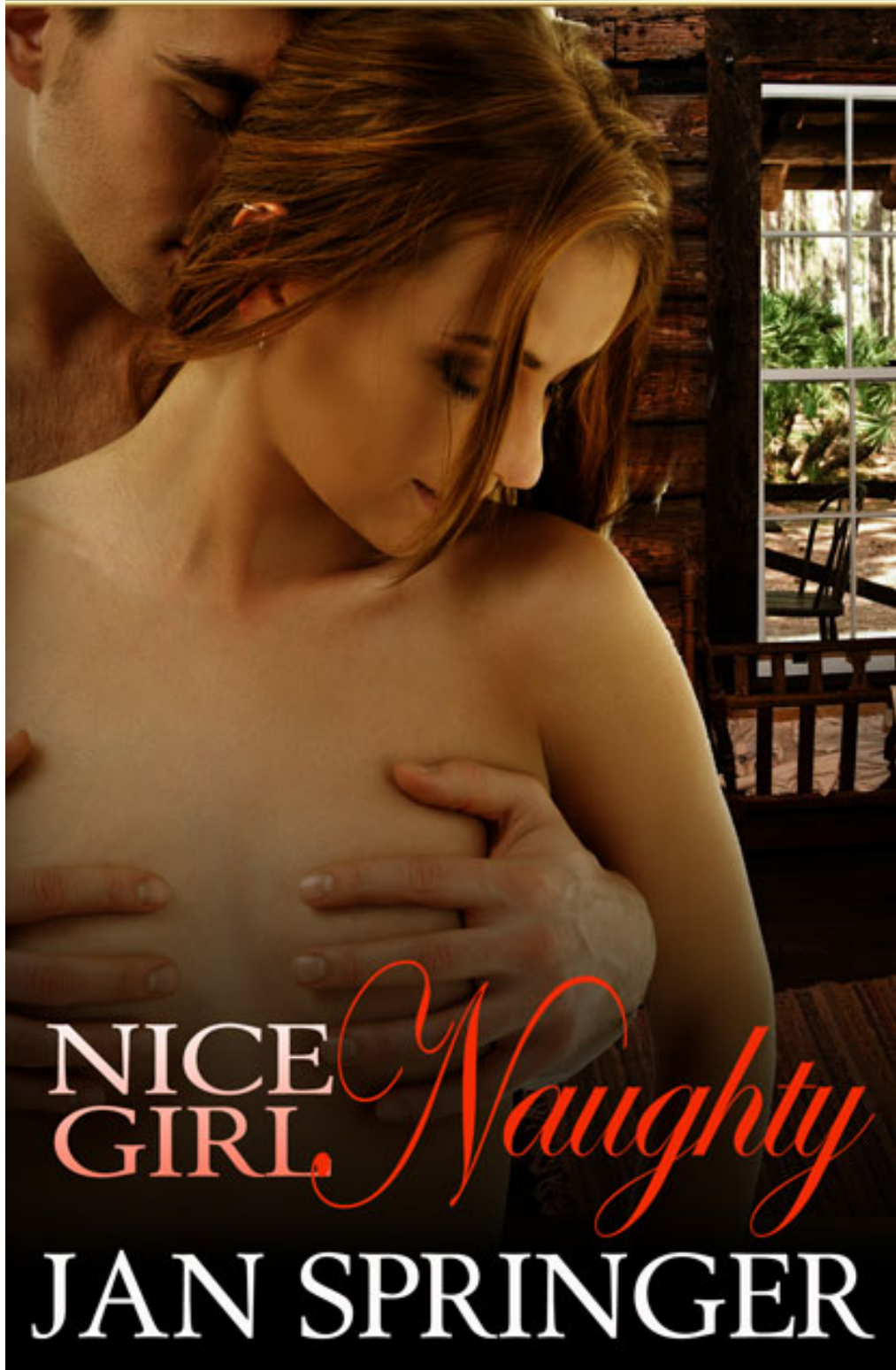


ELLORA'S CAVE *Breathless*



NICE
GIRL.

Naughty

JAN SPRINGER

Nice Girl Naughty

Jan Springer

Blind since nineteen, Summer has blossomed into a famous wood carver, her talented hands giving life to erotic art. When her *own* life is nearly taken by a serial killer, she finds herself suddenly whisked to a secluded wilderness cabin by sexy bodyguard Nick.

Summer can't get enough of touching Nick's thick, powerful muscles and all those other hard, yummy male body parts. It doesn't take long before the cabin's every surface—horizontal or vertical—is marked by their scorching lovemaking.

For years Nick has stayed away from nice girl Summer. Now he's back, and sweeping his gorgeous redhead into the naughty, erotic sex-fest they've been craving for years. With passion blinding him, Nick doesn't realize their hideout isn't safe—until it's too late.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorasave.com

Nice Girl Naughty

ISBN 9781419927423

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Nice Girl Naughty Copyright © 2010 Jan Springer

Edited by Jaynie Ritchie

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication May 2010

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

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

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

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

NICE GIRL NAUGHTY

Jan Springer

Prologue

“Happy nineteenth, Summer.” Nick Cassidy’s sexy, low drawl melted over Summer Colby like the smooth chocolate frosting on the cake her family and friends had just polished off in the restaurant upstairs. She’d come out of the ladies’ room at the bottom of the steep flight of stairs to find twenty-nine-year-old Nick standing there, the edges of his warm brown eyes crinkling as he noticed her surprise at seeing him.

Why shouldn’t she be surprised? Nick and her brother Ryan had gone overseas to the Middle East several months ago to hire themselves out as bodyguards. They’d been doing very well for themselves over there and she hadn’t expected either of them to come home just to celebrate her birthday.

Yet here Nick was and that awesome sexual tension she’d been feeling since shortly before he’d left erupted like a volcano inside her.

He leaned against the wall, his heavily muscled arms crossed over his chest as he grinned at her. He wore a black t-shirt that hugged his upper torso and a pair of hip-hugging jeans that molded to his legs, and she sure didn’t miss that awesome bulge between his thighs either. He looked so huge she could feel the familiar awareness blaze deep inside her. A heat that sent moistness to her vagina and had her breasts feeling much larger than they were.

Summer swore she forgot to breathe every time she looked at him down there. She knew she shouldn’t stare at him either, considering he thought of her as his best friend’s baby sister. But she just couldn’t help but gaze at all the parts of the most gorgeous guy she knew.

His brown hair was longer than when he’d left. Shoulder-length and swept straight back off his forehead and feathered back at the sides. He had a sweet slightly crooked nose she adored, a strong jaw, dark five o’clock shadow and his mouth looked full and

well defined. He had lips meant for kissing, not that she'd ever kissed him, but boy oh boy she wanted to.

"I thought you were working," she said, feeling her face start to heat, wondering why he would come down here to see her and not wait upstairs.

"I'm in between jobs. Thought I'd hop on a plane, come over and wish you a happy birthday."

"Phoning would have been cheaper, Nick." Summer laughed, praying he didn't notice how nervous she suddenly felt. He'd come all the way from the Middle East to see her? He had to be teasing.

She noticed how nice he smelled. He must have just had a shower because of the hint of soap and that pleasant spicy aftershave she'd always loved. He also possessed a raw dangerous scent that made her heart speed way too fast.

"So. Are you glad to see me?" he asked. He pushed away from the wall and drew nearer to her. He was a big man. Six foot three to her five foot eight. And boy oh boy she certainly did like the protective way she felt when she was near him. Not to mention all those mixed emotions that ran through her too. Awareness, excitement and other naughty things that felt very nice.

"Of course I am. I just wasn't expecting you." Here, and so sexy and so damn cute, she added silently. "Did Ryan come home with you?" Ryan was always a safe topic of conversation.

"No, he's on a job."

Oh. Not that she was disappointed. Ryan always managed to make her feel as if she were a little girl who didn't know what she wanted in life. Maybe all big brothers did that.

"Are you staying with us? Do Mom and Dad know you're here?"

"I'd rather they not know. I'm only in for one night. Took a hotel room. Have to head out tomorrow."

A hotel room? Oh wouldn't she love to spend the night with Nick. God, help her, she should just blurt it out and say she wanted him. But how could she? He had no idea that she thought of him as The One. The man she wanted in her bed. Forever. She'd never told him. Never showed him. Never had the nerve.

Stupid woman. Tell him! Show him!

No!

She felt all shaky when he moved in front of her and sat down on the stairs, preventing her from going back up to the restaurant. Preventing her from escaping. Not that she wanted to get away.

"Tell me how those art classes are going. Have your parents given you any more problems with your choice?"

Nick had been her ally in helping her deal with Ryan and her parents. They wanted Summer to take courses that would lead her to a "real" job. They didn't think an artist would make a good stable income like a lawyer or dentist or accountant. Sure she had the brains for those professions, but they didn't interest her. What did catch her by the heart was art. For as long as she could remember she had a passion for drawing and painting. She had to admit, she was good at it too.

"It's going good. The teachers like my work. I really enjoy it. I'm glad you helped me see that doing what my parents wanted me to do wasn't the right choice for me."

"Glad I could help out."

She felt self-conscious in the way he was looking at her. For a brief moment his gaze dipped to below her neck and lingered on her breasts. Oh yeah, they sure did feel way too big, pushing up against the delicate white blouse she wore, eager for his hands to cup her there. Her panties beneath her short navy blue skirt felt damp and her pussy was needy for his cock to plunge inside her.

She exhaled, tried to keep the smile on her face. But it was hard. Too frigging hard when all she wanted to do was peel that black t-shirt off his body and run her hands over those hard, rugged muscles. Muscles she'd only seen when she'd peek out her

bedroom door and watch him walk down the hallway of her parents' house after he came out of the shower with a towel wrapped low around lean hips. He wore nothing else. Just a towel she craved to yank off.

He was an early riser, so he probably figured no one else would be awake. But she got up just to watch the show when he stayed over those times her brother brought him home.

"And you're doing okay?"

Like do you miss me?

Boy, why did she feel so awkward? She'd never felt so out of sorts before with him. Why didn't she just reach out and grab his hand, make him stand and make him kiss her? Women on television or in the movies and even at the university she attended nearby were bold like that. Why couldn't she be?

"You should come up and say hi to my folks. They would love to see you."

That was a stupid thing to say. He'd just said he didn't want anyone to know he was here. But she couldn't help it. She hadn't seen Nick for more than half a year and the old saying absence makes the heart grow fonder sure was true. The shock of seeing him was throwing her off balance and making her look as if she didn't give two shits that he'd flown so far to come see her.

But why? Why just to see her? It didn't make sense. He always treated her like a kid sister. Hmm, now that she thought about it, there had been some hot looks now and again before he'd left, but he'd always managed to hide them by distracting her with something else.

Now all he was doing was grinning and looking at her. It just seemed dumb to do only that.

"How about a birthday kiss?"

Had he just said that? Oh my God, why had he just said that?

His grin widened. He had said that, hadn't he?

Oh lord, he was standing up. She couldn't help but take a step backward. Man, he was tall. And so dangerously sexy.

She was blushing. Furiously. She should stop blushing but she couldn't. There were feelings unraveling. Emotions long suppressed. Long denied. She felt drunk. A bit lightheaded. Maybe she'd sipped a bit too much pink champagne with her birthday cake? She felt like she had those times she watched him strutting down the hallway in his towel.

He was so cute standing there looking down at her. His dark gaze made her feel so weird and so good at the same time and his head was lowering. His wonderful smell played havoc with her senses. She wanted to run. She wanted to stay. She just wanted him inside her.

Then his hands were tenderly cupping her face and his lips melted over hers. At the soft impact of his mouth she swore her toes curled inside her shoes. His kiss was featherlight and ignited sensations she'd never felt before. Feelings that zapped through her in sizzling lashes.

His hot mouth branded her, unleashing streaks of pleasure. She loved him so much. She whimpered, her arms wrapping around his neck, pulling him closer. His chest crushed her breasts and she could feel the wild banging of his heart.

At first it seemed as if he wanted to break away, to stop the kiss, but she must have been mistaken. He uncupped her face, his fingers trailing down along the sides of her breasts to behind her back. His hands lowered in sensuous movements, fingertips massaging, until they settled on her ass.

A low growl erupted from him and drifted into her mouth. He pulled her hips against his, giving her a really good feel of the hard, huge heat between his thighs. The feel of his erection pushing against her lower belly electrified her. She shook with a wild need, gyrating against him.

He broke the soft kiss and breathed hard against her mouth.

"I came back because I missed you. I needed to see you. Needed to kiss you."

Her senses reeled at his words. His mouth locked onto hers again. This time harder. He kissed her until her mouth was on fire and her body went feverish with a desire she knew of only one way to quench. Him fucking her.

His hips moved rhythmically against her, keeping in tune with her gyrations. She felt the storm of lust growing inside her, pushing her toward a climax that until now, she'd only managed to have by masturbating. But this was going to be different. Better. She could feel it.

Her head spun when he pushed his tongue past her lips and between her teeth into her mouth.

Wow! This guy knew how to make a girl feel good. No, she wasn't a girl. She was a woman. His woman?

She smelled the power of his scent. Felt her blood racing through her veins as her tongue met his in a dance of lust. She unhooked her arms from around his neck and smoothed her palms over his strong muscle-laced shoulders, massaging his flesh, feeling his biceps flex as she dug her fingers into them.

And then on a low growl he lifted his head and cursed softly.

"Some kiss," he breathed heavily. She opened her eyes and found him smiling down at her.

But he was shaking his head. His dark gaze looking so hot, she moaned.

"I better go before something happens that shouldn't."

Oh my God! Was he for real? She was on fire. She wanted him. Now. Up against the wall!

"Nick."

He pressed a finger to her swollen lips. "Shh, we have time. I have to go."

"No," she muttered. She was so primed. So ready. He had to be crazy.

"It's best this way." He grinned that sexy grin that made her just about come.

"I can come to your hotel room," she blurted in a desperate whisper that had him stiffening in her arms.

"There's nothing more I'd like, Summer. Fuck, nothing more, but I can't."

He was pulling away, avoiding her gaze. The smile faded from his mouth and his eyes. He turned and took a few steps toward the stairs.

"Why did you come then?" she blurted, trying hard to see through the sudden swell of stinging tears.

"I told you. To see you."

"Bullshit, Nick."

He turned back around to face her and ran his hands through his hair. She knew he did that when he was frustrated about something. Good, she was glad he was upset because he'd sure aggravated her!

He nodded as if coming to some kind of conclusion about something.

"Give me some time. Can you do that?"

What the hell did he mean by that?

She wasn't sure if she was shaking her head or nodding, but he turned around again, his broad back staring her in the face as he took the steps three at a time. Then he disappeared.

Who knew that would be the last time she'd see him? And she meant that quite literally.

Chapter One

Ten years later

“Hello? Is anyone there?” Summer called out as she heard the nearby alcove door of her California Carmel-by-the-Sea art gallery creak open. She turned to face the soft sound of footsteps padding into the room where she’d been setting up her newest exhibit of erotic woodcarving.

“Hello? We don’t open until Monday morning,” she called to the intruder. Her assistant, Mary, had left only a few minutes ago to grab them a late night snack so they could finish up tonight and take tomorrow off to do some shopping for more supplies for her next batch of art.

Whoever had entered, it wasn’t Mary because the elderly lady walked briskly, as if she meant business. Whoever was there didn’t respond, but she could hear someone breathing somewhere to her left. Could actually feel her skin crawl as someone watched her. Uneasiness lashed her and she suddenly wished for her assistant.

Gosh, she hadn’t realized how dependant she was on Mary. Ever since she’d come into Summer’s life several months earlier, she’d been her eyes, describing the quaint European story book cottages lining the town streets they shopped at or explaining how the blue-green ocean interacted with the rocky coastline when Mary drove Summer to and from her art gallery.

“Hello?” she called again, getting really nervous at the person’s rudeness for not answering.

Ever since the accident ten years ago that claimed her vision she’d learned not to jump at every little sound. Freaking out would only riddle her with unwanted anxiety. She focused on using her other senses. Her ears could pick up sounds a normal seeing

person couldn't hear and her nostrils were definitely picking up the sharp aroma of aftershave.

Okay. So it was a man and he carried a dark, dangerous scent she'd never smelled before. Despite not wanting to be, she suddenly felt frightened.

"Are you lost? My assistant can help you." Despite her fear she managed to keep her voice surprisingly calm.

Reaching for the pager she kept strapped in a waist holster, she fumbled with the tight clasp. As it snapped open and her hand touched the plastic pager, the man's harsh voice stopped her cold.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Ms. Colby."

She froze. Whether it was because of the heavy way he was breathing or because of his thick, sharp, commanding voice—a voice she didn't think she'd heard before—instinct told her this guy meant her harm.

Fear zipped up a few notches and for a brief instant she couldn't think of what to do, let alone which way to move.

"I've wanted you for too long, Summer," the man whispered hoarsely. His breathing was getting heavier, quicker. She sensed him drawing closer. Moving very slowly like a cat getting ready to pounce on a blind mole.

Oh frig. He definitely meant to hurt her.

Mary! Where are you?

She heard him take another step closer.

She backed away. Felt the sharp corner of a table jab against the back of her thigh. Swallowing against her suddenly dry throat she tried hard not to panic as alarm bells slammed through her brain. This guy wanted to do very bad things to her.

"A sweet, angelic-looking woman like you deserves to be captured, Summer. Fucked all day long and all night. Bound and gagged. Totally helpless and under my

full control until I deem your punishment is over and I send you to the fiery gates of hell for what you did to me, you traitorous bitch.”

Oh God! This guy was definitely nuts.

“Get out of here,” she said as she tried to yank the pager out of the leather holster. But the holster was so new and so tight she’d been having trouble with it ever since she bought it a couple of weeks back. Yet the leather had smelled so good, she’d put up with the tightness. Now she realized her mistake in buying it.

Oh sweet mercy! The pager wouldn’t budge!

Reaching along the edge of the table she tried to remember where she’d placed her walking cane. In her haste, her knuckles grazed the handle and the stupid cane fell to the floor with a loud clatter.

The intruder shot her a casual chuckle that made the hairs on the back of her neck stand to immediate attention. He’d come closer now.

Too close. Cold horror grabbed hold of her.

“I said get the hell out of here,” she yelled.

Her assailant chuckled again. The awful sound sent icy curls up her back.

“I’ve paged my assistant,” she warned. “He’s on his way back. He’ll be here any minute,” she lied, figuring the creep would be frightened off more easily if she said a guy was coming back and not a sixty-year-old woman.

“Don’t worry, sweet Summer. We’ll be long gone by then.”

Oh frig! Run!

No. She needed to work on keeping her thoughts straight. Needed to remember her self-defense lessons. But nothing came to mind!

She finally managed to get the pager out of the holster and was about to press the button, but it slid from her trembling fingers and rattled to the floor.

Fuck! What the hell was with her sudden clumsiness?

“You are such a pretty thing, Summer. Red curly hair and summer blue eyes. Just the way I like my fallen angels. Your plump breasts will fit perfectly in my palms. That sinfully sexy body of yours...” He let out a slow whistle that sent icy shivers up her back.

“You’re too sinful not to be punished.”

“Leave or I scream,” she shouted, finding her last thin thread of sanity starting to slip. Maybe she was having a nightmare and was safe and sound in her bed?

He ignored her and kept talking. Kept stepping closer. Nice and slow as if he had all the time in the world. As if he knew Mary wasn’t coming back?

Oh God. Oh God. Oh God.

“When I first saw you, I knew I just had to add you to my collection of punished sweethearts.”

His collection? Was he a killer? Oh Lord! *Don’t do this to me!*

Suddenly she was paralyzed. Unable to scream. Unable to run. He kept coming closer. She swore he was about two feet away, right in front of her, blocking her way to the front door.

“I want to see what kind of a spitfire that red hair makes you, Summer. I want to feel you struggle under my strength. Will you be my most challenging redhead because of your blindness? Or will you tremble like all the others? I need to get you naked and splayed out on a table so I can fuck your tight pussy. I want to hear you scream. Hear you beg.”

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. She was going to lose it. She was.

His breathing sounded so loud in her ears she swore he was right there inside her head. Something else, besides his aftershave, permeated the air. A rancid chemical odor. Chloroform?

The darkness she'd been living in for years suddenly seemed claustrophobic. Stifling, just as it had been right after the accident when she'd woken to find out she was blind.

Fragments of her life suddenly flashed in the darkness behind her eyes. The night of her nineteenth birthday party. Her mother and father driving her home from the restaurant where they'd thrown her a surprise birthday bash. She'd been upset at Nick's desertion, snapping at her parents to leave her alone. Then the bright lights. Her parents' screams. Then waking up to the devastating news of her parents' deaths and her unexplained blindness.

She'd been overwhelmed. Unable to sort out her feelings. Her brother Ryan coming home from his bodyguard job in the Middle East and smothering her with affection and attention.

Oh, Ryan. Her brother would be devastated if something happened to her. She couldn't leave him all alone in this world. She had to escape!

Her brain flashed a warning about the intruder and she came back to reality. Instinctively she kicked out to where she sensed he stood. Her foot impacted with hard solid flesh and the sound of an oomph followed. A hand grabbed her ankle, painfully twisting her foot, throwing her off balance. She fell backward, her right hip impacting hard with the edge of the marble table behind her. Pain flared and she cried out.

The bastard continued to hold her ankle. And he was chuckling. The overwhelming reek of chemicals assaulted her nose. She held her breath and struck out with her fists, meeting her assailant's hard chest.

She screamed as he let go of her foot, sending her sailing sideways through the air. A burst of pain sliced against the base of her neck. Silver stars erupted behind her eyes. Blackness smothered her.

