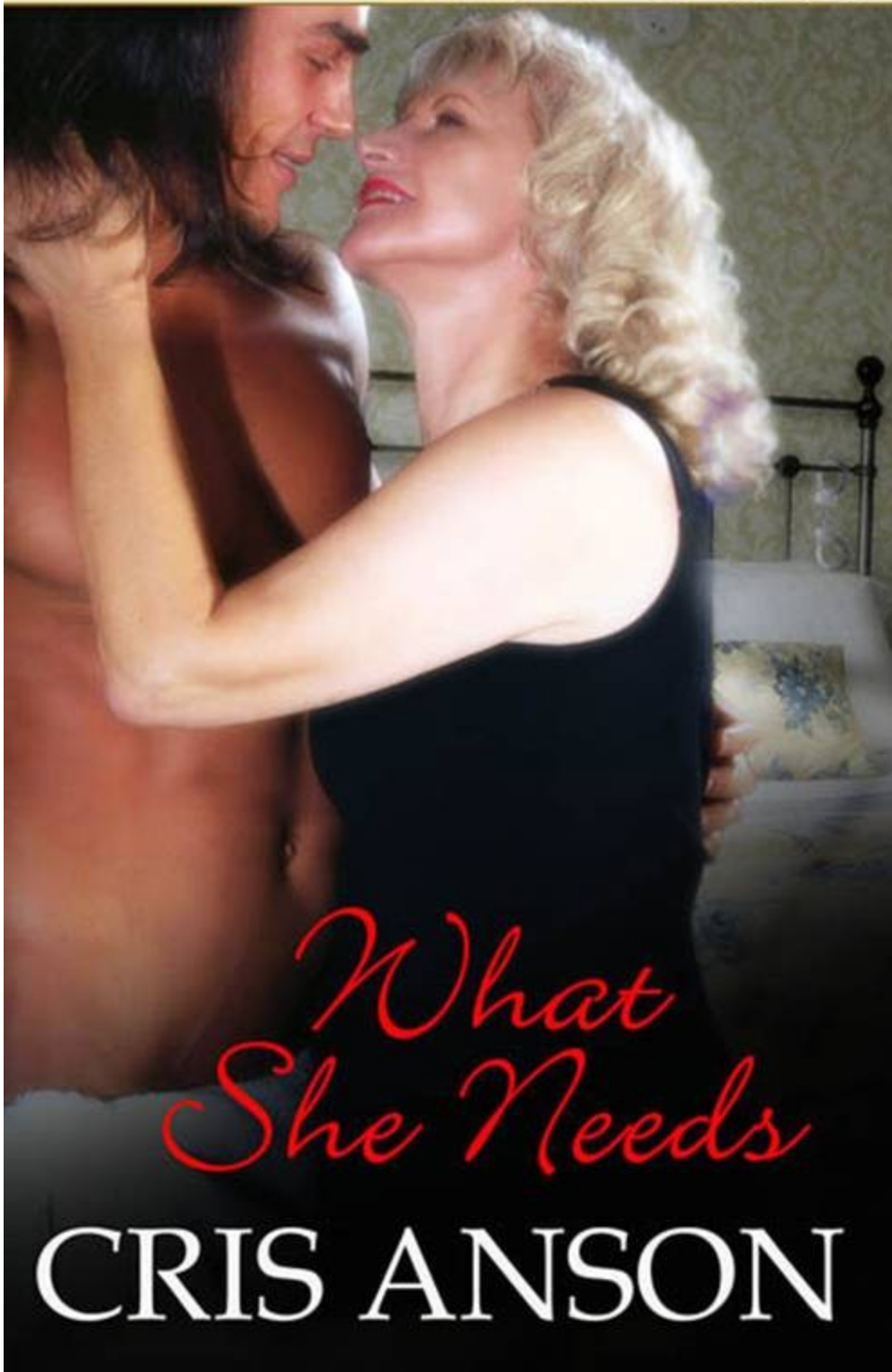


ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*



*What
She Needs*

CRIS ANSON

What She Needs

Cris Anson

Older widow Delia Barnes is sporting a black eye when she greets fellow authors before an erotic romance convention, which she explains away by joking “I didn’t say ‘Yes Master’ quick enough.” Sitting at the bar, burned-out ad executive and former Dom Kurt Reinhardt overhears the remark—and interrupts to suggest maybe she needs “a new Master”.

Urged by her friends to accept the younger man’s invitation to learn some D/s basics—hey, an author needs to do her research, right?—Delia joins him to get first-hand experience at being submissive, starting with removing her panties in a corner booth. Later, she learns more than she bargained for when she spends a weekend at Kurt’s home...with his eager business partner added to the mix.

But an innocent misstep brings Delia’s world crashing down around her. Can she trust Kurt with her heart...and her life?

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What She Needs

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WHAT SHE NEEDS

Cris Anson

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Chapter One

“Dammit, I can’t believe I was so klutzy as to get a shiner the night before the big event! I look more like a freaking raccoon than a romance writer.”

Delia Barnes held her shoulder at an awkward angle to keep the phone to her ear while she packed the last of her toiletries. Going to her first romance writers’ conference as a published author had her more uptight than she’d realized.

“Look on the bright side,” her cyber-critique partner Judith Henry said, “you won’t have to wear a rose in your lapel for me to recognize you.”

“There is that. And hey, having a rainbow under my eye pulls attention away from all the wrinkles, right?”

“That’s the spirit! How’d it happen?”

“It was so mundane.” Delia snapped the toiletries case closed. “I tripped on the damn suitcase and went crashing into the corner of the dresser. Guess I was really lucky though. An inch more and it would’ve squooshed out my eyeball.”

Judith made appropriate sympathetic noises in Delia’s ear. “Hey, I’ll buy you a few martinis, we’ll forget about our jobs and our respective kids and we’ll have a ball. And you know what? By the end of the conference, your name will be on everyone’s lips for being so brave in the face of adversity. You know what they say, there’s no such thing as bad publicity, unless you spell my name wrong.”

They shared a good laugh over that adage. “Okay,” Delia said. “You’ve convinced me. I’ll be looking at the weekend as an adventure.”

* * * * *

Staring into his half-finished mug of draft beer, Kurt Reinhardt wondered if he should just chuck it all and become a hermit in Nepal. Or maybe the Klondike. Here he

was, thirty-five years old and at the pinnacle of his creative and persuasive powers, and he couldn't even remember nor care about the ad presentation he'd just made to a Fortune 100 company.

His partner and the artistic genius of The Forefront Agency, Logan MacNeill, slid back onto the barstool next to him. "I think we ought to extend our stay by at least one night. You'll never guess what kind of conference the hotel is hosting over the weekend."

Kurt focused on the bead of condensation marking a path down his mug. His interest in a conference ranked right up there with whether his proposed campaign snagged the corporation's million bucks of advertising for the following year or what color shoes the First Lady wore. What did he care? He was burned out.

"Readers and writers of erotic romance."

Big whoop. Kurt had zero interest in romance ever since Gina –

Don't go there. He snatched up his mug and guzzled the remaining contents without taking a breath.

"Erotic. Romance." Logan emphasized each word. "In my book, that equates to a bunch of horny women. Right here in this hotel." From the corner of his eye, Kurt saw his friend swivel around on the stool and plant his elbows on the bar behind him. "And some of them look mighty fine."

Kurt caught the bartender's attention then turned to Logan, a year younger and a whole lot smoother with women. Whenever he smiled, the room lit up. Logan didn't need a wingman, he did very well cruising solo. "You gonna keep yapping or you want to use your mouth to suck up another bourbon?"

"I'm cool, man. You know who I ran into in the lobby? She was just checking in."

Kurt ordered another draft for himself and let his friend's nattering bounce off him without effect.

“A fellow photographer whose work I’ve admired for years. She does the book covers for this group. I told her I’d buy her a drink later. I’ll bet she can introduce us to any number of chicks. You game?”

A glare was Kurt’s only answer.

“Come on, buddy. It’s been, what, three years? I know you miss her, but jeez, when was the last time you had anything but a hand job? This is the weekend to find a chick, hook up, and then poof, back home to Philadelphia with a smile on your face.” He poked Kurt on the shoulder with a strong finger. “Look at that blonde. She’s a lively one, I’ll bet she can ride like a cowgirl.”

Kurt didn’t want to look. He wanted to wallow in his grief. But damn, someone had a laugh so infectious that he decided to turn around. Picking up the fresh beer the bartender set before him, he leaned his back against the bar and took a leisurely gander at the scene.

Women of all sizes and shapes and ages, meeting and squealing and hugging. With little effort, Kurt picked out the blonde his partner had mentioned, the same woman whose laugh had intrigued Kurt. She faced away from him, toward the bar’s entrance, and was engaged in a lively discussion with a group of five women. Her hair cascaded down in waves to just below her shoulders, sleek and shiny as aluminum foil. Tallish, maybe five-nine, with a narrow waist and fine wide hips under a denim A-line skirt that skimmed her knees. Kurt could see no bra line under a snug red sleeveless top, and wondered if her tits jiggled when she waved her arms, which she apparently did with regularity to get her point across.

She turned her head, showing a striking profile—long straight nose like a classic Roman statue and a pointy chin that made him think *stubborn*. Laugh lines radiated from eyes of a color he couldn’t discern. One of the group said something and she threw her head back, releasing another laugh that seemed to come from her very depths. He wished he had a tenth of her *joie de vivre*.

Another woman joined their group and cried out, “Omigod, Delia! How did you get your black eye?”

The blonde responded, “I didn’t say ‘Yes Master’ fast enough.”

Gales of laughter followed that retort, and Kurt realized he’d heard that comment more than once in the past ten minutes.

That was enough to piss him off.

Slapping his untasted beer back down on the bar, he slid off his seat and in two long strides stood behind her. “Then perhaps you need a new Master.”

All sound in the group ceased. The blonde swiveled her head, her tresses swaying like a shampoo commercial. Their eyes locked. He all but fell into her wide blue ones.

And he knew he was in trouble.

* * * * *

Delia turned to glare at the man who had intruded on her reunion with folks she’d only met online, but one look at him—in a dove-gray dress shirt with sleeves rolled up, no tie, and tailored black slacks—made her think, *Uh-oh, I’m in trouble here.*

About six feet of hunkalicious man stared back at her, all thunder and storm swirling in amber eyes that all but immobilized her. His mouth was a thin line of disapproval and his black brows echoed the line and the sentiment. Even the nose, slightly askew, probably from a badly healed fracture, added to the air of danger surrounding him.

Hair as black as the devil’s heart scraped back into a short ponytail except for a wayward swath down his forehead could not soften the severity of his gaze, yet Delia felt only electricity zinging between them. It was an uncomfortable feeling, a cross between a butterfly pinned to a specimen board and a ripe peach waiting to be sucked.

Then his expression softened as his gaze took in the bright reddish-purple of her bruise. He lifted a long-fingered hand to her face but did not touch her. “A slave of your

beauty and delicacy should be treated with reverence. May I show you how a true Master treats his property?"

Delia's tongue felt glued to the roof of her mouth. This hunk was calling her a beauty? Calling her delicate? Ye gods, was he a real-life Dom? Sure, Delia had read all about D/s relationships. Heck, BDSM was an erotic romance author's stock in trade. But actually *be* a slave? She was in waaaay over her head here.

The man's eyes narrowed. "You don't know the first thing about the Master/slave bond, do you."

It didn't sound like a question, because Delia was sure he already knew the answer.

"You are an erotic romance...reader? Writer?"

"She's a published author," Judith chimed in. "Her first book just came out and you can buy it this weekend at the book fair. Her name is Delia Barnes. And you're right, she's unfamiliar with that lifestyle."

If Delia had held a gun in her hands, Judith's lifeblood would be flowing out of her belly right about now. She flashed a silent warning to her critique partner, who blithely ignored her as she smiled up at him from her five-foot-nothing height.

"And you are...?"

The man had the temerity to bow like an eighteenth-century courtier. "Master Kurt, at your service."

"Well, Master Kurt, are you staying at this hotel?" Judith's question. Delia vowed to add poison to Judith's next pomegranate martini.

"I am."

"Then perhaps you'll find a few minutes to explain some basics to Delia here."

Master Kurt turned to Delia. "It would be my pleasure." His gaze skittered past her and his eyes gave some kind of signal, but Delia would be damned if she'd turn around and check out what he was doing.

“Delia Barnes.” His deep voice purring her name stroked her down to her toes. She couldn’t deny that his voice, his stare, his commanding presence had already started the cream flowing between her legs. She’d need more than a snorkel, she’d need full scuba gear if he kept that up.

“Delia, I am going to give you your first lesson in being a proper slave.” Gently placing his long fingers on her shoulders, he turned her around then leaned over her shoulder to whisper in her ear, “See that booth at the very end of the bar? A friend of mine has reserved it for us. Go to the booth and slide in opposite him, facing me. Then, and this is important, Delia, you must obey me when I ask you to do this.”

His palm cradled her cheek as he turned her head toward him. Their lips almost met. “Do you understand?”

“Yes.” It came out no more than a whisper, for his warm breath on her skin was like a lover’s caress that weakened her knees.

“This is what I am asking you to do. Once you sit down, you will reach under your skirt and slip off your panties. No, do not stiffen your shoulders when your Master speaks to you. A slave obeys her Master for the sheer pleasure of pleasing him. Do you understand that?”

Delia swallowed hard and nodded. Her throat was too clogged to speak even in a whisper. Was she actually going to obey this stranger?

He looked way younger than she. But...why not? She’d been widowed four years, and now that her son was a college junior, she’d vowed to make time for herself, her own pleasures. And heck, cougars were in vogue now, both in romance novels and in real life. She could do this, follow his orders.

For now, anyway. It wasn’t like he’d asked her to jump into his roadster and visit his private, secluded dungeon. There were dozens of people around and her friends would stand by to make sure she wasn’t hurt. Hell, they were already encouraging her with their eyes and their smiles.

She made a move to go when he added, "Once you remove your panties, fold them up and place them in the center of the booth where my friend can see them. I'll join you soon."

Crap! It would be bad enough that she'd be doing this in a dim corner booth all alone, but with a second stranger watching?

Cougar! Act like a cougar! I am woman, hear me roar! Just slink your way down to the booth and give Master Kurt an eyeful.

Raising her chin and squaring her shoulders, Delia showed him her back and sauntered to the booth in question to find a handsome, hazel-eyed, sandy-brown-haired man—another *younger* man—nursing a tea-colored drink in a shot glass, ice water on the side. "May I join you?"

"Are you Kurt's new slave?"

"Is that a yes or a no?"

The man laughed and slid out of the booth. Taking her hand, he brought it to his mouth and kissed her knuckles. "Please, be my guest." He waited until Delia seated herself before sliding back.

Another gigolo masquerading as a gentleman, she thought.

"Look, I—" she began then stopped, rubbing suddenly damp palms against her skirt. What on earth should she say?

"I'm looking, and I like what I see. Please, make yourself comfortable."

Suddenly more nervous than she wanted to admit, Delia chanced a glance out to the bar area where Kurt still stood chatting with her friends. He frowned at her, his message clear. *Do it!*

In that moment she thought she understood what it meant to be a sex slave. To do her Master's bidding, no matter the situation. Hummingbirds fluttered in her belly. She felt a drop of sweat roll down her spine.

Holding his stare, she leaned her shoulders into the padded back and levered her hips off the seat. Shoving the hem of her skirt up to her crotch, she snagged the elastic of her panties with her thumbs and pulled the skimpy bikinis down her legs and around her ballet flats. Heat swamped her, turning her skin damp from tip to toe.

Conjuring up a show of insouciance, she broke his stare and turned her attention to the red silk, mentally congratulating herself for her foresight in having bought a half dozen new pairs of sexy bikini panties for the trip to help her assume her erotic-romance-author persona. She carefully folded the tiny garment and placed it on the table equidistant between herself and her “companion”.

Delia could feel her face burning. It was probably the same shade as her top—and her red panties as well—and she dropped her gaze to her hands clamped together in her lap. Her breaths came shallow now as she waited for him to arrive and continue her lessons.

Research, she reminded herself. Jeez, the things writers do for authenticity!

After an eternity, or maybe it was just a minute or two, Kurt slid into the booth beside her, turning his body toward hers. The soft wool covering his left knee grazed the skin of her right thigh and she belatedly realized she hadn’t pulled her skirt back down very far. Skitters of awareness prickled all over her body.

“I’m proud of you,” he murmured. Palming the panties and raising them to his nose, he inhaled deeply and smiled. “Your obedience deserves a reward.”

Delia’s muscles tightened. What kind of reward could he give her in public? And did he have to flaunt those red panties like a cape to a bull? Why was she even doing this with a man whose age had to be in a whole other decade—a *younger* decade?

“Lift your left leg up to the seat opposite so Logan here can reach it. He’s going to remove your shoe and give your foot a massage.”

Heat engulfed her. Was he planning a ménage? In public?

“Delia.” Stern voice. Masterful voice. Meekly she complied.

