

ELLORA'S CAVE TABOO

DELILAH  
DEVLIN

Begging  
for It

1-800-DOM-help



## **Begging for It**

*Delilah Devlin*

*A book in the 1-800-DOM-help series.*

*She needs punishment...before she deserves pleasure.*

Tragedy scarred TJ Lipton. Now the only way she can find pleasure is when it's delivered with a heavy-handed dose of S&M. But finding a lover who can give her what she needs proves an elusive quest—until she finds the sex club Unfettered and a Dom named Cross McNally.

Cross understands all too well what drives TJ. He takes command of her body to give her everything she needs—restraint, the stinging kiss of a flogger, the thrill of a three-way—a sexual adventure that pulls her beyond her painful past and has her begging for more of his tender brand of domination.



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Begging for It

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# *BEGGING FOR IT*

Delilah Devlin



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## **The Magic**

The magic begins with the appearance of the business card. Sleek black print on a pristine white background – unassuming in its appearance. Those brave enough to call the number will begin a journey that will explore their greatest desires.

Once the call is made, the Operator goes to work. Somehow he knows just what every caller needs, always able to find the answer the caller seeks.

Callers may be directed to Unfettered, a new club in town, one nobody has heard of. It provides a safe haven for all who enter. Members are free to explore their every desire...even those they weren't aware of. Little do they know Unfettered will disappear once those yearnings have eased.

Submissives who don't know how to handle their Dominants. Masters looking for the perfect sub. People who need just a little push to admit vanilla isn't their favorite flavor. The card finds them all.

And once you dial 1-800-DOM-help, anything can happen.



## Chapter One

*She awoke, gasping, inhaling smoke, and then began to choke. Which forced her to close her mouth and breath through her nose – a mistake because the smell of burned rubber, gasoline and something mustier and more frightening turned her stomach. She feared she'd vomit, but her seat belt gouged her waist as she hung upside down in the harness.*

*Something was in her eyes. She blinked but couldn't clear the viscous fluid. Panic swelled, and then she heard a sound beside her, an odd rhythmic gurgling, and she remembered.*

*The driver.*

*Blind, she reached for him, but her fingers sank into warm, sticky blood. She began to scream...*

"TJ – Yo! Wake up!"

Tansy Jo Lipton jerked, banging her head against her monitor. Sitting back, she rubbed her head and glared at her partner Marnie Croft.

"You were asleep and moaning." Marnie's dark curls shivered around her face as she shook her head. "Did you call that VA shrink? Honey, you can't keep this up much longer. You need to talk to someone."

TJ frowned. She didn't like discussing her problems with anyone. Her demons were ones she preferred to wrestle on her own. In her own way. "We talk."

"But do you tell him anything he needs to hear? Does he know you're still havin' the dream?"

Giving a shrug, TJ's glance slid away. Then she lied through her teeth to her best friend. "I don't get it so much anymore."

Marnie snorted and turned away, closing TJ's office door without saying another word.



Not that TJ blamed her friend for her anger and frustration. Marnie had held the business together when TJ was called up. She'd hoped to have her burden lightened when TJ returned from Iraq.

The problem was TJ had never really come back. Not fully. She'd left part of herself behind in the bloody hell and had returned a wizened shell of her former self.

The dream was a nightmare. One she couldn't outrun. She'd slept so little the night before, she'd planned on only taking a catnap at her desk. However, if the puddle of drool on her desktop was any indication, she'd been out for a while. And the dream had found her again, leaving her cold.

She still shook with the horror of it.

TJ checked her watch. It was nearly time to call it quits for the day anyway. She turned off her computer, shuffled unfinished proposals into a neat stack and figured that was all she was going to accomplish. Nothing mattered anyway.

Who cared whether they raked in another fifty-grand contract for renovating office space in downtown San Antonio? Was anyone going to die if they failed?

She closed her office door and slinked down the corridor, whipping quickly past Marnie's door. Letting Marnie down did make her itch with guilt, but not enough to spark a fire for her to do her job.

She headed toward the underground parking lot, but music blared from the door of The Shamrock, just across the street. Would Brent be there again? Would he be up for a little sex? She was bored with him. He didn't really hit her buttons, but he was a good-looking guy with a willing dick. What more could she ask for when she needed a quick fix?

Standing at the curb, she waited for the traffic to pass. A car slowed, a darkly tinted window rolled down. A man peered up from his steering wheel.

"Not even in your dreams," she called out, and darted into the street behind his vehicle, strangely gratified by the sound of squealing brakes.



The bar was packed with happy-hour customers. She combed her hair with her fingers and made a beeline for the tables in the back.

Brent was parked in a booth and gave her a crooked smile as she approached. "Wondered if you'd show."

She slung her purse onto the seat opposite him then scooted in beside him, her hand going straight between his legs to cup his sex.

He jerked but eased his thighs open for her to give him a deeper caress. "I take it you're back for more," he murmured, and turned to nuzzle her ear.

She leaned away from the kiss he pressed against her skin. She wasn't here to cuddle. "Let's slip out back."

"Now, why do I suddenly feel cheap?" he muttered.

"Because you know I only want your body."

He grunted but let her tug his hand behind her as she slid from the seat and walked to the corridor at the back of the bar. She passed the restrooms, the bar owner's office, and pushed open the rear exit.

There, in the middle of the alley, she reached under her skirt and pulled off her panties.

"It's not even dark yet. Anyone could see," he said, his voice tightening with annoyance. "And it stinks out here."

TJ leaned into him, grabbing his hand and tucking it between her legs. No way could he miss the fact she was wet. Maybe he'd think she was hot for him. "Then go inside," she said, raising her chin. "I'll find someone else."

His gaze narrowed. "Anyone ever tell you you're a bitch?"

She smirked. "You. Last night. Tell me you weren't waiting with a hard-on just thinking about what we did. I'll call you a liar to your face."

He shook his head, his eyebrows drawing into a frown. "Girl, you've got issues."



“Not anything I don’t already know. But right now all I want is you inside me – and give it to me rough.”

She reached for his zipper, but he shoved her hands away and made quick work of his belt, his fly, and then shoved his pants off his hips, just far enough to free his cock, which sprang eagerly from the opening of his pants. He pulled a condom from his pocket and rolled it down his shaft. Then he reached for her. “Let’s make it quick,” he whispered urgently.

Fine by her. She put her back against the wall and let him lift her by the ass until she wrapped her legs around his waist.

When he started to push inside, she bent toward his ear. “Slap me.”

Already looking sex-dazed, he shook his head. “What?”

“Slap my ass. Pinch me.”

“All right,” he growled then juggled her a bit to free a hand and tap her butt.

“Not hard enough.”

He slapped her again.

She lifted her upper lip and snarled, “Harder, baby. I need it to sting.”

“Fuck.” His cock was poised at her opening, barely inside, but he cupped her butt and gave her a harder swat then followed with a biting pinch.

She kissed his cheek. “Now, bang me,” she whispered. “Right here against the wall. Leave the imprint in my skin.” She wrestled out of her blouse, letting the sleeves drop to her elbows. Not for him to admire her white, lace bra but because she wanted the bricks scraping her back.

He growled again and ground into her, thrusting inside and beginning to crash her against the wall. “You’re fucking crazy, you know that?” he said beside her ear. “Fucking out of your mind. We’re both gonna get arrested.”

“Just do it,” she said, giving his cheek a sharp tap. “Do it!”



He banged her pussy, jouncing her on his cock, driving her against the wall until the dirt and grit scraped her skin raw. This was how she liked it. What she needed. These days, she couldn't get off unless it hurt.

Only then did she deserve it.

Except he was already coming, giving a muffled shout into her ear, his movements growing erratic. When he halted, he pinned her to the wall and leaned back. "We're done," he said, his voice ragged. "Baby, I can't give you what you need."

No, he couldn't. He couldn't grind away the pain. Couldn't keep her mind so filled with sex that she didn't for even one second forget the jumbled images in her head.

And he was right. The alley stank. Not like the smell of loosened bowels and blood, but bad enough that it was all she could think about. "Let me down."

He raised her, disengaging, then set her on her heels.

She closed her blouse, tugged down her skirt and kicked away the panties lying beside her feet. As she walked away, she wondered if she was losing her mind. He certainly thought she had.

And she didn't blame him. Brent was basically a decent guy. It wasn't his fault she had so much baggage she couldn't let him fuck her the way he preferred. Last night, he'd pleaded with her to let him take her home.

Inside the bar, she headed back to the booth but found it occupied by a man—a big, burly guy with a thick neck and arms so big they could bench press a Cadillac. Her interest sparked immediately, but Brent was striding up behind her. "That's my purse on the seat next to you."

The man raised an eyebrow and gave them both a curious look, his gaze sliding over her disheveled appearance and likely coming to all the right conclusions.

TJ stared right back. There was something familiar about him. Something in the hard glint in his brown eyes. Or maybe it was just the short buzz cut that left his dark



hair standing up in bristles on the top of his head. Like a Marine. That must have been it.

Without a word, he lifted her purse and handed it to her. She glanced behind her to say her farewell, but Brent was already striding out of the bar. Getting away from her as fast as he could, and she couldn't blame him.

She was the freaky chick. The one a guy thought he wanted until she had him banging her cunt in a dirty alley.

God, she needed a bath.

She turned away, but her heel caught in the carpet and she fell forward. The guy in the booth shot out a hand to grasp her upper arm, saving her from landing on her face.

She'd have bruises. A big black-and-blue bruise for every thick, hard finger that squeezed her arm. "Thanks," she said, and she meant it.

Cross McNally watched the woman walk away, her back straight, but her chin tilted at an angle that betrayed her inner turmoil. He'd seen her cross the street and thought he'd recognized her, but she'd given him a sneer when he'd slowed down.

He'd parked in front of the bar and followed her inside. When he'd seen her drag the dude in the Brooks Brothers suit out the back, he'd hurried out the front and around the side to watch.

It was shadowed where they stood, but he hadn't needed to see clearly to know what they were doing or what it was doing to her. Her groans had been edged with desperation. The hard, crunching thrusts had to have rubbed her back and ass raw.

A familiar ache settled in his chest. The last time he'd felt it, he'd held her against his chest while she'd beaten him with bloody fists.

Cross left the bar and walked back to his car. He opened the door and slid behind the wheel but paused for a long moment before kicking the ignition. It must have been fate that had him on this exact street at just the right moment to find her.



And it looked as if he'd have to rescue her all over again. He just hoped this time she wouldn't hate him.

\* \* \* \* \*

TJ unlocked her apartment and walked inside, slamming the door with a backward kick of her foot and passing the beeping telephone. No doubt a message from Marnie asking her when she'd finish the proposal for next week's bid deadline.

She walked straight to her bedroom and began to strip. Her shirt stuck to her back and she winced. She gave it a quick tug, pulling it away from her sticky skin. When she held the shirt in front of her, she saw an ugly red stain. She'd bled.

Shame burned the back of her throat. She balled up the shirt, strode into the bathroom and pushed it into the bottom of the trash can. When she slipped off her skirt, she didn't bother checking for blood but pitched it as well.

Her reflection in the mirror made her stomach hurt. Her face was white, her blue eyes haunted. Her makeup was smudged beneath the lower rim. When she turned, red, pimpled abrasions covered her back and the top of her hips, along with two deeper scrapes that were coated in blood.

*What's wrong with me?*

Only she already knew. The VA counselor, who didn't know the whole story of what was going on with her, had told her—PTSD mixed with a shitload of survivor's guilt.

All because she'd lived and PFC Sammy Figueroa hadn't.

TJ showered, dressed in a tee and sweatpants, and then headed into the kitchen to fix a bite to eat. Her phone chirped inside her purse, and she wrinkled her nose.

Soon, she promised herself, she'd get her life back in order. Just not tonight. Still, the sound was annoying. She opened the flap of her handbag and reached inside for her phone, hitting the button to silence it. When she drew out her hand, a card tumbled out.



It landed on the floor face up. It was a plain white business card with bold lettering. *Call 1-800-DOM-help.*

Her head canted as she read the words and numbers again. It wasn't something she'd tucked inside her purse. She'd have remembered. The way the telephone number reverberated inside her, the images it conjured—she wouldn't have forgotten it. The pictures flashed through her mind—ridiculous ones of men and women dressed in leather and PVC, dragging each other around by leather-studded collars and leashes. Of women stretched in chains with floggers stinging their backs and buttocks.

The sting of her own scrapes flared, which nonsensically caused her clit to throb.

She bent to pick up the card, intending to drop it into the trash, but her fingers curled around it instead. A deep ache settled in her belly. Tears burned the backs of her eyes.

