



**The Extremist**

Juniper Bell

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## Blurb

*For Annie Swenson, only one cure works better than psychotherapy... Annie's afraid of heights, she's afraid of crowds, and she's not too crazy about flying. When her therapist orders her to take a vacation, she picks remote Cat Island in the Bahamas, hoping to hide away. Mortified to find she's the only single woman at the resort, she pretends the handsome, mysterious stranger behind her in the buffet line is her boyfriend. He goes along with the charade ... for a price! The choice is simple: reveal her sham or go along with his erotic, boundary-pushing games. Annie's life will never be the same after her sensual encounters with *The Extremist*. Contains male domination, sexual exploration, light bondage, exhibitionism.*

## Chapter One

“What is this, an ultimatum?” Annie Swenson felt the familiar giant’s fist of panic close around her throat. Her therapist, her rock, her savior for the past ten years was, more or less, threatening her.

“I suppose you could think of it that way. Or you could see it as doctor’s orders. It won’t kill you, trust me.” Dr. Stein rubbed his forehead wearily. Annie guessed she wasn’t his easiest patient. Still ... a vacation? Didn’t he understand the stress involved in a vacation?

“I’m afraid of crowds, I’m afraid of heights, I’m afraid of snow, and I’m not too crazy about flying. Where am I supposed to go?” She clutched the seat of her chair.

“You’ve been making progress with your fear of water. You went swimming the other day. I suggest the beach.”

“The beach?” She squawked. “Where other people might see me?”

“A secluded beach.”

“Where am I going to find a secluded beach in the greater New York metropolitan area?” Annie pulled at one of her thick, dark curls, one of her many nervous gestures. Left alone, it would fly in a million crazy directions, much like her thoughts. De-frizzing products worked on her hair, and therapy was supposed to work on her nutty brain. Right now, she was experiencing a few doubts.

“I suggest you look farther afield. I’ve heard nice things about the Bahamas. Now Annie, our time is almost up. I’ll see you again in a month, and I sincerely hope to hear a good report from you about your relaxing, rejuvenating vacation. Don’t forget: no cell phone, no computer. No work.”

*Was it okay to hate her therapist?* Annie brooded as she hailed a cab on 57th Street. A vacation—easy for him to say with his devoted, sweater-knitting, jam-making wife. He didn’t know how hard it was for a bundle of neuroses like her just to get through an ordinary day. She’d made progress with her various phobias, although subways, malls and mountains were still out of the question. Nevertheless, she still hadn’t made a dent in the worst problem of all: her crippling self-consciousness. When anyone looked at her, it felt like spiders on her skin. Even when no one was looking at her, she secretly believed someone was. She lived in New York and wore black so no one would look at her twice.

So why, she wondered, did she keep having those dreams? She wanted to talk to Dr. Stein about them, but they were too ... embarrassing. How could you tell your gray-haired, professor-like therapist that your recurring dreams involved standing naked in a golden basin while turban-wearing slaves rubbed your body with fragrant oil?

The dreams took place in some kind of Arabian harem: intricately tiled walls, orange trees in pots, and the tinkling sound of a fountain. A tray with several crystal finger bowls filled with oil rested on a nearby bench. The two slaves, bronze-skinned and muscular, mute and expressionless, smoothed oil onto every inch of her nude body. They worked in tandem, one on her right, the other on her left. Kneading and smoothing, they worked their way down her thighs, front and back. In a rough, businesslike manner, they caressed her knees and traveled down her calves until they reached her feet.

They rubbed oil into her toes and the soles of her feet, making her shiver. Her

reaction made them stop and give her displeased looks. She stilled herself, and they moved to her hips. With deep, probing strokes, they massaged the oil into her lower belly, the curve of her hips, and her navel. When she couldn't suppress another shiver, one of the slaves gave a guttural growl and moved behind her. He took both her arms and held them tightly behind her back so her spine arched. This made her breasts stand out against her lithe torso. Looking down, she saw her nipples already erect from excitement.

The second slave dipped his hands into a different finger bowl, came to her front and took her nipples into his hands. Surrounding them with his fingers, he rubbed thick liquid deep into the sensitive skin, pulling and squeezing, twisting and pressing with his thumbs. Her nipples responded immediately and grew ripe and thick. She could feel a thrilling tug deep within her body, and her hips moved against empty air. The man behind her tightened his grip, which made her breasts protrude even further.

As the oil soaked in, the most extraordinary tingling began. Her poor, aroused nipples were burning; they were bursting out of her skin. Something was in that oil, something she'd never felt before, something that was taking her into a feverish state of excitement. Despite the man's almost painful grip on her arms, she couldn't stop her body from writhing in need. *Please*, she tried to say, but realized her mouth was covered with a silky cloth, and no one could hear her. *Please*, she begged anyway, the words coming as frantic moans. *Please touch me! Anyone, everyone, touch me, touch my nipples, suck them until they burst with pleasure. Touch me down there, where I'm spreading my legs for anyone who cares. Please...*

Then the man working in front left her nipples, which were throbbing and swollen to twice the size of black cherries. *Thank you*, she nearly wept, *thank you*, as he spread her legs open with one massive hand, and dipped his other hand into the bowl. He carefully anointed her swollen, begging clitoris with the oil, and she threw her head back against the man behind her, waiting for the rocket of release. The burning began, and her hips bucked against the man's hand, she could feel the sweet joy just beyond, and then...

The rough hand was gone. There was nothing for her aching clitoris to rub against, and when she tried to bring her thighs together, strong hands held them apart.

*No*, she cried silently, *no!* She bucked and twisted in the men's arms, shamelessly craving a hand, a thigh, a hard cock, anything. The shocking sound of applause made her eyes fly open. The Sultan and his court were watching her avidly. Mindless with excitement, she didn't care who saw her. She just wanted release from the delicious agony. With the slow, masterful grace of a dancer, she undulated her body, offering herself, her swollen breasts and her dripping sex, to the Sultan. Eyes burning, he got to his feet and strode toward her.

At that point, she would wake up, hot and unsatisfied, red-faced with shame. In real life, such a scenario would be her worst nightmare. So why were the dreams so arousing? And, how could she tell Dr Stein about them? Impossible. Even going on a vacation would be easier than revealing that particular secret.

\* \* \* \*

Luck was with her. The taxicab was relatively clean, the lobby of her building was empty, and she was the only person in the elevator. Safely inside her orderly studio apartment, she breathed a deep sigh of relief, hung her coat on its padded hanger, and placed her shoes back in their shoebox. All her shoes were black, like her clothes. Maybe

she could find a secluded beach where everyone wore black. She'd have to buy a swimming suit, and a hat for the sun, and... She shuddered as the demands of a potential vacation piled up.

Why couldn't she just vacation in the seclusion of her own home? Her apartment was decorated more or less like a spa, in soothing shades of green. Green was her favorite color, the only color that made her relax. She had a jade green couch, and a heather green armchair, and most importantly, dull green window shades that blocked out any prying eyes. Green was the color of her own eyes, if silvery gray with little chips like spring grass could be considered green. Annie approved of her eyes, even though black didn't exactly flatter them. In another life, she would wear makeup that brought out her eyes, and maybe the men would notice. In this life, she preferred that men keep a safe distance.

She adjusted the throw over the back of her couch, and double-checked her TiVo settings. Would Dr. Stein consider a week off to catch up on Grey's Anatomy a vacation? Of course he wouldn't. He'd made himself perfectly clear: vacation, or else. She would have to come up with something.

In her kitchen, with its sage green walls and stark white appliances, she made herself a salad. She remembered she'd turned her cell phone off during her session. Her boss hated not being able to reach her, and she wasn't surprised to find an angry message. "Annie, did you sample this case of mineral water for the green room? It has a metallic taste, and Miss Prima Donna's gonna freak when she tastes it. Fix, please!" Annie worked for an event planner. Their current project was a premiere party for the newest action blockbuster, starring 'Miss Prima Donna,' who had a million ridiculous demands. The job required her to be obsessively detail-oriented, freakishly responsible, and willing to let other people's egos trample all over her. No wonder she was so good at it, thought Annie. *Fix, please!* The familiar phrase made her shudder.

Right after the premiere, Annie had a lull in her schedule. It could be a good time for a vacation. God, was she really considering this? She carefully set her salad down on the coffee table and pulled her laptop from her briefcase. When she Googled "beaches Bahamas," so many choices popped up that she slammed the laptop shut again. *Silly*, she lectured herself, *people go to the Bahamas every day*. So many people. Hordes of people. People in bikinis, in sarongs, in couples, in groups, with their families... She felt like she was choking.

*Breathe in, breathe out, in, out*, the way Dr. Stein taught her. When the panic subsided, Annie opened the laptop again. This time she typed "secluded beaches Bahamas." For good luck, she added the word "green."

\* \* \* \*

Two weeks later, stuffed with Xanax, Annie stepped off a tiny plane onto the tarmac on Cat Island, home of the Greentree Resort. Cat Island, she'd learned, was one of the "out" islands, remote and barely developed. The airport was little more than a shack with a tin roof and a broken ceiling fan.

"First time in de Bahamas?" asked the customs lady with a lilting accent.

"First time anywhere. Can you direct me to the rental car agency?"

The woman stamped her virgin passport. "Dey wait outside."

Annie found her bag and wheeled it outside to what was apparently the parking lot, a gravel expanse with no pavement or white lines. The bright sunshine made her wince.

She felt so exposed, with no tall buildings to filter the sun. Very few buildings of any kind were in sight, and half of those seemed to be in shambles or abandoned in mid-construction. She fumbled for her big black sunglasses. Where was her sun block? She'd need SPF 100 to protect her from that vicious sun. What kind of place was this, with the dusty roads and fallen-down buildings?

She didn't see anything that looked like a car rental agency. Under the shade of some coconut palms, a hefty woman in a purple shirt stood guard over an ancient Toyota. Clearly, the woman was unaware that falling coconuts killed more people every year than sharks did. Annie wheeled her suitcase across the dusty gravel. She stopped a good distance away.

"I'm looking for the car rental agency," she called.

"Okay." The purple-shirted woman opened the back door of the Toyota.

"Okay what?"

"I rent dis car to you. We drive to my brother's, you drop me off. My name is Sheila. You take de car, how long?"

"But, but..." That was it? What about the insurance? What about the inspection to make sure she didn't get blamed for old scratches and dents? Sheila folded her arms.

"Okay," said Annie weakly. At least she'd have a car.

Sheila got behind the wheel, and Annie sat in the back, her bag at her feet. They left the parking lot just as a pickup truck drove in. As the two vehicles closed in on each other, Annie screeched and dove for the door handle. She flung herself out of the Toyota, which stopped abruptly.

"You crazy, lady?" yelled Sheila.

"You nearly got us killed! You were driving on the wrong side!" Annie sat up and brushed dirt off her black Capri pants.

"Here, is right side. Get in, lady. I got to get to my brother's. This time you drive. You got to learn."

The pickup had also stopped, and a man leaned out the window. Annie couldn't see his face, just his arm resting on the door. It was strong and tan, with little blond hairs glinting in the sun, "Sheila girl, you all right?" He spoke with a slight accent, Australian or something.

"I'm all right. The lady, she crazy."

"I'm not crazy," protested Annie, getting to her feet. Now she saw the man's head: thick blond hair, an easy smile, sunglasses tilted up, amusement in his deep gray eyes. He gave her a slow, thorough, up-and-down scan, and his smile broadened.

"That's okay. Crazy suits you."

He dropped the sunglasses back onto his nose. Mouth agape, she stared after the truck. He'd checked her out. Blatantly, obviously. And, it hadn't bothered her at all. No spiders had crawled on her skin. Meekly, she got back into the Toyota.

\* \* \* \*

After five minutes and two near-death experiences—one involving a panicked chicken and the other, some kids playing basketball in the road—Annie and Sheila agreed that renting the car was not the way to go. Who knew it would be so hard to drive on the other side of the street? Sheila drove her to the Greentree Resort, which was at the end of a long, unpaved road lined with scrubby cedar trees and coconut palms. "You call if you

need a taxi, okay? Greta, she know de number.”

“Okay,” said Annie humbly. *Dr. Stein*, she said silently, *if I survive this trip, I’m going to kill you*. No bellhop waited to unload her bags, so she trundled them into the lobby herself. A stick-thin, leathery-tan woman with bleached hair and electric blue eyes greeted her at the desk.

“Annie Swenson? You haf a gut flight? I am Greta. Velcome to Greentree,” she chirped with a strong German accent.

“Thanks,” said Annie, dazedly. Greta must be about seventy, but she was wearing a skimpy tank top and no bra. Wasn’t the woman embarrassed? She averted her eyes.

Greta beamed at her. “You haf vonderful time, I guarantee. Ve eat dinner at seven. You rest until then.”

“I think I vill ... I mean, will,” said Annie.

Greta took her by the hand. “I show you now your home in paradise!” Annie felt like a child being led around by her grandmother, who just happened to be half-naked. She followed Greta through the pretty courtyard, which was filled with red hibiscus shrubs. Giant conch shells lined the gravel paths. Side-by-side bungalows surrounded the courtyard.

“Ist beautiful, no?” murmured Greta, as she flung open the door to one of the bungalows.

Beyond the rickety, bamboo bed, out the smudged back door, was a shimmering blue mirage. Annie blinked, expecting it to disappear. When she opened her eyes again, it was still there. No more than fifty yards away, the Caribbean glimmered and danced behind the coconut palms. Panic flooded her.

“The ocean is right outside! Is that safe? What about floods?”

“Hurricane season ist later.” Greta strode through the tiny bungalow and opened the door, which led onto a small concrete patio. “I leaf open for now, so you enjoy fresh air. At dark, you close, keep out mosquitoes.”

Mesmerized by the view of the ocean, Annie barely heard. Those sparkling blue waves seemed to call to her. *Annie, Annie, come out and play...* Annie shook off the absurd fantasy. She pulled out her cell phone. No matter what Dr. Stein said, she needed to check her messages.

Greta gave a chirping laugh. “No cell phone towers on Cat Island.”

“What?”

“We haf satellite phone, sometimes ist gut, depending on weather.”

She’d just have to check her email then. “What about wi-fi?”

“We haf internet, also from satellite. Depends on weather. See you at seven! Tonight, we serve bratwurst!”

“But I don’t eat...” Greta’s tan legs disappeared out the door. “Processed meat products...” Annie finished lamely. It didn’t matter. She’d brought a supply of Power Bars for just such a crisis.

She eyed the bed, with its worn bedspread. Luckily, she’d brought her own sheets and pillowcases with her. She unpacked them and made up the bed. When she got in, the familiar smell of her own cotton sheets nearly made her cry. She was at the end of the world, in a strange land where everything looked and sounded completely different. With no sirens and no loud voices in the streets, how was she supposed to sleep?

Outside, a gust of wind made the palm fronds clatter. The sound was like crabs



skittering across a tile floor. *Earplugs*, she remembered and dug them out of her bag. No way was she going out there. No way was she eating bratwurst. She'd stay right here in her room, wrapped in her own sheets, ears plugged, nibbling a Power Bar and Dr. Stein couldn't do anything about it.

## Chapter Two

For a long while, Annie didn't leave her bungalow. During the night, she woke up and ventured out onto the patio. The wind had picked up, and the palm fronds clicked against each other in a frantic tap dance. She shuddered and fled back inside. Unfortunately, some invisible bugs followed her in, and she spent the rest of the night tossing and scratching.

The next day, the sun was so bright, and the wind was still so high that she could barely manage to look out at the ocean. When she did, she saw deep blue water scattered with whitecaps. It seemed to call to her, and this time it sounded almost angry. *Come out and play or I'll come in and get you!* She locked the door and huddled in her bed.

By the second evening, she'd finished an entire paperback and six Power Bars. The wind had calmed to a whisper. She had memorized every inch of the tiny bungalow. Annie finally felt ready to leave her nest.

She dressed in one of the outfits she'd bought for her vacation, a dark denim skirt and a short-sleeved green-flowered top. Her clothes might be conservative by Greta's standards, but quite bold for Annie, maybe too bold. She added a cotton sweater and coated every inch of exposed skin with insect repellant, until she finally felt ready to brave the outside.

Red bulbs cleverly hidden inside conch shells lit the paths through the courtyard. They gave a warm glow to the place. She passed a swimming pool, laundry lines, the lobby where she'd come in, then headed for the ramshackle building adorned with a driftwood sign that read, "Eat and Be Merry." Certainly, someone was being merry. Even before she opened the screen door, she could hear booming laughter. A jolly group of blond, middle-aged Germans were gathered around the central bar, clinking beer mugs and slapping each other on the back.

Annie took in the scene. To the left of the bar was a lounge area, filled with bookshelves and stacks of board games. To the right stretched a long buffet table. Several people were already eating at the small tables dotting the room.

She looked around the dining room in dawning horror. Each table held a couple. Each couple was whispering intimately, holding hands, or laughing quietly at each other's jokes. Every person in this place was part of a couple—except her. Where was she supposed to sit? To whom was she supposed to talk? The other guests would all laugh at her. They'd mock her. What kind of loser came to the Bahamas alone? *I hate you, Dr. Stein, I will hate you forever! How could you do this to me? Could this be any worse?*

In the next instant, she found out just how much worse it could get.

"Annie Swenson? Is that you?" A woman rose from one of the cozy tables for two and came toward her.

"Missy," said Annie faintly. It was Missy Hertzberger, gorgeous socialite, high-society hostess, and Annie's college nemesis. Annie had never understood why Missy had bothered to notice her to the extent of making fun of her. Yet she had, and she'd continued to torment Annie until they graduated. After college, Missy had married a spectacularly successful stockbroker and taken her rightful place in New York's A-list social scene. Annie's company had helped with several of her parties, and Missy had

welcomed the opportunity to resume her teasing.

