



SOMETHING WITHIN HIM

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Something Within Him

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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

SOMETHING WITHIN HIM

Elizabeth Coldwell

Dedication

For Monty

Chapter One

I only took him on as a favour to Suzanna. I knew when she called me she must want something. It was the way our phone conversations always went. She would let me know how her two boys, Damon and Charlie, were doing in their respective glittering careers in medicine and law, casually drop into the conversation the size of the advance she had received for her latest novel, then hit me with the request. So I was prepared.

Or I thought I was, until she said, "So you will help Stephen, won't you, darling?"

"Stephen?" Somewhere along the line, I had missed something. I tended to filter out most of what she told me, only tuning in for what I thought were the relevant bits. And apparently Stephen, whoever he was, was one of them.

"Oh, you know. Stephen. Charlie's friend. They went backpacking round the Far East together. I sent you the photos, remember?"

I didn't. I had more than likely deleted them without even looking at them. But I just replied, "Of course. What about him?"

"Well, darling—" Suzanna paused to take a drag on the menthol cigarette that was never far from her lips. "He's doing some kind of journalism course, and he needs to find a work experience placement. And when Charlie told me that, I immediately thought of you."

I said nothing. I knew I was expected to help out, but I had an unbreakable rule: I never offered work placements to anyone. That hadn't always been the case. In my first couple of years editing *City Living*, I'd had a stream of eager interns, doing a couple of weeks here and there with the aim of bulking out their CV. They would help to compile the music and theatre listings, write little news pieces about gallery openings and book launches, or help reorganise the filing system. It was an arrangement that suited both parties. They gained lots of valuable experience and I was able to employ someone who didn't expect payment and, very occasionally, made a decent cup of coffee. One person had changed all that, and while I probably couldn't tell you the name of any of those other interns, his was lodged in my memory banks forever. Jamie Pettifer.

Jamie was a cocky post-graduate from Manchester, studying print journalism on one of the better-regarded courses. I knew Gerry, Jamie's course tutor, from way back – we'd had a hot and heavy affair that had lasted for most of one sweaty London summer – and usually he sent me details of whichever of his students he thought would benefit from a couple of weeks on the magazine. Jamie, however, sent his details himself, and followed them up by arriving in my office on deadline day and not leaving until I'd agreed to take him on. Against my better judgement, I agreed, and when he pushed for an interesting assignment, I sent him off to interview a young actress who'd landed the coveted rôle of Guinevere in a revival of *Camelot* in the West End. I didn't see Jamie again for forty-eight hours. Thirty-seven of those he apparently spent in bed with the girl he was supposed to be interviewing, after plying her with tequila slammers in a bar across the road from the theatre.

I didn't expect that kind of unprofessional behaviour from anyone, work experience trainee or not, and I told him so, indicating in the politest possible terms I could muster that he should piss off out of my office and never come back. His revenge was to make sure I 'accidentally' got a copy of the e-mail he sent to Gerry, claiming the reason I had terminated his placement so abruptly was that I had backed him up against the wall of my office and begged him to fuck me, then got upset when he had turned me down. It came as no surprise to me to discover that with his capacity for bending the truth, he eventually found his way onto the news desk of the biggest-selling Sunday scandal rag. And even though it was effectively cutting off my nose to spite my face, given how useful that extra pair of hands had always been around the office, I stopped offering work placements to make sure I would never have someone like Jamie anywhere near me again.

And now Suzanna wanted me to break my unbreakable rule.

"Well," I began, wondering how to turn her down most diplomatically. "I really don't have any places available at the moment –"

"Oh, you must be able to squeeze him in somewhere, Kate, surely. At least talk to him." Another drag on the cigarette, more forceful this time, as though she were deep in thought. "Tell you what, I'll tell him to pop along and see you on Friday. Just give him ten minutes of your time and then tell me you don't have a place for him."

And just like that, before I even realised quite what had happened, the unbreakable rule had been shattered into a million pieces.

* * * *

Naturally, on Friday morning, I was forty minutes late for work. I had wanted to be there early, so I could get a latte from the coffee shop across the street, go through my e-mails and still have time to rehearse my excuses to Stephen as to why I was sorry, but there was no way I could take him on work experience. Instead, my train was delayed by a points failure just outside London Bridge station. When I finally arrived in the office, flustered and desperate for caffeine, Joss, our receptionist, handed me my mail and told me that Stephen Miller was here to see me.

"Is he the new work experience guy, then?" Joss asked in her broad Johannesburg twang. "I hope so, he's —"

I didn't wait to hear Joss's opinion. I just breezed down the corridor towards my office. There was a young man sitting outside, fidgeting with a tie he clearly wasn't familiar with wearing. As I approached, he stood up and stuck out a hand.

"Kate? Nice to meet you. I'm Stephen."

I stopped in my tracks. Whatever I had been expecting, it wasn't this. Now, I'm no believer in love at first sight. You can't really love someone until you've taken the time to learn all their little foibles, their likes and dislikes, the habits you can learn to live with and those which will, given enough time, drive you quietly insane. Lust is a different matter. Lust has no subtlety, no need for getting to know someone. It just grabs hold of your pussy and gives it a good, hard squeeze. And that's exactly how I felt as I looked at Stephen.

Six foot tall and sturdily built. Dirty-blond hair, blue eyes, the merest hint of stubble on his chin and a smile that hit me right between the legs. How had I managed to completely avoid discovering the existence of this gorgeous young man? As he took my hand in his, I made a mental note never again to delete Suzanna's e-mails without reading them properly.

He was clearly waiting for something, and I had the hideous feeling that I had been gaping at him like an idiot. Finally, I managed to stutter, "I'm so sorry I'm late. I hope you haven't been waiting long."

"No, that's fine," he said, in a voice that bore a faint trace of a West Midlands accent. "I was a bit early anyway, so I went and got a coffee. It's a nice area round here. It seems to have a good buzz."

"Oh, yes, there's always something going on. Now, come into my office and tell me why it is you want to work for *City Living*."

Stephen settled himself in the chair across the desk from mine and handed me a slim black leather portfolio case. I unzipped it and flicked through the contents, which appeared to consist mostly of work he had done as part of his course, along with a couple of cuttings from a student newspaper. "My tutors keep telling me I've got a good writing style, but if I want editors to take me seriously once I've finished the course, then I've got to get some work experience under my belt," he said.

I listened with half an ear as he told me about his ambition to one day make it onto the staff of a national newspaper, and how he was willing to take any assignment, no matter how menial, as long as he came away from his placement with some cuttings he could add to his file. In truth, he could have told me he planned to spend his time on the magazine playing Solitaire and surfing for online pornography, as I had decided the moment we first shook hands that I was going to employ him. My head told me he would be a good choice—a quick skim through his portfolio had shown me he was clearly a talented writer—but I was also thinking with another part of my anatomy. Until now, I'd never seen the attraction of a cute boy toy, preferring the company of men my own age with whom I had rather more in common and could hold a stimulating conversation. However, looking at Stephen's handsome, youthful face and listening to the low, sensual laugh which punctuated his monologue, I was beginning to change my mind. Having him around the office would certainly brighten a dreary weekday morning, but I was doing this as a favour to Suzanna, that was all.

Or at least, that was what I told myself as Stephen and I shook hands at the end of the meeting, having agreed that I would employ him over the three weeks of his Easter vacation. I wouldn't be paying him for his time, but he would get the magazine's standard rate for any of his work that appeared in print.

Joss looked up from the magazine she was reading as I showed Stephen to the door. "You're taking him on, then? Great. I look forward to having a crack at him."

Hands off, girl, he's mine, I thought, and then wondered where the thought had come from. Stephen was cute, but he was half my age. I had never actively discouraged office relationships, aware that they were often a by-product of the tension produced when a group of highly creative and personally ambitious people were working together. However, if Stephen were going to be interested in anyone here, I suspected it would be someone like the young, funky Joss, with her burgundy-streaked dark hair, armful of clattering silver bangles and slim-hipped figure, rather than someone who was old enough to be his mother. Then I told myself to stop thinking about it and go and do some work. I was a professional woman, after all, and I had deadlines to meet. I wouldn't think about my feelings for Stephen until he actually joined the magazine's staff.

* * * *

That turned out to be easier said than done. When I got home that night, I poured myself a glass of mellow, oaky Chardonnay and went into my bedroom, intending to undress and run myself a bath. I never got as far as the bathroom. As I slipped off my suit jacket, I found myself pretending that Stephen sat on the chair by the bed, watching with that lazy grin of his as I stripped for him. I let my skirt fall to the floor, then pulled my white silk top over my head. That morning, for some reason, I had chosen to wear stockings and suspenders instead of the tights I usually favoured for their practicality, and in my mind's eye I pictured Stephen gazing at the creamy flesh above my lace stocking tops and liking what he saw. Lost in my fantasy, I took my time removing my bra, breaking off from what I was doing to take another sip of my wine, then turning my back on the chair as though I were a little coy about revealing my breasts to a new lover. Finally, I sat on the edge of the bed and eased my knickers down and off. Just thinking about having Stephen as an appreciative audience was starting to get me wet, and I struggled to remember the last time any man had affected me quite so powerfully.

