

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

On
the

Edge

RAINE
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ELLORA'S CAVE

Quickies®

On the Edge

Raine Latimer

For Lucy Malone—young and on the fast track to partner—nothing beats the adrenaline rush of edgy sex. But men can't handle Lucy's professional success or the passionate nature she refuses to hide behind a vanilla exterior...until she meets ex-Marine John Langley.

A man who handles all things dangerous, John respects Lucy's competitiveness and confidence even as he one-ups her fantasies, transforming their hot hookup into an emotional snare tightening around her heart. Determined to regain control, Lucy challenges John to a dark, risky game designed to push them both to the edge.

John knows he's in a winner-takes-all fight for Lucy's trust...and her heart. With the help of a fellow Marine, he's going to show Lucy there's nothing she can do but surrender.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

On the Edge

ISBN 9781419926945

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Edited by Meghan Conrad

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication March 2010

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ON THE EDGE

Raine Latimer

Dedication

To Meghan, for providing the motivation to write this story, and for questioning motivations, which made it better...

Trademarks Acknowledgement

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

BlackBerry: Research in Motion

Ketel One: Double Eagle Brands N.V.

Prelude: Honda Giken Kogyo Kabushiki Kaisha

Texas Longhorns: The University of Texas Board of Regents

Velcro: Velcro Industries

Chapter One

“Plaid skirt and stockings, front and center!”

With a sharp whistle and a come-here beckoning hand, the bouncer at No Limits plucked Lucy Malone from obscurity at the end of the line. She strutted past dagger-eyed glares from women lined up in front of her and took her place at the head of the velvet-roped queue. The waiting bouncer indulged himself in a thorough top-to-toe once-over as she retrieved her ID from the tiny pocket of her short red plaid skirt.

Lucy gave him a winsome smile and turned slowly under his appreciative gaze. She’d accessorized the skirt with a pair of white cotton thigh-high stockings, black chunky-heeled shoes, a tight, cropped white t-shirt and schoolgirl braids. Four inches of toned, bare thigh between the hem of the skirt and the top of the stockings, smoky eye makeup and gleaming candy-pink lipstick sexed up the braids.

“Nice,” he said slowly, then more professionally checked her face against the photo on her driver’s license. Without a flirtatious response he left it at, “*Very* nice. Have fun, Ms. Malone,” and opened the door to the club.

Oh, she intended to have the best kind of fun—the illicit, edgy kind she craved. No Limits was famous for cutting-edge dance music and sexually adventurous clientele. Lucy knew the bar and its patrons well. She wedged her ID back into her pocket, nodding greetings to familiar faces as she pushed into the crowd, the wall of sound as tangible as the bodies crammed together inside the club. Her heart rate quickly aligned with the bass beat thumping from the sound system and she lifted her arms over her head, twisting and sliding to the dance music as she moved through the crowd to the packed bar.

She found a sliver of space next to one of the few male patrons not wearing the obligatory tight t-shirt. A blue button-down shirt strained across wide shoulders as he

shifted to let her squeeze in. Elbows braced on the bar, he flicked a sidelong glance at Lucy while she waited to get the bartender's attention, then did a gratifying double take.

"Ketel One and cranberry," she said when the tender made eye contact. The heat and strength of the stranger's forearm radiating against her elbow hardened her nipples as effectively as if he'd licked them.

"I got it," the man said, a bill in his long, work-roughened fingers.

She turned, openly considering him and the offer. Dark blond hair finger-combed back from his forehead, unreadable brown eyes, a face not even the sweetest smile could soften. Grooves on either side of his mouth gave him an older, harder look than No Limits' usual metrosexual, player, twenty-something clientele. This man held himself much like her boyfriend, John, an ex-Marine, did, that same air of unassuming competence. No posturing, no bragging, no leering, just utter assurance of getting her world rocked.

Six months of world-rocking experiences with John had taught her well. She liked the look, and his hands, rough and deft at the same time.

"Good girls don't take drinks from strangers," she said.

A single eyebrow lifted as he scanned her again, his gaze snagging in all the right places. "Good girls don't dress like that, so how 'bout I buy your drink?"

Quick on the draw. Another plus. The combination of his deep voice and her favorite scent, male sweat and plain soap, made her want to drop to her knees right there. But she'd been in the club for less than five minutes and while she did have to choose someone for the game she and John were playing tonight, she could take her time doing it. Half the fun was stretching out the anticipation, heightening the pleasure.

"Maybe later," she said, with a smile that left things wide open.

"I'll be around," he said. He left the bill on the bar in front of him, a clear signal he was there to drink, not dance.

Lucy handed the bartender her twenty and accepted her change and her glass. She wandered over to the dance floor and sipped the drink, a smooth, tart combination of vodka and juice that tasted just right on a hot, humid night.

Her elbows braced on the chest-high railing, Lucy felt a zip along her nerves that came not from the alcohol but, she suspected, from her would-be suitor's gaze roaming down the line of her spine, over the curve of her ass and down the length of her legs. She shifted her weight and peeked over her shoulder. He sat right where she'd left him, back to the wall at the end of the bar, using the combined height of his body and the stool to watch her through the crowd.

Tonight was about living out a fantasy, so she locked eyes with him and let her imagination conjure up the image of her on her knees, unbuttoning the fly of those old-school jeans, sliding her hands under the elastic waistband of his...boxers? Definitely boxers. With his big, rough hands it was easy to imagine him holding her in place for corporal punishment. Her pussy fluttered in its white lace confines. Across the room his eyes darkened as if he'd felt the tiny spasm himself.

Take your time. There's no need to rush into a decision. The story you'll tell John is as important as the game itself.

Choosing a man for her task required identifying her options, and the sexy outfit she'd put together with John's assistance did its job. Within a minute she'd declined requests from two trashed frat boys and accepted one from a gorgeous, dark-skinned man with the muscles of a bodybuilder and the calloused hands of a construction worker. The slight scrape of the roughened skin against her bare waist as they danced sent promising shivers rippling through her.

But after a few minutes, Lucy connected him with a tight-lipped redhead glaring daggers at her from a table next to the dance floor. Lucy stepped back out of her dance partner's embrace. Tonight was about her choice, her fantasy. She had no intention of becoming some player's revenge fuck or getting into a catfight in the bathroom.

"Come on, baby," he said, trying to pull her back into his arms.

Entitled attitudes annoyed her, and she hadn't worked eighty hours a week for the promotion to partner to get called *baby* by a player. She flicked a glance at the redhead and shook her head as she removed his now-not-so-tempting hands from her waist. "I'm not your *baby*," she said, pushing through the writhing, gyrating couples to the edge of the dance floor.

To her surprise, the blond, dark-eyed stranger from the bar leaned against the brass railing. She raised both eyebrows in question and got a *c'mere* tilt of his head in return. Her short skirt flitted around the top of her thighs as she strutted up to him. When she approached he turned sideways, creating space for her to slip up against him, chest to chest, hip to hip. A hot awareness sizzled across the inch separating their bodies.

Under the guise of giving him a few more seconds of flirty assessment she checked in with her gut. She was on her own for the first part of tonight's game, but her gut was curiously silent, or perhaps drowned out by the noise and the hyper-sexual atmosphere. The man watched her, clearly wanted her, and his controlled demeanor, so unlike No Limits' usually raucous crowd, captured her attention as surely as John's had the night they met.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Ty," he said.

No last name meant no problem with no strings. Like John, Ty was only a couple of inches taller than she was in four-inch heels. She liked the feeling of peering into a man's eyes when she kissed him, liked even more the long look up when she dropped to her knees.

"Lucy," she said, making her choice. "A pleasure."

The stubble on his jaw glittered like gold dust under the lights. "He wasn't what you were looking for?" he asked.

Lucy nodded at the pair. Ty followed her line of sight to her former dance partner, now standing beside the redhead, palms up in supplication. "He's taken," she said. "He might not want to be but he is. I'm not looking for drama."

The redhead shoved her index finger in her boyfriend's face. "She looks like a handful," Ty agreed.

"I doubt you'd have much trouble keeping her in line," she said with another glance at his hands. They had the reddened, scrubbed look that came from using harsh soap and an abrasive brush to remove oil and grime.

Humor glimmered in his eyes but he didn't dispute her assessment. "I'm too old for that shit," he said.

"You're not that old," she replied, but even as she said it, she wasn't sure. A bit older than her...thirty-two, John's age? But even after two tours in Afghanistan, John didn't have those lines around his mouth.

"It's not the years, honey. It's the mileage," he replied offhandedly.

Lucy laughed. "Classic movie, classic line," she said.

"Beg, borrow or steal, that's my motto."

She reached for the end of her braid. "What do you do, Ty?"

He shrugged. "This and that. Mostly work on the rigs. You?"

"I'm an accountant," she said with an arch smile.

