucking up, down and sideways for the past week?"

He hesitated. "So you're, what, jealous?"

"I'm not jealous, you — you —" Britt cast about for an epithet evil enough to express her frustration and incredulity, and came up empty-handed. "You have a chance for something real and beautiful with a good woman who obviously adores you. And what do you do? Stick it in anything that'll hold still long enough."

"It's not, you know, it's not like that. Can I get up now?"

"No." Britt folded her arms. "Are you and Carolyn in a committed relationship?"

"In a...a..." He couldn't even utter the dreaded C word.

"She's 'the one', you said. Special, right?"

"Damn straight. We've been together for, like, a year." He grinned. "I'm thinking of asking her to marry me."

Britt opened her mouth, but no coherent words would emerge. She could only shake her head in awe. Finally she managed, "Then why are you fucking other women, Jack? And please don't insult my intelligence by claiming I'm the first one you've cheated on her with."

"She's been in Italy." He pulled a large clamshell from under his butt and flung it away. "For, like, two weeks."

"And you're such a sexed-up stud you couldn't possibly wait fourteen days for the woman you love."

"Ah, come on, Britt," he whined. "Haven't we had fun here? Why are you doing this?"

"Maybe you're right," she said, and watched him relax for a nanosecond before adding, "Carolyn shouldn't have to live like a nun for fourteen days just because the two of you are on different continents."

It took him a moment, then, "The fuck are you saying? Carolyn doesn't fuck around."

"I'm sure you're right. It's not like there are any sexy men in Italy."

"She's not like that!" He shot to his feet. "Where'd you get that shit?"

Britt huffed out an exasperated sigh. "Do you know what the term 'double standard' means?"

"Hey, you can't pin that one on me." Jack was the soul of sincerity as he added, "I firmly believe women like you should be able to fuck all the guys they want."

"Women like me." Why was she even trying? It was the "Bad Girls Versus Good Girls" phenomenon. Britt managed to keep a straight face as she said, "But not the other kind of woman. Carolyn's kind of woman."

He shrugged. "They don't even *want* to fuck other guys. It's, like, not in their nature."

"Uh-huh. You may find this hard to believe, Jack, but when I'm serious with a guy, I don't sleep with other guys." Yes, even a "bad girl" like her. She'd belt him in the kisser, try to knock some of the cluelessness out of him, but she'd actually grown kind of fond of the idiot over the past seven days.

"So Carolyn doesn't want to mess around with other men," Britt said, "but she's fine with you fucking other women." When Jack didn't respond, she added, "So if I tell her all about our fun and games the past few days—"

"What do you want, money?" he asked. "Is that what this is about?"

"Believe it or not, Jack, I'm trying to do you a favor. Carolyn's not dumb. Women know."

"What, that intuition thing?" He waved that off. "I'm careful."

"Trust me." Britt got in his face. "She suspects."

"Bullshit."

"Carolyn might not know about me, but she knows about you. She knows you're an alleycat."

He went still for a moment, studying her. "You really think so?"

"I've been where she is now," she said. "I know the signs. I can see it in her eyes."

He frowned toward the house.

"She's pretty young," Britt said. "Maybe she's never had to deal with a cheating prick before now and doesn't know how to nip it in the bud. Maybe she's never had her heart broken before."

"Babe." He looked at her. "That's cold."

"Bottom line—she deserves better. She'll figure that out eventually if she hasn't already." Britt left him standing there and strode back to the house.

* * * * *

It was the heat that woke her. Britt was immersed in a sound, dreamless sleep—delicious oblivion—when a live, warm something at her back nudged her to wakefulness.

She blinked at her moon-silvered surroundings, getting her mental bearings. She was lying on her side in bed, still in her elegantly appointed guest room in Southampton, the window open to the briny breeze. Her air-conditioned loft in Brooklyn always smelled faintly of oil paint, never like the ocean and—she took a deep breath—like Garrett.