After a few moments of strong fingers and thumbs kneading her plantar and flexor muscles, she wanted to close her eyes and moan in ecstasy. But she dared not allow herself to get carried away. These guys were strangers.

“Your friends are really nice.”

Delia blinked. *Focus!*

“Especially Judith. She’s aware of Logan’s photographic work and of our agency’s reputation. Just so you know we’re not some fly-by-night outfit.”

Uh-oh. Her friends setting up a tryst for her, giving her a thumbs-up, vetting her choice.

Could she blatantly accept what he was offering with them knowing what she’d be doing? Shouldn’t sex – especially the first time – be private?

But still, he was a fine specimen of manhood.

“Look at me, Delia.”

She turned her head and was immediately lost in the depths of eyes that had turned almost black from the dilation of his pupils.

“A Master’s first obligation is to his slave. He must place her welfare above his own.” A light touch of his finger down her arm accompanied Kurt’s recitation. Delia worked to hide her shiver but managed to hold his intense gaze.

“A Master will give a slave what she *needs*, not what she thinks she *wants*.”

He leaned forward until their mouths almost touched. Breathless, she waited for that last millimeter of movement that would bring their lips together.

It didn’t happen. Instinctively Delia knew that a slave would wait for a signal, for permission to move, if the Master withheld the kiss. She also knew that this young stud was appealing to her on levels she hadn’t even thought about. With an almost desperate harnessing of will, she stayed motionless. The rational part of her brain noticed that her red panties were no longer in sight, but she concentrated instead on the rough planes of his face, the slight shadow of his emerging beard on that square jaw.

“Very good, Delia.” Kurt leaned back and Delia almost cried aloud.

“You wanted my kiss. I could see it in your eyes, in the softening of your mouth. But you waited for permission. You have it in you to be a good slave.”

Slave, hell, Delia thought. I want to kiss you. I want to see if the reality is as good as the promise. But after an outraged flare of her eyes she managed to lower them in mock subservience. She had to see what he’d do next.

“You’re not wearing a bra, I see.”

Delia could see too. Could see her nipples poking out of the silken fabric of the red shell. Well, hell, she was – thought she was – just meeting her girlfriends, so she wasn’t tricked out in her editor-meeting outfit. Tonight was supposed to be mega casual. She hated wearing a bra, her boobs were fairly small and didn’t sag much, and if she dared admit it to herself, she felt sexy feeling their slight bounce as she walked.

At her age, anything that made her feel sexy was good stuff.

And this young man was making her feel mega sexy. Cougarly sexy.

I’m in deep doo-doo.

“Are you enjoying your massage?” Kurt had moved closer, his words sending puffs of breath to tickle the tendrils of hair around her temple.

Suddenly Delia sat up straighter as a new sensation flooded her brain. Her bare foot was pressed against – *OMG!* – the hard cock of Kurt’s buddy, and he was using the sole of her foot to stroke himself through his trousers, his eyelids drooping, a lazy smile skimming his face.

Kurt’s hand clamped on to her bare knee and he slid to the very edge of the booth, pulling her thigh out toward him. The buddy moved her other leg closer to the wall so that she was spread like a wishbone underneath the table. She swallowed, but could find no spit to soothe her throat.

“I detect an irresistible aroma of arousal about you, Delia Barnes.”

“This – this is just research, remember,” she managed to say.

His deep chuckle reverberated through every bone in her body.

“What would you do,” he murmured, “if I slid underneath the table and began to lick whatever warm, damp places I found open to me?”

“You—you wouldn’t dare.”

He brought his free hand to the hair at her nape, fisted it so that her chin lifted. “You do not dare a Master, for most likely he will do that very thing.”

“In public?” she managed to squeak out. “With everyone watching?”

“Look around you, Delia. We’re in the darkest corner of the bar. Your friends are having a fine old time meeting and greeting, not paying any attention to us. If they chance to look this way and don’t see me, they’ll think I left because you’ve become enamored of Logan. And I wouldn’t blame you.”

He released her hair, moved closer and rested his arm lightly across her shoulders while keeping a firm grip on her knee under the table. “Tell me how wet you are.”

Her temper flared. Her spine straightened. “You’re going too far.”

“Research, remember? Savor this moment of humiliation and titillation—an oxymoron, yes?—so that you can write about it with authority. You are a slave doing your Master’s bidding. You have no choice but to tell him how wet you are.”

Yeah, research, she could do this. “Okay, I’m turned-on. Mega. I feel like I have no choice but to...” Good grief, she had been about to say, “to let you go down on me, I *want* you to go down on me.”

“No choice but to say I’m afraid I’ll have a spot on my skirt, I’m so wet.”

The smile he bestowed on her made every muscle in her body weak. “See? That wasn’t so difficult, was it?”

“Is that ice water?” she croaked, trying to ignore how easy it was to succumb to his mellifluous voice.

“Help yourself,” Logan said, pushing the condensation-laden glass toward her.

Gratefully Delia took a few deep gulps. She wished she could dump the entire thing on her lap to cool down her flaming pussy.

“Now imagine yourself lying on a bed,” Kurt said, his eyes on her throat as she swallowed. “Naked. Your Master comes in with a glass filled with ice cubes. Where would you like him to put them? On your nipples? Slide them along your pussy lips? Or would you want to be on your hands and knees as he rolls them up and down your slit then starts concentrating on your rosebud?”

“I can’t...” Delia’s breathing had turned shallow. Every synapse was firing until she thought her circuit breakers would snap. Her brain felt like pabulum. She wanted him to kiss her senseless, to jam his fingers inside her and never mind the bartender or waitress or patrons, never mind her editor or her writer friends, she just wanted wanted wanted...

She turned to him, her eyes damp and filled with need. “Kurt, I can’t take any more of this. It’s been too long for me, my husband’s been dead four years and you’re awakening every sensation in my body. But dammit, you’re jerking my chain. I’ve got to get away from you or I’ll go mad.”

She lasered a glare to the buddy. “My shoe. Now. Or get my bare heel shoved into your crotch.”

Logan chuckled and slipped her flat back on to her left foot.

Half crouching, half standing, she shimmied her skirt down, pushed at Kurt’s wide shoulder until he slid from the booth to allow her egress. She all but ran from him, from the damn research, from her own burgeoning desire for Kurt whatever his name was.

* * * * *

“She’s a little old for you, don’t you think?”

Kurt gave his long-time friend a dark glance. “I wasn’t searching for wrinkles or gray hairs. All I could think of was, this was a woman who needed educating.”

“And who better to educate?” Logan’s smile was lazy, almost mocking.

“Look, I just got done making an hour-long presentation that could make or break our agency and I was on edge, okay? Sitting at the bar, enjoying a brewski to get my heartbeat back to normal, and I kept hearing ‘I didn’t say “Yes Master” quick enough’ so many times I thought I’d puke. Damn broad didn’t know the first thing about it.”

“Need any refills?” the waitress purred as she bent forward to take Logan’s empty shot glass. “Or do you still need some time?”

Kurt had given her a twenty with the instruction to keep away from their booth until he called her over. He almost chuckled. She had obviously read everyone’s body language when Delia Barnes huffed her way out of the booth and charged out of the bar, ignoring her friends’ catcalls.

“I’ll have another mug of whatever’s on tap. And thank you.”

“My pleasure.” She was sending out vibes that a blind jackass couldn’t miss, but Kurt ignored her. Anyway, she was Logan’s type, heavy on the tits and the eye makeup.

Logan asked for a refill on his bourbon and watched the waitress sashay to the bar. “So. Now that you’ve given our little slave her first lesson, what’s next?”

“First, she’s not ‘little’ and second, she’s not ‘ours’.”

Logan snickered. “And she’s not a slave either, I’ll wager. Not like Gina was.”

Gina. Kurt’s heart constricted. The stupid little twit. He’d never forgive himself for allowing her to—

“Oh no you don’t. I’m sorry I mentioned her. Look, Kurt. Granted, Gina was the perfect slave—petite, dainty, submissive, and crazy in love with you. But she’s been gone three years now. It wasn’t your fault. You can’t keep lugging that guilt around when it was her own actions that brought it on.”

Kurt slammed his open palm down on the tabletop. “Dammit, I should have been quicker. A Master is supposed to protect his slave and I didn’t. Her death rests solely on me and no amount of nagging from you is going to change that.”

"I need a two-by-four," Logan growled. "If I hit you with anything smaller it won't penetrate that thick skull of yours." He shook his head then swiveled in his seat to take in the action within the bar.

Reluctantly Kurt allowed his gaze to do the same. His brain certainly needed a change of pace. He saw clumps of women chatting, laughing, drinking, moving and mingling. Erotic romance convention, Logan had said. Did all those women have sex on their minds? Even the morbidly overweight ones, the wrinkled and white-haired ones?

Logan twisted back to face him. "Think I'll mingle and see what kind of 4-1-1 I can get from some of these women about your little slave Delia."

"She's not my slave," Kurt mumbled.

But she would be. Kurt had a feeling about that.

Maybe it was time to start living again. And with a woman whose age and maturity were definitely a plus.

* * * * *

"And I never did find out what happened to my red panties."

"Oh Delia, he's such a hunk!" Judith was so excited to hear of Delia's tryst, she was all but jumping up and down in her seat, her pixie-cut silver hair shimmering along with her eyes. "And he's sooo interested in you. Why, from where we were standing, it looked like he was devouring you with his eyes. I'm getting randy just thinking about it! You really need to start thinking like a cougar."

Delia was far from sure about that. Kurt made her uncomfortable. He made her squirm. He made her as hot as an Arizona desert in July.

He made her long for the safety of her Robert, the man she'd been married to for twenty-one years before his untimely death in a boating accident. She'd been *comfortable* sharing sex with him. They knew each other's likes and dislikes, turn-ons, hot buttons. The sex might have dimmed a little following the birth and years of rearing their son,

but the love remained, true and steady and glowing, like embers in the fireplace that kept them warm on nights they simply cuddled on the sofa.

Maybe she wasn't looking for love again—who could replace Robert? On the other hand, why couldn't a forty-nine-year-old woman have some fantastically hot sexual encounters with a younger man? Kurt talked a good game and she had no doubt that he could deliver. Hell, just seeing him naked would probably give her an O all by itself. The guy was built, with a capital B. And at his age, probably had the stamina of a stud.

But good lord, what would he think when he saw her body? She had no illusions that she was centerfold material, nor had she ever been. Although she used her fitness center regularly and considered herself in good physical health, gravity had done its thing on her. And yes, she touched up her hair and used outrageously expensive skin creams and tightening lotions. So what? Women like Susan Sarandon and Madonna looked sexy into their fifties and sixties, and in fact gossip mags labeled them cougars. Why shouldn't she?

She nodded her head once, decisively. "Okay."

"Huh? Where were you just now?" Judith cocked her head to emphasize the question.

"Um, I was thinking of this and that. If I run into this Kurt guy again, I won't snub him."

"You'd better not, he's prime cougar bait."

Delia swallowed. "I guess I seemed pretty uptight back there in the bar. I won't apologize, hear? But I'll give him—us—a chance to connect. To see where all this Master-slave stuff goes. For research purposes."

Judith burst out laughing and Delia joined her. Laughter was one of her defenses against sorrow, against pain, against growing old. It was almost as good as a full-body massage.

She felt her cheeks heating as she thought of the massage she'd gotten—given—a few hours ago. If Kurt's cock was as big as Logan's, she'd have her hands full. And, as

Judith would be quick to point out, her mouth and pussy as well. But that was putting the cart way before the horse. It definitely wouldn't happen this weekend, not with all her friends as her armor and shield. To say nothing about her own reticence.

"You know how not to lose another pair of panties, don't you?"

Delia brought herself back to their discussion. "How?"

Judith shrugged. "Don't wear them next time."

Chapter Two

He didn't know how he'd gotten there, but Kurt found himself standing in the shadows watching all the erotic-romance women dancing up a hurricane to the tunes a cool DJ had selected.

Who was he kidding? He was watching Delia Barnes. The woman had tunneled into his brain. Her combination of sass and reserve called to him. To say nothing of her curves and that trembling mouth. No way would she be a total slave like Gina was, but he could see her reluctant interest in being a sexual slave. Hell, if she wrote erotic romance, she needed to experience it. And the age difference was a real turn-on for him. Go figure.

Thinking of her under his domination was making his cock swell. Damn, but he usually had better control than that. He stepped deeper into the shadows of the private meeting room he'd crashed and zeroed in on her. Delia was shaking her booty to a smokin' beat, flinging her head back and forth so her hair shimmered like molten gold under the lights, bumping and grinding her hips like an accomplished stripper, arching her back so her shoulders bounced parallel to the floor. Occasionally she'd shimmy her tits, which now looked as though they were enclosed in a bra. Her moves spoke of unconscious sexuality. For a fleeting moment he even thought she looked like she was having an orgasm. She probably wasn't even aware of the signals she was sending.

But he was reading them loud and clear.

The music shifted to a seductive slow song by Michael Bublé and she pivoted to return to her seat. He made his move.

"I believe this dance is mine," he said as he scooped her into his arms and smoothly reversed her back onto the dance floor.

“How did you get in?” she sputtered even as she placed her left hand on his shoulder.

“Door was open. No bouncer, no gate-keeper.”

He snugged her up super-close to his body, holding his palm firmly on the small of her back. To his mind, they fit almost perfectly, her temple against his chin, her torso aligned with his. Heat from her previous gyrations radiated from her and raised his own temperature.

“You smell good,” he murmured into her hair. It felt soft and silky against his lips. “Like fresh air and rain.”

She stumbled but he held her steady. “It’s the hotel soap.”

“I’ll have to raid their storage closet.”

“Seriously, Kurt, you shouldn’t be here. This is only for conference registrants.”

He insinuated his thigh between hers as he moved her slowly across the dance floor. “Point out the ticket-taker. I’ll buy a registration if that’s what it takes to keep you in my arms.”

A soft moan was her only response.

No it wasn’t. Her hand slid up the back of his neck and her fingers sifted through the hair now loose around his shoulders, shooting a wave of pleasure through him. He could feel the accelerated beat of her heart through his polo shirt and her baby tee.

“You’re wearing a bra now. Did you put on a fresh pair of panties too? Like a coat of armor?”

Leaning back enough to look into his eyes, she said, “Those red ones cost me sixteen ninety-five. I hope you didn’t toss them in the trash.”

He gave her a Cheshire cat grin. “Nope. I have them in my pocket.”

Her hand slid down his back, furtively explored his butt cheeks for a telltale bulge in his back pockets and came up empty. He chuckled. “They’re in a pocket of my luggage.”

Holding his palm tighter against her back, he shifted so his hardening cock rubbed against her crotch, her belly.

“What do you feel now, Delia?”

She groaned. “You’re driving me crazy.”

“Good. I’d hate for it to be one-sided.”

She let out a helpless little laugh. “You’re changing the subject.”

“Don’t worry, your panties are in good hands. Speaking of hands, you can put yours back on my ass.”

“Kurt, everybody’s going to think that—”

“They’re all erotic romance readers and writers. They’re going to think it whether we do it or not. At least we can give them fodder for their imagination.”

“Kurt, no.” She pushed against him but he held firm.

“Just one dance, Delia, then I’ll leave.”

“Oh.”

That breathless exhalation sounded like disappointment to him. Kurt smiled in the dark as he tightened his hold and was delighted to feel her right hand slip out of his to come to rest against his heart. He put his other arm around her shoulders and simply rocked slowly to the music, two bodies wrapped tightly around each other, breaths coming shallow and expectant, heat on the edge of flaring into explosion between them.

He could smell her arousal, a scent already imprinted on his psyche from their time in the booth. “Delia,” he murmured into her ear. “My lovely slave. Squeeze your inner muscles for me. Squeeze them to the beat of the music.”

Silence. But her fingers gripped a fistful of his hair.

“Pretend my cock is inside your pussy and you’re getting ready to come.”

A shudder transmitted itself from her to him and he smiled as he held her even tighter. “I’m pumping harder now. My hips are slamming into your cradle and I can’t help myself. I’m gonna come soon. You’re so tight, so sweet. Come for me, with me.”

She whipped her arms from around his shoulders and slapped her palms against his chest, pushing back as far as his iron grip would allow. "What the hell are you trying to do, make a fool of me?"

"Of course not. I'm simply teaching you how a Master —"

"Not in public like this," she hissed. "I will not be played like a puppet."

She wrenched out of his hold and stalked off the dance floor, heading for the table where her friends sat. He watched as she grabbed her purse and shook off her friends' efforts to keep her there. A moment later she disappeared through the doorway and out of sight.

Kurt stood on the dance floor a moment, willing his erection to slacken from a damn oak tree to a mere sapling, then followed her footsteps to the table, noting that the music had shifted to a fast, throbbing beat.

"Well," he said as he pulled out an empty chair next to the woman called Judith, "I didn't think she hated reggae *that* much."

A couple of her friends tittered at his lame joke, but they didn't buy it.

"Not a good Master, huh?" This from Judith.