* * * * *

*Terror Bodyguard Services
Kuwait*

“Sorry I had to pull you out of Saudi, but you’re the only one I know who has lots of ties back in the States. More than me. What did you find out about what’s happening with this serial killer?”

Nick frowned at Ryan Colby’s question and tossed several color photos onto his desk. Nick didn’t like the icy shivers creeping up his back as he watched his friend pick up the photos and sift through them. The women in the pictures all looked eerily similar to Ryan’s sister, Summer. Various shades of red hair. Blue eyes. Happy and cheerful smiles.

“The perp is a bad one,” Nick began. “From what I’ve gathered the guy has been around for a few months. Apparently he was active about fifteen years ago for about two years. Killed six women that they know of and then he just stopped. He could have ended up in jail. Maybe got married. On meds. Who knows. Several months ago something triggered him to start again. He’s not keeping the women for as long a period as his first time around. He’s already killed four. He targets redheads with blue eyes. Tall, slender, single. They’re always artists. He keeps the women alive for several weeks, tortures them, rapes them and finally kills them. He’s taken women from all over the States and Canada. There’s no real pattern. They think it’s one guy. They’re checking with the victim’s families for possibilities that the vics may have met him at art sales or workshops or maybe dating sites. In the meantime, Summer is in serious danger and needs a bodyguard.”

Ryan suddenly looked up from the photos and his bold stare torpedoed Nick. “Glad to hear you say it, cause you’re him.”

Nick shifted in his chair, his leather coat creaking as he moved. His stomach turned with uneasiness. There was no way he was heading back to the States to see Summer. No fucking way. “Excuse me?”

“She would feel more comfortable with you. She knows you –”

“Hey, the last time I saw her, she made it clear she didn’t want me hanging around to help her out. I’m betting she still doesn’t want me around.”

“She didn’t want me around either back then. I mean it’s only natural you or I would show up as her bodyguard. We’re professional bodyguards and she knows I wouldn’t trust just anyone to protect her. Since she and I are currently fighting, like what else is new, she’d expect you to come and help her, right? Besides, she’s always liked you, Nick. She won’t fight this as bad if you show up.”

Nick shook his head, knowing full well she’d object. “The hell she won’t.”

“You scared?”

“Isn’t that why you’re sending me, instead of going yourself?”

His friend smiled dryly, but Nick noticed the man’s shoulders hunch in despair and desperation edged Ryan’s voice as he continued, “I really need you on board with me on this, man.”

Nick stayed silent as guilt began to gnaw through him. How could he explain to his friend he wasn’t ready to see Summer again. Maybe he never would be ready, especially after the way things were left between them.

“Why the hell are you hesitating? This is Summer, for God’s sake! Is there a problem I’m not aware of?”

Nick shook his head, his uneasiness increasing a few notches. Maybe he should get his ass back to the States and check out things for himself. Ryan was right. This was Summer’s life on the line. He shouldn’t be letting what happened between them get in the way of her safety. He was extremely thankful Mary walked in when she did and interrupted the freak. Summer had been lucky, but next time Nick wanted to be there to protect her. At that realization, all the walls he’d so carefully built up around his heart began to crack and crumble. Yeah, it was time to go back.

Sighing, he reached over and collected the photos from Ryan’s desk and pocketed them.

“No. No problem,” he lied. “Why don’t we get all the details ironed out while you drive me to the airport.”

“You won’t regret this, Nick. I owe you big-time.”

“Yeah, you do,” Nick said softly as he stood.

Ryan wasted no time in following him out the door.

* * * * *

Thirty-four hours later

Summer felt so warm and safe and relaxed. As if she were wrapped in a cocoon. She wanted to stay here forever. To enjoy this stress-free environment. It felt so good. Yet a dull ache pounded through her head, preventing her from sinking back into oblivion.

The headache seemed to grow stronger and alarm shifted through her. The safe feeling she’d been floating in suddenly vanished and she tried to remember why she was suddenly so scared.

And then she remembered the footsteps, the intruder’s voice and the horrible threats.

“Miss Colby, can you hear me?” A woman’s voice slashed into her thoughts and Summer lay still. Who was there? Where was she? What happened with the intruder? She focused on bringing all her thoughts in line and remembered waking up to Mary’s panicked voice as she spoke to the 9-1-1 operator. She’d tried to tell Mary she’d only blacked out for a few minutes, but Mary had been adamant she stay still as per the operator’s instructions. Head injuries were nothing to fool with.

The ambulance had come and Mary had followed her to the hospital, staying with her in the emergency room where they both spoke to two female police officers about the attack. Then Mary had stayed with her through some tests too. After the tests, the cops had talked to them again, appearing even more serious than their first interview.

"I'm Dr. Sweet, Miss Colby. Do you remember me? We spoke when I examined you in the emergency room late Saturday night. Can you open your eyes for me?" Her voice sounded soft and safe and she spoke from somewhere above and to Summer's right.

Summer realized her head was pounding like a bitch, just as it had been since she'd awoken from being knocked out. Opening her eyes, she gasped at a gray silhouette hovering above her.

Sweet Jesus! Things weren't black. What the hell was going on? She could actually see shadows. She swallowed as a roll of mixed emotions slammed into her. After years of being in the land of the unseeing, she could actually make out vague shadows. Was she dreaming? Was she delirious?

"Um, I think I'm seeing something," she blurted.

There was a gasp from Mary and the rustle of clothing. A tall shadow moved in front of her.

"How many fingers am I holding up?" the doctor asked, and Summer could barely make out a hand.

"What? Are you serious, Summer? You can see something?" Mary's excitement was contagious and Summer was swept up in it.

"Ma'am, please. I'd like to examine the patient," the doctor interrupted.

"So! Examine her."

Summer couldn't help but smile at the elderly lady's huffy tone.

"How many fingers am I holding up?" the doctor prodded.

"Two fingers," Summer said softly, not quite believing this was happening. "You're holding two fingers up in a peace sign."

Mary swore. The doctor chuckled.

"No way," Mary snorted in obvious disbelief. "Well, what does this mean? Is she getting her sight back? Those idiot doctors told her after her accident she would most likely be permanently blind. So what gives?"

Summer closed her eyes, feeling the need to sift back into the familiar darkness. To check back into that safety zone she'd been languishing in. All this with the eyesight and the attacker who'd gotten away and was now free to come after her, or another woman, was too overwhelming. Too unbelievable.

She'd worked so hard to accept her world of darkness and now she was being thrust into a world of hope. She didn't want to get her hopes up and then have them dashed. She just wanted to get out of here and get on with life.

"What exactly do you see, Miss Colby?" the doctor asked.

"Shadows. Shades of gray."

"Colors?"

"No. Just movement and silhouettes and shapes."

"Well, there is a lot of swelling at the base of your neck where you hit your head. Things may get better as the swelling goes down. Or things may just stay this way. I can't tell you unless I get in specialists and run tests."

"How can all this be possible, just from a bump to the head?" Mary echoed her thoughts.

"The body is a mystery, ma'am. Even to us doctors. I checked the report on the MRI they did and everything looks normal. I can get in touch with the doctors from your previous accident and we can compare notes to see if anything in your brain or spine has shifted. In some cases the C1 and C2 can shift and pinch a nerve. Blindness has been reported to happen on rare occasions. In your case maybe a disk shifted back. But something like that would have been seen on the first MRI."

"I don't remember the name of the doctor who treated me. My brother was in charge of everything back then."

"Well, if you could contact him I can get things rolling. There's something else that could have caused your blindness. Did anyone mention emotional trauma?"

Summer frowned and bit back the familiar anger at that concept. There's no way fear of what had happened to her parents would cause her to go blind.

"It's been mentioned."

"PTSD can do weird things. Do you remember the accident?"

"No. I just remember when I was at my birthday party." And she mostly remembered Nick and that scorching kiss, she added silently. Suddenly she felt warm all over at the thought of Nick.

"That's normal for a concussion with unconsciousness," the doctor replied.

"You haven't answered my question. Is her vision returning?" Mary broke in.

"I don't know. Some of it for sure but I would have to run a battery of tests. Are you up for them, Miss Colby?"

"Of course she is," Mary snapped.

Uneasiness swept over Summer. She didn't want to hang around here. She hated hospitals. They reminded her too much of losing her parents and losing her eyesight. She wanted out of here. Now.

"How long would she have to stay?" Mary asked.

"A week. Maybe longer."

"I can't stay here. I have an exhibit tomorrow morning." That was a good excuse. Mary would understand. They were both workaholics. That's why they got along so well. Maybe by then she'd be totally blind again anyway. Boy, she was getting gloomy, wasn't she?

"No way, Summer. The exhibit was supposed to be this morning. Today is Monday. You slept off and on through Sunday, and you weren't in any condition to go back to work, so I put up a notice on the gallery door that you were ill. There's some stuff you need to know, too, about this creep who attacked you," Mary explained.

Frustration gnawed her. This was Monday morning? Shit! She didn't have time for this. She needed to get back to work. Things were picking up so beautifully and she had

so many people interested in her stuff. She couldn't stay here and languish in the hospital.

"Ms. Colby, I would prefer if you stayed in the hospital for at least today and tonight merely for observation. You did black out for a few minutes. Head injuries are nothing to play with. If you feel good tomorrow, I can discharge you. But I would prefer if you just rest for several days."

Several days? Hello, she didn't have time to rest. She'd fall too far behind if she took more time off.

"I want to leave now please."

"Well, as I said I would prefer you stay, but I can't see anything wrong that would prevent you from leaving. You must promise that you will rest if I let you go earlier."

"Sure. I can do that." Like not.

"I'll leave you a script for painkillers for any headaches that may linger. I do suggest followup with the eyesight. In the meantime I'll get the paperwork going and when the nurse gets a chance she can remove you from the IV and she'll let you know when you're free to go."

"Thanks for all your help, Doctor," Summer replied, feeling a rush of relief sweep through her at getting out of here. She didn't want to be a sitting duck here for the guy who'd attacked her. She just wanted to go and hide somewhere and immerse herself in her work and forget what had almost happened.

She was surprised that Mary didn't protest as the doctor left. But when the door to her hospital room closed, the elderly woman dug in her heels.

"You should reconsider. You should get to the bottom of what's going on with your sight, honey."

Summer opened her eyes again. A shadowy figure stood there. It was unbelievable. She was actually seeing Mary. Or at least her shadow. She was just as petite as she'd

imagined and just as fragile looking. Emotions shifted over her again. God, this was unbelievable.

“We can’t tell my brother what happened with this guy or with my sight. He’d come over and be my babysitter and have me up to my eyeballs in doctors forever.”

“Too late. I called him shortly after we got here. Figured he should know. He’s already sent someone. According to the nurses, your bodyguard has been sitting outside your hospital room since late last night waiting to talk to you about the attack. He’s quite the babe. That’s what you call sexy hunks these days, isn’t it? Babe? If I were ten years younger I’d be after him myself. Although he’d still be younger than me, but I was a pretty good cougar in my day.”

Summer couldn’t help but laugh.

“You? A cougar, Mary? I thought you were married four times.”

“I guess I never mentioned all my husbands were younger than me?”

“Um, no.”

“Well, I don’t brag about my conquests, sweetie. The younger ones were easier to teach than the old dogs.”

“Let’s not mention this vision thing to the guy my brother sent, okay? I don’t want word getting back to Ryan and him getting his hopes up for nothing.”

“Sure thing, sweets. Whatever you want. You know how I always side with you over him. He’s too pushy. Too nosy. And I don’t like the way he treats you. You’re a grown woman, not some helpless little kid.”

“Okay, okay, enough about Ryan. Please?” Talking about him always made her too edgy. After she’d become blind, he’d supported her financially and mentally until the point where he’d started to smother her with his overprotectiveness. Truthfully, she was surprised Ryan hadn’t shown up as her bodyguard instead of sending someone else. She just hoped she could convince this guy that things were fine and she didn’t need his protective services. Although it would cost her an arm and a leg, she would

just have to hire someone on her own until the creep was caught. The last thing she wanted or needed was for her brother to be taking care of her again.

The mattress shifted beneath her as Mary sat down and then a warm hand shifted over Summer's. Mary squeezed her fingers gently.

"I'm glad you're all right, hon. I went almost mad when I saw that creep lift you up. I thought you were dead. It's a good thing I came back when I did because I just remembered I'd forgotten to lock the door behind me when I left. It's all my fault. I'm so sorry, honey. But I had the cops on the phone so fast it made that son of a bitch's head spin. And then I blasted him with the mace and he ran."

"I'm glad you didn't get hurt, Mary. I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if something happened to you."

"Ah, hon. No need to even think about what might have been. Live in the present. Remember? That's what I always say."

Mary went silent and Summer got the feeling something else was going on. Her assistant always got quiet when she was pondering something and didn't quite know how to express it. She'd done that for days before suggesting that Summer open up her own gallery, which had turned out to be a fantabulous idea. She'd done it again when she'd tried to set her up on a blind date with her grand nephew, which hadn't worked out at all. The guy just wasn't into blind women and she wasn't into freshly divorced men who whined about their ex-wives on a date.

The silence continued until anxiety clutched her chest and her head was throbbing up a storm.

"What's wrong?"

Mary chuckled. "You know me too well, don't you, sweetheart?"

"Good news or bad?"

"Hmm, I would say both. What do you want to hear first?"

"The good news. I could use some that's for sure."

“Well, the good news is the cutie pie outside your door.”

“Mary, c’mon. You already mentioned the guy.”

“Did I? Oh okay, well the good news is he’s a devilish hunk—and I am talking *hunk!*”

The pain in Summer’s head merely increased.

“I thought you said he was a babe. Now you say he’s a hunk. Which one is it?” she muttered, trying to humor her friend. But after that blind date fiasco with her grand nephew she just didn’t trust Mary in the dating or guy department.

“He’s both rolled into one.”

Silence again.

Summer inhaled slowly and closed her eyes, which were starting to hurt.

“The bad news?” She may as well hear it now.

“I have to agree with your brother. You need to have this bodyguard with you until the creep is caught.”

Her anxiety peaked and her mouth dropped open in shock. Mary was siding with Ryan?

“Now it’s okay, sweetie. There really is a good reason why I had to agree with him over this. I—”

“You agreed with my brother?” This was unbelievable! “You hate him. You two never agree on anything. What did he do? Break your arm?”

She heard Mary sigh, felt her squeeze her hand again. “We don’t want to lose you, Summer. There’s stuff that you need to know and this fellow your brother sent will explain it all.”

“To hell with explanations. I want to go home, Mary. I need to get back to my work!” Summer tried to sit up and pain slashed through her head. She flopped back onto the bed again.

“Headache, love?”

“A good one,” Summer admitted, feeling a bit queasy at the intensity.

“I’ll catch a nurse and get some of that painkiller the doctor mentioned. Be back in a few minutes. Sit tight.”

When Mary left, the room fell into silence and in seconds a creepy uneasiness splashed over her again. No, not uneasiness, it was fear. Dread at the thought of that creep coming into her room and finishing what he started. She wished she could just pretend the attack hadn’t happened, but she knew that wouldn’t happen. She was too spooked.

A cold shiver sliced through her at how close she’d come to being that man’s victim. Oh boy, was she ever going to feel safe again? Or would she end up a frightened person jumping at every little noise as she’d done after the car accident that killed her parents?

Maybe Ryan’s idea of a bodyguard wasn’t so bad?

She closed her eyes and breathed in slowly, hoping to chase away the despair racing through her. The last thing she wanted was to start living in fear again. Those days of blackness following the accident had screwed with her confidence and self-esteem. She hated the sympathy and pity people showered her with. She’d started overreacting to it. Shutting out her friends. Most of all she had shut out Nick.

Because she didn’t want him feeling sorry for her, she’d asked him to please leave her alone. Told him there could be nothing between them. That she’d only been teasing him that night when he’d kissed her. Obviously he’d taken her suggestion to leave her alone because Ryan had told her, Nick returned overseas to his job as bodyguard.

That’s when she realized she was the one throwing the biggest pity party for herself and as long as she continued, the walls she needed to break down would only get thicker, until they prevented her from regaining her independence. Yes, she was blind, but that hadn’t stopped her from attaining her goals.

Determination slashed through her fear and Summer forced herself to smile. She would not allow some lunatic to take it all away from her. Sure she was angry at this

interruption in her life, who wouldn't be? But she had to stay strong and deal with what was happening. She also needed to get herself ready so she could get out of here.

This time around, she moved gradually into a seated position, relieved to discover the pain in her head didn't get worse as it had before when she'd sat up too quickly. Nor was there any dizziness. Slowly, she swung her legs over the side of the hospital bed. Reaching out, she groped for her cane, using the vague shadows as a guide.

She realized when she faced to her left, things got brighter. And warmth splashed against her face. It looked like a square of lighter gray and excitement burst through her.

A window and sunshine. *This is so cool!*

It was at that moment she sensed someone had entered the room. She'd been so engrossed in looking at the window, she hadn't paid attention to the soft swish of the door opening. Ordinarily it wouldn't have alarmed her, but whoever had entered was just standing there. Just like that creep the other night.

Oh God.

Her heart snapped into a mad pounding and she fought down the panic. Had the man found her here? Had he come to finish the job? Was he going to try to chloroform her again? Kidnap her?

Where was her Goddamn cane? The nurse's bell? Her pager?

Shit! How could she make herself such an easy target?

Her head throbbed harder. She clutched her hands into fists trying to think about self-defense techniques. Last time her panic had not allowed her to think clearly. This time she would be prepared. She would fight and she would dig out his eyes if she had to.

Her panic increased but then a very intriguing scent drifted past her nostrils. This wasn't the same guy. But it was a guy. She could tell by his aftershave. He smelled nice. Of leather and spice. And power.

Summer swallowed past her suddenly dry throat. There was only one guy she knew who smelled this good and he hadn't bothered with her for ten years. It couldn't be him. Could it?

A weird fluttering feeling slashed through her tummy at the thought Nick Cassidy might have the balls to finally show up. Slowly, she turned her head and made out a dark shadow. A very big, tall shadow.

No, it couldn't be Nick. It was just wishful thinking. Maybe desperate for a knight in shining armor?

"May I help you?" she asked.

"Hi, Summer." His deep voice drifted over her in a soothing growl. "I would have knocked but your friend said you were awake and to go straight in."

"Nick?"

Her heart fluttered in excitement. Was it really him?

"Long time no see. How've you been?" he asked in a casual tone. He sounded as if they were mere acquaintances and not old friends. It's not like they were lovers or anything. She'd just had a huge crush on him and shared one knee-knocking kiss, and then when she'd kicked him to the curb after she'd become blind, he'd dropped out of her world and broken her heart.

"I'm fine. And you?"

"Been good. Heard you ran into a bit of trouble," came his smooth reply.

Irritation sliced away her tummy butterflies. Of course, he was here because Ryan had sent him. Not because Nick gave two shits about her.

"Yeah well, I'm sure the police can handle it. Feel free to tell my brother I don't need his babysitting services. I'm quite fine."

She heard him exhale. It sounded a lot like frustration. Well, screw him and screw her brother. She didn't need their help and she certainly wasn't going to be a nice little girl either.

She tried not to read into the way her body reacted as his big shadow came closer. Tried to ignore how her pussy was creaming with heat. Tried to ignore how her hospital gown felt way too tight over her breasts and was riding so high on her thighs. She resisted the urge to pull it down. Let him get an eyeful. He could see what he'd been missing.

The last thing she expected was to still feel anything for this guy. Sure, she'd had a crush on him since two or three years before the crash that took her sight, and God help her she still remembered every detail of the object of her infatuation. He always looked so scrumptious and the dark sexy shadow lining his cheeks and chin had always made her heart go pitter patter. His shoulder-length chocolate brown hair and the cute way he combed it straight back off his forehead. It made him look like a rogue, a dangerous bad boy hunk.

His full, kissable lips...oh that scorching kiss they'd shared. She felt all hot and tingly just thinking about it and those gorgeous brown eyes that twinkled with mischief. He had a sweet slightly crooked nose too and when she'd asked him who'd socked it to him, he told her he'd gotten into a fight with Santa Claus when he was a kid. They'd been fighting over his mother's freshly baked cookies one Christmas eve. As if she believed that tall tale, but it had been fun talking with him. He'd always treated her like an adult.

"I need to ask you questions about this guy who attacked you while things are fresh in your mind. Are you up for it?"

Her first instinct was to say no and send him on his merry way, but she knew it was important to catch this man.

"I need to know everything he said to you, Summer. What he smelled like. Everything about him that affected your senses. Anything that you remember. Right down to the tiniest detail. But first I need to know if he touched you anywhere?"

"I tried to kick him and he grabbed my ankle. That's how I fell and hit my head."

“Okay, I’ll have them pay special attention to the socks and shoes and pant legs. I understand the cops have already taken your clothes, so Mary packed you a suitcase, which I have in my car. She also packed all the stuff you need for your work. That’s all been sent ahead. There’s a set of clothes in the closet for you.”

God! He was taking over already!

“I’m sorry, Nick. But I won’t let that man scare me into hiding.”

“It’s okay to be scared. In this case it’s healthy to be scared. This guy is too dangerous to fool around with. He’s killed several women and he wants you.”

Wants her?

“I have a flight booked for us. We’ll be in a safe house somewhere in northeastern New York until this blows over.”

We. Like him and her? No way. She couldn’t hang out with Nick.

“I told you I don’t need you as my babysitter, Nick.”

“Did you scratch him?”

“I said –”

“I know what you said. Did you scratch him?”

“No, I don’t know. I can’t remember. It happened so fast. No, I don’t think I was that close. I was afraid of the chloroform.”

