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A movie poster featuring a man and a woman in a desert setting. The man, on the left, wears a black cowboy hat and a white tank top, holding a lasso. The woman, on the right, wears a straw hat and a white tank top, looking over her shoulder at the camera. The background is a warm, golden-hued desert landscape.

A Filly
FOR
DOUG

REESE
GABRIEL

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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A Filly for Doug

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A FILLY FOR DOUG

Reese Gabriel

Chapter One

Helaine and Doug would be here any minute for their blind date and Jilly was nervous as a bride-to-be. Usually things managed to work out with her husband Jake's schemes but this time Jilly wasn't so sure.

The very notion of trying to match up her staid, button-down banker ex-fiancé with a honky-tonk waitress friend of Jake's boggled the mind.

Jilly foresaw a total disaster but Jake, ever the adventurous cowboy, was going by his gut.

He had a track record—she'd give him that. Floating a loan to buy the town diner where Jilly was waiting tables when the two of them barely had the money to meet monthly living expenses had seemed pretty crazy at the time but a year later they were looking at breaking even with a solid financial future ahead of them.

Jake did most of the day-to-day managing of the place with Jilly pitching in as she finished up her nursing degree. Even though she no longer needed to worry about a full-time career, she did plan to follow through on her dream of giving care to people in need by working part time at the local nursing home.

As for Jake—he loved the diner. He thrived on the people contact, and honestly, she was thrilled to have him home and off the rodeo circuit. Sure, he wore her out with his constant sexual urges but a woman could have a lot worse problems where a husband was concerned.

To be sure, Jake was a phenomenal lover with a wicked imagination. His fantasies tended toward domination, which was fine by her. In the outside world, they were solid equals but in the privacy of their bedroom Jilly submitted happily, a spunky filly to be roped night after night.

Just a single masterful look from her man was enough to send chills down her spine. Usually he followed up with a whisper in her ear, letting her know what she was in for that night or afternoon or whenever he got his hands on her again. Hot, dripping wax over her heaving breasts, teasing licks to her twitching pussy while she was tied down spread-eagle to the bed or maybe a little fun with the paddle, turning her ass a bright pink, pain and pleasure sweetly mixed prior to the plunging of his turgid cock deep into her aching emptiness, to name just a few possibilities.

Oh yes, their marriage was humming along quite nicely.

Jilly's only regret had been Doug. Breaking her engagement to a man who obviously cared for her deeply and who was such a perfect gentleman had been the hardest thing she had ever had to do in her life. Doug had been so gracious about it all, stepping aside for Jilly's happiness without complaint. He had seen that Jake was her true soul mate, the one destined to rope her restless heart and he had refused to stand in the way.

But Jilly wasn't the type to take her pleasure at another's expense.

She wanted Doug happy too.

And so did Jake.

"Helaine has a heart of gold," Jake had said, by way of introducing his idea of hooking up the two. "She's totally down to earth. Doug will love her."

Jilly had seen Helaine's picture. She was certainly attractive with her lithe figure and long, curly, brown hair. She had a kind face too. She was smiling broadly in the photo, her arm around two cowboys who seemed more than happy to be posing with the beauty in the white miniskirt and halter top. To complete the Western theme of her waitress costume, Helaine had a fake six-shooter slung at her waist and a fringed vest. The woman oozed sensuality, though there wasn't anything cheap looking about her.

Clearly she was way above average when it came to blind dates.

If it were any other man going out with her tonight, Jilly could see the fiery Helaine having to fend off some pretty intense propositions before too long but Doug wasn't just any man. He would exercise restraint. He was conservative, a natural banker.

"What will they have in common?" Jilly had asked Jake.

Jake had just shrugged. "They both count money on their jobs."

Like banking and honky-tonk waitressing were even in the same ballpark.

Typical Jake.

Doug arrived first. Jilly put on her best smile, opening the screen door and greeting him in her floral print sundress, the one Jake had picked out for her a couple of weeks ago. She had modeled it for him in the store and he'd given her one of his smoldering looks, hot enough to melt candle wax. Jilly's mind slipped into reverie as she recalled the rest. It might as well have happened five minutes ago...

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"I'll take it," he had told the salesgirl with a wink. "And the sexy little model too."

They hadn't even made it home from the mall. Jilly's halfhearted protests had fallen on deaf ears as he'd driven them out to an abandoned barn on the North Road. Jake had carried her across the threshold and tossed her down into a pile of hay like it was their first time.

She had looked up at him, her pulse racing, her eyes locked on his, mesmerized. His cock had strained at the material of his jeans. She'd longed to tear them off him—and the flannel shirt too.

But she had to wait. Jake was the boss, at least where sex was concerned.

"You are so damn gorgeous, baby," he had rasped. "I want you so bad."

She had flushed, on all fours, strands of hay in her hair. Why did he insist on seeing so much in her?

"Baby, I want you too," she had said. "Tell me what to do."

“Lie down on your back,” he told her. “Put your hands over your head.”

She did so, palms up. He devoured her with his gaze. Her chest rose and fell rapidly. She begged him with her eyes.

“Unbutton your shirt,” he said, continuing to manipulate the moment. “Slow, baby.”

Jilly bit down on her lower lip as she obeyed, baring herself as she parted the halves of the denim shirt, revealing her pink cotton bra.

“Touch your nipples,” he ordered. “Through the bra.”

She shivered, raising them to tight peaks of desire.

“Tell me what you need,” he said, rubbing his hand over his crotch.

“I need you inside me. I need you to conquer me.” As if he didn’t conquer her day in, day out as it was. His smile indicated his pleasure. It always felt like the first time with Jake – that was the key.

“Your jeans, Jilly...take them off for me.”

“Yes, Sir,” she replied without hesitation. She unbuttoned the faded denim, her belly quivering. Quickly, she kicked off her cowgirl boots and shimmied the jeans over her hips.

Her panties were pink like the bra, tiny and feminine. Jake drew in a breath as he saw her. Just like the first time. “That’s it, yes,” he coaxed.

It was her turn to draw a breath of sharp lust as his unzipped his pants, pulling out his hard, thick cock. He did not come to her until she was naked.

He had the look of the devil and she knew the game was on.

“Try to fight me,” he said.

She did, knowing she would lose – to their mutual delight.

He finally pinned her, entering her hungrily.

Oh, yes, oh god, yes.

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“Doug,” said Jilly, snapping back to reality. “I’m so glad you could make it.” She had almost said come, which would have set her mind off all over again. She tried to focus on Doug’s appearance.

Doug was wearing jeans and a Western-style shirt, per Jake’s instructions to go casual, though in Doug’s case it came across as more of a uniform—shirt starched and jeans meticulously pressed. Even his black leather cowboy boots looked spit-polished, as if he had just been through a military inspection.

Doug did make for quite a package, though. There was no denying he was a hunk. Six feet tall, with broad shoulders and neatly combed sandy hair. His blue eyes had a life all their own and she could only imagine the effect they might have on someone truly in love with him.

Head over heels in love, in that way she never could find with him.

Would Helaine be that one and only – the filly Doug needed so badly in his life?

Jilly still couldn’t see it. Then again, there was a time she vowed Jake would never come back into her life and look at them now, thick as thieves and hot as a volcano.

“You’re looking beautiful as always, Jilly.” Doug kissed her cheek and handed her a single pink rose from the bouquet he was holding. “I got thirteen,” he explained. “An extra for you. The cost was very reasonable.”

On another man this might sound cheap but on Doug it was just...Doug.

“Thank you.” She hugged him. “You’re a dear.”

Jake came up behind Jilly, brushing his hand over her hip and making her shiver. One little touch from the man and she was good to go. Especially when he looked like that in his faded jeans, worn boots and a denim shirt rolled at the sleeves.

“Hey, *amigo*,” said Jake as he treated Doug to a slap on the back. “You ready to meet your dream girl or what?”

Doug cleared his throat.

Way to build up the pressure, Jake. Jilly elbowed Jake. "It's a blind date, honey. No expectations."

Jake's arm went around his wife's shoulders. "None at all. Just have a good time. But don't you go keeping her out until dawn on your first date." Jake winked.

Doug asked to use the restroom.

Jilly took the opportunity to chew her hubby out. "Jake, you want to scare him off completely? He's shy enough as it is, especially after what happened with me. Don't let the flowers and the suave exterior fool you—he's a pretty vulnerable guy."

Jake laughed out loud, a deep cowboy laugh—the kind that definitely spelled trouble.

"What's so funny?" she put her hands on her slender waist. "Jake, what are you up to?"

"Nothing," he said, looking way too mischievous for her liking. "I was just thinking maybe you're the one Doug's fooled, not me."

She arched a brow. "What's that supposed to mean?"

The two men had played poker once or twice and shared a few beers. What in the world could Doug have told him?

Before she could press Jake for details, Doug returned. "I like what you've done with the place," he said.

"Thank you," Jilly said proudly, taking full credit for the new Early American style furniture and polished pine floors. "I'm so glad we remodeled the old place instead of moving."

This old ranch had a lot of family memories and she hoped to raise her kids here, just as soon as things settled down enough to have them.

"Doug, Jake and I just want to make sure you understand you're under no obligations when it comes to tonight," said Jilly, feeling the need to take the law into her own hands. "Most of these things don't ever work out."

"But some of 'em do," Jake pointed out with pure cowboy orneriness. "You never know."

"Would you boys like some iced tea?" Jilly said, opting to let the topic go.

"That would be nice, thank you," said Doug.

"Thanks, honey." Jake gave Doug a manly slap on the back. "We'll be out on the front porch shooting the breeze."

Conspiring, more like. Since when was the conservative Doug in league with her wild husband?

Sighing, she headed off to the kitchen. There weren't many times when she wanted to be relegated to a female's traditional place but this was one of them.

Sure enough, she heard Jake laughing again. The sound sent warm chills down her spine all the way to her belly. Jake was in rare form today—charming, easygoing but very much in control. Whatever he had in mind, it made her want him, just on account of how devilish he was being.

Yes, Jilly was definitely going to need her man tonight. If she could wait that long. Certainly she was not above sending signals—a sultry look, a shy touch of her fingers trailing over his arm, a subtle moistening of her lips with her tongue—letting him know she was his, ready to submit in any way, craving his strong hands, his hard cock.

Whew. Jilly was going to need some of that iced tea herself.

Either that or a cold shower.

* * * * *

Out on the porch with Jake, Doug did his best to laugh at the man's ribald cowboy joke. To be honest, he was feeling a little awkward. Jake was a great guy and Doug respected him enormously but there were times that his brash style conflicted with his own more sedate approach.

Doug had let himself in for this, opening the door to a frank relationship between the two of them. He probably shouldn't have told Jake some of the things he had the

other night at the honky-tonk about his fantasies, but then, after four beers, no man could be responsible for his tongue, at least that was Doug's theory. In *vino veritas*, something like that.

He and Jake had talked about sex, specifically the kind of sex in which the man takes full control. Doug had real urges in that direction. He had often dreamed of having a woman naked or scantily clad, under his full erotic power, standing and posing for him, following his instructions, knowing her body would be enjoyed and exploited by him for mutual pleasure.

Doug was never fully comfortable with those desires. A gentleman did not masturbate thinking of a tied or handcuffed female and he certainly did not look at a woman's posterior while imagining it both bare and freshly spanked.

Jake said such things were possible. Some women enjoyed it, craved it even. He hadn't mentioned Jilly and Doug certainly wasn't going to ask. Jilly seemed like the last woman in the world to be submissive but maybe Jake had found something in her he hadn't.

Jake and Jilly had chemistry. They were meant to be together. Doug couldn't fight that. He was a firm believer in putting the needs of others first. It wasn't a bad way to live because he never lost a moment's sleep. His conscience was clean and who could put a price tag on that kind of peace of mind?

At the moment, that peace was being sorely tested. Doug was agreeing to this blind date to be polite to Jilly and Jake. To decline would be rude to Helaine as well. She certainly must be a nice person if Jake liked her so well.

She was attractive too, beautiful even, with her dark hair and saucy curves. A bit brash, though. He guessed it came from working in a honky-tonk environment and flirting with so many men. Honestly, Doug didn't see things working out.

But Jake was so convinced. And you just didn't argue with a man like that. He was too persuasive.

The part Doug didn't quite get was the timing of it all. First he had revealed his desire for domination to Jake, then, a day or two later, he had been shown Helaine's picture. Was she the sort of female Jake was talking about—the kind who enjoyed a strong man in the bedroom?

"Doug," said Jake as they sat side by side on the porch swing. "If I can give you one bit of advice..."

Doug's eyes were on the horizon, absorbing the paint-splashed sunset over the plain, spectacular as always. It was the most incredible sight in the world as far as Doug was concerned. Sure proof of a Creator and a daily cure for anyone who took his own life troubles too seriously. "What's that, Jake?"

"Be yourself with Helaine. Let her do her thing. She knows how to make conversation, how to connect with people but don't be fooled by her outgoing personality. She's fragile underneath. She's been hurt—worse than you or I could ever imagine."

Doug frowned, letting the words sink in.

"Jake," said Doug, wanting to reassure him. "You know I would never—"

"Please," Jake cut him off. "I know that. If I didn't trust you with my life and Helaine's too, I wouldn't be introducing the two of you. This is no small thing. Trust me, if you think you were hard to convince, you should have seen her."

Jake was chuckling but Doug's anxiety level had just tripled. "Helaine didn't want to go out with me?" Doug didn't point out that he had felt the same.

"Well don't take it personal, she doesn't even know you. She's kind of sworn off men for a while. But you're different."

"I hope that's a compliment."

"The best I know of."

Jilly came out with the iced tea. She politely handed a glass to her husband and then to Doug. Doug could tell she was still walking on eggshells a little, afraid to show

affection for her husband in front of her former fiancé. It bothered Doug. He knew that Jilly adored her cowboy and Doug wanted her to feel comfortable around him.

All things in time, thought Doug. His Aunt Florence, the woman who had raised him and taught him so much about God and life always used to say that all things come together for good, for those who believe, and the first part of belief is to not fight God. Let the bad rivers run on so you can see what's good.

"Thanks, baby," said Jake, his voice a little raspy.

"You're welcome."

Doug thanked her too, but Jilly's eyes were on her husband.

They were having a moment.

The truth hit Doug like a bolt from the blue. The way Jilly was looking at him, the way she had served him. She was a strong woman, a wife equal in her own right but there was an impulse to be something different in private.

Serving her man gave her a charge. Yes, there must be something to this dominance and submission outside of fantasy. It was real...and it was right in front of him.

Doug felt something he had never felt before where Jake and Jilly were concerned. Jealousy. No wonder he had let go of her so easily before! He hadn't seen what she was capable of, any more than he had been able to see what it was he needed for himself.

How wrong a marriage between them would have been.

Doug had loved Jilly and was prepared to spend his life with her but their marriage would have been...what was the right word? Sterile? Stiff?

Doug smiled to himself. Stiff was probably not a good choice of words given the stirring in his pants.

Listen to me. I'm starting to think like Jake.

It wasn't Jilly on his mind, though. It was the cowgirl in the picture, with her sexy little outfit, all those men wanting her. That was a female to rope if ever there was one. But a picture of a sexy woman was not the real thing. As a practical man, a man used to

working out the figures, he knew the odds were slim—damn slim. A woman like Helaine would want a cow puncher, not a numbers cruncher.

Doug got up so Jilly could sit down. The couple needed their space right now. Jilly slipped immediately into the seat, smiling gratefully, her hand immediately seeking Jake's. Their thighs were touching. That was how love should be. Like two old shoes in a closet. But there was passion there too—enough to ignite a forest.

A man would have to be blind not to see it.

Doug gazed out past the porch again. A cloud of dust was coming over the horizon, glinting gold in the fading light.