Annie felt her heart quail as Missy shook back her honey-blond hair and widened her sea-blue eyes. She wore a sleek cream-colored sundress that showed off her golden skin. Her husband, Daryl, was equally handsome, with his artfully mussed hair and gym-crafted physique. Had they brought their stylist with them? What on earth were they doing here, at this most unfashionable hotel? If she ran straight for the ocean, could she drown herself before Missy got to her?

“Darling!” cooed Missy, “What a lovely surprise to see you. Are you here ... alone?” She seemed to draw the word out, giving it far more syllables than it was meant to have. Her eyes glinted avidly.

Annie opened her mouth, ready to confess the mortifying truth, but before she could answer, she felt a firm hand on her shoulder. “I’ve been looking for you,” came a rumbling, masculine voice in her ear. She spun around.

The man from the truck at the airport stood behind her, right behind her. He was so close she could smell his scent, salty and a little pungent, with a hint of turpentine. So close, she could feel the warmth from his skin. This close, he was even more devastating. His thick blond hair looked like he’d actually been outdoors, not in a salon getting it styled. His gray eyes smiled into hers, and one of them dipped in a slight wink.

Annie tore her eyes away from the man to look at Missy, who was eyeing the stranger with a look of incredulity mixed with greedy lust. Behind Missy, through the big doors that opened onto the beach, Annie saw white foaming waves curl onto the sand. She heard the hypnotic, inviting whisper of the ocean: *Come out and play, come out and play...*

Abruptly she turned to the stranger. “Sorry, honey. I was hungry, so I came ahead.” Hardly able to believe what she was doing, she rose on tiptoe to kiss him on the cheek. Her lips tingled at the feel of his warm, rough cheek.

“No worries, sweetheart.” A firm mouth claimed Annie’s, and she could do no more than gasp as a strong arm went around her. Her head spun; her body went limp. “Hi, my name’s Martin,” he said to Missy, when he finally ended the kiss.

Martin. The name echoed through Annie’s dazed brain.

“Missy Hertzberger. Annie, I had no idea you were with someone.”

Since Annie had lost the power of speech, she simply shrugged.

“Please join us, Martin. And Annie,” Missy added, almost as an afterthought. Her manner left no room for argument, and Annie meekly followed.

Part of her expected the stranger named Martin to evaporate into thin air as soon as she turned her back. Or, at least admit they’d never actually met before. Instead, he helped her to the Hertzbergers’ table and pulled out her chair. When she sat down, he asked, with a casual caress along the nape of her neck, what he could bring her to eat.

“Anything but bratwurst, or any other processed meat, or...” she began.

“Leave it to me, darling.”

Annie watched Missy’s avaricious eyes follow him to the buffet table.

“Where on earth did you meet him?” Missy asked. “He doesn’t seem like your ... type.”

“We met at an airport.” Annie saw no need to specify which one. When Martin returned with two plates of food, she daringly thanked him with a swift kiss on the chin. In response, he tilted her face up for another deep kiss.

“Whew,” breathed Missy, pretending to fan herself when they’d finished. “You two must be newlyweds... Oops, no wedding rings, excuse me.”

Annie shot Martin a flustered look. Those kisses of his seemed to drain the brain cells right out of her head. With a secret wink, he smoothly stepped in. “Not everyone needs such public proof of their love.”

“Ri-ight.” Missy narrowed her eyes.

Missy opened her mouth for more interrogation, but Martin turned to Daryl and asked him about Scuba diving. Annie was saved, for the moment.

Under her lashes, Annie peered at the man who had so suddenly appeared in her life. He looked completely at home with Missy and Daryl; in fact, he even managed to make them look too polished and glossy. Maybe it was the relaxed way he sat back in his chair, with that little smile of his, as if everything around him was a source of amusement. Maybe it was the way his white linen shirt looked as it hung off his rugged-looking body. He looked like a rugby player who’d barely managed a shower before pulling on his clothes.

Halfway down, a button had come undone, and Annie caught a tantalizing peek of flat, bronzed stomach. Her breath caught, and she must have made a little sound. She felt his eyes on her. Busted. He’d probably laugh at her for ogling him. When she unwillingly lifted her eyes to his, they had darkened to a deep gray. The intent look in them sparked a throbbing deep inside her.

“Annie? Didn’t you hear me?”

“What?” She tore her eyes away from Martin. Missy glared at her. The Queen of Manhattan wasn’t used to being ignored. “Sorry, what was that?”

“Snor-kel-ing,” Missy repeated, emphasizing every syllable as though Annie were deaf. “Martin says you don’t dive, so tomorrow you’ll come with us in the boat, and we’ll drop you off at a beach so you can snorkel.”

“But how...?” How had Martin known she would never consider diving? He gave her another slow wink, along with a tiny shrug. “How nice!” she covered quickly. Either her phobias were stamped on her forehead, or this must be some kind of hallucination. If it was a hallucination, she might as well enjoy it. Not that it was difficult. Annie felt like she was in a movie in which, for once, she was in a starring role.

The four of them laughed and talked as the candles burned down and the other guests left the dining room. They moved to the outdoor patio with a bottle of wine. A warm breeze fluttered their clothes, and red lanterns made their skin glow. Daryl kept refilling their glasses, despite Missy’s occasional warning glance. Annie wasn’t much of a drinker, but tonight she was in a movie, so what difference did it make? She sipped freely of the cool white wine, and felt herself sparkle and come alive in the caressing night air.

Next to her was the remarkable, amazing presence of Martin. She had never been so intensely aware of anyone in her life. She knew when he reached for his glass. She knew when he looked out at the dark ocean. She knew when he wanted to change the direction of the conversation. Every time she glanced over at him, he met her eyes with a look of amused approval.

He was either a hallucination or an angel.

Gratefully, she shifted her chair to be closer to him. She leaned her body into his and rubbed her cheek on his shoulder. Looking up, she caught that playful smile she was beginning to adore, but this time, it had a wicked edge to it.

He turned to Missy and Daryl and leaned forward to ask them an innocuous question about their last trip to the Bahamas. At the same time, a big warm hand touched her knee, and Annie bit back a startled shriek. The hand squeezed until she gained control of herself. Then it began a slow, teasing march up her thigh.

“Did you enjoy Nassau?” Martin asked, looking extremely interested in the Hertzbergers’ response.

Meanwhile, his hand pushed under the edge of her skirt, and Annie bit the inside of her lip. He smoothed her inner thigh, making circular patterns on the tender skin. His palm was surprisingly rough-skinned. Did he work with his hands?

“Oh sure, I think it’s thoroughly stunning,” she heard Martin say, and from the teasing tone of his voice, she knew he was referring to her. His hand gently pulled her leg so it brushed against his. She felt a finger pull back the edge of her panties, and fresh air moved against her private parts. She couldn’t stop a surprised little gasp from escaping.

“Are you okay, Annie?” asked Missy.

“Yes,” she said in a strangled tone.

“Take a sip of wine,” said Martin, and the quietly masterful tone in his voice made her obey instantly. As she sipped from her glass, Martin took the opportunity to pull her panties completely away from her sex. She held the glass in front of her burning face as though admiring the wine.

My God, she was entirely exposed to anyone who happened to be under the table. No one was, but the thought brought a flutter of terror. At the same time it made moisture drip down her thighs.

Martin’s thumb was now holding back her panties while his fingers went on a determined quest through the wet folds of her sex. He found her clitoris and teased it with his forefinger, pressing it, circling it. His finger left her for a moment to dip into her heated sex. She felt its curious exploration; each little movement sent new shocks through her body. Then the finger withdrew, and it felt like eons before it returned, slick from her wetness, to continue rubbing her clitoris. Although she didn’t dare look at him, she felt his satisfied smile.

Annie thought she might die from the excruciating sensations he was creating. She couldn’t bear it another moment. She had to make him stop, but when she tried to close her legs he pinched her clitoris just enough to make her yelp.

“Did you say something, Annie?” Missy flicked her cigarette ash into the clamshell ashtray.

“Did you get bitten by one of those bugs, honey?” said Martin tenderly. “They’ve been driving me crazy all night.” He took her whole crotch in his hand and gripped it tightly.

“Maybe it’s time to go inside,” she managed with a remarkable degree of dignity.

“One more glass, what do you all say?” said Martin, with an infectious enthusiasm that made Daryl pour another round. “We’re on vacation, darling. We don’t want to disappoint your friends, do we?” He winked at her.

Disappoint her friends? Annie got the message. If she didn’t let him continue, he might expose their charade to Missy and Daryl. No matter what he did, it wouldn’t be worse than that humiliation. No doubt about it, Martin was in control here. He had all the cards. The only question was, what did he intend to do with them?

As she gripped the edge of her chair, he showed her. He stroked her until her sex was

pulsing with red-hot need, until she had to bite down on her lip to keep from screaming. She summoned every ounce of willpower—every particle of control—to keep her face still and her body immobile. He plunged two fingers inside her, then three. When it felt like his whole hand was inside her body, he pulled her forward, so she had to shift to the very edge of the chair. That changed his angle so his wrist could rub against her throbbing clitoris.

Annie felt the world had split in two. Beneath the table, her body was on fire. Her legs were quivering; her sex screaming for release. Above the table, she was a calm statue with an interested smile plastered to her face. Daryl was in the middle of a long story about a trip to Australia, and luckily Annie only had to nod now and then. This she did, at random moments.

She completely lost the thread of the story when the heel of Martin's hand ground into her clitoris. A rush of pleasure overwhelmed her, and she could no longer even make out the other couple's faces. Everything was a blur: Missy's head thrown back to draw on a cigarette, Daryl's arm draped across the back of her chair, the swaying palm trees, the hanging lanterns, and the wait staff lounging around a nearby table. The scent of the sea drifted from the beach and seemed to join with the sharp taste of wine swirling through her senses in a wild tsunami. She balanced on the unbearable edge of a tall cliff, dying to fall, terrified to fall. Despite herself, she pressed into that insistent hand. She felt the flush on her face, felt her breath coming faster through her clenched lips.

"Have a little more wine, darling," she heard Martin say. How on earth could he sound so calm, when he held a handful of dripping, scalding crotch? Jerkily, she moved to obey. "Here, let me," he said, as her hands shook. He reached in front of her, blocking her from the Hertzbergers, and in that instant, he tightened his grip, inside and out, as if making a fist around her privates. Now she had no choice. Burying her face into his back, she rocketed over the edge into a freefall of ecstasy. She didn't know where she was anymore. All she was, all she wanted to be, was a pile of hot, wet, pulsing flesh being shaken and squeezed by that relentless lion's paw of a hand.

As the spasms died away, Martin slowly sat back. With one part of her mind, Annie wondered what she could possibly look like now. Were her eyes glassy, her face red? The rest of her mind was still below the table, where Martin's hand patted her twitching flesh and smoothed her wet curls. She desperately wanted to close her legs, but still he wouldn't let her. Not until he'd had his fill of caressing her, put her panties back into place, and pulled her skirt back to her knees. Then he closed her legs and gave her a gentle pat on the knee.

"Just about bedtime for me," he said, yawning and stretching. "How are you doing, darling?" The same hand that had been inside her just a moment ago now came around her shoulder and tweaked her chin. Her own sharp scent rose from his hand, and her eyes flew across the table to Missy and Daryl. Couldn't they smell it too? Fortunately, no one was paying any attention to her. Missy stubbed out her cigarette.

"We'll meet you down at the boat tomorrow then, after breakfast. And bring your sunscreen, Annie, that pale skin of yours hasn't seen the sun since 1983."

"Her skin will be in good hands." Martin winked, making Missy titter.

"Oh you. Nighty-night!"

Annie got to her feet in a daze. What had just happened? Had she really just experienced the most intense orgasm of her life while chatting over wine with Missy and

Daryl Hertzberger? What had come over her? Martin's hand was on her back, steering her away from the table. Obediently, she let him lead her out into the courtyard. There she paused.

"You don't want Missy to see me leave, do you?" whispered Martin in her ear. She shook her head and walked toward her room. Martin followed close behind, as though they were an intimate couple strolling back to their bedroom after a satisfying meal. They passed an older couple Annie recognized from dinner. The woman nodded pleasantly, and her husband gave a slight smile. Annie's face went scarlet.

There was something in that smile. He'd seen, hadn't he? What if everyone had seen? What if everyone knew? What if they were all talking about her and laughing at her? This was a disaster.

When she reached her room, she turned abruptly and put a hand to Martin's chest. "You can't come in."

"Fair enough. Shall I meet you here before breakfast then?"

She stared at him. In the dim red glow of the conch lanterns, his eyes had an enigmatic gleam. The night breeze ruffled his thick hair. She noticed that one side of his collar was askew. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Me?" A slight smile quirked one corner of his mouth. "I'm the man who made you come tonight. And I hope to do it again, as soon as we can arrange it."

She felt her heart speed up. "You ... you can't..."

"No? Why not? You're very responsive. There's a wild side to you, and I want to get to know it. Intimately."

A wild side? To her? Her mouth was dry. Her thoughts ran in circles like a crazy merry-go-round. Finally, she managed to clear her throat and speak. "Look, I appreciate your ... time, you know, pretending to be with me. For Missy and Daryl."

"Couple of whackers. But they have their uses. I'm looking forward to our boat ride tomorrow."

"B ... boat..." It took a moment to remember they had a date with Missy and Daryl the next day. How would she explain it if Martin weren't there? She could just imagine how Missy would pry and ridicule. It was a fate far worse than ... worse than having a handsome, compelling man, who shared her opinion of the Hertzbergers, escort her. "I'll pay you," she blurted out.

An immediate feeling of relief washed through her. If she paid him, she could enjoy his company, while gaining control over the situation. She wouldn't have to worry every second about where his hands were or what he might do next.

The twinge of regret, she ignored.

"Oh, you'll pay me, all right. But not with money. Money doesn't interest me."

"Then what?" She couldn't meet his eyes.

"We'll figure out what. And when. And where. And how."

"If you mean ... that again..."

"Not exactly that. It's no fun repeating oneself. Although that was extraordinarily fun. Don't you agree?" With one finger, he tilted her chin up so she was forced to look him in the eye.

This wouldn't do, not at all. She had to put a stop to this, now. She looked sternly back at him. "Look, Mister..."

"Martin will do."

“I don’t do well with strangers. They make me anxious.”

“You didn’t seem anxious when you were coming into my hand.”

She felt her face burn. “This isn’t ... appropriate. I don’t even know your last name, or anything about you.”

“All right, then. What would you like to know?”

Everything. But, with his body so close, nothing specific came to mind. She searched her dazed brain. “Why? Why did you pretend you knew me?”

“Nothing wrong with rescuing a damsel in distress, is there? Especially one I find so very tempting and delicious. But, if you want me to go away...”

She gave a quick, involuntary shake of her head.

“Good.” His eyes gleamed with a wicked challenge. “Touch me.”

“What?”

“Unzip my pants and touch me.” His voice was soft as the night breeze.

“But anyone could walk by!”

“I don’t care about that.” When he took a step closer to her, she felt the heat of his body. He was beautiful, like a blond leopard cloaked in a man’s body. She wanted nothing more than to touch him, but if she did, that would be it. He would know that she would do anything he asked.

“If I don’t do it, you won’t come back, is that what you’re saying?”

Martin didn’t answer that. His eyes narrowed until they were shining slits against his shadowed face. “I want you to feel how much you excite me. Do you know what it was like, feeling your heat, your honey on my hand? You were so aroused, with your legs spread open for me. I could feel your pussy swelling in my hand, begging for me...”

She thrust her hand against his pants, as if to stop that disturbing stream of words. He subsided with a deep, groaning “ahhhh” as she unzipped his jeans and wormed her hand inside. Her hand seemed to have a life of its own as it searched avidly along the length of his engorged member. Was it as huge, as hot and thick, as it seemed to be? She greedily felt its contours through the thin material of his boxers. It seemed to leap toward her hand like a caged beast. She made a little sound and stepped back.

“See what you do to me?” murmured Martin.

Fascinated, she stared as he carefully zipped up his jeans. They barely fit over that massive lump. She had done that? Boring little Annie, who never got a second glance?

“Tomorrow, then?” He asked.

“No. I don’t know.”

He cocked his head, amused.

“Maybe. Yes. No!”

“How about you sleep on it, eh?” The way he said it, with a hidden wink at the word ‘sleep,’ made her shiver. She gave a tiny nod. “Bright and early, then.”

She watched as he strolled, hands in pockets, across the courtyard. Once he’d disappeared from sight, she might have thought she’d imagined him ... but for her fingers, which twitched with longing to touch him again, and her sex, which burned for more.

Restless and edgy, the only way she could sleep that night was with her legs sprawled apart, so the cooling ocean breeze could have its way with her.



### Chapter Three

Cat Island showed off a new mood the next morning. The wind stopped, and a sunny, cheerful brightness took its place. Annie, looking across the back patio at the ocean, noticed a kind of smugness to the dancing sparkles. *Had fun, didn't we?* It seemed to be saying. *And, there's so much more fun to be had.* Annie made a face at the view and closed the curtains.

Fun. Was it fun to be blackmailed into a sexual encounter? Wasn't there something immoral about that? Then again, she had been the one to initiate their "couple" act. Martin had been nice enough to go along with it. For a price, it turned out, a very unusual price. Of course she didn't have to go along with Martin's game. At any moment, she could tell Missy and Daryl the truth and send him on his way. Really, that's what she should do. She nodded decisively. Right now, before Martin showed up for breakfast, she would go find Missy and 'fess up.

She jumped out of bed and rummaged through her carefully packed suitcase. If she told Missy the truth, then all the cute little outfits she'd bought would go to waste. No blond, rugged stranger would see this sunflower-patterned halter-top or this adorable pink polka-dot bikini. The only people who would see it would be Greta and the Hertzbergers. What would Missy say when she told her the whole story?

