

ELLORA'S CAVE *Sophisticate*



SUMMER OF THE COUGAR
COUGAR CHALLENGE

NICOLE AUSTIN

Summer of the Cougar

Nicole Austin

A standalone title in the Cougar Challenge series.

With the big four-oh looming, Larissa Cross is more than ready to shed the roles that have defined her and make drastic changes. Gone are the widowed Army wife, soccer mom and empty nester. She's even setting aside the schoolteacher until fall.

A naughty challenge issued by fellow erotic romance booklovers on their blog, *Tempt the Cougar*, has come at the perfect time and ignited Rissa's competitive drive. It's going to be a glorious summer full of hot younger man lovin' for a new cougar on the prowl. Rawr!

Tattooed and pierced fireman JD Harmon is tempting prey but there's much more to the hunk than his bad boy good looks. A one-night stand isn't in his plans, and sex—no matter how mind-blowing—won't distract him from his goals. JD intends to tame the wicked cougar and stake a claim on her heart.

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Summer of the Cougar

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SUMMER OF THE COUGAR

Nicole Austin

Dedication

To all the readers who love my characters and stories as much as I do. Thank you for your support, which allows me to continue on this amazing thrill ride.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to Ciana Stone for creating yet another fabulous series premise and inviting me to join the fun.

And a special thank you to all the ladies of the cougar club. I am awed and inspired by your incredible talent, humbled by your generosity and honored by your friendship.

Author Note

You'll find the women of *Cougar Challenge* and the *Tempt the Cougar* blog at www.temptthecougar.blogspot.com

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CNN: Cable News Network LP, LLLP

Jaws of Life: Hurst Performance, Inc.

RomantiCon: Jasmine Jade Enterprises

Chapter One

Tempt the Cougar Blog:

Today is the first official day of summer break and the start of my new life. No more rambunctious fifth graders, classrooms or papers to grade. Robby is off to college for a special summer program and I'm living alone for the first time in my life. Talk about scary!

Sold the house, bought and decorated my new condo, packed up my "teacher" clothes and shopped for a sexy new wardrobe, traded the minivan for a cherry red convertible and got tattooed. I now have a colorful butterfly on my right hip—just above my bikini line—to symbolize my metamorphosis from Army widow and soccer mom to cougar on the prowl. Rawr!

There's just one thing left on my list—the cougar challenge. Hopefully this will be a summer full of hot lovin' with younger men! I've got eight glorious weeks to play, although I'm not sure how to get started or where to find and stalk my prey. Maybe I'll head to the beach, sip a couple of margaritas and check out the scenery.

Wish me luck, ladies.

Rissa

Larissa Cross cruised along the coast with the top down, a warm breeze rushing through her hair. She plugged her MP3 player into the stereo and cranked up the volume as Steven Tyler's signature scream blasted from the speakers. There wasn't a cloud in the bright blue sky and the weather forecasters had rated the day as a ten on the suntan scale.

A picture-postcard-perfect Florida day and a great way to kick off her new life.

Well, her new summertime life anyway. In the fall it would be back to "Miss Cross" and the comfortable routine of teaching elementary school. She tried not to think about all the changes she'd made in the past year because when you put them together it added up to a rather frightening conclusion—midlife crisis.

Where the hell did all those years go?

Next month she would hit the big four-oh. Pretty sad she'd waited this long to finally rediscover herself. "Better late than never though."

The changes had all started with the first erotic romance book she'd read. Then her friend Cam had introduced her to the cougars, a group of woman with one primary thing in common—lust for younger men. The original seven cougars met at RomantiCon, an erotic romance conference put on by their favorite publisher. Monica had been the one to throw down the gauntlet, challenging them all to find a younger lover. Rissa highly anticipated meeting everyone in person at the next conference.

She grinned, absorbing the thrill of competition. Nothing appealed to her more than the prospect of conquering a challenge. The cougar challenge was perfect for her and had arrived at just the right time in her life. She couldn't wait to try some of the erotic acts that had gotten her so hot and horny when she read all those steamy books.

A truck full of young guys honked and whistled at her. Hmm...maybe the challenge wouldn't be too difficult. These boys looked way too young but their appreciation still made her smile and gave her confidence a boost.

With a wave to the boys, she turned into the jam-packed parking lot for the public beach. As she claimed one of few available spaces at the back of the lot, her car sputtered, coughed and gave a loud hiss before the engine stalled.

"Oh great!"

Rissa knew next to nothing about cars, yet even she realized the smoke billowing out from under the hood meant bad news. She jumped out and raced to the front, intending to pop the hood. That's when she noticed the flames.

Thankfully the pickup had pulled in behind her. The teenage boys who piled out to help were on the ball, whipping out cell phones and calling for reinforcements while warning others in the immediate area to stay back.

In the few agonizingly long minutes it took for the cavalry to arrive, Rissa convinced the boys to salvage the contents of her trunk. Once they had her lawn chair,

overstuffed beach bag, umbrella, towels, cooler and her precious e-book reader on the side of the road it looked like someone was having a yard sale. Or more apropos – a fire sale.

“Miss Cross?” one of the boys tentatively inquired.

Oh no. He must be one of her former students. Didn’t that just make her day. “Yes.” She lowered her dark sunglasses and peered over the tortoiseshell frame at him.

“Remember me? Tyler James. I was in your class?”

Prior students always failed to realize how much they’d changed or how many kids she taught and expected her to remember them. She played along to make him feel better. “Oh my gosh. You sure have grown up, Tyler. How’s high school treating you?”

Once the others learned she was an elementary school teacher they became a band of protective alpha-males-in-training and stayed by her side, assisting her through the crisis.

In a flurry of flashing lights and blaring sirens, a fire truck, ambulance and police cruiser arrived. The firemen quickly set to work and extinguished the flames while the medics checked for anyone with injuries and the police wrote reports. By the time the firemen were done, her crispy car appeared ready for the junkyard.

What now, Miss Smarty-pants?

Should she call a tow truck? How the hell would she get back home? Anyone she could ask for a ride lived over the bridge, at least a half hour away. She was in no mood to sit and wait that long.

There would be so much to work out now. Thank goodness she had insurance. She’d have to get in touch with the agent to file a claim. Damn, she really loved that car. Her first non-family car in two decades. Now she’d have to shop for another and get a rental in the meantime.

Rissa plopped down on top of the cooler with a heavy sigh as her wonderful plans for the summer disintegrated. In need of some emotional support, she longed to call one of the cougars.

What would they do in this situation?

A wicked grin tugged at her lips. The cougars would tell her to check out the emergency workers and if possible get pictures. They'd also tell Rissa to flirt her ass off and get one of those hot young studs to take her home.

"Who owns the car?"

She looked up as one of the firemen headed in her direction while scribbling information on a battered clipboard.

"Uh...me. I do."

Oh yeah, I do. Please and thank you!

Damn, the man was gorgeous. Better than any of the pictures the girls posted on their *Tempt the Cougar* blog.

He was tall, at least six-one, and had a shaved head. A bit of dark stubble covered his scalp, ran along his square jawline and above his mouth. A very sexy mouth. He had to be in his early twenties by her estimation. Not too young or old. Perfect age for cougar prey.

"Name?"

Yes, what is your name, hot stuff? Please tell me.

Broad shoulders blocked out the sun as he moved to stand before her. What she wouldn't give to have him strip off the fire gear and let her see his body. From his solid build she guessed he had lots of yummy muscles. Maybe even a six-pack. She easily pictured running her fingers over his tanned skin, feeling the sinew ripple beneath her fingertips.

"That's Miss Cross," Tyler, her proud protector, stated. "She's a teacher in Tampa. Elementary school."

What a wonderful, helpful boy.

The fire god nodded toward the police officer ready to ticket the boys' pickup. "If that's your truck, you might want to move it."

"Aw crap," one of the boys groaned. The group loped off, leaving Rissa alone with the hunk whose sharp focus all of a sudden made her nervous and fidgety.

He might have been preoccupied earlier but now she had his undivided attention. Coal black eyes took a slow journey from the top of her head down her see-through cover-up, pausing at breasts nearly spilling out of tiny bright blue triangles before dipping down to linger on her tattoo then stroke her legs. And boy did his gaze ever have the impact of a physical caress. Everywhere his eyes touched her skin tightened and long-ignored nerve endings tingled.

If he can do that with a look, imagine what he'd be able to do with those big, strong hands.

That thought notched up the temperature by a good ten degrees and had sweat trickling between breasts that felt swollen. Her body hummed with sexual need and her nipples were standing at attention, clearly visible beneath the thin material of her bikini top.

"Hi. I'm JD Harmon."

He extended a hand and she slid her fingers into his firm grip, biting back a gasp as lightning bolts raced up her arm and headed straight for her core. All those erotic stories she'd been reading had left her ready for some action. And JD the fireman was looking like a prime candidate.

"They're going to send a wrecker for your car. Insurance company will probably total it since the entire electrical system is toast."

Rissa held on to his hand as if it was a lifeline and stared up at those mesmerizing dark eyes. She knew he was talking to her but the words didn't penetrate the haze of lust that had swallowed her whole.

"Miss Cross?"

"Rissa," she absently mumbled. He let go of her hand and a wave of disappointment crashed over her. But then he turned and bumped her hip with his, making a space to sit down. Right next to her on the narrow cooler. Close enough she caught a whiff of sandalwood cologne and clean, masculine sweat. Mmm...he smelled wonderful. Hot and spicy. The right side of his body pressing against her from shoulder to ankle felt even better and gave her a rush of positive vibes.

I am cougar, hear me roar!

"Do you have a way home?"

"I...home?" Her voice once again disappeared, along with the original question.

Good idea. Your place or mine?

"We'll make sure Miss Cross gets home," Tyler said as the boys reappeared. A couple of his friends groaned and he silenced them with a hard look. "We live across the bridge in Tampa," he informed the fireman.

Rissa saw her chance to make a move on the hunk slipping away.

"You're still over by the school, right?" Tyler asked.

Damn interfering kids! Didn't they have anything better to do?

Then the wonderful JD took her hand, helping Rissa to her feet, and she forgot all about the teenagers. They walked a few steps away and he got close. Real close. *Oh yeah!* His head lowered toward hers and her heart slammed against her ribs as she leaned toward him, praying he'd kiss her.

"Are you okay with the kids taking you home?"

"I-uh...sure."

Dammitdammitdammit.

"Okay. The guys are waiting and I've got to get back to work. But...umm, I have your number. Would it be all right if I call you? We could see a movie or go out to dinner—"

"Yes!" Her breathless, eager reply made her cringe but what the hell. Rissa didn't care. She'd never been asked out by a younger man, certainly never by a man half as handsome. She wasn't about to let this chance pass her by.

"Oh. Hey, that's great! Listen, I'll call you later. You know," he nodded toward the boys, "make sure the kids got you home safe and sound. Okay?"

Good lord, did the man not know the power of his appeal? How could he act tentative and unsure about her, an old, widowed soccer mom?

No, she silently reprimanded. You're a desirable, single, available woman. He'd be crazy not to ask you out.

"That would be nice. Thank you, JD."

His entire face lit up when she said his name.

"Great. I'll talk to you later, Rissa."

The cougars were going to freak. First time out and she'd scored. Or she would score once they got together. She'd already started composing her next blog post in her head.

They'll want pictures.

Rissa dug in her bag, grabbed her phone and snapped a photo of JD in profile as he climbed into the truck. Didn't turn out great or do him justice since she was too far away. The girls were going to love it regardless. She hit the text button and sent the picture on its way, winging through cyberspace.

In less than a minute, replies demanding details and offering congratulations started pouring in. She put them off and made her friends wait, letting their anticipation build. Besides, she hated trying to text on the phone. She waited until the boys got her home and logged on to instant message.

Rissa: I'll try to make this long story short.

Cam: Details. Need details!

Lynn: The juicier the better :D

Rissa: Drove to the beach and my POS new car caught fire. But lucky me, JD was one of the yummy firemen who came to my rescue.

Rachel: The pic was grainy. Describe him?

Rissa: I'm estimating twenty-four, at least six-one, couldn't tell much about his body with the fire gear on but he's got the most amazing eyes, big capable hands and he smells delicious.

Monica: Well all right. Go for it girl!

Stevie: Please tell me you got his digits.

Rissa: No but JD got mine. Said he'd call and we could go see a movie and have dinner.

Cam: Yeehaw! Saddle up and ride 'em.

Rissa: Umm...yeah. But what if he doesn't call? I'm sitting here next to the damn phone like some angsty teen. How pathetic is that?

Autumn: Get this straight, Rissa. You are not pathetic. Of course you're going to be nervous on your first time out.

Lee: He'll call! I know he will.

Rissa: I sure hope so!

When she turned out the lights and finally climbed into bed it was after midnight. She'd had calls from the insurance agent, the salvage yard and the car salesman. Each time the phone rang, excitement and anticipation surged only to be let down when it wasn't JD.

What had she been thinking? Why would a buff young guy want her? Yes, she worked out, watched her diet and stayed in shape. Still, time to face reality. She had two grown children and was getting older. She would be lucky to get a man her own age in bed. She didn't stand much chance with a twenty-something fireman.

From an early age she'd known that she wanted to be a teacher. Right out of high school she married her sweetheart and went to college while Tim joined the Army. They had not planned on having children early but these things don't often happen according to schedule. Mariah came along when the ink on Rissa's college diploma was

still wet and Robby had been born eighteen months later. Then Tim died in a stupid accident one month before Robby's first birthday.

Nineteen years and no serious relationships. There had been a couple of brief affairs but sex hadn't been important to her. She'd been too busy with the kids to truly miss it. Not until she found erotic romances. She'd never experienced many of the titillating things she read about. Now her body hummed with sexual need and she actually owned several adult toys.

She had hoped JD would reintroduce her to pleasures of the flesh. *His loss!* This wasn't a race, although she felt the familiar drive of competition. She had all summer and lots of young studs to choose from. She vowed that the next one to pique her interest would earn her cougar status.

Like her friends, many of whom were now in fulfilling relationships, she'd be bold, daring and confident. Maybe she'd even be scandalously naughty and get two younger men in her bed – at the same time – focused on giving her one hell of an amazing night.

Stevie raved about her experience with multiple partners. Monica, Autumn, Lynn and Lorelee all had tried out ménages. Why shouldn't she find out what all the fuss was about and experience that ultimate pleasure?

Ha, take that, JD!

Chapter Two

"Damn, I'm tired."

"That was one crazy shift."

"I'm going to veg in front of the TV all day."

"Dream on, Doug. Tracey will never let you get away with that."

The guys all laughed. JD didn't hang around to chat. He had better things to do this morning. Like grovel and beg for forgiveness from one very sexy lady. Real hardship that.

No sooner had they gotten back to the house after he'd met Rissa than they'd raced off to battle an apartment fire. That had been a bad one. And the calls had just kept coming, one after another. By the time he'd had a chance to pick up the phone it had been after midnight and he hadn't wanted to wake her. Hopefully she would understand.

"Hey, where's he off to so fast?"

"Yo, JD. You got a hot date?"

"Oooh, maybe with the sexy Latin schoolteacher whose car burned up. There were some definite sparks flying from her."

"None of your business." JD didn't slow down. He knew if he did he wouldn't make it out of there for at least an hour, and he definitely had something better in mind than hanging out with the guys.

It was still early but he was done waiting. JD closed his truck door and dialed Rissa's number before pulling out of the parking lot.

"Hello?"

She had such a great voice. It reached right through the phone to tug at his cock, which came to instant attention. "Mornin', gorgeous."

Her response was several long seconds in coming. "Who's this?"

