

ELLORA'S CAVE *Breathless*

DESIREE  
HOLT

*Dancing*  
with *Danger*

## Dancing With Danger

*Desiree Holt*

Rachel Windsor knew nothing about Gabriel Peralta except that he was walking sex appeal. He blew into her life without notice, here today then always gone on a puff of wind. But each time he appears, he does things to her body that even her fantasies haven't conjured up, driving her to orgasms that shake her like a raging storm. His mouth knows every inch of her body. The imprint of his intimate kisses linger long after he disappears.

Now he's back again, his life unexpectedly on the line. But even in the danger zone his sexual demands are more scorching than ever and this time, Rachel is determined not to lose him – or the erotic lifestyle that binds them.

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Dancing With Danger

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# ***DANCER WITH DANGER***

**Desiree Holt**

### *Dedication*

To Cindy and Rita, who keep me going on even the worst days and whose friendship is the cornerstone of my life.

### *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

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## **Chapter One**

The party had been going on far too long. It was a weeknight so dinner had been scheduled for six o'clock. The hosts had spoken and made their plea, things should be wrapping up now. The room should have been at least half empty. But it seemed no one was the least bit interested in leaving. The din of conversation competed with the sound of the orchestra, which segued from one rhythmic tune to another and people continued to jam the dance floor as well as both bars.

Standing quietly in one corner, Rachel Winters looked glanced over the room. She couldn't quite conceal a smile of satisfaction. Another successful fundraiser for The Harris Foundation. Despite tough economic times, the people who had the money couldn't seem to give it fast enough to Sam and Loraine Harris, people with old money and a very old social position. People everyone wanted to curry favor with.

Now the Harrises were mingling with their guests, discreetly collecting checks, their bodyguards in tuxedos and guns never more than inches away. Two years ago Sam had been kidnapped by a terrorist cell who wanted an enormous ransom to fund an arms purchase. Rachel remembered that time vividly. A very black ops agency contacted by one of Sam's close friends had taken over, faceless men moving soundlessly around the offices, interrogating everyone while a hand-picked team went in to retrieve Sam. Now the same agency provided security 24/7. It had been a difficult time for all of them and Rachel still worried about their vulnerability.

Rachel smoothed a hand down the silken fabric of her signature black cocktail dress. She always wore black, convinced it minimized the flaws in her figure. She saw her hips as too wide, her thighs as too chunky, her tummy as too rounded, especially for someone as short as she was. Now she wished she could kick off the four-inch heels she used to boost her five-foot-two-inch height. Her thick honey-colored hair was

pulled up in a sophisticated arrangement that added yet another inch or two. Anything to make her feel less like a chunky miniature lost at an adult function.

Casually she stole a look at her watch. Eight thirty. Should she find some way to signal people the party was over? Sam and Loraine weren't so young anymore and these functions were always grueling for them. She loved her job and the Harrises treated her like family, which made her take a more personal interest in their welfare. Serving as director of The Harris Foundation filled her days and nights.

Too bad it couldn't take care of her heart, which she was sure destined to remain unfulfilled. Why did she have to go and fall for a mystery man anyway? One who appeared without warning and then was gone like a wisp of smoke. No matter how sexy he was, how good in bed, how he drove her to the highest plains of pleasure, he never stayed. Never gave her more of himself than one night at a time and those were few and far between.

She didn't even know what he did. They'd met at a barbecue given by mutual friends and fallen into bed within hours of "hello". But even those friends couldn't—or wouldn't—give her any information about him.

She knew his name. Gabriel Peralta. That was it—if that was even his real name. She also knew he was six foot four of lean hard muscle with thick silken black hair she loved to run her fingers through, a hawk nose and eyes like onyx. Hands that could make a woman's body writhe in pleasure and a magnificent cock that stretched her to capacity and made her explode with its friction.

And scars whose origin he refused to discuss.

Just as he refused to discuss anything else. Whenever she tried to lead the conversation in that direction, he artfully distracted her with his talented mouth and hands and body. In seconds she would be a writhing mass on the bed and any thought of questions disappeared as if it'd never occurred to her.

Weeks would go by without her seeing him, weeks in which she imagined every type of situation her brain could conjure up. He was a spy. He was covert military. He

was a mercenary. On the worst days she even wondered if he was married and had a wife—maybe a family—that he spent his time with between his visits to her. But she always dispelled that idea quickly. No man could be so sexually intense with her if he had another woman in his life.

Sometimes she thought what an idiot she was, living for the rare visits with nothing in between. A smarter woman would tell him to go to hell and get on with her life. But no man she met came even close to measuring up to him. In any way. So there didn't seem to be anything to get on *with*. She'd stopped circling the dates of his visits on the calendar, just focused on her work and accepted the pleasure he brought when he magically appeared.

She was imagining him in her head, wondering when he'd appear out of the darkness again, when a smooth male voice cut into her thoughts.

"I would love to have one dance with you, Miss Winters. If you don't mind."

She shook herself from her reverie to find Lincoln Harris standing in front of her with an expectant smile. Dancing with him was last on her list of things she wanted to do. Just being with him gave her a headache. She didn't like the man. The fact that he was handsome in a classical sense and kept himself in top condition didn't offset his personality. He was egotistical, self-involved and arrogant.

Unfortunately he was also the heir to the family fortune, CEO of Harris Industries since his father's semiretirement and president of the foundation board. He wasn't someone she could easily brush aside. Or god forbid, offend in any way. Any imagined slight on her part could make her life very difficult. Board meetings that he ran gave her fits but she'd learned long ago how to deal with the Lincoln Harrises of the world. She just wished Sam and Loraine weren't quite so blind to him.

Rachel rubbed her forehead. Tonight for some reason she was edgy and Lincoln Harris wasn't a recipe for calm. However, she put on her public smile and held out a hand to him, reminding herself it was just part of the job. Even if she couldn't stand the guy, her paycheck obligated her to be nice to him.



"Of course." She forced her lips into a smile. "It would be my pleasure."

*Rachel, what an accomplished liar you are.*

The orchestra swung into an old familiar ballad and Lincoln led her onto the dance floor. He would have pulled her tightly against him but she put her free hand on his shoulder, ensuring at least an inch or two of space between them.

"You've done an excellent job tonight," he complimented her. "I believe this is our best turnout yet."

"It took a lot of people to make this happen," she demurred, turning her face away from him. The scent of his cologne was overpowering. "You and your parents have really carried your message to people. The right people."

"Don't be so modest. You deserve a lot of credit for the work you do." He tightened his arm around her slightly. "I've been watching you for a long time, you know. You're smart. You have elegance and grace, always know just the right thing to say to people. An asset to the foundation. Perhaps when this is over we can share a quiet drink together. Talk about...things."

*And I know just the kind of things you've got on your mind, you repulsive lecher.*

While she was searching for a polite way to turn him down a hand touched her shoulder and a familiar voice broke into the conversation and she knew what that edgy feeling tonight had been—her radar working overtime. "Sorry. The lady has other plans."

Even after all this time, after so many long absences, Gabriel Peralta's honey-smooth baritone could still make her knees wobble and her pulses pound. She was stunned that he'd showed up at a place like this, an event with so many people. Usually he slipped into her house in the dark of night and left the same way.

Lincoln glared at the man behind Rachel, anger and outrage chasing briefly across his face. "I'm sorry. Have we met? I'm Lincoln Harris. And you are..."

"A close...friend of Rachel's." Gabe's hand tightened on her shoulder. "I'm sure you'll excuse us. I'm only in town for a short while and we have a lot of catching up to do."

In a smooth maneuver he slipped her from Lincoln Harris' arms and into his and began moving them away, his feet catching the rhythm of the music. She glanced over Gabe's shoulder and caught the controlled anger on Lincoln's face before he melted back into the crowd. She hoped there wouldn't be a price to pay.

Rachel realized suddenly he was wearing what she considered an unusual outfit for him. All she'd ever seen him in were jeans and t-shirts, sometimes with a leather jacket if the weather was cool. But tonight he had on an expensively tailored charcoal gray suit, white shirt with gold cufflinks and a conservative tie. He looked exactly as if he belonged with the invited guests. It added a new dimension to her impressions of him.

With her face pressed to Gabe's chest, she inhaled his distinctive scent, all male with a hint of the outdoors and something citrusy. She would never tell him that she still had a t-shirt he'd left several months ago that she slept with every night, holding the smell of him close to her.

"I'm impressed with your outfit," she told him. "Did you have to borrow it?"

His chuckle rumbled against her body. "Believe it or not I actually own real-people clothes."

"How did you get in here, anyway?" She had committed the extensive list to memory and she knew for sure his name hadn't been there. "The guest list is completely vetted and our security is top notch."

He chuckled softly. "Yes, I know that. But I have connections."

"How long do you have to stay here?" he murmured in her ear.

"The Harrises usually expect me to stay until the bitter end. How long are you here for this time?"

"Two days. Can you leave early?"

The orchestra had segued into another slow, romantic tune and their bodies moved in perfect harmony. He danced with an unexpected grace, the muscles in his thighs flexing as he moved. She could feel his heart beating where he enfolded her hand against his chest and the thick ridge of his cock pressed against her soft flesh through the fabric of their clothing.

His hand caressed the nape of her neck, sending shivers down her spine and he pressed his cock more tightly against her. "Rachel, I have to see you naked. I'm so hard for you right now I'm doing my best not to lose control here in a public place."

"I can't leave," she protested weakly, although she wanted nothing more than to run out the door with him. "What would I tell my bosses?"

They continued to move in time to the music, his pelvis grinding against hers, the sleek muscles of his thighs flexing with each step. One hand drifted down to cup the cheeks of her ass, pressing the light fabric of her dress into the cleft.

"People can see us." She tried to reach back and rearrange the dress but he grabbed her hand and pulled it against him, trapping it between their bodies.

"They're all too busy being seen by other people." He bent his head so his mouth was close to her ear. "I love your ass. Do you remember the first time I fucked you there, Rachel? How hot it made you feel? How you loved my cock filling your hole? How hard you came?"

If he didn't stop talking to her she would implode right there on the dance floor. Already she could feel her cream soaking the crotch of her thong and pantyhose and sticking to the insides of her thighs. The moistened fabric rubbed against her skin as she moved in the steps of the dance. Rather than causing a feeling of irritation, it only aroused her more.

"Gabe, please," she whispered.

"Please what?" His head moved and his lips pressed against her hair. "Please fuck you? Please suck your sweet little pussy? Stick my tongue way inside until it scrapes

the little sweet spot that sends you into orbit? Please make you come in a hundred different ways? Jesus, Rachel, watching you come is awe-inspiring.”

The music shifted into something with a stronger beat and Gabe’s body shifted with it. He was a smooth dancer, much more accomplished than she would have expected. He had a natural grace and rhythm that reminded her of a jungle cat. Maybe a panther, dark and sleek like him. Every shift of his hips, every dip and sway, increased the friction of his cock against her and the arousing feeling of the cloth between the cheeks of her buttocks.

“We need to get out of here,” he told her, tightening his grip on her. “Right now.”

As he said the words, he danced her through the open French doors, out to the terrace and behind a huge stone pillar. Backing her up against it, he cupped her face with both hands and took her mouth in a claiming kiss. One touch and she melted against him. She parted her lips easily for him, accepting his tongue as it swept inside, sucking at it, tangling her own with it. Oh, god, the taste of him. How desperately she’d missed it.