What the hell anyway? She'd been battling urges that crippled her with horror ever since her return. She couldn't sleep. Couldn't work. Couldn't have a normal conversation with friends.

Maybe some man tricked-out in leather could give her the kind of pain she sensed she needed to find at least a temporary release from all of her problems.

She uncurled her fingers from around the edges of the card and reached for the phone.



## Chapter Two

TJ stood on a sidewalk outside a building in the warehouse district. Tall streetlamps gleamed up and down a row of hollow, abandoned structures, leaving dark pools of shadow.

She tugged up the collar of her jacket to shield herself against a sudden chill. The building in front of her, a tall, square box with garishly painted doors and a neon sign that flickered and buzzed was named Unfettered.

And it was a club. One the operator she'd spoken to last night described as an "alternative".

"To what?" she'd asked.

"To everything you've tried before." His voice had been silky and deep, soothing her nerves as she'd clutched the handset so tightly the slip of her fingers squeaked.

It had felt as though he knew her pain. But perhaps he'd had hundreds of calls from people every bit as twisted and broken as she was.

The door opened. A woman stood at the top of the steps. She was tall with black hair that reached to her waist. She didn't beckon but simply held the door, her expression unrevealing as TJ fought the urge to turn and run.

This wasn't her. It couldn't be her.

"Chickenin' out before you even have a look inside?"

She jerked and swung her head toward the voice, only to find the burly man from the bar standing several feet away, his narrowed gaze watching her. Her shoulders fell. "You put the card in my purse."

"What card?" But then he smiled and waved an arm toward the entrance of the club. "After you?"



He was dressed in jeans that molded thickly muscled thighs and a black long-sleeved tee that could have been painted onto his torso, and which revealed the heavy musculature that cloaked his frame.

Her mouth dried. He'd be strong. Stronger than her.

"Tell me you're not tempted."

Lord, had he read her mind? No, he was talking about the club. "Why'd you do it?" she asked, knowing she was stalling the inevitable. And he knew it too.

His shrug was nonchalant, but his gaze fell away. His lips curved into a slight, tight smile. "I saw you in the alley. Looked like your boyfriend couldn't get you off. Looked like a nice guy." What he left unsaid was that he was not.

Still, she didn't like being played, moved around like a marionette. "I'm out of here."

She flicked a glance at the woman at the top of the stairs who still hadn't moved then turned on her heel and walked away.

However, footsteps shadowed hers. She glanced back. Big and burly was several steps behind but had halted when she had. "Stop following me. I'll call the police."

His smile widened, and his hand reached into his back pocket. He pulled out small, black wallet and gave it a flick. A gold badge shown in the lamplight.

"That's supposed to make me feel better? Anyone can buy one of those."

"I'm a cop. East substation. You can call if you like. But you already know I'm tellin' the truth."

She raised her chin. "Then you know better than to stalk me."

"Not stalkin', baby," he said in a lazy, Texas drawl. "I'm here to help."

TJ looked away and swallowed down a bitter lump. "Sure you are," she shot back, but her voice was thick. The endearment, even thrown around casually, made her wish for something she couldn't have — arms to hold her, a man who loved her.



He blew out a deep breath. "Look, I left the card in your purse, but it was your choice whether you called that number or not. And you're here. Why not see if this is what you've been lookin' for?"

She kept her back to him, afraid he'd read her expression and know that her hesitation was because she was afraid to walk away. She'd called the number out of desperation. "What is it you want out of this? You into freaks?"

"You're not a freak. But I know a little something about what you're goin' through."

She snorted. "Oh yeah? Think you know me so well?"

"I saw you with that guy. Or rather heard you. You wanted to be punished."

Her lip lifted in a snarl, and she swung toward him. "That your thing? You like watching? Or do you like slapping girls?"

"Not so much. But I am good at readin' what a partner needs. I'll give it to you. You won't have to beg me for it. You comin'?"

TJ swallowed, this time because her mouth had gone dry. He was good. Knew just what to say to get her to melt. Her nipples were erect. Her clit swelled.

His expression was still hard, uncompromising. But this time she took comfort from his strength. When he lifted his hand, she found herself raising hers and sliding her palm against his.

Cross slowly closed his fingers around her hand and pulled her. She came a step closer, and he pivoted so they stood side by side. He encircled her waist with his arm, lightly bracing the small of her back. He half feared she'd jerk away, but she eased into the embrace, seeming to relax a little. Letting him take charge. She was already learning to lean on him.

And it was sweet, even if her lips were twisted in a snarl.



TJ was skittish—and she had reason to be. If she had any clue what was going through his head right now... His body was taut, groin aching—had been since he'd first glimpsed her striding toward the club.

Fuck, she was beautiful tonight. Her tawny-brown hair was loose around her shoulders, and she wore a skimpy top, a black, silky sleeve that hugged her breasts. She'd come braless—he knew because her nipples poked against the fabric. Long, pencil-thin black jeans skimmed her legs. Her red-painted toenails were framed by silver sandals. He'd never been into toes, but swore he'd get off sucking on them.

They walked back to the club, and he raised his face to meet Dru's stoic gaze. The manager of the club gave him a subtle nod, and her lips formed a soft smile before she glanced at the woman he guided firmly up the steps. "TJ, right?"

TJ cleared her throat. "Right. How'd you know?"

"You're the only newbie scheduled to arrive. I've been keeping an eye out for you. The neighborhood can be a little intimidating. Come inside. I'd offer to show you around, but Cross, here, has been around a time or two. You're in good hands."

Cross raised an eyebrow. He didn't know how she managed it, but Dru knew everything that went on inside the club and probably knew all too well that he'd greased the wheels to get TJ here. When he'd first hit town, he'd needed a place he could go where he could feel as if he was in charge of his own destiny. A business card tucked into the corner of a bathroom stall door with the club's 1-800 number hadn't seemed like the answer. However, Unfettered had fit the bill to a "T".

Last night, he'd told the Operator that he thought TJ might find the club just as "therapeutic".

Cross passed Dru, who gave him a surreptitious wink, then guided TJ through the dark foyer and into the main room of the club. Music played, a throbbing techno beat, but not so loud he couldn't hear the rumble of conversations all around him.



TJ's head turned, glancing left then right, and her steps slowed. He pressed the small of her back, urging her forward. She didn't resist. She was clearly curious about everything happening around them.

There were small, lit stages positioned around the room, raised daises really, where several scenes were playing with onlookers admiring the techniques of those providing the demonstrations.

Her attention snagged on a woman whose chained arms were stretched toward the ceiling and who stood on tiptoe. She was a busty blonde, and each swat of a paddle against her generous buttocks shook her heavy breasts.

He was sure it was the woman's expression that fascinated TJ. A look of pure bliss accompanied the blonde's loud, staccato moans.

He bent toward TJ's ear. "Would you like a drink?" he asked, pointing toward the bar that stretched across the back of the room. "Sorry, no alcohol served here. If you've never been to a place like this, it's frowned on because alcohol messes with a person's judgment." At the questioning arch of her brow, he added, "A Dom needs to stay aware, know when he's pushed a sub to his or her limits. A sub needs to be clearheaded for the same reason."

Her eyebrows lowered. "Look, I don't care about learning about this lifestyle. It's not my thing."

"And yet you're interested in what's happening there," he said, pointing toward the blonde whose Dom was releasing leather cuffs to free her.

"But it's stupid, all that ritual. All that 'yes Sir, no Mistress' crap. The gestures, poses..." She waved toward a man who knelt in front of woman, his hands behind him, his head bent as the woman stroked his shoulders with a quirt. "I'd never do that."

Cross bit back a smile. He'd bet money she'd eat those words before the night was over. "It serves a purpose, sweetheart. It's a discipline. We need rules. Etiquette. To keep things safe."



She swung toward him, her expression belligerent. "Can we skip that part? I'm not... I don't think I could stand that."

"Because you're just eager to have sex, right?" He ignored the instantaneous thrust of her lower lip—and the answering surge in his groin. "You might not be into this thing, but you still need to know the rules. They're for your well-being."

She snorted. "You're gonna talk to me about safe words now?"

Cross didn't let her little outburst faze him. Too much rode on getting her alone tonight. The last thing he'd let happen was her escalating an argument to the point she walked. "Are you always so quick to jump ahead? You want to talk about safe words now? All right. Choose one."

Her fists curled at her sides. "I don't want one."

"Then a signal," he said agreeably. "So you have control."

"I don't want control. I don't want some pussy stoplight when things get tough."

Cross held still. "You want me to decide?" he asked softly.

Her chin jutted, pulling the skin taut over her cheeks, accentuating the haunted shadows in her eyes. "I don't want you to stop."

His jaw sawed shut. "All right, sweetheart. I'll give you what you need."

TJ shivered at the promise in his voice. Perhaps tonight she wouldn't be left disappointed.

A hand slid along his arm, and his head swiveled toward the manager who gave him a polite smile while her gaze reflected her doubt. She'd heard them arguing.

"Would you like her prepared?" the dark-haired woman asked.

"I'll do it," Cross said, biting out the words.

The woman's chest rose as she took a breath. Her gaze went from him to TJ, who kept her expression neutral. "Then I'll leave you two alone." To TJ, she tilted her head. "He really is very good. I vetted him myself. Trust in him to guide you."



Once they were alone, TJ glanced around the room. "Will anyone be watching us?"

"We'll have a private room. No onlookers."

"But will anyone see?"

"You should know that all the rooms are monitored."

She snorted. "For my safety. Right."

Cross edged closer. She almost took a step back but straightened her spine. When he put his arm around her and pressed against the small of her back to get her walking, she gave a little shiver, and her pussy grew moist.

If he could manage that kind of reaction with just a gentle nudge, what might that hand do when it landed sharply on her bare skin? They walked, in no apparent hurry, down a long corridor with doors on either side.

Pausing in front of one room, he slipped a card from his pocket. It looked like a hotel room passkey, and he swiped it through the reader. A soft snick sounded, and he pulled down the latch. He waited while she passed inside.

The room was lovely. The colors soothing. The walls were a soft sage, the carpet navy. The furnishings were mostly padded affairs with navy leather upholstery and dark, burnished wooden frames. Candles burned atop a long cabinet with lots of closed drawers.

She stood still in the center of the room, waiting for him to move closer.

However, he remained by the closed door, standing with his hands hanging loosely at his sides.

"Well?" she asked, hating the grating sound of her own voice. God, she was a bitch.

The corners of his mouth twitched. "I'm waiting for you."

Was he laughing at her? "What? You want me to strip here?"

"That would be a start, but not the one I want. I want you to tell me what you think you need."



"What's anyone *need* who comes in here? The subs. They want someone else to make the decisions."

"That's not true. Subs know the possibilities. They can be surprised, pushed beyond what they thought they could bear, but at least they have a structure to rely on. You don't know those possibilities. Tell me what you want."

TJ turned to the side so she didn't have to meet his steady gaze. She felt uncomfortable beneath his stare. Even despite, or perhaps because of, his implacable façade, he made it so tempting for her to confide. She crossed her arms over her chest, hugging herself. "I need pain. For you to make me hurt or I can't get off." There, she'd said it. Now he'd know she really was a freak.

"You're sure about that?"

She nodded jerkily, still not meeting his eyes.

Cross walked toward her, his tread light despite his size. His hand lifted slowly. A finger tucked under her chin to raise her face, forcing her to look at him. "We don't always get what we want, TJ. But I'll give you what you need. Now strip. Put your clothes on the table beside the door. Folded neatly."

She almost balked but sensed that while he was relaxing some of the rules for her, he wouldn't budge on much more. In any case, she was more than ready for things to move along.

Her body was a bundle of pent-up energy. She'd had nothing to think about all day beyond what would happen this night. For the first time in months, she'd felt hope that she'd find release. That she'd enter the zone where her mind could let go of her memories. Just a few moments' ease might save her sanity.

So, she stripped in silence, removing her sandals then her jeans, leaving only her silver bikini panties to cover her below. Then she wriggled out her blouse, easing it down her hips to the floor, not glancing up because she wasn't sure she'd have the nerve to continue. He intimidated her. Which excited her beyond all common sense.



When she stood in only her panties, she took a deep, steadying breath and turned slowly to face him.

His gaze scanned her body quickly then rose to meet her eyes again. "You're lovely."

Perhaps he'd said it to reassure her. She couldn't really tell, but she'd never had any complaints. Her body was still toned, although she hadn't worked out since she'd left the Army. And she'd lost a little weight. "What now?" she asked, surprised to hear the husky note in her voice.