His brow furrowed. How many men had she been expecting calls from? "JD...the firefighter." Nothing. "We met yesterday...at the beach. You know, when your car was on fire."

He couldn't be that damn forgettable.

"And?"

Fuck! The chill carried in that one word traveled down the length of his spine and every muscle tensed.

"Sorry I didn't get to call you yesterday. God, I was dying to hear your voice. But we stayed busy 'til after midnight. I have to admit, I was very tempted to call you then just to find out how your voice sounds when you're sleepy. I figured you'd had a rough day, though, and I didn't want to disturb your sleep."

"Oh, that's all right." The ice cracked and started to melt. "Your job is very important."

Work was the last thing he wanted to talk about. "Hey, listen. My shift's over now and I'm starving. Have you eaten yet?"

"Not yet."

"Great. Can I take you out for breakfast? It's rush hour so it will take me about an hour to drive over to your place."

"No."

His heart dropped. Shit, he'd really screwed up by not calling her last night.

"Forget going out. I'll cook."

Yes! JD punched his fist in the air. He couldn't remember the last time a woman other than his mother had cooked for him. And a homemade meal would be nicer than a restaurant. More intimate.

“Awesome. I’ll be there quick as I can.” He couldn’t wait to see her again.

“Don’t you dare rush. Drive carefully.” She probably used that stern tone to tame unruly students. He wasn’t immune to its power, which had his stomach flip-flopping.

“Okay, I will.”

“See you soon, JD.”

He disconnected on a groan. God, he loved hearing his name roll over her tongue. Rissa had a low and very sensual voice—perfect for dirty talk and phone sex. A man wouldn’t mind hearing that voice whisper in his ear every morning. Like luxurious silk, it clung to him, molding to his body—warm, tantalizing and intimate.

Rissa Cross was one sultry woman. He’d bet his paycheck she’d also be fiery. Damn sure she was the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen outside the pages of a magazine. Her naturally dark-toned skin looked even softer than her thick mass of long brown hair. She smelled sweeter than honeysuckle. And that body. If he’d had a teacher that looked half as good he would have never learned a damn thing. All he would have studied was her.

Miss Cross kept herself in excellent shape. Hourglass shape—full breasts, narrow waist and curvy hips. The bright butterfly tattooed on the side of her belly was both sexy and elegant. But her lips—images of her wide mouth and pouty, glossed lips would haunt his dreams. Oh, the things he imagined her doing with those lips. Meeting his own hungry kiss, tasting his skin and stretching around his cock as she sucked him down her throat.

He shifted, adjusting his erection to a less painful position in his shorts. His mind filled with seductive images of all the ways their bodies would fit together.

JD couldn’t help but press harder on the gas pedal.

* * * * *

Only a few hours after sunrise and the temperatures were already in the mid-eighties. Rissa considered putting on a nice outfit and fixing her hair after her morning

run then quickly discarded the idea. Comfort won out over vanity. It was simply too hot for excess clothing. Besides, either JD wanted her or he didn't. No amount of primping would change his desires. And why get all dressed up when she intended to be naked before long.

She settled on a yellow eyelet camisole and denim shorts, skipping undergarments entirely. The top fell somewhere in the gray area between decency and blatant invitation, revealing a flirty glimpse of cleavage. After running a brush through her hair she pulled the heavy mass into a ponytail. A quick swipe of gloss across her lips was her one concession to makeup.

Now for breakfast. Her *abuela* swore the fastest way to catch a man was to cook for him. Rissa didn't want his heart, but hoped the meal she prepared would get her in JD's pants.

The spicy scent of chorizo and onions grilling in the skillet had her stomach growling. She scrambled in some eggs and raisins then the completed dish went into the warm oven along with a plate of fresh tortillas. Earlier she'd made salsa and set the table. But she was hungry for more than food. Rissa had every intention of getting JD on the menu.

She headed for her laptop to check email when someone knocked on the door. Glancing at the clock she noted how fast he'd made the drive. She started talking as she opened the door. "Wow, you made good ti—"

The sight of JD waiting on her doorstep, smiling at her broadly, had the words dying in her dry throat as Rissa nearly swallowed her tongue. She'd imagined how he'd look out of the uniform. Her imagination had nothing on reality.

Washed so many times the material was nearly threadbare, his blue T-shirt bore the fire department emblem and lovingly conformed to his chiseled torso. Intricate lines of a black tattoo that accentuated his huge biceps disappeared under his left sleeve. She longed to trace all those twisting, twirling lines with the tip of her tongue, and contemplated how much skin they covered.

He'd tucked the shirt into a faded pair of low-riding shorts that failed to disguise the thick bulge that extended all the way to his left hip. Saliva flooded her mouth and she wondered how he'd taste. Her breasts felt swollen and heavy, and with each ragged breath her rock-hard nipples rasped against her top. Shifting her weight from one foot to the other, Rissa realized more than her mouth had gotten wet.

"Damn, honey. You're even more beautiful than I remembered."

He lifted his right hand and held out a red fire extinguisher bearing a festive streamer of multicolored ribbons. How had she failed to notice the large red cylinder dangling from his fist? "I brought you a present."

"Um...thanks." Rather unique gift.

"When you get another car, I want you to put that in the trunk so I'll know you're safe."

Awww!

The sweet gesture left her speechless. For several long moments she stared into his dark eyes. Reflected in their depths she saw the potential for a future. A long-lasting relationship.

Rissa shook her head to dispel the rather disturbing idea. She wanted to live, have fun, sample all the different flavors she'd never tasted – not tie herself to one man. No matter how sweet and sexy and thoughtful he might be.

Breakfast. They were supposed to be having breakfast.

"Come on in." Stepping back from the door, she allowed him to enter her home. Not sure what else to do with it, she put his gift in the hall closet. Turning back toward him, she said, "I hope you're hungry. I cooked –"

The breath rushed from her lungs as her back came up against the wall. Warmth and JD's masculine scent enveloped her as his hard body fitted against her soft curves. It was a glorious fit. His body caged hers and his fingers bracketed her face, holding her in place.

"I'm starved." His voice rumbled close to her ear. "For you." Then his lips, soft yet firm, brushed along her jaw, moving slowly toward her mouth. She could have ducked or turned her head away. Longing for his kiss, she did neither. At the first touch of his lips to hers, Rissa spontaneously combusted. Fire raced across her skin and her blood turned to molten lava. From head to toe she burned and her toes curled into the carpet.

Dios, she might need that fire extinguisher to put out the flames.

He claimed her mouth in a scorching hot kiss and her lips opened wide, inviting him inside. JD accepted her summons. His tongue thrust into her mouth, slid against hers and she moaned as his bold and sweet taste washed over her like warm, delicious honey. Without conscious thought, she wrapped her arms around his neck and clung to him.

JD took over, exploring her mouth with his tongue, drinking down her needy moans and whimpers. Her breasts were crushed against his chest and everywhere they touched, from shoulder to knee, his body heat left a wake of desire licking at her skin.

She had never been so thoroughly and completely kissed. And if the shudders that shook his body were any indication, she wasn't alone. Their kiss had the same potent effect on him.

The heady mating of their mouths ended way too soon. Resting his forehead against hers, JD stared into her eyes as they both struggled to find solid footing. Her body hummed with desire, aching and ready for more. She wanted so much more.

"Damn, baby," he panted. "You're burning me alive."

Burning him? He's the one who started the inferno. He damn well needed to do something other than stare at her. Preferably something involving the long, thick erection that had left its impression branded over her abdomen.

"Now that we have the first kiss out of the way, we can relax and enjoy breakfast."

Breakfast? Her brain short-circuited. How could he think about food when she was primed and ready for sex? She wanted nothing more than to rip their clothes off and get lost in his amazing body. To hell with the food, they could eat each other.

A vivid image filled her mind. JD stretched out on the bed naked, her on top of him. Their bodies locked together in a sixty-nine, hungrily devouring each other. She could almost taste the tang of his semen on her tongue, feel it sliding down her throat.

Lust slammed into Rissa, melting bone and muscle. She would have dropped to the floor if not for his strong arms holding her tight.

“Come on, baby. Let’s eat. We can work off the calories later.”

Damn right they would. Perhaps on top of the kitchen table, getting all hot and sweaty then taking a shower together. She’d wanted to have shower sex since one of the cougars had raved about the wet and slippery glide of soapy hands over damp skin. Taken from behind, bent over in the shower with the spray sluicing over their bodies.

Oh yeah! She had a lot of ideas for how they could work off breakfast.

Chapter Three

Rissa could barely see to place the last of the silverware in the dishwasher. She laughed to the point tears streamed down her cheeks as JD told her hilarious stories about the bizarre calls the fire department routinely received.

“This one tops all the rest. It will go down in history. We got a call for an assist from the medics. Patient was inside the house but unable to come open the door. No big deal, happens sometimes.”

The wicked grin drawing up the corners of his sensual mouth told her the call had been anything other than ordinary and likely involved sex. Many of his stories did.

“We busted open the door and hung around to make sure the medics didn’t need anything else. Brian and Sean are two very serious dudes, but they came out of that house wearing big cheesy grins. They had a sheet covering one hell of a huge mass on the stretcher and we knew something weird was going on. We didn’t see what until they turned at the end of the driveway.”

He paused for effect and the anticipation got the better of her. “What? What was on the stretcher?”

“A couple.”

“A couple of what?”

“Not what, who. Two people, a man and woman. They were naked under the sheet. The woman was on top, facing the man underneath her.”

“Why would they put two patients on the same stretcher?”

“Couldn’t separate them.”

The sparkle in his dark eyes told her the sexual punch line to his story would be shocking.

“They were joined at the hip – literally. Stuck together. When the woman orgasmed, her vaginal muscles clamped down on the guy’s already swollen cock and stayed that way.”

Rissa scratched her head as she considered his words. Sure, it had been a long time since she’d had sex. She still didn’t see how what he described was possible.

“You know, like when someone gets lockjaw.”

Her confused expression prompted further explanation.

“Lockjaw happens when a sustained spasm of the jaw muscles causes the mouth to clamp shut. Only in this case...” His grin grew impossibly wider. The rest came out in fits and starts punctuated with robust laughter. “This was a case of l-lock pussy. The m-muscle spasms...of her orgasm...d-didn’t stop. The pressure...oh god. The pressure around the base of his cock made...him swell. Like a really tight cock r-ring. Same effect.”

“No way.”

“Yes way. Had to take them to the hospital. The doc had to shoot her up with muscle relaxers before she finally let go of the poor guy.”

Rissa narrowed her gaze on him. Something told her there was more to the story. “You went to the hospital, didn’t you.”

It had been more statement than question. JD nodded anyway. “Had to. They might have ne-needed the Jaws of Life to save that poor guy.”

Her mouth dropped open and for several long seconds she fought a valiant battle not to laugh. She didn’t want to laugh, no matter how funny. But snapping her mouth shut tight to bite her tongue just reminded her of the woman clamping down on the man.

Unable to hold back any longer, she slapped a hand over her eyes and turned her face in to her shoulder. He knew though. She might be able to hide her expression but nothing would quiet her sobbed laughs or the violent shaking of her body.

JD loved making Rissa laugh. The way her face and eyes lit up gave him a warm sensation different from the blinding, all-consuming sexual heat she generated. She lived totally in the moment and he got the distinct impression it hadn't always been that way. Almost as if she was making up for lost time. Yet whenever he hit on a personal subject or question, she quickly changed the topic or tried to distract him, which only piqued his interest in knowing more.

He knew he'd surprised her by not falling in with her plans of heading straight for her bed after breakfast. Not that he hadn't been tempted. The painfully hard erection filling out the front of his shorts was testament to how badly he wanted her. But he wanted more than a casual tangle in the sheets.

Her distraction worked in his favor. She laughed the whole way out to his truck and they were on the road before she tensed up.

"Hey, where are we going again?" Her arms crossed defiantly over her chest and she muttered something in Spanish he didn't catch. Probably nothing good. "I don't remember agreeing to go anywhere."

That fiery temper—damn, it did funny things to him. All that heady passion bottled up and ready to explode turned him on. He wanted her to open up and unleash all that heated energy, let it pour all over him.

He let her stew for a few moments before answering. "My friend's place on the Hillsborough River."

"And why are we going there?"

"It's a surprise."

"I hate surprises."

Yeah right. That's why excitement radiated from every pore of her luscious body. He wasn't fooled by her adamant denial.

"How much farther?"

Her foot tapped an impatient rhythm against the floorboard. After making the turn onto the dirt drive, JD squeezed her knee. "Relax." He pointed to the ranch house about five hundred feet away. "We're here."

He parked close to the detached garage and moved around the truck to help her down from the elevated cab. The confused look on her face when he opened the garage and lifted the two-seater kayak from a set of hooks was priceless.

He found it hard to believe he was delaying what they both wanted. But he couldn't deny the strong need to delve deeper and get to know the intriguing woman first. He'd learned enough about her to know that if given an inch she'd launch a strenuous protest to his plans. JD didn't give her the chance. He had the kayak in the water and Rissa settled in the forward seat before she could voice her frustration. Using the edge of his paddle, he pushed off from shore.

They'd remained quiet other than his instructions for navigating, but once comfortable with the slow and easy glide of the kayak, Rissa visibly relaxed, allowing her inquisitive mind and adventurous nature to take over.

"The river seems endless. How long is it?"

"More than fifty miles. Runs all the way from Pasco County to Tampa Bay."

"It's rather...swampy."

He chuckled over her scrunched-up expression of distaste. "The river starts in the Green Swamp."

"Oh." Flat and unenthusiastic.

As they floated along, he pointed out bald cypresses and longleaf pines as well as various wildlife. Considering her wary reactions, he decided not to point out the water snake weaving its way around her paddle. He had no interest in going swimming if she panicked and rocked the boat.

"That's a strange-looking log."

They floated closer and JD bit his tongue to remain quiet. Several turtles and a mature, eight-foot-long gator sunned themselves on the log Rissa had her gaze locked on. When she realized why the log appeared odd her entire body tensed and she let out a sharp whimper.

"There's no need to get upset. He's just enjoying the nice sunny day, same as everyone else."

"Y-you didn't tell me there are alligators in here."

"How long have you lived in Florida?" He didn't wait for her answer. "There are gators in almost every body of fresh water, honey."

Rissa's wild gaze shot around, taking in the other people calmly maneuvering their small boats along the waterway. With the sound of her heart pounding in her ears, she made a conscious effort to regulate her erratic breathing. No one else looked alarmed by the presence of a huge, prehistoric reptile and its mouth full of bone-crushing teeth. And JD projected a relaxed confidence that should be reassuring.

Yeah but how long have you known him?

A little over twenty-four hours. She barely knew the hunky man. He could be a deranged murderer who lured women out to this deceptively peaceful river to chop them up and feed the pieces to the gators, effectively disposing of any evidence. Hadn't people thought infamous serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer to be handsome, intelligent and charming? At least until police discovered his gruesome propensity for rape, torture, dismemberment, necrophilia and cannibalism.

A sharp peal of humorless laughter burst from her lips. Damn, she hated when her overactive imagination broke free.

"Rissa? Are you okay? If you're not up to this or are too afraid, we can turn around and head back."

Oh hell no! The challenge was on now. No way would she tell him to turn back. If JD and all these other idiots were able to conquer the big, bad swamp-river with all its creepy wildlife then so would she.

"Nope." Squaring her shoulders, she paddled with new determination and drive. "I'm fine."

The more she thought about it, the more she questioned his sanity and motives. She'd made it clear she wanted to fuck and instead he'd brought her kayaking. What red-blooded man passed up an easy lay?