“Chloroform?” Nick stepped closer. She could feel his presence all around her. Big and powerful. His nearness soothed her, but his sexy scent simply destroyed her senses. Gosh, she wanted him even closer. Wanted him kissing her and touching her and oh my, her face was heating up. How embarrassing.

“I...I don’t know for sure if that’s what it was. It was some kind of chemical. Like something rotten.”

“He used a large dose then. He wanted to take you down fast. If he’d used a smaller dose it would smell sweet.”

Oh God.

“That’s an interesting piece of info. I don’t remember anyone mentioning he was using chloroform on his victims. That’s hard to get as an individual. The government restricts the purchase of it, but it’s not impossible, especially with the Net. Do you think you would recognize the scent if we had an expert introduce you to smells?”

“You mean like a mug shot but instead of pictures, you use smells?”

“Exactly. Is there any way you got confused and caught a whiff of the mace Mary sprayed him with?” he asked.

“No, I smelled it before I fell. And he mentioned his fallen angels and redheads.”

“Fallen Angels?” Surprise laced his voice.

“Yeah, he said other things too. Things I’d rather not repeat.”

She heard the distinct sound of pen scribbling on paper. Suddenly she felt so frightened and vulnerable.

“Tell me everything, Summer. Leave nothing out. No matter how embarrassing the details.” The serious command in his tone had her nodding. He was right. She needed to tell him everything so they could catch this lunatic.

She fought back the rising fear of her close call with the man and told Nick Cassidy everything that happened.

Chapter Two

He shouldn't have come for her, Nick chastised himself as he sat outside Summer's hospital room while she got dressed. His attraction to her was still alive and well, kicking in big-time as he noticed she'd grown into a gorgeous woman with curves. Nice curves. Nice body. Nice cock reaction.

Shit. Focus on something else, Cassidy, he admonished and turned his thoughts away from his physical response to her.

The doctor had given the all clear for Summer to be released and Nick was getting excited and nervous about having her with him all alone in the safe house. Actually it wasn't a safe house, per se, but a friend's cabin nestled near the Adirondack Mountains in northeastern New York state. He'd been there eleven years earlier for a weekend of fishing with Ryan and their friend who owned it, and he'd enjoyed the place immensely. It was the perfect atmosphere for an artist. He was sure she would like it.

Just as he'd enjoyed the sight of her creamy thighs, long legs and pink painted toenails. She'd been sitting on the edge of her bed, the mint green hospital gown hiked high, giving him an eyeful. From the angle where he stood, he clearly saw her full back and he'd felt the stirrings of lust. His fingers tingled with the urge to cup her ass cheeks while he thrust into her pussy. Something had tugged inside him as he watched the golden highlights gleam in the thick mass of strawberry red hair on her head as sunshine splashed in through the window onto her.

He liked the spattering of her freckles over the bridge of her nose and cheeks and something dangerous arrowed through him as he studied her luscious strawberry red lips. He remembered from the night they'd kissed and she'd pushed herself against his chest that her breasts were full. Generous. And he ached to fill his hands with them. Wanted to take her nipples into his mouth. Taste her and kiss her there.

He'd always loved her cool blue eyes too. They were the color of a clear October California sky. Just like the sky looked today. Warm and beautiful.

He couldn't get over how different she looked. The pictures on her website and in some of the art magazines he'd seen didn't do her justice. Back when he'd known her, she'd been dating geeky guys and he'd thought of Summer as his friend's little sister. Okay, so that was a lie. Secretly he did lust after her, but that was after a couple of years of knowing her. Shortly after she'd turned eighteen, the undeniable lust had hit from one day to the next. Just like a sledgehammer.

He kept tabs on her through Ryan, who told him she'd trained at a blind school and had returned to art classes at the local university. Over the years she became a renowned wood carver and it made him really proud to know she'd made her dreams come true. She sold her art over the Internet and at her gallery in California. He even had some of her work decorating his apartment in Saudi Arabia.

He had some of her work and now he had Summer too.

When Ryan called him and told him Summer had been attacked, his first impulse was to catch the first flight out and make sure she was safe. But then his cold feet had kicked in yet again. He'd wondered if she would welcome seeing him after so long a separation? Would she hate him for never coming back to visit?

Nick sighed and shook his head. He was a bloody idiot for not coming back sooner. Maybe if he'd been around, she wouldn't have become a target for this lunatic.

"I'm ready, Nick," her soft voice snapped him out of his thoughts and he turned to see her standing in the doorway, her white cane in hand.

Man, she looked breathtaking. She was dressed in a tight pair of blue jeans that hugged her wide hips. A pink blouse peeked out from beneath a dark green cardigan that was wrapped snugly around her curves. Her fluffy red hair fell like a cloud over her shoulders and suddenly he felt unsure of what to do.

Did he take her hand and lead her, or what? He didn't have experience with a blind woman.

She grinned as if sensing his discomfort.

“Intertwine our elbows and lead me. The surroundings are unfamiliar. That is, if you don’t mind?”

Nick swallowed. His throat went dry with a nervousness he hadn’t felt before. He stood and hooked his arm with hers. Warmth from her body slammed into him like a furnace. He could feel her burn seeping through his leather jacket as he led her down the hall.

By the time they reached the parking lot and he helped her into his rental, Nick couldn’t believe how easily she’d managed. Or how freaking good she smelled. Heck, good wasn’t the word. Hot. She smelled hot and sexy and enticing.

Revvng up the vehicle, he then maneuvered the SUV out of the hospital parking lot and headed toward the nearest airport in Monterey.

How the hell was he going to handle having Summer in the same house with him when all he wanted to do was kiss her and follow through on this insane attraction he had for her? Even after all these years he was still craving her.

But he would restrain himself. He had to.

Overseas he had plenty of opportunities with women he found fascinating. Most were married and bored, looking for some casual sex, but he’d restrained himself, preferring to find sexual release with unattached women who felt the same way as he did. No serious relationships.

Summer, however, was different. She was wife material. Mother material. Sex goddess and shut the hell up, Nick, he chastised himself. He focused his thoughts on driving. Okay so he tried to focus on driving but with Summer sitting beside him, it was bloody hard not to keep staring at her.

He wondered how she felt being blind. How she coped at being in constant darkness, not knowing if some deranged killer might be watching her. As he was doing. Watching her and still trying to get over how pretty she looked and how he burned to touch her.

“And you mentioned you have all my work supplies?”

“They’ll be waiting for us at the cabin. I’ll unbox them and get things set up for you when we get there.”

“No need. Just put the boxes where I can work and I’ll take it from there. Are you a good cook yet?”

He cracked a grin. “Not the best, but I do still cook a mean chili.”

She laughed, obviously remembering their Friday night dinners. He had cooked for the family every Friday night when he was staying with her parents. His heart lightened even more at the musical sound of her laugh and suddenly things didn’t feel so awkward and serious anymore.

“Then this Friday night you’re in charge of dinner. Is it a date?” She’d turned her head and was now facing him. Her warm blue eyes looking directly at him as if she weren’t blind. They must have taught her that in blind school. To look at the person she was speaking to.

Nick grinned again. Cripes, he’d been doing a lot of that today. Probably more than he’d done over the last ten years.

“It’s a date. Friday night chili.”

“Good, then if you wouldn’t mind, I’ll take a bit of a nap. I’m kind of tired and have a headache still.”

“It’ll have to be a short nap. We’ll be at the airport soon. But you can sleep on the plane and then again when we get to New York as the drive will be a couple of hours. Here, I’ve got your prescription bottle and some water. The doctor warned me you might have a headache for a few days.”

Keeping his eyes on the road and one hand on the steering wheel he dug in his jacket pocket and found the pill bottle. He handed it to her and told her a water bottle was on the console between them. She didn’t have much trouble popping open the pill container and took the medication and a few sips of water.

“Sorry, I’m not the best of company.” She smiled after placing the pills inside her cardigan pocket.

“You’ve got a good reason. Just nod off. I’ll wake you when we get there.”

To his surprise he beamed even harder when she leaned her head back against the headrest and closed her gorgeous blue eyes. A car tooted in the opposite lane and he jerked the steering wheel to drive back on his side of the highway. Man, he was in trouble here if he couldn’t even concentrate on driving.

He forced himself to drive without looking at her. It was hard though. Damn hard.

* * * * *

He watched the taxi cab pull up in front of the old woman’s house. His heart picked up a mad beat as from the passenger side the old lady stepped out then headed up the walkway of the apartment building where she lived.

He knew the old woman’s routine very well and she’d definitely deviated from that routine since he’d tried to capture Summer.

Bitch. She’d blindsided him with that mace. His face still burned from her attack on him. He really should go in and kill her. Strangle her and watch her eyes bug out as she died.

Excitement raced through him at that scenario, but it quickly died as he knew he needed her alive. Needed to sit and wait for her to contact Summer or for the Fallen Angel to contact her. While the old woman had been away, he’d explored her apartment and planted a bug in her phones. It hadn’t been hard to do with his security background in the military. Thanks to his contacts in the military, he’d also been able to obtain one of those listening devices that allowed him to hear through the walls of buildings.

While Mary had been away he’d slipped a listening device against the outside of her basement floor apartment behind some shrubs allowing him to hear what was going on inside through his earpiece.

He was still upset he couldn't get close to Summer's house. He knew they would probably have someone staking out her home by now and he was also pissed off he hadn't been able to access her gallery. It had a good security system. That's why he'd jumped at the chance the other night to grab her when he'd noticed her assistant hadn't locked the door. Usually he wasn't so impulsive but his need for Summer was great. From here on out he'd just have to be more careful.

In the meantime, planting bugs in that old bitch's nest as well as the listening device would let him know when they called each other. When he got the info he needed, he'd make sure Summer didn't get away this time and he would kill anyone who dared get in his way.

* * * * *

It was dark. Night. A gorgeous silver full moon hung low over the twinkling glass-like ocean. Bright stars blinked down at the two of them. At her and Nick. They both lay naked on a fluffy blanket. The warm sandy beach was a comfortable mattress beneath them.

Nick was stretched on his side, his elbow pressed against the ground, his hand propped beneath his neck as he moved his head closer to her, his lips melting against hers in a tender kiss that shattered all her self-control. He slid his tongue into her mouth and she whimpered at the wet heat and at the carnal sensations sizzling through her.

While he kissed her, his hand glided over her bare hip, his fingers trailing along her tummy and abdomen to settle between her widespread legs.

He broke the kiss and whispered against her mouth, "I know you've been waiting a long time for me to touch you like this, haven't you, babe."

"Yes," she said, gasping and bucking as a finger slid against her swollen, sensitive clit.

"And you've wanted me to fuck you for so long."

"Yes. Too long."

She moaned as he parted her labia and slipped a finger inside her wet vagina. Quivering with tension and awareness, she felt his finger slip out of her and smooth warm cream covering her clit as he massaged her. Erotic sensations shimmered and built like a storm.

With each massage of his finger on her clit, her tension mounted. Her breaths came harder, faster. Her thighs tightened, but she kept her legs apart, allowing him full access. He rained kisses along her neck and brushed his mouth on her right nipple, creating new sensations. She arched herself, pushing her breast closer to his lips. She became aware of every breath he took, every plunge of his finger into her pussy and out again to smear wetness over her clit.

When his mouth latched onto her nipple, she shuddered. Reaching out she feathered her fingers into his hair, touching his scalp, loving the scorching feel of him beneath her fingers. As he sucked her nipple, she went wild from the wicked sensations. Cupping the back of his head, she brought his face into her breast. He gently bit her nipple, making her gasp. Making her let him go.

He moved farther down her body. His kisses were intense and she writhed beneath them. He maneuvered his body lower and when his head dipped between her thighs, she couldn't stop herself from wrapping her legs around his neck and crying out at the warmth of his breath against her clit. Her thighs strained and quivered as his lips latched over her pussy and his mouth branded her flesh. Extreme pleasure ripped through her and she moaned, clasped her legs around his head.

"This is what you're looking for, isn't it, babe." His voice sounded like a wild growl against her pussy and she wondered how he could speak with his face buried there. But she didn't care how. She just wanted to feel these amazing sensations lashing her.

"Yes," she agreed, very eager for him to continue.

Her tension mounted as he untangled himself from her legs and hovered over her. She cried out as she came down on top of him and she felt the tip of his hard, heavy shaft lodge against her vaginal opening. "Yes, Nick. Now. Fuck me, Nick."

"You are so sexy, so gorgeous," he groaned as he entered her.

Slowly he penetrated her. Heat and pressure flared through her and her eyes widened in surprise at his large size.

Oh wow! He's so big! she thought as he filled her. Wicked sensations snapped through her like a live wire and her body tightened so beautifully, chasing her toward the edge of the bliss she craved so much.

His eyes flared brightly with lust and the tips of his lips moved upward into a breathtaking smile as he looked down at her. He withdrew and pumped into her again, this time faster and harder, leaving her reeling at its intensity.

"Your pussy fits around my cock so perfectly," he muttered in a strangled voice.

He dipped his head closer and she whimpered as his hot mouth seared hers in a sensual, tender kiss. The erotic way his lips smoothed over hers and the strong plunge of his tongue into her mouth had her closing her eyes and melting into the pleasure he easily created.

He pumped into her. His cock and his mouth moving in perfect rhythm. His thrusts hot and hard making her cry his name over and over in her head. She burned for him. Yearned for the climax, which was suddenly there.

Brilliant explosions seared through her. The shuddering waves piercing her, making her arch, making her tight grip convulse around his cock. He groaned. Kissed her harder. Fucked her harder.

Nick! Oh yes! Nick! Oh yes! That's it. Nick!

She merged with him. Her mind. Her body. Her soul. She never knew something so beautiful existed. Never knew love could be like this.

Nick!

Summer awoke, flooded with pleasure, with Nick's name on her lips. Opening her eyes, her arousal vanished instantly and her tummy hollowed out in utter disappointment. No beach. No sex. No Nick.

Everything looked dark. Completely black.

Shit! The shadows she'd started to enjoy were gone and so was Nick. She knew because of the silence and lack of his body heat and scent. The air inside the car was chilled too. So were her hands and feet.

Sitting still, she listened for any sounds, but none came. The silence seemed utterly deep. No traffic noises. No neighbors chatting or partying. Not even an airplane roaring past overhead. All she could hear was the rushing sound of blood in her ears and her heart pounding from that very erotic dream she'd had of Nick.

Uneasiness zipped through her as her thoughts floated away from her bodyguard and toward their trip. At the Monterey airport he'd had a charter plane waiting. Several hours later they landed at Adirondack Regional Airport at Clear Lake where they'd hopped into a rental and she'd fallen asleep again, awakening here. Wherever here was located.

Maybe they'd had car trouble and Nick left her alone at the roadside? Or maybe she'd dreamed the whole hospital-bodyguard scenario and there was no Nick. Maybe she had fantasized him after being kidnapped by that horrible man and her mind was conjuring up fantasies to keep her sane?

She jumped as she heard the crunch of footsteps on gravel just outside the car. The driver's door burst open and a cold breeze slapped against her. She realized the shadows were back, compliments of the interior car light.

"Have you been awake long?" Nick's concerned voice soothed away her anxiety.

"A few minutes." She tried to smile but that didn't quite work. Her lips trembled and emotions slapped through her. God help her, she wanted to cry. Heck, she wanted to go home and get into her comfortable routine and not have these hot, needy feelings for Nick Cassidy. Truth was, she didn't want to have her heart broken when she fell in love with the guy all over again. He would leave, again, and not even look back.

"Are you okay? Do you still have your headache?"

His soft voice almost undid her. Almost. But darned if she would let Nick Cassidy in on the fact she lusted after him, even after all these years.

"Yes. I'm fine. Just a bit overwhelmed at all these changes."

"That's understandable. Just give me a second and I'll have you in the cabin."

True to his word he had her in the toasty warm cabin in a couple of minutes. He led her with a tenderness she never knew he had. At the doorway he explained the layout of the one-bedroom cabin, admitting that while she'd slept he called Mary to get tips on how to guide her without making it seem like he was taking over.

"Mary's okay?" Summer asked feeling overwhelmed with concern for the older woman's safety.

"She says hi and she's doing really good. She also said not to worry about her or the gallery. Um, your bedroom is straight ahead about thirty steps. Want to check it out?"

"Sure." Using her cane, she memorized the layout as he led her by her elbow. She counted and sure enough in thirty steps she reached the open doorway.

"It's a pretty room," Nick explained. "Roses are the main feature. Miniature red rose-patterned wallpaper, honey pine planked floor and a queen-sized bed to your right. The comforter is a dark pink and the sheets are light pink. The bed is in the right top corner of the room. There's a door near the foot of the bed to the bathroom and there's a baseboard heater beneath the window by the bed. That's this room's sole source of heat. They have a fireplace, but it's out of commission and needs a new wood insert. They're hiring someone to fix it up next year. So cross your fingers we don't get any power outages."

Summer nodded as she envisioned the layout and then walked into the room using her cane as guidance and investigated her surroundings.

"It smells nice in here. Like vanilla."

"There's a few vanilla scented candles in wall sconces around the room. I lit them a little while ago to help get rid of the musty closed-in odor. They closed it up for the winter just after Labor Day weekend."

"It was nice of them to open it up for us," she commented. Odd that she hadn't smelled a musty odor. Maybe because his nearness was a distraction to pretty much everything?

Visions of Nick's fingers sliding beneath the waistband of her panties zipped through her mind. Oh she wouldn't mind having Nick's hands roaming through her stuff or on her body for that matter.

"Are you hungry? It's just about suppertime. I've got some canned stew I can whip up for tonight and toss a salad. You okay here for a bit on your own?"

Summer nodded, thankful for having some time alone. She needed to unpack and get into the shower. She still felt unclean whenever she thought about that horrid man touching her while she'd been unconscious.

"Oh and I put your work supplies in a corner of the living room. Its right in front of a bay window with a view of the lake and it'll catch most of the morning and afternoon sun. I'll show you around the indoors after we eat. It's too dark to go outside tonight so we'll leave that for tomorrow."

To her going outside in the dark would just be second nature. "Thanks," was all she could think of to say. When she heard the soft click of the bedroom door closing, she let out a heavy sigh. She'd never been one for liking changes and having Nick back in her life was a huge change. She just hoped she could say goodbye to him when the time came and that she didn't make a fool of herself by clinging to him while she was here. She realized now that Nick wasn't a man who stayed in one place for long.

Ryan had once told her Nick was an adrenaline junkie. Craved danger, dodged bullets and anticipated trouble on a daily basis. In a way, she was his job right now, wasn't she? Danger surrounded her with the threat of a killer and he was probably anticipating trouble, that is, until the killer was caught.

But what if he wasn't caught? How long would Nick hang around before he got bored with his blind client?

Summer frowned. Probably not too long. So it would be best if she kept herself cool and distant from him. At least that way she could protect her heart from being broken this time around.

* * * * *

Something was happening to Nick, and he wasn't sure if he liked it. Instead of making sure the motion detectors were working and doing a perimeter check around the cabin, he was humming while he tossed a salad. He never hummed. Another thing, he'd wanted to sweep Summer into his arms and carry her from the car into the cabin. Kind of as if he were carrying his bride over the threshold. He'd never had that urge before.

And now as he tossed the salad and hummed, he heard the water taps creaking as she found her way into the shower. He wanted to join her. That instinct wasn't new.

The fantasies of her, naked, in the shower while he watched weren't new either. Just thinking of her pink flesh being pummeled by water and his soapy hands roaming every seductive curve of her body had his cock going nice and hard. He shifted at the suddenly tight way his pants hugged his erection and settled the salad bowl to the side.

Time to set the table. *Like a domesticated man.* That last thought had him coming up short.

What the hell was the matter with him? He was here on a job, not getting ready for a dinner date and a followup of all-night sizzling sex. Besides, the woman had just been attacked a couple of nights ago by a madman who had every intention of killing her. The last thing he should be doing was thinking of sex because he knew that would be the last thing on her mind after her experience. He was also here because Ryan expected him to treat his sister with care and respect. Not hop into bed with her.

Man, he was out of control with his thoughts. He needed to stop thinking with his wrong head.

"Mind on the job," he muttered to himself and hurried to set the table.

* * * * *

Summer felt better. Much better after having a shower and eating Nick's delicious dinner. He'd been rather quiet while they ate, but he'd had a long day. They both had. So she fully understood and didn't push or pry.

She did manage to get the location of their exact whereabouts out of him. Knowing she was here in the wilderness, surrounded by nothing but lakes and empty cabins— that had been closed down for the winter—and nobody around for miles, except Nick of course, she felt blessedly safe.

After dinner, he showed her to the area with her opened but unpacked boxes then left to clean up the dinner dishes. She was glad to be alone. Not that having him forty or so feet away was alone but at least here among her familiar wood carving tools, she felt as if some semblance of normalcy had returned to her life.

He'd supplied her with a lovely work table, a comfy chair and some wood shelves for her supplies. Running her hands over the top of the table, she could feel the nicks and scars from years of hard labor etched into the thick planked wood. Obviously someone had used this table a lot.

Piled at one end of the long table she found several blocks of wood. Blocks that she and Mary were supposed to go shopping for before she'd been attacked. Obviously Mary had done it without her, bless her heart. Running her fingers over the supplies, she noted Mary had picked up everything on their list. Very cool.

She would eventually turn these blocks into her erotic art. She used all kinds of wood for her work. Mahogany for its rich reddish tone, a tone she was told deepened in color over the years. She found its fragrance wonderful as she shaved the wood. The tupelo wood was a light wood that was knot free and easy to carve. Basswood was also light to handle as well as soft and easy to carve.