"After you remove your pretty panties, you'll undress me.

Undressing him wasn't something she minded in the least. But the panties?

She'd been casual about dropping hers in the dirty alley with Brent, but she wanted just a little "armor" against Cross' intense scrutiny. Her fingers fumbled as she pushed the satin fabric down her hips and let it fall.

His gaze dropped to her pussy and lingered there a moment. His nostrils flared. When he looked into her face again, she felt moisture pool between her legs at the way his features hardened to granite.

One dark eyebrow arched.

With surprising grace, she walked toward him, circling behind him, then reached for the bottom hem of his tee. She stripped it up his torso, and he raised his arms for her to pull it off. When she stood back, she stared at his back, at the naked breadth of his shoulders, the deep indent of his spine and his narrow waist.

She cleared her throat. "I suppose you want me to fold your clothes too?"

"Of course," he said, without glancing back.

And yet there was amusement in his voice, and she hid a smile as she folded his shirt and placed it on the table next to her clothing. Which made it easier somehow when she walked around him to kneel and untie his boots.



His large hands braced against her shoulders, shifting his weight to her – something so simple and natural, but that reassured her because he was heavy. It reminded her of his strength.

She stripped off his socks and rolled them together into a tight ball, tucked them into his boots and placed them beside the growing piles.

When she reached for his waistband, his chest rose. She thumbed open the button and drew down his zipper, her mouth growing dry because the long ridge of his cock was thickening against his leg, lifting the fabric.

She tugged down his jeans and his cock sprang free, bobbing once, gliding like hot satin against her cheek. The impulse to slide her cheek along his length a second time was overwhelming, so she followed the urge and rubbed her skin against him, closing her eyes to inhale his musk and fill her nostrils with his scent.

Hands petted her hair gently – fingers combed through the strands. “Whenever you’re ready, I want you up on that padded table, sweetheart.”

Her eyes snapped open, blinking, and she quickly pulled his pants the rest of the way off. She folded them, tossing them carelessly on the stack, and went to the padded table he indicated. She jumped up and began to lie on her back.

“Other side,” he said. “Rest your head on your arms and relax.”

The relax part was impossible, but she lay down, closing her eyes and listening to his sounds as he moved around the room, opening cupboards. When he came back, he stood beside her. Warm liquid poured onto her back, heated oil, she surmised when he began to massage it into her skin.

He started at her shoulders. “These abrasions...I’ll try to be gentle. Did those happen last night?”

“Yes.”

“There’s grit worked into the scrapes. They look inflamed. You won’t do that again.”



Not his call, but she didn't see a point in arguing. She'd decided the same thing herself.

His large hands rubbed the oil into her skin then he kneaded her shoulder, the tops of her arms. He didn't linger long enough for her to complain about the fact she wasn't there for a massage. He glided lightly over the scrapes. When he palmed her buttocks, she stiffened and lifted her head.

"I'm going to touch you everywhere. Get used to it." And with that, he traced the line bisecting her buttocks, glancing over her anus but coming back to swirl atop the sensitive opening.

TJ pressed her face into the padding, gritting her teeth to suppress a moan of pleasure. But then he moved on, spreading oil down the backs of her thighs and the pads of her feet.

"Roll over."

Lord, she wasn't ready for this. A fucking would be less intimate, but every smooth glide of his hand had given her a pleasure she hadn't known in a long, long time. So, she rolled, coming to rest on her back, her hands crossed over her belly.

He plucked them from her stomach and stretched them along her sides. Then while she watched this time, he tipped a bottle of oil and streamed it over her breasts and belly, into the top of her folds where it ran the length of her slit and pooled beneath her. He poured oil down the tops of her legs.

When he rubbed her this time, she couldn't escape his cutting gaze. "Why the guy in the alley, TJ?"

She jutted her chin. "Why not?"

"He wasn't doing it for you. He's not your type."

"And you are?"

He raised an eyebrow.



She grunted. "Okay. He was easy. Followed directions, to a point," she said with a one-sided smile.

"Like I said – not your type. The fact you had to order him to spank you made that crystal clear."

She hated that he'd seen that. She'd been weak and acted like a crazy whore. "You always spy on people?"

"I was watching out for you."

"You didn't know me. Why would you do that?"

His mouth tightened. "You remind me of someone."

TJ shook her head, wondering what his problem was that he'd be drawn to a woman like her. "Was she as big a bitch?"



## Chapter Three

His teeth flashed, and TJ felt an instant wave of heat that didn't have thing to do with the fact his hands were rubbing oil onto her nipples, thumbs and forefingers pausing to pluck and twist the tips. That smile softened his expression and made him handsome.

Downward he roamed, slicking over her belly then onto her thighs, her knees, calves. *Lord, her toes.*

Each was parted, kneaded. And then his glance sliced to her pussy. "Part your legs for me, sweetheart."

She was embarrassed by how fast she complied, but he didn't smirk. He simply glided a fingertip along her nude folds, up and down then in between, tracing the edges of her thin, inner lips.

Her pussy clenched then opened, making a moist, sucking sound that snared his attention and made her blush. "I like a nude pussy," he murmured. "Keep it like this."

He said it as though they'd see each other again. Frankly, she hoped he'd last longer than Brent.

Fingers parted her and pulled up her folds to bare her clit. Air hissed between her teeth at the first, oily swirl atop the hard, rounded knot.

"Same sweet pink as your lips."

She rolled her eyes. "We are *not* discussing my pussy."

His eyebrows waggled. "Even if how much I like it will mean I spend some extra time there?" Fingers thrust inside her, two—thick, hard digits that twisted and thrust.

Of their own volition, her knees rose and parted.



"Yeah," he breathed. "I like it too, but we're not there yet." He withdrew and wiped his fingers on a towel. "Get on up."

His hand extended, and she gripped it without hesitation, letting him bring her up to sit on the edge of the table with her thighs parted around his hips. His cock angled toward his belly, and she wondered what he'd do if she shimmied her butt closer until it snuggled against her sex.

His gaze dropped to where their bodies almost met. His firm mouth curved. "You need a little softening," he said, his tone even.

"Softening?" she whispered, leaning back on her hands, all but inviting him to come over her, here and now.

"You'll like it. It's right up your alley." When his head came up, the hardness of his stare told her the use of the word "alley" had been deliberate.

She straightened and pulled her legs to the side, closing them. "You sound pissed, and you've no right to be. What I do with my body is my business—"

"You're right. But you're also impatient as hell for me to *make* your body my business."

"You're an ass."

"And you're a bitch."

"So we're even?"

He snorted and shook his head. "We're back to rules. One I have to insist on now."

"Which is?"

"Call me Sir when you address me."

She turned away. "And if I don't?"

"Don't think disobedience will earn you the punishment you want. If you refuse, I walk. And it's not a tease. I won't stop at the door to give you a second chance."

TJ gave him a fierce frown. "Why's it so fucking important to you?"

"It's a sign of respect. Yours for me."



"You haven't done a thing to earn it."

"I'm here," he said, planting his hands on his naked hips. "I've seen the shit you dish, the stupid risks you take. But I'm still here."

"If I'm such a loser, why bother?"

"You really have to ask? When you saw me at the bar, there was a moment, wasn't there? You sized me up, and if your 'dick with benefits' hadn't walked up, I'd bet you'd have slid onto the seat with me. You knew in an instant that I could give you what you want."

He had to say that while they were both naked. While her nipples were hard and her pussy soaked. He'd oiled her up and gotten her stoked so she'd be weak. So willing to follow where he led that she'd beg for it. Damn, she was tempted to whine.

"What's it gonna be? Do you want me to stay?"

She swallowed down her pride but kept her face averted so he wouldn't see that she was secretly pleased he was placing limits on her. Like invisible bonds. "Please, Sir," she whispered. "I want you to stay."

Fingers slid into her hair, and he pulled to tilt back her head. Then he leaned toward her, closing the distance between them but never touching her with his chest or cock.

One breath, a slight arch of her back and she'd be able to scrape her nipples over his lightly furred chest. But his gaze warned her not to.

His mouth covered hers, suctioning slightly, then drew away.

She blinked open her eyes to find he'd never closed his. He studied her expression then his eased a fraction. "TJ, go to the bench behind me and bend over it. And no more questions."

"Yes Sir," she said, her voice husky.

He lent her his hand as she edged off the table and hopped to the floor. Her legs felt like rubber, and she wobbled a bit, but she strode around him toward the bench. A



spanking bench, she guessed. She'd read about them but had never actually seen one. She climbed onto the platform, knelt on a padded step and leaned over it. It was surprisingly comfortable, even if the position left her completely vulnerable with her ass and pussy exposed. And she was comfortable—until he used straps to secure her wrists.

Cross smoothed his hand on her slick skin, from her shoulders to her buttocks. Then both hands closed around one thigh, slid up and down, and lifted it to widen her stance. He repeated the actions with the other. His palm cupped her sex, warming it. A finger slid inside her. "You'll let me do whatever I want?"

"Yes Sir," she gritted out, trying not to clench around the invading digit.

"But you want it rough." Another finger slid inside and both pushed deep.

"Yes," she hissed. Without thinking, she tilted her hips to stick her ass up higher, inviting him deeper. A thicker single digit—his thumb?—pushed against her asshole.

Her head sank as she breathed deeply, trying to relax the tight, little ring. Gradually, he eased inside then fucked all three fingers in and out, slowly.

Arousal slid from inside her to coat the long fingers thrusting in her pussy.

Pursing her lips, she breathed slowly, deeply. She knew he had no intention of getting her off this way, but she was content to let him set the pace.

His fingers withdrew. He padded silently away, toward a dark oak cabinet with slide-out trays of sexual implements. She watched from the corner of her eye as he ran his fingers over the flanges of a flogger, but he passed over it in favor of a paddle—a long, wooden paddle with holes drilled in its surface. Then he opened a drawer and pulled out a blindfold.

His gaze darted toward her, catching her watching. He whipped out the blindfold, making it snap, and she smiled then trained her gaze straight-ahead. A blindfold didn't worry her.



His steps approached again and halted behind her. His body leaned over hers, the heat from his skin warming her back although he never touched her. The blindfold came under her face, and she closed her eyes obediently as he tied it.

"Can you see anything?"

"No Sir," she said, smirking.

"Good."

The door to the room whooshed open, and she jerked up her head. When Cross didn't say anything to whomever had entered, she tightened. She wanted to ask who'd come in and whether it was part of his plan, but he'd ordered her not to question him.

Did he expect her to balk? Footsteps treaded lightly on the carpet, stopping in front of her. A hand cupped her chin. Not Cross'. It didn't feel quite large enough. A thumb stroked her bottom lip, but she kept her mouth firmly closed.

The hand withdrew. The sound of latex snapping came from right in front of her, level with her face. She began to shake her head.

A smack landed on the back of one thigh. Delivered by a hand — this time, certainly Cross' — and hard enough to sting. She jerked, tightening her lips.

Another slap landed on the other thigh then one against her right buttock and the left. She breathed noisily through her nostrils, knowing now what Cross hoped to achieve. *Bastard!* she wanted to say. But then he'd know he'd surprised her. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing she'd wanted him. *Him alone.*

A latex-covered cock stroked her cheek, but she turned away from it.

Cool gel squirted between her buttocks. Something with a rounded point slid between her cheeks. When it circled her hole, she groaned deep in her throat. As it pushed inside, she opened her mouth around a gasp, and a thumb entered her mouth, dragging down her jaw. The cock pushed between her teeth, but she couldn't object because the thing Cross pushed inside her ass was widening, stretching her. Her jaw



opened wider for her to breathe around the cock pushing its way deeper inside her mouth.

TJ's entire body tightened. Her breasts hardened—her nipples grew painfully engorged. The plug Cross pushed relentlessly inside at last narrowed, and his palm snuggled against the base to push it the last little bit, but the toy wasn't going anywhere. The bulbous shape kept it trapped by the tightening of her sphincter.

He'd accomplished what he set out to do. Force her to accept another man's cock—a stranger's. The man in front of her stroked forward and back into her mouth, and she sucked him, obedient at last.

The hard surface of the paddle rubbed over her ass, and she tried to back off the cock to tell him no, that it was going to be too much.

"Don't fight. And for fuck's sake keep your lips around your teeth. If you hurt him, we're done."

He had her. Whatever he commanded, she'd obey. The hard paddle was a promise—her reward for good behavior.

And even before it left her skin, she closed her eyes. Her heart slowed. She locked her jaws wide open, prepared.

The first firm smack jolted her body. She groaned and the cock resumed shafting her mouth, in and out. She sucked hard, drawing on it.