"Darling, that is the most pathetic thing I've ever heard. Hold on while I call everyone in New York and tell them about it. No cell service? No problem. The second I'm back in town, the whole world will hear. Annie, you've made my day!"

She would have to kill Missy. There would be no choice about it.

In a choice between Martin and murder, perhaps Martin was the better option. He just didn't understand. Maybe he thought she was more open than she really was, more sexually experienced. All her life, she'd been shy with men. Her relationship fears had been the subject of many a session with Dr. Stein, who believed they stemmed from her childhood terror of her overly critical father. She didn't know what to say, or how to act, and she was terrified of looking like an idiot. As time passed, she felt more and more backwards, as though everyone knew more and was more sophisticated than she was. That made her even more awkward around men. As a result, she could count the times she'd had sex on the fingers of one hand. Certainly, she'd never had an orgasm like the one last night.

Maybe she should explain her neuroses to Martin. Maybe he'd feel sorry for her and agree to continue their charade without the quid pro quo, yet...

*There's more fun to be had,* called the ocean.

*Shut up!* she scolded it. Martin would have to know the truth about her. Avoiding the cute new outfits, she pulled on jeans and a long black button-down shirt. No bikini. If anyone had a problem with that, she'd say she was allergic to sunlight. She plopped a floppy-brimmed sun hat on her head and saw that her hair was curling wildly in the Bahamian humidity. Dropping the hat, she tackled her curls with a comb. She was deep in an impossible tangle when she heard a knock at the door.

"Good morning," came Martin's low voice.

She froze. Frantically, she tried to pull the comb from her hair, but it wouldn't

budge. "I...I can't go out."

"No? Why not?"

"I just can't." Part of her was breathless at the thought that he was here, at her door. The other part was mortified by her predicament. This was the kind of thing that threw her for a loop, the kind of thing that didn't seem to faze other people.

"Then I'll come in."

"Sorry, it's locked. Maybe some other time." A pause, during which she assumed he'd gone on his way.

The next thing she knew, Martin slid open the glass door to her little back patio. He looked like the god of sunshine striding into her room. "What's the problem on this bright sunny day?"

He was ridiculously gorgeous in a blue t-shirt with a jumping fish design. Loose shorts revealed muscular legs the color of light honey. They reminded her of last night and his arousal against her eager hand. She swallowed hard.

He strode to her side and peered down at her head. "I see your dilemma. Comb stuck in hair, that look went out in the '80's. Let me try, darlin'."

Before she could stop him, he took the comb and gently wiggled it back and forth to maneuver it from its nest. His hands were surprisingly gentle, and Annie found herself relaxing against him. What an unpredictable man he was. During her restless night, of all the ways she'd pictured seeing him again, this certainly hadn't been one of them. It was disorienting.

The way he worked on her hair, disentangling each strand so carefully, so delicately, put her into a trance. His left arm was right next to her face, and she smelled the sun on his skin. She had the irresistible urge to taste him. Her tongue darted out of her mouth and touched the inside of his forearm. Salt, honey, something tarry. Had he been out on a boat already this morning? She licked him again. When she felt him look down at her, she quickly withdrew her tongue.

"You vixen." He chuckled. "And me without my brekkie yet."

"It was nothing. You don't understand me, you know."

"No?"

"I'm not like that. I don't do this kind of thing. I have too many phobias. I'm very neurotic."

"Part of your charm." With painstaking gentleness, he pulled the comb through a thick tangle.

"Not according to most people."

"Like who?" Strong fingers held her head steady. The sensation was hypnotic.

"Like my father, for instance," she answered dreamily.

"Yeah? What's his gig?"

His matter-of-fact tone, combined with the soothing strokes of the comb, acted like a truth-telling narcotic. Almost on their own, words trickled from her lips. "He hates the way I am. So shy. He sent me off to boarding school to get used to other kids, but that just made it worse."

"How's that?"

"Well ... before, I was just a shy girl, but away from home, I became scared to do anything. Even leave the room sometimes. I'd lie in bed staring at the wall." Why was she telling him all this? She never talked about these things, except to Dr. Stein.

“Not much fun, that. And where was your mother in all this?”

“She died when I was little. She was shy like me, actually. Sensitive. After she was gone, I became even more anxious. It drove my father crazy. He has a new family now, a wife and two kids. They’re nothing like me, from what I hear. I’ve never met them.”

Martin was quiet. She closed her eyes as the comb tugged its way from her tingling scalp through her hair, in long, careful strokes. Again, just like the night before, she felt that intense awareness of him. She sensed his mood shift.

“No, I’m not going to do it,” he said suddenly. He ran his fingers through her hair so the curls, now untangled, sprang up around her head.

“Do what?” She swung around to stare at him.

“Let you alone in your hiding-place. Now come along.” He tossed the comb onto the bed. “What shall we do about that outfit?”

“I’m not changing.” So much for relaxation. “I’ll just stay here in this room if you try to make me.”

“Darlin’, jeans are the worst possible gear for boats. Guaranteed to get wet, and they take forever to dry.”

“I don’t care.”

“Fine then. Come as you are.” He offered his arm, and Annie realized she’d been outmaneuvered.

On the way out the door, she grabbed her sun hat and her bag packed with all the necessities, from sun block to first aid kit. Arm in arm, they walked out into the courtyard. She blinked at the sudden feeling of exposure. Would their charade hold up in the light of day?

“I only paid for meals for one person,” whispered Annie as they neared the main building.

“I already took care of it. Don’t worry about a thing.”

Took care of it? What did that mean? Just then, Missy and Daryl joined them, and Annie lost her train of thought. Missy was wearing a va-va-va-voom white halter-top bikini and tight red shorts that molded to her body. She brought to mind a much meaner Marilyn Monroe. To Annie, she looked out of place in this ramshackle resort.

With a look of disbelief, Missy took in Annie’s jeans and long sleeves. “You’ve got to be kidding.”

“I’m allergic to sunshine,” said Annie weakly.

“You should take your next vacation in a cave, darling.”

“Good idea. Maybe I will.”

Martin chuckled. “Oh, honey, you do make me laugh. Have you two eaten already, or are my little darling and I on our own?”

“We packed breakfast in a cooler. There’s plenty for everyone,” said Daryl when Missy looked too annoyed to answer.

“Spiffy! Let’s go then,” Martin replied.

Missy and Daryl had rented a boat called the “Hunka Luv.” It had no cabin, only a small windscreen to shield the driver. Their tanks, diving suits, and other gear were already loaded. Martin guided Annie down the short pier and helped her onto the boat. She was starting to sweat through her black shirt, and her jeans felt itchy and uncomfortable.

“We brought some snorkel gear for you two. Or you can hang out on the boat while

we dive,” said Daryl.

“We’ll stick with the boat,” said Martin decisively. Annie was relieved. How crazy could things get on a boat, after all?

After a brisk boat ride, with the wind snapping against their faces, Daryl tied the boat up to a buoy in the middle of a small bay. A gorgeous, pink sand beach stretched from one side of the bay to the next, and Annie couldn’t see a single person on it. A few houses, along with several large estates, were scattered on the cliffs above. The scent of gardenia drifted over the waves from someone’s garden.

Missy and Daryl got into their dive suits. Martin, who was apparently an experienced diver, helped them with their tanks. Annie, arms wrapped around her knees, sat on the narrow bench that stretched the length of the boat. With their tanks secured and weight belts fastened, Missy and Daryl launched themselves backwards into the water. They adjusted their masks, gave a thumbs-up, and then sank out of sight.

Martin went immediately to the cooler that held their breakfast. “Hungry?” he asked Annie over his shoulder.

“Sure. I usually eat toast and a little yogurt for breakfast.”

“Change of menu, then,” he said, handing her a slice of papaya. “This is the tropics, you know. You can’t eat toast in the tropics.”

The papaya, tasting of lime and lushness, slid across her tongue. Martin watched her with his eyes darkening. “I can live with the outfit, with some slight adjustments.”

“What?” she said warily, through a mouthful of fruit.

He leaned forward and unbuttoned the top two buttons of her shirt. Annie made no move to stop him. Another button went, then another, until the shirt was halfway unbuttoned and her bra exposed. “No bra, for starters.”

“What?”

“In fact, I don’t like this bra.” It was plain white cotton, like all her bras. “Do you have any scissors in that first aid kit of yours?”

“What are you talking about?” For the first time, she wondered if he was literally crazy. Was he going to cut her clothes to shreds? She was considering throwing herself overboard when he returned from her bag, scissors in hand.

“Shhh,” he said when she tried to object. “Don’t worry so much.” His eyes held a concentrated, relentless look that made her shrink back weakly against the side of the boat.

Two short snips severed her bra straps. He reached around her back and unsnapped the fastener, then drew the bra away from her body. “Much better,” he breathed, letting one finger brush against her right nipple. When it stiffened eagerly he smiled. “You see? No one liked that bra.”

He drew the shirt off one shoulder, leaving one breast exposed and the other hidden. “Much nicer. Now, I don’t mind your outfit so much. Your breasts are beautiful. They’re so white they gleam.” He stroked his hand in a circle around the breast he’d bared. Annie felt a deep quiver run through her body. Even though his hand was nowhere near her nipple, still it jumped to attention.

“You don’t understand. I need to protect my skin. I need SPF 100,” she said in a choked voice.

“So that’s your beauty secret. I like mineral oil myself. No worries.” He triumphantly held up her sunscreen and advanced toward her. She shrank back, mouth

dry. "But you'd better take the whole shirt off then." He eased it off her shoulders. Her hands flew to cover her breasts. "Now, now, that won't do. You're too beautiful to hide. Rest your arms along the side of the boat."

With her arms stretched to either side, she gave her body to his touch. With slow, teasing motions, he spread the sunscreen over her pale skin. She felt the sun beating down on her head and saw the glints of gold it sparked in Martin's hair. He began with her torso, tracing the bones of her rib cage and using a delicate touch just short of a tickle on her sensitive belly. It made her squirm slightly, with an embarrassed laugh.

"I like the way you move," he murmured. He stood directly in front of her and ran his hand up her chest, between her breasts, ending with his hand circling her neck. Her head bent back against the side of the boat, and her eyes closed against the dazzling sunshine. With two hands, he began circling her breasts, massaging the lotion into her tender skin. "Your skin is truly remarkable."

"I don't get a lot of sun," she said dreamily. "I usually stay covered up."

"You don't say," said Martin. "What a waste. Look at these beautiful nipples. Such a wonderful color, mauve with a hint of Brazilian chocolate. Raspberry truffles on a bed of cream." He lifted one nipple with a finger, and brushed his thumb across it. It swelled gratefully. "You're a work of art, Miss Annie Swenson."

"Annelise..." murmured Annie under her breath.

"What was that?"

"Nothing." Annie shook her head. She didn't know why that name had escaped her. He squeezed both nipples, sending a jolt to her groin.

"Say it again."

"It was nothing."

"You're trying to provoke me," said Martin, delighted. "I like that." His hands disappeared from her breasts, and for a moment, her torso was fully exposed to the sun... And, to anyone watching from shore, she suddenly realized. But, before she could sit up, Martin was back. He stood between her legs and rubbed his hands together. When he put them back to her nipples, she felt slick oiliness and recoiled.

"What is it?"

"Mineral oil. Organic. Healthy. Good for the skin. Lean back." He rubbed the warm oil into her nipples, circling them with thumb and forefinger, and the thrilling sensation made her cry out. As he pushed the oil into every crevice of her nipples, she had a flash of her recurring dream. It was almost like standing in a golden basin while slaves oiled her breasts. The thought made her heart race. "Now what was that name you said a minute ago?" She shook her head. With all five fingers of each hand, he surrounded her nipples, tugging and then gently twisting. Her torso arched back, and her sex jumped in response.

As he rubbed her and teased her, her nipples seemed to turn into sensitive little joysticks. He maneuvered and played with them, watching her body jump and quiver in response, until her breath came in great, ragged pants. "Stop, please stop, I can't bear it," she begged.

"Then tell me." His voice was rough, and his breath had quickened. When she opened her eyes just a slit, she saw a golden halo of sun lighting his hair. "Tell me, or I'll squeeze these little jewels until you can't see straight."

He squeezed, and she felt her hips come off the seat, shamelessly pushing toward a

cock that wasn't there. "Annelise!" she spit out. "It's my real name. But, no one calls me that. Now could you please...?" Her sex pulsed with need.

Martin had other ideas. "Annelise," he breathed. "Such a sensual name. Your sweet mouth looks so sexy when you say it." One hand left her breast, and she heard the sound of a zipper. Her eyes flew open to see his heavily aroused member inches from her face. Purple-headed and magnificent, it rose proudly from its nest of golden hair. "Open your mouth for me."

It looked so huge and thick; Annie had a moment of fear. However, her tongue had a mind of its own; not only did her mouth fall open, but her tongue reached out to welcome his cock. She tasted him greedily, ran her tongue along his ridges and folds, and soaked in his delicately salty scent, like caviar. His skin was so velvety that it made her tender toward him. She wanted to take care of him, to lick him lovingly, caress him with the insides of her mouth, the back of her throat.

With her head back on the gunwale of the boat and his hands holding her arms away from her body, she had nothing to touch him with besides her mouth. So she sucked and tasted and licked and savored the gorgeous spear of flesh that twitched and jumped within the soft cavity of her mouth.

His breath came fast and panting, and she dimly heard his guttural groans of encouragement. He began thrusting against the back of her throat, and she had to lean her head further back to take in as much as possible of him. "That's right, suck me hard," she dimly heard him say. "Suck me with that sweet mouth. Harder, harder, that's right, don't move." Her head rocked from his thrusts; her throat opened and closed, and her tongue convulsed against his hard velvet. Then she heard him give a deep growl, and the hot salt of him filled her mouth. When she gagged, he started to pull away, but she wouldn't let him. She latched her mouth to the delicious cock pumping into her and swallowed hard, savoring the pleasantly bitter taste.

Slowly he withdrew, and she opened her eyes to gaze up at him. He had an unreadable look on his face. He wiped away a few drops that had spilled onto her cheek.

"Thank you," he said calmly, but she noticed his voice was still shaking. The realization gave her a quick secret thrill of satisfaction.

He drew away from her and zipped up his pants. She dropped her eyes to hide her disappointment. Maybe he was satisfied, but she was still burning. Even her nipples were still hard; she could feel them throbbing in the open air.

"Would you like me to...?"

She nodded eagerly.

"What would you like me to do?" He stood with arms folded.

"You know."

"I can be rather dense sometimes. Did you need something?"

"I need... I'm still..." She couldn't finish.

"Maybe you could show me. Why don't you take down your pants? Then maybe I can see what you're talking about." His eyes were a deep, amused gray. If she didn't need his touch so much, she might have hated him. Defiantly she unzipped her jeans and pulled them down, exposing white cotton underpants.

"More detestable underwear. Why don't you get rid of it?"

She pulled her panties down, too. Martin, haloed by the sun, smiled down on her open sex. "Hello there. I didn't get a look last night. Lovely." He reached between her

legs to spread her open. “So pink and moist and eager. Hot strawberries, or ripe papaya. There’s nothing as sweet as a sexy pussy. Mind if I take a lick?”

She thought she’d probably die if he didn’t. He knelt down between her legs and drew the outer folds of her sex apart.

“Ahhh.” His sigh of appreciation wafted across her clitoris, making her squirm. “So impatient. So hot. It’s my fault, I suppose, teasing your nipples in that unfair way. But how was I to know you’d be so absurdly sensitive?”

He reached up and gave both nipples a tweak that made her lower belly jump. Moisture dripped from her sex. Martin brought his hands back to her crotch and squeezed the lips together. Annie shook and let out a moan. Dipping his head, he licked along her crotch in one smooth motion.

“Oh my God!” Annie let out an involuntary gasp.

He licked again, this time swirling his tongue against her clitoris. It was such a soft touch that she strained her hips toward him for more pressure.

“You want more?”

“Yes,” she whispered. He sucked her clitoris, nearly making her scream.

“More?”

“Yes,” she said louder. He clamped his mouth to her groin and gently moved his head from side to side. A deep groan shook her entire body.

“More?” he said from the depths of her sex.

“Yes!” she nearly shouted. He pulled his head away. She stared at him with frantic eyes.

“Are you sure?” Beyond words, she nodded and pulled at him. “Because Missy and Daryl are coming up the ladder.”

After a frozen moment, his words sank in. Then she scrambled for her jeans and buttoned her shirt, frantic with mortification.

By the time Daryl and Missy were back onboard, Annie was primly sitting in the same position as before, feet on the bench, arms around her knees. However, she couldn’t stop the throbbing of her poor aching clitoris. Her nipples, with no bra to shield them from the fabric of her shirt, continued to burn.

Later, as Martin jauntily walked her to her room, she fumed. At the door, she whirled on him. “How could you do that to me?”

“It’s not my fault they came back when they did.”

“Maybe not, but you knew.”

“Okay, I take full responsibility.” He threw up his hands. “Do you want me to come in and finish the job?”

“No! I don’t know. No! Maybe. I don’t know!”

He cocked his head, waiting. Mutely, she stared back.

Finally, he broke the spell with a sweet smile. “Then I’ll give you some time to think about it. I look forward to our next ... meeting.”

Speechless, she watched him walk away. God! She slammed her door and threw herself on the bed. How dare he? She hated him, with his gorgeous cock, his teasing look, and sexy accent. Who needed him, anyway?

A walk on the beach managed to calm her down, but walking was no easy task when she had reached a level of arousal she had never imagined. The empty beach, its pink sand littered with plastic bottles washed up by the last storm, stretched for miles before

her. If he were here, would they be looking for shells? Or a convenient sand dune to screw in? Would he be coming up with his next inventive, unpredictable game?