Pulling open the drawer in my bedside table, I reached for my vibrator. Over the years, both with former lovers and on my own, I had learned all the little secrets of how my body worked and the type of stimulation that was most likely to make me come. I didn't like oversized phalluses with ridges and realistic veins, or the type of vibrator that was stuffed

with multi-coloured beads and gyrated in two different directions at once. Instead, I had a small, discreetly contoured toy that might have looked more like a coffee table *objet d'art* but was designed to apply the stimulation just where I liked it, on and around my clit. I twisted its base and it buzzed into life. As I played it over each nipple until they peaked, I imagined it was Stephen's hand directing the vibe, rather than my own. I could almost hear his voice in my head, telling me how hot I looked as I lay on the bed, legs spread and juices beginning to glisten on my pussy lips.

Down, down I moved the vibrator, between my breasts and over my stomach, too excited to string out the pleasure as I sometimes did. Thinking about that gorgeous boy was making me greedy with lust, and I let the toy rest on my mound for a moment, feeling its vibrations thrill me deliciously. I stroked it along my cleft, then gave up any pretence of patience and homed in on my clit, applying just enough pressure to have me gasping and squirming against the bedcovers. In my fantasy, Stephen was urging me on in earthy tones, telling me to come for him. I needed no second bidding, and as I arched my back, I felt the first sweet flutterings of orgasm. I rode them out, lifting the vibrator away for a second, then touching it to myself again. It was enough to bring on a second climax, stronger and deeper than the first, sending hot fingers of sensation shooting up into the heart of me. By the time they died away, I was a weak, panting mess on the bed. I couldn't recall the last time I had come so hard, or had a second orgasm so swiftly after the first. Normally, my pleasure had to be carefully teased out, but tonight it was as though part of me had suddenly woken up and was actively demanding to be satisfied. *If only Stephen were really around to oblige*, I thought as I sat up slowly, still a little shaky, and decided I would have that bath after all.

Later, sitting in the living room with my wineglass to hand and my laptop on the coffee table in front of me, I dashed off a quick e-mail to Suzanna to say I had offered Stephen a work placement. I didn't elaborate as I knew I would be receiving a smug, 'told you so' reply whatever I wrote, and I certainly didn't want her to know that I was having filthy fantasies about one of her son's friends. Suzanna and I might go back a long way, but sometimes there were secrets you kept even from your oldest friends. And my sudden, unexpected desire for this young man was definitely one of those secrets.

The following Monday morning, I arrived at the office to find Stephen sitting in reception. I noticed he had ditched the suit and tie he had worn for the interview for a more casual polo shirt and jeans, reflecting the vibe of the office. It was a look that suited him.

Joss had abandoned her usual station behind the front desk and was standing at his side, chatting as they both drank from coffee mugs. I studied their respective body language for a moment. Joss was clearly into him, from the way she was leaning close and brushing her hair back from her face as she spoke to him, but he seemed more cautious—not exactly repelling her advances, but not making any move to welcome them, either. Or at least that was how I chose to interpret it.

“Oh, hi, Kate,” Joss said, finally noticing me. “I didn’t know which desk you’d allocated to Stephen, so I just thought I’d get him a coffee and make him feel at home while you arrived.”

“Yes, well, we’re all one big happy family here, as I’m sure Stephen will find out,” I replied. “And if you’re making coffee, Joss, you couldn’t do one for me, could you? I’m going to put Stephen at the vacant desk on the subs table. I’ll check the phone extension and let you know so you can put calls through to him.”

At that moment, the switchboard lit up and Joss, a little reluctantly I thought, went to answer it. I led Stephen over to the desk I’d earmarked for him and introduced him to Kelly, the magazine’s senior sub-editor. “She’s the one who’ll go through your copy and check it for mistakes, or tidy it up if it needs it,” I told him. “Though judging from what I saw in your portfolio, I don’t think she’ll have much to worry about on that score.”

Leaving him blushing at the compliment, I told him to familiarise himself with his computer. I’d had the IT department assign him the defunct `intern@cityliving` e-mail address, which hadn’t been used since the Jamie Pettifer fiasco, and he would be given some work to be getting on with as soon as Mike, the magazine’s features and reviews editor, arrived. Stephen didn’t look at all fazed as he logged on to the magazine’s main server. *If only I could feel as cool and unruffled in his presence*, I thought as I headed for the relative peace of my office.

* * * *

I intended to check on Stephen's progress at lunchtime, but I was called into a publishing meeting which dragged on and on, and by the time I emerged, the editorial office was deserted. Only Joss sat at her desk, tucking into homemade rice salad from a plastic sandwich box.

"If anyone needs me, I'm just nipping out to the shop," I told her. "Is someone looking after Stephen?"

"Yeah, Mike took him out to get a sandwich." Joss pushed a celebrity gossip magazine she had been reading across the desk to me. "Oh, before you go, Kate, I was reading an article earlier, and I thought there might be something in it for us. It was all about cougars—you know, older women who go out looking for sex with much younger men. Maybe you could do something about the best places to go if you're a cougar in London. After all, a lot of these women are well-off, successful and they look after themselves, so there could be some advertising revenue in it. I'm thinking about gyms, spas, beauty salons..."

"Are you pitching for a job in editorial?" I asked, quietly impressed by her show of initiative. "Seriously, that's a great idea, Joss. I'll give it some thought."

As I took the two flights of stairs down to the lobby, I was mulling over Joss's comments, but not just in terms of how they related to a possible feature. Did I qualify as a cougar? I wondered. After all, her description of these women could be applied to me—I was in my forties, successful, and I was no stranger to the gym or the spa—and there was certainly one much younger man I'd been fantasising about having sex with. But choosing it as a lifestyle seemed a step beyond my own situation. Still, Joss was right. It would make a great piece for the magazine, and I made a mental note to bring it up at the weekly features meeting on Friday afternoon. I didn't realise it, but the subject was destined to resurface before then.

* * * *

That Wednesday was Mike's thirty-eighth birthday, and to mark the occasion, he invited us all to join him for drinks in the Merry Miller. It wasn't the usual pub of choice for after-work socialising, being small, a little dingy and tucked away down an unfashionable side street. Mike, however, liked his real ale, and he claimed the place served the best pint of

mild in the area. Not that I found myself objecting too much, as I grabbed a seat in a cramped corner booth only to have Stephen squeeze in beside me on the dark wooden bench. I glanced up to see Joss looking slightly put out—she had been walking to the pub in a group with Stephen and a couple of the younger members of staff, and had clearly been expecting that he would sit with her—but I didn't think too much about it. I was too busy trying not to react to the sudden pressure of Stephen's firm, denim-clad thigh against my own as he made himself comfortable on the seat.

"So, are you settling in okay?" I asked, ignoring the sparks of sensation that had shot through me on making inadvertent body contact with my young intern. "Is Mike giving you enough to do?"

"Yeah, he's got me helping him with some research for a feature on city farms, and I've been given a couple of books to review, so I should have something to put in my cuttings file when I leave here." Stephen took a sip from his pint of bitter. "Thanks for taking me on, Kate. I was worried you were just doing it as a favour for Charlie's mum. I know she's a really good friend of yours, and I wouldn't want to have got this placement simply because of who I know, rather than because I'm any good."

"Stephen, journalism is full of people who are where they are because of who they know," I told him. "But that's not why you're with us. I may not look it, but I'm actually very demanding. It takes a lot to please me."

For a moment I made eye contact with him, and his expression made it clear there was more than one meaning to be read into my last comment. I took a hasty sip from my wineglass and hoped the flush I was feeling hadn't risen to my face.

"Actually, if you're looking for something to put in your file that will seriously impress your tutors, there's an idea I was going to bring up at the features meeting on Friday and I was going to suggest Mike give it to you." There was a sudden raucous burst of laughter at the bar, and I looked up to see Mike unwrapping a present the boys in the art department had handed to him. It was a strap-on dildo, complete with harness, and Jed, the senior designer, was making some crack about how much Mike would enjoy his wife using it on him. A vision drifted into my mind: Stephen, naked on my bed, arse raised in the air, waiting patiently as I strapped a similar harness around my waist and greased the dildo with plenty

of lubricant, preparing to penetrate him. I quickly shook my head to clear it of the image.

"Sorry, what was I saying?"

"You were talking about something you wanted me to write," Stephen reminded me.

"Oh, yes, that's right. But we didn't come out to a social function just to discuss work," I replied.

"I don't mind, honestly." Stephen's face broadened in the lazy smile I found so appealing, and I found myself launching into my vision of the feature.

"Okay. Well, it's all about cougars. Older women who have relationships with younger men. It'll partly be advertising-based—you know, where these women go to meet men, where they spend money on outfits and beauty products and keeping themselves fit—but I thought you could also speak to some of the men involved. Find out why it is they go for someone older than them."

"Well, I can tell you why I'd do it. I like the fact older women know what they want. They're confident and they have experience. They might also teach me some new things—like what to do with that dildo Mike's still waving around."

I looked over to where Mike and his friends were laughing and fooling about at the bar. "Yes, for what's supposed to be a joke present, he's taking far too much interest in it, isn't he?" I said, glossing over the fact that Stephen's fantasies appeared to run along very similar lines to mine.

"I'd love the chance to write that feature, Kate," Stephen said. "But for a moment, I thought you were going to say you wanted me to actually go out and pull an older woman as part of my research. And that's where I'd have to draw the line." He drained the last of his drink, leaving me to wonder what his moral objection might be. What he said next floored me completely. "Because the only older woman I'd want to pull is you."