A series of sharp slaps struck her buttocks and thighs, never the same spot, and as her skin warmed, her entire body quivered. Her mind let go, drifting in a luxurious haze.

A smack landed against the center of her ass, tapping the plug, and her pussy and ass clenched. Moisture trickled from her, running to the top of her folds and then her belly. With each slap after, she glided on wet heat. The fact of it registered, but she was far away, lost in a dream state where every part of her body blushed with heat. Every nerve ending sparked. She felt alive but removed.



The cock withdrew. Latex stretched. Then flicks of hot, thick sperm struck her face, her lips. The paddle skimmed her skin again, up her thighs, over her bottom. Then it fell away.

Footsteps padded away. The door opened and closed.

She was alone with Cross again. Her pussy was aching, so engorged it throbbed. She slumped against the bench.

The plug slid smoothly out. Velcro scratched, and her hands were freed. The blindfold loosened then drew away. "Open your eyes."

She blinked. Cross knelt in front of her, his intense, brown gaze locking with hers. He held a wipe and used it to clean her face.

"Any questions left?"

*Just one.* "Will you fuck me?"

His lips twisted in a grim smile. "That's the first one that came to mind?"

She nodded, tears burning her eyes.

Cross' expression softened. Then he straightened and lifted her from the bench, sweeping a hand beneath her knees when they threatened to buckle. He carried her to the table and sat her on the edge.

Her breath hissed as her inflamed skin met the cool leather. Already she could feel the welts rising.

"Lie back."

"Y-yes Sir."

When she lay back, she stretched her arms to either side. The euphoria hadn't fully receded from her mind. She felt mellow — her heart beat at a slow, steady thrum.

Until he bent toward her sex, and his fingers scraped the hood stretched over her aching clit. The first flutter of his tongue there had her arching her back. Her hands covered her breasts, comforting herself, kneading her nipples as he plied her with wicked, targeted laps and flicks until she exploded.



She hovered in ecstasy, blood pulsing through her pussy, rushing to her clit. His tongue soothed the knot until the last of her convulsions faded, and then he kissed her there and rose, leaning over her, his cock trapped against her folds but not entering her.

His hands cupped the back of her head, cradling it gently. "I'll see you again tomorrow."

She blinked. "But..."

He gave a grimace that eased into a crooked smile. "It's not about me getting mine, TJ. This was all about you. You'll learn to trust me on that—but you're right, trust has to be earned."

TJ lifted a nerveless hand and cupped the side of his cheek. "I don't understand. I'm willing, even eager for you to fuck me."

"Sweetheart, *fucking* isn't what I'm after."

"Then what?" she asked, her voice aching like a raw wound.

He shook his head. "No more questions. I'll help you dress." First, however, he leaned down and gave her the deep kiss she hadn't known she needed.



## **Chapter Four**

TJ placed the draft proposal in a folder and turned off her computer. For the first time since she'd come back to San Antonio, she hadn't just shown up, she'd done a full day's work.

Not that she had any illusions she was "cured" or even on a road to recovery, but she'd slept dreamlessly the night before, floating on a cloud after her session with Cross.

*Cross.* She wondered what his last name was and just what kind of cop he was. She could imagine him in black SWAT gear, ready to storm an armed robber, but she'd much rather seeing him push paper at a desk. She'd seen enough rugged, honorable men in uniform spilling their blood.

And she did consider him honorable. The fact he'd withheld his pleasure the night before had gone a long way toward proving that. She'd been completely seduced, putty in his hands, and yet he'd held back. His cock had been red and engorged from the moment she'd slid down his jeans, so she knew it wasn't because he didn't find her attractive.

Something she still couldn't get her head around. He'd seen her with Brent. Knew she'd be into a quick fuck. She couldn't figure out what it was he wanted from her, unless his pleasure was a deeper sort of mindfuck.

Why should she care so long as she got what she needed from him?

TJ picked up her purse and headed down the hallway toward Marnie's office. Her friend was busy reviewing blueprints spread on a table.

TJ cleared her throat. "I finished the quote."

Marnie didn't turn, but her back stiffened. "Great. Leave it on my desk, will you? I still have some work to finish up."



It was on the tip of TJ's tongue to offer to help, but something in Marnie's posture warned her not to try. She had fences to mend there, but she knew she had to prove she was really in this thing, that she wanted to be a full partner again. So, she dropped the proposal into the inbox, satisfied that Marnie would have no complaints over the quality or the figures. If they won the bid, well, maybe then they'd talk.

Truth was TJ wasn't sure she wanted to stay in the business. The spark that had fueled her ambition was gone.

She exited the building, waving to the building's receptionist, and stepped out into sunshine. Turning her face upward, she let the warmth infuse her. She'd woken up refreshed, but she'd stayed feeling that way all day not because she'd slept well but because she looked forward to tonight.

Music blared from The Shamrock across the street and she turned toward it.

"TJ."

Her steps slowed, and she glanced behind her. Then her heart kicked into high gear.

Cross unfolded himself from where he'd been sitting against the hood of his dark sedan. He turned toward The Shamrock then gave her a pointed stare.

"I wasn't going there." *Not that it's any of your business*, she said to herself. But even to herself, she admitted that wasn't exactly the truth. He'd made her his business.

"Didn't think you would," he drawled. "There's nothin' for you there."

"Really? You think I wasn't even tempted?"

"You tryin' to piss me off?" he asked, a grin kicking up one side of his mouth.

"What would it get me?" she asked, both hands clutching her purse in front of her.

"Not what you're hopin'."

She bit her lip and felt a wave of shyness sweep over her. Strange, given he'd seen her completely naked, from every angle possible—some completely unflattering. "What are you doing here?" she asked breathlessly.



"I want you to come with me."

She gave a soft murmur, pleased he'd been just as eager to see her. "I realized today, I don't even know your full name. You don't know mine."

"TJ Lipton. Tansy Jo."

Her mouth gaped then snapped closed. "You went through my purse?"

He gave a sharp, unapologetic nod. "Checked your ID before you and boyfriend came back to the table."

"He's not my boyfriend," she blurted. "And you had no right to go through my bag."

"No, I didn't. And I apologize, but I wanted your address."

"Some girls might find that a little creepy."

His dark eyes narrowed. "Do you? You have to tell me the truth."

Flustered, because she felt equal parts outrage and flattered, she evaded answering. "This part of the rules?"

"My rule. Do you find me creepy?"

Lord, she found him intimidating, arrogant and so damn sexy her panties were already soaked through. But not creepy. "No Sir," she said quietly then gave a quick glance around because this conversation and her reactions were quickly becoming intimate.

Cross stepped close, his hands sliding over hers still gripping her purse. "Do you have any idea how I feel when you call me that?" he said, his voice a deep, growling rumble.

She swallowed. "Turned-on?"

He nodded.

"Then it's mutual."

"Name's Cross McNally."



He bent, but she didn't wait for him to plant one on her lips. She came up on her toes and leaned into him, the purse trapped between them as he devoured her mouth.

His lips were firm as he dragged them over hers, forcing her to follow his lead, just as he had last night. When his tongue stabbed at the seam of her mouth, she relented, opening to allow him inside.

Their tongues slid sensuously together. Her breaths deepened as she gave herself up to the pleasure of his kiss.

When he pulled away, his hands gripped the tops of her hips to steady her. "Will you come with me? No questions?"

She nodded and let him take her hand and lead her to the passenger side of his car.

Once she was inside, she sat at an angle to watch him as he drove, not caring to know where they went. "How long were you waiting for me?"

"Not long."

"If we'd missed each other, would I have seen you at Unfettered?"

"I wasn't going to miss you."

She narrowed her blue eyes, and when he glanced her way, he smiled at her expression. "I took one of your business cards when I went through your purse. I'd have come to your office if you hadn't walked out soon."

She laughed. "Am I really worth that kind of bother?"

His glance cut her way briefly. "TJ, I wouldn't be here if I didn't think so."

Pleasure warmed her, and she relaxed, glancing around at last and realizing that they were heading out of the city. "You live far?"

"No questions, remember? But I have some instructions for you to keep you from getting bored."

Instructions. Her nipples tightened, and he hadn't even said what he wanted her to do.



"I like your skirt, but I want it and your panties off. And you can't remove your seat belt."

"You don't want to make this easy, do you?"

White teeth flashed against tanned skin. "Wouldn't be as much fun."

She toed off her pumps and pulled her seat belt to give her a little extra wiggle room then lifted her butt to pull her panties down. She dangled them on the end of her finger. "Where do you want these?"

"Glove box."

"Do you collect them?"

"No, but they're wet, right? I'd like to keep something with your scent."

She wrinkled her nose. "That's a little gross."

"Maybe to you. The skirt?"

She unbuttoned it then cursed under her breath as she worked it over her hips. "The glove box too?"

"Toss it on the backseat."

Without looking, she tossed backward. Now she was nude from the waist down.

The bleep of a siren sounded behind them. Her gaze darted to Cross. He rolled down his window and slowed, turning down a gravel road then reaching out an arm to wave the cop around them.

Odd behavior in her mind, but she wasn't really thinking because panic was starting to build. "Will you reach for my skirt? I don't want to flash anyone."

"You'll stay just like you are," he said then gave her a pointed stare. "And put your hands beside you. Don't even try to cover up."

Heat flooded her cheeks. Not the sexy kind. She burned with embarrassment while a cop pulled in front of them then got out of his car, halting to place his cream-colored cowboy hat on his head before striding toward them.



She began to cross her legs, but Cross placed a hand on her knee to hold her there. He leaned his head out the window. "Hey there, Tanner."

Why was she surprised they knew each other? "Tanner" approached the passenger side of the vehicle, and she squeezed her eyes shut. She heard the crunch of his footsteps then there was a silent pause.

No doubt he'd peeked into the vehicle and seen her.

Her window glided down. Footsteps crunched closer. She peeked up into the deputy's face that revealed nothing of what he was thinking. Tall and well-built, he was good-looking with close-cropped brown hair, blue eyes and a dimple in his chin.

"Sir," the deputy said, directing his words to Cross but keeping his eyes on her naked pussy. "Do you know you were speedin'?"

"Saw you a half mile back and stepped on it," Cross said, amusement in his tone.

Tanner's mouth twitched and his narrowed gaze shot to Cross. "There a reason your girl's half-naked?"

"I like her that way."

Tanner nodded, still fighting a smile. "Reason enough, I s'pose. Anything I can help you with?"

"Deputy, TJ here might be carryin'."

"I see." Tanner's expression turned stern when his glance cut to her face. "I understand now why you waved me past," he murmured. "My camera's runnin'." He tipped back his hat and gave TJ another slow look. Heat banked in his gaze, and he stepped away. "Ma'am, I need you to step out of the vehicle."

Her gaze shot to Cross.

"Do as the man says. *Everything* he says."

She read the hard glint in his eyes and realized the dominating man from the night before was back. Damn, she'd leave a puddle on the seat, and he'd know in a heartbeat just how turned-on she was.



Tanner lifted the door handle and stood back, his expression set in hard lines.

TJ glanced toward the main highway, but they'd pulled pretty far down the dirt road. No one would see. Still, she felt awkward stepping out half-naked onto hot gravel in her bare feet.

Her skirt landed on the ground beside her. Cross gave her a wink.

She stepped on the gabardine skirt, grateful for the buffer, but her shirtwaist blouse only covered her to the top of her mound.

"Face the car, ma'am."

She took a deep breath and turned to place her hands against the car.

"Spread 'em."

"What? No foreplay?" she muttered, but braced apart her legs. Air flowed between, reminding her just how vulnerable she was.

A soft chuckle sounded behind her but stopped the moment the trooper's hands smoothed over her shoulders, slid along her sides, over her hips and down each leg. When he came up, his hands trailed the inside of her thighs, coming to a halt at her pussy, which he cupped then probed with a finger.

"Think you're wrong, Cross," he drawled. "Nothin' hidden up here."

"Then do me a favor and put this inside her."

She couldn't see what Cross handed to the officer but felt something cool and round slide between her lips. Fingers followed it inside, pushing it deeper.

A hum started immediately, and she moaned, swaying for just a second as the vibrator started up. Tanner's fingers slid out.

"Were you thorough, Tanner?" Cross called out.

"Guess it's better to be on the safe side," Tanner said, a hint of laughter in his voice. "Bend over a little, sweetheart," he whispered next to her ear.

TJ blew through pursed lips then lowered her torso, gripping the bottom of the window for balance.



Tanner's hands cupped her buttocks, giving them a squeeze, then he tucked a finger between them.

"What is it with my ass?" she said over her shoulder, embarrassed because she was so aroused by the intimate touch.

