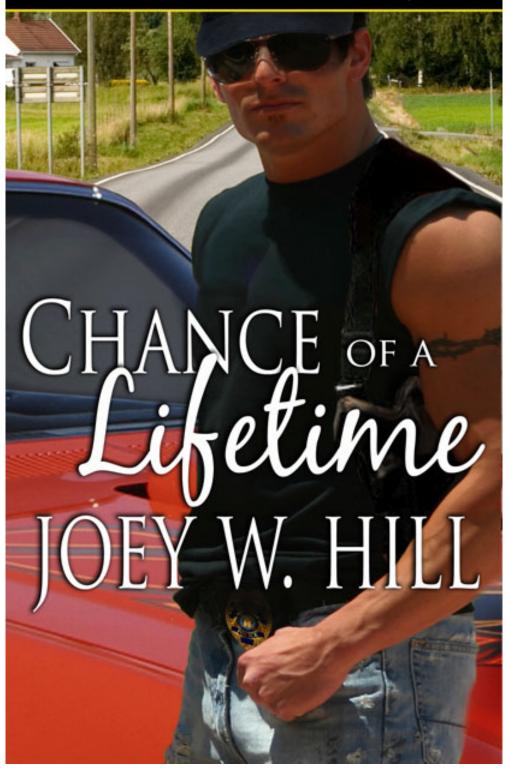
Ellora's Cave Presents



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



Chance of a Lifetime

ISBN # 1-4199-0779-4 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Chance of a Lifetime Copyright© 2006 Joey W. Hill Edited by Briana St. James. Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication: October 2006

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

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

Content Advisory:

S - ENSUOUS E - ROTIC X - TREME

Ellora's Cave Publishing offers three levels of RomanticaTM reading entertainment: S (S-ensuous), E (E-rotic), and X (X-treme).

The following material contains graphic sexual content meant for mature readers. This story has been rated E-rotic.

S-ensuous love scenes are explicit and leave nothing to the imagination.

E-rotic love scenes are explicit, leave nothing to the imagination, and are high in volume per the overall word count. E-rated titles might contain material that some readers find objectionable—in other words, almost anything goes, sexually. E-rated titles are the most graphic titles we carry in terms of both sexual language and descriptiveness in these works of literature.

X-*treme* titles differ from E-rated titles only in plot premise and storyline execution. Stories designated with the letter X tend to contain difficult or controversial subject matter not for the faint of heart.

CHANCE OF A LIFETIME

Joey W. Hill

Trademark Acknowledgements

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

Glock: Glock Gesellschaft M.B.H. Ltd Liab JT ST CO

Mustang: Ford Motor Company

NASCAR: National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc.

NBA: NBA Properties, Inc.

NFL: National Football League

Porsche: Dr. Ing. H.C.F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft Corporation

Sig Sauer: SIG Swiss Industrial Company

Trans Am: Sports Car Club of America, Incorporated

Chapter One

"Stacie, that was inappropriate behavior. I expected more from you than that." *Inappropriate behavior*.

She'd laughed at a joke. The wife of one of John's co-workers had made the observation, not unkindly, that John's boss looked like a giraffe. The likeness had been so obvious, she couldn't help the snort of laughter.

Maybe it had been too loud. Maybe a couple heads had turned. But all she'd done was laugh, for heaven's sake.

On Monday, her father had freaked out on his new meds and thrown her into a china cabinet. On Wednesday, her mother had needed her diaper changed. When she'd cried through the indignity of it, Stacie had cried too. She'd made multiple calls to the insurance company about a ten-thousand-dollar charge her brother insisted was incorrect and therefore refused to pay. Finally, to top off this terrific week, she'd been roped into being John's arm candy for this business party, the annual "Summer Fling" for which he *had* to have a date.

God, she was so sick of worrying about what she said, how she did things. Maybe she'd overreacted. But seeing John's face when she'd told him to "go to hell" had been worth it. She'd even taken his car, a car that certainly shouldn't belong to a stuffy corporate ass kisser who color-organized his sock drawer.

"Aarggh!" She pushed her foot down on the accelerator. The Porsche leaped forward. God...it felt so good. On these quiet rural roads, nothing around for miles and miles but corn and a rosy summer sky getting ready for sunset, it felt incredible, like riding a horse. Or riding a man. Maybe both were a form of running, but she didn't care.

Though she hadn't been out of nursing school more than a year, at the time it had made sense for her to leave her hospital job to serve as a home health care nurse to her parents. Fate had struck a cruel blow, inflicting Alzheimer's on her father within a month of when her mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer. As they worsened, she knew they needed a good long-term care facility that could be supplemented by her care.

Her two older brothers had moved north and joined a New York firm, an important career move they said they couldn't turn down, several months after she moved in with their parents. Both successful CPAs, Carl and Tom saw no reason why she couldn't provide their parents everything they needed at home. As the eldest child, Tom held power of attorney for their parents. At first, she'd tried to believe their reasoning was emotional, based on love. The "we're not putting Mom and Dad in a home" mentality, lingering from a time when the only choice was a brick box structure on the side of the highway with a few rocking chairs out front. As time progressed, her opinion changed bitterly. They insisted they would take care of the finances insurance didn't cover and her living expenses, but everything was a fight and grudgingly given.

Her dating life in the past couple years had been John. It wasn't dating she cared about, however. She'd asked Tom to pay for a relief nurse to give her a night away from the house once every couple of weeks. He'd hung up on her after calling her a selfish bitch trying to drain his children's college fund. An hour later, she'd been called by John. A former colleague of her brother's, he needed an attractive armpiece for his business dinners and didn't have much time to devote to developing a relationship. Tom said he'd pay for an overnight relief nurse whenever she chose to go out with John, as long as it didn't exceed once a month. In return, she suspected John gave him a discount on his brokerage services.

At first, she'd been insulted by the whole situation, including her brother's assumption she'd need an overnight nurse. After giving it some thought, however, she decided to take advantage of it. On her first date with John, she'd planned to have an

early night and spend the rest of her evening elsewhere. She'd take a few dollars she'd put aside to check into a cheap motel and read or sleep for the night, enjoy some solitude.

But for reasons she was ashamed to examine too closely, she'd let John coax her into going home with him and succumbing to some perfunctory sex she'd actually been grateful to him for initiating. A weak moment where she'd needed comfort, someone's sheltering arms.

After that it had become a monthly habit. Go to some idiotic business function, go home with John. At least he fell asleep quickly. She could then slide out of bed and sit by the window, listening to rain patter on the glass or watching the moon. Sometimes she read whatever paperback novel she'd picked up for escapism, knowing the dream it spun would be uninterrupted for a little while. While she was embarrassed at herself, at the whole revolting situation, she knew she didn't have enough energy left at the end of the day to walk away from it. Her mother was sliding fast toward the end and her father was losing his mind, and she couldn't give them everything she knew they needed. She was so desperate for that one day a month where she'd get a few hours away from that reality, she was willing to be whored out to get it.

Imagining John's arms around her now was smothering. Intolerable. Like a dog trying to wriggle under a fence, stuck in the hole he'd dug, she understood why he'd strangle himself to death trying to escape.

Perhaps she'd spend the night just doing this. In college she'd had a Mustang. This car had a lot more power, but it was easy to get used to the difference. She pushed the gas pedal down even farther. It was just her out here, on a silver ribbon of road with hills to give her stomach the thrill of a roller coaster. It was like the feel of first love, the first bite of lust. For once she was going faster than the demons chasing her soul.

Two days ago she'd turned twenty-five. Her mother had hugged her and looked at her with tears in her eyes. She didn't want her mother to worry about her. Worry about anything. Damn her brothers. Stacie vowed her parents would never see anything but her love. Her mother would *not* pass out of this world thinking she or Dad were a burden to Stacie. Never. They'd cared for her eighteen years and then some.

She'd been a wild child. Not a bad girl, just carefree enough to blow her shot at a scholarship, unlike her brothers. But she'd found her focus in her senior year and Dad had believed in her enough to sell his treasured restored Chevy and pay for her first year of tuition in nursing school. She'd worked her ass off to pay for the rest and make the grades to get the degree.

The two years she'd spent caring for them was nothing.

Just an eternity when she was watching her mother die while her father slowly forgot who his wife and daughter were. When she learned that no matter how hard she tried, one person alone, even medically trained, couldn't give optimal care to two adults with such disparately different serious long-term illnesses. She was afraid something in her own mind was going to crack wide open soon, like Humpty-Dumpty on his wall. She put the gas pedal all the way to the floor, trying to push all of that away and the panicked desperation that went with it.

She let out a short yip of alarm at a sharp blast of noise. Glancing up in the mirror, she saw flashing blue lights about a quarter mile back.

"You have got to be fuc...KIDDING!" She rolled her eyes. "Stop it. You're alone, Stacie. You can swear. *Say it.* F-fuck. You've got to be FUCKING kidding!" She glared at the rearview mirror in triumph. She'd cussed. Not one of those weak everybody-used-them words like damn or hell. She wished John had been here to hear it, just for a moment. His mouth would have hung open like he'd just been hit in the head by a flounder. *Inappropriate behavior*.

Bite me.

What in hell was a cop doing out here in a county area so remote the radio stations had static? She'd no idea how fast she was going, but she was sure it was at least twenty miles over the speed limit. It wasn't fair. Had she been like her self-absorbed brothers in a previous life, and this was karma?

Fine. Taking a deep breath, she pulled over. She could handle one cop. The threat of jail had all the appeal to her of a weekend spa session. *With* a full body massage.

She glanced in the side view mirror as the cop's car door opened. If she hadn't been used to seeing refitted drug dealer cars used in the city all the time by the police, she might have suffered a fleeting worry about a blue light bandit posing as a police officer. The car was a sleek and deadly-looking black Trans Am. It didn't answer what a city cop was doing way out here, though. Then he unfolded and straightened from the car and she lost the desire to wonder about anything.

Holy God.

As if she'd been going so fast the world had spun on its axis and now was going way, blissfully slow, his first few steps toward her were like the movies where the hero's initial walk-on scene was in slow motion.

He wasn't wearing a uniform. With her earlier thought of a sexual predator posing as a policeman, that should have alarmed her. But when dormant hormones surged to life as they did now, like a pack of wild dogs out of control, it sort of cancelled out brain cells.

His well-creased jeans moved with his hips just right, the badge flashing at her from where it was clipped to his belt. He wore a shoulder holster and his snug dark T-shirt was tucked in, capturing the sharp, authentic look of a cop, despite the casual wear. It also emphasized a broad chest, wide shoulders and flat abdomen that drew the eye back past his waist down to other things the jeans held well. He had a black baseball cap with gold PD lettering pulled down low on his brow and wore concealing sunglasses against the setting sun. His jaw line was hard and clean as creek rock, just a hint of five o'clock shadow that went with the dark close-cropped hair she could see beneath the cap. His arms. My God, she'd just dwell on those arms for days, the sinewy strength they conveyed.

If she could program this moment like her DVR, she'd pause and rewind so he could walk toward her forever. She'd worship the cable company like gods.

The baseball field. She remembered now. As she was headed out of town, there'd been a mixture of cop cars and vehicles with police and fire association bumper stickers. The police and firemen ran a series of six games every year, a benefit for the children's center. This guy was likely off duty, heading home. So why did he mind if she was doing a little careless joyriding? Was he one of those tight-assed sticklers for the rules?

He's a cop, Stacie. They enforce laws. That's kind of their job.

But he wasn't on duty. The whine, even in her own head, made her wince. It just wasn't fair.

From the way he approached the car, she knew he was doing that quick assessment police people did to ensure she wasn't going to pose a threat. Or pull a gun from her micro-sized evening bag.

Oh *hell*. She had no license with her. She'd left it and her wallet at home because she was with John. She had a clutch purse with a few toiletries in it and that was it. The thought came to her a moment before he made that final step to the window. Tapped on the glass.

Reluctantly she turned the key and let the window roll down.

"Ma'am, were you aware you were going a hundred and thirty miles an hour?"

Holy shit. She couldn't help it. A giggle burst from her. She clapped her hand over her mouth. Well, no wonder he'd stopped her, even if he was off duty. She might as well have sauntered past his window and waved a bag of cocaine.

When he frowned, she had a sudden, explosive urge to nibble on his firm lips. What was the matter with her? She bit back more of that inappropriate laughter. Seems all the men in her life, including this newest addition, didn't approve of her laughing. Well...f-fuck them. In fact... Her gaze coursed over him. That would be a really good idea. Those jeans looked like they contained something quite capable of inappropriate behavior.

"Ma'am, is something funny? Have you been drinking?"

"No. No." She shook her head, smothered another nearly hysterical hiccup of laughter. "I should though. I should drink *a lot*."

His brow raised, that stern expression deepening, and oh my Lord. Her panties dampened, a shocking reaction. She couldn't remember the last time she'd let herself think about the possibility of good sex. When she and John did it, she tried not to think about what they were doing at all because that would make her realize exactly how horribly unsatisfying it was. His touch barely roused her. He knew enough to get her lubricated so they could accomplish the act. She preferred to call it that versus "wet" because "wet" implied excitement, emotional involvement.

When he finished, he never even asked her if she had reached climax. Which she didn't mind actually, because if he thought she expected that, he might try doing it longer. God help her.

Was this cop really masterful like this? Or was it just a trained persona, something he took off like his badge and gun at the end of the day? Did he become a man as lackluster as John, an unimaginative couch potato?

"Ma'am, I need you to get out of the car."

The laughter faded from her mind, leaving a sense of hopeless desolation. Reality had intruded and the gorgeous cop was going to give her a ticket. Another thing to deal with, another thing she'd have to resolve with her brothers because she'd wanted one frigging moment to breathe. Something surged up in her so fast and hard it was like a bad reaction to the evening's hors d'oeuvres and just as alarming. Much worse than vomit.

A muscle flexed in her jaw. "Officer, I..." She swallowed. "Can you go back to your car just a moment, please?"

He lifted a brow.

"I'm going to cry now. I don't want to cry. It actually...d-doesn't...help anything. And...and...I'm not a crier!" She blurted it out as she felt the first tears start to well from her eyes. "I don't...try to get out of tickets and...I d-don't w-want...please. I'll take the t-ticket. Just... Oh hell. Go away."

She hit the window control. She needed a "Come back in five minutes" sign like they had at the bank. Why couldn't she have had this one thing? Why did it have to be this way, always? What had she done wrong?

* * * * *

Jake Chance blinked as glass whirred back up, shutting him out. She turned away from him, burying her face in her hands.

Well, that was a first.

When he'd told her how fast she was going, he'd wanted to add she'd been handling the car damn well at that speed. He'd pulled up to the road right as she passed. If not for that and the fact he'd immediately pulled out behind her and turned on his siren to get her attention, she likely would have been over the crest of the next hill and out of his sight before he could react.

He'd expected a face shellacked with wealth and was surprised the pale countenance staring back at him was lightly touched with makeup, though not enough to cover shadows and worry lines she was too young to have. Her shoulder-length hair was pushed back in a simple style. The dress she wore, what there was of it, was an elegant black short thing with spaghetti straps, the kind cut to show off a delicate nape, the fine line of the shoulders, a modest but intriguing amount of bare breast. It was the type of dress that teased a man with a lot of leg.

Her change in expression had alerted him, made him draw his attention away from enjoyment of her body. Her face was too thin, and suddenly it was thinner, drawn in on itself. He knew the signs of stress. He'd had women do all sorts of things to dodge a ticket, but his gut told him that wasn't what was happening here. The circumstances were wrong. A pretty woman all by herself in the middle of nowhere, eating the

pavement like she was outrunning the fires of hell. Going nowhere as fast as she could. She wasn't trying to play him.