His mouth still fused to hers, his hands slipped down her arms and around to cup her breasts. Instantly her nipples hardened and more moisture dripped from her cunt. He squeezed her breasts as he moved his thick shaft against her body, thumbs chafing her aching nipples. She gripped his muscular upper arms, rubbing herself against him like a cat, holding on for dear life.

Without warning his hands dropped to the hem of her skirt, pushing it up to her waist. His hand grabbed the waist of her pantyhose and thong and with a swift, strong move tore the garments from her body. With her underwear lying in a puddle at her feet, he lifted her so she had to wrap her legs around him to anchor herself. Pressing her against the cold marble of the pillar, he slipped one hand between her thighs and dipped his fingers into the moistness of her pussy.

“Oh, god,” she moaned, winding her arms tight around his neck, her vaginal muscles quivering at his first touch.

"Your sweet little cunt is wet and hot," he murmured, his deep voice like a warm caress. "I love the way your muscles grip my fingers."

He added a third finger to the other two, curling the tips to find her sweet spot, massaging it as she began to ride him. The sound of the music drifted out to them, surrounding them, their movements matching the rhythm like an erotic dance.

Rachel tightened her grip around Gabe's neck, holding fast to her anchor in the storm overtaking her. She pushed her hips forward, hitching herself against the fingers manipulating her hungry cunt. Muscles flexed and spasmed, heat uncurled like a tightly wound ribbon, surging through her. It seemed like only seconds before her climax seized her, shaking her body. She held on for dear life as the muscles of her vagina quivered and pulsed and she poured into his hand.

When it was over she was limp, covered with a fine sheen of perspiration and shocked to remember they were out in public. Had she actually done this on the terrace of the graceful old building? With dozens of people a stone's throw away? Had anyone seen her?

What was she turning into?

Gabe took a step back, still holding her, so she could slide her legs down his thighs and plant her feet on the flagstones. She was hot and cold and sure a million eyes were watching them.

"I can't believe I just did that," she whispered.

He kissed her forehead. "I can't believe I was able to wait until we got outside to fuck you with my fingers." He stooped and casually picked up the remnants of her lingerie, inhaling its scent before stuffing it into his pocket. "Wouldn't want the cleanup crew to find it," he grinned.

"Gabe!" she protested. "I'm supposed to be on duty here. I'm the hostess. If anyone saw me..."

"Don't worry." One corner of his mouth kicked up in a grin. "I made sure we were well hidden. But I think you need to make your goodbyes. Surely there's someone you

can hand over the reins to. Right? Or I'm liable to strip you naked right here in front of everyone."

She didn't know if he was teasing or not. As alpha as he was, he might just make good on his threat. Or was it a promise?

"A-all right. Just give me a minute."

She smoothed her hand over her hair, tucking the honeyed strands that had come loose back into place, wishing she had her purse so she could at least replenish her lipstick. Oh, well, they'd just have to accept her the way she was. Checking her dress one last time, she headed toward the entrance to the ballroom. At the French doors she caught the attention of her assistant, Nina Chan, who was lurking in a corner keeping an eye on the crowd.

Nina had worked for her for more than a year. She was efficient and dedicated, even if at times just a little too earnest for Rachel's comfort zone. She'd also seen her eyeing Lincoln Harris and had to bite her tongue to warn the woman not to play with snakes.

But she was very good at what she did and Rachel felt comfortable leaving her to finish out the evening on her own. She caught Nina's eye and beckoned to her. The woman hurried over to where Rachel was standing just inside the open doors.

"Are you all right?" There was concern in Nina's voice. "You look a little...oh, distraught, I guess."

Rachel hoped that was all. "No, no, I'm fine. I just have to leave. Can you get my purse and take over for me?"

Nina cocked her head. "You *aren't* okay. You never book out on something. What's the matter? Are you sick? Should I call a doctor? Should I—"

"Nina, stop." Rachel bit back her impatience and lowered her voice. "Nothing is wrong. I'm not sick. I'm fine. I just have to leave. Can you handle this or not? Hopefully people will start leaving soon, anyway."

Nina studied her for a moment, then nodded. "Sure, I can take care of things. I guess whatever it is must be important. What about the Harrises?"

Rachel spotted them at a table deep in conversation with two other couples. "They're busy. I don't want to disturb them. Tell them I got an unexpected phone call and had to leave. And I'm not sick," she emphasized. "Just get my purse for me without attracting attention, okay?"

"But your cell phone is in your purse," Nina pointed out. "So how did you get a call?"

"Damn it." Rachel took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Just stop asking questions and do this, will you? I'll owe you big-time."

She fidgeted outside on the patio until Nina returned and handed the purse to her. "I'll take care of everything but I'm definitely asking for payback."

Rachel stepped back onto the patio, wondering where Gabe was when his hand snaked out from behind another pillar and pulled her toward him.

"This way," he told her, leading her across the lawn. "I parked on a side street. Didn't want to have to deal with valet parking."

She hurried in her bare feet to keep up with Gabe's long strides, carrying her high heeled shoes in one hand. When they reached the car he was heading for, she stared in amazement.

"A Mercedes? What happened to your truck?"

Whenever he came to see her he always drove a massive black pickup.

"I didn't think it would blend in with the gathering," he answered.

"Is this yours too?"

He shook his head as he opened the passenger door for her. "Borrowed it from...the company."

"The company," she repeated. "What —"

"Later." He snapped her seat belt into place, closed the door and jogged around to climb into the driver's seat. The motor purred to life and they pulled away from the curb.

"Gabe," she began again.

"Later," he repeated. "It's taking all my control not to pull over to the side and fuck you right here in the car. If I don't get my cock inside you soon I might explode. So. We'll talk later."

The sexual tension in the car as they drove to her house was so thick she could reach out and touch it. She couldn't take her eyes off him, drinking in the sight of him, storing up the images before he disappeared again.

Where did he go? What did he do? And how could she be so addicted to a man she saw so seldom? But deep down she had to admit that two days with Gabriel Peralta was better than two months with any other man.

She couldn't help noticing that he checked both the rear and side view mirrors frequently and that he took a roundabout path to her side of town.

"Are we avoiding someone?" she asked finally.

"Just making sure," he answered.

"Of what?"

But that was all he said and she knew better than to push him.

In the hallway of her house Gabe barely slammed the door before he turned and pressed her against it. His mouth possessed hers as his hands busied themselves pulling at her clothes, nearly tearing them as he stripped her until she stood nude before him, shivering with need and desire.

He took one step back to let his gaze rake over her before removing the gun he always wore from its place at the small of his back and setting it on the hall table. After all this time she no longer wondered about it and had stopped asking him why he wore it. It was simply a part of him, like everything else she didn't understand. The soft light



from the lamp on the hall table reflected the blackness of his irises and the sharp angles of his face. He touched her almost reverently, mapping her breasts, the softness of her abdomen, the juncture of her thighs, her pubic curls and down into her slit.

He was out of his own clothing in seconds, dropping it on the floor with hers, stopping only to fish a condom from his pocket and roll it onto his erect and swollen cock. Placing his hands beneath the cheeks of her ass, he lifted her to the right angle and with a quick roll of his hips thrust into her deep and hard.

Rachel gasped at the penetration, the muscles of her cunt stretching to accommodate his size. Tonight he seemed even bigger than usual, swollen and heavy with need. She grabbed his shoulders for support, holding on for dear life as he pounded into her, her blood racing, heart beating wildly. She didn't think she could climax so quickly again but it seemed the previous one had just aroused her even more. The orgasm rolled up like an unstoppable wave, rushing through her until every fiber of her was ready to explode. When Gabe shouted her name and thrust hard one final time, her own body pitched over the edge, the muscles of her vagina clasp him and spasming as he pulsed inside her again and again.

She leaned against him, limp and spent. The rasping of their breaths was a counterpoint to the slamming of their hearts. Finally Gabe tightened his arms around her and, still joined with her, carried her into the bathroom.

"Shower," he said, his voice raw, carefully sliding out of her body to dispose of the condom. He leaned into the enclosure to turn on the water.

"Shower," she agreed.

## Chapter Two

Rachel was lying stretched out on the cool cotton sheets of her bed. Both she and Gabe were fresh from the shower and smelling of the vanilla-scented shower gel she used. Gabe was kneeling between her outspread thighs, hands pressing her hips into the mattress. He moved his mouth over the insides of her thighs with light butterfly kisses while his big hands stroked over her cunt.

"So beautiful," his whispered. "So gorgeous. I dream about your pussy all the time, Rachel. How it looks. How it tastes. How it feels when it grips my cock like a hot, wet fist."

A tiny thrill raced through her body. He actually *thought* about her when they were apart. How many times she'd wondered about that. If she could ever get her brain working again, maybe tonight she would have the courage to insist he talk to her, tell her who he really was. Explain why they had such a strange relationship.

"I can't ever seem to get your taste out of my mind." He leaned forward and licked the length of her slit, then tickled her thighs again with his tongue. "Delicious. Totally delicious. Better than the finest wine."

He moved his head and without warning began to flick her clit with the tip of his tongue. Heat shot through her, spreading outward from that single, sensitive spot. She moaned and tried to lift her hips to him but he held her firmly in place. His hands shifted until his thumbs were touching the lips of her pussy, pulling them apart, his breath like a soft wind across her wet flesh.

"Such a beautiful shade of pink," he murmured. "You don't know how it feels when my cock is inside you, feeling those tight muscles of your cunt clutched around me, knowing I'm filling every inch of you. Feeling those muscles spasm when you begin to come."

“Fill me now,” she begged. “Please. I want you inside me, Gabe.”

“Not until I’ve had enough of tasting you.” He plunged his tongue into her waiting pussy, rasping it against the slick walls.

Holding her open with his thumbs, his long fingers still pushing down on her hips, he drove his tongue in and out of her hungry cunt. Despite the earlier orgasms she’d had and the small one he’d given her in the shower with his fingers—“Just to tease you,” he said grinning—her body came to attention at once under his ministrations. Tiny shudders raced through her, muscles convulsing, the pulsebeat in her pussy growing stronger with each thrust of his tongue.

His hands shifted slightly and Rachel bent her knees and planted her feet flat on the bed, giving him greater access to her opening. In a moment his fingers had captured her clit, brushing it, teasing it, sending hot flames shooting through her.

He was relentless in his attention to every part of her cunt, licking, nipping, sucking and then thrusting his tongue hard inside again. The orgasm was building inside her, clamoring to be released but Gabe artfully held her on the edge for so long she finally screamed, “Please. Please, please, please.”

He raised his head. “Look at me, Rachel.”

She opened her eyes to see his face slick with her juices. “Please,” she begged again.

“Please what? Tell me what you want. Say it.”

Her body was strung as taut as a bow with the need for her release. She clenched her fists and fought to get the words out. “Please let me come.”

“All right. Come now, Rachel.”

He dipped his head down again, pinched her clit and shoved his tongue back into her vagina. She convulsed at once, the climax gripping her like a giant claw and shaking her until she thought her bones would snap. He rode the wave with her, never letting up until the last spasm, the final aftershock had died away.

