

ELLORA'S CAVE *Sophisticate*



ADDING HEAT
COUGAR CHALLENGE
CRIS ANSON

Adding Heat

Cris Anson

A story in the Cougar Challenge series.

Encouraged by friends she met at RomantiCon, widowed landscape contractor Giselle Sheridan decides she's finally ready to take the cougar challenge and explore sex with a younger man. Except she's too busy during planting season to go on the prowl.

CPA Conlan Trowbridge is battling the IRS deadline for his clients, but when Giselle saunters into his office with a tax question, all he can think of is sex. She's all luscious curves and smoldering brown eyes, and he doesn't care if she's a dozen years older, she's a wet dream come true.

Oh yeah, they're both ready for some hot and heavy sex—in the tub, parking lots, their offices—anywhere and everywhere. But Giselle is afraid her age will eventually bother Con, and her longtime foreman also has designs on her, in more ways than one. When Giselle faces some hard decisions, will she ultimately be able to keep the heat?

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Adding Heat

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Dedication

To the Cougar Challenge authors, especially Ciana Stone, who invited me to join the group, and Desiree Holt, who helped me over some writing bumps. All the Cougar Challenge ladies rock! And so do your characters, as evidenced by their postings to the Tempt the Cougar blog.

And to Josh, for the inspiration of licking barbecue sauce.

Author Note

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

Trademarks Acknowledgment

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Brooks Brothers: Retail Brand Alliance, Inc.

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Popsicle: Lipton Investments, Inc.

U.S. Post Office: United States Postal Service

Michener Museum: James A. Michener Art Museum

Chapter One

Tempt the Cougar Blog

From Giselle: Sure, I'd like to challenge myself to be a cougar. But damn, I'm torn. I have a dozen young men on payroll. It would feel like raiding a high-school basketball game when my boys were playing. I try to stay away from the jobs because I don't want my foreman to think I'm second-guessing him, but I do so love to watch them wrestling balled and burlaped trees into holes they've been digging. Especially in mid-summer, when they take off their T-shirts because they're so hot and sweaty, watching those muscles bunch and strain, well, it's enough to make me want to go for it.

I can just see the next ad I place in the paper: "Landscaper with twenty years' experience looking for hard-bodied men not afraid to sweat or expend energy. Must be between 25 and 35."

But suppose I do find someone way younger? What would my employees think? That I'm robbing the cradle? That I'm fair game? Eeek! They'll send the State Police after me.

Giselle Sheridan took a deep breath and posted her note. She was now an official member of the cougar challenge, a group of women who'd met at an erotic romance conference and decided to spice up their lives by having affairs with younger men. But she would only access the blog on the laptop in her bedroom, not on the two computers in the office downstairs that the foreman had access to. It would be a disaster for any of her employees to see the horny side of her. As a woman who'd taken over running her husband's landscape business, she had a whip-cracking rep to maintain.

Felix wouldn't have wanted her to be alone the rest of her life, but she just didn't have the time to go cruising in bars. And lord knows, after nineteen years of marriage and four years of widowhood, she hadn't a clue as to how the dating scene worked these days.

With a small sigh, she scrolled down the Tempt the Cougar blog to ogle the photos her fellow cougars had posted, both of hunks they'd found on the net as well as their

own younger men. One of these days she'd be posting her success too. That was a promise she'd made to herself.

Before logging off to start her workday, she checked for responses. Her heart leaped. Here was encouragement. Here was reinforcement. Here was the kick in the butt she needed to go out and DO it.

From Cam: Giselle, honey, it's not like you're breaking into people's houses and stealing their teenage boys! If they're twenty-five, they're legal. And hey, your employees are employees. They work, you pay, end of story. Don't live your life based on what other people might think. March to the beat of your own drummer - wait, let me rephrase - dance to the beat :) And if you find a hard-body who wants to do a horizontal mambo...well, shake it girl!!

From Autumn: Remember what we talked about? Younger is better. Just look at Mitch and me and you'll know what I mean. And don't let your employees stop you from grabbing onto life. Hey, I wondered the same things about the hands at the ranch here, and you know what? They all ENVY Mitch and think I'm hot, hot, hot. So go for it, girl.

From Elizabeth: You're talking yourself out of it before you even give it a chance! No "what if's" allowed! What you're looking for here is, "so be it."

p.s. If you do place that ad, you might want to specify that you're a *female* landscaper. <g>

From Grace: Don't make the same mistake I almost made and let an opportunity slip by. Go for it!

With a lighter heart, Giselle shut the computer and trotted downstairs and out the door to greet the day and the job. A few minutes later, in her well-worn jeans tucked inside calf-high workboots, she hoisted herself easily onto the back end of the stake-body truck, eyeballing the flora and equipment the team had loaded. "Did you get everything?"

"Yep, don't worry, Moms, I checked every shrub against the list as it was loaded."

Another quick scan and she jumped off to land lightly on the balls of her feet. She gave the laborer a playful whack on the shoulder with her clipboard. "I'm not your mom. Your mom doesn't ogle all your muscles the way I do."

The two other young men chuckled, posing and flexing their biceps in between last-minute checks of their tools.

"You guys better get going. You've got a lot of planting to do today." Larry Pulaski, Stonehedge Landscapes' foreman, came up alongside her. Felix started the business shortly after they were married and Larry was his first employee. If it weren't for him, she might not have been able to keep the business going after Felix died. She loved the man like a brother, but he sounded like a growly bear today.

"Everybody got their water jugs? We don't want any workers' comp claims from fainting." Giselle winked as she peered inside the driver's window at the crew who had clambered inside. It was the last of the four jobs she was sending out today.

"We're good to go," the driver responded.

"Work safe and make us a profit." She gave the door a slap of her palm and stood in the staging area, watching through the dust as the two-ton truck left the yard. One of these days she'd have to find the money to asphalt that long driveway.

"You know, 'Zelle, you gotta be firmer with your employees. They need to respect you."

Giselle smiled at Larry's protective attitude. "They respect their paychecks. And I think it makes for a smoother workday when everyone can banter and have fun while they work."

"Yeah, well, have you ever thought that one of them could sue you for sexual harassment?"

Giselle stopped in the act of turning back toward the house and all the paperwork. "You're kidding, right? I can't believe any one of them would —"

"Just don't lead 'em on is all I'm saying."

“Larry, I’ve never had any intention—”

“You’re no spring chicken, you know. You should act your age.”

Giselle bit her tongue against a nasty retort. Larry and Felix had been in high school together, so she knew for a fact that he was around fifty, half a dozen years older than she was. Damn, but his attitude was reinforcing the call of her cougar group, if only to prove to Larry that she could still make it.

“What you need is a man. Someone who’ll take care of you.”

That stopped her short. She plunked her fisted hands on her hips. “Larry, take a look around the nursery, at the equipment. Remember all the jobs I designed and costed out and executed. I’ve kept this place running for four years.”

“I didn’t mean you can’t handle the business, ‘Zelle. I mean...” He wouldn’t meet her stern gaze. “I mean, don’t you ever hanker to have a man in your personal life? Someone who thinks the world of you? Someone who wants to take care of you?”

Whoa. Where was this coming from? Giselle was stunned into speechlessness.

He stepped closer, raising his arms to grasp her shoulders. In his dark brown eyes she saw something she’d never seen there before—yearning. “Let me show you what you’ve been missing.” He pulled her into a clumsy embrace and dipped his head.

When his lips met hers, she dropped the clipboard and clutched at the beefy arms holding her immobile. No other part of their bodies touched, but suddenly an overwhelming desire swept through Giselle. She closed her eyes and, without considering the consequences, gave herself over to the feeling of a man’s kiss, a man’s touch. For the first time she realized how big Larry was, how *male*.

The phone vibrating at her hip distracted her. And not a moment too soon. This new side of Larry—of herself—had shaken her to her core. Surely it was just the morning’s cougar blogs that had allowed her façade to slip and remind her of what it could be like to have a man in her life, in her bed again.

With shaking fingers she whipped out the phone. "Stonehedge Landscapes, can we make your life greener?"

"Oh, thank heaven I've got you."

"Aunt Esme, what's up? You sound harried."

"I need you to drive me to the Senior Citizens' Center right away."

Giselle tamped down her annoyance at her aunt's peremptory tone. "Why? What's happening?"

"There's this nice young man, the son of Maurice's golf partner, he's a CPA, you know, and he donates his time to help older folks get their income taxes done."

"That's nice of him. And?"

There was a dramatic pause. Aunt Esme liked to be dramatic. "Well, it *is* April eighth."

The light dawned. "Oh no, don't tell me you've just started thinking about filing your tax return!"

"Well, I used to use Con Senior, but he's retired, and he used to call to remind me. I just found this notice in the pile of junk mail I finally got around to sorting that Con Junior—he's single, by the way—does this free thingie on Thursdays in March and April, and I looked at the calendar and realized that this is the last Thursday before taxes are due. And I had to start withdrawing from my IRA last year and I'm not quite sure how to handle it, so..."

Giselle sighed and turned toward the house for her car keys. "Okay, I'll pick you up in ten minutes. Make sure you have all your paperwork. And be ready!"

She disconnected, grateful for a reason to postpone the discussion she had to have with Larry, and soon. This time she couldn't meet his eyes. How could she have allowed herself to mix business with pleasure? What would this do to their working relationship? She called over her shoulder as she strode to the house, forcing a lighthearted yet authoritative tone to her voice. "I don't know how long I'll be. Aunt

Esme needs taxi service again. I'll run the payroll after I get back. You'll finish gathering the specs for the Gower job today, right?"

"Yeah. But that old bat oughta program her phone to dial a cab company."

Secretly agreeing with him, she nonetheless felt compelled to come to her aunt's defense. Esme was the last of her parents' generation. "It's been weeks since I've seen her. Maybe I'll take her to lunch after."

Or maybe Junior would be interesting. Anything to get her mind off Larry's kiss and her fervent response to it. She resolutely avoided looking at him as she drove away, leaving him standing in the dust.

She racked her brain as she drove to Esme's tidy Cape Cod on a quiet street a couple of miles from her own place. Yes, she thought she remembered meeting Uncle Maurice's golf partner—Conlan, that was his name—at Maurice's funeral. Nice-looking man, ramrod straight as though he'd been in the Navy, hazel eyes, nice smile. Maybe taking Aunt Esme to see Con Junior wouldn't be a total chore.

But just in case, she had the latest erotic romance by Desiree Holt in her satchel.

* * * * *

Conlan Trowbridge, Jr. almost dropped his pencil when he saw the woman who accompanied his father's friend, Esme Archer, to his makeshift office in the Senior Citizens' Center. Mesmerizing dark eyes shining with intelligent curiosity. Dark brown hair scraped back into a ponytail that couldn't hold back a bunch of curlicues framing a perfectly oval face. Snug white T-shirt with grass-green lettering that he couldn't quite make out under an unbuttoned aviator jacket in faded denim.

And oh my, snug jeans outlining a pair of rounded hips and thighs he instantly wanted to press against. Catherine Zeta-Jones and Kim Kardashian in one glorious package, alive and voluptuous and striding no-nonsense up to his desk. It took all his willpower to focus on his manners and force his eyes to his appointment.

"Mrs. Archer." He finally got his legs to heave him upright. "So nice to see you again."

"You get better looking every day," she said. "This here's my niece. She was good enough to drive me here. I can't legally drive, you know. I have a cataract in my left eye. But," she said as she sat down regally in the chair next to his desk, "I can still see enough to know if you're cheating me."

Con let out a bark of laughter. "I wouldn't dare, Mrs. Archer. Maurice's ghost would haunt me the rest of my life."

He couldn't let this opportunity pass. Subtly drawing a fortifying dose of air into his lungs, he thrust his hand across the desk to the beauty who stood inspecting him as though she was the accounting board director and he'd just embezzled a trust fund. "Conlon Trowbridge. My friends call me Con."

As she accepted his handshake, her twinkling gaze grabbed his and wouldn't let go. He noted tiny lines around her eyes when she gifted him with a smile that weakened his hard-won upright stance. "Giselle Sheridan. I'll haunt you, too, if you cheat my Aunt Esme."

You could haunt me any time, he wanted to say. You *will* haunt me.

"Um, I'll just sit..." She looked around and he finally realized he was still gripping her hand. He let it go as if fire had shot into his palm.

And maybe it had. He wanted to get to know Giselle Sheridan. Intimately. Thank God for Aunt Esme and her income taxes.

* * * * *

"Well, that about does it."

Giselle's mind snapped back to the desk where Conlan Trowbridge was huddled with Aunt Esme. She'd been thinking he was maybe a hair older than her employees, so if he was over thirty, she wouldn't be robbing the cradle, would she? And if she kept

him apart from the business, none of her workers would know of her cougar-ness, right?

She'd found a folding chair in the Activity Room and schlepped it back so she could wait in a corner while unobtrusively observing this paragon of volunteerism. She noticed the sprinkling of freckles across the bridge of his long, straight nose, just under eyes so blue it almost hurt to look at them. But it was the dimple in his left cheek when he smiled that most intrigued her.

Underneath that starched blue shirt with its white collar unbuttoned and sleeves rolled up she could see ropy muscles. A lock of reddish-brown hair kept falling down over his right brow, and he'd absently shove it back while he was penciling in figures.

So far, no minuses. Now if only he didn't think she was too old for a romp between the sheets.

Heck, she'd been so busy eyeballing this cougar bait she realized she'd read the same page several times. Oh well, she'd finish the book tonight. And have a real-life hunk to imagine as the hero.

"I'll have my associate input all the data into our system. It's a further check against my calculations. It's not a complicated return, I could probably have a final for you to sign by Saturday afternoon. So I could either overnight it to you or —"

"Or Giselle can drive me back here to sign it."

"Not here, Mrs. Archer. I'm only here on Thursdays and you'll want it in the mail before next Thursday. My office is on the other side of town."

Giselle couldn't hide her wince. Granted, Doylestown wasn't that big as cities went, but Saturdays drew tourists to the nearby Michener Museum and Fonthill. Plus, this was planting season and her guys worked Saturdays in April. Besides, they were twenty miles south of the town limits, out in the most rural area of Bucks County.

"Tell you what," he said, obviously noticing her grimace. "The Post Office will probably be closed by the time I'm done, so you wouldn't be able to get it in the mail until Monday anyway. Why don't I plan to deliver it some time Sunday? To either your

home or..." He turned to Giselle and his dimple winked when he smiled at her. "To yours, Ms. Sheridan, if that's easier."

Oh God, this was the moment of truth. Was he hinting at seeing her for a more personal reason?

Taking a deep breath for a shot of courage, and seeing in her mind the blogging high-fives she'd get from all the cougars, she withdrew from her satchel one of the folded pamphlets she always carried with her. "Here's a brochure about my company, Stonehedge Landscapes. I live on the premises. There's a map on the back. Can you drop it off around three o'clock Sunday afternoon?"

His dimple deepened. "That's great. Would you like to go for a bike ride then? It's supposed to be sunny all weekend."

She blinked. Okay, he didn't look like the motorcycle type, but she'd always wanted to go tooling around behind a guy on a big bike, feel the throb of its engine between her outspread legs...

Down, girl. "I'd love to."

Watching Esme take the arm he offered, Giselle could have sworn her aunt had a smirk on her face.