In fact, the look in her eyes roused a protectiveness in him, a second sense he had when he knew someone needed him. But even with that, it had been a long time since a woman had made him want to do the asinine thing he did now.

She hadn't locked her door. Opening it, he unbuckled her seat belt, his fingers brushing her silky hip. She smelled like one of those light floral body sprays with a hint of talcum powder. Gently he took her elbow, went to one knee. Because the Porsche was so low to the ground, it was simple to turn her and find she fit perfectly against his chest.

She hardly reacted. No jump, no stiffening. She was having a full-out flood, and it was the easiest thing in the world to wrap his arms around her.

"It's okay," he murmured.

Stacie knew she should have been shocked, but she no longer had the energy to do what was right or proper. The arms around her felt good. Strong. Able to hold her together so she wouldn't break. Until he'd put them around her, she hadn't realized how fragile she felt. He smelled of sweat from the baseball game, a faint soap and aftershave smell.

"No...it's...not. But it doesn't matter. I still have to keep on going, and I'm s-so affraid I c-can't. That I'll l-let them d-down."

"Sshh...sshh... Just let it out." She had her arms folded between them, protecting herself. Pushing her head onto his shoulder, Jake tightened his hold on her and let her sob. Her words struck him oddly. Here she was, pretty as a picture and driving a Porsche, and yet her words reminded him starkly of his own job. It wasn't okay, but you still had to keep doing it. Battered wives, homicides over old grudges, kidnappings, robberies, kids gunning each other down in the street...

She had a lot built up and he found he didn't mind holding her through it. So often he couldn't reach out, couldn't help. She might be crying over something utterly shallow, like she'd run up too much credit card debt, but somehow he didn't think so. The shoulders quivering under his hands were even now trying to snap back to regain control, to reel it back in. He watched for the signs, ready to ease up. When she lifted her head at last to look at him, or rather to hastily wipe her eyes before he could see her, he caught her wrist. While he didn't have a kerchief, he supposed the hem of his T-shirt would do. Pulling it loose, he brought the edge up to her face. As he did, her hand fluttered down, landed soft as a summer butterfly on his bare stomach, just above the belt holding his jeans.

Rather than jerking away, she went still. Carefully, he kept dabbing under her eyes, but he could feel every ounce of pressure from her fingers. *Christ, Chance, she's upset about something. Give her a break*.

He was rock-hard muscle, was Stacie's thought. She fought the irresistible urge to spread out her fingers, enjoy the flat stomach, the silken trail of hair she knew would arrow straight down toward his groin. Her thumb was on his belt. She should feel emotionally drained after such a cry. Embarrassed and ready for ice cream and female-only solitude. However, as her hand made that intimate contact, hard want pulsed between her thighs, telling her exactly what she was ready for.

Like her desire to speed in the Porsche, she wanted to ride fast and hard, as fast as she could, higher and higher. She didn't want to have sex. She'd given up on making love. She wanted to fuck. Like she'd read about, dreamed about. She wanted to fuck this sexy, gorgeous cop with gentle hands and hard muscles, who'd been enough of a good guy to know when she needed a shoulder. Something John wouldn't recognize if her parents dropped dead, her house burned down and she discovered she'd gained twenty pounds—all in the same day.

With his arms bent like this, his biceps swelled into nice firm curves. His hands were long-fingered and looked rough, strong. Well, lackluster and unimaginative he might be, but a couch potato he wasn't. She didn't care that a man might be a little soft, but right now she wanted a man the way a fantasy demanded him to be. A man who

would spread her legs with relentless determination and sheathe himself, drowning her in pleasure. Take her over, allow her to think only about his cock and the climax he'd send screaming through her every nerve ending.

Okay, she was taking this fantasy way too far. He'd straightened to his feet and extended an open palm. He could be kind, but he was still going to do his job, make sure she wasn't intoxicated.

Taking his hand, she put her heel to the pavement. Getting out of a Porsche in a short dress didn't allow modesty. She hesitated as he tightened his grip on her. Insisting she was going to get out of that car.

Well, why not? The speed she'd been going, the exhilaration she'd felt at the sheer freedom of it, came surging back through her. What was she worried about?

Clasping his fingers, she let his leverage bring her to her feet. Her slender fingers and wrist looked consumed by his grip. The skirt hiked up past the lace top of her thigh highs briefly before she rose. While she couldn't tell for sure, she thought he'd looked.

Suddenly her protective cop had the intimidating look of a pissed-off Clint Eastwood. Before she could step back, startled by the shift in his expression, his hands slid to her upper arms, holding her fast.

"Baby, who left those bruises on your neck?"

She blinked. The cop had just...he'd just used a possessive endearment, and heat rushed up through her at the way his jaw hardened, telling her he damn well expected an answer. It was like a sign. He wanted her too. Or was she having a delusion?

"Oh—no. It's not what you think. My father has dementia. His current meds aren't working so well, and he flies into rages. He caught me unprepared." Would have strangled her if she hadn't been able to use an umbrella to break his grip. She thought she'd patted on enough makeup to disguise it. "I take care of him."

"Sounds like you need some help. Isn't there a nurse?"

"I am a nurse."

Stacie gave him the information distractedly, already not thinking about that anymore. She moistened her lips. If she acted like this *was* a fantasy, then if she made a fool of herself tomorrow she could pretend it had all been a dream, right? Unless she woke up in jail, of course.

When he removed his glasses and hooked them in his shirt collar, she saw he had flinty gray eyes to go with his dark hair streaked with brown.

She cleared her throat. "I think you were going to determine if I'd been drinking." "Have you?"

"One glass of wine at the dullest party that's ever been held in the history of corporate America." She stepped backward two steps while he watched her closely.

"Let's be sure. Just walk down the center line, ma'am. One foot in front of the other."

A straight line, no stepping off right or left. She'd been doing that for the past seven years. Mom and Dad had believed in her, and she'd tamed the wildness. But tonight she wanted to let it loose. She'd have the control to rein it back in. Tomorrow.

"Mind if I take my shoes off first?" She gestured to the shiny three-inch heels. "I wouldn't want to catch one on the pavement and make you think I was something I wasn't."

He inclined his head. Holding onto the car, she took off one shoe then switched her grip to do the other. Now he was even taller. Dropping the shoes behind the seat through the open door, she turned, propped one foot on the back wheel. Reaching up a few inches under the skirt, she unhooked the garter and rolled down the stocking deliberately, knowing she was revealing her leg from the side almost to the hip.

Let's see how far we can take this. The sheer stocking came off like a dandelion's seeds at a puff from her lips, blowing lightly in the air. After she did the other, she turned to find him watching. Avidly, a man's desire in his eyes. His jaw flexed. Smiling, Stacie approached and draped the stockings over one of his broad shoulders, coming close

Chance of a Lifetime

enough she could feel his heat. Since something in his eyes told her she should be cautious about coming too close, she took a step closer.

"Thanks," she said simply. "That's the best compliment I've gotten in months."

As she moved by him, she made sure her hip brushed his before she walked toward the center line.

Chapter Two

Jake Chance had dealt with countless women who tried to use their wiles to get out of punishment for their crimes. But this one... He wasn't sure what she was up to, but it was almost like she was enjoying herself, not in the slightest bit interested in how much trouble she could be in. She was a knockout, a girl-next-door innocence in a fuck-me elegant black cocktail dress.

It had a low back held together with one horizontal strip that passed just beneath her bare shoulder blades, just wide enough to cover a bra strap. Below it, the cut of the dress dipped to the small of her back, increasing his focus on a perfectly shaped pert ass that he'd like to grip with both hands as he bent her over the hood of his car.

Hell. Though he was getting harder by the minute, he was just going to have to grit his teeth and bear it. This wasn't his jurisdiction, but he lived out here. The county sheriff wouldn't mind him putting a little fear of God into a reckless driver. He *would* mind him fucking her senseless up against the side of his car.

The lacy dangling strap of her garters he'd glimpsed teased his imagination. A man could slide his fingers under hooked garters, feel the silky elastic stretch over his knuckles as he gripped her hips, drove into her. Her stockinged legs would tighten over his back, heels to his ass as he buried himself into wet, blissful pussy.

The deft way she'd taken off her shoes told him she wasn't drunk. He might be the intoxicated one at this point. Having her walk the center of the road put a few feet of space between them, which he desperately needed.

Stepping onto the white line, she placed one foot before the other, deliberate as a deer. Those bruises he'd seen at her neck continued down her back. They'd been concealed by makeup but became more obvious in the play of the dying sunlight on her skin. Women lied about things like that, but the genuine surprise she'd shown at his

question, the fact she displayed none of the familiar defensive wariness around a cop, told him she was telling the truth about how she'd gotten them. It still pissed him off though. There was more to this story. A woman shouldn't be handling a grown man with dementia by herself.

Putting her hands out to either side like a bird, she looked back and gave him a mischievous, thorough look with midnight sky blue eyes. "My, that's a very big gun you're carrying, Officer. You're scaring me."

His lips twitched. Then you better get your ass down that line before I decide to pull it out and use it.

Had he lost his mind? He cleared his throat. "Just walk the line, ma'am."

As she put one foot in front of the other, her hips swayed. He could swear she was exaggerating the motion. It taunted the part of him that enjoyed a little fight out of a woman before he overpowered her and made her scream with pleasure. It'd been a while since he'd let a woman get that close. Women now were too jaded and distrusting, thanks to the bastards men could be. But this one...

She did the walk with perfect precision, executing a graceful pirouette at the end that made the skirt swish around her thighs.

"And touch my toes?" As she went down, that short skirt inched up, close to showing him what was beneath it. When she rose, she cast an innocent look over her shoulder. "Did I do it right, or should I do it again?"

She was not going to make him laugh. But his lips had to press hard together to resist it. "We actually require you to touch your nose, not your toes."

"Oh." She dimpled. "My fault." Dropping her head back on her shoulders, she brought one pale limb up, one slender finger touching her nose, then the other. As she lowered her arms, the spaghetti strap tumbled off the curve of one shoulder.

The bra she was wearing had to be one of those strapless demi-cup things that held breasts up on a shelf, as inviting as cold beer sitting at easy gripping level in the fridge. If she was one of those trashy types willing to give him a blow to evade a ticket, maybe he would have taken advantage of it. No. No, he wouldn't. He was a good cop. But something about the feverish quality in her eye intrigued him. She wasn't drunk or on drugs, but something was driving her, a need so powerful he could feel it pulsing off her. Something in him was responding to it full force.

Padding across the asphalt in her bare feet, she came back to him. The wind caught wisps of hair to caress her neck in a way he'd like to do. This was a woman who should belong to someone, who should be cared for. She wasn't promiscuous or irresponsible. Despite catching her in a situation that suggested otherwise, he knew the difference between chronic irresponsibility and the need to run from something, to cut loose because the rubber band elasticity of her soul was stretched to breaking.

"I need your license and registration."

She bit her lip. "I don't have them. I mean, John may keep the registration in the car, but—"

"This isn't your car."

"No." She shook her head.

"Is that your boyfriend?" He tried to keep it professional, authoritative, a voice that would compel her to tell him the truth the way a doctor's authority compelled a patient to tell him anything.

"John?" She blinked. "Oh heavens, no." That smile touched her lips again, but he noticed it looked as if it were attached to a millstone. "Why is that relevant? You can't require me to talk about my personal life, can you?"

"Actually, there's a statute that says I can. It's very complicated."

She gave him a dubious look, went and sat down in the driver's seat of her car, slipping those shoes back on, this time without the hose.

Stacie tugged the heel straps over her ankles, crisscrossed and re-buckled them, letting her hair fall forward over her face. He was back to giving her that detached, speculative look. What was she doing, really? What would one moment of fun help?

Especially when it could be so easily disrupted by the slightest mention of the life she'd tried to leave behind for one night.

"I think I should tell you, I stole the car."

"What?" That cop look snapped back on his face so fast she wondered if she'd imagined him responding to her brief, pathetic attempt at flirtation. He probably got hit on all the time.

"Well, he was being such an ass. I mean, it's bad enough I'm there as his show pony, but to tell me I can't even laugh when I want to laugh. And his boss does look like a giraffe, I'm sorry."

Jake pinched the bridge of his nose. "So you took off with his car."

"I got his keys out of his coat. It's not like he knows how to drive it anyway. He likes pretty cars and pretty women and has no idea how to handle either one of them."

When she looked up at him, she couldn't keep herself from lingering over the terrain. Or from saying the words that came out of her mouth, which seemed to be disconnected from her brain. "I bet that's not a problem you have, do you? Officer..."

"Chance. Lieutenant Jake Chance."

Jake sighed. He needed to cut this one loose before he did something incredibly stupid. "Let me run the plates, make sure he hasn't reported it."

She nodded, but he wasn't sure she even heard him. Her mind seemed to be elsewhere. Before he went back to the car, he couldn't help himself. He stepped forward, brushed her shoulder, catching his fingers in the strap to tug it back onto her shoulder. Dipping her head, she laid her cheek against the top of his knuckles. Not sexual at all. A simple gesture of gratitude for the kindness. It was intimate, familiar, as if they'd known each other for awhile. When she looked up at him, it was so obvious what she wanted and needed, it left him nowhere to go but in retreat.

It was the honorable fucking thing to do. Damn it. He nodded awkwardly, extricated his hand and moved away.

As he strode back to his car, Stacie closed her door, leaned her head back on the seat and watched him in the rearview mirror. So was that it? An odd moment shared with a stranger, one they'd each recall later, her with some embarrassment, him with some perplexity? Would either of them wonder what would have happened if they'd taken it just a step farther?

It had been a while since she'd had the heart to believe in Fate. She studied the way the dark sleeve of his shirt stretched as he bent his arm to bring the radio to his mouth. Perhaps, even though she hadn't had the courage to give Fate a chance lately, Fate had decided to give her one.

Chance. Jake Chance.

He couldn't make the decisive move. He was a decent guy, she could tell, and he wouldn't disgrace the badge by taking advantage of the authority it gave him. But if she made it clear this wasn't about that, not exactly... That she was willing to cross boundaries if he was and move into a territory where a whole other set of rules applied...

A smile flirted around her lips. She couldn't possibly.

Oh why the hell not?

She twisted the key in the ignition. As the engine came to life, his head snapped around, those gray eyes narrowing, his jaw flexing in a very attractive way.

Lowering the window, she leaned out. "Lieutenant Chance." She hit the gas once, punctuating her call with the response of the Porsche. "Can that muscle car hold its own in a good chase, or does it just look good?"

A series of expressions crossed his face, faster than the car could move, but she was almost sure one of them was arousal at the unmistakable taunt, the purr she put into her voice.

"Don't even think about it." He was trying for that stern look again, the one that got her juices flowing even hotter. "Miss..." Jesus Christ, what was her name? Jake took a step forward and she goosed the pedal, rolling several feet. "You've managed to get out of a ticket up to this point." He tried for calm, even though that light in her eye made him feel anything but. Fire was licking through his vitals, and the revving of that engine reverberated in his own body. "Don't push your luck."

"Stacie. I don't want to get out of a ticket." Her lips curved, the girl-next-door suddenly the siren of his most prurient dreams. "But tell you what, Lieutenant Chance. If you can catch me, you can try to get me out of these clothes. Though you better have handcuffs, because I fully intend to resist arrest."

He swore. "Dammit, woman—"

She hit the gas. A spray of gravel and dirt peppered the front of the Trans Am as she peeled the back tires deliberately, skidding back onto the asphalt and heading up the deserted highway, the car's flanks flashing in the light of the rising yellow moon.