Rachel lay there gasping for breath, her body covered with a fine sheen of perspiration, her heart beating triple time, banging against her ribs. Eventually her fists unclenched, her breathing evened out and she lay pliant, completely wrung out.

Gabe crawled up her body and pressed his mouth to hers, his lips still slick with her liquid. She tasted herself, licking his lips clean.

"See how good you taste?" he grinned. "Better every time."

She was too spent to do anything but smile at him. She lay there quietly, eyes closed, enjoying the feeling of satisfaction, when she felt Gabe move again, shifting his position. Now he was paying careful attention to her breasts, kneading them, pulling at the nipples until they were dark and swollen.

As always she wished her figure didn't have so many flaws, although Gabe didn't seem to mind that her hips were a little too wide, her tummy rounded, her buttocks a little too full. Or that her thighs just a little too fleshy. She considered herself plump but when she tried to disparage herself he got angry with her, telling her a man loved a lush figure like hers. It gave a man something soft to sink into, he argued, not some skinny body all angles and bones. He must be telling the truth, she thought, because he returned again and again and spent every moment they were together exploring her naked body in ways she'd never imagined before they met.

He bent his head and pulled one nipple into his mouth, closing his lips around it and sucking on it. She reached up her fingers and threaded them through the silky strands of his still-damp, jet black hair, arching her body up to him. His thick cock jutted from its nest of curls, the head of it kissing her tummy, brushing against her sensitized skin with the sway of his body.

When he pulled back from her, the nipple popping from his mouth, she felt the loss of contact. But in the next moment he moved to straddle her, his hands pushing her breasts together, his cock resting in the cleft he created.

"I'm going to fuck your breasts," he told her. "Reach your hand down between my legs and cup my balls. Let me feel those soft little fingers on me."

She slipped her hand between them until she reached the heavy sac, cupping it in her palm and manipulating it with her fingers. Gabe sucked in his breath and briefly closed his eyes.

“Jesus, Rachel. Your touch makes me ready to go off like a skyrocket.”

“Shall I stop?” she asked, teasingly but she knew the answer.

“No, damn it. You know better.”

She would have come back with some smart remark except he began to move his hips back and forth, his hard shaft rubbing against the inner swell of her breasts. The sight was so arousing she felt her pussy quiver in response and moisture drip out onto her thighs. She was fascinated at the sight of the thick cock moving back and forth, its broad, flared head now a dark purple, a tiny bead of moisture sitting perfectly on the slit.

She shifted the hand holding his sac, pressing lightly with her fingertips, feeling his testicles inside hard and swollen. She’d been sure there was nothing else they could do that would drive her to a higher plane of pleasure but this...this was so erotic she was sure she could climax just watching him.

Back and forth he moved, his cock flexing, his inner thighs rubbing against her skin, his breathing unsteady. When she raised her eyes to his she saw such lust in them she had to squeeze her thighs together against the pounding pulse in her cunt. Her gaze flicked over his upper body as he rode her breasts, awed as always by the hard plane of sculpted muscle, curious and worried about the scars, some old, some new.

In seconds he increased his pace and she stared, mesmerized by the ever swelling size of his shaft, feeling her own climax once again building inside her. He pushed her breasts together harder, tightening them around his arousal. When his fingers tightened on her and he stiffened she knew he was nearing his release. In another moment he was there, semen spurting from him onto her skin, guttural sounds escaping his throat. She felt her own release pulsing in her pussy and more moisture seeping out to coat her skin.

When his cock lay spent at last, the head resting just below the hollow of her throat, Gabe released a ragged breath, gathered some of his semen on his fingertips and spread it over her breasts. He painted her nipples with it, then raised his fingers to her mouth and dabbed it on her lips.

Rachel ran her tongue over the moisture, enjoying the salty-sweet taste of him. He'd come in her mouth many times before this, his thick semen spurting down her throat, his essence filling her. But this seemed somehow more intimate, more personal. When she looked into Gabe's eyes she saw a blaze of possession that had never been there before. Did that mean things were changing somehow?

He bent forward to kiss her, tasting himself on his mouth, his hands threading through the thick strands of her hair.

"Rachel, I—"

But whatever he was about to say was cut short by the ringing of the cell phone he'd placed on her nightstand. The out of place sound jolted her from the erotic fog wrapping itself around her.

Gabe's eyes suddenly turned opaque, his jaw tightened and he reached for the offending instrument.

Damn it to hell anyway. *Now* the damn phone had to ring? He'd asked for—no, *begged* for—forty-eight hours. The two-year-old mission had become more and more intense and his rare visits with this woman were the only things that kept him sane. Strange, when he'd been doing this work for so long and all he'd ever needed before was a warm body and a dark room. But he was aware that he and Rachel had been dancing around the edges of this relationship, or whatever the hell it was, for far too long. It was time to break his own rules, tell her what he could and ask her to be part of his life.

Not that he had that much to offer. In the give and take between them, the give would be mostly on her part. And it would mean a lot of lonely weeks and months. But

he'd finally realized that she'd made a permanent place for herself in what passed for his heart. Others in his situation were able to do this, because they'd found extraordinary women. Well, as far as he was concerned, Rachel surpassed them all. He was convinced she could handle it. If, that is, she felt the way he was sure she did. A big step yet one he finally felt comfortable taking.

But now it seemed he wasn't going to have the time he needed to put things right. Maybe not any time at all.

*Shit, shit, shit.*

He flipped open the phone. "This better be goddamn good," he growled.

"Get out of there now," the voice on the other end told him.

"Now?" Gabe gritted his teeth. "I may have a little complication here trying to do that."

"You'll have more than a complication if you don't get moving," the voice told him. "You've been compromised. Your cover's been blown, they tracked your location and you've got five minutes to get yourself out of there. Transportation's waiting one street over."

The line went dead.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck." Gabe snapped the phone shut.

"What is it?" Rachel asked, a tiny thread of fear in her voice.

"We have to get out of here. Now." Gabe was off the bed in seconds, throwing on his shirt and pants, gathering the rest of his clothes. "Get dressed," he snapped at Rachel as he grabbed the gun and cell phone he'd brought in and set on the nightstand. He took only a second to check the gun's clip and rack the slide. "Move. Now."

Rachel opened her mouth as if to ask him something, then snapped it shut and leaped up from the bed. He blessed her willingness to trust him, though god knows he hadn't given her much reason to. But she dug out jeans and a shirt, grabbed her purse

and a pair of athletic shoes and silently followed Gabe through her house and out the back door.

"Should I have turned off the lights?" was the only thing she asked as he tugged her across her yard.

"No. They need to think we're still there."

"Who?" She was panting as she tried to keep pace with him. "Who needs to think we're there? Who are you talking about?"

But he'd stopped answering questions, concentrating only on escape. He dragged her through the hedge separating her yard from her neighbor's, crouching low as he ran until they reached the street behind her house. A black SUV idled at the curb. He yanked the rear door open and literally pushed her inside before leaping into the front passenger seat.

"Go, go, go," he told the driver.

"Slowly," the man in the driver's seat told him. "We don't need to attract attention by laying down rubber."

"How the hell did this happen?" Gabe demanded. "Who blew the whistle? I thought we were totally secure."

"That's what the boss wants to know."

"Where are we going? A safe house?"

The man nodded. "Sort of. One I think even you don't know about."

\* \* \* \* \*

Rachel had been too terrified to say a word from the moment Gabe pushed her into the SUV until they reached their destination. She had never seen Gabe as cold and hard as he was right now. In the backseat of the SUV she managed to pull on her shoes and tie the laces, then make sure her clothing looked at least semi-presentable. Thankful that she'd taken a second to dump the contents of last night's dainty purse into her big one,



she dug out a scrunchie and a brush and did the best she could to pull her hair into a ponytail.

She wondered what the driver thought when they'd come flying onto the street, Gabe with his shirt still unbuttoned and his jacket and shoes in his hands. Gabe's scent was still all over her. Him too, she thought. Certainly the driver couldn't miss the aroma of sex. Wherever they ended up she hoped she got to take a shower.

Gabe and the driver conversed in low tones and Gabe made two very brief phone calls. Then he shifted in his seat and turned to look at her.

"Rachel? You okay?"

Okay? He wanted to know if she was *okay*? She had to swallow the hysterical laughter that bubbled up.

"I'm fine," she managed. "I always run out of my house half naked in the middle of the night."

He reached back for her hand and squeezed it. "I'm sorry about this. I'll explain whatever I can when we get where we're going. Just hang with me, can you?"

What could she say? It wasn't as if she had a choice.

"All right."

She tried to orient herself to the direction in which they were driving but they made so many twists and turns, backtracks and side trips, that she stopped trying. Finally they were on the Interstate, leaving the city behind but when they exited she still had no idea where they were except on a narrow road somewhere outside the city in a heavily wooded area. This wasn't an area she was familiar with.

Finally they turned onto a dirt road almost hidden by thick oak trees, bumping along until they came to an iron gate across the road. The driver picked up a radio from the seat and spoke into it and the gate slid open. Then they were in a small clearing in front of a two-story log cabin that blended into the surroundings. Rachel noticed another clearing to the side and wondered what it was for.

Gabe was out of the SUV and opening the door for her in seconds, holding out his hand.

"We're here." His voice was gentler than she expected under the circumstances. When she put her hand in his he squeezed it again and unexpectedly leaned forward to brush his lips against her forehead. "Thanks for being who you are," he whispered, making her heart skip and a warm feeling spread through her, despite the obviously dangerous situation they were in.

The door to the cabin opened and a tall, somewhat heavysset man stood outlined by the light behind him. He shook hands with Gabe and nodded at Rachel.

"Did you explain anything to her?" he asked Gabe.

Gabe shook his head. "I figured I'd leave that up to you. She's smart and savvy, which puts her a cut above most women in this situation. I assumed you meant me to bring her with me. Besides, I don't plan to let her out of my sight. It's my fault she's in danger and I won't leave her unprotected."

"That was the appropriate decision. Come in and we'll see where we are." The man stood back to let them enter.

Rachel looked around the interior of the house. As rustic as the place was outside, the inside was finished down to the last detail. A massive stone fireplace rose against one wall, with bookshelves on either side. The walls were beige stucco, the floors polished hardwood, the furniture comfortable and inviting. One end of the room had a dining table and chairs as well as a long sideboard and led into an open kitchen. Stairs reached up to a second floor where she assumed the bedrooms and bathrooms were.

"I think we can all use a drink," Gabe said to the other man. "Then explanations. I want to know what the hell happened and how."

He led an unresisting Rachel to the couch and sat down beside her. She gratefully accepted the drink the man who'd greeted them handed to her, knowing she desperately needed something to settle her nerves. She'd gone from hot, sweaty sex to

fleeing the city in a too short a span of time and her head was reeling. This whole situation convinced her even more that whatever Gabe did was very top secret.

“All right,” their host said, sitting in a large chair across from them. “Here’s the situation. Miss Winters, we haven’t met but you may be familiar with my name. Daniel Killian.”

Rachel’s hand jerked in surprise, nearly spilling her drink. “DRK Inc., right?”

He nodded.

She dug into her mind to remember what she’d been told about DRK. Daniel R. Killian, Incorporated. A highly respected, low profile security and protection agency specializing in...well...almost everything covered by those two terms.