Chapter Two

Had she actually accepted a *date*? It was only 2:45 and she was inspecting herself in her bedroom mirror, in her snuggest jeans, leather ankle boots with a two-inch heel, a cream-colored T-shirt with embroidered flowers around the neck and a couple of jackets at the ready. The temperature gauge read seventy-two, but she wasn't sure where he'd take her and how fast they'd go. And if they made it all the way up to the Poconos, it'd be cooler in the mountains, so the wind chill factor would come into play –

Good grief, she was acting like a teenager on her first date. He was merely delivering Aunt Esme's *tax return*, for crying out loud!

Still, she'd fussed with her hair but decided if they were riding a hog, she'd better keep her ponytail, especially since she'd probably be wearing a helmet. Although she did stroke on some tinted lip gloss.

She'd gotten an earful about Con Junior from her aunt. His family was salt of the earth, he was up and coming, blah blah. Sounded as though he might be too goody-goody for her. If she was planning to take up the cougar challenge, she wanted hot sex, not a man with a PG rating who passed muster with her relatives.

But would he want hot sex with her? Sure, she was in great shape for her age, burning so many calories on the job she didn't have to worry about dieting, but still, time and gravity were inexorably reminding her she was no longer in her twenties. Or hell, even her thirties.

The growl of a heavy engine broke into her thoughts. She went to the window in the upstairs hallway that overlooked the driveway, and saw a large black truck coming to a stop at the front door. She dashed downstairs wondering, why did he have to put the motorcycle in back of the truck?

She opened the front door as he got out of the truck, wearing —

Biking shorts?

Could he be any more goody-goody than thinking a *bicycle* ride was an appropriate first date?

The dimple in his smile as he waved hello didn't catch her interest this time. She was angry that she'd been hoodwinked. No, that wasn't fair. It was her own fault she'd misunderstood.

But oh lord, when he walked to the back of the truck, her eyes popped at the finest, tightest, roundest ass she'd ever seen. Come to think of it, his thighs were more muscular than she'd imagined when she'd seen him in loose-fitting dress pants at the Senior Center.

And his belly. It was concave under the spandex. His clothes looked painted on, and every step showed the flex and flow of his muscles. Not an ounce of fat. Anywhere. She could just imagine the type of woman he probably dated. No way was she in anywhere near the shape of those twenty- and thirty-somethings with hard bodies and unlined skin who rode in biking marathons.

He looked like one of her employees, young and buff and...

She gulped. Was he actually being a *tease*? Or was she just acting like the dirty old lady Larry had accused her of being?

Larry. Good grief. She'd consciously avoided him, avoided the upcoming confrontation, since the other morning when they'd shared that unexpected kiss. She'd always considered Larry in the context of an employee, not a man, although he was tall and burly and masculine down to his big workboots. But his kiss was as manly as any she'd ever experienced. She'd probably be smart to consider dating Larry and leaving Con to the younglings.

"You might get a little warm and sweaty in those jeans," Con said as he rolled out one of the bikes and leaned it against the porch railing. "And you might want to wear sneakers."

Was this guy really a nerd? Or was this his way of trying to impress her?

Okay, she'd show him. Without a word she marched back upstairs and a few minutes later walked back out wearing a brand-new outfit she'd bought for wintertime exercise at a health club she never got around to joining—tight, mid-thigh, spandex workout shorts and sports bra that lifted her ample breasts and maximized her cleavage. The get-up showed a fair amount of skin between garments and she was gratified that his mouth actually dropped open as he rolled the second bike to a stop.

"Is this better?" she cooed. And smiled at the instant bulge his molded shorts couldn't hide.

Instead of turning to hide his erection, as she'd expected a goody-goody to do, his eyes shot lightning bolts and he strode purposefully toward her.

"I've wanted to do this since the moment I laid eyes on you," he murmured as he cradled her head between his palms. His mouth touched hers and all hell broke loose inside her.

He shifted his stance, bringing her in closer contact with all his bumps and ridges. She found herself responding, not just to the feel of his lips, firm yet featherlight as they teased her mouth, but to the heady sense of being enveloped in a cocoon of testosterone as he wrapped his arms around her shoulders. Then he spun them around so her back was against the driver's-side door and he sandwiched her between it and that hard, wiry body whose firm texture took her by surprise.

Oh God, it had been so long since a man had rubbed against her in such a sexual way. Her pussy tightened. Her nipples jumped to attention. Of their own volition, her arms encircled his waist and her hands began stroking that muscled back.

Suddenly it wasn't enough. Something inside her reared up, something frustrated and hungry and ignored too long. Grabbing the stretchy fabric, she yanked his shirt from his waistband to feel smooth, warm skin, like silicone over iron. She wanted to lick him all over, wanted her naked body rubbing against his. She wanted to see, to taste the cock that was poking into her belly like a shovel handle.

Her mouth captured his tongue, sucked it in like a Popsicle. Her hands moved to map the curvature of his waist then delved upward to follow the ridges of his abs to search for those flat nipples she loved to scratch, like pushing buttons, to make a man jump to her beat.

"Giselle," he murmured, wrenching his head back. "Stop."

Somewhere amid all the jumbled emotions, her brain began functioning, then tossed out a bitter thought. He was calling a halt because he was embarrassed. She had to be a dozen years older than him. And yeah, he'd reacted to her blatant display of curves and skin, and she'd been thrilled that he seemed attracted to her, but now he'd come to his senses with a vengeance.

She went rigid against the truck, let her hands drop. Felt him step back and watched as he tucked in his shirt.

"I'm sorry," she said through clenched teeth. "I didn't mean to make you —"

"We have company."

"Uncomfortable — What?"

"Someone's coming down your driveway. See that plume of dust?"

"Dust?"

"Yeah. I wouldn't want anyone to see you in a compromising position."

With difficulty, Giselle focused on the approaching vehicle. A truck. A very familiar truck.

"Larry," she said in a disbelieving voice. "Larry?" she said again when he stopped right behind Con's truck. "What's the matter? Is everything okay?"

The grizzled man stepped down to the ground and hitched up his jeans. He wore a muscle shirt that displayed beefy biceps and huge shoulders and minimized his thick waistline. "That's what I came down to find out. I happened to be passing by and saw a honkin' big truck I didn't recognize. Just wanted to make sure you were okay."

Larry's possessive attitude reminded her of their kiss. Did he actually feel he had a claim on her? That she couldn't date anyone?

"That's so sweet of you, Larry. Thank you for your concern. But it's okay. This is Conlan Trowbridge. He brought Aunt Esme's tax returns for her to sign. You know, from the Senior Citizens' Center? Con, this is Larry Pulaski, my valued foreman."

They shook hands briefly, but to Giselle's eye it looked like a mongoose and a snake sizing each other up. She blinked to clear such an unlikely image from her brain. Con's kisses had bumfuzzled her.

"He selling bicycles too?" Larry eyed the two bikes then switched his gaze to Con, who had lifted one of the helmets hanging from the handlebars, then to Giselle, lingering on her bare skin between bra and shorts until she felt uncomfortable.

"He asked me if I wanted to go for a bike ride, and I accepted."

Larry's gaze lifted slowly from her waist to her cleavage, then to her eyes. It felt as if he were devouring her. "Anything happens to you, he'll have to answer to me."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Larry, I know these roads like the back of my hand."

"I'm not worried about you getting lost."

"Larry, I'm forty-four years old. I'm accustomed to making decisions for the business and I can certainly make them for my personal life. I thank you for stopping by, but we're ready to go now. I'll see you tomorrow morning at seven, okay?"

She turned toward the house, unwilling to make a scene that would give more credence to their kiss than was warranted. "I'll just lock the door and we can be off, okay, Con? Let's take advantage of this lovely afternoon."

A moment later she slipped the key inside a small fanny pack and accepted the helmet Con held out to her.

"Really, Larry, it's okay." To emphasize her point, she rolled the smaller bike between the two trucks, slung a leg over the bar and fitted her sneakered feet to the pedals. The breeze felt good on her face as she accelerated. On making the turn onto the

paved road she glanced back. Larry still stood watching them, hands on hips. She'd have to have that talk with him tomorrow morning. He wasn't her father, to be vetting her dates as though she were sixteen. Still, he was correct in that they *were* both of an age, and his experience on the job had kept the business afloat until she'd been able to grasp the rudder. She needed Larry in her life. He was calm and stable and he knew her better than anyone else did.

Then her words replayed in her brain and she chewed on her upper lip. She'd out-and-out admitted her age in Con's hearing. Was he even now having second thoughts knowing how much older she was than him? Maybe Larry was right and she should try to act her age.

* * * * *

As they leisurely made their way over mildly rolling hills, Con noticed some fields awaited the plow and some had already been turned, exuding the unmistakably fecund smell of the rich Bucks County soil. But only half his brain was appreciating rural delights. The less relaxed half decided that Larry Pulaski was going to be trouble. A couple inches taller and fifty pounds heavier than Con, the foreman had scrutinized Giselle as though she was a marble goddess come to life in a museum. He'd damn near seen drool seep out of the older man's mouth, and he couldn't blame him. The sight of Giselle Sheridan in tight spandex had brought whips and blindfolds to mind and sent blood straight to his cock, enough that the other man had noticed.

And he'd been ready to jump her bones with just the slightest encouragement. Which encouragement his testosterone-drenched brain thought he'd detected in the way she'd all but ripped off his shirt while they'd kissed. Hell, the luscious feel of her sandwiched between him and the truck had pushed him to the edge of his control.

It was so unlike him to lose it like that. But his companion epitomized his dream woman. Petite but possessed of curves luscious enough to make the devil weep. Skin so glowingly healthy from the sun she couldn't possibly be wearing makeup. Eyes like a bottomless bowl of chocolate sauce.

Why on earth he hadn't suggested, say, bringing some chick flicks to watch while snuggling together on her sofa and sipping a good shiraz, he couldn't answer. She'd simply pole-axed his brain the day they'd met at the Senior Center. He'd been a little surprised when she'd offhandedly mentioned her age—she sure didn't look forty-four—but his cock certainly didn't care about their dozen-year age difference. He hoped she was broad-minded enough to feel the same.

A glance at his watch told him they'd been at it for a half hour. How the hell could he have thought biking was a good idea? He'd dropped back every now and again for the sublime pleasure of watching her ass cheeks flex as she pedaled. He was getting more aroused by the minute.

Just as he was about to suggest turning back, he recognized the street they had turned onto. She'd led him in a long square and they were heading for her property.

And in the slanting late-afternoon sun, her sweat-kissed skin shimmered golden. A picture of her lounging sweaty and smiling—and naked—between his navy-blue sheets instantly made more blood pool between his legs.

Whoa, cock. Down. He'd have to get off the bike and stand pretty soon, and he'd better not look like an adolescent with his first surreptitious copy of *Hustler*.

He followed her down the long, dusty driveway, the lush smell of burgeoning spring swirling around him. They alit at the rear of his SUV. She rested her bike against the back bumper then made a small sound of distress.

"Did you hurt yourself?" Con reached out, ready for any excuse to touch her.

She lifted one racer back strap a few inches off her shoulder. A delicately pale stripe bisected a rather bright red curve of skin. "I figured the shade trees along the road would protect me. I should have slathered on some SPF."

"Oh my," he murmured. "It looks painful."

"I've survived worse. It's just, I spend a lot of time outdoors in the nursery or on the job and I should have known better."

"I keep some aloe vera gel in my biking kit." He bent forward to unbuckle the kit from behind the back seat of his bicycle and rooted around. He dearly wanted to stroke her skin himself, but the gentleman in him forced him to say, "Here's the tube. The label says to apply lavishly."

Instead of reaching for it, Giselle said, "I should probably wash the sweat off first, you know, so it would absorb better."

Con blinked. Stood stock-still, trying not to picture her doing just that, suds dripping down those firm, heavy breasts. He fought to keep control of his nether regions.

"Do you think you could help me?" Without meeting his eye, she turned and climbed the three steps to her porch, pulling out her key from her fanny pack and unlocking the door.

Was she thinking along the same lines as he? Or was it only his cock seeing what it wanted to see? With an effort, Con snapped his jaw shut and, clutching his kit, followed her into a two-story house he judged to be 1920s Craftsman style.

He entered her front hallway and spared a glance through an archway leading to a cozy living room filled with plump chairs and a loveseat grouped around a fireplace. But his gaze was focused on that luscious round rump as she climbed the uncarpeted stairway. He noted she'd kicked off her sneakers and Peds. He did the same then followed her into a spacious bathroom. Trying to distract his thoughts from that fine ass of hers, he noted an old-fashioned claw-foot tub and pedestal sink, both with a patina that led him to think they were original to the house.

All thoughts of architecture and décor fled as she reached behind her to unhook the back clasp of her bra, then turned around to look over her shoulder into the mirror. The bike kit slipping from his fingers, he barely noticed her little moue of distress. He was holding his breath, wondering if she'd forgotten he was there, and wishing her next move might be to remove the bra entirely.

“Con.” She lifted her gaze to him and he hoped she hadn’t caught him staring. “I need to take a tepid bath. And I really would like you to stay and help me. Because look at my back. And I’ll bet my thighs are also...” Bending down, she lifted the tight hem of her spandex shorts. “Ugh. I thought so. Just call me Checkerboard Charlie.”

No one would ever mistake you for a Charlie, was on the tip of his tongue, but he trapped it behind his teeth. “I’ll do anything you need me to do.”

“Would you run the water for me? I’ll just...” She trailed off.

Okay, don’t spook her. Keeping his gaze firmly on the faucet, he jockeyed both handles open. When the temperature approximated his concept of tepid, he plugged the drain and let the tub fill. He could feel his heart pounding double-time, echoing the throb of his cock. Would she come naked to the tub? Wrap herself in a robe and consign him to the hallway while she stepped in and soaked?

A soft moan snapped his gaze to her.

“I need help.”

Con hurried to shut off the water and sprang to his feet. He couldn’t quite read her expression, so he stood there, undecided what to do.

“These things are so darn tight, it hurts when I rub them against the burn. Can you, um, help me take off my bra and shorts with a minimum of dragging against the sunburn?”

Was the Pope Catholic? Did the sun set in the west?

He mentally lectured himself. Her comfort was paramount here. He could do this. “Sure. Turn around.” After a quick perusal of the bra’s formidable construction—unclasping the back strap had merely loosened its hold what with the X over her shoulders still holding her cups in place—he said, “Okay. At the count of three, you lift the front and I’ll lift the back.” With hands that barely trembled, he spread his fingers underneath the superstructure of the racer back and counted. Slowly, as he followed the cautious raising of Giselle’s arms, they managed to get the stretchy garment over her head.

Then he looked in the mirror and almost swallowed his tongue. Amber. Her nipples were the shade of precious amber. Her breasts were heavy, round, slightly drooping and swaying as she lowered her arms.

“Ah, that feels better.”

“Giselle.” It came out as a squeak.

She turned to him, uncertainty in her eyes. “You don’t like...?”

He commanded his tongue to work but couldn’t keep the breathless quality from his voice. “I have never seen a more beautiful sight in my life. Thank you.”

The uncertainty remained, but the corners of her mouth tilted upward. “Oh.”

Then his cock made him speak without engaging his brain. “Giselle, more than anything else in this world, I want to get in that tub with you, but if I wait another minute, I won’t be able to get my shorts off. Do I have your permission?”

Her gaze traveled down his torso. The tip of his cock, outlined against the tight spandex, lengthened as though she’d touched him.

Instead of answering, she reached for his waistband.

“No! I mean, I’ll probably have as much difficulty removing it as we did with your bra.” And damn if his cock didn’t swell even more at the thought of showing itself off. He hoped he didn’t come off as too eager and unsophisticated, but damn, he couldn’t wait a moment longer. Con ripped off his shirt and gingerly slid the tight shorts down his hips with one hand, holding his rampant cock against his belly with the other.