His hand slid over her silk-clad waist from behind. Not once during the past six nights had he joined her in bed, but this was her last night here. Tomorrow she would return home and they'd never see each other again.

Britt placed her hand on his, felt him nuzzle strands of hair off her neck, felt him press a soft kiss there where her throat met her shoulder—felt the hot, naked length of him pressed against her back. She dragged in another deep breath and let it out slowly.

Don't think about it. She wasn't there as his girlfriend, despite their earlier playacting for Carolyn's benefit—well, for Jack's benefit really. She couldn't even be called a lover in the real sense. After all, it wasn't mutual attraction that had brought them together, not even good, clean lust. It was an act of retribution in response to an act of fraud. A power play.

They were covered by a sheet and a light cotton blanket. There was something unspeakably intimate about lying between the bedcovers with this man, even after everything the two of them had done during the past week, acts that many would consider deviant and worse.

Earlier that evening Britt had finally shared with Garrett her plans to go legit. No more forged paintings. No more dirty money. She couldn't live with it anymore. *Yeah, good luck with that*, he'd drawled, not even trying to sound sincere. Not for one moment did he believe she intended to go straight. His lack of faith shouldn't have stung, but it did.

Garrett smoothed his hand down her hip and thigh, then seized the hem of her nightgown and dragged it up and off her. She shifted onto her back, arching off the mattress to help him. He dropped the gown to the floor and settled on his side, their legs entangled.

"Does it still hurt?" he murmured, gently touching her breasts.

"A little."

He bent his head and soothed the tender skin with delicate strokes of his tongue. She pushed her fingers through his hair as he ministered to her abused flesh, a kind of atonement—though the twitching erection pressed to her thigh had nothing to do with regret. She reached down and closed her fingers around his rigid cock. Satin over steel.

The next swipe of his tongue found her nipple and she gasped softly. He didn't alter the pace or firmness of his licking but concentrated now on the sensitive tip, laving it like a cat—or like the lion she'd likened him to so often in her imagination. Britt's fingers tightened in his hair. Her mouth parted as her eyes drifted half-shut. Garrett switched to the other side, licking that breast and nipple with the same heady thoroughness.

She felt the lips of her sex swell and flower, felt moisture pooling there. She let out a shuddering breath when he drew her nipple into his mouth. Gently he sucked while his hand skated down her body, over her rib cage and abdomen. His fingertips brushed over her curls, parted them, stroked the slippery folds.

He touched her carefully, almost reverently, as if committing every inch of her to memory. Britt couldn't hold still as he probed her most intimate flesh. Her clitoris burned under his explorations. Her pussy grasped at his invading fingers. She whispered his name, over and over, clinging to him.

Garrett reared over her, the strong planes of his face just visible in the wash of moonlight from beyond the window. His gaze never left hers as he opened her, filled her, touched the deepest, neediest part of her. Britt half-sobbed her pleasure as she rose to meet him, grasping his hard buttocks.

They moved as one, a languid, measured dance. She didn't want it to end and she sensed he didn't either. He framed her face in his big hands, his eyes still burning into hers. She pushed her climax away from her, slowing, pausing, gripping his hips to keep him still while she bit her lip, nearly drawing blood.

It felt too pure, too right, to let it end. Garrett felt it too. She saw it in his moon-sparked eyes, felt it in the way he held her, in the ebb and flow of his body's movements.

Finally he whispered, "Let go, Britt."

"No." She shook her head, her throat clogged with tears she refused to shed. "Not yet."

He rocked against her, into her, taking the decision away from her. "It's time, darlin'. You know it is."

"Garrett..." His name rode a sob that felt torn from her chest. *Please don't let it end*, she wanted to beg him, even as he dragged her orgasm, screaming and kicking, out of her.

Garrett held her tight as the waves crashed over and through her body. He tucked her head into his neck and wrapped his arms around her as she rode it out. Only then did he give in, emptying himself into her, his teeth gritted as if in pain.