He felt his ears going hot and hoped the dim lighting in the room hid the red tips. "I guess she wasn't ready for dance-floor sex."

"Delia is a pretty private person. Maybe you should try phone sex first."

Kurt's cock fired up again. His eyes flared. "Maybe I should. I'll give her a call at..." he checked his watch. Eleven-thirty. "Midnight. The witching hour. What's her room number?"

"Two tw —" Judith began.

One of the others overrode her, a blonde, blue-eyed, curvy woman with a Texas accent. "Judith, think about this. Maybe we should check with Delia first."

Two-twelve? Two-twenty-something? Hell, he'd dial every extension until he heard her sleepy, sexy voice answer the phone.

Then it hit him. Two. “She’s on the second floor? Lord, you can still hear all the noise that close to the ground. She should have demanded a higher floor.”

“She, um, has a fear of heights,” Judith said. “Wouldn’t even register if she couldn’t get a room on the first or second floor. Look, don’t even kid her about that. It’s real.”

Kurt digested that. Somehow the quirk made her more real to him, that she was imperfect, not so unattainable.

He stayed with Delia’s friends for a while, charming them—he hoped—and paying some attention to every woman at the table. After a surreptitious check of his watch, he excused himself.

“Midnight,” Judith observed. “Instead of turning into a pumpkin, Mister Master is turning into a phone booth.”

Everyone had a good laugh at his expense, including Kurt himself. Because he couldn’t wait to have that phone sex with Ms. Delia Barnes.

* * * * *

Pretend my cock is inside your pussy and you’re getting ready to come.

God, that’s exactly what she was doing, Delia thought, rubbing gentle circles on her clit as she recalled his seductive words, the deep voice. Oh lord, the way he’d felt against her, his cock thick and hot against her belly, his muscular arms holding her tight, his breath warm and damp against her ear.

She’d acted like a virgin debutante, fleeing the dance floor like that. Usually she closed down the bar, although her intake limit was a mere three pomegranate martinis. She simply loved being with friends, old and new, having fun and finding out what made them tick.

Dammit, that man had had her so turned-on, so hot, so wet, she’d been seconds away from detonation. *Master Kurt*. Yeah, yeah, so he had a pedigree and references. He could go screw himself and his slaves. What he did—tried to do—to her on the dance

floor was unconscionable. Not. On. The. Dance. Floor. With witnesses. With *her friends* as witnesses.

But in the privacy of her hotel room, the thought of him sliding that cock inside her, slamming that finely honed young body into her, she was almost there again, hot and wet and seconds away from a big O. She dipped her finger into her wet pussy as she pictured him as naked as she was. He'd have hair on his chest. She'd seen shadows under the open placket of his gray shirt. Would his cock stick straight out like a beckoning finger? Or up against his belly, rampant and reaching? Or maybe it would be so heavy it would lean downward. Her breathing turned more shallow and choppy at each and every picture she conjured up.

The phone's jarring ring interrupted her erotic daze. Probably Judith, checking to make sure she hadn't hooked up with him, bless her heart. She fumbled for the receiver. "No, but I'm thinking about him," she said, her voice muzzy.

"About me?" a deep, masculine, very sexy voice answered.

Holy crap! Kurt? How did he get—damn, if one of her friends gave out her room number, the woman would be on Delia's shit list for months.

"Do you know what time it is?"

"Time to give you that orgasm you almost had on the dance floor?"

"You're impossible." She tried to sound irate but the velvet timbre of his voice sent erotic shivers all the way down to her red-painted toenails and primed her all over again.

"I'm merely helping you do your research. Have you ever had phone sex?"

Her silence probably gave him his answer, for his next words actually curled her toes. "I'm holding your red panties up to my nose and smelling you. Smelling your arousal, your cream. The same way I smelled it in the booth at the bar. Your voice was very sexy when you answered the phone just now, Delia. Were you lying naked on your bed, playing with yourself?"

Silence. She dared not speak over her heat, her embarrassment. This was a whole new experience for her. Probably not for him. Phone sex was probably like vitamins for his generation.

“Delia, your Master asked you a question. Answer me. Were you masturbating?”

Okay, she was alone, she was safe, she’d always wondered about the veracity of scenes she’d read in erotic romances. And she could blog about it later. About his voice, not about masturbating.

“I was.” She made her voice as sultry as his, trying to give him a taste of his own medicine. Because she was sure she’d detected a hitch in his voice. Maybe he wasn’t immune to her either. “I was swirling two fingers—two very wet fingers—around my clit.”

“And did it make you wetter?”

She stroked herself, imagining his tongue replacing her fingers, and felt another gush of cream between her open thighs. “Yes.” She drew out the sibilant sound.

“I’m picturing it seeping out of your sweet cunt, dribbling down your thigh. Sweep some of that cream up on your finger and taste it for me, Delia. I’m going to stick my tongue out. Pretend you’re feeding me your cream so I can taste it. Put it on my tongue, Delia. The way I want to put my tongue on you, on your pussy, to lap it up.”

Dammit, it was almost as though he’d known what she was thinking.

“Tell me, Delia. What does it taste like?”

Almost against her will she lifted her hand to her mouth, stroked her fingers against her tongue, sucked deeply. “Um, salty, bittersweet.”

“That’s exactly what ambrosia tastes like. Now I want you to put those two fingers inside your slit. Right where I want to put my cock. As deep as they can go.”

She couldn’t stifle the tiny moan that escaped when she followed his instructions. Her interior passage was slick with her juices, plump and engorged with blood. She

pressed her thumb over her clit as she slid her fingers in and out. Her hips started gyrating with the sweet friction.

“I heard your breathing go shallow, Delia. How many fingers are you using to fuck yourself?”

“Two. No, three.” His harsh breathing through the phone was making her hotter, so she’d inserted a third finger. God, she was almost kissing the phone. She wanted to kiss him, wanted to feel the suction of his mouth on her tongue. On her clit, dammit.

“Good. I’ve got my fist around my cock. It’s hot and it’s hard. And getting hotter and harder thinking about where it wants to go.” His breathing got choppy, his voice shakier. “It wants in, Delia. It wants to sink into that wet pussy of yours. *I want to sink into it. I want to watch you come. Are you almost ready to come?*”

Delia closed her eyes, the better to capture the sensation overload. His voice stroking her, her fertile imagination feeling the rasp of his chest hair against her tight nipples, the sweat dripping down his temple as he pounded into her, the clutch of his strong fingers at her hips—she twisted her fingers around, found her G-spot and stroked harder. Rocked her thumb against her clit. Dug her heels into the mattress. Lifted her body up to him, offering him her orgasm.

She bit her lip to contain the scream but it found its way into the night from deep inside her, long and rolling and utterly without shame.

“That’s right, sweetheart, come for me. Come loud and long. Let me hear you moan and gasp. That’s it, I love the sound.”

His voice trailed away, but Delia was so far into herself she barely wondered if it was because he was having his own orgasm or if she’d let the phone fall from her ear onto the bedding. Seconds—minutes?—passed before she heard faint sounds around her.

“Delia, darlin’, can you hear me?”

As her breathing stabilized and her aftershocks subsided to mild tremors, Delia became more alert to her surroundings. Of the tangle of sheets around her legs, strands of hair plastered against her neck, the heat and dampness of her skin.

Of Kurt's voice. She jerked up onto her elbows, thrashed around the pillow for the phone and lifted the receiver. "Kurt?" Her voice sounded breathless to her ears.

"Hello, love. That was beautiful. Next time I want to watch. I want to touch." Damn, but his voice sounded breathless too. "Delia. I promise not to intrude on your weekend, but I do want to see you again. There's something between us and I want to explore it."

"Um."

"Ask Judith. She's familiar with our agency's work. I'm a productive member of society. I don't kick puppies. But I will help you with all the hands-on research you need."

Delia sat upright on the bed at the reminder. Dominance and submission. "I could never be a slave," she whispered.

"I don't do the lifestyle 24/7," he was quick to respond. "I don't want someone walking three paces behind me, someone who'll wait until I allow her to be fed. But you are a sexual submissive, Delia. I'm sure of it. And I want to show you how beautiful it can be."

Was phone sex part of the dominance? Delia wondered. Or just something between a horny man and hornier woman?

"I'm leaving in the morning—hell, I might as well tell you, I tried to get my stay extended but the hotel was sold out. But I'll leave a happy man if you give me your phone number, or email address, or some way of contacting you."

Delia hesitated. Her friends would urge her to go for it. Heck, she could have email sex with him and never actually meet him in person again. On the other hand, why not sample such a glorious specimen? She was ready for an affair. Especially with a younger man who looked as good as Kurt.

“Okay. I could play coy and say, check out my website, where there’s a ‘Contact Delia’ link. But I’m too old to play sophomoric games.” She rattled off her email address. “And speaking of ‘too old’, you don’t need glasses, do you? You know I’m quite a bit older than you are.”

“There’s nothing wrong with my vision. I saw an attractive woman in her prime who’s happy in her skin, who radiates self-confidence, who embraces life with joy. I see a passionate, responsive human being who will welcome all the sexual experiences in store for her. I don’t care how old you are. I’m a very mature thirty-five and I want to give you those sexual experiences.”

Well, that took care of that argument, Delia thought.

“You go to sleep now,” he crooned in her ear. “I hear an orgasm makes one sleep like a baby.”

“Kurt.”

“I’m still here.”

“Good night.”

“Until we meet again. And believe me, Delia, it will be sooner rather than later.”

Delia fumbled the phone back onto the cradle and slithered between the sheets. The next thing she heard was the six a.m. wake-up call.

* * * * *

Kurt hung up the phone beside his bed and relaxed back onto the pile of pillows. For sure she would give him a run for his money. But he knew the payoff would be phenomenal. Her buddies had already lined up in his corner. He’d been handed several of her bookmarks and they’d been careful to point out the URL where he could buy the digital version of her book. They’d also had a high ol’ time giving him her promo item, a twelve-inch ruler with the legend “Measure the man” as well as her book title.

Oh yeah, you bet he’d let her measure him. But only after he undid the cuffs. Or untied her from the bench in his playroom. Or the spider web.

With delicious thoughts of Delia at his mercy, he reached down to the swollen organ that was his cock and leisurely began to measure himself.

Chapter Three

"Judith, what am I going to do? I just got home from a seven-hour drive and first thing I see when I turn on the 'puter is an email from Kurt." She wished her friend was here with her instead of on a phone a thousand miles away.

"He wants me to spend a weekend with him," she continued, her panic escalating. "Apparently he has a home somewhere in the rural part of Bucks County. I thought he lived in Philly. Figured him for a penthouse condo. Yikes! I don't even know the man."

"Okay, calm down. Since I was familiar with their firm, I googled them. They've made quite a name for themselves in the past five years. Kurt is the mastermind, does all the presenting. Has a golden tongue." Delia heard a snicker and tried to ignore it. "Kurt Reinhardt. Check him out on the Net. He's been written up in some of the industry mags. His partner is Logan MacNeill. He's the photographer. Also golden."

"Wait, here's another one." Delia clicked it open. "Eeek. What should I do now? He's already read my book. How will I ever live up to what I wrote? He probably thinks I'm like my heroine and I'm not. It was all conjured out of thin air."

"It was conjured out of your imagination, out of your latent desires. This will be sure to give him reeeeeeeally naughty ideas, girlfriend. Might not be a bad thing, ya know? Go for it, girl!"

* * * * *

She must be out of her gourd, leaving work at the unheard hour of four-thirty on a Friday afternoon to spend a weekend getting laid by a hunk she barely knew. And it was all Judith's fault.

Well, at least she knew him a little better after a week's worth of late-night phone calls. His deep, sexy voice reverberated through the phone lines and throughout her

body as she lay in bed each night, following similar directions as that first time in the hotel when she'd masturbated to order. But before the *pièce de résistance*, they'd made some headway learning about each other, talking about inconsequential things like food, movie and reading choices, about their respective high-pressure jobs.

Two weekends in a row she'd begged off working Saturdays, the first being the conference. Her boss had raised an eyebrow but, bless her, Martha simply pursed her thin lips to an even thinner line and gave her one of those tolerant "harrumphs" that passed for approval. Of course, having worked twelve-hour days Monday through Thursday didn't hurt her cause, Delia thought. Her in-boxes, both cyber and paper, had been empty by the time she left.

Last night she'd come home dragging at nine-thirty but determined to look her best for the coming adventure. She'd touched up her roots, shaved everywhere, given herself a facial and lavished her skin all over with a high-end body cream. If Kurt decided she was too old or too dumpy after all, well, she wouldn't be able to say she hadn't given it her best shot.

Lordy, don't talk trash to yourself, the perky angel on her shoulder chided. *Kick that nay-saying heifer out of the park and go get your man. And remember Judith's mantra – Go for it!*

The thing was, she argued mentally, any kind of BDSM relationship was built on trust. She knew that from her research. And she was pretty sure Kurt would tire of a woman her age long before they could reach that point. Oh well, grab it while you can, she told herself.

A few miles after she crossed the Delaware River into New Hope, her little red sports car's navigation system announced an upcoming left fork into the more rural part of Bucks County. She'd been surprised to discover that Kurt's true home was on a hundred-acre farm. This route, some twenty-seven miles from her office in Princeton, was much better than finding her way through Philadelphia's rush hour traffic to a center city condo that he'd called only "a stopping-off place". At least she wasn't flying

somewhere. If this didn't pan out, she'd be back home tomorrow and could sleep the rest of the weekend.

"After the feed mill store," Kurt had told her, "look for a gravel drive between a stone barn and a yellow-sided farmhouse sitting close to the right side of the road." Then up a half-mile driveway to his home.

And there it was, sitting on a rise, its back side catching the last rays of the mid-October sun. Constructed of native stone, the imposing two-story main house had a one-and-a-half-story wing with eyebrow windows to allow light into an attic. She'd bet her next pedicure that the shorter structure was the original home and it was added to over the years as time and money afforded.

Someone had treated history reverently, she saw as she swung out of the car with her carry-on. Nine-over-six-paned windows, a couple of replacements looking identical to the ones with wavy glass in their lights. Cleanly mortared stone—

Her perusal came to an abrupt halt when the front door opened and Kurt stepped, barefoot, onto the covered stoop. She barely spared a glance for the worn jeans or the black henley snugged to his chest or his black hair loose around his face, because the smile he gave her shot a jolt of adrenaline throughout her body.

"Welcome to my home, Delia. Thank you for coming."

He held out a hand, helped her up the three flagstone-topped steps.

"Your bruise. It's almost gone." Gently he touched the skin under her left eye, where only traces of greenish-yellow remained.

"It's been a week. And I found some heavy coverage makeup."

"I'm glad you didn't walk into any more furniture." Yes, he had elicited from her the prosaic reason for her shiner during their phone calls.

With another smile, he ushered her into a front-to-back hallway containing a polished staircase. She set her bag down by the pineapple-topped newel post. On both

sides of the hall, random-width pine flooring underpinned two ample rooms, each with logs burning in fireplaces that took the autumn chill off the stone walls.

“Hungry? Thirsty? Tired? I can offer you wine in front of the fire, or wine in the Jacuzzi, or wine in the sun room...”

Delia chuckled. “I get the message. Yes, thank you, I’d love a glass of wine in the sun room.”

He took the short leather car coat she slipped off and laid it over a side chair in the hall. Then led her to an opening through what apparently had been the rear wall of the original house—it was close to two feet thick—and through a modern kitchen into a room made in heaven. Probably thirty feet long, its skylighted ceiling sloped up to a height of about fifteen feet, with the proffered Jacuzzi bubbling in one corner. The room contained potted lemon and orange trees in fragrant bloom as well as ficus and bromeliads scattered among the wicker furniture. But what struck her speechless was the view.

Two walls of floor-to-ceiling windows displayed a rolling vista of cultivated farmland, patches of autumn-toned forest, a glimpse of creek and a sky full of orange, red and purple clouds saying goodbye to the day in an ever-changing kaleidoscope.

How long she stood there agape, she wasn’t sure. The sky was navy blue when she felt a stemmed glass pressed into her hand.

“Earth to Delia.”

“Oh Kurt, I haven’t seen a sunset in months. And to have such a beautiful one offered to me. The view is exquisite.”

“It certainly is,” he murmured, his eyes fixed on her face.

She turned to him. And felt the heat of a blush climb over her cheeks. “To sunsets,” she said, lifting her glass.

“And other beautiful gifts of nature.”

They touched rims – the glasses made the distinctive tinkle of fine crystal – and she sipped the full-bodied red liquid. “Mmm. Another exquisite gift of nature.”

“It’s a Brunello. I decanted it about an hour ago. It’s been resting in my wine cellar for a decade, waiting for a special occasion.”

“A woman could get spoiled very quickly here.”

He moved in close, kissed her temple. “Exactly what I had in mind.”

His scent, an exotic spice – applewood smoke and fresh air – intoxicated her. “Kurt...”