“Oh!” Her tentative smile ripened into full sunshine. “I always wondered if Lance Armstrong and his peers went commando.”

“I don’t know about them, but it’s more comfortable for me to, er, have everything in its place without extra layers of fabrics or hems and seams that create ridges.”

The laugh she gifted him with warmed him. “Well, it’s time to discover whether I’ve gone commando as well. Please?” She raised her palms in invitation, and his mouth watered as he noticed how her nipples had gotten puckered and tight.

Kneeling at her feet, he carefully rolled the fabric down her hips. He stopped when her neatly trimmed triangle of dark hair came into view. Without conscious thought, he leaned forward and rained kisses on the exposed skin from one curvy hip to the other.

She burrowed her fingers in his unruly hair. He closed his eyes in thanksgiving for that reaction then continued rolling her shorts down her legs. He thought she winced when the bundle scraped the burn at her thighs so he did the first thing he could think of to take her mind off the pain.

He began to stroke the plump lips with his tongue, inhaling the ripe scent of sweaty, aroused woman.

* * * * *

“Con!”

He jerked his head back. Luckily the fistfuls of hair she gripped kept that dazzling tongue from straying too far.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to —”

“Conlan Trowbridge, don’t you dare apologize. You just...surprised me, that’s all.”

“I wanted to take your mind off your pain.”

Giselle bent forward, cradling his head in her hands. “Good. That’s a creative solution. But how about I get my feet out of these shorts before I trip and bang my head against the tub? Then I’d really be in pain.”

Instantly his strong fingers twined around her hips. “Hold on to me and just kick them free.”

Placing her hands on his shoulders, she did, marveling at the tensile strength of his long, ropy muscles. He hadn’t looked so...formidable in his blue Brooks Brothers shirt at the Senior Citizens’ Center, but here in her bathroom, he seemed the perfect specimen of manhood, his cock jutting out like a trowel, the hair around it dark and thick with a trail leading up to his navel. She could only hope that in his obviously horny state, he’d overlook her less-than-centerfold-quality body. And with both of them

naked, dayum, she wondered if he could see her juices seeping out of her pussy from his vantage point on his knees in front of her.

On his knees. In front of her pussy. Her naked pussy. She leaned forward a scant inch and made contact with his mouth again.

He took the hint eagerly, groaning and sliding his hands down from her hips to the vee between her legs. With her ankles untangled from the shorts, she was able to spread her legs to allow him greater access. His thumbs parted her pussy lips and...he feasted. No other word would do. It seemed to Giselle as though he was satisfying a deep hunger.

Which fed her own hunger. She threw her head back, closed her eyes and simply...felt. Now he was circling a thumb on her clit, which shot lightning bolts throughout her core. Now his tongue soothed the hard nubbin, doubling the sensation. One strong hand slid around to her ass and cupped her flesh. His other hand stroked her inner thigh up to the crease then slid between her lips. He slipped one finger, then two, into her slick passage and thrust rhythmically. Her hips started rocking of their own volition.

She wanted this, wanted him, desperately wanted that peak she couldn't reach by herself. Her breath came shorter. She heard a feral-sounding growl and realized it came from her own throat as she gripped fistfuls of his hair tighter and tighter, pulling his face even closer to her pussy. Need spiraled into a mere pinpoint against his tongue. Something—his finger?—poked into her anus and she shattered the way a tossed stone shatters the still surface of a lake, sending ripples to every atom in her body again and again until calm descended once more.

And then he was standing before her, Con, her accountant and biker, murmuring nonsense syllables, soothing her, carefully holding her by her unburned hips and nudging her into the tub.

The tub. Her sunburn. What she'd done. What *they'd* done.

Oh my, she was now a cougar.

She blinked several times and focused on eyes as blue as a glowing sapphire, soft and lusty at the same time, his lips shiny with...her juices. Wow. She'd have to remember this little detail to tell the blog ladies.

"That's it. Just sit down. Is the water too warm? Too cool?"

A laugh escaped Giselle. "I'm no Goldilocks, but it's just right."

His smile brought out that dimple in his left cheek. Adorable he was, a stray lock of brown hair draping across one brow, a washcloth in one hand and her botanical soap in the other, bending across the tub to stroke the sudsy cloth carefully across her shoulders. Now that her torso was mostly hidden under the bathwater, she let her mind wander away from how much older her body was than his and relaxed even further into his intimate attention.

"Does that hurt?"

"No. Con..."

"Good. Bend forward. I'll do your back."

"Con, you didn't clim—"

"It's just right, remember? Let's get your sunburn taken care of first."

So she lowered her lashes and allowed him to minister to her. His touch was so gentle it made her want to weep. He tenderly cleansed then rinsed and she was lulled by the novelty of a man taking care of her again, basking in his attention and concern.

A splash startled her eyes open. Con stood with both feet in the tub, facing her, his back to the faucet, his cock bobbing up and down above her face. "Can you scoot back a smidge? The water feels good."

"Oh. Of course." She did and he knelt on the slippery porcelain, immersing his thighs almost to his balls. She held out her hand. "Do you want me to..."

"Yeah, I want you to."

She wiggled her fingers. "The soap?"

"The cock."

He took her outstretched hand and settled it against the scorching heat of him. Giselle felt it jump as she wrapped her fingers around a cock that veritably pulsed with life. On a moan of bliss he settled into the tub, sloshing the water that had gone perilously high with his movement. She inched closer, jockeying her legs over his and around his hips so she could more easily reach this new toy, this hot shaft that throbbed in her hand.

"Giselle." Her name sounded like a prayer on his lips. "I wouldn't be averse to you sitting on me. But your touch is a little bit of heaven all by itself. Don't stop."

"I won't. But I do need the soap and the washcloth."

She saw the muscle at his jaw twitch at her playful diversion but he said nothing as he pivoted to reach the soap dish.

Giselle couldn't believe his forbearance as he allowed her to soap his arms, his chest and down his belly to his cock. The soap disintegrated in the water as she smoothed one hand then the other down the length of him, dallying at the crown to circle and tease it. She moved her hands down to fondle his balls, which by now had tightened and tucked themselves close to his body.

"You have a heavenly touch," he bit out between clenched teeth.

"It's a pleasure to do this for you."

His gaze lasered into her. "Giselle. How does your sunburn feel?"

Sunburn? He was thinking about her sunburn at a time like this?

"Totally a non-issue. The heat I'm feeling right now has nothing to do with sunburn."

"Good." With that, he stood upright, rising like Neptune from the sea, dripping and shiny with moisture, and stepped out onto the bath mat. He hauled her to her feet then swept her into his arms, one around her shoulders and the other under her knees. Her mind snagged on the fact that he'd lifted her with no more effort than if she was a fifty-pound bag of peat moss.

"Which bedroom?"

"Con." This was the moment of truth. She had a vibrant, strong, adorable man eager to make love with her. He was younger, much younger than she. Did age matter? Did the fact that they'd only met a few days ago make any difference?

So what, she could hear her cougar challenge buds say. Your aunt vouches for him as an upstanding member of the community. You're not marrying him, you're just going to fuck him. And younger means more virile, with more stamina. You're crazy not to go for it. Take the bull by the horn – so to speak – and get it on!

While she was mentally dithering, she became aware that his muscles had tensed. He stopped at the bathroom doorway, water dripping down his torso. "I beg your pardon for overstepping." He set her on her feet. The tiles felt cool on her damp soles. "You make it difficult for a man to think with his brain."

He turned to take a few steps back into the bathroom, snagged a large purple towel, wrapped it around her shoulders then grabbed one for himself. He did not turn around again.

"Con?"

He was resolutely rubbing the towel around his torso then down his legs, keeping his skin covered as much as his actions would allow, keeping his head down and eyes averted. Keeping alive the space that suddenly yawned between them.

"I'm sorry. I'll just pop by Mrs. Archer's home and show her where to sign the form ten-forty –"

"Con! What the devil's the matter with you?"

She could see his spine straighten. "I've heard that very tone of voice saying my name when teachers wanted to chastise me. I apologize for –"

"Conlan Trowbridge, you turn around this minute!" Giselle didn't know whether to laugh or be mortified. Did she sound like his teacher? Did their age difference matter that much to him?

When he didn't move, she grabbed a fistful of his towel, yanked it off him and tossed it in the hallway. "Con. Dammit, turn around and read. My. Lips."

He turned, seemingly as slowly as the earth revolves around the sun. She was gratified to note that his cock hadn't diminished one whit. It still thrust out impressively in her direction.

She licked her lips as she stared. It jumped under her scrutiny.

"Con. I wasn't hesitating because I didn't want you. I was afraid you'd think I was too old for you."

"Good grief, you're just right, just perfect!"

She opened her arms. "Then come here. We're not finished. Not by a long shot."

Suddenly he was all over her, kissing, stroking, laving swaths of her skin with his tongue. "Giselle. You're so kissable. I was afraid I wanted you so much that I willed the same for you, whether you wanted it or not."

"I do, Con. I do want you." She let her mouth explore the vulnerable spot where his neck connected with his torso, the bones of his clavicle, down across his pecs, his chest practically hairless and oh so smooth. It had been so long since she'd tasted a man's skin, felt the sinew and muscle and bone so much stronger than her own.

She shifted to reach the hard bump of his nipple and sucked. Hard. Then fell to her knees. He murmured a weak demurral, but she resisted his attempt to bring her upright.

"Con, I need to do this. I need to taste, to feel..." And then her mouth was too busy to talk, to explain. Oh, the heat of him! The delirious sensations of smooth, hard, hot and throbbing that was his cock in her mouth ratcheted her frenzy up another notch. She drew him in, hollowing her cheeks to hold him there while her tongue stroked and the insides of her mouth and throat closed around him. Her hands were everywhere, fisting in his soft pubic hair, stroking a hairy thigh and smooth hip, squeezing and releasing his balls, snaking around to cup his tight, round ass cheeks.

"Giselle, please. Wait, stop, hold on."

She felt herself being lifted to her feet and, against her will, his cock popped out of her mouth.

"Honey, when I come the first time, I want to be looking into your eyes. Please, let me do it my way."

She melted. How could she say no to such a heartfelt plea?

"Of course. Follow me."

From the corner of her eye she noted he grabbed his bike pack and suddenly wondered, did he have condoms in there? She certainly had no stash, hadn't even considered buying any, expecting his visit to be merely a drop-off of tax forms and maybe a spin around a rural road or two.

But, oh, she was ready, and if he didn't have any, there'd be hell to pay.

Snickering quietly to herself, she led him to the master bedroom, with its queen-size bed still strewn with her hastily discarded motorcycle ensemble. She swept it onto the reading chair near the window.

And then he was behind her, kissing her neck, pulling the scrunchie off her damp ponytail to thread his fingers through her dark curls. He moved his hands to cup her breasts, rolling her hard nipples between thumb and fingers then shifting his feet, changing her stance as well. The reflection of the two of them in the mirror above her dresser fascinated her as much as his ministrations aroused her.

"Look at that face," he murmured into her ear. "Those heavy-lidded eyes, the pouting mouth, the rosy skin. A beautiful woman in her prime, knowing how desirable she is, and offering it to her lover." He gently bit the lobe. "Just right. Just perfect."

She snuggled into him, her back against his chest, his hot cock nudging its way between her ass cheeks and, holding on to his hips, slowly gyrated like a wanton. She *felt* wanton. And yes, desirable. In this dance of seduction, age was irrelevant.

"Help me," he pleaded as he pinched both nipples. "I don't have enough hands. Rub your clit for me while we both watch."

Now she felt absolutely decadent. She dipped her fingers into her pussy to lubricate them then stroked the hard nub with one hand, touching herself in exactly the right way as she watched him pull and tug at her nipples. She thrust two fingers of her other hand inside her pussy and stroked herself. A thousand volts of sexual electricity zinged through her. Moisture gushed down her thighs.

He bit down on her shoulder and lights exploded behind her eyes.

"Con!" she screamed as her knees buckled.

"Yes." He held her, one hand squeezing her breast, the other clamped atop her own hand inside her pussy, until her contractions lessened and the shards of light coalesced into the mirror reflecting their embrace. Then he swept her into his arms again and set her atop the spring-flowered coverlet. "I'll be right back. Don't go away."

She'd have laughed if she could find the energy. She wasn't going anywhere until his cock had been inside her for a good long time.

In seconds he slid beside her on the bed. "Miss me?"

At that she did manage a tiny, languorous laugh. "What took you so long?"

"This." He pulled her hand to his now-sheathed cock. "It's my turn."

Her slumberous gaze lifted from the cock her hand was wrapped around to his eyes, the pupils so dilated only a sliver of shocking blue surrounded them. Her lips tilted upward in a wicked smile. "It's about time."

As she drew her thighs apart in welcome, he rolled onto her. "You are my living wet dream," he said, his gaze riveted on hers, and slid his cock into her, one slow inch at a time until their pubic bones met.

It felt right. It felt as if he belonged there, filling her, stroking her, slowly at first then with mounting frenzy, their gaze connected as totally as their bodies were. Everything around her faded except his weight on her as he pumped his hips, her legs

squeezing like a vise around his waist, the mounting heat, the spiraling desire, the reaching, reaching for nirvana then finding it. They exploded together like a burning building that collapses only to revive the fury of the fire until nothing remained except smoldering embers.

A long time later, after two more orgasms, Giselle floated back to earth in Con's arms, every atom of her body sated. Hovering between waking and sleep, she snuggled deeper into his embrace.

He stirred. "You know, I've never been in the middle of an earthquake before."

"Mmm. Me neither." Then her eyes popped open in the darkness as she assimilated his words. Yes, they'd had cataclysmic sex. But what must he think of her? They'd known each other only a few days. Would he think she'd been desperate to get laid because of her age?

As if he'd read her mind, he murmured into her ear, "I heard you make that comment to your foreman about how old you were. So just in case you were wondering, I'm thirty-two. Old enough to appreciate your maturity and life experience, and young enough to take advantage of it."

"Oh." She didn't know how to respond, so she closed her mind to it and tried to relax enough to sleep. She needed to be ready for the morning and an uncomfortable conversation with Larry. Seven a.m. would come soon enough.

Chapter Three

From Giselle: I'm a cougar! At last! And all I can say is, WOW, did he rock my world! Several times. And did he look adorable with his face covered with, well, <ahem> juices. But gawd, I only met him on Thursday. How can he not think I'm a slut? I need my morning coffee. Plus I've got to focus on work until I get my crews out on the job, but will check in later, 'cuz I definitely need your further directions and support.

At 6:30 she was in the kitchen in jeans, T-shirt and thick socks, savoring a second cup of coffee with a buttered bagel. She heard Larry keying open the outer door to the office that her husband had built as an addition to the main house. With a sigh she flipped open the deadbolt to the connecting door. He'd never been a half hour early before.

She wasn't in the mood for this talk. She wanted to savor the aching muscles between her legs, wanted to remember Con's murmured goodbye in the middle of the night, saying he didn't want anyone to see him leaving and compromise her reputation.

Opening the door, she said, "You're early. I don't even have my workboots on yet."

Thunder emanated from Larry's eyes. "Who was that pipsqueak nerd on a bike? And what business did he have with you?"

Giselle tamped down an errant spark of anger. "I told you. He dropped off Aunt Esme's income tax forms. They have to be in the mail this week."

"So how come it took all afternoon and into the evening?"

Her back went straighter. "And how do you know how long Con was here?"

"I happened to drive by around dusk and his truck was still there."

His accusatory tone of voice didn't sit well with her. "Did it ever occur to you that I might have invited him to dinner since he was nice enough to deliver those papers personally?"

