

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Snow Play
**BARBARA
ELSBORG**

ELLORA'S CAVE *Quickies*®

Snow Play

Barbara Elsborg

Single on a couples' getaway? Not the way to spend a vacation skiing the Alps.

Allie, the odd woman out, leaves the couples behind as she takes a tour under a glacier and ends up trapped in the dark. Cold and alone, she resigns herself to a night of misery. But when Zach finds unclaimed skis after the mountain has closed, he follows his instincts and charges to the rescue, bringing more than a helping hand.

He brings enough heat to melt the polar icecaps and change her life forever.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Snow Play

ISBN 9781419928635

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Snow Play Copyright © 2010 Barbara Elsborg

Edited by Mary Moran

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication June 2010

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

SNOW PLAY

Barbara Elsborg

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Burger King: Burger King Corporation

Star Trek: CBS Studios, Inc.

Chapter One

Fresh snowfall, bright blue sky, crisp mountain air, a view to die for and Zach's heart ached as if he stood under gray clouds in pouring rain.

"If you don't start smiling at the customers, I'll dock your pay," Jurgen said at his ear.

Zach tipped the bottle of beer to his mouth, finished the contents and burped. "You pay me for working here? I hadn't noticed."

Jurgen raised his eyebrows. "I can't afford to pay you *and* keep you supplied with alcohol."

Zach winced and slotted the empty bottle in a crate.

"There are other perks if you can be bothered," Jurgen said, and added in a whisper, "Eyes left."

Zach turned to face two female skiers and plastered a smile on his face.

"*Zwei gluhwein, bitte,*" said the tallest one.

He filled two mugs with hot mulled wine and put them on the ice counter. "*Bitteschoen. Acht Euro.*"

"American?" the other woman asked as she handed over the notes.

Zach nodded. Three words and they knew he wasn't a native. Or had they recognized him? A knotted ball of worry churned his stomach. He'd assumed dark glasses were enough of a disguise, and then mentally kicked himself for the vanity of thinking anyone here would know who he was. If they *did* recognize him, it wouldn't be for the right reason.

"What's an American doing working at the top of an Austrian glacier?" the taller woman asked in perfect English.

Trying to lick my wounds in private.

"I'm a friend of the guy who owns this place."

"I'm Helga. This is Melanie. Want to meet us later at the Ice Bar in town?"

"I should warn you I'm an axe murderer," Zach said, hoping he didn't need to translate.

"You're a wanker," Jurgen said behind him.

The women walked away from the bar laughing.

Jurgen sighed. "You could have had both of them. You still could. Two and I can't even get one."

"If you remember, it was a woman who got me into this mess in the first place." The ache in Zach's leg started up on cue.

"Yeah, and you should have fed her to the sharks, not kept quiet."

"It wouldn't have made any difference," Zach said.

"Still doesn't mean you have to give up women, just give up doing stupid things with them."

And where would be the fun in that?

"You'll heal and people will forget," Jurgen said.

Zach wasn't sure he could retrieve his wrecked reputation.

Jurgen slapped his back. "There's always next year."

"Shall I see if Kurt needs any help?" Zach asked through clenched teeth.

His friend held up his hands. "Fine. You don't want to talk about it. Go help Kurt but don't overdo it. You're supposed to be recuperating."

Zach came out from behind the bar and made his way through the maze of skis and poles over to the ice hotel. Jurgen had quite an operation. An outdoor snow bar, indoor ice bar and a few yards away, a small hotel with four igloo-style rooms, the first guests expected in a couple of days. Almost everything was made of ice. The idea of sleeping there held no attraction whatsoever for Zach.

He opened the wooden door of the hotel entrance and found Kurt chipping at a sculpture of interlocking snowflakes set into a wall.

"Anything I can do?" Zach asked.

Kurt didn't lift his head. "Clear out that pile of snow. Polish the edges of the bar. Increase the height of the doorway by three inches. Sort out the lighting in the dining igloo. Repair the box spring base in bedroom three. Check the delivery of furs—"

"Okay, okay. I get it."

Zach was happier not having to deal with people, not having to speak except that it gave him too much time to think. He should be in Switzerland, competing for his country as a downhill skier, and instead he was in disgrace with the team manager, the team and his sponsors. Particularly his sponsors. They'd paid him a fortune to promote their skis, their helmet, their boots at the race and he wasn't there. And it was his own stupid fault.

* * * * *

"Come on, Allie. Hurry up!" Jen shouted.

Allie pushed herself up from her sprawled position on the slope and brushed the snow from her jacket. The third time she'd fallen but the first time both skis had popped off. The bindings needed adjusting. She stamped her feet into her skis and slipped her wrists through the straps on her poles. Jen didn't wait. None of the group had. They careered down the slope, whooping and hollering. Allie wasn't a bad skier, but when she constantly fought to keep up with the others, her technique went to hell and her butt hit the slope.

By the time she reached the chairlift at the bottom of the run, all but Jen and Mike had gone back up. That was the other problem, she never got a chance to have a rest. Allie could see the annoyance on Mike's face. She was slowing them down and spoiling his fun.

"I've had enough," Allie told them. "I'm going on that last glacier tour. I'll see you back at the resort."

"We're going for pizza tonight," Jen said.

"See you at breakfast then." Allie wondered if she was the only person in the world who didn't like pizza.

Mike poled his way to the lift and Jen followed. Allie hung back and went up on her own.

The second day of her holiday and Allie already wished she was home in London. Nine months ago, when the seven of them had booked, they'd all been single. Now they were three pairs and Allie. She'd thought they'd sit together to eat breakfast in the hotel, but they'd been given four tables spread around the room, so Allie sat on her own. She'd sat on her own on the coach coming to the resort, on her own on the ski bus to the glacier and on her own last night to watch TV in her room. Although her friends had originally agreed to share the single room supplement, in the end because they were pairs and she wasn't, Allie had paid it.

She skied off the chair and skated over to the mound of snow that had been carved into a bar and a hotel. Allie took off her skis and hid them at the back. They'd been warned by the hire shop about theft, and although Allie had bought a ski lock, Jen had pocketed it when they'd unlocked their skis in the hotel basement that morning.

Allie made her way to the little hut from where the glacier tour started and found it bustling with people in blue helmets.

"Can I join in?" she asked.

"Ja," said a bearded guy.

"Okay to do the tour in ski boots?" Allie pointed to her feet.

"Ja," he said. "*Kein Problem.*"

Allie paid and took the helmet offered. It wouldn't fasten over her hat but it was too cold to take that off, so she left the helmet's chin strap flapping. She'd hoped the guide

would use some English but she was out of luck. Allie's German was almost nonexistent. The bearded guide seemed too interested in a long-legged woman in pink to bother translating for Allie. She tagged along at the back of the group, dismayed to see everyone else wore hiking boots.

The zigzag slope to the entrance was so steep Allie had to sidestep through the choppy snow. At the top of the second turn she lost her footing, slid past the hikers, past the man guiding them and ended up hip deep in snow. Miss Pink might be laughing but Allie's heart had settled at the bottom of her stomach. She'd been inches from sliding over the edge of a very long drop.

Allie crouched to follow the others into the gap at the base of a high snowbank but still banged her helmet on the entrance roof. She gasped when she stood upright inside the ice cave. Inches above her head stretched a glittering mass of beautiful frosted crystals. The walls on either side were glassy sheets of smooth, solid ice, the passageway she stood in no more than a couple of shoulder-widths wide and ahead it narrowed. It was lethally slippery underfoot and she clung with both hands to a rope that had been attached along one wall. When Allie saw the person ahead of her descend a ladder, she groaned. Clumpy ski boots made everything difficult.

By the time Allie reached the bottom, there was no one ahead of her. Stomach churning, she hurried past the illuminated icicles and rippling waves of clear ice to shuffle through the narrow channel. Allie ran her gloved hands along the ice walls to keep upright. No hand rail. No people. Where had they all gone?

One awkward step and her feet went out from under her. Her helmet flipped off as she started to slide and there was nothing to stop her descent. Well, nothing except a line of tourists whom she expected to crash into at any second. But all Allie could see were ice walls closing in. Then she hit her head and everything went black.

* * * * *

"I'm going to ski down to the bottom gondola," Zach told Jurgen.

"Want me to wait and give you a lift back to town?" Jurgen asked as he locked the door on the ice bar.

"I'll be halfway home before you reach the parking lot," Zach said.

"Try to stay in one piece. See you tomorrow?"

"Unless I find something better to do."

At the rear of the bar, beyond where he'd planted his skis, Zach saw another pair stuck upright in the snow. The stickers on the tips told him they were hired. That was weird. Last gondola of the day was on its way down. The chairlifts and t-bars had stopped. The only people who should be left were lift attendants and a couple of ski patrollers who'd make the last descent to ensure the mountain was clear.

Fuck, had Jurgen locked someone in? Zach walked up to each door on the bar and the hotel and bellowed, "Anyone there? *Jedermann innen hier?*"

No response.

He thought about kicking his way in, but that seemed a bit extreme for a situation that could have a simple explanation. Zach took another look around, checking for footprints leading one way in a strange direction, but found nothing unusual. By the time he came back to the front of the ice hotel the top of the mountain was still and silent.