“I know. I can’t wait another second.” He lifted the glass from her nerveless fingers and set it as well as his own on a side table. His thumbs caressed her cheeks as his fingers tunneled through her hair. “I’ve been wanting to do this for a whole week now.”

“Kurt,” she repeated, her ability to string two words together suddenly deserting her.

They were almost of a height with her three-inch black pumps and his bare feet. His gaze bored deeply into hers, and it felt as if he were staring into her soul, searching for her most profound yearnings. The intimate penetration caused her lower lip to tremble. His eyes snapped to the subtle movement and he moved those last few millimeters between them and touched his mouth to hers.

Tiny explosions detonated around her lips and she softened, opened to his touch. His tongue took instant advantage, exploring the perimeter then stroking over hers, thrusting and sucking in turn until she was wild to feel him aligned against her. Yet he held himself apart, nothing touching except their lips, and his hands in her hair.

So Delia took the initiative. She snaked her arms around Kurt’s waist and arched her back, rubbing against him, thighs to thighs, hips to hips, silently berating her lack of foresight in not removing her suit jacket when she’d handed him her car coat. She wanted to feel his chest against her breasts, skin against skin. Heat bloomed inside her, seeking an answering heat. After all the phone sex she was primed for the real thing. His kisses, the solid reality of his body against hers, were dangerous to her sanity.

“Delia.” Kurt’s voice was ragged, his erection pressing hard against her as he took her upper arms in his grip and gently disengaged their bodies.

“We have all weekend,” he continued smoothly, apparently having regained his control. “I will teach you that a little anticipation, a little withholding of ecstasy, can be most rewarding.”

She couldn’t suppress a delectable shiver at the thought. Her only worry was what his reaction would be when he saw her body with its more than four decades of wear and tear. Not that she lacked self-confidence. She had it to spare. But this was entirely new territory for her.

“You’re cold,” he said. “I’m a terrible host. Here, let’s get you into the Jacuzzi. I’ve set it at ninety-nine degrees. Did you bring a swimsuit? Or would you be comfortable lolling around in your birthday suit?”

Delia blinked. This was the moment of truth. Was she a cougar or not? Did she want sex with this man or not?

Go for it! She could hear Judith urging her to grab the brass ring. Still, he was the first man she’d kissed—and what a toe-curling kiss it was!—since Robert died four years ago, and no one else had seen her naked in twenty-two years.

“Delia. Your Master is asking you to remove your jacket and skirt. Will you do that for me?”

Yes. That’s what she needed, to have the decision taken from her after all the myriad decisions she’d made at the office. And that’s why, she reminded herself, she’d removed her prim white blouse just before leaving said office. She had to take a deep breath for this. Yes, she’d dressed for seduction, but actually *doing* it took all the nerve she could muster.

Slowly she undid the three fabric-covered buttons from her gray faux-suede jacket and slid it off her shoulders, revealing a silky, cobalt blue bra that molded her B cups perfectly to create a gentle cleavage. His eyes flared but he said nothing as he reached out a hand for the garment. She draped it over his arm.

“Now the skirt.”

She could do this, no sweat. Just think how all the other cougars would handle it. Undo button. Slide zipper down. Wiggle hips to let the skirt slither down her legs.

He inhaled a harsh breath.

A part of her rejoiced that she could elicit such a reaction from him at the sight of her. Thigh-high sheer gray stockings rode her long legs. Bikini panties, matching the bra, barely covered her scar.

Reaching out a hand to him for stability, she lifted one leg to remove a black stiletto.

“No. Not yet.”

Seeing the lust on his face made her spine straighten and gave her a much-needed shot of courage.

“Step out of the puddle of your skirt, take it to that chair in the corner and set it down. Then come back, walking slowly.”

Was that a wobble in his voice? Perhaps he wasn't as unaffected as he portrayed.

As she followed his instructions, she couldn't help but notice the involuntary sway of her hips, the catwalk saunter that suddenly felt the right way to walk, to tease. Being an exhibitionist was a high she hadn't expected.

“Sit here. On the edge of the tub.”

She did, lowering herself gracefully.

He knelt before her, lifted her left leg and slid her shoe off. Began to massage her foot, gently kneading her sole, the arch, each individual toe. Delia closed her eyes in bliss. His fingers strayed higher, to her calf, the back of her knee, the outer muscles of her thigh.

“Let's get this off, shall we?”

Her eyes snapped open. He tugged at the elasticized lace garter, rolled the stocking down to her ankle. Then set his lips on the indentations of her skin where the elastic

had constricted her all day. He licked and nipped, skimmed his fingertips across her mound as he massaged the skin.

The sight of his black-haired head so near her crotch sent a shock of cream drizzling through her pussy lips to dampen her panties.

“Don’t move, Delia.”

She didn’t even realize she had shifted her hips to bring his mouth closer to the spot between her legs that throbbed so heatedly.

After a few delicious minutes of torture, he moved to her right leg and performed the same combination of magic and teasing. Delia felt her breathing go shallow. He’d spread her legs and knelt between them. He couldn’t *not* smell her arousal, so close to the source was he.

“Delia. Delicious Delia. You smell of ambrosia.” Kurt’s fingers delved beneath the elastic of her cobalt panties, one hand on each side, and he slowly slid them toward each other. Hesitated. Continued until both index fingers met at the juncture that hid her clit.

“Bare. I like bare. Thank you, Delia, for that gift.” His fingers stroked abstract designs on the sensitive skin surrounding her nether lips, and Delia was glad she’d acted on a whim and shaved all of it, not just her bikini line.

Kurt dipped his head then, stroked her through her panties with firm pressure of his tongue. Delia almost jumped, but his grip on her thighs reminded her not to move. Such delicious torture, his mouth sucking, tongue delving, fingers probing, and she unable to flex her hips for more. She gripped the crown of the tub as she felt her muscles tense, her insides clench. Oh god, it felt so good, it had been so long, she was going to—

He leaned back, still on his knees. “Stand up.”

“Wh-what?” Her pussy was screaming for release. Dammit, she’d come here to get laid, not to get teased. She was on fire, wanted to rip off his clothes and jump him.

“Delia. You are learning how to be submissive. You will not come unless I allow it. Now stand up.”

Dazed, throbbing, she did so. He raised his hands and pulled her bikinis down to her ankles, his gaze riveted to her clean-shaven pussy. Okay, she could understand that he wanted her naked. She wanted that too.

But he didn't touch her.

“Step out of your panties so you don't get tangled up. And please remove your bra and toss it on the floor.”

“Hey, not fair. Then I'll be the only one naked.”

“Delia.”

He hadn't raised his voice, but its timbre, its power, raised little goose bumps on her arms. Raising her hands to the front clasp, she flicked it open and sloughed it off.

Lord, now she was totally naked and he was dressed. There was an illicit thrill to this, and she felt drops of cream leaking down her thighs. Would he see it? Would he comment on her scar, which was at his eye level?

“Tell me how you feel at this exact moment, Delia.”

She took a deep breath, felt her naked breasts sway. How honest should she be? “Like I'm doing something naughty but loving it. Wanting an orgasm so bad I want to yell and scream. Scared that you'll find me lacking. Wanting to tear off your clothes so I can devour you with my eyes, the way you're devouring me.”

“Fair enough.” He stood, jerked the henley over his shoulders and head, tossed it aside. Shucking his jeans, he stood before her in form-fitting black boxers.

Omigod. Robert had been in good physical shape, but five years older than she. This man, this *younger* man, robbed her of breath. Not body-builder bulging, but finely chiseled muscles, beautifully shaped arms, abs she could wash clothes on. His erection strained against the silk. She licked her lips.

A chuckle brought her out of her sensual stupor. “I guess the feeling's mutual?”

She lifted her gaze. "Oh yeah. You are one hell of a specimen."

"And you, Delia, are exquisite. I will so enjoy bending you to my will."

Her chin jerked up.

"Delia."

She couldn't help the involuntary gesture. She was so accustomed to being the boss, she needed time to shift gears.

Research, she reminded herself again.

He held out his hand. When she took it, he said, "Now step inside my office."

She almost snorted. Holding on to his strong arm, she swung one leg then the other over the rim of the tub.

"Sit right here, under the waterfall. I'm going to wine and dine you now."

The heat of the swirling water surrounded her, cocooned her like amniotic fluid. Delia relaxed into the sybaritic offering, resting her head on the cushion, the waterfall flowing over her shoulders and down her bare breasts. It felt like heaven.

Kurt retrieved her wineglass and handed it to her. She took a leisurely sip of the best wine she'd ever tasted as he uncovered a tray sitting on the table nearest the tub.

Climbing in beside her—still in his shorts, she noted petulantly—he sat sideways. "Close your eyes and see if you can identify what I put in your mouth. And Delia, if you open your eyes before I allow you to, you will earn a punishment. Agreed?"

A half-smile playing about her mouth, Delia murmured, "Agreed." This was pure luxury. Mentally she put a hot tub at the top of her wish list.

Something cool and wet slid between her lips. Delia bit down. Tart, tangy. "Kiwi?"

"Very good. And this?"

Horseradish and more. "Um, cocktail sauce? Oh, shrimp."

Absolutely decadent, Delia thought to herself as she identified bits of lobster, teriyaki steak, peaches and other slices of heaven as the jets at her back soothed and those coming up from the bottom aroused. Between bites she sipped the wine and felt

the tensions of the workweek recede. On occasion Kurt would stand, splashing the water around to, she assumed, reach the tray, and a bit of cheese or angel cake would reach her lips.

“Open wide,” she heard him say after she washed down a nugget of bitter chocolate with the last of her wine.

She did. Heat immediately engulfed her. Kurt’s cock, smooth and hot and hard, invaded her mouth. Her lashes snapped up.

“You disobeyed me by opening your eyes. Now suck me.”

Since she was already going to be punished, Delia let herself look at him close up, noting with delight that the skin around the base of his cock was devoid of pubic hair. Thick veins striated the length of him. The plum-shaped head was smooth to her tongue, pre-cum at its slit, and she licked, sucked, encased him inside her mouth, her free hand cupping, molding his balls. Blindly she handed up her empty wineglass and felt him lift it from her fingers. Now she could grasp the base of his cock, hold the thick shaft while she moved up and down with her mouth, drawing her cheeks in to apply more suction.

She could feel her pussy lips plumping, her puckered nipples aching for his touch. She desperately wanted his cock inside her. Pounding into her. Fucking her. One hand slid around to cup his ass cheek and she wormed her fingers inside his crack, searching for that rear opening.

Kurt grunted. His knees buckled then locked. He grasped her hair, pulled his cock away from her mouth. Her triumph at eliciting that reaction was short-lived.

“Enough. It’s time for your punishment.”

Damn, there was something about Delia Barnes that weakened his control. He’d planned to bring her to the brink a dozen times before allowing her release, but she’d brought him to the edge seemingly without effort. He needed to regain the upper hand.

Kurt climbed out of the tub, opened a warming cabinet and withdrew an oversized white towel. Then he offered her his free hand. "Step out, Delia."

She did and his cock leaped at seeing her rise, dripping, like Venus from the water. Yes, she was a fair bit older than he, but her air of self-assurance and self-knowledge appealed to him. As did the carnal way she'd massaged him with her mouth and hands. And her willingness to learn more about being submissive. For research purposes, she'd said. Yeah, right.

He fluffed her towel open and draped it around her, then quickly reached for another one and dried himself. "Follow me."

Wrapping the towel loosely around his torso, he strode through the doorway that opened into his studio. Skirting the large drafting table and chrome stool flanked by filing cabinets, he opened the door next to the unlit walk-in fireplace. He nudged her ahead of him to climb up the sharply curving stairway to the attic playroom.

Her footsteps faltered when she took in the huge room decked out with his personal dungeon accoutrements. The ceiling slanted down from a high peak to walls of no more than four feet in height, lending a vaguely confining air to the space.

"Not getting cold feet, are we?" he murmured into her ear from behind then slipped off the towel she'd tucked around her lush body and tossed his own on top of it. "It's time for your punishment."

He pushed a button. Soft saxophone jazz emanated from hidden speakers.

"To the bench. Lay on it, belly down. Legs spread like you're riding a motorcycle."

He guided her by a hand lightly clamped to the back of her neck until he'd positioned her to his satisfaction, legs wide apart with toes and balls of her feet on the floor, knees bent just a fraction to accommodate the bench's almost-crotch height, arms resting on small outcrops slightly below her torso, her ass cantilevered off the cushioned leather. "Just so you know, I had this bench special-made. Think chiropractor, where portions move down or up according to need."

Expertly he locked her ankles and wrists inside padded cuffs and stood back to admire the view. The long, smooth curve of her back, the flare of her hips. Her round ass cheeks wide open, the tempting rosette at the top of her crack, the cream seeping from her pussy. He felt his balls tighten.

The look of uncertainty on her face as her head rested on her cheek sent him down to one knee at her side. He looked into those blue, blue eyes. "Delia, I hope you know I won't hurt you. Being an erotic romance author, you know about safe words, don't you?"

"Wait, wait. Safe words, yes. What about...safe sex? I haven't been with anyone else in twenty-some years. Have you – will you –"

His cock leapt at the thought of training someone so untutored, so ripe for fulfillment. "Delia, a good Master knows what you need. Please believe that I will do nothing to harm you. I've been tested recently and I assure you that in everything that happens, you will be sexually protected." He touched her cheek with a knuckle. "Are you okay with that?"

She bit her lip then squeaked out a timid "Yes."

"Okay. Good. Now back to safe words. Red, yellow and green okay with you?"

"Yes. Green."

"Good." He smiled, bent forward to kiss the trembling edge of her mouth. Tucked a damp wisp of blonde hair behind one ear, delved into the shell and kissed it until he felt the tiny shudder under his lips.

Straightening, he went to the corner storage unit and selected a soft leather blindfold along with a flogger. The latter he placed across her waist. "You know, of course," he said casually as he covered her eyes and tied the tails at the back of her skull, "that the loss of one sense sharpens the others. I will demonstrate."

He caressed one round cheek with his palm, then lifted his hand and struck her ass with a resounding slap. "Are you okay, Delia?"

"Green," she murmured.

Her pale skin pinkened beautifully where he'd struck it. He laid half a dozen more blows in quick succession, alternating hands, then smoothed both palms against those soft mounds now turning enticingly red. "Beautiful."

He bent down to apply small licks to soothe her skin then stood back silently for one, two minutes. Ah, there it was, he thought, smiling to see her arch her back, to lift her splendid ass up as if asking for more.

"What do you want, Delia?"

"I want you to touch me. I want to feel your hands on me."

"Ah, but is that what you *need*?"

He picked up the flogger he'd laid on her back and began applying mild strokes at random to her shoulders, butt, upper arms, thighs, then picked up the pace and the strength of the blows. He watched as she bit the inside of her mouth, stuck that pointy pink tongue out to moisten her lips, squirmed against the bench, straining on tiptoe to push her ass higher into the anticipated blows.

Ah yes, she may not want to agree with his assessment, but she definitely showed submissive tendencies.

His strokes came down now with more fervor as she danced under the onslaught, mewling, panting, writhing. He could smell her arousal, could see the cream flowing from her damp pussy. He went to his knees and lapped up whatever his tongue could touch.

"Kurt, I'm so close! I need to come, please!"

"I do not want you to. Not yet." Nuzzling deeper, he sucked her pussy lips, plump and hot and juicy, stuck his tongue way up the length of her slit to touch that sensitive button that would make her scream.

"Kurt."

“Soon, Delia. Soon. But not yet. I will leave you alone for a bit to anticipate, to wonder what form your satisfaction might take.”

“No, please don’t leave me like this. I need to come. Dammit, Kurt, all week you’ve been promising fireworks with your phone sex. You can’t leave now.”

“I can and I will. But before I do, let me remind you what might happen later.” He moved to her side, lifted her jaw. She turned her head, trying to capture a finger to suck. Instead, he inserted his hard and willing cock into her mouth.

She pounced on it, her jaw muscles clenching, her cheeks pulling inward to draw him to her.

“Ah yes, Delia, much to anticipate.” With no little regret, he withdrew his cock. “I’ll be back.”

As her quiet curses reached his ears, he opened the door in the wall opposite the curving stairway, walked through the master bedroom and into the guest room across the main hall.

“Ready?”

“Oh yeah,” Logan said. Eagerly his best friend shucked his ruby-colored robe and, naked, followed Kurt back to the attic dungeon.

Damn him, damn him, damn that supercilious son of a bitch, Delia thought. How could she have allowed him to tie her up, she who had a dozen staff reporting to her, who ran her department like a submarine captain? How could she have laid bare her body with all its flaws for him to peruse? No matter how much she worked out, age and gravity seemed to go hand in hand.

If she was free, she’d ram her fingers up her pussy, rub her clit raw and have a slam-bang climax. She didn’t need his cock, dammit! Okay, yeah, he’d lowered her defenses with the food, the wine, the Jacuzzi. And don’t forget the drugging kisses, her sex angel whispered in her ear. She’d never been so horny, not even on her honeymoon.