Run by a former CIA operative, it employed former Special Ops, Army Ranger, Delta Force and SEALs as well as high caliber former policemen. They operated internationally and no one ever talked about the things they did or their accomplishments. Clients had to be referred to them to hire them. It was whispered they also did “off the books” work for the government when missions required plausible deniability.

Was this who Gabe worked for? Was this why he was gone all the time and could never tell her where he was going or why?

She studied the man standing there for a moment. Probably as tall as Gabe but heavier, his dark brown hair shot with gray, piercing chocolate eyes peering out from beneath thick brows. Lines were carved into his square-jawed face and his nose looked as if it had been broken at least once. She was sure the sweater and slacks he was wearing cost as much as her entire wardrobe.

“You were... Didn’t you... I mean...” God, why did she have to sound so stupid.

“Yes. We were the ones who rescued Sam Harris two years ago.”

Rescued. Such a basic word for the intricate mission they pulled off.

"Of course." She took a sip of her drink to steady herself. "Not something I'm likely to forget."

"You and I did not meet personally at that time but I understand you were extremely valuable in helping the foundation keep a low profile during the entire episode. And also providing support for Loraine."

"Both Sam and Loraine are very important to me," she told him. "As is the foundation." She looked at Gabe. "When we met at that barbecue..."

"I wangled an invitation," he confessed. "I saw you briefly when we returned Sam to his home and I wanted to meet you. I asked a few quiet questions, found out you were going to the barbecue hosted by a couple who owed me a favor." He reached for her hand again, a surprising silent declaration to the man who was obviously his boss that she was more than just a woman he was spending the evening with. If he meant it to make her feel more secure it was helping.

"I hope you won't be offended," Killian said, "if I tell you that from the moment Gabriel showed an interest in you we had you thoroughly investigated." He held up his hand as she opened her mouth to object. "Please understand that the nature of our work dictates that anyone my people are involved with must be beyond suspicion. We already knew a great deal about you from our association with the foundation."

She looked at Gabe but his face at that moment was unreadable. Was he waiting to hear what she said? She swallowed the angry retort on the tip of her tongue and took a moment to compose her thoughts. Despite her irritation at this unknown intrusion into her life, now that she knew the circumstances a little better she had to admit it made sense. Especially after finding out that Gabe was on someone's hit list.

"I understand completely. If Gabe is doing dangerous work, it's important to know that when he's not on duty, so to speak, he has a safe place to unwind. So can you tell me exactly what he does?" She looked directly at Daniel Killian. "I mean, now that I've been yanked out of my house in the middle of the night and have no idea what's happening?"

Gabe and Killian exchanged glances, then the older man cleared his throat. "Since Sam's kidnapping we've worked off the books for the government to infiltrate the terrorist cell that took him and tried to follow it to the top. The group that kidnapped him was just one unit of an organization calling themselves Sword of Allah. But we think the name's a red herring. That they're a huge mercenary army for hire to whatever cause pays them the most. The government needs them put out of business but at the same time can't be involved in it. We've done things like this before."

"And?" Rachel prompted when he paused.

"Gabe is one of my best. We managed to get him inside and he's been working on this for two years, moving up in the structure to where he was close to getting the names we wanted. And the opportunity to shut them down for good."

"But something happened," Rachel guessed. "Or we wouldn't be here in the middle of the night."

"Yeah," Gabe broke in. "I'd like to know what the hell is going on too. I thought we had this operation locked down tight. No leaks. No way for anyone to know who I am."

Killian nodded. "So did I. But someone somehow learned who you are, Gabriel and put out the order to eliminate you. Immediately. We...learned through an informant that the order just came down tonight, that they knew where you were and you were to be taken down at once." He looked at Rachel. "I promise you, Miss Winters, you would have been little more than collateral damage to them. That's the way they operate."

"But how did this happen?" Rachel asked. "He wasn't at the dinner even thirty minutes. We left almost as soon as he arrived. I know for a fact he was very careful when we drove to my house. And I can't imagine anyone at the fundraiser knowing who he is." She looked at Gabe.

"That's the only thing I can think of." Gabe's voice was flat but Rachel sensed the hidden anger. She didn't blame him. This was his life they were talking about. "Someone we didn't expect was in place and somehow recognized me." He looked at his boss. "What are you doing about it?"

Killian shrugged. "I put people to work on it at once. It happened suddenly so we're playing catch-up at the moment. The first thing we did was pull a list of everyone at the function tonight, including staff and start a check. Everyone in the tech department's working on it."

"What happens next?" Gabe asked. "Do we just sit here and wait? You know that's not my style."

"At the moment your safety is the number one priority," Killian told him. "I use this house when I need a very secure place for someone important." Killian swallowed the rest of his drink and looked at Rachel. "I'm sorry you were caught in this but Gabriel was right not to leave you behind. Five minutes after you left men invaded your house looking for him."

"My house?" She suddenly felt cold all over.

"Yes. We managed to get there just as they finished searching and let them go in order to see who they would lead us to."

"And?" Gabe prompted.

"We followed them back to an apartment building and we're sitting on them. They had to report they didn't find you, so sooner or later they'll get new orders. When they move, we move."

Rachel looked from one man to the other. "And that's all we can do? They wanted to kill us, for god's sake."

Killian rose from the chair. "I know that. But until my men report in we can't make specific plans. That's why I had both of you brought here. Obviously neither of you can leave here for the moment."

Gabe tensed beside her and squeezed her hand even harder. She wanted to say something but she was so out of her element she couldn't think of something sensible. Additionally, she was conscious again of the scent of sex still clinging to her and the way the two of them appeared.

"I'd like to take a shower, if that's possible," she told Killian.

"Of course. Let me show you both upstairs." His gaze traveled over the two of them. "We keep a wide selection of clothes in one of the rooms since we never know exactly who will be a...guest here. Feel free to help yourself. Both of you."

He led them up the stairs and opened the first door they came to.

"I assume you'll only need one room?" A tiny smile played at the corner of his mouth.

"That's fine." Gabe's voice was expressionless. "Give us some time, okay?"

"No problem. I assume Miss Winters has a lot of questions to ask you."

Gabe grunted. "No doubt."

"And Gabriel? Despite any objections you might have, you're stuck here at least until the team reports back. I know you want to get out there but I'm not willing to risk your life any more than we have to."

He turned and walked back down the stairs, effectively shutting off further conversation.

Gabe slammed the door and banged his fist against it. "Shit, shit, shit."

"That seems to be your favorite expression tonight," Rachel commented, wrapping her arms around herself.

She suddenly felt chilled to the bone. Her home had been invaded, she'd had to flee in the middle of the night with a man who—face it, she hardly knew except in bed—and she had no idea what was going to happen next.

Gabe drew in a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and pulled her close to him. "I'm sorry about this. You didn't deserve to be caught in this."

"Maybe now it's time for you to fill in the blanks around Mr. Killian's information." She leaned her head against his chest, feeling the hard planes of muscle beneath his shirt.

“Let’s get you showered first. Then I’ll tell you whatever you want to know. After that we’ll talk to Dan and see if we can close the door on this. Come on.”

He took her hand and led her into a bathroom with the biggest shower she’d ever seen. Thick towels were piled in readiness on the counter and a variety of soaps and gels were lined up on an inside shelf.

“Your boss seems to think of everything,” she commented.

“You don’t know the half of it.” Gabe slid the shower door open and reached in to turn on the spray, then pulled off his shirt and trousers. He looked at Rachel. “Well? What are you waiting for?”



## **Chapter Three**

Gabe was so gentle with her Rachel nearly cried. The shock of the night's events had caught up with her. She stood, shivering, as he peeled off her top and slacks, then positioned her in the shower so the spray hit her just right. He brushed her wet hair away from her face, stroking her cheek with his long fingers. Even the hot water couldn't seem to warm her up, so Gabe pulled her tight against his naked body, wrapping his arms around her and rubbing her back.

They stood there, water pouring down on them, creating a mist that wrapped around them like a cocoon. Somehow as his hands stroked her and his body warmed her she forgot about shivering and being scared. Her brain locked onto one thing—she and Gabe were naked, skin-to-skin in this shower. She closed her eyes and for a moment wished she was back at the foundation party, the orchestra playing something warm and mellow in the background, Gabe moving her to the music with a familiar fluid grace.

But now they were locked in an erotic dance, flirting at the edge of danger and she wasn't sure she knew all the steps. He had an erection that was hard enough to carve a hole in her. His thick rod was like a hot pipe pressing into her, the hair on his chest a rough carpet pricking at her breasts and nipples. She tightened her arms around his waist and nipped at his chest with her teeth. When she found a flat nipple she pulled it into her mouth, closing her lips over it.

Gabe's big body tensed and his fingers dug into her spine. While her mouth explored every inch of his chest and abdomen his hands slid down to her buttocks, squeezing the cheeks rhythmically, the tips of his fingers intruding into the deep cleft.

"Look up at me," he rasped.

Rachel lifted her face and as the shower sprayed down on them he took her mouth in a rapacious kiss, his tongue licking every inch of the inside of the welcoming cavern. She was trembling now but for a different reason. The danger they were in disappeared in the thunder of lust that swept through her. She wanted this man. Oh, god, how she wanted him. The pulse deep in her cunt began to beat its tempo of arousal.

"Jesus, Rachel." Gabe was breathing heavily when he broke the kiss. "This probably isn't either the time or the place for this but I have to have you now."

"Now?" she repeated. "In the middle of all this?"

"I don't know what's going to happen tonight. I don't want to think I wasted even one minute of whatever time we have."

She blew out a breath, wiping everything else from her mind except the here and now. "Me, either."

He gave her a wry grin. "You're a habit I can't kick."

"Is that so bad?" she asked, reaching between them to wrap her fingers around his cock.

His breath whistled through his teeth and he flexed in her grip. "Common sense—which apparently I don't seem to have—says I should never have started with you. I'll probably go to hell for pulling you into this life I live. It's too erratic. Too unsafe. But the truth is, the minute I saw you my brain took a vacation and my body took over. And with each time we spent together, you became more and more important to me. Now I've put you in danger, yanked out of your home in the middle of the night—"

Rachel pressed her fingers against his lips. "Hush. I knew the minute I met you that you weren't any kind of ordinary man. I knew nothing about you and I didn't care. And I also didn't care whenever you showed up without warning and left the same way." She tightened her grip on his shaft and moved her hand up and down. "Call me stupid and naïve but I'd rather have a few hours with you than months with someone else."

The moment the words left her mouth she realized how true they were. She lived a lifetime with each of his visits. And she couldn't imagine sex with any other man after

Gabe. The attraction between them had been so instantaneous and so electric she wondered even now how they'd made it to her house that first time without tearing off each other's clothing.

The kind of sex they'd indulged in had been so different from anything she'd ever experienced. It was an unfamiliar dance but Gabe sang the tune and led her skillfully through the intricate steps. That's all it had taken for her to become so addicted to him she'd forced herself to be satisfied with his unannounced, infrequent appearances rather than try to find a stable social life. It would have been unfair for any other man to be forced to be compared to him.

Latching onto one of his nipples again, she increased the pace of her hand stroking his cock. His body tensed as the shaft swelled even more.

Suddenly he pulled away from her and she looked up, startled.

"What's wrong?"

"Time for me to take care of you."