Zach trudged over to the gondola station and found it closed up. He wasn't sure why he was so convinced something was wrong, but he was. No one would leave skis at the top of a mountain. If someone had been injured, the ski patrol would have taken the skis down. So, was someone still up here? If so, where?

The little hut from where they ran the glacier tours was locked. Zach banged on the door, but it was too small for anyone to have been mistakenly locked in. He glanced toward the slope that led to the ice cave. Unlikely as it seemed that anyone could have been left in there, he knew he wouldn't sleep tonight unless he checked. Zach had done the tour last year, and despite the impressive ice formations, he hadn't felt comfortable

being inside a small cave that changed shape every day. He preferred wide-open spaces.

He didn't try to walk down the steep slope to the entrance but yanked his jacket under his butt and slithered down. The planks of wood that served as a door were wedged in place, so he propped them to one side and reached in to find a light switch.

"Anyone in here? *Jedermann innen hier?*" Zach yelled, and listened, not expecting a response.

"Me," came a faint female voice.

"Oh fuck." Zach tucked his sunglasses into his pocket and clomped along the narrow passage. "Are you okay? Keep talking."

He descended the ladder and kept hold of it when he reached the bottom.

"Where are you, me?" he called.

"Here. I'm trapped."

Zach winced. Trapped didn't sound good. He was pretty sure he remembered going left at the bottom of this first ladder but the voice was coming from the opposite direction. With no rope to hang on to, Zach edged his way along the slick ice. As the tunnel grew smaller, he dropped to his knees and crawled. Zach found a helmet and a few yards later the head it belonged to. Thankfully still attached to a body. Big eyes stared up at him, a trickle of dried blood streaking the side of a pale face.

"Me, I presume," he said.

"Can I cry now?"

He swallowed his laugh. "Not until we're out."

"You're not a figment of my imagination, are you?" she whispered. "It has sort of run riot since I banged my head. When I opened my eyes and it was dark, I wondered if the ice had swallowed me and I was lost forever. That tour guide had a shifty look. I figured I'd been left as a sacrifice to the god of the mountain."

"God of the mountain? That would be me then, but the ice isn't having you." Zach sat down and wedged his feet and knees against the walls of the tunnel. He flinched from the pain in his knee and gritted his teeth. Then he reached with one hand and braced the other on the roof. "Ready?"

He yanked, and to his relief felt her move. She slithered out of the hole, tugging at his ski pants and then his jacket, climbing up his body until she lay panting on his chest. Her mouth curved in a smile, her face lit up and Zach's cock swelled. Ten out of ten for inappropriate timing.

"Now what?" she asked.

"Well, we can't stand. Maybe we should try to crawl until we get on level ground."

"If we tip onto our sides, it might be easier and we could stop each other slipping back."

Inch by inch they squeezed themselves up the passageway until it widened and flattened.

"Can I cry now?" she asked.

Zach laughed. "I'm amazed you didn't freak out, stuck down here on your own in the dark."

Her mouth twitched. "I did. It was very ugly. I'm glad you missed it. I whizzed through denial, anger, bargaining and depression and realized I just had to wait. It's probably less cold in here than outside. I have a bar of chocolate in my pocket, so no need to chew off my arm. Though thirst might have been a problem. All this ice but one lick and I'd have superglued my tongue."

Zach stood and helped her to her feet. She was tall. He was six four and she was only half a foot shorter. "No boyfriend, girlfriend, husband to raise the alarm when you didn't turn up at your hotel?"

"No. But yes if you're a mad axe murderer."

What were the chances of that? Zach grinned.

She chewed her lip. "I came skiing with a bunch of friends, but I doubt they'll miss me."

Their loss, his gain. "Well, now you belong to the god of the mountain."

She laughed.

Could thinking bad things get you sent to hell? Zach sighed. He'd done enough to get sent there anyway. The couple more little lies he'd soon need to tell wouldn't make any difference. He tugged her toward the ladder.

"How did you know I was under the glacier anyway?" she asked. "Did you hear me singing *Climb Every Mountain*?"

He sniggered. "I found your skis at the back of the ice hotel. I just had this feeling."

"Well, I love you forever for listening to your inner voice. Though not if you really are deranged. Particularly not if you have an axe hidden somewhere."

Zach had a smile on his face as he followed her up the ladder and along the last stretch of the tunnel. Not often a woman made him laugh. Not often anyone made him laugh. He switched off the lights and stepped out into the open. Once he'd wedged the planks over the entrance, he turned to find her staring at him. She had the most gorgeous brown eyes, like pools of liquid chocolate. *Damn, I'm getting sappy.*

"I don't know how to thank you," she said.

Zach could think of a way. So could his cock. He forced different words from his mouth. "Share your candy bar?"

"I'm not *that* grateful."

He laughed.

Chapter Two

They climbed side by side up the steep bank of snow, and after a few yards, Allie struggled to catch her breath. She'd set off fast in an attempt to impress, but thin air, heavy boots, deep snow and an impossible gradient swiftly turned her gulps into ragged gasps.

"Need...to stop...for a minute," she panted, and bent over, hands on thighs, puffing clouds into the air.

"Okay." He pulled off his hat and ran his fingers through short, dark hair.

Allie forgot she needed to drag air into her lungs. She couldn't tear her gaze away from her rescuer's face. Mussed hair, perfect lips, sharp cheekbones and the longest eyelashes she'd ever seen framing brilliant green eyes. He really was a god.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Allie."

"I'm Zach."

Opposite ends of the alphabet—she hoped that wasn't a bad sign. "Are you on holiday?"

"I'm working for a friend. He owns the ice bar and hotel up here."

"Wow, quite a workplace." Allie stood upright, her breathing easier. "My office is in a basement of a Victorian house in Greenwich, London. One small window. I'm lucky if I see the sun."

She started up the slope again.

"What do you do?" he asked.

"Help run a project to develop urban community gardens."

"Like your job?"

"Horrible hours, I'm always dirty, I get shouted at all the time, the pay is terrible. I love it."

He smiled.

Allie slugged up the slope, inch by inch. "God, this is steep... Can't think now...why I got up at five three times a week...to go to the gym. Waste of time."

"Nearly there."

He didn't seem to have any problem with the steep slope. Allie almost threw herself over the lip at the top and collapsed on her back.

"I'd cry if I had the energy," she gasped.

A dark shadow loomed over her. "You're not allowed to cry or lie down."

Allie dragged air into her lungs. "Am I allowed to die?"

"Not now that I've saved you."

She squealed as he kicked a shower of powdery snow onto her face.

"Oops, sorry," he said.

As if she believed that. Allie clenched her glove around a handful of snow and held up her other hand. "Pull me up?"

As he reached down, she flung the snow. It was so fine, none of it hit him. It all fluttered back to land on her. He laughed so hard Allie yanked down when he took her hand, and instead of pulling her up, she pulled him down. He landed awkwardly, part on top of her, his knee between her legs, his face inches from hers.

Their laughter faded to silence. Zach stared into her eyes and Allie's heart fluttered. She'd either made a big mistake and was going to feel a fool or he'd kiss her and she'd feel like she'd won the lottery. He lowered his mouth a fraction, and her heart jumped so hard she worried it would fly out of her chest. He licked a flake of snow from her cheek, licked another from her eyelash and Allie fell deep and irrevocably into terminal lust.

"Does this hurt?" he whispered.

A kiss hurt? Is he crazy? "Ouch." She yelped as his fingers brushed her bruised temple.

"It's a nasty graze," he said. "You might be concussed."

"You mean I might be imagining lying in the snow with a gorgeous guy on top of me and praying he's about to kiss me?"

Shit.

"Did I say that out loud?" she whispered.

"Mmm." His mouth twitched.

Allie swallowed the lump in her throat. If he wasn't interested, wouldn't he have gotten up and walked on? Too many months being set up on blind dates from hell by sadistic friends had left her insecure and desperate. A heady combination.

"Am I really still in the ice tomb and hallucinating?" she asked.

"You're deep in the lair of the god of the mountain, totally at his mercy, submission your only option or else."

Allie could have sworn his eyes darkened to a deeper shade of jade.

"Or else what?" she asked.

"I'll push you back down that slope you just crawled up."

She shuddered. "Total submission is no problem at all. Do you prefer to be addressed as Master or Sir? Though I should warn you I have a pink belt in karate and I'm lethal with a butter knife."

His face split into a grin and Allie's desire shot from simmer to boil. Then his smile faded and he just stared at her. Was he thinking himself out of it?

"Don't change your mind," she whispered, and then groaned. "Damn, something else I meant to not say."

"I'm savoring the moment. We can never have this kiss again. It has to be special. Something we can tell the grandkids."

It might have been a line he used a lot, but Allie didn't care. It worked. One tender brush of his lips across hers and she caught fire. Every part of her blazed with heat. They wouldn't need the gondola to get down. She'd melt the snow they lay on and they'd sink through centuries-old glacial ice and end up flowing into that raging river in the valley below.