The sharp look he gave her made her take a step back.

"It might have, if the kitchen lights were on."

She blinked. "Larry, what I do on my own time is none of your business."

He took two steps forward, crowding her against the counter near the sink. Close up, his dark eyes glittered and the deep crow's feet around his eyes stood out in stark relief. "Giselle, I've given you plenty of time for your grief. I miss Felix too. He was a great guy. But he's been gone almost four years now, and I think it's time you realize that I haven't just been helping you out because I felt sorry for you."

Her rigid stance softened. How to say this diplomatically? "I know, Larry, and I'm grateful to have such a loyal friend."

"Friend, hell. Dammit, stop playing coy! You and I are well suited for each other. That kiss wasn't all one-sided. You responded to me like a seedling does to the sun. I want more, Giselle. I want all of you."

Stroking her cheek with a calloused finger, he cajoled, "You know you couldn't have kept the business going without me. Not only do I keep the boys in line on the job, I order the supplies, approve the bills and hold the clients' hands. I've always been there for you. We belong together."

Giselle's eyes went wide. "Larry —"

"That's right, you didn't even see what was right in front of you." His voice softened. "I love you, Giselle, I wanted you the whole time you were working alongside Felix. It damn near killed me not to say anything, but Felix was my friend. So I made myself indispensable to him, so he'd keep me around. And after he died, I felt that I had a clear shot at you."

"Larry, I never thought —"

He touched his lips to her temple. "Give me a chance. Let me take you out to dinner and talk about other things than landscaping. I bet you don't even know my favorite song."

Giselle didn't know what to say. He was correct on so many levels. They had so much in common. They were more or less of the same era. And he'd eased her mind simply by always being there for her. On the other hand, megavolts of electricity had sparked between her and Con. Could she just have a fling and, when it burned out, come to Larry for a more prosaic life together?

Until the other day, she'd never had an inkling he felt this way. Yes, she loved him as a friend, as a foreman, but could she love him like a—like a husband? And he was correct. She didn't know his music preferences. Or almost anything else. That had never been part of the equation.

"Larry, I'm so sorry. I don't know what to say. You're going to have to give me some time to think about—"

A noise in the outer office distracted her. The crew. One of them had probably come in to get the day's plant list to load on the truck.

Larry's gaze almost burned a hole through her retinas. "This discussion isn't over." He turned on his bootheel, leaving a scuff mark on her tile floor, and greeted one of the drivers gruffly as he stalked outside.

Giselle sat down heavily on the bench near the door to lace up her workboots. It was going to be damn uncomfortable working together until this was resolved. Sure, Larry was the most valuable of her employees, but she didn't consider him indispensable. Over the years she'd gotten her hands dirty and fingernails broken, learned by osmosis working alongside her husband, taken college courses for landscape design, and now she considered herself almost as capable as Felix had been, Felix who had a degree in landscape architecture. The steady stream of her clients assured her of that.

What on earth was she going to do about her foreman?

* * * * *

"So how did you and Con Junior get along?"

"Get along?" Stifling the urge to squirm under Aunt Esme's astute gaze, Giselle reached for another dill pickle spear. The 1040 was signed, sealed and waiting for Giselle to drop it at the post office, and Esme had invited her to stay for lunch. She should have known it was more than a familial gesture. The woman had a sixth sense about some things.

"Don't tell me he needs glasses."

Giselle's mouth twitched. "I don't know. He might be wearing contact lenses. I didn't ask."

"You watch your mouth, young lady. I could tell the moment he laid eyes on you that he was interested. His eyes lit up like a kid's on Christmas morning." She sat back with a smug smile. "Was I right?"

"Aha. So you tried to play cupid by making him trot around the county on his day off and deliver your income tax return to me instead of you. Am I right?"

The older woman shrugged. "Can you blame me? He's a nice young man and you're a woman ripe for a little masculine attention." She sat back and waited.

Two could play this game, Giselle thought. She said nothing, merely sipped at her iced tea, although she could feel the heat gathering inside her belly as she remembered just how much masculine attention she had received at his hands...and mouth...and cock...

She also remembered Autumn's answering blog and felt another surge of heat.

Honey, I rebuilt a ranch from scratch with Mitch and we still found time to tumble. And let me tell you, a hot bath may be great at the end of a long workday, but a hot young stud is even better.

She hoped Aunt Esme never learned to read minds. She charged into the silence. "I only remember meeting Con Senior once, at Uncle Maurice's funeral. Good-looking man, but I wouldn't have guessed they were father and son."

"Genetically, they aren't. He married Con's mother just before Con was born. The father got her 'in trouble', as they used to say, and ran away to join the Marines. Got himself killed when the American embassy in Tehran was taken over by the Iranian militants."

Giselle didn't know what to say to that.

"She was seventeen."

"Who?"

"Con's mother. Brenda. When she had him. Poor thing, at least she lived to see him get established in his job."

Giselle blinked. "Con's mother is dead?"

"Breast cancer. By the time they discovered it, it was too late. Went—" Esme snapped her fingers. "Like that. It was about seven, eight years ago."

The iced tea Giselle had been sipping tasted sour. Remembering the pain of her own mother's death a dozen years ago, she could sympathize with such a sudden loss. She'd be extra-nice to him the next time they got together.

Chapter Four

From Giselle: Honestly, I feel like I was merely a bar pickup, a "Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am." We fucked like sex-crazed maniacs, he sneaks out of bed in the middle of the night, and zero. Four days and nothing. You'd think he'd at least email me or leave me a voice mail saying, "Hey, it was great". Hell, he doesn't have to declare undying love, he could just ask me how my sunburn was. I mean, he spent enough time slathering aloe vera on me. Of course, half of it got rubbed off during—well, you know.

What do I do now? Take a line out of Erica Jong's book and say, "I was just looking for a zipless fuck"? Or maybe he's bothered by the fact that I'm only five years younger than his deceased mother, a true child bride.

Crap. It's almost midnight and I'm going to bed. The hell with Conlan Trowbridge and his outstanding ass.

Con reached for the eye drops again. It felt as though his corneas had fused to his eyelids. He'd been staring at numbers every waking moment since early Monday morning when he'd reluctantly crawled out of Giselle's arms and into his smelly biking gear. He knew he shouldn't have spent so much time there with the IRS deadline looming, but hell, he was a man who knew what he wanted, and he'd wanted Giselle. Even realizing he'd be burning the midnight oil the rest of the week, he'd do the same thing again.

Cursing all the idiots who waited until the last minute before deciding they needed their taxes done stat, he squeezed the soothing liquid into each eye and allowed himself a moment of self-pity. He'd barely had three hours' sleep each of the last three nights, but the end was in sight. In twenty minutes it would be midnight on Thursday, the fifteenth of April, and anyone who hadn't filed their federal income taxes by the witching hour was SOL.

He double-checked the figures once more and hit Send.

The irony wasn't lost on him. His own taxes and he barely managed to get them filed under the wire. Thank heaven he'd been filing them electronically for the past few years and could do it practically in his sleep. He couldn't imagine driving downtown to hand them to a poor postal employee stationed outside the only post office open until midnight to grab envelopes from frantic procrastinators and get them stamped in time.

The computer dinged a confirmation that his tax return had been received. With a heartfelt sigh, Con turned it off and dragged himself into the small room adjacent to his office. Just a short nap on the cot so he'd be awake enough to drive home, get a shower and then sleep for fourteen solid hours. Then he'd wake up and go for a thick sirloin at the local steakhouse. He was damn sick and tired of power bars and protein shakes.

He unbuttoned his wrinkled Brooks Brothers shirt, whipped off his belt and shoes and collapsed onto the cot.

* * * * *

From Autumn: Listen, Giselle, get out your calendar. Can you say April 15 tax deadline? The guy's a CPA. Give him a break. I guarantee you he's hard as a spike trying to focus on numbers instead of you.

She felt like a fraud tracking him down in his office to ask him a bogus question, but the cougars had assured her it was a legitimate way to contact him. She only hoped it didn't sound too contrived.

Her taxes had been filed by the end of March, both the business and her personal forms. The business had finished the year in the red, but only because her accountant insisted she take a salary which, of course, she had to pay taxes on. She'd argued that she didn't need it because she still had a small nest egg from Felix's life insurance policy, the bulk of which was paying for her two sons' college education. Still, she was

able to follow the woman's reasoning and acquiesced to her suggestions. So who was to say it was implausible to ask Con if she'd taken the correct course of action?

Aunt Esme had given her directions to Con's office, the entire second floor of an attractive, colonial-style mansion-turned-office-building within walking distance of the county courthouse. With her documents in hand, she climbed the wide staircase and there it was, a discreet bronze plaque engraved "Trowbridge & Trowbridge CPAs". Light glowed through the translucent glass in the door. She turned the handle and entered. Table lamps on both sides of the waiting room sofa were lit, but no one sat at the receptionist's desk and its computer screen was dark.

"Hello?"

It felt...abandoned. But still, the door had not been locked and lights blazed here and in the hallway ahead. She called out again and heard a sound like an intermittent buzz. A malfunctioning fluorescent bulb? A radio pulling in only static? *Snoring?*

"Hello? Con?"

Venturing into the hallway, she heard a crash then a muted curse.

Damn, was she going to be one of those too-stupid-to-live heroines out of a romantic suspense novel? Spinning on her heel, she'd taken two steps back to the reception room, intent on putting distance between herself and trouble, when she heard Con.

"Giselle? What are you doing here?"

Whirling around, she gaped at the man staggering down the hall toward her, wrinkled dress shirt open and hanging limply to his hips, T-shirt partially out of his beltless, half-buttoned trousers, hair sticking out every which way like a rat's nest, with what looked like several days' growth of beard darkening his jaw. God, he looked all rumpled and sleepy-eyed, younger and more vulnerable than she could wrap her mind around. But sexy as sin.

Her pussy spasmed at the memory of them in bed together and her heart stuttered. "Are you all right? You look like—" She clamped her mouth shut on the word *hell*. It was more like *shit* anyway.

He raised both hands to his head, his fingers making different furrows as they plowed through the disheveled mess. "What time is it?"

"Almost one."

"In the morning?"

She gestured to the window. He blinked at the sunshine streaming in. "Afternoon. I'll ask again. Are you all right?"

"As right as I can be after spending eighty-five out of the last ninety-five hours in front of the computer. Damn last-minute taxpayers, each thinking they were the only one on my to-do list."

"Oh." Giselle glanced around the reception room. "Do you have a coffeepot?"

Con's eyes lit up as if someone had pushed the bright-headlights lever on a car. He gestured back toward the hallway. "First door on the left. A kitchenette. Thank you. Um, excuse me. I'll be right back."

He stumbled in the direction he'd come from and she busied herself with the coffeepot. Boy, did she feel stupid. Of course he'd be too busy to call her the last three days before the IRS deadline. Hadn't the cougar challenge ladies reminded her of it? As the coffeemaker started making burbling sounds, she heard water running. He was probably in the powder room, no doubt splashing his face trying to wake up. Must have fallen asleep at his desk, the poor, dedicated soul.

He staggered back out, his hair wet and finger-combed into some semblance of order, his eyes still at half-mast, drops of water caught on his beard stubble. She thrust a cup of steaming black coffee into his hand. "Here. Drink this. It'll wake you up."

"Yes, Mother." He grabbed it with both hands and lifted it eagerly to his mouth.

Giselle went rigid. *Mother*.

Oh no. Had he come on to her because she reminded him of his *mother*?

Good grief, girl, get a hold of yourself. He hadn't objected to their age difference. In fact, he'd flat out told her before they fell asleep in bed together that he appreciated it. Why on earth did she have to manufacture problems where none existed?

Still, she'd come on him unawares. Maybe now wasn't a good time to pick up where they left off. He needed to get his head on straight. Go home and shower, and probably sleep another ten hours. And get his stamina back.

Because as sure as taxes, she wanted to be with him again.

She watched as he wandered into one of the offices, still looking like a sleepwalker, his eyes closed in a nirvana of caffeine. That decided her. She wrote him a brief note and eased out of the room, leaving the note clipped to her envelope of documents beside the coffeemaker. Just in case he needed an excuse to come around.

* * * * *

God bless good old Colombian roast, Con thought after guzzling a second cup of scorching-hot java. He was starting to feel human again, although every bone in his body ached from sleeping on that lumpy, skinny cot for—huh, must have been ten hours.

Stretching the kinks out of his muscles, he sauntered back into the reception room. "Giselle? Thanks for making the coffee. I really needed a kick-start today of all days."

Silence surrounded him. His brain began to function. What had she been doing here? She'd worn jeans, yes, but not the clunky workboots she'd said she used around jobs or the nursery. She had come a-calling in ankle boots and a classy linen jacket.

The thought pleased him inordinately.

But then where was she? "Giselle?" He wandered through each of the five rooms, his mind sifting through facts and ideas. Maybe she'd been worried about him, knowing he'd been under the gun. She had more questions about Aunt Esme's tax

return. Or maybe she just wanted more of what they'd given each other the other day. And night.

That thought perked him up considerably, and suddenly eating breakfast clunked to the bottom of his to-do list. His cock roared to life.

After a few more minutes he accepted the fact that no one shared his office space. Then he noticed the manila envelope on the counter near the coffeepot.

So she *did* come on business. He wasn't sure how he felt about that. He hadn't thought he was inadequate in the sexual department, but now he wondered if a woman with so much self-assurance would think he'd been experienced enough, sophisticated enough. As much as, perhaps, her foreman, who had acted as though he had some personal claim on her.

With a scowl he shoved his doubts into a corner of his mind and reached for the note clipped to the envelope.

Sorry to wake you. Catch up on your sleep. When you have time, maybe you can look this over. Thanks.

No signature, no "I had a great time". Well, she was probably too shy to put anything in writing. He opened the envelope and began to peruse its contents. Two tax returns, her personal one and the business one. Ever intrigued by numbers, he sat down to check them out.

* * * * *

Halfway down the Stonehedge Landscapes driveway, Con had to pull onto the verge to make room for an empty semi rattling up in the opposite direction, then eased to a stop near a huge hill of mulch that had obviously just been dumped into the holding area. Bits of bark and dust shimmered in the air currents above the pile.

He took a moment to appreciate Giselle's curvaceous body as she surveyed the delivery, unaware of being observed through his windshield. Snug jeans, check.

Outstanding ass, check. Flyaway curly hair escaping her ponytail, check. Slanting late-afternoon sunlight giving her skin the rosy glow of a well-fucked woman...

Down, boy!

She might be a dozen years older, but damn, she looked good to him. And felt even better snuggled against him. He would make it his business to convince her to think the same thing.

Shaved, showered and ready for public discourse again, he killed the engine and stepped out. The potent smell of fresh pine bark surrounded him, sweet and pungent, almost like a narcotic.

"Wow, that must be a whole year's supply."

She turned, eyes leaping with sparks before banking into something he interpreted as caution. "Close to four hundred cubic yards. If we have a good year, we'll need to order more before planting season ends."

Con let his gaze rove around the holding area, something he'd ignored last Sunday when he'd been too busy ogling Giselle in her tight biking shorts. Neat rows of potted shrubs and ground cover, larger shrubs and trees whose root balls were wrapped in burlap and heeled in, everything looking healthy and well tended. A three-bay barn converted to accommodate company trucks. Smaller holding pens for decorative gravel and stones of various colors and sizes.

"Huh. I'd have thought you'd have as much stone supply as you do mulch."

"Why?" She began to walk toward the office.