He's teasing me, I thought, afraid for a moment that he was just another Jamie Pettifer, prepared to do whatever it took to make a name for himself, even if it meant sleeping with the boss. However, the look on his face was totally sincere. He rose to his feet. "I hate to leave you, but I'm going to have to dash. Some mates and I play five-a-side football every Wednesday, and they've got the pitch booked for half-seven. I'll see you tomorrow, Kate."

Hidden from the rest of our crowd by the side panelling of the booth, he dropped a soft kiss on my lips. Sudden heat flooded through me, and I had to fight the urge to pull him to

me and prolong the kiss. That wouldn't be professional, even though every fibre in my body was screaming at me to hold him tight and not let go. Instead, I watched him push his way through the crowd to the door, slapping Mike on the back in farewell as he passed. I tried not to notice the way his jeans fit so nicely to the taut globes of his backside, and accentuated the solid length of his thighs.

Did Stephen really feel the same way about me as I did about him? How much did he want me? Did he lie in bed at night, hand wrapped round his hard cock, and wank himself to the accompaniment of vivid fantasies in which I took control and fucked him whenever and however I wanted?

Just the thought of it was getting me horny again. I would leave as soon as I had finished my drink, I decided. And if my journey home took me into the late-night supermarket near the tube station, where I could stock up on batteries for my faithful vibrator, that was nobody's business but mine.

Chapter Two

For the next few days, I did my best to keep a low profile when Stephen was around. He had thrown himself enthusiastically into researching the cougar feature, and I would often hear him on the phone as I walked through the office, checking some piece of information or other. I called Mike into my office, ostensibly to find out whether he was satisfied with the quality of Stephen's work. What I really wanted to know, however, was whether Stephen was the type who would flirt with his boss purely to make progress in his career.

"So how's he getting on?" I asked, perching on the edge of my desk so I could see out into the larger office beyond. Stephen was bending over the photocopier, attempting to sort out a paper jam, and I tried not to be distracted by the enticing view of his arse with which his position presented me.

"You want my honest opinion? I wish we were in a position to employ him full time," Mike replied. "He works hard, his copy's clean and well written and his interview technique is excellent. That last idiot we gave a placement to – what was his name, Jamie? I tell you, they couldn't be more different."

"I'm so pleased to hear you say that," I said.

"Why this interrogation, anyway?" Mike asked. "It's not like you to question your own judgement."

"I know," I said, "but after what happened with that idiot Jamie, as you called him, I felt like I was going out on a limb. It's always reassuring to know you've done the right thing."

Mike turned to leave, but paused with his hand on the door handle. "So you've got no objection to me keeping Stephen's details on file, in case there's ever a vacancy for him?"

If it means he spends more time in this office, you can carve them into your desk with your house keys if you want to, I thought. I nodded. "Good staff members are hard to come by. Let's not let this one slip out of our grasp." And as Mike returned to his desk, I went back to the e-mail I had been writing, responding to an invitation for a press trip to Amsterdam.

I couldn't remember the last time I had spent a couple of days out of the office on such a trip. As I had been promoted up the ranks of the magazine to become editor, my rôle had become increasingly desk-bound. Not that I minded this too much: over the years, I had enjoyed my fair share of press launches and lunches and visits to different parts of the country, which were designed to promote some new product or other. Now, whenever I received a press release concerning such an event I would pass it on to Mike, who would either attend himself or nominate one of his team to go in my place.

This particular invitation, however, had caught my eye the moment it had popped up in my inbox. The former actress turned interior designer, Della Vernazza, was opening a boutique hotel in Amsterdam. This was the third in her chain, following successful ventures in London's Holland Park and Manhattan's Upper West Side, and I, along with various other members of the travel and lifestyle press, was being given the opportunity to spend a couple of nights there. A flattering write-up would be expected in return, but I had visited the Vernazza in Holland Park when it had been the venue for a former colleague's wedding reception, and been highly impressed by what I had seen. I was sure its sister hotel would be just as elegant and understated in its approach. Not only that, but Amsterdam was probably my favourite city in the world. The chance to visit the place was one I did not intend to turn down.

Following a quick e-mail conversation with the press officer who handled Della Vernazza's affairs, I managed to book myself and Gina, *City Living's* staff photographer, on the trip. No doubt there would be plenty of official photos available for me to use, but I always preferred to have my own photographer with me for more candid, informal shots. I had it in my mind that Gina would have time to take some more general photos of the city, and was already planning a comprehensive guide to Amsterdam for the magazine's travel section.

The timing of the trip meant I would be away for a couple of days during the last week of Stephen's placement, but I would be back in time for any farewell drinks. Perhaps this time I would be able to give him a proper goodnight kiss. After all, by then I wouldn't be his boss any more. Who knew what might happen when I no longer had to act in a responsible and professional manner whenever he was around?

* * * *

My plans for Amsterdam seemed to have fallen apart when Gina came down with flu the day before we were due to fly out. To make matters worse, she was only one of half-a-dozen members of staff who had succumbed to what appeared to be a particularly nasty strain of the virus. I felt fine, but as I looked round the half-empty office, I began to wonder whether I could justify taking time away when we were so stretched.

I voiced my concerns to Mike, but his response wasn't what I had been expecting. "Go," he said. "It gives you a better chance of avoiding catching the damn thing altogether, and if anyone deserves a break, it's you. You're always the last to leave the office every night, and don't pretend you don't take your work home with you."

"But I don't have another photographer I can call on at such short notice," I told him. "I know it's not essential I have one with me, but Amsterdam's such a fantastic city, and I wanted to enjoy showing someone else all my favourite places there."

"Tell you what, why don't you take Stephen?" Mike suggested. "He's as healthy as an ox, and I'm sure he won't complain if he gets to write a feature out of it."

It was an outrageous idea, but the thought of spending two days alone with Stephen in a foreign city was one that was too tempting to ignore. "Mike, that's a brilliant idea," I said. "I'd been thinking we're overdue an Amsterdam city guide in the travel section, and I'm sure Stephen would love to write it. Let me see if I can get the plane ticket changed and then we'll break the news to him."

Half an hour later, and after considerable sweet-talking of the press officer, I was able to tell Stephen that I'd managed to get him on the trip to Amsterdam. His grin threatened to split his face in two. "Thanks, Kate, that's amazing. God, my mates on the course are going to be so jealous when they hear about this."

"Don't thank me. It was Mike who put your name forward. I don't suppose you're handy with a camera, are you?"

"I'll see what I can do. And don't worry, I won't let you down." He grabbed me, enfolding me in a huge hug. For a long moment, our bodies pressed together. To anyone passing, it would have looked like an innocent embrace, but I was all too aware of Stephen's cock, hard in his jeans and pressing urgently against my stomach. The strength of his

physical reaction surprised me, but it also made me realise this was no manipulative flirtation on his part. He really did want to fuck me. Perhaps in Amsterdam I should do what any self-respecting cougar would in the circumstances, and offer him the chance?

* * * *

Stephen and I met up at City Airport early the following afternoon. We were both travelling light: I was carrying only a small holdall and Stephen had a rather battered-looking rucksack that I suspected had accompanied him on his Far Eastern adventures. There appeared to be about fifteen other writers on the same trip, all waiting with Rachel, Della Vernazza's press officer, having already checked in their bags. A couple of them I recognised, having bumped into them at some function or other over the years, but as I scanned the itinerary Rachel had handed me, I knew that if I chose to, I didn't have to spend too much time in their company.

Like many female press officers I'd dealt with over the years, Rachel was well spoken, immaculately groomed and a little overbearing in her manner. "The trip to the Rijksmuseum tomorrow morning is optional," she said, looking at me over the rims of her glasses as she gave me the spiel I suspected she'd already used on every other journalist in the group, "but I do recommend it, even though it's a little bit chaotic with all the renovation work going on there. You'll be having dinner and breakfast in the hotel dining room, and Della will be taking part in a question and answer session after the meal tonight, but the rest of your time will be your own." She turned to Stephen, giving him the once-over. "And you must be the replacement photographer?"

"Well, I'm a writer first and foremost," Stephen admitted, "but I have brought my camera with me. And I have to say, I'm really looking forward to seeing the hotel. I've been checking it out on the website and it looks amazing."

"How nice of you to say that. I'm sure you'll enjoy your stay there," Rachel replied, before turning away to greet another newcomer to the group.

"I see I don't have to teach you anything about how to schmooze a press officer," I said to Stephen as we made our way up the escalator to airport security. He just winked, a wink that sent a pang of lust darting through me.

The flight itself was swift and relatively uneventful. Because Stephen and I had been among the last to check in, we weren't sitting together, much to my disappointment. Instead, Stephen was alongside a middle-aged, motherly gay writer from one of the Sunday supplements, who was clearly smitten with him from the way he kept patting Stephen's knee to emphasise a point while they talked. I was seated with a Dutch businessman, who politely asked me a couple of questions about why I was visiting Amsterdam and then switched on his laptop to check his e-mails as soon as the signs indicated that it was safe to do so.

After we had cleared passport control and the baggage reclaim area at Schipol, Rachel directed us out to the concourse in front of the airport, where a chartered minibus was waiting for us. A light drizzle was falling, and for anyone who was getting his first glimpse of Holland, as Stephen was, it must have seemed very unexciting. As flat, empty fields gave way to the high-rise developments of the business parks on the outskirts of the city, we could have been almost anywhere in northern Europe. It was only as the minibus drew close to the city centre, and Stephen began to spot the first tall, thin canalside houses, that he began to take an interest in his surroundings.