"So how long have you been a teacher?"

And what was with all the personal questions? JD insisted on complicating things, which boggled her mind. Countless female friends had complained their men didn't want to talk or get involved in their lives. She'd thought most young men would give their left nut to find a non-clingy woman who wanted to have no-strings, casual sex with them. Apparently, JD wasn't one of them.

"Forever." She glanced over her shoulder and considered him. "Are you gay?"

When he recovered from a choking fit, she felt him glare a hole in the back of her head. "Why the hell would you ask that?"

"I all but gave you an engraved invitation to take me to bed. Instead you bring me out here." She shrugged. "You're hot as hell, muscular, young and sexy. In a word—perfect. All the perfect ones are either married or gay."

A sickening knot formed in her stomach. Rissa would *not* sleep with a cheater. "Please tell me you're not married."

"Nope. Not married, divorced or gay. Don't have any kids. Haven't been in a committed relationship in some time."

She sighed in relief.

"What about you?"

Great, they'd come full circle to the serious personal relationship questions she'd tried to avoid. Fine. She'd give him the same rapid emotionless response. "Widowed, two kids, both off to college. No lesbian tendencies—not that there's anything wrong with that. Not committed to anyone." She turned again to meet his intense stare. "Not interested in serious entanglements so you can relax, I won't be trying to drag you to the altar."

She turned back around in time to notice a snake dangling from a tree branch way too close for comfort. With a pronounced shudder, she paddled faster.

"What *are* you looking for, Rissa?"

Not much. Success in the cougar challenge and a good time.

This one question she actually appreciated. Recognizing the opportunity, she didn't sugarcoat or evade answering. By making her intentions clear they'd avoid any uncomfortable misunderstandings or messy emotional stuff.

"I just want to have fun."

Calling on every ounce of his self-control, JD still almost laughed right in her face. She had herself convinced but he didn't buy the detached attitude for a second. He'd been hit on by enough good-time girls that he could spot one a mile away.

The more time he spent with her, the more apparent the truth became. They were out on the river for several hours. He listened carefully, picked up her silent cues and read between the lines. Rissa Cross wasn't hard to figure out, and regardless of what she wanted him to believe, she was far from a casual fuck.

All the clues were there. She refused to share personal information, hoping it would keep emotional distance between them. But she'd messed up when she left discussing his life an open and acceptable topic though. Rissa greedily devoured all the details he shared. Getting to know him she started to genuinely like him, which made her interested in knowing more.

Her emotions were already involved whether she admitted it to herself or not. Each one was easy to see in her expressive features and soulful eyes. Not that he'd been able to watch her expression in the kayak but he hoped she'd listened as he talked about himself. He would play along, for now, let her believe she was safe from the deeper connection between them.

As he locked up the garage after their ride, she rubbed against him and gave an enticing feline purr.

"What do you say, stud? Want to come back to my place?"

The intimacy of sex would bring them even closer and strengthen the emotional bonds. Getting naked with this confident, vibrant and sexy woman had been on his mind since he'd first seen her. And yet, JD didn't want to rush it. Everything he knew about Rissa had alarm bells ringing long and loud.

Up until the past few months a casual fuck was exactly what he'd wanted. Not anymore. He was ready for a woman to share his life with. Rissa very well could be that woman. Making sure they had more than one night would be up to him.

He wasn't about to back down from the challenge of capturing Rissa Cross' heart. She didn't know it yet, but she was as good as his.

* * * * *

A vivid rush of violent curses spoken in Spanish was punctuated by the loud bang of the front door slamming shut. Her entire body shook with rage and dissatisfaction. Rissa went straight to her computer and started a group instant message with all the cougars currently online.

Rissa: Leave it to me to find a hot yet defective younger guy.

Cam: Oh crap. Is he impotent?

Lori: Defective how?

Monica: What's wrong with your hunky fireman?

Lynn: CAM! Don't even think that. How horrible. He's not, is he?

Rissa: Not impotent. I felt a very big, hard bulge when he kissed me. And I left no room for doubt. Told JD exactly what I wanted, mainly his fine ass in my bed. He didn't go for it and I'm still not a cougar.

Rachel: Maybe he wants more than an easy lay.

Cam: Yup, definitely impotent. Or gay.

Edie: Plenty of fish in the sea. Get your hook into a different one.

Rissa: He took me kayaking on a swampy river full of snakes and gators.

Lynn: What happened after that?

Monica: Please tell me he at least set up another date.

Rachel: There has to be more to this story. Spill!

Rissa: He called this morning and I invited him over for breakfast. Everything was going good. JD has an amazing sense of humor. I invited him to bed and he took me kayaking then dropped me off at home. Didn't even come inside. He starts a 24-hour shift in the morning. Said he'd call me when he gets off.

Rachel: What did you say?

Lynn: Yeah, tell us the rest.

Rissa: I told him we could both get off if he came inside. He laughed, said there's no rush then offered to take me car shopping. Ugh!

Cam: Hopefully he's a good negotiator.

Monica: I hate car shopping.

Edie: Maybe one of the salesmen will be a hot young stud.

Rissa: What the hell am I supposed to do now?

Her friends were full of advice. Some of it actually sounded good too. So JD had turned out to be a dud. There were plenty of available younger guys out there. She just had to find one...or more.

"To hell with sitting at home alone."

Rissa took a shower, put on her sexiest come-fuck-me dress and went on the hunt. A few hours later, in a hip nightclub, she pushed melting ice around with a straw in the margarita she'd been nursing.

"Darlin', it pains me to see such a pretty lady all down in the dumps." The blond bartender leaned his elbows on the counter separating them. "Want to talk about it? I'm a great listener."

"Isn't that rather cliché?" Rissa gave him a thorough once-over, taking note of his wavy hair, deep tan, muscular build and vivid green eyes. Definitely younger, she figured mid-twenties. A total hunk.

One big problem – no spark. Not even a mild tingle.

Same as every other hot young guy in the place, he left her feeling cold. Her damn libido had picked the one it wanted and as far as her body was concerned, there was no substitute.

Her only solace came in the fervent hope that wherever JD may be tonight, he also suffered.

"Whoever he is, I hope the bastard knows how lucky he is."

The bartender's comment brought a reluctant smile to her lips. "He could have been lucky but left me high and dry."

"Ouch! His loss, beautiful. With the number of guys in here checking you out and offering to buy you drinks, I don't think you'll have any problem finding a replacement."

She sighed heavily.

"Ah. You don't want a replacement. Damn, that's tough. You could always use someone else to make him jealous, spur him into action." His broad grin flashed a row of perfect white teeth. "My shift ends in an hour. I'd be happy to help you out."

His heated gaze lowered and blatantly traveled over her upper body before once again meeting her eyes.

"Thanks, umm..." Rissa realized she didn't even know the blond Adonis' name. And why the hell couldn't she want him? Oh wait, that's right. He was available and interested and she wanted the unattainable fireman. She bit her lip to stifle a groan.

"Spence – but you – you're welcome to call me yours."

God how she wanted to take Spence up on his offer. Spend the night with his hard young body pumping into hers. If only his arms were beefier, his eyes coal black instead of bright green, and that mop of blond hair had been shaved off.

"Thanks, Spence. That's a very tempting offer but I've got a date with BOB."

"Aww, darlin'. Why settle for a cheap imitation when you could have the real thing?"

She merely smiled, handed him an extravagant tip then headed home to an empty bed and cold sheets, not even bothering with her vibrator. Spence had been right. A cheap imitation wouldn't suffice when her body knew what it wanted.

Chapter Four

A few hard taps with a hammer had a hook secured in the wall. With tender care and a great deal of reverence, JD hung the heavy frame. He stared in awe, seeing his own satisfied grin reflected back in the glass. The frame held a mere bit of paper and ink, nothing special, yet it represented the culmination of all his hard work and determination.

In smaller frames next to the diploma hung official documents issued by the state of Florida – his firefighter credentials and brand-new teaching certificate.

He would always crave the adrenaline rush of fighting fires, the heady thrill of saving a life. Still, he wasn't getting any younger and was ready to start a regular career. In less than two months he would be a teacher – elementary school. If that didn't scare the shit out of him nothing else could.

As often happened, his thoughts turned to his favorite teacher. Perhaps the beautiful Latin spitfire would offer some words of wisdom on handling a classroom full of rowdy kids. Not that he'd have too much trouble. JD's love of children was the driving force behind his new career choice. Next month he would serve his last stint as a weekend warrior in the Guard and hang up his fire gear, although not for good. He still planned to spend part of his summer breaks working for the fire department.

Anxious to share his news, JD pulled out his cell and hit the speed-dial button. Rissa answered on the second ring. Her sensual voice had the immediate effect of making his cock twitch in interest.

"Hey, baby. Damn I've missed you. It's been a crazy couple of days."

"JD?" Her incredulous tone turned his anticipation to irritation.

"Yeah, it's me. Listen, I talked to my buddy at the dealership. He has a couple of cars for us to check out this afternoon if you're ready to shop." She hadn't forgotten his promise to help with the car shopping, had she?

"I...uh— You still want to take me car shopping?"

"Of course I do. And this time I'm going to make sure you don't end up with a fire hazard." The idea of her being in danger shredded his nerves.

"Oh, okay. Do you want me to meet you there?"

"No, I'll swing by and pick you up. The dealership is over there in Tampa. Two o'clock work for you?"

"Sure. And JD?"

"Yeah, baby."

"Thank you."

A few hours later when he knocked on her door, Rissa showed her thanks with a thorough, hot, wet, full-body contact kiss that took him from flaccid to rock-hard in under two seconds. All conscious thought flew right out of his head.

There was nothing gentle about her kiss. Her teeth nipped at his lower lip then her tongue thrust into his mouth, teasing and tasting. Exploring. Staking a bold claim. Days of pent-up need exploded and rained down over him. JD greedily took it all, demanded more. Their lips finally parted out of necessity and they both sucked air into oxygen-deprived lungs.

"You missed me." The idea stoked his male ego.

Rissa panted in his ear, her hot breath washing over his neck. "You will not leave me wanting again. I don't care what else happens today, buy a car or not, when it's all said and done, you *will* fuck me."

Her sexual demands had JD ready to forget their appointment and drag Rissa straight to bed. Instead he asked, "Is that my homework, teach? Because I've always been an overachiever and I have the next three days off."

He let the implication of how he'd spend those days hang in the air as she locked the door. Once settled in the cab of his truck, JD contemplated satisfying her demands right then and there but thought better. An arrest for public indecency would end his new occupation before it got started.

The woman had kissed him so good he'd completely forgotten to share his exciting news. "I don't plan on being a lifer in the fire department. I've been going to school. Graduated last month."

"That's good."

Her unenthusiastic comment while digging for something in her purse put a damper on his mood. He glanced between the road and Rissa as she slicked gloss across her luscious mouth then fluffed her hair.

"I got my —"

"So did you tell your friend I want a convertible? I don't care what kind as long as it makes me look good."

Dammit! She changed the subject or tuned him out almost every time he tried to talk about his personal life or ask questions about hers. What the hell would it take for her to let him into her life?

"Yeah, I did. He has three cars to show us."

Rissa blew out a relieved breath when JD went along with the change in topic. She liked him but had no interest in getting more involved than they already were.

She glanced over and the sight of his crestfallen expression created a sharp pain in her chest. From the moment she'd opened the door it had been obvious something big had happened and he was dying to share. The kiss had proven to be only a temporary distraction. Now she wished that she'd let him tell her whatever it was because he looked like she'd just kicked his puppy and she felt lower than dirt.

He remained silent for the rest of the drive then treated her as a casual friend. Their appointment turned out to be with the dealership manager, JD's uncle Emilio. Rissa tried to ignore the conversation while the two men caught up but certain information filtered through. She learned that JD had a big family. Two brothers, a sister, tons of aunts, uncles and cousins. Most of them lived in Florida although one brother was overseas with the Air Force.

She would have gone insane with worry if Robby had followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Army. Rissa suppressed a shiver and interrupted the happy reunion. "So, what have you got to show us, Emilio?"

* * * * *

The thrill of driving home in her new car and the adrenaline rush from the amazing deal JD's uncle had given her had Rissa jacked up. Yet neither could touch her anticipation of what would happen when they got home.

She found staying within the speed limit to be one of the hardest things she'd ever done. At each stoplight they made eye contact in the rearview mirror, increasing the need humming through her. Rissa had never wanted a man half as much as she hungered for JD. She could almost taste their combined lust in the humid summer air.

Pulling into her assigned parking space with a squeal of tires, she jumped from the car and raced up the stairs. She left the front door open, dropped her purse in the entryway and started to strip, leaving a trail of clothes in her wake.

With a hard kick, one shoe flew into the living room. Not missing a step, the next landed in the hallway. The peach blouse she yanked off now hung from a wall sconce. She had no idea where her chocolate brown skirt or panties had landed, but on the way into her bedroom she looped the strap of her pink lace bra over the doorknob.

Crawling onto the center of her four-poster bed, Rissa lay on her side facing the doorway. She bent one arm and propped her chin in her hand. The other arm followed along her curves, fingers trailing down to tangle in the soft curls covering her mound.

She'd decorated her bedroom in rich, warm colors and sensual materials for just such a moment. The lighting, although dim, was enough to see everything that mattered. Her skin felt stretched tight and her heart pounded in her ears as she impatiently waited.

JD stepped into the doorway, still fully dressed, her panties dangling from his fingertips. He leaned against the doorframe, lifted the material to his face and took a deep breath. He looked so damn sexy. And for the night, he was hers.

Every muscle tensed and Rissa swore she felt his hard exhaled breath against the throbbing flesh between her thighs. She trembled in expectation as he leaned casually in the doorway, his gaze leisurely traveling over every inch of bare skin. How the hell did he remain so calm and collected when she felt like a tightly wound coil ready to snap?

Without a word, he straightened and took a slow step forward. The heat of his dark gaze never left her as he moved closer. Fisting his shirt, he tugged the material free of his jeans and dragged it up his body. Mesmerized by his movements, not even a bomb blast would have drawn her attention from the tanned flesh revealed inch by torturously slow inch.

Chiseled muscles rippled over his washboard abdomen. Her gaze followed the solid planes and angles as his torso broadened into a magnificent chest with solid pecs and flat, dark nipples she hungered to touch, to taste. Mmm...she'd love to lick every swirling line of that sexy tattoo covering the beefy muscles of his left arm. A light dusting of dark hair on his chest narrowed to a thin line disappearing beneath the waistband of his jeans.

God, the worn denim had driven her to distraction all afternoon. Faded blue, almost white near his groin, slung low on trim hips and cupping his muscular thighs to perfection.

He stayed still as she looked him over. As their eyes met, Rissa became lost in the intense fires burning in the dark pools. No man had ever looked at her with such

undiluted longing. It did funny things to her insides. Thousands of butterflies took flight in her belly and her heart felt stretched, swollen with a barrage of emotions.

His hands slid over his abdomen and her gaze dropped to watch dexterous fingers work the fastener and draw down the zipper. JD leaned over, blocking her view as he pulled the denim toward his bare feet. Shoes she hadn't noticed him kick off lay on the floor near the doorway.

Tossing his pants to the side, JD rose to his full height and Rissa nearly swallowed her tongue. Sweet Jesus! She may have taken on more than she could handle. But what a damn good time she'd have giving it her all.

His thick, ruddy shaft hung heavily between his widespread legs. Roped with plump veins and capped with a broad crown, a bead of fluid glistened at the slit. But what drove her crazy was the gold, open hoop with small balls capping each end that pierced his crown.