After her shudder of excitement came a sudden, horrible thought. What if he'd had enough of her silly neuroses and uptight ways? What if she'd seen the last of the mysterious Martin?



## Chapter Four

That evening, Annie did something she'd never done before. Instead of choosing her most concealing outfit, she searched for something revealing. Something provocative. Since she was new at this, she had to improvise. She found a deep burgundy sarong she'd brought as a cover-up at the beach. Wrapping it around her back like a bath-towel, she crossed the two upper ends over her chest and tied them behind her neck. The sarong fell in graceful, silky folds to mid-thigh and opened just above her belly button. Tight white hip huggers kept the outfit from being X-rated.

Surveying herself in the mirror, she saw someone she didn't recognize. Her dark hair danced around her head in swirling curls. Her tilted, gray-green eyes took on a jewel-like tone against the slight tan she'd developed. With her shoulders bare and her navel exposed, her body looked lithe and sensuous. She looked exotic, like a dancer from some faraway land—the way she looked in the sultan dream. Slowly, she raised her arms above her head and undulated her body. Under the nearly see-through material, she could see her breasts move.

No, this wouldn't do. She couldn't possibly go out looking like this. Maybe she should change into the khaki coatdress that made her look like a secretary. No, she had to prove to Martin that she wasn't uptight and boring ... if, of course, he even showed up. She'd probably already scared him off.

Anxiously she watched the minutes tick by. Dinner began at seven. It was already quarter past. At seven-thirty, she would change her clothes and go eat by herself.

At seven twenty-nine, as if he knew just how long to push her, Martin knocked on the door. Annie's nerve nearly failed her. She gave her reflection one last look. Smile, she told herself. If you don't feel comfortable, act like you do—another of Dr. Stein's techniques. She tossed her head, opened the door, and greeted Martin with one hand on a saucily swiveled hip. "Hello there, handsome," she said in a sultry voice.

Martin, for the first time since she'd known him, didn't have a quick teasing response. His jaw dropped, and his eyebrows lifted. He too was dressed differently, in a dark blue jacket over an open-collared shirt. In one hand, he carried a small bouquet of wildflowers. He cleared his throat, and she watched his Adam's apple rise and fall. Why did every part of him look so edible?

"I'll be stuffed. You must be Annelise Swenson," Martin finally said.

"That's right. And you are...?" She cocked her head at him. He merely smiled and handed her the bouquet. In the transfer, he managed to tweak her nipple through the deep-purple silk. It rose to a dark point.

"An admirer," he purred. Just like that, he regained the upper hand. The way his eyes ate her up made her bravado disappear. What made her think she could play in his league?

"I'd better go change." She turned away in a panic.

"Don't even think about it," he answered, grabbing her arm and propelling her out the door. "I'm just glad I dressed for the occasion." With his warm hand caressing her bare shoulder, they strolled toward the dining room. "Missy's going to be more jealous of you than ever."

“Excuse me? Missy doesn’t know what ‘jealous’ means. And even if she did, she sure wouldn’t be jealous of me.”

“We’ll see about that.”

They entered the dining room with their arms around each other, and Annie had the satisfaction of seeing Missy freeze for just a split-second. At the bar, Daryl looked up from his bottle of Kalik beer and gave her a bleary-eyed leer. “That you, Annie? Din’ rec’nize you. Drink? This Bahama beer isn’t bad.”

Even though his drunken state was slightly repulsive, Annie decided a drink couldn’t hurt. She took the bottle of beer that he slid toward her. Missy tossed back a cocktail the color of cranberries. “I like the makeover, Annie. Just full of surprises, aren’t you?”

“She has no idea,” murmured Martin in Annie’s ear.

Throughout dinner, he stayed close to her side. He jumped up to bring her a second plate of salad and brought her the news that there was fruit cobbler for dessert. “Your favorite, darling. Remember that cobbler we had in Vermont?”

“With the fresh whipped cream we licked off? Who could forget that?” Annie returned. Martin’s gray eyes gleamed with appreciation, and Missy raised an eyebrow.

“My, my. Do tell.”

“Oh no. No kissing and telling.” Martin cupped his hand around Annie’s neck. She felt his thumb gently rubbing her skin. “That could take all week.”

“I don’t know how our little Miss Goody-Goody hooked up with a bad boy like you.” Missy lit a cigarette. Annie thought her eyes looked like chips of blue sea glass.

“I just got lucky, I guess,” answered Martin.

“Have you always been such a bad boy?” asked Missy, drawing deeply on her cigarette. For the first time, Annie noticed wrinkles forming around her perfect mouth.

“I c’n be bad, too, right Miss?” threw in Daryl.

Missy ignored him. “You know, I never even saw Annie go on a date in college. Except for that little wormy guy who ran out on you during a movie.”

Annie cringed. Trust Missy to remember her most humiliating moment.

“What was the story again? He wanted you to go down on him, and you freaked out in the middle of it?” Missy taunted.

“I don’t like small spaces...” She could feel the claustrophobia all over again.

“You had a panic attack, and they had to clear the theater, didn’t they?”

Annie ducked her head, shame flooding her. She’d been so excited to be asked on a date. When he’d pushed her head down into his lap, she’d tried her best, but she’d started hyperventilating.

A soothing touch made the memory vanish. Martin worked his fingers under her hair, massaging the bones at the back of her head. “That’s my girl. Anyone without painful memories isn’t worth spending time with.”

Missy gestured for another cocktail. “I’ve got plenty of painful memories.”

“Have you?” Martin asked, with a challenge in his voice. “But do you dare to share them?”

“Dare?” Missy’s eyes brightened. “I’ll dare if you dare. Truth or dare, anyone?”

Daryl rolled his bleary eyes. “Miss, this isn’t that kinda party.”

“Who says? Are you in, Martin?”

“It’s up to my lovely lady,” said Martin softly as he played with Annie’s hair. “Only if she’ll play.”

Annie glanced up at him. His eyes held a secret gleam just for her. 'Truth or dare' had lots of potential for humiliation, but it also would give her a chance to find out more about Martin. On balance, it seemed worth the risk. She nodded.

Missy clapped her hands.

"But I'd like to add a twist," continued Martin. "I saw a pool table downstairs. We'll play pool, and whoever sinks a ball gets to ask a question."

"Fine." Missy pulled the sagging Daryl to his feet. "That lets you off the hook, Daryl. You won't be able to hold a cue, let alone sink a ball." On the way out, he swiped a bottle of brandy.

The poolroom was in the basement. Musty couches were shoved up against the walls. A chaotic jumble of books filled the rickety shelves. The whole room looked dusty and neglected. Annie wondered if anyone ever hung out here. At least the pool table was in mint condition; the balls gleamed under the hanging light that swung from the ceiling.

Daryl insisted on taking the first shot, which sent the cue ball skipping off the table. In disgust, he folded himself into one of the couches and clutched his brandy bottle.

Missy took her turn. When she sank the six-ball into the corner pocket, she turned on Annie in triumph. "Truth or dare."

Annie knew exactly what Missy wanted. Missy wanted her to choose "truth," so she'd have to answer whatever prying, nosy question the heartless diva asked. "Dare," said Annie, sticking out her chin.

Missy narrowed her sea-glass eyes. "Fine. I dare you to ... give Martin a lap dance." She smirked. Annie had sat in a corner at every college dance. Didn't Missy forget anything?

"Nice one," said Martin, winking at Annie. He sat down on the couch on the opposite wall from where Daryl sat. "Strut that stuff, beautiful!" Annie's heart raced. She'd never even seen a lap dance. What were you supposed to do? Panicked, she gazed blankly at Martin.

His gray eyes shone into hers, telling her without words how sexy she was, how alluring. With her eyes clinging to his, she began to move. She ran her hands along her body and swayed sinuously toward him. The silk of the sarong stroked her skin, and she moved as it moved, twining herself across Martin's lap, rubbing her breasts against his chest. Her nipples hardened as they brushed against the fabric of his jacket. He opened his legs and leaned back.

"Keep it clean, now," said Missy, clearly realizing she'd miscalculated.

"Must I?" Annie moved so her right nipple teased Martin's lips. Her back was to the room, and no one else could see when Martin took the nipple into his mouth through the thin silk. She brought her arms above her head, twisting sinuously, while Martin tongued her nipple. The wet silk shifted under the movements of his mouth, creating a rough friction that made her eyes glaze over. When she couldn't bear it anymore, she pulled away, and instantly her nipple swelled even more as air chilled the drenched silk. She shot a glance down at Martin's crotch, which sported a huge bulge. Before she turned back to the room, she gave it a hard caress.

When Martin got to his feet for his turn, the focused gleam in his eyes promised vengeance. With a strong, unerring stroke of the cue, he banked the four-ball off the side and into a corner pocket. Then, to Annie's surprise, he turned to Daryl. "Truth or Dare, Daryl?"

Missy leaped to her feet. "Choose 'dare,' Daryl!"

"Dare."

"Right-o. I dare you to empty that bottle of brandy into the toilet."

"Hell, no!" Daryl snuggled the bottle close. "Make it 'truth' instead."

"Daryl, you idiot!" Missy looked like a queen furious with a disobedient servant.

Martin ignored her. "Truth it is. Daryl, why did you choose Cat Island for your vacation?"

"You don't have to answer that, Daryl!" Missy scrambled to the couch and put her hand over her husband's mouth.

"It's a simple question. What's the problem?" Martin asked mildly.

"It's unfair! Ask something else."

"Oh shush." Daryl pushed Missy's hand off his mouth and staggered to his feet.

"You wanna know the truth? Fine. Got fired. No more money. We're hiding out here, where no one goes. Missy here dussn't want anyone to know. Big fucking deal. Going to bed." He stumbled out of the poolroom, still cuddling his bottle of brandy.

Missy's face was white. "I suppose you'll spread this all over New York, Annie."

"Why, you're just as mean as cat's piss," said Martin, before Annie could answer.

"Maybe Annie doesn't need to tear other people down to feel good. That's something only jealous people do."

With a snap of her blond hair, Missy flounced from the room.

Annie shook her head in amazement. "I wondered what they were doing here. They usually go to places like St. Moritz or St. Barts."

"No saints here," said Martin. "Saints are no fun anyway. Good riddance to them. It's your round now."

"We're still playing?"

"You haven't even taken a turn yet." He handed her the pool cue.

Annie missed her shot. Martin, who seemed to be some kind of pool shark, sank two balls with his next shot.

"Truth," she said quickly.

"Hmm." He eyed her for a long moment. "What is your most secret fantasy?"

An image of the sultan's court with the slaves oiling her bare body, flashed through her mind. She felt her face turn scarlet. "I meant, dare! Dare!"

"You can't change now. Rules are rules."

"I don't care. I won't answer that." Tears sprang to her eyes.

He relented. "Okay, dare." Running his hands along the pool table, he thoughtfully knocked one ball against another. "So many options." He eyed her speculatively. "I dare you to play the rest of this game naked."

"No! What if someone comes in?"

"Then they'll see your luscious body. Lucky night for them."

She tried to picture herself shooting pool naked and shook her head slowly. "I'll die."

"The choice is simple. Play naked or tell me your fantasy." Pinned by his darkened gray eyes, she felt a surge of rebellion. She didn't have to play his game. So what if he told Missy and Daryl the truth? Now she knew their secret. They would never expose her, knowing she could return the favor. She could walk away right now, and Martin couldn't do anything about it. Ironically, Martin himself had set her free.

His hot gray eyes traveled down her chest, and she felt her nipples stir under the still-wet silk. Suddenly the truth seemed so clear. She wasn't going to walk away. He didn't need to blackmail her anymore. With him, she felt more alive than she ever had in her life. She craved him. Whatever he wanted her to do, she would do.

She reached up, untied her sarong, and let it drop from her body. His eyes roamed her torso and fastened on her nipples. Even though he'd seen her before, on the boat, this felt much scarier, standing so still and vulnerable in front of him.

"Now the pants." Clinging to the calm command in his voice, she unsnapped her white hip huggers and slid them off. Underneath she was naked. "No panties," he said in a warm voice that slithered through her like honey. "You're learning. Now, cross your arms behind your head. I want to get a good look at you."

She raised her hands over her head and clasped them together, turning her eyes away in embarrassment. What was she doing, displaying herself in a musty basement poolroom to a virtual stranger? She felt the now familiar tingling in her groin. Her skin quivered with anticipation. Why didn't he touch her? Instead, he walked around her with slow deliberation as she stood with every inch of her body exposed. The lamp hanging over the pool table cast a pool of light that ended just beyond her body; she was lit up, and Martin was in darkness.

He stood behind her. "Your body is beautiful," he said softly. "Lithe like a dancer. Skin like ice cream. Perfect little ass. Shake it for me." She swayed her hips. "That's it. Even more. I want to see you move. Oh, that's sweet. I could just rip you apart right now." She heard the hunger in his voice. Even though he hadn't touched her, her skin was aflame, and her sex, moist. She tried to inch her legs together.

"Oh, no, you don't. Legs apart, Annelise. I want to see how wet you are. Reach one hand down and touch yourself."

Touch herself in front of another person? Even alone at home, she only touched herself when hidden under the covers. "Will you close your eyes?" She whispered.

"Absolutely not. I intend to watch every delicious second. Now, come on. It won't hurt, I promise."

Her hand crept down to the curls covering her sex. She quickly soaked a finger in her own wetness and started to draw her hand away.

"Not so fast," he said. "Take it nice and slow. Get that finger wet and rub it up and down your clitoris."

This was horrible. As soon as she touched her clitoris, her whole body jumped, and she felt, rather than saw, Martin smile. "That's it, right there. Rub some more. Don't stop until I tell you."

She fingered herself again and felt another sharp thrill. A flush came over her body, and she began to forget where she was. All she knew was she had to keep rubbing herself—the commanding stranger had said so—and anyway, she couldn't stop now if she wanted to. She rubbed faster against the hot slickness and pressed her groin forward into her hand. Although he didn't touch her, she could feel Martin's gaze on her like a physical weight. His eyes probed her most secret places. No part of her was safe from his searching, admiring gaze.

Stabs of rising pleasure made her rub faster. The sounds of her panting filled the room. The scent of her arousal rose into the air and mingled with the dusty smell of the basement. Her body wriggled with increasing urgency. It wasn't enough. She wanted

more, needed more—something hard to rub against, something hard to fill her up. But she couldn't stop, wasn't allowed to stop, so she ground her own hand into her groin until she felt the pleasure just about to burst open and carry her over the edge. Just a little more rubbing, a little more pushing against her hand...

"Stop!" said Martin, pulling her hand away. Her sex, throbbing painfully, convulsed against emptiness. If she could only cross her legs; but he edged them apart. If she could only rub against him; but he put her firmly at arm's length. "I'll tell you when you can come. Now, stand up straight, the way you were before. Hands above your head."

Trembling, panting, she obeyed. Her skin was flushed pink. Her breasts rose and fell with her quick breaths. "Exquisite," he murmured. "Now take your shot."

Her shot? What was he talking about? Oh, right. Awareness of her present surroundings returned. They were playing pool. And, she was playing naked. Slowly, with limbs that seemed twice as heavy as normal, she lowered her arms and walked to the pool table. She supposed she should be embarrassed that she was bending nude over a pool table, exposing her backside, but she was too lost in desire to feel any shame. She picked up the pool cue and made a perfect shot.

"Aha!" she said, spinning around. "I get to dare you now!" She already knew what she'd dare him to do. Take his clothes off, and take her, immediately, hard and fast.

"Truth," said Martin, smugly.

"What?" She didn't think she could stand another second like this. Then, she realized he'd handed her the perfect chance to find out about this man who, so suddenly and mysteriously, had appeared in her life. "Where do you live? What do you do?"

"You only get one question."

"Okay. What are you?"

"What am I? That's your question?"

It sounded silly phrased like that, but she couldn't think of a better way to put it.

"Yes. What are you?"

"I'm an Extremist." He winked at her.

"That's not an answer."

"Yes, it is." He took the pool cue from her hand.

"I mean, what's your job. What do you do for a living?"

"Even though that isn't what you asked, it is in fact my job. And, how I make my living."

"You make your living being an Extremist?" The conversation was beginning to feel surreal to her.

"I do very well for myself as an Extremist."

"Is it some kind of kinky sex thing?" she asked nervously. She was, after all, standing naked in front of this man, the 'Extremist,' whatever that meant.

"You only get one question. And now, I believe, it's my turn." He bent over the table. She didn't bother to watch the shot; she knew he'd make it. Instead, she watched the way his hair turned a burnished bronze in the light cast from the hanging lamp, the way the muscles of his forearm flexed as he drew back the cue, the way his eyes narrowed and became deadly serious as he lined up the shot. With a sharp crack, balls zoomed across the table, crashed into each other and bounced off the sides. When Annie tore her eyes away from Martin to look at the pool table, it was empty. With one shot, he'd sunk all the remaining balls.

“Game over,” he said, tossing aside the pool cue and turning that focused, triumphant look on her. “So what’ll it be: truth or dare?”

She shrank back, her nerve failing her. The last time she’d asked for ‘dare,’ she’d lost all her clothes. “Truth.”

“Wonderful,” he said, eyes brightening. “What’s your deepest, most secret fantasy?”

“You already asked that!”

“And you never answered. Well?”

In the silence, her heart raced. Could she? No, she couldn’t. “Dare. I choose dare.”

Martin shrugged. “Fine with me. Either way, I win.” He took a few steps back from the pool table and unzipped his pants. “Fair warning, though. I intend to take full advantage of this moment. If you want to back out, now’s the time.” He dropped his pants, and the full length of his hardened cock sprung free. Annie’s breath caught in her throat. With a tiny movement of her head, she indicated, “No, I don’t want to back out.”