Ty wasn't distracted by the small talk. He looked Lucy over again, his gaze lingering on the lace and see-through cotton that did nothing to hide her hard nipples. Provocatively responding to his scrutiny, she rested her elbows on the brass railing behind her and smiled at him. The position thrust her breasts forward and transformed her from a uniformed schoolgirl to every man's private lap dance fantasy.

"How about I buy you that drink now?" he said, his voice lower and rougher.

John was waiting for her, so she cut to the chase. "How about you tell me what you want in return for that drink?" she replied.

He blinked, slow and slumberous, but not shocked. Maybe not old, but definitely jaded. "I like those stockings," he said.

Wide-eyed with feigned innocence, she looked down at her cotton-clad legs as if she'd never seen them before. "Just the stockings?" she asked coquettishly.

"The lipstick, too."

Now they were getting somewhere...somewhere down and dirty. Her heart began to pound, a rapid, adrenaline-charged knocking against her breastbone. "Really?"

"Yeah," he said, his hot, anticipatory glance a stark contrast to his low, even tone. "I'd like to see you on your knees in nothing but those stockings and shoes as my cock slides between your pretty pink lips."

It was as if he knew exactly what she'd told John she wanted for the latest game in their increasingly edgy sex life.

I want to pick up a stranger and give him the blowjob of his life. I want to come home to you...and tell you all about it while you fuck me.

* * * * *

Lucy's unorthodox relationship with John Langley began with a chance meeting at the neighborhood bar where she stopped in to unwind on Fridays. When she arrived the Rangers were two innings into a game with Toronto but it was the brown-haired, blue-eyed stranger drinking her favorite beer that caught her eye.

The interest was mutual because three beers and a platter of wings later they were betting increasingly risqué sexual favors on the outcome of the game. John saw her flirtatious bet of a kiss and raised it by removing any stipulations on which part of the winner's body would get kissed, or for how long. Things got very explicit, very quickly. By the seventh inning stretch she was squirming with desire on her barstool, past caring who won or lost as long as he didn't welsh on his bet.

Unfazed by her overt sexiness and as competitive as she, John showed up at exactly the right time. She'd been gun-shy for too long after a series of bad breakups. Her last relationship fell apart just as a partner position at her accounting firm opened, giving her good reason to retreat into a hellish work schedule. After two bitter endings with

men who resented her success and three with men who couldn't handle her bold sexuality, Lucy had given up on finding a man who could accept her, let alone handle her. She took the night with John for what it was—a long, hot tease leading to a stress-relieving fuck—nothing more.

John won. She paid off her debt pinned to the brick wall of the alley behind the bar, stifling her orgasmic cries in his denim-covered shoulder. But to her surprise it didn't end there.

You like games, he stated more than asked as he buttoned up his jeans.

Love 'em, she replied with a saucy grin.

And you like taking risks. No question there, just recognition of a fellow adrenaline junkie.

The riskier the better. She'd insisted on safe sex, of course. She wasn't stupid, especially when it came to confusing sex for love.

The Rangers play again tomorrow. Double or nothing?

He made her laugh and he was hot as hell, a great combination, but she didn't fool herself. She was on track to make partner at the biggest accounting firm in Texas and she liked sex rough and varied, with a side dish of dangerous. John, an ex-Marine working long hours to get his security firm off the ground, seemed unperturbed by her drive to succeed and enthralled with the risk-taking adrenaline junkie with a taste for kink.

They started with spankings. Skirt-up, panties-down, over-the-knee spankings at first, experiments with a crop as his confidence and her trust grew. John had a slow, hard hand and the talent to make her walk the line between pleasure and pain longer than she'd ever thought she could.

To keep an emotional distance between them, she didn't insist on dinner beforehand or phone calls during the week to check in, but John did both. Old-fashioned Southern manners were a treat, but it wouldn't last.

She turned down requests for dates to work nights or weekends and turned up the erotic heat with risky public provocation at a rock concert, teasing him with kisses, full-body caresses and glimpses of sheer white underwear. She expected a naughty-girl spanking and heated sex after the concert. Instead, when they reached his SUV he'd bent her over the hood, shoved up her skirt and fucked her from behind, hiding only their faces and his license plate from the video camera relaying the whole encounter to the downtown parking garage's security office. Then he opened her door and handed her inside like she was Cinderella on her way to the ball.

Every fantasy she shared he took without hesitation and made into something more, something unique to them. Something special. She sensed danger but like any true adrenaline junkie, she couldn't walk away.

The games continued. A prostitute-client role-play fantasy became a rough, nearly wordless fuck in the darkened room of a seedy hotel. He'd negotiated her price and services in a detached manner that didn't hide the dark fire in his eyes. The twenties tossed on the battered veneer of the dresser as he left were a nice touch, but John did get into the details.

Then he upped the ante in a way she didn't expect. He surprised her with flowers and dinner when she signed the multimillion-dollar client almost guaranteed to secure her promotion to partner. After dinner he'd walked along the riverfront with her, patiently waiting while she inquired about an amber necklace that caught her eye in an exclusive jeweler's window. Almost like a boyfriend, or a lover.

Warning! Danger! Her heart screamed the words, so she suggested a threesome with a green-eyed, raven-haired, tattooed waitress from their neighborhood bar. He didn't blink an eye, just came over early with takeout and a bottle of wine and nudged her into revealing her strategy to make partner. His sincere interest caught her off guard, made her wonder if this was his way of toning down their sexually charged relationship.

But when Mikki arrived he orchestrated every moment of the threesome with his quiet, unshakable confidence. Dangerous, indeed.

Yesterday, three weeks after she signed the firm's biggest client, two weeks after the threesome with Mikki, she got the promotion. One side of her life neatly balancing meant the other side would become an unholy mess. She couldn't bear the pain that would come if she grew more and more attached to him, so she dug deep for a fantasy she knew even John couldn't take and make *theirs*, not hers.

I want to pick up a stranger and give him the blowjob of his life. I want to come home to you...and tell you all about it while you fuck me.

That would have meant *game over* for most men. Not John. He'd raised one eyebrow, then said, *If that's what you want, Lucy, then I want it for you.*

But she'd heard hesitation in his voice. Maybe this was it, the scenario that would put an end to John and, more importantly, to what she was beginning to feel for him.

Maybe you don't want it to end...

* * * * *

The techno-dance music shifted, the backbeat sliding into a Michael Jackson song from the eighties. The male half of a couple grinding next to her bumped Lucy's shoulder, startling her out of her reverie.

"Sorry," called the woman.

She wore the jade version of the amber necklace Lucy had admired and didn't really need but secretly, desperately coveted. Flush from the promotion and a higher-than-expected salary increase, after work Friday she'd gone back to the store to buy the necklace.

It was gone, sold two days earlier.

She couldn't have the necklace, or John, but she could have this. Lucy looked at Ty, his shadowed eyes, the hands she knew would drive her utterly wild as they threaded into her hair, and pushed aside her irritations. "You have somewhere in mind?" she asked.

He tilted his head toward the door. "A room at the hotel across the street."

The hotel across the street was a run-down dive known to rent rooms by the hour if you slipped the manager a tip. In other words, it was perfect. "Let's go," she said.

He laid one hand on her shoulder, guarding her as if another man might snatch her away before he could get her out the door. The heat of his long fingers lay against the damp skin of her collarbone, the roughened pads of his fingertips subtly caressed her skin through the t-shirt as they hurried across the bar's parking lot, then the empty street. The earlier rain hadn't cleared the air, and another storm threatened; thunder rumbled above their heads and lightning cracked the sky. In no time they were at the door to room 127.

She hung back while Ty unlocked the door with an old-fashioned key and walked in, flipping the switch to turn on the single bulb as he did. Once inside, she stood by the closed door, her hand on the knob. A rumpled, faded bedspread covered the sagging double bed. Clothes spilled from a green canvas duffle bag similar to the one John used when he traveled, and she could see toiletries on the counter in the bathroom. From the looks of things Ty intended to stay in this dump for at least a few days.

The incongruity gave Lucy pause. Roughnecks made good money, certainly enough to at least rent a room from a friend. John had worked the rigs for a while after getting out of the Marine Corps, saving money to buy his condo and start his security business. He might have stayed in a place like this, but not for long.

Ty slumped into a chair in front of the window and poured a healthy measure of whiskey into a Styrofoam cup. Elbows on the armrests, he considered her over his steepled fingers. "Something wrong?"

She looked at him, letting the fantasy play out in her mind, searching for that thrill that accompanied the rush of enactment...

Searching...*searching*.

No thrill. Her gut had shut down, gone silent in a way it never had before. Something was wrong, very wrong.

Going through with this wouldn't make it right. Lucy turned the loose doorknob and cracked the door an inch. "I've made a mistake."

Ty's gaze sharpened, but he didn't move from his seated position. "Come again?"

There was no need to apologize. They were two consenting adults, with the emphasis on *consenting*. "I've changed my mind," she said simply.