"That'll be Helaine," said Jake.

Doug's heart quickened. He felt like he was back in high school.

Something's going to happen tonight, something important...

"She's right on time," Jilly pointed out, a quick glance in Doug's direction. "Just like you."

Doug smiled, picking up on Jilly's intent. She wanted the two daters to get off on a good footing. "That's a good thing," Doug agreed.

"Say, that reminds me, you all ever heard the story about the cowboy who was late for his own funeral?" Jake drawled.

"Only about a thousand times," Jilly teased.

"How about you, Doug?" Jake asked, grinning. "You ever had the privilege?"

Jilly slapped his arm. "Don't you ask him. You know he'll say he hasn't, just to be polite."

"Blast it, woman," said Jake, laying it on thick. "Can't a man get a break around here?"

"Not on my watch. Now quit your griping and get ready to be a good host." She tugged him to his feet, indicating just how much play there was between them.

Again, Doug felt a pang of envy. The young woman in her short, casual dress was one hell of a filly and she was quite happily corralled by Jake.

When he thought of a relationship that way – corralling – it made him ache. If Jilly had been that way with him – playful, submissive – Doug wouldn't have given in so easily, principles or no. But it seemed to Doug a woman had to have her right man, a particular one she was ordained to trust, to love...to submit to.

Helaine's car was pulling up the drive. It was a small metallic orange import, about twenty years old. "Quite a vehicle," Doug said, amused.

"You mean Old Rust Bucket?" said Jake. "Helaine's had that thing since the first Gulf War. Bought it new, refuses to part with it now that she's got it paid off."

"Frugality is not a bad thing," said Doug, liking that Helaine had a practical side.

Speaking of sides, Helaine was getting out of the car, treating him to an unobstructed view of her profile. The woman was every bit as gorgeous as her pictures – trim, shapely, with curves in all the right places. She had her hair back in a ponytail and was wearing a dark blue sleeveless dress with white piping. The dress came almost to her knees and the neckline was sensibly high.

All in all, the dress could have passed for church wear.

The accessories were just as proper and well thought out, including a patent leather purse to match and a pair of blue heels, medium high. Everything was coordinated, even the ribbon in her hair.

"I'm underdressed," Doug said.

Jilly eyed her husband. "Didn't you tell Helaine casual?"

"Yeah." Jake rubbed the back of his head, perplexed. "Could have sworn I did."

"Your exact words," prompted Jilly with exaggerated patience. "What were they?"

"Well let's see. I told her to come by about six...that she and Doug would probably be grabbing a bite to eat."

Jilly sighed.

"What?" said Jake. "What did I do?"

"You told her she would be going out to dinner, so she dressed up."

"I said a bite to eat," Jake defended himself. "That spells casual to me."

Jilly stood on tiptoes to give him a kiss on the cheek. "I know you do and you mean well but you don't think like a woman."

"I would think you'd be happy about that," Jake declared.

"Oh, I am!" Jilly exclaimed, smiling slyly.

"Doug," said Jake. "I have a suit you can wear. We're are about the same size."

"I'm really not sure. Maybe we should cancel," said Doug.

"Oh, Doug, I hope you won't," Jilly pleaded. "I know Helaine would be so disappointed."

Jake cleared his throat. Obviously he hadn't told Jilly about Helaine's reluctance to go on this date in the first place. "Come on, buddy." Jake opted for a quick escape. "Let's go try it on. It's the best damn cowboy suit you'll ever see."

"I'm sure it is," said Doug, taking a last peek from the doorway at Helaine as she walked toward them. She moved with the grace of a cat—subtle, dignified but with a definite feminine flair. The way she held her little purse, those green eyes, the long legs, Doug was chomping at the bit.

"Come on, Romeo," Jake prodded, mixing up his classical stories. "Your fairy princess will wait for you."

"That's fine. I'm in no hurry," Doug lied, surprising himself.

It was the first fib he had told in quite a long time.

He hoped it was not the start of a trend.

* * * * *

As Helaine turned off the sputtering engine and got out of her car, she saw Jake and another tall, broad-shouldered man, probably her date, walking inside. Strange. She

forced a smile. An attractive, vivacious-looking woman was waving to her from the porch. Helaine recognized her from her pictures. So that was Jilly in the flesh. Obviously Jake had chosen well. His bride was quite lovely and she had a very positive glow about her. She seemed intelligent and sincere. Helaine had always had an instinct when it came to judging other women. If only she could do that with men. Honestly, Helaine would not have gone along with this blind date idea for anyone other than Jake. He had been such a loyal friend and he had defended her honor, not to mention her very life.

She couldn't refuse Jake after all that. He meant so well. In her opinion, though, Jake had done enough for one lifetime already. But the rough and tumble cowboy with the heart of gold didn't see it that way.

If only Jake wasn't trying so hard to make up for Chuck. Like it was Jake's fault he had introduced the two of them in the first place. There was no way Jake could have known that Chuck would turn out to be such a snake in the grass, the kind of man who bullied a woman to feel better about himself.

You could bet Chuck would think long and hard about doing that to her or anyone else again. If Helaine had been able to go to Jake for help right away, she would have saved herself a lot of misery. But Jake had been far away on the rodeo circuit at the time and Chuck would never have let her run that far anyway. Besides, Helaine had considered it her responsibility.

She had tried to hide the marks on her arm, the bruises when Jake had come into the bar where she worked that fateful night. The way Helaine had shied away from Jake's welcoming hug had tipped him off. By the end of the night, Jake had guessed her secret.

Helaine had begged Jake not to hurt Chuck too severely and he had honored that one request. He'd driven Helaine out to the place she was renting with Chuck and told her to wait in the truck. At the time, all she'd heard was the noise, the cracking of fiberboard furniture and the thud of Chuck's body hitting the wall more than once but

later she had heard from an eyewitness that Jake had made a small speech to Chuck first.

Just a few words, cowboy style. The gist of it had to do with what would happen to Chuck if he ever came within a thousand miles of Helaine again.

Cowboys didn't talk much unless they were spinning yarns. When they made a promise, they kept it. You could take that to the bank. And you didn't mess with them or the people they loved. Ever.

That witness was actually another woman, a checkout girl at the Save King Super Mart Chuck had been seeing on the side. The woman and Helaine had shared a beer one night later on, along with an ocean of tears.

"Helaine," said Jilly. "Welcome to our home. We're so honored to have you here."

"I'm the one who's honored." Helaine never did like people to make a fuss over her. She was a waitress, nothing special, born with less common sense than most. Would a woman like Jilly ever allow herself to be abused for eight months and not tell a soul because she was too afraid? Never. Would a woman like Jilly let thirty-three years of her life go by with little or nothing to show for it? Hardly.

Jilly pulled her in for an embrace. "Gosh, Helaine, you are so pretty. Even more beautiful than your picture."

"You're the pretty one. And I can't believe Jake showed anyone that picture. I'm barely dressed."

"You've got nothing to be embarrassed about," Jilly assured her. "If I had a figure like yours, I would have no problem with people checking it out."

Helaine smiled politely. Jilly *did* have a body like that, though she was not the type to advertise it. "Well, the picture's not x-rated, at least."

"Good thing," said Jilly with a wink, "because there's only one cowgirl Jake is ever going to see in her birthday suit anymore."

Helaine frowned, her lips curling downward ever so slightly. "I hope you don't think..." She didn't know how to put it in words. It was a silly thing to worry about because Jilly and Jake surely trusted each other but Helaine wasn't used to dealing with good people, ones not given to petulance and fits of jealous rage where she was concerned.

It had begun with her father many years ago and had never gotten any better. Chuck was the worst but there had been plenty of others who had done their damage with words.

Jilly eyed her intensely but not unkindly. "Helaine, you are Jake's friend. Period. Okay?"

Helaine nodded, relief coursing through her. She hadn't realized exactly how much stress she had been under. What with the car on its last legs and the new owner of the bar being so hard on the waitresses, expecting double shifts and squeezing their benefits, she was getting tired. It was hard to fight so much, with less and less to show for it each year.

"Okay, Jilly," she agreed.

"Helaine!" Jake was at the screen door. "Come here you little ray of sunshine! Give me a hug!"

Helaine fell into the arms of the strong cowboy, the sensation completely platonic. She could imagine those arms loving Jilly. Jilly was one lucky woman and Helaine hoped she truly appreciated that her man was one in a million—strong, confident, totally sexy, not one ounce of darkness in him.

Oh, he was probably a handful, stubborn as a mule—what cowboy wasn't?—but you could count on a man like that until your last breath and his.

"Helaine, I want you to meet the smartest, best banker in the state. Doug Blue. Doug, this is Helaine Willis, the number one—"

"Jake, give it a rest," Helaine interrupted good-naturedly. "You're overselling."

Helaine was more than a little self-conscious as it was. For his part, Doug Blue didn't need selling. He looked like a million bucks in that suit, with the white shirt and string tie. Such a sexy smile—kind of cagey, kind of shy. And those eyes. A woman could get lost in them they were so deep, like the ocean or a far-off sky.

He sure was handsome too. More than she had hoped from his picture. He had looked stiff, posing in front of the bank, as if he was getting a mug shot. But in person, he was warm and very real. And those hands of his looked so large and capable. She could imagine him doing other things besides working in a bank.

Riding the range, maybe, on a proud stallion, tugging the reins as he maneuvered his way in and out of a herd of cattle.

Or touching his woman, a little bit firm, a little bit gentle, a little bit nice and a little bit naughty.

Jilly smirked. "Oh, I like this one already. She talks back." She took Helaine's arm. "How would you and Doug like the fifty-cent tour?"

"I would love that," said Helaine, feeling more comfortable by the second with this no-nonsense woman.

"Douglas," Jake declared, pulling up the rear with her blind date. "I do believe we've been put in our places."

"Seems like it," concurred Doug, his voice as rich as coffee.

Helaine felt a blush on her cheeks, painfully aware of Doug's place at the moment—directly behind her, with a full view of her gently swaying posterior.

She would be lying if she said it wasn't giving her ideas, interactive ones that involved her ass and his hands, the contact gentle and smooth.

Or maybe not so gentle.

Chapter Two

Doug was painfully quiet behind the wheel. Helaine was trying not to fidget in the passenger seat of his late-model sedan—midnight blue, with all the trimmings.

“So...” she said, applying her best ice-breaking skills, honed from years of working in bars. “Do you hate blind dates as much as I do?”

Doug laughed. She could see the relief pour over him, his shoulders easing, his posture just a little more casual. She swallowed because now he looked more like a jungle cat, supremely confident, no fear whatsoever in the company of its prey.

Was it just her imagination?

“Yes, Helaine, I must admit, I have been dreading this a bit. Not because of you,” he said quickly. “Don’t misunderstand. It’s just...”

“It’s just you feel like you’re in some kind of dog and pony show? Having to impress a new person and the people who set you up too? Nowhere to go but down and all those expectations to ruin?”

He turned to look at her, a strange expression on his face. “Yeah, that’s exactly it. You a mind reader or something?”

“My license expired,” she quipped.

Actually she wasn’t usually so precise—there was something about Doug that allowed her to see into him, almost as if she were looking into herself. Weird.

“So do you like steak?” he asked.

“I don’t know a woman who doesn’t.”

“Oh, there are some. Uptight ones, city types. I run into them at bank meetings. They eat sushi, stuff like that.”

Helaine made a face. "Raw fish? No, I don't do that. Maybe if they fried it up or something. Hey, that could be a good name for a restaurant, right, "Helaine's Deep Fried Sushi?"

"Sounds good," he said. "Come on in to the bank. We can give you a loan."

"I would need collateral, wouldn't I?"

"You could use your smile," he said. "That's worth a million right there."

Helaine blushed, second time today. "Doug, if you don't mind my asking, why is an obviously great guy like you—attractive and successful—not married or seriously involved? I would have thought someone would have scooped you up by now."

Doug's lips tightened. She knew she had said something wrong.

Typical, Helaine, ruin everything. This is why you can't make it with nice guys.

"I did have someone, Helaine. I was engaged to Jilly."

"Oh...oh my..." She absorbed the statement like a sucker punch. Incredibly, she could feel Doug's pain. How was such a thing possible?

"That must be terrible," she said.

"It's all right. I don't walk around crying all the time. I am getting on with my life. I know Jilly's happy. See, she and Jake go back a long time—they were on again, off again. I came in somewhere in the middle of an off period. The time came for me to back out and I did, for everyone's sake."

Helaine reached across and touched his shoulder. Sheer instinct. She was rewarded with the feel of muscle under his jacket. "You're a pretty special guy to do that. Jake and Jilly owe you a lot."

"Anyone would have done the same," he said.

Helaine couldn't help but laugh. "Oh, no, Doug, they wouldn't. Trust me, I've known enough men."

She regretted the comment at once. He was going to think she was loose or something.

"I mean, I talk to a lot of men. I see them at the bars I work at," she added.

"Yes." Doug nodded. "A bar waitress is a whole lot like a psychologist, the way I see it. You hear people's troubles and you try to give them a little peace of mind."

The compliment made her very uneasy. "I don't know about all that, Doug. I pass out beer and keep drunk rednecks from pinching my bottom. I'm not sure that qualifies me to set up a practice."

Doug grinned. "Helaine's Fried Sushi and Life Counseling," he pronounced. "Kind of has a ring to it."

"Sure," she mused. "But in my case, I couldn't *give* advice away."

He gave her another look and a slightly puzzled, studying smile. She squirmed. He was so serious. "What are you looking at?"

"I was just wondering... Turn about is fair play, you know. Why is a woman as smart and funny and beautiful as you not married?"

Helaine felt like she'd been zapped by electricity. "Obviously Jake hasn't told you much about me."

"Not a lot," he agreed. "But with all due respect to Jake, this is our time now. The only things I care about are the things *you* tell me and the things I see for myself."

"Okay," she said frankly. "But I'm warning you, you are not going to like what you see."

"Why?" He gave her a quick grin that made her toes curl. "Do you swing from chandeliers naked or something?"

"Only after a couple of beers. You know," she observed, "you don't really come across as a banker. Are you sure you aren't a bartender or something?"

"A bartender? Why would you think that?"

"Because you're interesting. You know how to talk to people."

"Boy, have you got me confused with someone else," he mused.

"I don't think so." Helaine's voice was soft. She was feeling really relaxed, like she had already had a beer to unwind.

"Wait a while. My true banker's colors will come out."

She squeezed his arm, taking instant notice of the well-developed biceps. Would surprises never end where Doug Blue was concerned?

"Don't tell me that you swing from chandeliers too?" she quipped.

"You guessed my secret." He shook his head in mock distress. "I guess our date has lost its suspense."

Helaine laughed. *Oh, no, she thought, there is plenty of suspense left. Who is this man and why am I responding to him so positively after barely an hour of knowing him?*

If he had not come recommended by Jake, she would surely have suspected him of having some vastly unsuitable dark side like all the others. But Jake wouldn't have sent her this man unless he had seen some potential.

What did the wily cowboy have in mind?

Whatever it was, Helaine had all night to figure it out.

* * * * *

Doug was definitely falling for Helaine Willis. It might just have been the light in the steak house, the dim glow in the corner from the wagon wheel light fixture or maybe it was the wine they were drinking.

Wine. When was the last time he had drunk wine...and enjoyed it?

One thing was sure, Helaine was for real, not like cocktail party women, or the stuffy bank customers he dealt with and certainly not like the scads of boring women he had met in the in the past.

The more time he spent with her, the more he didn't get it.

Why wasn't Helaine spoken for?

According to Jake she had never been married. But she had been hurt, more than they could imagine, which was saying a lot because Jake should certainly be able to imagine a lot of pain, given all his experience being abused by broncs and bulls over the years.

Was that it? Had beautiful, carefree Helaine been abused?