Matching her stride, he waved the manila envelope he'd brought with him. "I browsed through your tax returns. Just seemed like stones and paving should have been your biggest inventory."

"Actually," she said, stopping at the door to the office and giving him a thoughtful gaze. "If a client wants too much paving or stonework, we subcontract that out. Felix specialized in artistic placement of greenery, and I just built on that reputation. I love

the asymmetry, the irregularity of nature. I hate to see a row of *Euonymus* or boxwood against the front of a house. Boring.”

Nothing about Giselle Sheridan was boring, Con thought as he swiveled to watch a staff truck bounce down the long driveway. “Well, looks like your crews are coming home to roost. I’d be happy to offer my observations about these documents—” He handed over the manila envelope. “But not when you’re so busy. Maybe we can talk about it over dinner some evening.” He yanked out his PDA. “Or, since we’re both professionals, maybe we should make an appointment. Let’s see, I’m free on...”

Giselle’s warm laugh made the calendar function blur. “Actually, tonight’s good. Just give me an hour to check each crew’s progress, print out tomorrow’s service schedules and shower off all this grit. I feel like casual and close by. Seven-thirty? Meet you at the Rib ‘N Draft?”

“I know where it is. Sure you don’t want me to pick you up?”

But she was already turning to greet her crew and Con saw another truck pulling in. He wouldn’t argue the point. He’d wait for her at the Rib ‘N Draft while catching up on his emails. The cozy pub and rib joint was only a mile or so from her home. Nothing like eating with your fingers and sucking off the juices to aid in a seduction.

* * * * *

“You let that guy see your tax returns?”

“Oh, hi, Larry. I didn’t know you were inside already. I thought you might be checking out the black smoke coming out of the stake body.” Giselle had just entered the office to find her foreman at the second computer, off to the side at a smaller desk. She stiffened, bracing for a confrontation.

Instead, he merely said, “It’s fixed. Oil change, new filter. Just making the notations now. I ran off a batch of checks for you to sign. I saw the deposit slip from yesterday’s bank run, so I figured we could pay some of those bills nearing the end of the net-thirty cycle.”

"Thanks. That was on my to-do list this weekend. You're a mind reader."

Larry shrugged as though it was no big deal, although she knew it was. She relied on him for so much. Too much?

"I've been reading your mind for years, 'Zelle. Comes from working together so closely for so long. And knowing you so well."

He signed off the computer and darkened the screen. "One thing I will say to you, though. That Trowbridge guy? You better take anything he says with a grain of salt."

Standing to his full height, he loomed over her as she sat down at her own desk and logged on. "The name rang a bell, so I dug into my memory bank until I came up with it. They had some big lawsuits thrown at them for malfeasance a couple of years ago. Wasn't just any piddling misappropriation of funds, either. It was some big-deal corporate scandal."

Larry leaned down across the desk, planting his scowling face a little too close to hers. "You better be careful of him. And that's not just a suggestion. It's a warning."

Giselle took a startled breath at his vehemence. She remembered no such scandal, but perhaps it had been around the time Felix had died, a long stretch when she paid no attention to newspapers or TV.

"And just so you know," he said before walking out the office door to deal with the crews, "I like Broadway musicals."

She stared after him. Broadway musicals? Who'd have thought rough, gruff Larry Pulaski liked to sing and dance?

Which begged the question, shouldn't she give him a chance to show her his softer side?

She'd think about that tomorrow. She had other things on her mind tonight.

Chapter Five

Gawd, did this place bring back memories of the early days, when she and Felix had more brass than cash. When they thought they could conquer the world. Now he was gone and, while her clients loved her work, she knew she hadn't reached his level of experience and savvy.

On the bright side, Con Trowbridge was sitting next to her, sucking his fingers with his eyes closed as if he were in heaven. Giselle watched his thick tongue lap up barbecue juices from the base of his palm to the tip of his middle finger.

And remembered the feel of that educated tongue on her clit.

A delicate shudder went through her. She wanted more of it, more of his tongue stroking her, his arms holding her captive, his cock pounding into her. Oh yeah, her inner cougar had perked up when they'd met and she was ready to growl and bite and pounce.

But cougar or no, she still worried that he was too young for her. *So*, she firmly chastised herself, *get it while you can*. And when that younger hunk has gone back to his younger crowd, there'll be enough time to decide about Larry.

They sat at right angles at a table in the rear of a large dining room, their knees touching as they sipped their draft beers, halfway through a large plate of barbecued beef short ribs. She'd worn flats with a flaring, lettuce-hemmed skirt and a cream T-shirt emblazoned with oak leaves. She'd resisted the temptation to go commando. He might want to rip off her panties.

The exact instant the thought took hold of her, Con's gaze snagged hers, as though she'd said it aloud. He leaned over to her and licked the corner of her mouth.

"Sloppy eater. Mmm, and here's another spot your napkin missed." He swiped his tongue across the bow of her upper lip.

“Con,” she whispered. Misgivings or no about the future, she wanted this man. Now. “Doggy bag. Home.”

His eyes flared as he sat back and raised his arm for the waiter. In minutes they’d been given two wet-napkin packets and a flip-top takeout box stuffed with leftovers. They quickly cleaned the grease from their hands. Con flicked two twenties on the table and grasped Giselle’s elbow to steer her through the maze of diners and out into the parking lot where she’d found a space to park her truck just two slots away from his.

She unlocked her door and bent forward to toss the doggy bag onto the passenger side. Before she could climb into the driver’s seat, he spun her around and kissed her as though the world were ending tomorrow.

Her knees buckled under the onslaught of his hunger and her misgivings evaporated like smoke in a breeze. He slammed her against the side of the extended cab, held her there with his body. It was every bit as hot and hard as she remembered, and she gloried in his ravaging kisses, his hands sliding under her T-shirt to feel skin on skin, the hot poker inside his trousers rubbing against her belly.

Vaguely she wondered if he’d parked here in the dark last row with forethought, or if it was just happenstance. When he grabbed handfuls of her skirt and yanked upward, it no longer mattered. Juices were flowing down her legs and she needed his questing hands, his hungry mouth right –

Yes! He’d gone to his knees and she felt his mouth on her wet bikini panties. Instinctively she spread her legs to allow greater access. He took instant advantage, tonguing and sucking on her pussy lips through the sodden material. She clutched fistfuls of his hair, jerking with his every stroke. Voices sounded behind her but Giselle was beyond modesty. She needed to come. Now!

As if he’d been making love to her forever, Con read her body language and, pressing her clit with his thumb, pulled her sodden panties aside to thrust two then three fingers inside her pussy, curling them to zero in on the spot that pushed her over

the edge. She bit her tongue in an effort not to cry out her orgasm, allowing only a few desperate whimpers to escape.

A car door slammed, an engine revved, a horn tooted. A semblance of awareness returned to Giselle and she wondered if someone had recognized her face, or just saw agitated shadows and heard her feline yowls and was giving her an aural high-five.

Weak-kneed and temporarily sated, she could muster no shame for her wanton behavior. She'd have loved to reciprocate, but wasn't sure her knees were functioning enough to bend down.

"Holy abacus, Giselle, you make me so horny I can't keep my hands off you." Con slowly rose to his feet, kissing his way up through layers of clothing, lingering at her tingling breasts. "I must have been a good boy this year, because Santa's given me my top-of-the-list present a few months early."

Her laugh was throaty, languid, not at all like the Giselle she'd been the past few years. She'd become a sexual being again and she gloried in it, as if she were a queen and it was her due. She would enjoy it as long as it lasted.

Con nibbled his way from her breasts to her shoulder, her throat, taking tiny nips until he reached her ear. "I swear, I could take you right here, right now. Whaddaya say? Would you like me to fuck you against the truck in the parking lot of Rib 'N Draft? I'd happily serve the jail time if we were caught."

Jail time. Crap, she had a dozen employees depending on her. What had she been thinking?

You haven't been thinking, she chastised herself.

But oh boy, wouldn't the Tempt the Cougar ladies be proud of her?

"Home," she managed to squeak.

* * * * *

Con couldn't believe this sexy babe was hot for a nerd like him. All his life he'd fantasized about an amply endowed woman, starting with Sophia Loren and Raquel

Welch when he'd first noticed that women had breasts. Not a Marilyn Monroe-type, though, not a blonde sexpot. He wanted a dark-eyed, dark-haired, earthy temptress, and by golly, in Giselle Sheridan he had a tigress he wanted to tame.

Or not. She made him harder, hotter than he'd ever been with a woman. Was it her lush body? Her sexual hunger? Or simply Giselle herself that had his insides tied up in knots? Whatever, he was going to make damn sure she didn't see him as too young and inexperienced for her.

Following her down her long driveway, he stopped at her front porch. She kept going and he realized she was headed for the detached garage a few dozen feet from the house.

Hell, he couldn't wait another minute to hold her, to taste her. He jogged to the garage and caught her as she was alighting. Hauling her up against the door of her truck, caging her against his body, he repeated his earlier question, with one minor change. "Would you like me to fuck you against the truck in the garage of Stonehedge Landscapes?"

"Yes. Now. Hurry!" As he'd hoped, she was with him a hundred percent, her arms clamping around his neck and her mouth seeking his, one leg lifting to cling to the backs of his thighs to allow him total access to her sweet core.

He fumbled his zipper open and freed his cock, hard and hot and hungry for her. Sliding the flimsy scrap of her still-wet panties aside, he bent his knees for leverage and thrust home into the scorching heat of her wet pussy.

Immediately he felt her inner muscles spasm, squeezing his cock. Holy shit, he'd never felt anything so sublime as steeping himself in Giselle's essence. He wanted to reside there, die there. He wanted to fuck her until the force of their lovemaking dented the truck. He wanted to come inside her —

Dammit! "Giselle," he gasped, going motionless from tip to toe. "I've got to stop. God, I want you so much I can't think straight. I should have been better prepared." He

rested his forehead against hers, took a deep, shuddering breath. "I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry. You made me so horny I forgot a condom."

With a strength of will he didn't think he had, he pulled his cock out of the sweetest pussy he'd ever known and gently settled her leg back on the floor.

"I'm clean, Giselle, honest, I had my annual physical in, um, February, yeah, it was after Presidents' Day, and I haven't had any other, er..."

Oh, sweet Jesus, did he have any condoms in his wallet or were they all in the super-size box he'd bought this afternoon that was probably on the floor of the truck? He groped blindly behind him, feeling for the back pocket where his wallet was, his cock bobbing and throbbing between them.

"We'll worry about condoms later," she gasped. Wrapping her fingers around him, she sank to her knees on the concrete floor. "I'm so hungry for your cock I want to give you what you gave me in the parking lot."

In an eyeblink she surrounded him with her mouth. His knees did a shimmy. This wasn't right, her servicing him like a streetwalker, his pecker jutting out of his pants as if he were a john in a dark urban alleyway, a furtive, almost forbidden feel to it. But holy hell, she worked him like a pro, lips and tongue and fingers all over him, eager and hungry for his cock, and he couldn't stop the lava about to erupt, gathering at the base of his balls and gushing into her mouth until he felt as drained as a balloon that had lost all its helium.

When sentience returned, he realized he was still hunched over her, his legs barely holding him upright, and she still held his limp cock in her mouth.

"Giselle," he gasped, his brain searching for the synapses that would make his arms lift her to her feet. "Your knees..."

"Didn't even feel them," she said, rising effortlessly to meet his gaze. With a wicked grin she licked her lips. "That was fun. Almost better than chocolate."

He blinked then joined in her laughter, and something huge lodged in his heart—the idea that he wanted to keep Giselle laughing for a long, long time.

From Giselle: Oh boy, he went down on me right in the parking lot of the Rib 'N Draft. This guy is unbelievably hawt! I'm walking on air. Well, that's not quite true, I'm walking on caffeine. It's Saturday morning and I just sent two crews out at time-and-a-half, and it's not even eight o'clock yet. But hoo-eee, it's a great kind of tiredness! Whether he sticks around or not, I can't thank you all enough for allowing me to join you and to encourage me to find my inner cougar.

* * * * *

"That truck you drove Friday night to the Rib 'N Draft. Is that your personal vehicle? Or do you use it for the business?"

The offhand reference to Friday night made Giselle's belly do a little cartwheel, but Con was strictly business today, all refreshed and alert after his gonzo week. It was Sunday afternoon and she sat in the client chair at his polished walnut desk. Con alternately swiveled to face her and keyed numbers into one of the two computers on the matching credenza behind his desk.

She answered in the same businesslike fashion, sitting on his businesslike chair in her businesslike jeans and button-down silk blouse.

"Both. I have a magnetic sign for the front doors when I go out on jobs, but it's also my primary mode of transportation, and if I don't necessarily want anyone to know my whereabouts..." She shrugged. "You know, like if I spend time at the mall, I don't need any clients wondering why a Stonehedge truck is in the parking lot all day and why I'm not managing my employees properly."

Con nodded absently and continued perusing her tax returns.

In between answering questions, Giselle let her gaze roam around Con's office. When she'd been there before—right after his D-Day—she hadn't seen much beyond the reception room and the coffeepot alcove. A sunny corner room held not only his desk and credenza, but a loveseat and two well-cushioned side chairs for conferences around a substantial coffee table. Another office of like size occupied the far corner of

the second floor. It had been his father's, he'd said as she showed her around. A conference room plus an office with two desks for associates completed the suite.

He'd suggested she gather all pertinent papers from the past two years so he could plug vital statistics into one of his accounting software programs. She'd been happy to have another opinion of her company's health. Not that she didn't trust her own accountant, just an independent audit, so to speak, of the data.

As he browsed through documents from the various files she'd brought in two plastic bins with locking tops, she stood to inspect the photos along one wall. Here was the Con Senior she remembered meeting, his arm draped around a younger Con Junior's shoulders, in front of the building they now occupied. A photo of Con in cap and gown between his father and a tall, thin, very attractive blonde—his mother?

She saw photos of the older man with a former and the current governor of Pennsylvania. Hmm. That was interesting. In neither case did it look like a posed shot of a politician with a voter, but rather two equals engrossed in conversation. And both inscribed with personal notes.

With that kind of legacy behind them, surely Larry had been mistaken in his accusation of malfeasance on the part of Trowbridge & Trowbridge.

"Con?"

"Yeah, babe, just a minute." He punched a few more numbers then hit Enter. "I'm trying some alternative calculations that might make it worth filing an amended return. When I see the numbers, I'll do some more thinking and get back to you."

When the computer started whirring, he turned his attention to her where she stood at his wall of photos.

"Your father seems to know a lot of high-ranking politicians."

"He did a lot of pro bono work, like with the Small Business Administration, helping set up companies and consulting with start-ups, so he got some citations and recognition. He showed me by example to give back to the community. Hence the Senior Center volunteering."

How to say this delicately? “Um, Larry told me that your company had some legal difficulties a few years ago?”

Con huffed out a breath. “Difficulties. You might say that. It was more like being railroaded.”

“What do you mean?”

“Someone got their knickers in a bunch and decided to go after Dad. Slapped him with several nuisance suits that dragged our name through the mud. Two of them were dismissed. The others went to jury trials, and both came back not guilty. Turns out the guy behind all of them felt Dad had stolen a local corporate client from him, but Dad had simply done a better job of wooing them. When Dad retired from T&T last year, they asked me to stay on as their consultant, by the way.”

“Oh.”

“I wanted to sue the bastards for defamation of character, but Dad was too much of a gentleman to play cutthroat.” He gave her a lopsided smile. “Thankfully, people remember the good things about T&T and we’ve got all the business we can handle. In fact, I’m thinking of making my associate a junior partner and hiring a couple of new accountants to round out our staff.”