"It's an amazing city," I told him. "I'll take you through the red light district so you can see the girls in the windows, but we'll go there during the day when it's a bit quieter. It's less sleazy that way."

"Oh, I don't mind a bit of sleaze," Stephen said with a grin, pressing a little closer to me than was strictly necessary as he gazed out of the window at the passing scenery.

"But the nicest thing to do," I continued, "is just find one of the old brown cafés, order a coffee, and then sit and watch the world go by."

"Sounds good to me," he replied, "but then I'm happy to put myself in your experienced hands."

Before I could respond to such a blatant *double entendre*, the minibus pulled up outside our hotel. Stephen helped me out onto the kerb, and we took our first look at the focus of this trip. The Vernazza was on one of the smaller, quieter canals. I knew from reading the press release that it had originally been one of the grand merchants' houses that had been built in the late seventeenth century, at a time when the Dutch had been at the centre of the spice trade with the Far East. The dark brick building had high, white-framed windows, and there were bay trees growing in pots on the low stone staircase that led up to the front door.

We stepped into the warm, welcoming lobby, where we were greeted by a smiling blonde concierge. "Welcome to the Vernazza," she said to each member of the press party in turn as she handed out room keys. "Ah, yes, Ms. Mellanby," she said, as I gave her my name. "I've given you and Miss Kay the White Room. It's one of our loft-style rooms and I know you're going to love it."

"I'm sure I will," I replied. "The only thing is, there was a last-minute change of plan and Gina—Miss Kay—hasn't travelled. I've got a male colleague with me now, and so I wondered if the two of us could have separate rooms." In truth, the thought of being forced to share a bed with Stephen was exciting beyond belief, but there was a certain etiquette to press trips, and I didn't want him thinking I had somehow arranged this in advance.

The concierge looked at me regretfully. "I'm afraid that won't be possible. Unfortunately, as there are only sixteen bedrooms, we're fully booked for this launch event. That's why I had to place two of you in the same room in the first place. But there's a couch in the room that is as comfortable as a bed."

I took the key from her. "I thought that might be the situation, but I had to ask."

"Well, if there's anything else you need, please feel free to call down to the desk at any time. Oh, and one more thing," she said as I turned to join Stephen. "You need to be aware that the stairs here are rather steep."

That was no exaggeration. Though Della Vernazza had hired a team to renovate the building extensively, there was little she could do about the precipitous staircases. Like all the canalside houses in the oldest part of the city, this one had been built at a time when tax was raised on the ground space a property occupied, and so the most efficient thing to do was build up, rather than out. Stephen had no problem with the stairs, bounding up ahead of me to the top floor, eager to see whether the rooms lived up to the gushing description on the press release.

As the receptionist had predicted, I did love the White Room. It had been furnished in Della's signature minimalist style, with pale wooden furniture and soft white drapes at the windows. The floorboards had been sanded smooth and covered with loosely woven rugs, the low couch looked as comfortable as the concierge had assured me, and a tall, slender vase stood by the door, filled with ethereal-looking lilies. There was also a welcome gift basket on

the coffee table, filled with fruit and a selection of pastries, and a bottle of champagne sat chilling in an ice bucket. It was all very impressive.

Stephen dumped his rucksack on the floor and wandered into the bathroom to investigate. "There's no tub," he reported, "but there is a shower, and it looks plenty big enough for two." He gave me a moment to let that piece of information digest, then added, "I don't know much about bath products, but everything here looks pretty expensive. If I were actually paying for this room, I'd certainly think I was getting my money's worth."

I glanced at my watch. "According to the itinerary, dinner's at half-past seven, which gives us about an hour and a half of free time. Why don't we go for a quick walk so you can get a feel of the city, and then we'll still have time to get ready?" What I really wanted to do was drag Stephen into that shower and discover exactly how much fun we could have in there, but I still felt I needed to be sure of his motives before I acted on my impulses.

"Sounds good to me," he said. "Let me just get my camera."

I was surprised to see him fish a professional-looking SLR model from his rucksack, rather than the basic digital camera I had been expecting. "I borrowed it from Mike," he explained. "It just means if I take any naked shots of you, I'm going to have to make sure they're all off the memory card before I give it back."

I grabbed my handbag and followed him out of the room. Outside, the weather had brightened a little, and the streets were busy with people on their way home. Stephen quickly learnt the knack of looking out for cyclists on their elderly, black-framed bikes before he stepped off the pavement, aware that the majority of them stopped for no one. Every now and again he would stop to take photos of something that caught his interest, seemingly anxious to prove that despite all his jokes, he was taking this assignment seriously.

We were walking through the Jordaan, an area of quaint, narrow little streets that were home to any number of shop selling quirky or exclusive products, from designer shoes to chocolates to one shop whose front window was packed with all manner of mismatched bric à brac, including dozens of pairs of spectacles, a china head marked with all the relevant areas for a phrenology reading, and a stuffed owl.

"I can see why you like this place so much," Stephen said as we stared into the window of an art gallery, admiring a collection of paintings of beautifully rendered nudes. He turned me to face him, and kissed me. I relaxed into the kiss for a moment, then pulled away.

“Stephen, before this goes any further, I once employed someone who was prepared to do anything to get on in his career, even if it meant having sex with someone who was in a position of influence. I need to know that you’re interested in me, not what I might be able to do for you.”

His reaction was one of genuine offence. “How can you even think that? Yes, you’ve been really helpful to me, and I’ve learnt so much working with Mike over the past couple of weeks, but I would have been attracted to you no matter how we met. You’re an amazing woman, Kate.” He caught me in an embrace, and I felt the solid bulge in his jeans pressing into me. “See what you do to me? I couldn’t sleep at all last night, thinking about spending time with you here, in a city where no one knows us and we can do whatever we want...”

He might have said more, but at the moment we heard the church bells pealing out from the nearby Westerkerk, signalling the hour, and realised we didn’t have much time to get back to the hotel and change before dinner.

Stephen let me have first use of the bathroom, then went to shave and, as he described it, make himself look presentable, though I thought he looked pretty good as he was. Through the door, I could hear him whistling as I quickly changed into a dress I had bought on impulse months before, then never found a suitable opportunity to wear. It was a backless black number with a high neck and a hem that finished just above the knee, elegant but daring in the way it showed off most of the creamy expanse of my back and made it obvious that I wore no bra beneath it. I piled my hair up on my head, letting a few tendrils fall free to frame my face, and carefully applied dark, smoky eye makeup and a neutral lip gloss.

We had been unable to resist opening the bottle of champagne and pouring ourselves a glass, so we could toast to each other and to Suzanna, for bringing Stephen into my orbit. I stood by the window, staring at the street scene below, as Stephen finished getting ready. A small boat pattered past on the canal, a Dutch flag fluttering at its stern, and people relaxed at tables outside the little bar across the way, coffee cups or glasses of beer in front of them. I began to feel as though I were on holiday, my carefree mood enhanced by the fizzing of the champagne bubbles on my tongue. With a start, I realised just how long it had been since I had taken time off from work, and suddenly I no longer felt guilty about booking myself on this trip. I had been working far too hard for far too long, and it wouldn’t hurt to slow down for a couple of days.

Stephen walked out of the bathroom, fastening his shirt cuffs, and stopped dead in front of me. "Kate, you look fantastic. I hope I'm not going to let you down in comparison." He was wearing a simple pair of dark trousers and a teal-coloured shirt that suited his fair colouring, and that he had left untucked. The outfit was smart, but not too formal, and perfect for the occasion.

"Absolutely not," I told him, reaching for my evening bag and strappy black patent shoes.

"Are you going down barefoot?" he asked, a little surprised.

I laughed. "You try managing those stairs in three-inch heels."

* * * *

The dining room was decorated in the same modern, simple style as the room we were staying in. Low-backed chairs with floor-length white linen covers were arranged round dark wooden tables, and the curtains at the big windows had been left open, giving a view out on to the courtyard beyond, where candles flickered in Japanese lanterns.

Della Vernazza had employed a Michelin-starred chef to create a menu that fused traditional Dutch ingredients with a modern French cooking style, and we had been told we would be sampling what he called his 'tasting menu'. "I hope it's good," Stephen whispered to me as we took our place at the table. "The last thing I had to eat was that cheese roll on the plane."

The food was better than good. It was exquisite. We were served a creamy celeriac soup garnished with truffle shavings, followed by a confit of guinea fowl that came with a spicy cranberry compote. The main course was a fillet of Netherlands blue beef, almost bloody in the middle and so tender, my steak knife sliced through it like butter. And to finish came chocolate tart served with a Seville marmalade sauce and clotted cream ice cream.

"Now I know why people become restaurant critics," Stephen said, scooping up the last few crumbs of pie with his dessert fork.

"Oh, darling, don't talk to me about being a restaurant critic. I did it for years, but I had to give it up. I was turning into an absolute heifer." That was Guy, the gay journalist Stephen had sat next to on the plane. We had been placed with him and Marie, who wrote for the in-

flight magazine of the airline on which we had travelled, and they had proved to be witty and amusing company. Both of them were as impressed with the hotel as Stephen and I had been. It appeared that each of the rooms had a different colour theme and style. Marie was in the Burgundy Room, which had the opulent drapes and soft furnishings of a high-born lady's boudoir, while Guy was in the Japanese-influenced Blue Room.

On learning that it was Stephen's first-ever press trip, Guy had swiftly declared, "Ooh, a virgin. I like that," and kept making cracks about him having to be initiated into the ways of the seasoned freeloader. Stephen played along with the joke, but if Guy thought he was getting anywhere with his advances, he was wrong. It was clear Stephen only had eyes for me, which was just the way I liked it.