“Good,” said Martin, his voice a greedy growl. “I dare you to bend over the pool table and spread your legs.” When she hesitated a moment, he put a hand between her shoulder blades and gently propelled her toward the pool table. The edge caught her just at the waist. She bent forward so her breasts were against the green velvet surface of the table. With her face against the table, she couldn’t see much, but she felt his knees move her legs apart and his hands search her sex.

The ache was still there. It leaped to life under his prying fingers. With one hand, he fingered her clitoris, and with the other, he stroked her ass, roaming freely along her thighs, her quivering cheeks, and her arching spine. He pressed her lower back, which made her ass rise higher into the air.

“Lovely,” he groaned in a thick voice, and she felt him take her hips in a fierce grip. Then she felt nothing else in the world besides the thick, hot rod that drove into the very depths of her. A guttural cry sounded, and she dimly knew it was her voice. He plunged in again, making her body jerk against the surface of the pool table. Her nipples burned from the abrasion of the velvet. Her feet dangled off the ground; his hands gripped the backs of her thighs and held her legs wide apart. He lifted her ass even higher so he could pull her hard against him.

Oh, it felt too good to believe. All the teasing, testing, and arousing had built up to this moment of oncoming rapture. Oh, was it coming; it was coming fast and hard, like an electric storm across the ocean. With her breasts crushed against the dusty pool table, her ass arched up like a cat, her thighs wide open, and Martin riding her, grinding and pounding, she surrendered to the ecstasy. At the final moment, he reached under her and pinched her lips around her burning clitoris. The bright waves broke, and she cried out.

While she moaned from the aftershocks, strong hands lifted her up onto the pool table. She felt Martin climb up behind her and then yank her upright. He positioned her so she faced the door of the poolroom. The light was just over her head, shining down on her like a spotlight. Gripping the front of her sex, he inserted himself into her still-throbbing heat. He felt enormous inside her, a relentless steel rod filling her up. With one hand, he pressed her lower belly. The combined pressure of his huge cock and his masterful hand sent wild jolts rocketing through her body. With his other hand, he squeezed her breasts together.

“Anyone could walk by,” he muttered in her ear, squeezing her breasts together in one hand. “They’ll see us rutting like animals. They’ll see your hot little pussy wet as an

oyster. Your nipples hard, your legs spread. Your whole body begging to be fucked. Fucked hard.”

His hard thighs pushed against the backs of her legs as he thrust up into her. Each stroke opened her more, made her body arch further, so she would be even more exposed to a potential passerby. However, she could do nothing, even if she wanted to. Martin’s frenzied grip held her tight. Her own unstoppable need held her hostage. His thrusts turned harder, faster, more intense. Martin’s hot liquid jetted into her, and her body convulsed. Again and again, her inner muscles pulled at him, sucking him dry. The waves of another orgasm swamped her, so sharp and sweet, she filled the room with her primal, blissful keening.



## Chapter Five

Annie thought she must have blacked out. The world slowly swam back into focus. She was gazing into the corner pocket of the pool table. Nestled within, she saw the shine of the white cue ball, the last ball Martin had sunk. Dust motes danced in the light above the table. In the shadowed corners of the room, bookshelves. That's right. She was in the basement of a run-down hotel on a remote island in the Bahamas, thousands of miles from home. What was she doing here, naked and spread wide, with her body exposed for all to see? Then again, was there anywhere she'd rather be?

Martin stroked his hand down her spine. Gathering her in his arms, he lifted her off the pool table. "You can stand up now, sugar." When her feet touched the ground, her knees buckled. He grabbed her around the waist to keep her upright. "Do you know how delicious you look? You should walk around naked all day long."

She cleared her throat. "I ... I don't think so. I have social phobia."

"Social phobia? What's that?" His hand was warm around her waist.

"Oh, just ... fear of having people look at me. Fear of being embarrassed. Fear of being with people in general."

"What a tragic waste. Is that why you hide your body away?" His hand descended to her still-damp curls.

"Usually," she said dryly.

"I should thank my lucky stars you're making an exception in my case. You're stunning, you know. Your white skin against the green of the table—I wish I had my camera."

She blanched.

"Camera-shy, too, are you? No worries. No cameras here. Well, we're a sight, aren't we?" He looked down at his dangling cock and the sticky liquid drying on her thighs. "I'd say it's time for a dip. I'll race you to the beach." He strode to the door, naked; his muscles moved beautifully under his bronze skin.

"Just hang on a minute." She looked around for her sarong.

"Looking for this?" He held up the sarong, a crumpled burgundy ball in his fist. "Or this?" He slung the hip-huggers over his shoulder. "Come and get 'em." He disappeared out the door.

Mortified, Annie stood alone in the dim poolroom. All the light, all the fun, seemed to have gone out of the room when Martin left. It even seemed a few degrees cooler and, for the first time, she noticed the dankness of the air. With one hand, she covered her breasts, with the other, her groin. No way could she go out there naked. What if she stayed in the poolroom all night? All week? Would a cleaning lady come eventually? Or some pool players, God forbid? She looked around for something to drape over herself. The couch pillows might work, or maybe she could hold books in front of her if anyone came.

Or...

The whisper of the surf seemed to steal through the window. *Don't be afraid, it hissed. We're waiting for you. Please come and play.*

She pictured the route she would have to take. Once she left the poolroom, she would

run down a path that passed the dive shop on the left, and the outdoor patio on the right. After that, she would pass a small gazebo with a hammock and some chaise lounges. The dive shop would be closed by now, but the patio would be open, lit by red lanterns. Late lingerers might still be sipping their after-dinner drinks. The path had no lights nor did the beach. If she could make it past the patio, she should be safe ... unless someone was walking the beach with a flashlight.

*We're waiting. We'll have so much fun.*

What was worse, standing here naked until some stranger found her, or running naked toward the stranger waiting for her? What was worse, standing paralyzed by fear, or following the path Martin had shown her ... the path of freedom and ecstasy?

Dropping her hands from her body, she marched toward the door. She wouldn't even run. No, she would stroll, slow and sexy. If someone saw her, she'd wave as if nothing were out of the ordinary. Weren't the Germans always sunbathing nude? No one would be surprised. No one would care. Besides, Martin said she was beautiful. She had nothing to be ashamed of.

Slowly, sensuously, she ambled out of the poolroom and up the stairs. Light shone from the patio, and laughing voices rang out. A whole crowd was out there, drinking and telling stories. She turned back in a panic but spotted someone else walking toward the poolroom. It sounded like two young men.

She ran. Down the path, past the patio. As she dashed past, she saw a few heads swivel. Someone said something in German. She heard the sound of chairs being pushed back. God, were they standing to get a better view? What could they see? Her legs flashed white in the darkness, and she felt her breasts bouncing as she ran. That old familiar sensation, spiders crawling on her skin, came back, with ten times the force. Tears ran down her cheeks. She stumbled down the path, until she felt sand under her feet. The beach. A lone figure waited at the water's edge.

She ran to him and Martin opened his arms to enfold her. Shaking, she clung to him. He whispered to her, soothing words, comforting nonsense. She drew back and pounded her fists on his chest. He didn't try to stop her, just continued his murmuring.

"I'm so proud of you, sweetheart. No one saw anything, I promise. You looked like a white nymph, running down the path like that. If anyone noticed, they thought you were a sprite, an enchanted fairy. Or, a drunken hallucination. You're perfectly safe, my little darling."

Slowly, his words sank in, and she relaxed enough to let him draw her back into the warmth of his embrace. She sighed against his chest. "Do you have my clothes?"

"Clothes? They're somewhere. But, we still haven't washed you off. After watching your beautiful breasts bouncing up and down like that, I'm about ready to come all over again. All over that tender little body of yours. I want you nice and clean and fresh. Come on, let's take a dip."

He lifted her in his arms and strode into the surf.

Annie peered down at the dark water, broken by thin lines of white foam that glistened in the moonlight. Swimming in a pool was one thing, but the ocean at night was so alive, so mysterious. Anything could be lurking under that surface. She clung to his shoulders as he lowered her to the water.

"No, wait, I'm not ready," Annie protested.

"Yes, you are, trust me. Let's clean you off." He kneeled in the surf, holding her in

his lap, and she realized they were only waist deep or so. The water was astonishingly warm. Martin gently spread her legs apart and pushed little waves of water against her crotch. He rubbed his hand up and down each inner thigh and ran his fingers through her curls. The salt water stung against her inner lips. She hadn't realized that she was sore from their recent activity.

"Does it sting?" asked Martin. She nodded. "Sea water is very healing. How does it feel now?" He patted her crotch.

"Better." A feeling of warmth swelled her groin. The movement of the water against her sex was hypnotic and deeply relaxing. She leaned back in Martin's arms. "I'm glad we're going swimming."

"Skinny-dipping," he corrected.

"Skinny-dipping. I've never done this before."

"I'm glad to initiate you. There's nothing like being naked in the ocean. Makes you feel free, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Very free." She moved Martin's hands to her breasts, and he covered them, catching the nipples between two fingers. Sighing, she rubbed her ass against him. Like a spear rising from the ocean depths, she felt his erection stir against her.

"How free?"

"This free." She squeezed her thighs around his erection and put one hand down to caress the tip. With her other hand, she pressed Martin's hands against her breasts. He groaned and bounced her breasts up and down, squeezing the nipples so they jutted out like hard, little pebbles. Stabs of sensation jolted her sex, and she moved her hips up and down against his straining cock.

"Suck me," he said. "Just for a minute. Kneel down in the water."

She knelt down, immersing herself in the ocean. His cock bobbed just at the surface. When she took it into her mouth, water lapped against her cheeks. She couldn't distinguish between the fresh salty taste of him and that of the ocean. She wondered what it must feel like to him, as if the ocean itself were drawing on him, teasing him, urging him on.

After a few minutes, he said, "That's enough." He pulled her to her feet and led her, sloshing through the waves, closer to shore. When the water was only a few inches deep, he picked her up and laid her down in the water. She felt the wet sand on her back and the warm water washing over her. The little waves broke just at her sex, and when they receded, the breeze wafted over her. The combination of warm wetness alternating with the cool breeze was excruciating. He kneeled between her legs. She squirmed and twisted her hips up toward him.

"Please," she begged. "Touch me."

"I'm going to do more than touch you," he said, plunging his hand deep into her, making her cry out. He bent down and latched onto her eager clitoris with his mouth. His tongue worked in tandem with his thumb over the sensitive, burning kernel of flesh, and all the while, the waves lapped around them while his hand probed deep inside. She thrashed her head from side to side, wanting to beg and scream for release.

In the back of her mind she remembered they weren't very far from the patio, but that fact simply didn't seem important. What mattered was Martin's hand governing her, tantalizing her, torturing her. What mattered was the moment he pulled out of her. What mattered was the way he kneeled in front of her, displaying his member.

“You look like the god of the sea,” she said in awe, pulling him toward her.

They rolled over in the shallow water so he was on his back. Sitting up, she gripped his hips between her thighs. Her wet hair streamed down her back, and she felt goose bumps rise on her skin.

“If you could only see your eyes,” whispered Martin. “They’re as silver as fog in the moonlight.”

Then it was his turn to roll her over, and she was back in the warm ocean. It hissed and swished around her like a second lover. He lifted her legs up out of the water and wrapped them around his waist.

“Squeeze tight,” he hissed through gritted teeth.

Tightening her legs around him, she watched with dazed eyes as he took a firm grip on her hips. Except for her torso, her body was entirely out of the water. While the playful waves teased her nipples, Martin sank the full length of his pulsing cock deep into her body. When he withdrew all the way back to the tip, she saw his cock gleam, magnificent in the moonlight. He drove into her again, making pleasure burst within her.

All conscious thoughts flew out of her mind as he worked her against that hot spear. His thumbs dug into the flesh above her groin, creating the most exquisite thrill. Frantically, she tried to push her hips closer to him. She wanted all of him, every inch of that glorious rod of fire that pushed into the deepest parts of her. They strained and groaned against each other, as she urged him on with fierce, guttural words.

“Fuck me hard, fuck me,” she heard herself say.

“Pull your nipples,” he ground out. “You want to, I know it.”

He was right. As soon as she put her hands on her nipples and pulled, the way he had done, she felt herself start to rocket over the edge.

“Harder, harder,” he growled.

She rolled her own breasts, squeezing her nipples until she reached a place where pain mingled with pleasure, where all extremes were one.

“Fuck me, fuck me,” she screamed as her head thrashed in the water.

Like a demented pile driver, he slammed into her with huge thrusts that made her body jerk against the sand. She felt pebbles under her back, and a little crab crawling over her arm. *Fuck me, ocean. Fuck me, sand. And, don’t stop...*

With a mighty cry, she arched up, the electricity arcing through her. *Oh God, oh God, oh God...* Her body clenched and twisted in the open air. Martin’s strong hands dug into her hips while he worked himself deeper into her. Every time she thought the orgasm had ended, his thrusts wrenched new cries from her. Until finally he threw his head back and roared. With his chest defiantly arched to the sky, his powerful thighs spread, her body latched onto his, he seemed oblivious to her. She was there for his pleasure, for his release. Weak from her own sublime peak, she was happy to be so.

Martin collapsed next to her. They lay in the shallow water, letting the waves wash them clean. Dazed, Annie stared up at the sky. It looked like a storm was coming, and clouds were beginning to block out the stars. Would Dr. Stein be proud? Not only had she gotten into the ocean, she’d gotten off in the ocean. A hysterical giggle bubbled from her lips.

“What’s the joke, eh?”

“I’m afraid of the water.”

He gave a snort of laughter. “You didn’t seem afraid to me.”

She giggled and then sobered as another thought occurred. "Are there sharks in this ocean?"

"I saw a lemon shark this morning, about fifty yards out. And there's plenty of barracudas."

Annie looked out over the water. In the disappearing moonlight, there was something menacing about it now. The clouds cast dark shadows on the surface. Wind skittered along the waves, brushing the tips into little whitecaps.

"How would you feel about getting out?" she asked nervously.

"Good idea."

He drew her to her feet. They splashed their way to shore. Annie saw a gleam of white halfway up the beach. Her hip-huggers. As if her pants were a long-lost friend, she ran to them and pulled them on over her wet skin. She wrapped the sarong around her like a beach towel.

"Chilly, huh?" Martin rubbed his hands up and down her arms to warm her. She nodded, teeth chattering. "Best thing for a chill is to walk it off. Come on."

Without bothering to put on his clothes, he led her down the beach, away from the Greentree. How strange that she was walking down a beach with an entirely nude man, a man who could have posed for a statue of a Roman warrior, or a Viking maybe, with that blond hair. He paced next to her like a golden leopard. Who was he, anyway? By now, she knew better than to ask. She kept quiet, enjoying the rising wind and the hiss of the waves on the sand. The air smelled of faraway flowers.

"I live down there," said Martin abruptly, after they'd walked a few minutes. He gave a vague gesture toward the beach that stretched before them.

"What?"

"That was one of your questions, where do I live. I think you've earned an answer. I live a few miles down this beach."

"You live here on Cat Island?" Annie frowned, confused.

"Yes. My house is blue, and it's shaped like an octagon. The view is spectacular."

"But—I assumed you were a guest at another hotel."

"No, I'm a local. I sometimes take my meals at the Greentree, when I don't feel like cooking. Greta doesn't mind if I crash her buffet."

It all fell into place. Martin lived here; he and Greta knew each other. They were friends. Greta knew she and Martin weren't a real couple.

"What ... what must Greta think ... about me?"

Martin seemed surprised. "What about you? Greta minds her own business. You don't have to worry."

"You don't understand." Annie felt a panic attack on its way, thundering like a freight train.

"Explain it, then."

"She's probably laughing at me." Her heart raced in that dreaded way. Soon her throat would close up.

"So?"

"Maybe she's told everyone else."

"Told them what?"

"That I'm so pathetic I asked some stranger to pretend to be my boyfriend."

"I prefer the term 'lover.' And it's no pretense, darling. We are lovers, or hadn't you

noticed?"

Martin seemed amused. His eyes gleamed down at her as the rising wind ruffled his hair.

"But we weren't when I got here!"

"We fixed that, didn't we?"

"She probably thinks I'm a ... slut. They probably all think that. Oh my God, the things they must be saying."

She pictured the outdoor patio, the group gathered around their drinks. It was unusual to see so many people on the patio. What if Martin had told them what he was up to? What if they had known she was going to expose herself in public? What if all those people had watched them fucking on the beach? Suddenly she remembered a red light on the patio, like from a camera. What if someone had been videotaping them? What if the whole thing was a devious plot, with Martin as the kinky mastermind?

She whirled away from him. "Get away from me."

"What's wrong?"

"You're disgusting, and I hate you."

The smile disappeared from Martin's face. "You didn't seem to hate me fifteen minutes ago, when you begged me to fuck you."

Did he have to remind her? "Well I hate you now. How could you fool me like that? Oh my God. Do Missy and Daryl know?"

"Who cares what those pretentious dipsticks think? What does any of that matter?"

She backed away, toward the hotel. "If you follow me, I swear, I'll kill you."

He raised his hands in a defensive gesture. "I'm not going to follow you, Annie."

For one crazy moment, she wondered why he'd called her Annie, not Annelise. She took another step away from him.

"But think about this, Annie. You're a grown woman. You make your own choices. Everything that happened between us, you chose."

"What are you saying? That I have no one to blame but myself?"

"Not at all. I'm saying you chose it. Think about why." Now he was the one backing away. Still naked, splendid in the patchy moonlight, he stood a few yards away from her. "Goodbye, Annelise."

She screwed her eyes shut. She didn't want to see that body, which, even now, made her knees tremble. Or that face with its rough perfection. Or those eyes, usually playful, now frowning. Maybe if she wished hard enough, she'd be safely back in her apartment, surrounded by soothing shades of spa-green, nestled on her couch watching Grey's Anatomy.