Rissa's mouth went dry for a moment before flooding with saliva as she imagined taking his beautiful cock in her mouth. And her pussy – Christ! Her pussy clenched and hot cream slid over sensitive tissues to coat her inner thighs as she contemplated the wonderful friction of her body stretching to accommodate that big cock. Before the night was over she intended to know how that piercing felt thrusting into her aching body.

Long fingers fisted his shaft, tugging upward and giving her a glimpse of the hefty sac drawn up close to his body.

"JD," she pleaded, unable to lift her gaze from the solid fist squeezing and gliding over his cock. Thankfully he understood and took the last few steps bringing him to the edge of the mattress.

Rissa couldn't remain still or wait any longer. She'd waited too long for this. Her body took over, moving before the conscious thought formed in her head. His hand dropped away as her fingers slid over the hot, silken skin, her fingertips learning his shape, tracing pulsing veins. Over the super-smooth head, around the thick ridge,

against a spot on the underside where the hoop disappeared. A spot that made the thick flesh jerk within her grasp.

Her fingers barely met around the shaft beneath his crown. As she slid her hand farther her fist was forced wider, fingertips losing contact at the substantial base. She leaned in closer, closed her eyes and took a deep breath, drinking in his heady scent. He smelled hot and masculine, like long steamy nights.

Opening her eyes, she met his heavy-lidded gaze as she stuck out her tongue and captured the fluid dripping from his slit. He cursed as she hummed in appreciation of his salty male flavor then lightly tugged his piercing. One small taste wasn't enough. She wanted — needed more.

Rissa held his gaze as her tongue circled the head, quickly becoming addicted to the invigorating taste of JD, spice and pure sin. She knelt on the bed before him, breathless, holding the hard length in her hand, drawing the large head into her mouth. A riot of energy surged through her, making her feel more alive than she had in years — wild, feminine, powerful. She moaned, sucked at his crest and flicked her tongue on the sensitive spot underneath. The sharp hiss she drew from him sent excited shivers racing along her spine.

JD's fingers bunched in her hair, flexed, tightened. The slight bite of pain made her scalp tingle and she sucked harder.

"Rissa." His voice had turned rough, raspy. The command in his tone had her gaze snapping to his face. "Stop."

Stop? She didn't want to stop. Her mouth watered to suck him deeper. She swallowed hard, hungering for the hot wash of his cum in the back of her throat.

"Lay back on the bed and spread your legs, baby."

Oh, okay. That sounded promising.

Small spasms shimmered along the walls of her sex and she scrambled to follow his command. She glanced at him and shivered. JD stood tall and confident, the

embodiment of pure masculine power and carnal need. One hundred percent alpha and sexier than hell.

On quivering limbs, she moved to the center of the bed, overwhelmed with lust, restlessly rubbing her thighs together.

He growled her name and she trembled as heat spread from the soles of her feet to the top of her head. Dominant men irritated the hell out of her. She'd contemplate why in this situation, this man taking control turned her on...later. For the time being she planned on living in the moment and drowning in the pleasure gathering within her core.

"Spread those gorgeous legs and let me see how wet you are for me."

Testing his control, she moved with slow deliberation, bending her knees and sliding her feet toward her bottom. Anticipation and hunger flickered in his eyes as she let her knees fall to the bed, spreading her wide.

"Use your fingers. Spread those pouty lips."

JD fisted his hands at his sides in an effort to hold himself in check when everything in him screamed to be greedy, grab Rissa and take what he wanted. There had been a brief moment she'd bristled over his taking control but there was no hiding her body's heated response. Her nipples tightened into hard pebbles and thick cream glistened on the flushed folds she bared for him. He'd sensed her need to give up that iron-fisted control. To let someone else take responsibility, allowing her to simply feel.

Her internal struggle had played out on her expressive face, from the crinkling of her forehead with deep thought to the white teeth gnawing on her plump lower lip and the shiver of anticipation when Rissa surrendered to her desire.

When her lips had parted and she'd drawn his cock head into the damp heat of her mouth, his balls had clenched and he'd almost come from the unbearable pleasure of her teasing tongue. He wasn't selfish enough to let it happen. The vital drive to ensure

this amazing woman reached satisfaction first pulled him back from the edge of climax. He intended to watch her orgasm several times before indulging his own needs.

Unashamed of her nakedness or vulnerability, Rissa's fingers circled her clit, stroked her wet slit and two plunged into her pussy. Glazed eyes watched him from beneath dark lashes as her hips thrust, riding her hand.

While he enjoyed observing, JD wanted to deliver her pleasure. He took her wrist in a loose fist and drew her fingers from her body, pinning her with his hungry stare as he brought the wet digits to his lips. She moaned as he sucked her fingers into his mouth, noisily slurping up her bold, musky essence. In that moment, he knew her taste would be the ultimate addiction, one he'd never manage to get enough of or completely satisfy his craving for.

He released her wrist and climbed onto the bed between her legs, right where he'd longed to be since the first time he saw Rissa sitting on a cooler in that tiny blue bikini.

Taking her hands, he guided them to her slick folds, positioning her fingers holding back her wet, flushed flesh. "Keep your hands there, spreading that pussy wide for me. And keep those eyes on me, baby."

Chapter Five

After placing a sweet kiss on her butterfly tattoo, JD moved between her legs, his broad shoulders wedging her thighs so far apart the muscles strained. The man was sin incarnate—from the top of his shaved head to his tattooed biceps and pierced cock. And his naughty grin. Lord, that wide smile melted Rissa faster than chocolate in the Florida sun.

The incandescent heat of his dark gaze sizzled across her bare skin and held her captive as his head lowered. She needed his tongue on her clit with a vicious desperation. The warm brush of his breath over her heated flesh had Rissa crying out with incoherent mumblings. Her eyes slammed shut and her head thrashed from side to side. Time and place lost all meaning as she held her breath, waiting for the first touch, knowing in her heightened state of arousal it wouldn't take much to push her over the edge.

"No, open your eyes."

At his command her eyes opened but he made her wait. Finally, after what could have been seconds or hours, his tongue glided up her slit then grazed over her quivering clit. The hot, wet caress filled every muscle with tension.

"Damn, you taste sweet."

His words echoed in her ears as his lips closed around her clit. She clutched at his head, fingers slipping over the smooth skin until landing on his ears, which she held to keep his wicked mouth right there on her pussy where she so desperately needed him.

"Uh-uh," he chastised. "Put those fingers back where I told you to keep them."

She rushed to comply, eager for more. Once her hands were back in position, he sucked her engorged nub and lashed it with his tongue. That was all it took to send her

flying. She screamed his name as a powerful orgasm detonated in her core and shot out to every sensitized nerve ending.

He lapped at her liquid response, refusing to let the tension ebb. Stiffening his tongue, he circled her clit before moving lower to fuck her opening. The walls of her channel pulsed as he tongued her, fast and energetic. One orgasm blended into another in an endless succession as Rissa soared and dipped, flying higher and higher.

He never stopped, barely paused, mercilessly driving her from one shattering peak to another, again and again, not staying in any one spot too long. Her thighs trembled weakly, yet she kept her legs spread wide, numb fingers holding her open for him. He thrust three fingers into her pussy, stroked her G-spot with a come-hither motion that drove her crazy. He didn't ease back until she no longer had any strength to hold on and collapsed into a heap.

Her breasts were swollen, achy. Rissa lifted her hands from the mattress and cupped them, plucking at her pebbled nipples. Heat rose through her body as JD paid close attention to how she handled her breasts.

"That's so hot, baby." He lifted to his knees and moved up her body until he straddled her torso and his heavy cock bobbed above her hands. "Press them nice and close so I can fuck those beautiful breasts."

She loosened her grip, made a channel for his cock between the full globes then molded her breasts around him. JD's hands covered hers on her breasts then his hips rocked forward. As the crown pushed past her cleavage, Rissa tucked her chin and licked the silken knob, rewarded by his deep moan. On the next pass she sucked the head into her mouth and tugged at his piercing with her tongue.

JD's head fell back between his shoulders with a mumbled curse. His cock slid back and forth, her saliva creating a slippery path to ease his way. He rolled her nipples between his fingers and thumbs, Rissa moaned and her hips bucked.

She'd read about this in some of her books but never thought it would be enjoyable for the woman. She'd been so wrong. The eroticism of sucking at the head of his cock

while it thrust between her breasts and both their hands pleased the mounds was a huge turn-on. The proof of her arousal soaked into the sheets beneath her.

JD continued to fuck her breasts and she experimented, gently scraping her teeth over his crown and tugging harder on his piercing. He gasped, thrust faster but then pulled back and with an agonized expression, squeezed the base of his shaft tight. "Not yet. I want to be in you when I come."

He climbed from the bed then quickly returned, rolling a condom over his rock-hard cock. He knelt between her legs, lifted her hips and placed two pillows under her bottom. Leaning down, he latched on to one puckered red nipple and sucked it against the roof of his mouth. She moaned and pumped her hips.

"Look at me, Rissa." Lost in the moment, she didn't immediately respond. JD pressed the tip of his cock against her fluttering entrance.

"I want you to see who's making love to you."

Making love? Her eyes sprang open wide and she met his intense stare.

No. Her heart slammed against her breastbone. This wasn't love. It was just sex. She whimpered, struggled to suppress the emotions trying to break free but did as he asked, keeping her eyes trained on him.

JD stared into her eyes as he pressed into her body, stretching her to accommodate his thick girth. His piercing rolled over highly sensitive tissues, creating stunning sensations that had her walls tightening on him. She thought it impossible for there to be more, yet he continued to push into her until his balls rested snug to her ass and his crown nestled against her cervix.

"You're so tight...hot...wet," JD praised.

He held still, allowing her to adjust, savoring the moment. Rissa had other ideas and wiggled beneath him, rolling her hips, enticing him to thrust. After several erratic heartbeats, he pulled back until only the crest remained within her. Her legs shot

around his hips, locking them together. He chuckled. As if he could leave the snug grasp of her hot pussy.

No, now that he'd discovered paradise in Rissa's arms he wouldn't be going anywhere.

He wanted all of her, was dying for the taste of her. Their lips met, joined in a soft and tender kiss. She opened and as his tongue took her mouth, he thrust his hips in counterpoint. They moved together, Rissa meeting him with matching fervor. The passion built, escalating along with the force of his thrusts. His head swam, intoxicated by how readily she responded to his every touch.

JD was getting close. Too close. The skin covering his balls stretched taut and the telltale tingling gathered at the base of his spine. Wanting to make their first time together last, he reluctantly pulled from the tight clench of her pussy.

"Nooo!" Rissa cried and made a mad grab for him. He moved faster, grasped her hips and turned her onto her stomach.

"Relax. We're far from finished."

The tension in her body eased marginally with his reassurance. She'd surprised him earlier with her eager submission. He decided to push her a bit more to discover how much she'd be willing to surrender and how deeply it would affect her.

"On your knees," he ordered. "Shoulders on the mattress."

She scrambled to comply and JD's lips stretched into a goofy grin. Oh yeah, she was primed and anxious to give up control, which worked for him. He loved when a woman entrusted him to provide for both their pleasure.

Her knees were spread wide, her luscious ass thrust proudly upward, presenting a temptation he refused to ignore. His palm landed with a resounding smack that jiggled her right cheek and surprised a squeak out of Rissa. He waited, gave the warmth a few seconds to kick in and sure enough, she lifted her ass higher, seeking more. He spanked her left cheek twice before returning to the right, delighted by her sultry moan.

“Fuck, Rissa! You’re perfect.”

He rubbed her pinkened cheeks, spreading the heat, leaned forward and nibbled on one fleshy, rounded globe. He had to get back inside her, buried balls-deep, their skin slapping together with each hard thrust.

“Reach back and spread that beautiful ass for me. Show me how wet and ready you are.” When she hesitated he dropped his voice, adding a note of authority to his tone. “If you want my cock, you’ll do as I say...now!”

Rissa gasped but hurried to satisfy his demands and put herself in the embarrassing position. Knees shoulder-width apart, ass in the air. Her fingers slipped, scrambled for purchase on her slick skin, and pulled the cheeks apart. She was on display for JD. Vulnerable. Yet she didn’t feel weak or exposed. Rissa felt sensual and seductive. Primed and ready. Energized.

“Beautiful.”

The word, spoken in a low, raspy tone filled with need, went straight to her head. She’d never given a man control over any aspect of her life. With JD, this incredible younger man, doing so came naturally. His erotic demands amplified her arousal for him. No other man had such a profound effect on her.

His hands grasped her hips, held her in place as his broad crown probed her opening, made a shallow thrust. One hand moved inward, skated over her tight pucker then circled. “I’m going to fuck this ass, baby.” It wasn’t a question but a promise. “Later. First I want this tight pussy.”

Rissa shivered and her pussy spasmed. She was curious about anal sex, wondered if the reality was half as exciting as the erotic novels described. She had a hunch that with JD it would be even better than what she’d read. Hell, he’d made her crave the heated slap of his palm spanking her ass. He’d likely make her crazy to take him in her untried bottom.

“Oh, you like that idea.”

She didn't have the breath to speak. He circled her nerve-rich anus again and his thumb exerted gentle pressure. "Breathe, Rissa. Nice and easy."

She took slow breaths and fought to relax. His thumb slid past her opening and she gasped as a riot of sensations flooded her body.

JD drilled his thick, hard cock into her pussy, filling her so good. He didn't pause or go slow. Her breasts swung, nipples scraping on the sheet with each pounding thrust. He took her hard and fast, stimulating her everywhere at once. His balls thudded against her clit as his cock stretched her, the piercing creating wonderful friction over her G-spot. And that thumb in her ass moved in the same tempo. Sweet Jesus. There was no holding back. Her orgasm detonated in her engorged clit, spread to her pussy, which clamped down hard on his shaft, and fluttered through her spasming ass. Her entire body tightened and then spiraled in a spectacular freefall.

She floated, dipped, soared out of control with only JD keeping her from flying away. The pillow absorbed her ecstatic tears. He grounded her, fucked her through the orgasm. As her strength ebbed, Rissa collapsed in a sweaty heap, facedown on the bed, tremors still rocketing through her. JD stayed with her, his cock still deep within her pussy, his muscular body blanketing her back. Then his muscles tensed, his cock swelled and his hips bucked wildly as heat blasted her right through the latex barrier.

Neither moved nor spoke as they panted, sucking air into oxygen-depleted lungs.

* * * * *

Warmth covered her back and one breast. Groggy, Rissa reached out to tug the duvet over her. Only her hand didn't find crinkly, feather-stuffed cotton, landing instead on a wall of solid muscle. She blinked rapidly and everything came to her in a rush.

There was a man...in her bed. All night long. Wow! That hadn't happened since Tim died. She didn't bring her flings home. Not before JD. But then JD was turning out to be the exception to many of her rules.

Her body ached in some pretty interesting places, but considering the mattress gymnastics she'd performed with JD that was understandable.

She had no regrets. Far from it. It had been an incredible night. There wasn't a surface in the bedroom that hadn't seen action. She had to hand it to the young stud. He had some creative and inventive ideas. And stamina to spare. Holy crap. How had she managed to keep up with him?

She saw just one problem. He'd stayed the night. What the hell was she supposed to do now? Hand him his clothes and push him out the door? She was hungry and in desperate need of a shower.

Her thoughts bounced around in different directions but it finally hit her. *Oh. My. God.* She was a cougar. Wait until she told her friends. They were going to want lots of explicit details but she intended to be selfish and hoard those for herself.

Yup, time to get rid of the hunk. Maybe if she fed him breakfast he'd go.