At the top of the blocks she was thrilled to discover the three unfinished pieces of carvings she'd been working on at home. She smiled as she imagined Nick's reaction to these particular products. What did he think of her work?

When he removed them from their boxes had he run his hands over the smooth contours of the naked women? Did he touch their breasts? Gaze at the intimate areas of their bodies that she so tactfully carved?

Her favorite current piece was being carved out of cypress wood. She'd worked exceptionally hard with this one. She'd created a nude woman sitting down on a toboggan, her long legs pulled up against her body, her arms hugging her legs. The only thing she wore was a scarf. The scarf as well as her hair flew behind the woman in a free flowing motion as if she were going down a hill with the wind rushing against her.

Using her tiniest chisels and gouges she made the woman's hair strands feel as fine as the real thing and as soft as silk to a person's touch. Her toes and fingernails were intricately etched as well as her eyes, nose and mouth. She'd given her generous breasts huge nipples. Now all she had left to do with this particular sculpture was a final fine sanding and spray with varnish.

Her other two pieces were about half done. One piece she called Blindfolded. A nude woman standing against a tree. Her breasts were bound with carved rope and her body lashed to a tree trunk. She'd gotten the bound and blindfold idea from one of the erotic audio tapes she listened to.

Her third erotic piece had been a challenge. She called it Available. A nude woman on her knees, her legs widespread, her back arched, her head tilted until the ends of her hair touched the ground.

Summer planned on putting a lot of details into this piece. Nude women with sultry erotic poses with intimate parts fully exposed and intricately designed sold very well and not only to men but also to women.

Placing her sculptures back on top of the wooden blocks where she found them, she continued to unpack her supplies. She had quite a lot of carving supplies, accumulating them over the years – wood carving knives, chisels and gouges to create her sculptures, whetstones and machine oil for keeping her tools sharp, clamps and vices to hold the

blocks steady while she carved, thumb guards, cut resistant gloves and other protective gear kept her safe.

“Your work is very good.” Nick’s soft voice almost made her drop the package of Swiss made carving tools she’d just pulled out of a box.

“Thanks,” was all she managed to say as his powerful aroma drifted through the air and teased her nostrils.

“How long does it take for you to make a piece?”

“Depends,” she said as she reached out and found a place on the shelf for the tools.

“On?”

“On the project. The more intricate the work, the longer it takes. It also depends on how passionate I am about the sculpture as well as how hard the wood is, the grain of the wood and stuff like that.”

“Sounds complicated.”

He was moving closer. His big body a lovely shadow as she gazed up at him. However, she was careful not to look directly at his face because it could tip him off that she was actually seeing something. She didn’t want him to know about her eyesight. It really was none of his business and he’d blab it to Ryan who would just get his hopes up.

Not that *her* hopes weren’t up. They were. Big-time. But she needed to concentrate on her work, or she would go mad with worry about her eyesight.

“It was complicated at first. But I just kept at the carving until things started to click. Now I’m an old pro.”

“I noticed you seem to concentrate on female nudes. Is there a reason? Don’t women buy men nudes?”

His voice had lowered to a soft whisper and she shrugged. “I plan on moving into that area some day. And in answer to your question, yes women do buy nude males.”

She grinned. A little bit of teasing might be in order. She hadn't been able to tease him in years and suddenly the urge to do so was great. "Are you volunteering to be my nude model?"

Silence drifted over her in waves and she found her face getting warm.

Oh shit. Perhaps he was taking this the wrong way? Maybe he thought her promiscuous?

"No experience," he said. His voice sounded thick and sultry.

"No experience necessary," she whispered back.

Something was there between them again. Just like that night he'd kissed her all those years ago. A thick tension she found both invigorating and scary at the same time.

He sighed and she swore she heard him run his fingers through his hair in that same endearing way whenever he got frustrated.

He cleared his throat. "It's been a long day. We should get some sleep."

Disappointment shot through her. Yes, she'd thought she was teasing him, but now she realized she wasn't. Maybe comfort in his strong arms is what she was looking for? Or maybe she just wanted to relive that awesome kiss from that night and forget the things that had happened over the last few days.

Yes, that's what it was. She was only looking for some form of comfort. She shouldn't be reading more into this.

She nodded. "Yes, that's a good idea."

"You can find your own way to the bedroom?"

"No problem." She grabbed her cane and rose.

"Let me know if you need anything tonight. I'll be out here on the couch."

"Oh I'm sorry. You should take the bedroom," she said as guilt slashed through her at having put him out.

He chuckled. "Me? In a room full of roses? I don't think so. My reputation as a tough bodyguard would be ruined."

She laughed and mimicked seriousness. "Yes, of course and I guess I wouldn't be able to trust a man who slept with roses."

"Definitely not." She could hear the grin in his voice and then an awkward silence drifted between them. She broke it quickly.

"Thanks for the dinner and for bringing all my things in here. Hopefully I won't be in your hair for too long."

"You aren't in my hair, Summer."

She thought he was going to say something else about it, but he didn't. Instead, he moved away from her.

"I'll just finish up with the dishes," he muttered and a moment later she heard some pots and pans clanging.

"Good night!" she called and made her way to the bedroom.

"Night," he tossed back between more tinny sounds from the pots.

After entering the bedroom, she closed the door and inhaled the luscious aroma of vanilla. The fragrance cheered her up and she found her nightgown, toothbrush and toothpaste, where she'd placed them earlier on her pillow when she'd unpacked before heading into the shower.

Mary had packed her stuff perfectly. In the top right corner, she'd found her nightgown and overnight case, as well with a small box she hadn't been able to identify.

Using her nails, she tried to rip the plastic off the tightly wrapped package, but she always kept her nails short, so she wasn't able to open it. She made a mental note to use one of her cutting tools tomorrow. She didn't feel like going back into the living room right now and disturbing Nick. Besides, it was probably something for her hair. Maybe a barrette or a frilly elastic or something. In the bottom right corner of the suitcase she discovered her underwear and socks. In the bottom left corner were some pants and the top left corner her blouses and tops.

In her other suitcase she found some winter wear. After unpacking the items into the nearby dresser, Summer undressed, donned her nightgown and grabbed her overnight bag. She brushed her teeth, flossed and tended to other business then maneuvered her way back to her room.

Sighing wearily, she hung her cane on the bedpost, then plopped into bed, snuggling beneath the puffy comforters. Wrapping her arms around herself she found comfort in her hug and listened to Nick moving around in the cabin. He moved quietly but from the sounds of it he was preparing his bed on the couch. She heard the swish of the sheets and comforters. Heard him give his pillow a couple of punches before tossing it onto the couch. An interlude of quietness descended and she imagined him removing his clothes. Her heart pounded with excitement as she wondered if he slept in the nude.

Moments later, creaks of springs followed as he lay down on the couch. There was a click of a lamp being shut off and then the sounds of the night permeated her room.

Rain pittered against the window and she listened to the soft lonely wail of a loon from a lake nearby. Feeling safe and secure knowing Nick Cassidy was in the room next door, she smiled and closed her eyes, hunching deeper into the comforters. In moments she gave way to the exhaustion claiming her senses and slept.

* * * * *

Nick could smell her freshness. She was everywhere. Drifting along the warm air and teasing his nostrils and making him tense with awareness. His cock was hardening, not that it or he had relaxed at all over dinner or while he did the dishes and watched her sifting through her carving stuff.

She looked so pretty. Her hair darkened with dampness from the shower. Her cheeks rosy and her eyes sparkling as she ran her fingers over those erotic sculptures. Man, when he'd opened the boxes with those carvings, he had to admit he'd been stunned at the naughty poses she'd put her nude women in. Especially the blindfolded woman.

Where had she gotten the idea for that one? Or the other nude arching herself on her knees, her legs spread in welcome and the tiny slit of her pussy slightly open and waiting for a man's cock.

Shit, just looking at her art made him hard.

What about her comment on him being her male model? Of course she had to be teasing. She had to be teasing, right?

He tried to resist reaching down and touching himself, but he wanted so badly to pretend Summer was touching him that he couldn't stop himself. Sliding his hands between his thighs, he stroked his throbbing erection. His body felt tight, aware of her being so close, yet he was refusing to act on it. His breathing sounded loud and harsh in the still night air as he fantasized about Summer.

He could almost see her coming out of her room, wearing nothing but a seductive smile in the darkness. Her breasts were high and perky as she strolled silently toward him. She would gasp softly as she found him here on the couch, the sheets and comforter pulled down below his hips, his balls swollen and needy and his cock hard and throbbing in his hands.

She would know what to do to alleviate his problem. Slowly dropping to her knees beside him, her head lowered, her hair tickling his thighs as heated lips wrapped around his cock head.

He groaned as her wet mouth began its magic. Her lips were so tight, her tongue dancing over his flesh, creating an agony he could barely endure. She slipped more of his cock into her mouth, sucking and biting. Bobbing her head, she drew him deeper and then moved back again, before taking him deeper again.

His body tightened. His breaths came faster. He was nearing the edge. So close. *Oh yeah, bring me over the edge.*

She was eager to please. She wanted him. Needed to taste him. She wasn't shy, oh no. She knew what she wanted and she was taking him.

She sucked harder, quicker, her tongue moved along his shaft with quick-fire speed, lapping and licking until he could bear the tension no longer. He came on a groan, the couch springs squeaking, his hands stroking his hard, hot length so fast, his brain short-circuited and for a moment he didn't care if Summer did hear. Ejaculating into his hands, he enjoyed the pleasure that slammed into him like a storm. When it was over, he lay gasping, a thin sheen of perspiration on his forehead and chest.

Wow! Now that had been something. He hadn't masturbated like that in years. Would being with Summer be like this? he wondered as he wearily got off the couch. Quietly he padded into the bathroom, which also adjoined the only bedroom in the cabin. The bedroom where Summer lay.

His heart thumped with both excitement and anxiety. Was she asleep? Or had she heard him fucking himself?

After flicking on the bathroom light, he gently turned on the faucet and let the water run softly until it reached a nice warm state. Using the white bar of soap in the container on the counter, he washed his hands then soaped the cloth. Even in here her fragrance wrapped a blanket of arousal around him and damn if he wasn't getting hard again.

Once he cleaned up, he glanced into the mirror. With his hair mussed and a glazed look of lust shining in his eyes, he looked like a madman in dire need of a woman. Man, it was a good thing Summer couldn't see him or she'd be running the other way. That is, if she was inexperienced in sex.

This made him ponder that she must have some sexual experiences to come up with such erotic poses for her carvings. Did she have a boyfriend? Ryan had mentioned on several occasions she dated, but he'd never mentioned anything serious. Nick swallowed back a fissure of jealousy at the thought of Summer being with another man. If she belonged to him, he'd make sure she was pleased so much she wouldn't even have a chance to think of another guy.

He shook his head. What was the matter with him? He had no right to think about her that way.

But why couldn't he stop smelling her? Or stop thinking about her? He couldn't sleep; he was so centered on her. He'd never felt this way about any woman. It was weird and exciting and nerve-racking rolled into one big ball of pressure. His cock and balls were all tight and hard again.

A light sound from her room had him stiffening. The noise came again. Like a scratching sound. Like maybe someone jimmying the lock on Summer's bedroom window? Nick's senses went to alert mode. Had the killer been tipped off somehow that Summer was here?

Okay chill, man. No need to panic. No one but he, Ryan and Mary knew he was staying here with Summer. And they sure as hell wouldn't be saying a word to anyone whether they trusted them or not. The chances were highly unlikely the sound was the killer, but he needed to check it out.

Shit! He'd left his gun on the night table beside the couch so he was pleased Summer hadn't locked the bathroom door to her room. Flicking off the light, he waited a moment for his eyes to get used to the darkness before slowly slipping into her room.

The vanilla candles he'd left on the sconces were still flickering, casting a cheery glow along the rose-printed wallpaper and Summer's bed. He captured the origination of the sound immediately. Wind was making a branch scratch along her window. He sighed in relief but then froze.

Summer wasn't in her bed!

Chapter Three

Summer stood behind the open doorway, her heart pounding a mile a minute, her cane upraised and ready to clobber the intruder. She'd awoken abruptly from a deep sleep to find herself immersed in all kinds of sounds. They'd bombarded her from all angles, throwing her off balance. At first she hadn't been able to remember where she was and confusion enveloped her. Inhaling and forcing herself to keep calm, she remembered she was in the middle of nowhere with Nick Cassidy for who knew how long.

Before she could set her thoughts fully on Nick an owl hooted right outside her window. The sound chased shivers up her spine, making her burrow deeper beneath her comforter. Floorboards creaked as someone walked around out in the living room and then in the bathroom and she jumped at the popping sounds of broken branches hitting the roof.

From outside somewhere she could also hear waves crashing against the shore, making her wonder exactly how close this cabin had been built to the lake Nick had mentioned. Wind shrieked, rattling the window panes. There was this creepy sound scratching at the glass of her window right beside her bed, which had her bolting upright and angling her head in the hopes of identifying the sound. But she couldn't.

For a moment, she thought about screaming for Nick but decided against it. Mainly because she didn't want to come off to him as a scaredy cat if this latest noise was just normal for this cabin.

Instead, she opted to go to the living room and get him herself. Finding her cane where she'd left it on the bed post, she scrambled out from beneath the covers and stumbled along the bed. She'd been about to open the door to the bathroom when she felt the doorknob turn in her hand.

Letting go of it, she leaned against the nearby wall. Raising her cane, just in case, she waited and almost bonked the intruder before recognizing his aroma.

Nick.

Relief poured through her, yet she remained riveted. He must have heard something too and come to investigate.

Staring into the complete blackness, she wondered if she might be imagining the small glows of light she was seeing as she looked to her left. Suddenly she heard him curse violently as he banged into something and she couldn't help but smile. Welcome to my world, she wanted to say, but kept her comment to herself. No use in throwing taunts about her blindness at him.

It wasn't his fault she was blind. Well, if he had taken her to his hotel that night, she wouldn't have been in the car with her parents. Maybe, her parents would have left at another time that night, missing the drunk driver who veered into their lane, instead of leaving when they did, at her insistence, because she'd been upset about Nick leaving.

Okay chill, she chastised herself. Thinking about that night and throwing fault around was totally wrong. Things happened and that was that.

"Nick?" she called as she sensed him passing by the open door she stood behind.

He swore again and she heard the light flick on.

"Summer? What the hell are you doing? You scared the shit out of me. Are you all right?"

"I heard noises. I was coming to get you."

"There's a wind storm. Some branches are hitting the window and dropping onto the roof. The cabin sits on a peninsula with huge pine trees all around it. I'll have to cut some branches in the morning. Are you sure you're okay? You're shaking."

"Just a bit jittery. I'll be okay." Yeah sure, she was. Now that things seemed to be okay, her mouth was suddenly dry and her palms sweaty at his nearness. Need, dark and desperate, was shifting through her body. She licked her lips, and her pulse

skittered as she could almost feel his gaze on her mouth. With the lights turned on she could see his large shadow in front of her. He smelled so very nice. The aroma of fresh soap and his unique scent launched a burning desire through her.

He was sexy. Powerful. Hers.

He slid his arm around her waist, his palm branding her flesh. His hand felt large and so perfect on her. She ached for more. Craved both his hands on her. She wanted him roaming over her body, touching her, exploring her and fucking her.

Feverish blood pounded through her, arousal and need pooled in her pussy. She wasn't sure if she was dizzy with excitement or if he was moving her too fast because she suddenly felt off balance.

In an effort to steady herself, she reached out and tried to grab him. Her hands flattened against his rock-hard chest. He groaned and she felt scorching taut muscles beneath her palms as her fingertips tangled in his crisp chest hairs. His other hand slipped against her left hip and she stumbled closer. Or maybe *he* was bringing her closer to him. She wasn't sure because she truly couldn't gather her thoughts as his length pressed against her, shocking her to her core. The hot, hard erection was unmistakable against her right thigh.

"Easy, I got you," he whispered.

Oh yes, he certainly did have her, didn't he? And um, was he naked? She couldn't feel any pajama bottoms or underwear lines on the guy considering only her thin nightie and her panties was keeping them apart and there was loads of naked flesh pushing intimately against her. Obviously he did sleep in the raw.

Standing here in this position reminded her of that night and the one scorching kiss, which curled her toes. Just like back then, she could feel his tension and his restraint. Senses told her he wanted to kiss her and do other naughty things to her. God help her, she wanted him to, but she couldn't say anything. All she could do was stare at his shadow and hope he would kiss her.

She heard him swear again, this time softly. A moment later his warm breath caressed her face. Oh my! Was he going to kiss her?

Liquid heat lashed her and she arched against him, molding herself against his powerful thighs and his bold erection. Her cheeks burned with excitement and her lips parted in expectation. His thigh muscle flexed against hers as he moved into a more intimate position, his cock pressing into her tummy. The feel of him left her breathless.

For a brief instant she wondered if maybe this was another dream fantasy she was having. Similar to the one she'd had in the car, but a second later his mouth fused against hers and the fierceness of his kiss rocked her. Nope, this was for real.

She didn't remember him being this intense in that other kiss years ago. Or being this bold in pressing so hotly against her. It frightened her. Almost.

She didn't have a chance to think much about her reaction as his hands slid off her body, coming around to her front, splaying along her tummy and up until he was cupping her breasts. Pleasure streaked through her and exploded into her brain chasing away all thoughts.

Electricity sparked through her and instincts took over. She kissed him back, sliding her lips against his. He conquered her with his hard mouth, his teeth nipping her bottom lip, their tongues dueling and licking. She pressed herself into him, moaning at the promise of how fantastic his thick erection would feel sliding into her needy wet pussy.

His hands were massaging her breasts, his fingers and thumbs tweaking her nipples. His touches were addictive and driving her mad. So was his mouth. He slid his warm lips over hers, hard and fast, making the arousal buried deep within her vagina uncoil. She was aware of his taut muscles pressing against her curves. Aware of his hips gyrating with hers, his thick erection poking into her lower abdomen.

She wanted to reach down and lift her nightie and pull down her panties. Bring his thick erection into her, but suddenly he was pulling away, breaking the kiss. She

moaned in protest, her palms sliding up his chest, her fingers curling over his thickly muscled shoulders, quite ready to bring him back.

“Don’t stop, Nick,” she whispered, her voice thick with lust.

He stayed within her embrace, his body coiled with tension, his breaths as harsh and erratic as hers.

“I’d only hurt you,” he whispered back, his hands still cupping her breasts and teasing her nipples through her nightie.

She wasn’t sure what he meant. Hurt her as in sex or in a possible relationship?

“Hurt me,” she moaned, not caring what he meant, realizing she wanted him any way she could get him.

“Summer—”

“Make love to me, Nick. Make love to me like you wanted to that night. I know you wanted to. I wanted you to.”

“We can’t live in the past, Summer.” Despite what he was saying, he brushed his lips against her mouth, his touch fiery hot and so seductive, lightheadedness blew through her. “You’re still half asleep. Not thinking.”

“Unfinished business. I want to know how it would have felt,” she panted.

She heard him swallow. Felt his shoulder muscles flex beneath her fingers as he continued to play with her breasts.

“It can’t mean anything...”

His words were spoken softly and tenderly, but she knew it would mean something. For both of them. Knew it deep in her bones.

“Do me, here, up against the wall. Like you wanted that night. I know you did. I saw it in your eyes. Your hunger. Your need. I’ve felt it the moment you came into the hospital room.”

He cursed, giving himself away. He was doing a lot of that tonight, wasn't he? Cursing. She hoped it was a good sign. She held her breath as his hands left her breasts, and then she felt a tug at the hem of her nightie.

Oh my God! He really was going to go through with it! She was more powerful with the man than she thought. Amazing!

"Lift your arms," he groaned thickly.

She did as he asked, and he tugged off her nightie. Warm air from his breath whispered against her belly and her breasts.

"A few steps backward and we've got the wall," he whispered. She was breathing harshly now, not quite believing Nick was going to go through with her suggestion. But he led her a few steps until her back and butt were pressed against the cool wall. He took the cane from her. Twining his fingers with hers, he brought her hands onto his shoulders.

"I've wanted to do this to you for so long, babe," he said around her nipple, before slipping her into his mouth again, bringing a storm of sultry sensations crashing through her. Digging her fingers into his shoulders, she held on for the ride. Her heart pounded against her chest and fire rocked her as he let go of her nipple and kissed a blistering trail down over her belly.

She could feel the warm cream seeping from her pussy and dampening her panties. Erotic need to have him inside her made her cry out his name and then he was tugging her panties over her hips and down her legs. Eagerly she stumbled out of her garment and spread her legs.

She'd expected him to come into her, but her mind and body shattered when his mouth covered her clit. With gentle strokes his tongue dabbled at her ultrasensitive bundle of nerves, destroying her. She bucked and arched her hips and welcomed the fiery sensations. Holding tight to his firm muscular shoulders, she felt them flex and move in solid form beneath her fingers as his hands clasped her upper thighs, holding her, bracing her.

Cream flowed down her channel and out of her. She could hear him slurping, growling in appreciation as he drank.

As he suckled her, the storm inside her built and raged and before long she was panting and on the edge of something so beautiful she swore she'd never felt like this before. Another firm swipe of his tongue against her clit, another knee-melting suck on her pussy and Summer exploded, the pleasure uncurling and rocking into every nerve in her body. It rushed through her like a wild fever. She was shattering and screaming and God help her she was dying. An inferno of pleasure lashed her. She was keening and loving the sensations.

Suddenly Nick was stopping, his hands leaving her thighs and for a moment she thought she would topple in a sudden state of unbalance but then he was there. All of him. His mouth fusing onto hers, his hands bracing her hips and his cock was sliding into her. As he started thrusting, another orgasm slammed into her.