His tongue traced the line of her lips and she opened her mouth. Either a thundering avalanche or instant chemistry sent bolts of electricity zipping down her spine. Or was it the way he groaned into her mouth? Allie spread her gloved hands over his back and let him steal her breath. His tongue explored, teased and began to pulse into her mouth as if he were fucking her. He tasted of beer and Allie became drunk on it.

It wasn't enough. She reached for his tongue with hers and they played in each other's mouths until the kiss grew harder, more desperate and control began to slip. His knee pressed more insistently between her legs and a gush of warmth wet her panties. No way could he know through all these layers of clothing, but he moaned into her mouth and clutched her tighter.

Just as she thought she'd die if she didn't take a breath, Zach pulled back, panting.

"Wow," he whispered. "Not going to forget that kiss. I should have timed it."

He stood up, helped her to her shaky feet and brushed the snow from her back.

"Okay?" he asked, and pulled his black hat back on.

"Ecstatic."

He grinned and, taking her gloved hand in his, tugged her the rest of the way up the groomed slope until they reached the brow of the hill. The huge bowl of the glacier lay below them. Not a skier in sight.

"Where is everyone?" Allie asked.

"Lifts are closed. Everyone's gone."

"We have to ski down?"

Zach turned to look at her. "Yes and no. We could ski down to the next station but the lift won't be open there either, and in any case we can't ski to the base."

He was right. The first stage up the mountain was by gondola.

"So we're stuck," she said, thinking about the mobile in her pocket. It had been no use under the ice but it'd work fine out here.

"Stuck," he said, thinking about the mobile in his pocket. One call and they'd have a way down.

The sun dipped below a peak and the light dimmed.

"What are we going to do?" Allie asked.

"Just so happens that we have exclusive use of a spectacular hotel. We'll have to break in, but Jurgen won't mind."

He waited to see what she'd say. His cock was fighting to make its opinion clear.

"How about you break in while I look the other way," she said.

Zach raised his eyebrows.

"The thing is," Allie lowered her voice, "my dad's a policeman, so is my mum and so are my two brothers, three uncles and one cousin."

"So, you're a good girl?"

"Not once you've broken in."

She winked, and Zach's cock broke out into a song-and-dance routine. How many condoms did he have in his wallet? Did Jurgen's entrepreneurial flair go as far as offering an emergency supply for guests? Zach doubted it.

"We better make a move while we still have some light," Allie said. She headed away from the gondola station and over to the snow construction. "How are you going to break the door open? Kick it?"

"No." Zach didn't want to do any further damage to his knee. He looked around, found a metal rack leaning against the edge of the ice bar and jammed it between the

wood and the snow frame. The door stayed firmly shut. *Shit*. He tried again, pressed his weight into the rack and shoved. Nothing. *Fuck*. His cock yelled to try harder.

He stood up and muffled a yelp when the door opened. Allie stood grinning at him.

"The other door wasn't locked," she said. "I found the lights. It's lovely in here. But where's the TV? And how do we put the heating on?"

Zach smiled. "I've a very special personal heater, just for you."

He didn't miss her blush and grabbed her hand. "We need to set up somewhere to sleep." Not that he intended to do much sleeping.

Zach ripped open boxes until he found the furs and sleeping bags. He handed a bunch to Allie and took a pile for himself. Kurt and his team had carved sleigh beds of ice with elaborate patterns at the head and foot. The one in this room featured trees along with wolves howling at the moon. Zach laid two layers of fur over the box base and spread them out.

"Can we zip these together?" Allie asked, holding up the sleeping bags.

"Yep." Zach would *make* them fit together. If they crammed into one bag they'd have no room to move. Moving was essential.

They zipped the bags together in silence and then tossed two more furs on top of them.

"The sooner we get in, the better," Allie said.

Just what he was thinking.

"Once the temperature starts to fall, we need to be wrapped up warm." Allie straightened the top fur and didn't look at him. "We can share body heat."

We can share bodies.

Zach stared at the bed and gulped. "I think there were pillows in that box. Want to grab a couple while I look for something to drink? If you need the bathroom, there's one in the very end room. Everything links together."

"Okay."

Zach went back outside and up to the ice bar. The light had fallen really fast, clouds had swept in and it had started to snow. He wanted Allie naked in his arms before she heard the sound of the snow grooming machines. Zach wasn't sure what time they'd start work.

Jurgen had locked both doors on the bar. Zach offered a mental apology and forced one open. Thankfully this door had a looser fit. He flipped on the light and helped himself to a bottle of apple schnapps and beer. There was no food. Zach checked his wallet. Two condoms. Better than no condoms. He switched off his phone and slipped it into a pocket on the calf of his ski pants, figuring it was the least likely place she'd touch.

Back in the ice hotel, Zach wedged the door closed and shouted, "Honey, I'm home."

When he had no reply, he hoped she hadn't changed her mind or thought about the fact there'd be a telephone in the gondola station, a short stroll away. Still, maybe he was leaping a little ahead of the game. One kiss, stupendous as it was, and a question about zipping sleeping bags together did not mean she wanted to fuck like snow bunnies. A couple of steps toward the room where they'd made a bed and he froze.

The furs writhed as if they were alive. Was she under there with someone? Zach bristled and then rolled his eyes at his stupidity.

"What the fuck are you doing?" he asked.

"Trying to make the bed warm," came a muffled voice.

Zach's gaze strayed to the side of the bed. Her ski jacket and pants were draped on top of a box. How about the rest of her clothes? Underneath, or was she still wearing them?

"Need some help?" he asked, and unfastened his jacket.

She continued thrashing. "Yes, hurry up. Four legs are better than two." She stopped moving for a moment. "Don't take that the wrong way." She began jerking around again.

Zach sat on the edge of the bed and took off his boots. She'd laid a piece of cardboard on the floor and left her boots on it. And socks tucked into them. He gulped. Did that mean she'd taken everything off? He looked under her ski jacket and smiled. Zach put the two condoms and the alcohol within easy reach, and then stripped off fast. He flung himself under the covers, pulling the furs over his head. *Shit, it's cold.*

"Zip your side up," Allie said.

Zach edged into the sleeping bag and reached behind his back for the zipper. His knee brushed part of her body and he heard her gulp. Too dark to see, too cold for slow exploration, too cold to hesitate. He pulled her into his arms and molded his naked body against her equally naked one. His cock was the warmest, happiest part of him, sandwiched between them. His chest was pretty happy too, her soft breasts pressed against him, her nipples like little beads of ice.

He moved his mouth over her face and brushed it against the seam of her lips. His tongue flickered inside and Zach sighed into her as he swept his hands down to her bare backside, his palms a perfect fit over the tight, round cheeks of her ass. Zach rocked into her, pulling her hips hard into his as she slid her hands to his butt and squeezed.

"Ahh, Allie." He groaned his pleasure into her mouth, their gasps washing together. "You feel so good, soft and warm."

"And you feel hard and cold—well, hard's good, cold's not. We need lots of friction to warm us up."

She rubbed her palms over his backside and up his back, back and forth, round in circles, and Zach did the same as they writhed against each other, trying to get as much of their skin in contact as possible. They'd been face-to-face, back-to-back, his chest to her back, her breast to his chest. The upside of all the activity was heat had seeped into his body, the downside—she'd driven him into a frenzy of need. His balls ached and his cock was painfully hard.

"Well, I've made a reasonably thorough examination of your limbs," Allie said. "You'll be pleased to hear that you have all five."

Zach laughed.

Allie now pressed against his back, her mouth by his ear. "I'll tell you a bedtime story. I was eleven years old, on a school trip to Paris and we'd been taken to the *Jardin du Luxembourg*. Lovely spring day, flowers to admire, roller skaters to avoid, donkeys to ride. Except one of the poor donkeys was deformed. I really freaked out because I thought it had an extra leg. This huge, long thing just dangled there and I asked my teacher why they hadn't amputated it. I was the laughingstock of the whole school when I got back."

"Oh God." Zach tried to suppress his mirth.

"There was a string of boys ready to show me their extra limb. I bet you'd have been one of them."

"Probably."

"You'll be glad to hear I don't run away screaming anymore."

"Ecstatic," Zach said.

Chapter Three

They shifted to their sides, face-to-face, but Zach could barely see Allie's features under the amount of covers. Without sight, he could only feel, taste, smell. Deprived of space, he couldn't do many of the things he'd normally have done, couldn't expect her to do things he might have hoped she'd do. Zach knew she had short hair but he didn't know what color. He knew there was no hair between her legs. He knew she was excited because he could scent her arousal. He knew what her breasts felt like, but he wished he could see them.

Then her hand slid around his cock and his brain tripped and fell over.

One long, slow pull from base to tip to make his heart pound and his glans drip with lust. Zach's nipples hardened to match hers. Her thumb swirled over his cock head, brushing along the slit, and he shuddered. Allie dragged her fist from crest to balls, and he wondered if he'd ever been touched more perfectly, apart from when he did this himself. *Christ, she's better than me.* A gentle hand settled around the tight bulge of his sac, one finger reached to tease the strip of flesh behind and he let out a strangled groan. While he still had a functioning brain cell—well, a brain cell that wasn't solely thinking of his own pleasure, Zach brought his hands to her breasts and caressed her nipples with his thumbs before pinching them lightly.