Doug frowned. If he ever found out someone had done that to her, he would not hold back. He would teach that man a lesson he would never forget. Doug didn't fight much but he knew how. He was trained in karate and when he was in the Army for three years he had done some boxing.

"What's with you?" Helaine teased. "You look like the cat just ran away with your spoon."

She was grinning, so totally relaxed. He loved that about her, the way she could let her hair down, figuratively speaking.

"I look like what? The cat and spoon? Where do you come up with this stuff?" he marveled.

"Okay, you look like someone just stole your puppy. Is that better?"

"Not much. Anyway, it's nothing. I was just thinking."

"About what?" Her eyes were bright, flirty. Her lips were red as the wine. They had two sirloins sitting in front of them and neither of them had eaten a bite.

"About you," said Doug, amazed at his forwardness. It had taken a month of dates with Jilly before he would share that much.

Time was different in Helaine's company, though. Compacted, somehow—weeks and months of familiarity packed into minutes.

"Uh-oh." She rolled her eyes. "A banker is thinking about me. I'm in trouble now. You gonna put me up for collateral?"

"Maybe I want to lock you in the vault," he countered.

She pursed her lips and sipped her wine. He half expected her to freak out. Instead she kept her tone light. "You don't want to lock me up. I might turn all moldy like cheese."

"That's good advice and free too. See," he said. "You are capable of giving out free advice."

Helaine's tongue moved across her lips. Doug's cock leaped in his pants. He watched the steady motions of her breasts, the graceful lines of her neck. He wanted her locked up, all his.

"Who says it was free?" she rasped.

"Planning on driving a hard bargain, are you? Seriously, though, it's just bugging me. Why don't you have a boyfriend? You are so fantastic. Guys must fall for you all the time."

"Not the right guys."

His pulse quickened. Was there an invitation in there?

"Helaine, I would like to see you again," he announced.

She raised a brow. "You haven't even finished seeing me this time."

"You know what I mean. I would like to date you again."

She drank some more of her wine. "Let's see how it goes tonight, okay?"

"Okay." It didn't feel okay but it was going to have to be.

"You haven't even tried your steak," she said.

"I'm a little preoccupied watching you."

"I've noticed. The thing is I'm not on the menu."

Doug would like for her to be, though.

He would like her splayed out on this very table, open to him, her body his playground to explore and tantalize.

Would Helaine like to play out his fantasies with him? Not many women could be approached with handcuffs or ropes, he suspected, without screaming for the police or laughing out loud. And a spanking...did he dare hope?

Until Doug had talked with Jake about his fantasies it hadn't seemed possible, but since then his mind had been hyperactive, imagining all the scenarios.

"If you were on the menu," said Doug, shocking himself with the whimsicality of his words. "What kind of entrée would you be?"

"Aside from fried sushi, you mean? I don't know, I guess I would be pot roast—something plain, filling and not too interesting."

"You're not pot roast to me."

"No?"

"Nope. You are chicken cordon bleu. You are filet mignon, caviar," he said, trying to name the most exotic food items he could think of.

She screwed up her face in that cute little expression of hers. "You have just compared me to fish eggs. Thanks so much."

Doug laughed from deep in his belly. "You know what I mean. You are everything rare and special."

"Never call me special," said Helaine. "I don't like that."

"Okay." Doug let it go, trying not to react to the sudden seriousness in her voice. That was the problem with blind dates You never knew when you would hit a nerve.

They ate some of their food, forks and knives quietly scraping the plates.

"So are we not talking anymore?" he asked at last.

"I am talking just fine," she said cryptically. "I just don't have anything to say."

Doug decided he was falling in love. It made no sense, it couldn't be real, but it was there, close enough to touch. He had to get closer, find out more. "Helaine, I really have to see you again. I need to make a plan for that."

She frowned. "Doug, you can't plan anything. A freight train could hit me on the way home. What then?"

"It won't hit you. I'll be with you and I'll push you out of the way."

She smiled enigmatically.

Doug felt the familiar stab. He was about to get rejected.

"I'm sorry, Doug. I just don't see us having any future. It isn't you. I'm just not at a place in my life where I have space for a relationship."

He had gone too far too fast, spooked her. "Why not?" he asked, trying to recoup. "What is it that fills your life up so much?"

Her features tightened just a little. He was on the verge of pushing her away for good. Talk about train wrecks—he was causing one and he didn't even know how to stop it. This had happened to him before. He always over-analyzed, pushed too hard for commitment, frightening or annoying the woman.

Only Jilly had ever kept up with him but he had come to understand her ulterior motives, not directed against him but against Jake and against herself too, for falling for a man she thought would never love her back.

But Jake did love her back and now they were married. Anything was possible.

"Doug, I am not going to get into this with you. You're a sweet guy and we have had such a nice time. Am I attracted to you? Sure. But I don't want anything more serious. I'm not up for it and frankly, I don't think you are, either. I'm not saying you don't accept Jilly and Jake's marriage but you are obviously mourning the loss of your engagement. I don't want to be anyone's rebound."

It was Doug's turn to have a nerve touched. She had seemed so different up to a few minutes ago, putting her hand on him in the car even, making him think there was something there. "And I don't want to walk off quietly," he declared. "I'm tired of being the sweet guy, Helaine. When do I get to ride off into the sunset with the cowgirl?"

Helaine was on her feet. "I don't know, Doug but you won't be riding with this cowgirl."

"Helaine, wait."

She was out front by the time he caught up with her. He had her by the arm. Her eyes were fierce as she whirled to face him.

"There's nothing more to say, Doug."

Doug's heart raced. He had reached the point of no return. He knew this was right and he knew he had to be the one to take the first step. "Who says I want to talk anymore, Helaine?"

His lips sealed hers, forestalling any protests. She gasped in surprise, stiffening for just a moment before letting go. He drew her close, soothing her pain, communicating things words could never manage. She melted against him, sighing.

His arms tightened, fingers splayed over her back. She was so small and delicate in comparison to him. How could a man not protect and honor a creature like this, so loving, so soft and giving? And how could he not want her completely?

Doug wrapped her in his arms, letting her know it would be all right. For this brief moment at least, she was his.

His lips found the soft skin of her neck. She tasted of honey. Her scent was like flowers in springtime. His hands were everywhere, caressing her taut buttocks, running along her thighs, inducing deep moans.

He was on the verge of coming, his cock hot as fire. He felt like he was in high school again, with his very first girlfriend.

"Oh, Doug..." She was breathless, her voice a whisper. "Do you think we should? We only just met."

"We owe it to ourselves," he said, nibbling her ear. "We deserve something good. We're not kids – we know what we're doing."

Her body was hot against him. He could feel the press of her erect nipples. "No...strings...attached," she managed to add.

"None at all," he conceded. "This is about tonight. I don't care about tomorrow. I shouldn't have tried to force things."

Indeed, what did tomorrow matter when he could have heaven tonight?

"I don't care about tomorrow either," Helaine admitted. "I want you now, that's all I know. I have felt that way since the moment I saw you. I knew you could do things to me."

Her hands moved over his chest. If she only knew the kind of effect this was having on him as a secretly dominant man born to be aroused by a female's unconditional surrender.

"I can do a lot of things," he rasped. "In fact, I've been imagining some of them ever since I saw your picture."

"Is that right?" Helaine's eyes lit with mischievous passion. She stood on tiptoe, kissing at his chin. "Such a naughty banker you are."

Doug groaned softly, his cock pressed into her pelvis, all restraint gone as her teasing fingers played over his crotch. He drew her tight, trying to make sure no one could see what she was doing.

"I like to think of you that way," she rasped. "Looking at my picture, your cock throbbing. Did you masturbate?"

"Yes." His throat was tight. Did he dare tell her some of the ways he had specifically pictured her—hog tied on the bar room floor, bent over a table, legs apart, taking a spanking in front of a roomful of witnesses. "Actually, I did it more than once."

She rubbed his erection. "Well you don't have to tonight. You have the real thing."

"Helaine, there is something you need to know, something I've just figured out about myself."

"What is it?" She squeezed his shaft. He wanted to explode. "You're obviously not going to tell me you're gay."

"No, I'm not gay. But I am, that is to say, I have certain...preferences."

"Like what? Gelatin, whipped cream? Stilettos? You wear high heels to bed, is that it?"

"It's BDSM," he said, getting it off his chest once and for all. "Don't get me wrong. I'm not some kind of leather-wearing freak with a whip. I just have some fantasies, things I have always wanted to try with a woman."

"Like what?" She went up on tiptoes again to place small, teasing kisses on his lips.

Encouraged that she hadn't run off in terror, he opened up a little. "I would like to spank someone. I want to tie her up too, if she agrees. And I would like her to pleasure me on her knees, her hands cuffed behind her back."

Helaine kissed him again. "You see? That wasn't so bad."

Doug frowned. He had no idea where things stood. Was she humoring him?

Helaine giggled and took his hand. "Come on, Tiger, take me home to your lair."

"I have to pay the bill first."

"Give me your keys," she said. "I'll wait in the car."

He turned them over to her, his head spinning.

As near as he could tell, he was on the verge of dominating a willing female—beautiful and passionate to boot.

The weird thing was, she was acting completely in charge.

Doug wasn't put off by that. Quite the opposite.

Helaine was a bundle of contradictions, fearless and vulnerable, whimsical and intensely, insanely caught up in the moment. Totally gun shy, not even ready for another date and yet here she was ready to share her soul and her body.

"Don't you keep me waiting, big boy." Helaine licked her lips discreetly, giving him a pretty good idea what he had to look forward to.

He didn't need to be told twice.

Off like a shot, he went to pay the bill for the untouched steaks.

It was worth the financial loss, ten times over, maybe even a hundred.

Who could put a price on the night that lay ahead of them?

Doug intended to squeeze every minute of pleasure from it...not to mention all that teasing domination.

Chapter Three

After Doug and Helaine left, Jilly's evening shifted a hundred-eighty degrees, taking on that heart pounding, panty wetting edge that only Jake could create.

Their lover's game of Master and slave was destined to be much more intense than usual, thanks to Jake's especially sadistic mood. Or maybe it was her fault—getting a little big for her britches and coming on just a little too strong with her dominant husband.

To begin with, Jake was at the sink, washing the dishes leftover from the simple meal of chili and rice she had prepared for the two of them after Doug and Helaine's departure. She was in such a good mood, hopeful that maybe the odd pairing of the banker and the waitress might yield something after all. Call it women's intuition, watching the two of them eye each other surreptitiously during her impromptu tour or maybe it was just Jake's intoxicating optimism wearing off on her.

In any case, he looked mighty sexy with his sleeves rolled up, his tight ass filling out his jeans so nicely, the muscles in his shoulders and arms working subtle magic as he scrubbed the plates.

She just couldn't resist coming up from behind, reaching around to work her hands into his front pockets. "Is that a rocket in there, baby?" she teased. "Or are you just happy to see me?"

Jake stiffened just a little. Her body tensed in response, delicious nervous anticipation, the sweet approach of unknown but all too desirable mayhem. She had done it now. What was it that made the mouse want to tease the cat, anyway? Like she didn't know full well what would happen and what kind of price she would have to pay for her tiny act of cheekiness.

Turning himself about, Jake took hold of her slender wrists, his grip like steel cuffs. "Did I give you permission to touch me, Jilly?"

Her breathing was quick and shallow. Her nipples peaked under the sundress. He had her good.

"I was just playing, baby," she rasped.

Jake raised her arms over her head. "You're not lying to me, are you? Seems to me you aren't just playing. You want something, don't you?"

Jilly knew she had one chance to come clean. "Yes, Sir, I do."

"What is the truth, girl?"

Jilly felt herself slipping into submissive mode. Consensual as this was between them, it was very, very real. "I'm horny, Sir," she confessed, knowing it was useless to preserve her pride. "I need your cock."

"I see." The flat, low tone was driving her wild. He was planning something. He intended to play out a scene...a long one. "And is my cock some toy for you to play with?"

"No, Sir," she said quickly.

"Between the two of us, who is the toy?"

"Me, Sir." Her heart was racing. She craved his hands on her body, his iron will taking her down. "I'm the toy."

He hauled her against him, body to body. "Kiss me," he ordered.

Jilly emitted a small whimper, knowing what she was in for. Rising on tiptoe, she proffered her lips, offering them for conquest. Jake took her mouth hard, tongue plundering, teeth digging, breath stealing.

By the time he released her, she was a wreck, her body confused, her mind blasted wide open.

"What are you, Jilly?"

Jilly gasped as he insolently slid his hands up her hips, raising her skirt to her waist, slipping his fingers under the waistband of her sopping, fragrant panties. "I'm...your toy, Sir."

"What kind of toy?" He dug his fingers into her naked ass, managing to find all the welts from her last whipping.

"A s-sex toy," she exclaimed.

Keeping one hand on her ass—kneading, possessive—he moved the other between her thighs. She did not need to be told to spread her legs for him. He explored at will, as if he needed to be re-familiarized with the details of her sex.

"Do you know how hard it is, Jilly, when other people are around and I want you? I see you—that body, the way you move, your mouth, your laugh. Every little thing drives me crazy. I want to be all over you, dominating you and I can't. I have to wait."

"It's so hard for me too." She shuddered as he stroked her steadily, relentlessly. Jake was so good at that. He had spoiled her, not only for any other man, but even for the self-pleasuring that used to be her mainstay while he was on the road. Even if Jake allowed her to touch herself on her own—and he didn't because he was an unapologetic tyrant over her body—she wouldn't want to anymore.

"Is that right?"

"Yes, Sir." She tried not to wriggle too much—he didn't like that. He liked her to stay nice and still and pliant when he was torturing her.

"What's so difficult about it?"

"I-I need you to be doing things to me. I want to be your slave girl, your sex toy."

"What about coming up to me like you did, touching me at will? Is that how you ought to be handling yourself?"

"No, Sir," she exclaimed vehemently, knowing that he was about to put her on the plateau of bittersweet frustration, that no man's land where orgasm was perpetually just out of reach.

By then, it would be too late. She would say and do anything – whimpering, crying, groveling for release.

He kissed her neck deceptively softly. “If you were me,” he said, putting her in the horrible position of sentencing herself. “What would you have to do right now.”

She could not hold back the words, any more than she could deprive him of her body’s responses, whatever he wanted from her.

“P-punishment,” she gasped. “I’d give punishment.”

The word was electric, a sparking, seductive energy up and down her spine. Just to utter it was to be under the spell, the submissive’s private world of giving and surrendering.

Jake again kissed her very gently on the lips. She shuddered, broken, against him. “It’s going to be a long night, baby.”

“Yes, Sir,” she acknowledged.

“Take off your dress.”

With no hesitation, she pulled the hem over her head. The obedience was too ingrained, she was his in ways no non-BDSM couple could ever understand.

Jilly let the sundress fall to the floor.

“Your sandals too,” he said.

She slipped them from her feet.

“You know how beautiful you are to me, Jilly?”

She stood before him, barefoot, in bra and panties, under inspection.

“Yes, Sir.” Jilly’s hands were at her sides. She did not obscure his view. Not now or ever.

He reached out, cupping her silk-covered breast. “I had to wait to have you, baby, while you gave your little tour to Doug and Helaine.”

So that was it. His male ego had not wanted to be put off.

“Yes, Sir,” she said humbly.

"Now you'll wait. Before we are done, you will beg and whimper for my cock."

I will do it now, she thought. Just say the word.

He found her nipple through the material of her bra. He wasn't gentle.

"I want you in bed," he commanded. "Naked."

"Yes..." She managed the word through the sudden sharp pain.

Without releasing her swollen, throbbing nub, he began once more to touch her intimately, stroking her throbbing sex. His eyes burned into hers as he brought her to the brink, working her clitoris.

It was pathetically easy how he worked her body.