He shrugged, then reached for a second cup and the bottle. "You would've been a hell of a lot of fun, Lucy. I'll still give you that drink."

She shook her head. "No, thanks. I should go."

"Somebody's waiting for you," he said, but there was no surprise and no judgment to his tone. Jaded indeed, if he picked up a woman for casual sex without a care for her relationship status.

"Something like that," she said, looking around the nondescript room. Curiosity almost prompted her to ask him what he was doing here, in a dump-ass hotel room, hanging out in a bar so clearly not his style, but good common sense kept her mouth shut.

"He's a lucky guy," Ty said, his voice emotionless.

That startled a laugh out of her. Ty didn't know her, John, or their unconventional relationship, so how he got anything other than *cheap slut* from her behavior was beyond her. "You think a guy whose girlfriend almost blew a stranger is *lucky*?"

"He's waiting for you. You're going home to him. That's lucky in my book."

Low standards indeed. She went still at the raw pain under his gravelly voice, but she was an accountant, not a therapist, so she opened the door and left.

* * * * *

Lucy drove to John's the long way 'round, down Seawall Boulevard then up Harborside Drive, watching lightning split the sky over the Gulf again and again. Normally an hour of no cell phone and no radio in her car brought clarity. Tonight the roiling sky splintered her efforts to find detachment.

An hour after she left No Limits she steered her Prelude into the main street running through John's condo complex. The guest parking spaces were full, so she pulled in behind his SUV. The porch light illuminated the front step and door, and lights were on in both the first- and second-story windows. She tried the knob, found it unlocked in anticipation of her return and let herself in.

John stood in the shadows, one shoulder braced against the doorway between the kitchen and the entryway. He wore only a pair of faded jeans, the globe and anchor tattoo above his heart barely visible against the deeply tanned skin of his bare, muscled chest. His sable brown hair was only slightly longer than active duty regulation length. A few water droplets on his shoulders told her he'd been on the porch in the intermittent rain, watching the storm build in strength. He looked up as Lucy stepped the foyer and locked the door behind her.

The moment his deep blue eyes met hers she figured out what had spooked her in Ty's hotel room. The fantasy, so arousing when she daydreamed about it, spoke it aloud to her lover, was missing John. All the other scenarios included John, either as an active participant or guide, or both.

The scene was meaningless without John, which meant she'd done the unthinkable. She'd attached emotions to what was supposed to be no-holds-barred, just-this-side-of-dangerous sex.

She'd won her promotion, she hadn't gone through with the game, and she'd fallen for John.

Cravenly, she took refuge in the mundane. "Damn, I'm thirsty," she said and brushed past him, into the kitchen. She opened the fridge to get a bottle of water, then let out a little shriek when she closed the door. John was there, his blue eyes glinting in the dim light.

He backed her into the counter, wedged one thigh between her legs and braced both forearms against the cabinets on either side of her head. "*What* did you do, Lucy?"

Did his reaction mean this particular game was over the line for him? She could lie, pretend she'd done exactly what she said she would do and drive him away. Just as quickly she discarded the idea. She was a bulldog at work, took no prisoners in bed, and she didn't lie.

"I didn't do anything, John," she said.

His brows lowered as he frowned. "What?"

"There was a guy," she admitted, the heat radiating from his bare chest softening her stance. "Hot as hell. But—"

He interrupted her. "What about after him? Where have you been for the last hour?"

The specific time confused her. "I went for a drive, watched the storm coming in," she said.

His breathing eased, along with the tightness in his shoulders. "A drive..." Bending his head to nuzzle into her hair, he slid his hand up to the bare skin of her waist. "You didn't go back to No Limits. You didn't do it."

At his touch arousal streamed into the pit of her belly, the heat oddly comforting. "No," she said simply. "I didn't."

"Why not?"

She thought about her answer for a few moments, then decided she could give him the truth. Although the gap would close as John's business grew, she already made twice what he did. Not many guys could handle that blow to their masculinity. John seemed pretty confident in what he brought to the table, but she'd bet the promotion, with its pay increase and bonus, would end them whether she told him this or not. "You weren't there," she admitted.

He leaned back, tucking her loosened hair behind her ear as he peered into her eyes. "It wasn't the guy. You just wanted me to watch?"

"Would you want to watch?" The startled question came out seductive as his lips teased the sensitive corner of her mouth, trailed along her cheekbone to the curve of her ear.

"Yeah, if that's what you wanted," he murmured.

His hands were as busy as his mouth, fingertips trailing over the exposed skin at the top of her stockings, teasing her eager pussy through her white, lacy boy shorts. She remembered Ty, with his rough hands and his dark blond hair, added John's presence to the mental image. Desire flared white hot and urgent in the pit of her belly. For tonight she didn't have to deny herself anything.

"How?" she breathed. "We don't know him like we knew Mikki. He's staying at the hotel across from No Limits, so who knows how long he'll be around?"

"For what you were promising, honey, I'll be around as long as you want."

The voice was rough, rumbling and familiar. One hand clutching the nape of John's neck, the other soft at his waist, she looked past John and saw Ty, her sexy roughneck.

She'd been outmaneuvered. John's hesitation hadn't been at the risqué nature of the latest game. He'd been protecting her.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "You set me up," she said slowly.

"Kept you safe," he contradicted without a hint of apology on the hard planes of his face. "Sending you out alone seemed like a bad idea, but I wasn't about to tell you no."

"I met you alone at a bar," she shot back.

"And look where that ended up," he reminded her.

A rare blush crept into her cheeks. In her mind she'd taken a calculated risk. A professional manager of all things dangerous, John saw other angles.

"Love the way you take chances, sexy girl, but not on my watch," he continued.

"Point taken," she said.

Ty said nothing, just looked at her with all the promise he'd offered at No Limits.

"How about a formal introduction?" she asked lightly.

John turned and leaned against the counter, holding Lucy close to his side. "Lucy Malone, meet Ty Hendricks. We were in the same platoon in Afghanistan, different squads. He's been out on a rig for the last two months with only magazines and his hand for company."

The clean, soapy scent rising from John's skin and his quick sense of humor made her smile. "How...boring," she said, falling easily into the exchange.

Ty shrugged, the amusement radiating from his sexy brown eyes not quite masking his intent focus on her. With both John and Ty within arm's reach, the temperature in the small kitchen shot up ten degrees.

She stepped in front of John and leaned against his warm chest. He nuzzled the skin of her neck, licking and nibbling as his hands rose to the taut skin between the rib-hugging edge of her t-shirt and the hip-hugging waistband of her skirt. With him at her back this felt so right.

"What do you think, Ty?" Lucy said slowly, kittenish teasing in her voice. "Feel like doing me a huge favor?"

For a long moment Ty watched John's hands roam her body, his fingertips trailing over her thighs, her belly, lifting her skirt an inch or two, before cupping her breasts and pinching the nipples. Lucy gave a slow shimmy as sensation raced along her nerves.

"She's so hot," John murmured. "Lava flowing under her skin. She gives amazing head, too."

At the level of her brain that executed with cool competency in the corporate world, Lucy knew she should be completely offended by John extolling her sexual expertise to another man. Offering her services to that man. But this was bedroom stuff, not a conference room, and John's words made heat flare in her pussy. Through heavy-lidded eyes she watched Ty survey her body, as if determining the value of the proposition.

"You're going to owe me for doing you this *favor*," he said finally.

The lazy demand in his voice made Lucy shudder even as John's deep chuckle rumbled under her back. "Nice, man. That'll trip her trigger every time." He pushed Lucy forward, gently setting her on her feet. "Bedroom. Now."

Chapter Two

She stood at the foot of the bed, the room illuminated only by the irregular flashes from the lightning storm, cursing lace underwear. The scratchy fabric tormented her erect nipples and tugged at her slick, swollen clit as she waited docilely for the men. Downstairs, John's voice rumbled low and indistinct in the kitchen. A short response from Ty, then a moment later footsteps came up the stairs and both men appeared in the door. Ty went for one of the two straight-back chairs John kept in the corner. He swung it around and set it down in front of Lucy, facing the end of the bed, then sprawled into it, his thumbs loosely hooked in his pockets.

John took up position behind her. "How do you want her?"

Two prime specimens of the human male talking about her as if she weren't in the room...trapped between them...dressed for any man's pleasure, dropped her into the scene. With those words John took her from talking about her fantasy to living out her sexiest, most submissive dreams. Fresh heat surged in her cunt as she tossed a wide-eyed glance over her shoulder at him.

"Shirt off," Ty said, recapturing her attention.

She didn't know where to look, from which direction the next command or touch would come. The uncertainty tugged her deeper into the maelstrom of lust whirling inside her.

John tugged the hem of her shirt up, revealing her breasts as she lifted her arms to let him pull the fabric over her head. The movement further loosened her already messy braids. The blonde strands hung in her face, catching on her lipstick and the fine film of sweat on her skin.