He caught her gasp with his mouth, and as he slid one hand to the junction of her thighs, he gave her a deep, wet kiss.

Zach moaned as he touched her.

Allie moaned as she touched him.

His fingertip exploration of her soft, bare mons had her squirming until he pinned her hip with his other hand and pushed her to her back. No need to ease her legs apart, Allie opened for him. Zach let his fingers slide over her hot and creamy folds, over the

rolling hills and valleys of her sex and listened to the pattern of her breathing, her gasps and gentle sighs saying more than words.

One finger over the swollen nub of her clit, a gentle rub and Zach felt the moment she began to come, the shiver that swept over her skin, the catch in her breath, the way her body tensed before it spasmed. She sucked his tongue into her mouth as she gulped, her fingers squeezing his cock. Zach struggled to keep himself in check. *Fuck, I've made her come that fast?* Maybe she wouldn't be disappointed if he was as quick. *Why doesn't it work the same way for guys?*

He kissed her down from her high and she melted in his arms. He couldn't remember the last time he'd enjoyed kissing as much. Her heady scent teased his nostrils, her taste made his head swim.

"You *are* a god," she muttered. "Can you do it again?"

"As many times as you like."

"Two and a half."

Zach laughed. "And how do I manage the half?"

"I've no idea. You'll have to keep trying until you get it right. Might take years." She stilled suddenly as if aware of the implication of what she'd said. "Or minutes," she added.

He caressed her silky folds, and as he slipped his longest finger into her body right up to the webbing, she let out a tremulous sigh. Her muscles tightened around him as he stroked in and out.

"Maybe seconds," she said.

"I'm going for this half you mentioned. I'm intrigued now."

As he curved his finger, a strangled cry slipped from her lips and she rubbed her palm over his cock head.

Zach grunted and clamped down on his need to come. "Are you always a little firecracker? I'm not fishing for compliments." Though he was.

He nuzzled her neck, licked around her ear, trying to put her off her stroke and push back the inevitable. Though it occurred to him that maybe he ought to let himself come now so he could manage more than a couple of seconds inside her before he lost it.

Her fingers tightened around him. "A firecracker? No. I'm usually slow and boring. I see now I should have fallen for a deity before. That's where I've been going wrong. Mere mortals just don't have what it takes."

Zach pushed two fingers inside her, increased the speed of his thrusts and felt her winding up again. With his other hand, he reached for her wrist and pulled her fingers off his cock. "This god can't do two things at the same time," he gasped.

"Oh, are you only a lesser god? I'm disappointed now."

He growled.

She gulped. "Inside. Now. You. Please."

Zach didn't need asking twice. He slipped one arm from the covers to reach for a condom and sucked in a breath at the cold blast, goose bumps erupting on his flesh. He had to take his fingers out of her to rip the packet and get the damn rubber on. But as everything in his head screamed hurry, and Zach hovered over her, his cock at the entrance to her body, he paused.

He stared at her face in the gloom under the covers, wanting to see her eyes. Zach lifted his head to let a little light under the furs, shuddered at the icy chill that came with it and saw her mouth curve in a smile. His lust rocketed. Allie and he both jumped when the broad head of his cock breached her folds. Her hands clamped on his hips as he held himself just inside her. Zach had switched from a desperate need to pile drive into her. Now he wanted it slow, wanted to make each moment count, each fraction of an inch count.

Gently he pressed inside her, the rounded head of his cock stretching her, making her ready for the hard length of the rigid shaft that followed. Her pussy coated him in its creamy honey and Zach had to grit his teeth against the compulsion to pound into

her. He slowly sank all the way inside until they were locked together and he felt the rim of the condom between them.

“Oh God, you are huge,” she blurted.

He stifled a laugh.

“It’s not funny,” Allie gasped. “Size isn’t everything. That poor lady donkey.”

He did laugh then, felt his cock twitch inside her and inhaled hard, trying to maintain control. When had he ever laughed while he’d had sex? The women he’d been with wanted a performance and he’d obliged. His entire existence was about putting on a show. Not with Allie. She made him real. *Fuck*.

“You’re so cute,” he said. “Really adorable.”

“You’re just saying that because I’m keeping part of you lovely and warm.”

He pulled out until only his tip remained inside her. “Nope, you’re still cute.”

Allie laughed. As he pushed forward, her muscles sucked him inside and squeezed so hard Zach felt the pull all the way to his heart. He couldn’t have that. This could only be a fuck, nothing more. He bucked into her, increasing the speed of his thrusts. His breathing labored as each slide into her wet warmth sent fire licking up his spine.

His cock throbbed and thickened as he struggled to curb the arousal cramping his balls. This felt so good. Allie felt so good, but he wanted her to come again before he lost it. Zach slammed his cock harder and faster and she bucked her hips to meet his. He dropped his mouth to hers and they rocked and jerked together. Her fingers dug into his back and pressed harder when he circled his hips to screw into her.

She screamed into his mouth, and as orgasm swept over her, Zach’s climax broke in a rush of heat. His balls exploded and sent his cum rushing into his cock only for it to get trapped in the rubber. Zach had never wished more that he could have dispensed with protection and marked her as his.

Zach kept kissing her as they drifted down from the high, nibbling her lower lip, running his tongue along the fleshy underside. Allie was awash with sensation and emotion. She'd never had sex like this before. Gentle one minute, frantic the next, they seemed to mirror the desire of the other. She wanted to lock herself away with Zach for the rest of the week. Only maybe this was a one-night stand. Allie didn't do those.

Correction, she *hadn't* done.

Sleeping with a guy on the first date was a definite no. Did the under-ice rescue even count as a date? She'd thrown herself at him. She was a shameless hussy. Allie giggled.

"What's so funny?" he mumbled.

"You're the one who has to get out of bed to get rid of the condom."

His chest shook against her. Zach pulled out of her, wriggled around and sighed. "While my hand is exposed to arctic temperatures, do you want a drink? Beer or apple schnapps?"

"Mojito."

Zach laughed.

"Oh all right. The schnapps."

The bastard pressed the cold bottle into her chest and Allie yelped.

"Sorry."

"If I thought you meant it, I might be tempted to overcome my fear of enclosed dark spaces."

"I'm really, really sorry."

She huffed. "Are you good at unscrewing?"

"I'm very good at screwing."

Allie rolled her eyes. "I can't get the top off."

Zach took the bottle, twisted the cap loose and handed it back. Allie took a mouthful and let the cold, smooth schnapps roll around her mouth before she swallowed.

“Any good at unzipping?” she asked, and heard the rasp of the sleeping bag zipper.

Allie took another mouthful of the alcohol and trailed her lips very slowly down his chest, releasing a trickle of liquid as she went, then reversing her route to lap it up. Zach twitched beneath her. She bit gently around his nipple and he shuddered.

“Oh shit,” Zach groaned. “I’m torn between telling you not to drink too much and to keep doing that.”

“S’okay. You think I can have family in the police force and not know the dangers of mixing alcohol and cold weather? The schnapps makes us feel warmer because blood flows away from our organs into the skin but that means our core temperature drops. Increased risk of hypothermia.”

“Really?” Zach said in mock astonishment. “I just didn’t want you to fall asleep before you got to the interesting part of me.”

“You’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all.”

“What?” he snapped.

Allie grabbed the bottle. “I was talking about your navel.”

But the mouthful of schnapps she took wasn’t destined for his navel. Zach’s cock was hard again and she wriggled out of the sleeping bag, her back covered by the fur throw and took the tip of him in her mouth.

“Oh fuck,” he gasped.

Allie cupped his balls while she sucked at his crest, and then ran her tongue around the point where the foreskin was attached. Zach’s body quivered. A dribble of liquid over the split in the head made him buck into her and Allie began to choke when the schnapps went down the wrong way.

“Sorry.”

His fingers stroked her head then threaded through her hair. One last mouthful before Allie wrapped her hand firmly around the base of his cock, her thumb and forefinger circling his shaft. She pushed her mouth over his crest and let the schnapps trickle down his length.

"Shhhhit," Zach hissed.

Allie loved that he loved this. It had been a long time since she'd given a guy a blowjob. She pressed her tongue over the slit in the glans and swept it side to side, back and forth, round and round while Zach groaned and squirmed beneath her. When she took a little more of him into her mouth, she held him firm with her lips while her tongue circled around the head. As Zach's sensitive crest slipped around her mouth, connecting with her tongue, her hard and soft palates, Allie twisted her head to increase the sensation and at the same time slipped a thumb back to press against the strip of flesh behind his balls.

"Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. That's really good," he whispered. "Sweet Jesus, Allie, you have a miraculous mouth."

She smiled around his cock and kept up the pulsing pressure with her thumb on the strip of flesh in front of his anus. Allie wasn't good at deep throating. She hadn't mastered a way to not gag, but between fast, shallow sucks at his head, she slipped in an occasional long swoop toward his balls before dragging her mouth back up his length.

"Ten-second warning," Zach gasped.