"Goddamn it." Tossing the radio back in the car, he yanked open the door, sliding behind the wheel. Little idiot probably wasn't wearing her seat belt. Or any underwear. Firing the car, he hit the gas, not bothering with a seat belt either because he wasn't sure he'd get it over the hard-on she'd just brought to full life on him, even though common sense told him he needed something to chafe it back down to a size that would allow him enough blood in his brain to think.

Her boyfriend hadn't reported the car stolen. Probably figured she'd steam it off and come back. No, not her boyfriend. Her escort. He went up to a higher gear, remembering she'd said that. His vixen wasn't attached. Well, that was about to change, at least for tonight. Though for some reason, the idea of taking her home and keeping her was plenty appealing.

Chapter Three

Oh he had good reflexes. She'd only gotten a quarter mile on him when he was closing the gap. She of course was holding back some, not just because she was now a little more cognizant of how fast she was going but also because flat out on an open road a Trans Am wouldn't have a chance in hell against a Porsche. She didn't have any intention of losing him. She grinned at the thought.

However, those refitted cars had some serious power under the hood. She suspected the driver did as well. As she whipped into a turn, she accelerated coming out as if there were an egg under the gas pedal, a slow roll, just the way a fast car liked it. The Porsche leaped forward. As she straightened, she watched that black muscle car take it the same way, coming on low and mean after her.

The tractor road came up suddenly, but she hit the brake, spinning out the back wheels for a fast ninety-degree turn. God, she'd missed this. When her dad had worked the pits of the dirt tracks, he'd taught her how to handle the cars like the young NASCAR wannabes. This car was as responsive as a hard and hungry man. Like the one she felt closing in behind her.

A fork came up and she veered right, shooting over a bump that flew her over a sizeable pothole, the tires almost leaving the ground. She landed as light as a unicorn on the other side of a road that was barely more than a deer track.

Get me out of these clothes. She'd meant it and far more. Get me out of this life, if just for a night. I'll be everything everyone needs me to be tomorrow. Tonight, let me just belong to myself...and you, Jake Chance.

* * * * *

She was headed for Cutter's Bridge. He cursed. This road was only used by farm equipment moving between the corn fields that whipped by them, green, gold and silver in the moonlight, the silk tassels waving like race pennants, their movement like the roaring crowd.

Damn, she could drive. But that didn't alleviate the fear in his gut. If anything, it increased it. Because the road was unused by regular traffic, there was no reason to post warning signs that Cutter's Bridge was unsafe. The support beams had rotted out some time ago. She'd approach it at the cool seventy she was doing now on the dirt road and wouldn't notice it until she and that little car were in the middle of it. He'd been an idiot to get carried away by this.

Well, she'd started it—he'd finish it. Get her stopped, get her back to the highway with a pat on her head and a careless grin, try to make her believe nothing real had led to this moment, no undeniable connection that still had him hard thinking about it. He was a cop first and foremost. Human came second. Being horny had to be dead last.

He gunned the car as they took the curve into the straightaway to the bridge. Three hundred yards and no options. There was a slight incline on the right shoulder, a shallow gully on the left side. Her chances were better with the incline. Flooring it, he swung around her in the narrow space and swerved toward her driver's door, wondering if six months of his salary would cover body work to a Porsche.

Be as good a driver as you seem to be, baby. Don't flip it.

Her eyes snapped toward him and she yanked the wheel right, hard. She jumped into a sea of corn, the back end of the car careening as she fought to hold control.

Hold it, honey. Hold onto it.

The car spun, but the corn formed a good break and she straightened, rolled to a halt.

He'd already slammed on his own brakes and was out of the car headed toward her when she came out of the driver's side unhurt, her eyes bright, face flushed with adrenaline. She was barefoot again. The significance of that registered just a moment before she shot him a reckless smile. And took off.

Here he was, having heart failure, and it hadn't even fazed her.

"Catch me if you can," she called out, backpedaling, waiting to see if he'd follow, if he'd play her game. The feverish look was gone. What he saw was careless abandon, a devil-may-care desperation he couldn't help but answer when she had her bare toes gripping the earth, the strap falling back down her shoulder and her hair shiny and disheveled around her pixie face.

Hell with it. He would play her game and show her some rules of his own. He backed up one step, two steps, keeping his attention on her face, watching disappointment gather there, the apprehension that he was about to become an officer of the law, beyond the touch of her charm and desires.

Yeah, right. He didn't think even his sergeant, a guy with forty years on the force and so by the book they joked that it was surgically implanted up his ass, could have resisted the magic of this precocious fairy.

Unlocking the trunk, he put his gun in there, re-locked it. Then he moved back toward his car door. Puzzlement chased its way behind her eyes, those tempting lips forming a luscious pouting shape that made him want to groan. Leaning into the open window of his car, he reached across the passenger seat, came back out with handcuffs.

A flush of heat spread across her cheeks. The game had just shifted, and he could tell she knew it. He'd accepted her gauntlet and his body was tense and ready to deliver on it.

"What's it going to be, baby? You going to come quietly, or am I going to have to get rough?" He waited. While his voice was husky, he wanted to leave her an option. The reality might be more than she'd wanted, since she was obviously seeking a fantasy. But he wanted her with a pounding need that was raw and entirely real. So he would give her a choice only up to a point. "You start this, it may not end here. When I like what I see, I tend to hang on to it for a while."

Stacie swallowed. Those handcuffs winked in the moonlight. She could imagine them holding her wrists, his mouth on her skin, his fingers driving her. With him, she suspected she'd *never* come quietly.

She knew what tomorrow would bring. Because of that, she also knew what she needed now, even though her body trembled at the thought. As his gaze registered it, the heat in his eyes increased.

She tossed back her hair. "Hope you didn't eat too many donuts today, Lieutenant. I don't go down easy."

Jake thought she'd go down on him real easy. Slick as butter. He bolted toward her.

With a squeal and a yelp, a snip of laughter, she took off, that little slip of a dress fluttering up her thighs as she tried to evade him.

She ran the way she drove. Full out, with unexpected nimble twists and turns, keeping an edge on him longer than he expected. But he was wearing sneakers, she was barefoot. He was in top shape and a lot taller. He feinted left with her, and when she spun, he moved right with her, making her retreat from him again. When he was closing the gap, she made the mistake of glancing over her shoulder at him, losing a stride, and that was all he needed. He put on a burst of speed. She made a dash to her left, then startled him by lunging back, knocking into him. When he stumbled around her, she twisted neatly under his arm, obviously intending to double back on him. He fell back, catching her around the waist, and tumbled them both to the ground, landing with an armful of gasping woman and silky fabric.

Damn if the little siren didn't make good on her threat. She was down but not out. She squirmed, she writhed, she threw elbows, but she was laughing so hard she was breathless. He found himself grinning ear to ear himself as he tussled with her across the ground. His hand encountered a thigh, the trim nip of her waist, the silk teasing his fingers. The spaghetti straps had both fallen, giving him tantalizing glimpses of the soft swells of her breasts. She snatched at his handcuffs and he fended her off. In a deft move, he rolled her shrieking to her stomach and caught one wrist above her head,

pinning her with the gentle but inexorable pressure of his knee high on her back. When he locked one cuff on the wrist, he realized he had her. Realized what that meant.

She realized it too, for she was suddenly still. She laid her cheek on the ground. Closed her eyes for a moment, making him wonder if he'd gone too far. Then, before he could ease off, her gaze lifted. Looking up at him, she slowly brought the other arm up above her head. Then she looked back down, her lashes sweeping her cheeks.

He swallowed. He liked his women submissive in the bedroom, enjoyed bondage play enough that it was almost a requirement. He guessed he was one of those Dominant personalities the S&M sites talked about. Regularly dealing with the seedy side of people's sexual urges, he wasn't really comfortable calling it that. Even though he knew his desire to bring a woman pleasure while she was restrained was not a criminal act, he never would have guessed such a sweet little thing would ask for that, want it like this. The idea of it was enough to make his cock larger and harder, pressing tight against his jeans. It made every part of him eager to take. But did she really understand what she was giving? *Be careful, Jake*.

"You don't know what you're playing at, little girl," he said roughly. It was as much slack as he could give her, because he wanted her too much to give her an easy out.

When he eased the pressure of his knee, moved it off her, she shifted her head and laid her cheek on it, pressing her lips to his leg. She caught the inseam of the jeans just above the knee with her teeth, a playful tug of the denim before she let it go. It put her head practically in his lap and he bit back a groan.

As she rolled over, she kept her arms stretched above her head, her body open to his, vulnerable. She was shaking, but her lips were parted and moist, her eyes hungry with things he knew she didn't even know she wanted. As his gaze coursed over her breasts, the slope of her stomach, the expanse of her thighs revealed almost to the crotch by the hike of the dress, he could tell she was offering anyway.

Her blue eyes were full of the night's mysteries, drawing him in. "A cop is supposed to be a guardian. A protector," she said softly. "Every woman wants to believe that, Lieutenant Chance. I do. I need to. I need you to take over. I don't want any other options tonight."

This moment could be called many things. The wrong choice, something that either or both of them would call an attack of hormones in the morning. A bad career decision for him most certainly, a weak moment of shame for her. Time played those kinds of tricks on people. He paused, feeling the heated breeze on his face, hearing the rustling of the corn, seeing the low-riding moon out of the corner of his eye. Its light shone on the pale skin and lovely face of the woman on the ground. Everything about this moment felt right. So right it had to be wrong.

Lifting her uncuffed hand, she reached toward his face. When he caught her wrist just before she got to him, she managed to brush her fingertips along his jaw.

"It's all right," she promised. "I won't hurt you either."

Time could make a lie out of that as well, he knew, but he understood what she meant. This moment belonged to them, a magical space of time for something to happen that never could have happened otherwise. Perhaps that was the definition of magic. She was saying they would both try to remember that later, no matter what happened.

Leaning over her, he took her wrist back to the ground over her head. Her lips parted, eyes following him as he stretched over her, cuffed the other wrist. A look of peace—the only way he could describe it—warred with the leap of desire in her eyes.

"I guess you're going to do whatever you want with me now, and I'll have no say in it." Her voice was a whisper.

Did the sweet thing realize her voice was quavering? That she was torn between desire at being at his mercy and fear at being there? Did she realize how that made him feel, how he might come at the look in her eyes alone?

He stared down at her. Stacie wondered if he knew he'd gone stern and unsmiling again, in that way that made her pussy so slippery.

He could have started a variety of ways, but Jake followed instinct. With deliberate roughness, he reached between her legs, pushing up the flimsy barrier of her skirt, and pressed the heel of his hand against her mound. When she arched up like a firecracker detonating, he swore. Fervently. She was soaking wet and wearing just a lacy thong beneath the garter belt. He let his fingers play with the thong's back strap, teasing her buttocks, making them clench.

Hoping what she was wearing wasn't some ridiculously priced scrap of fabric, he did what his gut told him to do. Make it real for her. It sure as hell felt real to him. He took hold of the front of the dress and ripped those straps loose, pulling the front down to her hips to display her to his avid gaze.

A demi-cup bra, just as he'd expected. Strapless so her breasts were barely in it. A flat belly, just a little rounded curve below the navel, with that smooth feel of peach fuzz.

Though he'd touched her first between her legs to underscore his desire for her, he didn't want to rush this. Now he took his time, easing the hem of the dress up her thighs. He watched them tremble as he let his thumb graze her skin, revealing to his gaze what he'd already touched.

He pulled the thong to the side so he saw the lips of her pussy, damp like the tiny patch of silky curls there.

"You're so delicate all over." He stroked her there, watched her fingers flex and then curl into helpless fists as he stimulated her, made her wetter. "Such a pretty little thing. With a sassy mouth."

She smiled a little, too dazed with desire to make it focused, and he loved it. "What are you going to do about that?" she managed to rasp out.

He wanted more. He wanted inside of her.

As he stroked her clit harder, her thigh muscles loosened, her body moving restlessly up toward him. "Let me..." She hesitated, a flush staining her cheeks.

"What, baby?" He kept up his manipulation, slid one finger into her. She whimpered and struggled, trying to take him deeper, her pussy bumping against his knuckles. "What should I let you do?"

"I want..." Stacie thought those two words summed it up. But the things moving inside of her were dark desires, things she'd never thought of wanting with John or any other man, let alone voicing.

"Please, I want...you. In my mouth. Make me..."

Those gray eyes could spark with fire. It rippled over her like flame on her exposed skin. His hand between her legs was stoking an ache that was spiraling high and wild already, igniting a chaos of reaction in her body.

"Suck my cock." He said the words she couldn't, but as he did, her muscles convulsed against him, giving him his answer. He swallowed, that sculpted jaw flexing with the motion. "That's exactly what I'm going to make you do. Stretch that sassy mouth."

"Yes. Please."

Slowly withdrawing his hand, he pinched her clit, making her buck with reaction, a gasp leaving her lips. He brought the fingers to his mouth, tasted her. When she made a soft yearning noise in her throat, he couldn't wait another second.

Standing up, he lifted her to her feet, an effortless move that made Stacie's stomach drop. Almost as much as when he pressed on her shoulder, his face uncompromising, unrelenting, making her do his will as he eased her back down to her knees, controlling her descent. His gaze watched the changes in her face so intently, a way she'd never been looked at by anyone, as if he was registering everything about her life in how she reacted to every new thing.

Jake thought if she wet her lips once more, he was going to explode. "Open my jeans."

Bringing her cuffed hands up, she obeyed, unbuckling the belt and slipping the button to take the zipper down in what felt like slow motion. Suddenly, as if sensing his urgency, she moved much faster, yanking it down and spreading her hands across his pelvis, her fingers curving inside the jeans to dig into his hips as she moved forward on her knees. He stifled a groan, stripping the belt out of the way and dropping it as she mouthed him through the fabric of his underwear, biting him, trying to get it out of her way as well. When he pushed her touch aside, he shoved down the garment so that his cock stretched long and hard out of the opening of his pants. She closed both hands over him and rubbed her cheek along his length in an oddly tender gesture that mixed something else with his hard desire. God, she was the perfect little submissive. Enjoying his control of her while she made him want to beg.

"Put me in your mouth. I'm going to go fucking crazy if you don't."

She took him in without reservation, generously, and he had to close his eyes to keep himself from jetting from the first touch of her soft lips. She probably wore some type of lipstick with a name as innocent as she was. Primrose, or Pink Blush. The fact she'd barely hesitated to take his cock like this didn't make her less innocent. Working on the streets, he'd seen homeless people with it. Sometimes even the younger drug dealers. It was something unblemished in a soul, something that could be beaten down or even destroyed, a loss to the whole world, but it couldn't be changed. She'd be the type of person who would light up in surprise at a bouquet of picked flowers. Stand at a kitchen sink in the morning, watching birds feed from the window feeder.

It wasn't hard to put those two thoughts together and create a bunch more. He could imagine her in one of his T-shirts, playing with the trio of daisies he'd given her from some roadside wild garden. She'd put it in one of his spotted beer mugs. Probably his favorite one, just to tease him. He'd stumble into his kitchen, grumpy and groggy, and she'd be standing at the window at the sink, watching the sun rise along with the birds. The room would smell like the coffee she'd put on. The shirt would show enough of her slender thighs that his fingers would want to find her under that shirt and drive

her to climax as he bit her tender nape, waking up in a way that even coffee couldn't match.

Closing his eyes wasn't helping. It'd been too long since he'd had a woman he wanted to keep. Maybe he'd even had a bachelor's tendency to avoid anything as good as what was on her knees before him now. This one could make him change his mind about that, but maybe she only wanted this moment, this fantasy. What was he going to do about that?