"Nice," Ty said, his voice whiskey-rough. "Accountant by day, reform school bad girl by night. Drop the skirt, too."

A deft tug at the button and short zipper and her skirt fell to the floor. Lucy remembered Ty's wish to see her in nothing but the cotton stockings and shoes and felt her knees weaken.

Another hot, sliding glance. "The bra. You do it," he said to Lucy.

She slid the elastic straps off her shoulders then reached behind her to unhook the fastener. The lace dropped free from her breasts, leaving her in the boy shorts, stockings and heels. Her nipples, desperate for a touch to soothe them after hours in tight lace, tightened in the cool, dry air. She reached for them, the gesture driven by the animal need thumping inside her, but John caught her hands and pushed them down. Thwarted, she put one on her hip and toyed with the end of a braid.

"Now those," Ty said, his eyes on the wet lace covering her mound. She had her thumbs hooked in the lace before he said, "Turn around first."

If Ty thought he'd overwhelm her with his firmly voiced commands, he had another thought coming. With a swing of her hips she faced John, then peeked over her shoulder at Ty as she slid her palms under the waistband and pushed the lace down over the curve of her ass. A gentle undulation sent the wet lace to her ankles. Straight-legged, she bent from the hip to carefully step out of the fabric, pausing for a brief moment to give Ty a glimpse of her bare, flushed folds.

The hesitation in his breathing was potent reward.

When she came back up, panties in hand, John was waiting. He gripped her chin and kissed her, tongue flickering over her lips before pushing inside to touch hers.

He turned Lucy back to face Ty. "What do you think?"

Ty's gaze licked over Lucy like a physical touch. "She'll do."

With a gentle push and an "On your knees, sexy girl", John ordered Lucy into position. A drawer opened behind her, but with her hands on the button fly of Ty's jeans she didn't pay much attention to John or his movements. Ty took her hands in his and with pursed lips and a shake of his head, set them on his thighs.

"What?" she began.

Ty touched his finger to her lips, his dark brown gaze like liquid chocolate. Behind her, John said, "That mouth of yours has one purpose only tonight. Don't talk unless we ask you a question."

From the tone of John's voice and the look on Ty's face she doubted they'd want her opinion on anything. She felt more than heard John resume his position behind her, then a sting bloomed on each inner thigh. "Spread your legs."

Without looking over her shoulder she knew what John held—a black leather riding crop, the tongue soft and supple from repeated contact with her ass and thighs. Another sting bloomed, then another, lower down her left leg, then her right. She couldn't predict when the pain would well up, only accept it as John warmed up on the curve of her ass and her upper thighs.

"Ty's doing you this favor, sexy girl, so it's only fair that he gets to watch you take your punishment for being such a bad, bad girl tonight."

She peered over her shoulder, up at John. He loomed above her, the crop held negligently in his right hand. With a flick of his wrist, he gave her a slightly harder smack for her impertinence. "Look at him. When you're on your knees for him, you look at him. Not me."

Her heart pounding, she met Ty's molten gaze. Blowing Ty while John watched would make her desperate for any kind of release. Blowing Ty while John watched and spanked her might send her into an alternate dimension of desire.

From behind her, John added, "One last thing, Lucy. Ty decides when you've had enough. Be good to him, sexy girl. The better you blow him, the sooner I stop."

Her eyes, still locked on Ty's face, widened. He gave her a slow smile, warm without the slightest hint of mercy, the amused grin emphasizing the inequitable nature of the bargain she made downstairs and the implacability of the two men she'd made that bargain with.

The crop began to strike her bottom with the same relentless pace and firmness John used to drive her to orgasm, missionary style. His commitment to her pleasure, however she found it, made her heart seize for a moment, then knock hard against her breastbone. She swallowed down the emotion and reached for Ty's button fly again.

Again he caught her hands and returned them to his thighs. "Not yet," he said firmly.

She let out a soft, pleading sigh but otherwise kept silent as she gazed at Ty. He was fully dressed, shirt buttoned halfway up his chest, jeans encasing a hard-on that had to be painful if he hadn't been inside a woman for two months, but his gaze flicked from her flushed face to the mirrors lining the walls as if getting her mouth on his cock made no difference to him at all. The condo's previous owner, an interior decorator with an eye for maximizing light and space, installed floor-to-ceiling mirrors in most of the rooms to make them seem larger. Mindful of John's command to keep her eyes on Ty, she watched his face as he looked in the mirror and mentally constructed her own image.

Her bare torso, the nipples flushed and begging for hard, rough fingers, white cotton stockings and heeled schoolgirl shoes, the picture of a fallen angel kneeling between his jeans-clad legs. Her lover behind her, also wearing jeans, wielding a riding crop on her defenseless, upturned ass. The slutty braids holding her hair back from pouty lips perfect for sliding down an erect cock, her hands gripping and releasing his thighs as the crop strokes began to work.

"Spread your legs wider," Ty said, watching her in the mirror.

The crop struck each inner thigh until she widened her stance to the near side of pain. Her poor, wet pussy clenched against the ache created by the emphasized openness.

"Good. Now tip your ass back. Give him something to work with." She tilted her hips as if getting fucked from behind. The soft groans from both men told her they were

thinking the same thing. The enticing scent of sweat and musk rose from Ty's body, sending Lucy's brain into a dizzying spin.

"Perfect," Ty murmured as he played with the end of one of her braids.

John's strokes began to work over flesh already hot from earlier strokes and Lucy's eyes dropped shut as sensation ratcheted up. She gripped Ty's muscular thighs through his jeans, making a conscious effort to relax into the ache. John methodically covered the skin from the top of her outthrust ass to the backs of her knees. He struck the sensitive curve where her buttocks met her pussy and lightning cracked to her clit, then up to her nipples. She gasped, the sound now higher-pitched as it broke in the cool, dark air. The fierce sensation caused by the deceptively gentle impact made her eyes fly open.

Ty watched her, assessing her response. "Unbutton my shirt," he murmured.

Oh, yes. He knew when to hold back and when to press on. Arousal wicking through her, Lucy reached for the white buttons running down the front of his shirt. Careful to keep her bottom pressed back for John, she unfastened each button and opened the fabric to expose Ty's muscular chest and abdomen. With a lift of her eyebrows she asked permission to touch him.

Ty read her mind. "Go ahead," he said.

She spread the cloth back from heavily muscled shoulders and ran her palms along his collarbone, then down over his pectorals. She brushed his nipples with her thumbs, felt more than saw his cock surge against his jeans. Leaning forward, she pressed a chaste kiss into the skin just above his navel, then trailed her tongue along the line of soft blond hair that disappeared under his waistband.

"Trying to tempt me into shortening your spanking?"

A direct question meant she could answer. "Trying to tempt you into letting me suck your cock," she said with an inviting glance through her eyelashes.

"There's no rush," he said with the casual attitude of someone not on the receiving end of a crop wielded by an ex-Marine. "One button at a time."

She felt John's eyes on her as she popped open the top button on Ty's jeans.

"Use your mouth on me. Give me a preview of what you can do."

She did as he ordered, bending to the uppermost expanse of chest she could reach, licking, kissing, nibbling on his skin, worshiping him with her lips and teeth and tongue.

"Nice, sweetheart," he said, his voice thick, syrupy as it slid along her nerves. "The next button."

He kept that up until she'd opened all five buttons in the placket, stretching it out, making her earn the privilege. She'd been wrong about the boxers. He'd gone commando, his cock lying heavy and dark red against his ridged abdomen as she spread the denim placket wide.

"This really works for her," Ty noted idly, elbow on the armrest, one long finger against his cheekbone as the others supported his jaw. His dark blond hair tumbled forward, into his eyes.

John never broke rhythm with the crop. "Lucy, show him how wet this makes you. Don't touch your clit."

Her gaze locked with Ty's, Lucy leaned back just enough to slide her hand down her stomach, between her thighs. She dipped two fingers into her soft channel, slid them up either side of her swollen clit, then brought them up for Ty's inspection.

He wrapped his fingers around her wrist and examined the glossy liquid coating her fingers. "Damn," he said, then slowly licked the juices from her fingers.

"Your turn," he said. "Licks only. I'll let you know when you can start sucking."

John, the merciless devil, added another degree of sting to the crop's relentless smacks. Lucy let out a hitching little whimper. Her hips swayed from side to side, seeking relief, then stopped again, holding submissively still for her punishment. With the soft tip of her tongue she licked a wet path from the base of Ty's shaft to the head, collecting the pearly fluid before returning to the base for another long, slow lick. Ty

fisted his cock and held the rigid length away from his belly so she could coat the circumference of his shaft with her saliva.

"Put your hands on my knees," he instructed.

Lucy braced both hands on his widespread knees. The position thrust her breasts toward him, emphasizing both her vulnerability and the pulsing tips. A few rolling pinches, a steady scrape of thumb over nipple and she'd drop into the center of the sun. But this wasn't about her. For now, this was about Ty.