Chapter Six

Britt was on such a roll with her painting she didn't notice she was no longer alone in the barn. That was what she called the structure, though it hadn't served as a working barn for four decades or more. It had long ago been gutted and cleaned up, the walls whitewashed and the wide plank flooring sanded. The last owner had installed massive skylights, which was what sold Britt on the place. You couldn't ask for more in a painting studio.

The barn and a dilapidated one-bedroom ranch house occupied six acres about a hundred twenty miles north of New York City. She'd bought the property three months earlier after selling her expensive loft in Brooklyn to a hipster couple who raised hairless Sphynx cats.

The day Britt left Garrett's rented beach house, she began photographing her belongings and offering them for sale on eBay. All her furniture and rugs, jewelry and decorative items. Her designer dresses, luggage and purses. And shoes. Who knew there was a market for gently used Jimmy Choos and Ferragamos? She'd made nearly three grand on those alone.

She'd sold her Audi and bought a nine-year-old subcompact. Much harder, emotionally, was parting with her modest art collection. The only pieces she'd held on to were those she'd painted herself, most notably that of the naked odalisque trailing her fingers through the Turkish bath. Her last fake Ingres. Garrett had wrapped the painting in a quilt, carried it to her car and carefully positioned it for the ride back to Brooklyn. She'd wondered if he intended to keep it—something to hold over her head, a reminder that he still held the power to send her to prison. His only comment as he stepped back from the car was to caution her not to hit any bumps.

There'd been just enough cash to keep her in peanut butter and toilet paper for a few months while she built up an inventory of paintings – her own legitimate paintings, the impressionistic portraits and landscapes that reflected her personal style as an artist. A gallery in New York had expressed interest in her work and had actually sold two canvases. Not quite a one-woman show, but it was a start. Meanwhile winter was around the corner and she needed to buy heating oil and put new tires on the car. A sign in the window of the local diner advertised a waitress position. She'd apply tomorrow.

Her last fake Ingres hung in the barn where she could see it while she worked, a constant reminder of her folly, of how close she'd come to disaster. A reminder, too, of Garrett.

Not that she needed reminding. He was impossible to forget. She often wondered how their lives would have turned out if she hadn't gotten greedy, if instead of dangling the fake Ingres before him that night at Club Infinitee, she'd followed her instinct and seduced him – or let him seduce her, as had been his intention. Of course, he hadn't been up-front with her that night either – frozen-foods heir indeed – but at least he hadn't tried to rip her off.

And that, he could never forgive. Whatever else they shared or might have shared, she would always be the woman who tried to make a fool out of him.

It was an unseasonably balmy day in early November, and Britt had left the barn doors and the windows wide open. The huge space was awash in early afternoon light. It smelled pleasantly of autumn and linseed oil. She studied the unfinished canvas on her easel – a lightning-studded landscape based on a time-exposure photo she'd taken during the last bone-rattling thunderstorm. The large photographic print was taped to a second easel for reference. She squeezed dollops of oil paint onto her palette and began blending them.

"Did you really think you'd get away with it?"

Britt's startled gaze flew to the speaker, standing just inside the open barn doors.

Oliver Burke. The corrupt art dealer who sold her forged paintings. Her former partner in crime.

Oliver looked put-together as always, though this must have been his day off—he wore custom designer jeans and a cashmere sweater in place of his usual obscenely expensive suit and tie. He was pushing fifty but looked ten years younger, an attractive man who'd played college football and still spent most mornings at the gym.

"She's beautiful." Oliver approached the odalisque, serene and sensual as she dragged her fingertips through the pool. Britt's final fake Ingres, the one whose existence Oliver had been unaware of—until now.

Britt's fingers trembled as she set her palette and brush on the paint-spattered worktable behind her. She took an unsteady breath. "How did you find me?" Almost no one knew where she lived, and the few who did had been sworn to silence.

