

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

DESIREE HOLT  
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KIDNAPPING  
THE

*Groom*

ELLORA'S CAVE *Quickies*®

## **Kidnapping the Groom**

*Desiree Holt & Allie Standifer*

Cameron Greeley had spent a lot of years trying to put the memory of Gabe Holder behind her. But now he's getting married to the wrong person and, despite the way they'd parted, she can't let that happen.

Kidnapping Gabe and taking him to an isolated cabin, she treats him to hours of the hottest sex either of them could imagine. In one all-too-short evening they indulge in every erotic act she can think of—and then she dumps him back at his house, the memory of those hours eating at her. Will he let her go, or will he come after her, taking her into his bed and into his heart?

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Kidnapping the Groom

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# ***KIDNAPPING THE GROOM***

**Desiree Holt & Allie Standifer**

### *Dedication*

To Bob P, who will never read this because it has nothing to do with planes or racing, but is still the best pseudo second father and friend a girl could have. Thanks for always showing up when I call, screaming, “But it’s hissing at me!” A magician with cars, water heaters, putting up living room walls and everything else you do for a girl not allowed within fifteen feet of electrical hardware. Thanks for always answering the phone even when you know it’s me on the other end.

—Allie

As always, to my beloved David. Your spirit will always be with me.

—Desiree

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Barbie: Mattel, Inc.

## **Chapter One**

Cameron Greeley blew a wayward red curl out of her eye and wondered how bad prison really was. Surely she could find some nice woman to protect her. Couldn't she? Because what she was contemplating could land her plenty of time behind bars if things didn't go her way.

"Stop worrying."

Cam ignored her companion and her words. Did they still make prisoners wear those ugly orange jumpsuits? The color would clash with her dark auburn hair.

"It's all going to work out, Cam," her best friend and conspirator whispered as they hid in their unsuspecting victim's laundry room.

"This is all your fault," Cameron whispered back in a voice strung tight with nerves. "I'm going to spend the rest of my life in prison wearing an awful jumpsuit the color of a clown's wig. And desperately trying to please a woman named Sue so she won't share me with the other inmates."

Thea Brandon's brown eyes gazed back at her with astonishment. "You have put way too much thought into that, hon. Gabe Holder is not going to have you arrested. You're not going to prison much less sharing a cell or your...um...goodies with a woman named Sue." Dark brown curls bobbed as Thea shook her head. "Sheesh, where do you come up with this crap? You're an attorney, for heaven's sake. You should be more realistic."

Cam shifted her weight, wondering if their victim would ever show up. His housekeeper, Jimmie, had assured both women Gabe wouldn't be out later than midnight. That's when he generally returned from his monthly poker game.

"It's because I studied the law that I know exactly what's going to happen to us," Cam hissed. "It will be all over the papers. My neighbors will say how I seemed like

such a nice young woman. Mrs. Gilcrest will tell the reporters she always knew I was up to something fishy because I hired a lawn service instead of cutting my own grass. And more crap like that.”

How had she gotten to this place in her life? One glance at her best friend reminded her.

Two weeks ago Thea had called with the news that set off a chain of events.

“Gabe Holder is getting married,” Thea announced. “Or at least half the town thinks he is.”

Cam’s hand tightened on the receiver. Gabe? Married? Who the hell to? And why did she care? “Wha...”

“Did you hear me, Cam? I said the word’s all over town that Gabe’s getting married.”

A red curl drooped over her eye. Cam brushed it away with impatient hands. “Yeah, I heard you, Thea. Umm, I guess congratulations are in order.” Her voice held steady even as her stomach clenched.

“Hell no, we aren’t congratulating the news. That money-desperate, backseat porn queen Tina the Tart Tartinson is the one who’s making the big announcement. She’s been divorced twice already and she’s got her fake fingernails so deep into Gabe the poor man doesn’t know his head from his ass,” Thea complained. “She’s going all over town bragging about how she’s about to bag Gabe, like he’s some big game cat.”

Tina? Tina the Tart? What the hell was Gabe thinking? Tina had more silicon in her than a computer.

“Umm.” Shit. What should she say? What the hell was she supposed to do about it? She and Gabe were over, had been for fifteen years. Ever since Gabe had broken her heart when he left Heron Bay to see the world. Why did she even care about him now or worry that he was marrying the town tramp?

"That's the best you can do? The love of your life is marrying a two-bit street whore and you just sit there and mumble?" Thea's voice screeched across the line, jolting Cam back to awareness.

"Crap, Thea, what do you want me to say? Gabe and I haven't seen each other since he left Heron Bay. I seriously doubt he'll want my opinion on his upcoming marriage. And why do I even care?" she retorted before getting up to pace the wide space of her office.

But apparently that was just a rhetorical question. Every bit of feeling she'd buried for Gabe Holder all these fifteen years apparently had just been waiting for a situation like this. Now it surged upward and grasped her in its clutch. Her shattered heart banged in her ribs and her nipples tightened, her pussy dampened with the memory of that one long-ago night.

"I really don't want to have this conversation," she said. "I have a life here and it doesn't include some egotistical asshole who dumped me for his own ambitions."

"Gabe never got over you," Thea pointed out.

"And you know this how?"

"He looked for you all over town when he first came home. Interrogated everyone. Too bad for him your folks had already moved to Arizona. Jimmie finally told him you were living in Houston and working at some high-priced law firm."

"He could have called me if he wanted to see me that badly."

*Yes, Gabe. Why didn't you call?*

Thea paused. "He was hurt pretty bad covering that uprising in Africa, in case you didn't know. When he came back here and took over the paper he was a real mess. That's when he let Tina latch on to him, like some money-sucking leech. I just know Gabe's going to get worn out and buckle under the strain of that woman." Another pause. "Do you want to be responsible for the entire town of Heron Bay's loss of sanity if he marries that woman?"



"What do you want me to do, Thea?" Cam couldn't keep the exasperation out of her voice, even as her body clenched remembering the one night she and Gabe had spent together and her head started to pound under the pressure. "Drive into town and kidnap him until he sees reason?"

"Hey, you know? That's a great idea, Cam." Thea's voice perked up. "I knew we could count on you."

"We" had turned out to be half the population of Heron Bay, Texas, her hometown, plus Jimmie Smith, the Holders' longtime housekeeper whom Gabe had inherited when his folks retired to New Mexico not long after his return. Banding together, they had all but forced Thea to call her. Thea had even driven to Houston and bullied her into this. What an idiot she was.

But then she'd realized what an opportunity this was. A chance to show Gabe what he'd missed all these years, and then she could walk away from him.

So now here she was, crouched in Gabe's laundry room about to take the first step to jail.

"He's here," Jimmie hissed through the crack. "And he's alone. I told you he wouldn't dare bring that dime-store hussy into my home."

Cam swallowed down her nausea and nerves. It was now or never.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Jimmie, I'm home," Gabe called out as he locked the heavy front door. "I made three grown men cry and Earl Watkins owes me his best fishing rod."

All in all a good night at the poker table, he thought, with the exception of his friends' nagging complaints. Hell, he knew Tina wanted him for his money and fame. He didn't need them to tell him. Despite rampant speculation among the town's citizens, Gabe did have a brain in his head. He knew exactly what Tina wanted from

him. Ten years ago he wouldn't have given her the time of day, but times changed and so had he.

At thirty-six years old Gabe Holder felt like an old man. The blast from the rebel army's bomb had torn his knee into so much hamburger and ended his globetrotting career. Now all he wanted were the very things he'd run like hell from fifteen years ago. A home, family and community ties complete with kids and a shaggy mutt from the pound.

"It's not like I've asked her to marry me," he complained out loud while heading to the kitchen for whatever Jimmie might have left out to eat.

"You didn't have to ask her," a harsh smoker's voice answered him. "She's done gone and told anybody who will listen that she's got you wrapped around her bony little finger."

Gabe felt the first smile of the evening crossing his lips as he spied Jimmie cutting a large slice of homemade pecan pie and setting it on a bright blue plate. With two long strides he crossed the large kitchen floor and wrapped his tanned arms around his housekeeper's ample waist. "If only you'd dump that no-good husband of yours and run away to Bimini with me I wouldn't be in this position."

Jimmie slapped him away before setting his pie and a large steaming cup of coffee on the big oak dining table. "My Marty wouldn't know how to put his drawers on without me there much less make it into work every day."