"I own you, Jilly."

"Yes, Jake, you're my Master," she whispered, her voice choked with love.

"Show me."

She writhed against his hand – responsive, obedient.

"That's enough."

Jilly gasped, suddenly deprived of his hand, his delicious exploring fingers. For one brief second, she looked at him, eyes pleading.

No mercy.

"To bed, Jilly. Now."

"Yes, Master." Jilly picked up her dress and shoes, knowing he'd come to her in his time, not hers.

Until then, the seconds would pass like hours, the minutes like years.

* * * * *

Was it the wine?

Helaine didn't think so.

Alcohol had never affected her that way in her life. She had been on the verge of running away from this man and now she was in his car, waiting for him to pay the restaurant bill, ready, frantically eager to fulfill his fantasies.

Dark and wicked fantasies which her body was suddenly craving. Doug could never have just talked her into such things. It was his kiss, the intensity, the complex passion, a mix of innocence and sin. She felt like the moth before the flame. She had to touch it, had to know the heat in her bones, in her flesh.

Helaine had thought of bondage, yes, and sometimes she had imagined a lover strong enough and honest enough to trust with her sexual submission.

The fact that Doug was new to all this himself was definitely a positive factor. Fundamentally they were equal.

Doug had never tied a woman before. He had never spanked one or dominated one, either. To think he had hesitated in even telling her, like there was something wrong in a man wanting to share his deepest self with a woman. It was an honor. And it turned her on too.

Doug wasn't the only one with fantasies, after all. Helaine had been dealing with some of her own for as long as she could remember. In her case, as a potentially submissive woman, they did her no good. They were downright dangerous, actually. If a man like Chuck had ever learned she got wet thinking of a man's hand smacking her ass...well, she shuddered to think of the results.

As it was, the men she had known were content mostly to verbally abuse her and occasionally smack her around. They made love with indifference, selfishly, not dominantly. They were getting off, nothing more. She could have been any woman and often they did have other women at the same time as her.

Feeling incredibly wicked and alive, Helaine opened the passenger door and climbed into Doug's pristine car. Settling her bottom into the plush leather seat she got an idea.

She had to lift her bottom and reach under the hem of the dress. She could smell her own arousal as she pulled down her panties, wriggling out of the black satin material.

Black—now there was a good color for BDSM. Had she known subconsciously what would happen tonight? And what if anything did Jake have to do with setting this up? She had never talked to him of her sexual preferences. Had he guessed? If so, did he already know about Doug's interests too? Was that what this match-up was about—a kinky hook-up, Master to slave?

Helaine pulled down her panties and kicked them from her trim ankles. Retrieving them from the thick pile carpet on the floor, she considered where to put them to send the right message. On the top of his car antenna maybe? That would say something, all right, though she would be letting the whole world know and not just Doug.

What about over the rear view mirror? It was dark enough in the parking lot. No one would see exactly what they were except from up close.

She imagined the look on Doug's face when he got in the car and found his blind date sans underwear, wet and ready for whatever his heart desired.

Or his cock to be more precise.

She had Jake to thank for all this, whether or not the cowboy knew the details. Jake made this feel safe. Jake was the conduit, to awaken her and Doug. She would have to repay Jake for what she was pretty sure was going to be the best sex of her life.

Would Doug be okay to say goodbye to her tomorrow? Helaine was not a person to do one-night stands but this was a special situation. Nothing here was superficial but it was not going to end up in a relationship, either. Doug had to know that. They were here to heal each other. She was a firm believer people came into your life for reasons, even the bad people. Some were meant only to be with you a little while but they could have the greatest effect of all.

She hoped Doug would share her faith, her sense of magic working in the world. The way he made her laugh, made her feel comfortable him was a good omen—that was for sure.

Doug approached now, walking in front of the car. His cock was tenting his pants. She giggled. How had he avoided detection in the restaurant?

Helaine quickly took off her shoes and pulled up her dress. She greeted him with her legs apart, naked below the waist.

"Oh, man," he grumbled, not even noticing the panties or her exposed body in the dim light. "That was a close call. I had to leave one huge tip, I'll tell you."

He put the key in the ignition. Looking up, his eyes connected with her underwear. A hot chill went down her spine. Her pussy began to throb. She was dripping on the seat.

Eyes expressive and full of desire, he turned to her. She grinned slantedly. "I guess I'm at your mercy, huh?"

His gaze swept down to her bare sex. "Helaine..."

His voice was throaty. The raw desire made her body ache. She still had too many clothes on. Her nipples were tight points under her bra, her every nerve ending was on fire.

"You like what you see, baby?" she asked.

In answer to her question, he captured her lips, teasing, nibbling with his teeth. She moaned...taken.

"Tell me what to do, Doug. I want to live out one of your domination fantasies."

Doug put her hand on his crotch, a different man. "Unzip it," he ordered, his voice gentle and firm. "Take out my cock and caress it."

"Yes, Sir," she replied eagerly.

How was she falling so quickly and naturally into her role? It wasn't her identity she was surrendering, just her fear, all the uptightness and worry, the clouds of negativity that told her to always beware, to expect the worst all the time, day after day.

"That's it," he urged, lost in bliss. "Keep going."

"Yes, Sir." With infinite care, she removed his erection from his boxer shorts. It sprang forth, proud and tall, reddish purple, veins protruding from the sculpted surface.

"It's so beautiful," she said appreciatively.

Helaine ran her fingers up and down, her touch light as a feather.

"Mmm, that's good," he praised. "You want to put it in your mouth?"

"Yes, Doug, oh, yes." *More than anything.*

Doug's cock responded so well to her. She liked to think it was made for her. She entertained a little fantasy that it really was and that after tonight it would never again accept another woman's touch or mouth or pussy.

But Helaine had to keep in mind that she didn't want a permanent relationship. That kind of locking in and commitment was what her parents had done and out of their mutual unhappiness had come a living hell for the entire family. She had barely survived her childhood and as it was she was pretty badly twisted up, with no ability to navigate a straight course in life.

Bending her head, Helaine kissed the tip of his cock. There was a little drop of cum at the opening. She dabbed at it with her tongue. It was salty sweet, the essence of his manhood, the key to savoring and understanding him.

Doug moaned and reclined his seat all the way back. A soft mechanical whirl accompanied the smooth, perfect motion. Taking advantage of the extra room, Helaine applied her tongue enthusiastically from all angles—along the ridge underneath his shaft, across both sides and finally kissing along the top to the base.

Doug had such a wonderful, long erection. She could almost feel it inside her already, her body moving to accommodate it, pussy muscles relaxing and contracting, anticipating the fullness to come.

Helaine popped him inside her mouth, sliding her lips downward. She took as much of him as she could straight to the back of her throat. Grasping the base, she wrapped her hands around the still-exposed part.

"Oh, baby," he groaned. "I won't be able to hold out..."

Helaine didn't want to let him hold out. Instead, she took advantage of his momentary weakness. Since he hadn't ordered her to stop or slow down, he was going to get what he deserved—exquisite pleasure from a willing, submissive female.

Doug inhaled sharply and then groaned, releasing himself. It was such a sweet feeling, pleasing him and bringing him pure and simple bliss. Downing the semen of a good man, a self-sacrificing man, erupting to the back of her throat to be savored, obediently gulped.

He had a lot of it, burst after burst. Had he been saving it up? Not enough sex in his life, apparently. She drank him dry and then released him.

"Thank you, Doug," she kissed his cock head.

"I wanted to save myself," he said, disappointment in his voice. "I wanted to come inside you."

She ran her hand over his thigh. "There will be more chances later, don't worry."

"If I decide to give it to you," he teased, getting into the spirit of things.

"Planning on making me beg, are you?"

"You'll have to wait to find out. For now, put your hands behind your head and grip the headrest," he ordered.

Helaine felt a surge of heat as she obeyed, clenching the cold metal bars, the sensations of slavery pouring over her body. What was it that attracted her to this? To the idea of being an adored, though exploited object—a creature of pure lust—forced to obey, to feel, to come or not to come?

"Do you like doing that?" he asked. "How does it make you feel?"

"I do like it. I feel...helpless."

"That's the idea." His hand strayed between her legs.

She gasped. On sheer reflex she let go of the headrest, reaching to protect herself.

Doug gave the inside of her thigh a little pinch. It was a warning. "Keep your hands where you're told...slave girl."

Helaine felt a hot thrill as he called her his slave. In context it was right, even inevitable.

"S-sorry, *Master*." She tried the title on for size. Her skin was hot, stinging. It was only a game, but it went deep inside her.

"Don't be sorry. Just obey." She moaned as he found her clitoris. "I don't even have to ask if you enjoy that. It's written all over your gorgeous face. Better not come, though, or you will be punished."

Helaine lifted her pussy, begging his attention, his praise, his erotic control. "What punishment, Master?"

She was captivated, entranced.

"How about a nice warming for your insolent little bottom, for starters?" he said with a leer.

She groaned. He might as well have jammed her full with a huge, juicy dildo. "Oh, Master, oh god, you're driving me crazy."

"That's the idea." He paused to pinch her again. "Legs wider."

Helaine spread as far as she could. "Master, I'll do anything to be fucked."

"Yes," he agreed ominously. "You will."

With three fingers, he entered her, simulating a cock pressing deep inside her vaginal walls.

"You're certainly wet," he said.

"For you, Master."

Doug moved his hand, thrusting slowly, decisively. Helaine began to writhe on his fingers. He stopped her short of climax.

Next he put his fingers to her lips, bidding her to open her mouth. She took his fingers inside, softly sucking. She tasted her own excitement—the exotic, pungent flavor of submission.

“I want to see you masturbate,” he said. “Show me how you play with yourself.”

Helaine bit her lower lip. She had never done that in front of anyone, least of all a man she hardly knew.

“Don’t hold out on me,” he warned her, his voice thick with the imperious tones of his Master character. “Or you will get more than my hand on your ass.”

“Wh-what will you do?” She had to know what was on his mind, she had to connect.

“Use your imagination,” he declared. “There are so many possibilities—a spoon, a spatula, my belt.”

“Oh, god...” She was panting. He was taking her choices away from her and that was exactly what she wanted. “You’re incorrigible.”

“You’re my slave,” he rasped. “What did you expect?”

Helaine felt the will drain from her body. Her hand moved into place but it might as well have been his hand, his will. With tingling fingers she touched the engorged slit that shielded her nether opening. She writhed in response.

“I want to see everything,” he said, multiplying her predicament. “Turn toward me, expose yourself completely.”

“Yes, Master...I...will obey.” The words came in stabs, barely audible.

Doug started the car and headed down the dark road, his attention divided between driving and the spectacle before him—her glistening sex, illuminated by moonlight.

The lust in his eyes drove her on, breaking through the barriers of her relatively tame sex life. No man had ever really cared if she came at all, much less wanted to see how she went about making it happen.

What if he were to laugh or sneer at her? It could be some elaborate joke he was playing. Later he would tell the story, get mileage at the honky-tonk, making her life miserable — ruined reputation and all that followed.

It was so hard to be a woman sometimes. When a man was horny, when he shouted it to the world and went to do something about it, everyone praised him or at least tolerated it. Even infidelity was excused when committed by a cock. But the woman following the needs of her pussy, that always entailed twice the guilt.

“Touch me,” Helaine pleaded, unable to put it all into words.

Doug seemed to know it was validation she craved. His hand went to her cheek. “You’re so beautiful,” he declared. “I love seeing you do this.”

She exploded in response — cleansed, purified, her finger stroking her clitoris in that special way that always did the job for her, so good, so damn good. She was gushing as the orgasm racked her, setting off her synapses in rapid explosions.

She could smell her fragrant, wanton scent filling the interior of Doug’s practical, no-nonsense sedan. *Would he ever play sexual games again like this in here...with another woman?* She frowned, not wanting to think of such a possibility. For some reason it disturbed her conceiving of Doug having been with anyone before and she certainly didn’t want him with anyone else after this, not with what they were going through, all the things she was to exposing.

“Mmmm...Doug...” The first orgasm melted into a second. She rode the hot wave. Here was one of the good parts of being female, no two orgasms ever the same, as many as there were moods, enough for all the different days, all the guys, all the circumstances.

This one ranked.

It was in fact, one of the best she remembered. Not to mention being the first and only climax she had ever achieved with a man.

Doug clutched her thigh tightly. “Helaine...”

Lord, the way he said her name, as if it was some kind of prayer.

"Doug." Her head rested on his shoulder. "Thank you."

"I should be thanking you," he said. "I didn't even know."

"Didn't know what?" she murmured, interlacing their fingers, liking how they looked together, so different in size and yet so complementary.

"That it could be this way, with a man and a woman, I mean."

She giggled. "And we haven't even made it to bed yet."

Helaine was lightheaded, like she had just downed a bottle of champagne. But she hadn't and the wine wasn't a part of this either. She was totally clearheaded, more than she had been in years.

Maybe ever.

The reality of that thrilled her but it terrified her too.

Heart pounding she fought every impulse to ask him to take her back to the motel she was staying at for the night so she wouldn't have to make the long trip home after her date. Jake and Jilly had wanted her to stay with them overnight but she couldn't impose like that. As it was, she would be up at five am, on the road and back home, ready for her next shift at eleven.

But all that assumed she was going to be able to open her mouth and tell Doug she wanted to go back to her motel.

Oh, god, she thought, what about her car, back at Jake and Jilly's? She had to go back and get it. Doug would have to take her but she really did not want to face and Jake and Jilly right now.

This was confusing and more than a little difficult for one woman to handle.

And there was another problem. She had almost forgotten that she had asked Doug if she could spend the night with him. What was she thinking? Was she crazy?

"We need to pick up your car," said Doug, obviously still going full steam ahead. "I'll call Jake on my cell phone and give him some excuse for not going inside. Then we

can head over to my place. I have a beautiful view of the canyon. Wait until you see the sunrise.”

The sunrise?

As in the other side of night? Would she make it that long? Would she melt down from Doug’s affections, his loving attention? She didn’t deserve that much. It would be overload and she would pay a hell of a steep price later. She always did. That was the story of her life, the pattern begun by her daddy, always there to slam down on anything good.

See, Helaine, that’s how it goes...the cookie crumbles. Don’t cry because I’ll make it all better. Her lovers always said that but they only brought more pain, one way or the other.

Don’t cry.

Well Helaine was crying, so much so that Doug pulled off the road. He held her tightly, without a word. No one had ever held her like that and it was one more thing to be scared of.

But she couldn’t let go, not now. Talk about canyons, she was on the edge of one now – so deep it made the Grand Canyon look like a scratch in the dirt with a stick.

Chapter Four

Jilly could find no comfortable position. The sheets were erotically painful everywhere on her body. Each little brush of the satin over her nipples, across her hips, down her legs, reminded her of Jake and what she needed from him so desperately. At one point she bit into the pillow, clutching helplessly at it with her hands.

There would be no relief, though, no salvation until he came for her. This was punishment, this was training...this was Jake exercising his supreme power over his sex toy because he could.

What woman could have stood a chance? He was her noble defender, her cowboy knight in shining armor. She knew what he would do if ever anyone even thought of hurting her. And he would never leave her, not even to get a carton of milk, if she wasn't all right. He would be an incredible father too, she had no doubt.

He just also happened to be a sadistic Dominant who had found in her the perfect masochistic submissive. No extreme pain, nothing radical but lots of torment, denial and maddening little reductions in her status, temporary role-playing that took her from equal spouse to...this.

A naked wench, helpless in bed, consumed by sex, filled with nothing but thoughts of Jake's body and pleasing him and having him please her. The fact that she was forbidden to touch herself made it a thousand times harder. Just one little graze of her nipples, one tiny flick over her clit and maybe the itch would be relieved just for a second but the nipples, the clit, weren't her own.