"Everyone knows everyone in this business, Britt. You know that." He tilted his head, studying the odalisque, then moved on to the completed canvases propped against the walls—what she thought of as her "real" paintings. "Someone owed me a favor."

He said this with a shrug and a little smile. His tone was conversational, even pleasant. Britt felt her armpits dampen. She knew this man, had seen his temper in action, though always directed at others. And then there were the stories of what he'd done to those who'd crossed him.

She started, "I—I told you—"

"Yes, yes." He gave a negligent toss of his hand, his attention on a painting of the local main street, including the diner she hoped would soon employ her. "You're out of the forgery business. You told me several times. I haven't forgotten."

Oliver had phoned her repeatedly in the days and weeks following her return from Southampton, while she was uprooting her life and starting over. He had a buyer in Dubai who was getting impatient. Britt had been working on something, Oliver knew, her latest faux Ingres. It should have been finished by now. Where was it?

There was no painting, she'd told him. She would produce no more forgeries. She was going legit. He'd have to find another partner – the city was full of starving artists. Finally, when he'd persisted, she'd gotten an unlisted phone number. She'd left no forwarding address. She thought she'd covered her tracks.

He turned to face her now. "But you weren't being quite honest with me, were you, Britt?"

Her mouth worked, but no words formed.

He sauntered toward her. "'Oliver,' you tell me, 'I'm finished with Ingres, you got my last one.'"

"That...that was true." Her voice was raspy, thin. She cast about in her mind, trying to recall if there was anything in the barn that could be used as a weapon. "This painting...I just wanted one to keep, one to—*Ah!*" she cried out as Oliver seized her arm in a punishing grip.

"Do not treat me like an idiot." He never raised his voice, his tone as calm as ever. "Have I ever given you reason to believe I'm a fool, Britt?" When she didn't immediately answer, he twisted her arm.

She let out a sharp scream, her arm on fire. "No," she managed. "No, I never thought—"

"You never thought," he agreed. "That's the first true thing you've said. You never thought I'd find you. You never thought I'd figure out what you've been up to."

"I'm not up to any —"

Oliver belted her across the face. If he hadn't been holding her arm, she would have sprawled onto the floor. Tears of pain stung her eyes. She tasted blood. He shoved her back against the worktable. She gripped it with both hands to keep from collapsing. To her shame, she failed to keep tears of pain and terror from streaking down her cheeks.

He brought his face close to hers. "Britt." Patiently he waited for her to raise her eyes to his. "Do you have a buyer for my painting? Or are you still looking?"

"I—I don't have a buyer."

"Good." He nodded. A reasonable answer to a reasonable question. He patted her cheek, triggering stabs of pain. "I'm not going to threaten you. I'm not going to tell you what will happen if you ever again try to cut me out of a deal."

Whispers had circulated in the New York art community last winter concerning an artist who'd gotten on Oliver's bad side. The man had suffered an "accident" that had crushed both his hands, breaking every bone in them. She'd refused to believe such tales—they were too outlandish. Now, however, as she stared into Oliver Burke's dead eyes, she no longer doubted.

Oliver patted her face again, harder, and she winced. He turned and strode to the canvas she was working on, the storm scene, nearly completed. "This is compelling—I mean that. You've grown as an artist, Britt." He produced a switchblade from his pocket, opened it and sliced the painting from corner to corner. Britt pressed a hand to her mouth to stifle a sob. Three more slices and the canvas was in tatters.

Calmly he wiped his knife on the rag hanging on the easel. He nodded toward the odalisque. "You've painted your last Ingres—the worldwide market can absorb only so many overlooked works by one master. You're going to start work on a Monet. You clearly have a gift for impressionism. I'll give you some time to perfect the style, but don't dawdle. I'll expect the new canvas by New Year's."