"But—"

"Now it's your turn to hush."

He put his hands at her waist and lifted her to the low, built-in seat in the corner. Now it was his mouth on her nipple, sucking it and grazing it with his teeth. One hand drifted between her thighs, urging them apart. Fingers probed between the lips of her pussy, seeking her wet warmth. His thumb grazed over her clit, sending flashes of heat through her.

"You're always so ready for me," he murmured, his voice hoarse. "Sometimes in the dark of night I think about it and my cock gets as hard as a spike. If you were right there with me then, I'd ride you so hard you'd never stop coming."

She always loved the way he talked to her, the things he said, telling her in detail what he was going to do to her, the words heating her blood and adding to the stimulation of his hands and his mouth.

Shifting his lips to her other nipple, he slid two, then three fingers into her quivering vagina. Automatically she began to ride his hand, arching to give him better access to her breasts. His thumb kept up its pendulum movement on her clit, driving her higher and higher.

Without warning he released his hold on her nipple, letting it pop from his mouth and withdrew his hand from her pussy. Before she could wonder what was happening, he turned her around and ran the tip of one finger between the cheeks of her ass. He reached around her to grab a bottle of shower gel and she felt its cool thickness rubbed at the puckered skin of her anus.

Gabe Peralta was the first—and only—man who'd ever taken her there. The first time she'd felt his cock plundering her ass her body automatically resisted. But he was a skilled lover and when he was inside at last, filling the tight channel completely, an icy hot flash of lust surged through her and she'd climaxed almost at once.

Now she felt the rush of anticipation, of expectation as his soap-slicked fingers probed her rear entrance. One finger, then two, scissoring to stretch her tissues.

"When we get out of this," he rasped, "if you're not ready to write me off, I'm getting you a butt plug to wear every day I'm not with you."

"O-okay," she stammered, wishing he'd just shut up and get on with it. The tight knot of need low in her belly was unraveling and spreading through her, lighting every nerve she possessed.

Gabe withdrew his fingers and she heard the shower door open.

"Killian damn well better keep this place as well stocked as his others," he muttered.

She sensed rather than felt the movement of his body, heard something open and close. Then Gabe was back, his lips tracing a path down her spine ending with little nips at the swell of her buttocks. The distinct *snap!* told her he was sheathing himself in a condom. His fingers probed her again, spreading more lubricating shower gel into her

hot, dark tissues. Then the head of his cock was pushing, pushing, pushing at her anus until with a thrust he was inside.

She sucked in her breath as he filled her, the muscles in her cunt pulsing in reaction. His fingers manacled her wrists, lifting her hands and placing them on the shower walls, holding them there as he set up a steady rhythm, pumping in and out of her ass. His lips were hot against her shoulder, his teeth just grazing her skin as they found that special spot where neck and shoulder were joined.

This was another kind of dance, one where she *did* know the steps and could lead as well as follow. She braced herself against the tile with her hands, trying to time the movements of her hips with Gabe's thrusts. She was stretched on a rack of pleasure so taut she was afraid she would snap, yet she didn't want this to end, either. The orgasm was building inside her, clawing its way up through her body like a tiger fighting to be unleashed.

Gabe moved his mouth so it was next to her ear. He traced the outline with the tip of his tongue before growling, "Come now, Rachel. Right now."

His arm wrapped around her and his hand slid down between her thighs, seeking and finding her swollen clit, pinching it just enough to send her flying over the edge. As her climax exploded, Gabe shouted her name, pushed hard into her rectum and held himself rigid as his cock pulsed again and again inside its latex sheath.

As his spasms died down, he shifted his hand to reach her cunt, drove two fingers into it and worked them inside her until the last of the aftershocks quieted. She was panting, gasping for breath, her body so boneless she would have slipped off the seat if Gabe didn't have her impaled on his fingers and his cock.

When at last he withdrew from her body, he stripped off the condom and lifted her down to the floor. She was soaked and shivering again, this time from the strength of the passion just expended. It seemed as if with the intensity of her orgasm her adrenaline had crashed and every bit of energy had leached out of her. Leaning against Gabe for support, she was glad enough to let him soap her again and rinse her off.

When he had her completely dried, he pulled a thick terry robe off a hook on the wall, bundled her into it and tied the sash. He shoved his arms into an identical one, then lifted Rachel and carried her into the bedroom, laying her gently in the bed. Sitting beside her, he took one of her hands and enfolded it in his.

"I'm going to dig in the closet find some clothes that fit me, then go talk to Killian. They must know something by this time." He leaned forward and pressed a soft kiss on her forehead. "You get some sleep. You have to be exhausted."

That was certainly true but she had no intention of being left out of whatever was happening. Gabe was becoming more important to her by the minute, not to mention the fact that she'd landed square in the middle of this hot potato. Exhausted or not, she was sticking to him like glue.

She pushed herself up on the bed. "I need to find some clothes too," she told him. "If I can just get a pot of coffee I'll be fine."

"Listen, Rachel..." he began.

She shook her head. "I have a right to know what's going on. You'll have to tie me up to make me stay up here."

From somewhere he dredged up a grin and a hot light flamed in his eyes. "Hold that thought for a better time." His face sobered. "I know you're exhausted and the workout I just gave you didn't help."

She shook her head. "I told you. Some coffee and I'll be fine. Now. Are you going to help me find clean clothes to wear or do I sashay downstairs in nothing but this robe?"

Gabe threw up his hands. "Fine. All right. I guess I wouldn't feel the way I do about you if you could be pushed around. But you follow my lead in everything. Agreed?"

The way he felt about her? Exactly what did that mean? Something inside her unfolded and surged through her. Was it hope? Anticipation? Some emotion she'd deliberately kept buried? Hopefully when this was all over she'd have a chance to find out. But right now they had other things to worry about.

She nodded her head. "Agreed."

Reluctantly he stood up and held out his hand to her. "I'm not happy about this but okay. Let's find something to put on and go find Killian."

Dan Killian was right about keeping a fully stocked wardrobe in every size. Both Rachel and Gabe were able to find jeans and shirts, even underwear, to fit them. Gabe dressed in his usual black, while Rachel found navy jeans and a dark blue pullover top. Luckily her shoes were none the worse for the wear. The clothes she'd pulled on at home still reeked with the scent of sex. She'd either have to find a way to wash them or throw them out.

Killian was in the kitchen, waiting as a stream of water from a fancy machine somehow miraculously turned into coffee.

"Instant?" she asked. "Although at this point I'd take anything."

He shook his head. "One of my new toys. It's a Keurig." He indicated a carousel filled with a variety of tiny sealed cups. "We've got every kind of coffee or tea you can think of. Brewed in less than sixty seconds. What's your pleasure?"

She tucked her damp hair behind her ears. "Anything high test. Straight."

In seconds he handed her a mug of strong Columbian roast. She sipped at the hot liquid, pleasantly surprised at the enjoyable taste.

"Tell me why you aren't upstairs sleeping," he said. "You look beyond exhausted."

"Because she's as stubborn as I am," Gabe said, coming up behind her and resting his hands on her shoulders. "Surely you didn't think I'd get involved with a woman who caved easily or could be pushed around."

Killian gave a dry laugh. "Truthfully, I never thought you'd get involved with *any* woman."

Gabe's hands tightened on Rachel's shoulders. "Sometimes we don't get to choose. Things just happen."

"Not to you." Killian stirred sweetener into his coffee. "You've always been my best black ops person because you're an avowed loner." He looked at Rachel, then back at Gabe. "Does Miss Winters know what kind of danger she's in having any kind of involvement with you?"

"I can take care of her," Gabe began.

Rachel interrupted him. "I think that choice has to be mine, Mr. Killian. Certainly any woman with a brain who's been involved with Gabriel Peralta for more than eighteen months knows he doesn't work as an accountant or a salesman. I could have shut the door on this any time. So please don't discuss me as if I weren't here."

She thought she saw a smile tugging one corner of the man's mouth but it was gone so quickly she wondered if she was mistaken. Daniel Killian didn't seem like the type of man who smiled very much. He lifted his mug to his mouth, disguising any reaction by taking a long swallow of coffee.

"Fine. Those are things we can discuss after we get this current situation under control. I just wanted you to know, Miss Winters, that when you dance with danger it's easy to make a misstep. One that can be fatal."

She wanted to tell him she'd been dancing to that tune since the first night she and Gabe fell into bed together but she was afraid he'd think her remark flippant.

"I'll watch my footwork," she told him in a firm voice. "And under the circumstances you might as well call me Rachel."

"Rachel it is," he agreed.

"I want to know what information's come in," Gabe demanded, fixing his own cup of coffee. "There's been enough time for the team to come up with some answers."

Killian nodded and led them back to the living room area. Again he sat in the large armchair, leaving the couch for Gabe and Rachel. Gabe pulled her close to him, one arm over her shoulder.



"The puzzling thing from the beginning," his boss said, "was how they managed to lock onto you tonight."

"I agree. For two years I haven't given them any cause to suspect me of anything. Even when you managed to block some of their plans through info I gave you, I put myself in the line of fire so they wouldn't look at me crosswise. In fact," he went on, "I moved into the position of team leader thanks to a message from the head nut himself. Damn it. I was this close to finding out who he is."

"What about your very rare off times, when you came here to visit Miss...Rachel?"

Gabe shook his head. "Not even someone with the best skills could follow the routes I take. It has to be something else."

"Then someone who saw you in your role as part of the cell spotted you tonight and put out the word."

"But I've only been two places tonight—the blind apartment to change clothes and the Harris Foundation fundraiser."

"Wait a minute." Rachel shrugged off Gabe's arm and sat up straight. "You said this before but you can't seriously think anyone at that party has anything to do with this."

"You'd be surprised," Killian told her, "how many supposedly squeaky clean citizens are dirtier than the swamp. They just maintain a very carefully constructed front. That's why we're checking each and every one of them."

"But everyone on that list is carefully vetted," she protested. "We screen our donors very carefully. The Harris Foundation can't afford a breath of scandal, not from its donors or its staff."

"With all due respect," Killian said, "if someone in that crowd tonight is the head of the Sword of Allah, he's rich enough and clever enough to shield himself or herself so completely you don't have the resources to dig that deep."

"But —"

Whatever else she might have said was interrupted by the ringing of a cell phone. Gabe and Killian both pulled theirs out, then frowned when they discovered both of them silent. The ringing continued and everyone finally looked at Rachel's purse that she'd dropped on a table when she first came in. The ringing stopped but in seconds it began again.

She wrinkled her forehead. "Who would be calling me at this hour?"

Gabe nodded at her purse. "Why don't you answer it and find out?"

Gingerly, as if it might explode, she opened her purse, pulled out her phone and pressed Talk.

"H-hello?"

"Rachel?" She could hear the whoosh of a breath being released. "Thank heavens. I've been calling and calling your house and no one answered. I was so worried."

"Nina?" Rachel was completely puzzled. She and Nina Chan had a good working relationship but nothing that would prompt the woman to call her at such an ungodly hour. They were staff members, not friends. This was too weird. "What's this about? Do you know what time it is?"

"Yes. That's why I was so uneasy. When you left the party you looked really strange. I was afraid something was terribly wrong. After everyone left tonight I tried calling you at home but you didn't answer."