When she opened her eyes she was still in the Bahamas, still on Cat Island, still on the beach, but Martin was gone.

\* \* \* \*

What a relief, she told herself as she walked back to the hotel, panic attack averted. Martin had made a fool of her. If it hadn't been for him, she would never have exposed herself to potential mockery and humiliation. She would have had a nice peaceful vacation. Boring, but peaceful.

As she walked across the courtyard, she heard Greta calling her name. Her heart sank. How would she be able to look Greta in the eyes? What if Greta wanted to kick her

out for lying, for besmirching the morals of the Greentree Resort? Maybe she'd have to wear a scarlet letter S for slut.

She scrunched her eyes shut as Greta caught up to her. "You forgot to write checkout date on card. When you plan to leaf?" Annie opened one eye and peered up at the woman. Greta gazed back serenely with those electric blue eyes. "You okay? Do you feel sick? Was it da schnitzel?"

What the hell was Greta talking about? "I didn't eat the schnitzel," said Annie faintly.

"Gut. Some people, they say the schnitzel was bad, it made them feel funny. They go outside for air. Many go to sleep early tonight. So ... which day you leaf?"

"I was planning to stay another two nights."

"Vunderful! Maybe ve haf party before you go. Martin vill miss you," she added as she turned to go. "He likes you very much."

Annie stumbled along the gravel path toward her bungalow. She'd done it again. She'd let her nutty fears run away with her. Those people on the patio hadn't been gathered to see her naked; they'd been recovering from bad schnitzel. And, Greta wasn't mocking her. If anything, she'd sounded wistful when she mentioned Martin, as if Greta wished Martin liked her instead of Annie. What woman, of any age, wouldn't wish for that? Annie, when she was in her right mind, had loved every second she'd spent with that maddening, fascinating man.

Now, he'd seen her at her craziest. *Congratulations, Annie. You drove away the sexiest man you'll ever lay eyes on.*

## Chapter Six

Annie lay in bed, listening to the storm. A mocking wind chattered through the palm trees outside her window. *What a fool, what a fool. Foolish Annie. Better go home now. Go cry to Dr. Stein.*

"Hey, leave Dr. Stein out of this," she answered.

*What a fool, what a crazy fool.*

"I'm not crazy. I just had a moment of paranoia. It's no wonder. I haven't seen Dr. Stein in almost a week. And come to think of it, I'm having a conversation with the wind, so maybe I am crazy."

She pulled a pillow over her head to shut out the persistent whining. Still, it filtered through the window and tugged at her clothing. *Get up, get up! You can't just lie there. Get up and dance. Get up and fight. Get up and do something.* Instead, she reached for her cosmetics bag and dug out her earplugs and a Xanax.

The next morning she swallowed another one and slept most of the day away. It was just like boarding school, when she'd holed up in her dorm room where no one could hurt her. Eventually, her roommate had called in the school counselor and soon after that Dr. Stein had entered her life. She'd come so far, thanks to him. Except he wasn't here now, and neither was Martin, thanks to her craziness.

When her stomach growled around lunchtime, she crept into the dining room. Bracing for the sight of Daryl and Missy, instead she found a few of the schnitzel victims exchanging stories of their rough nights. No one looked strangely at her. No one asked where Martin was.

People mostly pay attention to themselves, thought Annie. There really isn't much point in being so darn worried all the time.

After lunch, the wind was still high enough to pile up sand dunes outside the hotel's patio. It made sunbathing at the beach impossible, so Annie stretched out on a chaise lounge by the pool, in her bikini. No one gave her a second glance, other than the young mother who asked if she could keep an eye on her sleeping baby while she went to pee.

Where were the spiders crawling up her skin when people looked at her? Where were her fears?

As she let the sun caress her body, she realized there was only one thing she was really, truly afraid of at that moment. She was afraid she'd never see Martin again.

At dinnertime, she dressed in her sexiest dress, a gauzy pale gold concoction that dipped low in the back and left her shoulders bare. However, Martin didn't come. Missy and Daryl didn't show up either. She ate dinner with a group of Germans who picked cautiously at the food on their plates.

"I don't eat processed meat," she told them, to explain why she'd escaped the nightmare. At least one of her phobias had a benefit.

Greta, who liked to dart from table to table like a hummingbird, told her that Missy and Daryl had decided to leave early. "Such a sad ting. Why go back to New York, ven here ve haf paradise?"

"Paradise, paradise," agreed the Germans, still sickly and pale under their Cat Island tans.



“Ven you go back tomorrow, Annie, you tell them ve insist they visit again soon.”

“I’ll do that,” she said, her heart sinking. Tomorrow. One more night on Cat Island, and then she’d be gone. She jumped up, knocking her chair to the floor. “Oh gosh, thanks for reminding me. I’d better go pack.”

She ran out of the dining room, but she didn’t go back to her room. Instead, she headed for the beach. The wind had finally died down to a gentle breeze, but it had left behind piles of seaweed dotted with plastic bottles washed in from the sea. The briny aroma of stranded, dying sea creatures rose from the beach. Her flip-flops sank into the spongy sand.

She heard the skittering of a crab launching itself away from the intruder. Poor crabs. She knew just how they felt when it came to intruders. Although that didn’t mean she wanted them crawling across her feet.

What else was out here in the dark? Looking back, she saw the glowing red lanterns of the Greentree Resort. In the other direction, there wasn’t a single light. It was clear, and the moon provided plenty of illumination, but anything could be under those piles of seaweed. Giant crabs, for instance. Her nerve failed as her imagination began to spin out of control. Pirates. Ax murderers. Above the beach, on dry land, the wind stirred the tall grasses and twisted cedar trees. Anything could be hiding up there, too. Snakes. Wolves. Ax murderers.

*Breathe in, breathe out*, she reminded herself. She conjured an image of Martin, naked and fearless, striding down this very same beach the night before. If he were walking next to her, she wouldn’t be afraid. No, she’d be too worried about what crazy thing he’d come up with next. Roll around in the stinky seaweed? Rub plastic bottles across her nipples? She laughed, and the sound lifted into the breeze, which seemed to laugh along with her. *Nothing to fear, nothing to fear, nothing to fear...* she repeated as she walked into the moonlit darkness.

A few miles down the beach, he’d said. Those weren’t very precise directions. On the other hand, how many blue, octagon-shaped houses could there be? For the first two miles, she didn’t see a single house. A new worry occurred to her. What if his house was set back from the beach, where she couldn’t see it?

Doesn’t matter, she decided. Even if she never found his house, she’d rather spend the night looking for it than go back to her bungalow, knowing she’d never see him again.

Finally, after what seemed like endless walking, she saw a light winking from the top of a low bluff. Bracing herself for the familiar panic, she scrambled up a sandy path that led to the top. *It’s not that high*, she told herself fiercely. *It’s not a mountain. Fear of heights doesn’t include a teeny, weeny cliff.* Even so, she felt the fist of fear close around her throat. Ignoring it, she climbed on. When she reached the top, she rolled onto her stomach and hugged the earth. *Breathe in, breathe out.*

As her pulse steadied, she realized, *I survived. And maybe Martin is inside that house.*

Pulling herself to her feet, she padded across the grass toward the house. Light blazed from huge picture windows that looked out onto the ocean. The view must be spectacular. This had to be Martin’s house. Inside, she saw bright splotches of color, in free-floating shapes she couldn’t identify.

It took three knocks before Martin answered. His hair was spiked with sweat, and his

gray eyes had an unfocussed mistiness. Was he in the middle of ... was he with another...? She couldn't bear to finish the thought. He looked at her blankly, as if he didn't recognize her. Her stomach lurched, and she turned to flee.

"No! Come back," he said quickly. "Sorry, I was..." He gestured vaguely behind him. She looked past him, and all the bright colors in the room coalesced into giant oil paintings. Spectacular oil paintings took up whole walls. One was propped against a huge easel in the middle of the room. In his hand, Martin held a paintbrush.

"You're an artist." Annie couldn't stop staring at those enormous canvasses. They were lush, saturated with color, dripping with sensuality. One showed a naked couple lounging on a banquet table loaded with fruit. Another depicted a child laughing at a grasshopper; his face lit up with joy that seemed to leap off the canvas. "They're ... amazing."

"Thank you. Can I ... uh ... get you something? Sorry, I go into something of a trance when I work. Takes a while to come out of it."

"No, I'm fine." Now that she was here, in this palace of sensual artistry, she felt overwhelmed with awkwardness. She'd interrupted him at work, distracted him from a masterpiece.

"Rubbish. At the very least, you need some water. Did you walk all that way across the beach?"

Annie nodded.

"In the dark? Alone? And you climbed up my hill?"

"Yes."

"I'm honored." He handed her a mason jar filled with water, and she caught a whiff of that underlying, tarry scent she'd noticed before. The jar had a spot of cobalt paint on it. Annie wondered if it had been used to soak brushes.

She took a sip anyway, wishing it were filled with vodka. "Why do you live out here?" she asked.

"On Cat Island? Remote. No distractions. No ATM machine. No cell phones. No garbage pickup. Mail only once a week. Only about two roads. Suits me. Now, what brought you out on this fine evening?"

She gathered her courage. "I'm sorry I flipped out last night," she said. "You didn't do anything wrong. You didn't deserve to be yelled at like that."

"No?"

"No. Like you said, I could have stopped it whenever I wanted to. I didn't choose to."

"Don't let me entirely off the hook now." Martin walked to a small worktable and poured turpentine into a glass jar. "As soon as I saw you, I knew I would have you, one way or another. You gave me an opening, and I grabbed it. So to speak."

"You mean, when you saw me at the airport?" said Annie faintly.

"Yup. Sprawled in the dirt, with your hair around your face. I wanted to paint you right then and there."

"Oh no, I won't be painted."

"Why not?" Martin swirled the paintbrush around in the jar. Annie felt as if she could feel its movements against her own skin.

"Well, why?"

"Because you're beautiful. There's a special neurotic energy about you that I find

incredibly sexy. It makes me want to know you. To see right into the core of you. I can only do that by painting you.”

Annie was quiet. Was it so bad, the way he put it? All she would have to do is stand still. Pose. Besides, Martin was an incredible painter. She would be contributing to real art. “I guess I could do that. Where should I stand?”

“Oh, no, my darling. Not so fast. If I’m going to paint you, I’m going to do it the way I want.”

“Oh.” Annie blushed. “Naked, I suppose.”

He laughed, wiping the paintbrush on a rag. “That would be too easy. Too mundane. I have a reputation to uphold. If I paint you, it has to be in a certain scenario.”

“Scenario?”

“I want to paint your deepest fantasy. We’ll do a reenactment, you and I, and when we reach the most provocative, most evocative moment, the one that shows me the true essence of Annelise Swenson, that’s what I’ll paint.”

The vibrant colors spun around her in a dizzying swirl. “No. No. No, no, no.”

She turned and ran out of the blue octagon. Outside, the warm flower-scented night welcomed her and, sinking down onto the grass, she breathed it in, taking big gulps of the soothing air. Slowly she calmed down.

That man inside, who was he? Why did he want to pry inside her? Why should he care about her secrets? She didn’t have to do what he wanted. The cliff didn’t seem so high now that she was at the top. The beach was just below, and it was only an hour walk back to the Greentree. Back to her room and her suitcase, which she still hadn’t packed.

However, this was her last night here on Cat Island, her last night with the ocean. *See you soon, sweet Annelise*, she heard the waves whisper. *We’ll play again another time.*

*Oh no you won’t*, she answered. *I’m leaving and I’m never coming back. We’ve played enough.*

*Never enough, never enough*, came its gentle hiss.

She looked back at Martin’s house. The picture windows shone with light and color, big blocks of mingled ruby, sunflower, and cobalt. The house seemed to hold an explosion of life within it. Outside, all was dark and serene. Inside, there was pleasure, joy, and freedom. Inside, there was Martin.

Martin looked up as she walked back inside the blue octagon. A strange expression, part relief, part respect, flashed across his face. Already he had set up a fresh canvas on his easel. Brushes were laid out. Glistening dots of color awaited his command.

“I’m standing in a golden basin,” she told him. “It’s some kind of Arabian harem. I’m naked, and two slaves are oiling my body.”

“We’ll have to improvise,” said Martin. He spread a drop cloth on the floor. He lifted her dress over her head. Underneath she was naked. He positioned her on the cloth and then settled the gold fabric of her dress around her naked feet. “Hang on, let’s set the mood.”

He disappeared, and a minute later, she heard the sound of an Arabian flute, accompanied by a hypnotic drumbeat. Trance music. “The right music makes all the difference in my work. What’s next?”

“I don’t know. This feels funny. It’s not like how it is in the dream.”

“Ah, a dream. I often paint from my dreams. This time, we’ll go from your subconscious into mine. And give our imaginations a little credit. Now close your eyes.

Listen to the music. Remember the last time you had the dream. What happened when the slaves started oiling your body?"

With her eyes closed, it was easier to bring back the sensations in her dream. "Well, there's something strange about the oil. It ... stimulates me. Drives me crazy."

"And where do they put it?"

"All over. No, just my nipples. And ... down there. And that's what really makes me go wild."

"What does it feel like?" His voice rumbled in her ear.

"Oh, just ... like I lost my mind, and I don't know where I am anymore, the only thing I care about is getting some kind of relief. The slaves won't touch me. They hold my hands behind my back so I can't touch myself. It's torture." She started to open her eyes, but Martin was there.

"Uh-uh," he said, and tied a length of black cloth over her eyes. He fastened her hands behind her back with something silky. "This will keep external reality from distracting you. Go back to the dream. That's the only reality we care about right now."

He began stroking lightly scented oil into her body. With deep, rolling motions, he smoothed the tension from her thigh muscles, her shoulders. Floating into a relaxed dream-like state, she shuddered and sighed.

"Let me try something. Don't move."

For a moment he disappeared, and she stood alone and naked in the room. A waft of air announced his return. A hand on her breast made her jump. "How does this feel?"

He rubbed her nipple with oily fingers. A new smell, something spicy and pungent, made her nose wrinkle. And then a tingle began in her nipple, a tingle that reached deep inside her lower belly. It swelled to a burning, throbbing need. All her being seemed to be focused on that tiny nub, which was growing and hardening. It was just like her dream... But better.

"What is it?" She choked out the words.

"An herb I happen to know about. Nothing bad, my darling. Is it too much?"

No, no, it wasn't too much; she needed more. The other nipple was crying out for attention. With an inarticulate groan, she offered her other breast up to him.

"Ah, my beauty. How you excite me." When he rubbed the other nipple with the spicy oil, her breasts felt as if they'd jump off her body. He blew air across her nipples, and she cried out at the sensation that raced through her. Then she felt his knees part her legs.

"I don't know ... I don't know ... if I can take it..."

"I'm an Extremist remember? Only one way to find out."

His fingers surrounded her clitoris. It took an instant, during which she held her breath, and then the burn clutched at her lower body. More than a burn, it was a craving. Need danced through her veins, turning her body into one throbbing cry for release.

"What now?" Martin's voice reached through the haze of nerve-shattering desire.

"What happens next in your dream?"

"The ... there's a court filled with people, and they're all watching. The slaves bring me in to the sultan. Please, touch me. Please." Her knees buckled, and she struggled to stay on her feet.

"Not until I hear the rest. Go on."

"The sultan makes me ... all I want is for him to ... to help me ... make me come ...

but first he makes me suck him. On my knees.”

She felt a strong hand pushing her down to her knees, and Martin’s hard-as-iron cock at her lips. Strongly, greedily, she drew him into her mouth. Her tongue stroked him like a hungry cat. Below, she felt her juices, combined with the spicy oil, run down her thighs, creating new trails of fire on her skin. For what seemed an eternity, she worked her mouth around his cock while the ache in her sex grew until she knew nothing else.

“Does he come?” Martin said in a choked voice. She shook her head, and he pulled away from her. “What then?”

Annie heard her own voice come in a hypnotic tone, as she knelt, blindfolded, hands behind her back. She was in a dream, after all. None of this was real. “He orders the slaves to display me to the court. They lift me off my feet and take me to where the people are watching. Each one gets to do what they want. The first man kind of bunches both breasts in his hands, so the nipples are squeezed forward. Yeah, like that.” Annie stopped to let out a deep moan as Martin did as she described. “He sucks one nipple and lets the guy next to him suck the other.”

Oh, it was sheer blissful agony as Martin’s mouth descended to her breasts.

“Then a lady comes behind me—I can smell her perfume—and plumps my ass. She spans me a little, not hard, just so it tingles and makes me jump. I can feel it in my nipples. Then they pass me down the line and someone holds my legs apart while someone else pulls my lower lips open. He pokes around at my clitoris, which feels like a bonfire by now. As soon as he touches me I start to go off, and he snatches his hand away. I cry out to him, begging and pushing my groin after his hand. But all they’ll do is dance around it, opening my thighs, bending me over, prying open my ass. There are hands all over me, in every little secret place on my body, except that one spot that’s about to explode, and I’m crying and pleading, and they’re laughing and stroking me, every stroke making me more and more insane, until finally the Sultan yells some kind of command. Everything stops. All the hands disappear. The slaves back away. But my body is still shaking, and I’m still crying. If I don’t come, I’ll die.”

“And?”

“I dance. For the Sultan and his court. I undulate my body, I offer my breasts, I stroke my belly. I don’t touch my sex, because I know it’s not allowed. I lower myself to the floor. It’s cold marble, and it feels nice on my hot skin.”

“Show me.”