Gabe laughed. "So how come he's not waiting up for you tonight?" Jimmie and Marty lived in the small guesthouse Gabe's parents had built for them years ago to give everyone some privacy. At the time something like that was unheard of in Heron Bay but after all this time people had just gotten used to it.

"That don't happen to be any of your business. Now quit your fooling around and eat before the food gets cold. But don't forget to wash your hands first. I know you boys play that devil's game in the back of old Coot's store. A dirtier place I never did see."

Gabe, having grown up with Jimmie, followed her instructions just as he did when he'd been a boy of ten. "Yes ma'am."

Hands washed and dried, Gabe sat at the table and ate his pie while watching Jimmie busy herself around the room. "Am I allowed to ask why I'm getting special treatment on poker night? Usually you nag and complain that I'm going to hell and leave me a wimpy salad for dinner."

"I felt like it, is all. If you don't want the pie nobody here is going to make you eat it." Dark brown hands the color of rich soil fisted at her hips and Gabe flushed.

"Don't take the pie, Jimmie." To ensure the dessert stayed with him, Gabe pulled the plate protectively closer to his chest. "I won't say another word."

"See that you don't. Now drink that coffee so I can get things cleaned and go home. Marty will be asleep in his recliner and complain for the next week about his stiff neck."

Gabe quickly polished off the pie and enjoyed the last swallow of coffee before standing to carry his dishes to the sink.

Except his legs weren't following his mind's directions. He flopped back into the straight-backed chair with a thud. "Jimmie," his voice came out thick and slow, "something's not right."

The world spun in crazy colors when he blinked repeatedly trying to get the merry-go-round to stop whirling. His lips tingled, his eyelids felt like they were carrying boulders and all his energy drained straight out through his useless feet.

Jimmie's loving dark face swam into his blurred vision. "No, honey, everything is all right. At least now it is. I'm sorry for tricking you this way, but I can't take a chance of my baby boy marrying that two-bit rattlesnake trash. But don't you worry none. I've found the perfect way to fix everything."

As his eyes drifted shut for the last time Gabe could have sworn he saw Cam Greeley's red head pop out of his laundry room and his heart gave a stupid jerk of sheer joy. Then the blackness took him under and he knew nothing more.

## **Chapter Two**

Gabe surfaced from the darkness slowly, pushing his eyelids open with a great effort. He felt as if he'd fallen into a pool of black velvet that was just now releasing him. When he could focus he looked around at his surroundings. He was in someone's cabin, the old-fashioned log type, the wood inside polished to a high sheen and reflecting the light from two table lamps. He noticed bookcases bracketing a fireplace against one wall and a kitchenette on the other. Soft music drifted into the room from someplace. A couch and chair were drawn up in front of the fireplace, and he was lying on...a bed?

He started to rise but found he couldn't move his hands. When he shifted his gaze to see what the trouble was, he discovered he was tied to the bedposts. He tugged, but nothing gave or came loose. Glancing down at the rest of his body, he was shocked to discover he was stark naked.

What the hell?

He looked wildly around for another person but the room was empty except for him. He yanked on the ropes around his wrists again and tried to remember how he'd gotten there. And in this condition. Was this another one of Tina's little games?

Tina! Shit!

The name left a bad taste in his mouth. How had he been so stupid as to let her think she was hogtying him? Jimmie had tried to warn him — make that scold him — that Tina was running around town and had them all but standing up in front of a preacher. But when he'd limped home to Heron Bay and found Cam had definitely moved on with her own life, the uncomplicated but entertaining sex Tina offered had given him a place to hide.

God! In his right mind he'd never given her the time of day. Maybe that was his excuse now. He wasn't in his right mind.

He had a funny cotton taste in his mouth and his limbs felt weak. Not good if he wanted to get out of here. And exactly where was here anyway?

While he was scanning the room again, the door in the wall next to the kitchenette opened and the vision from every one of his wet dreams walked into the room. Cameron Greeley, with her riot of red-gold curls, her bright green eyes and her mouthwatering body. Which he could see every inch of since she was dressed in nothing but a pair of killer high heels. Fuck-me heels.

Her breasts were still high and firm, her tummy still slightly rounded, her hips lusciously curved and her thighs...well, he could still remember his head pillowed between them as he lapped at her sweet-tasting cunt. Ah yes, her cunt. Protected from view by the nest of soft red curls he'd never forgotten. Was it still as hot and tight as he remembered? Had there been many lovers in her life since the one night they'd shared?

He didn't want to think about that. Actually, he was sure he wasn't doing much thinking at all as his eyes drank in every inch of her and his cock, always with a mind of its own, was doing its best to stand at attention.

"Well." She grinned at him. "I see you're finally awake." She looked at his groin. "In fact, I see all of you is awake."

"Hi, Cam." He tried to swallow as she walked slowly toward him, breasts swaying slightly. "Long time, no see."

"Is that all you have to say, hot shot?"

She was standing less than six inches from the bed now, her pussy nearly at eye level. For a long minute he could barely say anything. Cameron Greeley. Suddenly he was assailed by a combination of regrets and lust. Why had he thought it was so smart to walk away from her?

"I don't suppose you want to tell me where the hell I am? And what I'm doing here?"

She smiled, the smile of a temptress, and his balls tingled. "Rumor has it you're getting married."

His eyes widened. "And after fifteen years you come back to Heron Bay, shanghai me and strip me naked just to congratulate me? Wouldn't a card do better? I didn't think you'd ever want to talk to me again."

For a brief moment the smile disappeared from her face and he saw the naked hurt in her eyes. Then it was gone. But it had been there long enough to make him feel like eighteen kinds of shit. He'd been a jackass, taking something precious she'd offered him, then telling her the world was bigger than Heron Bay and he was off to conquer it.

*Could I have been a bigger asshole?*

But the smile was back in place and as her eyes took in every naked inch of him he saw heat blaze in her eyes.

"Anyway, who am I getting married to? How come I don't know about it?"

"We'll get to that." Her eyes took in every inch of him. "I see you haven't lost any of your...assets," she teased.

"Could I have that in writing?" he joked. He still had no idea what was happening here but he figured if he could keep her smiling he had a good chance of getting out of here with his skin intact, as well as other of his more favorite body parts.

"So what's with the getting married thing?" she asked, hitching her naked self onto the edge of the bed.

"I could probably discuss it better if I wasn't hung up in these things." He yanked on the cuffs.

She shook her head. "Not gonna happen. I have big plans for you."

"Plans?" He quirked an eyebrow. "After all this time you have plans?"

"I figured before you tied on that tramp's ball and chain I'd give you a real good taste of what you'd be missing."

Now his cock hardened and swelled even more, standing nearly erect in a desperate bid for this woman's attention. His balls had developed a steady ache and his mouth, previously dry from whatever she'd knocked him out with, was watering as he thought of what she might have in mind. For the life of him he couldn't remember why he'd thought leaving Cameron Greeley had ever been a good idea. The young girl who had made such delicious love with him had matured into a hot, tempting woman. Definitely way up the food chain from Tina the Tart, another big mistake. That was who she was talking about?

Shit! He'd better kill that idea in a hot minute.

But then he thought, maybe not, if that's what it had taken to bring Cam back into his life.

"So what exactly do you have in mind?" He tried to keep from leering at her.

Cam leaned over him and placed her bee-stung lips, beautiful in their hot red lipstick, on the head of his cock and slid them down his full length until she reached the root. Her equally red fingernails trailed lightly over his thighs. Gabe's hips rose from the bed and his hands curled into fists.

Jesus!

Heat shot straight through his groin to every other part of his body.

She slid her mouth back up to the head very slowly, then licked it with her small tongue. Gabe shivered as she swirled her tongue around the now engorged head and ran the tip of her tongue through the slit.

"You're killing me." His voice was hoarse with the need clawing up inside him.

Cam raised her head and licked her lips, sending another bolt of electricity through him.

"Killing you is definitely not what I have in mind. In fact, why don't I get started so you can see what you've been missing all these years."

She straddled his thighs, her wet pussy rubbing against his skin. Wrapping the fingers of one hand around his cock and cupping his balls with the other, she bent forward and took his cock all the way in her mouth again. Gabe closed his eyes and gave himself up to the sensual pleasure flooding his body.