Her moves weren't well-practiced. She was being driven by whatever fire was burning inside of her to touch and taste him everywhere she could reach. That raw desire called a response from him he wasn't sure she could handle. He wasn't sure if he could. Then she reached up to caress his stomach and forgot the cuffs were positioned below his cock, pinching tender skin.

He flinched and her gaze snapped up to him. "I'm sorry, I didn't..."

"No." He fisted his hand in her hair, rubbed his thumb along her temple. "I'm sorry. I should have done this first." He didn't want to tell their kids the first time their mother had kissed him, it hadn't been on his lips. Catching her by the shoulders, he lifted her back to her feet and lowered his mouth to hers.

Oh God. Yes. Stacie closed her eyes and let herself be swept away by the firmness of those lips, the wet heat as he invaded her mouth, biting at her before he sealed the pressure there, teasing her, exploring her mouth. With her hands cuffed she could do nothing but be held by him, experience the explosion of sensation. Who knew that having one's lips caressed by a man's tongue could send electrical current through every part of the body? He had one arm banded around her back, the other behind her head. Her arms were bent so her wrists pressed against his chest, pinning her arms. His cock pushed between her thighs, only the thin dress in between. When he lowered that arm, palmed her ass and hitched her up so she straddled it, holding it between her thighs so he could do a slow rub against her clit, any sense of shame fled. She rubbed back, tightening her buttocks under the knowledgeable kneading of his fingers,

standing on her toes on top of his shoes, straining for every sensation. As he lifted her off her feet, holding her even more tightly, she whimpered into his mouth.

When he pulled away, her body was looser than it had ever been and radiating like a nuclear core.

"I'm sorry I hurt you," she managed. "I—"

"I want you to want me so bad you don't mind hurting me to get what you want. If you don't," a slow smile spread over his face, "I'm doing something wrong."

Stacie felt her lower body turn to heated wax at that smile. "Same goes," she whispered.

Chapter Four

That smile died away as she took hold of his shirt, used it to lower herself back to her knees without his compulsion. Keeping her eyes on his, she covered him with her mouth, taking him in as far as she could. Hot, hard, musky male. His hand came back down to grip her hair, his facial features tightening with his desire. With her hands cuffed she had to hold onto the root of his cock with both hands, the base of her palms pressing into his testicles, still half hidden in his underwear.

She'd never wanted to do this for John. Never felt the slightest desire. But now she was exactly where she wanted to be, her body coiled like a spring, so aroused she couldn't help the noises of hunger she made as she went down on him again and again, sucking, nipping, flicking her tongue. She felt the convulsion of his hand on her head, knew from glancing up that his face was suffused with hard lust, eyes burning with it as he watched her, every muscle taut. She took pleasure in that as well, this time carefully stretching her fingers so that she could tangle them in his pubic hair, put a little dangerous, sensual pressure on the base of his cock with the cuffs as she teased his lower abdomen.

Catching her head in both hands, Jake lifted her mouth roughly away from him, nearly groaned at the sheer pleasure of it when her tongue swiped at his tip, taking the fluid that had collected there and added it to the moist glistening of her lips.

Jesus, he wanted her. But he didn't have any way to... he could use his mouth on her, make her come, but he wanted more out of this than just the two of them going down on each other. This was deeper than that. He knew he was being stupid but...

"I want you inside of me. Please."

He closed his eyes as she spoke the words so fiercely echoing in his own head. He had to make himself shove away the desire to be careless. Guardian and protector.

That's what she'd said. He couldn't let her down on that. He'd do his best to sate her desire without relieving his own need to spread her legs, plunge into her, make her his.

"Baby, I'm sorry. I don't have anything to keep you safe."

She didn't care. Stacie stood up on her knees, brought the cuffed hands out from beneath his cock and up to run her palms under the T-shirt and feel how his arousal had made his firm skin damp. Pushing the fabric out of the way, she kissed him across his stomach, flicked her tongue over a hip bone, touched his navel. He caught her hands when they reached his chest and tugged her to her feet. With her hands trapped between them, he cupped her ass, bringing her hard against his cock, rubbing her there again. The sounds of hunger in her throat were increasing, and when he tightened an arm around her waist and pressed his leg between hers, she rode his thigh with ruthless abandon, gasping as he squeezed her buttocks, goading her to an even more frenetic rhythm. The man was standing and holding her on his thigh with one arm. The idea of such strength was delicious.

Though she knew a physically strong man didn't translate into security or being emotionally strong, she could pretend it did, since she hadn't asked for more than this night. But oh, to have a man like this as a part of her life. He would only have to be one half of the fantasy he'd been so far to be enough. Just give her love, gentleness, a sense of safety and passion. Passion like this would keep her warm no matter how old she was when she recalled it.

She supposed it was just like a woman to mix these kinds of thoughts with an unadulterated, lustful moment. He probably wasn't thinking about anything like this.

Jake was thinking she was a generous lover, a beautiful woman with a fragile, pure soul that practically shone through her pale skin. And a mouth that could suck the chrome off a trailer hitch. If that wasn't a man's idea of perfection, he didn't know what was.

Stacie blinked as he drew back to rearrange his clothes, hiding his still turgid length from her and wincing as he worked to tuck it back in. Before she could protest, he caught her under her arms and legs, simply scooping her up in his arms to carry her to the front hood of the Porsche. "We'll do this another way," he growled. "I want to hear you scream."

She wanted to scream now. Why couldn't farmers produce fields of condoms instead of corn? It was such a ridiculous thought it helped loosen the strangling band of frustration in her vitals.

"What, you weren't prepared to take home a band of groupies at the game?" she attempted to tease him.

He smiled, though desire kept his jaw in a tense set she couldn't help but caress with her bound fingers as he set her on the hood. "We don't like to admit it, but firefighters always get the best pussy. We did kick their asses seven to five though."

Her answering smile died as he put one hand on her sternum, his fingers spread over the curves of her breasts in the low-cut bra. Holding the cuffs, he pushed her back slowly, his eyes coursing over her body until she lay all the way on her back. He kept hold of her wrists, resting them on one of her thighs, his fingers touching her there.

"I don't believe that," she murmured. "Not if they had their eyes open."

"If you come to the game, honey, next time I'll bring a full dozen condoms." He gave her a heated look that was contagious, spreading fire on her skin. "You better expect to use the first two or three before we even get out of the parking lot."

"Why, that sounds like a date, Lieutenant."

He let his free hand drift down her quivering stomach, down to her mound. It stayed there, his fingers teasing her as he gathered up the edge of her skirt again, one inch at a time.

"I don't fuck women on back roads. I don't pick them up in bars. I've had two or three adult relationships, some one-night stands. Most of the one-night stands were mistakes."

"Do you think that's what this is?" She wasn't sure if she wanted the answer.

"I don't know. But I will if you show up at the next game."

He eased the crotch of her thong aside again, revealing her pussy to the night air. Cicadas made their rasping songs and frogs warbled, telling her there was water nearby, perhaps a fishing pond. The air was heavy with summer's heat, but the cool touch of the moon gave the night some breathing room, not that she could tell. Because of the look in his eyes, she was having trouble getting oxygen into her lungs.

"Touch your pussy for me, little girl."

"Oh..." She knew it was ridiculous, as forward as she'd been until now, but she'd never done that type of thing in front of a man. Only in her bedroom, alone...

"I wasn't asking. Do it."

Reaction shot through her, leaking out of the area in question, such that his gaze registered it, flared hot. "I'd say just close your eyes and imagine you're in your bedroom, no one else around, but I want you to see how hard my cock is and how much I like watching you play with yourself. Make me suffer, baby."

He guided her resisting fingers across her thigh and up onto her pussy. At the dual touch on her vibrating skin, she couldn't help straining up for more.

"Un-unh." He took his hand away, leaving it all to her. "You don't get anything from me until you play with that pretty wet cunt, show me how much you want my mouth there. Or maybe I should get my nightstick from the car. Maybe you'd prefer something long and hard up inside of you, my lips playing with your clit until you come. You have a gorgeous little ass. I might need a finger or two up there as well." At her startled look, replaced by aroused speculation, he growled his approval. "A virgin in that area. Makes me all the hotter. I want to take you everywhere, so no part of you hasn't had me in it."

All of it sounded wonderful. How could it not? But she wanted his cock inside of her pussy the most, completing her and connecting with her. This yearning in her was more than just physical. As she looked at that lean body, she wasn't just seeing some pin-up in a magazine where the muscle was two-dimensional and glossy. He had a scar

on his forearm. His face was handsome but lined, probably from the stress of his job. It occurred to her then how difficult that job must be. He was also probably exposed to outside elements a lot, some combination of all those factors creating a face with character. His T-shirt had a stain on it that looked like salsa or ketchup, maybe from chips or fries enjoyed at the game. He didn't go to a great hair stylist, which was why she guessed he kept it so short, besides the military-style dress code of his job. His short nails weren't entirely clean at the moment, coming from the ball field. He had dirt and grass stains on the knees of his jeans. He'd tried to brush them off. Otherwise she would have noticed it before now.

She wondered what position he played on the team. Who his friends were, what he did when he wasn't working, other than playing baseball. There was one part of her brain interested only in the here and now, another part reaching for something else. But she'd wanted a fantasy. Why was she looking for more? Did she really have the type of life where she could pursue anything after tonight? Why was having him inside her like that so important?

She knew the answer. Even a woman's fantasies had to touch her heart as well as her body. Otherwise they weren't worth having. Or remembering.

"You're thinking too hard, honey." Bending his head, his tongue slid between her fingers, licking along her clit, and then dipped inside of her.

She cried out and bucked. Catching her thighs, he held her as she moved her hands, sought a purchase on him. She ended up with a two-handed grip on his shoulder, digging in and pulling hard on the T-shirt, balling it up in her fists as he continued to eat her pussy. His hands raised her up to him the way he might lift a split coconut, cupping her buttocks in both hands as he sipped, feasted, bit, not minding the juice that got on his mouth and chin. In fact, he seemed to be alternating his forays inside with a liberal rubbing of his mouth on the outside, rousing her with tongue and teeth as she dug her fingers in further and cried out, trying to pull away as the sensation became overwhelming.

He wouldn't let her, making it clear she was not in charge.

When he told her it wasn't a request, all the things she was always responsible for doing had run through her head. The choices she was required to make every day, truly horrible things no one ever thought they'd have to face. All that had been swept away by a tidal wave of relief. He'd made it a hundred percent clear he would take care of this one, vital thing. Her pleasure.

"No...no. Please stop."

He bit her lightly, spoke against her flesh. "Not happening, honey. I'm going to feel you come against my mouth."

"I want to do it with you inside of me. Please." She pulled on the T-shirt with each plea.

He lifted his head, regret crossing his face. "Baby—"

"Glove compartment." She gasped as his five o'clock shadow rasped against her with an incredible friction. "He always keeps some there. I'm sure of it." *God, please let me be right*.

Jake's gaze narrowed. "You said he isn't your boyfriend."

"He's not. He's..." She shook her head, the truth mortifying. "He's the pity date my brother arranges for me. We've had sex a few times. Mostly for him. Mostly because I wanted to feel something. Kept hoping to feel something...like this. Though at first it didn't matter. I just needed...someone." At his expression, her desire curled into a cold defensive ball in her stomach, a lump rising in her throat. "You think I'm cheap." She tried to get up. To struggle away from him. "Some kind of slut. Oh God. Of course you do. Look at me. I don't even know you. I—"

"Hush." He yanked her up by the wrists and covered her mouth with his again. Bringing her to the edge of the car, he made her wrap her legs around his hips, reaching beneath the skirt to take a proprietary grip on her ass.

She tried to pull away. "Let me go. I'm not like—"

"I know that." He gave her a little shake, commanding her attention. "You think guys are the only ones allowed to get lonely and take something empty because it's the only thing available? You think we don't know the difference between that and something more special?"

He wasn't thrilled about envisioning her in this guy's arms, but it did increase his satisfaction quotient to consider taking her on his car hood. A male dog driving a competitor out of the competitor's own territory. Being a woman, she'd probably think that was silly. Wouldn't get it. But John sure as hell would.

When Jake put his firm pressure against her, she rocked despite herself, making him grit his teeth and put both his hands on her ass to hold her still. "Hold on a moment," he said hoarsely. "You've got to give me a moment, darling."

"No. I don't want to wait. I need you inside of me." She pinned him with desperate eyes. "You don't...it's different."

"Sshh. I know that. Stop worrying about it." Jake dipped his head. "Put your hands around my neck."

She linked them there behind his nape and he felt the cold steel of the bracelets. Hitching her up, he lifted her, carried her around to the passenger side where the window was open. Holding one arm around her back to brace her against him, he reached in, popped open the glove compartment, fished around distastefully and came out with a fistful of condoms. Dropping them on the seat, he took one and eyed it critically.

When he looked at her, she was staring at it, moistening her lips. She was still feeling uncertain, he could tell. "Hey." He touched her with the corner of the plastic wrapper, chucking her cheek with it, chasing and teasing her until she was ducking her head away, trying not to smile. Pressing her back against the car frame, he held her there and dipped his head down, nudging hers to the side to kiss her neck, touch his lips to that sensitive pulse point. She shivered, her nipples hardening against his chest. "Ah, sweetheart."

Gripping her head and keeping his hand around her back, he turned her, brought her back to the hood. With her arms around his neck, he had to go down with her a certain amount, putting him on top of her. She played with the hair on his nape while he studied her face inches away, felt her thighs on either side of him as she spread for him, pressed her pussy against his erection. He nuzzled her lips, coaxed some teasing kisses out of her, nipped at her tongue until she was squirming against him, rubbing and mewling with her desire, enough that he knew he'd driven any worries from her mind. Only then did he take her arms from his neck and make her stretch them over her head, laying her out for him. He knew exactly how he wanted her, and that was how he was going to have her.

Stacie's breath caught in her throat as he took her torn dress off her body. Freeing her garter belt, he dropped it so she felt it caress her ankles. He opened the front-closing bra with seeking fingers, brushing the curves before he bent to press a kiss on her sternum. When she started to lift her arms, he shook his head, spoke against her skin. "You're my prisoner, sweetheart. You stay still or I'll go get that nightstick."

She subsided but couldn't help but feel a jolt of reaction at the serious look in his half-lidded eyes. It made her imagine what it would be like to watch him insert it into her, her muscles clutching the inanimate object the way she wanted to clutch his cock, making it slick with her fluids.

Then he took off the thong. She was naked, sprawled on the hood of a Porsche in a gleaming silver, gold and green cornfield on a summer night, the sounds of the night creatures surrounding them. No other people. Nothing but the two of them and two now silent cars. The bridge was a silent silhouette behind them.

"God, you're beautiful."

How many times did a woman get to hear that, knowing a man meant it? In a special unique way he'd never mean in the same way to any other woman? She could almost believe it from the look in his eyes.

"Jake." She spoke his name on trembling lips. "I want you so much. Please..."

"I like you begging." He kissed the curve of her left breast, traced a hand down her belly, dipped into her navel. "It makes me hot. Makes me want to do other things to make you beg."

Unzipping his jeans, he pushed them and his underwear out of the way. While she watched him, he tore open the condom, rolled it on.

"No going back, sweetheart."

In answer, not sure of this wanton creature she'd become, she lifted her legs, spread them wide, displaying herself to him, her hands coming down in the cuffs to finger herself, bring wetness from inside and spread it on the lips, making his eyes go molten hot.

"Please."

He put his big hands on either side of her bare hips and thrust home. A deep, hard penetration with a cock big enough to be a tight fit. It caused her to moan at the brief pain, the stretch, then respond to that tight fit, her cunt rippling along his length.

"Yeess."