The dessert plates were cleared away, and coffee and home-made petits fours were served. This was the cue for Della, who had been dining at one of the other tables, to stand up and introduce herself to everyone. She took the time to move from table to table, shaking hands with each of us and asking for our general impressions of the hotel before commencing on the promised question and answer session. I had never met the woman before, but I recognised her not only from the photographs I had seen of her in the press in recent years, but also from her appearance in a couple of low-budget British comedies in the eighties. It was her disenchantment with the film industry, coupled with her marriage to a minor Italian aristocrat, which had led her to move into the world of interior design.

Her voice had a pleasing low timbre, but I found it difficult to concentrate on what she was saying. While everyone was otherwise engaged, Stephen had taken the opportunity to have a little fun. His hand had settled on my knee a couple of times between courses, but now I was aware of him gradually pushing the hem of my skirt up my legs. His fingers stroked along my stocking-clad thigh, moving in feather-light patterns that sent tingles of sensation through me. I should have stopped him when I felt his hand move above the welt of my stocking, but it felt so good that I didn't. As Della continued to speak, Stephen lightly scratched his fingernail over the crotch of my panties. I couldn't stop myself from making a little whimpering noise, which I disguised by turning it into a cough. Marie looked over at me, as if to check that I was okay, and I hurriedly took a sip of water from my tumbler.

Once Marie's attention was back on our speaker, I whispered, "Stephen, please, not here." He just shot me a mischievous look and went back to what he was doing, teasing me

through my underwear. The skimpy silk quickly grew damp, and my nipples pushed against my dress, letting Stephen know just how turned on I was. Part of me was afraid that he was actually going to make me come, here in a room full of people, while I was still fully dressed, but I couldn't deny the thought thrilled me. I remembered his comment about the fact we could do anything we wanted, and if he wanted to give me a public orgasm, I wasn't going to stop him.

I eased my legs apart, giving him the hint that I wanted him to sneak his fingers into my panties and finger me properly, but he seemed to think it was naughtier to string the pleasure out for as long as possible. Perhaps he wanted to prove he didn't need to touch my naked pussy to give me an orgasm. My breathing was getting faster, and the muscles in my thighs were trembling as Stephen kept playing with me mercilessly. The hot, intense sensations were building, and I knew it wasn't going to be much longer before I came. I only hoped I could do so without making too much noise, as I didn't want it to become obvious to everyone else just what was happening. Fortunately, just at the moment when the waves of ecstasy rolled through me, the other guests broke into a round of applause, signalling the end of Della's speech. Only Stephen, his blue eyes fixed intently on me, saw the way my hand clutched convulsively at the tablecloth while my thighs clamped hard around his wicked fingers.

"And that was just for starters," he murmured, leaning close to my ear.

* * * *

We declined the offer of more coffee and a nightcap in the lounge, suddenly anxious to be alone together. We said our goodnights to Marie and Guy, trying not to make it look too obvious that we intended to go upstairs and fuck each other's brains out.

In the lobby, I slipped off my shoes once more, so I could negotiate the stairs without mishap. "If the staircase weren't quite so narrow, I'd carry you up to the room," Stephen told me. I didn't doubt that he could manage it, and I was loving the way he made me feel so special, as though nothing were too much effort as long as it pleased me.

"I should make you do it anyway," I replied, "after your little performance in the dining room. What would have happened if anyone had realised what you were doing to me?"

"But you looked so beautiful," Stephen said, "trying not to come, but not being able to stop yourself. I'd love to get you off like that in one of your publishing meetings, with you trying to be really professional while my fingers were buried in your cunt under the table."

By this time, we were at the door of our room. The first time I swiped the card key, it didn't open. Then I realised I had inserted it the wrong way round, I was so flustered by Stephen's dirty talk and the way his fingers had insinuated themselves into the sides of my dress so he could cup my breasts and rub my nipples.

"You've got gorgeous tits," he sighed, turning me round and pressing me against the door before I could attempt to open it again. The next thing I knew, he was fumbling with the fastening at the neck of my dress. He swiftly undid it and let it slither off my shoulders, leaving me standing in the corridor naked except for my stockings and panties.

"Stephen, what if anyone sees us?" I exclaimed, a note of panic in my voice. although my pussy was pulsing hotly with the excitement of being stripped bare in public.

"Then they'll just think what a lucky so-and-so I am." He took the card key from my fingers and let us into the room. I scooped up my dress from the floor, and dashed inside before anyone could come up the stairs.

Once inside, Stephen flicked on the lights and turned the dimmer switch down, bathing us both in a flattering golden glow. He pulled me down onto the couch beside him and we kissed, our tongues twining together. I tugged at Stephen's shirt buttons, anxious to get him naked. He joined in, pulling off his shoes and socks and undoing his trousers. By the time I had him down to his underwear, I thought we were about even, and I took my first good look at his body.

He looked practically edible, his skin bearing the faint remnants of a honeyed tan. His muscles were nicely toned, his body tapering down from broad shoulders and a hairless chest to a slim waist and hips. Through the tight-fitting white trunks he wore, I could see the outline of his erection, thick and bending to the left. A little spot of pre cum on the front of the cotton clearly betrayed his excitement. Seeing the lust shining in his eyes, I could tell how much he wanted me. It no longer mattered that I was twice his age, nor that I was a working

woman at the top of my profession and he was a mere student. We were just two horny, near-naked people who were desperate to fuck each other.

It didn't mean I had to relinquish complete control, though. After all, I'd had all the pleasure up till now, and I was anxious to return the favour. As Stephen stood by the couch, I sank to my knees and pressed my lips to his cock through his trunks. Just as he had teased me without actually touching my bare sex, I was going to do the same to him—at least for a little while. Gently, I mouthed him through the cotton, planting little kisses along his length. He groaned, registering the feeling of my wet mouth and the way it made his underwear cling to him, revealing his shaft and balls even more explicitly.

"God, Kate, no one's ever thought to suck me like this before," he said. "It feels so good."

I remembered what he had told me in the pub on Mike's birthday, about how an older woman could use her experience to teach him things he had never tried. That was exactly what I intended to do while we were here, so that even if this were as far as our relationship went, he would have something to take away from our time together and share with someone else. Something that would make him a better and more generous lover.

His fingers tangled in my hair, releasing the clips that had been holding it in place and letting my red-gold curls tumble round my shoulders. I felt utterly wanton as I peeled down the now-soaking trunks, letting his trapped cock spring free.

Obediently, he stepped out of the garment and tossed it to one side. I stayed where I was, looking up at him submissively as I cradled his balls in my hand and ran a finger lightly over his glans. He was almost holding his breath, willing me to take him back in my mouth. I obliged, swallowing just the tip at first so I could let my tongue swirl over the head and the tender little spot just beneath it. He urged me to take him deeper, but unlike some men I had been with, he didn't try to rush things by pulling my head further onto his cock. He seemed to know that if he let me set the pace, his pleasure would be all the sweeter when it came.

I used every little trick I knew to enhance his enjoyment, letting him fall out of my mouth completely so I could suck on each of his tight little balls in turn, while gently wanking him to keep him hard. Then I swallowed as much of him as was comfortable, just for a moment, to give him the sensation of being wrapped in the velvet prison of my throat. I didn't intend to suck him till he orgasmed, being anxious to feel him inside me, but what I

was doing must have been too much for him, because suddenly he cried out and my mouth filled with a flood of his salty come.

"I'm sorry, Kate," he said when he was able to speak again. "I was trying to hold back, but what you were doing was just so good."

"That's okay," I replied. "I'd forgotten quite how excited young men get. At least it means you'll last longer when you get round to fucking me."

I unclipped my stockings from my suspender belt and rolled them down my legs. Then I stepped out of my panties and handed them to him. "Here, keep yourself entertained with these while I go pour us the rest of that champagne."

When I returned, carrying not only the glasses but also a condom I had plucked from the depths of my handbag, I was greeted by one of the horniest sights I had seen in my life. Stephen had my wet panties to his nose and was breathing in my scent as he languidly wanked his cock back to hardness. Watching my gorgeous boy toy play with himself so unashamedly, I couldn't help but set the glasses down and slip a finger between my legs so I could strum my suddenly-needy clit.

"Hey," Stephen exclaimed, realising what I was doing, "save some of that for me. Your pussy's mine now, you know."

That sentence sent a delicious thrill through me, making me think of all kinds of games we could play. Games where I wasn't allowed to come until he gave me permission, or ones where he would ring me, wherever I was, whatever I was doing, and mutter the words, "Don't forget, your pussy's mine." I knew that would have me creaming in orgasm every single time.

"And who said you could take possession of me?" I asked. "Don't forget, the cougar does the hunting. I'm the one in charge here."

"You really think so?" He gave that dirty laugh of his. It was all the invitation I needed to launch myself at him and begin to wrestle. It wasn't a fair fight, as he was so much bigger and stronger than me, but I writhed on his thick thigh as I struggled to pin his hands above his head, sending delightful thrills through my pussy as I did. He humoured me for a while, then simply used his superior muscle power to reverse our positions, grabbing my wrists with one big hand and holding them together.

"Submit," he murmured as his body loomed over mine, his cock standing fully to attention once more. The sight of it made me ache to have it inside me.

"Never," I replied, wriggling in a vain attempt to get free.