She smiled back at him. “I’m glad.”

“There’s something else I want to check out.” He pawed through both bins until he withdrew a file from each. “Remember when you had that load of mulch delivered Friday and I said I was surprised that you didn’t have more stone and gravel?”

Giselle returned to sit in the client chair. “I do. And?”

“Who’s responsible for approving invoices to be paid?”

“Larry, mostly. He knows everything there is to know about the operation. He’s more than just a foreman to me.”

Con’s head came up sharply at that, but he merely asked, “Who signs the checks?”

Realizing what she'd implied, she backpedaled. "I mean, he's a jack-of-all-trades. As to checks, I'm the only authorized signatory. But Larry does have my password for the software that prints the checks out. Not payroll, that's confidential, but for business expenses. He often leaves folders of them, a check attached to an invoice, for me to sign."

"Who reconciles your bank statements?"

"My administrative assistant. Works part-time, ten to two, which allows her to be home when her kids get home from school."

"Hmm." He set aside the two folders he was holding and selected two more.

"What? What are you looking for?"

"Your accounting software isn't generic, right? It's geared to landscaping?"

"Absolutely. Well, it's called business management software, but it's the same thing. It has applications for time and materials, job cost estimates, the ability to track chemical use and generate reports, that kind of thing. When Larry or the crew chiefs key in what work was done that day, it automatically transfers the charges to the client's account."

"Hmm." He shuffled through more folders, more invoices. "Does it interface with your design software?"

That one went over her head. "What do you mean?"

"In other words, how do you get your reports as to how many cherry trees or how many pots of Vinca or how many bucketloads of mulch are actually used on each job versus what you estimated on the job quotation?"

"Right now we take inventory quarterly, but I'm constantly eyeballing everything to make sure we don't run out of staples. If I create a plan that has, say, a weeping *Cedrus libani*, I've made sure they're available at one of the specialty nurseries before I offer it to the client."

"This might be some software to add in the future," he said carefully.

A helpless little laugh escaped her. "As soon as we start turning a profit again. I'm living on as little as I can, but I do have to draw a minuscule salary. I don't want to take out a second mortgage on the house to finance the business. I just don't know where to cut any more corners and still be a Class-A operation."

She felt a frown settle into place between her brows as her enthusiasm sagged. She loved what she was doing. She did. She just didn't know if she could keep it going at the high level Felix had established.

Then her frown disappeared as Con came up behind her chair and, bending forward, began to nibble at her ear.

"Did you happen to notice that sofa?" he asked between kisses and bites at the vulnerable spot where her neck met her shoulder.

Giselle sighed at the delicious shudders cascading through her at his touch. "Mmm. It's dove gray. Looks like leather."

Sidling around her chair, he pulled her to her feet and wrapped his arms around her. "Right. And it's virgin."

She jolted out of his arms with a surprised bark of laughter. "Virgin? What kind of leather is..."

"It's a small sofa, so it's called a *loveseat*. Emphasis on the love. And it's been waiting for a long time to live up to its name." He turned her around so they both faced forward then steered her behind said loveseat. "See," he said, nudging her until her thighs hit the sofa. "In order to baptize virgin leather, you have to start slowly."

Trapping her with his body, he unbuttoned her blouse with careful deliberation. "It doesn't like to be surprised, so we'll just..." He slid the silky fabric down and off her arms and gently flung it to one armrest. "Cover up its eyes."

Giselle would have giggled at the image, but her brain locked on to the feel of his questing fingers making smaller and smaller circles on her lacy bra, bringing her nipples to rigid attention. When he reached them, he squeezed each hard nubbin between thumb and forefinger, priming her.

"It's okay, Giselle, you can moan," he whispered as she began to move her hips against the erection she felt prodding her ass cheeks. "The loveseat is hard of hearing. In fact, I hope you'll be making lots of noise soon, but it won't hurt the leather at all. You'll just have to stand still, okay?"

The clasp of her bra loosened and she felt the straps slipping off her shoulders. The bra landed on top of the blouse and his hands closed around her freed breasts.

"Lordy, your tits were made in heaven." He lifted them, gently squeezed them in his grip, tucked his chin on her shoulder. "Look at them. I could suck on them all day long."

Then he abandoned them and she felt bereft. "But the loveseat is waiting to be christened."

He slid his hands down to the placket of her jeans, popped the button and pulled down her zipper, then slid the garment over her hips. "Look at those curves. Just made for a man to sink into." He went to his knees behind her and yanked her jeans down to her ankles. Then slowly drew his hands back up along the insides of her thighs, kissing and licking as he rose.

"And a thong. Woman, you really know how to raise a guy's blood pressure. It's like unwrapping the birthday present you've been waiting for all year long." She felt him nuzzle between her ass cheeks, prodding with his tongue as he stroked the sensitive skin all around the minuscule strip of silk.

Without conscious thought, Giselle bent forward, placing her elbows on the sofa for support as she closed her eyes to concentrate on every stroke, every breath Con lavished on her hypersensitive nerve endings. Every atom of her being was attuned to him, to his fingers, his mouth and teeth, as he raised the level of his sensuous attack. Soon she was squirming for more. "Con, please."

He nipped a mouthful of skin just to the point of pain that drenched her pussy with moisture. "I think we have to dispense with this very sexy wrapper so I can get to the cake...and then the icing."

With that he slipped the thong down to her ankles. In her sensuous haze, Giselle couldn't help but wonder what it would look like to someone walking into the office just then—a naked woman bent forward over the sofa, breasts swaying freely, unruly hair flowing all around her face, with a fully clothed, younger man behind her, ripping open a foil packet, and then—

One smooth, hard thrust and she felt Con seat himself to his balls. Somehow it was more decadent to her, being naked while he was dressed. As though she was someone else and Giselle was watching them. Then she realized she was making frantic little noises in the back of her throat, the decibels escalating as the speed of his thrusts increased.

She tried to spread her legs to allow him more access, but with her jeans around her ankles she succeeded only in losing her balance. Her knees buckled. "Oh, damn," she groaned. "I feel like a mummy."

"I've got you," he gasped, staggering, yet with a firm grip on her waist. "You feel so good, I don't want to pull out."

He didn't. She managed to regain her equilibrium, and good thing, because Con continued to thrust hard and fast and all she could do was hang on and enjoy the ride until she exploded in a shower of sizzling fireworks. And still he pumped, each furious thrust making her breasts bounce and jiggle, making her juices flow more freely, bringing her higher and higher once more.

This time when she came, all noise and growling and scratching at the leather she was slung over, he joined her in a hoarse shout before collapsing on top of her.

A long moment later, when she still hadn't caught her breath, she felt his softened cock slip out. "Don't go anywhere," he rasped. "I'll be right back."

Soon she felt a warm cloth being stroked between her nearly closed thighs. She managed a weak laugh. "If you'd have taken my jeans all the way off earlier, you might be able to get all the dribbles now."

"Don't sweat it. There'll be more dribbles before we're done." His voice sounded muffled. She chanced a look over her shoulder and saw him bent over trying to unlock the secret to removing her zippered boot then gently lifting her foot to remove it and her leg from one jeans leg.

"Eureka! Now you can come around here, my lady fair, and..."

He pulled her around to the front of the sofa, her one ankle dragging the puddle of her jeans and thong, and nudged her down so she plopped into a soft seat cushion.

"And christen it properly."

"Con! Won't it stain?"

He sat very, very close beside her and drew her into an embrace, one arm draped over her shoulder to stroke her still-hard nipple. "Whether it does or not, every time I look at this *loveseat*, I'll remember this. Remember us."

Now that her sexual haze had passed its peak, she was reminded again of the public nature of her surroundings, of her nakedness and his clothed state. Of the fact that anyone could walk in on them. "Con, don't you think you should —"

He jumped to his feet like a jack-in-the-box. "You're right. It's way overdue." With that he shucked his clothes in record time and sat down beside her, more naked than she was, down to his bare toes.

"Here's what I think I should do." He leaned back into the cushions, drawing her atop him. "I think I should let you take the lead this time."

Sprawled over him, Giselle let out a nervous laugh. "Con, you just — we just —"

"That's okay, I don't have any appointments this afternoon, do you? We can just lie here until something pops up."

She lifted herself onto her elbows to look into his lake-blue eyes. The emotion in them damn near floored her. It was more than lust. In those eyes she saw tenderness, eagerness, a hint of vulnerability...and something more. Something she didn't want to put a name to for fear it would dissipate like smoke.

It made her wonder if maybe this was more than a fling. On both their parts. If what they shared could ripen...and last.

"If you keep looking at me like that," he said, the huskiness in his voice like breath on sandpaper, "I won't be responsible for my actions."

"Looking at you like what?" Downplaying the vulnerability she felt at her thoughts, she injected a playful note into her voice.

"Like you want to eat me up. Like you want to fold me up and put me in your private hiding place for safekeeping." He lifted his head, captured her mouth in a tender kiss. "Like you want to play with what just popped up between us."

Giselle blinked. His erection was already hardening between their bodies. "Con! What are you, a super stud?"

"Nuh-uh. It's you making me this way." He kissed the tip of her nose. "Can you reach over to that end table? I put something in there that would come in mighty handy right now."

Oh yeah, a condom. With great delicacy she slithered forward over his torso, letting her breasts glide across his face as she reached up and tugged open the drawer. Then chuckled. "Con, a half-dozen?"

"What can I say? The local pharmacy had a sale. Besides, we'll go through them in no time, if I have anything to say about it."

Unbelievably turned-on by the thought of using them all, she wiggled back to sit astride his thighs. "Let me do this."

Ripping open the first packet, she positioned the condom at his tip then slowly rolled it down his warm, hot length. Her fingers continued downward to cup his balls. His low moan gratified her, encouraging her to tease him more, squeezing and molding them in her palms.

Soon his hips lifted, thrusting his cock upward.

"Come here and sit on this, why don't you?"

He wrapped his hands around her waist and tried to position her over his cock. "I want your imprint on this leather. I want your scent embedded in it. Embedded in me, on me, around me. I want you. All of you. In every way."

"Oh, Con," she sighed, allowing him to lift and place her. "Let me ride you."

And she did, bucking and rocking, hungrily taking and taking. Her breasts bounced and swayed, her hipbones ground against his, her thighs squeezed him. She had the fleeting impression that he tried to stay still to allow her free rein, but soon he joined her, meeting her thrust for thrust, moan for moan, heat for exquisite heat. She threw her head back and reveled in the sensation of flying, floating, soaring to the sun and distant galaxies, and him free-falling with her. She gave him everything she had and he gave her the same, emptied himself into her until she collapsed atop him, breath coming in short pants and brain aware of nothing except his sweat-slicked body molded to hers, his heart beating frantically against her ear.

Finally an electronic beep penetrated the edges of her consciousness. "Con?"

"Damn." He threw one arm down on the pile of his clothes and groped around until he grasped his wristwatch. "My alarm."

He lifted it and squinted. "Damn! Time flies when you're having fun. I'm sorry, Giselle, but I promised Dad some face time this evening."

She scrambled off him, hopping on one foot when she realized her jeans and thong still clung to one ankle. She pulled the garments up then rummaged in the pile for her bra and blouse.

"We have this ritual. The first time the Phillies play the Mets every season, we watch it with pizza and beer. I can't let him down. My mom was a rabid Mets fan, betting against our beloved Phillies, and this is one of the ways we remember her." Fixing his own clothes, he added, "I'm just glad it didn't come until after the fifteenth."

Now totally put back together, Giselle came up to him, stroked his cheek with a fingertip. "I understand. That's very sweet."

When they were both dressed, he carried the file bins out to her truck and she opened the passenger seat for him to stow them.

“There. I’ll see you soon, okay? I just have to lock the front door and I’ll be on my way to Dad’s. I’ll call you tomorrow when I figure out the best software for you.”

“Thanks, Con. For...everything.” She touched him on his biceps, unwilling to embarrass him with a public display of affection until they talked about what had happened between them, or at least her perception of it. For any casual passerby who knew him, it would look as if she’d been thanking him for his professional accounting services.

He walked up the steps to the front porch while she went around to the driver’s side and unlocked the door. As she was sliding into the seat, she saw a young, lithe blonde in tight jogging shorts and skimpy top scoot up the steps behind him.

“Con,” the model-thin woman said, embracing him from behind. “I saw the lights on in your office and drove around the block to find a parking space. I’ve been waiting for you to call me, sweetie. It’s been too long since we got together. Wanna have some fun sometime soon?”

Giselle saw Con swing his arm behind him to give the young beauty a half hug while his other hand was still on the key. *OMG*, Giselle thought. She had to get away before she burst into tears. She’d just had an epiphany about him and an obvious lover from the past—or maybe the present—was inveigling him into a liaison. Oh lord, the jogger was much closer to his age, more his style. They looked so good together, both tall and athletic, her fair skin and blonde hair the epitome of California surfer-girl looks.

Dammit, she would not jump to conclusions. She wouldn’t run scenarios in her head about the two of them rubbing together, sweating and screaming. She would be adult about it and wait for him to provide an explanation.

But she didn’t sleep well that night.

Chapter Six

Con was in a terrific mood. One of his strengths as an accountant was to cogitate on a problem until he found an answer. While the Phillies were losing last night, his subconscious mind had worked overtime and he woke up this morning knowing just what Giselle needed to remedy the deficiency in her accounting procedures. He hoped she wouldn't mind that he'd taken the initiative to push her into something new.

He pulled into the driveway of Stonehedge Landscapes at six in the evening, happy to see all the trucks in their bays and the laborers stowing tools and equipment. Hopefully Giselle would soon be free to talk to him.

When he didn't see her in the staging area, he walked down to the office. Giselle sat at her desk computer and the burly guy, the foreman, was at the one set on a smaller desk against the wall. Her face brightened when she saw him, then she seemed to rein herself in.

"What do you want?" the foreman growled, swiveling in his chair to glare at him.

"I have some business to discuss with the president of Stonehedge Landscapes. I'll wait." He gave her a warm smile. "Good afternoon, ma'am. You're looking especially lovely today."

The foreman snorted. "Beware of salesmen carrying attaché cases and speaking with forked tongues."

"Larry! Con is a friend."

Larry stood then looked down at Con from his couple inches advantage. "Yeah, I guess he's a con man, all right."

Not intimidated, Con glared back at him. "Is he your guard dog, Giselle?"

"That's enough, you two." She rose from her desk chair and came to stand between them. "Please, Larry. Settle down. What kind of business, Mr. Trowbridge?"

"Remember I asked you about interfacing your business management software with your design software?"

"Oh. Yes, I remember."

He could have sworn her face registered disappointment before her professional façade was back. What had she been expecting, that he'd ask her to marry him with that grizzly bear in the room?

"If you'll permit me..." Con swung his attaché case to an empty corner of her desk and opened it. "I downloaded that connecting software we discussed on a one-week trial. I also browsed through the online version of the software programs you told me you used, so I've familiarized myself with them. If you have a half hour or so to spare, I can show you how it works, and if you agree, I have all the bells and whistles to connect my laptop to your computer and start it running."

"What kind of snake oil is he selling, 'Zelle? Does he think he can just waltz in here and run your business?"

Con straightened his spine, squared his shoulders and puffed out his chest. He'd never be as strong as this galoot, but he could stand his ground, dammit. "Mrs. Sheridan requested my professional assistance as a CPA and I am providing it. I'm sorry, I wasn't aware that you had the final say in how she runs her business."