"Yes," he agreed, his face intent, mouth held firm. She loved that mouth, loved the way he looked at her as he fucked her wholly naked. As if she was his entirely, his to fuck naked while he stayed clothed. He hadn't even taken off his shoes. She wanted to see that hard body bare. Shower with him, clean off the dirt from the game, maybe kneel and take him in her mouth again. Feel him explode against the back of her throat. Ah God, she was having a fantasy while experiencing a fantasy, and the double shot was sweeter than anything she could imagine.

When she lifted her hips to take him more deeply, he caught her ankles, bringing them up to his shoulders. Holding onto her hips, he rammed into her, increasing his thrusts, shooting her up a roller coaster. The first hill, one click at a time, signaling an approach to the steepest crest where the speed would be a thrilling rush.

All the frustrations and emotional pain, the sense of impending loss weighing upon her soul all the time now, came off her in healthy sweat gleaming on her skin. Purging and purifying her as she immersed herself in this, in the feel of his body taking hers over. Just as she wanted. Was it greedy to want more? To imagine more things she'd like to have?

I tend to hang onto things I like...

If they could just stay in the moment... But knowing she couldn't do that, she let go of everything else. She abruptly levered herself up off the car, brought her legs down and around his hips, and hooked the cuffs over his head again. Clasping his shoulders, she held her body to his, increasing the friction against her clit, the rub of his cock on the densest spot within her.

"Oh God..." She pressed her cheek to his throat. His buttocks clenched under her heels as he drove into her. She could handle anything, knowing she'd had this.

Colors flashed and his cock ripped something deep within her free. Her moan escalated into a guttural cry, into the scream he'd wanted. Clinging to him, she pressed her lips to his neck, tasted the salt of her tears as the force of the orgasm washed all of it from her, overcoming her. She went over that first hill and kept flying.

"Come for me. Please..." She gasped it in his ear. She wanted to feel him come while she was coming.

He gave in to her, pressing her hard against him, thrusting in and out, holding her buttocks in tight hands that would leave bruises on her ass. She didn't mind. She liked the idea of looking in the mirror and seeing them, feeling the soreness of her body. Too soon it would fade into a memory with no landmarks, but as long as it was this vivid in her mind, she suspected she'd remember it for some time to come.

She'd been immersed in death and loss for so long, she'd forgotten that life was more than enduring. When Jake Chance had gotten out of his car tonight, somehow he'd touched her with a magic that had reminded her that life was worth living. That it could always surprise you. That no matter how the pain and sorrow closed in on her, there was always room to cut out a window and see something new. Something like hope.

Chance of a Lifetime

She had no words for that, so she settled for shattering the night with her cries, holding onto him with every ounce of strength she had, giving him all of herself.

Chapter Five

He supposed it could end here. A few moments of cuddling, nuzzling one another like contented cats. He admitted he liked the kittenish way she was rooting into his neck. Placing soft, moist touches of lip and tongue there, her breath caressing him in a way that made him think he'd never again feel a summer breeze whisper across his skin and not think of this moment in a remote cornfield.

But the moon had barely risen. If she didn't have anywhere to go...

"Do you have anywhere to be?" He took care of the condom, wrapping it up to put it carefully in the pocket of his jeans. When he helped raise her to a sitting position on the edge of the car, she stayed that way, her head tilted. Her innocent pose, the somewhat self-conscious way she had her restrained hands folded in her lap, made him stir to life again.

"Not until dawn." That impish smile crossed her face as she lifted her wrists.

"Besides, what would it matter? I'm your prisoner."

"Yes, you are." Deciding, he scooped her up. "We're going to go find a softer spot for what I have in mind next."

"Police brutality? Harassment? Interrogation?"

When he pinched her, she giggled and writhed in his arms. It made him want to be naked too, to feel the drag of her nipples across his flesh the way they were rubbing against his T-shirt. But maybe her fantasy was that he be clothed.

"Behave yourself."

She complied with a tiny smile, those eyes so big and round in her face he wanted to stroke the lashes, coax them closed. Overwhelmed by the intensity he saw in them, he wasn't sure he could handle the way they made him react. Love didn't happen at first sight. Strong attraction did. Lust. Love took time, needed friendship to be real,

years of understanding building on experiences shared together. But maybe some levels of attraction made you want to take that leap within a few minutes of meeting someone. Maybe your heart and gut just knew what it took your mind years to fathom.

* * * * *

"You're getting the family bug," Detective Nichols had told him at the last department picnic. Jake had spent most of the afternoon playing with Nichols' two boys and picking at his wife with platonic flirting, letting her mother him. "That bachelor life of yours is losing its appeal, no matter how much you deny it. You want a woman to come home to."

"Men don't have biological clocks." Jake had tried to shrug it off. Nichols shook his head.

"Bullshit. They're just a different type. Mark my words. When you find her, you'll know her. The way your luck runs, she'll fall right in your lap."

* * * * *

Hadn't he thought the same thing only a little while ago? And if they'd been sitting, her cute ass would have been pressed into his lap right now.

Lust. Just lust and attraction. *Keep it easy, Jake. Give her the fantasy.*

But it was difficult to remember that. Especially when she hooked her arms around his neck again and hitched herself up so she could spread her elbows and grip his shoulders like an embrace. Her hair brushed his neck, her face nestled below his ear.

"We're going to stop here a moment, hon." He let her feet down at his car. Freeing his neck from her hold but keeping a steadying hand on her elbow, he opened the driver's door, popped the trunk.

She looked into his back window, studying the personal items he'd been carrying. Baseball gear. A car magazine with a well-endowed blonde in a string bikini stretched out on the hood. She cast him an amused glance.

"It has good articles," he said.

"I'll bet." Her laughter was rusty, unpracticed but honest. Her look altered then, changing his amusement to something else. Backing a step from him, she turned and strolled completely naked except for his cuffs to the front hood of the Trans Am. Giving him a sultry look, she slowly leaned forward, bracing out her legs the same way the models did. Only instead of a tiny strap of bright yellow bikini outlining the plump oblong shape of her pussy, there was nothing covering it at all. She put her elbows on the car's hood, dipped her head to shake her hair over her face and then tossed it back in a lithe move, looking over her shoulder at him. The strands spilled back in a shiny wave that just grazed the top of her shoulders before the breeze caught and caressed her lips with them.

He'd no idea what he'd been intending to do in the trunk. He moved toward her, one step, two steps, just as she touched her tongue to her upper lip, swept her gaze down. She kept her ass tilted up, the natural result of arching her back from tossing her hair in that sexy way.

"Up on your toes, darling, as if you were wearing a pair of really high heels. I want to see those muscles strain."

Hot desire licked through her at the demand. Before Stacie could blink, he'd closed the distance between them, reaching forward to stroke between her legs, his thumb parting her buttocks.

"Oh...I... Oh." She couldn't finish her protest, for he was tracing her rim in a way that made her lose the thought, her hips jerking against him as he played with her clit as well. Her nails dug into the top of the car, her arms straining, unable to help her cries of need. "Jake..."

"What, baby? Tell me what you want."

"You. Please..."

"Please what?" His voice was husky, seductive, drawing the words from her like a bee keeper drawing honey from a hive. "Please...take me. Again." Her breath left her in a hitching gasp as he continued his slow kneading, drawing her lower body into a taut spring. "I...need you." She couldn't say the rough words. All she knew how to say was what was in her heart. He voiced the primal desire for them both.

"Show me. Lift those hips up and down on my hand. Show me how you'd fuck my cock."

God, his command of her was making her blood run thick and boiling through her vitals. She pumped against his hand, masturbating herself with increasing speed. She'd never been this way. But she didn't want civilized. She was spiraling up toward another climax, faster than she'd imagined was possible, coming so close on the heels of the first. A quick glance at him showed he was also more than ready for her again, and she knew men took longer. Usually. But then, this was her fantasy, wasn't it?

She'd have smiled at the thought if she wasn't suffused with such a knife edge of need.

He tugged open the top button of his jeans, pushed the zipper open again, took hold of her hips and drove into her, keeping such a hard grip on her that her toes barely brushed the ground.

"That's it, sweetie. Put your ass high in the air for me." Jake caught his fingers in her silky hair and held her head up, her neck arched so he could watch the wobble of her breasts as she took him in, took his thrusts. She was drenched, slippery. She'd been holding it in for too long, apparently. And he... Hell, he'd never been so turned on in his life.

"Don't want to hurt you, but..."

"Hard.... Hard as you want." Her eyes were wet, tearing. "I need to know you want me. That you want me like you've never wanted anyone. Even if it's a lie, I want to believe it tonight."

"Ah Jesus." He snaked his arm around her waist and this time he didn't hold back. He slammed hard into her body again and again as she lost her balance and just had to let him hold her, his hand coming up through the circle of her arms to grip her breast, his forearm diagonally across her sternum to keep her up. "My cock's never been this hard for anyone. I'd kill to keep fucking you right now. Anyone who tried to take you away from me. Who looked at you. You're mine. Mine."

It wasn't what she'd asked for, but it came tumbling out of him before he could stop himself. She pressed her temple against his biceps, gasping, her body trembling.

"Let it go. Scream for me."

As she obeyed, her response rippled around his cock and spread outward, tightening her all over so he felt the tension in her buttocks, in her shoulders against his chest. Then the rippling became an excruciating suction of her inner muscles on him, such that he couldn't help but follow her. He groaned, jetting hot, soaking her further as she gyrated wildly on his cock.

His own private pin-up girl, the gentle creature who'd just fulfilled a fantasy he'd had since he picked up his first hot rod mag at twelve years old.

She was wet, drowning him, her cunt so hot, so perfect, so— *Jesus Christ.* "Oh, Christ."

As she shuddered to a halt, he pulled out slowly, not wanting to but thinking he had to do what he could to fix what could be an unfixable mistake. How could he be so stupid? "Oh, baby. I'm sorry. I didn't even stop to think. I didn't use anything this time." What was he, some irresponsible teenager?

She pressed her cheek to his arm, brushed him with her lips. "It's okay. There's nothing we can do about it now."

"That's not—"

"I take contraceptives." She tilted her head, looked up at him with serious eyes, lips swollen from his kisses, from the stretch of his cock there just a little while before. "I wanted you to take me this way. And now I'd like to lie in a corn field completely naked with you and watch the stars."

* * * * *

He would have taken the cuffs off as a reminder real life had to step back in at some point, something to keep him from being so stupid twice, but she wouldn't let him.

"I'm yours to do whatever you wish with until dawn," she said quietly. "When the cuffs come off, it's over. I don't want it to be over. Not until it has to be. Which is dawn."

When he led her deeper into the corn, his hand light on her forearm, she shifted so she was gripping his hand in both of her bound ones, like kids holding hands, only she was completely naked and cuffed. And unlike a pair of kids, they probably both knew exactly how rare and amazing this night was. So for a little while they didn't say anything. Just ambled along holding hands like that, looking up at the stars, though he kept sneaking looks at her.

He'd grabbed a blanket and a couple other items from his trunk, wrapping them up in the blanket so she couldn't see them. He held them in one arm as he led her with the other.

He thought one corn row would be just like another, but he knew they'd found their spot when they came upon a sprinkling of star-shaped white wildflowers that had managed to push out of the tilled ground between the rows of stalks. The angle of the moon touched the flowers with a luminescence that reminded him of the white of angel's wings. So he reluctantly released her to set the items to the side behind a cluster of stalks and shook out the blanket.

Something he didn't expect came tumbling out. Before he could retrieve it she bent, picking up the teddy bear as it rolled to a stop, face down.

Stacie looked at the shiny dark eyes, felt the soft plush of the fur give under her grip. Because she couldn't help it, she brought it to her cheek and lifted her gaze to find Jake watching her, a light smile on his firm mouth.

"You keep these for kids at crime scenes."

He nodded. "You watch your news programs. You can have him if you want. We always get new ones whenever we use one."

She closed her eyes, her lashes sweeping down, fanning her cheeks in a way that made him want to nuzzle them, blow on them to watch them shut more tightly, her full lips purse in a near smile, like she did now.

"You forget how this comforts. Holding one in your hands." She opened her eyes.

"If I had a cop like you telling me it was going to be okay, and giving me this to hold,
I'd never be afraid again."

"Come here." He drew her to him, pressed the teddy bear between them as he cupped her neck, ran his thumb over the line of her cheek. When she raised her chin, he rubbed his lips lightly over hers. "I'm not sure you're as safe from me as you think."

"Well, Lieutenant, I'm not a little girl." Those lashes that had looked so innocent a moment before now looked anything but as she shot him a sultry look through them. "Maybe the last thing I want is to be safe from you. Maybe you're not safe from me. You haven't even frisked me for weapons."

"You're right about that." Tightening his hold on her nape, he dipped his other hand, cupped her mound, earning a gasp, a darkening of those eyes as he teased her clit, slid two fingers along the opening of her pussy, finding moisture gathering there again. Damn, if she wasn't the most responsive little thing. Her thighs loosened for him, her stance widening, and his cock amazed him by proving he could more than keep up with her.

Her arms were bent at the elbows, so her hands now curled into his T-shirt, tugging. "Please take off all your clothes. I'll do anything if you take them off."

"Oh yeah?" His voice was throaty. "Well, you go lie down on that blanket and spread your legs for me. If you do exactly what I want, I might get naked for you."

Another small smile curved her mouth, so he couldn't help his fingers dipping into her, holding her pinioned. She went to her toes, her lips parting, eyes locked on his as her muscles clamped on him.

Giving in to the desire, he dropped his other hand from her neck and took possession of one nipple, holding her with one set of fingers deep in her cunt and the other tormenting her nipple as she held onto him and writhed, whimpering. She bumped her leg against him, grazing his groin, and the bare amount of friction was enough to make him ready for her again.

But he wanted to do something else first. She'd planted the seed of the idea and he couldn't get it out of his head until he did it.

He slid his fingers from her, turned her toward the blanket and gave her a firm smack on the ass, liking the handprint he left there when she jumped.

Jesus, Jake. Do you want to brand her or something?

Yeah, he did, in a way. He believed in wedding rings and a woman taking his last name, proving she wanted to be his. Proof he'd made an oath to safeguard her happiness, protect her with his name and possessions, his very life—for all of her life.

She'd jumped at the blow, but the gaze she tossed over her shoulder wasn't startled or cowed. In fact, if he wasn't mistaken, it suggested she was thinking of more ways to get him to do it again. Which brought to mind the image of her in his bedroom, her panties at her ankles as he gave her a firm spanking for some trumped-up thing, like erasing his pre-recorded sports show. Her mischievous smile would say she'd done it because she wanted to be spanked. Wanted to pursue a sport far better than anything the NBA or NFL could offer, even on their best day.

He didn't know her, but somehow he knew that was the way it would be. Or maybe her desire to fantasize was contagious.

When she dropped to the ground, he had to stifle a groan as she went to all fours before she turned to her hip and then her back, spreading her legs, laying her wrists over her head without even being told that was how he wanted them. But then she'd said that was what her fantasy was as well, right? To have him keep control over her.

He withdrew the item he'd concealed from her in the corn and saw her eyes widen, a tremor go through her body at the sight of the wooden black T-baton. It wasn't widely in use anymore since the expandable batons had gotten popular, but he'd found it very useful for tangling up the legs of a running suspect. Now that he had another much more pleasurable use planned for it, he was glad he'd kept it around.

About an inch and a quarter thick and quite long, it would impale her, limit her mobility for what else he had in mind. He'd never gone this far, even with women far more adventurous whose limits he knew, because none of them had ever looked at him like this. Begging to be dominated, brought to screaming pleasure so intense they'd never forget it. Trusting him to do so.