"You want to suck it?" he asked, stroking himself as he watched Lucy's face.

She'd imagined the scene a thousand times, how she would feel, what she would do, but thanks to John's commanding presence and Ty's uncanny ability to know exactly what to say, she was floating in a zone of heated arousal unlike anything she'd felt before. In that frame of mind the crude question worked as well as the ongoing spanking and her submissive position. She nodded, wetting her lips in preparation.

"Just the tip," he said, his encircling fingers coming to rest just below the rounded head. "Earn the rest."

They'd shut down her brain, pure and simple. In that moment her only conscious thought was that she had to do this right. If she did exactly as he asked, if she pleased Ty, the spanking would stop. While the pain was transforming her, when the spanking stopped John would fuck her, and right now she needed John's thick cock in her cunt more than she needed to breathe. So she arched her back, bent her head and closed her lips around the dark tip of Ty's cock.

"Fuck me, that's hot." John's voice behind her sounded strained, almost pained, but he never faltered with the crop. "You doing your best, sexy girl?"

She kept her lips closed around Ty's cock as she nodded.

"Gonna make him come?"

Another nod, this time with a firm lick to the tip.

"She's fucking awesome," Ty said. "You get a little more."

With that his hand dropped another inch on his shaft. Lucy didn't need instructions. She bobbed up and down, swirling her tongue around the sensitive head.

"A little more pressure when you come up," Ty commanded, his voice like steel wool. "That's it. Slower. Oh *fuck*...that's it."

She paid attention and did her very, very best, the combined energy of Ty's growing sexual need and John's meticulous attention to her stinging ass and legs driving her deeper into a dark realm of sexual desire. She sucked Ty's cock until she was taking him to the back of her throat, his fist pressed against her lips each time she went down, until her jaw began to ache. And all the while her nipples throbbed and her clit fluttered and her empty cunt clenched around nothingness.

Then the flicking, stinging taps on her ass stopped and a condom package dropped on Ty's abdomen. "Put that on him, sexy girl. I want to watch you fuck him," John said.

With that rough, brusque sentence John transformed Lucy's latest game into something mutual, something more than a distraction. His words made this *theirs*, just as she needed. Hands shaking with desire and an emotion she couldn't begin to name, Lucy ripped open the wrapper and sheathed Ty's cock in latex.

Behind her, John tossed the crop on the bed and swung the other straight-backed chair into position facing Ty. Trapped in the diamond created between their knees she rose to her feet, swaying a little under the unrelenting, surging lust.

Ty looked up at her, his gaze burning into hers. "Only thing hotter than watching you blow me in those stockings is watching you fuck me in them."

Lucy stepped to either side of Ty's legs and gripped his shoulders as Ty pulled his straining length back from his stomach. Behind her, John took her hips and guided her down.

Three groans, two deep and one high-pitched and fluttery, sounded in the room as his shaft slid into her pussy. He wasn't as thick as John, but given the teasing she'd suffered all night, her inner walls were swollen, slick and he felt incredible. She held on to his shoulders and ground her aching clit against his pubic bone.

"Fuck, man, she's... Jesus, don't move," Ty groaned.

John's hands clamped down on her hips, holding them still. "Do exactly what he says," John murmured in her ear. "And don't come."

What the fuck? "Are you insane?" she wailed. "The two of you...I'm on the edge! I can't fuck him without coming!"

"Better not," John said, a deadly serious warning in his voice. "Or I'll give you a spanking that will make the last one look like a cakewalk."

Lucy shot him a glare that should have knocked him out cold, then turned her attention to Ty. His head rested on the back of the chair as he gritted his teeth and sucked in air. Lucy would have sworn he was counting in Farsi as she recited accounting rules to stem the subtle pre-orgasmic pulsing in her pussy. After a minute Ty let out a long, even breath.

His gaze locked with hers. "Nice and slow," he said.

No mercy. Ty laid his hands on the tops of the stocking clinging to her thighs, spreading her open. John's hands held her hips. Together they guided her up to the tip of Ty's shaft.

"Look in the mirror, sexy girl," John growled in her ear.

She turned her head to the right and felt her head explode. There she was, naked between two mostly clothed men, her legs kept wide apart by Ty's spread legs and his big, dark hands, John holding her waist, his breath hot against her shoulder blade. Ty's shaft gleamed with her juices, already pearling at the base of the condom.

John guided her back down, a torturously slow process that sent Ty's cock edging over every overstimulated nerve ending in her pussy...except her clit. "Fuck him good, as good as you sucked him. Make him happy and I'll fuck *you* 'til you scream."

She knew what that promise meant, so she bit her lip in the hopes that the pain would distract her needy body and looked at Ty through her lowered lashes. "Is this good for you?" she asked as she raised herself up and slid down again.

"Holy Christ," Ty said with a groan, his gaze focused on her gently bouncing breasts. "Is she always like this?"

"Hell, no," John drawled as he trailed his fingers over the sore spots he'd raised on her ass. "Lucinda Malone, CPA, is usually buttoned up all right and tight. Business suit and heels, laptop, BlackBerry." He pinched a particularly tender spot and Lucy gasped as her cunt clenched around Ty's cock. Ty let out a groan. No doubt at all, John was running this show. "Bad girl Lucy is my sexy little secret."

The possessiveness running under his voice blended with the sensual honey coating her nerves. She leaned forward as she swiveled her hips down Ty's cock. "Am I doing it right? You like my hot, clinging pussy around your cock? Tell me exactly what you want," she breathed in his ear, then licked the rim, "and I'll do it."

Ty gave a rumbling laugh, not the response she expected. "I think your sexy girl knows how to push your buttons, too, man."

She glanced over her shoulder to see John, head bent, breathing hard through his nose. He looked at her. "Give you an inch," he said, shaking his head.

"It's more than an inch," she purred, then blew him a little kiss.

"Face him," Ty said, effectively wresting control back where it belonged. "I want to see that pretty red ass while you fuck me."

Looking into Ty's eyes had been harder than she expected. Looking into John's would destroy her, but in the end, she wasn't about to say no. John helped her up. Ty brought his legs closer together to let her straddle him, then let them fall apart. Plump, pinkened cunt on complete display for John, she braced her hands on Ty's knees, tipped her hips back, and pushed herself down on Ty's cock. A dark red flush moved up John's throat as she sank down and began to move.

Given John's command not to come, reverse cowgirl was easier because the angle was subtly wrong for her. Ty's stiff shaft no longer stroked over that aching bundle of nerves inside her with every movement. But looking into John's eyes as she found a

pace that pleased his friend was a different kind of subtle, deep caress, one that quickened her heart as well.

Then lightning cracked over the house, illuminating the room briefly as John kissed her. He cupped her chin in his hand, leaned forward and claimed her mouth, hot and soft and slow. She reached for his biceps, clamped her hands around the taut muscles, and sank into the emotion swirling under the simmering sexual currents in the room. He broke away, stared deeply into her eyes, then kissed her again, and again, the flicker and sweep of his tongue in her mouth as intimate as the rhythmic rocking of her hips as she fucked Ty.

John shifted, lifting her hands to his shoulders as his settled on her breasts. He thumbed the nipples, sending a shudder through Lucy. The games, the rules, they were all his.

"Oh, be nice to me," she whimpered as release threatened once again. "Give me a chance!"

"I'd be nice to you if *nice* did a damn thing for you," he whispered against her mouth. "You don't like *nice*. You like *dirty* and *raunchy* and *sweaty*. *Hard* does you just right. So does *rough*. Beg me for something you really want."

The blunt, accurate assessment shocked Lucy, but behind her Ty let out a low, fevered moan. His hands clamped down on her hips. "I gotta come. Now."

With those stark words he leaned forward and wrapped his arm around Lucy's waist, holding her in place for him, and unleashed the pent-up power and demand he'd been holding back. Each stroke thudded into the depths of her slick channel, the firm thrusts of his hips sending pleasure streaking through her.

Lucy braced her feet against the carpet and tossed her head back, increasingly breathy gasps forced from her in time with Ty's strokes. Then he let out a stuttering groan. He shoved his hips up as his cock jerked inside her, his arm tight around her waist. Lucy trembled on the edge of an orgasm, but fought it back. When Ty released her and slumped back into the chair, she looked deep into John's movie-star blue eyes.

And saw nothing but raw admiration and lust. "So hot," he said. He kissed her again, his lips hot and firm against her open mouth. "You're not done."

Need raged inside her. "I'd better not be," she snapped. "You two got me into this mess. You'd damn well better have a plan for getting me out of it."

A huff of a laugh from Ty. "Your hellcat thinks we don't have a plan."

John just smiled. "We're Marines," he said, supremely confident. "We always have a plan."