"Be surprised the things a criminal can hide up there."

His finger penetrated, and TJ couldn't help it, she bent lower, her eyelids drooping. Her glance found Cross watching her through the window.

As Tanner swirled his finger inside her, the vibrations increased. "She's tight and clampin' down hard."

"Don't come for him, TJ. Not yet." Cross opened his door and came around the car.

Tanner cupped her belly and walked her back a step from the vehicle, just far enough that Cross was able to kneel in front of her. Then with Tanner holding her, fingering her asshole, Cross leaned toward her and tongued her pussy.

She was so taut with excitement that the first flick of his tongue caused TJ to give a yelp because it was so engorged.

The hand pressed against her belly tightened. "She's sweet, Cross. Perfect. Fuck, I'd love to have this ass."

Cross rolled his tongue over her nub then eased back a fraction of an inch. "If she's good, I might let you do more than take her mouth next time."

TJ barely registered that this was likely the guy who'd striped her face with cum the night before.

Cross latched on to her clit and sucked it hard.

She came up on her toes and reached out to brace herself on his shoulders. Tension wound inside her, curling in her womb—so tight it was nearly painful.

Fingers thrust inside her and snagged the vibrator. Then something long replaced it, coming up inside her.

She curved to see Tanner push the end of his nightstick up her pussy.



"Ride it, baby," he said. Fingers thrust into her ass, and his stick fucked her pussy at the same time.

She was there, right there. Her whole body began to shake, knees ready to give any second now.

Cross released her clit. "Come all over his stick, baby. Do it now." Then he toggled her clit with his fingers, working it fast.

The stick pushed up then came down, pumping easily inside her slick walls.

TJ rode the edge for a long moment then shook her head. "Can't. *Please*, Cross."

Cross sighed but reached up and slapped a breast hard enough to make it sting then pinched the tip.

She shot out of the stratosphere, convulsions working up and down her channel, her ass clamping hard around Tanner's fingers.

Cross let go of her nipple then gave her clit a long glide of tongue before sitting back on his haunches.

TJ held his shoulders while Tanner removed his fingers and pulled his stick free. He pinched her chin and pressed a kiss against her swollen lips. "Nice meetin' you at last." Then he tipped his hat at Cross and left.

She didn't watch as his squad car pulled away. She stood on the edge of a road in the middle of nowhere, half-naked for anyone to see. When Cross opened his arms, she straddled his hips, sighing when his arms closed around her in a fierce hug.

"That was the nastiest thing I've ever done," she said, although she wasn't complaining. Far from it.

Laughter gusted against her neck. "You're welcome."



## **Chapter Five**

"What was that all about?"

Cross didn't scold her for asking. It had taken her several minutes to settle in the seat beside him after he'd helped her back into her skirt. She'd brushed at dirt, fiddled with her seat belt. Anything but look his way.

From the corner of his eye, he could see how red her cheeks were. She might have banged a stranger in an alleyway, but having him watch while another guy touched her intimately had rattled her.

He hadn't planned it. Sure, he knew Tanner's schedule and what strip of highway he'd be patrolling, but it had been fate, again, that enabled him to engineer that little scene. Something that would surprise and unsettle her, however pleasurable.

"Maybe I wanted to see how well you'd follow my lead." No maybes about that.

"You want some little wind-up doll?"

He snorted. "Sweetheart, you're not that easy."

She sighed and glanced out the passenger-side window. "I haven't always been like this. Manic, you know."

He pretended a casual interest even while his heartbeat sped. Would she really let him get that close? This soon? "Tell me about it."

She shook her head. "It's not something I discuss." She gave him a sultry smile. "And there are other things I'd rather think about."

He let it go. Soon enough, he hoped she'd open to him. Share something of the pain she was going through. "What things would you rather think about?"

"What you look like when you come would be good for starters."



Cross smiled. She was grouching because he still hadn't taken his own pleasure. "Anything you want to do about that?"

Her head turned. "Fucking's nice."

"Fucking's easy."

"You could let me return the favor..."

He arched a brow. "Wanna give me a blowjob?"

Her thighs pressed tightly together. "Yes Sir."

She said it so breathlessly that his entire body reacted, hardening to stone. "Good thing we're here," he murmured as he pulled into the drive.

TJ didn't wait for him to come around the car to open her door. She flipped the handle and stepped out. She held back a second as she patted a hand on her backside. A frown drew her tawny brows together.

"Wet?"

Her nose wrinkled. "I'll have to sponge it off before I send it to the cleaners."

He chuckled and preceded her along the walkway to the porch that stretched across the front of his white-limestone, ranch-style house. When he flung open the door, she stepped past him but halted at the entryway to glance around.

"It's a work in progress," he said, wondering what she thought. It shouldn't matter so much, but he knew she was in the business of renovation, and he hoped she wouldn't pick apart his efforts. "This room's a mess," he said, striding in to pull a piece of plastic from a countertop. "I was paintin' the ceiling last weekend."

"Nice moldings," she said, looking up.

Cross nodded proudly. He'd spent hours at a place in Dallas looking for just the right molding to frame the tall ceiling covered in punched, tin tiles.

"The colors are fabulous."

"Not too bright?" he said, eyeing the sunset-gold walls.

She gave him a smile. "I wish all my clients would be as fearless. No furniture yet?"



"I pulled it out of the living room when I had the floors tiled. It's in storage."

Her gaze narrowed. "Any furniture in the bedroom?"

He gave a waggle of his eyebrows. "Don't you worry. The bedroom's finished."

TJ didn't wait for an invitation. She trailed down the hallway, her hips swaying in a sassy wag.

Cross grunted but followed on her heels. "Last door."

When she opened it, she halted, standing in the doorway.

Casey waited while her gaze swept the room. "Yeah, looks like a brothel, huh?"

TJ shook her head. "It's gorgeous. Decadent. You did this?"

He nodded. Fiercely glad she liked it. He hoped she'd like it well enough to come here often. "I worked on it a little at a time. It's been therapy since..." But that was for another time. "Had some help choosing the paint. Wanted it red, but not like a blister."

"It's lovely." Her gaze landed on his bed. It was a tall, dark-walnut poster bed, and he'd hung gauzy gold and ivory curtains around it.

"Not a brothel—it looks like a harem," she murmured.

"The curtains serve a purpose."

Her eyebrows rose. "Oh?"

He pulled the curtains aside to reveal ropes hidden behind them. "For suspension."

"Of what?" she asked, but her voice was so airy, he thought she'd already guessed.

"Have to leave a few surprises, sweetheart."

She blushed and glanced around again then looked up at the ceiling. There he'd painted the tin tiles a rusty bronze, but that wasn't what snagged her gaze. She'd found the hooks in the ceiling and the ornate chains that dangled with padded cuffs at the ends.

He walked up behind her and laid his hands on her shoulders. "They're screwed into studs."



"What?"

"The chains can take weight without pulling the ceiling down."

She laughed and shook her head. "Never put screw and stud in the same sentence." Her hand reached to finger the leather cuffs.

He bent toward her ear. "Want to try it?"

A delicate shiver vibrated down her back. "Maybe later. Satisfy my curiosity first."

He squeezed her shoulders. "Are we back to what I look like when I come?" he asked, close enough his breath feathered the hair beside her ear.

She gave a shaky breath then turned her head to meet his gaze. "You've seen me come apart," she whispered. "I feel a little overexposed right now."

Cross released her and stepped away. "I'm all yours."

She turned to face him, her expression reflecting skepticism. "Really?"

It might kill him, letting her take the lead, but if he hoped to deepen their bond, she needed to trust him and herself. "I'll let you be in charge – whatever you desire."

Her chin came up, the glint in her eyes sparking with the challenge. "I want you naked."

His mouth twitched. "That was quick. Think about that long?"

One brow lifted in a wicked arch. "Since the last time I saw all of you. It's been hard to get you out of my mind. I like a strong man." She lifted her chin again. "Quit stalling. Naked. Now."

"Want to help me get that way?"

TJ shook her head. "Uh-uh. It's my turn to watch."

Cross narrowed his eyes but sat on the edge of the bed to remove his shoes.

"Leave a mess," she said, a dimple digging into one cheek as she crossed her arms over her chest.

He chunked the first shoe in the corner then the second and his socks. He drew his shirt over his shoulders and stood.



She was standing close and backed up, her gaze blinking as she eyed his chest and shoulders. Then her gaze reached his face. Her head tilted back. "You're a big guy."

"That scare you?" he growled.

"No. Makes a girl feel safe."

When he reached for his belt, she didn't move away. He unbuckled it and slid it from the loops of his jeans. Before he'd finished chunking it with the rest of his clothes, she'd thumbed open his buttons. He pushed down his pants but let them hang around his thighs.

Just as he'd hoped, she took over, bending to help him out of his pants, serving him again, even though this was supposed to be her turn to be in charge.

Lord, her face was right beside his cock but tilted down. When she tossed aside his pants, she turned and gave his dick a long, thorough inspection. Her expression would keep his fantasy fucks vivid for months.

Her lips parted, nostrils flaring as she took in his scent. Her tongue stroked her bottom lip, nearly killing his composure. Restless beneath her scrutiny, he gripped his shaft and ran his hand up and down his length.

Apparently, that wasn't a big enough hint.

TJ watched him stroke himself and creamed right then and there. His cock was impressive. Heavy, ruggedly veined like the rest of him. Even his balls didn't look vulnerable, not topped with all that masculinity. With his hand running up the flagpole, fingers balled around it, she wanted him so badly her belly hurt.

"Spread your legs a bit," she whispered.

Cross widened his stance while his head bent to watch her.

She felt a moment's trepidation. He'd been so good with her. So masterful. She hoped she didn't disappoint, but she was also selfishly involved here, wanting to learn his flavors, his textures, how his shaft felt stroking inside her mouth.



However, his ball sac drew her first. She leaned toward it, opened her mouth and stroked him with her tongue.

The skin there felt like velvet and was hairless. She wondered about that, but appreciated the fact just the same. She broadened her tongue and lapped around and around then drew one ball into her mouth while his fingers climbed his shaft again.

He tasted salty, and his masculine musk inflamed her. She grew greedier, sucking both stones between her lips. Then she went wild, tonguing them inside her mouth. They grew harder, drew closer to his groin, but she pulled gently, bobbing in shallow motions that fed the need for her to rock against him.

His breaths shortened, and he gave a low groan. Fingers combed through her hair then cupped the back of her head to pull her up. Trying to take the lead.

She released him and sat back, wiping a hand across her mouth as she looked up.

His eyes were narrowed slits. Skin stretched taut around his square jaw.

TJ backed away and stood, quickly stripping off her clothes until she was nude as well and panting with excitement.

"What do you want, baby?" he asked with another slow up and down glide.

Lord, who the hell was in charge here? Not her. His strokes made her jealous of his hand. She wanted all that thick hardness crammed up inside her.

"We need a condom," she said, quietly, urgency straining her voice.

"The bedside stand," he said, aiming his chin toward it, giving up even a pretense that she was still in control.

Eagerly, she went to the stand and opened the top drawer. She found the box of unopened Trojans and fought with the plastic and the lid then drew out a packet. Her hands shook, so she held it out to him.

His lips crimped into a small smile, but he bit the foil and drew out the latex circle, rolling it skillfully down his massive shaft. When it was in place, he glanced her way and quirked an eyebrow.



"The bed," she bit out. "I need you on the bed."

He sat on the edge then slid his thickly muscled legs over the side. Was there anything about him—his toes, maybe?—that didn't make her melt? She'd never felt so feminine, so weak beside a man before. "Scoot," she said then climbed onto the mattress to kneel beside him.

She bent over his cock, slid her nose along his cloaked shaft, nuzzled the crisp, curling hairs at the base of his cock then trailed the length with her tongue to learn by feel every little ridge and vein.

When she came to the cap, she sucked it between her lips and teathed it, careful not to pierce the latex. "I wanted to do this without the condom," she murmured, "but I knew I wouldn't last. I want you inside me. I want you to come for me. I need to fuck you hard, Cross."

"Will you come?"

"You know how to make me come, so hold off until you're close."

He nodded, his gaze dipping to watch her pussy as she spread her thighs over him and funneled his cock inside.

He was broad at the tip but arrowed. He stretched her opening, filled her better than the cold, hard stick his friend had stroked inside her. "Have you and Tanner been friends a long time?"

"Long enough."

She swirled her hips to wet the tip of his cock. "He the guy you had fuck my mouth last night?"

"Yeah, does it bother you, putting a face to the dick?"