They belonged to her husband. She belonged to her husband. Fear of punishment had little to do with it. It was a matter of conscience. All he would have to do was ask her, Jilly, did you disobey me? Her eyes would give her away and over his knee she

would go. He didn't go easy on her either, not when it came to spankings. Not where rules were concerned.

They had sat down once and come up with a list. Masochistic fool that she was, she had agreed. Some were arbitrary, just for his fun, while others had to do with safety. Being out and not calling, driving strange places after dark—those things made her husband see red.

Long lectures would follow, then his hand, hard and efficient on her ass, and then the lovemaking. Always the lovemaking.

It was the erotic, the sex that overrode everything. And that was the real reason she would never willingly disobey her man. She loved him and the unique way they lived was part of her pledge to him. She had given her body and her obedience. Period.

So here she lay, ears straining, hoping against hope to hear his footsteps in the hall, the sound of his breathing, that tiny little throat-clearing thing he did sometimes, the doorknob turning, the door creaking... But there was nothing, only silence.

How much longer?

Jilly didn't think of herself as particularly strong but Jake had told her she was. Most women, he insisted, would crack under this kind of pressure. They would have gotten up out of bed, crawled down the hall to find their man, so terribly insecure and frightened and needy.

Jilly thought that sounded pretty ridiculous and it might have just been male ego that led him to think a female would ever do such a thing.

"Would it ever do any good if I did come to you like that?" she had asked him once.

He had given her a look, pure cowboy. "What do *you* think?" he had replied, putting it right back on her.

"I think you would give me a stern lecture and a spanking and you would make sure I didn't see any sexual relief for a long, long time," she had answered without hesitation.

“Wise woman,” he had said, stroking her hair.

Oh, god, she loved Jake. He was so right for her now that he had finally gotten all the rodeo wanderlust out of his soul. Let her be his challenge. She was much more interesting and difficult to conquer, in her opinion, than any bull he could ever ride.

Difficult out of the bedroom, that is. Inside its confines or in any realm he made sexual, Jilly was putty in his hands, a born slave. She would give him anything, do anything and submit to anything. The kind of trust that required boggled her mind. If that wasn't love, she didn't know what was.

It made her heart want to explode with joy sometimes. Other times, it frightened her silly, like one of those amusement park rides you dread but can never get enough of.

She pictured herself, cramped tightly in one of those little cars, seat-belted in, whooshing over the edge of the platform, down the tracks, into a bottomless valley, screaming people all around her, laughing, dissolving.

She would try to touch her own body but it wasn't there. She wouldn't hear or see or feel a thing. Still, she would know she wasn't alone. He would be beside her in the car, telling her everything would be fine. Like the magic storybook cat, everything gone but her smile, Jilly began to purr...

“Baby?”

Jilly started. Jake's hand was on her shoulder for real. Had she managed to fall asleep or had she fallen into some other state of unconsciousness?

“Jake.”

He climbed into bed behind her, spooning her. He was naked in all his glory. She shuddered at the contact, unable to restrain herself. “Baby, make love to me...take me...”

Jake chuckled, rolling her onto her back. He covered her cheeks with kisses. "Damn it, woman, how am I supposed to be tough on you when you are so adorable? A fine Master I make."

"You're my Master," she sighed as he entered her, his thick cock sheathing itself within her soft, wet heat. "And that is good enough for me."

Jake's cock throbbed inside her. How well she knew it, every little ridge, every contour and every vein, how it heated just before orgasm, how long it took to get soft afterward and exactly how much time it took to get him hard again.

"Jilly, let's make a baby."

Her heart skipped a beat. It was what her heart dreamed of but they had talked about waiting—they had a three-year plan. "But...I'm on the Pill," she said, dodging the main issue.

"I know, Jilly. Obviously you would have to stop taking it."

"I-I don't know if we're ready."

He moved inside her, shifting in that way that always drove her crazy. "We are ready, honey. We need to do this. I promise it won't interfere with anything. You will get your nursing license, the diner will be fine."

She writhed beneath him. "This is hardly the time," she said, breathless, "to make any serious decisions."

"Sure it is. How do you think babies are made? Tell me our love doesn't need that final expression. I want the world to know. I want to have a little boy or girl of yours to love like I do you."

Talk about finding the right words to say.

"Oh, Jake..." Her eyes misted over. "You make me the happiest woman in the world."

"We'll be the happiest parents," he said, his face breaking into a perfect cowboy grin.

"S-sweetheart," she stammered, "I need to...come..."

"Not yet," he said, returning to the role of sadistic Master. "I want you on top of me."

Jake withdrew and lay down in her stead. He interlaced his fingers behind his head. "Come on, sexy mama. Show me how it's done."

Jilly straddled him, lowering herself tenderly, hungrily, more than a little cautious on account of the volatile state she was in. One false move and she would explode all over him.

"That's it, baby." He gave an approving nod as she slid herself over his shaft, achieving full impalement.

"Oh, Jake," she marveled, reveling in the feeling of fullness. "You are such a handsome, sexy son of a bitch."

He puffed out his well-honed chest. "That's Master Son of a Bitch to you."

Jilly grasped her breasts, molding, massaging. She began to rock back and forth. "You don't know how bad you make me need this, how bad you make me need you."

He took hold of her waist, helping her to move in the way he liked best. "It's in my best interest to keep you hungry for it. That way you won't kick me out for any of the newer models."

She laughed. "There's no replacing you. The mold got broken."

"There were more," he quipped. "The rest got recalled."

"But not you..."

"Nah, someone had to stick around and give you grief."

She put her hands, palm down, on his pectorals. "I'm glad you did, honey, I wouldn't want to try to live without you ever again."

"Don't even think of trying, cowgirl. I have lifetime rights."

Jilly moaned as he lifted her one final time and then let her drop. The orgasm tore through her, slow motion, a million tiny fireworks up and down her spine, inside every nerve ending, a brief millisecond of eternity followed by inevitable meltdown.

She screamed, bucking on top of him. He grunted underneath, sinews in his neck exposed as he practically levitated. At one point, she went into a squatting position over his pelvis, pumping up and down, sucking inside herself the torrents of semen ejecting from his red-hot cock.

He took hold of her nipples, twisting them, pushing her into another level. She squeezed him with her pussy muscles, trying to keep him hard, trying to make it last.

Jake never did lose his erection. Even after his orgasm was done, he kept at her, flipping her back over, no refraction time at all as he continued the pace—long, steady, measurable thrusts, the two of them bathed in sweat.

They were going to make a baby. She would go off the Pill and it would happen. There was no doubt their child would come—bright, energetic, a definite handful—and Jake would love it, male or female. He was that kind of man, that kind of husband and would be that kind of father.

She held on to him so tightly, loving him with every part of her body. He might own her but she was still free to respond, to give him the gift of a sexy, appreciative female.

On and on it went, until they were too tired to move, too tired to think and too tired to sleep.

They stayed up until dawn, talking and planning.

* * * * *

Doug had never had to think so fast in his life. He was going on instinct, no precedent, no rule book, just a deep, gut feeling of what Helaine needed right now.

And nothing mattered to him more than helping this tearful, shaking woman clinging to him for dear life in the front seat of his car.

"Sweetheart, I'm going to take you back to my house. Nothing's going to happen. You'll sleep in the guest room, you'll rest easy, you won't think about anything—not your car, not tomorrow and not the past either. At sunrise, I will wake you and you'll see what I mean. It's good out there...it's good at my place, good for what ails you. Okay?"

Doug wasn't sure where all the words were coming from, how he could read so sharply what was in her mind. But he knew he was right.

She sniffed, raising her head from his chest. The jacket he had borrowed from Jake was soaked with her tears and the shirt too. She was trying to say something, her eyes puffy and bloodshot. How long had she been crying? How long had he been holding her?

It felt like his whole life.

"Not...not alone." she breathed.

"What, Helaine?" He brushed back damp strands of chestnut hair from her pretty face. "What do you mean, not alone?"

"Can't...sleep alone." She took a deep breath and embraced him again. "I need to sleep...next to you."

"All right, darling." He stroked her hair. "We will sleep in my bed. You'll be safe. You'll be safe with me."

Doug didn't know what gave him the right to say that. How could he guarantee Helaine's safety when he didn't even know what demons she was fighting?

Jake should have told him more. Then again, maybe it was best not to know.

They drove the rest of the way in silence. Helaine was buckled back in, staring blankly out the window. He couldn't believe this was the same woman who had talked his ear off and then turned into such a sexual dynamo. But it was all right, Doug didn't expect her to be the life of the party, not perfect...just real.

He wanted to be there for her ups and her downs.

He had certainly gotten greedy where she was concerned, hadn't he? One night, not even a whole night and he wanted it all and he really couldn't imagine sharing any of this—any of her—with anyone else right now, whatever the complications, wherever they might lead.

* * * * *

Helaine had no choice. Doug wouldn't let her walk by herself into the house. Overriding her weak protests, he scooped her into his arms, cradling her. She clung to him, reveling in his strength, marveling in this body that could carry her over the crushed stones, past the pair of sandstone lions and through the rounded Spanish mission-style door.

Doug's house had a lovely courtyard with wildflowers and a whole array of unusual cacti. She wished she was more with it to appreciate the hard work, the genuine thoughtfulness in the arrangements.

Such a shame he lives alone, she thought. *A place like this, a man like this, deserves a partner.* "Your home is so beautiful," she murmured.

"It's not really worthy of you," he dismissed.

Helaine couldn't help but smile. He sounded like her with his patent refusal to take credit for anything. "It's plenty worthy," she said. "There's not a woman on the planet who wouldn't be blessed to come here."

Doug was amazed at her enthusiasm. "Helaine, you have no idea what a breath of fresh air you are."

"I want to see the kitchen," she decided. Doug carried her across the threshold. The room was bright, with colorfully tiled floors, papered walls depicting a striped Native American pattern and a wonderful round breakfast island—blue slate circled by hanging pots and woks of gleaming silver. She shivered deliciously, seeing the row of hanging spatulas and spoons. "I bet you like those," she teased.

"Don't know what you're talking about..." He cleared his throat. "Want to see the rest of the house?" He changed the subject.

"No," she said, a little of her energy coming back to her. "I want to go to bed."

"You don't have to ask twice."

He took her directly to his bedroom. It was a clean, wide-open space with a hardwood floor and white walls. The bed was a four poster, each post composed of a square column of wood, probably oak. The comforter was a bold pattern of hunter green and burgundy. The sheets and pillows matched as did the upholstered wooden chair in the corner, next to the plain wood dresser.

She could smell fresh pine and clean soap. It smelled of a man, it smelled of Doug. Holding her up with one arm, he pulled down the comforter and top sheet with the other. The sheets were fresh and clean.

She didn't want him to let go of her. She kept both arms around his neck. Suggestively, she began to nibble at his earlobe.

"Sweetie, you need to get some sleep."

She kissed at his lips, inviting. "Later..."

"Baby? Are you sure?" He was breathing quickly, letting her know he was reaching the point of no return.

Her pussy liquefied all over again, thinking of this man, powerful enough to overwhelm her with his desires but utterly scrupulous in gauging her will.

"I want it. I want you to take me."

Doug nodded. She released him and he began to tear at his clothing. He didn't say another word as he peeled off the cowboy suit item by item. She scrambled to keep up, pulling off her clothes. She still had her bra on when he came to her, naked, hard as a rock.

"Put your hands down," he commanded. His voice was gravelly and full of desire.

Helaine obeyed as he reached behind her.

“Oh, Doug, yes,” she exclaimed.

He nearly tore the bra open, so eager was he to work the clasps.

“Oh, Doug, oh my fucking stars...”

There was no holding them back. It was all Doug could do to position her legs apart in the middle of the bed for lightning fast penetration. She took his cock in one thrust, her sex so open and wet it might as well have been composed of melting butter.

He groaned as he sank to the hilt. His hands moved immediately to her wrists, pinning them over her head.

“Fuck me,” she urged, ensuring her own decimation. “Fuck me like you’ve never fucked a woman before.”

Doug lifted his strong body—tanned and sculpted, incredibly fit and fine for a banker. He must surely work out.

Withdrawing all the way to the tip of his cock, he followed through on his promise from before, making her beg. “What if I don’t want to fuck you, Helaine? I can hold out longer than you, you know.”

She lifted her pelvis, trying to circumvent his domination.

Doug deprived her completely, laying his hip alongside hers, his cock burning like fire against her. “Maybe I’ll go masturbate instead. I still have your picture.”

“Don’t be like that.” She gritted her teeth, trying to rouse her will. “You’re cheating us both. This isn’t the time.”

“It is if I say so. How about if I tie you down, Helaine? I’ll tease you until dawn and you’ll never get to come at all.”

He was already on one knee, getting off the bed. Clearly he held all the cards. “No, Doug, don’t. I’m sorry, I’ll be good.”

Doug examined her, considering. “Turn over on all fours.”

Helaine did as she was told. “What are you going to do to me?”

His hand connected with her ass, letting her know where things stood between them. "Whatever I want to, slave girl."

"Yes," she quickly concurred. "Yes, Sir."

"You want to come?" He toyed with her clit. "You want my cock? Earn it."

"Yes, Sir." She pushed out her ass. "I'm ready."

He spanked her again, harder. "You don't even know what is coming next. How can you be ready?"

It was true, she hadn't a clue. Gripping the bed sheet with her fingernails she let the realization pour over her. She was possessed, under domination. And all of this was her choice.

Was it too late to ask to go to the guest room by herself?

Her pussy would kill her if she quit now, though. And the rest of her body too. After she had gone this far, what was a little more groveling and suffering for a good cause?

"I'm ready to learn," she said bravely.

"You and me both, slave girl."

Helaine sighed. They were in this together, making something real that had lived in both their hearts. *It's all natural, an inevitable chemistry*, she wanted to tell him. *My ass has been waiting for you, my lips, my throbbing pussy...*

"Do it," she moaned. "Don't hold back."

He thwacked her—hot and punishing. She could feel the red swelling, the raw heat.

Doug paused to admire his work. "You look so hot like that, baby."

"What does it look like? Describe it, please, Master?"

"Round red patches, like tattoos," he said. "It makes me want to do it more. It makes me want to fuck you."

"Yes," she hissed. "Do it. Whatever you want, Master."

He rubbed her sore bottom and then fingered her ripe pussy. She could feel the liquids oozing. Abruptly he smacked her, only to return to caressing. Over and over, repeating the pattern—pleasure, pain, pain pleasure. Helaine moaned. She was shaking and shuddering, all the symptoms of orgasm but no release, nothing but the pressure ever building until she both feared and craved the inevitable meltdown.

“Puh-please,” she wailed. Please what? Did she even know what she wanted? More, less, something in between? *Fuck me, Master, spank me, pound your cock into me, flatten me to the mattress until I can’t breathe, can’t think, can’t live without you.*

Doug took mercy on her now or maybe he was just too close to the edge himself. Helaine wept as his cock slid into her. She was a thousand times more vibrant and alive than before. She accepted his invasion with infinite gratefulness, memorizing every little contour, every bit of the fuck—each thrust all the way in and back out, then almost all the way but not quite.

She lost track of reality.

Was he going fast, slow? She couldn’t tell.

“N-need to...” She couldn’t get it all out. The orgasm was hammering in her ears with her blood. Was she in the present or on the verge of future—her eternal reality, overtaking her soul, plunging her into hot, murky depths of female orgasm.

“Yes, that’s it, my sweet,” he groaned, the consummate beast enjoying his prey. “Come, come for your Master.”

They climaxed together. The world stopped, everything bathed in orgasmic silence, close as two could ever be. No couple had ever fucked like this, none ever could—she knew it was true. So what if everyone else felt the same with every coupling? They were right. Bloody, absolutely, mind-blowingly right.