Chapter Three

Five minutes later she was on her back on the bed. John tugged off her shoes and peeled her stockings down her legs as Ty emerged from the bathroom, shrugged out of his shirt and stripped off his jeans. John did the same.

"How do you want to do this?" Ty asked, back to talking around her. His cock was flushed and thick, well on its way to fully hard again.

John crawled onto the bed. Still peeved, Lucy closed her legs and twisted her body to the side. "Don't pout, sexy girl," he said, giving her a tilted smile as he easily rolled her on her back, parted her knees and sat back on his heels between them. A few low-voiced instructions situated Ty against the headboard, Lucy resting against his broad chest while John knelt between her legs.

"Her breasts are incredibly sensitive," John said as he idly caressed one pert nipple. "That's why I said hands off until I gave the go-ahead."

So *that's* what they'd been talking about downstairs...how to handle her. No touching and, she realized, no kissing. Ty hadn't tried to kiss her and she hadn't wanted to kiss him. Strip for him, suck him, fuck him but not kiss him.

"I am *right here*," Lucy said, her tone mock-petulant.

John continued as if she hadn't spoken. "She can come from nipple play alone."

"Damn," Ty said. "You want me...?"

"Yes," John said with a firm nod. "I want to watch." His words and the scent of male sweat, female arousal and sex rising into the air between their bodies sent Lucy tumbling down the evolutionary ladder.

Ty looked at his hands, marred with calluses and rough spots. "Happy to help, man, but my hands are a little chapped for that."

John found the bottle of massage oil in the nightstand, flipped open the lid and poured a generous amount into Ty's cupped hand. The aroma of sandalwood and musk rose from his palm, the scent mingling with the earthy smells lingering in the darkened room. Ty rubbed the oil into his palms, the overflow dripping onto Lucy's breasts and trickling down her ribs. Carefully he cupped a breast in each palm, massaging gently but avoiding her nipples. When she sighed with pleasure he rolled the sensitive buds between his thumbs and forefingers.

Lucy's eyelids lowered as electric heat cracked through her body. The strength of his hands, the oiled scrape of the calluses, his gentle touch, all combined to send powerful jolts straight to her clit.

"Okay?" Ty murmured. "I don't want to hurt you."

"Better than okay," she replied, her voice low, drugged.

"Good," Ty said. His hands left her breasts, sweeping down her ribs, smoothing the gleaming oil over her abdomen before stroking her inner thighs to the edge of her pussy. He urged her legs farther apart. "Show him that pretty cunt while I make you come."

Drifting in arousal so potent she was incapable of rational thought, Lucy watched Ty's hands glide back up her torso. He lifted her arms until she clasped her hands behind his neck, leaving her exposed, then swept his hands back down to her breasts. She expected him to resume squeezing, caressing. Instead he stroked his flattened palms over her erect nipples. The oiled calluses struck sparks under her skin and she arched into his hands.

"Beautiful," John said. "So hot."

Ty continued to tease her, alternating light strokes of his palms over her nipples with kneading caresses of her breasts, never combining the massaging touches with the pinching she so desperately needed. As if from a distance, she heard light, high-pitched whimpers coming from her throat, but forming words to beg was beyond her.

John leaned forward, pushing her legs wider apart, and kissed her. He oiled up his hands by running them over her abdomen and thighs, then used his thumb and forefinger to open her inner lips and expose her clit.

"More," Lucy said, lifting her hips toward him.

"Tell me what you want, sexy girl."

Ty was giving her enough stimulation to send her rocketing to the moon in a matter of minutes, but limiting John's involvement to directing alone wasn't enough anymore, not with his big, muscled body between her legs, his cock thick and ready for her. She needed a physical connection, something fierce and wild to ground the intense emotions spinning wildly inside her. Her defenses were down. She needed to make it sexual again.

"Feel what he's doing to me," she said, lifting her hips to tempt him.

A muscle jumped in John's jaw as he nodded, then smoothed on a condom. He gripped her spanked ass in his hands and lifted her hips. "Ease up for a second," he said to Ty.

Ty trailed his fingers around and around Lucy's pert, throbbing nipples. Slowly, torturously slowly, John guided his cock into her drenched pussy. The controlled movement had no power behind it, no possibility of increasing Lucy's arousal as he stretched the aching walls of her channel. But the heft and thickness alone sent an intense spasm through her cunt, caressing John's shaft in an undulating movement.

"Fuck, man, she's almost there," John growled.

"Too much?"

"Yeah," John said over Lucy's protesting whimper. "Pull her back a little."

A lighter pinch from Ty's fingers had Lucy gasping and arching against John's hips. Calling on his iron control, he didn't move, instead directed Ty's caresses according to the reactive spasms in her pussy. "Lighter, oh fuck, she's pulsing around

me...lighter...roll them, yeah, like that...squeeze her breasts then pinch...she likes that...nice and slow...good."

"You look so hot spread for him," Ty said, carrying out John's orders with devilish ease. "Legs wide, his cock deep inside you."

She was beyond fantasy, beyond games. Breathless, panting cries echoed in the room. John held himself thick and hard inside her, no strokes, no movement at all except for the rhythmic squeezes of her sensitized walls around his shaft. A swift learner, Ty now knew exactly how to keep her simmering with need.

There was only one way to break this deadlock. She opened her eyes to peer into John's, begging with her gaze and her voice for the release he could give her. "Please. Please, John, *please* make me come!"

John nodded at Ty, and her roughneck stopped teasing. He took her nipples in a firm, slippery pinch and every muscle in Lucy's body went rigid. Something too searing to be pleasure surged along her nerves. John's gaze flickered between Ty's hands on her breasts and her exposed cunt, burning with hours of provocative anticipation.

"Come, Lucy," he said. "Come for me."

At his command release swelled up and knocked her over the edge, sending her slick, hot flesh into convulsions. She blindly grabbed for John's wrists, grinding against him as she twisted and arched, pleasure pounding her, body and soul. Pinned between them, she rode out every last quiver, every last spasm, until she subsided against Ty.

The remnants of her orgasm fluttered like electrified ribbons along her nerves. John bent and put his rough jaw alongside her heated cheek. Ty backed off his caresses just enough for her to stand them but the pressure of John's chest against Ty's hands made her tremble with renewed desire.

A light flick of his tongue the edge of her ear, then John said, "How was that, sexy girl?"

Explosive...mind-blowing...exactly what her body needed, but a fierce longing still surged inside her. "It's not enough," Lucy panted, hardly knowing what she pleaded for. "Not nearly enough."

"Tell me what you need," John said, his voice low, private.

He routinely made her beg. She loved putting her pleasure in the hands of a confident, capable man, especially John, but this felt different. "You know what I need," she said, not sure what she resisted, or why.

"Say it and I'll give it to you."

He wasn't asking her to beg. He was begging her. The vulnerability melted something hard and spiky in her chest. "You, John," she said and felt his breath hitch. "I need you."

The words hung in the sultry, sex-saturated air of the bedroom before John's swift inhale broke the tableau. Behind her Ty stiffened, as if the longing in her voice somehow touched him.

"I'm all yours," John said, his own voice soft and strained.

While John sat back and adjusted his grip on her hips Ty slid his hand behind his body and hers, his knuckles rubbing against her back as he stroked his shaft with his oil-slick hand before returning it to her breast. His instincts were on the money. John's first thrust pushed her hard against Ty. The movement made Ty's cock slide hot and hard in the groove of her spine, sparking a groan from the unyielding blond man behind her.

Her eyes slammed shut as John let go. There was no slow build, no teasing now, just bed-shaking plunges that ground her into Ty, Ty back against the headboard, and the headboard into the wall. The rhythmic thuds underscored the grunts and whimpers forced out with each plunge into her body. The sex was hard, as hedonistic and dirty as her wildest dreams, completely lacking finesse.

A small, wild cry tore from her throat when John adjusted his grip on her sore bottom and tilted her hips so his cock stroked over her G-spot. She tried to lock her legs

around the small of John's back but when she lifted them Ty reached for her thighs and spread her open again.

No finesse at all, just two testosterone-filled men sunk deep in the whirlpool of lust.

She was too slick for friction; John plunged in and out of her body with a gliding ease but the long tease and orgasm made the soft walls of her pussy swell and tighten around his cock. With each thrust, John's shaft slid through the tight clasp of her cunt and from the taut expression on his face, the pressure and heat against his cock were driving him insane.

It was better than friction. It was that primal mix of force and surrender that sent her into oblivion every single time. Face and chest flushed red, his breathing coming in soft grunts, John fucked her with reckless abandon. Ty pinched her nipples and held her ruthlessly for each unrelenting thrust.

She dropped into the abyss, felt everything at once. Ty's body at her back, sweat slicking the contact between their skins, his big hands oiled against her breasts as he worked her nipples in deft synchronicity with John's thrusts. John's hold on her raw, throbbing ass and the powerful strokes of his thick cock right over her G-spot had her gasping and arching again, twisting in their grips.