After a few futile jerks of her arms and legs, she decided struggling was useless. She'd conserve her energy for scratching out his eyes. Or kneeling him in the gonads.

A sound captured her attention. Her breathing stopped as her senses sharpened. He was back, she could smell his masculine scent of spice and musk and fresh air. The air around her was disturbed. He was nearby, watching.

Anticipation skewered her. Surely he'd touch her, stroke her, fuck her, *something, anything.*

"Kurt?"

She heard a metallic rasping. The cushion holding up her head fell away.

"Just like a chiropractor's bench," Kurt's voice said as his palms cupped her face, turning it to the center and lifting it until the arch of her neck was totally engaged. "This way someone can stand closer and reach that delectable mouth from below."

Like Pavlov's dog, she opened her mouth, so blatantly eager for the taste of him. His soft laughter swirled around her.

He didn't disappoint. Firm flesh under hot, silky skin filled her mouth. She pounced, drawing him in hungrily, stroking his cock with her tongue. Her breathing quickened. Her hands fisted within the cuffs as if she held his cock within them. If he was that hot, that hard, she figured it shouldn't be too difficult to make him explode and he'd let her come too.

But jeez, it felt different. Kurt's cock had such a pronounced ridge around the head. This one had the girth, but the head wasn't so prominent. Oh lord, was it someone else? Was this what Kurt had meant when he'd told her he'd teach her to be submissive?

She had just relaxed her jaw muscles to begin protesting when she felt similarly firm flesh stroking her slit. And then he entered her in one long, hard stroke to seat himself to his balls.

"Kurt!" Her cry came out muffled around the other cock. He hadn't said a word, hadn't acknowledged that he was one of the cocks fucking her, one in her mouth, one in

her pussy, but damn, she'd been so turned-on, was so horny, at that moment she didn't care who they were, she wanted – no, needed – relief.

She sucked the one cock with renewed vigor, lifted her ass to accommodate the other cock slamming into her, and felt herself soaring, flying higher to that distant speck of light that would splinter –

They both withdrew.

She gasped a few frustrated curses. "Dammit, what are you doing to me?"

"Delia, I did not give you permission to come. And it looked to me as though you were about to disobey me." She felt his warm lips against her ear, the sigh of his breath caressing her skin. "Would you have me punish you again?"

"Kurt." Her voice was a whimper, but she didn't care. To have his cock inside her again, pounding her, fucking her, would be worth any later punishment. "Yellow, dammit! Please, please, please let me come. I'm burning up. I'm one big nerve ending."

"Very well. We will do this in increments. First you will suck off my friend. Then I will allow you to come, and I in turn will follow."

Damn this blindfold. Dare she ask who the friend was? Or would he consider it another reason to postpone her orgasm? And maybe if she pretended to be a true submissive, he'd hurry up and let her come...

"Yes...Sir. I'm happy to suck off your friend first." *So I can come, dammit.*

"Thank you, Delia. Such a good submissive you are. As soon as Logan tells you he's finished, you can come. But not before he gives you permission. His *words*, Delia. Not the action of his cum spurting down your throat."

Logan. His friend who'd massaged her feet, whose hard cock her feet had rubbed.

"Yes Sir." And then she could say no more, for Logan's cock thrust into her mouth and her mind turned to mush. Then her heart stuttered as Kurt rammed hilt-deep into her, withdrew and slammed, in and out in a diabolical rhythm as if his life depended on pleasing her.

Pummeled as she was from both sides, her arms powerless to fondle Logan's balls, her legs unable to wrap around Kurt's hips, she could only take and take, suck and mold, reveling in two cocks pushing her higher and higher. Oh god, she was going to come, she could feel every nerve gathering like a tidal wave pulling back before slamming full-blown onto the shore, and she sucked in mindless greed, willing Logan to release his spunk before her own cataclysm overtook her.

And then she felt it—the wet tip of his cock deep in her throat, his balls tightening up against her chin, his palms massaging her jaws and neck, the tremor running through him, the dip in the level of his cock that told her his knees had buckled—and she opened her throat wide to swallow the cascades of cum that shot into her throat, swamping her ability to capture it all. Felt the juices run out of her mouth, felt her own climax about to overtake her, and she moved her head at the same time that Logan stepped back a millimeter, giving her a breath to beg.

“Please, please let me come. I can't—”

“Come, darlin', you earned it,” Logan gasped, his hands clutching at fistfuls of her hair and shoving his cock back inside the womb of her mouth.

And a millisecond later she did, the earth exploding upward and stars raining down to clash within her like cymbals as Kurt's cock battered her again and again. Her cunt muscles squeezed him, milked him. Her groans sounded as feral as any wild animal's and she surrendered to her ecstasy in a shattering climax.

A moment later she heard an equally feral yell as she felt Kurt's life force pulsing through his cock and she squeezed him with her inner muscles, wanting to hold him inside her to capture these glorious sensations and never let them escape, but her feelings, her emotions, were so raw and vivid that everything around her went black.

“Delia, sweetheart, talk to me.”

Her lashes fluttered open. “Kurt.”

Never had Kurt felt so relieved. Seeing awareness again in Delia's blue eyes had him swallowing hard. "I think you fainted."

She snuggled deeper into his embrace under the soft beige blanket cocooning them together and murmured, "I can't imagine why."

He choked back his laughter. Parked on the oversized lounge in his playroom with Delia in his lap and Logan, his gaze anxious, seated on the floor beside them, Kurt mentally thanked every one of those erotic romance women for encouraging her to do her research personally. He leaned forward to kiss her brow. "Thank you for such a gift."

"From me too," Logan added. "You are an A-plus woman."

Delia lowered her gaze. "I guess I'm not used to this...brutal honesty, this two-on-one. I...we...my husband and I had a satisfying sex life, but we'd never..."

She shrugged, avoiding Kurt's gaze. "I never even considered this kind of thing until I started reading erotic romance."

"But you wrote about a ménage, yes?"

"You know I did. You told me you read my book."

"And your next one will be even better, because you've done your research."

Delia's laugh sounded as if it came from deep within her. It warmed him. Here was not a blushing maiden, but a woman who could take pride in her sexuality. A woman with whom he wanted to develop the all-important bond of trust. Here was a woman he wanted to keep.

The thought made him frown. He'd "kept" Gina, and look how that had ended. "Logan, you know where the mini-fridge is. Could you get us some water?"

"Sure."

He watched as his friend rooted around in the corner of the playroom and returned with three bottles of Evian. Maybe he was a snob, but he liked the slight effervescence of this particular water. Anything else was just tap water.

Unscrewing the caps, Logan handed one to Delia, one to him, and sat back down on the floor, naked, Indian-style, with his own refreshment. The casual flaunting of Logan's package between his outspread thighs annoyed Kurt. Delia was his. He'd only brought his friend on board to help Delia with her research, not to advertise someone else's wares.

He shook his head. It had obviously been much too long since he'd had such mind-blowing sex and he was mistaking the power of pheromones for something else. He needed to get back on track here.

"Hungry? You expended quite a bit of energy."

"No, but I could probably use a nap. I worked long hours this week so I could have the weekend free."

Guilt washed over Kurt for being a lousy host. He could make his own hours – and did, especially as concerned this weekend – but she had a demanding job, and he'd kept her up past midnight every night this week talking on the phone.

Letting the blanket fall to the floor, he rose, still holding her in his arms, and strode to the master bedroom, leaving Logan behind.

Or not. Coming up right behind him, Logan scooted around them to pull down the bedding of his custom-made, bigger-than-king-sized bed, which had seen more than one ménage in its day. With a brusque thank-you nod, Kurt lowered Delia onto the luxury-count sheets. He slid in beside her, gathering her in his arms and resting her head on his shoulder, and arranged the duvet around them. Leaving Logan standing there. The single bedside lamp illuminated the indecision on his friend's face.

Oh hell, Kurt thought. He was acting like an ass. Like a possessive teenager. He jerked his head to indicate the other side of the bed.

Logan wasted no time sliding in on Delia's other side and snuggling against her hip, one arm slung around her belly.

Sleep was a long time coming for Kurt.

Chapter Four

Delia awoke to an intense heat. It spread across her back. Her front—well, her front was splayed across Kurt's magnificent torso. She was lying on one arm with the other tucked under his armpit, her leg slung across his muscled thighs.

Her back...oh lord. *Logan*. His warm chest was pressed against her. Everything came back to her in a rush. She'd been on the receiving end of two magnificent cocks last night. Damn, she hadn't brought her BlackBerry. How could she wait until Sunday night to tell Judith how well her research had turned out? Surely Kurt had a computer somewhere in this rambling house. *Think, girl*. Had she seen it yesterday when Kurt had led her through the room that housed a drafting table? Or had the fact that she'd breezed through it naked and horny under her towel somehow affected her ability to notice things?

Then her thoughts scattered at the feel of a hard, hot cock between her ass cheeks. It would seem Logan sported a woodie and was slowly pumping his hips. She stiffened. She was Kurt's guest. But so was Logan. Should she rebuff him? Wake Kurt?

Oops, Kurt was aroused too. Were they awake and waiting for her to make a sound? Or was it simply a function of nature to have a morning hard-on after an evening such as they'd experienced? She couldn't see a clock, but through the drapes she could see a softening of the darkness. Really, she'd love to sleep in, but with two burgeoning young cocks in bed with her, perhaps she should take advantage of another research opportunity.

Kurt made the decision for her. He flipped her so that she lay atop him, chest to chest, her thighs straddled across his with a hot poker between them. His hands roved across her ass cheeks, spreading them wider, running his fingers inside the crack to dip into her pussy. They slid in as though her channel had been lubed.

She closed her eyes. Was she that aroused already?

A wet finger slid up to reach and tease her clit. Yes, she was that aroused already. She began slowly circling her hips, telling him without words what she wanted.

“Don’t move,” he whispered. “Do. Not. Move.”

Okay, he was in Master mode and she had to submit to his whims. She lay passive but thrumming atop him as he slowly built desire within her, stroking two fingers in and out of her pussy, detouring to her clit then all the way up to her anus and back again, dipping into her center at his whim. The languorous pace delighted her. Like Ravel’s *Bolero*, she thought, that started slowly, softly, and without altering the tempo grew louder and louder until the shattering climax.

Oh yeah, he had got her breathing hard, yearning to jerk her hips, to rub her clit against the cock that poked into her belly. He dipped rhythmically inside her anus, deeper and deeper until it was all she could do not to squirm. A second finger there, scissoring, coated with her juices and slowly stretching the passage, made her gasp. Her pussy muscles wanted to spasm along with those she had never exercised before.

“Want it in there?”

“I...maybe...I don’t...we never...”

“Poor, sheltered Delia. We’ll help you with your research.”

We. Oh boy.

“Logan.” Kurt’s voice was soft, low, but loud enough.

“I’m wide awake and standing at attention.”

With a sound like muffled laughter, Kurt shifted in the enormous bed, flipping Delia onto her back then rolling onto his side facing her. “On your side, Delia. Spoon your sweet ass up to me.”

Breathless, Delia did so. And felt Logan’s cock poking her belly as he moved closer.

“Logan? Can you catch a leg?”

“It’ll be my pleasure.”

With that, Delia felt her leg being hoisted high onto Logan's hip.

"And Delia, remember. Do not move. Do not speak."

A delicate shudder passed through her when she felt the tip of Logan's cock prodding the wide-open space between her legs. When he found her opening, he hissed as he slid his cock inside her.

"Oh god, you are so hot, so tight."

"Steady, Logan. Let her get used to the two of us together."

Delia heard Logan's groan as he held still inside her, felt Kurt insert a third finger slowly, gently into her anus. The fullness was almost painful, yet she had never felt so alive, so turned-on, so ready to move, to explode.

Logan began slowly stroking, in and out, in and out, skimming, teasing, rocking his hips, never accelerating his pace, as though he'd read her thoughts about *Bolero*. All the while, Kurt kept up his gentle, three-fingered assault on her anus, so easily available to him with her leg slung over Logan's hip.

Kurt withdrew his fingers and she almost cried out. But Kurt had forbidden her to move or speak. She heard the telltale rip of a condom package then a moment later she felt his fingers probing her again, the cold slick of lube slathering her inner passage as he picked up Logan's slow rhythm, sliding in tandem, first the cock in her pussy then the fingers in her ass.

It was maddening. She wanted to snatch the metronome and force them to a faster rhythm, wanted to slam her hips forward and backward, but she lay there, helpless and unbearably aroused, as they toyed with her.

"How do you feel, Delia?"

"Green," she breathed. "Green, green, green."

He chuckled. "I heard the first one. Are you being greedy again?"

"Yes! I want—" She snapped her teeth shut. If they withheld her orgasm this morning, she didn't think she could bear it. Every nerve ending jangled, her breasts felt

as if they were wired to an electrical outlet every time Logan brushed his hairy chest against her nipples, and her toes were actually curling, her desire was so strong.

“Very good, Delia. You deserve a reward.”

Yes, she wanted to shout. *Yes, yes, yes!* But she lay there silently, eyes closed to assimilate every sensation, quivering with the need to come, reveling in the razor edge of ecstasy, without making a sound.

And her reward came. She felt Kurt’s cock replace his fingers and gently, so gently nudge a millimeter at a time into her lubricated ass.

“Green, Delia?”

“Yes.” It came out a prolonged hiss. She wanted this, wanted him, wanted them.

Another slide, deeper penetration, his head past the constricting ring. “Delia?”

“I...green.” She felt the pressure, the almost-pain, of penetration, and she willed her body to relax.

“That’s it, honey, relax all your muscles. Take me in deeper.”

She did, her body jerking from the delicious sensation when Logan rubbed his thumb round and round on her clit, driving her passion even higher. By now she was so turned-on, she needed more. “Green,” she said without thought.

On a strangled laugh, Kurt worked his cock the last millimeter inside her anal passage and she felt the skin over his pubic bone smack against her ass. “Oh god, yes!”

Now they were fucking her in synch, the two cocks rubbing against her and against each other through the thin membrane separating her two passages, their bodies squashing her between them with all their strength, and she went nearly out of her mind with the desire to move, to scream, to come.

Logan kept the strict rhythm he’d set but slammed harder into her cunt with every stroke, his hand on her waist. But Kurt broke the rhythm, grabbed her by the hips and pounded into her like a deranged satyr. She barely had the pleasure of realizing she’d made him lose control when she felt him stiffen. A few more earthquake-caliber strokes

later, he shouted an unintelligible profanity and she followed him into the orgasmic void, not caring that he hadn't given her permission, but wanting – needing – to go with him wherever he led. Every muscle spasmed, her throat went raw from growling, and she felt her climax go on and on and on as Kurt squeezed her hips harder and gasped into her ear.

Just as she felt her climax ebbing, Logan reached his peak and offered his own version of an earthquake, sending her spiraling again. She tightened the grip of the leg flung over his hip and, damning Kurt's dictum not to move, she reached behind her to grab hold of Kurt's ass to make sure he shared this new flight to the stars with her.

Light had filtered into the room by the time Delia came back to herself. Her eyes fluttered open. Her gaze collided with Logan's intense, hazel-eyed stare and she blushed. Oh god, what was she supposed to do now? How should she handle this morning-after awkwardness? Or in her case, morning-after-fucking-two-guys awkwardness. Should she say something to him? Close her eyes and ignore him? Remove her leg from where it still rested against his hip, exposing her battered pussy to him? He was the third wheel, so to speak. She'd been lured here by Kurt and she'd just been thoroughly fucked by his buddy.

And by Kurt.

Kurt. A thrill of panic shivered through her when she realized she and Logan were alone in the huge bed. Alone but only millimeters apart. And his eyes conveyed overwhelming interest in a repeat performance. But wait, he hadn't yet disposed of his used condom. How did one handle a situation this discomfiting?

Then she felt the bed dip behind her. A soft, warm cloth stroked thoroughly between her legs, paying special attention to her anus, and she closed her eyes in relief, in bliss, in gratitude for Kurt's thoughtfulness.

"Roll onto your back, Delia."

She did, grateful to be extricated from a situation Miss Manners probably hadn't ever experienced, and he gently wiped her belly, the seam between torso and legs, her inner thighs. Then bent down and blew softly.

Delia couldn't help it. She moaned.

Kurt chuckled. "Ready for more?"

Her gaze captured his intense one. In it she read satisfaction, possession, and something she couldn't decipher. "I...I think I need a bit more rest, if you don't mind."

"That can be arranged. Logan? Ready for your morning shot of caffeine? We should let my precious guest catch up on her beauty sleep."

Delia didn't miss the flicker of annoyance, of protest, that flitted across Logan's face before he smoothed it into a jaunty smile. Did their younger playmates react differently? Stop it, she told herself.

"Yeah, I probably need more than one shot." Leaning forward, he kissed Delia on the tip of her nose with a heartfelt, "Thank you for such a mind-bending experience," then rolled out of bed, fumbling for a tissue for, she assumed, the used condom. Then he swaggered around the bed to the door, and she couldn't help but follow him with her eyes, watching the flex and bunch of his outstanding ass, the confident sway of his shoulders.