Oliver inspected the blade, appeared satisfied and replaced it in his pocket. He didn't look at her as he crossed to the faux Ingres and lifted it off the wall. He was halfway to the open doors, carrying the framed painting one-handed, when Britt heard herself say, "Don't take that."

He glanced her way at last. His chuckle told her she was a pitiful thing, a weak thing unworthy of notice. "By New Year's, Britt," he reminded her.

"You have no right." She stalked up to him. The instant she reached for the painting, Oliver's blade switched open less than an inch from her face. She stepped back.

His eyes looked deader than ever as he quietly said, "You try my patience."

"Move away from him, Britt."

The voice came from the open doors. Garrett! She could only stare in amazement. Where on earth had he come from?

"Come here." Garrett gestured to Britt, never taking his eyes from Oliver.

She forced her legs to move. Garrett met her halfway. He wore a long black leather jacket unbuttoned over a gray T-shirt and jeans. She wanted to throw herself into his arms, but he stopped her with a hand to her shoulder. Never had she imagined he could look this hard and implacable. His gaze traveled over her face, and she knew what he saw—the swollen lip, the bruise just forming. His hawk's gaze scanned the barn, lingering for a second on her easel and the shredded canvas there.

"What do we have here?" Oliver sounded bored. "The local-yokel boyfriend riding to the rescue?"

Garrett pushed Britt behind him. "Go to the house," he told her.

"Garrett—"

"I said go!"

"Listen, pal, this is none of your business." Oliver still held the painting. The blade glinted in his other hand. "You don't even know what's going on here, so back off."

Garrett walked toward him. "Put down the painting, Burke. You and I are going to have a talk."

Oliver's eyes narrowed at the use of his name. "I see my fame precedes me." He turned his glacial smile on Britt. "Who else have you told about our partnership?"

"You talk to me, not her," Garrett said. "You will never speak to Britt again." He stopped directly in front of Oliver, within range of his switchblade. Britt's heart stuttered.

"Do they grow them stupid up here," Oliver asked Britt, "or do you just prefer them that way?"

Garrett struck with the speed of a cobra. He seized Oliver's wrist, wrenching his knife hand behind his back while the man shrieked like a teakettle. The blade clattered to the floor and skidded halfway across the barn as Garrett kicked it. He took the framed painting from Oliver's limp fingers and lowered it to the floor, then quick-marched him in a hammerlock to the nearest wall.

"You must not have been listening." Garrett slammed Oliver's face into the rough wall. "You are not to speak to Britt. Not now." *Slam.* "Not ever." *Slam.*

"Britt!" Oliver screamed. "Get your goon off me!"

"Now, see, that's precisely what I instructed you not to do," Garrett said. "You seem to be having a hard time grasping the concept."

"*Britt!*" Oliver howled.

Garrett addressed her over his shoulder. "Your presence seems to be a distraction to the man, darlin'." *Slam.* "Do us a favor and wait for me in the house like I asked, okay?" When she hesitated he said, "Go on now. I'll join you there presently."

Britt stumbled out of the building. She made her way across the field and let herself in to her little house, where she planted herself at the window overlooking the barn and the woods beyond. Any other time she'd have been indignant at Garrett's highhandedness. Now, however, she felt only relief at how efficiently he'd subdued Oliver, mingled with fear of retribution from her former partner in crime. Garrett didn't know the son of a bitch like she did.

After what seemed like an hour but was closer to ten minutes according to her stove clock, the two men emerged from the barn. Garrett escorted Oliver to his black Mercedes parked near the house next to Garrett's plain dark sedan and Britt's patchy rattletrap. Oliver's eyes and lip were swollen and discolored. He looked a little unsteady on his feet.

Garrett closed Oliver's car door. He stood there watching the Mercedes as it made a wide turn and headed back down the long dirt drive to the main road. Britt entered the mudroom and opened the door as Garrett stepped onto her little porch.

He wiped his boots on the doormat and gave her his killer smile. "Hey, darlin'."