A memory surfaced of the lost puppy she'd made the mistake of allowing Mariah to feed. Damn moocher had settled in and never left until Mariah got a place of her own and took him home.

On second thought, she wouldn't offer JD breakfast.

She peeled his fingers from her breast and rolled out of bed. A cup of coffee and a shower would clear her head and she'd send the fireman on his way. Plans made, Rissa slipped on a robe and stumbled into the kitchen.

She filled the coffeemaker with several heaping scoops of Colombian and breathed in deeply. The rich aroma perked her up, adding pep to her step. But when she walked through the bedroom and spotted JD sprawled out on her bed, she stumbled over her own feet, nearly falling flat on her face.

He slept on his stomach, gloriously naked, one arm stretched out across the bed. Miles of tanned skin stretched taut over sculpted muscles that were impressive even when relaxed. Her gaze followed the indentation of his spine from shoulder to the rise of his drool-worthy ass and down the crease to thick thighs. One knee was bent, leg

drawn up. His balls stood out in stark contrast to the white sheet they rested on. She absently noted that, unlike the rest of his body, his legs were hairy.

Her mouth went dry and she wondered why rushing him out the door had seemed like such a good idea when all she could think about was running her tongue down his back and licking that magnificent ass.

Giving herself a mental shake, Rissa hurried into the bathroom before she acted on the desires her crazy hormones urged her to indulge. Unfortunately, getting him out of sight did not get him out of her mind.

She cranked on the shower and slipped out of her robe, studying her body in the mirror while she waited for the water to heat. There were a few tiny wrinkles next to her eyes but overall her skin remained smooth and supple. She palmed her breasts, lifted slightly. Not quite as high, yet they were firm and even. The touch of her hands made her rosy nipples stiffen and turn a deeper shade of red. Releasing her breasts, she trailed her hands over her flat stomach and flared hips. Her legs were toned thanks to years of exercise.

Looking good!

Hell, she'd managed to catch the eye of the young hunk stretched out on her bed.

Why the hell am I not in bed with him? Oh yeah, temporary fling, Rissa reminded herself and wondered how long she'd be able to keep JD at a distance.

Steam rose around her as she opened the shower door and stepped inside. The hot water eased tired muscles but did nothing for her arousal.

Really, what would it hurt to crawl back into bed with JD?

She closed her eyes as visions of all the wonderful ways she could wake him up raced through her head. Squirting some shower gel into a mesh poufy sponge, she worked up a thick lather then started washing her arms. As she dragged the sponge between her breasts she remembered the sensation of JD's cock sliding through her cleavage. Her heartbeat sped up as her breasts became achy.

Big hands wrapped around her and she was pulled back against a warm, very masculine body.

“Here, let me do that for you, baby.”

Any thought of resisting vanished as his fingers closed around her breasts and brushed over her nipples. Her muscles liquefied and she melted against him, surrendering to the addictive pleasure of wet skin gliding against wet skin.

JD thoroughly washed and stimulated every inch of her body. When his soapy fingers stroked between her legs and separated her tender folds she turned to face him. Rissa knew what she wanted and it wasn't his fingers. The man had a gift for oral sex and she wanted to put that talented mouth to good use.

“Think of me like those little chocolate candies. I melt in your mouth, not in your hands.”

Chapter Six

Sneakers pounded on the path in tempo with the high-energy music blasting into her ears through tiny speakers connected to the MP3 player strapped to her arm. Perspiration dotted her skin and soaked her sports bra. Sore muscles protested the movement but Rissa pressed on.

Only two miles into her normal five and she was feeling the burn. She had missed her daily runs a lot over the past few weeks. Not that she'd been sitting on the couch eating bonbons. No, she'd been getting lots of physical activity putting JD through his paces.

Good lord, did he have stamina. They'd christened every solid surface in her condo, including the balcony. Just thinking about that night sent shards of pleasure splintering through her exhausted body.

When he wasn't working, JD barely gave her time to breathe. A few nights ago she'd snuck out on the balcony to get some time alone. With a short, silky robe covering her, she had leaned against the railing and stared out at the water spraying from a lighted fountain in the courtyard.

Before long, JD had found her and taken advantage of her position. He fucked her from behind, right there on the balcony. Her fingers stiffened with the remembered ache of holding the railing in a death grip. She'd drawn blood from biting her lip to keep quiet.

She'd never had sex in public. Now she longed to do it again. It was sexy and naughty and so fucking good. JD had flipped her robe over her hips, exposing her ass and wet pussy to the light evening breeze. He'd taken her hard and fast with minimal foreplay, talking dirty the entire time. The inherent danger of someone seeing or hearing them had made it that much better. Made her that much hotter.

Rissa wasn't surprised when a large masculine form appeared at her side and kept pace with her. She didn't have to glance over to know it was JD. Her entire body had gone on high alert, tingling with sensual awareness the moment she sensed his arrival.

She wasn't sure how or when it had happened, but JD had slipped under her radar and insinuated himself into her life.

On his days off he'd started showing up on her runs. Out of the blue one day he'd knocked on her door and taken her out shopping because he wanted a woman's opinion. And then there were the phone calls, several times a day, just to talk or to say goodnight if he was working.

Some of his personal things had made it into her condo too. His toothbrush resided on the bathroom counter, there was masculine soap in her shower and beer in the fridge. When she had done laundry yesterday the basket contained more of his clothes than hers.

Regardless of her stance on relationships, Rissa had to admit that having him around was nice. Comfortable—like roommates except with benefits. There was no pressure and he'd backed off with the personal subjects. They'd formed a relaxed, easy partnership of sorts.

Neither felt the need to fill the silence with random chatter. They walked the last two blocks to her condo where they shared the shower and their bodies.

Shower sex had become her favorite way to connect with JD. Wet skin sliding against wet skin, the sensual caress of sudsy hands. Warm water pelting her and the cool tiles against her back. She wound up clean and refreshed instead of sweaty and tired.

They dressed and headed into the kitchen, working together on breakfast, neither having to ask how the other took their coffee or preferred their eggs.

"Wanna go to a barbeque tonight? Nothing major," JD clarified. "Just the guys from the station. We'll toss some burgers and dogs on the grill, have a few beers."

"Sure," Rissa readily agreed. She had no plans and it sounded like a nice way to spend the evening. "We can walk over to the farmers' market and pick up some fruit for a salad."

The phone rang and since her hands were full JD answered with a cheery greeting. His expression soured as he listened. "Sure. Just a second. I'll get her."

He handed her the phone and a sense of dread tightened her chest. She tucked the cordless between her ear and shoulder and continued to whisk the eggs. "Hello?"

"Mother, it's not even eight a.m.," Mariah screeched. "Why is there a man there? What the hell is going on? He sounds young."

Aw shit. There went her good mood. Busted by her daughter. How embarrassing. She set down the bowl and refused to meet JD's gaze before rushing down the hall to her bedroom. Rissa hadn't dated while the kids lived at home, so a man answering her phone must have been a major shock for her daughter. Mariah's barrage of questions continued unabated. Rissa plopped down on the bed and struggled to get a word in.

"Calm down, honey."

"Calm down? *Calm down?*" Her voice got higher as she repeated the words. "How am I supposed to calm down? Is he some pervert? Were you having sex?"

"Mariah," she snapped. "Shut up!" Her daughter instantly went quiet and Rissa breathed a sigh of relief. "He's a friend and what he's doing here is none of your business."

"You didn't deny having sex with him," Mariah squealed dramatically. "I'll take that as a yes. *Dios*, Robby is going to freak."

"Watch your mouth, young lady. And bite your tongue. Whether I'm having sex or not isn't a subject you will be discussing with your brother."

"I can't come home right now so Robby's going to have to get down there and kick some ass."

"He most certainly will not! I am a grown woman and more than capable of handling my own affairs." No sooner had the word left her mouth than she knew it had been the wrong one to use.

"Affair? You're having an affair. Daddy's probably rolling over in his grave." Mariah let loose with a steady stream of curses in Spanish.

"Don't make me come to that school and wash your mouth out with soap, Mariah." She took a few deep breaths in an attempt to calm down. Losing her cool with her daughter would not help. "I am a single adult woman in my prime. Your father would not have wanted me to stop living when he died. He'd want me to enjoy my life." She knew it was the truth. Tim would have been upset over all the years she'd spent alone.

"I'm getting on a plane. You get that man out —"

"You will do no such thing!" Her heart raced as JD strolled into the room, bare-chested, devious grin on those lush lips. Rissa did her best to ignore the sexy ripple of muscles over his torso as he moved, and focus on her daughter.

"What you are going to do is hang up this phone, calm down and go to class. You will not call your brother and get him all wound up."

JD went down on his knees and pushed her thighs apart then moved into the space.

No, she frantically mouthed.

He ignored her silent protest. His hands wrapped around her ankles and slowly moved upward. Rissa gasped as calloused fingers swept along her inner thighs. She covered the mouthpiece with her hand and hissed at him. "Stop it."

"Uh-uh," he mumbled. "Tell her about me."

"Are you crazy?"

"Mom? What did you say?"

"Nothing. I have to go now." Blunt fingertips eased under the edge of her shorts and panties, pulled them to the side then glided along her hot, wet slit. She clamped her jaw down hard enough to crack teeth.

"He's with you right now, isn't he?"

"You're always so hot and wet for me," JD praised. Two fingers parted her folds then zeroed in on her pulsing clit. His warm breath washed over her and Rissa wasn't able to keep her hips from pumping toward him.

"Oh my god, he is. I can hear him."

"I-I'll call you later." Rissa's voice was unnaturally high. "After you've calmed down."

"You mean after he fucks you."

Two thick fingers thrust into her and pleasure rocked her, turning Rissa's breathing choppy. JD kissed her clit and hummed, the vibration of his lips almost pushing her into orgasm.

"Goodbye, Mariah," she panted, her voice shaky. "I'll talk to you later."

Her daughter was still ranting when Rissa pressed the power button. The phone dropped from numb fingers and she fell back on the mattress. "Jesus, JD. I was talking to my daughter."

"Mmm..." he purred then his tongue lashed her clit. "But I'm hungry."

Was it possible to overdose on oral sex? If so, it would be one hell of a way to go.

All thought disintegrated as JD's fingertips stroked that amazing spot on the upper wall of her pussy and his lips closed around her clit. His rough, hot tongue flicked rapidly over her clit and Rissa came hard, pussy clenching on his fingers.

He brought her down from the intense waves of pleasure with gentle touches and kisses. Her body went limp and he shifted her clothes back in place. The bed dipped as he leaned over her for a hot kiss flavored with her essence. She didn't shy away from tasting herself.

He stood and held out a hand to pull her onto her feet. "Come on. I want breakfast now."

"But you didn't—"

A quick kiss silenced her protest. "Later. I'm going to feed you first."

Rissa was stunned. She'd never known a lover, or any man for that matter, to be so selfless. While JD finished making breakfast she headed straight for the computer and hastily wrote a blog post.

Tempt the Cougar Blog:

Help! I need serious cougar reinforcement and advice.

After my husband died I didn't date and the few affairs I had were conducted away from my kids. Well, my daughter called this morning while JD and I were making breakfast and he answered the phone.

To say Mariah freaked out would be putting it lightly. That darn kid is too smart for her own good. She could tell from his voice that he's younger than me and she connected the dots with relative ease. You have no idea how embarrassing it is to be confronted by your child about your sex life. She threatened to come home or send her brother home to "kick some ass".

I took the cordless phone into the bedroom, JD followed and proceeded to...um, distract me. Mariah knew something was going on. I told her that I'm single and in my prime, and that her father would have wanted me to enjoy life. JD wanted me to tell her about him and proceeded to do wicked things to me with his tongue. I had to end the call before I was moaning into the phone.

It's my own fault for putting this part of my life on hold and never letting the kids see me around men other than family. They just aren't prepared for the reality of mom being human and having sex. Oh Lord, what a mess! The last thing I need is my kids racing home to confront my much younger lover. Yikes! What the heck do I do now? How do I handle this?

Lori: Oh boy, this is tough, honey. Listen up! First, settle down a little bit and when you are good and calm, have a heart-to-heart with her. Tell her what you just told us. You are a woman in your prime and your life isn't over. Why shouldn't you have love and happiness and all the good things? Assure her that your relationship with them won't change. You love them but why shouldn't you have your own happily ever after?

Stevie: Yeah, well, when they show up and find you two naked and draped across the couch, they'll get used to it fast enough! LOL Live your life for you not them. You've done that already.

Elizabeth: Rissa! First, you sit yourself down and repeat after me. "I deserve to have a sex life. I am woman, hear me roar!" Next, sit your daughter down and gently but firmly draw the line. This is something I had to do with my girls, too. Turns out what they were really looking for was reassurance that my relationship with them wasn't going to change, and that I really did know what I was doing with Kevin. Then sit JD down and reassure him that your relationship with your daughter is not going to dictate how you feel about him. Rissa, I may be delving too deep here, but it sounds like JD used the only option you left open for him to get his point across. Your refusal to tell Mariah about him probably hurt. You've got a good thing going here. Don't let anyone but you and JD dictate where this relationship goes.

Her friends used scary words. Happily ever after, relationship. Yikes!

They were right about talking to Mariah though. Rissa would prefer to do so in person but might have to settle for a phone call considering the geographical distance between them.

But Elizabeth's reply made her pulse beat frantically. Could her friend be right? Had she hurt JD's feelings by refusing to tell Mariah about him? In that moment all she'd wanted was to end the conversation not draw it out. She had no problem with telling her daughter about him, but not on the phone while he pleased her.

She made a mental note to reassure JD she wasn't embarrassed to be sleeping with him.

* * * * *

After breakfast they headed to the market then went to see the latest action flick critics had been raving about. The movie didn't have much plot, just lots of shooting, things blowing up, fast cars and beautiful women. JD loved it. Rissa had remained lost to her worries over whether she should say something about what happened earlier or not.

She leaned against a tall wooden fence and took in her surroundings. Children raced around oak trees, laughing and carefree. Adults congregated in intimate groupings, discussing a wide variety of topics. The teenagers all stayed inside to play

video games. A large dog sat next to a smoking barbeque grill, begging for a taste of the sizzling burgers. She seemed to be the only one who noticed the magnificent pink blush highlighting puffy clouds as day faded into night.

How the hell did I wind up here?

"Didn't you come with JD?"

Oh great! She hadn't intended to actually ask that question out loud. Biting her lip, she tried to remember the name of the petite blonde seated at the nearby picnic bench giving her a concerned glance. Was it Trisha? Tracey? She'd been introduced to so many people that she wasn't sure but thought Tracey was right.

"Sorry, just thinking out loud."

Tracey laughed. "JD does tend to have that effect on women. Not that he's ever brought one around before."

Interesting. Tracey seemed to have the down and dirty on JD. Rissa sat on the bench. After helping the toddler seated between them with his cup, her attention returned to his mother. "So he's a player? Not that there's anything wrong with that," she rushed to add.

Tracey considered for a moment before responding. "I wouldn't necessarily call him a player. JD just had not found what he's looking for." Bright blue eyes sparkled as she flashed a knowing grin. "Not until recently."

"What makes you think that?" Rissa scoffed.

"I've known JD for a long time. I've never seen him so aware of a woman before. He may appear to be engrossed in whatever the guys are saying, but no more than a minute or two goes by before his eyes are on you. Plus, Doug told me they're all sick of hearing about you. He's talked about nothing else for the past few weeks."

And how had her one-night stand turned into weeks?

"He's special to you too."

Rissa's gaze snapped to Tracey's. "What? What gave you that impression?"

"You're not hard to read and every time you look at him there's a dreamy longing. When your eyes lock with his the desire rolls off the two of you in waves everyone feels."