He untied her hands, and she lay down on the floor. The blindfold was still on, but she felt the gauze of her dress and the rough canvas of the drop cloth underneath her. Slowly, provocatively, she writhed in an erotic, teasing dance. Moving her hands across her breasts, she offered her nipples to her unseen audience. Then she rolled over, arching her back to offer her ass. Her limbs were so heavy with desire that she felt she was moving through thick honey. The unseen watcher demanded more. She had to tempt him, to make herself irresistible. On her knees, she thrust her breasts forward, holding each nipple between thumb and forefinger, twisting and teasing them into nearly unbearable peaks. When they were so hard and aching that she felt tears running down her cheeks, she brought her hands down to the floor behind her. Spreading her knees wider, she brought one hand up to caress her inner thigh. She tangled a finger in her curls and pumped her hips up and down. Although she couldn’t see herself, she imagined her sex as a glistening, red-hot fruit, split open and begging. As her finger brushed against her

clitoris, she lost control, and her hips began to dance at a rat-a-tat pace against her hand.

“Please, please,” she begged. “Please, Martin.”

“I can barely stop myself, darling. You should see my cock right now. But, what happens in the dream?”

“Nothing! The whole court watches me beg and plead. They watch as I expose myself in every possible way, while the Sultan lets one of the slave girls suck him off. Then I wake up.”

“Well, that won’t do.” As if she were nothing but a toy, Martin flipped her over and firmly took hold of her burning crotch. At the very first touch the waves began. Held tight in his lap with her breasts crushed in one rough hand and her crotch in his other, she jerked and cried out her pleasure with great wracking sobs. Before the waves died down he lifted her up and jammed her onto his hardened cock.

After a few twisting thrusts, he came up onto his knees and pushed her down so her face was mashed into the gauzy cloth of her dress. Her torso twisted and her nipples seemed to seek out the gauze on their own. She rubbed her breasts against the teasing abrasion of the fabric and arched her hips high in the air.

With both hands he spread her cheeks so she felt herself split apart, and drove into her. She screamed. She was turned inside out. Everything inside—her desire, her need, her craving, her shame—was open to the wide world. Nothing outside—her shyness, her fear, her shell—mattered anymore. Greedily, she spread her own thighs as wide as she could, twisted her hips to give him deeper penetration. She felt the shockwaves throughout her body, in her womb, her tongue, the tips of her toes, in every nerve ending. Under his hammering strokes, the world fell apart and a giant fountain of release gushed through her, smashing everything into a kaleidoscope of cobalt-ruby-sunflower smithereens.

## Chapter Seven

When Annie opened her eyes again, Martin was sketching her using charcoal and a sketchbook. He looked back and forth from her face to his sketchbook with quick, intent glances. Annie sat up and gathered her gold dress around her.

"Don't worry, I have your body memorized," he told her. "But I want to make sure I get your face just right. Lift your chin, would you?"

Frowning, she lifted her chin. After that transcendent sexual encounter, how could he think about his sketchbook? "Did you get what you needed?" she asked, disgruntled.

"Yes." His abstracted tone gave her no comfort.

Annie jumped to her feet and pulled on her gold dress. "I don't see why you need my face."

He said nothing and kept sketching. She covered her face with her hands.

"Isn't it a little hard to see that way?" He sounded more amused than annoyed.

"Stop drawing my face."

"What are you so worried about? Your face is part of you. I want to know all of you. I wonder if Mona Lisa was this much trouble."

"She wasn't naked."

"I think she probably was. Just my own personal theory, of course. Now are you going to stand there with your hands over your face all night?" When she peeked through her fingers, she saw him frown down at his sketchbook. He smudged a line with his thumb, and she remembered how that thumb felt as it rubbed oil into her nipples. Even now she felt a dull throbbing in the tips of her breasts. As she remembered the peaks, or was it depths, of pleasure she'd gone to, she suddenly felt furious. Such a momentous experience in her life was simply another sketch for him.

"No," she said, with determination. "I'm not." She turned toward the door. "If you can't remember my face, feel free to use someone else's." She didn't look back, but she could feel his gaze heavy on her back. Was he sad, surprised, or indifferent? She couldn't tell.

When he didn't follow her, she figured indifferent was the correct guess. What an idiot, she berated herself as she stalked back down the beach to the Greentree. What did she expect from the man? Martin had never said anything about ... oh, emotions, feelings ... anything like that. Why should he? She'd roped him into their charade; he'd turned it into a sex game and then coaxed her into revealing her long-running fantasy. Whether he did it for sex or for art, for fun or for subject matter, what difference did it make?

The night was eerily still. The wind had died completely, and the waves made no more sound than milk in a glass. "Nothing to say?" She challenged the ocean. "I went out to play, like you said, and where did it get me?" The ocean had no answer.

She had her own answer. Where did it get her? It got her right where she was: walking in a sexy gold dress, unafraid, down a secluded beach on a romantic island in the Bahamas, after fucking her brains out. Dr. Stein would be proud ... if she could bring herself to tell him about it.

\* \* \* \*

She left out most of the details, but even without specifics there was enough to make her therapist's eyes pop open and his bushy eyebrows waggle up and down. It certainly wasn't the kind of reaction she was used to seeing from him. "So how do you feel about it?" was all he asked.

"Feel about it? Um, I don't know how to answer that. I guess I feel different."

"Different how?" It had been a long time since Dr. Stein had taken notes during their sessions, but now he drew a notebook toward him.

"Well, I rode the subway today."

"Really!"

"Yeah. I couldn't get a cab, and it was raining. Did you know that the subway costs quite a bit less than a cab?"

"Indeed. Have you tried anything else? What about crowded places, or mountains?" He looked back and forth from her face to his notebook.

Suddenly she wanted to cover her face. "Stop that, please."

He was so surprised he dropped his pen.

"It makes me uncomfortable," she explained. What she didn't mention was how much it made her regret those last minutes in the blue octagon house. So Martin had wanted to remember her face; was that so bad?

"I understand. You also seem to be more able to speak up for yourself. Is that another difference you've discovered?"

"I guess so. I did tell my boss to stop calling me in the middle of the night. She shouldn't assume I'm always available."

"Very true. I notice you're not wearing your usual black. Is there a reason for that?"

Annie looked down at her outfit. She was wearing a vintage emerald-green satin, fitted suit that she'd found at a thrift shop around the corner. It fit her perfectly and made her eyes look stunning against the light tan she'd gotten on Cat Island. Everywhere she went today people had looked at her. Even the doorman of her building had done a double take and stared her up and down. She'd almost fled back into the elevator, but then he'd put his hand on his heart and said, "If I wasn't married with six kids I'd be on my knees. You're a knockout, Annie."

It wasn't so bad, being looked at. Even by an elderly, gray-bearded psychologist who had, perhaps accidentally, changed her life.

"Well, I got out of the habit of wearing black when I was on Cat Island. No one wears black there, you know."

"I imagine not."

"Even though there are coconut trees everywhere, I never saw anyone get hit with a coconut."

"Very fortunate," murmured Dr. Stein. She could practically see the scribbled notes forming in his head. "I believe our time is up, Annie."

"Annelise."

"Annelise."

"And thank you, Dr. Stein. Thanks for everything."

On the way home, she took the subway again. It was more crowded than the subway she'd taken that morning and the press of people made her breath come fast. *Breathe in, breathe out.* This was a mistake. She wasn't ready. These people were going to crush her, take all the air and suffocate her. Just as the hysteria began to set in, she heard a voice



call her name. "Annie, is that you?"

Missy Hertzberger was working her way through the jam-packed subway car. Missy on a subway? Quite a comedown from the Aston Martin she used to drive everywhere. Annie braced herself for some kind of nasty comment about her outfit, but Missy looked different too, less sure of herself, less queen-of-Manhattan. "When did you get back from the Bahamas?" she asked. "Love that suit, by the way. Vintage?"

"Yes. Thrift shop, actually."

"Fabulous. I haven't seen you around town much. Have you been busy? How long have you been back?" It was a typical Missy interrogation, with a twist. She sounded anxious, not mocking.

"I got back a few weeks ago. And no, I haven't told anyone about Daryl's job."

It was priceless, the look on Missy's face. If only Martin were there, with his sketchbook. "I didn't mean ... well, that's to say ... thank you." The subway screeched into the next station as Missy wormed her way toward the door.

"But Missy," called Annie. "That's not to say I don't remember."

Missy shot her a look of pure hatred and dug an elbow into the ribs of an iPod-wearing teenager who hadn't gotten out of her way quickly enough. Annie smiled, satisfied. Having something on Missy was a gift. It would save her countless moments of potential humiliation. She had Martin to thank for that.

For the thousandth time, she wondered what Martin was doing at that moment. Was he at the Greentree, seducing another lonely single woman on vacation? Was he holed up in the octagon with his paints and canvasses? Did he ever think about her? If he did, did he get as aroused as she did every night thinking about him?

The doorman winked at her as he ran to open the door. "You got people talking, Annie. Mr. Dunn upstairs was asking about you. He's single, you know. Lawyer-type."

"Oh. Well, I'm not, I mean, I don't..." What did she mean? She was single, wasn't she? New York was full of men. Maybe it was time to stretch her wings a little. "He's the one in 3B, right?"

"Right," said the doorman with a wink. Annie gave him a smile and went to the bronze bank of mailboxes to collect her mail. Bills, advertisements, and a postcard fell out of the mailbox. Not a postcard, she realized as she turned it over, but an invitation to an art show that night at a gallery in SoHo.

"Experience the Extremists," the card said in bold black letters on white. It invited her to the unveiling of new works from the world's foremost proponents of one of the most talked-about schools of contemporary art. The show would feature three "world-famous artists." She'd never heard of the first two. The third was Martin van der Kamp.

Martin, the Extremist.

The invitation was addressed to Annelise Swenson in a strong, spiky scrawl. On the back of the card was scribbled a hand-written note. "Please come. M."

*Please come.* She could almost hear his playful, rumbling voice saying the words, no doubt giving them a sexy double-entendre. *Please come*, he'd written, not *Please go*. The word "come" implied that he would be there, too.

Did that mean Martin was in New York at this very moment? That she might see him that very night? The thought momentarily rooted her to the marble floor of the foyer.

"Hi, Annie," she dimly heard a voice say. "It's nice to see you."

She smiled vaguely up at the blurry figure at a nearby mailbox.

It wasn't until she was in the elevator that she realized that was the guy from 3B. He might as well have been a houseplant for how much she'd noticed him. She could only think about one thing at the moment: in just a few hours, she might see Martin again.

\* \* \* \*

Annie stepped out of the cab into a scene of feverish excitement. Throngs of stylish uptown arts patrons mingled with the punk-rock hipsters of the downtown crowd. The gallery was lit up with bright strobe lights, and the crowd was so thick there was an overflow of people outside, clamoring to get in.

Even the scene outside was fascinating. Annie saw a glamorous woman in a ripped ball gown holding a long gold cigarette holder. She was arm-in-arm with a man in a kilt. Another woman was wearing a virtually see-through silver mesh sack dress. Annie wondered if it had literally been a sack before it had become a dress. Beautiful young servers made their way through the crowd distributing glasses of champagne. The street was alive with laughter, chatter, and the sounds of electronic music pumping from the gallery.

Annie was glad she'd worn black. It made it easier to blend in, even though the only real way to blend in with this crowd would be to dress as bizarrely as possible. The tight black sheath she wore was tame in comparison, although the way it clung to her body made her hyper-aware of her own skin. No one paid any attention to her as she waited her turn to get into the exhibit.

She eavesdropped as she waited. The Extremists were the talk of the art world, it seemed. With their lush sense of color and bold sensuality, they appealed to all ends of the art spectrum. Unlike other current trends, they didn't aim to shock or provoke controversy. The Extremists were all about bringing joy and excitement back to art. That's why they'd made this exhibit into a party.

And, a party it was. When the music switched to a salsa beat, some normally jaded New Yorkers began a conga line out in the street. The servers came out with crab puffs, then a round of cream puffs, and then marshmallow puffs. A young man came through with an incense burner, much like the censers used in Catholic churches, and the delicious scent of sandalwood blotted out the usual smell of garbage in the streets. For sheer entertainment, there didn't seem to be a better place in the whole city to spend an evening. With so much craziness going on around her, Annie forgot to be self-conscious and simply enjoyed herself.

After an hour or so, it was her turn to go inside. In the gallery, the music was even louder, and the energy of the crowd more intense. The gallery had unusually high ceilings, and the huge canvasses of the Extremists filled every inch of the space. "Overwhelming," "breathtaking," and "spectacular," were some of the words Annie overheard. She felt lost in an ocean of glamorous people and dizzying color.

No longer was she moving under her own power; instead she was drifting with the movement of the crowd from one painting to the next. On one canvas an overhead view of a crowded street mixed business-suited types with singing angels perched on nearby buildings. A few of the people in the crowd were looking up and singing along with the angels, with expressions of exaltation on their tear-streaked faces. In another painting, a patient undergoing open-heart surgery spilled marigolds from his opened chest. The paintings were surreal and joyful yet gut-wrenching.

The crowd was in awe, with each painting provoking “oohs” and “aahhs” and lots of animated conversation. In the first two rooms of the gallery Annie didn’t see anything with Martin’s name on it. Nor did she see Martin. She realized his paintings must be in the final room, where the stream of people was heading.

She let herself flow with the crowd, losing herself in the shared excitement. They were witnessing history; they were witnessing something primal and raw, something new and transformative.

Then—they were witnessing Annie.

A hush fell over the crowd when they reached the last room. One painting drew all eyes; one painting so compelling, so riveting, that no one could look away. Annie found herself staring transfixed at her own dream, brought to vibrant, orgasmic life.

She stood naked on a golden basin. Two turban-wearing slaves knelt next to her, rubbing oil on her body as though she were a precious object. Her head was tossed back; her eyes glowed silver green, and her hair was a wild black tangle, like electrified snakes. With her own two hands, she offered her breasts to the audience. The nipples were wet and aroused, the color of ripe plums. At the triangle of her sex, her curls gleamed with moisture. Warm shades of gold dominated the color scheme, so the entire painting seemed to shine with the afterglow of ecstasy. Even the room seemed to take on a warm satisfied atmosphere. While the other paintings had provoked an awed reaction, this one inspired sensual sighs to rise up from the crowd.

Annie gazed at the people around her. They looked avidly at the painting, just as the onlookers in the sultan’s court looked at her in the dream. She saw their expressions of lust and longing. They wanted to be in that painting with her. If they could have jumped into the painting and fondled those proudly aroused nipples, they would have. If they could have knelt at her feet with the slaves and oiled her white skin, they would have. If they could have touched one hair on her wild head, they would have. She thought she saw one man touch himself and another brush his hand against his companion’s breast.

She couldn’t blame them. Even she was on fire, throbbing beneath her black sheath. Fidgeting, she adjusted her dress.

“Hey, isn’t that her?” she heard someone whisper.

“Where?”

“Right over there, in the black dress. With the eyes.”

“Oh my God, you’re right!”

One by one, heads turned from the painting toward Annie. She felt her face flame as the weight of the crowd’s combined attention settled on her. *No*, she tried to say, *it’s not me. It’s someone else, someone much more beautiful, more sexual, more uninhibited.* Instead, the room spun around her; the faces all melded into one blur. Blindly, she turned to run, but the wall of people was impossible to budge. Every neck craned to get a look at the real-life subject of the most sensational painting at the exhibit.

“Where is she?”

“I see her, I see her!”

Were those flashbulbs going off? Annie flinched and threw up an arm to block her face, but someone, rudely, pulled her arm away from her face.

“It is you! Can I take a picture?”

“Look over here!”

“Over here!”

It was madness. Annie wanted to scream. When a camera loomed before her face, she felt a thrill of terror. A kind of frenzy took hold of the crowd, a sexual frenzy. These men and women could do anything to her. If someone felt free to grab her arm, what else might they do? After all, she was that same naked woman, ten feet tall on the wall above their heads, displaying her wet crotch and swollen nipples to the world. Just like in her dream, she'd been offered to the court, in spectacular fashion, and they might consider it their right to have their way with her. They might tear her clothes off, grab her nipples for themselves, pull up her skirt and probe her shameful wetness.

Her tiny thong panties were soaked through. As they'd find out soon enough, when their hands were everywhere on her, when they were opening her, fingering her, turning her over, spreading her open, pinching her, licking her, squeezing her.

The sexual vision was so overpowering, she felt faint. She started to sink to the floor. Hands grabbed at her and one of them brushed a nipple. It burned against her black dress. She let out a moan. Her sex tingled. Oh, where was that hand, the one that had accidentally brushed her breast? She wanted it lower; she wanted it under her dress, against her pulsing clitoris.

*Nothing easier*, she thought crazily. All she had to do was fall to the floor and sprawl her legs apart. Someone would fall on her and rip the soaking panties in two. Someone else would pull her dress over her head, so all she'd see was merciful darkness as the greedy hands descended on her. Mouths would attach to her nipples. Hands would plunge into her sex. Screams would rip from her mouth.

"Let me through," came a commanding voice.

Annie steadied herself against the arm holding her up. She blinked to clear her vision. Hard to believe, she wasn't on the floor being sexually used by a gallery full of strangers. Her sex still burned; moisture still felt sticky on her thighs. When she twisted toward the voice, her nipples brushed painfully against her dress. Passionately, she wanted off with the dress. She wanted to be naked and free, like the woman in the painting, like the woman on Cat Island, the woman she'd been with Martin.

"I've been looking for you," Martin murmured, breaking through the crowd. The same words he'd spoken to her at the Greentree buffet. God, he was beautiful, with his rumpled blond hair and gleaming, gray eyes. He wore an open-collared, white linen shirt and loose cotton pants, much as he'd worn on Cat Island.

"Hard to miss me," she managed, with a glance at the painting.

"It's not hard at all to miss you," he said seriously. "I've missed you a great deal." He turned to the crowd. "Thanks for coming to the show, everyone. I'm Martin van der Kamp, and I'd like you to meet the lady who inspired my very favorite painting here tonight. This is Annelise."