A million and one questions tumbled around Britt's brain, but nothing coherent made it past her lips. She spread her hands in utter bafflement and let them fall.

"Thanks, don't mind if I do." Garrett stepped through the doorway, forcing her to back up.

"Wh—okay, first things first." She held the sides of her head, struggling to prioritize her thoughts as she followed him into her tiny kitchen. "How did you find me?"

"Followed Burke from the city." Garrett looked around, getting the whole tour in one quick scan—the combination kitchen-dining-living area and the open doors leading to the bathroom and one small bedroom.

"For a hundred twenty miles?" she said. "Why?"

"I stayed right on his tail the whole time." Garrett shook his head. "Guy never noticed me—never even glanced in his rearview. He made one pit stop to pee and buy a latte. It was smooth sailing 'til a cop pulled me over for blowing that stop sign at the bottom of your drive. That's the only reason Burke got to you first." He cupped her face, brushed his thumb over her split lip. "We should put some ice on that."

"I'm fine. Answer me, G. Why did you follow him here?"

"I tried to find you, but you'd already gone to ground—no one knew where you were. Decided to look into your former business partner and didn't like what I learned." He shrugged. "So I kept an eye on him."

"You spied on Oliver?"

"With Jack's help. Hey, that reminds me." Garrett grinned. "Jack's getting married. Popped the question last month and Carolyn said yes. June wedding. Isn't that great?"

Britt struggled to mentally shift gears. "Only if he can learn to keep it in his pants."

"Well, I don't know what you said to him, but it did the trick. He stopped chasing tail—cold turkey. Won't even look at another woman. Well, he *looks*."

"I'm happy for them, but listen to me, G. Oliver Burke is not going to go away. He's greedy and he's dangerous. And now he'll be even more —"

Garrett interrupted her with a raised palm. "He won't bother you again. No financial incentive, for one thing — his days as an art dealer are over."

"What?" She gaped at him.

"He decided to sell his dealership and find a new vocation. Who knows? Maybe even a legitimate one."

"He decided, did he?"

"He will never contact you again. And if the law eventually catches up to his sorry ass, he will never implicate you in the forgeries."

"I...I don't believe it."

"He knows I can get to him no matter where he is, in or out of prison. Seems, uh..." Garrett scratched the back of his head. "Seems he got this crazy idea I hold a responsible position in law enforcement. Maybe even with one of those shadowy agencies that know how to make people disappear without a trace."

"Oh my God, you convinced him you're a spook."

"Head spook, if you please."

Did Garrett show him fake credentials? Britt decided she didn't want to know. She did, however, want — no, need — to know one thing.

"Why, G?" she asked. "Why did you look for me?"

His eyes searched hers. "Does it sound too corny to say I can't live without you?"

A warmth ballooned in Britt's chest, stealing her breath. She managed to whisper, "I...I thought you didn't want me." At his perplexed frown she added, "Because of, well, my criminal activities. And because I tried to rip you off."

A self-deprecating smile tugged one corner of his mouth. "The more I missed you, the more I forgot about my precious wounded pride. And as for your life of crime, I seem to recall you saying something about going straight."

"Yes." She raised one eyebrow. "And I seem to recall you not believing me."

"Can you blame me? It's no secret you have expensive tastes."

Now both eyebrows rose. Britt glanced around, pointedly taking in their shabby surroundings. She looked down at her painting outfit, an ancient, spattered sweatshirt and plaid dorm pants. And fuzzy slippers.

"Be fair." Garrett slid his arms around her waist. "This isn't the Britt I saw in the Hamptons. How could I have known...?" He shrugged.

"That I'm not a shallow, money-grubbing bimbo?"

"Seriously. The lifestyle you led, the car, the Jimmy Chungs..."

"Jimmy Choos. You thought I'd keep breaking the law for sexy-ass shoes."

"It wasn't that. It was just...I knew I couldn't give you what you needed." He pulled a speck of paint from her hair. "Not on a bounty hunter's take-home."