A shallow pulse forced him inside an inch. "Yes, I didn't want him last night. I wanted your cock."

"I was a little busy giving you what you really needed."

He said it in a gruff, masculine tone that clued her to the fact he was just as tightly



wound as she was. She pressed down, taking the cap inside another two inches. Her thighs flexed, and she fought the urge to shove downward. She wanted to savor the stretch—this fuck had been a long time coming. And because she was a little annoyed that he'd made her wait, she asked, "Do you like fucking?"

His smile was a quick, tight flash. "One of my favorite things to do."

Her nipples were hard, aching, but she resisted the urge to cup them. She wanted his hands there but wasn't able to command him. Her voice would lack strength. She feared he'd laugh if she tried because she shook with need. "Why didn't you take me? You knew I wanted you to do it."

"I told you, baby. It was about you. What you needed. And I wanted to build your trust."

She came up but missed the solid heat of him filling her and pushed quickly down again, taking him deeper. Sweet Lord, she was wet. He slid inside with a succulent sound. "You don't need my trust. Not for this," she said breathlessly. "You can have me. Have me any way you want, so long as you do one little thing for me. You know what that is."

"Have you any time? More than just today?"

She shook her head but dug her fingers into his chest as she gave him another shallow stroke. "Don't go getting possessive. I don't need promises. You don't want mine."

"You don't want to see me again?"

Her mouth gaped as she slid down a little farther, almost dizzy with relief, feeling as though every inch she consumed deepened their emotional connection. She shook her head, waging an internal battle for control. "I don't want to make plans. Don't want promises," she lied. "But I wouldn't mind you knocking at my door some night."

His jaw flexed. "For a quick fuck but not a date."

"This isn't good for you?" She was wetter now, and the glides were faster, getting



deeper, her breaths shortened and her face flushed with heat. His strong hands took some of the burden from her straining thighs.

"This isn't enough for me, TJ," he said, slamming her down his cock now. "I want the whole woman."

She slowed, shuddering hard. "That's the problem," she said, smiling with tears in her eyes. "I'm not whole."

His palms slid up to cup her breasts, gently kneading them. "Tell me, sweetheart. Tell me why."

She blinked away the moisture. "Just be quiet. Please."

His lips closed, forming a thin line.

Closing her eyes to his disapproval, she continued to rock, but even though her body melted all around him, even though arousal curled inside her, she knew her limits. Her thighs gave way and she sank against him. "Cross?"

"Open your eyes when you speak to me."

She gave him a glare but knew the corners of her mouth were pulling downward and that her bottom lip was trembling.

"What do you need?"

Her shoulders fell. Her head bent. "For you to take over. For you to punish me."

"Do things my way?"

She nodded.

"Will those legs hold you up if I tell you that you have to stand?"

She nodded again then gave a little, gasping hiccup. She hated being so needful, so out of control. He'd think she was a complete basket case, but maybe that was already too late.

His hands cupped her ass and he lifted her. His cock slid from inside her and bobbed against his belly. "Go stand under the hooks."

Her nipples spiked. Fluid dripped from inside her, and he knew because a fingertip



followed the trail. He brought her moisture to her mouth and painted her lips with her own arousal.

TJ moaned and leaned down to kiss him.

His hand fisted in her hair to anchor her close and his lips roamed over hers, rubbing hard, before he pulled her hair to raise her head. "Go now," he rasped.

Even though she trembled with need, she pushed off him and slid from the bed. The bed groaned behind her. His footsteps shadowed hers.

When she stood beneath the hooks, she raised her arms obediently and let him close the padded cuffs around her wrists. With she was secured, he walked to the wall and pulled down a handle where the ends of the chains were wrapped around a small wheel. He began to turn it, tightening the sturdy linked chain above her but was still able to stand on her heels.

"Higher," she grated out.

"You want to be stretched? Like the girl at the club?"

She nodded, and he winched her higher until she swayed on her toes.

"If this gets to be too much, if your arms go numb, you'll tell me."

She nodded, but it was a lie. Numbness would be a blessing. Pain would be rapturous. Already she felt a dull ache swell in her shoulders along with the lump burning the back of her throat.

Cross went to the dresser and pulled open a drawer. Poised on her toes, she peered down to see an array of implements. He picked up a flogger but discarded it. Then another. He drew a finger across the suede leather ends then glanced up at her. "I'm in charge now."

She nodded, even though he hadn't worded it as a question. Licking her bottom lip, she whispered, "Yes Sir."



## **Chapter Six**

Cross cursed under his breath. He knew what he had to do. What she really needed. And it wasn't about getting her off. Hanging her up would just be about softening her, getting her emotions all roiled up before he took her to the bed for the hard part.

Tansy Jo Lipton had lived a nightmare and had swept him right along into that dark place. And she didn't even know it. Every time they came together, he ruthlessly held himself back, knowing he couldn't give her everything she wanted or they'd be done.

He had to string her along. Seduce her. Make her lean on him when all she wanted to do was withdraw and keep her pain tightly leashed inside. But damn, she was gonna kill him first. The feel of her cunt sliding down his shaft had been pure hell to resist.

Steeling himself, he sought that place he had to go, the one where he could go to work on her body, feather and lash her with the strands of a flogger when all he wanted to do was drive deep inside her body until the anguish and lust inside himself was freed.

He forced his expression into a mask, kept the heat from his gaze and walked back to her.

Her glance left the flogger then roamed his face. Her tongue made a nervous foray over her bottom lip.

He stood close, letting the heat from his skin warm hers but without touching. She swayed toward him but couldn't quite reach.

"Still no safe word?" he murmured.

Her nostrils flared. Her lips closed, tightening. She gave a short, sharp shake of her head.



"Stubborn, that's what you are. Not good sub material at all. Not really. You think you want a man to take control but only because you want to fight. You want to be punished. Do you know why?"

She shook her head, but a shadow crossed her face.

"Liar," he whispered. Then he stepped away and ran the soft flanges down one side of her body and up again, pausing to trace around and around one breast. He tipped back the flogger then gave it a little flick, hitting the nipple.

Her body jerked. Her teeth sank into that wet, lower lip. He wanted his teeth there, biting, sucking then watching it stretch around his cock again.

He gave her breast a second flick then trailed the flogger down her belly, stopping to snap here and there, making her belly quiver and jump and leaving red splotches in his wake.

When he traced the contour of her mound and slid the soft, leather strands between her legs, she tried to open her thighs but couldn't because she was braced on her toes. He wet the strands in her arousal then walked behind her, ignoring the soft, sobbing quality of her breaths.

Done teasing, he flicked her buttocks and the backs of her thighs then stood to the side to stripe her with longer, harder slaps. He painted her pink then red, and still she hung on her chains, her chin level with the floor.

Cross tossed down the flogger and went back to the drawer. This time, he selected a braided leather quirt. He snapped the end against the air, liking the sharp sound it made, then glanced her way.

Her dewy gaze sharpened.

When he approached, he slid a hand between her legs and cupped her pussy. Her lips were hot, swollen, throbbing to her heartbeat. Moisture coated her sex and inner thighs. He swirled a fingertip around her hard, little clit. "You don't want a safe word, but I'll give you one anyway. *Fallujah.*"



TJ inhaled sharply and anger firmed her mouth. "Strange choice."

"Then you'll remember it, right?"

She shook her head, eyes glaring. "I won't use it."

"Suit yourself." He walked behind her, slightly to her left, then stood still for several moments, waiting while she fought her pride. Only when she glanced as far back as she could to see what he was doing did he raise the quirt. The snap he gave her ass raised a welt. A red, painful-looking one that for the first time since he'd entered the life, he regretted.

He felt remorse because before her head snapped around to stare at the wall in front of her, he'd seen the sheen of tears fill her eyes. With this woman, he couldn't close off his feelings, couldn't do what was needed. Not without feeling the cut himself.

Damn her stubbornness. Why couldn't they have a conversation like two mature people and talk about their past? But he knew. The moment she learned who he was, she'd shut off like a spigot and walk away.

Anger seared him. He breathed through his nostrils, seeking control of himself. Only then did he give her a second then a third stinging lash.

Her body rocked in the chains. Her back bowed and her expression, even in profile, blurred in subspace bliss.

She was serenely beautiful. But removed, he sensed. The next lash was sharper and forced a gasp. Her eyes blinked at tears, and at last, her toes crumpled. Only the cuffs held her suspended. Her breaths came in short, jagged bursts, but still she didn't relent—wouldn't give him the word—the name of the place that bound them.

Instead, he surrendered. He walked to the wall and unwound the chain. As she sagged, he stepped forward to catch her against his chest.

Tears wet his skin, and he cursed under his breath. "Why didn't you just say it?"

"I want to come. With you. But I don't deserve the pleasure."

He closed his eyes and held her close. "Not true. Not true at all," he whispered.



A sob racked her body. He scooped her into his arms and strode for the bed. There, he crawled onto the mattress, still clutching her against his chest until he was in the center of the bed and she was stretched beneath him.

Weight supported on his elbows, he cupped her cheeks and licked away her tears.

She gave a mewling sound and turned her face to capture his mouth.

He kissed her, thrusting his tongue inside and groaning because she tasted like her salty tears. Ending the kiss, he nuzzled behind her ear. "Open for me," he whispered.

TJ dragged in a deep breath and slowly parted her legs, bending her knees to make room as he centered himself. Her eyes were closed, her wet lashes forming spikes against her cheek.

"Look at me."

She blinked slowly, her gaze focusing on his face.

When her chin trembled, pain lodged next to his heart. "Guide me inside you."

Her fingertips scraped down his chest, his belly, and his cock jerked as she drew near. The fingers of one hand wrapped around his shaft. The others slid between her legs to part her folds, and then she pulled gently, bringing the tip to her entrance.

Cross straightened his arms then scooped his hips, flexing to impale her. He slid swiftly inside, not stopping until her walls surrounded him in wet heat. "Say my name."

"Cross," she gasped.

He pulled out then stroked forward with more force. "Say it again."

"Cross," she repeated, her voice breaking.

He resettled his knees, readying himself to power into her, but held still to make sure he had her full attention.

TJ raised her legs, framing his hips with her thighs, then tentatively clasped her ankles to surround him, waiting now for him to begin.



Suspended above her, Cross forced his breaths to even out. "Baby, what do you want?"

"For you to fuck me."

"Now tell me what you need."

She shook her head, pretending confusion, but as he hovered, unrelenting, her face crumpled. "I need all of you. All the way inside me."

"Good enough for now," he muttered, and drove into her, over and over, not breaking rhythm as he built frictional heat between his shaft and her tightly claspung cunt.

She was hot, wet, and beginning to roll her hips to meet his strokes. Her breaths sighed around him. Her moans broke shyly at first then deepened, becoming a staccato chant as he quickened his motions.

When she began the spiral, her head tossed on the coverlet, and he watched, gauging the depth of her pleasure by the way her teeth raked her lower lip and her eyes squeezed tightly. Things he'd noted when he'd eaten her out, because he'd never let her lie to him, never let her think she could fake a response.

Her pleasure was his to give. Soon, she'd surrender everything—her stubborn pride, her nightmares. He'd be the rock she clung to through the storm.

Cross braced his weight on one arm and curved a hand beneath her bottom, pulling her closer as he shortened and sharpened his thrusts. "Now, baby. Fly for me now."

Her hands slid around his back, her fingernails digging into his spine, and then she arched, thrusting her pussy upward to slam into his groin, grinding against his pubic bone until an aching cry broke around him.

Her breaths ragged, she clung for a long moment, her mouth open and eyes glazed, but then she sighed and fell back, her hands sliding from around him as he continued to thrust and at last gave himself over to the pleasure cramping his balls.



His explosion wrung a shout from him as hot spurts of cum filled the condom. He rocked between her thighs, trying to prolong the pleasure, but finally tumbled down, settling against her.

Her hands soothed his skin, raked his short hair. Her murmurs whispered in his ear. "Cross, Cross..."

The temptation to linger was there, but he suspected that she'd recover her pride quickly, and he didn't want to see the defensive jut of her chin. Not if he could make her smile instead. At least, at first.

He gave an exaggerated sigh and slumped against her.

TJ bit his earlobe. "You're crushing me, big guy."

"Best sex in forever," he muttered, "and you're complainin'?"

Fingernails dug into his armpits.

A grin tugged at his mouth. "I'm not ticklish." He lifted his head. "Are you?"

Her mouth opened, but she quickly clamped it shut, her eyes narrowing in warning.

Cross gave a chuckle then came up on one elbow, one hand free to roam, which it did, fingertips tweaking a nipple then sliding down her side.