She didn't let a guy come in her mouth either, but she wanted to do this for Zach, wanted to do it for herself. His balls tightened against her fist and his breathing quickened. She pressed her mouth more firmly around his head and bobbed faster. His cock swelled, jerked, and then cum flooded her mouth.

He tasted both sweet and salty, and Allie swallowed every drop of him, licking his semi-hard cock until it was clean before she scrambled back up to his lips. Zach kissed

her, plunging his tongue into her mouth and groaning. Allie liked that he wasn't bothered about the fact she tasted of his cum.

"Let's stay here forever. This is the best hotel in the entire world," he whispered.

Allie snuggled in his arms and allowed herself the hope that he might want to see her again. Only how would that work? He lived in Austria and she lived in London. Allie didn't have the sort of income that would allow her to fly back and forth, and neither did a guy who worked behind a bar. She suspected he was a ski bum, working for peanuts so he could spend his time living his dream. A good-looking guy like Zach probably had a different girl every week.

"You're very quiet," he said.

"My jaw aches."

He laughed. "God, Allie. Where have you been all my life?"

A loud rumbling interrupted her thoughts and she jerked in his arms. "What the hell was that? Avalanche? Oh God."

"*Piste* machines, snow groomers."

He trailed his fingers to her breast.

"And we're not going to run outside, waving our arms or lighting a rescue fire?" she asked.

Zach nibbled her ear. "Do you want to?"

"No. Only I *am* hungry. You weren't very filling."

He nipped the edge of her ear and she yipped.

"Luckily, this hotel has one saving grace," Allie said. "Feel under the pillow."

Zach pulled out the bar of chocolate. "You're ready to share?"

"Persuade me."

Chapter Four

Zach didn't want to move. He lay on his side, spooning with Allie, her back against his chest, his hands cupping her breasts, perky nipples in the middle of his palms and his erection nestled between her legs. He'd worried that despite the thermal sleeping bags and furs they'd be cold, but they weren't. Trouble was, they couldn't stay here forever. They needed to get dressed before Jurgen and his crew arrived. Still, maybe there was time for a quick —

"Three hundred and thirty-three euros," Jurgen said. "You didn't have the champagne but I see you helped yourself to beer and schnapps, so we'll call it even."

Allie tensed in his arms. Zach gave her a reassuring squeeze and popped his head out from under the furs. *Whoa — cold.*

"I take it you're not alone in there?" Jurgen's voice was clipped. "You could have fucking asked."

"I didn't plan this," Zach said.

Allie wriggled up to emerge next to him. A bolt of lust locked the air in Zach's lungs. Choppy blonde hair all messed up and a scowl on her face, she looked like a naughty fairy.

"Jurgen, meet Allie. Allie, this is my boss Jurgen."

"Temporarily," Jurgen snapped.

"Don't be cross with Zach," Allie said. "He's a hero. He rescued me."

"Rescued?" Jurgen raised his eyebrows. "He pluck you from the clutches of a celibate vacation or maybe from the arms of an aggravating boyfriend?"

"No, he —"

"Leave it, Allie." Zach pressed a kiss on her lips and then turned to Jurgen. "I'll pay for the fucking room, okay? Want to give us a moment?"

"But this isn't your fault," Allie said. "We were stuck on the mountain. The lifts had shut. What were we supposed to do?"

Jurgen shrugged. "Used your mobile or the emergency phone at the gondola station." He stared at them. "Neither of you have your phone with you?"

Zach guessed she'd done the same thing as him and hidden it. He stifled the urge to laugh and felt her quiver as she did the same.

"Zach did what he thought was best," she said. "And I thought it was best too."

The fact she was trying to defend him brought a lump to Zach's throat. He wasn't used to people sticking up for him, especially not women. He knew Jurgen wasn't seriously pissed off. His belligerence was borne out of concern, probably worried about what might have happened if they'd not been able to keep warm. A couple of cases of hypothermia wouldn't do his business much good. A couple of deaths would likely finish it.

"Zach's not good at making sensible decisions." Jurgen gave him a knowing look.

"I was trapped in the glacier cave," Allie said. "I went on the last tour, slipped and knocked myself out. When I came round, the lights were off and I was wedged in a narrow channel in the ice. Zach found me. He saved my life."

Jurgen's mouth fell open. "Seriously?"

"Want to see the cut on my head?" She pushed back her hair.

"Shit," Jurgen blurted.

"I might have died," Allie said. "Zach saw skis still here and went looking for the owner. By the time he found me the daylight had all but gone and so had everyone else. I'll pay for the room. It's the least I can do."

"I didn't mean it about paying. Sorry," Jurgen said. "I'll keep Kurt out for a few minutes."

He left them alone.

Zach sighed. "Not quite the way I wanted to wake you up." He turned Allie so she faced him and kissed her gently. "Want some breakfast?"

"Is anywhere open up here?"

"I'm sure I can persuade someone to feed us. First one dressed gets to decide where we eat tonight. Ready, steady, go."

Zach didn't think either of them needed an incentive to get dressed quickly, but pulling on arctic clothing had them both wincing and sucking in breaths, though her goose-bumped body interested his cock.

"Tell me I didn't do that." Zach gulped, pointing to speckled bruising on her thighs.

"That would be from me falling over. I don't like to ski too fast and I was trying to keep up with my friends. I bet you whizz down the mountain. I wouldn't be able to keep up with you either."

No you wouldn't. But Zach, for the first time in his life, wanted to ski at someone else's pace.

Allie was first dressed but only because he was distracted by her naked body. He'd stroked, licked and inhaled it, but the sight of it had his cock rearing up inside his ski pants. There was a lot more still to explore.

"Want to have a short run down to warm up?" Zach asked. "There'll be hardly anyone this high for a while."

"Okay."

Zach retrieved and disposed of the frozen condoms while Allie folded the furs and untangled the sleeping bags. When the room looked as it had the evening before, they emerged into daylight. Kurt and a couple of his ice-carving team stood waiting, one of them took a photo as Zach and Allie stood blinking in the sunshine.

"Our first guests, even if you were unofficial," Jurgen called.

Allie put on her goggles. "Wow, look at the snow."

"Powder." Zach gave her a broad grin. "We could get a couple of runs before the machines destroy it."

She winced. "I like the nicely groomed corduroy look."

"Powder's easy. Ski tips up, keep your weight even, just flex and extend."

Allie clipped on her skis. "Thank you, Mr. Expert."

"Follow me."

"Yes, Master."

Zach laughed and launched himself down the slope. He made a few turns and then stopped to look back at Allie. She tried to keep to his route but she was a defensive skier, and because he'd taken a steep descent, she quickly had to make her own tracks.

"Argghh, can't see my skis, can't see my boots. Where are my legs?" she yelped. "The snow's swallowing me."

She slithered to a halt at his side, her cheeks glowing.

"It's supposed to feel like you're floating," Zach said.

"Yes, well, you're a fluffy cloud. I'm a baby elephant."

He chuckled and turned to slide his skis either side of hers so he could get close and then kissed her. Zach had planned a quick peck but lost that thought the moment his lips touched hers. His cock swelled and he groaned. Was he ever going to be able to kiss her without getting an erection?

"You're so good at everything," she mumbled into his mouth. "Kissing, skiing, kissing, rescuing baby elephants, kissing."

"By the time you've been down the slope three times, you'll be floating," he promised.

Not quite, Allie thought, but she did improve with each run. By the time the grooming machines had flattened the powder and she was turning on pristine corduroy, her confidence soared. Zach had a mouth-wateringly elegant style and it

made Allie want to ski as well as he did. Except she didn't fancy the idea of living hand to mouth following the snow. Hadn't fancied – she amended, and then huffed at her stupidity. This was a holiday romance, nothing more.

They removed their skis to go into the mountain restaurant, and when Zach slipped on the snowy step, she saw him wince.

"Are you okay? Was it difficult to keep up with me?" Allie asked, lifting her goggles onto her head.

He laughed. "I have a bad knee, that's all."

"Why? How? When? Who? Er...what? Am I being nosy? Only, did you do it when you were rescuing me? I could have rubbed it better while I was rubbing other bits of you."

Zach pulled off his hat. "You know, I think that might have worked. Everything you've rubbed of mine has felt better for it."

She grinned. "So, what did you do?"

He released a deep sigh. "I twisted my knee doing something stupid. I can ski but I have to take it steady. Wait here a minute while I go and have a word with Sophie and persuade her to feed us. Think about where you want to eat tonight."

Allie had no idea where to suggest. She'd only arrived in the resort two days ago. The first night they'd eaten at the hotel next to where they were staying, but Allie hadn't been impressed with the food. Watery soup and tough meat. She was thrilled that Zach wanted to be with her tonight. Even if this turned out to be a fling, Allie intended to enjoy every minute.

The door opened and Zach beckoned her inside. "Scrambled eggs and toast?" he asked.

"Perfect."

The heat hit Allie as soon as she walked in. She pulled off her hat, goggles and gloves and clomped over to a table by the window. She and Zach sat opposite each other on wooden benches.

"Will Jurgen mind that you haven't shaved?" She reached to stroke Zach's stubble.

Zach caught her finger, put it in his mouth and sucked. Allie felt the pull race through her body to her sex and gulped.