She'd never known anything like this. Scorching pleasure. Mindless lust. Sharp awareness of her body and mind moving together as powerful sensations carried her into a white-hot destroying high. An addictive, wonderful high.

He continued thrusting into her, bringing her down and then up again into the mindless pleasure she wanted more and more of. Finally she felt sated, her legs limp with exhaustion and her gasps weak. But her body was humming and she felt so sleepy. She heard him groan, the sound animalist and so severe, she thought he was in pain.

"Brace yourself, baby," he growled in a strangled voice and she wasn't sure what he meant until his hands left her hips and he was withdrawing from her. The muscles beneath her fingertips went wild, jerking and moving and then she heard the slap of liquid and knew he must be ejaculating outside of her, instead of in.

Of course, birth control, she thought numbly. At least one of them was thinking. A moment later he was whispering into her ear.

"Come on, let's get into bed. You look beat."

She smiled as he led her by hand to the bed. Climbing in beneath the comforter she was glad when he clambered in beside her. He swept her into his arms and she nestled her cheek against his shoulder and heard him whisper something and then she slept.

* * * * *

Hard. Aching. Aroused.

Lying beside Summer, her seductive curves burning into him while he stared at the dark ceiling, was pure torture. The wind storm was going strong outside. Window panes rattled. Branches scraped the window and things were dropping onto the roof. But he paid none of that any attention.

Especially when all he could think about was Summer, lying in his arms, fast asleep after coming several times. He shouldn't have let her fall asleep. Should have laid her on her back and taken her again and again. But just gazing at her weary face, after he'd fucked her against the wall, made him realize she was still recuperating from a head injury, hence her sleepiness. Just as the doctor predicted.

He could have easily gone on all night long pleasuring her, but those nights would wait until she got better.

Oh man, he couldn't believe how easily he'd fallen for her sultry looks as she'd gazed up at him. It had brought back that night he'd kissed her ten years ago. He'd been so close to taking her back to his hotel room. But she was a nice girl. A young woman who didn't need a guy ten years her senior screwing her brains out. Besides, her brother would probably have killed him if he'd taken advantage of her that way.

Nick grinned. She was still a nice girl but naughty too. Being bold enough to tell him she wanted him to fuck her. Hey, when a woman he'd secretly loved for so long asked him to fuck her, he better well do it, if he knew what was good for him.

Loving her was awesome. Taking her breasts into his hands, her nipples into his mouth then suckling her pussy, caressing her clit, feeling her body tighten with arousal, all of it was absolutely mind-blowing.

Shit! He had Summer Colby in his bed. Okay, so technically it wasn't his bed, but still, it was like a dream. And if it was a dream, he never wanted to wake up.

Odd how things happened so fast. Finding her missing from her bed. The clutching fear in his heart at the thought the son of a bitch killer had taken her. His fear for her safety had been his undoing. For years he'd sworn to himself she was totally off limits and then suddenly it had all unraveled.

He'd made love to her for the same reasons she'd wanted him to. To experience what could have happened ten years ago. To live a past that should have been, had he been a stronger man and gone after what he wanted. Her. And to hell with anybody who didn't like that idea.

Regrets?

Hell, he'd have to deal with any in the morning. Right now he just wanted to be beside her and feel her heat and drown himself in her delicate scent. Burying his face into her fluffy hair, he heard her whimper in her sleep. Maybe she was thinking about the killer and how he'd done the same thing after she'd been knocked out in the gallery?

Nick cradled her tighter and for a long heart stopping moment he tried to imagine not having Summer in his life. The ache was breathtaking and a horrible hollowness swept through him at the thought. She'd been super lucky that Mary had come back into the gallery when she had and scared the son of a bitch away.

He clenched his jaws and forced himself not to imagine what might have happened to her. If he didn't stop thinking about it, he'd lose his mind. He knew the best way to protect Summer and other young women the killer might target was to catch him as soon as possible. That meant getting as much information out of Summer as he could and sending it to the cops. They could add the information to the pattern used by the serial killer. In the meantime, he'd just have to deal with the fallout of what had happened between them tonight and hope he didn't hurt her in the process.

* * * * *

Summer told herself she could handle what happened between them last night. Told herself it was just a fling for both of them. Nothing permanent. Yet at the same time she ached to have him in her life as her man. The wild way she'd felt every time he made her orgasm was more than she could ever have hoped for. Absolutely perfect. More than perfect. Her breasts still felt heavy from the arousal. Her nipples still throbbed from his mouth and there was this intense erotic need to be filled again. How easily he'd caved to her request he make love to her.

Had it been for old time's sake? Or did he still feel something for her?

A soft snoring sound erupted from Nick and Summer smiled, stretching her arms outside of the warm comforter. She found the air a bit chilled and brought her arms in again, snuggling against her human furnace.

Oh he felt so good. All hard muscles. He smelled of sex and man. Very sexy man.

Gosh, that sex had been awesome. Unbelievable. Raw, intense and perfect. She wanted more of him. A whole lot more and if she could keep her emotions to herself and ensure she didn't make him feel obligated to stay with her just because they'd made love, she just might get more scorching sex with the man she secretly loved.

Those were the thoughts scrambling through her brain as Summer slowly awakened. Opening her eyes, she gasped softly at finding the blurry shadows were now a bit clearer and maybe her sight was even a touch brighter? Her heart leapt with a bubbly giddy happiness that made her want to shout from the rooftops and for a split second she almost woke Nick to tell him the good news. But then she stopped herself.

No, she wouldn't share the news with him. At least not yet. Things could still get worse again and the last thing she wanted was to get everybody's hopes up, especially hers. It was hard not to wish for her sight to return. So hard. But, she reassured herself, whatever was happening to her eyesight must be happening for the better and that had to be a good thing. She would wait and see if things continued to improve.

In the meantime, she needed to get up and start working, no matter how much she wanted to languish here in her sexy man's arms. No matter how much she craved exploring his body. That he'd stayed in bed with her after making love meant something. She doubted he would be spending much time on the couch, not after how easily she'd been able to get him to fuck her last night.

Summer's smile widened. After last night's searing sexcapade, she doubted Nick would want to do anything else when he woke up. If she could get in a couple of hours work in the meantime, then she'd have more time to cater to his needs. And hers.

* * * * *

Warmth splashed over Summer's arms from the sunshine that must be streaming in the bay window as she whittled away at a new block of wood. After a quick shower, she'd headed into the living room to the table and her carvings. But she hadn't been able to work on her current works-in-progress. Not after what she'd experienced last night.

Excitement shot through her in spades at the thought of Nick seeing how far she'd come with this new sculpture already this morning. She couldn't wait for his reaction. What would he think of it? Would he grin at the art, comment on how erotic it looked and make breakfast? Or would the art inspire him enough to drag her over to the couch and fuck her like she wanted?

She hoped it would be the latter. Because she was starved for another fuck session with Nick. Then they could have breakfast because she was starving that way too.

* * * * *

Nick stood at the bedroom door, his erection throbbing like a bitch, as he watched Summer work. Buttery sunshine streamed into the bay window, illuminating gold highlights in her strawberry red tresses. He hadn't realized she had gold highlights in her hair.

She looked cute sitting there on the chair and just watching her made warm happiness uncoil somewhere deep inside him. She wore blue jeans and a pink t-shirt with a low neckline, the tightness of her top accenting her generous breasts. Her pink lips were pursed in concentration and her carving knife moved confidently as she cut. From where he stood, he could easily make out what she was sculpting from that block of wood and damn if his cheeks weren't warming up. Man, was he blushing? He never blushed! It was an unfamiliar reaction and his throat tightened with emotion.

She was recreating last night in wood. A female standing and a male on his knees going down on her.

He grinned. Talk about inspiration. What other interesting poses could he get her into before making love to her?

Okay, he had to stop thinking with his cock. He was her bodyguard. He had to control himself and do his job of protecting her. From the killer *and* himself. The last thing he wanted was for her to get hurt. Especially by him. Not hurting her was a mantra he'd been sticking to for years and within a blink of an eye it had all crumbled last night.

Before the car accident, he'd known her almost three years. For two thirds of that time Nick thought of Summer only as a kid sister to his best friend. Then he thought of her as a friend and then considered her family. She became a girl he should protect.

Last night, seeing her naked and aroused, he knew she wanted him. Knew if she really didn't want anything to do with him, she would have sent him packing and told her brother to send another bodyguard. But she didn't.

She trusted him enough to allow him to bring her to a secluded place and stay here. Just the two of them. There had been something in her eyes since he saw her in the hospital. It was there every time she looked at him. Something that made his heart melt for her. Something that touched his entire body, mind and spirit. In other words, he had it bad for her.

"Don't be shy. Come on over," she called out.

He realized while he'd been thinking she'd turned her head toward him, obviously sensing he stood there.

"I want to show you something," she said and he swore her gaze followed him as he walked over to where she worked. He decided to forgo the clothing he'd left on the couch last night. She didn't have to know he was naked and wanting her again.

"Hi," he said, wondering if maybe he should kiss her good morning.

Shit! He felt so awkward. Like a teenager after having sex for the very first time. Not knowing what to do the morning after. Another first.

Her mouth curled into a heart-stopping grin and her eyes were staring up at him like she was actually seeing him and reading his mind. Her look shook him right to his core.

"You okay?" she asked. Her gaze was right on him. Obviously she sensed something was going on with him. Hell, he was used to having sex with women. Just not with The Woman. This sudden and unexpected turn of events had him feeling out of whack with reality and out of touch with his promise to himself he'd never hurt Summer.

"You're awfully quiet," she spoke again, her smile disintegrating fast. He realized that she wasn't confident about what had happened between them last night either. Or maybe she had been expecting him to kiss her?

Shit! This morning wasn't going at all the way he'd planned, was it? Upon awakening and finding her gone, he'd only wanted to find her and make love to her again.

"I've been watching you work. You're beautiful."

"Keep those kinds of compliments coming and you'll never go wrong."

He gazed down at her art. Now that he was closer he couldn't help but gasp in surprise at the sheer intimacy of her work. Although she hadn't put the details in yet, his imagination was running wild at the erotic pose.

“Last night was inspiration, I presume.” His voice suddenly sounded thick and lusty.

She grinned. “And hopefully more inspiration this morning.”

Jesus. This was getting way too serious.

“Summer, as I said last night, I don’t want to hurt you.”

“The only thing that’s hurting me right now is not having you inside me.”

Shit. Had she always been this bold and he’d never noticed?

“Um, maybe we should talk about this...” Maybe he should just shut the hell up and give them both what they wanted. They were consenting adults after all.

She was standing now, gently placing her wooden sculpture on the table. She turned to him and he held his breath as she reached up and touched his jaw. Her fingertips were warm and feathery as they found his lips and traced them. Her gaze latched onto his mouth. Then she was rising on her tiptoes and her warm mouth fused with his.

Whoa! Talk about fireworks. He was seeing them big-time as he closed his eyes and melted against her curves. Her arms curled around his neck pulling him deeper into the kiss. The walls he’d fought so hard to erect over the years came tumbling down yet again.

The burning pressure of her lips sent a heady rush of blood racing to parts south and he moaned at the intense shock of sensations. A voice in the back of his mind warned him he should get the hell out of here right about now. He should get someone else to replace him as her bodyguard, but the flowery fragrance of her hair, the sweet impact of her warm mouth on his and her soft curves pressing in around him had the idea of leaving suddenly not registering.

The lovable urgency of her kiss had him reacting in the moment. Raising his hands he sifted his fingers through her fluffy hair and held her head still as he devoured her

mouth. Thrusting his tongue between her lips, he savored her flavor, loved the scent of her breath and enjoyed her sensual whimpers.

When they both came up for air, they were gasping and she was giggling, the sound so musical it injected adrenaline right into his system. Fresh urgency slammed into him and he had to have her. Now. Had to experience more of this woman who scattered his self-control to the wind.

“Now that’s what I call a good morning kiss, Nick,” she said breathlessly. Her cheeks were flushed pink with excitement and her eyes glazed with happiness and need.

“You should see my good afternoon and good night kisses,” he joked, suddenly remembering how at ease he’d always been with her when they’d been just friends. However that had all changed when he realized he had feelings for her.

Her smile deepened. “I look forward to experiencing them. But first—”

She surprised him when she fused her mouth over his again and gave him such a fascinating kiss she had his head reeling and all caution drifting away. Opening her mouth with his tongue he went deep into her, exploring every angle of her moist cavern. He tasted her. Savored her. Loved her. That last thought had him almost pulling out of the kiss. But her lips reeled him right back under again.

Letting go of her head and keeping their mouths fused in the intoxicating kiss, he ran his hands down Summer’s body and grabbed her by the waist. She yelped in surprise into his mouth as he hoisted her ass onto the wood table.

“Time to get you out of those clothes, babe,” he whispered after breaking the kiss. When his hands slid to the clasp at the waist of her jeans, her fingers snapped around his, stopping him.

“There’s something I need to do first.”

“What’s that?” He was breathing harshly, suddenly impatient, wanting to make love to her.

“Trade places.”

At her words his head snapped up from where he'd been working on lowering her jean zipper. He caught her gaze. Hot. Needy. Bold. Her intense look had him nodding in anticipation, doing her bidding. As he lifted her off the table, he swore he'd never been more aware of a woman before. Or more alert to the awareness and excitement racing through him. He gave the wood shavings a quick brush off the table and launched his bare ass to where she'd been sitting seconds earlier.

He inhaled as her sizzling palms settled like two brands onto his upper thighs.

“Naked for breakfast. Just the way I want you,” she breathed.

He held back a groan and watched her move in between his thighs, her palms slowly sliding upward, along the rigid muscles of his abdomen and splaying out over his chest. His erection grew harder, angling upward. Aching with need. Wanting her to touch him there.

Her eyes were sharp with arousal as she leaned in against him and kissed the edge of his lips so tenderly, so beautifully, he got all lightheaded and had to hold onto the edges of the table to keep from falling over.

While she kissed him, want pulled tight in his belly but he gave her rein to do what she needed. She explored his chest, her fingers catching in his chest hairs, making him wince at the erotic pain. Smoothing her hands up, she curled her fingers over his shoulders. Nick sighed as Summer massaged a knot here and there. While she touched him, he realized she was studying him with her fingertips as a seeing person would explore with their eyes, committing his contours to memory.

“Is this the male model aspect of your art?” he teased when she broke the kiss and stepped closer, pushing her belly against his hard-on.

“Call it a fringe benefit,” she breathed and came in for another kiss. He grinned against her mouth, loving the fact he wanted to drown himself in her kisses.

When her fingers trailed off his wrists to land on his upper thighs again, he stiffened with eagerness. She moved her fingers excruciatingly slowly toward where he

wanted her to go. The anticipation of her touching his cock had his senses drugged with excitement and when she grazed her knuckles against his scrotum he sucked in a sharp breath.

She broke the kiss and licked her lips before smiling at him. "Hmm, I like this reaction."

She brushed his sac again with her knuckles, her touch driving him insane. When she cradled his balls in her palms and squeezed gently, he just about came off the table at the wicked sensations slicing through him. She kneaded him so tenderly his breaths were escaping in rough gasps and he closed his eyes and slipped into the pleasure. Moments later she caressed his throbbing length, her nails skimming along his cock firing up all his nerve endings. She stroked him and massaged him and he swore he would come at any second, but he forced himself to hold back. He wanted to experience this heaven as long as possible.

She kept up the erotic ministrations and through his panting he heard her whisper to him not to open his eyes. Excitement raged through him as she let go of his cock and he listened to her removing her clothes. Within a minute she'd moved between his widespread legs again. Before he knew it her warm breath caressed his cock.

Snapping open his eyes he looked down to see she'd dropped to her knees and her parting mouth was inches from his cock. Sunshine streamed in the bay window illuminating gold highlights in her red hair, which tumbled over bare shoulders. Her sweet scent mixed with the nice fragrance of the wood shavings. The combined aroma made his cock harden more. She was also totally naked. He gazed at her breasts and remembered the heavy feel of them in his palms last night. Remembered the hard peaks of her nipples as he'd taken her into his mouth.

"I've been wanting to do this to you since last night," she whispered. She smiled, but it was a nervous smile and instincts told him she'd never done it before. He felt honored to be her first.

Raw excitement pulsed through him as Summer opened her mouth and the head of Nick's cock slid in. Lips stretched around him and he fought for breath at the intensity of sensations.

Scorching. Wrenching. Beautiful. Those thoughts whipped through his mind as she wrapped her lips around his cock head and sucked gently. She took him in deeper, her mouth covering about half his shaft before she tightened her lips again and sucked.

Oh perfect. Fucking perfect. He concentrated on not taking his hands off the edge of the table, but it just didn't work. He had to touch her. Hold her head. Have more pressure.

"Wrap your hand around my cock to where you can take me safely into your mouth," he panted.

For a moment she looked confused. Her lips were wrapped around his cock and a tiny frown marred her forehead. Then she seemed to understand. Clenching her hand around his shaft, she bobbed her head, stopping at where her mouth touched her hand. It would prevent her from having his cock go too deep into her throat. Her lips caressed his flesh, her tongue lashed him with pleasure and her teeth sparked off bits of pain as he slid in and out.

He groaned as his pleasure grew. Urgency gripped him. His head reeled. Need hammered through him and his senses exploded. His cock was killing him. He was rock-hard. Heat and desire was slamming through his body like a storm and suddenly he couldn't take it anymore. He needed to be inside her.

Reaching down he grabbed her shoulders, urging her backward. She let go of him, whimpering as he instructed her to stand. And then he was lifting her into his arms, her sweet scent of arousal an aphrodisiac. Her warm curves melted against his hard body like liquid gold, as he headed across the living room and into the bedroom.

Oh man, he was dying here. Bloody well dying to be inside her.

He lay her down on the bed and settled in beside her. Turning onto his side he moved partially over her and kissed her hard and deep, his hands touching and

massaging her breasts, until he heard her moaning and her breaths coming fast. Leaving her mouth he kissed her along the length of her neck and took her nipple into his mouth and sucked hard. She arched her back, moaning and enjoying the sensations. Moving to her other nipple, he bit gently into the hard peak until she moaned and he quickly licked away the pain.

While he tended her breasts, he reached down between her legs, spreading her thighs. Inserting a finger into her vagina, he was pleased to find her nice and wet. Collecting warm moisture he came back out and smoothed his finger over her clit, massaging her there. She gasped and cried out, her hands searching to find his shoulders and when she did, she dug her nails into his flesh, hurting him so good, he just about came on the pinpricks of pain.

Sinking two fingers into her, he came out with more moisture and smoothed over her clit again, this time increasing the pressure. After he finished massaging her clit and tending her breasts he kissed a fiery trail over her belly toward her pussy. He remembered her taste from last night and couldn't wait to experience it again.

As he dived for parts south, he noticed her hands had left his shoulders and were tangled in the sheets and her head was thrashing back and forth on her pillow. Long lashes framed tightly closed eyes. Her cheeks were flushed rosy and her pink lips were slightly parted as she panted, obviously enjoying what he did to her. Grinning, he maneuvered between her spread legs. Dipping his head, he slipped his tongue between her soft labia fusing his mouth over her engorged clit. She was feverish with need and wet and he sighed into her taste.

She cried out his name and bucked as he massaged her with his tongue—short direct strokes to her clit, which had her writhing beneath him. She tasted so perfect, her pussy warm and wet, her cream gushing into his mouth. He could feel her body tightening and knew she was on the edge and ready to be taken.

Letting go of her pussy, he moved up over her, bracing his body into the perfect position to penetrate her. As he came down on top of her, he plunged his cock into her

pussy. She gasped and reached up, curling her hands over his shoulders again, those nails digging into his flesh, sparking the pain he loved.

Summer exploded. Her body contracting and spasming with violent tremors. As Nick pumped into her, he couldn't take his eyes off her. Her breasts jiggled wildly every time he thrust and her whimpers and moans kept his thoughts hostage. When he felt her orgasm beginning to subside, he increased his thrusts until they became uncontrollable. Lightning shards of pleasure splintered along his shaft, slamming into his balls and lower belly making him cry out her name. And before he could stop himself he was spilling his hot seed into her.

* * * * *

An uncomfortable silence sifted between them as they lay in each other's arms beneath the comforters after their lovemaking. Her heart was hammering away at the prospect of becoming pregnant. She wasn't sure if she was frightened or deliriously happy at the prospect of having a child with him.

But Nick was quiet. Too quiet.

I screwed up. I may have made her pregnant. I've got to step up to the plate and take responsibility for my action. She swore those were his thoughts, even if she couldn't see his face. It was written in the tense way he held her. His arms not holding her as tight as she would have liked. The whispery sound of him shoving his fingers through his hair. He'd done that already several times in the few short moments while they'd lain together. A definite sign he was frustrated.

"I...I apologize. I shouldn't have let it happen, Summer. I should have been more careful. I always use protection. Um, are you on the Pill?"

His question dangled over her head like a guillotine. Now, of course would be the time to say yes, she was on the Pill, just like many sexually active women were. Unfortunately, she wasn't. Hadn't been for years as the Pill had never agreed with her.

"No," she replied truthfully.

She swore his body tensed at her answer, but then he seemed to relax. "If something comes of this I won't turn my back on you. I'm not that kind of guy."

Well, there she had his statement. Just as she'd thought.

"We're both adults. I'm sure we can handle it if something happens."

She couldn't help but trace an exceptionally large muscle on his shoulder with her finger and heard him inhale, whether out of excitement or dread that he thought she wanted more sex and no condoms in sight, she didn't know.