She groaned and before she could stop herself, she was searching him out through the crowd. The corner of her lip twitched as she watched him lift a small girl high above his head and spin her around. The girl squealed in delight. Another child, a boy, wrapped himself around JD's leg and he reached down to ruffle the head of dark hair.

He'd be a great dad.

A sharp pang sliced through her chest and killed her train of thought. She had to keep this real or one of them – probably both – would get hurt.

"Lust," she mumbled. "A summer fling. There's no future for us. JD's young, a thrill seeker. One day he'll want to start a family. I've already raised my children, seen them off to college." She wasn't capable of giving him that even if she wanted to.

"Maybe," Tracey conceded. "Maybe not. Have you discussed any of this with him?"

Rissa shrugged. "No. JD's a good time. There's nothing serious between us."

As if on cue, JD's dark eyes found her, stroking over her skin, heating her blood. Her nipples hardened and her panties got wet.

"If you say so but I don't buy it, Rissa. Looks like serious intent written all over his face to me."

She shook her head in denial but her heart pounded harder in agreement. And just what was she supposed to do with these growing emotions? Their time together had an expiration date. In August, like Cinderella at the stroke of midnight, she'd turn back into "Miss Cross". Go back to her normal life. A life that had no place in it for a summer lover.

And yet the thought of not having JD in her life made it hard for her to breathe.

What a colossal mess!

* * * * *

The dreamy look on Rissa's face made his heart ache and fill with hope. He'd achieved a great feat this morning getting her to say yes to the barbeque, then lost ground when she refused to tell her daughter about him. The woman drove him nuts with her insistence on keeping distance between them. Personal subjects were forbidden and she'd refused every previous invite to meet his friends and family. Her daughter's phone call confirmed his suspicion that her kids had no idea she was seeing someone.

He was happy to see her start talking with Tracey. Maybe now that the ice had been broken and she'd met his friends from the station Rissa would be comfortable enough to let him into her life. He'd love to meet some of the people who were important to her, especially her kids.

"You might not want to leave her alone with Tracey for too long," Doug cautioned. "There's no telling what my wife will tell her."

JD laughed. "I don't have any secrets."

"Yeah, right," Doug scoffed. "That's why you've told her how hard you worked to earn your degree. I bet you didn't even tell her about the new job."

He sighed and rubbed his scalp. Feeling stubble rasp against his fingers, he made a mental note to shave in the morning. "It's complicated."

"Hell, everything about women is complicated." Jordan Moore, B shift's captain, took a long pull on his beer then pointed the bottle at JD. "It's your job to figure out how to make it simple."

All of the guys within hearing range laughed, a few commenting on the impossibility of reaching such a lofty goal.

"Hey," Jordan griped. "Once I laid down the law with Mary life got a lot easier."

Sam Lang, B shift's lieutenant, choked on his beer. "You are full of shit, Jordan. Mary's the one who laid down the law. It wasn't until you learned to obey that the two of you stopped fighting all the damn time."

Running from her brother, Kyle's daughter, Jillian, launched herself into his arms. JD lifted her up high and spun the girl until she screeched. Her brother, Evan, tried to tackle him, only managing to hug his leg and attempt to climb up and reach his sister. Absently, JD mussed the boy's unruly hair, imagining how much he was going to enjoy being a teacher.

He loved kids, babysitting his nieces and nephews had shown him how much. When he realized how good he was with them he'd started thinking about teaching. Taking charge of school field trips at the station only reinforced his desire to work with children. In another month his dream would become reality. JD couldn't wait.

He was dying to get some pointers and ideas from Rissa but every time he tried to talk about his new job she'd shut him down. Finally he'd stopped trying. Maybe tonight would change that.

JD glanced over at her again and his heart beat faster. She was so damn beautiful, smart and funny. Everything he'd ever wanted. He had a lot riding on his hopes and dreams for the future. With Rissa at his side, he just might have a chance of seeing them come true.

Chapter Seven

Warm air skated over his cock, which jerked, snapping to attention. JD reveled in the exquisite dream. The tip of a damp tongue circled his crown before dipping into the slit to lap up a salty drop of pre-cum. A hum vibrated through his flesh and the skin covering his balls grew taut. Tight, wet heat engulfed the tip of his cock, taking him from sultry dream to waking reality.

Opening his eyes, he looked down his torso. In the dim light of her bedroom, he drank in the heady sight of Rissa curled up over his groin as she devoured him with her desire-filled gaze. Her plump red lips were stretched wide around his cock and the dark mass of her silken hair fanned out to blanket his lower body. He knew the image would haunt him for the rest of his life.

God, she was so fucking beautiful. And he was totally and completely in love.

Pressure squeezed his chest, pushing his heart up into his throat, and lightning jolted his sternum. His heart stopped beating and he tensed for several long moments. Then just as suddenly his mind and body eased as he slowly came to terms with his fate. He was head over heels in love with a woman who wanted him for nothing more than sex.

Unaffected by his inner turmoil, Rissa continued her sensual assault, twirling her tongue around the ridge of his crown before taking him to the back of her throat, strong muscles swallowing around him, milking his cock. At the sound of his guttural moan she redoubled her efforts, sucking with hard pulls, tonguing him with new enthusiasm.

Needing to touch her, without conscious direction, JD's hands cradled her head, fingers spearing into her dark hair, flexing against her scalp. "Damn, baby. So good."

Mind-blowing good.

He'd been tired from his last shift at the station but sleep was highly overrated compared to the sexual hungers of his fiery lover.

Her lips released him and her tongue trailed the length of his shaft, sliding lower, down to his scrotum. Gently she took first one then the other globe into her mouth, suckling and swirling her tongue insatiably.

JD became lost in the sensation of having Rissa pleasuring him with her mouth. She shifted, one hand gliding over sleek curves and moving between her legs. Two slender fingers disappeared with a wet slurp that drove him wild.

Sexy as it was to watch Rissa fuck her fingers, JD was dying for a taste of her sweet cream. "Come here," he demanded.

Rissa shuddered and he couldn't suppress a satisfied grin. The strong-willed, confident woman loved surrendering to his command in the bedroom.

Releasing her hair, he patted his chest. "Straddle me, baby. Give me that delicious pussy. I'm hungry."

She refused to let go, stroking his shaft as she swiftly moved to assume the position he wanted. With her knees bracketing his shoulders, she knelt over him, palming his balls, her ravenous lips closing around him once again.

JD stretched out the moment, forcing both of them to wait as he blew a hot stream of air over her drenched pink folds. He swirled a finger in the fluids gathered along her slit, drawing the lubrication back over the shallow groove all the way to her tight pucker. His fingertip pressed past the ring of muscle, stimulating her hidden nerve endings.

Rissa sucked in a hard breath around the cock filling her mouth. While he had hinted at his desire for anal sex, JD had only ever gone so far as fingering the forbidden channel. It was the only thing they had not yet explored together. There was no denying that his finger shafting into her ass felt incredible. Still, the idea of trying to take his huge cock in the tiny orifice filled her with anxiety, fear and excitement.

Would he be content to finger her ass or would this be the time he went further? She realized that JD was the one man she trusted not to hurt her. The one man she could relax and enjoy a new experience with.

So focused on the shallow thrust of his finger stroking the sensitive tissues just inside her bottom, Rissa faltered and his engorged shaft slid from her slack mouth. The wonderful friction immediately ceased.

"You want more, Rissa?"

"Oh god, yes. Please, JD. Don't stop."

His teeth nipped at the juncture of her thigh and shudders tore through her body.

"Then keep going, baby. You stop and I stop."

She eagerly took him back into her mouth, sucking on his turgid flesh, twirling her tongue around him. Whatever he wanted, she'd do it as long as he continued to pleasure her.

JD stayed still for a drawn-out moment but his finger began to move again, making small circles, stretching her narrow channel. He pressed a hot kiss against the susceptible spot on the outer curve of her ass that always drove her wild. He licked a hot path along the fold where her thigh and bottom joined, all the way to the crease of her ass, then slowly inched toward her empty, aching pussy.

As his tongue thrust past her trembling entrance, his finger drove deeper into her ass. Rissa groaned and scraped her teeth gently over his length. JD's moan vibrated through her pussy and his hips bucked.

He licked and sucked at her swollen tissues, that talented tongue searching out all her most sensitive areas and tormenting them with earth-shattering bliss. A second finger joined the first in her ass, moving in conjunction with the two slamming into her pussy and reaching that wonderful bundle of nerves high on her upper wall. At the same time his lips closed around her clit and his tongue flicked it rapidly.

A powerful orgasm crashed over her, crushing her under a wave of debilitating ecstasy. She couldn't breathe or move as intense spasms blasted through her from head to toe. JD murmured encouragement against her overstimulated flesh, keeping her climax going until the pleasure became almost painful.

She collapsed on top of him, gasping for air, and his touch gentled, bringing her softly back down until his palm landed a jarring swat to her ass.

"Don't you dare fall asleep now that you've got me wide awake. We're far from finished."

"Damn," she panted. "I love...your enthusiasm."

Every muscle cushioning her body stiffened and Rissa cringed as her choice of words filtered through her mind. Crap, she'd messed up again. Now he'd think she was getting all touchy-feely and be freaked out.

"Give me a second." Rissa rolled to the side and up onto her hands and knees, using what always worked with JD – distraction. She wiggled her ass suggestively and tossed a come-hither glance over her shoulder. Gathering her courage, she looked him straight in the eye and dropped the equivalent of a sexual bomb.

"I want you to fuck my ass."

Her words had the desired effect, erasing her previous slip from his mind. The heat of JD's gaze slid over her bottom as he blindly reached for the nightstand, fumbling for the lube she kept in the drawer with her toys.

A pink vibrator, her favorite, rolled across the sheets and settled next to her knee, followed closely by a butterfly-shaped clit teaser. Silver Ben Wa balls sailed right off the end of the bed. A flash of red caught her eye a split second before the leather tails of her flogger snapped against her ass. The heavy thud stung for only a moment before warmth spread through the fleshy globes. Rissa moaned and lifted her ass into the next swat.

"Damn, baby. I would have done this sweet ass weeks ago if I'd known you had a flogger hidden away with your toys."

JD landed several more heavy swats then his hand rubbed over her stinging ass, spreading the heat. "So pink and beautiful," he praised.

The leather tails connected with her upturned ass over and over, and Rissa was lost to the decadent thrill. She had bought the flogger on a whim, more as a novelty, never expecting to feel the thuddy sensation on her bare flesh or to be so turned-on by it. Mere minutes ago she had been sated, yet after a few swats her desires roared back to life. With each lash her body rocked, breasts swinging, pebbled nipples dragging across the sheets. Her clit swelled, throbbed, needing attention. Hot fluids gushed from her pussy, the walls clenching, emphasizing its emptiness.

"JD," she moaned. "Please."

He dropped the flogger and a big palm smoothed over her flaming flesh, making her even hotter. "Please what, baby? What do you need?"

Something blunt pressed at her opening and she gasped, arched her back and thrust her hips, impaling herself on the vibrator he held. Strong muscles flexed, drew the toy deeper.

"Fuck, Rissa. That's hot!"

He flicked the switch and the toy started to oscillate as he fucked her with it, rasping over her G-spot with each pass. Lost to sensation, she squealed as cold liquid sluiced down the crease of her ass and a well-lubed finger thrust deep. Soon one finger became two, scissoring, stretching. Burning pleasure-pain had her grinding against the toy and his fingers. The two pulled out and on the next pass were replaced with three. It was too much, not enough.

JD was in limbo, somewhere between heaven and hell. Rissa's responsiveness blew him away as he watched her ride his fingers and the vibrator. He couldn't wait to thrust his cock into her hot, tight ass.

She cried in frustration when he removed his fingers. He grabbed a condom and rolled it on, squeezed a generous pool of lube into his palm and fisted his throbbing

cock. When he was nice and slick, he pressed the head against her tiny hole and grasped her hip. With his free hand, he reached around and rubbed her clit. The stimulation to the engorged nub relaxed the tension and her anus fluttered open.

“Nice and easy, Rissa. Take a breath. When you blow it out, bear down.”

Following his lead, she breathed and relaxed. The head of his cock slipped past the dense ring of tissue and into the blistering heat of her body.

His control nearly faltered as JD gritted his teeth and held perfectly still. If she changed her mind now it would kill him but he’d pull out. Endless moments passed in sheer anguish as her ass fisted the first inch of his cock and Rissa panted. When she finally moved, pushing back slightly, he hissed at the heady combination of ecstasy and agony.

Her shy, tentative thrusts ripped away at his resolve, but digging deep, he forced his body to comply, remaining rigid as she took more of him. After what felt like excruciating hours the rounded curves of her ass nestled in snug against his pelvis and her body engulfed him in glorious, tight heat.

“JD,” she gasped. “Move, damn it.”

Calling on every ounce of discipline and control, he eased back through the heated grasp of her body, hissing from between clenched teeth. “Not...going...to...last—”

His fiery temptress had other ideas. She dropped her shoulders and cheek to the mattress then reached back under her body to fondle his balls, which were already drawn close to his body.

“No,” he shouted, barely holding on.

“Yes,” she growled and thrust hard. “Fuck me.”

A man’s endurance and strength has limits—a line that when crossed will snap the strongest of wills. Rissa’s verbal and physical demands pushed JD far past his restraint. He lost any semblance of control, taking her hard and fast with wild abandon.

“Yes...yes...yes,” she cried, punctuating each punishing thrust. Unable to bear leaving her intense heat, he pulled out only halfway, the vibrator partially withdrawing with him. He slammed back into her and so did the toy, fucking her pussy and ass simultaneously almost as if he had two cocks.

Her ass spasmed and clenched, she screamed and panted, riding an almost continual orgasm, forcing his own climax to arrive much quicker than he wanted. He couldn’t hold back, her body milked every pulsing jet of cum from his balls and he continued to thrust until exhaustion claimed him.

JD dropped against her back, rolling them both onto their sides so he didn’t crush Rissa. Her body continued to contract, forcing out his deflated cock and the vibrator. The device skittered across the mattress and disappeared over the side.

He felt a powerful need to care for Rissa—wash her body, see to her comfort—but he couldn’t move. He managed to remove the condom and toss it into the wastebasket. Intending to rest briefly, JD gathered the last of his strength, pulled a blanket over them and cuddled her into the curve of his body.

He woke with a hard, insistent pounding echoing in his head. Cracking one eyelid, JD cursed as sunlight pierced straight through his skull. Rissa shifted in his arms and he realized that neither of them had moved a muscle since they’d fucked each other into a coma. A goofy grin split his lips but the constant pounding intruded on his happy thoughts.

He glanced at the bedside clock and wondered who the hell was knocking down the door at seven twenty-nine in the morning.

“Make it stop,” Rissa grumbled and pulled the blanket over her head.

He rolled out of bed, pulled on a pair of boxers and shouted at the unwanted visitor as he stomped through the condo. “Do you have any fucking idea what time it is?”

He unlocked the door and threw it wide. “This had damn well better be good!”

Standing on the doorstep was a wide-eyed teenager. The boy’s mouth opened and closed several times but nothing came out. JD gave the stunned kid a quick once-over.

Thick mop of brown hair, familiar dark brown eyes, high cheekbones, full lips and a wide mouth. The spitting image of his mother.

“Aw, fuck!”

* * * * *

A sliver of moonlight fell on JD's handsome face and sparkled in his pitch-black eyes. God, those eyes. He didn't even try to hide the growing emotions reflected in their depths. If she stared into the dark pools long enough, she'd lose herself. And she couldn't let that happen, although her reasons why seemed less and less important. Especially in such a romantic setting.