Cam raised her eyes to Gabe's as she slid her mouth up and down his cock, one hand cupping his balls and caressing the soft skin with its covering of fine hair. She'd only had the taste of him that one night but it had lingered in her memory all these years. She reveled in the feel of the velvet skin covering his rock-hard shaft and the way the head slid against the roof of her mouth as she took him deeper inside her.

Moving her head upward until only the tip of his cock rested between her lips, she swirled her tongue around and over the head. More salty-sweet liquid had seeped from the slit and she lapped at it very slowly. Every time she dragged the surface of her tongue across that sensitive skin Gabe twitched, his cock pulsing and his balls tightening in the palm of her hand.

"You're killing me here," he rasped, balling his hands into fists again. "Let me touch you, Cam. I need to touch you."

"Not yet." She made her voice as sultry as possible. Which, considering how aroused she was at the moment, didn't take a lot of effort.

For months after their breakup she'd fantasized about sex with Gabe. All kinds of sex. Every kind of sex. She had long ago accepted the fact that it would never happen. Now that it had, she planned to draw out each and every minute of it, to torment him as much as her erotic dreams had tortured her.

Tightening her fingers around his cock, she moved them in an up-and-down motion, squeezing his balls at the same time before sliding her mouth down to the root again. Her head dipped forward and the silky fall of her hair brushed against the bare skin of his thighs. A hissing sound escaped his lips.

"More," he begged. "Jesus, Cam, your mouth is fucking magnificent. That's it, honey, let me feel that sweet tongue of yours. Suck me, Cam. Suck me hard."



He tried to urge her on with a slight lift of his hips but she was determined to keep the steady pace she'd set. She didn't want this to be over any time soon.

Peeking through the cascade of her hair, she took a moment to admire his well-honed body, the broad shoulders, the fine golden hair that dusted his muscular chest, his flat abdomen and legs as hard as tree trunks. The boy had definitely matured into a man. She avoided looking at the scars on his knee, which by now had faded into thin white lines. She was more interested in other parts of his body.

Inside her mouth Gabe's cock flexed again and the rhythm of his breathing increased. She increased her tempo, sliding her lips up and down and relaxing her throat to take him as deep as possible. As she increased the pace she continued to squeeze his balls gently and rhythmically. His breathing became more erratic and his hips continued to thrust upward. He was fucking her mouth and Cam felt an answering arousal as liquid seeped from her pussy. She wanted to clamp her thighs around one heavily muscled thigh and ride it to oblivion but that could come much later.

She increased her tempo, felt his cock swell in her mouth as his balls tightened. Suddenly his entire body went taut, his hips arching up to her mouth, and a low growl burst from his mouth.

"Cam!" he shouted her name as he spurted into her mouth again and again. Heavy streams of cum filling her mouth almost faster than she could gulp it down.

She swallowed the thick, salty liquid, squeezing his cock to wring every drop from him, cupping and massaging his balls as he pumped into her mouth again and again. When the last tremor had died away and his body relaxed, she slowly released her hold on him, licking a few stray drops of cum from her lips. Raising her gaze to his, she smiled at him.

Gabe didn't return her smile, instead fixing her with a hot gaze.

"All right, Cameron. Now that you have that out of the way, why don't you tell me what this is all about?"

Instead of answering him Cam slid off the bed as if nothing had happened. Once again he pulled uselessly on his restraints, silently cursing whoever had tied him up. That person had some serious skill with knots.

"Cameron, damn it, don't run away from me." He growled deep in his throat, hungrily taking in everything about her. All the details he thought he'd forgotten after all these years came rushing back into his head. Her rosy-tipped breasts. Slender column of neck. The star-shaped cluster of moles high on her right thigh. His mouth watered just thinking of tracing the delicate skin with his tongue.

Before his mind and libido could wander any further the object of his obsession cleared her throat. Gabe jerked his gaze from the tempting shadows between her thighs. "Umm...what?" Oh great, man. He mentally smacked the side of his own head. Way to keep her interested.

"I said, I see nothing kills that over-the-top sex drive of yours." She slid a green silk robe over her lush curves.

"Tell that to the bomb that almost killed me." He regretted the words almost before they left his lips. The last thing he wanted to do at this moment was discuss his unremarkable sex life, the aftermath of the explosion that had nearly cost him both his leg and his life. Or at least his libido had been playing dead until Cam showed up. Besides, whatever he might want from her, it sure wasn't pity.

But instead of giving him weepy eyes and a foot rub, Cameron slapped his thigh. "Get over yourself, Holder."

He blinked up at her in surprise. "I almost get killed and you tell me to get over it?"

Where was the sympathy? Where was the innate urge to coddle that women were supposed to have? And where the hell were his clothes? Being naked with an aroused Cam was one thing. Being naked with an angry Cameron Greeley came too close to stepping on a land mine.

"I see you have a new bedside manner," he commented, looking around the room in the futile hope of finding some logic or reason behind his confinement. "While some people may find this whole scene charming and romantic, I'm not one of them."

"No?" One auburn brow rose. "I suppose if I were twenty pounds thinner, shot full of silicon and lifting your wallet—like Tina the Tart—you'd find me both charming and romantic?"

Gabe rolled his eyes and scooted back until he rested comfortably against the slate wood headboard. "That's totally unworthy of you, Cam. I know Tina's had some work done, but—"

"Some?" Cam whirled from the window, her green robe swirling around her thighs like a mini tornado. "The woman has more plastic in her than a Barbie doll."

"Fine. I'll take your word for it since you're obviously such an expert."

"Take my word..." Those all-seeing green eyes narrowed on his hopefully blank face, then widened in amazement. "You never fucked her. I don't believe it, but I'll bet my next paycheck you've never even seen her naked."

Indignation rose up in him. "I have too seen her naked," he protested hotly. "Plenty of times."

Mostly when Tina showed up in his bed without an invitation or tried to tease him into a naked moonlight swim in his pool. He knew she was sexy by most male standards, but somehow she hadn't really done it for him. She was a convenience, which didn't say much for his willingness to use her. And he certainly hadn't been inclined to indulge in the kind of sex he really liked. Not with her.

"I wanted to feed her, not fuck her," he finally admitted both to Cam and himself. "The woman needs food."

He watched Cam's mouth open and shut several times but no words came pouring out. In a huff of defeat she sank back onto the bed and rubbed her forehead.

"That's not the story she's telling all over town. She might as well have taken out an ad in your paper." She studied him thoughtfully. "I don't know. Is it possible to have a wedding without the groom?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

She shook her head. "I cannot believe you are so thick. Tina Tartinson has told every single person in this town that you and she are all but married. She's even been seen trying on wedding gowns."

"What the hell!" He tried to jerk upright but the ropes restrained him. "That's a fucking lie."

Obviously he needed to stop feeling sorry for himself and pay more attention to what was happening around him.

"This has got to be the weirdest conversation of my life," she complained without looking at him.

Gabe made a show of pulling at his bonds before remarking, "Ya think?"

A small smile curved her lips at his words. "Oh Gabe, what have we gotten ourselves into?"

"I for one haven't got a clue. I'm just the guy lying naked on the bed here. But I'd better warn you, Jimmie will be on a warpath when she finds out I'm gone."

Cam rolled her big green eyes and tugged idly on the silky belt hanging from the sides of her robe. "How do you think you got here? I sure as hell couldn't carry your heavy ass. And there's no way I'd have known what herbs to use to knock you out."

It took a few moments for her words to sink in. Cam and Jimmie in cahoots? His two favorite women in the world working together...against him? Wait. If Cam was one of his favorite women, how had he walked away from her? Was he suffering from terminal stupidity? It was the only thing that explained his life up to this point.

"You've turned the last good woman on the planet against me? How could you? I was this close," he held two fingers less than an inch apart, "to talking her into Bimini and a bikini."

Cam burst out laughing. "Gabe, you haven't got the sense god gave a goldfish. Jimmie hates Tina with all the passion a god-fearing Southern Baptist is allowed. She wants Tina the Tart out of your life and hers. I think Jimmie would have agreed to sell you to purple aliens in order to get you away from that woman."

"Now that just doesn't seem right. Purple aliens? They'd only want to use me for sex. I'd feel cheap and degraded." He blinked up at her with what he hoped were innocent eyes. "Hold me, Cam. I need to feel love for something other than my perfect body."