"I have been with a couple of guys. I'm not celibate. I'm always fully prepared with some form of protection, so I'm clean. You don't have to worry about STDs. Unfortunately I didn't bring any protection for this trip. I mean, things weren't planned."

He stiffened even more against her. Obviously surprised at what she was saying. She had had sex with a couple of guys after the accident and her blindness. But she hadn't been able to give up full control to either of them and the experiences hadn't truly been enjoyable. Except with Nick. She trusted him like she'd never trusted a man.

Speaking of a man, her pussy was throbbing. Aching with such a pleasant soreness she wanted him fucking her again. But not if he was going to go on some guilt trip over this.

Awkward silence drifted through the air.

After a few moments, she heard him sigh and say, "We should get up and have lunch."

"Lunch?" Checking her Braille watch she realized it was already way past eleven o'clock. "I'll get lunch. Just give me a quick rundown where everything is and I'll whip us up something," she volunteered. It would give her something to do to keep her preoccupied.

When she pushed the comforters off herself and began to wiggle out of his arms, he let go of her. Climbing over him, she could feel the heat drifting off his body in teasing

waves and wrapping around her. Accidentally, she nudged her knees against his thighs and the touch of his warm flesh brushing against hers had her biting back a moan. Her pussy pulsed at the idea of straddling Nick and just riding him hard and fast, but she'd already been too bold with him. She was afraid she might turn him off. Wasn't the guy supposed to be the bold one? She wished he would wrap his hands around her wrists and pull her back beside him so they could have another exquisite fuck session, but he didn't.

Standing, she stared around at the shadows and tried to remember where her clothes might be. Her brain was still fuzzy from that wild orgasm he'd given her or maybe she was being emotional. Whatever the case, it took her a minute before she realized her clothes were in the living room by the table where she'd left them just before taking his erection into her mouth. Or had it been after?

Awareness whipped through her as she remembered the feel of his huge swollen shaft in her hands. Oh sweet mercy, he did feel awesome sliding between her lips. Thick and heavy and pulsing hot. She shivered at the thought of taking him like that again.

"Stay here. I'll bring in your clothes and cane." She jumped as she hadn't heard him get out of bed and follow her. Ordinarily she would protest if anyone tried to help her, but with Nick she couldn't seem to be as independent as she liked. She wanted him to wrap his arms around her and tell her she was safe with him, always. But that wasn't going to happen, so she'd better deal with it and right now.

Plopping back onto the bed, she grabbed the comforter and wrapped it around her. Why should he get an eyeful of her, when she couldn't even see him, dammit! But her fingers had done the talking and she'd engrained his body to her memory. He was a big guy, in more ways than one.

She heard the bathroom door open from the adjoining door. He didn't come in.

"I have your clothes in here. You want to shower first? I can get some of the lunch stuff out on the counter in the meantime if that's okay with you?"

Oh great, back to being polite strangers again.

"That's fine. I know the way. I'll be out in a few minutes."

"Here's your cane." He'd taken a few steps into the room and she heard him place the cane on the bed beside her.

"Thanks."

He grunted something and then he was gone. A moment later she heard him in the kitchen opening the fridge and placing items on the counter.

Oh to hell with him! She didn't need to pine after the son of a bitch. It had only been sex and that's what it would always be with him. It's not as if he hadn't tried to warn her a few times. But she'd just thrown herself at him, hadn't she? Both times. So it was all her fault for thinking it was something else.

For goodness sake, they hadn't seen each other for ten years and within twenty-four hours they were in bed together. It had everything to do with unfinished business and their sexual attraction in the past. Now that they knew how it would have been, she should just go on with life. She didn't need him. She'd managed very well on her own. She would give Mary a call and tell her to set it up so she could get the hell out of here. Then she would hire her own bodyguard once she got back home.

Having come to that conclusion, she suddenly felt a whole hell of a lot better and more in control. She'd make the call the minute she turned on the water faucets. She'd come back in here and use the phone on the bedside table. The running water would cover the sound of her voice and Nick wouldn't be the wiser and he wouldn't be able to talk her out of it. Brushing aside her anger, she whipped away the comforters, grabbed her cane and headed into the bathroom.

* * * * *

Man! He'd really blown it, hadn't he? Aside from having unprotected sex with Summer, he'd pissed her off by questioning her sex life. He hadn't meant to snoop, but he figured it was best to find out if she were on the Pill. Hell, he should have kept his head and asked her that question before sleeping with her. But he'd been so caught up

in the moment and well, he hadn't meant to sleep with her in the first place. Now what the hell was he supposed to do?

Grabbing a jar of mayonnaise, he ripped off the plastic seal and opened the lid, slamming the jar back onto the counter so hard, he swore the Formica top had cracked. Or maybe the jar had.

He didn't realize pissing her off could piss him off so much. Fucking emotions. They'd been haywire ever since he'd agreed to be her bodyguard. What the hell had he been thinking anyway? Ten years ago he'd been this way too. Now it was even worse. Summer just had a way of getting under his skin and staying there and he found his cock hardening once more at the thought of bedding her again.

No, he would not give in to his urges. He had more control than that. Nodding his head in assurance, he pulled more items from the fridge that Summer would need to prepare lunch. Afterward he would have to question her about every aspect of her lifestyle and get that info to the cops pronto. It should have been done by now but with all these scorching interruptions how in the world could he get his job done?

He'd been so deep in thought he hadn't even heard the shower taps shut off or the bathroom door opening until Summer was halfway to the kitchen counter where he stood. Turning around he watched her as she confidently swayed the cane back and forth in front of her, tapping against an armchair and then the edge of the kitchen table before joining him.

He was amazed at how at ease she seemed to be now, compared to how ticked off she'd been earlier. She may not have showed it, but he'd seen it in the tense way she held herself against him in bed.

"So what have we got here?" she asked as she ran her hands over the items he'd placed on the counter. "Sliced tomatoes, lettuce, cold cuts and cheese. Let me guess? Submarine sandwiches?"

"Buns are in the breadbox, just in front of you on the counter. There's pickles and mayo in these jars." He placed his hand on her wrist and tried not to react to her silky

flesh as he guided her to the two open jars. "Knife is right here. You start the subs and I'll set the table."

"Sure thing. You know what? I'm famished. I haven't had this much of an appetite in years. I could eat a horse about now." She grinned as she found the bread box and pulled out the plastic wrapped buns.

And he could eat her again because he was so hungry for her, he mused as he set the table. But he needed to get down to business. No more fucking around.

Chapter Four

Summer polished off two submarine sandwiches and two cups of coffee before saying yes to the ice cream Nick mentioned was in the freezer.

"It's my specialty. I call it Nick's banana split and it's at twelve o'clock," he said, indicating he'd placed the bowl right in front of her as he re-joined her at the kitchen table. Brushing her finger over the cool metal spoon, she then clutched the handle and dug in.

The cold, sweet treat melted over her tongue and she groaned at the delicious delicacy. He'd poured chocolate syrup onto the vanilla ice cream and she tasted slices of bananas and whipping cream.

"That sound is a compliment if I ever heard one," Nick chuckled as he sat down beside her. As he did so she heard the unmistakable rustle of a notebook being opened.

"Trying to sweeten me up for something, Nick?" she asked as she shoved another spoonful of the delicious desert into her mouth.

"I need to ask you a bunch of questions, Summer. It's to help the police narrow down who this guy might be."

This guy, meaning her attacker.

Summer frowned and suddenly lost her appetite. Drowning in sex with Nick had made her forget about that creep and now Nick wanted to drag him into the cabin with them?

"But you already asked me what happened."

"This is more personal stuff."

"Personal like what?"

"Lifestyle questions and work related things."

Her frown deepened. She didn't want to give Nick any more info than she already had. She preferred to keep her life private, especially if he wasn't the least bit interested in a relationship with her.

"It has to be done."

Great, he was reading her expressions and mind now too? Like a hubby or long-time boyfriend.

Sighing, she tried to scoop another spoonful of the ice cream, but just couldn't manage to eat it. Dropping the spoon back into the bowl, she shoved it away and stood.

"Fine. Ask me questions. But ask me while I work." The soothing rhythm of carving would help keep her centered because the thought of talking about that creep was getting her nerves rattled. Not to mention her heart pounding a little bit too fast. The last thing she wanted was for Nick to see how vulnerable she felt whenever she thought about her close call.

"Okay, in your office." There was a chuckle in his voice and she was glad he hadn't picked up on her sudden panicky feelings.

Grabbing her cane, she led him past the sofa she knew he'd been in last night and to the table he'd allowed her to use for her carving. Finding her chair she smiled into the warm sunshine that streamed through the window. Quickly she sat down, found the sculpture and started to work on that carving of their first time together.

Last night. Her standing and him going down on her. She'd been working on this piece this morning before he'd gone down on her again in bed. She inhaled softly as a fluttery excitable feeling zipped through her. Okay, so maybe it wasn't such a good idea to work here?

She heard Nick breathing. Hard. Saw his shadow sit on the edge of the table, just a few feet down from where she'd taken him into her mouth earlier.

Oh boy. He was probably thinking the same thing she was thinking.

Sex. Sex. Sex.

Her pussy creamed at the idea of him spreading her out on this table and taking her here. Blistering warmth infused her cheeks and melted through her body, awakening nerve endings and making her breaths come faster. Exhaling slowly in an effort to keep herself calm, she located her carving knife and started to work.

“Okay, so what is it you want to know?”

“The police gave me a list of questions so it’s not that I’m prying or anything.”

Not that he wanted to, is what he was saying, right? She shrugged, feeling hurt and vulnerable.

“Okay, Mary mentioned you have a special computer that you use to surf the net? I need to know if you go to any chat rooms?”

“No.”

“None?”

He sounded surprised.

“I don’t do chat rooms or relationship sites or anything of that nature. The only time I use my computer is for work or to answer emails from a few of my girlfriends. My dates are usually blind dates set up by well-meaning friends.” There, she’d said it and now she hoped he didn’t think she was a prude or unable to get her own guys.

Thankfully he said nothing and continued on with his line of questioning. He asked her about workshops she’d attended or taught. Supply stores or online stores she frequented and stuff like that.

There were so many questions that by the time he was finished her mind was reeling. Despite the warmth in the living room icy shivers chilled her as she realized she was easy prey to any psycho.

Her gallery website had her pictures plastered all over it. They showed her working on her projects, where the gallery was located, as well as the fact she worked there. Advertising her gallery had almost gotten her killed. All someone with ill will toward

her had to do was visit her gallery and do a stakeout. Since she kept to a regular schedule, anyone could follow her home when Mary drove her there.

“Are you okay?”

“I hadn’t realized how much danger I put myself in. I’m going to have to do some major changes to keep myself safe.”

“These days it’s best to keep yourself as protected as possible. But you can’t allow yourself to live in a cocoon because of it. You just need to be diligent about the information you get out on the Net or in articles in newspapers and magazines.”

“These other women this guy attacked. What kind of women were they? I know he’s after red-headed women but what else do we have in common?”

“According to the profilers, this guy targets artists. He’s angry at someone who he can’t strike out at. Maybe a wife or mother. She could be alive or she could be dead. Someone who he feels has neglected him for her art so he channels his anger into women he sees that look similar to that woman in his life. He acts out his hatred for her by torturing, raping and then murdering her.”

Lovely, just fucking lovely.

“He mentioned I was a fallen angel. Did you pass along that info when I told you in the hospital?”

“I did. The profiler I spoke with says the guy had the woman on a pedestal. He worshipped her. Thought of her as an angel. Pure and giving and protecting him.”

“And then like you said earlier, she did something to make her fall in his eyes.”

“That’s right. He’s got an anger problem and is mentally unstable.”

“So these artists. What kind of work did they do? Did they live close to me? Are they blind like I am?”

“So far you’re the only one who is blind. The rest weren’t. Their ages vary from twenty-five to thirty-five. The women are single, independent and live alone. He’s killed a couple of painters, two potters, a sculpturist, one erotic romance author, a

stained glass artist and several more. Profilers believe he's a salesperson because the victims live in different areas of Canada and the States. The police are checking with border customs, records of airlines, buses, trains to see if someone has travelled that way around the times of these murders."

"That would be like looking for a needle in a haystack, wouldn't it?"

"It's going to take some time, if ever. He could be using aliases to throw cops off his trail."

In other words he thought she would be here with him for a long time. Well, she'd called Mary earlier when she'd let the shower run. Mary had agreed she wouldn't contact Ryan and let him know Summer was giving Nick the boot. But on one condition—that Mary hire a bodyguard on Summer's behalf and the bodyguard would come and pick her up as soon as Mary could arrange it.

Summer agreed, knowing the less time she spent with Nick, the better. She'd had sex with the guy twice since leaving the hospital. She could only imagine what would happen if she spent days or months with him, having red-hot sex and knowing all the time he wasn't interested in a relationship. She didn't think her heart could take it.

"Are you up for a little walk outside? Get some fresh air and exercise?" Nick asked and Summer watched his shadow slide off the table.

Was that anticipation in his voice? Did he really want her along for a walk or was he being polite?

"We can go down to the lake. I can take you out in the motorboat. Fresh air has a knack for making one feel better. I can call the cops later with the info you gave me. What do you say?"

Indecision racked her. She could tell him to go alone and she could get some work done. Or she could go with him and loosen up these creepy feelings Nick's line of questions had created. Besides, she would love to experience the scents and noises of life in this wilderness with Nick by her side.

"Okay. I'll get my coat."

“Good. I told Mary to pack you mitts and a scarf and long johns. You’ll need to get them on. It’s still windy out there and chilly.”

“I’ll be just a few minutes,” she called over her shoulder, anticipation flaring through her at the prospect of spending more time with Nick.

Boy, she was setting herself up for another fall, she thought as she angled her way into the bedroom. Shaking her head at her stupidity, she tried to remember which drawer she’d put her long johns in. Pulling the top one open her hand fell across that mysterious box she’d found in her suitcase.

Curiosity grabbed a hold of her and she opened up the small package. Inside, she felt plastic packets with little circles. Her heart picked up speed as she instantly realized what she’d discovered.

OhmyGod. Mary had packed condoms.

* * * * *

While Nick bundled himself into his leather jacket and waited for Summer his cell phone rang. Glancing at the number he recognized it as Ryan.

Shit! Big brother was checking up on little sister. Wonder how Ryan would react when he found out Nick had fully taken advantage of Summer? Probably kill him and ask questions later.

For a split second he thought about letting the call go to voice mail but decided against it. It could be important.

“Talk to me, my man,” Nick said as he flipped open the cell.

“How’s it going? Is she giving you grief for kidnapping her?” Ryan chuckled.

Grief? No, not really. Lots of sizzling sex was more like it. But he couldn’t tell Ryan that now could he.

“She’s handling the situation just fine.”

“Really?” Ryan sounded surprised.

“She is a grown woman, Ryan, not a kid,” Nick snapped.

Silence followed.

“Any news?” Nick asked when the silence got uncomfortable. He could imagine the surprise in Ryan’s face at Nick’s gruff attitude. His friend would definitely know something was up if he didn’t keep it cool.

“The cops are waiting for Summer’s info so they can compare the victims,” Ryan continued.

Shit. The last thing he wanted to do was gab on the phone to the cops and keep her waiting.

“I’ll get it to them later in the day. I still have to ask her,” he lied.

“Sure thing. Are you sure everything is okay?”

“Everything’s fine. Couldn’t be better.” Hell, actually it could be better. He could tell Ryan that he had the hots for Summer and he wanted her in his life forever.

“Can I talk to her?”

“She’s in the bedroom getting dressed.”

“Really? It’s one thirty. She’s usually up by six in the morning. Is she sick?”

“She’s getting her long johns on. I’m taking her outside. Show her around. Take her for a boat ride around the lake. I think she’d really like that. You know with the fresh air and I can explain to her about the beautiful scenery with the leaves turning all gold and red. Looks pretty neat.”

More silence and then he heard Ryan chuckling softly.

Irritation slammed into Nick. “What’s so funny?”

“You. Since when are you such a nature lover? I thought you hated quiet.”

“I expanded my horizons. Now I appreciate nature. It’s quiet.” Except for when he was making love to Summer.

More chuckles.

“You hate the quiet. Said so the last time we were up there on that fishing trip. You tell me all the time how you enjoy the sound of bullets whizzing by your ears or slamming into a wall beside you. Not to mention the adrenaline rush you get shooting back at someone who is trying to kill your client.”

Yeah well, he'd trade that sound of bullets whizzing by his ears to the sound of Summer's aroused moans anytime. Maybe he should just tell that to Ryan and shut him up.

Movement at the side of his eyes made him hold back an irritated retort. Summer stood there and looked quite fashionable. She wore a dark green knitted hat with matching green knitted mitts. She was also dressed in a really cool-looking mid thigh length white winter jacket with big buttons and it really illuminated her gorgeous red hair.

He let out a slow whistle of appreciation and she smiled warmly.

“What? What's got you whistling like that?” Ryan asked in a rush.

“Gotta go. Talk later.” He disconnected Ryan amidst a protest and turned his attention to Summer.

“You look fantastic, woman.”

“Well, it is a bit warm under all this getup, but you said it's cold outside.”

Nick smiled.

* * * * *

“Hold tight to the rim of the boat. It's pretty choppy out there.”

Nick's shout had Summer grabbing the edges of the tippy boat and deeply inhaling the cold air. She couldn't get enough of the crispness of the air as it went into her lungs. Or how light and fresh it felt blasting against her face. She caught whiffs of pine and fish and damp earth and so many other unknown aromas.

On their way down to the dock, he'd outfitted her with a snug life jacket and explained how her surroundings looked. With a steep red metal roof, the cabin was a

simple design made out of pine logs with pale red shutters at each window and perched on a rocky peninsula with towering pine trees. But across the lake, which was about two miles long and one mile wide, he explained there were brilliant colors of forest lashing the rocky shoreline.

Nick made it sound so breathtaking it sent shivers of delight racing through her.

He hadn't been kidding when he said it was cold and windy out here either. But the slap of air against her face was just what she needed to break her out of the funk she'd been in after finding those condoms Mary had packed.

How dare Mary do something like that? Especially without telling Summer. Here she was having sex with Nick and not knowing that within reach was a box of condoms.

Oh hell, she'd been living in a dream world of a nineteen-year-old anyways. Times had changed concerning Nick and she had no right to live in the past and think Nick would feel the same way about her as she did about him, especially after she'd pushed him away from her all those years ago.

The boat moved and tossed some more as Nick stepped in, his shoes pounding on the aluminum floor. A moment later she heard the roar of the engine from somewhere behind her and then the boat was moving. Tightening her grip on the cold edges of the boat she squinted through the shadows as she saw pinpricks of silver sparkles.

Oh my God! Was she actually seeing something?

She leaned over trying to see more. More silver sparkles and some wavy lines? Waves? She could see waves?

Indescribable exhilaration lashed her.

"Nick!" she cried. She had to tell him what was going on. This was so unbelievable!

Immediately he cut the engine.

"Are you cold?" he shouted above the wind.

"No!"

How could she tell him she was seeing things? Maybe she was just imagining it? Maybe she would jinx it if she told him?

“Nothing. Can you maybe go a little slower?”

“Sure. No problem. You’re okay?”

She nodded but kept her gaze glued to the water. To the gorgeous silver sparkles and the wavy lines. They were hypnotizing her. Making her blink hard as she strained to see more, her eyes were actually getting sore.

Her heart pounded like a battering ram against her chest as happiness spilled through her. The doctor’s voice ambled through her mind reminding her she should be having tests done on her vision, not enjoying herself out here with Nick.

Wind hummed in her ears and a few droplets of spray lashed her face as he started the engine again. He guided the boat slowly over the lake and waves pounded noisily against the aluminum sides and she could actually see something.

Lifting her face to the sky, a brilliant yellow fog hurt her eyes. Yes, her sight was returning. She could scarcely breathe as hope shot through her. Maybe she was going to see Nick again?

Her mind whirled at the prospect and she forced herself to remain calm. Well, as calm as she possibly could, after seeing color for the first time in more than ten years.

She sat that way. First staring into the lake and then up at the sun as they glided over the waves. Suddenly everything felt so unreal. As if she’d slipped into another dimension or an alternate reality or something. Happiness bubbled through her and she simply couldn’t stop smiling.

She didn’t know how long they were on the lake before Nick finally slowed the boat, announcing they had returned to the cabin. Anxiously she waited for him to tie the boat to the dock, and several moments later he was helping her out onto the steady dock. Her legs were rubbery and she felt off balance as he led her back to the cabin.

“Your face is as red as a beet,” he laughed as he tugged off her mitts and hat and quickly unbuttoned her coat. And she let him do it. To hell with being independent. It felt good having Nick chuckling away and being near her. Really good. He made her feel safe and protected.

Heat melted through her and her breath quickened with awareness of him. God help her but she wanted to feel his hands on her body again. His lips on her bare skin. She wanted to have his cock in her mouth and have him inside her.

She just wanted him. Under her and on top of her. Understandable coming from a woman whose only good sex in years was in the form of masturbation.

Surely she was nuts to think of sex at such a time? Instead she should be telling him she’d started to see and the doctor had suggested tests. But she wanted to stay here with him. Just a little longer. Just one more night.

“Mary packed condoms. I found them earlier,” she blurted. His fingers hesitated on a coat button for a moment before he continued to unbutton at a slower pace.

“Did she now.” His voice sounded thick and husky. Aroused. Just like her.

And I can see again, she ached to say but again held it back. If she told him now he would question her further or contact the doctor and use his muscle to get the information. He’d take her away from here tonight and have them running tests on her in no time flat. She knew that would be the best thing for her, but she suddenly didn’t want to leave here or for that matter didn’t want another bodyguard as she’d agreed to with Mary this afternoon. She wanted the impossible. She wanted Nick.