"I'm not going to bother working today," Zach said, still holding her hand.

Alarm bells clanged in her head. "You can't just take the day off. You'd be letting people down."

One thing Allie's parents had drummed into her — *When you say you'll do something, you follow through, no matter what.*

"Jurgen can manage fine without me. I've better things to do." Zach smiled at her.

A woman, presumably Sophie, slapped Allie's food down hard enough to bounce the toast and slid Zach's plate carefully in front of him. Behind Zach's back she glared at Allie and then ran her fingers through Zach's hair and twisted them so he tipped his head back.

"You didn't call," she said.

"I didn't know I was supposed to." Zach's face was devoid of expression.

"Yeah, you were. You still have my number?"

Now he looked like an animal trapped in a hunter's sights, Allie thought. Well, no point getting bent out of shape. She'd spent one night with the guy, and lovely as it was, it didn't make them married. Allie looked at her food and hoped Sophie hadn't done something horrible to it. She didn't listen to what the pair was saying. Zach had lowered his voice and then Sophie blurted something in German and stomped off.

"Sorry about that," he said.

"Swap plates?" Allie asked.

Zach lifted his plate and they exchanged them.

"Any particular reason?" he asked as Allie began to eat.

She waited until he had a mouthful of food. "I'm one of the forty percent of people who can't smell cyanide."

Allie thought Zach was going to explode with the effort of not ejecting the contents of his mouth, though he was laughing not choking. He reached out and caught her hand as she lifted her fork.

"Sophie gave me her number last week. I didn't ask for it, but I wasn't going to offend her by refusing it."

Just upset her by not calling, Allie thought. She dragged the fork nearer to her mouth and lunged for the egg and toast. Zach released her.

"Can I have your number?" he asked.

She swallowed the mouthful she was chewing. "What number?"

"The number of the cell phone you have secreted somewhere."

"What? Me?" Allie asked, and jumped when she felt Zach's hand between her legs.

He patted the pockets in her pants and sighed when he touched her phone. "The number?" he asked.

"Careful. You have your hand on my interplanetary transportation device." Allie unzipped her pocket and took it out.

"Looks uncannily like a cell phone."

She leaned across the table. "I know. Isn't it brilliant? All I have to do is press this button here and I'll be back on Zog in a minute and a half."

"Talking of half... Don't you still owe me half an orgasm? How does a warm room, a warm bed and a warm...me sound?"

Allie put her knife and fork neatly on her empty plate. "Very good—after you've finished work. What's your number?"

Zach took her mobile, tapped on the keys and gave it back to her. His phone started up in his pocket. Zack bent to his lower leg and took it out.

"Hello?" he said.

"Beam me up, Scotty." Allie gazed at the wooden ceiling.

He grinned. "Wrong number."

"Ah. Is that the god of the mountain?"

Zach laughed. "Speaking."

"Five thirty at the Polar Bar?"

"It's a date."

Allie switched off her phone. "Well, I'm going back down to have a shower, a sleep and maybe a swim. My treat tonight, by the way. A thank-you for saving me. Is there a Burger King in town?"

* * * * *

Zach was still laughing as he headed over to the Ice Bar. He'd watched Allie ski down and wished he was with her. No woman had ever offered to buy him a meal. Even chips. He always paid. After the accident, Zach had vowed to be wary of women, but Allie had been too tempting. Still, she was so totally unlike any of the others, maybe she didn't count.

He put his skis at the back of the bar. Zach didn't feel like working. He didn't need to. He didn't need the money. But Allie's opinion of him mattered. If she thought he'd be letting Jurgen down, then he didn't want to let Jurgen down. Zach didn't know why he didn't just tell her the truth—that he was a world-class downhill skier with more money than he knew what to do with, who was currently "resting" due to an injury sustained—ah well, that was where his lips stuck together.

"You dumped her already?" Jurgen asked when Zach joined him.

Zach glared. "No."

"I thought you decided you were a one-date-only guy?"

"I like this one."

"I hope you like all the women you fuck."

"Allie's different."

Jurgen frowned. "So, why are here with me when you could be with her?"

"She told me I had to work and not let you down."

Jurgen roared with laughter. "She *is* different. She's given you a conscience."

* * * * *

Zach removed the key from his locker in the basement of the Hotel Strass and turned to find a teenager holding out a scrap of paper and a pen.

"Can I have your autograph, please," she asked in English.

"Sure." Zach took the paper. "What's your name?"

"Marie."

He wrote, *To Marie with love from Zach Adams. Ski safe.*

She beamed at him. "You were fantastic in Val D'Isere. You ski like an Austrian."

He laughed. "Thanks."

She blushed and ran off. Zach sighed. Fantastic in Val D'Isere and a fuck up in Vail. He checked his messages on the way to his top-floor room and smiled when he saw one from Allie. They'd been texting all day.

Found something interesting on sale to rub into your sore bits. Marmot oil.

Like idea of being rubbed by small fluffy critter, he texted back.

Zach slipped his key card into the slot and pushed open the door. Four more steps to bring him in line with his bedroom and the smile fell off his face. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

Trudi Love, the American popstar sensation, famed for her excesses of language, wardrobe and behavior, lay sprawled on his bed. Thankfully not naked but dressed in skin-tight jeans and a fluffy white sweater. She rose to her feet, stretched like a sleek cat and flung her arms around his shoulders.

"I missed you, Zachie," she whispered. "I missed having your lovely cock inside me."

Zach shrugged her off and tossed his jacket, hat and goggles onto the bed. "Oh yeah?"

"Course I did, babe. After the accident, I—"

"Disappeared."

"Well, I didn't see any point in both of us getting into trouble. Thanks for not dropping me in the shit. Now that the dust's settled, I figured we could get together again. You said you'd teach me to ski. You're well enough to do that, right?"

"I'm too busy. I'm going to have a shower. Goodbye."

"I could do with a shower."

Zach didn't know whether she was too thick to take a hint or too determined. He suspected the latter.

"Not with me. Room key." He held out his hand. He'd be having a word with the hotel manager. Trudi twisted her lips and gave him the card. Zach put his palm in the middle of her back and guided her out of the room.

"How about you buy me dinner?" she asked.

"Not hungry," he said, and closed the door on her.

He sighed as he leaned back against it and then heard her voice from the other side. "I don't throw big fish back."

What the fuck was that supposed to mean? Zach yanked his phone from his pocket and called his agent.

"Zach, my friend," said Eric. "How are you feeling?"

"Did you tell anyone where I was staying?"

"No. What's wrong?"

"I just came back from the slopes to find Trudi Love in my room."

Eric laughed. "So what's the problem? I thought you two were an item."

"I don't want her around."

"She keeps you high profile."

"I don't want that sort of profile. She was — she was there when I had the accident."

Eric spluttered. "Wh-what? You're supposed to tell me everything. How did that nugget slip your mind?"

Zach sat on the bed. "We were drunk and she'd taken something as well. She threw herself onto a toboggan after I told her not to and I skied after her. I headed her away from a drop but I fell down it. When I came round, she was nowhere to be seen. I figured my injury was bad enough without anyone getting wind of drugs being involved even though I didn't take them."

"Shit, Zach. Do you lose your capacity for common sense once you get an erection? You do not need to be connected to anyone who's taken drugs. Stay away from Trudi Love. She's got trouble written all over her. Get a cab to Innsbruck and fly home if you can't keep your zipper fastened."

"Too late."

There was a long pause. "Oh crap. You're supposed to be on sabbatical from women. You went to Austria to help a pal out and rehabilitate your body and reputation, not to get involved with someone else."

Zach found himself blurting out what had happened since he'd spotted Allie's skies. Eric listened in silence.

"She's someone real," Zach said. "No pretense about her."

"Then don't fuck it up," Eric told him.

Not going to happen, Zach thought.

Chapter Five

"Where is he then?" Jennifer yelled in Allie's ear.

She shrugged. The Polar Bar hadn't been a good choice. It might be *the* place for *après-ski*, but it reminded Allie of the tube at rush hour. Worse because everyone held drinks, and she worried she'd get something tipped on her before Zach got there. No room to move, everyone stood shoulder-to-shoulder, nose to armpit. The only dancing was done on the spot. The music was so loud it made the windows shake.

"Not here yet," Jennifer shouted to Mike.

She didn't miss Mike's smirk. When the others returned to their hotel an hour ago, Allie told them what had happened. Well, most of it. She'd thought they might have missed her last night but they hadn't. They knew she didn't like pizza and assumed she'd gone elsewhere to eat. When they'd knocked on her door later and she hadn't answered, they thought she was asleep.

How easy to die unnoticed, Allie thought. Would better friends be so uncaring? She edged her way through the seething mass of young, fit skiers to the side of the room. From there she had a better view of the two entrances. The DJ changed the pounding beat to something faster and two scantily clad women, one black, one white, started to dance on top of two large barrels. When a third climbed onto the bar in her underwear and thigh-high boots, the crowd gave a collective gasp.