*Because I had the phone shut off.*

"I appreciate your concern but —"

"When I couldn't get hold of you —"

"Hold on a minute." She held the phone against her thigh.

Gabe and Killian were staring at her with grim expressions.

"Who is it?" Gabe demanded.

"My assistant. Nina Chan. She says she was worried about me when I left the party." She looked Gabe in the eye. "I don't usually leave before the end. She says she

tried calling me at home but I shut the phone off when we got to my house. I wasn't expecting any calls."

"Is she a close friend?" Killian asked. "Would she normally do this?"

Rachel shook her head. "In fact, for her to act like this is really strange."

"Hang up," Killian ordered. "Now."

When she didn't move he grabbed the phone from her and pressed End. Then he removed the battery and crushed the phone beneath his heel.

"What are you doing?" Anger surged through her. "That's my telephone."

"Yes. It was. And we don't want to give anyone more time than necessary to triangulate your position."

"You're kidding, right?" She looked at Gabe. "Nina Chan is a clerical person. No way could she be the person you're looking for."

"But someone could have asked her to make the call," Gabe pointed out. "Don't worry. When we need your phone, we'll replace it. Dan has a stash of them around here. Meanwhile, you're out of technology range."

Rachel threw up her hands. "I can't believe this." She started to pace, then stopped and stared at Gabe. "Wait a minute. You got into the party tonight without being on the list. Maybe someone else did too. And maybe that someone is holding a gun to Nina's head."

Gabe's smile was anything but humorous. "I got in because DRK was providing the security. I can promise you no strays wandered in."

"Then how...what..."

"I don't know but I'd better get you two out of here." Killian snapped open his own phone.

"Wait a minute." Gabe put a hand on his arm. "Why? I thought we were safe here?"

"We don't know if the Chan woman kept Rachel on the phone long enough to pinpoint this location. We can't take chances. And besides, she may have given us an unexpected opportunity."

"So where are we going?"

His grin was humorless. "The last place you'd expect."

## **Chapter Four**

Rachel felt as if she'd been tossed into a giant mixer, spun around multiple times and dumped into a black void. Killian walked to a corner where he made a series of calls in a very quiet voice, to Gabe's obvious irritation. She'd barely gotten her wits together after fleeing from her house and ending up someplace in the woods, before a helicopter landed in the side yard and Killian was giving orders. What she hadn't been prepared for was Gabe obstinately digging in his heels and refusing to leave until he knew exactly what was happening. And insisting—no, demanding—that she stay put.

"You wanted action," Killian pointed out. "I'm giving it to you. That phone call gave me an idea."

"Then we'd better let them find me on our own terms," he argued. "Let me call the shots. My gut tells me we're very close to finding out who the big man is. I refuse to pass up this opportunity."

Killian shook his head. "That's exactly what I have in mind for you."

"What you have in mind? Care to clue me in?"

"We have an unexpected opportunity," Killian pointed out. "The Chan woman is somehow involved. I'm sure of it. That phone call was too far out of left field. If they spotted you tonight they know you and Rachel are somehow together and they see her as a direct conduit to you. That brings us back to the shindig tonight. I'll have reports on everyone there in minutes."

"So someone there tonight somehow recognized me and spotted us leaving together. And the Chan woman is somehow tied up with whoever spotted me."

Killian ran his hands through his thick hair. "That's my guess. She gave us an opportunity and we need to take it."

Gabe nodded. "I see what you're thinking. Rachel can call the woman back, explain they were cut off and tell her...whatever. But say she's going home and bringing her date with her. If we're right that Chan's involved somehow, she'll pass the word. You can get men in place at her house ahead of time and still continue to monitor the guys who were after me earlier."

"The problem is, Rachel would need to be with you," Killian said.

Gabe shook his head. "Absolutely not. She can make the call from here once you've got everyone in place. I'll be in the house by myself."

"Wait a minute," Rachel broke in. "There's a flaw in your plan."

Both men turned to look at her.

Gabe was the first to speak. "What are you talking about?"

"If you want me to hint to Nina that you'll be in my house with me, won't they wonder when you show up alone? Won't they suspect something? And what if they triangulate my cell location? What will they think if I'm in one place and you're in another? This only works if we're both in my house. Together. You *have* to take me with you."

"No." Gabe's voice left little room for argument.

Killian cocked his head. "Wait a minute, Gabe. She has a good point here."

"Ridiculous," Gabe said. "I won't risk —"

"We'll take every precaution. And I trust you not to let anyone near her."

"I'm in the middle of this whether you want to admit it or not," Rachel put in. "They tracked Gabe somehow through me and the people you're looking at are my donors. If I call Nina and tell her I'm home, that's where these people will expect me to be. You don't want them to know Gabe's setting a trap, do you?"

"Forget it, Rachel." Gabe was unmoving. "I need all my faculties on alert while I'm doing this. You'll only distract me."

"Forget nothing," she spat. "Either I go with you or I don't make the call. I have a lot at stake here too."

"Give it up, Gabe," Killian told him. "She goes with you, like it or not. I'll have plenty of men in place."

Gabe looked as if he wanted to bite nails. "Fine. But you do exactly as I say. And I mean exactly."

She nodded.

"Let me hear you say it."

"Yes. I'll do whatever you say."

"Fine. Then let's get going. I assume we're using the bird to save time?"

Killian nodded. "The pilot will take you close enough to Rachel's without attracting unwanted attention. I'll have a car there for you. We already picked up the one you left in her driveway."

He opened his phone to make his calls and Rachel and Gabe boarded the helicopter. In less than twenty minutes the pilot landed them at a place not too far from her house where an SUV waited for them.

Rachel couldn't stop turning to look over her shoulder as they drove through the silent streets, until Gabe reached over and grabbed one of her hands.

"Try to relax. No one's following us. They didn't have a clue where to pick us up."

"Sorry." She sat rigidly, forcing herself to keep her eyes straight ahead. "When do you want me to call Nina back?" She looked at her new cell, which she had clutched in one hand. "I called message bank and I have a slew of messages from her."

"Someone's getting anxious. Let's wait until we're back in your house and get ourselves settled."

They parked the SUV in her driveway where anyone could see it and let themselves into the house.

"They must have turned off the lights when they left here," Gabe commented. "Maybe they thought they'd have a better chance in the dark if we came back."

"I'll just get this little lamp," Rachel began.

"Don't turn on the lights." Gabe's fingers clamped on her arm. "And stay right here. Don't move."

"What—"

"Ssh," he whispered. "Just wait right here. They may have had another reason for turning off the lights."

He pulled the gun from the small of his back and moved stealthily through the house, hugging the walls, peering around corners, not exposing himself. Rachel pressed herself against the wall, fighting to get her nerves under control. She had pushed her way back into this, after all. And she'd promised Gabe to follow his orders exactly.

It seemed like forever until Gabe returned, tucking his gun back into his waistband.

"All clear. I wanted to make sure they hadn't left someone here hiding in the dark. Just in case."

Rachel sagged against the wall. "Should I call Nina back? I turned my phone to vibrate and it hasn't been still for a second. And I'll bet my answering machine is full to the brim. Let me turn on the house phone."

As if on cue, the moment she flipped the switch to On the land line rang, the sound shrill in the darkness.

"Don't answer it," Gabe said, his fingers clamped around her wrist.

"But—"

"Not until I tell you, okay? And still no lights."

He lifted her in his arms and carried her down the hall to her bedroom.

"Gabe? What's going on?"

"A little physical release would help right about now, don't you think?"



Her jaw dropped. "In the middle of a...whatever this is? Are you crazy?" She swallowed a hysterical laugh. "Shouldn't I be making my call to Nina, before she calls again? Killian said he'd have men in place."

"We need to give him time. Figured we needed a way to pass the time that might settle those nerves of yours. Anyway, we both need to be relaxed and alert."

"But if someone's watching," she told him, "they'll see the car in the driveway and know people are inside."

"They don't know yet and won't until you make that call. Then we'll turn on the lights in your bedroom and let them see you just for a moment silhouetted against the light."

"But you were worried someone might have been left here to watch," she reminded him.

"Killian checked. There's no one around here at the moment. When he has everything set up, including the people watching whoever broke in here, he'll call me on my cell. That's when you call your friend back. Until then we're clear."

He nudged open her bedroom door with his shoulder. "Besides, I have some things I want to say to you before this thing goes down."

## **Chapter Five**

Things to say to her? Rachel felt a band suddenly tighten around her chest. Surely he wouldn't be the kind of man to have sex with her then dump her just before a critical operation, would he? Especially when she had a crucial role to play. Or was she just fooling herself. Had it just been the hot sex all along?

He placed her on the bed, drawing the covers back first. In seconds he had her stripped of every piece of clothing, his eyes burning into her while he removed his own. She already felt her nipples bead involuntarily, her pussy muscles quiver and the liquid of her arousal seep out to the insides of her thighs. How could she want, desire—need—this man so incredibly much when she got so little of him? And when he was probably tuning up for the big farewell scene.

But like it or not, there it was. Over the eighteen months of their—whatever she could call it—he'd become like a drug she was addicted to. She'd given over complete control of her body to him, reveling in every erotic act they perform, at his ability to draw her beyond any bounds of pleasure she had ever known. Dreaming about it during the long nights between his visits.

Somehow she'd contented herself with the strange arrangement, one she was sure most women wouldn't tolerate. But it worked for them. And she filled the weeks and months between with her life at the foundation. Another reason she was reluctant to believe anyone at the Harris Foundation could be involved in this. She felt as if she knew each of them, donors included, on an intimate basis, one that would allow her to vouch for them.

But then again, she never would have expected Nina Chan, with whom she had an excellent working relationship but nothing more, to be so hysterical at not being able to reach her. Someone was definitely pushing her buttons.

While she was trying to connect all the loose threads, Gabe peeled away the last of his clothing and her brain took a sharp left. All she could think of was his magnificent body standing next to the bed, his thick erection jutting out at her, a drop of moisture already beaded at the slit, his sac heavy against his thighs. Would she ever get so used to the sight of this man that it stopped turning her brain to mush and stimulating the throbbing at every pulse point in her body?

With a tentative hand she reached out and wrapped her fingers around his thick cock, automatically stroking the velvet skin covering the steel-hard shaft. Her thumb brushed the drop of liquid over the smooth skin of the head, back and forth, feeling the shaft thicken even more, blood pulsing in the vein wrapped around it. Gabe's breath whistled through his teeth and his hips began an automatic hitching movement.

"Careful, careful." His voice was thick and guttural. "Let's not get to the last chapter too fast."

Last chapter? Her fingers tightened around him. Did that have a double meaning or was she just seeing something that wasn't there?

Gabe's fingers manacled her wrist and lifted her hand away. "Good. Stop. If you kept that up..."

But she shook off his hand and reached between his thighs to cradle the heavy sac that hung there, rolling the balls of his testicles until he made the same whistling sound as before.

"I'm warning you, darlin'. Push me over the edge and there might not be anything left for you."

Even with the danger of their situation subconsciously lurking in her mind, she had to tease him. "I can't believe that Gabriel Peralta is suddenly only good for one bite of the apple."

"In your dreams. I'm just telling you we don't have much time and I don't want to come until I'm inside you."

He grabbed her hands, lifting them away and levered himself onto the bed, positioning himself between Rachel's thighs.