A low snort of laughter greeted his somewhat heartfelt plea. "Trust me, Gabe, the aliens would return you within an hour and demand a refund. You're way too high maintenance for them."

"But not for you?" He managed to stretch his arm out enough to catch her wrist, wrapping his fingers around it. "Why else would you and Jimmie come up with this cockamamie plan? Not to mention the very outstanding way you greeted me."

Cam tugged on her wrist, but Gabe had no intention of letting her go. Not now, not when he finally had her back in his life and bed where he'd always known she belonged. Even if he'd nearly had to get killed to realize it. "What's this really all about, Cam?"

She tried to turn away from him. "You can't blame a girl for living out a fantasy or two, Gabe. After all, we only had that one time together. Haven't you had regrets over the years that was the end of it? Ever? Now here you are all tied up and looking better than Jimmie's Christmas spread and just as yummy. And if it keeps you out of Tina the Tart's clutches at the same time, shows you what you're missing, so much the better."

Finally he asked the question that had been burning in the back of his mind since he woke. "Why are you here? Why involve you? Jimmie could have found someone else to pay the part of vixen."

"I don't think she wanted to ask someone else. And she knew just reading you the riot act wouldn't do any good."

"And no one else would care for me the way you do?" he asked softly.

"I just didn't want to see you miserable for the rest of your life. Not if I could help stop it." Her hand brushed lightly over his body.

He sucked in a sharp breath as Cam's free hand traveled down between his thighs to massage his semi-hard erection. "Cam, we should talk. I mean really talk. Untie me and we can sit down and discuss everything we never did all those years ago. And what a stupid ass I was."

His cock screamed that he was an idiot for wanting to stop the delicious friction of her soft palm against his heated flesh. They would have plenty of sex later, lots and lots of fucking after they talked, he silently promised his hardening flesh. But now wasn't the time. After fifteen years Cam still cared what happened to him. He could see that. Sense it. That had to mean something, didn't it? Something more than living out a few fantasies left over from their one hot and heavy night. Otherwise she wouldn't be here at all.

"You must think I'm a fool, Gabe Holder." Her tone was deliberately light. "I've got the chance of a lifetime here and there's nothing you can say or do that would make me give it up. I intend to ride you like a bucking bronco until you plead for mercy. Or maybe I'll let you fuck me with your tongue. If I remember right, it's pretty educated. Because I have to tell you." Cam lowered her voice as her head dipped to his ear. "I absolutely loved sucking your cock. It makes my mouth water just thinking about it. How hot and hard you were, the salty-sweet flavor of you pouring down my throat. Mmmm, Gabe, just think. I can do that all over again, but this time sitting on your face."

Gabe thought he might be having a heart attack. With each softly spoken erotic word out of Cameron's mouth his heart pounded harder and louder. He wanted to do everything she said. He yearned to spread her silky thighs over his face until he drowned in the taste and feel of her. To feel her body's warm honey drip thickly on his tongue...

"Cam, let me up. I'll do everything you want and more," he promised, as his hips lifted and fell to the movements of her hand.

"Not yet, mister." She rested her palm on his erection. "I'm still in charge here."

When her hand left his aching cock to roam down his right leg, his body froze. "Cam, do me a favor and cover the leg."

One auburn brow cocked as she turned to look at him. "Now why on earth would I want to do a stupid thing like that?" Then she deliberately brushed her fingers lightly against his puckered and scarred flesh.

He mentally winced at the whiny excuses going through his brain. "I just don't like people to see them, okay? I know what they look like. Hell, even I don't like seeing them." He kept his eyes focused on the ceiling. The last thing he wanted was to see pity or compassion on Cam's face. He'd forgotten just who he was talking to. Sympathy had no place in Cam's vocabulary.

A slap of her hand against his scar-riddled knee had his head jerking in her direction. "What the hell was that for?" he demanded, suddenly furious at being in this situation and even angrier at himself for letting it get this far.

After crawling back home and taking over the family newspaper, Gabe knew he should have driven to Houston. Found a way for them to reconnect. He'd never gotten her out of his mind. Not ever. Instead he'd hidden like a wounded deer and let Tina the Tart crawl all over him.

Now Cam had kidnapped him with the help of his housekeeper-mother hen. He had this one chance that had been dumped in his lap, to resurrect what they'd once had.

"The scars aren't any big deal," she said, tracing the various lines marring his tanned flesh. "I'm surprised you haven't been showing them off to the boys in the poker club. I bet we could find some really interesting methods to reverse your aversion to these little bitty lines."

"Little," he croaked out. Her hand left his marred knee only to return to his needy cock, but her mouth was busy tracing the surgical incisions with her tongue. "You're killing me, Cam."

"Good," she lifted her head just enough for their eyes to meet, "because you've been killing me for the past fifteen years."

"Come here." He reached for her again. "I want you."

But she danced away, extracting a bottle of wine from the fridge, deftly twisting the top with the corkscrew and pouring some into the goblet waiting on the counter. Lifting the glass with one hand, she snatched a small black box with the other. Then she was back, letting her robe slide to the floor. As the robe slipped from her shoulders she held the box up for him to see.

Gabe raised an eyebrow. "Condoms? You thought of everything."

"I hope so." She was determined to keep the atmosphere light, teasing, sexual. Delicately balancing the wine, she straddled his chest. Suddenly Gabe was having great difficulty breathing.

Cam touched the glass to his lips so he could drink, then held it to her own mouth to take a swallow. Setting the glass on the little table beside the bed, she gradually slid herself forward until her gorgeous cunt was less than an inch from his mouth. Leaning over, she linked her fingers with his and braced herself.

"Lick me," she ordered in a husky voice.

Sure that his blood pressure was through the roof, Gabe ran the tip of his tongue through the nest of red-gold curls, flicking it against her little clit that was dark pink and swollen. When he looked into her eyes he saw dark desire and...something else. But before he could figure out what it was, she was moving against him.



“More,” she whispered.

He obliged her, licking every inch of pink flesh he could touch, savoring her honey as if it was the best nectar in the world. She moved her hips back and forth in a smooth rhythm as Gabe licked and lapped at her. He wished she’d untied his hands so he could grip her hips and hold her in place, but he had no intention of stopping.

Her rhythm picked up speed as his strokes became faster and harder, always making sure to flick her clit with the tip of his tongue. Finally she hitched herself even closer to his mouth so she was nearly sitting on top of it. He shoved his mouth into her quivering pussy and pressed his upper lip against her clit. He felt the first flutters against his tongue, then her body tightened and as she cried out his name she poured onto his tongue.

He closed his lips around her cunt, his tongue still inside, until he felt the last of her quivers die away. Then he slipped it out, giving her slit one final lick, and looked at her eyes.

She was staring down at him. “I think maybe it’s time to untie you.”

## **Chapter Three**

Cam wanted to smack herself in the head even as she spoke the words. Untying Gabe from the bed was the last thing she wanted to do. She thought for sure she was over him, but if he kept touching her and looking at her with such emotion in his eyes Cam would end up handing him her heart on a silver platter...again. Which of course was why she'd resisted Thea's pleas for so long.

But now look what she'd gotten herself into. She'd thought to use the night to show Gabe what he'd been missing sexually, tease him away from Tina and then walk away, just as he'd done to her. Only things weren't working out that way.

Having lived through the pain of loving and losing Gabe Holder once, Cam knew she wasn't strong enough to survive it twice. Letting him go now would save them both a lot of pain and embarrassment later.

A confused expression crossed his handsome face. "Huh? What do you mean you're letting me go? You can't."

This she hadn't seen coming. "I can't let you go?"

Shaggy blond hair fell over his brow as he shook his head. "No, of course you can't."

"And why can't I? I'm the one who tied you up in the first place." Logic apparently had no place in this conversation.

"Yeah, but are you sure you've convinced me to get Tina out of my life?" Gabe sat straighter on the bed, his tanned fingers gripping the rope holding him prisoner. "And I don't think you're finished showing me what I'm missing. What I've missed all these years."

Feeling like an extra in a bad comedy, Cam sank down on the bed, slapped a hand over her eye and moaned. "You've developed that Stockholm syndrome. I should have stopped at the first blowjob. Anything after that and your brain's been drained."

"Hey, I resent that. My brain is right where it's supposed to be. Tucked between my legs like every other man's." His wink had her choking back a laugh.