Giselle turned to the foreman. "Larry, please. If you can't be civil, I'll have to ask you to call it a day and finish inputting your specs tomorrow. We're all hot and tired and cranky. Why don't you log out and go home?"

"How much is it going to cost, I want to know? Fancy software can run thousands of dollars."

"Larry." She sounded exasperated. "This is just a trial. Once I see how it works, I'll decide whether I need it and whether I can afford it."

The grizzled man gave Con a long stare then turned back to the satellite computer and logged off. "I'll be home tonight if you need me, 'Zelle."

"Thanks, Larry." She watched him stalk out the door then turned to Con with a sigh. "I'm sorry. I know he's just being protective of me. But I appreciate your taking the time to check out the software. What do you need to know about my computer?"

Con desperately wanted to take her into his arms and kiss her until she was wet as a river, but he sensed her unease about that little scene. So he'd be businesslike until he tested the waters, so to speak.

He smiled at that double entendre and touched the space bar. Her computer came to life and he got to work. Sitting down at her desk, he checked out what programs were loaded then browsed for several moments. "Okay. I think this will work. Give me a few minutes to set everything up. I brought all the connector cables and accessories I could possibly think of."

When the data began flowing between his laptop and her computer, Con watched carefully for a while then rolled back the chair and stood. "We need to give it some time to do its thing. Meanwhile," he stepped close to her, "are all your workers gone? You don't have to go outside to stow anything or lock up anything or water anything?"

For some reason she looked like a doe in the forest just before being frightened into leaping away.

"No, I'm fine. I'm all ears. Tell me about this software."

"Giselle." He wanted to stroke her cheek but held back. "You look nervous. Are you worried that I'll put out a contract on your foreman for being so belligerent?"

She didn't smile as he'd hoped, and couldn't quite meet his eyes, but locked her gaze on a point just beyond his shoulder. "No, not that."

"But you're worried about something."

She rubbed her hands down the thighs of her jeans as though wiping sweat from her palms. "I guess after yesterday, I just expected..."

"Yesterday." His word came out like a sigh. "Yesterday was the most beautiful day of my life. And I can't wait another minute to begin a repeat performance."

He swept her into his arms and kissed her thoroughly, with mouth and tongue, teeth knocking against hers, one hand fisting her ponytail to hold her head just so, the other hand pressing her glorious hips into his raging hard-on.

"I can't tell you how hard it was to concentrate on software," he said against her lips, "when all I could think of was how you taste, how you feel. God, Giselle, I don't know how I was able to control myself until that bodyguard of yours left."

She pushed against his chest until she could look into his eyes. "Truly?"

"Honey, how can you doubt it? I've never experienced such fireworks in my life. We were made for each other."

"Oh." She sagged against him, her head buried in his chest.

"What's the matter, sweetheart? Should I have gone caveman in front of your foreman and fucked you against the wall?"

She let out a small snicker then said in a tiny voice, "That woman who ran up to you yesterday as I was leaving your office. She hugged you and all but asked you for a date. She's tall and slender, and she's your age. I thought maybe you had...dessert with her."

Con had to shake his head. "You thought I was—that Samantha was— Wait a minute. My age? I thought we settled that. I don't care how old or young you are. You're exactly what I want. Period."

"Well, consider it from my vantage point. I saw this gorgeous young woman hugging you like you were *intimately* acquainted and you didn't object—"

Con threw back his head and laughed, then hoisted her up in a bear hug and spun her around the room. "Of course we're intimately acquainted. You were jealous of my baby sister!"

"Put me down, you—you caveman! I wasn't jealous, I just wondered..."

He finally set her on her feet. "Tell me the truth, Giselle Sheridan. Were you really, really not jealous? Not even the tiniest bit?"

Instead of answering, she said in a prim voice, "Your sister? I didn't see any photos of her in your office."

"I'll make her remedy that situation post-haste." He hooted and spun her around again. "You were jealous! Giselle Sheridan loves me enough to be jealous of another woman hugging me. Yee-hah!"

He felt her go rigid in his arms. Uh-oh, his enthusiasm overstepped his common sense. It was much too early in their relationship to get into that. Although he felt they had a damn good chance to make it last.

Slowly he released her to slide down the front of him. The hard, rigid front of him that wanted in. Now. "Giselle," he breathed, his mouth a hairsbreadth from hers. "Do you want me half as much as I want you?"

"Oh Con, yes! Can we –"

He didn't let another word get past her mouth, for he was devouring her, sucking her tongue then thrusting his own inside that hot, moist cavern, lifting her against him, grabbing hold of those wonderful ass cheeks of hers. Pivoting on his heel, he carried her flush against him, forcing himself to break the kiss to navigate through the kitchen. "Where do you want to go? Upstairs? Right here? Tell me now or I won't be responsible for –"

"Con, stop!"

He checked his forward motion but refused to relinquish his hold on her lush body.

"The office door needs to be locked," she gasped.

"Oh. Right."

He did a one-eighty back to the office and when he reached said door, she twisted her upper body to flick the latch then flung her arms around his shoulders. His knees all but buckled when she sank her teeth into the curve where shoulder met neck.

They got halfway across the kitchen. "Now," she said. "Right here."

"Yes."

Then they both ripped off their clothes. Con, with high hopes as to this particular outcome, had dressed in easy-to-discard polo, trousers and sockless loafers. Giselle cursed as the laces on one of her workboots knotted. Naked and with cock rampant, Con knelt to tackle the stubborn knot.

"Knife. First drawer to the left of the sink. Cut the damn thing! Hurry, Con!"

He found one that did the job. Finally he stripped off every piece of her work clothes and managed to remember a condom and, hoisting her onto the nearest counter, slid his cock into her with a fierce growl.

"Oh lord, thank you for this little bit of heaven on earth," he breathed.

Looking deeply into her eyes, he said, "Giselle, I want you with every fiber of my being. Don't ever think you're too old or that I'll look at some young thing who doesn't know what she wants out of life. I want *you*!" He punctuated the last word with another brutal thrust of his cock. "Only you."

She wrapped her legs around his waist and gripped the edge of the counter. She had to, he thought, or the force of his thrusts would send her right into the wall. God, he loved this woman. "I love your intelligence, the way you took over the business, your courage, your backbone." With every trait he listed, he slammed into her again to punctuate his words. "I love your tits, your curves, your wild hair. I love the way you feel when you're squeezing me from the inside out. I love your arms and legs wrapped around me."

Damn, but he had to bite his tongue to keep from admitting the last bit of information he wanted to blurt out. But he knew in his heart and his mind that he loved her, that she was the only woman for him, and he'd wait as long as it took for her to realize it.

Then she did that squeezing thing with her inner muscles and he could feel the storm roar through him, his balls tighten up against his cock, his head feeling it could explode like his cock was getting ready to —

He let out a feral yell and emptied everything he had into her welcoming cunt, his heart, his soul, his life force, and only prayed that she would accept them.

* * * * *

A long time later, after half a dozen orgasms and a scant supper of a wedge of cheese and a couple of apples, they collapsed in each other's arms in Giselle's bed. She was happily exhausted and thought she could sleep for hours. Cuddling close to him, her rear against his front, she felt Con's breathing even out. Shifting a bit, she crooked her neck to look at him. The night-light in the hallway dimly illuminated his dear face. He looked even younger in repose, especially with the freckles, but for the first time she considered their age difference an asset. His stamina boggled her mind, and she was gratified for the years of physical labor that allowed her to keep up with his almost insatiable appetite. For her.

Smiling like the storied Cheshire cat, she felt her limbs grow heavy as she sank into sleep. She didn't know how long she slept before she half woke when she felt the mattress dip.

"Con?" she mumbled.

Naked, he leaned into her, nuzzling her sleep-warm shoulder. "We left both computers running. I'll just run down and check them out. Don't go away. I'll be back in a few."

"What time is it?"

"Time for you to catch up on your sleep, my princess. I plan to wear you out again soon."

Feeling thoroughly loved, she burrowed more deeply into her pillow and fell asleep to dreams of Con and her walking through her nursery area hand in hand, enjoying the

pungent smell of fresh bark mulch on the heeled-in trees and shrubs, listening to birds chirping and crickets singing.

All too soon her alarm clock jolted her awake. "Damn, I wish today was a holiday!" But she knew her guys would be here in an hour and she needed to be dressed and alert. And have Con be the same.

She turned under the sheets to nudge him awake. The side where he'd slept was cool. Had he never returned to bed?

Maybe he already left, as he had before, conscious of her reputation with her staff. Whichever, she jumped into the shower and dressed quickly in jeans and tee. Smelling coffee, she smiled to think he'd repaid the favor and made a pot of morning coffee for her. Perhaps she'd find a love note alongside the pot.

In stockinged feet, she skipped down the stairs, following her nose to the coffee. No note, but when she'd poured herself a cup, she heard a noise through the open door that connected kitchen and office.

"Con? What are you —"

Her mouth dropped open when she took in the scene. Printouts were scattered across her desk, file drawers were open and Con sat at the satellite desk in snug navy boxer briefs, pencil in hand. She wanted to admire his masculine form, but her gaze was snagged by the number of paid invoices arrayed around an old-fashioned columnar bookkeeping pad half filled with penciled-in numbers.

"What on earth are you doing?"

Without moving his gaze from the document in front of him, he reached out a hand. "Hi, honey. Come here. That software found something very interesting."

"Conlan Trowbridge, have you been here since you said you were turning off the computers? What time was that?"

"Hmm? Oh, around three, I think. This one thing alone will more than pay for the software. Look at this."

She smiled at his boyish enthusiasm. It was obvious he loved dealing with numbers, just as she loved working with growing things. "What did you find?"

"Let me just run the numbers." He reached for a handheld calculator he must have brought and began to key in data. After a while he whistled.

"What? What did you find?"

He reached for his coffee cup and grunted. "Empty. Would you mind getting me a refill, hon?"

She wanted to strangle him. Con was even more dramatic than Aunt Esme. She strode to the kitchen, refreshed both their mugs and returned.

"Ah. Thanks. That's the second pot, you know." He sipped appreciatively then got down to business. *Finally!*

"Okay. I'll give it to you straight. Remember when you left me your business tax return? And when that truck dumped your mulch, I commented that I thought you'd have more inventory of stone and gravel based on your list of expenses?"

She nodded, trying to follow his words instead of the muscular lines of his naked back and shoulders, where she spied a few more freckles.

"Well, here's where this software comes in. What it does, it takes all the bills you paid in various categories of expenditures from your business management data. Then, from the design data, it takes the total volume of supplies you based your estimates on. Follow me so far?"

She nodded again, silently encouraging him to continue.

"So this software uses that data from the two programs and calculates whether things roughly equal out over a period of time. Let's take that mulch you ordered. Four hundred cubic yards. Over the past year, that's approximately how much you expected to use. So far, so good."

"But? I sense a big 'but' coming."

“Right. I came up with a total expenditure for the past two years for a company called Skyway Gravel and Paving.”

“Yes, I remember approving invoices for them. Larry found them a couple of years ago when our last supplier went out of business.”

Con sipped absently at his coffee while he shuffled papers around, obviously searching for a particular list. When he added nothing further, she said, “Go on.”

He took a deep breath. “Giselle, I’m not accusing anyone of anything. Maybe I should go back two more years before I say anything further.”

“For God’s sake, Con, spit it out! I’m a business owner. If something’s not right with my business or my accounting procedures, or one of my employees made some serious mistakes, I need to know about it.”

“Okay. The reason I pulled all these invoices out is because I couldn’t believe the data the new software generated for this account. So I verified every single invoice you paid, both the dollar amount and the volume. I couldn’t verify the design amounts, but I assume you keyed in those figures, right? Since only you did the designing?”

She nodded again. She was starting to feel like a bobblehead doll.

“If this new software is correct, and if my handwritten figures are correct, it looks like, since the beginning of 2009, you overpaid Skyway Gravel and Paving close to nineteen thousand dollars.”

“What?” She jerked around, sloshing coffee onto her hand.

Con stood and faced her. “Giselle, when I saw the results, I was at a loss to explain the discrepancy. I thought the software might have had a bug in it. But you said you changed suppliers a couple of years ago.”

“Yes.” Giselle put a hand to her heart. She could almost anticipate what Con would say next.

“Could it be that Larry knows something about it?”

Giselle reached out for her chair and sank into it. “Is that the only discrepancy?”

"Afraid so."

"So it's probably not a software glitch?"

"I doubt it."

She placed her elbows on her desk, lifted her palms and buried her face between them. Blew out a few deep breaths to keep from hyperventilating. Lifted her head to look directly into Con's eyes.

"Why don't you get dressed? The guys will be checking in soon. We'll ask Larry together."

Con came to kneel at her feet. "I'm so sorry, hon. I didn't know it would take such a turn."

"No, it's better that we know."

And maybe Larry's out-of-the-blue declaration of love was deliberately designed to keep her from finding out.

* * * * *

Giselle was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. She couldn't out-and-out accuse Larry of anything. *Nineteen thousand dollars*. If Con was right, her business was making a profit. But dear lord, Larry? Was he ripping her off? How? Why?

Con came into the office and stood behind her as she sat, dumbstruck, staring at the bookkeeping columns he'd penciled in. Vaguely she recognized the smell of her shampoo on him. He leaned over to give her a quick hug, his cheek grazing hers. "Courage," he said, and she realized he'd shaved as well. Even with all her angst, she found a small comfort at his thoughtfulness in offering the illusion that he'd arrived early this morning instead of yesterday evening.

They spent a few moments strategizing then Con stepped back into the kitchen.

As usual, Larry arrived first, and today, again, he arrived early. Apparently having seen Con's truck, he stormed into the room. "Did that son of a bitch spend the night with you?"

Thunder couldn't have sounded louder than her heartbeat did at that moment. Giselle faced him, chin outthrust. "Yes."

Larry looked sucker-punched. Then he rallied. "Is that your way of answering my declaration of love, 'Zelle? I give you my heart on a platter and you put it through the meat grinder for hamburgers?"

"I'm betting your earnest declaration was just a smokescreen," Con said, coming to stand beside Giselle. "Tell us about Skyway Gravel and Paving."

She had to hand it to the older man. He didn't blink an eye at the sudden change in subject, but went on the offensive. Taking a menacing step forward, he clenched his fists. "You bastard! I know all about guys like you, preying on older women who need a man."

Giselle bristled. "Larry, it's not about Con and me. It's not even about you and me. It's about Stonehedge Landscaping and Skyway Gravel and Paving. How did they get to be one of our suppliers?"

The foreman took a reluctant step back. "Why this sudden inquisition, 'Zelle? What kind of poison did this kid infect you with?"

"It was the new software that detected the discrepancy, Larry," she said softly. "There's an unexplained difference of nearly nineteen thousand dollars between what I thought we ordered over the past two years and what Stonehedge Landscaping actually paid them."

Con reached down to a particular sheet containing columns of numbers. "After I saw the printouts, I dug into the files. I'm a forensic accountant, you know. Just like my dad was. You might remember Con Senior, the man who was raked over the coals in public but was vindicated in the courts? He taught me how to search for clues to

embezzlement, to malfeasance. And I found a lot of clues right here in these filing cabinets."

He lifted his chin, straightened his spine, and seemed to Giselle to grow an inch taller. Taking a step toward Larry, whose shoulders slumped, Con asked, "Who besides you and Giselle approve invoices? Who besides you and Giselle can access the accounting software? Who besides you and Giselle signs checks?"

"Larry doesn't sign checks, Con. I'm the only signatory."

Ignoring her, still looking at Larry, he repeated, "Who besides you and Giselle signs checks?"

"Giselle, I was only trying to help you."