Stacie knew that forever after she'd be able to pull this moment out and remember it when her real life threatened to destroy her belief in fantasy. When he frowned, moving two steps toward her to stand tall and forbidding between her spread legs, Stacie's breath caught. The curve of his cock and testicles was prominent in his snug jeans. Her eyes coursed from there over the muscles in his arms that flexed as he held the baton in one hand, tapping the other a moment before the stick dropped, tapped her smartly on the inside of one thigh.

"Wider."

Response trickled from her. When his eyes fired at the sight, she spread herself wider, offered him everything. Being taken over like this, she didn't have to think of anything else. Only what he wanted, while it set her body on fire.

He squatted, showed her the baton. "You want me to fuck you with this?"

"Yes." She managed it in a whisper.

"Why?"

"Because... Next time you use it, I want you to remember it...in my pussy."

"Honey, remembering any of this is not going to be a problem. I may just keep that bear for myself. Make you come by rubbing it on your cunt and then keep it near my pillow ever after so I can smell the lingering odor of your pussy on it."

When she moaned in response, it made his need to take her beyond arousal and straight into mindless insanity even more fierce. Watching every flicker of expression—the parted lips, the desperate eyes, the arch of her throat—already had him there miles ahead of her. Jake slowly lowered the baton, making sure her eyes latched onto it so she'd see it go into her. He spread her slick lips wide with his thumb and forefinger, his thumb pushing up on her clit as he began to insert the baton. She quivered, her nostrils flaring.

"Breathe deep, baby. I'm putting it in deep. Once I've got it seated, you're going to hold onto it with your muscles. I want you to milk it so hard I'll see it twitch when I let it go."

She rocked against him, pulling it in, her head starting to thrash back and forth.

"You keep those hands over your head."

Her hands locked together as if they were around a bedrail, the white flowers tickling the curves of her arms, her pale skin gleaming like pearl.

```
"Jake...please... Oh God..."
```

He took it in about eight inches and stopped, letting the weight of it rest on his knee, holding it steady in her as he reached for the other thing.

In the semi-darkness, it looked like a thin black stick with a metal edge that flashed in the moonlight. When he laid the end against the side of her nipple, her eyes opened at the new touch. The moment she did, he tapped the control on it.

The hot stick was set on the lowest setting, a shock capable of a mild current of power but packing a lot of stimulation, if her reaction was any gauge.

She jumped. At the same time the T-baton began to twitch rhythmically, her hips moving in the act of fucking.

```
"You like that, baby?"
```

"Oh...God."

He kept it up, erratic charges so she couldn't predict it as he held the T-baton, withdrew it almost all the way and then pushed it back in until she was crying out each time. Still he wouldn't let her come, fascinated with the way her nipples were so hard, erect and large, her pussy so soaked the wood was glistening, the moisture trickling down to his hand and pooling in the crevice between thumb and forefinger.

"Please, please, let me come. Let me come. Oh..."

As he let the hot stick drift down her belly, her eyes were on it again, as they had followed the baton. Showing that she knew where he was headed, what he was going to do, and she wanted it. God, he wanted to fuck her. Her lips parted, breath shallow and fast, and he watched her face, her absorption as he rested the tip on her clit. Gave her a zing.

She bucked up, the baton moving furiously. He hit her with a slightly higher voltage as the first scream broke from her lips, twice more as she kept screaming, milking the baton, her body arched back like the crescent moon above them, her fingers digging into each other, her wrists held by his cuffs. Her ass slapped hard on the ground in a staccato rhythm that became even more erratic as she thrashed.

"Oh...it's too much... Please...stop..."

"You're not stopping until I say stop, baby. Keep going." His voice was harsh as he watched, too choked up for more words as that simple sentence sent her over another peak, her voice getting hoarse as she cried out her desire, long, drawn out notes of pleading. He was immobilized, watching her come all over his baton, her cunt spasming on it, her nipples as erect as his cock.

He stopped the shock, dropped the device to the side and now rocked the baton, keeping her going until he could tell he'd exhausted her. When he eased it out slowly, he was enthralled by the way she shuddered and whimpered with the resulting aftershocks. Laying it to the side, he stood on his knees, straightening to strip off the shirt.

"No." She reared up before he could do it and curled her hands in the fabric. She managed to catch her nails in an apparent weak point, or maybe her adrenaline was making her that strong, because she ripped the fabric away from the collar seam. When she leaned against him, panting, he curled his fingers over hers and helped her finish it, tearing the shirt open to just below his rib cage. He dropped his head on his shoulders as she passed her thumbs over his nipples, threaded her fingers into his chest hair and tugged savagely.

He shoved his jeans down his hips and tossed the shirt away before he wrapped his arms around her, pinning her hands between them and took her to her back, sliding into her as one continuous motion. She was just going to have to wait on having him completely naked because he was going to die if he wasn't inside of her now.

She wrapped her legs around his hips, her heels drumming his ass as he pounded into her, her wet channel gripping him again with sure muscles. He felt like he'd been away from that welcoming, heated home for far too long, though it had been less than thirty minutes. Rimming her with his still wet fingers, he found her anus and slid into her there, making those blue eyes widen further. Her mouth formed an "oh" of startled reaction. Then she went wild. She bucked against him, making him feel the clutch of her ass muscles, the ripple of her pussy that sent him right over the edge.

He cried out his pleasure to the night the way she'd screamed hers, two wild, primal animals under the watching face of the moon.

Nature would forever be a mystery to man, binding together elements in complex and beautiful ways. But as he felt her go over again, Jake thought a man could share that power, at least in this one perfect way.

Chapter Six

When he opened his eyes, he was lying on her and her fingers were making circles on his chest where her hands were pinned. She was still quivering, her buttocks clinging tightly to his fingers, her cunt gripping his cock. The moonlight created slivers of silver in her hair and cast shadows that etched out the line of her cheek, the upper slope of her breast, the cleft in between.

"You're going to have to let me go, baby," he whispered, soft and tender, sliding from her ass. She held on reluctantly, making it torture. "You stay right there. There's something I need to do."

When she looked up at him as he stood, he remembered. Toeing off his shoes, he stripped the jeans and underwear, the socks, and just stood there a moment. Not because he was vain, but because he couldn't move with her gaze traveling over him as if she was memorizing every inch of him in the moonlight.

It made him want to fall to his knees and worship her. But because this was her sexual fantasy, he gave her a slow, thorough perusal instead. It wasn't a hardship, with her body naked and still quivering from her climax. He squatted again and laid his hand high on the inside of her thigh, applied pressure, making her widen their spread. When she resisted somewhat, that shyness coming to the forefront again, he laid his other hand on the opposite one, opening her further to him.

"Let me see your pretty cunt," he murmured in a husky tone, liking the way her cheeks got stained with color. "You've never had a man talk that way to you, have you?"

She shook her head.

"But you like it."

A quick nod and that charming sweep of her lashes.

"You took all of me in well enough."

Stacie couldn't stop looking at him. Tanned, with a few pale places. Her cop didn't go to tanning beds and apparently had a certain amount of personal modesty. He was as perfect as any man she could imagine. A fine pelt of pubic hair. His cock lay against the soft nest of it, the curve of his heavy testicles just below. He was lots of lean thigh and arm muscles, with a well-cut stomach. Broad chest and flat pecs with a light thatch of hair that narrowed to his groin. It wasn't that she hadn't covered the territory before. It was just each time she detailed it she got the same sweet rush through her vitals. Perhaps it was good they wouldn't be together after tonight. The constant need for him might kill her.

As if he wasn't providing her enough sensual eye candy, he gave her a full sugar rush by ordering her to stay on the blanket and turning to walk into the corn. His ass was likewise firm and tasty-looking, his back wide. Some old scars and new scrapes, the latter probably from tonight's ballgame. A man's man, not afraid to play as hard as he worked. She was sure of it.

A moment later he was back. He wasn't self-conscious with her, so she could enjoy the way his cock moved as he moved his body. Forever after she'd know what he looked like naked when he walked, even when he was wearing his work clothes. His gun...

A smile crossed her lips as he knelt by her. She noticed he had a couple packs of crackers and two sodas.

"What?"

"I was just wondering if you had a gun belt. You know, the kind that goes around your hips?"

He picked up on the gleam in her eyes immediately. "Oh no you don't. You bad girl." He tore open a pack of crackers, popped one in her mouth before she could get the suggestion out. "That's where I draw the line. There are just too many cheesy one-liners."

"Like don't make me draw my weapon—"

"Don't talk with your mouth full," he reproved, but he grinned when she tried to bring her hands to her mouth to cover her laugh. Unsuccessfully, because she baptized him with a small spray of crumbs. "Imp. You were looking a bit pale. If we have until dawn, you're going to need some calories. I had these and a cooler in the backseat of the car."

"You have some. You'll need it too." Stacie kept the tone light, even as something caught in her throat. He was feeding her, not allowing her to do it for herself, and it made butterflies in her stomach. The way he took the soda to her lips before taking a drink himself, his eyes on her again as he made her take another cracker from his fingers. The way he watched her lips, his gaze flickering with sparks of fire, telling her he was turned on by it as much as she was.

She'd never shown this side of herself before to any man, perhaps because she'd never known it was there. It was like Jake had had a secret key that unlocked this desire. She'd wanted a man to take her mind away from the reality of her life for just a little bit. Since John couldn't ever give her even a minute of that, perhaps she'd forgotten that there were men who were capable of it. But Jake... He'd sent her spiraling into a whole new plane of perception. Whether it was reaction to the excessive amount of control and discipline she had to have in her own life, or if it was something else, she didn't know. There'd be years to analyze it later. Right now, she just wanted to be experiencing this, taking sustenance from his hand, watching his gray eyes darken and his cock rising again from the stimulation of controlling her completely. Of her willing submission to him.

* * * * *

It was an effort to keep his hands off her, but Jake knew he might only have one night with her. Ironically, that meant he shouldn't rush it. He needed to give her body some time to recuperate, and it probably wouldn't hurt him to give his dick a few minutes to reset launch mode.

"So tell me how you ended up taking care of your dad. Don't you have any other family to help you?"

As he took a couple crackers for himself, Jake noticed what she gave him was cautious, reluctant. Maybe because she didn't want to ruin it. Maybe because she had a Southern woman's tendency to believe that nothing asked of her was too much and she shouldn't complain.

Or maybe she was laconic because she didn't trust him enough to reveal details of her life to him. Why that should bother him, he didn't know. Realistically, they'd just met. But accepting reality didn't seem to have a place here. Not tonight.

She did trust him in ways women who'd known him longer had never done. But maybe that was because she was at the end of her rope, desperately hoping for one night where someone would take care of her. With no hope for anything more than that one night, the limited time span made it easier to trust him that way. His siren had learned to have low expectations. He saw that in far too many women. While he knew he was feeling way too proprietary for his own good, he particularly didn't like seeing that quality in her.

Patiently, he prodded her for more about her parents. From working over sources and suspects, he knew how to persuade. When to push and how to listen for what wasn't being said as much as what was. Reading between the lines, he quickly determined her brothers needed to be pistol-whipped. He had a Glock and a Sig that would fit the bill nicely.

Reaching out, he traced the lingering bruise on her collar bone. "He had a good hold. How'd you break it?"

"We hit the umbrella stand when we rolled off the china cabinet. I was able to grab one and get it between us. Twisted it and broke his grip. Fortunately, when I did that, he regained some sense of his surroundings. I told him he fell, just knocked me down with him." At his disapproving look, Stacie shook her head. "I wasn't going to tell him

he tried to hurt me. It would kill him. This isn't a kind disease, and home care with me...it's our only option."

It wasn't a kind disease to anyone, he thought, his brow creasing at her hesitation. Dementia robbed a family of their loved one, often years before the person died. He thought about it, if it was his daughter trying to take care of him. If he found out she'd lied to him so he didn't know he'd abused her, tried to kill her. He was pretty sure he'd decide to self-administer a bullet then and there.

He wanted to order her to do things he had no right to demand, particularly if she had no one to back her up and help her change things. He needed to ease off. No more questions. He already had a pretty good picture of what was going on. She'd drawn her knees up to her chest and was rocking on the point of her buttocks, gazing up at the stars. It was a defensive posture. Her fingers clutched her painted toenails, the silver of the cuffs catching the moonlight against her ankles.

She made a very appealing sight, with her head tilted like that. He followed her gaze so he saw the shooting star at the same moment she did.

"Oh—" She glanced at him. "It belongs to you. You saw it at the same time I did."

"So why should I get it?" He fished a quarter out of the heap of his jeans. "Call it."

"Tails."

"Tails it is."

He saw her fight against a smile. "You didn't even flip it."

"You're right, I didn't. Make your wish."

"It seems selfish to take it for myself. Your dreams may be more important. Maybe you'd wish for the cure for cancer."

"What would you wish for, if you could wish for something just for yourself?" When she didn't respond, he reached out, caught hold of the cuffs, lifted her hands to draw her attention back to him. As he did, his thumb caressed the top of her knee. "What would you wish, Stacie?"

He wondered if it was the moonlight that made him see the brief glint of tears in her eyes. "I should wish for—"

"Stacie—" With a hand behind her head, he hauled her over to him and put his mouth on hers, capturing her lips, tangling with her tongue. He still held the cuffs in his other hand. He'd been sitting cross-legged, so when she fell against him, her fingertips grazed his pubic hair, tangled there, tugging. Stirring his cock to life, particularly since she was lying half over his lap now. "I'm sure you send out prayers and wishes for your parents like raindrops in Seattle. Probably for world peace as well. For the neighbor's husband's colonoscopy, for their dog's neutering surgery." When she ducked her head on a nervous chuckle, he brought her back to him with a firm hand to her chin, making her look at him. "You can have one goddamned wish of your own. What is it?"

They were under a blanket of stars where all wishes could be voiced without censure. Stacie struggled to believe that. But with a ghost of a smile, she said, "That would be cheating. You're not supposed to tell anyone what your wish is."

He gave her an exasperated look. "I've never believed that dreams can be taken away by sharing them." Then his voice softened. "In fact, it may be the best way to make sure they come true."

She swallowed. His eyes were so close, searching hers as if he was looking to find her soul. She'd never been looked at so intently by a man in her life.

"Did he hurt you?" he asked quietly. For some reason, she knew he was referring to John. Or perhaps every man she'd known before the cop next to her.

"No. He just didn't see me. No one has in a long time. But you do." That's what she'd liked about his eyes from the beginning. He'd been looking at and seeing everything about her since the moment he'd stopped her.

"If I could have one wish," she said at last, her voice a shaky whisper, "it would be that this was real. But I'm afraid if it became real, it wouldn't be the same."

He feathered a hand over her brow. "It wouldn't be. It'd be better."

She couldn't tell from his expression if he was serious or just flirting. "That's very romantic," she said at last.

"You're not a romantic?" He raised a brow.

Desperate, she thought. There's a difference. A difference I can't forget. Or I'll ruin how special this night is.

Jake noticed she didn't answer him. Just smiled that smile which frustrated the hell out of men. As if women understood the great truth of the universe. That most promises were empty ones.

A man would stubbornly go his own way, like a great white hunter hacking his way through the jungle of his life with a machete, never seeing that what he sought was standing right there with him, with her arms wide open, hoping he'd figure out what mattered the most, the way she had.

Even when his failure to see it broke her heart, a woman like Stacie kept her soul open anyway. A fragile creature who could be fulfilled by something as simple as knowing a man was attempting to love her the best he could. She'd ask for little but need so much it could make a man feel like he was drowning...or that she'd pulled him out of the ocean where he'd been dog paddling for far too long.

"I want you to dance with me," she said. "Dance with me under the stars. Is that romantic enough?"