Obviously he wanted her too because she could see his shadow coming closer and his lips settled softly on hers. Fire blazed through her and she closed her eyes, melting into the gentle kiss. Reaching up she curled her hands over his shoulders and held on, her tummy fluttering at the way his muscles flexed beneath her fingertips.

His hands were like brands as they settled on her hips and she became vaguely aware of her coat being removed and the cool wall pressing against her back.

"I can't seem to keep my hands off you, Summer. I've wanted you for a hell of a long time," he said after he broke the kiss and nuzzled his cheek against hers.

His admission had her senses reeling.

"You really wanted me?" she asked.

"Still do. More than ever."

"I figured you were only hanging around out of pity. That's why I asked you not to come around anymore. I lied when I said I was only teasing."

He swore violently. The fierceness of it making her jump in surprise at his sudden anger.

"I've always cared about you. I left because I cared so much." There was a long hesitation before he continued in a softer voice, a wounded tone that made her heart clench in compassion for him.

"When you said you didn't have feelings for me, deep down I knew you were lying. But I told myself it was better if I just left. Whenever I get close to someone, they die."

Summer didn't know what to say. So she kept quiet.

"It happened with my parents when they died two months apart. My dad in a workplace accident and my mom killed herself because she couldn't cope with him dying. Then a set of my foster parents that I really liked died close together. They were an older couple and not in the best of health. Then your parents who I loved and with what happened to you, I figured I'd better stay the hell away from you before you ended up dying too."

"But that's not true; you realize that, don't you? You can't change fate. You aren't that powerful. That's up to the big guy upstairs."

"I know, babe, but that doesn't make it any easier to deal with. If I get close to you, you'll end up dying. It's as simple as that for me. So I stay away."

"I'll end up dying if I don't fuck you. So I want you with me. It's as simple as that for me," she whispered, hoping he didn't think she was making light of his problem or belittling him. To make her point she gave him a long lingering kiss that had him breathing hard and grinding his erection against her lower belly.

"You're just trying to distract me," he breathed as he broke the kiss. She heard the humor in his voice but also the undertone of pain. Thankfully though she sensed he was lightening up and still holding her close.

"Is the distraction working?"

"Hell, yes."

"Will it work forever?"

He swore again. This time softly.

She kissed his chin, felt the stubble of his shadow and could picture how sexy he must look right about now with his eyes smoldering with lust.

"If you really look at that scenario about losing people you love, it seems to have to do with parent figures, right? And I am definitely not a parent figure, am I?"

"You would make the best parent, Summer. I know that in my heart but I do see your point," Nick replied. "You aren't saying this because you think I'm going to take off if you're pregnant, are you?"

"I'm saying this because I love you, Nick Cassidy. I've loved you since probably the minute I first laid eyes on you."

Silence followed. She didn't expect him to say he loved her. She just wanted him to know it. Despite that though, urgency and apprehension spiraled through her. What if he just wanted her sexually? And not as a possible wife or girlfriend? Maybe she'd just scared him away by stating her feelings?

"It's why I came to you on your nineteenth birthday," he breathed and brushed his warm lips against hers in such a gentle caress desire shot through her. Suddenly her skin felt as if it was on fire and her toes were curling.

“That night I came to tell you I loved you.”

He said he loved her. In the past tense. Did he still?

“When I saw you coming out of the ladies’ room looking so young and innocent, I froze. Suddenly everything just seemed too good to be true and my problem kicked in big-time and I just sensed that if I did take you away then you would end up dying.”

“You didn’t have a problem kissing me that night.”

He chuckled. “That kiss blew my socks off. I almost changed my mind and took you with me to that hotel. I wanted to fuck you so bad. Wanted you in my life as more than my best friend’s baby sister or my friend.”

Summer remembered him hesitating after that kiss but then racing up the stairs as if she were a monster. She also remembered the devastation roaring through her as she watched him disappear at the top of those stairs. Then, a few weeks after the accident, she’d been shocked again when Ryan told her Nick had gone overseas permanently. He hadn’t so much as said goodbye. She’d blamed it on her outburst that she didn’t want him in her life anymore. Blamed herself for him leaving. Totally a natural response, especially after the way she’d treated him. But now she had him back for a little while, didn’t she? God, was she being pathetic pining after this guy?

“I still love you, Summer. I love your independence. I love your art. I love everything about you. I never left because of your blindness or because you tried to push me away. It was me. I’m screwed up when it comes to relationships. I just don’t want anything to happen to you or for anything about you to change and do you know what?”

“What?”

“I’d love to make love to you right now.”

Excitement pounded through her. “What’s stopping you?”

“Where are the condoms?” he asked against her mouth.

“In the bedroom. Second drawer on the left. Right on top of my panties.”

He chuckled. "That's an appropriate place."

His hands slipped off her waist and intertwined with her fingers. As he led her through the living room and into the bedroom, she could barely breathe from the need of having him again. Letting go of her, she heard the drawer opening and the rattle of the box as he removed one, two and then three condoms. She swallowed back a moan at the sounds of plastic being ripped open.

One. Two. Three.

The small plunks of the individual condoms being tossed on the night table was followed by the entire box being placed there.

Oh my! Looks as if it's going to be a busy night.

A moment later his mouth seared hers again and she eagerly accepted the thrust of his tongue. Her heart thumped like mad as her jeans loosened and slipped over her hips and down. Quickly she stepped out of her denims, kicking them away. She unbuttoned and unzipped his pants. Urgency pounded through her pussy and she tugged his underwear and pants down.

He broke the kiss and chuckled. "In a hurry, are we?"

"More than you know," she breathed and latched on to his hot mouth again. She bit his lips and sucked on his tongue, unleashing hot sensations that sent her head whirling in a nice way.

Rubbing her lower half against his hard erection she roamed her hands over his leather coat until she found the zipper. Lowering it, she then grabbed the edges and moved the coat off his shoulders. His t-shirt quickly followed. Trailing her fingers over his chest, she felt the crisp curls of chest hair and the powerful band of chest muscles shift and flex. He groaned and ground his mouth harder against hers. His kisses were scorching her. Not to mention addictive.

His hands sifted beneath her shirt and flattened against her bare belly, sending shards of heat into her. Then his palms smoothed upward and found their way beneath

her bra and he cupped her breasts. He found her nipples and she gasped into his mouth as he tweaked and twisted until this side of pain.

She stopped kissing him, needing air, but his dominating odor intoxicated her and she started planting kisses along his strong neck and over his collarbone and down. She found a nipple and sucked the tight bead into her mouth. She nibbled on the nub until he was moaning. The sound was so primal and raw, it sent wild sensations racing through her.

“On the bed,” she gasped, the erotic storm unleashing inside her now. Her pussy pulsed with wet, warm cream and urgency swept her away. She wanted him. Now!

He grabbed her hand and a moment later they were tumbling on the bed.

“Me on top,” she demanded as she struggled out of her panties.

“And here I thought you were a nice girl. Hmm, nice girl naughty,” he chuckled.

Reaching out, she ran her hands over his legs and pictured his position. In an instant she climbed over his hard thighs and found his cock.

She shivered. His erection was long and thick and so heavy in her palms. Fire raged through her at the thought of having him inside her again.

“Hang on. The condom...”

She felt his fingers as he rolled on the protection. When he was fully sheathed she held his cock with one hand and angled herself over the erect flesh. Squatting, she moved down until she felt his thick cock head lodge at the entrance of her vagina. Her pussy trembled with anticipation as she moved down some more. She hissed as his swollen flesh sunk deep inside her, stretching her beautifully. In seconds she was perfectly impaled and gasping at the huge intrusion.

“You look so beautiful,” he groaned. “Take off your top. I want to see all of you.”

They were both breathing fast as she slipped off her top and bra.

His hands palmed her swollen breasts again, sending scorching flashes of lust shooting through her. He massaged her, touched her, plumped her nipples.

Finding his waist, she held onto him, gyrating her hips and grinding her clit hard into his molten flesh. Her sensual storm increased, whipping through her like white lightning. She felt Nick tighten up as he neared his climax.

Looking down, she strained her eyes to see him, but he was still a shadow. One day, if she were really lucky, she'd be able to see his face again. If that ever happened, it would be the happiest day of her life.

She was gasping and ground her hips, pressing harder into him, her wet pussy gripping his cock like a glove. He groaned and thrust upward, pushing himself deeper. She tightened on him. Breathtaking spasms racked her, making her shudder and cry out his name. The orgasm slammed into her and she cried out, shuddering as the agonized pleasure took hold of her. She rode the intoxicating waves and loved him.

* * * * *

They'd made love the rest of the day stopping only for supper, which included canned vegetable soup, crackers and some fruit. Afterward, they made love again until the wee hours of the night and Nick was exhausted.

Summer lay fast asleep in his arms, her curves pressed intimately against him, her slow steady breathing a lullaby. It was a sweet, relaxing sound, which just couldn't fully get him to sleep. Finally, he drifted off and dreamed of Summer on top of him. Her tight warm pussy wrapped around him, her hips gyrating, her breasts bouncing beneath his palms. Her fluffy red hair tossed back, making her look so sexy.

And she'd been looking at him. As if she could actually see him. But that wasn't possible. It was just wishful thinking. Her blindness was something he would need to get used to. Not that it bothered him. She seemed so independent. So strong and determined to have him. But she just didn't understand his problem of not wanting to get close to people. Hell, he didn't understand it either. He knew it was wrong to think this way, but sometimes he just couldn't help it. One thing he knew for certain was the

thrill of adrenaline rushes of dodging bullets overseas was nothing compared to the thrill of watching Summer orgasm.

When she was about to come her cheeks got this pink glow and her eyes lit up with wonder. Not to mention her pretty pink lips parting as she panted and –

Something, a sound perhaps, filtered through his drowsiness. He came fully awake and fully alert. It was still windy outside. He could hear the waves crashing on the shoreline. The branches he should have cut still scraped along the bedroom windowpanes in an eerie way that shot uneasiness through him and there was an occasional sound of a small branch or pinecone dropping and slapping upon the metal roof. But there was something else. The low rumble of an engine – an approaching car? Or maybe a motorboat out on the lake?

He held himself still and listened. The purr of an engine was distinct. Definitely a car. Then the sound disappeared. Someone had cut the engine. Who the hell was coming here at this hour? He glanced over at the illuminated clock on the night table.

Two thirty-three.

Shit.

Moving slowly so as not to startle Summer, he lifted her head off his arm, which she'd been using as a pillow. She shifted, mumbled something, and then went quiet again.

Peering out the bedroom window, he stood and waited for the motion detectors to go off. They didn't. He saw nothing but those damn branches he should have cut. They were swinging wildly in the wind and from this angle of the cabin he had no view of the driveway. Wondering if he should wake Summer, he looked down at her sleeping form. She looked so peaceful, he just didn't have the heart to disturb her. Maybe he'd been wrong about the noise? It may have been a motorboat on the lake? Or the fridge doing its defrosting cycle?

Up until now, he'd felt pretty comfortable knowing that no one knew he'd taken Summer here except Ryan. But still, he needed to do a perimeter check. Should have

done several checks since coming here. Instead, he'd been too busy making love to Summer.

Man! She was a distraction he'd never experienced before. She had him thinking constantly with the wrong head. He needed to get his ass in gear and get back to thinking like a bodyguard. He hadn't been doing his job up until now. That had to be rectified starting immediately. He dressed quickly and quietly. In the living room, he retrieved his gun and headed for the back door of the cabin. If someone had arrived, why wait so long to knock?

Warning bells were slamming into him as he pressed his back against the wall, his gun in hand. Cautiously, he switched off the back motion detector light and keyed in the disarm to the alarm and unlocked the door. Cracking it open a few inches, he peered out. He shivered as strong gusts of cold October wind slammed against his body, sending a volley of goose bumps pinpricking through him. Falling leaves snapped against the door and blew inside. He didn't move. Straining his eyes against the darkness, he wished for a moon so he could see something, anything, but no such luck. He tried to distinguish if anyone was sneaking around but all he could see was the nearby pine trees thrashing about.

Instincts told him to do a perimeter check. Just to make sure. Slipping outside, he locked the door and reengaged the alarm. It was an older house alarm and the deadbolts not state of the art. He should have put in more up-to-date security. But it had been a spur-of-the moment idea to come here and he hadn't done much preparation for Summer's safety. He knew that now. He'd been in a rush to get her alone, even though his brain hadn't been able to admit it, his heart had.

Shit! Nothing good came out of thinking with the heart instead of his head. Hadn't he learned that over the years?

The blasts of cold air kept him sharp as he moved along the side of the cabin toward the area where his rental was parked. Gravel crunched beneath his shoes as he hit the perimeter of the gravel parking lot. He spied only one vehicle there. His.

Standing in the darkness, he surveyed every dark tree and bush. When the cold seeped beneath his leather coat and his jeans and soared deep into his flesh, hurting his bones and making his teeth chatter together, he continued to stand guard. Every noise filtered through his mind. Branches snapped in the wind and fell to the frozen ground or slapped onto the roof. An owl started hooting somewhere close high up in one of the pine trees. The waves continued to crash against the rocks.

It started to snow. Tiny wet flakes peppered his face and the cold metal of the gun in his hand was making his fingers numb. Time to go back inside. He could sit on the couch and keep guard there. Wait until daylight and then take a look around.

Turning, he went back around the other way, staying close to the cabin, his gun poised and ready for action. Nearing the front door he realized the motion detector hadn't gone off. It meant no one had come around this way. Backing up, he went around to the back and checked the other side of the cabin. Nothing.

He headed to the nearby door. Excitement lashed through him at the prospect of waking Summer and asking her to warm him up.

Shivering madly in the darkness, he could barely find the slot for the key. Fumbling around, he finally managed to slip the key into the lock. It clicked and he grabbed the doorknob, about ready to slip inside. But the key chain slipped from his numb fingers and dropped to the frozen ground with a clatter.

"Shit," he swore softly under his breath. He let go of the doorknob and a gust of wind blew the door all the way open. The door smacked against the wall inside. Hopefully the sound didn't scare Summer. If he didn't hurry and find those keys and get inside, the alarm would go off. He had thirty seconds. He swooped around and searched the darkness. He couldn't find the keys in the cold fluffy snow that was beginning to accumulate and his fingers were getting painfully cold.

Frustration zipped through him. He'd have to deactivate the alarm before it went off. Thankfully the owners had invested in an illuminated keypad so he could at least see the numbers. As he keyed in the password, he realized it would be easier getting the

hell inside and turning on the motion detector lights to find the keys. Just as he thought about that scenario, he felt a presence behind him. Before he could react, something hard slammed against the back of his head. Pain and stars exploded. His stomach lurched with nausea. His legs gave out. He tried to shout. To warn Summer. But another blow to the back of his neck had him falling into a dark pit of black.

* * * * *

Fallen Angel, he thought as he looked down at the big figure sprawled on the ground. He should have known she'd be here screwing around on him. Her scent was all over him.

But that was okay. It would just give him a reason to punish her. He loved punishing the Fallen Angel. Loved it when she cried and begged and screamed. Then afterward, he was merciful and put her out of her misery.

He smiled and swooped the gun off the ground where the demon had dropped it. The gun would come in handy. It would keep the angel in line.

As for this demon who had wandered out into the cold, he could shoot him now and that would be that. But the gunshots would only alert his angel. He wanted to surprise her.

He pursed his lips thoughtfully. He would have to kill this demon after he found her. Or maybe he would let the demon watch the angel get fucked? Hmm, now that was an idea, but he preferred no audience.

No, he would kill this one after he found the fallen angel and he would make her watch. Consider it a partial punishment for her sin of allowing the demon to defile her. With gun firmly in hand, he stepped through the open doorway.

Chapter Five

Something woke Summer. Her heart was pounding and a cold perspiration dotted her forehead. She felt so cold. The coldest she'd ever felt in her life.

What had woken her? A sound? She thought she had heard something. But now she swore there was a movement in the cabin. Whatever it was, uneasiness had slipped through the many layers of peaceful sleep she'd been enjoying, jerking her awake. Instinctively she knew Nick wasn't in bed beside her. She also knew it wasn't him walking around out in the living room. Nick walked with confidence. Whoever was there moved slowly, cautiously. They were searching for something or searching for her.

She heard harsh breathing and the blood froze in her veins.

His breathing.

Oh God! Was she in the throes of a nightmare? Imagining she heard the killer breathing? Her throat went dry and she needed to scream but nothing came out. She wanted to burrow deeper under the covers, hoping he wouldn't find her. But he would if she stayed here. She was trapped!

No. No. No. This can't be happening!

Fear clawed through her. Where was Nick? What happened to him?

She jumped as the intruder hit something. The couch? He stopped. Maybe he thought she was awake and she'd heard?

Nick? Where the hell are you? And her cane? Where was her cane? And Nick's gun? Why in hell did she always forget where she'd put her cane? Dammit!

Her mind made quick judgments for an escape route. She could go out the window, but the intruder would hear the window opening. Or she could hide under the bed? No, he'd look there.

Another idea slammed into her. Yes, it was her only hope.

Lifting up the receiver, she then dialed the numbers 9-1-1. In Blind School they'd made her memorize the layout of the keypad on the phone in case of such emergencies. As she placed the receiver to her ear, there was no tone. Only black silence. The hairs on the back of her neck rose even higher. Oh no! He'd cut the telephone lines.

Her cell phone! She'd placed it in the drawer with the condoms and panties. But he would hear her the minute she slid the drawer open.

Okay chill! He wasn't blind. His ears weren't in tune like hers were. She would have to be extra quiet. If she hurried, she could get to the cell and maybe even slip out of the bedroom before he came in.

She quickly, and as quietly as she could, peeled the comforters away. Mild air blazed against her nakedness and she cursed herself for sleeping in the nude. No time to think about it now. She needed to move at the same time he moved. His footsteps would hopefully cover any noises she made.

Her heart was beating against her chest like explosions as she reached down and slid her fingers along the bed. Okay, the bureau was directly across from here. All she needed to do was —

Her bare feet tangled into something and she stumbled but caught herself quickly. Of course, their clothes were on the floor. Leaning over, she groped in the darkness and quickly found her jeans and top. She also noted Nick's jeans and top were missing.

Okay, so Nick had heard something. He must have gone out to investigate. Maybe he was outside looking for this creep who'd managed to get in?

She wasted no time slipping into her jeans and top and felt just a touch better thinking Nick might be okay after all.

Out in the living room, she could hear the intruder moving again. She swore he'd stopped by the table with her erotic art and shivered with revulsion at the idea he might be admiring the project she'd been working on. The carving of Nick going down on her.

No. She couldn't think about that now. She needed to move. She needed to find Nick so they could get the hell out of here.

For a split second she thought about forgetting the cell phone and just sneaking out. But they might need it. She opted to get the cell. In a moment she reached the bureau and slowly slid the drawer open. Groping around she quickly found the cell phone and stopped cold. If she dare flip it open that little bit of music she'd programmed into it, would go off. He'd hear and she'd be dead.

Shit!

Okay, she had to get out of this room. Out of the cabin. Then what?

She blew out a slow breath and forced herself to relax. As if that were possible. She could hear him on the move again. Coming toward the bedroom. Her heart picked up speed and she swore she would die of a heart attack on the spot.

He thumped into something else. What? She had no idea. Whatever it was, he had come closer. Too close.

She moved faster. Turned and headed back to the bed. Reaching out she skimmed her fingers over the comforters until she turned the corner of the bed. Then, keeping her arms straight out in front of her, she took a few more steps before her hands touched the wall. Then the doorway.

Thankfully the door was open and she slipped through, quietly closing it behind her. Holding her breath, she slid the lock home, wincing at the loud noise. She froze when she heard the click of the light switch being turned on in the bedroom she'd just left. She heard the intruder swear softly.

Her mind whirled frantically. Was there a window in the bathroom? Running her fingers along the wall, she felt the shower stall, the wall and yes! She found a window. After unlocking it, she slid it up all the way and made sure he heard. Leaving it that

way, she ran her hand along the wall until she found the other door. Opening it, she then tiptoed into the living room and quietly closed the door behind her. If her plan worked, he would climb out the window, thinking she'd gone out that way. If it didn't work, he'd come out here and find her and she was as good as dead.

* * * * *

Nick was freezing. Nausea roared through his belly. His head hurt like a son of a bitch and the back of his neck felt sticky and hot. Blood. The insane crack to the back of the neck had blown his balance and sent him sprawling like a helpless rag doll.

Vaguely, he wondered if maybe the blow had paralyzed him. But he put that notion out of the way when he flexed his fingers and moved his legs. Things were working. Now he needed to get his ass up and stop that bastard from hurting Summer. Unfortunately his cold muscles weren't moving as fast as he liked and he could only manage to struggle into a seated position before the whirls sent him spinning.

For a few freaked out seconds he couldn't orient which way was up or which way was down. Reaching out, he cracked his knuckles against the cabin wall and braced himself, forcing his brain to rise above the dizziness. It seemed like forever, but he managed to get a semblance of up and down.

Truth was, he was scared shitless. But the fear wasn't for himself. It was for Summer. She was in trouble. Or he might already be too late and the bastard was hurting her. His stomach dropped like a runaway elevator at that last thought.

He had no idea how long he'd been lying out here. It could be minutes or hours or maybe even the next night. She might already be gone.

Fuck! He had to stop thinking like this. He needed to get up. Find her. Kill that bastard. In that order. But when he fully got to his feet, blackness enveloped him.

He passed out again.