She twitched, but her lips firmed into a straight line. "I don't like to be tickled."

"If you're not ticklish, why do you care?"

He snuck a finger beneath her arm and scratched.

Her arm clamped against her side, and she wriggled in earnest. "Don't tickle me. I'll pee."

Cross barked a laugh then rolled, bringing her with him, their bodies still connected. Her knees slid to either side of his hips, and she pushed up to rise off his cock.

He clamped his hands on her hips to hold her snug against his groin. "Why the hurry?"



She shrugged. "I came. You came."

"So we're done?"

"It's how I roll."

Cross grunted. The woman was a terrible liar. She wanted to put some distance between them because she felt vulnerable. "Were you always like this?"

"What do you mean?"

"Before Iraq. Were you always this quick to jump off a guy's dick?"

She froze, her face whitening. "What did you say?"

Cross locked his gaze with hers. "Was I too crude for you?"

"The other part," she said, her voice strained. "How'd you know?"

Before he'd brought her to bed, Cross hadn't been a hundred percent sure that he'd level with her. And he hadn't meant to blurt it out that way, but maybe it was for the best. It wasn't as if she could storm out of the house. She needed him to drive her back to the city. "We met there—a few months ago."

She shook her head. "I'd have remembered you."

"Apparently not."

She rolled her hips, trying to wriggle out of his embrace. "Let go of me."

"Not a chance. We're talking, Tansy Jo. We're gonna have a conversation about something that matters."

"Why does this matter to you?"

"Because you're eaten up with rage. You're beatin' yourself up over something that wasn't your fault."

Shock drained the rest of the color out of her face. "How the hell do you know that?" she whispered furiously. "Let me up! Now!"

"Tansy—"

She slapped his chest. "Don't call me that. No one but family calls me that."



"I like it. It's soft. Feminine. Like you are inside."

"I'm not. Not anymore," she said, scratching at his hands. "And I want off now."

Cross released her, holding out his hands in surrender.

She slid off him and the bed then ran to the bathroom, locking the door behind her.

Frustrated, he pounded a fist into the mattress.

*Not well done, buddy. Fuck, why did I push?*

But he knew why. He'd hoped she felt the same way he had when he'd slid inside her body—impatient for her to admit something special was happening between them. Something beyond the sex.

Cross knew why he'd blown it, why he'd lost control of the moment. He'd finally come home.



## Chapter Seven

Once again, TJ stood at the bottom of the steps leading to Unfettered. This time, a bouncer guarded the door with a clipboard in his hands.

Seven days had passed since she'd last seen Cross. Seven days during which she'd begun the battle to regain control of her life.

For one thing, she'd slept like a baby every night. Work had been exhausting, demanding, and at last, the sparkle in Marnie's eyes when she spoke to her was back. Her friend's relief had been palpable.

When Marnie had asked what had changed, TJ shrugged. "I got some help."

And she had. Making time to see her counselor, and at last opening up about the things she'd been unable to cope with on her own since she'd returned from the war. This time, she hadn't immediately flushed the meds she'd been prescribed, and she'd let him schedule her for more sessions.

The nightmares no longer plagued her dreams, but the memory of the event that had haunted her for so long was never far from her thoughts. She'd forced herself to face it, to follow the jagged path from the first terrifying moments to its devastating conclusion. To relive the event and accept that she couldn't change a thing.

And to finally start to make peace with herself. Not that she was ready to talk to anyone else about it. Not yet.

But she remembered everything. She remembered Cross.

TJ closed her eyes.

*She awoke, gasping, inhaling smoke, and then began to choke. Which forced her to close her mouth and breath through her nose – a mistake because the smell of burned rubber, gasoline and something mustier and more frightening turned her stomach. She feared she'd vomit, but her seat belt gouged her waist as she hung upside down in the harness.*



*Something was in her eyes. She blinked but couldn't clear the viscous fluid. Panic swelled, and then she heard a sound beside her, an odd rhythmic gurgling, and she remembered.*

*The driver. PFC Figueroa. A bullet had ripped through his neck and he'd lost control of their vehicle, rolling it with her inside, bouncing her head inside her Kevlar helmet. She'd clipped her chin against something, causing it to bleed.*

*Blind, she reached for him, but her fingers sank into warm, sticky blood. She began to scream but quickly muffled her shouts and tried to staunch his blood with her fingers, but he bled out beside her.*

*Then strong hands reached inside, loosening her belt and dragging her from the vehicle. She fought her rescuer, slamming her fists against his cheek and chest until he subdued her. Only then did she realize the convoy was still under fire. He spread his body over hers to pin her and protect her.*

Her rescuer had been Cross, and he'd shushed her, rubbing his thumbs over her eyes to clear away the blood until she could see. She owed him her life, but she'd spat and snarled and called him names until she'd shuddered and begun to cry. Figueroa had been a sweet-faced kid with a wife and young child awaiting his return. He was dead because of her. She'd sketched out the supply convoy's route based on the day's intel.

All this, Cross had heard while others continued the fight around them. He'd protected her, at last rolling from her but tucking her between him and the wrecked vehicle while he returned fire.

The sudden upsurge of noise around them, the shouts and staccato reports of weapons, made it impossible to hear exactly what he said, but he'd kept talking in soothing tones until she'd calmed and given him a nod that she was okay. Then she'd drawn her weapon from her holster and crawled on her belly to take up a position beside him and help lay cover fire for the men forcing their way inside the house where the shooter hid.



Perhaps she hadn't recognized him before because she hadn't been ready to remember. Now she needed to see him. To thank him. And to figure out whether he'd arranged their meeting at Unfettered because he felt responsible for her still or because something had happened between them, there in Fallujah. Something so profound it had shaken her to her core.

Climbing the steps, she took deep, cleansing breaths. The man with the clipboard eyed her face then scratched at the paper and stood to the side for her to enter.

The main room was busy—a woman with her hands bound behind her, tied in intricate winding of ropes and knots, sat on her knees before a man who circled her, touching her hair, a breast with the loving waft of a feather.

On another stage, a man was bent over what looked like a sawhorse, a ball gag in his mouth while a woman plowed his ass with strap-on cock.

Smiling faintly to herself, because she could never envision wanting to ream a man's ass. TJ passed them by, heading toward the door that led down the corridor and the room the Operator had told her to go to.

The door handle depressed without the need of a passkey. She opened it, searching the room for Cross, but stiffened when instead she found Tanner.

He was dressed in a dark tee, leather pants and cowboy boots. Had she met him in The Shamrock before she'd been with Cross, she would have been tempted. But now Cross held her hopes and dreams in his hands. Tanner was just another handsome guy with a crooked, killer smile.

"Come in, TJ," he said in his sexy drawl. "Cross'll be along in a moment."

Disappointment seeped through her bones, weighing her down. She'd hoped it would just be the two of them, her and Cross. That she'd meant more to him than just as a playmate, but he'd invited his buddy along again.

"Shall I prepare you?"

TJ shook her head. "I'd rather wait for Cross."



"I want to show you something." He invited her deeper into the room with a lazy wave of his hand.

She blew out a breath and approached, watching his expression. If he'd smirked even once, she'd have turned on her heel and run for the door. She couldn't take mockery, not even a gentle tease today. She was too nervous about seeing Cross again and angry with herself that it meant so much.

The last thing she *wanted* right now was trust in someone else's strength when she'd finally begun to believe in her own. But she *needed* Cross in ways she couldn't explain, not even to herself.

However, she walked closer, halting when she saw the ropes arranged on the floor. There was a pattern to their placement, but not one she discerned, and the ends of two of them were drawn up to curve over the tops of two pulleys in the ceiling.

She cleared the knot of tension in her throat. "This for me?"

"Depends."

"On what?"

"How much you trust Cross."

She shrugged, trying for casual when her stomach was beginning to knot. "What's he want me to do?"

"He wants me to bind you, and then pull you up."

"Suspend me," she said, her voice rasping now because she thought she understood why he wanted this.

Tanner nodded. "That's right." There wasn't even a hint of smile on his handsome face. Only something soft and a little sad in his blue eyes as she watched her.

TJ turned away and blinked at the moisture filling her own. But she squared her shoulders and began to strip. When she was nude, she faced Tanner.

His gaze never dipped, and he held out his hand. Then he led her to the center of the ropes and helped her to the floor. When she lay on her back, she watched the line of



muted, recessed lights that ran the length of the room rather than anything Tanner was doing.

She sought that center of calm, the one that only pain had given her in the past. While he moved around her, binding her feet, her hands, wrapping ropes around her waist and thighs, she ignored the clamoring of panic building inside her chest. *Breathe. Cross will come.*

Cross watched the monitor as Tanner slowly built the cradle of rope that would suspend TJ gently from the ceiling.

"You're sure she's ready for this?" Dru asked beside him.

"I'm not, but she needs this and it has to be me."

"Do you think she knows who you are?"

Cross rubbed the back of his neck. "Yeah, or she wouldn't have ignored my calls all week." A week that had dragged while he'd worried that he'd blown it completely.

Dru's mouth quirked. "She didn't ignore this summons."

"It's neutral ground. She figures if things get too hairy, you or one of the staff will step in."

Dru turned, her usual professionally neutral mask gone. Concern darkened her eyes. "Are you in love with her?"

Cross swung away from her to stare blindly at the monitor again. "Head over fucking heels."

Tanner was finished and nodded toward the monitor out of view of TJ, whose head was supported by a leather strap beneath her neck. She couldn't move, not without pulling at the rigging and offsetting her balance to send her swinging.

Cross wanted her still. Her body. Her mind.

He crossed the hallway and entered the room, walking around her to gaze down into her eyes.



She looked frightened but stoic just the same. Her face was pale, her lips tense.

"Want that safe word now?" he asked softly.

"Will I need it?"

Cross smiled. At last she'd acknowledged that she trusted him. She'd trust his advice. "You'll need it, sweetheart. The same one. You remember it?"

Her gaze paused for long poignant moment. "All of it."

He nodded then tugged a blindfold from his back pocket. He dangled it in front of her face.

"That's necessary?" Her lips twisted. "You've already got me trussed up like a turkey."

Cross cupped her cheeks and stroked his thumbs across her skin to soothe her. "You know it is. But remember, I'm right here. I'm going to undress. Tanner's here to help but won't do anything I don't approve of. You'll be safe." Then without another word, he tied the blindfold around her head. "Can you see anything?"

"No Sir," she said in small voice.

"How do you feel?"

"Like I'm floating."

"The ropes are comfortable?"

"None are digging into my skin. He's good."

"That's why he's here, baby. Now's the time for quiet."

Her lips crimped as if she wanted to say something else but held it back. Satisfied, he nodded to Tanner, and the two of them quietly undressed.

TJ heard the rustle of clothing as the two men disrobed. The sound was soft but jangled her nerves anyway. When a hand glided along the outside of one thigh, she gasped.



Her folds were opened, a blunt, round tip pushed against her entrance and she tightened in rejection because the cock sliding inside her didn't feel like Cross'.

"Don't fight it. Just float, sweetheart," Tanner said softly.

Hands, Cross', molded her breasts, rubbing a warming oil into her skin.

"I wasn't sure this was right for you, having Tanner here again," he said softly. "I know you aren't comfortable, having me share you. Fuck, I don't like sharing you."

He paused to circle her nipples, the pad of his fingers gliding around and around. The tips tingled and hardened, but he was already moving down, rubbing her belly, and then the folds stretched around Tanner's erection as the other man slowly shafted her.

"But Tanner's more than a friend, Tansy Jo. He was over there with me. I trust him with my back. And you, sweetheart, like to be in charge even when you aren't. I had to push you past your comfort zone. Push hard."

"Why?" she asked, her voice more of rasping croak.

"To break you."

She shook her head, not understanding.

A finger soothed over her lower lip. "What I saw in the alley. It was fucked up. You were hard. Bitter. Sure that all you needed from that guy was for him to make you come."

Shame set fire to her cheeks.

"No, sweetheart," he whispered beside her ear. "I'm not judging. I made my own mistakes when I came back. Trying to get rid of the edge, the dirt. I found a card, the same one I tucked into your purse. I'd played at being a Dom before but hadn't understood what I needed from it. Not before you."

"What was it you needed?"

"Everything I ever played at, everything I ever experimented with, was preparation for you. To see you through this. To break you down then make you strong."



Something in his tone, something in the whispered harshness told her what she needed to know. This wasn't a game—really, truly wasn't about the sex. It was about them. What they'd survived. What bound them still.

She swallowed to wet her mouth. "I'm not sure what this means. What's happening between us."

"Do you trust me?"