Judith might chastise her for putting on the brakes, but Delia really was exhausted. After a week of too little sleep and three mind-bending orgasms over just a few hours, she could use the luxury. She didn't have the stamina of these younger guys. And she needed to regroup. She was way out of her element here.

* * * * *

Sipping steaming mugs of coffee, Kurt and Logan squared off in the kitchen. Or at least that's how Kurt interpreted his friend's stance. Having shared women any number of times, he could read Logan's body language pretty clearly. And he didn't like the avid interest in Delia he saw there.

Still barefoot and bare-chested, Kurt had slipped into well-worn sweatpants. Logan, thankfully, was fully dressed. And if Kurt had anything to say about it, he'd stay that way whenever Delia was around.

Shit. When had he gotten so possessive?

"Man, when you get back into action, you do it in style," Logan said, topping off his mug. "It's been a long three years for you. She's not at all like Gina. I'll bet she'd never be a convincing slave. Too much spirit." *Gina*. Guilt skittered up his spine. He hadn't spared a single thought for his dead wife since Delia had arrived yesterday afternoon. With a hitch in his breathing, Kurt turned his back on his friend and gazed out the kitchen window. Remnants of morning mist sculpted the undulating hills. Dew sparkled on the grass as the strengthening sun touched it.

"She's one hot babe, especially for a woman her age. I'd do a three-way with her anytime, any day. Up, down or sideways."

Kurt ground his back teeth together. If Logan didn't stop his mouth flapping, he'd be getting a knuckle sandwich.

"Do you know exactly how much older she is than us? I checked her out. She's close to the big five-oh, you know. It's a good thing you decided not to have kids after Gina's miscarriage. Having your sperm tied off might give pause to a woman whose biological clock is ticking, but Delia would probably be happy to hear it."

Kurt spun around. "Look, Logan—"

"Okay, okay, I'm just saying. When you find out she's not the submissive you're looking for, give her my cell phone number, okay?"

"Don't overstay your welcome."

Logan threw him a cocky grin. "Wouldn't think of it. I'll see you back at the office on Monday, old chap." He set his mug on the granite counter and sauntered into the front hall. Retrieving his jacket from the coat closet, he called out a casual "Later" as he headed out the front door.

Kurt stood rooted in the kitchen. So she was a dozen years older. So what? They'd clicked during their nightly phone calls, and she was dynamite in bed. He wanted Delia in his bed. Only Delia. Not a three-way.

Christ, was he jealous of his best friend?

When you find out she's not the submissive you're looking for, Logan had said. Hell, he wanted Delia just the way she was, submissive only in the bedroom. He'd tried that slave shit with Gina. If she hadn't been so eager to please, to assume a chore she considered his, she wouldn't have died as a result of that fire. And he wouldn't still have nightmares because he hadn't done enough to save her. But maybe Delia, with her maturity, would handle things differently. God, he hoped so.

* * * * *

Delia awoke slowly, the most wonderful feeling of lassitude surrounding her as she curled into herself on her side. The softness of the sheets, the warmth of her cocoon, the memory of being so thoroughly satisfied—

Kurt. And Logan. Fucking her to within an inch of her life and six ways from Sunday. Awareness flooded her of all the nooks and crannies and muscles that ached. Her eyes snapped open. And met the hot, amber-eyed gaze of Kurt on the opposite side of the bed from where he'd slept. On Logan's "side". Bare-chested, leaning on one elbow, lying on his side under the covers, he watched her like a predator. She turned her head, only a smidge, hoping his friend wasn't still with them. Because really, that would be too much.

But that single slight movement caused the warmth in Kurt's eyes to cool. His voice could have frozen boiling water in ten seconds. "He had to leave."

Delia sighed and snuggled her head deeper into the downy pillow. "I'm glad."

A frown appeared between Kurt's thick brows. "You are?"

"I...look, I'm grateful for the experience. I'd never have the nerve to initiate a ménage. Yeah, it was jaw-dropping, and yeah, it was great research. But...I don't know how to say this without scaring you, or giving you the wrong idea."

Okay, just spit it out, she ordered herself. You've fired people, you've gone head to head with the brass when you believed in something. "I'm glad that I'm here. I mean, that you're here. Now. Just...just the two of us." She turned her head away, suddenly unsure whether she should say more, to say she wanted to get to know him better.

"Delia." He slid closer, leaned over her, cupped her jaw tenderly. "No Master this time. No slave. No withholding of pleasure. Just a man and a woman."

He dipped his head and touched his lips to hers, teasing, stroking. His tongue darted out to lick the seam of her mouth and she opened to him. His kiss was tender as he explored the recesses of her mouth. His fingers danced up and down her arm, making gentle forays around her breasts, avoiding her nipples. Until he flung back the covers and his mouth claimed first one, then the other.

Delia arched her back, clutched fistfuls of his long hair between her hands. "Yes," she hissed.

His hands continued their downward exploration, his mouth following in their wake. He laved, nipped and kissed his way to her naked pussy, nudging her legs apart and settling himself between them. "I like naked down here, Delia." Then took the time to lick every inch that she'd so carefully shaved.

Sunlight flooded the room, so she knew he saw every wrinkle, every sag. Against her will, her muscles tensed.

"Delia. You are beautiful to me. Let me look at you." His tongue traced the horizontal scar at what the surgeon had called her bikini line. "Tell me about this scar, Delia. I want to know all about you."

"It's...I had to have a hysterectomy seven years ago."

He kissed the scar then moved lower, to where her pussy stood wide open and weeping. "We're a matched pair," he murmured. "I had a vasectomy."

His tongue lapped up the juices that had started to flow between her legs and the delightful feelings he engendered almost made her miss the significance of his comment. Even though he was in his thirties, an age when most men wanted children, he didn't. Their relative ages wouldn't be a stumbling block.

Whoa. A stumbling block to what?

And then she forgot her train of thought as he applied himself to her pleasure.

* * * * *

"How is it you had so many of my favorite foods available?"

Delia sat next to him on a barstool at the kitchen counter as they nibbled on leftovers from last night's dinner in the Jacuzzi. He loved the look of satiety on her face, the softened mouth, the lowered lids, the flush on her smooth skin. He fed her another cracker slathered with softened Brie. "I listen."

"But..."

"Five nights of phone calls? You think I can't get a few pertinent questions answered in between orgasms?"

Delia threw her head back and laughed without restraint. He liked her belly laugh, that she could find delights in things without worrying that she should be daintier. She was more than feminine enough for him. He wouldn't change a thing about her. Especially how she looked wearing his navy blue robe.

After making her come with his mouth, he'd slipped into her slick pussy and made tender love to her, holding her gaze with his as they shared a quiet explosion. It was probably the most erotic, religious orgasm he'd ever had.

"I wrote them down somewhere so I wouldn't forget. I'll show you the list."

She looked at him so intensely that he was rocked down to his toes. Something was happening here. Something he wanted to happen.

He leaned forward. Kissed her gently. Her lips trembled then melded to his. It felt as if they were sealing a pact. When they drew apart it was moments before he could speak.

“Come. Let me show you around while it’s still light outside.”

They dressed in jeans, boots and flannel shirts and he took her through the meandering path he’d hacked through underbrush in the woods that edged his property, searching for wild mushrooms and any wildflowers still blooming in mid-October. She delighted in watching a hawk catch thermals and circle lazily in the sky. She laughed when she slipped off a wet rock crossing the stream and damn near fell on her keister. She led him on a chase through dried cornstalks that rustled in their wake like skeletons dancing. On a whim she gleaned a handful soybean pods that the farmer’s combine had missed. “For soybean sprouts,” she explained with a gleam in her eye. He’d never felt so bewitched by simple, commonplace actions.

Holding hands, they returned from their inspection of his acreage. She commented appreciatively on the mortise-and-tenon sturdiness of something as mundane as the woodshed attached to the house, with its stash of firewood that he’d culled from dead trees on his property.

“Oh look, you have charcoal and an old hibachi. You have any hot dogs in your freezer? Let’s eat outside. Looks like Mother Nature will favor us with another spectacular sunset.”

He couldn’t resist her enthusiasm. He lugged the appropriate items out from the woodshed and set them up on the picnic table gracing his south-facing terrace.

“I’ll cook,” she said impishly.

“You’re on. But first...” He drew her to him, enfolded her in his arms. “You look so lovely with red cheeks and a sparkle in your eyes. I want to savor this moment.”

They stared into each other’s eyes, the stillness of the afternoon wrapping around them. A pair of raucous crows broke their reverie.

“Even your red nose looks cute.”

“Oh, you...” she gave him a mock punch on his shoulder. “Go see if you have any hot dogs. I’ll start the fire.”

He opened his mouth to protest. Closed it. She wasn’t Gina. She was a mature woman with common sense. She wouldn’t do anything stupid.

Still arguing with himself, he rummaged in his freezer. No hot dogs, but he found a batch of ground sirloin patties that his housekeeper had packaged for him. He pulled them out, unwrapped them and set them on the microwave tray. Pushed some buttons to thaw them. Got out condiments, bottles of locally brewed beer, glasses, flatware, cotton napkins.

Well, duh, that was dumb. What’s a hamburger without buns? He moved packages around, opened cabinets, drawers, the fridge. No buns. Ah, but he had a fresh loaf of Russian rye bread. He pulled out a sharp knife. As he sliced, he glanced out the window at Delia’s progress.

The knife clattered to the floor. “Jesus Christ!”

Everything forgotten except his need to get to Delia, he raced through the sun room and burst out the patio door. The ghosts from his past ran alongside him, taunting him, frightening him out of his usually unflappable cool. “What are you doing? Are you crazy?”

Startled, Delia dropped the can of starter fluid that had been stored in the woodshed next to the charcoal.

“Dammit, I knew I should have thrown that stuff away!” He’d been meaning to inquire about the local hazardous waste disposal site but had never followed through. And now he’d barely averted a repeat of his worst nightmare.

“What’s the matter? I couldn’t get the fire started, so I thought—”

“That’s the trouble with you. You don’t think. You just do.” He grabbed her arm. “I thought at your age you’d know better.”

She flinched, but he ignored her reaction.

"I'm going to have to teach you a lesson you won't forget." His voice hard and firm, he yanked her to the low end of the house. "You stay right there. And don't move, you hear me? Do. Not. Move."

Racing to the barn on the other side of the driveway, he hauled out his shortest ladder, dragged it to the woodshed, propped it up close to where the shed roof met the stone wall of the house.

"Up. Up the damn ladder. You'll stay there until I decide you've learned your lesson."

Panic flared in her eyes. "No, Kurt, I don't do ladders, I'm afraid of—"

He overrode her. "You're my slave. You will do as I say. This may not be what you want, but believe me, right now it's what you *need*." He half carried, half pushed her up, one rung at a time, until she stumbled onto the cedar shakes on her hands and knees. Then he dragged her to the ridgeline. "You just sit there and think about what you did. Look! Look at my hands, how they're shaking. I just averted a goddamn catastrophe. I need a good, stiff drink."

He balanced easily as he walked the slope of the roof. "I'll be back whenever I damn well feel like it. And you will stay there until then."

His foot found the ladder's top rung and he started down.

Delia could not contain her panic. All she could do was replay the long-ago feeling of dangling upside down, her foot wedged in the notch of the old oak tree in the side yard, and no one hearing her cries. Bizzy the cat had long since negotiated his way back down after luring her up there with his loud meowing as though he was trapped. Delia had crept out onto a branch, way higher than she'd ever climbed, to try to gather Bizzy in her arms. But the branch had been rotten and it broke under her ten-year-old weight, and Delia would have tumbled to the ground twenty feet below if her sneaker hadn't caught in the crotch of two branches. She'd cried and yelled and no one had come to

rescue her for what seemed like hours until her mom came home from the supermarket and called the fire department.

Mindless of the garish sunset turning her surroundings to fire, she straddled the roofline, legs clinging rigidly on either side, and dug her fingernails into the ridges of mortar between the stones, searching for a handhold to create an illusion of safety. Her breath came in deep, hyperventilating gasps. Her heart labored like a freight train climbing a mountain.

Her vision blurred and she began reciting a litany.

“Red. Red. Red...”

Halfway down, Kurt had to stop his descent. His knees felt as weak as frayed ropes. Resting his head on the top rung, he gripped the ladder’s sides with white-knuckled fingers. Jesus. He’d lost one good woman to a stupid fire and he’d be damned if he’d lose Delia, who’d already grabbed hold of his heart and soul.

His vision blurred as he relived it. His feet feeling mired in molasses as he ran that very same path from kitchen to sun room to patio, helpless to stop Gina’s unthinking squirting of lighter fluid on a seemingly dormant fire. Flames had leaped up from the charcoal bed through the trickle of liquid evil to the container, causing her to jerk her hand, splashing her clothes with rampant tongues of fire. He’d ripped off his denim jacket and begun beating at the flames, succeeding only in stoking the fire that enveloped her. He threw her onto the grass and covered her with the jacket, hoping to smother it.

By the time he’d snuffed out the last bit of danger and called 9-1-1, Gina was barely conscious. He’d called her stupid at the same time he declared his undying love, and his tears had created streaks through the soot on her blistered, ravaged face.

His soul had been shattered when she’d died in the hospital a week later—from a simple, stupid infection of one of the burn sites they’d been unable to conquer.

Clinging now to the ladder, Kurt felt his heart beating so fast he thought it would smash a hole through his chest. Sweat congealed in his armpits. *Calm down.* There was no accident. No fire. He'd been able to avert a disaster this time. Delia was fine. In fact, he heard her voice.

Yelling.

"Red!"

Her safe word. The word he'd assured her would keep her from harm.

Jesus, what kind of lowdown snake was he to put her in such an untenable position? How could he have taken her worst fear and shoved her face in it? What an ass she must think he was.

Kurt shot back up the ladder and approached her cautiously, like a human would to an injured, frightened bird. He knelt behind her, a thigh astride each of hers. Chills of fear shook him as he gently wrapped his arms around her. "Oh god, honey. You have no idea how sorry I am. Come, let's get you down the ladder."

She refused to relinquish her death grip on two stones where she'd found chinks in the mortar. Shit! Blood dripped from her fingertips. Her skin was clammy cold to the touch, her eyes squeezed tightly shut.

"Red. Red..."

His heart stopped then pounded into his rib cage double-time. "I'll make it up to you, Delia, I swear I will. Come with me. You're safe now. I've got you. Feel my arms around you. I'll hold you and get you down."

"Can't. Not on a ladder. Can't."

"You've got to let go, honey. You can't stay here, it's getting dark."

"No!"

His own panic rising, Kurt had no clue how to handle her phobia. He'd castigate himself later, but right now, Delia's safety—her very sanity—was paramount. His frantic gaze touched every inch of the roof, the wall, the—

The window.

“Look up, honey. See that window? Could you climb through the window if I stay right behind you so you can feel safe that I’ve got you? Delia? Please?”

Much to his relief, she moved her head in the direction his finger pointed.

“See? It’s almost a direct line from where you’re sitting. I’m going to run down and open it from the inside. I’ll climb out and help you, it’ll be two steps and you’ll be safe.”

“No! Don’t leave me!” The panic in her voice all but shattered him.

“Okay, baby. It’s okay, I’ve got you. I won’t leave you.”

Kurt stared at the window. It was one of the original six-over-six panes with wavy glass that sat adjacent to the chimney flue in the playroom. He’d been meaning to reglaze them, but a few pieces of rotting, two-hundred-year-old wood needed to be replaced first. If he could get her to her feet, she could sit on the windowsill, which was, like all the other windows in the original structure, twenty-two inches deep. That should feel sturdy and secure to her.

He prided himself on saving every original detail of this 1817 home, but the window had to go. Delia was worth a thousand original window lights.

“I’ve got an idea, honey. I’m not going out of your sight. Okay?”

She didn’t respond, but she didn’t do another panicked “No!” either.

Standing up, he removed his flannel shirt and wrapped it round and round his right fist and forearm. Skirting her rigid leg, he took a step downhill along the stone wall, pulled back his arm and broke the pane closest to the puny latch, scattering glass shards across the floor of the playroom. The latch opened with a squeak but, dammit, the window itself had apparently been painted shut at some point in the past. He couldn’t get the lower sash to slide up.

Setting his jaw, Kurt smashed out every pane of the sash then planted his feet solidly on the slanting roof and thumped against the rotting wood with his protected

hand. After a dozen or so whacks, one of the muntins splintered. With renewed energy, he began yanking at the dovetailed pieces until he had created a gaping hole.

He took a deep breath, suddenly realizing it was almost dark. He had to get Delia moved. Now.

Gingerly he made his way back behind her and, crouching forward, tucked his hands under her armpits. "Up you go, honey. It's a piece of cake from here. Come on, let's go."

An agonizingly long moment later, he saw Delia's white-knuckled grip relax. Smears of blood on the stones gave evidence to the tenacity of her hold and his heart cracked with a painful jolt. He'd done that to her.