"Quick and dirty, darlin'," he told her, "but I'll still take the top of your head off."

And she knew he could do exactly that. Just as he always had.

He bent quickly, lifting her legs and giving him full access to her cunt. In a second she felt the warm, wet uneven surface of his tongue rasping over her slit and probing into the opening of her vagina. She jerked in response but his big hands pressing against the insides of her thighs held her in place.

He lapped at her, licked every surface, flicked the tip of his tongue at her throbbing clit, repeating the process over and over.

"Take your nipples," he ordered in a low, gravelly voice, lifting his head momentarily. "Do it, Rachel. Tug them for me. Pull them. Pinch them hard."

Rachel lifted her hands without thinking, her brain already shrouded in a fog of lust. Her blood raced through her veins, its pulsing movements pounding in her ears. Two fingers slid into her pussy, twisting back and forth as they scooped some of the copious fluid pouring from her. In the next moment she felt them painting the tight skin of her anus.

She tensed herself against the expected intrusion but when it came she welcomed it, icy hot sensations like flames wrapped in snow shot through her and the walls of her pussy quivered with need. She pushed herself against the fingers, trying to force them in further.

"That's it," Gabe said. "Ride my fingers, Rachel. Let me feel the inner muscles of your ass tighten around them. God, you are so hot and tight. Every time I take you here it's like the first time. Sometimes when I'm undercover in that terrorist cell, waiting for whatever's coming next, I think about fucking your ass. With my cock, with my fingers, any way I can. My cock gets harder than a spike but it's the only thing that keeps me sane. Keeps me from losing myself in the terrible things I have to do."

"Oh, god, Gabe." A low moan rolled from her throat, his words as much a catalyst as the probing of his fingers.

With two fingers inside her rectum all the way to the knuckle, he returned his mouth to her pussy, repeating the licking and nibbling, his teeth grazing over the swollen bud that was her clit. The muscles in her tummy flexed as her climax began building. She knew she was close to the edge, the release beckoning magically to her.

She almost cried when Gabe pulled his fingers loose and lifted off the bed, bereft at the empty feeling he left behind.

"Just hold on one second, darlin'," he told her in an unsteady voice.

"Please," she begged. "Don't leave me like this."

Then he was back, rolling a condom onto his thickened shaft. "Never, Rachel. Not ever."

Lifting her legs over his shoulder to give him greater access, he reared back and plunged deep inside her. She hung on the precipice, her vaginal walls gripping him and pulling at him, her body so ready to explode, but Gabe knew just how to hold her there. He stroked in and out, each time a little harder and deeper. They found the rhythm together, their own special dance, moving faster and faster to music only they could hear.

"Now, Rachel," he shouted and took them over the edge together.

The spasms went on and on, her entire body shaking. She clutched Gabe's braced forearms, nails digging into his skin. The convulsions grew in intensity until she thought she would surely shake to death. And finally, finally, as she was about to sink into the black void swirling around her, the aftershocks diminished and it was just her and Gabe, sweaty, skin-to-skin, hearts beating like jungle drums working overtime.

Finally Gabe lowered her legs and slowly pulled his spent cock from her pussy. Working his way off the bed, he lifted her in his arms again and headed for the bathroom.

"Quick shower," he told her. "We'll be out of time any minute now."

He snagged his phone on his way through the room, reached into the stall to turn on the shower and stood Rachel on her feet inside. She clung to him for a moment, getting her balance.

"You certainly soothed my jangled nerves," she told him, grinning.

"Mine too."

He climbed into the shower with her and adjusted the spray to cover both of them. But instead of reaching for the soap, he pulled her close to him and put his mouth to her ear.

"Rachel, I have something I want to say to you and I want to do it now, because it's always possible something could go wrong tonight."

She froze. "You said I'd be safe. I believe in you, Gabe. In your ability to take care of me."

"That's not what I meant." He let out a long, slow breath. "This...thing I'm involved in. Tonight may be what finally brings it to a head."

When he paused, she said, "And?"

"And I have to tell you you're more than just a now-and-then person to me. You keep me sane, Rachel. You keep me from losing my mind when I have to be someone else and I wonder if it's worth it all."

She ran her hands up and down the wet planes of his back. "Are you trying to tell me something?"

"Yeah and it's the hardest thing I've ever done. Which I guess is why I'm making such a mess of it."

The cold knot settled in her stomach again. "If you want to tell me you need to move on, Gabriel, then go ahead and say it. I'm an adult. I won't try to stab you in the shower or dissolve in hysterics."

His big body tensed. One hand cupped her chin, tilting it upwards. Despite the water spraying down on her, she stared up at him. The look in his eyes nearly brought her to her knees.

"Move on? Darlin', that's the furthest thing from my mind. What I'm trying to tell you is, when this thing is over tonight, I'm going to ask Killian to change my status, not send me out on such long-term assignments anymore. I want to spend more time at home. Your home. With you."

She was so shocked her heart nearly stopped beating. "With me?" she parroted.

"If you want." His eyes bored into her. "Or maybe I'm reading something into this that isn't here. If so, now's the time to tell me."

She managed to lift herself on tiptoes and press her mouth to his. "Whatever you're asking me, the answer is yes, yes, yes."

The kiss might have lasted longer but the shrill sound of Gabe's phone pierced the steam-filled air.

"Damn," he swore. "Timing is everything, right?"

He turned off the shower, handed Rachel a towel and picked up his phone. "Peralta." He listened for several seconds, nodding his head. "Got it. We'll be ready."

"Time?" Rachel asked.

He nodded. "Hustle that cute little ass of yours into some clothes and make your call. We're ready."

Rachel was only partially dry when she dragged on jeans and a t-shirt, dug out her phone and, hands shaking, pressed the speed dial for Nina Chan.

"Oh, Rachel," the other woman cried. "Thank heavens. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Nina. What's this all about? There are a million messages on my machine and the phone's been driving me crazy. Are you keeping tabs on me for some reason?"

"Oh, my, no, no, no." It was easy to hear the strain in her voice. "It's just that I was so worried about you. You never, ever leave a function early and you looked so strange."

I thought maybe you were sick. Besides, everyone was asking me questions about you. I about worried myself to death over it, thinking maybe I should check on you. But when I finally called there was no answer."

"Questions?" Nina's hand tightened on her phone. "Like who?"

"Oh, you know. Like Mr. and Mrs. Harris. And Lincoln Harris too. He seemed to think there was some kind of problem."

"Did he, now? I wasn't aware my movements were of such interest to him."

There was silence for a second. "Don't be mad at me, Rachel. I...we...everyone just wanted to make sure you were okay."

"Well, you can call them all and tell them I'm just fine. I was just...busy." Rachel had been warned not to say she'd left the house for any reason.

"Ooh," Nina squealed after a moment, "is it that hot hunk I saw you dancing with?"

"That's him. So you can understand why I wasn't answering the phone."

"Rachel?" Nina's voice dropped but Rachel could hear the tension in it. "Is he still with you?"

"Listen, I appreciate your concern but don't you think that's my business?"

"Oh, yes. Of course. I'm sorry." She paused. "Well, then. I guess I'd better get off the phone and let you get back to...whatever you were doing. Will you be in tomorrow morning?"

"Of course," Rachel assured her in a firm voice. "But if you get to the office first and it makes you feel better, you can call all the Harrises and tell them I'm just fine."

"I will. And I'm glad you're fine. Good night, Rachel."

"She's as nervous as hell," Rachel told Gabe, pressing the End button. "And I can't be positive but I think someone was there with her whispering to her, telling her what to say."



Gabe nodded. "Probably the person we've been trying to find all this time. I can't believe he'd expose himself like this."

"But if he saw you tonight and recognized you..."

"He's never seen me," Gabe objected. "At least in person." He snapped his fingers. "The pictures. I should have thought of that. Every new person has their picture taken with a cell phone and transmitted to the leader. So he knows who's on what team."

"Then that's how you were identified." Rachel shoved her fingers through her still damp hair. "But why would he think it suspicious that you were at a function like that, dancing with me?"

"No one in the terror cells goes near functions like this. Only the leader and two or three of his lieutenants. The rest of us are just grubby foot soldiers. So my being there was like waving a red flag. Especially since the event was by invitation only."

"It just stuns me that it could be someone associated with the foundation."

Gabe's phone rang again. He spoke cryptically, nodding as he talked, then snapped it shut.

"We're set. Not more than a minute after you called Chan, the guys who broke in here earlier must have gotten a call because they're on the move. But we're watching for any other vehicles too. The boss may come out of hiding to make sure the job gets done right. He can't afford to take the chance I'm a plant and could disrupt his operation."

Her body still tingling from the intense orgasm, Rachel watched Gabe checking the clip in his gun, then two others that he shoved back in his pocket. She watched curiously as he stuffed all the pillows under the covers, then pulled them up as if two people were sleeping beneath them,

"What—"

"We'll let them come in here and take their shot. My guess is they'll use a silencer, hit both forms, then turn on the lights to make sure they got us."

"Me too?" she asked.

"Collateral damage, as far as they're concerned. Okay, come on. I want you in the closet in the bigger guest bedroom. And do not come out until I tell you to. Got it?"

"Yes, sir." She resisted the urge to salute him. "Where will you be?"

"I'm going to wait in the living room. I can see clear through to the back from there. You stay here in the bedroom and don't move until I tell you to. That's an order."

"O-okay." She wouldn't have trouble following that direction.

Gabe hauled her next to him, banding one arm tightly around her and placed a ferocious kiss on her lips. They were both breathing hard when he released her.

"For luck," he said. "Now go sit in the corner until I give the all clear."

## **Chapter Six**

Gabe moved stealthily down the hall, crouching low, a night vision monocular clamped to his head. He hadn't pulled any of the curtains closed so he could see what was happening outside. At the same time, he needed to keep below the level of the window sills. He'd taken the comm link Killian had given him, put on the thin wire headset and adjusted the earpiece.

"Ready," he whispered into the tiny mic.

"We're set," came back the voice of Randy Knowles, the team leader. "Red Team just called me that the guys we're looking for should be here within fifteen."

Rachel turned on the bedside lamp, walked across the floor in front of the window, stretched, walked back to the bed and snapped off the light. Gabriel crouched low, pushed back his night vision monocular and opened the blinds, slanting them just enough to let in the moonlight, allowing them to see out but no one to see in.

Now there was nothing to do but sit and wait. Gabe positioned himself in the living room where he could see both the front and back yards of the house. He'd taken a big chance, telling Rachel what he wanted. He hadn't even made his feelings totally clear to her yet. Maybe because he was still sorting them out himself. But she hadn't turned away from him, even knowing what he did for a living. Especially having it thrown at her the way it happened.

He'd told Killian even before tonight that whenever this assignment was complete he wanted to make a change. For the first time in his life, he wanted more than the covert existence he'd lived for so long. And he wanted it with Rachel.

A clicking sounded in his ear, then a low voice said, "Heads up. Black SUV just parked at the end of the block. No one's getting out yet. Red team's parked one block over, heading here on foot."

"Okay. Let me know when the guys in the SUV start to move."

Less than a minute later Randy's voice whispered in his ear. "They seem to be waiting for something. I wish to hell I knew what it was. Oh, wait. There's a Mercedes coming from the opposite direction and it just parked at the curb in front of Rachel's house. And here come the bad guys."