Both men followed her movements without missing a beat. "Oh, fuck yeah," she heard Ty growl behind her.

In the mirrored wall Lucy saw herself at her most elemental. Her legs were spread, her belly and thighs gleaming with the oil from Ty's hot little massage. John's tanned hands clamped down on her hips, holding her still for him. He sat back on his heels between her legs, held her hips, and fucked her, his cock gliding in and out of her pussy. Sweat dripped from his jaw and streaked down his carved torso.

Defenseless. She looked defenseless, helpless, vulnerable, getting used in the most primitive way possible by two big, powerful men. John would fuck her until she came apart under him and Ty would hold her for him. With that realization, her mind dissolved into nothing more than sheer animal receptivity, sensation and need

entwining together, burning under her skin, feeding on each other until she was nothing but gasping, sweating female with two males working every pleasure receptor she had.

It was every hedonistic fantasy she'd ever had, and some she hadn't let herself acknowledge. In that moment her heart tore free, soaring into the void.

John leaned forward, his tongue flickering along her jaw, into her mouth. "I've got you, Lucy," he said. "I've got you. Let go."

As if his words called down the storm, an enormous boom of thunder sounded over the house and rain lashed the windows. The storm's pent-up energy surged through Lucy, and a tiny wail escaped her lips. Then the orgasm hit her, sharp, consuming pulses of release pounding her, pushing her bodily against both men as concentric rings of pleasure exploded outward from her core. As her cries crested, her fingers digging into a nape, a shoulder, biceps, whatever she could grip, Ty ground up into her back. Hot wetness spurted against her skin and the musky smell of come filled the air. John plunged into her until he set off another orgasm on the heels on the first, then fell to his elbows over Lucy. His guttural groans and the jerk of his cock inside her sent her spiraling into blackness.

When she surfaced she realized in the heat of the moment she'd let go of Ty to grab for John. His upper arm bore dents from her nails and the red marks of her fingers, now limp and trembling against his tanned, sweat-streaked skin.

She'd reached for John, the man who protected her even as he let her fly.

She'd fallen in love with John.

"So hot, sexy girl," John said. After a slow, passionate kiss, he lifted himself up and away, disconnecting their bodies to head for the bathroom. When he returned he tossed a towel to Ty, who gently pushed Lucy upright. John stroked a wet washcloth along her neck, down her abdomen and between her legs, cleaning her thoroughly and carefully. Ty wiped more clumsily at her back, then headed for the bathroom himself.

Lucy curled up on her side on the bed, pillowing her head on her bent arm, the remnants of pleasure trickling through her veins, utterly unable to process what she felt.

Ty stepped into his jeans and yanked his shirt over his sweaty arms.

Startled into awareness she lifted her head. "Wait a minute, Ty. You don't have to leave," she said. "At least get a couple of hours sleep before you drive."

"I'm fine, Lucy," he said, swiftly buttoning his shirt. "I've got to be somewhere early tomorrow."

She just looked at him, not bothering to hide her disbelief. Two tours in Afghanistan, working the rigs and a solitary life in a room in the worst hotel in town did not add up to *fine*.

He met her gaze, then his eyes slid away as he patted his pockets in that unconscious way men have of checking for their wallets, keys, cell phone. "Go to sleep, honey. You look like you're halfway there as it is."

John emerged from the bathroom in a pair of boxer briefs and exchanged nods with Ty. "Later, bro." While Ty's boots thudded down the stairs, he looked at Lucy. "You staying?"

Sometimes she spent the night. Sometimes she didn't. The choice was always hers and if there was ever a night to retreat to the safety of her own apartment, this was it. But the bed seemed to pull her down, down into the depths and her body hummed with a pleasant lassitude, effectively discouraging her from rolling over, let alone getting up, getting dressed and getting out the door. With a snick of the latch the front door closed behind Ty, cocooning her and John in the dark, silent room.

She felt the bed dip as John put one knee on the edge, then felt his fingers tuck her disheveled hair behind her ear. "Luce?"

"Staying," she said, and closed her eyes.

John stretched out on his back beside her. She tucked her head into the curve of his shoulder and let the bed suck her down into the abyss.

* * * * *

The brilliant, sharp sunshine that always followed a summer storm woke her the next morning. Moving carefully so as not to wake John, she lifted herself on one elbow and watched him sleep. His full mouth was slack, lending an endearing softness to his shadowed jaw. His straight, spiky lashes nearly brushed his cheeks. Her own image, reflected in the mirrored wall, wasn't nearly as sweet as John's. Raccoon eyes, swollen lips, completely wrecked braids and stubble burn on her chin, neck and upper chest completed her transformation into a reform school runaway.

She slipped out from under the sheet and tiptoed to the bathroom for an overdue shower. Under the running water she cleansed her face free of all makeup, washed her hair and soaped away the any residue of the decadent night. She towel-dried her hair, slipped into one of John's gray Texas Longhorns athletic department t-shirts and a pair of gray shorts, then quietly closed the bedroom door behind her before going downstairs.

Still moving on autopilot, she tucked a filter into the coffeemaker, then measured grounds and added the water. She stared out the window over the kitchen sink, then remembered the coffeemaker wouldn't actually brew coffee unless she turned it on, flipped the switch and went back to the view of the small, grassy common area planted with palm trees and cedar elms for shade.

One night of shatteringly powerful sex hadn't changed her fundamental nature or alleviated her fears. The spiny protective creature inside her that had melted with John's vulnerability was back, sitting in its usual place between her stomach and her heart, chatting happily with the weighty news of her promotion...news she still hadn't shared with John.

Life is about compromises. You might be able to have the stellar career, or the edgy sex you crave, but you can't have both and the man you've grown to love.

The coffeemaker emitted its final gurgles. Lucy poured herself a cup and opened the sliding glass door to the tiny concrete patio. She settled into one of the two Adirondack chairs, pulled her knees up under her chin, sipped her coffee, and watched the condo association's maintenance man, a stripe of sweat darkening the back of his green shirt, mow the lawn with tidy, precise sweeps of his riding mower.

A kiss landed on the top of her head. "Good morning," John said.

"Morning," she said automatically as she looked up and over her shoulder, the move so reminiscent of her first moments kneeling in front of Ty that she blushed. John had showered but not shaved. Red highlights in his dark brown stubble caught the sun. In one hand he held a cup of coffee and in the other, the newspaper snagged from the front porch. He dropped the paper on the small, round table between the two chairs and settled in next to her. In the softer morning light, with a simple smile on his face, he looked like John. Not the take-charge director of her fantasy life, not the wickedly sexy man who offered her to his friend. Just John.

The morning after. Suddenly, cravenly, she wished Ty had stayed, too. Ty would have distracted John. But she wouldn't have been able to do what she had to do this morning if Ty were there.

Just do it. It's not hard. Just tell him you've been promoted and this was fun, but it's over.

Tension throbbed behind her forehead. She needed water, about a gallon of it. More coffee wouldn't hurt, either. She pressed her middle fingers into her temples to stem the dull ache.

"You okay?" John asked.

She nodded, covering her confusion with another sip of coffee. Birds tweeted and twittered, the gardener began another pass with the mower, the smell of cut grass grew stronger as the heat and humidity built.

Just do it.

Her heart began to pound hard against her breastbone.

"You're not okay."

"No, no, I'm fine," she babbled, snatching up a random section of the paper for something to hide behind.

It took less than a minute for John to end her little charade. "You're not fine, Lucy."

"What makes you think that?" she said through the paper.

"That's the car section. You never read the car section. You hate all conversation about makes, models and engines. You read the money section, then the local news."

Damn all observant men! "Where *is* the money section?" she asked, trying to keep things light.

Instead John whisked Automotive out of her hand, shuffled all the sections together and dropped them beside his chair. "Tell me what's wrong."

"It's time we ended this," she said, purposefully cutting the *I think* from the beginning of the sentence to sound firm and decisive.

One eyebrow quirked, not the reaction she expected. He set his coffee mug on the table and interlaced his hands behind his head. "Trying to get the drop on me?"

Was that amusement tugging at the corners of his lips, hidden behind a day's worth of bristle? She opened her mouth, closed it, opened it again. "Excuse me?"

"You think I'm going to dump you when you get too kinky. Or when you get promoted to partner. So you've been trying to push me away. Get the drop on me," he added patiently.

"I know what it means," she snapped. "And I'm not...that's not why..."

"Yes it is."

He was using his NCO voice, the flat one, the one that demanded in no uncertain terms that she listen up or there'd be hell to pay. She closed her mouth and stared at him.

"You push away things you want but don't think you deserve. Like that amber necklace you looked at last month after you signed the Morgenstern papers. I watched your eyes light up when we saw it in the window, then listened to you talk about why it was too clunky to wear with a jacket and the color wasn't right for you and it was too expensive. But you went back to look at it six times in three weeks. You're doing the same with me, telling me your fantasies like they make you so nasty I won't want you."