She struggled to move her legs. Her knees had probably locked, he realized when she didn't try to stand. Gently he lifted her to her feet, held her while she got her sea legs.

"Good. Good, sweetheart. Now I'm going to lift you by your waist as high as I can. Think you can scoot your legs inside the window?"

In the last feeble twilight he could see how furiously the vein at her temple throbbed. She licked her lips but no sound came out. She moved her head fractionally down, and he took that as a nod of "yes".

Thanking God for every bench press, every biceps curl he'd ever made, he lifted her until his elbows locked. "Walk your legs up the wall if you have to, honey. That's it. One step at a time. Good. Keep it up."

At last both her feet were inside the hole. He took that last step, pushing her torso forward, until his booted toes touched the stone wall and her thighs rested on the windowsill. His muscles burned from the strain, but he'd lift her up the entire length of the chimney if he had to.

"Brava, Delia. I'm so proud of you. Now just lean down so you can swing your head under the top sash. I've got you, Delia. I'm climbing in right behind you and I'm never letting you go."

And that, he swore, was the God's honest truth.

* * * * *

"I'm fine. Really."

Delia didn't know how long she'd been locked in Kurt's embrace, sitting sideways on his lap on a convertible sofa before a roaring fire in what he called the guest room. All she knew was that her heartbeat had finally subsided to normal and she had stopped hyperventilating. But her muscles ached from having been held so rigid for what had seemed like forever, although Kurt had said it was only a few minutes before he'd gotten her to her feet. And her fingers and palms stung from cuts and abrasions. She'd broken several nails trying to cling to—

Don't think about it! Block it from your mind!

She wanted to go home. She wanted to hide in her own bedroom and never venture back out. She wanted to start the weekend over again, start it by sleeping in her own bed last night. She wanted to call Judith to vent her anger and her fear, to ask for her advice as to how she could get revenge on him. She wanted to curse herself for thinking she could play these kinds of games with a man who was way out of her league. But it seemed Kurt wouldn't let her out of his sight, out of his arms. She stared at the plethora of bandages he'd swathed on the worst of her cuts and wondered if she'd be able to hold on to the steering wheel for an hour.

"I have GPS, I won't get lost. I really need to get home tonight."

"Delia, I'm not being autocratic, but you've just had a traumatic experience, thanks to my stupidity, and I'd never forgive myself if I let you drive home now, in the dark, while you're still recovering."

"I'm fine."

"I'm not. Please, honey, let me make it up to you. Let me cuddle you. I swear, you can go home tomorrow whenever you like. But please, don't drive tonight."

Maybe she was just being stubborn. She really was as limp as those dried cornstalks in the field, and her eyelids seemed to be getting heavier and heavier now that all the adrenaline had dissipated.

"Delia, I'm sorrier than I can say. I broke your trust, and for that I profoundly apologize. Please, I need to see for myself that you'll be okay."

She felt his lips press against her temple. "Please stay here tonight. You can sleep here on the sofa bed, or in the master bedroom, or in the lounge, wherever you want, and I'll be hunkered down on the floor nearby. I just need to know you're..."

His voice trailed off and Delia gritted her teeth. Safe. He was going to say he needed to know she was safe. Would she ever feel safe with him again?

"I have an idea," Kurt said, obviously wanting to distract her. "Why don't we go downstairs and I'll warm up some soup for you. And maybe a cup of tea or something. Then, after you have some food in your stomach, we'll see how you feel."

"All right."

He breathed out a long sigh and stood, still holding her in his arms as though she weighed no more than a stack of firewood.

"I can walk."

"It's okay, I need to do this. I need to hold you. Please?"

Rather than answer, she closed her eyes and rested her head on his shoulder, her hands clenched together in her lap. He seemed to take that as affirmation, because she felt herself descending the stairs.

She opened her eyes when he carefully set her on her feet on the tiled kitchen floor.

"You sit right here," he said, pulling out one of two stools at the center island.

She watched as he moved like an orchestra conductor, a flick here, a gesture there, and soon the smell of some kind of vegetable soup filled the kitchen.

Her stomach rumbled. "Pavlovian response," she said. It did smell good and she realized she was hungry.

He set a steaming, earth-toned bowl in front of her, then a chunk of crusty bread he'd popped in the toaster oven to warm.

"Good soup. Tastes homemade."

"It is. I pay my housekeeper big bucks to keep my larder stocked with healthy stuff. During the week, I usually stay in the city, but weekends? I eat like a farmer. She lives in that yellow house on the street. The one I told you to look for as a landmark? Her husband farms my fields. They've lived there for thirty years. I don't know what I'm going to do when they retire." He gave her a rueful smile. "Probably starve."

"You don't cook?"

"I do at the condo when I have to, and I can do a pretty fair stir-fry. To say nothing of omelets. But Helen spoils me. 'Course, I pay her to spoil me. It's a fair trade."

He was trying to put her at ease, she could tell. But she still had mountains of angst to work through.

She finished the soup, nodded when he offered seconds. He ladled some for himself and sat in the other stool. They ate, surrounded by a silence that she welcomed.

"Want a cup of tea?"

"No thanks, the soup warmed me sufficiently."

"Dessert? Chocolate truffle?"

"I'm fine."

He turned in his stool to face her, a look of intense scrutiny on his face. "Are you, Delia? Are you really?"

Her gaze lowered to the floor. "I guess you think I acted like a silly little girl. But I can't help it."

"You don't have to apologize, Delia. On the contrary, I'm the one who needs to ask your forgiveness. I apologize again. I overreacted. But in my defense, there's a reason."

Delia stilled. "Yes?"

Kurt slid off his stool, paced around to the opposite side of the island and turned to stare through the night-blank window. After a moment he spun around to face her and placed his hands, palms down, on the counter, although he looked just to the left of her eyes, as though seeing something else.

“Gina was my wife. We’d been married five years and yes, I loved her. She was... she was very submissive. The kind of slave I thought I wanted, someone to cater to my every whim, to be available for me body and soul. To anticipate my every need.”

He breathed deeply, lifted his eyes to the ceiling. “It was mid-summer. She wanted to please me, so she decided to do ‘my’ job of starting the fire. She filled the hibachi with charcoal, used one of those long matches to start them burning. I was in the kitchen, I don’t remember what I was doing. But I looked out the window and saw...I saw the same thing I did today.”

His eyes closed a moment. A visible shudder ran through his body. “Gina was holding a can of lighter fluid and began squirting a heavy stream of it on the charcoal because she obviously hadn’t seen any flames. The stream caught fire and she jerked away.” He shuddered. “Spilled flaming lighter fluid all over her.”

His voice trailed away. She could see his Adam’s apple working up and down.

“I understand, Kurt. I really do.”

Another shudder went through him. “The smell of burnt flesh, her screams, I felt so helpless. It seemed like forever before I got all the flames out.”

Head down, arms hanging at his sides, he looked defeated. “I couldn’t let that happen to you. I couldn’t bear it if you died too.”

It was a tragic story and Delia really did understand why he’d yelled at her. Maybe she even understood why he’d punished her.

But she wasn’t sure she could forgive him for the particular punishment he’d inflicted.

Because she knew she couldn’t trust him not to do it again.

Chapter Five

“I don’t know whether to forgive him or not.” Delia paced her bedroom floor as she talked to Judith on the phone. Since they’d met in person, Judith had become her closest confidante. Especially since she also knew Kurt. “He’s certainly acting contrite. He’s left me half a dozen messages of apology on my voice mail. I’ve gotten fifteen yellow roses at home and a box of artisan chocolates at work.”

“Hey, that was sensitive of him. Sending flowers at work might raise some eyebrows. Especially fifteen yellow roses. You do know that yellow roses convey a ‘let’s start over’ message. And the precise number of fifteen. That’s universal for ‘Please forgive me’. The guy knows his roses.”

“Probably did an advertising campaign for a florist shop.”

“Don’t put him down. I’m not sure a man closer to our age would know that or be that caring. They tend to take us for granted.”

“Robert never took me for granted.” Her heart gave a little bump on thinking of her late husband, but it was with love and nostalgia, not grief, that she remembered him.

“Still, Kurt is giving you the message in every way he can think of. Ask yourself, Delia, deep down, what are your feelings for this guy? Don't let one wrong move end the relationship if you think there's more there. We all deserve a chance to learn from our mistakes.”

Delia sighed and toyed with a lock of her hair. “I was really coming to care for him. He’s smart and funny, easy to talk to, thoughtful, he’s both tender and forceful in bed. It was so enjoyable just walking through the woods with him, it felt like we were really meant to be together. It’s just that single, humongous stumbling block.”

"If he's that smart, mightn't he have learned a lesson? After all, from what you told me, it had to be a traumatic experience for him. Who's to say we wouldn't have done something similar?"

"But how can I trust him again?"

"You just enumerated all the reasons not to let him go. Why don't you start out by meeting him in neutral territory?"

"Maybe I'll suggest a quiet place for dinner. Then I can judge if he's being aggressive and possessive or if he really is sincere in his apology."

"That's the spirit. You've been in the business world, negotiated contracts, handled the hiring and firing of personnel. You know how to interpret body language, facial expressions. You won't know how you'll react until you see him again."

Seeing Kurt again. Just the thought made Delia's heart pump faster.

"Or maybe just have lunch," Judith continued. "Dinner implies a serious date. Lunch would be more casual, less pressure to follow up with wild monkey sex for dessert."

"Maybe just the food court at the mall," Delia said weakly.

Judith snickered. "And who says you can't have wild monkey sex after lunch?"

* * * * *

Damn, did he even want to wear a tie? Kurt stared at the reflection scowling back at him in the bedroom mirror. Just a quiet brunch on Sunday, she'd suggested, naming a mom-and-pop restaurant in Lambertville, the bustling, picturesque Delaware River town halfway between her home and his.

God, he'd been insanely happy to hear her voice message on his home phone. He'd figuratively kicked himself a thousand times in the two weeks since he'd almost destroyed what they'd found. He hoped it wasn't too late to glue the tattered edges of their relationship back together.

The hell with it, he decided, whipping off the yellow striped silk tie. In fact, off with the white shirt. White shirt was too business, too adversarial. This was a personal campaign. An all-out effort to convince Delia Barnes that she belonged with him. That the age difference had nothing to do with them. He had to prove he was mature enough to regain her trust.

And he had to be careful to make the distinction. Belonged *with* him. Not *to* him. As equals. No more Master and slave. Well, yeah, in the bedroom he'd love her to be submissive, because she'd taken to that like Pooh to the honey jar.

He sniggered. Wouldn't Logan kid him about *that* image. But still, he loved his nephews and if he wanted to read to them, he damn well would.

Back to the closet he went. If she wanted casual and quiet, that's what she'd get. He finished dressing and set out on his motorcycle to secure his future.

* * * * *

Oh lord, he was waiting for her outside the restaurant. She'd purposely been a few minutes late, thinking she could simply saunter inside and slip into the booth that he'd already be occupying.

She found a space in the tiny parking lot, heart pounding and nerves tingling. He looked delicious, his dark hair loose around his face, the collar of his black leather jacket standing up around his neck like a picture frame. Open in front, the jacket revealed a collared knit shirt in a creamy shade that contrasted sharply with his olive skin.

By the time she'd turned off the ignition and gathered her handbag, his hand was on her door handle. She disengaged the lock and he swung it open.

"It's good to see you again." Was that a touch of nervousness in his voice?

As she swung her legs out to reveal designer jeans and low-heeled ankle boots, she couldn't help but notice how snug his black leather pants were, outlining his strong thighs and cupping his bulging package, right at her eye-level. She swallowed and fought down the memories of his cock, hot and hard and —

He thrust out his hand. Grateful for the distraction, she grabbed it and exited the car, beeping it locked.

“Delia.” He held on to her left hand, swung her to face him. “Let me look at you in the sunlight.” His eyes traveled over her face, her hair, which she hadn’t—*hadn’t*, she’d just needed to tame the wild ends—taken a lot of time to fuss with, and lingered on her lips. It felt like a kiss.

Her gaze eagerly drank in the slightly crooked nose, the square, smooth jaw. His amber eyes burned with an inner fire in the sunlight. He looked good enough to eat. And she knew just which part of him—

“Shall we?” she asked, tamping down her runaway libido.

They entered the restaurant and were immediately ushered to their reserved booth. Both opted for the buffet brunch. Setting their jackets on the padded benches, they filled their plates. Delia chose a slice of quiche Lorraine, a sliver of freshly baked ham and fresh fruit salad along with a croissant. Kurt filled his plate with pancakes, sausages, scrambled eggs and fruit.

Seating herself, Delia fought to keep from turning her head to watch him saunter back to the booth, all masculine grace and presence. She did, however, note many a female head swivel with avid gazes as he passed.

Kurt settled in opposite her and set down his plate. “Delia. Thank you for joining me. I hope this means I’m forgiven.”

Delia took a deep breath. “Yes, I’ve forgiven you. But I still haven’t been able to forget what happened.”

“I understand. And thank you. Please let me try to make it up to you.”

She nodded then conspicuously turned her attention to her meal. “Tell me what accounts you’ve been working on.”

Understanding her question as the diversion it was, Kurt launched into a discussion of his various ad campaigns, offering anecdotes and observations of the clients he’d

been dealing with. He drew from her similar tales of work, and before they knew it, their plates were empty.

“I’m hitting the dessert table. You?”

Her first inclination was to decline, but decided, why not? Her appetite was part of her and she wasn’t starving herself like some teeny-bopper runway model. She was glad she didn’t when she saw a chocolate layer cake filled with chocolate ganache, and she availed herself of a slice.

She had all but licked her dessert plate when she noticed him staring. “What?”

“Just thinking what I’d give to be the one to put that expression of bliss on your face.”

Heat rose up her neck and into her cheeks. “I like chocolate. And this was good.”

His smile curled her toes. “I could tell.”

The heat in her face transmitted itself throughout her body and reached out for him. “Kurt.” She swallowed.

“It’s your move, Delia. I think you know how I feel. But I have to earn your trust. I’ll go wherever you lead. I want to be with you, spend my free time with you, and I’ve damned myself for ten kinds of a fool for putting you in such danger, for giving you so much anguish.”

He reached a hand halfway across the table. “Delia.”

Hesitating a bit, she moved her hand, touching his knuckles with her fingertips. He responded by turning his hand palm up and grasped her hand in his. She stared at their linked fingers a moment, willing her heartbeat to stay normal.

“I, um, would you like to see where I live?”

Other than the slight clench of his fingers on hers, he made no move. “Yes, I would. Very much. Are you ready to go?”

She looked deep within herself. “Yes. I’m ready.”

Withdrawing her hand from his, she groped in her handbag, found her credit card.

“No, please, it’s my treat.”

With a cool look, Delia said, “I invited you here today.”

He dipped his head without demur.

Grabbing her jacket, she preceded him to the cashier near the entry, paid the bill, adding a substantial tip, and walked through the door he held open for her.

“Thank you for the double pleasure.” He held her elbow, escorting her to her car.

“What are you driving? You can follow me.”

He gestured to the motorcycle parked against the building. “That’s my chariot. I brought a second helmet in case you got the notion to explore up the river.”

Oh she was tempted, she’d only had a few bike rides in her life, and the thought of sitting behind him, clasping his very masculine body with her arms and legs while feeling the thrum of a powerful motor reverberating up her widespread thighs—

But first things first. She needed to know how far she could trust him. She had a plan. A plan to drive him wild and then walk away.

* * * * *

“Oh this is lovely, Delia.”

She had just escorted Kurt into her high-ceilinged living room, a cozy space that opened via pocket doors into a formal dining room boasting a bay window.

“Robert was the one with a fondness for old houses, for restoring them with respect to their heritage. I went along because the house was a bargain and needed repairs, but pretty soon I fell in love with it as well. It was built in 1903. All the door and window surrounds are the original oak. He spent three years of weekends and vacations scraping a hundred layers of paint off. Once it was down to bare wood, though, I did most of the sanding and hand polishing.”

“It’s a treasure.”

“Thank you. I figured you’d enjoy seeing it, since yours is so well restored.”

She walked him through her home, much as he'd done at his stone house, including her downstairs office and writing room, a modern kitchen with old-timey touches like glass-fronted cabinets and original brass lighting, and upstairs—three bedrooms and two baths. She'd lived here fifteen years and was proud of her home.

They ended the tour in the master bedroom. The only thing she'd changed there since Robert died was the duvet covering the king-size bed, its cherry headboard arching over the turned spindles. Instead of the more masculine navy plaid, it now sported stylized pink and red peonies on a beige background. Framed prints of a variety of flowers made an artful display on one wall. Sunlight cascaded through a pair of opened drapes of navy brocade.

"This room suits you," he declared. "Not fussy at all, but a hint of feminine power in all the flowers."

"Power? I never thought of it that way. But...yes, you're correct. I guess I'm holding the power right now."

It was subtle, but she noticed Kurt straighten a tad, as though becoming more alert. And, possibly, ceding his power to her.

Yes. It was time.

"Kurt?"

"Yes?"

"How long can you stay motionless?"