"Help her?" Con interrupted. "Help her by embezzling nineteen thousand dollars? What do you think she was living on, air and mulch?"

"Giselle, please, let me explain everything to you without this kid interrupting. Can we talk privately?"

"Con is not a kid. He's fully as adult as I am, and maybe more adult than you. He can stay right here and listen. He's my accountant as of this moment, and he is being paid to advise and represent Stonehedge Landscapes. As soon as we get to the bottom of this, I'll be informing my current accountant of her change in status. And for both her sake and yours, Larry, I hope you have nothing to do with how she worked on my accounts or calculated my taxes."

She rested her hip on the desk and sighed. "I guess my part-time administrative assistant is suspect now as well. She's the one who reconciled all my monthly bank statements."

"I have a handwriting expert I can call on," Con volunteered. "He can tell us whether your signature was forged on any checks, especially checks written to Skyway Gravel and Paving."

At that, Larry collapsed. "Giselle, I didn't mean to hurt you. Please forgive me. Skyway is my cousin's company. He knew how much I love you, how it hurt me that you didn't give me the time of day. It was always business, business, business with you. I thought that if you saw the business wasn't doing well, I could suggest you take me in as a partner because I could offer you lots of cash to stay afloat. Then I could become your hero by negotiating better prices with Skyway and saving you all that money."

"Oh Larry." Giselle swallowed hard. It took three tries to get enough saliva into her throat to be able to speak again. "Did – did you forge my signature?"

He looked so abashed, so forlorn, that Giselle almost – almost – felt sorry for him. "A few times. Most of the invoices were legit. And no, your admin had nothing to do with it. I never knew her before you hired her. She's clean."

Giselle closed her eyes. Even with Larry's endorsement of the admin, she'd better go over the bank statements and scrutinize all the checks.

Con pulled out his cell phone. "I think it's time we get the authorities in here. Embezzlement is a crime punishable by hard time in prison."

"Con, no!"

"Giselle, he's a thief."

She stayed his action by putting her hand on his arm. "Con, wait. The guys are coming in. Let me get them on their way quickly. I don't want them – or anyone else – to know about this problem until we have a handle on it." She looked into Con's eyes. "Promise me."

"You know I'd do anything for you," he said softly. "Even let slime slip through my fingers."

Fighting tears, she nodded once, decisively. "Fine. I'll just give everyone their orders for the day and be back as soon as I can to resolve this."

Grabbing the day's orders, she fled outside and tried to wipe her mind clean of anything but how to advise her crews.

* * * * *

"I do love her, you know."

Con snorted as he eyed the foreman. "You have one shitty way of showing it."

Larry seemed to shrink inside his leathery skin. "I was desperate. He'd been dead several years and she still didn't get it. I'd do anything for her. I *did* do anything and everything she asked. I thought I was making progress with her when she kissed me back the other day."

Con stood up slowly from where he'd been casually resting a hip against Giselle's desk. "You. Kissed. Giselle. Your boss."

"What of it? She enjoyed it, I know she did. Snuggled up to me and put her arms around me. Should have done it a long time ago." He closed his eyes, and Con was hard-pressed not to smack that blissful look right off his face with a fist.

"Then you came along, you with your tight shorts and big smile and hoity-toity way of talking. You talked yourself right into her bed, didn't you?" Larry snorted. "Didn't take very long, did it? And you not much older than her sons. There's a name for guys like you."

Con consciously waited a beat to get his fury under control. "There's a name for guys like you, too, old man. It's 'felon' and that's what you are. Embezzlement and forgery are felonies. You could spend the rest of your life in prison. You'll spend hard time behind bars if I have anything to say about it."

Larry's eyes widened. "She wouldn't press charges. I meant too much to her husband. I gave up my life for him, for them. For Giselle. She wouldn't do that to me. You heard her. She refused to let you call the police."

"Maybe not today. Or even tomorrow. But you heard the lady. I'm her professional advisor and I'm totally inclined to throw the book at you. In fact," he said nonchalantly, "I'll have that handwriting expert in for a consultation just for insurance."

His hard stare lasered into the older man. "You might want to cover your ass and make restitution post-haste. It would go over well with any judge prior to your

sentencing. Shall we say double the amount of the shortfall? You know, similar to the way the IRS assesses penalties?"

Con had the satisfaction of seeing the older man blanch. He turned up the heat. "And I recommend that you tender your resignation immediately along with your keys. Of course, it doesn't really matter. The boss will be calling in a locksmith as soon as you leave."

The foreman's Adam's apple bobbed up and down. "I can't just leave her in the lurch like that. We're in the middle of four jobs."

Con shrugged. "It won't be the first time that someone left a job unfinished. As a business consultant, I see it all the time. She'll manage. Giselle Sheridan is one savvy businesswoman. Savvy enough to see that you can't possibly stay on as an employee."

Pulaski seemed to deflate in front of Con's eyes. Well, it couldn't be helped. Giselle had to be protected from predators, especially those masquerading as friends.

"One of the euphemisms they use in the biz world to explain an employee's departure is 'Leaving to pursue other interests'. That's a useful, all-purpose phrase you might want to consider. It doesn't accuse, it doesn't point fingers."

The door burst open and Giselle rushed in, her gaze bouncing between Con and the foreman as though searching for bruises or blood.

"They're all out on jobs," she said breathlessly. "I didn't say anything to them, only that I was handing out the job orders because Larry was working on stuff to discuss with me."

"We're cool," Con said. "I think Larry has something to say to you."

It seemed to take a long time for the man to find the nerve to look into Giselle's eyes. When he did, he said, "I'm a fool, 'Zelle. I thought I could..."

He choked up and Con was decent enough to say, "I need a cup of coffee" and walk into the kitchen. Although he'd be damned if he'd go out of their hearing, just in case the man got obstreperous.

"I'm so sorry, Giselle." Con heard through the doorway. "I just wanted you to think of me as more than a foreman. To get dependent on me. But obviously I did it the wrong way, the stupid way."

"I'm sorry, too, Larry." Giselle's soft voice held worlds of regret. "But obviously you can't—"

"I know. I-I— Damn, this is hard. I-I hereby resign from Stonehedge Landscapes. To pursue, uh, other interests." Con heard keys jingle then Pulaski said, "Here. This is my office key. And the key to the garage."

There was a long pause. Con decided he'd better remind the man about offering restitution. When he walked back into the office, he saw Pulaski staring out the window and Giselle seated at her desk.

"I'll need your password," she said in a subdued voice, her eyes on the computer screen.

He gave it to her. Then Con cleared his throat and Pulaski spun around.

"And, uh, 'Zelle, I'll get you back every penny, don't you worry. And, uh, I'll even pay a penalty. You just name it and I'll give it to you."

Con watched as Giselle fought to control the emotions swarming across her face. "I accept your resignation. And in recognition of your loyal service to Felix, I'll give you thirty days to repay Stonehedge Landscapes. Nineteen thousand plus interest plus penalty, let's say an even twenty-five thousand. In exchange for not pressing charges." She looked up at him then. "Can you do that?"

His Adam's apple bobbed several times. "Yeah. Yes. I can. I will. Thank you, 'Zelle. I'm sorry. I'm sorrier than I can say."

She sighed. "So am I, Larry. So am I."

* * * * *

"Oh Con, it hurts."

"I know, baby. It's a huge change in your life. Come here. You need a hug."

More eager to accept his consoling arms than she should be, Giselle snuggled against him in the quiet of the kitchen. "I never knew."

For a moment she reveled in being coddled, protected. Loved. Then she pushed away from him. "I have lots of work to do before the crews come home."

"I'll stay if you want me to. I'll also go if you feel you need some alone time. But know this, Giselle, you're going to be going through all the stages of grief again. The anger, the disbelief. Because you're losing another big part of your life."

"I— Why don't you go. I think better when I'm alone, and I'll need to make a list of what needs to be done." She gave him a watery smile. "Maybe you can call me late this afternoon and see how I'm holding up."

He gathered her in his arms again. "I'll do better than that. I'll come by around six, when the crews are closing up shop for the day, and I'll bring dinner. Would you like Chinese? Pizza? Deli?"

"No. I'm not sure I'll be able to eat much. Just—just call me around dusk. I'll have told the guys by then and will probably need a little cheering up."

Con kissed her then, gently, as if she were fragile and valuable. "Whatever you say, hon. Just know that I'm here for you."

Chapter Seven

The workweek passed without mishap. Giselle found herself enjoying the daily visits to the jobs as de facto foreman—forelady?—and found two of her workers had the potential to become foreman before season's end. All her guys had expressed surprise at Larry's "defection", as one of them put it, but she'd gathered from casual remarks that they'd known of Larry's feelings for her and thought his departure was in her best interests. Especially since several of them had met Con and encouraged her to "hook up" with him.

She didn't tell them she already had.

But she'd declared a work-free Saturday, to which they reacted as expected. Some relished a longer weekend, a couple grumbled about missing overtime pay. But she was the boss and, as she'd told them, she needed time to decompress from her new work situation.

And she needed the day to prepare for Con. Because she'd invited him to spend the night. Premeditated, not because he was too exhausted to leave by midnight as with their prior trysts. They'd talked on the phone every evening, but she hadn't been inclined to see him. She had to put her life, her future, into perspective first.

She was stroking blusher on her cheeks when the phone rang. Her heart skipped a beat. *Con*. He was probably calling to say he'd be there in a few minutes.

"Hi," she said, somewhat breathlessly.

"Mom? Are you okay? You sound like you've been running."

"Oh. Andrew. I'm fine. I just—dashed to answer the phone, that's all."

"I mean, are you really okay? I heard about Larry. You know I got to be friends with Darren when I worked on his crew last summer and he called me and told me what happened. What a bummer. How are you handling it?"

"It was somewhat of a learning experience, going out to all the jobs every day, but I'm getting a handle on it. I really love to see the progress the crews make from one day to the next. I have my eye on two of the guys I think could step into the job. Another week or two and I should have my decision."

"Good. Now what you need is a boyfriend."

Giselle was stunned into silence.

"It's been almost four years, Mom, and you've been a nun all that time. You need to go out and have some fun. Get laid."

"Andrew!"

"Hey, Dad and I talked about sex all the time. Ever since —"

"TMI, Andrew," she cut him off primly. *Way* too much information from her older son.

"You're a beautiful woman, Mom. All my friends think so. I've even gotten into a couple of fights because they say things I think are disrespectful."

She let that comment pass. Andrew was twenty-one and a junior at college. Old enough to pick and fight his own battles.

"So, Mom, go out into the dating world. But be cautious, okay? There's lots of STDs and stuff. You know, be prepared."

A deep belly laugh exploded out of Giselle. "Wow! Talk about a turnaround!"

"It sounds good to hear you laugh, Mom. You deserve someone who fusses over you, who makes you happy. Get out there and start looking."

Giselle cleared her throat. "I'm happy to have your blessing, Andrew. It so happens that I'm getting ready for a date with your Great-Aunt Esme's accountant. In fact, he should be ringing the doorbell any minute now."

Andrew groaned. "Oh Mom, he's not old like her, is he?"

"As a matter of fact, he's younger than me. You may just be calling your mother a cougar one of these days."

“Awesome! Way to go!”

She wasn’t sure she wanted him to know just how much younger. At least not yet. But she was encouraged by Andrew’s blessing.

“Gotta go,” she said. “I hear someone coming down the driveway. Thanks for calling, and thanks for encouraging me to go out and kick up my heels. Love you.”

“Love you too, Mom.”

After she hung up, Giselle looked at herself in the mirror. For someone who rarely cared how she looked, she thought she did well—mascara to her lashes, gloss to her lips, perfume to her pulse points. Brand-new see-through bra and matching thong, thigh-high stockings under strappy high heels she’d found at the back of her closet.

She slipped into a two-piece silk dress in a cream shade to highlight her dark hair and eyes, with a flared skirt—for easy access, she’d thought when she bought it this past week—and sleeveless top with a deep vee, buttoned in the front.

She opened the door to his knock and simply stared. Con stood before her in a well-cut suit in a deep brown pinstripe, emphasizing the chestnut and mahogany shades in his slicked-back hair. He held one hand behind his back and his blue eyes looked at her as if she were Venus come to life.

Bringing his hand forward, he offered her a single white calla lily. “I asked the florist for the most beautiful flower in his store, but you put it to shame.”

It had been a long time since she’d felt so feminine, so beautiful. So wanted. Fighting the prickle of tears in the backs of her eyes, she smiled and invited him in. “And you. If I picked up the latest copy of *GQ* in the bookstore, you could be on page three.”

He followed her all the way into the kitchen, where she retrieved a tall, etched-glass vase, filled it with water and ensconced the lily within.

Then she turned to him. “Thank you for making me feel so special.”

“You are special. And you look good enough to eat.”

Her heart skipped a beat. "So..."

"Giselle, I know we have reservations for that fancy restaurant down in Newtown, but what I really want to do is keep you right here where I can look my fill without a waiter intruding every half hour to ask if we're ready to order yet."

"I don't know if I should believe you. You haven't even kissed me hello."

The explosive sparks in his eyes warmed her. "Once I start kissing you, lady, it may be tomorrow before we place our dinner order."

"I'll say it again. So?"

He needed no further encouragement. In seconds he was all over her, his hands sliding around her back, her waist, down to her ass cheeks. Slanting his head just so, he captured her mouth with his, licking, sucking, thrusting his tongue into her hot cavern. She delighted to feel his growing arousal and rubbed against him, her arms tight around his waist for leverage.

"I had my hand on my cock every night thinking of you," he said when at last he gasped a breath. "But it just didn't seem right to polish my wood without you. I'm so horny now I'm surprised I haven't turned into a toad."

She would have laughed at the image, but his mouth captured her breath and his hunger sparked hers. She welcomed the thickness of his tongue, the heat of it, as a precursor to what she knew would come later. "That makes two of us," she murmured. "Except I'm as horny as a rhinoceros."

Around a snicker he said, "Okay, you win that metaphor." Sweeping her up with one arm around her shoulders, the other under her bent knees, he strode to the front hall and up the stairs. "We don't need a waiter. We can feed each other for a few hours. Or a few months. Or for however long you can stand me."

In the tiny corner of her mind that wasn't saturated with thoughts of wild monkey sex, Giselle realized there was some import to his words, but she was so eager to get him naked and inside her, she could think of nothing else. As soon as they entered her

bedroom, they divested themselves of their carefully selected clothing and threw it in haphazard heaps on the floor.

Con backed Giselle to the bed, his cock hard against her belly, and followed her down to bounce on the coverlet. She reveled in the feel of his weight, his heat, on her, around her. Instinctively she lifted her legs to hug his hips with all her strength. He slid home in one long, hard thrust then stilled, looking deeply into her eyes.

"I'm not wearing a condom, Giselle. I want to feel all of you. If that bothers you, tell me now and I'll fix it."

"No!" She tightened her leg muscles to bind him more closely to her. "It's okay, it's the wrong time of the month. And I want all of you too."

As the impact of those words hit her, she repeated, "All of you. As long as you want me."

"Oh God, Giselle, you are my dream come true. I'll want you forever."

And she realized she wanted the same. This younger man had burrowed into her heart and soul and she couldn't imagine life without him.

"That sounds good to me, Con."

Those were the last coherent words they uttered for a long time.

From Giselle: I don't know how I can thank you all enough. Having Con at my side (and in my bed *grin*) has given a new joy to my life, and I'd have never had that gleam in my eye on meeting him, if you hadn't invited me to join your Tempt the Cougar Blog. Cougars rule!

About the Author

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

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

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

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