"I'm ready," Gabe assured him.

"Remember, we've got the house surrounded. We'll move in on their heels. Don't want to wait until they shoot you, old buddy."

"Thanks for that," Gabe answered in a wry voice.

He closed his eyes momentarily so his sense of hearing would ramp up. He heard faint scratching at both the front and back doors. Lock picks. No blasting through for these guys. They wanted quick and quiet and then they'd be gone. Well, they were in for quite a surprise.

Gabe clicked his mic twice, the signal that the bad guys were entering the house, then twice more to indicate entry front and back. Opening his eyes, he could barely make out figures in black moving through the darkness, converging on the hall to the bedrooms.

"Now," Gabe whispered into his mic.

"On our way. Red Team's watching the Mercedes."

"Let's just be sure to give these guys enough time to take their shot."

Randy and his men moved stealthily into the house, standing close to Gabe. They could see the short hallway to the bedrooms and the three men at the doorway to Rachel's room. The open blinds outlined the shapes in the bed.

"All three of us," one of the men whispered. "That's the way the boss wants it. They'll never be able to sort out which bullet killed who. On my mark—three, two, one."

The silenced shots sounded like a series of muffled puffs of air. When they stopped, the man who'd spoken before said, "Let's get the pictures so we've got our proof. The boss was pissed we missed before. He's waiting outside for us to finish. These people could blow everything wide open."

Someone flipped on the bedroom light and Gabe heard a string of curses.

"What the fuck? What's going on here?"

"Shit. What is this?"

"The booty prize, gentlemen." Gabe stepped in and pressed his gun to the leader's head. "Randy? I think we want to immobilize our guests, turn off the light and see who comes after them."

With the rest of his team, Randy had the three men flex-cuffed and duct tape pressed across their mouths, sitting them on the floor against one wall. Each one of them had a murderous look of rage in his eyes.

Gabe turned the light off and they stood against the wall to wait.

"Company coming," someone whispered in Gabe's ear and he heard Randy click acknowledgement of the message.

They heard the front door open and footsteps heading down the hallway.

"What the hell's going on?" a man's voice asked. It was edged with irritation and impatience. "Can't anyone do a simple job anymore?"

He stepped into the bedroom and Gabe flipped the light switch, only partially surprised at the man revealed.

"It's three o'clock in the morning," he chided. "Tell me, Lincoln Harris, do your parents know where you are?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Rachel sat in a chair at her kitchen table, cradling a hot mug of tea in her hand. She had no idea how long she'd been sitting there. Hours, probably. Gabe had tried repeatedly to get her to go to bed but she seemed stuck in one place, unable to move.

The shock of seeing Lincoln Harris walk into her house, in a role she never would have ascribed to him, learning he headed a global terrorist organization, had frozen her into virtual immobility. And that he had been cold-hearted enough to kidnap his own father. She was stunned at both the vileness of the act and the revelation of Lincoln Harris as an international terrorist. How could he have involved his own parents? Put their lives in danger?

She realized with a sick feeling that this was a man with no conscience, no morals, no scruples. Her heart ached for Sam and Loraine and what they would have to face with this stunning revelation.

Her house had been filled with men dressed in black, speaking in low tones. Dan Killian himself had arrived once Gabe called to tell him they had the big fish. Then Killian had called Homeland Security and three more grim-looking men had shown up. Rachel heard snippets of conversation as Lincoln Harris was transferred to the custody of Homeland Security and DRK agents agreed to transport the others downtown to the federal building.

"We're square now," Killian told the HS leader. "Tell your boss he can sign off on the contract."

"Will do," the man said.

There was a fair amount of scuffling and muffled protests before the prisoners had finally been taken away, Lincoln Harris still cursing and demanding that he be allowed to call his attorney. Rachel didn't consider herself a violent person, but at that moment if someone had given her a gun she was convinced she could have shot this man without a moment's hesitation.

Then it was blessedly quiet but still Rachel couldn't make herself move. She heard footsteps and when she looked up Gabe was sliding into the chair opposite her. He reached across the table and closed one warm hand over her wrist.

"Drink your tea," he urged. "In fact, do you have any brandy?"

"Yes but I don't want liquor."

"Believe me, your body needs it. Where is it?"

She told him where to find it and he added a good dose to her tea, then put his hands over hers, lifting the mug to her lips. The mixture burned at first going down but then its warmth spread through her body and she felt her blood begin to circulate again. Gabe stood next to her, urging her, until she finished it all, then took the cup away and set it on the counter.

"Better?" he asked.

She nodded. "I just can't seem to wrap my mind around the whole thing," she told him. "Lincoln Harris. My god, Sam and Loraine will be devastated. They'll be just sick over this." She chewed on her bottom lip. "It's bad enough that he's willing to plot against his own country, but to kidnap his parents to further his own ends? I don't know how they'll ever get over it. Gabe, they are just the nicest people. This will destroy them."

"We'll help them get through this," he promised her. "You know, he's the one who recognized me when I showed up at the fundraiser tonight." He shook his head. "Apparently he got on the horn and had someone in place who could give him information on me. Someone who's going to be sorry they ever heard of DRK Inc. Anyway, the name they gave him wasn't the one he knew me by."

"How did Nina get involved?"

"He questioned her, asking what she knew about our relationship."

"Which was virtually nothing," Rachel pointed out.

"Except to tell him it had been going on for quite a while."

Rachel pushed her hair back from her face. "How did he get her to make the phone calls?"

"Simple." Gabe made a disgusted sound. "He knew—or guessed—I'd be going home with you and was pissed when his team missed me. He got hold of Nina, did his

imitation of the frantic boss and told her I was really some kind of criminal. If she could make sure we were still together and where, he'd be able to 'rescue' you from me."

"You know, he's always resented his parents, felt he operated in their shadow. He wanted to make his own mark."

"Well, he's certainly done it now," Gabe said. "One of the things we learned is that he targeted major donors to the foundation, kidnapped them, insisted on secrecy or the hostage would be killed and collected millions in ransom. He was building his own private army."

Rachel frowned. "But to do what?"

"Hire himself out to the highest bidder. It was all about the power."

Rachel pushed back her chair and stood up, stretching. "I feel as if I should call Sam and Loraine, only I don't know what to say to them."

Gabe kneaded the nape of her neck with his fingers. "Tomorrow will be plenty of time for that. I think it's time for us to go to bed."

"You must be exhausted," she commented.

He grinned. "Did I say anything about sleep?"

\* \* \* \* \*

All the tension of the evening, all the emotional stress of the long hours, had every nerve in Rachel's body wound tighter than wire on a spool. She was naked on the bed, fairly vibrating with the need for relief. Gabe was on his knees between her thighs, her legs spread wide, his big hands anchoring her arms in place. He was licking her breasts, swiping at the aching flesh with his tongue in a random pattern. Rachel only wanted him to take her nipples in his mouth and suck them, hard, until they felt like bursting. But he was teasing her, his tongue darting here, there, everywhere.

Frustrated, she arched up to him, silently begging him to take the throbbing, hardened buds into the hot wetness of his mouth. The hard thickness of his cock bobbed against the soft flesh of her tummy, the hot shaft imprinting itself on her skin.



She wanted to reach for it, take it in her hands but Gabe held her in place as he relentlessly attacked every sensitive area of her body.

When he finally pulled one nipple into his mouth she moaned in pleasure, rocking her body from side-to-side with the limited motion he allowed her. Gently he bit the hardened tip, the grazing sensation of his teeth firing every tiny nerve in the ripened bud. As if a line ran directly from her nipples to her cunt, her inner walls fluttered in response to the attention to her breasts.

Rachel bent her knees, her feet pressed flat to the mattress and tried to rub her body against Gabe's but he allowed her minimal movement.

"We have plenty of time, sweetheart," he murmured against the swell of one breast. "This is a feast. I want to take my time digesting it."

*But I want you right now. Right now!*

"Couldn't we get to the slower part later?" she asked, breathless.

He chuckled, the sound vibrating against her skin as he moved his mouth lower, tickling her bellybutton with the tip of his tongue before reaching the soft curls covering her mound. His hands still held her arms firmly in place, his legs spreading hers so she was open to his onslaught. When his tongue flicked through the curls to find the hot nub of her clit a high keening sound burst from her mouth.

Gabe's touch was so light. Too light. The whisper of his tongue over her skin was like the touch of a feather, teasing, promising, then darting away. When he finally dipped his tongue into the hot well of her cunt she screamed with pleasure, hitching her hips, trying to draw him deeper inside her.

But again he darted and retreated, tasted and backed off. Her torment was his pleasure. Her need fed his desire.

Suddenly he moved up her body again, straddling her, his hugely swollen cock bobbing at her. He moved one hand from her arm to wrap his fingers around his shaft and rubbed it lightly across her lips.

"Taste me," he told her, his voice husky. "Wrap your mouth around me."

She opened her mouth wide, let him slide over her lips, then closed around him and swirled her tongue against the underside of his cock. His breath hissed through his teeth and he rocked his hips back and forth, dragging himself over the edge of her teeth, feeling the pull of her lips against his skin.

Then he was moving again, shifting his body, turning her on her side, sliding his cock into her mouth again while his fingers opened her pussy wide and his tongue plundered her. It felt as if a hot wire had invaded her, singeing her nerves and causing her inner muscles to pulse and throb.

God, she wanted to come so badly but he was keeping her at the edge, just hanging there, release tempting her like a forbidden treat. When he pressed one finger against her anus, massaging the tight, puckered skin, the level of pleasure was almost too much for her to bear without the possibility of release.

"Please," she gasped, pulling her mouth back from his cock, her fingers massaging his balls. "Oh, Gabe, I can't stand it anymore."

"Neither can I," he growled. "I guess I'll have to save the rest for later."

He moved again, she heard the sound of the condom being rolled on, then he was holding her legs wide as he entered her with one, swift stroke. The moment he filled her he stopped, the heat of passion flaring in his eyes, his gaze holding hers.

"I want you, Rachel," he growled. "Tonight, tomorrow, forever. My job will change but there's always a threat. But know that I will protect you with my life."

"I love you," she told him. "Dancing with danger keeps me on my toes."

"Then get ready for the dance of your life," he told her, setting up a fierce rhythm.

It took only seconds before he carried them both over the edge into a whirlwind of pleasure, the pulsing of their joined bodies a silent promise for the future.

## About the Author

I always wonder what readers really want to know when I write one of these things. Getting to this point in my career has been an interesting journey. I've managed rock and roll bands and organized concerts. Been the only female on the sports staff of a university newspaper. Immersed myself in Nashville peddling a country singer. Lived in five different states. Married two very interesting but totally different men.

I think I must have lived in Texas in another life, because the minute I set foot on Texas soil I knew I was home. Living in Texas Hill Country gives me inspiration for more stories than I'll probably ever be able to tell, what with all the sexy cowboys who surround me and the gorgeous scenery that provides a great setting.

Each day is a new adventure for me, as my characters come to life on the pages of my current work in progress. I'm absolutely compulsive about it when I'm writing and thank all the gods and goddesses that I have such a terrific husband who encourages my writing and puts up with my obsession. As a multi-published author, I love to hear from my readers. Their input keeps my mind fresh and always hunting for new ideas.

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

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