They stared at each other. An irrepressible smile spread across her face—across his too. "Looks like we have a lot to learn about each other," she said.

"I know some things about you." Garrett slipped his hand in the back of her dorm pants and caressed her bottom, conveniently exposed by a skinny thong.

Britt purred in contentment as his fingers teased the sensitive skin between her ass cheeks. She slid her hands inside his leather jacket. "I guess we got a head start in that department. Oh my God, is this a...?" She opened the left side of his jacket to reveal a leather shoulder holster and the scary-looking pistol she'd seen in his dresser drawer at the beach house.

"Excuse me, darlin'." He shrugged out of the jacket and unlatched the holster, draping both over a dining chair.

"I don't like guns," she said.

"I know. Guns scare you."

"Did you...well, in the barn with Oliver..."

"I didn't even show it," Garrett said. "Didn't have to as it turned out. Britt, I did my homework on the guy—I knew what he was capable of. Do you think there's anything I wouldn't do to protect you?"

Britt recalled how terrified she'd been before Garrett had arrived. "Thank you." She kissed him, a tender, lingering kiss.

His eyes crinkled. He slathered on the southern charm. "My pleasure, ma'am. Now, if there's any other way I can be of service," he ground his hips against hers, backing her against the dining table, "you be sure to let me know, y'hear?"

"Hmm..." She busied her hands with his belt buckle. "How are you with a hammer and nails?"

He gave her a dubious look as he yanked on the waist tie of her pants. "I, uh, I've been known to sport some serious wood from time to time."

"No, I mean really." Britt unzipped his fly and pushed his jeans and briefs down his thighs. She closed her fingers around his hot, thumping cock, delighting in the deep groan that rose up his chest. "I'm talking about you building something for me. When you come up here on the weekends." She kicked off her slippers.

"I'm coming up here on the weekends?" He stripped her pants and thong off her, swept a pile of newspapers and magazines off the dining table, and lifted her bottom onto it.

"Bet on it. Maybe you should dig the pond first. Ohhh...yes," she moaned as Garrett rammed into her to the hilt. She dug her fingers into his firm butt, holding him to her, in her, feeling her internal muscles welcome him home. "God, I've waited so long for this."

"Me too, darlin', me too. There's been no one else since you." His kiss was hard, almost savage, as he found his cadence. He frowned in confusion but never slowed his pistoning thrusts. "Pond?"

"Garrett, ohhh, it's too good," she panted, matching his rhythm. "I forgot how goddamn amazing you are."

He concentrated on fucking her silly but after a few moments had to ask, "You want me to dig you a *pond*?"

"Before you build the other thing, yeah." Britt let out a string of delighted cries, feeling the cyclone of her orgasm gain force, ready to touch down. She barely managed to speak. "'Cause if you build it before the pond goes in, it'll just look stupid." She screamed as she came, clutching him.

Garrett tumbled into his own climax then, his hoarse shouts ringing off the walls. He held her tight. "Damn, I needed you, Britt." He kissed her hair. "I need you now, I need you forever. Only you."

He withdrew from her with obvious reluctance, straightened his clothes and helped her back into her pants. They curled up together on the sofa, a rump-sprung thing the previous owner had left in the house. It felt so natural, so right, to have this man there, in her new home. In her new life. Britt felt content, complete, in a way she never had before.

"I know I'm going to regret asking." Garrett tipped her face to his. "What's this building project I got myself roped into?"

"What else?" She kissed him. "A lifeguard stand."

About the Author

Pam McKenna has been an avid storyteller since she was old enough to put pencil to paper. Her number-one passion is the written word, though if you read her stories, you might conclude that her true passions lie elsewhere. And you'd be right. Pam loves erotic fiction and has never been shy about pulling out the stops and treating her readers to five-alarm fantasies. Pam McKenna is the pen name of an award-winning, multi-published romance author.

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