"Trudi Love," she heard the guy next to her say to another. "*Das Betthaschen, ja?*"

Wow. Trudi looked smaller than she did on the TV, swinging her long blonde hair as she gyrated to the music. The guys were all clapping and yelling and trying to get nearer. When Trudi unclipped her bra and threw it, there was near hysteria. The two other dancers faltered and then jumped down into the crowd. Hard to compete with naked breasts.

No way would Zach be able to find her in here. Allie decided to go outside and phone him. She was worming her way through the throng to get her jacket when the unpredictable popstar suddenly launched herself into the air over everyone's heads to be caught feet in front of Allie.

At least the woman hadn't landed on her, but when she saw who held her, Allie's heart jumped into her throat. Trudi had her legs wrapped around Zach's waist, her breasts pressed into his face. She slithered down his body and hands grabbed her from behind. Panic flashed across Trudi's face, she glanced up at Zach and then cowered into him. Allie stood motionless in the boisterous group and watched as he wrapped Trudi in his jacket. He put his arm around her and elbowed people aside to escort her out to the street.

They know each other.

Zach could have just been behaving in a chivalrous way. He'd rescued Allie from the ice cave after all, but she felt deep inside it was more than that. Maybe if it wasn't it soon would be. A little bit of her heart died. Someone tapped her on the shoulder and she turned to see Mike.

"We're going to get something to eat, want to come?" he yelled.

Allie made herself smile and shook her head. She collected her ski jacket from an improvised hook made from the metal fastening of a lager bottle and exited from the bar directly into the Hotel Strass. There was a dining room on the left. Allie had eaten nothing since that morning. Maybe she could hide there for a while.

A waiter showed her to a table in the far corner and Allie ordered tomato soup. She was so pathetic. Waves of disappointment flooded her body to make her heart heavy and her lungs leaden. Stupid to have turned last night into something more than it was.

Her soup arrived and so did a text message. From Zach. Allie took a deep breath and opened it.

Where are you?

Having dinner, she texted back.

Thought you were buying me dinner?

Too hungry to wait. In Strass next to Polar Bar.

I know.

She looked up and saw Zach walking across the room. He slid onto the seat next to her. One kiss and Miss Pushover forgave him everything.

"I spotted you in the bar and was elbowing my way over when this half-naked body dropped on me. I disposed of it and came back to find you gone." He signaled to the waiter. "Bottle of your best champagne and the menu, please."

Allie cringed.

"What's the matter?" Zach asked.

"You're a very expensive date."

He laughed. "I'm paying."

"I said I would."

"I'll pay for the champagne then."

"Okay." Allie took a deep breath. "What did you do with the body?"

"Dumped it."

Allie didn't need to know more than that. Zach wanted *her*.

They settled into an easy conversation, chatting and flirting. Zach told her about his two older brothers who were doctors like his parents. How he was the patient of the family, always damaging some part of his body in a daredevil stunt. Allie told him when she'd been studying Russian at university she'd been approached by a government agency and asked if she was interested in being a spy.

"Well, they didn't use the word spy," she said. "So it might have been quite innocent but I like to think not."

Zach twirled his champagne flute in his fingers. "You weren't tempted?"

"Since I scream for mercy if I have my feet tickled, I don't think I was a suitable candidate."

"Ticklish all over?" he asked.

Allie grinned. "Want to find out?"

Zach shifted his chair closer. "I wish you were wearing a skirt." He put his hand on her knee and trailed his fingers up her thigh, over the zipper in her pants to flip open the button.

"Zach!"

"Allie!" he snapped back with a smile.

Dessert arrived. Layers of fruit and sponge sitting in a swirl of red sauce and piled up like the leaning tower of Pisa. Before the waiter had moved away Zach pulled down her zipper. Allie was in an agony of indecision. They were at the edge of the half-empty dining room. Zach's fingers slid through the gap and brushed the material of her panties.

"Mmm. Lace. For me?" he asked. "I wish I could pull them off with my teeth. I'd push my tongue—"

Allie forked a spoonful of dessert into his mouth.

"Shut up," she whispered.

He laughed and slid a finger over her wet folds. "Show me how bad you are."

Allie chewed her lower lip and then widened her legs. Zach smiled.

Thank goodness she hadn't worn tight pants. Thank goodness for an enormous tablecloth. Thank goodness Zach knew what he was doing. As he circled her clit with his fingertip, Allie clamped her teeth around her spoon.

The waiter headed back in their direction and Allie assumed Zach would stop, but he didn't. She sucked harder at the spoon.

"Is everything to your satisfaction?" the waiter asked.

"Everything's perfect," Zach said, and rubbed the little nub of nerve-rich tissue.

"Mmm, lovely," Allie mumbled. "Totally delicious."

She sighed with relief when the waiter walked away. Then Zach somehow managed to get a finger inside her as well as increasing the pressure on her clit. Allie stared in despair at her empty plate and dragged Zach's half-finished desert in front of her.

He put his mouth next to her ear. "Going to scream? If you do, we can pretend you saw a mouse."

She let out a muffled snort and scooped another spoonful of sponge. Eating was the only thing that stopped her moaning.

"You feel so soft and hot and creamy. Think anyone would notice if I slipped under the table?"

She shot him a panicked look.

"I want you to come," he said.

"Where?"

He smiled.

"I can't. Not here."

Zach licked her ear. "Yeah you can."

He was right. She was wrong. Allie could feel tendrils of orgasm gathering together into a thick thread to wrap her tighter and tighter. Her breath emerged in jerky gasps, her pulse raced and she trembled.

"Look at me," he said.

One look at his green eyes was enough to sweep her over the waterfall. Her chest clenched in time with her pussy and she exploded in sharp waves of pleasure as she tumbled into the deep pool below.

Allie slammed a hand over her mouth. "OhGodohGodohGodohGod."

Zach pulled his finger out of her, brought it to his lips, licked it and then sucked it into his mouth.

"Best thing I've tasted all night," he whispered. "Now I want more."

* * * * *

Zach positioned Allie in front of him in the elevator to hide his erection from the elderly couple who joined them. When they all got off at the same floor, Zach rushed her down the corridor to his room. When the door shut, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"I was close to getting us arrested," he said, pinning her against the wall. "I wanted to pull you onto the table, yank down your pants and eat you."

Allie's knees sagged. He laughed, pulled her upright and then groaned.

"Jesus, Allie, I am so desperate. I want to fuck you as hard and fast as I can. I'd planned gentle and slow, but I can't wait." He pulled her sweater over her head and gasped. "Thank fuck I didn't know what you had under that."

He stared at her breasts, pushed up in a red lace bra, and his mouth watered.

"Help me," Allie said.

"Wha-wha..." He couldn't speak.

"Zach!"

He looked down to where she struggled with the fastening on his pants. He ripped them open, lost the button, dragged them down his legs and couldn't get past his shoes. Zach almost fell over because he was so busy watching Allie strip to her underwear. When she turned, bent to pick up her clothes and he saw the way her butt cheeks peeped below a strip of red lace, he *did* fall over. *Shit*.

Allie was on him in a moment. "Are you okay? Have you hurt your knee?"

"No, my pride." He rolled onto his back.

She smiled and unfastened his shoes, levering them off, then his socks, his pants and finally his shirt. Allie ran her fingers along the tent in his shorts and rubbed her thumb over the wet patch.

"I think maybe I'd like to fuck *you* hard and fast," she said.

Zach hoped that pathetic whimper hadn't come from him, but he suspected it might have. He lifted his hips so she could pull off his shorts, and when she kissed the crest of

his cock, wrapped her lips around the rim and teased, Zach knew there would be no more whimpers because he'd stopped breathing. Allie moved back to slip out of her bra, eased down her panties and Zach had his first proper look at her naked.

Holy shit. Completely gorgeous. He wrapped his hand around the base of his cock and squeezed hard as he pushed down. That bought him an extra couple of minutes.

Twenty seconds, bud, screamed his balls.

Allie straddled his body, giving him a mouthwatering view of her wet folds before she lowered her hips. She pressed her pussy against the length of his cock, and when Zach felt the heat and the warmth of it, he thought he might die from sheer joy.

"Condom. In. Wallet." He forced out the words while his brain still worked.

"In a minute." She brushed her thumbs over his nipples and rocked her hips so the tip of his cock played on her clit. Zach tensed so hard he shook with the effort of not thrusting into her.

Her eyes were closed, her mouth open, her breasts rising and falling as her breathing quickened. He saw the moment she flew, felt the ripples tempt his body to follow and Zach knew he didn't have a minute. He pressed hard on the strip of flesh behind his balls. Too much and he'd drive his orgasm back into his body, not enough and he'd spurt before he got inside her.

"Sorry. Couldn't wait." Allie opened her eyes and grinned.

Zach growled one word. "Condom."

She reached for his pants and Zach grabbed his wallet. He had the rubber on before he took another breath. It took one little swimmer to create a lifetime of responsibility and he'd never taken risks, so he didn't quite understand why he was so desperate to toss the rubber aside and fill her with his cum.

Because she's different.

Allie held his cock at the entrance to her body and stared at him. Zach could have sworn her chocolate eyes darkened. He raised his hands to her backside and let his

fingers slide into the crease of her butt while she pressed down and down. His brain fogged as his cock was wrapped in tight heat. When their hips kissed as their bodies meshed, they both gasped.