Leaving behind his disturbing thoughts, he glanced down at himself. "I'm a little underdressed."

Her eyes sparkled. "Me too. I don't mind if you don't."

She offered her hands to him and he lifted her to her feet, her palms sliding onto his chest as he gathered her in and began to sway. Their thighs touched so that he felt the lingering dampness of her skin from their joining. His cock rubbed her as she moved, making her curl her fingers on his chest like a cat kneading. When she pressed closer, capturing his cock with light nips between her legs, her pussy teased him. He circled

her waist with an arm and brought her up to her toes, insinuating himself more securely between her legs. Her lips parted, moist.

"You keep that up, honey, I'm going to have you flat on your back again."

She smiled, turned with him, her bare toes stepping on his lightly as they learned to coordinate their movements. "You use a lot of pet names. I like that. Do you do more than slow dance, Lieutenant?"

He grinned and though he was reluctant to let her go, he eased her back into the first round of a shag step, working around the fact her hands were cuffed to guide her and turn her. She didn't know the steps, but he took his time and she followed well, giving him time to enjoy the delight in her eyes.

"Some older stuff..." He took her down the aisle of corn in the camel hobble of the stroll then brought her back with the tango, dovetailing it perfectly into a more intimate Latin step that brought his knee between her legs and allowed him to put his hand down low, cupping her ass with his palm to hold her there. He teased her as he shifted, making those hands of hers clutch on his chest more tightly, with less finesse, telling him she was arousing exponentially to the stimulus. When he guided her hands back over his head to press her bare body against the length of his, his cock pressed against a pussy that had gotten much wetter.

Slowing their pace, he held her close and felt curiously humbled when she laid her cheek on his chest, caressing his nape with her fingers. Though he knew she was aroused enough to go for another round, he followed his intuition and didn't push it. He found he preferred to experience it this time like a sailboat, riding the rhythmic, slow swells of wake. An easy journey toward the ocean of need where their bodies would join together again.

"You're a nice man, Jake."

He laid his jaw on her hair. "How's that?"

"To know a woman's fantasy is as much about this as the rest. To be held." Stacie closed her eyes. *Just held*.

She listened to his voice rumble through his chest, smiling when he said gruffly, "I'm as selfish as the next guy. Just using the excuse of cuddling to rest up."

Stacie tightened her grip on his neck. It was such a perfect meshing of sensations. This sweet quietness. The pleasurable swirling in her lower belly from the memories they'd recently created, so vivid they couldn't help but be rippling through her awareness, keeping her nerve endings sensitized to his every touch on her body. The current sensation of his strong hands on her back, one low on her hip, caressing the top of her buttock. Then there was the promise of more pleasure to come, hardening against her hip.

The past, present and future, all possible with the same man. While she knew the dangers of dwelling on the fantasy of a future, she didn't mind the risk. Some pleasures were worth the pain and this once-in-a-lifetime experience was one of them. Pain would come in life, whether she protected herself from it or not. But this type of moment might never come again.

When they turned, she brushed his instep with her foot so his ankle touched hers. For the first time, she wished for the cuffs to be off so she could touch him freely, but she liked being at his mercy as well, knowing when he was hard enough he'd take her to the ground again, just as he said he would. She'd wrap her legs around his hips, feel his buttocks move, tighten and plunge under her heels, the curve of her calves.

Lifting onto her toes, she brushed her lips against the pocket of his collarbone. Using the tip of her tongue to tease him, she felt his biceps harden against her sides as he increased his grip on her. When she took a nip, she earned an indrawn breath. She remembered what it was like to be on her knees before him, his cock stretching her mouth. She shuddered, more fluid dampening her thighs.

"You're ready for me again, aren't you?" His voice was harsh with needs of his own. She liked it, liked the way he talked to her about his needs and her own in a raw and real way. His cock was now an iron bar against her hip and she ached to have it back inside of her.

Nodding, she lifted her gaze to him, making a soft noise at the desire in his eyes, the promise of what he would do next unmistakable in his expression.

He'd reacted hard and fast to desire each time, driving them up and over as if they were on that zero-to-sixty-mile-per-hour roller coaster, giving her a spiraling, twirling thrill of sensation from which she still felt dizzy. Even in the aftermath she'd felt off balance. Like when she spent a day out on a boat and the memory of the sea's movement kept her body swaying even when she was back on land. An element whose hold was so strong it wouldn't let go.

He didn't take his gaze off her as he took her down to the ground, easing her to her back and laying himself down fully on her, his knees gently insinuating him between her thighs. Because her hands were still hooked around his neck, their bodies were never more than a breath away as they came down to earth together.

Grounded. The word passed through her mind. It could have mundane connotations. It could also be this, this sense of wholeness, of utter contentment. Being joined to his body made her feel as if the connection went far deeper than that, deep into the core where the secrets of Creation were woven into the stratus of the Earth.

"Are you sure you want me this way?" His thumb touched her cheek, traced her lips, making her open her mouth and taste his fingertip with her tongue. "I could go back to the car and get... I know we did it twice without—"

"How do you want me?" She gazed into his gray eyes. "No choices, remember? I'm all yours. How do you want me?"

"Like this. My cock deep in your pussy, nothing between us."

His broad head was at her entrance and she moved, trying to draw him in, but he raised his hips a little, drawing out the anticipation, a light smile on his lips telling her he knew he was teasing her, though she could see the strain in his jaw line. "Ask for me, Stacie."

"Please. I need you." There were so many levels to that statement, she couldn't voice them all. Or, if she did, it would make the thought, the possibility, evaporate away. And that was going to happen soon enough.

From the way his expression stilled, she knew he understood.

The tone had changed. It was too close to dawn. This was it. The last time.

She'd have taken him any way he wanted her because of that. But he'd been her perfect fantasy since the moment he got out of his car. So perfect, she had the disturbing thought that she might wake in her bed in the morning and find the whole thing was a dream. Particularly when he now made it clear he intended to exceed her expectations until the very end.

This time, his hands were gentle, one moving down, the other cradling her face as he guided himself into her. His fingers teased her opening as he slid in, filling her, making her hips rise and undulate to take all of him.

When he rested deep inside of her, his cock in to the hilt, testicles pressed against the base of her ass, he stopped. Looking down at her, he reached over to his discarded jeans, fished out the key and took her hands from around his neck to uncuff her.

"I know you said it would be over when they were off," he murmured. "But I need to feel your hands on me."

How could she resist such a demand, his lips so close, his body joined to hers? Particularly since she could think of nothing she wanted more at the moment than to touch him.

When he removed the cuffs, her fingers touched his palms and he let the bracelets fall to the ground, twining his fingers with hers such that in the first moment his touch held her as much as the restraints had. Lowering his head, he closed his lips over hers. She melted under the power of that kiss, moaning into his mouth as he coupled it with a slow stroke into her body, teasing her clit. His lips and tongue, firm, clever, persuasive, seduced her all over again. As his touch whispered along her wrists, the

pulse points fluttered beneath his fingertips, sending frissons of energy down her arms into her chest and lower.

He curled one hand under her neck, his thumb sweeping her jugular, his other hand lowering to her hip, gripping her thigh and lifting her leg higher, rocking her up for a deeper angle of penetration that made her cry out into his mouth. When he answered with a growl, she reached for him, feeling the breadth of his shoulders under her palms for the first time. Bare, warm muscle and bone. The strong line of his throat. Then she touched his jaw, moving her fingers over his lips, his face, into his hair, feeling the short ends as her body bucked in slow waves beneath his thrusts. Savoring every inch of him, inside and out, she glided down the slope of his back, her hands resting on the taut curve of his buttocks. Her body reacted by becoming a spring-loaded coil of erotic tension as she felt those muscles tighten and release under her touch. Curling her legs over the small of his back with a helpful hitch from him, she reveled in his strength. Even more when he changed the angle and took her higher, sinking so deep a grunt of urgent need broke from her throat. Her head tilted toward the night sky, her eyes closing so she could just focus on how he felt, everywhere he was touching her, inside and out.

"God...perfect," she managed, soft, breathy words as her body climbed and climbed, responding to every stroke, getting hotter and hotter. The coil of her body was ready to release, and it would be capable of shattering even a brick wall of control, let alone her simple network of flesh and bone, which was wide open, eager to embrace the impact.

He bent, catching his hand in her hair and tilting her head to give him access to her throat, raking it with his teeth. Even with her hands free he was underscoring he was in charge, commanding her. But his hard body was shuddering, even trembling, injecting her with a searing wave of feminine power. His chest hair rasped across her nipples. When he dipped down, took one into his mouth while increasing the speed and force of his strokes, she lost the ability to think. Everything was tugging, wet-hot sensation. She

opened her eyes and found the whole sky was becoming a series of shooting stars, a thousand wishes coming true in the magic of the moment, dreams unrealized or never even voiced until now.

As he suckled her, squeezing her, she writhed, rising to meet him now, wanting the fire to become a conflagration. But he kept to his own pace, making her gasp in his mouth, beg. "Jake...please. I want to come for you. Please..."

"Stay with me, baby. We go when I say we go."

She could come from the sensuous abrasion of his tongue on her nipples alone. It seemed he'd gotten even harder and thicker inside her and then he came to a complete stop, making her feel the impact of that hard thickness filling her from clit to womb.

She knew he wanted to draw it out, make it last. Her body was quivering on the cusp of release, every limb trembling, but Jake was taking his time, moving from one breast to the other with his mouth. Even when he squeezed them together to play in the cleft, making her plead with wordless moans, he only growled his response. He held still within her for endless moments, refusing to move as her hips twitched, her muscles spasming against his cock. She was milking him as hard and fast as she had the baton before. She knew he wanted her because his long lean body had become iron wherever it touched her, all those sexy muscles drawn tight.

"Jake, please..."

"Kiss me." At last, he seized the back of her head and brought her half off the ground, holding her on the strength of one arm as he started pistoning into her, moving them across the ground with the force of it.

Wildfire, sweeping across the forest of her soul, burning it to ash so she had no refuge but his arms. She bowed up even as he held her mouth to his, swallowing her screams. She savored the vibrations of his guttural response as he met her, spasm for spasm, jetting into her, spinning her orgasm to greater heights. She had to let go of his hard backside and cling to his biceps, her head resting fully in his palm like a weak infant. She let him hold her up as he pumped into her and she bucked in response,

slamming hard against his body. She wanted to make this last, wanted to keep him so badly she wanted to fight about it and so she did. She took her pleasure and found the strength to pummel against him now, raking his back, trying to take every drop of what he was offering her and more, needing it all.

He gave it to her, took her over peak after peak until she gave up and clung to him in exhaustion, convulsing as if she were in the grasp of a sensual fever.

Only when they began to slow to a rocking motion, so dreamy and rhythmic it was like the pulsing of a heartbeat, did she press her face and lips to his throat. She curled her arms around his back and neck and hid her face. Inhaling him deep, she wished the protective wall of flesh, the close proximity of his heart and soul, the touch of his breath, were all something she could have forever.

I love you, she thought in amazement. I love you for this moment. For the type of man you are, that you would give me this. I'll always love you, always pray for the world to keep you safe and cherish you the way I do. The way I wish I could cherish you forever, if my life was different.

Dawn was beginning to light the sky behind his shoulders. For the first time in her life she took no joy in the rose and blue beauty of a sunrise. She wouldn't let herself grieve, however. She might not be able to keep him, but this night had been every fantasy she could wish to have. It was a gift that most women with much less problematic lives never got. Whatever Divinity was, It had given her this. She had to honor that.

Which meant she had to close the book on the fairy tale and go home.

Chapter Seven

"Well, I certainly feel served *and* protected." She had to keep it light. Told herself that, even as she thought about how good he looked standing there by her car door.

"You drive this thing home under the speed limit," Jake told her.

They'd helped each other dress with a lot of slow kisses and intimate touches that had the enduring sweetness of first love. The night was waning, but strangely the magic wasn't, as if it didn't know that something this wonderful couldn't last.

"And if I don't drive the speed limit?" Stacie managed an impish smile.

Leaning through the window, he captured her lips as his hand eased down the front of the dress she'd repaired with two safety pins from her clutch purse. Finding her breast, he cupped it, rubbed his thumb against her so the nipple hardened, already eager for his touch again. When he drew back, she was breathless.

It's over. I have to go. I have to.

"If you don't," he said, "I'll chase you down, pull you out of that car and give you a bare-assed spanking on the side of the road where everyone can see."

"Why, Lieutenant." She grinned up at him even as she felt a flush course up her neck at the thought. "All those women who will be speeding just to get your attention."

"Brat." But his expression sobered. "You going to be okay? The nurse will stay until the afternoon so you can get some sleep?"

"Sure." She didn't really know if she would, but she had no hold on this man, wouldn't make him feel he had to watch over her. "I'll be all right."

He eyed her. "I'm not going to give you my phone number."

She blinked. Well, that stung a little. "I didn't ask you to."

"No, you didn't." He took hold of her chin. "Which is why I'm not going to ask for yours either. You wanted this to be just a fantasy. Okay. It was a hell of one. I'm privileged to be part of it. But what's better than a fantasy is figuring out how to be with someone you're meant to be with. I know we can't say for sure that's what's going on here, but I think we got a hell of a good start."

She stared at him. "Jake...my life. I just... It wouldn't be fair to you."

"You think it's fair for a woman to be with a cop? Our divorce rate is huge and domestic violence...well, you wouldn't ever have to worry about that with me, but—"

"Were we talking about marriage?"

The way she was looking at him with those wide blue eyes, Jake felt crazy enough to be doing so. Which told him he needed to step back before he scared her to death.

"I come home mean, a lot," he continued doggedly. "I do things that will make you worry. It's not fair. But love isn't about fairness. It's about wanting to be with someone so much none of that matters. You willing to see if we've got that?" He leaned in again, stopped just a hair from her lips. "If you do, come to the ball field next Saturday. If you don't, I won't pursue it further."

Like hell he wouldn't. Still, he kept his gaze on her face, brought his lips to her mouth, the barest of touches. "Bye, baby."

Walking back to his car without looking back was the hardest thing he'd ever done.

* * * * *

And apparently the stupidest. Eight innings. He was playing like shit, and no sign of her at all.

"What's got your dick in a twist?" his sergeant demanded. "If you don't hit the ball this time, I swear I'm going to stick the bat up your ass to give whatever you've got rammed up there company."

"I hit better with a stick up my ass than most of you clowns do on your best days."

"Yeah, yeah." A few more razzing comments from his teammates, thrown punches, and he felt more fortified to go to the plate. He narrowed his gaze at the pitcher who smirked at him. The bat was going to connect with something this time that would knock him on his grinning ass.

Damn it, he had connected with *her*. He could find her. It wouldn't be so hard with all the resources he had at his disposal. He'd persuade her. Nibble on that sensitive spot on her neck and she'd give him anything.

Then he saw her. Just sitting down on the top bleacher in a little cotton dress and sandals, looking as pretty as the summer day. When she saw him looking, she gave him a tentative wave, telling him she wasn't sure of his welcome. Well, fuck that. He handed the bat to the umpire. "I'll be right back."

Vaulting over the four-foot chain link fence like it wasn't even there, he took the bleachers two at a time up to where she was. When he got to her, he didn't give her any preliminaries. She started to speak, but he bent down, caught her by the upper arms and took her mouth in a hard, demanding kiss that told her exactly how much he'd been thinking of her. There were catcalls and whistles from the dugout, laughter from the bleachers and somewhere in there his sergeant's voice.

"Chance, get your ass down here and bat."

All that mattered was how she melted in his arms, the way she curled those slim fingers into his T-shirt and held on, bringing back all sorts of memories. When he lifted his head, her beautiful eyes were soft, aroused. "I wasn't sure if you meant it," she said quietly.