"Seriously, Gabe, this plan had failure written all over it." She shook her head. "It was a bad idea all around. No one has the right to tell you how to live your life, least of all me. Or who you should marry. If Tina the Tart makes your heart and other organs happy, then why should anyone stand in your way?"

The sad part of her speech was that she meant it. Gabe had always lived life at full throttle, pedal to the metal. But fifteen years had passed since they'd last spent any time together. People changed. Maybe one of those changes had been to his brain because only brain damage could explain his interest in a relationship with Tina.

Then her own brain kicked in and fastened on a fragment of a sentence. Hadn't he said they hadn't even slept together? So where was all this marriage stuff coming from? Had Tina just figured that by telling enough people she and Gabe were getting married she could make it so?

Gabe tried to shift into a more comfortable position. "Cam, let's talk, okay? Maybe shake out fifteen years worth of resentment out from between us?"

"Fine," she agreed with reservation. If nothing else they could clear the air between them.

"In that case, go ahead and untie me. I talk better when I can use my hands."

Her mouth curved in a mischievous smile. "As long as you don't put them where they don't belong."

"I think I can be the judge of that." He winked again. "But I promise to be good. At least for now."

"You're not supposed to behave," she told him. "You make a lousy hostage, Holder."

His face took on a look of mock indignation. "This is my first kidnapping. Cut me some slack. I'm sure with practice I'll get better."

Cam barely resisted rolling her eyes. "So you expect to be kidnapped again? Dream on, Holder. Dream on."

He didn't miss a beat. "Actually I kind of like it, now that I'm getting used to it. I didn't know you were into kink." He grinned at her. "And if you're into kink then I'll probably find myself in this position quite often in the next fifty or sixty years. And you won't have to kidnap me to tie me up. Just promise me you'll never let our kids find out. I'll call you mistress and peel your grapes, paint your toes—"

Fifty years? Oh right. He was joking. Teasing her. Getting back at her for pulling this little trick on him. She wanted to slap him. Instead she tossed a pillow at him, which landed squarely over his rising erection. This whole situation was spinning wildly out of her control.

"You are an idiot, Gabe Holder. We aren't spending the next fifty minutes together much less years."

Ten minutes later Cam had freed both his hands, filled two wineglasses and carried them with the platter of fruit and cheese Thea had left over to the bed. Now they sat said by side on the bed, completely naked, occupying their hands with the food and drink.

"Good thing you told me about Jimmie's involvement." He swallowed a large bite of cheese.

"Why's that?" Cam asked.

She was having trouble concentrating. How could she be expected to focus on his words when Gabe's body sat right next to her with nothing but a pillow on his lap to protect and preserve his modesty? Then again she'd been the one to throw the pillow at him. It seemed Gabe had never learned modesty in their years apart.

“Because otherwise I might have to chew her out for letting this happen. Although I should have figured it out. Nothing gets past that woman.”

Cam was beginning to feel uncomfortable. This was so not going the way she thought it would. Big kidnapping to get Gabe away and cut out Tina the Tart. Show Gabe what he missed. Blow this town again. Figuratively, of course. Not literally. Sitting here, both of them naked, eating and drinking while playing catch-up with their lives—everything about this felt too right. But how could she even think of opening her heart to this man again? What if she let herself believe that once more something was happening and Gabe got his life back together and left her a second time?

“Hey, Cam, you paying attention to me?” Gabe waved his free hand in front of her face.

With a slow deep breath Cam reined her thoughts in. “I’m here, just zoned out for a minute.”

“Okay, you were going to tell me all about your life in Houston. Impress and amaze me with the life of a power-hungry big-city lawyer.”

Cam laughed because nothing could be further from the truth. She, of course, didn’t intend to tell him how mistaken he was. But then the words just seemed to fall out of her mouth. “My life is really pretty boring. I get up at four every morning, eat breakfast, check my email, dress and head to the office. I work until at least seven to avoid rush hour on I-10 then grab something to eat, work out a little, shower and into bed by eleven.”

Gabe paused with a bite of cheese halfway to his mouth. “No high-powered meetings? No A-list cocktail parties? Jesus, Cam, what the hell are you doing with your life? And why?” Then he leaned over, his lips close to her ear. “We really need to do something about your boring life.”

“Hey.” Cam jerked away. “I’ll have you know I can get as wild as the next woman. But I’m trying to establish myself and I don’t have time to waste on silly things.”

"Silly things?" He took her wineglass and set it on the table next to the bed along with his glass and the platter of food. Then he looped his arm around her and pulled her gently to his side. "Fun, romance and adventure are not silly. They are the things that get us through the hard times."

"And you would know about that because?" His face was so close to hers she could see the sparks of amber in his eyes.

"Because I thought that's what I would find when I left here." His thumb brushed lightly across one nipple. "Do you really want to know why I left, Cameron?"

She could hardly catch her breath.

"Because I wasn't enough?"

He pinched her nipple. "Because you were too much. You would have kept me here and I wasn't ready for what you offered. If I'd stayed I'd have gone to work for *The Heron Bay Recorder*, everyone would have congratulated my dad for giving me a job and I'd have just been Drake Holder's son for the rest of my life." He bent his head and licked the nipple he was teasing. "I wanted to find out what I could do on my own. Make my own name."

Cam had to force herself to reach for words. "And you couldn't have been honest with me about it? We could have handled things differently."

"I didn't know how," he confessed, his words vibrating against her breast.

"What did you think of during the worst of it? When you got hurt so badly?" When his body tensed at her question Cam wanted to wipe her words out of existence. But it was too late for late. She'd asked and there they were floating in the air waiting for Gabe's response or his refusal.

Cam reached over and swept her fingers along the pale white scars marring the otherwise perfection of his leg. The silence stretched on for so long she wanted to scream into the tension-filled room. Finally Gabe's head fell back and his mouth opened.

"Shit, I don't know." He expelled a deep breath. "I thought of fishing in the bay. Playing poker with the guys, watching old man Myers to remember how to cheat at cards." He moved his mouth to her other nipple. "I pictured Jimmie over a hot pit cooking me the perfect steak with a side of corn and a big baked potato."

She sucked in a breath as his tongue laved the swollen bud. "Food? That's your happy thought?"

He looked up, his hot whiskey-brown eyes focused on her. "I thought about home. I thought about the people who cared about me. Picturing their faces helped deal with the pain. Everything I endured, every surgery, every hour of P.T. was worth it just to be able to come home again."

Tears blurred Cam's eyes as she looked away from the man taking over her heart once more. "That's nice," she managed to say around her swollen throat. "I bet everyone loved hearing that." Too bad he hadn't once mentioned her in this vision of perfect happiness. She forced herself to swallow the resentment. No use getting upset over something she could never change.

"I never told anyone."

She pushed him away and sat up, wide eyed and stunned. "Why not?"

"Because I felt like enough of a freak and a failure without getting all mushy and girly on them. I'm a man, Cam. Regardless of my injuries, I still want to be thought of as a man. But I knew if they thought I'd just crawled home to lick my wounds and recover I'd be left in peace. And so I have until now."

"Until Tina started in on the marriage plan," Cam corrected, desperately trying to keep the Tina wall between them before her heart leapt out of her chest and straight back into his hands.

"Yeah, about that." He pulled her back to him, one warm palm cupping a breast. "Everyone really thought I'd be stupid enough to ask her to marry me?"

The breath she didn't know she'd been holding rushed out of her. "You never said a word against it. Whenever she brought it up, Jimmie said you nodded your head like a bouncy ball."

"Damn, Cam. I really have been hiding inside myself. I just didn't know it had gone this far. Or that Tina would go this far. I've never once mentioned marriage to her."

"Now you know." She paused, putting her hand on his cheek and forcing him to look at her. "So what are you going to do about it?" Mentally she crossed her fingers that he would laugh and tell her how much he still loved her and always would. That Tina meant nothing more than a shadow to hide behind.

The heat in his eyes leaped out at her, scorching her with it.

"I'm going to fuck you—no, make love to you—within an inch of your life. Then we're going to talk about the rest of our lives."

He caught her mouth with his in a kiss so predatory it stole her breath. His tongue swept in like a marauder, licking every surface, dueling with her own small tongue, drinking from her as if he was dying of thirst. One muscular arm snaked beneath her to pull her close to him while the other continued to knead her breasts. Cam could feel the hot thickness of his cock where it pressed against her thigh.