One slow rise and fall on his desperate cock and Zach blurted, "You haven't forgotten you wanted hard and fast?"

"Changed my mind."

"No, no, no," he groaned.

Allie laughed and tightened her muscles around him, swiveling as she rocked to send ripples of sensation pulsing down his cock to his balls and back again. Zach swept his hands to her breasts, rolling his palms over the sensual curves, plucking at her nipples as she began to ride him along the road to nirvana. As she drove down, Zach bucked up, their bodies slipping into a perfect rhythm.

Hard, fast, deep.

The words echoed in Zach's head as he slammed his cock up into her. Allie collapsed onto his chest, rubbing her body against him as he pulled her tighter into his embrace. Her mouth sought his and they moved out of control, tongues fucking, teeth clashing, bodies bucking as they climbed to the peak together. Switches tripped in Zach's brain and his spine began to melt from the top down. His bones hurt and his back arched. He needed to come so badly he wasn't sure if he could hold back anymore.

Then Allie clenched so hard around his shaft, any pretense at control evaporated. She cried out his name and unraveled against his chest, her pussy dragging his cock to completion. A glow spread though his body, his hair prickled from his scalp to his toes and he emptied himself in wrenching waves of bliss.

Hard, deep, fast.

Yep, Allie had fallen for him. She lay on Zach's chest, panting into the side of his neck and knew whatever she thought she'd felt for a guy before—she'd never felt this.

She and Zach were right together. He made her laugh. He made her heart jump when he looked at her. She trusted him. She loved him.

Except he was a ski bum. He probably fucked snow bunnies everywhere he went. How could anyone resist him? He *was* a god. Could they have a long-distance relationship? Would he even want one?

"You're too quiet," Zach whispered.

Because she was thinking too much, making this into something it wasn't.

"You just turned me into a puddle," Allie said.

He chuckled and lifted her off him to remove the condom. Zach pushed himself to his feet and groaned, "Bathroom."

Allie began a slow crawl toward the bed, stalled before she got there and found arms lifting her, laying her on her back.

"Told you I was a puddle," she said.

"Then I'll lap you up."

His tongue explored just about everywhere, found every sensitive place and then some. He licked and nibbled her toes, behind her knees, around her elbows, the shell of her ear. He kissed his way to her navel and every touch of his soft lips, hard jaw and wet tongue made Allie's skin explode in shivers of bliss.

When he finally spread her legs and his warm breath washed over the folds of her sex, a strangled groan burst from her throat. One swipe with the flat of his tongue to make her quiver. One slurp to make her burn.

"Allie, Allie, Allie." He buried his face between her legs.

Oh God.

His teeth closed around the swollen nub of her clit and sucked it into his mouth as his hands reached for her nipples. He really *was* a god. He could do many things at the same time. His tongue, lips, fingers, legs... Allie was having trouble doing one—breathing. Though, did getting wetter and wetter count as multi-tasking? She threaded

her fingers through his hair and gulped as his tongue swirled around the opening to her body.

She stopped trying to think and allowed her emotions to wash over her. No one had ever made her feel like this, made her come like this. One jolt deep in her womb and her climax surged over her with the power of an accelerating jet. And Zach kept lapping, kept sucking, kept eating her as she flew into oblivion.

No time to recover, he flipped her over and dragged her up onto her knees.

"Have to fuck you right now," he gasped.

Allie heard foil rip and then his hands were on her hips and he sank deep inside her, pulling back to slam his weight into her, over and over. His breathing frantic, he leaned over her back, slid his arms down hers to hold her hands and then he bit her shoulder.

Impossibly, Allie came again, white lights flashing behind her eyes. Zach cried out, shuddering into her, and she collapsed onto the bed.

"You're...going...to kill me." He breathed the words into her neck and then rolled his weight off her. "How is it as soon as I've fucked you, I want to do it all over again? I'll never get enough of you. I'm addicted."

Allie's heart almost burst with joy. Maybe it didn't have to be a long-distance relationship; she could find temporary work like Zach. She had some money put aside, they could use that.

"How many more days do we have?" he whispered.

Her poor heart shriveled. "I leave on Saturday."

He pulled her closer. "I don't want you to go."

It burst back to life.

* * * * *

Neither of them slept much. If Allie dropped off, Zach woke her and vice versa. So it wasn't a surprise the next morning that Allie got as far as the elevator before she realized she'd forgotten her gloves.

Zach handed her a room key. "I'll wait downstairs. If we both go back, we won't leave the room."

They planned to walk back to her hotel and get her gear. Zach told her he'd asked for the day off so they could go skiing. Allie was thrilled.

When she emerged into the lobby, she reeled. It was packed with people and cameras. Big cameras. Here for Trudi Love, Allie assumed and was glad she wasn't a celebrity. Zach might not have guessed it by her behavior, but she was really shy.

"What's your response to Trudi's confession that she was responsible for your accident?" a man asked.

"It makes no difference to the fact I let the team down."

Allie drew in a breath at the sound of Zach's voice. She edged through the throng and saw Zach standing next to the flamboyant popstar. She wore a fluorescent pink ski suit and clung onto Zach's arm.

"Why have you only just come forward?" the interviewer asked.

"I didn't know where he'd gone." She snuggled closer to him.

Zach didn't look happy, Allie thought, but what was happening? How did he know Trudi Love?

"Like to comment on the headline in today's paper?" The man held up an Austrian newspaper in front of the camera. "Has the king of the slopes found a new queen?"

Allie gulped when she saw the photo of her and Zach emerging from the Ice Hotel.

"Where is this mystery woman? Was her rescue a setup? An attempt to redeem yourself for your careless injury?" someone shouted.

"His injury wasn't self-inflicted," Trudi said. "My toboggan was about to crash and Zach skied in front of me to knock me to one side. He's my hero."

And not mine.

Allie slipped to the back of the crowd and listened to the conclusion of the interview. Seemed Zach was a famous skier. Allie didn't know the names of any skiers, so why would she recognize his? As the crowd parted and he came toward her, Trudi tagging behind, Allie stared straight at him.

Zach ignored her.

She heard her heart crack. Allie walked out of the hotel and out of his life.

* * * * *

Allie dragged her feet as she walked to work. She'd flown back to the UK on Saturday night, surrounded by people raving about the great snow and the even greater *après-ski*. She'd put up with teasing about the nonexistent guy she hooked up with and known she needed to find new friends. Allie had blocked Zach's number and deleted it from her phone the moment she'd left the Strass Hotel. She had more than one pang of regret but what was done was done and probably for the best.

At eleven she headed to the kitchen on a hunt for coffee, and when she came back into her office, she found a badly wrapped parcel in the middle of her desk. *Anniversary paper?* Allie gasped when she found a soft gray baby elephant inside. She looked up at the knock on the door.

Zach walked in, all tall and dark and gorgeous. Her heart jumped up to meet his and her backside hit the desk. Good thing it was there or she'd have fallen.

He blew out a breath. "I've had a hard time tracking you down. I looked into every glacier crack and crevasse. I walked all over the resort trying to find you. I stuck pieces of paper to every lamppost."

"You ignored me," she whispered.

"God, Allie, I was trying to put the hounds of hell off your tail. Trudi was up to her usual tricks. She'd seen the story about us in the paper — fucking Jurgen thinking he was

doing me a favor and making me look good—and wanted to steal the thunder. I didn't want you dragged into my mess. I didn't want what we had spoiled."

Allie's mouth went dry.

"I didn't handle it well, I'm sorry, but why the fuck did you run?" Zach asked.

"You'd tipped my world upside down. I'm not a popstar. Why would you want me?"

He took a step toward her. "Trudi's a manipulative bitch. She doesn't care what she does to get what she wants, but she's not having me." His mouth twitched. "I was hoping you might." He took another step. "Not going to run?"

"I might fall over."

Zach laughed. "One week since we met. Like to celebrate our anniversary?"

Allie nodded. "I know just the spot. A small, dark place where there's only room for two."

"I thought I'd lost you." He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a square of paper. "This is what I pinned to the lampposts."

Allie unfolded it and read, *God looking for his goddess*.

She smiled and walked into his arms. "You found me."

About the Author

Barbara Elsborg lives in West Yorkshire in the north of England. She always wanted to be a spy, but having confessed to everyone without them even resorting to torture, she decided it was not for her. Vulcanology scorched her feet. A morbid fear of sharks put paid to marine biology. So instead, she spent several years successfully selling cyanide.

After dragging up two rotten, ungrateful children and frustrating her sexy, devoted, wonderful husband (who can now stop twisting her arm), she finally has time to conduct an affair with an electrifying, plugged-in male – her laptop.

Her books feature quirky heroines and bad boys, and she hopes they are as much fun to read as they are to write.

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

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

Also by **Barbara Elsborg**

Anna in the Middle

Doing the Right Thing

Finding the Right One

Lucy in the Sky

Perfect Timing

Power of Love

Something About Polly

Strangers

Susie's Choice

The Bad Widow



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer ebooks or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

www.ellorascave.com