"I don't say what I don't mean." He nipped her chin, lifted her hands and kissed one at a time. "You might need to remember that now."

At her curious look, he smiled. "Remember what I said I'd do if you came to a game?" He leaned down, whispered in her ear. "I've got a solid dozen in my wallet."

Her laughter filled his ears as she wrapped her arms around his neck. He tightened his grip, lifting her briefly off her feet, burying his face in her hair.

"I'm glad you came," he murmured into her ear.

When he let her down, she briefly swept her lashes down in that shy way that stirred his libido, remembering her cuffed and stretched naked across the hood of the Porsche.

"Well, what woman passes up the Chance of a lifetime?" She teased him with his surname, but as she raised her gaze, she became more serious. "I'm not sure if I'm good for you, Jake. This may be a mistake you'll regret but..." Her shoulder lifted. "I want you. So..." She took a deep breath, her fingers flexing nervously on his chest. "I'm here."

Ah hell. Screw it. He swung her up in his arms, delighted to catch her startled expression a moment before he headed back down the bleachers with her in his arms. He shook his head at his teammates, indicating he was out of tonight's game.

There were shadows under her eyes. She needed someone to help out, take care of her. She probably thought she'd come tonight and they'd have a repeat of their night in the corn field. Then he'd let her go home and take care of her other life all by herself.

Well, if he'd gotten her here with the offer of more, he was going to live up to it. They'd have the fantasy, but he'd show her he could be part of her reality too. A part she wouldn't regret having there.

She was his chance of a lifetime as well.

Epilogue

All-night stakeouts had gotten a lot harder to bear. Knowing what was at home, curled up in his bed waiting for him made him want to just shoot the suspected perps and let God sort them out. Jake grinned at himself, ran a hand over his sweaty neck. Well, at least they got a good collar tonight.

Out of habit, he tried the knob on the laundry room door and frowned as it turned easily, letting him in. Damn aggravating woman. Even as he had the thought, the smell of coffee and breakfast curled its way around his senses, trying to distract him from his annoyance. But even though he was a man who lived by his stomach, it couldn't hold a candle to what the sound of her humming in the kitchen did to him.

She hadn't done that at first, but as time had passed and things had gotten better, he'd found it an endearing habit. One he suspected she was rediscovering. Right now she was singing an off-tune version of a Rod Stewart classic. *You're in my Soul*.

In the beginning, he thought it was his job to be the white knight. He'd already plotted it out. A word to his cousin in the New York DMV, and her brothers would have enough traffic violations on their records that every cop in the state would be pulling them over. If they really pushed him, he'd talk to his college buddy who worked with the Bureau. Tom and Carl would believe they'd been put on the FBI's Most Wanted list with scum like bin Laden.

However, in the end, it was Stacie who'd made things better. Not just for her parents but for all of them. Jake included. All she'd needed to know was that she wasn't alone. That she had someone in her corner.

The little spitfire had marched herself up to New York, planted herself in Tom's office, called in Carl and laid it out for them. Their parents deserved quality care. There was an excellent facility within ten minutes of the house and she'd already talked to the

administrator about hiring on there part-time, the balance of her hours to be spent in direct care of her parents, in a place where she'd have the resources to give them what they needed. She further informed them if they didn't agree to kick in where insurance wouldn't, she'd stand outside their office with a very large sign stating they'd embezzled funds from one of their major clients.

They'd actually had the brass balls to test her, but the next morning she'd shown up on the sidewalk in front of their snazzy office with a brown bag lunch and a large printed placard in hand. Just like that, the fight was won. They even repaid her the funds she'd pulled from her own meager savings to pay the nurse who'd covered the dayshift for her while she was in New York. Jake had handled the night shift and had learned firsthand in three days what she'd been dealing with for over two years. Enough to make him want to zap their testicles with the hot stick on its highest setting.

He'd been so proud of her though. He'd wanted to go with her, but she'd taken his hands, her eyes shining, chin firm, and said, "You've given me the strength to do this. If you'll take care of my parents while I'm gone...I want you to know them. And them to know you."

Her mother took to him right off. It tore out his heart, how fragile and light her body was when he moved her in and out of the bed, even as she was able to make him laugh with the sassy sense of humor she'd given her daughter. Her dad played a vicious game of checkers, though he and Jake had to start and stop it over a day's time to finish it. By the time Jake helped move some of their things into the long-term care facility, he cared enough that he ached for them, particularly when he saw they wouldn't share a room together. But Stacie had worked out having them on the same hall, despite their differing conditions. Her mom didn't have much time, and her father's lucid moments were decreasing at almost the same rate. But already, when Jake came to the hospital to join Stacie for dinner, he saw a peace in her mother's eyes, the worry she'd been carrying for her daughter and husband now not as sharp.

There was sadness and pain. A lot of tears. But there was also happiness and the discovery of what being in love was all about, in the shadow of two people who had truly lived it, were living it to the very end.

Things had changed so much for both him and Stacie. Love was like that. Magic. Just like all the books said.

He slipped into the kitchen. The shadows had disappeared from beneath her eyes and she'd put on some weight, in all the right places. One of those places was very pleasingly displayed as she bent over, loading the dishwasher. Thank God, she was wearing the white nurse's uniform he liked so much, the one with an above-the-knee skirt. It wasn't immodest, but it hugged her trim figure like an hourglass and had a zipper down the front that gave him no end of fantasies, to her amusement. She hadn't yet donned her ankle socks and comfortable orthopedic shoes, which while good for work, tended to minimize her sexy legs. Of course, he didn't mind that. There were too many male orderlies and doctors at that place she worked as it was. He'd be glad when that diamond on her finger had a second gold ring keeping it company.

She was rearranging the plates he'd tossed in haphazardly yesterday morning. He needed to do better about that. He'd rather conserve her energy for other things.

He eased up behind her and as she straightened, he caught hold of her waist, making her jump, but when she tried to turn, he held her fast, sliding one hand up to claim one breast, easing down the zipper to find curves cradled in a thin lace bra. As a sexy little tremble ran through her, he pressed his attentive cock up against her soft ass.

"You didn't lock your door, little girl. Look what kind of trouble you let into the house."

"Mmm..." A shudder rippled through Stacie as his fingers teased a nipple while his arm held her fast. God, she loved his strength. The way he smelled, the heat of him. The way he made her want to devour him alive one moment and then the next, she wanted just to curl together on the couch, feeling him doze off from a long day, his arm still holding her close. Or the way her knees went weak, every time, when he arrived at

Rivershores to have dinner with her and her mother or play checkers with her father. He always cleaned up first, made sure he shaved for her parents. Wore a clean shirt and brought her mother flowers.

She'd found far more than a lover the day she'd been stopped by Jake Chance. She'd found something she'd never realized a man could be. A best friend.

Though friendship wasn't at all what she was thinking about now as he ran his hand down her thigh and started to gather up her skirt in front, reaching under the uniform to find her panties. She smiled as his clever fingers found the lace thong she'd had time to slip on before he arrived.

"You'll have to make it fast," she whispered, laying her head back on his shoulder as he bent his head to her throat, bit. "My fiancé is due home any minute and he's very jealous. He's a cop," she added. "He has a gun." As he pressed harder against her, she smothered a giggle. "A great...big...gun."

His hand came up, collared her throat. "You are going to start locking that door, or I'm going to start spanking you."

She braced her hands on the sink, wiggled her ass against him, at first to tease and then with more serious intent, a rhythmic stroking up and down his length. "That's supposed to discourage me from doing it?"

He groaned. "It will if I really tan your hide." But a moment later he had the zipper to her waist and his hands full of her breasts. Stacie gasped as he fondled her with those far too knowledgeable fingers, making her pussy's reaction trickle down her legs. "How long before that fiancé of yours gets here?"

"Any minute. I think I hear him parking now. You better hurry."

He opened his jeans, pressed her against the kitchen counter with his thighs and bent his knees just enough. "Pull up your skirt for me, baby. Show me that pretty ass of yours that needs a spanking."

As she reached back, Jake growled appreciatively at the way it thrust her breasts out. He felt hard as iron, ready to explode. As soon as she pulled the hem up, revealing

her round buttocks provocatively accented by that bit of lace between the cheeks, he caught the crotch of the thong, pulled it aside and thrust home.

She was ready too. She cried out, began to spasm around him almost immediately. She loved it when he played rough with her, his kitten with her own sharp claws. He caught her throat again, held her back up against his chest, her cheek alongside his jaw so her cries caressed his face with her breath even as he pounded into her wet cunt, imagining her wearing this tiny scrap of lace all day long at work, the uniform cloth rubbing against the bare cheeks of her ass.

The image sent him over, as he suspected she knew it would. Whether she'd planned to wear it today or snuck it on just before he pulled in and—damn, which probably meant she'd unlocked the door just to give him a reason to get tough with her—she knew what got him going. She also knew what kept him together. As good as she was at driving him insane and keeping his cock in the begging position, she was just as good at listening. At knowing when he didn't want to talk, needed the feel of her arms around him, snuggling up to him while he nursed his beer and unwound after a tough day. He just liked hearing her move around the house, watching the curve of her delicate cheek in the lamplight, the flicker of her beautiful eyes. The way she got ready for bed. Her cotton sleep shirts, the way she stuffed her feet in bunny slippers and raked her fingers through her hair when she first got up in the morning. Damn if Nichols hadn't been right all along.

He worked her hard against the sink and she gave him just as good back, squeezing him, rubbing her bottom against him so he couldn't resist. Still hard, slick from her juices, he pulled out and put it back inside that tiny rosebud opening, taking her down deep and propelling her finished climax into a whirlpool of aftershocks that had her thrusting back against him again, her breasts quivering. As their breathing slowed, began to synchronize, he ran a hand down her front, a soft caress of her breast, fingers dipping into the dent of her navel, then down to cover her mound, pressing his fingers

on her clit so she arched up hard, breath leaving her fast, her ass squeezing his cock like a vise.

"Ah God." He buried his face in her hair. "Missed you." She always made the ugliness go away. He didn't need to tell her about it. She cleaned him with just a touch.

"I can tell." She pressed her lips to his throat, her body still trembling where he was caressing her, up and down. He could have her hot again in no time, wanted to, but damn if breakfast didn't smell good. He grinned at himself then lifted her hand that had the engagement ring on it to his lips.

"I'm going to keep riding you about that door. Did you unlock it right before I came in?"

Her eyes sparkled at the double entendre. "I'll never tell."

"Stacie Marie —"

She put a finger up to his mouth, her eyes soft, lips wet with his kisses. "Some chances are worth taking." Then, at the lingering worry in his eyes, she relented. "Yes. I unlocked it when I heard you pull into the driveway."

He gave her rump a little slap and pulled out reluctantly. He went for the wash cloth, but she beat him to it, wetting it with warm soapy water and then caressing him with it, giving him that shy look below her lashes as she cleaned his cock for him. Breakfast maybe could wait. God, she was going to kill him.

"What you were just talking about...that's what I intend to do."

"Hmm?" She glanced up at him as he put a finger under her chin, tilted her face up. Her hands continued to cosset him, but her fingers were firm, stroking, the light in her eye telling him she was on his wavelength about breakfast.

"Once I marry you. There's one particular chance I intend to take. Over and over and over again. Mrs. Chance."

She rolled her eyes but moved in for the kiss, let him wrap his arms around her and take her under again.

While she'd agreed to marry him, she'd wanted to wait to get married at Christmas, in a candlelight service like her mother had done with her father.

When she told him that, she'd cried. That wasn't the first time she'd cried. Now that she had a shoulder offered, she let the tears wash through her more often, to help her get up and face it every day. He stood at her back every way he could, physically and mentally, and wondered what he'd done to deserve such an angel in his life. His wild angel.

"I don't care what they say," he'd told her once when it had overwhelmed her. "When you love a woman like your dad loves your mom, the way I love you, even if some son of a bitch disease takes your mind, you always remember her in your soul. Deep inside him, he knows. He'll remember her, how she was a part of his life."

"But he won't remember her dying," she said softly. "That's the blessing Mom wants to give him. That's why she'll make it until Christmas. She knows by then he won't be able to remember."

His tender-hearted angel. He'd proposed to her a month after they'd met, and it was her dad who had made it happen.

During one of their checker games, he'd been alerted by a prolonged silence. He glanced up from the board to find her dad had a hundred percent checked in, suddenly a very lucid father, eyeing him closely in that way that would have any man straightening up, feeling a little nervous.

"What do you intend to do about my daughter?"

He had Stacie's eyes, midnight blue. His body still had the hint of the rangy, tall man he'd been. Jake not only saw in his eyes that soul-deep memory he'd talked about but the man who'd taken her to the track, loved her joyous recklessness even as he helped her find her path to adulthood.

"I intend to marry her, sir. Love her with all I've got and take care of her for the rest of her life."

Chance of a Lifetime

Fate had Stacie walking in at just that moment, so there it was, his proposal out on the table. But Jake had looked at her and known it was how he felt, what he wanted. The soft expression in her eyes gave him the terrifying and exhilarating realization she was going to say yes, agree to be his forever.

"Good. Isn't any good to finish a race alone." Her father jumped two of his reds. "Competition keeps you alive. Letting someone keep you sharp. It's all about taking chances."

Her lips curved in a soft, poignant smile and Jake was lost in the vision of her.

"Yes, sir. You're sure right about that."

About the Author

I've always had an aversion to reading, watching or hearing interviews of favorite actors, authors, or musicians because so often you find that the real person does not measure up to the beauty of the art they produce. You find their politics or religion distasteful, or you find they're shallow and self-absorbed, or a vacuous mophead without a lick of sense. And from then on, though you still may appreciate their craft or art, it has somehow been tarnished. Therefore, whenever I'm asked to provide personal information about myself for readers, a ball of anxiety forms in my stomach as I think, "Okay, the next couple of paragraphs can change forever the way someone views my stories." Why on earth does a reader want to know about me? It's the story that's important.

So here it is. I've been given more blessings in my life than any one person has a right to have. Despite that, I'm a Type A, borderline obsessive-compulsive paranoiac who worries that I will never live up to expectations. I've got more phobias than anyone (including myself) has patience to read about. I can't stand talking on the phone, I dread social commitments, and the idea of living in monastic solitude with my husband, a few animals, books and writing is as close an idea to paradise as I can imagine. I love chocolate, but with that deeply ingrained, irrational female belief that weight equals worth, I manage to keep it down to a minor addiction. I adore good movies. I'm told I work too much. Every day is spent trying to get through the never ending "to do" list to snatch a few minutes to write.

This is because, despite all these mediocre and typical qualities, for some miraculous reason, these wonderful characters well up out of my soul with stories to tell. When I manage to find enough time to write, sufficient enough that the precious "stillness" required rises up and calms all the competing voices in my head, I can step into their lives, hear what these characters are saying, what they're feeling, and put it down on paper. It's a magic beyond description, akin to truly believing that my husband loves me, winning the trust of an animal who has known only fear or apathy, making a true connection with someone else, or knowing for certain that I've given a reader a moment of magic through those written words. It's a magic that reassures me that there is Someone, far wiser than myself, who knows the permanent path to that garden of stillness, where there is only love, acceptance and a pen waiting for hours and hours of uninterrupted, blissful use.

If only I could finish that darned "to do" list.

Joey welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

Also by Joey W. Hill

Behind the Mask anthology

Enchained anthology

Holding The Cards

Ice Queen

If Wishes Were Horses

Make Her Dreams Come True

Mirror of My Soul

Mistress of Redemption

Natural Law

Snow Angel

Threads of Faith

Virtual Reality



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

www.ellorascave.com