The heavy, spiked mass of fear and dread sitting in her chest exploded into red-hot shards of furious words. They rushed up jostling for space at the back of her throat but she was so dumbfounded she couldn't coordinate breathing and talking. She took a deep breath, sputtered, "You have *no* idea...that's not...I can't believe..." but then she had to breathe in again.

John let the quirky, patient grin bloom on his mouth.

She exhaled long and slow and found the fear, the anger, the hesitation, the uncertainty but most of all, the fear left her with the released breath. "You do pay attention, don't you?" she said.

"Kept my squad alive for two years," he said easily. "Hard habit to break. Let's try again. What's wrong?"

"I'm falling in love with you." The words were easier to say than she'd expected.

His calm blue gaze never strayed from her face. "And that's a problem...why?"

"Because of last night. And I got the promotion. In my experience, which we must admit is vast, men can handle either my career drive or they can handle my sexual drive. They can't handle both. Sometimes they can't handle either. So they leave."

"Pussies," John said. The scornful remark started a laugh from her. He continued in a more serious tone. "Lucy, I'm in love with you. I have been since that first night at the bar. To me, all the edgy, exploratory sex is just icing on the very delicious cake of a smart, sassy, driven, successful woman. If you stop pushing me away we can get down to the business of making a life together."

It couldn't possibly be as simple as finding the right guy...could it? "So you don't care that I got the promotion?"

He reached across the table between their chairs and took her hand. "Of course I care that you got the promotion," he said with a squeeze. "I'm proud of you. Happy for you. You'll make senior partner three years from now and I'll be happy for you then. Like I said, if that's what you want, then I want it for you." He looked at her, eyebrows raised. "That's it? That's all you've got?"

"That's it," she said, half amused, half bewildered.

"Damn. I was hoping for more fantasies," he said, lifting the back of her hand to his mouth for a kiss.

She laughed as his bristle and lips worked their magic on the back of her hand. "How do you feel about handcuffs?" she asked.

"Love them," he said. He flicked his tongue against the sensitive skin between her knuckles.

"Great. I've got a nice Velcro pair that will hold you if you don't pull too hard," she said sweetly.

The expression on his face was worth the effort. He recovered almost immediately. "Fair enough, as long as I get a turn," he said.

Something else still bothered her. "Seven times."

"You want to cuff me seven times?"

"Tempting..." She relented. "I went to the jewelry store seven times. The last time was Friday after I got the promotion, but the necklace was gone. I earned that promotion. I wooed clients, worked Sundays and holidays, volunteered for projects no one else would touch. I wanted that necklace to celebrate, but I let it get away."

"Lesson learned, sexy girl," he said as he got to his feet. "How about some more coffee instead?"

"Yes, please," she said.

When he returned he set her coffee mug on the table and held out a square, flat jeweler's box to her.

"Congratulations," he said. "I was going to give this to you at dinner, but I don't want to make you wait."

She looked up at him, not believing what she was seeing. When she reached for the box he took her hand and tugged her into his lap as he sat down. With the heat of his bare torso and hard thighs seeping through her t-shirt and shorts, she opened the box. The necklace, chunks of polished amber ranging in size from a grape at the center to small beads near the clasp, rested on a bed of dark gray silk. It was the most beautiful necklace she'd ever seen and she knew what it cost—a small fortune. It was hers.

Just like John.

"I...I don't know what to say. Thank you," she said.

"You're welcome," he said softly. "It was my pleasure."

"But you didn't know I got the promotion until just now," she said, confused.

"I knew you would someday," he said. "When that day came, I'd be ready."

"You always have a plan, don't you?" she whispered, then added, "*Thank you*," again and kissed him.

He stroked her cheekbone with his thumb then kissed her back, soft and sweet. "I've got big plans for you, Malone."

The kisses quickly deepened. His shaft thickened and lengthened under her hip as she shifted to loop her arms around his neck. Before long he broke the kiss and murmured, "Come upstairs with me."

"Yes," she whispered back.

He went easy on her this morning, stripping off her shirt and shorts, laying her gently back on the bed, stroking her from ribs to thigh in possessive, thorough caresses before settling between her legs. His mouth was soft and wet against her tender skin, a marked contrast to the always-delicious roughness of his stubble. He lapped at her

nipples until they pouted and begged for more, then flicked his tongue over them until she laced her fingers behind his head and arched into his mouth. Shifting his weight to the side, he slid his fingers into her wet folds, circling her clit with a light touch that grew firmer, more purposeful as her thighs began to tremble. His mouth open against hers, he kissed her in time to his stroking fingers, absorbing her soft, wild cries as she soared over the edge into bliss.

She'd barely come back to reality when he slid inside her, sending her quivering nerves back to a state of high alert. Each measured, resolute thrust strengthened the relentlessly building ecstasy, but what made her tremble and gasp wasn't just his body, hard against hers, merged with hers. It was the emotion in his eyes, mirroring what she felt back to her.

In the bright light of day she made love with John, looking not at their bodies reflected in her peripheral vision but into the eyes of the man she loved. No games, no third parties, no sexy lingerie or accessories, just skin on skin, her legs entwined with his, her arms curved around his shoulders, their bellies clapping as they surged together.

The end tore her apart more potently than any fulfilled fantasy. She clung to him, her face buried in his neck as pleasure swamped her, and held him tight as he came, shuddering in her arms.

They'd recovered enough for John to lift his head from her shoulder when Ty's voice came from downstairs. "Hey, man, you awake?"

They both looked at the open bedroom door. "Oh my God," Lucy gasped. "He said he had somewhere to be this morning. He meant *here*?"

Reenergized, John lifted himself off her and headed for the bathroom. "Give me a minute," he called down the stairs, then swung the bedroom door closed. "Meant to tell you last night, but things got a little busy. I've got a surveillance operation I need help with. Ty's got a month off and knows the drill. It's a good fit." He turned on the water in the shower. "Go tell him I'll be down in five."

Very domestic of him, sending her down to chat with his business associate before they left together. Wifely, in fact. His plan sounded very long term.

"Morning. John said to tell you he'll be down in five minutes," she said to Ty when she padded into the kitchen. He held his own cup of coffee and looked like he hadn't slept at all. Lucy went out on the patio to retrieve their abandoned cups and refilled hers, then busied herself with loading the dishwasher.

"Lucy," Ty said.

"Yes?" she said innocently.

"Last night's like Vegas. What happened there stays there."

He said it with such finality she wondered what had taught him to compartmentalize emotions and experiences so effectively. And to avoid true intimacy. Last night he'd set a land speed record getting out the door.

"I appreciate that. Why didn't you stay?" She looked at the clock. "You've been gone all of six hours. Why not crash on the sofa?"

Ty stared at her, his face completely blank, long enough to make her a little uncomfortable. "I don't sleep much. It's easier to be alone."

"No girlfriend?" she asked.

"Not really in the cards with my lifestyle," he said.

"Hmmm..." she said noncommittally, eyeing him over the rim of the mug. He hadn't bothered to shave, although his hair was damp from the shower, combed back from his face in wet furrows. Today he wore a black t-shirt, jeans and boots. He was all man, self-assured enough to let a woman explore her own desires and take direction from his buddy. Any woman in her right mind would wait for that potent package of confident masculinity.

If he'd let her in.

She'd seen him watching her with John last night, and thought his glittering, sharp-eyed focus was on the way their bodies came together, the meld of their mouths, his

hands gliding over her skin, teasing her past arousal and into insanity. He'd watched John navigate her through the complex tangles of her own desires, guiding her, honoring her. Loving her, in all the different ways of the word. Then the puzzle pieces clicked into place.

Ty didn't long for meaningless sex or a casual relationship.

He longed for what she and John shared. He longed for love.

She walked over to him and cupped his jaw with her hand, then kissed his cheek. "I hope life deals you a different hand, sweetie," she said.

As she stepped back he caught her hand and pressed a kiss into her palm. The rasp of his dark gold stubble against her skin sent a faint, almost wistful tremor through her. "Not likely," he said, then let her go.

John came down the stairs dressed much like Ty in jeans, t-shirt and boots with wraparound shades covering his brilliant blue eyes, keys in hand. "Later," he said, giving her a quick kiss and squeeze on the ass. "Be here when I get back?"

"I will," she said. Hoping everything she felt shone through in her eyes, she followed them to the door to close and lock it behind them. She gathered up her coffee cup and went to sit in the sun.

About the Author

After trying a range of career opportunities, including software developer, compensation analyst and her favorite, graduate student, Raine Latimer settled down to write what she loves—heroes who are gentlemen in the parlor and alpha males in the bedroom. Heroes like that deserve strong, complicated heroines who can hold their own, and to everyone's satisfaction, that's exactly what they get. Raine lives in the Midwest with her family. Please visit her website for more information.

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

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