She rubbed against him like a lazy cat, feeling the friction of skin on skin, of the soft hair on his chest and his groin abrading her with a sensuous touch. Her nipples ached from the attention of his tongue and she silently begged him not to stop. As his mouth continued to make love to hers, he rolled until he was on top of her, circled her wrists with his fingers and pulled her arms over her head.

"I want you to stay just like this," he told her, his lips touching hers. He moved her fingers until they gripped the slats of the headboard. "Don't move."

Holding her in place with his body, he looped the rope still hanging from the headboard around first one wrist, then the other. Cam's first thought was to push him off, or wriggle out from beneath him. But the thought of being restrained and totally at



his mercy was so tantalizing, so arousing, that she lay there until he had the ropes tied and her wrists secured.

Gabe looked down at her, his gaze burning into to her, his lips curved in a smile that was pure carnal desire. "Let's see how the shoe fits on the other foot, shall we?"

He shifted position slightly, brushing a kiss against her lips, trailing his tongue down the column of her neck and nibbling at the place where neck and shoulder joined. When he licked the hollow of her throat a delicious frisson raced over the surface of her skin.

"You taste like fresh peaches," he murmured, drawing a line with the tip of his tongue down the valley between her breasts to her navel, where he traced the tiny circles of flesh.

Shifting slightly, he reached out an arm for one of the wine goblets, then dripped some lightly into the hollow of her navel. Cam shivered with anticipation as the chilled liquid fell lightly onto her skin. In a moment Gabe's mouth covered the tiny pool of liquid, his tongue lapping at it as he sucked it into his mouth. Oh god. The tiny muscles in her pussy contracted with need, liquid flooded her tight channel and another moan rolled up from her throat.

"Delicious." Gabe licked his lips. "But not as delicious as I remember you being. I need a taste of you right now.

Sliding farther down her body, he used his shoulders to nudge her thighs apart. Opening her labia with his fingers, he blew a stream of warm air onto her slit, then flicked out his tongue to tease the tip of her clit. The tremors in her cunt increased their intensity, little shimmers that spread outward through her body. Gabe paid careful attention to the wet, swollen flesh, licking the lips with long, slow strokes then returning to her throbbing nub.

His hands moved to slip beneath her buttocks, lifting her to his hungry mouth. Nudging her clit with the tip of his nose, he thrust his tongue inside her cunt and licked the inner surfaces.

"Oh!" The cry slipped from her mouth as sensations washed over her.

Gabe lifted his head slightly. "You like that, do you?" His tone was mischievous but the hungry need roughened it. "You taste even better than I remember."

Lifting her even higher, he thrust his tongue into her again and began to fuck her with it, moving his head so the tip of his nose rubbed up and down on her clit.

"Oh, oh, oh!"

Cam fisted her hands, her entire body straining with the need for release.

The need continued to rise within her, pushing her closer and closer to the edge, but Gabe kept her hanging just out of reach. His wicked tongue stroked and flicked while his lips sucked. One hand slid down the cheek of her ass and in a moment the tip of his pinkie pressed against the sensitive ring of her anus.

"Gabe!" she screamed as pleasure and pain melded together inside her.

As he pushed it inside her, he increased the in and out slide of his tongue and without warning her climax broke over her. She pushed down hard against his mouth, riding his tongue. The harder she clenched her inner muscles, the faster his tongue thrust in and out and the deeper his finger pushed. She was flying, her honey pouring onto Gabe's tongue, every nerve in her body firing, every muscle convulsing.

*Don't stop!*

She didn't know if she only screamed it in her head or said it out loud, but she cried out when he did stop, pulling back from her. She opened her eyes to see what was wrong to catch sight of him unwrapping one of the condoms and rolling it onto his heavy, swollen cock. Then he was lifting her again, parting her, positioning himself and thrusting deep. With one push he impaled her.

"Open your eyes," he commanded.

Cameron was in such an erotic fog she could barely pry her eyelids open, but she did as he asked and found his own eyes blazing into hers. His face was dark with

desire, his lips wet with her juices. She tugged on her restraints, wanting to reach out to him, but he'd done as good a job securing her as she'd done to him.

"You feel so damn good," he rasped. "God. Your pussy is so tight and wet. I could stay like this forever. I want to fuck you forever and never stop."

*Get on with it. Do it now!*

He closed his eyes as a shudder racked his body. Then he opened them, staring straight into hers as he began to move his hips. In and out, back and forth, first slowly, then faster.

"You wanted a bucking bronco? Here I am. Ride me for all you're worth."

He pulled nearly all the way out, then drove deep inside her, regaining his tempo. Cam saw the lines of strain on his face and the drops of perspiration on his brow, signs that he was hanging onto his control by a very thin thread. She rolled her hips, meeting him thrust for thrust, reaching, reaching, her body rising to that invisible peak again. Determined to break his tightly held control.

It hit them both at the same time, his body stiffening just as hers did, the shudders racking them both. On and on, one body fused to the other, the orgasm shaking them like a giant fist.

At last the tremors slowed and finally subsided, leaving them both gasping for breath. Gabe lowered her hips and collapsed forward, his weight on his forearms, his forehead touching hers, hearts banging against their ribs. Still dragging air into his lungs, Gabe reached up and released her wrists. One last tremor raced over his body before he slid from her tight wet grasp and rolled to the side.

"Bathroom?" He pointed to the door beside the kitchen.

Cam nodded, beyond any speech. She closed her eyes, wondering just how her plan had backfired on her. This was definitely not the quick fuck she'd intended it to be. The teasing game. The "let me show you what you missed" performance she'd planned on before casually walking away from him for good.

She was well and truly caught. All the thoughts that had danced through her brain tonight coalesced into one gigantic realization. She didn't hate Gabe Holder, didn't resent him. No, damn it.

She loved him. Had always loved him. And what the hell was she going to do?

Only one plan came to mind as Cam bounded from the bed and frantically searched for her clothes.

When the going got tough, the tough got going...right out of town.

## **Chapter Four**

Gabe stared at the cloud of dust leading straight out of Heron Bay, Texas, and wondered what the hell happened in the five minutes he'd been in the bathroom disposing of the rubber and cleaning up.

When he'd walked out the bathroom door, ready to talk and lay his heart on the table Gabe found the bedroom empty. At the sound of Cam's voice he turned and followed it through the small cabin and out to the back porch.

"Don't worry, Molly," Cam said into the phone at her ear while she hurriedly shoved clothes into a black suitcase. "I'll be there in a few hours and I can get everything taken care of."

A pause in the conversation as the love of his life listened to this Molly had her nodding her auburn head. "Yeah, I understand and it's no problem. I was just finishing up here so you're not taking me away from anything important."

Just finishing up...nothing important? Gabe's pride and ego felt lower than a snake as his newly healed heart started to crumble all over again. Had he been mistaken? Had they not put old ghosts to rest and begun something new and fresh?

He wanted to rip the phone from her hand, tell whoever had the misfortune of calling that Cameron would be busy for the foreseeable future and not to bother calling her again. Instead, he took several deep breaths and tried to get a handle on his sparking temper.

Waiting until she finished speaking felt like the civilized thing to do so he waited. But she finished one conversation only to dial the phone and begin another. This went on for the thirty minutes it took him to find his clothes and dress and pick up the cabin.

When Cam reentered the cabin she just smiled at him and said they needed to get going.

“But I have to make some phone calls.” She was only mildly apologetic.

Gabe decided not to push it. Time for that later.

The ride back home didn’t allow for much conversation. It consisted almost completely of Cam driving and talking, ordering and threatening people in a bid to get some paperwork she apparently needed.

By the time she stopped in front of his house, Gabe’s heart had all but given up. He knew this was Cam’s way of making it clear whatever they had was well and truly over. Either she was scared – and he didn’t blame her – or she really didn’t give a rat’s ass about him. Which he found hard to believe.

She paused her marathon phone conversation long enough to press a careless kiss to his cheek. “Don’t be such a stranger, Gabe, and watch out for the Tarts in this town. They’ll eat you alive.”

“Cam, I think we need to talk.” He tried to protest her brush-off.