She glanced around, praying the condo association had not installed a security camera near the hot tub, which according to the sign was closed after midnight. Not that JD let the association's rules or an unknown witness stop their naughty water fun. The mere idea of someone watching created a wicked thrill that had her fucking him faster, harder.

“Rissa!”

“Oh yeah. Almost there.”

“Rissa!” JD's tone turned sharper and he shook her shoulder.

“What?”

“Wake up, baby.”

Wake up? What the hell was he talking about?

“Come on, Rissa. Wake up.” He shook her again. “Robby's here.”

Her son? In the hot tub?

Rissa's eyes snapped open and she blinked against the bright light flooding her bedroom. Damn it! She was still in bed and it had only been a wet dream.

“I'll start some coffee.” JD headed for the door, muttering under his breath, “We're going to need it.”

Robby's visit wasn't that big of a surprise. Ever since Mariah had talked to JD on the phone, Rissa had been expecting one of them to pay an unexpected visit. Apparently, Robby had drawn the short straw.

And right now her son and her lover were together, possibly talking.

Dios!

She rolled out of bed and raced around the room, threw on some clothes, brushed her teeth and pulled her hair into a ponytail. She saw no point in trying to cover the love bites on her neck with makeup since she and JD had obviously been in bed when Robby arrived.

Taking a deep breath, Rissa squared her shoulders and walked into the kitchen as if it was just any regular day and nothing of particular note had happened.

Robby sat on a stool at the counter with a steaming mug of coffee. "Good morning." She stopped to kiss his cheek and headed for the coffeepot. JD leaned casually against the cabinet dressed in jeans and a shirt. As she moved closer, he reached out and pulled her body flush with his.

"Don't I get a good morning kiss?"

She laughed and spoke softly so her son wouldn't overhear. "You've already had several but another would be nice."

JD took her mouth in a scorching-hot kiss, his tongue sliding past her lips to tangle with hers. But they had an audience and she had no intention of putting on a show. She pulled back and nipped his lip. "You've made your point, now play nice."

"Baby, I always play nice." He kissed the spot behind her ear that never failed to turn her core to molten lava.

She grabbed a mug, added a liberal amount of flavored creamer and sighed as she took a tentative sip. Mirroring JD's relaxed stance, she faced her son. "I wasn't expecting to see you this weekend. Don't you have exams coming up?"

Robby had matured at an early age and regardless of the unfamiliar situation, she was proud of the calm composure he displayed. Thankfully, Mariah had not made the trip, because her daughter had an innate flair for drama and would have made a scene.

"Mariah's been pretty crazy. She threatened dismemberment if I didn't get in the car and come check on you." He shrugged. "Besides, I figured you'd prefer to avoid one of her manic fits."

JD shivered. "Thank you! I have an older sister and several female cousins so I know how insane girls can be."

"You haven't met my sister yet. Add in her Latina temper and she redefines psycho."

JD shot her a knowing look then began speaking fluent Spanish, teasing Robby and making Rissa choke on the sip of coffee she'd just taken. He slapped her back and kept up the chatter without missing a beat.

"Are you okay?" he asked when she'd regained her composure.

"I didn't know you spoke Spanish."

"There's a lot you don't know about me."

True, but did he have to stress that point in front of her son? She'd been so busy keeping their relationship casual and avoiding personal subjects that she really didn't know her lover at all. Regardless of her efforts to keep her life and her affair separate, the two were bound to collide at some point. She began looking at JD through fresh eyes as he quickly put her son at ease and they got to know each other. When they began making plans to go kayaking, Rissa knew she'd lost the battle. She longed to spend some time with her son but she had made plans for the day.

"How long can you stay?"

"Not long." Robby raked a hand through his thick hair and sighed. "I need to head back by tomorrow morning."

"Well damn. I have an appointment at the salon in an hour and then I'm supposed to meet some friends for lunch."

"Don't worry about it. I'll catch up with some friends."

"No." Rissa had missed Robby and wanted to spend time with him. "I'll reschedule."

"You don't need to do that, baby," JD said. "I'm off work until tomorrow morning. Robby and I will go kayaking and hang out—get to know each other."

She nervously chewed on a fingernail and her gaze shot to Robby to gauge his response.

"Really!" He shot JD a wide-eyed, hopeful glance. "You wouldn't mind?"

"Yeah, man. I've been dying to get some time on the river. Besides," the two shared a conspiratorial grin, "your mom's not big on kayaking."

"Did she freak out? Tip the kayak?"

JD clapped Robby on the back and the two of them meandered toward the living room. "She held it together pretty good but the snakes and gators made her really tense."

"Hey," she called after them. "You didn't warn me about the snakes and gators."

Not good. Already thick as thieves, they ignored her ranting. Rissa rubbed at her temples as they began to pound. She had not imagined her son and her lover becoming buddies and taking off to spend the day together without her. No, this was definitely not good for her chances of keeping things with JD casual.

Chapter Eight

For those who reside in the sunshine state, hurricanes are a fact of life. Hurricane season runs from June first through late November with August and September being the busiest months. A late July storm, Alex, had thrown weather forecasters into a frenzy. No one had expected Hurricane Alex to become so strong or move so fast.

Being a veteran of many storms, Rissa didn't worry until a storm approached Cuba and either stayed in the Atlantic or headed into the Gulf of Mexico. The warm waters of the Gulf strengthened the storms and put the Tampa Bay area in the potential strike zone.

Lucky for her, Alex had stayed in the Atlantic. Unfortunately, the residents in the southeastern part of the state got hammered by the formidable force of nature. Curled up on her couch, she watched the reports as Alex crossed the Everglades and moved into the Gulf. All the computer models were now showing the storm had finished with Florida and headed straight for Mexico.

She'd stocked up on water, canned goods and batteries, and as a precaution the condo association had hung plywood over all the windows. The entire situation made for a rather depressing fortieth birthday, sitting alone in her boarded-up condo watching for the latest news.

The fire department had been put on emergency activation yesterday, which meant the crew had to be there whether scheduled to work or not. Although now that the storm had passed things would go back to normal.

JD hadn't even called today, not that he knew it was her birthday. He didn't. Rissa wasn't sure why she'd kept it a secret, but the longer she remained in the condo alone the angrier she became, which was ridiculous. She shouldn't be mad at him for not knowing.

And yet, over the past six weeks, JD had forced his way in and become a big part of her life. He'd practically moved into the condo with her and had even befriended her son—all while she'd sat by and let it happen. In another two weeks school would start and she would soon have to face the inevitable breakup. Their summer fling had almost reached the end. But how was she supposed to break it off?

Needing some advice, she booted up her computer and opened the instant message program, glad to see Cam was online.

Rissa: Hey

Cam: Hey stranger! Please tell me you're not in the path of that storm.

Rissa: Nah, I'm good. It stayed far south of me and is supposed to go after Mexico next.

Cam: Good! Well, not for south Florida or Mexico, but you know what I mean. So what's up? How are you doing? Or more appropriate, who are you doing? *G*

Rissa: LOL! I'm good. It's my birthday. The big four-oh today.

Cam: Hey, happy birthday. You have plans to celebrate?

Rissa: Not really. I'm still seeing JD but he's on emergency duty.

Cam: That sucks.

Rissa: Yup. So listen, I need some advice.

Cam: Sure. What's up?

Rissa: Well, school starts in a couple of weeks. It's time to get back to real life and end this summer fling. But I've never had to break up with anyone before. How do I do it?

Cam: WTF! I don't get it. I thought you and JD were solid. He and Robby became friends, right? And isn't he living with you?

Rissa: Yeah but this was never supposed to be more than a summertime thing. I don't want it to become permanent. So how do I end it without hurting him?

Cam: Too late for that. If you didn't want to hurt him then you should have left it at a one-night stand. Why do you think you have to end it? Why not ride it out, see where it goes? You never know, it could be the real deal. Something permanent.

Rissa: I've had that. Went right from my parents' house to my husband's. From daughter to wife then widowed mom. This is my first time living alone, being on my own. And that only lasted

for a little over a week before JD started moving himself in. There are a million reasons he doesn't fit into my real life.

Cam: So you've never lived alone. So what. You're going to pass up a possible future with a good man because you want to be alone? Are you crazy?

Rissa: Maybe I am. I'm not sure of anything anymore.

Cam: Then my advice is until you get your head on straight don't do anything rash. Don't break up with JD. Take this chance to be happy and hold on tight.

Hold on tight.

That was the one thing she couldn't do. If anything, all her conversation with Cam did was add to her frustration. She didn't want a permanent relationship with JD. At least, she thought she didn't. Right now she wasn't sure of anything and feared making the wrong move. The fear fed her temper to the point Rissa was spoiling for a good fight. All she needed was a target for her anger.

The phone rang and she snatched it up. "Hello."

An automated recording began a sales pitch for term life insurance coverage. Rissa listened only long enough to identify the company. She found a phone number for the organization online and placed a scathing complaint with the poor soul unfortunate enough to be on the other end of the line.

She hung up feeling less than satisfied.

In need of a distraction, Rissa picked up the book she'd been reading. It was written by one of her favorite erotic romance authors. No matter how great the story, Rissa wasn't able to concentrate. When she'd read the same page five times and still didn't remember what it said, she closed the book and tossed it aside.

Someone knocked on the door.

"Well, all right. Fresh meat." She made it to the entryway before the third rap sounded. She yanked open the door, ready to rumble, but found herself taking a reflexive step backward, one hand covering her throat. Her jaw hung open for a

moment before she recovered from the shock of seeing JD decked out in full camouflage military uniform.

“*Dios!*” she cried. “A little early to be dressing up for Halloween.”

“This isn’t a costume, Rissa.” He sighed, took off his hat and rubbed a hand over his head. “I only have a minute. The guys are waiting.” The problem was he had no idea what to say.

Rissa’s hands fisted at her sides and her cheeks were flushed red. Her anger irritated the hell out of him. He’d lost count of how many times he’d tried to tell her about his life. She hadn’t wanted to listen, always keeping him at a distance. And she didn’t appear any more receptive now.

He took a breath and forged ahead. “I’m a member of the National Guard and my unit has been called to the areas hit by Hurricane Alex. I’m not sure how long I’ll be gone. A week—maybe ten days.” He shrugged. “Could be longer.”

She cursed him in Spanish then switched to English. “You lied to me. Let me believe you were just a firefighter. I should have known. You’re an adrenaline junkie so the military makes perfect sense. *Dios!* I have no restraint. Should have resisted that damn cougar challenge.”

Cougar challenge? Exactly what had she been keeping from him?

Her right fist flexed and JD shifted his stance, steadying himself for a blow that never came. “Well, see ya. Don’t let the door hit you in the ass on your way out.” She grabbed the door and swung it forward.

Hell no. He wasn’t about to let her just end things by slamming the door in his face. JD thrust his foot out to prevent the barrier from closing, barely flinching as the solid wood crashed into his booted foot. “Uh-uh. Not so fast, baby.”

She shrieked and stepped back as he stormed into the condo, ignoring the honking of a horn, his ride's way of telling him to hurry up. There would be no rushing this. He didn't plan on leaving with so much unresolved between them.

"I didn't lie to you."

"You lied by omitting important facts. Facts that would have changed everything. My husband was in the Army and died while on duty. He was in an accident during a vehicle transport."

Ah, now here was the reason for her anger. She was trying to protect her heart from being hurt in the same way twice. He decided to push her a bit, release some of his own frustration. "I've tried to tell you about myself hundreds of times, Rissa. You've never let me, never wanted to listen. And if you're going to pin my balls to the wall for lying by omission then you're a hypocrite. Tell me about the cougar challenge." He hoped to hell it wasn't what it sounded like.

Rissa's spine stiffened, her lips compressed to a thin, pale line and she glared at him. He really shouldn't be getting turned-on by her fiery temper but there was no denying the potent effect she had on him.

"You can't handle the truth," she yelled.

He didn't say a word, knowing doing so was akin to lighting the fuse on a stick of dynamite. The explosion wasn't long in coming and completely blew him away.

"Fine. A friend invited me to join a blog, *Tempt the Cougar*. It's for a group of women who lust after younger men." She paused and her fists moved to her hips. "By the way, I turned forty today."

There was nothing he could say since he hadn't known when her birthday was. If he had, he would have definitely done something to mark the occasion.

"The blog started after a group of women met at an erotic romance conference and one of them challenged the others to become cougars by sleeping with a significantly younger man. It doesn't have to result in a permanent relationship. A one-night stand is

sufficient. Some of them even had more than one younger guy at a time." She crossed her arms under her breasts and arched her brow. "You made great cougar prey."

The words stung, bad. JD took a deep breath and thought the situation through. Rissa's intention may have been a quick notch on her bedpost but he'd become a bigger part of her life than she realized or would admit. He had no doubt she cared about him or she wouldn't waste the effort to argue.

Several loud horn blasts had him cursing. The guys wouldn't wait much longer. He hated to walk away like this but he didn't have much choice, he had to do his duty.

"I have to go but this isn't over, baby. Not by a long shot."

Rissa swallowed hard and her eyes sparkled with tears she fought to hold back. She would not let him see her cry. The very idea he could push her to the brink of tears renewed her temper but when she spoke, the words lacked her earlier conviction. "Don't bother. By then I'll have found other cougar prey."

Her back slammed into the wall, driving the breath from her lungs and before she could suck in a breath, JD's lips smashed down on hers. It was a hard, potent kiss. A claim. A promise. She was held captive between the solid wall and his hard body as he poured all his anger and frustration into the punishing kiss.

JD lifted his head, keeping her pinned, and stared into her eyes for several long moments. She saw too many emotions passing through his black gaze to grasp yet one came through loud and clear—love. God help him, the fool had gone and fallen in love with her.

"Don't you see this can never be permanent? I'm forty and you're what, twenty-three?"

"Twenty-six, but what's that have to do with anything?"

"It's everything. You're young, one day you'll want a family. I've already raised my children and that's not something I can give you."

Two more loud honks intruded on their argument.

"I've got to go. We'll discuss all this when I get back. And make no mistake, baby, I will be back."

Rissa sighed and shook her head. "It's pointless."

"Do not go out looking for some other guy because I will tear him apart. Don't test me on this, Rissa."

A fist pounded on the door. "Shit!"

"Just go, JD."

He kissed her again, this time a soft and tender brush of his lips. A kiss full of love. Then he turned and stormed out of her life without looking back.

Chapter Nine

Excited chatter hit her the moment Rissa opened the door and stepped into the teachers' lounge. She sighed deeply. The first day of a new school year the air always seemed to crackle with electricity.

Until this year.

For the first time in twenty years of teaching at the Bay Academy, a private elementary school, she wasn't anticipating greeting parents and getting to know a class full of bright-eyed, curious children.

It had been fifteen days, seventeen hours and a handful of minutes since JD had walked out of her life, and she had thought of little else during that time. Today was the first time she'd stepped away from her television, broadcasting CNN all day and night as she waited for any small bit of news about the aftermath of Hurricane Alex, foolishly hoping to catch even a fleeting glimpse of JD during one of the reports. Utterly pathetic.

He hadn't called, not that she'd expected him to since utilities and cell towers were still out in the hardest-hit areas. He'd be busy working and it wasn't as if she'd encouraged him to stay in touch.

Her condo was no longer the sanctuary it had once been. Every room, piece of furniture and item within its walls held memories of JD. She'd tried to exorcise his spirit from her space by packing up all his things and cleaning the place from top to bottom. It didn't work and eventually she put each item back where he'd left it to await his return.