"Then I'll make you." He began to tickle my ribs with his free hand, until I was giggling and breathless and begging him to stop.

Eventually, I cried out, "Okay, I submit. Do whatever you want to me."

"Do you mean that?" he asked, pushing my legs up so they were bent at the knee and widely spread so my wet, puffy sex was on display. "Will you let me do anything I want?"

"Anything," I agreed, feeling his fingers stroke over my pussy, now without the barrier of my panties to impede their progress.

"Spank you? Fuck your arse?"

"Anything," I reiterated, responding to the maddeningly light pressure of his touch at the same time as my mind weaved images of all the deliciously kinky acts he was suggesting. So much for my assertion that I was in charge. It seemed what I really wanted at this moment was for my young stud to have mastery over me.

"Very well, then." He picked me up and deposited me on the bed. As he walked over to the table, I admired the firm globes of his arse. There was a pale brown birthmark on the left one that I longed to kiss. I watched as he picked up the condom, unwrapped it and quickly skinned it down over his erection. Securely sheathed, he came to join me, arranging me in the way he wanted me. He turned me on to all fours so my bottom was sticking up in the air, and I wondered whether he had the intention of giving me the spanking he had promised. Instead, I felt his hands smooth over my bum cheeks for a moment, before he got into position behind me.

He ran his cock along the length of my crease, from my anal hole down to my clit and back. I felt the latex-clad head bump at the entrance to my arse for a moment and I gave a little shudder of alarm. He wasn't really going to fuck me there, was he? There was no way I was ready enough to take him, not yet. Then he turned me over so I was lying on my back, looking up at him, and his fingers spread my lips apart. One little push and he was inside me. Another couple, harder this time, and he was buried in me to the root. *God, what a perfect fit*, I thought, and he seemed to echo my thoughts, exclaiming, "Kate, you feel so good, so tight. I feel like I could stay here forever."

We shared a series of long, increasingly passionate kisses, whispering soft endearments to each other. At last, he began to fuck me, slowly at first, then picking up speed. In this position, we could look into each other's eyes, never losing the intimacy of the moment. I was reluctant to read too much into the situation, but I felt we were making a special connection, the sort you only experience a couple of times in a lifetime. The sort you hope will never break.

Coming once already had given him extra stamina. I could hear the bedsprings creaking faintly beneath us, and realised we were probably the first people ever to fuck on this bed, wrapped in Della's specially selected Egyptian cotton sheets and breathing in the scent of those beautiful lilies. My passion intensified by the thought, I crossed my legs round the small of his back, drawing him into me as deeply as I could. My heart was racing, my skin flushed. Sweat glistened on Stephen's pecs, and I could feel the muscles in his buttocks clenching faster as his excitement mounted.

"I'm going to come, Kate," Stephen announced, his voice little more than a gasp. "Going to come for you."

My orgasm hit me at almost exactly the same time, draining me of the ability to do anything but cling on to my young lover and whisper, "Thank you," over and over.

Afterwards, we lay in each other's arms, Stephen pushing my damp curls away from my face. I felt so safe, head cradled in the crook of his shoulder, listening to his heart beating steadily as he held me. The last words he said before he drifted off to sleep were, "I really think I'm starting to fall in love with you."

Me, too, I thought, my own eyelids heavier but my heart suddenly lighter. *Me, too*.

Chapter Three

If we had been ordinary paying guests at the hotel, I would have rung the front desk and asked the concièrege to arrange for our breakfast to be brought up on a tray so we could linger in bed a little longer, feeding each other bites of croissant and fruit salad. However, not only were we expected down for breakfast by half-past eight at the latest, we had agreed to join the trip to the Rijksmuseum, feeling that if Stephen were to write a comprehensive guide to the city on our return to London, it was an important place for him to visit.

Having showered—separately, so as not to be tempted into having sex under the steamy spray—and dressed, we made our way down to the dining room. Guy was already seated at a table, and beckoned us over. He was looking a little fragile as he regarded the bowl of yoghurt and fresh berries in front of him.

“You were probably wise not to join us for that nightcap,” he said. “One glass of twelve-year-old single malt turned into about four, and I don’t think I went upstairs till gone two. And then I woke up on the bed this morning, fully dressed and with my boots still on.” He attempted a chuckle, which had more than an element of a smoker’s wheeze to it. “What am I like?”

I tried not to look too smug. Stephen and I hadn’t a great deal of sleep, either, but we both looked a lot fresher than he felt, glowing with the excitement that comes from being in the first, lustful throes of a new relationship.

Unlike dinner, which had been a leisurely affair, punctuated with laughter and bursts of animated conversation, most people were eating briskly and in silence. It seemed as though Guy wasn’t the only one nursing a serious hangover this morning.

Fortified with eggs, toast and milky coffee, I was looking forward to another day exploring Amsterdam in Stephen’s company. Rachel had asked everyone who was visiting the museum to be in the hotel lobby by nine. Only half the party who had travelled over were assembled there. Guy wasn’t among them, nor were any of the other queasy-looking folk we had seen at breakfast.

It was a twenty-minute walk from the hotel to our destination. Stephen and I walked at the back of the group, holding hands, not really caring whether anyone noticed. Most of the other journalists were too busy listening as Rachel pointed out places of interest along the way to pay any attention to us.

She had pre-arranged our entry to the museum, which meant we walked straight past the queue of tourists that snaked along the front of the imposing building to meet the guide who was going to escort us. Stephen, who had brought Mike's camera with him, fired off a couple of shots of the queue and the museum's exterior, but had been warned in advance that he wouldn't be permitted to take any photos inside.

As Rachel had explained, extensive renovations were underway, which meant it wasn't possible to view the museum's full collection. However, all the best-known works by the great Dutch masters, including Rembrandt's stunning *Night Watch*, were on display. In other circumstances, I might have paid more attention to the guide, a middle-aged woman with bouffant hair whose English, as with so many of the Dutch, was almost flawless. She was taking the time to tell us a little about the life of each artist, and explain how the painting we stood before fitted into the greater body of his work. Unfortunately, much of the symbolism Vermeer in particular had used turned out to have a deeply sexual meaning, which didn't help my cause.

I was finding it hard to concentrate as it was. My thoughts couldn't help flashing back to the night before, remembering the way Stephen had smelt and tasted, the wicked look on his face when he had talked about spanking me, and the way he had gazed into my eyes at the moment his cock had penetrated my depths. Watching his arse as he walked only made me think of the cheeky little birthmark that was hidden beneath his jeans.

"And you see that here on the table there is a lute," the guide was saying. "This makes it clear that what her lover has sent to her is a letter in which he is talking explicitly about sex. You see, the Dutch word for lute is also a slang term for the vagina..."

That did it. I put my arms round Stephen and whispered, "Come on, we have to get out of here."

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"I don't know. It doesn't really matter. Just somewhere we can be alone together."

"Won't Rachel notice that we've gone?"

I looked over to where the press officer was examining a still-life featuring a wine glass, a half-peeled lemon and a bread roll, all so realistically depicted you almost felt you could pluck them off the canvas. "I doubt it. And if she does, she'll probably just assume we're feeling as ill as everyone who didn't bother to come on the tour."

No one as much as glanced in our direction as we slipped away down the stairs and out of the main entrance. I felt like a child bunking out of school early as we crossed the bridge over the Singelgracht canal and started heading up into the old heart of town. I intended to carry out my promise to show Stephen the red light district. As it was the height of tulip season, though, we took a detour via the flower market. The stalls were a riot of blooms in shades as varied as those of the Vernazza's bedrooms, and the intoxicating scent of thousands of flowers filled the air.

"Beautiful, aren't they?" I said as I watched a woman walking away from one of the stalls with an armful of blood-red tulips.

"Nearly as beautiful as you," Stephen replied.

Crossing the street, we noticed the first of the buildings where lingerie-clad women worked in the windows, offering their bodies for sex. Though I had walked through the area before, it still seemed strange to see the matter-of-fact way in which they behaved. Some were pressing themselves up against the window, using a beckoning finger to entice the men who wandered past, while others read books or worked on their knitting to keep themselves busy at a time of day when business was likely to be slow. Here and there, a curtain was pulled tight across one of the windows, indicating that its occupant had a client.

"Does anyone take your fancy?" I asked as a dark-haired Filipino girl in a scarlet basque and stockings caught Stephen's eye and ran her hands slowly over her curvy body.

He shook his head. "She's cute, but I'm quite happy with what I've got, thank you." He pressed his lips to my ear. "Although I'd like to see you in one of those windows, giving men the come-on. You'd look stunning up there in those tiny little panties you were wearing last night."

Before he could take the fantasy any further, I noticed a shop across the street. Styling itself as an 'erotic boutique', it struck me as being a cut above the usual Amsterdam sex shop that offered nothing but hardcore DVDs and cheaply-made sex toys. In London, I would

have hesitated to visit such a boutique, due to the irrational fear that someone I knew would spot me entering, but here there was no one to recognise us.

"Come on," I said. "Let's treat ourselves."

In the shop, incense sent a spicy, exotic aroma into the air, and there were racks of expensive-looking lingerie and stylish vibrators on display, including a range I recognised all too well.

"Oh, I've got one just like that," I blurted out before I could stop myself.

"Really?" Stephen quirked an eyebrow. "I'd love to watch you using that on yourself."