He looked as though he'd started to shift his stance but, because of the question, decided to stay put. "I don't know. I've never had occasion to discover that particular statistic."

"Would you like to find out?"

"I would like to do anything you wish, Delia."

She smiled then, something inside her loosening. She hadn't really, irrevocably decided until then, but yes, she was going to do it.

They'd both hung their jackets on the old-fashioned coat rack hanging in her entryway, so they stood in shirtsleeves. She walked the few steps to close the gap between them, standing between the doorway and the bed, and turned him slightly so he faced the large mirror over an antique cherry dresser.

"Keep your eyes on your reflection."

"Does motionless include not speaking?"

"You may speak, and of course you may breathe," she gave a little laugh then, "but you may not move your hands. Agreed?"

"You're the boss, boss."

"Fine." She stood on tiptoe and began to drop tiny kisses along his jawline, up to his ear, his cheek, the corner of his eye. She ran her fingers through his silky hair that touched his shoulders, licked the seam of his mouth. It softened, but he didn't open it.

"Very good, Kurt. You deserve a reward." She kissed him fully, tugging on his lower lip with her teeth, ran her hands lightly up and down his arms, across his well sculpted pecs through the soft knitted cotton of his shirt, down his waist, his hips. And heard the rate of his breathing change.

"You may remove your shirt, Kurt. Just toss it on the floor then stand still again."

He did so, with alacrity, she noted with a hidden smile. Her nostrils flared as the unique smell of him wafted to her, drove deep into her senses.

She kissed his smooth olive skin, licking and stroking, tugging on his flat, dark nipple with her teeth. She noticed his hands curl into fists – that much movement, she thought with satisfaction, she could allow – so continued her assault on his other nipple.

Then down farther, following the marked delineation of his abdominal muscles to his navel, tonguing it, nipping skin around it – delighting in the sudden intake of breath making his belly hollow – and down to the waistband of his leather pants.

"These have got to go," she whispered as she knelt before him, fumbling with the button.

"Do you need help?" His voice sounded gratifyingly strangled.

"I think I can figure it out." Deliberately she groped around his burgeoning cock as if searching for the "open sesame" of his zipper. His hips jerked forward but he caught himself, and his leg muscles visibly tensed and bulged as he strained to keep himself immobile.

"Ah, got it." With a teasingly slow movement she lowered the zipper and was rewarded with the tip of his cock—his extremely long and hard cock—popping out above the elastic of his shorts.

"Hmmpf," she grunted as she breathed on that round plummy head. "You'd think a man looked like this would go commando."

"Delia." His voice had lowered an octave. "I knew if I was seeing you, I'd need every layer of protection I could find to keep me harnessed."

"Well, let's unharness you and see what we unleash." Putting action to her words, she worked the supple leather down his bunched thigh muscles to puddle at his ankles.

With shaking fingers she traced the outline of his cock, his balls, through the silky black fabric of the boxer-briefs covering him. His cock swelled even more, forcing the head totally above the elastic.

She couldn't help it. She licked around the crown, touched her finger to the creamy bead of pre-cum at its slit to swirl it round and round the head. Looked up to see his eyes closed and teeth clenched.

You ain't seen nothin' yet, she thought, thrilled with her power over him.

Carefully she pulled the elastic away from his cock and worked the briefs down his thighs. His cock sprang free, pointing straight and proud, directly at her. She took it deep into her mouth. His knees buckled but locked a second later.

Swamped with the feel, the taste, the musky, intimate smell of him, Delia closed her eyes and lavished attention on this magnificent instrument, pulling and sucking, drawing him in then releasing him almost to the tip. With one hand she cupped his balls, kneading and stroking them, lost in her own sensations of this man, this moment.

She skimmed her other hand around his hip to cradle one ass cheek, a firm, downy orb that tightened as she alternately squeezed and released her fingers around it.

Heaven. She was in heaven. All this magnificent man, hers to play with, to tease, to bring to the edge.

To prove a point, to retaliate.

That thought brought her to her senses. She stopped every delicious motion, drew away from him. "Kurt, I want you to sit on the bed so I can take off your pants."

Like a man snapping out of a trance, he did, turning to judge the distance, mindful of the tangle of his feet in his pants, until he sat solidly on top of the duvet, thighs resting on the mattress.

She divested him of boots, socks, pants and underwear, gratified to note he said not one word about her still being fully dressed. But the contrast was heady, making her feel like a dominatrix in her jeans, boots, soft V-neck sweater and all her under armor of bra and panties while he sat before her, gloriously naked.

"Lie down on your back," she ordered. "Lift your arms above your head."

A shadow came and went quickly over his face and he complied.

The result, ah, the result was that his thick, hard cock stood straight up, pointing at the ceiling, magnificently solid, darker than the surrounding skin with its head even more purple, veins highlighted and shadowed by the strong light coming from the windows. He looked like a satyr waiting to trap a nymph in a field of wildflowers.

"I think...all the way up. Slide up the bed so your head is on the pillows. Keep your arms over your head."

Jaws tight, he wormed his way up, his cock bobbing and twitching as he did.

“Perfect,” she crooned. She reached into a drawer of the bedside table then climbed onto the bed near his head.

“I got these things from an online cop store. Bought them for a just-in-case moment like this.” She clicked one oversized universal handcuff on his wrist then threaded the other on its short chain around a spindle, deliberately letting the soft wool covering her breasts graze his face. “Now your other hand.”

As she worked, she said offhandedly, “You know, I thought about silk scarves, I thought about using neckties. But really, Kurt, you’re so strong, so buff, that I wasn’t sure they’d hold you.”

She leaned back, admired her handiwork. Master Kurt Reinhardt. Helplessly handcuffed to her bed. Gloriously naked and at her mercy, his amber eyes burning pools of lust. “I needed something a little less...elastic, something reliably strong.” Something to make sure she had the upper hand.

His voice was a low growl. “Because you still don’t trust me.”

She thought for a moment. “Because I’m afraid to trust you.”

“Delia, I’ll do anything to prove—”

She sliced her hand downward. “No more talk. I’m going to play with you and I don’t want you to move a muscle. Not a hip, not a leg. You can flutter your eyelashes though,” she added impishly.

“Hit me with your best shot,” he gritted out through tightly clenched teeth.

His eyes followed her every move as she kicked off her boots then shimmied out of her jeans, leaving a swath of vivid purple thong covering her pussy. The sweater came off next and she flung it aside, raising her arms to rearrange the hair she’d mussed. Her breasts lifted, shifted their cleavage within her see-through bra, her nipples poking out like ripe acorns.

He swallowed, his intense gaze nailing her.

Climbing onto the foot of the bed, she stalked up his legs on hands and knees then sat on his thighs. "What a nice little dildo to play with. So lifelike. So smooth and hot." She fondled his cock a moment, pulling it toward her belly and rubbing it against her skin, her fingers stroking along the crest of the head. More fluid seeped out of the eye and she swirled it around the head with her thumb.

He groaned and she could see the effort it took to keep his hips from moving.

She pushed his cock toward his torso and sat on it, thighs hugging his sides. She rubbed the crotch of her silky thong over the tumescence, arching her back like a cat as she rode forward, her breasts rearranging themselves in their cradle, and hunching over on the return, back and forth, feeling the heat of him burning her slit. Her fingers danced over his abs, skimmed the tantalizing pair of muscles that slued diagonally from his waist down to his groin, and stretched an arm behind her to fondle his balls.

His muscles flexed and released. Breath labored and uneven, he drew in his belly until it became a concave surface. And always, always, she kept touching, stroking, gripping his cock, teasing, tormenting him until even she was ready to burst.

Now, she thought. Now she would discover it. Discover if she could trust him.

She knee-walked backward, leaving his cock swollen and throbbing, pulsing with life, veins standing out like three-dimensional roadmaps.

And climbed off the bed.

"Delia," he groaned.

Her avid gaze devoured him. The bulging biceps in his upraised arms. The strands of black hair sweat had plastered to his neck. The tightly fistted hands above the carbon steel cuffs. The flat brown nipples standing at attention, echoing the rigid stance of his unbridled cock.

She reached inside the drawer again. "*Voila*, a key. I wouldn't leave you trapped here...alone." Immediately she regretted that remark, for she saw him flinch as he remembered leaving her alone and unprotected for a mere breath of time.

But all that was behind her. Now she was looking at tomorrow and every day after that, if she'd guessed correctly. "Don't move."

Leaning forward, she unlocked and removed both cuffs and tossed them and the key back in the drawer. "Now comes the true test."

He squeezed his eyes shut, as if to say, *haven't you tested me enough?*

"No, I'm not finished. You want to keep your hands in the same position." She moved to the foot of the bed. "Do you understand?"

His eyes flicked open, shining with a fierce determination and something else, something she was afraid to put words to. Because she was feeling it too. Something between them that would grow from this moment on.

Without a thought to doing a further striptease, she shucked off her bra and thong and, breasts bouncing, climbed back over his thighs. "This is what I want, Kurt. I want to make love with you. With nothing between us." She positioned herself and sank onto his rampant cock, an inch at a time, until she was seated down to his pubic bone, as close as she could get to him, as deep as he could fit into her.

"I want to know I can count on you to be there when I need you." She lifted herself, grabbing his hips as leverage, then slammed down onto him. Up then down again, tipping her pelvis for more intimate contact, shuddering at the feel of her clit rubbing against him. "I want you to respect me, respect my fears. To treat me as an equal."

She leaned forward, her blonde hair dangling across his chest, tickling his skin as she snagged a small, hard nipple between her teeth and bit down. He bucked once and his teeth ground together, but his white-knuckled hands held on to the spindles even without the restraints.

"I want to trust you, Kurt. I want to give myself to you without reservation, without fear. I want to believe that this trust doesn't disappear in our age difference."

"You know, I think we can put that puppy to bed once and for all." His voice was tight. "I look at you and see a beautiful, desirable woman. There's no expiration date

stamped on your forehead. What I want is to convince you I'm mature enough for you to trust me again."

She rubbed herself against him, their skin slick with sweat as her mouth moved higher up his torso, nipping bits of skin at his chest, his throat, where muscle and sinew stood out in sharp relief at his strain. Then to his jaw, skimming his cheek with her lips until she reached the corner of his mouth, squeezed into a tight white line.

"Delia," he moaned, moving his head to capture her mouth, stabbing into it with his tongue, pumping his hips in counterpoint to her moves, but all the while clinging to the spindles. She felt the tensile strength of every muscle in his body as he fought his Dominant self to prove himself worthy of her trust.

And it struck her that it wasn't about the age difference at all. It was about the people involved. Kurt could have been twenty years older and the same problem could have come up. She had to change her mindset if she was going to enjoy this relationship.

"I want to stand alongside you. To give myself to you," she gritted out. "Totally and irrevocably. I need to know you won't abandon me. I need to know you'll always be there for me. In *and* out of bed." She bucked, she clawed, she jerked her hips, bit and sucked his tongue deep into her mouth. Her thighs squeezed his hips, her pussy contracted around his cock.

She was at the lip of the precipice. And ready to dive in.

"I warn you, Delia, I'm an inch away from coming." His body went rigid to hold back the tidal wave as every single muscle within him fought against both his Dominant nature and his urge as a man in his virile prime to claim his mate.

She quivered atop him a moment, on the verge of coming. Then yelled, "Green, Kurt, green!"

With that, his hold on the spindles evaporated and in a nanosecond he flipped her over onto her back, still seated deep inside her. Hoisting her legs, one at a time, to rest

on his shoulders, her knees against her chest, he slammed into her, again and again, holding her immobile by her shoulders, loving her with every bone in his body, zeroing in on her rising tide to give her what she deserved, his total and all-consuming love and attention, his protection, his body and his soul.

He held himself back by the sheer force of his love, that she should be fulfilled and exalted before his own needs. He concentrated on every stroke, every glide of his cock into her hot, holy cavern until he felt the tremors, the building cataclysm within her, and he rode her, pushed her to a joining of unfathomable beauty and explosive release.

And as he felt her contractions squeezing his cock with a divine rhythm, he finally allowed himself to follow her, shooting his essence deep, deeper, as deep as he could go into her body and yes, her soul, to make them a single blessed entity that would withstand whatever pressures they would encounter in the future.

A future that, if he had his say, included Delia Barnes in it.

* * * * *

Two weeks later, Delia gave her costume a last-minute check in her bedroom mirror. The tawny bodysuit clung to her curves. She'd paid special attention to her makeup, giving her face the markings of an actual cougar photographed in the wild. She'd foregone glued-on whiskers, however, for the painted-on variety. Perky ears nestling in her upswept hair completed her outfit. Tonight one of the vice presidents of her company was hosting a Halloween party at his home. It would be Kurt's introduction into her circle of friends and acquaintances.

She heard his tell-tale double-double knock then the snick of the front door lock as it opened. She'd given him a key to her home as a sign of her growing trust.

Taking a calming breath, Delia headed for the stairs, gathering her long tail in her hand. Her tan leather ankle boots skimmed the steps as she descended to see...

A lion tamer—or rather, a cougar tamer, she thought with a smile—complete with shiny black knee boots, snug khaki pants and safari shirt, wraparound sunglasses, and a whip. Breath whooshed out of her at the sight of him.

Mine.

She still couldn't believe it. That this gorgeous, sexy, younger man was in her life. Well, she'd grabbed the brass ring and she'd keep him for as long as he wanted her.

Halting on the last step, she watched him stalk toward her and wished she could see the look in his eyes behind those shades. Because she wanted to see if he reacted to her form-fitting costume the way she did to the sight of him—her mouth watered, her eyes greedily drank him in.

"You look so ravishing that I want to take you right here on the step," he said in a hoarse voice, "but I'm sure you'd get mad if I smeared your fanciful makeup."

Delia smiled. "Oh yeah, I want to ravish you too. But..."

She turned her head so he could give her cheek a chaste kiss. He dropped the whip with a clatter and hoisted her in his arms then allowed her to slither her way down his formidable torso.

"Damn," she whispered. "If it wasn't a company bigwig hosting the party..."

"You look exactly like the cougar you are." His predatory smile weakened her. "I am so going to enjoy working you into a frenzy at the party and not letting you come until I say so."

"And I'll love every torturous moment of it."

"Delia."

The serious tenor of his voice tensed her every muscle. What had she done wrong? Would a punishment be in the offing later in the evening? Just the thought of it had her creaming.

Kurt released her forearms and took a step back. "I have something to show you."

Holding her breath, she waited for his next move. When he removed his sunglasses, she burst out laughing. He had a shiner. A bright purple bruise painting the skin from his left eyebrow and curving around half the eye socket.

When she could catch her breath, she choked out, "Been there, done that."

"Yeah, but I didn't do something as mundane as trip on a suitcase."

Sobering her demeanor, Delia leaned forward to place a soft kiss on the spot. "There. Did that make it better?"

"It did."

"Okay, I know you want to tell me. How did it happen?"

"I was admiring something and dropped it. So of course, with my excellent reflexes, I swooped down to catch it before it hit the floor."

"And the dresser drawer was open?"

"No. I was in the sun room because that's where the light was best. I didn't want it to fall into the Jacuzzi. It didn't, but I did. Smacked my hard head right on the porcelain edge."

"Oh poor baby." She let her fingers trail lightly over the colorful design of it, feeling his pain in the reliving of her own accident.

"But," he continued triumphantly. "I retrieved the object of this little contretemps." He shifted, reached into the back pocket of his khakis. "When you see it, you'll know why I didn't want to lose this."

He swung his hand around and showed her a small, black box resting in his palm.

Delia felt the world tilt.

With trembling fingers, she took the box and opened it. Even in the muted light of the front hall, the round diamond threw vivid flashes of color and brilliance in all directions. Impressive but not ostentatiously large, its solitary splendor rested atop a simple gold band.

“I chose yellow gold because of your hair. We can change it to white gold if you like. Or platinum. That is, if you want to wear it?”

Never had she heard her alpha Master so timid, so unsure. She jumped up to hang on to his shoulders, whipped her legs around his waist. “Yes,” she cried. “Green, Master! Green, green, green!”

They were late to the party, but their costumes took the prize.

About the Author

Cris Anson firmly believes that love is the greatest gift...to give or to receive. In her writing, she lives for the moment when her characters realize they love each other, usually after much antagonism and conflict. And when they express that love physically, Cris keeps a fire extinguisher near the keyboard in case of spontaneous combustion. Multi-published and twice EPPIE-nominated in romantic suspense under another name, she was usually asked to tone down her love scenes. For Ellora's Cave, she's happy to turn the flame as high as it will go – and then some.

After suffering the loss of her real-life hero/husband of twenty-two years, Cris has picked up the pieces of her life and tries to remember only the good times...slow-dancing with him to the Big Band sounds of Glenn Miller's music; vacations to scenic national parks in a snug recreational vehicle; his tender and fierce love; his unflagging belief in her ability to write stories that touch the heart as well as the libido. Bits and pieces of his tenacity, optimism, code of honor and lust for life will live on in her imaginary heroes.

Cris 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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