She shot him a sympathetic glance before checking the time on her watch. “As much fun as another roll in the sack with you would be, I’m afraid there’s an emergency at the office and I’ve got to get back. Take care of yourself, Gabe Holder.”

And then she disappeared, leaving only a cloud of dust and his broken heart behind.

\* \* \* \* \*

“What did you do to my boy?”

Cam winced at the voice in her ear. Why hadn’t she changed her number after leaving Heron Bay and Gabe three days ago? A smart woman would have planned ahead and made the necessary adjustments, but not Cameron Greeley, coward and fraidy cat all rolled into one.

“Uh, Jimmie, this really isn’t the best time for me to talk. I’ve got a meeting in a few minutes that I can’t be late for.” Granted the meeting was with her intern to discuss ordering lunch, but still, it would be rude to show up late.

“I don’t give a damn if the King of England is waiting on you. You’re going to tell me what you did to my Gabe.”

Knowing better than to correct the older woman on the correct power structure in England, Cam kept her mouth shut. To do anything else would reveal her open wounds that had not even begun to scab over.

“I’m not sure—” she started to say only to be cut off by Gabe’s housekeeper’s furious tirade.

“I gave you that boy in near perfect condition. And you have the nerve to return him broken and run down, looking all droopy eyed and worn out, now don’t that beat all. I know your mama taught you better than that, Cameron Greeley.”

Broken and run down? Had her leaving really affected Gabe that badly? If so maybe it meant his feelings for her were real and not the product of lust-induced hormones. And maybe she’d made the biggest mistake of her life by running away from him before they could talk like he wanted to. After all, hadn’t Gabe been the one to repeatedly mention spending the rest of their lives together? But Cam had let the old fear and her memories of the past rule her actions, and fled town in a hurry.

“Are you even listening to me?” Jimmie barked over the phone line.

“Yes ma’am, I’m listening. But honestly, Jimmie I don’t see what Gabe’s condition has to do with me. I came out there to prevent him from marrying Tina and unless they’ve set a date I think I did what everyone wanted.”

*Please, she prayed silently, don’t let her tell me there’s a date set.*

“You may have stopped him from being leg-shackled for the rest of his life to that trampy tart, but that doesn’t mean you’ve fixed things. My boy just sits around here and mopes. I’ve never seen him like this before even when he came back hurt.” Finally the other woman’s tone lowered and she spoke in an emotion-laden voice. “Cam, I can’t

stand seeing him this way. He's so hurt, but too much a man to let anyone see it. He loves you, girl, more than he's loved anything in his life. Including that fancy job of his. Please set an old woman's heart at ease and tell me the two of you are working things out?"

Cam let out her own sigh. "I don't know, Jimmie. He broke my heart fifteen years ago and I don't know if I'm strong enough to make it through the pain again."

"But isn't it worth a shot if things work out?" The housekeeper, determined to see her boy happy, played devil's advocate. "Isn't a loving man, a good home and kids worth the risk of a little heartache?"

Oh god, she could picture it all. Every word Jimmie said burned into her brain. Waking up with Gabe every morning, going to bed with him every night, raising their kids in a home filled with love and laughter. Cam closed her eyes before the tears building in them could spill over.

"It's worth it, Jim. I just don't know if I'm strong enough to go after it though," she confessed, laying her head back against the leather cushion of her chair. "I don't know if anyone's that strong."

"Baby girl, if you don't do this, face Gabe with your heart open and willing, you will spend the rest of your life in regret. Always wondering what would have happened if you'd been brave enough to take that chance. I don't want to see either of you end up like that, not when I know you were meant to be together."

"I only wish I were as sure."

"Then take from me. Lean on me until you can trust Gabe enough to shoulder your burdens. I know that man loves you just as I know you're head over heels in love with him. Right now you're just two stubborn people without the sense the good Lord gave a flea. Now you get back here before I send Marty up there to straighten the both of you out."



Cam gave a weak laugh at the threat of Jimmie's small husband taking care of both her and Gabe. A sweeter, gentler man she'd never met, but if his wife told him to fix this, Marty would move heaven and hell to make it happen.

"Don't sic Marty on me. Just give me a minute here," she pleaded as every detail of the past few days flew through her mind. The time spent with Gabe had felt so right, so natural. Could she really risk never being with him again, never knowing his touch or hearing his voice as he whispered her name? Was she really willing to throw away a possibly incredible future just because of fear?

Well, when you put it that way her brain and bravery finally spoke out...

"Jimmie, let me clear my desk, go home to pack a bag and then I'll be on my way."

"Good girl. I knew I could count on you. I'll leave the porch light on for the two of you."

She hung up before Cam could ask what she meant by the two of them. Then shrugged her shoulders, she had more important things to think about. Like how to win back the heart of the man she loved.

\* \* \* \* \*

"She's finishing up at the office," Thea told him. "Then she's headed home to pack."

Gabe let out of breath of relief. It had worked. *Thank you, God and Jimmie*, he silently praised. "You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. Those were Jimmie's exact words. Now do whatever you need to do in order to get my best friend back here, Gabe Holder. She's killing herself for nothing in Houston. I won't have it." Thea slammed the phone down in his ear.

"I won't have it either," he promised dead air while shoving his small silver phone in the pocket of his leather jacket.

Thanks to Thea's spare key Gabe had no trouble getting into Cam's condo. Once inside he knew his decision to bring her back to Heron Bay was right on the money. No matter what she said, she had never created a real life for herself here. Her home looked

like an upscale hotel. There were no pictures on the bland, cream-colored walls, no personal doodads to clutter the surface of the fine wood furniture. If he hadn't seen mail with her name on it Gabe would have sworn this apartment belonged to a stranger.

Living in Houston was sucking the life out of Cam and he'd be damned if he let that happen.

A wicked smile curved his lips as he thought of his plans for the bossy Cameron Greeley, attorney at law. Oh yes, what comes around certainly must go around, he thought, then tested the fur-lined handcuffs Jimmie had handed him this morning. But only after she'd chewed his ass out for being the back end of a donkey and dumber than a pile of dead fish.

Nothing like a swift kick in the ass to get a man motivated, but motivate him it had. Right to Cam's sterile condo. Ready to give her a dose of her own medicine and all the love she could ever want.

His body tightened when he heard the scrape of the lock turning. Forcing himself to relax, Gabe casually leaned against the breakfast bar, crossed his arms over his chest and waited to see what Cam would do next.

She flew through the door only to stop abruptly at the sight of him.

"Gabe?"

He watched a million emotions fly through her eyes, but none lasted longer than a second.

"Hi, honey, I'm home," he returned cheerfully, while his insides churned and twisted with nerves.

"Wha...what are you doing here? How did you get in? Who let you in?"

Striving to look casual and unaffected at the sight of her, Gabe slowly straightened from the wall and closed the distance between them. "Now, Cameron, you knew I

wouldn't be able to leave things alone. Not with the way you ran out of town like your tail was on fire."

That chin he loved so well jutted out at his accusation. "I most certainly did not run out of town. I had business to attend. I'm an attorney. I have clients in need of my services."

"That's good, honey, because I happen to be in desperate need of your services as well."

Then Gabe pulled the handcuffs out of his pockets and reached around her wrist before she could blink. "Now then. Why don't we try a little tit for tat, since I plan on returning the favor and kidnapping you?"

Cam could only stare into his eyes, darkened almost to chocolate with desire. "You can't be serious."

"Honey, I've never been more sure of anything in my life." In one smooth motion Gabe lifted her cuffed hands over his head to rest on the back of his neck. His own arms slipped around her waist, pulling her tight against his rigid erection.

"But...but why are you doing this?" She tried to pull back from him, but the attempt was halfhearted at best.

A lock of blond hair fell over his brow as he leaned his head down. "Because, Cam, you left before we talked."

Eyes clouded with panic, she tried to lift her hands but a quick jerk from Gabe changed her mind. "Honey, the more you fight me the closer we'll get. In case you're wondering, I have no problem fighting dirty."

With a sigh of resignation Cam dropped her forehead against his warm chest. "Gabe, I can't do this again."

"Do what, honey?" Strong rough hands gently circled her back while he made soothing noises.

Pulling in a deep breath, Cam straightened up and looked into Gabe's beloved face. "Gabe, I can't sleep with you again. I thought I could. I thought I could fuck you and walk away, but I can't. I'm not that type of woman."