"Maybe you will, if you're a good boy," I told him. But as soon as I walked into the shop, I knew exactly what I intended to buy. I ignored the vibrators, the anal beads, the handcuffs and whips, and went over to a display of harnesses and dildoes. Ever since Mike had received his joke birthday present, I had been wondering what it would be like to wear such a harness, and have a willing man bend over to let me plunder his arse with the dildo. Remembering Stephen's obvious enthusiasm for such a scenario, I reckoned this would be my best opportunity to find out.

"Are you game?" I asked as I caught sight of Stephen watching me hefting one of the dildoes, mentally weighing it up in terms of size.

"If you are," he replied, "though I'd prefer it if you chose something a little smaller than that." Eventually, we settled on a dildo which had the look and feel of a real cock, even if were shorter and thinner than average, and a purple studded leather harness. I also picked up a tube of extra-thick lubricant designed for anal play and some more condoms, for good measure. The Gothic-looking girl behind the counter didn't even raise her pierced eyebrow as I put my purchases down on the counter. She simply packed them all into a pink-and-black paper bag that bore the shop's logo, and told us she hoped we would enjoy using them.

"Anywhere else you want to go?" Stephen asked once we were outside on the pavement.

"Well, I quite fancy getting a coffee, and then I wouldn't mind visiting that chocolate shop we walked past last night."

We had passed a nice-looking brown café a hundred yards or so down the road, and we turned back in that direction. Dawdling along hand in hand, we almost collided with a man hurrying past with his hands buried in the pockets of his dark brown overcoat. I made to

apologise and realised I was looking at a very familiar face, slightly beaky and crowned with a mop of curly black hair. It belonged to Suzanna's son, Charlie.

"What are you doing here?" the three of us exclaimed simultaneously.

"I had to come over to see a client," Charlie explained. "I've just got out of a meeting with him. It's a complicated probate case, I won't bore you with all the details." I knew he was working for a law firm in the City, but as I always tended to tune out when Suzanna was telling me about her boys' latest achievements, I hadn't actually realised that his work might take him abroad. "More importantly, what are the two of you doing here?"

"Surely you knew Stephen was on a work experience placement with me?" I replied. "We're over here on a press trip, visiting the hotel Della Vernazza, which is opening next week. I have to say your mum would love it. It's absolutely..." My voice trailed off as I followed the line of Charlie's gaze, from Stephen's and my still-linked hands to the bag I was holding, to the window of the shop behind us.

"You," was all he said. I waited for him to elaborate, and finally he did. "Stephen told me there was a woman he was completely mad about. I never even dreamt it could be you."

"Do you have a problem with that?" I asked. "And if so," I added, as a couple stepped into the road to avoid the obstruction we were causing on the pavement, "maybe we should go somewhere a bit less public to discuss it."

"Let's go and have that coffee we were talking about," Stephen suggested, already sensing there was a situation building that he might need to defuse.

He led us into the café we had been considering visiting before we bumped into Charlie. All the tables outside were occupied, but inside it was empty, apart from a fat ginger cat dozing on one of the windowsills. A fire was burning in the grate, and a list of the day's specials was chalked on the wall. It was the kind of place in which I would have been happy to waste an hour or so, but I sensed our business with Charlie would be brisk.

We took the table farthest from the door. The waiter sauntered over and Charlie ordered cappuccinos all round without even looking at a menu. Once they were in front of us, a generous sprinkling of chocolate decorating their foamy tops, I asked him again, "So, do you have a problem with me dating Stephen?"

"Yes, I do," he replied, shovelling a couple of spoons of sugar into his cappuccino and stirring it vigorously. "I think it's pathetic. I mean, look at you. You're old enough to be his mother, for God's sake."

I tried to keep the anger I felt out of my voice. "Oh, grow up, Charlie. I'm forty-five. It doesn't exactly make me ready for the retirement home. Why shouldn't I date someone younger than me?"

"There's younger, and then there's..." He struggled for a suitable word. "You're like the mothers of some of the girls I was at university with. The way they act, the way they dress, trying to convince people their daughter is actually their younger sister because they can't admit how old they really are."

I'd been toying with the cinnamon biscuit that had come with my coffee, but Charlie's words made me snap it in half. "If that's what you think I'm trying to do, then you don't know me at all." I couldn't believe he was objecting so strongly to our relationship. I was sure Suzanna, who had been enough of a free spirit when she was younger than her two boys had different fathers, would never have brought him up to be so narrow-minded and prudish.

Stephen had been quiet through all this, listening as I had my say, but now he piped up. "Yeah, Kate's older than me. So what? She's got experience, she's got substance, and that's what makes her so hot. And, mate, I have to tell you the sex is fantastic."

I knew I was blushing, but my attributes weren't usually discussed in such frank terms—at least, not when I was around to hear the conversation. I caught hold of Stephen's hand under the table and gave it a little squeeze, grateful for his support.

"Can't you just be happy for us, Charlie?" Stephen asked.

"I suppose so," he said grudgingly. "After all, it's not like it's going to last, is it?"

His words stung more than I could admit. How dare he sit in judgement when he knew nothing of our situation? And how could he have voiced my most secret fear? "Maybe it won't, but I'm going to make damn sure I enjoy it as much as I can while it does. And to be honest, I really don't need your blessing. As I'm sure you realise, I'm old enough to make my own mistakes."

My voice must have risen a little more than I thought, because I was aware of the waiter staring over at us, probably wondering whether he should ask us to leave. Charlie solved his

dilemma by swallowing the last of his coffee and slapping a ten-Euro note down on the table in payment for all three drinks.

"Billing that to the client, eh?" I asked acidly.

"I'll see you around, mate," he said to Stephen as he rose to leave. "Send me a text when you're free." He didn't even acknowledge me, just strode out into the street.

"Well, that went well, didn't it?" Stephen said.

"I'm sorry, I could have handled it better, but then how was I to know we were going to bump into him here, of all places?"

"I didn't mean you. I meant him." Stephen stood up, shrugging his jacket back on. "I really didn't think he'd get so bent out of shape about us being together."

"I think I know what his real problem is," I said, as we walked to the door. "If I can start sleeping with a younger man, then so can his mother, and that's what he doesn't like the thought of."

"You could be right." We were back out on the pavement, and Stephen glanced up and down the street. "You know we were going to do some more shopping? Well, why don't we forget about that, go back to the hotel and I show you how I really feel about you?"

I couldn't resist. Charlie's angry assertion that I had no long-term future with Stephen had rocked me more than I might have expected, and if my young lover intended to do something that proved otherwise, I was more than happy to let him. Last night, I'd had the thought in the back of my mind that this might just be a fling, but that was before Stephen had told me he was falling in love with me. *Whatever happens, I told myself, just make sure you have the best time you can.*

* * * *

The same blonde concière as the night before was working on the front desk as we entered the hotel. I was sure she recognised the logo on my carrier bag and knew exactly where we had been shopping, but all she said was, "Are you enjoying your stay here?"

"We're having a great time, thank you." Stephen slipped his camera out of his bag. "Would you mind if I took a photo of you for the magazine?"

The concière smiled. "Of course not." She posed behind the desk as Stephen snapped away. Satisfied with the results, he thanked her and we started to climb the stairs.

"She still knows we're coming up here to have sex," I said.

"I don't care what she knows," Stephen replied. "And anyway, I thought we were just coming up here to have one of those nice Danish pastries out of the fruit basket and discuss what you want me to cover in this guide to Amsterdam I'm writing."

I was laughing as I practically pushed him through the door of the White Room. "You said you were going to show me how you felt about me," I said, adopting a suddenly dominant tone. "So show me. Strip for me."

I kicked off my boots and made myself comfortable on the couch as Stephen did as I had ordered. Last night, I had let him take control, but now, with the strap-on dildo in my possession, it was time to reverse the rôles.

Slowly, but without turning it into a performance, Stephen removed his clothes, piling jeans, jumper, teeshirt, trainers and socks underneath the coffee table. He hesitated for a moment before pulling down his navy blue boxer shorts. "And those," I told him. "I want you to take it all off."

The boxers came down, setting free a cock that was already almost erect. For a moment, I enjoyed the rush of power that came from having Stephen standing before me naked, while I was still fully dressed. "Now, get yourself properly hard," I ordered.

An embarrassed flush came to Stephen's cheeks. For all his outward confidence, he was still a little self-conscious at being made to wank for me, and I found it an unexpected turn-on. Suddenly, my jeans seemed to be slightly too small for me, the seam pressing directly against my clit as my pussy swelled with heat and lust. I wriggled in my seat, enjoying the friction of the rough fabric against my sex as Stephen took hold of his shaft and began to run his fist up and down his length. Every time he reached the head, he gave a little twist of his fingers, and I made a mental note to do the same next time I wanked him.

It wasn't long before his cock was sticking up in front of him, and I knew that despite his initial reluctance, I could have easily made him carry on until he shot his cum. But I had other plans in mind. I already knew about the pleasure he could give me with his fingers and his cock. Now, I wanted to see what he could do with his mouth.

Brusquely, I commanded him to stop what he was doing, then get down on his knees in front of me. "You don't get your orgasm yet. Not till I've had mine."