She drew in a ragged breath and nodded. She trusted him, but that still didn't mean she was going to like this.

The cradle of ropes resumed rocking forward and back, pulling her off Tanner's cock then sliding it back inside. The motion was fluid, oddly soothing—like the hands once again caressing every part of her. Her frantic thoughts slowed, grew peaceful as she rocked again and again.

Her breaths deepened. Her body warmed. The rocking slowed then stopped. Tanner's cock slid free.

Hands cupped her head. Fingers combed through her hair. The scrape of Cross' beard abraded her cheek. "You remember where we met, don't you?" Cross rasped.

"In the bar?" she said, knowing it was a lie, but she didn't want to go *there*. Not now when she felt so relaxed. And certainly not when she was aroused and ready for sex.

"Now's not the time to be cute. You and I have a past. One I have to know won't come between us."

"I don't blame you. Not anymore."

"But do you still resent me?" he said, his voice tightening. "Do you still think I'm the bastard who let that kid die?"

She'd said that. No, *shouted* that while she'd beat him with her fists. She'd meant to wound, and apparently she had. "I'm sorry about that. I know you didn't. Figueroa couldn't have survived."

"Do you really know it, TJ? Deep inside?"



She hesitated. Suddenly, the sling tilted, lowering her head beneath her body then turning her upside down. The rope twined around her waist bit into her midsection, not painfully but reminiscent enough of that other time to send her into panic. Her body tensed and she tried to flail her arms and legs.

Tanner grasped her thighs.

"Baby, stop," Cross said, petting her cheeks, kissing her forehead. "Shhh," he said beside her ear, until at last she calmed.

Then something warm and wet trickled from her chin and across her cheek, seeping into her hair. Something thick, like blood.

TJ clamped her mouth closed but screamed behind her lips and bucked hard. Arms wrapped around her to hold her still.

"This what is was like inside that Hummer?" Cross whispered next to her ear. "Was this how you felt? Blind? Bound?"

TJ gave a ragged sob and began to cry. "Stop. *Stop it now.*"

His head shook, scraping her skin again. "I was there. I had you."

"I was supposed to stay with him."

"You couldn't save him." He cupped her head again and kissed her upside down. "He was already gone when I pulled you free," he said, his warm breath gusting against her mouth.

"You don't know that," she whispered raggedly. "His blood was still pumping beneath my fingers."

He kissed her again. "Baby, he was gone. I swear it."

A sob jerked her chest. "It was m-my fault."

"Not your fault," he whispered. "It was a sniper. An ambush. You were targets of opportunity."

"It should have been me."

"Why, baby?"



"I took the convoy down that street."

"You think you made a mistake? That you cost him his life?"

She shook inside his embrace. "Yes... No. I know it was just shit luck. I know that. But I still feel..."

"Like it wasn't fair you walked away?"

Tears stung her eyes, and she nodded. "I remember you," she said hoarsely.

"I'm sorry as hell it had to be me who pulled you out."

"I'm not."

Cross' hug tightened, and she sobbed again, shaking in the ropes. "*Fallujah*," she whispered.

The sling lowered. Bindings loosened. And then she was picked up and laid atop a soft mattress. The blindfold slid away and she blinked, looking up to find Cross' face hovering above hers, tension digging lines around his mouth and between his brows.

He sat beside her, not touching her. She wiped her eyes with her fingers and touched the oil soaked into her hair, grimacing at the mess. "I bet I'm a sight."

"You're beautiful, Tansy Jo."

Her glance fell away. "What now?"

"Guess that depends on you," he said softly.

"You always told me you'd give me what I need."

"What do you need, sweetheart?"

She closed her eyes, drawing deep for courage. Then she opened them to meet his steady gaze. "I need you."

His smile was quick and one-sided. He cleared his throat. "Then you're in luck. I need you right back."

TJ rose on one elbow and curved a hand around the back of his neck to pull his face toward hers. The closer he came, the surer she was that the glitter in his eye was a tear.



His mouth slammed into hers, devouring her lips. His hands slipped beneath her and lifted her onto his lap. He held her close and gradually the kiss softened.

TJ sighed and drew back.

"You okay?" he asked in a ragged voice.

He'd been worried. She could see it in tension in his jaw. "I'm... I feel...new."

His jaw eased a fraction. A soft smile curved his lips. "Sure it's not just the blood rushing back to your toes?"

"I'll be okay. I have you." She leaned closer and brushed her mouth softly over his. When she leaned back, his smile deepened.

Reassured she hadn't made a complete fool of herself, she smiled. "Want to play?"

Her glance cut to Tanner, who stood with his arms crossed over his chest. He raised an eyebrow, and that charmer's smile of his quirked up one corner of his mouth.

"What do you have in mind?" Cross growled.

"Trust me?"

Cross' mouth eased into a grin. "With my life and my heart."

Cross watched as Tanner bent TJ over the spanking bench then deftly bound her hands behind her. He'd raised the padded bar beneath her waist, so she knelt with her back sinking in a lovely arc to lift her firm, round buttocks. The men stood behind her, admiring her smooth, white skin and the slick pussy that was engorged and a pretty pink.

"You did put dibs on her ass..." Cross drawled.

TJ groaned and her head sank between her shoulders. "You aren't going to leave me even an inch of pride, are you?"

"Pride's overrated. We're in the pursuit of pleasure."

Cross palmed two silver clamps and walked around in front of her, knowing she was eyelevel with his cock and would be distracted from his purpose. He reached



beneath her and cupped a breast then stroked and squeezed it with his fingers before twisting the tip and pulling. He released it, enjoying her faint gasp and the way her lips pouted.

“You’re going to be a tease, aren’t you?”

“I never tease.” He knelt in front of her and kissed her lips. Then ducked lower to twist one engorged tip and clamp it with a tweezer clamp with rubber tips. “Too tight?” he asked.

She blew between pursed lips but shook her head. Between the two clamped nipples, he connected a chain from which he hung a small fishing weight.

“Jesus!”

“Too much?”

She shook her head, but her expression lost a little confidence. He glanced toward Tanner and gave him a nod.

Tanner slicked up his cloaked cock with warm oil then trailed a finger between her buttocks. The moment he sank the finger inside her, Cross knew because her eyes widened and color bloomed on her cheeks. “You’ll have a new safe word.”

“I won’t need it.”

“Never say never,” he murmured then leaned in to whisper it in her ear.

She laughed but shook her head. Cross straightened to stand directly in front of her and stroked his cock. His shaft was thick, felt like a steel rod in his hand, and it was bare because he wanted nothing between them—just the sensation of her mouth working his dick. Her idea.

He gripped his shaft and slapped her cheek with it. She opened her mouth like a baby bird, her tongue extended. He couldn’t resist and let her use the tip to slide into his slit and taste the pre-ejaculate he squeezed out.



Her tongue fluttered then sank, rimming the slit. Cross scraped his feet across the carpet to come closer, lured by her enthusiasm. He let her suck the cap, her lush mouth surrounding him, her tongue swabbing the surface, stroking in wicked circles.

A snort drew his attention to Tanner, who pulled his finger from her ass. Tanner pointed his cock at her entrance then spread her hole with his thumbs and pushed against it.

TJ moaned deep in her throat and stretched to suck more of Cross into her mouth.

"Jesus, Tanner, let's get her off the bench."

Tanner laughed at his eagerness, but pulled out. Then he gripped TJ's hips and helped her up.

Cross slipped off the nipple clamps and strode to an armless, upholstered chair and sat. Tanner urged her forward, helping her to straddle his lap.

Cross gripped his cock and centered it between her folds then eased back, bracing his hands on the edges of the seat. "Tanner's gonna take your ass. When he moves, you'll move."

"Won't I need my hands for balance?" she said, not a trace of trepidation in her face. Just an eagerness to please and explore.

He shook his head. "Rest your pretty tits against my chest and show him your ass."

TJ leaned against him, hiding her face in the corner of his neck while Tanner came up behind her. He widened his legs to lower his hips then guided his cock into the cleft of her buttocks.

TJ shook her head. "Fuck," she whispered.

"Is he hurting you?"

"No... *Jesus*."

Cross knew what she was feeling because Tanner's large cock was separated from his by only a thin membrane. He felt the other man push inside, crowding into her. Cross tensed his buttocks to lift her higher.



TJ moaned, the sound so thin, so strained he knew she was close.

"Don't need a pinch or a slap?"

She shook her head. "Don't think so. Full. Dammit, I'm so full. I'm gonna come."

"Look at me, sweetheart."

She lifted her head. Her eyes were moist. Her lips blurred and swollen.

He rubbed his mouth against hers then tilted his head to push his forehead against hers, his gaze boring into hers. "You're mine, you know. Sweet little body and soul."

Tanner leaned over them both and rode TJ's ass in deepening glides. "Just tell her you love her, man."

She laughed, but her eyes betrayed her doubt.

He arched a brow. "Think this isn't the real thing for me?"

"You're letting another guy do me."

"My best friend. For you, baby. Because you need this. Because you're ready for it."

Her nose wrinkled, a teasing light glinting in her blue eyes. "You think you know what I need."

Cross grunted. "Have I been wrong? About anything?"

"I..." She bit her lip. "This... You tore me down. Piece by piece."

"Was it a bad thing?"

She shook her head, releasing a single tear that streaked down her cheek. "You got to the heart of me."

Tanner increased the depth and speed of his thrusts, pounding, shoving her up and down his dick. Cross closed his eyes and kissed her hard then leaned back to watch her face again. "Can you take this? Take me the way I am? I like to play. Hard. Often."

TJ trembled against him, her lips blurring as they rounded with pleasure, sweat shining on her face. "You really love me?"



"Baby, ever since I took you to the dirt and covered you. You cried and fought, but in the end, you let me in. It was powerful, what I felt for you then. You haunted me. I would have looked for you, but my unit moved on. I'm not lettin' go of you this time."

"I'm not sure how I feel. I'm not all the way back yet."

"And that's okay for now. Just know I'm here for you."

Doubt cleared from her face, and she gave him a tender smile. TJ arched, her tight little buds scraping his chest as Tanner powered harder. He glanced up to catch Tanner's expression. His buddy was close but gritting his teeth to make sure he lasted.

"It's okay, Tanner. Baby's all right. She's right there, aren't you, sweetheart?" He plucked her clit then rubbed it hard.

She gave a little yelp then moaned, rubbing her head against Tanner's chest, her tits against Cross'. "Oh please, fuck! *Fuck!*" And then she stiffened between them and howled.

Tanner cursed then came, jerking them all until he pulled free and leaned against TJ's back to catch his breath. When he recovered, he kissed her shoulder, winked at Cross and left.

Alone now, Cross tugged on her bound hands to pull her upright. She gave a moan, but he knew she could take a little discomfort. It was his turn.

He pulled down on her hands again, forcing her back to arch. Then he bent and drew one pink-tipped nipple into his mouth. He'd take his time, torture her tits until she begged him for release.

Only TJ didn't know how this game was supposed to be played. He grinned as her cunt clasped his dick, the contractions measured and strong. He grinned against her breast then laughed. "You're not a very submissive woman, are you, sweetheart."

With her head bent back, she eyed him through narrowed lids, a challenge sparkling in her blue eyes. A tawny brow arched and she glided forward and back on his lap, grinding on his dick.



He pulled the loose end of the rope knotted around her wrists, freeing her, then lunged upward. Her legs wrapped around his waist, her arms encircled his neck. He walked her to the wall and ground her back against the smooth surface as he banged her hard.

No, TJ wasn't a sub. But she was his to mold. His to love. He'd keep her safe, close, and too damn busy to let any damn shadows from the past creep into their bed.

"I'm yours, Cross," she said, her voice soft but strong.

He aimed a glance into the corner where the camera monitored their lovemaking. He imagined Dru smiling then saw the little green light at the bottom blink out.

They wouldn't be back to Unfettered. Neither of them needed any safe haven other than the one they'd found in each other's arms.



## About the Author

Delilah Devlin dated a Samoan, a Venezuelan, a Turk, a Cuban and was engaged to a Greek before marrying her Irishman. She's lived in Saudi Arabia, Germany and Ireland, but calls Texas home for now. Ever a risk taker, she lived in the Saudi Peninsula during the Gulf War, thwarted an attempted abduction by white slave traders and survived her children's juvenile delinquencies.

Creating alter egos for herself in the pages of her books enables her to live new adventures. Since discovering the sinful pleasure of erotica, she writes to satisfy her need for variety—it keeps her from running away with the Indian working in the cubicle beside her!

In addition to writing erotica, she enjoys creating romantic comedies and suspense novels.

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

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