Eyes swung toward her and embraced her in a flood of warmth. From the crowd, she felt approval, gratitude, admiration, and ... envy. She straightened proudly. What woman wouldn't want to be Martin's inspiration? If there was an undercurrent of lust, then all the better. She imagined the people here tonight going home and screwing their brains out. It would be a sex-filled night across Manhattan, and she would be partially responsible.

She smiled up at Martin. He leaned over, brushed the thick hair away from her ear and, breath tickling her neck, whispered, "I know what you were thinking about just now."

"What?" she asked, warily.

“I could see it on your face. I know you, Annelise. I see your nipples poking up, and I don’t even have to slide my hand under your dress to know how excited you are.”

She felt weak, and her face burned. “So?”

“So—I am, too. Do you know what it’s been like, alone with my paints, bringing that gorgeous body of yours to life? Now, I have it right here in front of me.” He rubbed his hand over her black-sheathed ass, and she shivered. “Let me ask you something. Did you ever wonder what my deepest fantasy was?”

“Yes. But I’m terrible at truth or dare.”

“Do you see that door in the corner? It’s a coatroom. I want you to meet me back there in ten minutes. I have to schmooze a little more. The art critic from the Times just got here. If I’m not there in ten minutes, just wait for me. Take all your clothes off. If you’re a good girl and do what I say, I’ll let you in on my fantasy.”

## Chapter Eight

Martin released Annie. Immediately, a crush of fawning admirers swarmed around him. Annie heard them gush and flatter. “Fabulous, Martin, unbelievable.” “The critics are going to go insane.” And, amazingly, “Where did you find her? She’s sensational.” As she wound her way through the crowd, buffeted by elbows and knees, she noticed more than a few glances shoot her way. She pasted a smile on her face and soldiered on.

When she reached the coatroom, she slipped gratefully into its welcome dimness. The gallery was so over-stimulating. The electronic beat still pulsed through the door, but at least now, it was muffled. The smell of expensive fur and clashing perfumes rose around her. As her eyes adjusted to the relative darkness, she saw she was in a small room lined with two freestanding racks filled with coats, gorgeous, eclectic coats. Full-length brown mink mingled with funky pink plaid, and something that looked like a pirate’s cloak. *Artsy people sure had fascinating taste*, she mused.

She trailed a hand down the sleeve of an exquisitely soft mink coat. What would it look like on her? More importantly, what would it feel like? Martin would still be a few minutes; she had time to play dress-up. Quickly she slipped on the coat. It settled around her body like a long-lost friend. Stroking her hands down its luscious length, she turned this way and that. If only she had a mirror. But, she didn’t need to see her reflection to know how the coat made her feel. Expensive. Desirable. More precious than a sultan’s treasure.

Under her dress, her nipples itched. That black sheath was confining and kept her from feeling the full sensual impact of the mink. Martin had said to take off all her clothes. He hadn’t said not to put on anything else. She unzipped her dress and kicked it aside, drew off her thong but left on her thigh-high stockings. Martin wouldn’t want her to freeze to death, would he?

Naked except for the mist-gray stockings, which made her skin look almost shockingly white, she pulled the mink coat back onto her body. Oh, the silk lining felt wonderful against her skin. So cool, so luxurious. She smoothed the coat against her, and her skin heated in response. Running her hands down her body, smoothing the rich fur over her hips, she felt a shudder of excitement skip along her spine. Tilting her head back, she closed her eyes and swayed back and forth in a sensory trance.

“Beautiful,” murmured Martin. “I couldn’t have imagined a better sight for sore eyes.”

Her heavy eyelids lifted. He was leaning against the closed door of the coatroom. Reaching down to the knob, he turned the lock. Already she could see the bulge in his cotton pants.

“Open the coat so I can see you better,” he said. With a lingering touch, she moved the silky folds to the edge of her body, so she was exposed from chin to stocking-covered feet. “The chocolate fur against your skin, those stockings the color of a Scottish fog. You look so tender. So fragile. But you’re not fragile, are you?”

She considered the question and slowly shook her head. “I don’t think I am. I thought I was, but I was wrong.”

“Good. Stand back a little closer to the coat rack. Perfect. Now spread your arms out,

one to each side. Grab the coat rack.”

With no hesitation, she did as he said. When her hands gripped the cold aluminum of the coat rack, she shivered. The coat fell even further away from her body, so nothing was covered, not even the outer curves of her breasts. Martin rummaged through a few coat pockets until he unearthed two scarves: one was a delicate mauve piece of froth and the other was a more prosaic polka-dotted flannel. He tied each of her wrists to the coat rack. The feeling of confinement frightened her, and her breathing sped up.

Martin put his hand on the center of her chest. It wasn't a sexual touch, but a soothing one, as if he were sending a message through her skin to her heart. “Do you trust me?”

“Ye—es.” She couldn't help the hesitation. What did trust mean? This man had painted her naked and displayed her to the cream of Manhattan's art crowd. How could she trust him? Yet she did. She trusted him to bring her to dizzying peaks of pleasure she'd never imagined, even in her most explicit dreams. Whatever crazy, unpredictable thing he did, she trusted it would open her up, bring her joy, smash through her boundaries—but not destroy her.

“Are you sure?” His gray eyes challenged her. Holding his gaze, she nodded. “Then I'll be right back.” Leaving her tied to the coat rack, he moved down the other rack, pushing hangers aside, searching through the coats until he found what he was looking for. A fur stole, also mink, this one a silvery gray.

Back at her side, he gently used the stole to caress the entire length of her torso. The mink hairs jumped with static electricity, and a little shock traveled straight to her nipple. A wave of reaction made her whole body shudder. Then he drew the mink across her breasts, from one nipple to the other, back and forth until they were both yearning little peaks. The fur felt sleek and sultry, and it teased her in the most delicate possible way. It made her skin prickle. She wasn't sure she liked it. It made her restless and itchy. It made her nipples crave the suckling of a hot mouth or the nip of teeth. She thrust her torso forward, silently asking for something more, but the fur continued to taunt and tease. Then it left her breasts entirely. The air felt cold after the warm stroking of the mink, and her nipples puckered. The fur, wrapped around Martin's firm hand, traveled the rest of her body in a luxurious massage. He felt every curve; he turned her to one side, then the other, slipping the mink around her ass, down her twitching thighs.

“How I've missed these breasts,” said Martin. “This pretty pussy of yours. These sweet cheeks.” The fur traced silky circles on her ass until she squirmed. Tugging her close with the stole, he knelt down and nuzzled his nose into her crotch. “How long have you been wet like this?”

“Since I saw the painting,” Annie admitted.

“Then I do good work.” He breathed in deeply. “My God, you smell good. Like cinnamon.” The point of his tongue flicked against her clitoris, and her hips jerked. “And you taste like pear juice. The next time I paint you, there will be spices and fruit involved.” His tongue twirled around her clitoris. That tongue was in no hurry, even though the need inside Annie's groin was building fast. It had been so long since she'd been with him. Three weeks? It felt like three years.

He licked her slowly and lingeringly; each stroke of his tongue seemed longer than the last. At the same time he moved the stole back and forth against the backs of her thighs. She moaned from the two sensations, the silky softness behind and the wet

thickness of his tongue in front. Moisture dripped down her thighs and she felt the tops of her stockings getting wet. Losing all track of time, she drifted on a rising wave of pleasure. Then he stood up and drew the fur away from her ass.

"Let me see what else I can find in here."

Leaving her wet and quivering body, he searched again through various coat pockets. "Ah ha," he said, returning with a wide vinyl belt, shiny and black. Fear flared, and she shrank back. "Do you trust me?" he asked sternly.

Did she? Slowly, she nodded. "I'm not going to hurt you," he murmured, fastening the wide belt around her waist. "Such a tiny waist. Beautiful hips. This will set them off perfectly." He cinched the belt as tight as possible. "Breathe in. Like Scarlett O'Hara getting her corset tightened."

She breathed in, and he pulled the belt another notch tighter. It was an unexpectedly exquisite feeling. The tightness of the belt made her torso relax. It felt comfortable, actually. Looking down, she saw what it did to her figure. Her breasts looked huge and swollen against the black vinyl. Every time she breathed in, they swayed, like ripe fruit on a vine. The belt made her hips curve like a fertility goddess. Between the vinyl and the stockings, the triangle of her sex was a black tangle, gleaming with welcome. Looking up, she saw what this new look did to Martin. His eyes were fierce points of gray; his face, a picture of building lust.

"What else can we do?" he muttered. More pocket searching. This time he brought out a tube of lipstick and a delicate gold chain someone had left in a pocket. With the lipstick, he coated her nipples a deep ruby red that made them stand out even more against her paleness. She eyed the chain nervously. What did he have in mind for that?

He undid the fastening and stretched it out to its full length. One end he twined several times around her left nipple. The delicate gold dug into her flesh, making her give a little moan. When he pulled the chain tight and wound the other end into her right nipple, her mind nearly exploded from the excruciating pleasure. With both ends secured, the chain stretched between her ruby-painted nipples like a tightrope. He gave it a slight tug, and warmth gushed through her body. A gasp escaped her.

"You okay?" Martin murmured.

Speechless, she nodded.

Again he tugged on the chain, lighting a bonfire inside her nipples. It swept through her body and she twisted and undulated. Her wrists pulled against the scarves that firmly fastened her to the coat rack. Martin ran his hands over her ribcage, rested on the vinyl belt, then curved over her quivering hips. When he clamped his hand over her sex, she let out a groan.

"So hot. And soft as sable."

As he parted the folds, her knees buckled, and she knew it was a good thing she was tied up, or she would have collapsed in a whimpering heap on the floor.

With the rough skin of his palm rubbing against her clitoris, he sent his fingers across the sensitive skin surrounding her sex. Wherever he explored, new fires lit up. When he found a spot that made her nerves jump, he pressed deeper, caressing and massaging until she couldn't stop the frantic moans. Just as she reached the edge, her inner thighs shaking, he moved on to new territory. Tears of exquisite agony ran down her face.

The darkness of the room, the small space, and the warmth of their body heat



combined to create a cocoon-like feeling. It was easy to forget where and what she was. No longer was she Annie Swenson; she wasn't even Annelise. She was pure sensation, desire made flesh, a goddess unleashed. Martin was a devotee worshiping at the altar of her sex. Everything he did, binding her, decorating her, treating her like a plaything, it was all in service of her untamable sexuality. As he knelt before her, tongue playing with her blazing clitoris, she felt an all-encompassing, helpless love for him. She wanted to give herself to him, every part of herself, forevermore.

Someone knocked on the door, and she froze. The door was locked, but it was a flimsy little knob, and whoever was trying to open it seemed very determined. Martin pulled his face from her crotch.

"You need something, mate?" he called.

"Yah, my coat's in there." A male voice, rough and impatient.

"Hang on a minute." Martin rose to his feet.

"Where are you going?" she whispered.

"The bloke needs his coat."

"But you can't! He'll see me." She struggled against the scarves at her wrists, but they were knotted tightly, and the more she pulled on them, the tighter the knots grew.

"I thought you trusted me." His eyes were mysterious pools of deep gray in the dim light. She didn't know this man. But as she stared into his eyes, as her chest rose and fell with her arousal, she knew that wasn't true. Something inside her knew him, and he knew her, thoroughly and unquestioningly.

"I do."

"You do?"

"Yes. I trust you."

He took her face in his two hands and bent down to kiss her mouth. As her lips opened for him, she realized it was their first kiss since that very first night at the Greentree buffet. Their tongues met gently, in a long and graceful dance.

"Yo!" said the man at the door, rattling the knob.

Martin raised his head, still holding Annie's gaze with his. He ran his fingers along the chain between her nipples and watched her expression like a loving hawk. "You are spectacular. Do you know how many men would come at the sight of you right now? You're every man's fantasy. The fur coat framing your white body, the stockings, the red nipples, your waist belted in. And this." He tugged again, and lightning flashed, nipple to groin. "To have such a woman at your mercy. That man out there would think he'd died and gone to heaven. Are you afraid?"

She nodded.

"But you trust me?"

Her breath came in choked gasps. Through the fog of fear and excitement, she held onto the thought that whatever he did, he wouldn't lead her wrong. She nodded. He patted the wet curls at her sex and went to the door.

He opened it a crack. "Sorry to make you wait, mate. My girlfriend had one too many glasses of champagne, and she's having a bit of a rough time. D'you mind if I find your coat for you?"

"No problem. It's a black leather jacket. I left it right at the end of the rack."

Martin closed the door again while he found the coat. "This it?"

"That's the one. Thank you, man."

“Have a good one.”

Finally he locked the door again. Annie felt limp with relief as he ambled back to her. Yes, she trusted him ... but some stranger in a black leather jacket was another matter.

Back at Annie’s side, Martin ran a possessive hand down her torso. “I’m entirely too selfish to share, I’m afraid. Now where were we?” He inserted two fingers into her sex. Her muscles clutched convulsively at the intruding hardness. She knew it would take almost nothing to put her over the edge.

“Wait,” she said. “You said if I did everything you asked you’d tell me your deepest fantasy.”

“I did, didn’t I?” He wiggled his fingers inside her, and she fought against the coming explosion.

“I’ve done everything, haven’t I?” she whispered. It was so hard, holding back the ecstasy. However, more than an orgasm, she wanted to know him. She wanted what he’d promised.

“Let’s see. What have you done?” He pretended to think, all the while waggling his fingers, until she wanted to scream. “You don’t like being naked, do you?”

“I like it with you.” It felt almost ridiculous that she would have to confirm that, in her present nude-but-adorned state.

“But you didn’t know that, until you tried it.”

“No. I was terrified, at first.”

“You don’t like people looking at you. But you let me paint you.”

“Yes.” Paint her and display her in a trendy New York gallery.

“You don’t like people to see what’s inside you. But you told me your secret fantasy.”

She nodded. Where was this leading?

“Ever since you met me, you’ve done things that frightened you. But, you broke through your fears. Why?” As he spoke, he untied the scarves from the cold metal rack. Her wrists were sore and cramped. He gently rubbed them.

“I don’t know. I don’t understand it. Even Dr. Stein doesn’t understand it.”

“Maybe you were ready to let go of your fears. Or maybe Dr. Stein did his job well.”

“Or maybe ... it’s just something about you.” She whispered the confession.

“So you want to know my deepest fantasy?” He stroked her wrists, coaxing the tight muscles to relax.

“I really, really do.”

Martin paused, and she saw a new look on his face. His playful expression turned to one of vulnerability. “I’m selfish. I’m an artist who loves glory. But I’m also very alone, alone with myself, with the images in my head.” He lowered her to the floor with the fur coat as mattress. With possessive hands he stroked along the belt, along the tops of her stockings. His fingers left a ring of fire dancing along her skin.

“So while crowds of people gush over my work, at that same moment, in that same place, I want to sink my cock into a woman, but not just any woman. There are a thousand women out in that gallery right now I could be screwing. I don’t want them. What I want is a woman with the nerve to face her deepest fears, dig down to her very soul, and give me her biggest gift. Her trust.” In one smooth motion, he unzipped his pants and thrust into her. Her body arched like a bow. The movement made the chain pull

on her nipples, and fireworks burst inside her. “You, Annelise Swenson, are my deepest fantasy.”

With that, Martin was done talking. Joy filled her as he gathered her in his arms, and they both held on tight as his thrusts threatened to break her apart. She came with harsh groaning cries, but he still wasn’t finished.

He pulled himself out of her. His hardened cock stood out from his body, thick with the lacquer of her juices. He plunged the massive thing into her mouth, and she fumbled to contain it. Her tongue ran along the hard ridges and smooth tip. The texture and heat of him drove her mad, and her body writhed beneath him. The world shrank to a place of primal rhythm and the hot smell of male flesh. She tasted the salty brine of the first drops, which she sucked eagerly into her throat.

His movements became more urgent, and she heard little sounds deep in his throat. When he started to come, he pulled from her mouth and held his cock as the scalding liquid spurted onto her stomach. Even through his wracking orgasm, he seemed to be painting a pattern on her skin, a pattern of swirls and curves. When the last drops had drained out of him, he rubbed the sticky liquid into her skin. At first, it felt uncomfortable, but in a matter of moments, the moisture vanished, and her skin was silky smooth. It felt good. He was part of her now, inside and out.

“You’re mine now,” he said.

“And you’re mine.”

He smiled. “All yours.”

Her heart shook at the miracle of it. She looked down at her body. “Did you paint something on me?”

He traced the pattern he’d left on her chest. “My own personal insignia. It’s on all my paintings, but no one knows about it. Except you. You’re never alone if someone knows your secrets.” He helped her sit up and began unwinding the gold chain from her nipples. “I have to get back to our admiring public. I hope I can remember which coat pocket this was in.”

She laughed. “And I hope they never find out what we did with it.”

“Our secret. One of many.”

He winked, zipped himself up, and helped her dress. Together, they put the coatroom back in order.

When they emerged into the gallery, nothing had changed. The crowd still chattered like an excited pack of coyotes. Electronica pulsed. Champagne flowed. However, for them, everything had changed.

Annie gazed up at her painting. In the lower right corner, she made out the graceful swirls of Martin’s insignia. The skin on her chest and belly seemed to warm in response. Tightly, she held Martin’s hand, and he gave her a private smile.

She thought how intertwined everything was. Nakedness transformed into art. A secret dream transformed into a public vision. Fear transformed into freedom.

The proof? The next time she and Martin flew to Cat Island, she didn’t even need a Xanax.

**The End**

**About the Author:**

Juniper Bell lives with her sweetheart in a cabin in Alaska. When it gets too cold, she flees to the tropics. When she can't afford it, she uses her imagination. For more about Juniper, visit her website at [www.juniperbell.com](http://www.juniperbell.com)

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