He seemed to know what I required of him without being told. Quickly dealing with the fastenings of my black cords, he pulled them and my panties down to my ankles. Once he had removed them entirely, I sprawled back on the couch. Stephen lifted my legs over his shoulders, bringing his face close to my pussy. He ran a finger tenderly over my soft, wet flesh and then he got down to the serious business of worshipping me with his mouth. Under my guidance, he quickly began to learn just where to lick and how much pressure to apply. He didn't take my suggestions as any criticism of his technique, as he seemed to appreciate that what might have worked for other girls he had been with didn't necessarily work for me. I looked down at the top of his fair head, running my fingers affectionately through his hair and thanking fate for bringing this talented boy to me. Nothing was guaranteed to make me come faster than a diligently applied tongue, and as he alternated between slow sweeps along my cleft and fast flicks that centred on my clit, I surrendered to the unstoppable force of my orgasm. My thighs clasped tight around Stephen's ears, and only the thought that there might be a maid cleaning the neighbouring room, or a fellow journalist sleeping off the effects of the night before, stopped me from screaming my pleasure out loud.

When I released him from my grip, he rocked back on his heels. As he smiled up into my eyes, the lower part of his face was visibly glazed with my honey.

I leant down and gave him a kiss of gratitude, tasting myself on his lips.

"And now it's your turn," I said. "I'm going to the bathroom. When I come back, I want to find you on the bed with that gorgeous arse of yours up in the air. Do you understand?"

He nodded, though I could have sworn I saw him give a little shiver of apprehension at the thought of what was coming next. I picked up the bag of sex toys and took it into the bathroom with me, leaving Stephen to prepare himself.

Studying my reflection in the mirror, I decided I was no longer the woman who had boarded the plane to Amsterdam. She would have dreamed about seducing a boy half her age and acting out all manner of outrageous fantasies with him, but they would have remained dreams, kept at bay by conventional ideas of how a woman my age was supposed

to behave. Here, in this magical city with its endless erotic possibilities, I could live them out, and not even Charlie's angry, spiteful outburst could seriously dent the happiness I felt.

Fishing the strap-on harness out of the bag, I slipped the dildo into place and buckled it securely round my waist. I stripped off my top, but left my bra on, deciding I liked the slutty combination of black lace above my waist and a hard phallus below. I wanked the dildo experimentally a couple of times, almost as if I expected to feel an answering sensation between my legs. *So this is what it's like to have a cock*, I thought. I blew myself a little kiss in the mirror, then picked up the tube of lube and went out to where Stephen was waiting for me.

Just as I'd requested, he was on the bed on all fours. He turned his head at my approach, and his eyes widened at the sight of me sporting the strap-on. I was walking with a bit of a swagger, thoroughly enjoying my new rôle.

"Good boy," was all I said as I climbed onto the bed with him. His backside looked so peachy, pointing up at me, and his birthmark was inviting me to kiss it, which is just what I did. I spent a long time kissing and licking every inch of both cheeks, worshipping him just as avidly as he had done me. Eventually, my tongue snaked down the crack between his cheeks, pausing to lap at his musky arsehole. He shuddered at the intrusion, but the groan that escaped his lips told me he didn't find what I was doing in the least unpleasant.

After a while, I knelt up and reached for the lube. Squeezing a generous dollop on to my fingers, I began to play with Stephen's arse again. Before I even thought about going near him with the dildo, I wanted to make sure he was nicely loosened up. Soon, I had one finger in him up to the second knuckle. Once he was comfortable with that, I eased in a second. He grunted a little as his virgin hole began to stretch, but we had plenty of time and I was prepared to take things slowly.

From time to time, I broke off from what I was doing so that we could share a long, lingering kiss or two. The hunger with which Stephen returned my kisses told me just how horny he was, as did the strength of his erection. At last, I reckoned he was ready, and I let him watch me as I coated the dildo with plenty of lube. "Just think about where this is going," I crooned. "And how good it's going to feel as it slides up inside you for the first time."

I positioned myself behind him, and let the head of the dildo press against the entrance to his arse, now slick and loose from all the time I'd spent fingering it. "Are you sure you're okay with this?" I asked softly, giving him the option to call a halt if he wanted to.

He nodded vigorously. "There's no one I trust to do this more than you, Kate."

That was all the affirmation I needed. Slowly, I pushed the first inch of the dildo inside him, letting him get used to the feel of it. It wasn't really any thicker than my two fingers together had been, and he made no objection as I penetrated him a little more deeply. I knew that here again I had an advantage over girls of Stephen's age. I couldn't believe there would be many who would have the confidence or the authority to take control in a situation like this, or to be aware enough of their partner's needs to make sure he was comfortable with what was being done to him.

I had positioned us both so that we could look over and see our reflection in the free-standing mirror at the side of the bed. As I slid into Stephen up to the limit of the dildo, completely taking his anal virginity, I was able to watch the changing expressions on his face. There was a brief moment of discomfort, then pride as he realised he had taken the whole thing.

"Look," I encouraged him. "Don't we look fantastic?" He turned his head to see what I meant. Everything that should have been wrong about the picture—the fact I was so much smaller than him, and I was in the position of taking, rather than being taken—was what made it so magnificently right. By allowing himself to be opened and filled with the toy, he had made himself vulnerable, and I was so proud of him for letting me see that side of him.

"There's just one thing that would make it better," he told me. "Take your tits out of the cups of the bra." Obviously wondering whether he had overstepped the boundary of his rôle by telling me what to do, he added, "Please?"

I laughed, and complied with his request. He was right. It did add something to the overall effect. But that was the last instruction he was going to give me for the time being. As I began to ease the dildo in and out of his arse, I was the one in charge. At first, I moved slowly, but as we both grew more comfortable, I increased the pace insistently. Soon, Stephen was grunting and gasping as his pleasure mounted, while I was surprised to feel the blunt end of the dildo, cradled in the harness, bumping against my mound with enough force to send slivers of excitement through me. This was sex like I had never experienced, and I was

loving every minute of it. I was able to set the speed and rhythm of our fucking, in a way I had never quite been able to manage before, even when I was on top. I was so intensely aware of the way Stephen was responding to being shafted, his body shuddering beneath mine and his comments about how good it felt becoming increasingly incoherent as he got closer and closer to coming. And most of all, I was loving the way he trusted me enough to let me do this to him.

“Have to come,” Stephen muttered. “Need to come, Kate.”

“You don’t need my permission, love,” I told him. “You just need this...” And I reached underneath him and grabbed his cock, giving it a couple of good, firm strokes that had his spunk shooting out all over the bedclothes.

We were still for a moment, and then I slipped the dildo out of his arse. Clutching each other as though we intended never to let go, we shared a sensuous embrace. I held Stephen’s head to my breast, stroking his hair as we declared our love for each other.

“If only Charlie could see us now,” Stephen said, eventually. “He’d be so fucking jealous.”

“This isn’t about Charlie anymore,” I said. “This is just about us. And it’s going to be about us for a long, long time...”

As Stephen and I snuggled close, I had absolutely no doubt that I was speaking the truth.

Epilogue

Back in London, it was so hard to spend the last couple of days of Stephen's internship pretending nothing had happened on the press trip. As far as everyone was concerned, we'd had separate rooms and spent a perfectly innocent couple of days seeing the sights. The copy he turned in for his city guide feature certainly gave the impression we'd toured the Rijksmuseum and the well-known tourist spots far more extensively than we actually had.

After work on his final day, a number of us went to the Merry Miller, the pub where we'd celebrated Mike's birthday, and I sat at the same corner booth and tried to keep the smile off my face as Joss made an unsuccessful attempt to invite Stephen out on a date. She came away from the conversation with the knowledge that he was already spoken for, but she had no idea who the woman was. I decided I would let her know – eventually.

Gradually, things between us became more serious, and when the lease on the bedsit Stephen was renting came to an end, I took the decision that he should move in with me. By now, he was writing for *City Living* on a freelance basis, as well as placing articles with a couple of other magazines. I was sure it wouldn't be too long before his ambition of getting a job on one of the national papers was realised.

As for the sex, that just got better and better. The fantasies we acted out grew more imaginative as we learnt more about each other's needs and desires, but the strap-on still played a regular part in our games. We were best friends, we loved each other with a strength and a passion neither of us had really believed possible, and the age difference had completely ceased to matter, if it ever really had done.

And then, one evening as I was relaxing alone with one of my favourite weepy movies and a glass of wine, Stephen having arranged to play football with the boys, I had a phone call from Suzanna. She seemed unusually agitated, puffing away furiously on her cigarette, and I had to ask her to slow down before I made sense of what she was saying.

"Darling, I need your advice," she said. "You're the only person I could think of who could tell me what I should do. It's Charlie."

“What’s he done?” I asked, switching off the DVD as I sensed I could be in for a long conversation. “Had an accident? Got himself arrested? Packed in his job and joined a commune?”

“No, nothing quite as bad as that, thank God. He’s started seeing this woman he works with.”

“Well, you know I don’t have a problem with workplace relationships. How could I?” I was enjoying Suzanna’s discomfiture rather more than I should, but her next words almost made me laugh out loud. I would have to share them with Stephen as we lay curled together in bed that night, knowing they were the best endorsement of our relationship Charlie could ever have given us.

“Darling, you’re not going to believe it. She’s even older than I am...”

About the Author

Elizabeth Coldwell is the author of numerous short stories and two full-length novels, 'Calendar Girl' and 'Playing The Field'. Her stories have appeared in the best-selling 'Best Women's Erotica' series and Black Lace's popular 'Wicked Words' collections. Formerly the editor of the UK edition of Forum magazine, she now contributes a spicy monthly column, 'The Cougar Chronicles', to its pages. When she is not busy writing, she is an avid supporter of Rotherham United Football Club and can be regularly found on the terraces at weekends, cheering her boys to victory (hopefully!).

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