Surprisingly enough, it had been a visit from her daughter that made Rissa finally face her true feelings for him. Mariah saw through the false cheer she put on and forced her to open her eyes by dragging her in front of the mirror to look at herself. What she

saw was sunken eyes surrounded by dark circles from a lack of sleep, and the expression of someone who had lost their best friend.

"You have to snap out of this," Mariah demanded. "*Dios!* I never thought I'd see the day. You're lovesick."

Mariah was right, Rissa had done the unthinkable. She'd fallen in love with a man she couldn't keep. No matter how she tried to convince herself she didn't love JD it failed to work. He was a good man with so many wonderful qualities and they fit together perfectly – with one exception. He loved children and because of complications in Robby's delivery it was the one thing she couldn't give JD. He deserved to have the experience of being a father. Deserved so much more than what she could give him.

And now she had to move on with her life, get back to reality. Pasting on a smile that made her teeth ache, Rissa moved through a sea of familiar faces to the coffeepot. The only way she'd make it through the day was with large quantities of caffeine.

"Oh. My. God. Rissa! Have you seen the new teacher yet?"

Wanda Weaver, one of the kindergarten teachers, held out a steaming mug, which she gladly accepted. "We have a new teacher?"

"Heck yeah. His name is Jeffrey Harmon and the man redefines the word gorgeous," Lynn Fuller added.

Rissa glanced around the room but there were no new faces. "Who? Where is he?"

"He's brand-spankin' new, just got his certification, and he's more nervous than a virgin getting her first kiss," Wanda said.

Amy Brighton leaned in closer, joining the conversation. "He just got into town late last night and is setting up his classroom. I think we should show pity on him and offer to help."

They all shared a good laugh.

"What?" Amy asked. "He's hot as hell, young and single. No ring, I checked. I am definitely making a move on that fine hunk."

“Oh, the things I’d like to do with that rock-hard body.” Wanda all but drooled as she spoke.

Since she had no interest in hearing about the hot new teacher that had all the women worked up, Rissa tuned out the conversation, her mind wandering back to the question that ran through her mind in a continual loop. What the hell was she going to do about JD if or when he came back?

The day dragged forward slowly. Rissa found her patience severely tried by the drama of tearful goodbyes, rough adjustments to a new situation and willful testing of her authority by the rambunctious children. By the end of the day she had a raging headache and visions of a long soak in her tub, along with a big glass of wine.

She pushed in the last chair and was straightening the supplies on top of the desk as her classroom door swung open. Some of the others had talked about going out for drinks tonight but she wasn’t in the mood. Rissa turned with an excuse on her lips that strangled in her throat.

In dress pants and a button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up, revealing muscular forearms, JD looked more extraordinarily handsome than she remembered. She wanted to run straight to him, throw herself in his arms, but she couldn’t move and was afraid to breathe.

“Hello, Miss Cross. Some of the other teachers thought you might be able to give the new guy some pointers on how to survive the sheer insanity of first grade. Although I do have to say that I did pretty well today regardless of how hectic everything was.”

Her mouth dropped open as she tried to form some sort of response. Her arms and legs tingled and chills raced through her body as her head swam.

“Wow, I don’t think I have ever seen you at a loss for words before.” His dark eyes shone and he gave her a tentative smile. “Can I come in?”

"Y-you...you're the new teacher? Jeffrey Harmon." God, she hadn't known his first name and had forgotten his last, otherwise the pieces would have clicked into place this morning. And he was a teacher? That's something she definitely should have known.

He nodded as he took a step forward. "Yeah, that's me. Jeffrey Daniel Harmon. JD to my friends."

He continued to move closer, slowly closing the distance between them. "We have a lot to talk about. The way we left things—" His lips pressed into a thin line and he shook his head. "Are you ready to talk, Rissa?"

"I—you—you're a teacher?" She was stuck on that concept, unable to fully wrap her mind around it.

"Yeah, I am. Don't be so shocked. I'm not stupid and can do more than jobs requiring physical strength."

No, he definitely wasn't stupid. She didn't doubt his intelligence. What she'd done was put him in the same category with her late husband as all brawn and no ambition. She hadn't taken the time to actually find out if he was different and wanted more in life. "I know you're smart, but a teacher? Why a teacher?"

"I love working with kids and wanted to settle down with a stable career. Teaching's a good fit. I worked hard, took classes on my days off, graduated and landed the job here just before we met. I didn't know you taught here.

"My time in the Guard was up last month, although I do still plan to work at the fire station during summer breaks." He shrugged as if it were nothing special, but satisfaction shone in his eyes for all he'd accomplished.

Rissa's chest tightened, her knees weakened and tears pooled at the corners of her eyes. This was why she'd held back. She'd already thought the world of JD and now her heart swelled with pride and love she had no right to share with him since she'd kept him at a distance. She had to be strong now, encourage him to find someone capable of giving him everything he deserved, regardless of how much it would hurt to let him go. It was the right thing to do for him.

"Come on, Rissa. Let's go home."

Home? Good as that sounded they couldn't have a home. Not together. *Dios*, what a mess she'd made.

He reached her just as her legs gave out and pulled her cold, weak body into the warm support of his solid frame. "Are you okay?"

The tender concern in his sexy rasp made her heart ache for things to be different but she had to face reality. "I can't," she hiccupped, took a breath and started over. "This can't be, JD. I can't give you what you want. What you deserve."

"Aw, baby. You are everything I want."

She shook her head, trying to ignore his intoxicating scent and the warmth of his body. "I'm fourteen years older than you. I've had my family, raised them, seen them head out into the world. You're young and will want to have a family one day. I can't give you that."

"Rissa, age is a number and it doesn't matter. Not to me." He shook his head. "Is that why you've kept me out of here?" His palm pressed flat over the upper curve of her left breast and her nipple beaded in response to his touch. "You don't want to have more kids?" His voice turned cold and hard. "Or is it that cougar thing? You want to get more young men in your bed?"

"The challenge is irrelevant and what I want doesn't matter." Unable to look him in the eye, she lowered her gaze. Rissa didn't want to tell him but he deserved the truth. If anything would set him free the truth had the power to do so. She took a breath and forged ahead before second thoughts formed.

"When Robby was born there were...complications, I hemorrhaged. They had to do emergency surgery. I—I *can't* have any more children." She still didn't meet his eyes, afraid she'd see pity she didn't want, and continued to stare at his chest.

"Jesus, Rissa. I'm sorry you had to go through that. It must have been horrible. But have I ever said I want to have kids?"

Well, no. But they hadn't discussed important issues like having a family.

He gently lifted her chin and she lost herself in his stunning black eyes. What she saw was warmth, understanding and something tender. Was it affection?

"Sure, I love kids. Other people's kids that I can give back when they've worn me out. I have more than enough nieces, nephews and cousins to keep me busy without having to change diapers or stay up all night when they're sick. Those are not things I need."

"Oh." Rissa felt the barriers she'd so carefully erected between JD and her heart start to crumble. The primary justification for keeping her distance fell away with a few simple words. "Then what exactly do you want?"

"All I want—all I need—is you! I love you, Rissa. I'd like to see where that can take us. I just want you to give us a chance."

He what? Her mind stuck on the part where he said he loved her. It didn't seem possible with the lengths she'd gone to make sure that didn't happen.

"Is there a chance for us?"

He didn't wait for her to respond, not that she knew what to say. JD turned her numb body toward the door and began walking out of the building with his arm wrapped securely around her waist. Several other teachers watched with stunned expressions and a million questions brewing in their eyes. She'd have a lot of explaining to do...tomorrow. Right now, hard as it was for her to comprehend everything that had happened, the only thing she cared about was within her grasp.

Overwhelmed by his reappearance and finding out they had a lot more in common than she'd thought, Rissa remained quiet and let JD talk, greedily taking in all the details of his life, feeling the undeniable bond between them grow stronger with each passing moment.

She decided that JD wasn't asking for too much and maybe she could actually give him what he wanted. Relax and let things develop between them. After all, a teacher was stable and fit in with her normal life much better than a thrill-seeking fireman.

Rolling with the tide and seeing where it took them sounded good. Damn good. Maybe they'd last a few months or a few decades. There was no telling unless she gave them a chance to find out.

Rissa was quiet. Too quiet! Her usual chatter nonexistent. JD watched her from the corner of his eye as he drove, trying to gauge her mood until he couldn't take it anymore. "Are you okay?"

"Um-hmm."

The mumbled response failed to reassure him.

"Everything okay with Robby and Mariah?" Robby was a great kid. He'd like to meet her daughter, who was probably a lot like her mom—strong, confident and stubborn with a wicked temper. He hoped the two of them had ironed things out between them while he was away because they seemed to have a close relationship.

She sighed heavily. "Mariah came home last weekend. It was awkward at first but we had a nice talk. She...umm," Rissa rubbed her palms on her slacks and avoided meeting his eyes. "She's busy with school but wants to come down for Thanksgiving week."

Her hands fluttered about and she chewed on her lip. He'd never seen her that nervous and wondered what she was afraid to tell him. "And?"

"Well...she wants us to spend the holiday together, cook a big traditional meal. Umm...you know. The four of us?"

Did he dare hope her daughter wanted to include him? He had to be sure. "Four?"

"Yeah. Robby, Mariah, me...and you. If you're interested."

His heart swelled and slammed into his ribs as he parked the truck and turned in the seat toward Rissa. Her big brown eyes finally met his to reveal a wide variety of emotions. Fear, restrained optimism, self-doubt and longing all swirled together, increasing his own desires for the future.

Taking her hands, he stilled their nervous motion and brushed a kiss across her knuckles. "What about you? Is that what you want too?"

"I would like to have all the people I love together." She searched his expression, apparently finding the encouragement she needed to continue. "I missed you. Worried and thought about you the entire time you were gone."

His pulse raced as he waited her out, knowing how hard it was for her to say what was on her mind.

"I was stupid and scared. Tried to maintain distance between us and only let this be an affair. It's not our age difference but my own insecurities. I wanted to prove I'm capable of standing on my own two feet. And I didn't want to risk my heart, to feel such loss again as I did when my husband died. I tried to keep you out so I wouldn't lose you. And you know what?"

Jesus, she was killing him. He needed her to say it, to return the emotions she sparked in him, more than he needed his next breath. "What?"

"It happened anyway." She nodded. "When I wasn't looking you became a part of my life. A vital part. It took being apart for me to see that and realize how much I love you and want to be with you. I can't sleep without you in my bed, your legs tangled up with mine, your snores ruffling my hair."

"Aw, baby." He cupped her face and slid across the bench seat. "I'm right here and I'm not going anywhere."

"Good because I need you here."

He pressed a chaste kiss to her lips. "There's just one more thing. I want you to tell me about the cougar challenge."

She sighed. "It's stupid."

"I don't care. I still want to hear it."

"Fine," she huffed. "A friend got me to join a blog, *Tempt the Cougar*. It's a group of women who have a thing for younger men. One of the members, Monica, challenged us all to become cougars."

"Go on."

"There's not much more to it. We talk about our experiences, post pictures we find or take of hot guys and we're all going to meet up at RomantiCon, an erotic romance book conference."

"Does this challenge require you sleep with a certain number of younger guys?" He practically growled the question but it was a sensitive subject for him. The idea of Rissa sleeping around pissed him off. He wasn't into sharing. The idea of another man touching her, holding her, fucking her made him absolutely insane.

"What? Um...no, just one. Although some of the girls had ménages and got sandwiched between two guys at once, that's not part of it."

"So you're done with it? You completed the challenge?"

"I really don't want to talk about this now."

"Rissa," he gritted from between clenched teeth. "Answer the question. Are you done?"

She leaned back and blinked. "Of course I'm done. I conquered the challenge the first time we fu—"

He narrowed his gaze and shot her a warning glance.

"Uh, I mean the first night we made love it was finished."

"Good because I'm going to be the only man in your bed. Understand?"

She swallowed hard and nodded. "I kind of like this possessive side of you. It's sexy and really turns me on."

He sealed the agreement by claiming her lips in what started as a soft and tender kiss that quickly turned into a blazing-hot possession. When he pulled back they both gulped in air.

"Come on. Let's go inside."

"Wait!" Rissa's voice was higher, almost frightened. "One more thing."

"Okay. What is it?"

She bit her lip and stared at her fingers before looking up and meeting his eyes with none of her usual confidence. Whatever she had to say was important. JD sat up straighter and his pulse raced.

"I want us to be together. All the time. Will you move in with me?"

He laughed and gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. "Won't take much. Most of my stuff is here already."

"Is that a 'yes'?"

"Yes, Rissa. There's nowhere else I'd rather be. Now let's get inside before two fine, upstanding teachers get arrested for having sex in public."

"Ooh, that sounds delightfully naughty."

"Rissa," he groaned and shoved his door open. "Get out of the truck and up those stairs, baby. I need to be in you, no condom. Nothing between my hard cock and your tight, wet pussy. Skin on skin."

"*Dios*, yes! Hurry."

Feeling as if a huge weight had lifted from her, Rissa jumped out of the truck and raced up the stairs, squealing as JD landed a swat on her behind. She shouldn't enjoy the heat spreading through her bottom as much as she did.

She had to slow down to get the door open. As soon as it slammed shut they were all over each other. It had been way too long since she'd been in his arms and had his cock inside her. She was primed and ready.

Arms tangled as they tore at their clothes, frantic in their need. Their lips were just as busy kissing every inch of bared flesh. Neither one cared about foreplay. By the time they were naked, the bedroom was still too far away. JD's hands closed around her

waist and lifted her, placing her back against the living room wall. She wrapped her arms around his neck and her legs around his hips. Their bodies lined up perfectly, with his hard length nestled along her wet slit.

“Hurry,” she repeated on a gasp. Tremors racked her body and her pussy clenched in anticipation.

JD moved his hands to her ass, palming the cheeks as he lined his cock head up at her needy opening. His eyes locked on hers like dark lasers. Regardless of their urgency he slid into her slow and easy, making sure they both felt every wonderful inch.

“Oh god. So hot. So good,” he hissed. He paused for the space of several wild heartbeats then started shafting her blessedly hard and fast. Tender lovemaking would come later. Right now they both needed hard and fast.

“Yesss,” Rissa moaned, lifting into each thrust as much as possible. “Perfect.”

Having him inside her without a barrier was amazing. She was dying to feel the hot spurt of his release fill her, making her complete. Tension coiled tight in her belly, rising in waves of pure bliss. She was so close.

“JD,” she gasped. “Now. Come now.”

She raked her fingernails over his sensitive scalp, knowing he loved the tingling sensation. He shifted her hips, changing the angle, his piercing tapping against her cervix on each forward thrust.

Her body went rigid as she crested the peak. JD shouted her name and his movements became erratic. And then it happened, sizzling-hot cum filled her, breathing new life into her orgasm, extending the pleasure.

God, it was perfect. And she was right where she wanted to be—where she belonged—in the arms of her sexy fire stud.

About the Author

Nicole Austin lives on the sheltered Gulf Coast of Florida, where inspiration can be readily found sitting under a big shade umbrella on the beach while sipping cold margaritas. A voracious reader, she never goes anywhere without a book. All those delicious romances combined with a vivid imagination naturally created steamy fantasies and characters in her mind.

Discovering Ellora's Cave paved the path to freeing them, as well as manifesting an intoxicating passion for Romantica®. The positive response of family and friends to her stories propelled Nicole into an incredible world where fantasy comes boldly to life. Now she stays busy working as a certified CT scan technologist, finishing her third college degree, reading, writing and keeping up with family. Oh yeah, and did we mention all the hard work involved with research? Well, that's the fun job—certainly a labor of love.

Nicole 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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