Doug collapsed on top of Helaine. She reached for him, entangling fingers, her leg bending at the knee to catch his ankle with her foot.

“Mmm,” she murmured, sliding obediently half over so he could take the whole of her breast in his hand.

"Was I good, Master?"

"Yes." He kissed the back of her neck. "You were a good girl, you pleased Master very much."

"Tie me?" she said. "Please, tie me?"

"Just a moment," he murmured. "I'll get some rope."

She turned to her side, waiting, her head on his pillow, her fluids of seduction and surrender still dripping onto his bed, mixed with the come he'd given her, the hot, branding seed.

At one point the closet door opened, a few moments later it closed. Her heart raced.

She gasped as he returned, placing his hand unexpectedly on her ass. Her body tingled to attention.

"Helaine?"

"Yes...Master?"

"Lie on your back. Place your wrists overhead, crossed," he said.

She did so gracefully, delicately. He bound them lovingly, decisively with a necktie. She smiled – proud, in awe, captive to his power.

"May I lick your cock clean?"

He knelt on the bed beside her. She turned her head and began to lick, her motives quite ulterior.

"Wench," he growled as she restored his shaft to full length in record time.

"Yes, Master." She tried not to smirk.

"You'll pay for that." His tone was playful enough but she shivered nonetheless. Even in play, she was slave and he was Master.

"On your belly," he ordered.

Helaine rolled over, exposing her freshly spanked bottom. She kept her hands overhead as ordered, palms down, in total prostration. He tickled her back, causing her to tense up.

"Ever been fucked in the ass?"

She responded mentally to his words, the sharp crudity of the statement in direct contrast to his gentle nature. She was at once allured and repulsed.

"Yes, Master," she said.

"Did you enjoy it?"

"No, Master." She knew there would be no lying, not to him, not now.

He touched her shoulder. "We don't have to do it, then."

"No." She was very firm on that. "The other man who did it, he didn't care about me. It will be different with you."

"Yes," he said, his word as good as gold. "It will."

Doug retrieved some lubricant from the bathroom. Very gently, he rubbed it into her opening. Helaine moaned from the contact. She couldn't help but move her body in response.

Doug was clearly pleased, which in turn doubled her pleasure.

"That's my girl," he encouraged. "Open your ass for Master. You know how bad I want to be inside you. Relax and enjoy it—this is for both of us. It will be so beautiful. And then afterward, Master will have a special treat for you."

His voice had just the right edge, delicious and tingling. She marveled at how good he was at that. She had no experience with a Master but she couldn't imagine anyone doing it better. He knew just what to say, just what to do, as if he'd done it a million times before.

"Yes." She writhed against the bed as his finger moved inside her hole with the cool, slippery lubricant. "I need it. Take me. Take me hard."

"Oh, yes, Master is going to take you hard," he confirmed. "You will give it up to me."

"I will," she promised. "I'll do it for you. Just show me what you want."

"We'll show each other," Doug said, introducing once more a note of equality to their roles. Certainly there was give and take and to be sure they needed each other. What was a Master without his devoted, willing slave and what use was it to call one's self slave if no Master was there to claim and to nurture?

"I'm putting the lubricant on my cock, now. It's shiny all over. It's so hard and hot. Can you picture it? It's just perfect for fucking you."

"Oh, I love it when you talk like that. Fuck me, Doug...Master."

Doug chuckled. "You'll get no argument from me."

His hands went to her waist, clamping like a vise, retaining and binding her. His fingers were warm and dry, freshly wiped, she assumed on some towel or other. The man thought of everything, considerate to a T.

"You tell me if it gets to be too much," he said with an authority she couldn't deny. "Say stop and I will. Don't endure anything just for me. I'll spank you silly if I find out later you took more pain than you should have."

Helaine couldn't resist pointing out the contradiction. "So you are threatening to cause me pain in order to make sure I don't cause myself pain?"

"You know what I mean," he said, lining up his cock between her butt cheeks. "You little wench."

"Yes, Sir." She wiggled her ass, enticing him, inviting his penetration.

"You know," he pressed inside her just a tiny bit. "You are mighty cheeky for a submissive female."

"Tell me you don't like it," she challenged.

"I don't like it," he said, not very convincingly.

Doug managed to get the last word in, unless you counted her sudden groan of pleasure as he pushed his cock inside her. He threw her for a loop, massaging her clitoris at the same time as he was possessing her ass.

“Oh...wow...” She couldn’t say much else. She did manage to push herself against him, asking for more.

He gave it to her, impaling her slowly, steadying her. The pressure in her anus had its effects elsewhere. She felt an invisible fullness in her pussy, combined with a mysterious aching emptiness, as if a ghost cock were claiming, teasing mocking her. He was a natural. And the way he worked her clit, he was definitely not a novice in that department. Either that or he had some incredible instinct for controlling her body. Helaine found that possibility more than a little exciting and a bit unnerving too.

“How are you feeling? Is it comfortable?”

“That would be an understatement,” she answered, relishing the man’s powerful attentions to her fevered body.

“Good girl.” He pushed inside another inch or maybe it was a foot. His cock was her whole world—his finger too, ruling her, making and breaking her with every passing second. She panted obediently, opening like a good girl, a naked slave, loved or at least appreciated.

Love—what had made her bring up that loaded word?

Strange things were definitely in the air tonight.

Doug pushed himself deeper and then pulled back. He thrust into her again. In a few moments he had a rhythm going—in and out, commanding, conquering. He was good, all right. She could definitely get hooked on this kind of treatment. If he were ever her man, she would not let him go for anything.

Emphasis on *if*.

Imagine being with a man like that all the time. It couldn’t last. Could it? How would he keep up, one perfect session after another? She wouldn’t be able to keep up with him—she would let him down.

Doug grabbed her breasts now, using one hand to work them both—massaging, kneading, back and forth, one after the other, creating the counter pressures to balance

what was happening below. Her entire lower half was throbbing, building to some kind of explosion. She really didn't know what would be left of her. It was uncharted territory. Had any woman ever been there? She felt like the Eve of Submission, in the hands of a kinky Adam. Or was he the snake?

He had a snake, all right and he was working her good—moving fast and furious. She would never have thought she could take it like this, craving more. The one other time she had given in to anal sex had hurt so bad. It had been Chuck and he had been drunk and she'd just prayed he would get off quickly. Naturally he had taken his time, inconsiderate to the last.

"Helaine..." Doug was moaning her name, making it sound so special.

Perish the thought. Her—special?

She shuddered into orgasm, his finger working her clit. He climaxed at the same time, shooting his seed into her ass. Such a naughty thing to do, fucking a woman that way. His energy blasted into her, his warmth, his soul. Hell, yes, that was what she needed.

What next? Could that be topped?

Doug withdrew from her tender opening.

"Come on, we have things to do." He gave her ass a little love tap to rouse her.

Helaine was drained, lost in some other world. It was a good place, comforting and protected and she wanted to stay there.

"I want to sleep," she murmured. "Aren't you tired?"

"No. I am just getting started." He took her hands, still bound and helped her to her feet.

"I can't walk."

"I will help you." Doug let her lean against him as they walked to the bathroom. She felt deliciously weak and cared for, treasured, totally dependant and sweetly pampered.

"Stand here," he ordered as he put her in the shower, positioning her almost against the back wall. "It will be warm in a second."

He positioned himself in front of her, so the water would hit him first. Conscientious on his part but she gave him grief anyway.

"You're mean, making me take a shower."

"You'll live." He undid the tie, releasing her hands. Then he ushered her forward under the steaming spray. It did feel good, easing her muscles, making her skin sing out in memory of all the pleasure from the evening. Of course there had been pain too.

"What exactly did you do to me?" She felt her ass. It was hot to the touch. She knew what he'd done, then again she didn't.

He had done things to her brain, not just her body.

"Nothing you didn't ask for. Stand still. Put your hands on top of your head."

"If you're going to make me bend over for the soap. You can forget it, buster."

He grinned. "Not exactly."

With that Doug got down on one knee in front of her. Now what?

Holding her waist, putting her in place against him, he put his lips against her thrumming sex. She gasped as he kissed her trembling labia. The sensation thrilled and embarrassed her. Not one man had gone down on her, ever. Her lovers had always made it seem too much of a chore, something unpleasant.

"Doug, don't."

"Hush." He reached behind, smacking her wet ass.

She squealed, trapped.

"Hold still, or you will get more."

Helaine obeyed.

His tongue slid up and down along the ridges of her sex, teasing everywhere he touched. She dripped for him, opening sweetly, tenderly.

“Mmmmm...” she moaned, having been put immediately back into that place of sexual bliss from a few minutes ago.

His tongue got bolder, working inside her like a miniature cock. When he got to her clit, she nearly leaped from her skin. She danced a little on both feet until he stilled her with more slaps to her ass.

Damn it, she had to take it, like or not.

Okay, so she definitely liked it. It was just that sex should be about the man, at least in part, if not totally. What was Doug getting out of this?

Doug cupped his hands on her ass cheeks and drew her close. His entire face was pressed tightly against her. He was breathing her, inhaling, licking and giving.

She came for him, she came for herself—a roaring waterfall that blended with the cascading waters from above, a pouring rain to kiss her body, every inch of her flesh, inside and out.

The waters washed her away and then they brought her back.

“Oh, Doug, oh, baby.” She sighed in gratitude, thinking just how many things a woman would need to do to make up for that. *Blow jobs delivered during the next ten or so sporting events of his choice? Serve beer and nachos to his friends, dressed like his favorite pro football cheerleader for a night?*

She was still purring and thanking him as he cleaned her, soaping her body, working the lather over every part of her skin, refusing to let her help, refusing to let her touch.

Even without help, though, he managed to get hard again.

They fucked right in the shower, her back to the wall, Doug holding her up, Helaine’s ankles locked behind his ass. She didn’t want to come but she couldn’t help it, what with his mouth devouring her breasts. She clung so tightly it was like they were one person, half lean, masculine muscle and half yielding, feminine curves.

Sometime later—much later—they took a real shower. By the time they got out, sleep was a moot point. The light was coming, the dawn he had promised her was here, now.

Chapter Five

Doug held Helaine's hand. He was seeing everything through her eyes, as if for the first time. The brilliant colors, the first shooting rays of sunlight across the blue-black expanse, the fading, soon to be extinguished night just above the desert floor.

"It's indescribable," she whispered.

"Yes, isn't it?"

Not that any of it could compare to the beauty of her face.

She turned to him, her eyebrow raised. "How would you know? You're not even looking."

"I see it...in you."

"Please." She rolled her eyes. "You are so corny sometimes."

He gave her posterior a pinch. She was wearing one of his old dress shirts and nothing else. "That's 'please, Master' to you."

"Fine." She had mischief written all over her face. "You are so corny, *Master*."

"Do I detect a note of sarcasm in there?"

"Me?" She feigned shock. "Not at all."

"Uh-huh. If I were you," he recommended, "I would give your Master a kiss right now. Very heartfelt."

Helaine considered the matter. "Maybe, then again, maybe not."

She was off like a shot, padding on bare feet from the patio back into the kitchen. He grabbed hold of her from behind, just past the breakfast island, arm around her waist.

"Let me go," she squealed as he lifted her bodily.

"Let you go? No, I think I would rather put you over the counter and try out one of those spatulas on you."

"No!" She was all smiles, even as she managed to squirm free, thanks to a strategic grab to his exposed testicles.

"Hey! Watch that!"

"Sorry," said Helaine. "Did I hurt them bad?" She knelt down, kissing them.

He groaned, feeling himself stir. How many erections would this make for the night?

"Never mind, let's go back to bed."

"No, not yet." She had real determination in her voice and she was not getting up. "Let me do this for you."

"But you'll be uncomfortable. The tile will be hard on your knees."

"I don't care. I want it that way. And I want your hand on me, like this."

She guided his fingers to the top of her head. "Make a fist in my hair," she urged. "Guide me, use my mouth, Doug. Fuck my mouth, Master."

Doug's cock swelled impatiently. There was no refusing. He took hold of Helaine's beautiful tresses, freshly washed, still damp. He had to admit, this release would feel good—just using his woman—and she certainly seemed eager.

"Yes," he said feeding her his pulsing, turgid shaft. "That's it, take it for me."

She sucked him in with an energy just short of desperation, like it was to be her final taste of his cock, his companionship. But why act like it was the end, when it was only the beginning?

No time to think. He was past that. Feverishly pumping, he pursued his climax, his buttocks moving in and out, just deep enough for his masterful pleasure, not too deep to cause her real discomfort. He kept his grip precise too, savoring the feel of her hair but not pressuring her scalp.

It was a damn near perfect orgasm—a thick, hot shoot between warm female cheeks, her tongue working him, sliding along the ridge underneath. Oh, yes, he could feel this one all the way down to his toes.

He closed his eyes, letting it all come out. Would he ever get hard again? It felt like he had drained every drop from himself.

Doug smiled. He would surely get hard again if Helaine was around. In fact, it seemed to be his normal state in her presence.

He released her hair, freed her mouth and helped her to her feet.

“Does that about fit the bill?” she asked.

“And then some.” He held her tightly. “Helaine, you are so amazing. I can’t even believe you exist. I had just about given up on finding someone...”

He could sense her tension. Her expression became instantly unreadable. “I am going to need to get going, Doug.”

“Oh?”

“I have work. We don’t all have banker’s hours.”

“Right, Saturday is a big day in your business. I wasn’t thinking.” He was trying to keep the disappointment from his voice.

“I had such a great time.” She quickly kissed him on the mouth, a definite cool down by a couple of hundred degrees from what she had been giving him up to now.

“When will I see you again?” he asked, smelling rejection in the air.

“Oh, we’ll make time. I will see when I can get another day off. The new owner’s working us pretty hard.”

“I can come and see you any time, any night.”

“I’ll call you. It will be easier that way.”

Easier, how? he wanted to ask. If you were looking to blow someone off, maybe.

“Helaine, am I picking up something here? Has something changed?”

"No." Her smile was reserved, not at all the Helaine he had come to know. "Things are fine. I am just stressed about work. I have things on my mind."

He followed her as she walked from the kitchen to retrieve her clothes.

"Anything I can help with?"

She whirled on him, a not so happy look on her face. "Look, Doug, I know you mean well and you are like this super supportive dream guy but not everything can be fixed with the snap of your fingers. Some things are just broken and that's that."

He lowered his brow, confused. "What are you trying to say, Helaine? I feel like we're having two different conversations."

"Well then I guess you're not listening to me very well are you? Maybe you're not the perfect sensitive male, after all."

He frowned. "I don't know where this is coming from but I don't scare off that easily. I know there are things you're dealing with—"

"You don't know shit, Doug." She cut him to the quick. "And Jake doesn't either. I knew this date was a bad idea. He should have let things be and you—you should have turned it down, if you were really a gentleman."

"Why would I do that? Why can't I go out with a nice, attractive woman if I want?" He was starting to lose his cool. "Hasn't the world finished kicking my heart around yet?"

She snorted in contempt. "Boohoo, Douglas. Such a rough life you lead. Give me a fucking break, why don't you?"

Doug frowned heavily. "I don't like this morning side of you. You need coffee or something?"

"No. I need to fucking go home. What is so hard to understand about that?"

"And all this swearing, it doesn't suit you, either, Helaine."

She shook out her hair, the gesture meant in defiance but only serving to enflame his blood. "So why don't you take me over your knee, you egotistical, controlling bastard."

Doug straightened himself like a soldier. "No matter what you say, you can't ruin the memories I have of our time together or the way I feel about you."

"Oh, yeah?" Fire flashed from her eyes, emerald beams that would slice and dice if they could. "Well they are my memories too and I am taking my half back, which leaves you with just one more pathetic night of mental and physical masturbation."