* * * * *

Summer's heart was in her throat. She swore it was as she instinctively dropped to the floor and began crawling. Behind her, in the bathroom, she could hear the intruder struggling to get out the window. At least that's what she hoped he was doing. She shivered as she made her way through the darkness, touching the kitchen table and orienting her direction toward the front door where she remembered leaving her cane when they'd come back from the boat trip.

She knocked into something, which she assumed were boots, then by some insane miracle, her fingers brushed against the cane. Relief poured through her. At least now she had a chance of getting out of here. Grabbing the handle, she stayed down on the floor and listened.

Silence. Not even the wind was blowing out there anymore.

Had the intruder gone out the window? Or had he heard her out here and was waiting for her next move? Either way, she needed to get some help. Sticking the cell phone into one of the boots, she had a heck of time flipping it open, but when she did, the boot muffled the music.

For a split second dialing 9-1-1 entered her mind, but then she opted to call Mary because she knew where Summer was, and Summer didn't know if the intruder might overhear her if she stayed on the line talking to the police, giving them instructions to this secluded place. Holding back a sob of panic, she also realized she needed to hear Mary's reassuring voice. She hit the redial number, realizing the last time she'd used it was when she'd talked to the older woman.

Her teeth chattered and her fingers shook as she held the cell to her ear. It rang and rang and Summer's hopes plunged. At this time of the night, Mary may not even answer.

But when the elderly lady's voice answered in a sleepy hello, Summer couldn't stop the hot tears from flowing as she quickly told Mary what was happening.

* * * * *

How could his Fallen Angel have disappeared so easily? She was blind for crying out loud. She couldn't have gone far out here in these woods. Not in this darkness. He caught himself at that last thought. But she was familiar in the dark, wasn't she?

He smiled. Of course. She was setting a challenge for him. Bringing him to her level. Very good, Angel. Very good. He would accept her challenge and when he caught her he would show her how much he appreciated her games. Yes, he would.

Gun in hand, he sauntered to the rented SUV parked in the driveway behind the cabin. The demon's transportation. Well, she couldn't drive if she was blind and the demon wouldn't be going anywhere. Not after he put a few bullets in him to make sure he stayed dead. Before he went in search of her though, he would do just that. He would kill the demon before the angel had a chance to revive him.

Turning back around, he headed toward the cabin. And toward the demon.

* * * * *

Summer didn't know what to do. Mary had told her to stay put, after telling her she was calling Ryan and the cops. When the line went dead, something inside her went dead too.

By now she realized something bad had happened to Nick. He would have come by now. The killer must have done something to him. She couldn't think about what or she would instantly go insane. She didn't feel comfortable on the floor here either. She was a sitting duck. She needed to arm herself. Defend herself to the death if necessary.

She knew Nick had a gun, but he'd probably taken it with him. No use looking for it. But she was near the kitchen. There would be knives around. Knives for protection.

Shoving her cell phone into her back pocket, she stood. Waving the cane in front of her, she touched the wall with her hand and followed it into the kitchen. Brushing past the fridge and the stove she found the counter top. Sliding open the drawers, she quickly found a nice long steak knife, the sharpness of the blade almost cut into the palm of her hand as she yanked it out.

She froze as she heard someone at the front door. It was him! It had to be the killer! Oh God! He was right on the other side of the door! All he had to do was open it and he would find her.

Gut wrenching fear paralyzed her as she suddenly sensed movement behind her. Something cold slapped over her mouth. Instinctively she knew it was a hand. Next the handkerchief doused with chloroform would cover her face. When that happened she would be in even bigger trouble.

Panic sliced through her and she screamed. The sound came out muffled. She struggled against a pair of cold, unbelievably strong, arms that embraced her. It was him! He had her! Oh God! He had her! She stomped her foot on his, felt satisfaction rip through her at a groan of pain. She worked one of her elbows loose from his hold and slammed it somewhere into her captor's hard belly. Another grunt of pain followed, but his arms held her tight.

The knife! She had to use the knife, but it was in her other hand. The one he held tightly.

"Shh, it's me." The voice sounded gruff yet familiar.

Me? Nick? Nick!

"Relax, will you?" he muttered against her ear.

She hadn't realized she'd still been struggling with him and stopped.

"Man, you're a fighter, woman. Remind me not to get on your bad side," he whispered.

Alarm zipped through her. She could hear pain in his voice. As well as his teeth chattering, the noise reverberating like bones tapping together, not that she knew what that sounded like, but that's what she thought. Okay, she needed to get the idea of bones out of her head and concentrate on Nick and getting out of here, or they'd both be dead after this lunatic got through with them.

“What happened?” she asked. Needing to see if he was all right, if he was truly here and not a figment of her imagination, she reached up and touched his face, checking for injuries.

Immediately she noticed he was sweating. Big-time. Perspiration dampened his chin, his cheeks and his forehead. His skin felt cold and when her fingers came away sticky and wet after touching the back of his head and neck, she forced herself to inhale deeply and not give into the overwhelming fear he may be badly hurt. He was breathing hard. Way too hard.

“No time to explain,” he said hoarsely.

Right. He was right. They needed to get out of here before the killer came in again. She swallowed the fear tugging at her throat and focused on staying calm. Yeah, as if that was possible.

“He was at the front door. I heard him,” she whispered.

“Okay, let’s back away.”

He let go of her and she felt the knife being taken from her hand, his fingers slid against hers, cold but steady. He led her through the living room and she instantly knew something was very wrong with him in the way he staggered, almost falling against her a couple of times. She wanted to ask him again what had happened, but this wasn’t the time. She wondered where they were going in the cabin as her cane slapped into the sofa, then the table she’d used for her wood carving this morning.

God, had it only been this morning that she’d taken Nick in her mouth?

A moment later she felt the handle of the knife being thrust against her palm. Nick was giving her back the knife.

“He took my gun and I lost the keys to the house and rental outside,” he said and Summer’s tummy hollowed out in despair.

He placed her hand on a doorknob. "Here's the back door. We'll go out this way. But first, I need to get the spare key for the SUV. It's just in the front hallway in the closet. Stay here. I'll be right back."

"But he might come through the front door. We just heard—"

"Shh, if he was coming through the front way he would have come by now. Don't worry. I'll be careful. I promise."

She nodded numbly and realized her teeth were chattering. And she was shivering uncontrollably.

She heard him stumble away and then a moment later she heard the click of a light switch. She froze and knew the lights had been turned on. She also knew Nick wouldn't be the one turning on those lights, which meant only one thing—

"Ahh, my fallen angel. I finally found you."

Terror gripped her. It was him. The murderer.

The fight or flight response was so strong she almost caved in to it. For a split second she toyed with twisting the doorknob and getting out. In another brief second she thought about throwing herself at him and plunging the knife into him. But the unmistakable click of a gun being cocked had her standing stiff. She could only hope that Nick knew the intruder was here.

* * * * *

Nick had always thought of himself as patient man, keeping his head cool under extreme circumstances. But when it came to Summer, his calmness was out the window. He knew he should keep focused on taking out the killer any way he could, but all he could think about was finding her and getting her the hell out of here.

Upon awakening outside, he'd managed to stand. Barely. Thankfully he hadn't passed out again, but he'd come damn close. He realized he could only stagger, compliments of the blows he'd taken to his head and neck. So he'd swayed along the

cabin wall until he'd fallen. Then he'd crawled around to the back of the cabin hoping to hell the intruder had left the door unlocked. He had.

How the hell had this murdering son of a bitch found them? Nick sifted through the envelope that contained the spare key to the rental. He'd placed the key on the top shelf of the closet by the front door. Had he somehow gotten to Ryan? That question would have to go unanswered for now. All he needed was that key to the rental and—

In the darkness, he reached up and groped around the shelf and almost fell over as a wave of dizziness rocked him. Okay, so no more reaching. Breathing hard, he slumped against the inside of the closet and waited for the gut-rolling lightheadedness to pass. It was then he saw the light turn on in the living room and realized the intruder must have climbed back in through the bathroom window.

Dammit!

He tried to reach up for the key again, but the dizziness roared over him making him sway dangerously.

Oh shit.

* * * * *

Terror iced Summer's veins as she heard the killer come closer. His footsteps were just the same as that night he'd come into the gallery. Slow and deliberate.

She stood as still as a hunted animal and held her ground, slowly removing her hand from the doorknob and repositioning the knife in her other hand, hoping he hadn't seen it.

She swore she wouldn't go down without a fight. She wouldn't let him rape her or torture her. She was sure the other women he'd attacked were thinking the same thing and look what had happened to them. Swallowing back the bitter bile that jolted up into her throat, she forced herself to inhale slowly and deeply.

“Now I finally have you don’t I, Summer?” The killer was chuckling, the grating sound of his laughter sent chills screaming through her. She shook harder. Held tight to her cane and to the knife.

“I have been watching you and wanting you for so long.” His voice didn’t sound right. Tight and lusty. Aroused? The man was obviously a sicko. “When you didn’t come home the other day, I was worried you’d been badly hurt in that fall. You can imagine my surprise when I called the area hospital and found you’d already been discharged.”

“W-Who are you? What do you want with me?”

“Ah, Summer. Sweet, sweet, Summer. Your red hair glows so beautifully under the lights. May I touch your hair?”

Was this guy for real?

“Keep your distance,” she growled in anger. Holding the knife tighter behind her back, her fear increased.

He took a step forward. She saw his shadow now. He was about ten feet away and to her right. He looked about her height. But wider than her.

She had to keep him talking. Keep him focused on her. It would give Nick a chance to get away. God, she hoped he was able to get the car keys and go out the front door undetected. She prayed he didn’t stick around to play the hero. This guy had Nick’s gun for crying out loud. Besides, Mary had called the cops. They would come. Wouldn’t they? If Summer could just keep this guy calm and talking, the cops would come. They had to!

Think, girl! Think! But how could she, a blind woman, protect herself? She just had to stall him. But how? Her mind was racing so much, she could barely form a thought. But what did finally form in her mind was an idea. Didn’t they always say in a hostage situation to make the kidnapper aware of you as a human being and not an object? Or something to that effect? Gosh, she hoped she remembered right.

“Do we know each other?” she asked. Her voice was shakier than she was.

"I've seen your pictures in the art magazines of course. And visited your website. I was awestruck to discover you're blind. I've never made love to a blind woman before."

Oh God. She was starting to feel lightheaded and sick to her stomach.

"And what about those other girls? Why did you go after them when you have me?"

Oh sweet Lord, she hoped she wasn't getting herself killed by saying that.

He chuckled softly.

"Ah, my angel. You're not jealous, are you? They didn't mean anything to me."

She bet he said that to all the girls. Obviously the guy was one sick puppy.

"Why would you bother with those girls if they meant nothing?" she snapped.

He didn't say anything. She stiffened as he took another step toward her.

"And what's with the gun? Why would you make love to a woman with a gun on her? Is that some macho thing? Because it really doesn't turn me on. I want romance. And I want to know your name."

Okay, she was totally nuts going down this avenue. Focusing his attention on the gun would most certainly remind him to attack her. Oh boy, she really wanted to puke now.

"You don't need romance, Angel. You're already trembling for me." Despite not wanting to, she shook harder. Her heart was pumping terror straight through her and she swore she was going to faint.

He took another step toward her. He was now around six or so feet away. She wanted to run. Oh God, she wanted to run so bad, it hurt. The fear was so intense her knees were growing weak. But she stood her ground. She would wait until he got close enough. Timing. It was everything.

"What's your name? At least tell me that before you make love to me."

Make love? Okay, she'd flipped her lid for sure.

“Don’t you recognize my voice? We’ve spoken several times on the phone. When you placed orders for your art supplies? I loved the sound of your voice the minute I heard you. Your voice turned me on so much. I asked you if you were a true redhead and you said yes. And you look so much like her. It’s uncanny.”

She didn’t remember any such conversation. She was easygoing and always joked with people on the phone.

“Who? Who do I look like?”

“Her.” He spat out the word in anger. He took two steps forward. “Don’t talk about her.”

Another volley of shivers scrambled through her. How could she deal with this? This guy needed major shrink time in a cell.

“Can’t you give me your name?” she managed to say between her chattering teeth. Oh sweet mercy, she’d been dumped into a nightmare. All because she’d agreed on a telephone conversation that she had red hair and because he thought she sounded nice? It was crazy!

The psycho moved fast, grabbing her arm so violently she nearly fell. Her heart staggered in her chest as he pulled her against him. She screamed. Struggled against his vise-like grip, suddenly remembering the knife in her hand. But he held her so tight, she couldn’t so much as move her arms. But she did manage to angle the knife and push it against him. Into him.

A sharp inhalation of breath seared against her face. She felt the slightest release on her arms but then he only gripped her tighter. He was squeezing her so hard, she could barely breathe. Crushing her chest and arms until faintness swept through her. Until her fingers became numb and she automatically dropped the knife.

No! Any hope she’d mustered suddenly vanished.

The sound of a gunshot seared her ears.

Oh God! He’d shot her. But she didn’t feel anything. Shock. It had to be the shock.

Another gunshot sliced through the air. Warm liquid sprayed against her face. Blood. Her blood? Or his?

His tight hold loosened and she grabbed blindly for his gun. Cool metal slapped against her palms.

“Get away from him so I can get a clearer shot!” Nick shouted. Another shot echoed through the air. She felt her captor lurch.

Grabbing the gun, she pushed against him with all her might. But he didn’t let go.

“You...little slut,” he growled against her ear. His breath smelled bad. Of onions. Of something rancid too. She cringed as he licked her chin. “You deserve to die for screwing...around on me. You deserve...to die, my fallen angel.”

She aimed the gun into him and pulled the trigger.

Suddenly he let go of her.

“Run! Summer! Go! Go! To the left!”

She ran through the darkness toward Nick’s voice and then veered to the left as his instructions sunk through her fear.

Another gunshot rang out. It was quickly followed by the unmistakable sound of someone falling.

“Nick!” she screamed.

“I’m here, baby. I’m here.” She was being embraced by a couple of very strong arms and she shook even harder as she tried to sort out everything that had just happened.

“How did you? Gun?” She was shaking so hard she couldn’t even form sentences.

“I had another gun in the car. Locked in the glove compartment.”

He held her tighter, kissed the tears running down her cheeks. She was so happy he was okay.

“The keys were in the jacket. I had to go out to the rental...”

Nick cursed violently and she absolutely loved the sound of his swearing. He was safe and he was alive.

"Is he?" She couldn't finish the sentence. Just the thought of the insane guy made another volley of shivers rage through her. Was she ever going to stop all this shaking? Or would she be a nervous wreck for the rest of her days?

"He's got four slugs in him. I couldn't get a clear shot because he had you too close to him. I winged him the first couple of times, but he's out of commission now. You're safe. Shh, try to relax."

Terrible possibilities of what could have happened if Nick hadn't shot him when he did ran rampant through her mind. Icy sweat covered her and her knees melted. That lightheadedness made a comeback. Big-time.

"It's okay. I got you."

She allowed herself to sink against him and he staggered. In all this commotion she'd forgotten he was injured.

"I can't believe this happened. I just can't believe it." She couldn't stop herself from shaking.

The faraway sound of police sirens zipped through the living room.

He led her to the living room couch, which they both fell onto. She loved that he held her so close. Loved him when he kissed her.

"I love you, Summer," he whispered after he pulled back from the kiss.

"I love you," she sobbed and curled her arms over his shoulders, holding on tight.

"I think we've lost way too much time. How about we get married?"

Love swelled inside her heart. "Thought you'd never ask."

Suddenly, she laughed, finding it odd that with a dead guy in the room, she actually *could* laugh.

"What's so funny?" he asked.

"I was thinking after what just happened, we can handle anything life decides to throw our way."

“What the hell is going on in here?” Ryan’s horrified voice broke through the living room, moments after the door burst inward.

“Except maybe Ryan,” both Nick and Summer said in unison.

Despite both of them shaking uncontrollably, they burst out laughing.

Epilogue

A warm salty breeze drifted into Summer's partially open bedroom window, nudging her awake. Beside her she could feel the erotic warmth rolling off Nick, feel the pressure coiling inside him as he held her in his arms.

Sexual pressure. Hot, lusty and so very nice. The fantastic tension was there between them every morning when she woke up and as always her body immediately reacted with a burst of sweet moisture between her thighs and an overwhelming urge to merge with her man.

Six weeks had passed since that awful night at the cabin. Ryan had been dumbfounded and at a loss for words at Nick hooking up with her. But he seemed to accept their new relationship without too much trouble. He was probably relieved because Summer now had a full time "babysitter". But hey, she wasn't complaining.

Since that night Nick appeared to have gotten over his fear of losing her. He seemed happy. He'd suffered some nasty head and neck wounds but the doctor said he would be fine with lots of tender loving care. That was her department of course and she'd been dishing out love big-time. He'd quit his overseas job by selling his share of the bodyguard business to Ryan and then moved in with Summer. She'd finally told him about her eyesight and as she predicted he'd set up appointments to have tests.

Although she still did see the shadowy figures and different shades of lighting, it hadn't gotten much better since their time at the cabin so she decided it was best to learn to accept whatever came her way regarding her blindness.

The killer was dead as a result of the gunshot wounds suffered in the altercation with Nick. The police discovered he'd tapped Mary's phone as well as finding a sophisticated military listening device placed against the wall of her apartment

building. Police also discovered he'd been a security analyst in the military, discharged due to mental instability.

He'd also been working many years ago as a salesman at his father's art supply store in Florida. His father had rehired him as a salesman when he'd been released from an asylum where he'd been put for thirteen years until a combination of new medications had seemed to calm his instability.

The store was one where she ordered her favorite type of Swiss-made wood carving knives. According to the killer's stepmother and father, he was a quiet loner who stuck mainly to himself. Family admitted that fifteen years ago he did have one girlfriend. The only girlfriend he'd ever had that they were aware of. She was a sweet, gentle woman. A kind-hearted artist. A very pretty redhead with blue eyes, but she disappeared one day. He'd never been the same since.

Shortly after being released from the asylum he found another girlfriend, who looked eerily similar to his first. Realizing he was stalking her, she'd broken off their relationship almost immediately, getting a restraining order against him and moving out of the country, not giving a forwarding address. It seemed her rejection had prompted him to stop taking his meds, triggering his latest killing spree.

Reaching out, Summer settled her palm on Nick's warm chest and heard him inhale. His heart beat strong against her fingertips and happiness filled her heart.

"You're awake?" he asked, his voice sounded low and sultry. So damn sexy.

"Awake and ready for you," she breathed and smoothed her palm farther down over his flat stomach to clasp his hard cock.

"Just as I suspected." She held his swollen flesh, testing its heaviness.

He laughed in answer and curled her tighter into his solid embrace. She snuggled her face into his bulging arm and squeezed his swollen member.

"I want you bad, babe. Climb on top of me. I missed you all night."

"You missed me? Or your cock missed me?"

“Hmm, now that’s a tough one to answer.”

Her mouth dropped open in a mock gasp at his sultry answer and her eyes opened. That’s when white-hot shock seared through her whole system and she forgot to breathe. She blinked at a man she hadn’t seen in over ten years. And she meant that quite literally.

He was grinning widely, obviously enjoying teasing her. His gaze was on her face and unmistakable love poured out of a pair of the most gorgeous brown eyes. She’d forgotten how breathtakingly handsome he looked. He’d changed little since she’d last seen him. His brown hair was a bit shorter with sprinkles of silver here and there and he still wore it the same way, feathered at the sides and combed back. He even had that sexy five o’clock shadow she always found so irresistible.

She couldn’t stop staring at his face and she knew exactly the moment he realized she was actually seeing him. His grin softened, those crinkles at the sides of his eyes vanished. His dark brows twisted downward into a frown and oh man, his lips were so full and still so kissable, the sight of them sent a spear of longing racing through her.

“Summer?” He was turning toward her now. Those luscious muscles bulging in his arms were tearing excitement through her like a live wire. But she just couldn’t stop staring at him, taking him all in. Insane happiness bubbled through her as his frown turned upward back into a heart-stopping grin.

“You can see me?”

She nodded.

He cursed softly and broke into a rough laugh. And then his warm mouth branded hers and she was experiencing the most toe-curling kiss of her life.

Oh yes, she was the luckiest woman alive.

About the Author

Jan Springer writes on four acres of paradise tucked away in the Haliburton Highlands of Ontario, Canada. Past careers include accounting, truck driving, farming and factory work but her passion for writing won out in the end. Now Jan writes full time and is a part-time caretaker. She enjoys kayaking, hiking, photography and gardening. She is a member of the Romance Writers of America and Passionate Ink (RWA Erotic Romance chapter). She loves hearing from her readers.

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

Tell Us What You Think

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

Also by Jan Springer

[Christmas Lovers](#)

[Claiming Hannah](#)

[Edible Delights](#)

[Ellora's Cavemen: Legendary Tails II](#) *anthology*

[Heroes at Heart 1: A Hero's Welcome](#)

[Heroes at Heart 2: A Hero Escapes](#)

[Heroes at Heart 3: A Hero Betrayed](#)

[Heroes at Heart 4: A Hero's Kiss](#)

[Heroes at Heart: A Hero Needed](#)

[Holiday Heat: Jade](#)

[Outlaw Lovers: Colter's Revenge](#)

[Outlaw Lovers: Jude Outlaw](#)

[Outlaw Lovers: The Claiming](#)

[Outlaw Lovers: Tyler's Woman](#)

[Outlaw Lovers Dossier](#)

[Sexual Release](#)

[Sinderella](#)

[Sweet Heat](#)

[Undercover 1: Peppermint Creek Inn](#)

[Undercover 2: Kiss Me](#)

[Undercover 3: Intimate Stranger](#)

[Zero to Sexy](#)



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

www.ellorascave.com