"Of course you're not," he agreed, his eyes softening with emotion. "I never thought you were."

"But, Gabe, you don't understand. I can't fall in love with you again."

He watched her struggle to pull together her tattered pride, that small chin jutting out again. "You're right, Cam. You can't fall in love with me again." A beat passed before he continued. "Because you never fell out of love with me."

"Of all the egotistical crap I've heard, that takes the cake, Gabe Holder. You really must think you're hot shit. I'll have you know —"

A finger pressed her lips closed, trapping the rest of her insults. "Cam, I know you still love me because...because I've never stopped loving you." Once he started Gabe's words came faster and faster, everything he'd been storing up for years. "I thought I wanted the world in the palm of my hand. It took me a long time to realize the world was empty without you to share it with. Every new country, every new experience lacked something because I couldn't share it with you. Don't get me wrong, I loved my work, I loved the travel, but there was always something missing. When I got hurt and came home, I thought finally I'll be able to feel whole again because I knew you'd be here. But you weren't and I let my stupid pride get in the way of finding you. I'm not about to make the same mistake twice. I love you, Cam, and I'll do anything, say anything or go anywhere to prove it to you."

His arms tightened around her waist as he pressed her closer to his warm body. "I want to spend my days exploring the world with you and my nights loving only you for the rest of my life. Can you do that? Live with me, love me even half as much as I love you?"

Cam's mouth opened and closed several times as happiness swelled inside her heart. "I can't think," she finally admitted.

“Just tell me I still have a chance,” he urged while his hands cupped her ass and teased her with the proof of his desire. “I can deal with anything so long as I know we’ve got a future.”

“How can you still love me?” she whispered.

Again he saw the uncertainty in her eyes. He’d do anything to wipe that look out permanently. Hot lips moved in a teasing trail along the tender skin of her neck.

“How can I not? You were my world fifteen years ago. Changing locations didn’t stop me from loving you. Being halfway across the planet didn’t stop me from thinking about you, fantasizing about having you in my bed again. I’ve never needed any person the way I need you.”

Cam looked into Gabe’s solemn brown eyes and finally understood the truth. They’d both run from their feelings all those years ago. Emotions too big for them to understand and accept at such an immature age, but everything had changed. They were both adults now with life experiences behind them, more comfortable with the depth of love they held for each other.

And Gabe was throwing his heart open and his pride on the table, ready for her to crush or cherish—either one.

How had she ever gotten so lucky as to find a man like him? Not once, but twice.

“You’re so much braver than I am,” she confessed, holding his gaze. “I do love you, Gabe. And you’re right. I probably always have. Why else would I have run back home the minute Thea told me you were in trouble? I used Tina as an excuse to force my way back into your life. I’ve never needed anyone the way I needed you and it scares the hell out of me.”

Tenderly he stroked her hair while planting gentle kisses along her soft skin. “Then we can be scared together, Cam. So long as you’re by my side I don’t think there’s anything we can’t handle.”

"Together, huh?"

"Together for now and always."

"I like the sound of that."

"You know what I'd like to hear even more?"

Caught up in the feeling of home she'd found only in Gabe's arms, Cam lost focus on his words, her body more interested in where his hands and lips traveled. "Mhh?"

"Mrs. Cameron Holder sounds pretty damn fine to me, don't you think?"

Shock had her nerve endings tingling. "Gabe?"

"I want you to marry me, Cameron Greeley. I need to tie you to my side with everything I can because I can't face a life without you in it. Promise me you'll never leave me again. Promise you'll marry me, be my wife and partner throughout this life and the next."

When the back of her legs bumped into something hard, Cam looked away from Gabe's intense love-filled gaze. "We're in my bedroom." She looked around. "How did we get here?"

"I may have guided us in here." He grinned. "I need a few promises before I let you go."

He lifted her handcuffed arms over his head, tunneled his fingers into her long hair and tilted her head back. His mouth descended on hers as her moans filled the air. He reached under her silk shirt with his free hand, gripped one of her aching breasts and toyed with the nipple.

"Gabe."

"You want me to take you?"

Cam almost panicked. Was this a trick question?

He circled her hard nipple then squeezed it tight between his rough fingers. "You know there's plenty of work for a top-notch lawyer in Heron Bay. Hell, the whole

county could use another legal shark. How does that sound? Can you walk away from what you've got here?"

*Walk away? How about if I run?*

"I can manage that," she breathed, wishing he'd get down to business.

"Promise?" He licked at her nipples.

"I promise. Okay?"

But apparently he had more to ask of her. "Promise me you'll never leave me again. Promise me you'll marry me and be there every night so I can wake up with you every morning."

*Promise to marry him? If I'm dreaming please don't let me wake up.*

"I don't want to leave you again, Gabe."

His fingers slipped between her legs and beneath her panties to stroke and tease her aching wet flesh. His fingers continued to play with her as he put his lips close to her ear.

"That's not the answer I asked for."

"I promise." Like she had any other choice. She loved the man, would do anything for him. She'd beg him for anything now. Do anything he wanted. Absolutely anything to have his cock pounding deep inside her right now.

"You sure about that? 'Cause there's no do-overs once we say I do. It's for this life and beyond." He leaned over her, his newly naked chest teasing her silk-covered nipples.

"I meant it, Gabe. We'll get married, have one or two little Gabes running around, and fuck like rabbits every night."

"You sure you mean it? Every word?" He licked the sensitive flesh of her shoulder as his fingers plunged deep into her waiting, eager cunt.

"Please, fuck me, Gabe." She could barely get the words out. "Make love to me every way you know how."

"All you had to do was ask, honey. I'll give you anything you want, anytime you want it for the rest of our lives."

The rest of their lives sounded damn good, Cam thought, as she watched her lover and future husband strip off his jeans and roll a condom over his rock-hard cock. Uncuffing one of her wrists, he had her clothes off in seconds and lowered her to the bed.

"I love you, Gabe."

"I love you too, honey." He lifted her arms over her head. "Now spread those beautiful legs for me. We're going to play the pirate and the captive."

She blinked up at him and tugged on her arms. The sneaky pirate captain had somehow managed to cuff her to the headboard. Cam was stuck, but oh, what a way to be stuck. With a handsome, sexy man who loved her more than life.

"When do I get my turn?"

"Just as soon as we run out of condoms." Gabe said and tossed an economy-size box on her night table. "I figure we'll come up for air, eat, buy more rubbers. Then I'll let you tie me up and take shameless advantage of my poor body."

Ideas tumbled through her head at his words. Oh yeah, she could so get behind this plan. "Who knew one kidnapping could lead to such a happy future?"

Gabe leaned down until their lips were a breath apart. "Honey, you can kidnap me any day."

"I just might, Gabe, I just might."



## About the Authors

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

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

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

Allie Standifer has lived in various places around the world. The gift of travel enables her to create the rhythm and feel of far-off places and feed an overactive imagination. Her life has been one of constant adventure, including growing up in Saudi Arabia, where her brother tried to sell her to Bedouins (for what amounts to less than \$1.50). It's been nonstop; she loves every minute of it.

Ideas, plots, characters and conversations keep her company inside her head and fuel her need to write. And no, they don't tell her to start fires. :) Tired of everyday stories, Allie adds paranormal twists to her tales. They're filled with past lives, chain-email-sending oracles, mythical creatures, magic, sexy gods, and heroines who know exactly what they want—and aren't afraid to go get it.

Free time is spent spoiling two nieces and two nephews, pumping them up on sugar and caffeine and buying very loud toys then sending them back to their parents. The perfect revenge for all the slights of being the youngest child. When not writing or contributing to the delinquency of minors, or trying to outsmart her psycho cat, she spends time with her wonderful and supportive family.

Desiree and Allie welcome comments from readers. You can find their websites and email addresses on their author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

#### *Tell Us What You Think*

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at [Comments@EllorasCave.com](mailto:Comments@EllorasCave.com).

Also by Desiree Holt

Cougar Challenge: Hot to Trot

Cupid's Shaft

Dancing With Danger

Diamond Lady

Double Entry

Driven by Hunger

Ellora's Cavemen: Flavors of Ecstasy I *anthology*

Elven Magic *anthology*

Emerald Green

Hot Moon Rising

Hot, Wicked and Wild

I Dare You

Journey to the Pearl

Just Say Yes

Letting Go

Line of Sight

Night Heat

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