"You don't mean any of this."

"Don't tell me what I mean. You don't own me."

"Helaine..." He made one final appeal. "You will regret this."

"Regret is the story of my life," she hissed. "Now, are you going to call me a cab to take me to Jake's to get my car or do I have to walk?"

"I will drive you," he said, exercising his last bit of authority over her. "And I will not take no for an answer."

"Fine," she spat. "I couldn't care less. But you don't talk to me and you don't look at me, got it?"

"I got it," he assured. "And trust me I have no problems on that score."

Actually, he didn't have a damn thing at all, no girl, no happy ending and not a single clue as to what had gone wrong.

Had he done anything wrong? Did he ever? It was a curse, that's all. He needed to stop falling in love. That was his problem. Because any woman he wanted would never want him.

"I will be in the car," he said, taking the keys off the counter.

"Did you forget something?"

He turned back to face her. He was already at the kitchen doorway. "If you expect me to plead with you or drag this out any longer, I'm sorry but I'm not up for it."

She regarded him, her face emotionless. "Actually," she said. "I was wondering if you were going to put clothes on or drive me to Jake and Jilly's naked."

He looked down at his unclothed body, frowning. Yep, he was definitely losing it, if he hadn't already.

* * * * *

She had done it now. Oh, man this was a tough one.

Driving down the road in her clunker, still tingling all over, throbbing between her legs, horny, all the while trying to stay mad at Doug.

Seriously, how could she be angry with a guy like that? The sight of him, standing there back in his kitchen a little while ago, stark naked, holding a set of car keys just made her smile, no matter how hard she tried.

Helaine was willing to bet nobody else got to see that passionate, silly side of him either. To everyone else, he was likely the efficient, straight-laced banker but she prided herself on being able to totally discombobulate him. It made her laugh. He was capable of so much emotion. He would get annoyed, he would spank her, he would growl, he would share his dreams, he would look at her all goofy as they stood on the patio watching the sun rise over his beautiful little piece of earth.

Now why did he have to go and do that? They had enjoyed a fun night of sex they would both remember. They didn't need to be mooning over each other like teenagers. She was never going to be a banker's wife. She wasn't going to make it as anyone's wife. Guys knew that—they sniffed her out, the users and losers. Clean out her bank account, empty her heart, leave her bruised, that's what men did to the likes of Helaine.

Doug would only get dragged down. She was bad luck, nothing to show for her life. Just one good friend, Jake...and now Jilly. That was a lot, sure but she couldn't marry them.

Luckily neither of them was outside when Doug dropped her off to get her car.

She'd managed to say thank you to Doug, it wasn't as if he didn't deserve that and much more. He had seemed surprised and perplexed as she'd poked her head through the window.

"I had a nice time," she'd said woodenly.

"Me too," he had answered.

She had taken off before he could work on her with those eyes—puppy dog eyes mixed with wolf and oh, what a combination. He had worked her over good, left her wrung out, totally fucked out, cleaned out and freaked out.

What was wrong with him, anyway? Why was he trying to make her into some kind of role-playing princess? She was a bar waitress. People looked down on her and she took what she could get in life. She wasn't in his league. Didn't he see that?

Not to worry. At this point he would write her off as the psycho bitch of the century. *Thank you. I had a nice time.*

What a fine thing to say after ripping a man's head off for no good reason, attacking him simply because he was being nice and kind. She owed a big-time apology to Jake. What an embarrassment. He wouldn't even want to be her friend anymore.

Could her life possibly get more pitiful?

Sure it could, she could fall for the next Chuck. He was out there, around the next fucking corner, waiting.

Whoops, she'd just said fuck again. Doug didn't like that. He liked well-behaved ladies who said phooey or whatever passed for fuck in polite circles.

Helaine pulled up the driveway of the phooey duplex she rented from the phooey landlord and got out of the phooey car, slamming the phooey door. Time to get ready for phooey work, phooey boss—all of it par for the course in her phooeyed up life.

"Honey child," called out her neighbor Antony. "How was the blind date with Mr. Yummy Bank Boy?"

Helaine glowered. She had forgotten that she'd told Antony about Doug. Worse still, she had shown him his picture. Antony had already told her he would happily take the six-foot hunk off her hands if she didn't want him.

"Can't talk. I'm going to be late for work."

He followed her in the front door. She got no privacy, not from him or his lover Miguel, both of whom shared the other half of the duplex. Helaine didn't mind, they were good guys, a lot of laughs and they always had hellacious hair tips.

"Oh, no Miss Thing," he pronounced. "You don't get off that easy. I want details, x-rated, if you please."

"We aren't seeing each other again, let's leave it at that." Helaine tossed her keys on the counter and opened the refrigerator. Pathetic. She had two apples and a half carton of spoiled milk. She might as well be a guy.

Antony plopped on the couch, crossing his thin legs, fashionably covered in a pair of white trousers. He had two jobs – bartender at the Jolly Bill and part-time usher at an art theater.

You wouldn't see any of those things in the town Doug lived in, she thought. Not the gay bar, not the theater and certainly not Antony. What a difference a few miles and a larger population could make.

"Okay, let's reason this out. No second date. What does that mean? He certainly must have asked you because you are, pardon the expression, smokin' hot. That means you turned him down. Why would our Helaine do that? Because the man's a jerk? Not likely, sad to say. How about because he's *not* a jerk? Ding! We have a winner."

"Antony, you don't know as much as you think you do," she said as she mixed up some instant oatmeal with water.

"I know the female mind. I have one, remember? Face it, girlfriend, you think he's too good for you, don't you?"

"He's just too different. He...he has this house, and you can see the sunrise and there's this kitchen and his car, oh my god, it is all leather inside and every time I turned around he was like 'Helaine, are you okay? Helaine, can I do anything for you?'"

Antony put his hands to his heart with great drama. "Oh, child, he sounds like the devil incarnate, how *did* you survive?"

Helaine tossed a dishtowel at him. It fell far short. "You're supposed to be on my side!"

"How can I? Even you aren't on your side."

Helaine rolled her eyes. "Why couldn't I just be a nun or something?"

"Because you like wearing tight shorts and having beer spilled on you too much?"

"Yes, I'm sure that's it."

"Seriously, Helaine, does this guy scare you that much?"

She settled down beside him with her oatmeal. "I'm not sure if I'm more scared he will break my heart...or that he won't. I mean, things have to balance out, good and bad, and if this guy kept on being nice, you know how much I would owe the universe after a while? My descendants would be cursed for like ten generations."

"How was the sex?"

"Best damn orgasms I ever had," she admitted reluctantly.

He eyed her. "Did you say you had orgasms? As in more than one?"

"Yes," she grumbled. "And the man was actually in the room at the time too, for a change."

"That's a first."

"Tell me about it."

"You have to call him back," Antony decided.

"I don't have his number."

"Oh how sad. One day maybe they will invent something to look it up—a phone book, the Internet. Won't the future be grand?"

Helaine eyed him. "If I wanted this much sarcasm I would go to work early and deal with Mr. Loud Mouth."

"Ah, yes." Antony sighed. "The inimitable Mr. Louderman."

"Yes, like I said, Loud Mouth."

"If you hate this new owner so bad, why don't you just quit?" he said.

"It would be just as bad somewhere else," she said firmly.

"Good grief, child. You certainly do expect the worst, don't you? It's a wonder you get up in the morning at all."

"I would stay in bed but the roof would probably fall on me."

Antony chuckled. "On that pathetic note, Miss Diva, I must bid you *adieu*."

"You sure you don't want some oatmeal?"

"I'll pass, thank you." He waved on his way out. "See you, wouldn't want to be you, dear."

She stuck out her tongue. "And you're wrong," she called out as she closed the door behind him. "Doug isn't anything so hot. You can find men like that everywhere."

So why haven't I? she thought. Thankfully Antony wasn't still there to ask the question himself.

Just then her cell phone rang. Her heart leaped. Was it Doug? She looked at the number. Jake. Sighing, she let the call go.

Jake was the last person she needed to talk to.

Time to get dressed, she thought. One more day in her skimpy uniform. It was not a good day to feel exposed. She dreaded it, frankly.

Unable to help herself, Helaine thought of Doug's hands, the way he'd loved her, the way he'd spanked, the way he had reached inside and drawn things out of her, like he had always known her. No one had done that, no one had ever cared enough to try.

The lovemaking, the laughter, the tangling of limbs, the sighing, the intertwining of heartbeats, the interplay of taut muscle and soft flesh. Her openness, his hardness,

liquefying, teasing, raising and plunging her into a sea of bliss. And the punishment, the sharp edges of discipline given by a man to release her. And the peace that had followed.

It dawned on her. Had she been trying to play that role herself all these years, that of the harsh punisher, depriving herself of pleasure?

Maybe it really was time to turn over the reins to someone else, not to be a slave to a man's whims but to let him take that natural role—above her, protecting, guiding, nurturing and ultimately freeing her.

A man like Doug.

But not exactly.

Then again, what was so wrong with him in particular? She had written him off too fast, assuming he would be a disaster like all the others.

She would have to think about these things. She would do so in her spare time, when and if she ever had any.

Chapter Six

Jilly came by to see Doug at the bank around one o'clock. She was positively glowing, probably from a session with Jake, though he could tell she wanted to contain herself until she found out how he was doing.

"Have a seat," he said as he ushered her into the leather chair opposite his polished oak desk, one of the perks of being senior loan officer at Second Federal, Branch 3432.

"Thanks, Doug, I know you're busy and I won't take up your time. I just wanted to see how you were, that is to say how things, um, went last night. Jake tried to call Helaine but she didn't pick up her cell, which is unusual."

"I haven't talked to Helaine," he said flatly. "And I don't plan to, either."

"Things didn't go well?"

"Honestly? I enjoyed myself very much but it didn't appear to be mutual."

Her eyes flashed with pain. "Oh Doug, I am so sorry."

Doug smiled. "It's okay, Jilly, I'm not that fragile. I won't break. I will tell you the bottom line because I know you and Jake care about me and Helaine and I know you feel kind of responsible for me. The truth is, I like her a lot and I thought we really hit it off. But she doesn't feel the same way."

Jilly bit at her lower lip in distress.

If it were a lesser woman he was dealing with, Doug would have suspected her of trying to get rid of her own guilt for their broken engagement but he knew Jilly's heart was pure. She simply wanted him to be happy. In her own way—platonically—she would always love him. And he would love her, just like the sister he'd never had.

"We can't control people, Jilly. We can't control fate." Doug couldn't possibly miss the irony of his own statement. Helaine had sweetly surrendered to his control again

and again. She had allowed him to be the Master he had dreamed of being. More than that, she had helped him to feel, to find a sense of profound peace about life and love. Why that had to be a one-time event, he didn't know. But he accepted it—he had to. What was the alternative? Self-pity? Anger? These were bad roads, bad indeed.

Jilly sighed. "I know, you are such a brave and good man, Doug, you wouldn't even be upset but I guess I am. What reason could Helaine possibly have?"

"We can't answer that, Jilly, and we shouldn't try. Now how about if you tell me what it is that's on your mind that's got you looking like the cat who swallowed the canary?"

She blushed. "I didn't realize it was so obvious."

"You were doing your best to hide it. I guess I just saw through."

"We are going to make a baby, Doug—Jake and I."

"Jilly! That's wonderful!" All his pain was set aside in that instant. The potential for new life was always cause to be thankful.

She continued blushing. "I really hadn't intended to tell people right off, I mean, I am not even pregnant yet."

"You will be. I just know it."

Jilly stood. "Can I have a hug?"

Doug couldn't refuse her. Of course he wanted his own woman to hold, his own baby to make. And he knew he would never find a better woman than Helaine.

"You're different," Jilly declared when their embrace was over.

"How do you mean?"

"Since last night you're...more confident or something."

"I told you, I had a very good time." He played it down.

She touched his cheek. "You're as bad at hiding things from me as I am from you, Doug Blue. You're falling for Helaine, aren't you?"

Hearing the words aloud startled him. Had he been thinking them in his heart? "It would be a little quick, don't you think, Jilly?"

"Love has nothing to do with time...or money."

"True."

Jilly's smile was wistful. She had that look of a pregnant woman already and apparently the wisdom too. "Helaine will come back to you. I predict that."

Doug said nothing.

"And you can take that to the bank," she added.

He smirked. "We're already there, remember?"

She gave him a wink on the way out. "I know. Have a good day, Doug Blue."

"Always." And he meant it too, though it would take strength, more than he had ever needed in his life.

The question was, would he be able to keep the vow he had made to himself, not to interfere in Helaine's life? Not to run off half-cocked and try to sweep her off her feet.

After all, he was a banker, not a cowboy.

* * * * *

Helaine parked around back of the honky-tonk, taking her usual spot in the corner of the lot next to the other sorry-looking employee vehicles. Honestly, they should all be doing a lot better but this new owner, he was marching straight backward, squeezing harder and harder, trying to wring every last dime at their expense. If someone was smart they'd form some kind of union. That would fix him.

Lyla was standing by the cooler outside the back door. She was a redhead, about forty, with the kind of body that men still drooled over and probably would until she was well into her fifties.

"Honey," Lyla rasped, taking a last puff of her menthol cigarette. "You better be careful in there. Loud Mouth is on the warpath today."

"Fuck him," said Helaine, not feeling particularly lady-like.

"I would but I don't have my rabies shots."

Helaine laughed. "You know how much I love you, Lyla?"

"Enough to put me in your will I hope." She stamped out the cigarette with the heel of her white cowgirl boot, part of their daily uniform. There weren't many women who could pull off the Dallas Cowgirl Cheerleader look after three kids but Lyla was one of them.

"Sure. You can have my car."

Lyla snorted. "I thought you liked me."

"I do. That thing will be an antique some day, you know."

"So will I, honey and you know what that will get me."

"It will get you fired for starters," called a bull-necked man from the doorway. "Get your asses in here, both of you."

It was Louderman, in his stupid polyester shirt, always white, sleeves rolled up, greasy collar, perspiration marks under his fat arms. And that little line of sweat under his lip, just where the mustache ended. Who wore mustaches like that anyway? Hadn't they gone out of fashion with Hitler?

"Yes, Sir," said Lyla, who had too many mouths to feed to hold on to her pride.

Loud Mouth glared at Helaine. She badly wanted to tell him off. She knew he wanted her but he was either too scared or too henpecked to ask.

That's right, there was a Mrs. Loud Mouth. A leopard print, tight-pant-wearing, frosty-haired barracuda with some kind of stupid mail order degree that made her think she could run a business.

"What do you want, girlie, a written friggin' invitation?" Loud Mouth never said fuck either. That was the one and only thing he had in common with Doug.

"I'm not a girl. I'm a woman." The response shocked them both. Helaine's pulse raced. Here it comes – unemployment, living in the back of the trusty rust bucket or on Antony's couch.

Loud Mouth frowned, pursing his sausage lips. "I'll deal with you later. For now, I want all the tables wiped down. And then I want 'em wiped down again."

"Um...sure." Son of a bitch, the man had backed down. Helaine walked tall into the bar like one of those movie sheriffs.

"Somebody had a good night," said the bartender, Charlie Joe, adjusting his black cowboy hat. He was cute but married. He didn't mess with Helaine because he actually loved his wife. "That means you either won the lottery or you got laid. Seeing as how you have shown up here for another day of work, that means you got laid."

She took the rag from behind the bar. It stank of beer. "How am I supposed to clean tables with this?" she complained. "And stop asking about my sex life."

"Then stop advertising it. You take a look at that shake in the mirror this morning?"

Helaine flicked the rag at him. "I do not have a shake."

"She didn't just get laid," said Lyla, carrying a case of soda from out back. "She's in love."

"I am not!" Was she? "How can you say I'm in love?" Helaine demanded.

Lyla shrugged. "You're just different. It must be something."

"Well I'm not different. And I don't want to hear another word about it."

Helaine spent the rest of her shift thinking about it, though. Running through her mind all the feelings she was having for Doug and what if anything they could add up to. They ran the gamut—everything from annoyance at his niceness to a passionate obsession over what he had done to her body and how it felt as if he were still here, with her, caressing her with invisible hands. Heartbeat by heartbeat, she wondered where he was, what expression was on his face and what he might want from her sexually too.

Would he want to have his way again, brushing her hip, casually grazing her nipple, patting her ass? It didn't help that she was so exposed in a bar full of men. Every one of them wanted to have sex with her and they pretty much *were*, in their imaginations. Usually that gave her a kind of charge, a sense of importance and being needed but today it was just confusing.

She didn't want just anyone looking at her. Doug was the one who should be doing that. Shouldn't he?

At least time was passing quickly, she thought. Unfortunately, she had let her guard down where Loud Mouth was concerned. A man like that didn't take to being corrected by a woman. He would bide his time and strike back in the nastiest way he could think of.

Sure enough, toward the end of her shift, he called her into his office and told her he needed her to do him a special favor.

She knew that wasn't good. He was talking all sweet to her and he was even smiling in that sick way of his, lips curling like worms had parked on his face. Oh, hell, why hadn't he just fired her and sent her home in the first place?

"I got this new investor, Helaine, see? And he has been by the bar before. I don't think you would have seen him, he was just kind of peeking in. Anyway, he liked you—he really did. Singled you out, you know?"

Loud Mouth was in motion the whole time he talked. He had come out from behind his desk and now he had her backed against the wall. The door was ten steps away and it was closed.

There was nowhere to retreat, nowhere to escape to. She could smell his breath. She knew he would never touch her but he could do worse, he could play with her mind, make her feel dirty, maybe even turn her into some kind of prostitute.

"No, I really don't know. And I don't want to know."

Loud Mouth wasn't a tall man, barely as tall as her but he had a barrel chest. He laughed, his eyes fixing where they usually did on her well-advertised breasts. Some nights she went home and took a shower just because of Loud Mouth's eyes.

"You're a card, Helaine, aren't you?"

"I have work to do, Mr. Louden."

"That's what I'm getting at." He wasn't blocking her way, not quite.

She tensed, heart pounding.

"It would just mean a lot to me, you see, if you...well you know."

"Mr. Louden..."

"Helaine, just hear me out. I mean, what if everyone lost their job because I ran out of money for the place? I need this investor. I'm not saying, you know, anything would have to happen. You would just go with him, you know, let him take you out, he'll show you a good time. That's not so bad, right? When does a girl like you—a woman like you, I mean—get to go somewhere really nice, all dressed up like? It isn't like you waitresses don't like men, right? Hey, I wasn't born yesterday. I know you fool around sometimes with customers. I don't even care if they keep coming back, right?"

"That's enough, Mr. Louden."

"What? What have I said? This guy's good looking. I don't know if you ladies can get guys like this on your own."

Something snapped inside Helaine. She had been insulted by this man for the last time. "Screw you, Mr. Louden. I can get men just fine and they sure won't be the kind of scum buckets you'd be likely to hang around with."

Loud Mouth's face twisted in hatred. Helaine had pushed him too far.

"You little tramp," he hissed.

Oh, god, he was going over to lock the door. She grabbed a paperweight off his desk. It was a small statuette of an angel. Not much but it would have to do. Resisting the impulse to throw it, she waited until he closed in.

Damn, she had misread this man. She should have known. That was her life story. And here she was, maybe at the final chapter.

He came at her. He was way too strong. He took her wrist and bent it so sharply she had to drop the angel...the one that was supposed to be her guardian.

"You and me are going to have a little heart-to-heart," he said, his eyes wild. "And then you'll see what happens to little girls who talk back."

Louden was just grabbing her other wrist when she heard pounding on the door.

"Helaine, are you in there?"

Her knees nearly gave way. It was Doug!

The blood pounded in her head. She almost didn't find her voice.

"Yes...I'm...here."

That was all Doug needed to hear. Louden's office door exploded inward from the force of the kick. Doug was on him so fast Helaine never had time to breathe. Louden gasped, Doug's hand at the back of his neck. The next thing Helaine knew, the evil man was flying backward into the wall. He hit with a sickening thud and slid down into a sitting position. Doug was over him, lifting him by the collar. He might as well have been a rag doll.

"Don't...hurt me." Louden pleaded.

Doug had a fist cocked. It looked lethal. Charlie Joe was in the room by now and Lyla and a few more besides.

"Hey, man," Charlie Joe urged Doug. "Don't kill him, he ain't worth it."

Helaine had never seen such rage in a man's eyes. *Loud Mouth is going to die*, she thought. *And Doug will go to prison for his murder unless I stop him*. "Doug," she cried, saying the one thing she knew would call him back. "Master...please don't."

Doug's lip twitched. It took him a second to return from his world of martial concentration. Altering the angle of his arm slightly, he gave Louden a solid hit to the solar plexus.

The man crumpled, groaning.

Two policemen rushed in at that exact moment, clubs drawn.

"That man," Charlie Joe pointed to Louden. "He had Helaine locked in his office."

"Did he try to hurt you?" asked the officer.

Helaine nodded her head yes, the full enormity of the situation washing over her.

"That's all we need to know," said the officer.

Louden was pulled back to his feet, this time to be cuffed and Mirandized.

"You have the right to remain silent," said the other officer. "You have the right to an attorney..."

Doug drew Helaine so close against his chest she couldn't breathe. It took her a moment to convince him she was okay. His eyes were still lit with fire. "I almost lost you. I let you go...this is all my fault."

She smiled, her eyes misting over. "Oh, baby, none of this is your fault. How can you even think that?"

Because he is like me, she thought. We are two of a kind, taking on all the world's troubles. We will have to be each other's liberators.

"I am going to have a hard time letting you out of my sight after this," he warned, tongue-in-cheek. "At this rate we might have to get married."

Helaine couldn't help but laugh. "You make it sound like I'm pregnant."

"That wouldn't be the worst thing in the world," he declared. "You would make a terrific mother."

She shook her head. "I was kidding, Doug."

"Many a truth," he said, "is spoken in jest."

What could she say? It was less than twenty-four hours since she had met Doug but it felt like a lifetime ago. Stranger things had certainly happened. Once upon a time people married without knowing a thing about each other. Would it so bad if the two of

them formed an alliance against the world? There was chemistry, after all—who could deny it?

They were getting ready to take Loudon from the room.

"You." Doug pointed at him, his voice terrifyingly even and calm. "Better hope they keep you in prison for a long, long time. And God help you if you so much as look at this woman cross-eyed again. In fact, I think I would like to hear an apology if these officers wouldn't mind a moment's delay."

"Sounds good to me," said the second officer, a dark-haired woman with a ponytail. "You heard the man," she commanded the prisoner. "Apologize."

"I'm...sorry," said the red-faced, sweating pig of a man.

"You can do better," said Doug. "Try, I am sorry, Mrs. Helaine Blue, because that's who she is going to be."

Helaine's knees went weak. She wanted to object, but no words came to her.

"I'm sorry," he said miserably. "Mrs. Helaine Blue."

"I wish I could say I accept it," said Helaine, speaking of the apology *and* the presumed proposal. "But I'm not that big of a person."

"I beg to differ," said Doug. "You are the biggest person I know."

"Wait until you see me pregnant," she quipped. "Women in my family tend to blow up like beached whales."

What am I saying, she thought. I can't be giving in to Doug's delusions.

He grinned. "You won't be alone, at least."

Helaine gasped. "You mean...Jake and Jilly?"

"It seems they are moving in that direction, yes."

"We need to celebrate," said Helaine. "Charlie Joe, beers all around, on the house."

"You got it, Mrs. Blue. That is unless Loud Mouth here has any objections?"

Predictably, Loudon was silent.

With that, they dragged him away.

“Let’s give these two some privacy,” said Lyla, though they hardly needed it, being already engaged in a deep and soulful kiss.

Chapter Seven

Helaine pounded on Antony's door. The noise only served to aggravate her headache. "Antony, turn that music down!" she demanded.

"All right, I give up," he said, poking his head through the window. "Don't huff and puff and blow my house down."

"Some of us are trying to sleep," she said, in no mood for teasing.

Antony opened the door, pink eyebrow pointing skyward. "Girl, we need to talk."

"I don't want to. I want to sleep. Have you any idea what time it is?"

"Ten after ten," said Antony. "My eighty-year-old grandmother isn't even asleep yet."

Helaine sighed. "I'll come in for a few minutes, but I'm not talking about —"

"Yes, you are," Antony cut her off.

Helaine plopped down on the leather sofa, resigned to another lecture.

"You're miserable without Doug and I have no clue why you are trying to live without him in the first place. The two of you are made for each other."

"He's the perfect man, I know, he rescued me, blah, blah, blah," she said.

The truth was she was scared. In the hours following the incident at work she had moved from euphoria at being rescued by Doug and the things he was saying, to a state of shock and then to a frenzy of jagged emotions. She was back to being her old fearful self. The woman who was afraid to trust, to believe in happily-ever-after. The woman who knew *she* could never have a life like that. The very sight of Doug became painful.

So, she had pushed him away, asked and finally begged him to stop calling. Ever the gentleman, he had obliged. That had been ten days ago. The longest days of her life.

"I wouldn't say perfect," Antony replied. "Though I think you love him, which is the only thing that matters."

"What is love," she exclaimed. "Does anyone really know?"

"I do," he volunteered. "It's crawling into a shell and harassing your poor neighbor because you're too proud to admit you need someone else to go on living."

"I am not harassing you," she insisted. "And I am not crawling into my shell."

"Really? Then tell me, when was the last time you left home except to go to work."

"Yesterday. I went to the grocery store."

"That doesn't count, girlfriend."

Helaine rolled her eyes. "Why don't you bother Doug for once. It's not like he's banging my door down to get at me."

"Why would he? So you can complain that he's coming on too strong? You asked him to leave you be and he is."

Helaine hugged a shaggy throw pillow and sighed. "I'm confused," she admitted. "It all happened so fast. It's too good to be true, don't you think?"

"What's too good to be true?"

"Having a man treat me that well. He has to be an axe murderer or something."

"Worse," he quipped. "He'll probably snore and hog the covers."

"See? I told you I would be miserable if I got married," she grumbled.

"You want to know what I think," said Antony, glaring at her, hands on hips.

"No. But I'm sure you'll tell me anyway."

"I think you're afraid of being happy because if you are, then you will have something to lose. If you stay miserable, it's nice and safe."

"You would make a terrible psychologist," she said, though she wondered if he had a point. What did she have to lose? If things didn't work out with Doug, well at least she could say she had tried.

"Maybe so, but I'm a terrific hair dresser."

"Which qualifies you to analyze me, right?" she said sardonically.

"It's all in the hair, Helaine. Look at you, you have split ends, no shine. Your hair is screaming out stress and unhappiness."

"My hair lies."

"Hair never lies." Antony picked up the cordless phone and held it out to her. "Are you going to call or do I have to?"

Helaine swallowed. "I wouldn't know what to say."

"You could start with 'I'm sorry'," he suggested.

"Sorry? For what? I didn't do anything."

"Exactly."

Helaine frowned, taking the phone. "This is a waste of time," she said, dialing the number from memory. Doug answered the phone on the second ring. Even over distance he could still take her breath away.

* * * * *

Doug's heart skipped a beat as soon as he realized who it was on the other end of the phone.

"Helaine," he said, trying to keep his voice steady. He had all but given up hope. With each passing day the possibility of a reunion had seemed more and more remote.

"You sound surprised to hear from me," she said. "It's only been ten days."

"It's felt like a lifetime."

Helaine hesitated. "If you are trying to make me feel guilty —"

"That's not my style. I thought you knew that about me."

"I don't know much of anything, Doug. That's the problem."

"I had a solution to that," he reminded.

"What? Marriage? That's hardly a way to get acquainted, Doug."

"Okay, maybe I rushed things a little," he conceded. "I spoke from the heart, though."

He heard her breathing. He wished he could be in the same room, comforting her, holding her...loving her.

Ten days had given him plenty of time to think. More than one of those days he had ended up talking things out with Jake over beer and honky-tonk music.

Jake was a firm believer in love at first sight and he was not about to let Doug give up on his dream of Helaine.

The one thing Jake did help him learn, though, was that a relationship didn't rest on professions of love or on acts of heroism. It was about the day in, day out, the humble, routine things, working out who takes out the trash and who gets the remote control.

Doug was more than ready for a routine with Helaine. He craved it more than anything.

Jake had told him to be patient, though. When you are after a filly, you can't spook her. You have to wait for her to come to you. You have to let her test you, trust you.

Was Helaine trusting him now? Was she ready to take a step in his direction?

"I don't doubt your heart, Doug. You're the nicest guy I ever met."

The words rankled him. "That sounds like a brush off, Helaine."

"If it was, I wouldn't be calling."

"Point taken." So why was she calling? "Whatever is going on, it's good to hear your voice. It gives me a chance to thank you too, for being such a good thing in my life."

"For heaven's sake," she snapped, "you make it sound like we're never going to see each other again."

"Are we?"

"If you want," she answered, attempting to sound nonchalant.

"It's up to you," he said, putting the ball back in her court.

"I'll meet you for coffee, and that's all."

"That would be fine," he said, resisting the impulse to gloat.

She wanted him, all right. And he was going to have her if it was the last thing he did.

"Will tomorrow work for you?" she asked.

"Why not tonight?" he pressed.

"Tonight?" Her voice cracked slightly.

"Yes, Helaine, tonight."

"But...it's the middle of the week."

"So?"

"So...you have to get up in the morning, don't you?"

"That's my problem." He checked his watch. "I'll leave now. I'll give you a call when I'm in your neighborhood."

"I'll probably be asleep," she said.

"No, she won't," Antony said, bending to talk into the receiver.

Doug chuckled. "See you soon, Helaine." He hung up the phone. In under five minutes he was in the car.

Breaking the speed limit.

* * * * *

Helaine considered wearing a winter coat. Or maybe a blanket over a couple of bathrobes. Anything to make her sex-proof.

Why did he have to come over tonight?

Doug.

The one man she couldn't keep out of her mind. The only man since Chuck to pull her heartstrings. And look how Chuck had turned out.

So Doug had rescued her. What basis was that for a relationship? So they had terrific, mind-blowing sex. Where did that get you in life? It certainly wasn't enough for marriage.

Maybe if Doug had just agreed to something casual, a nice occasional contact, a little companionship, a nice roll in the hay every now and again.

Why did Doug want it all?

Wasn't it enough to be single and enjoy an occasional liaison? She was happy enough that way, wasn't she?

Not according to Antony.

Or Doug either.

It wasn't fair. How come she didn't get a vote?

Of course she did get one and the truth was, she hadn't said no. The prospect of seeing Doug made her toes curl. Her lips longed for his. She wanted to look into his eyes and see if he was still real. She wanted to be close enough to feel his heartbeat against her chest.

She wanted to feel him inside her, his cock filling the emptiness of her sex, his tongue working magic over her skin, his hands kneading the flesh of her breasts.

Even now her nipples were tight in anticipation. Why did her body have to betray her mind so easily? If she were smart she would double lock the door and go to sleep.

As if she could fall asleep. Rifling through her closet she looked for something to wear. Something appropriate. For a split second she thought of a negligee, something skimpy and see-through, advertising her needs, her deep yearnings.

At once she felt the heat between her thighs, the familiar moistening. Frowning, she grabbed a heavy bathrobe and pajamas to cover her nakedness.

The shower she had just taken to cool off had done little, if anything, to help matters. Not with Doug in her head, playing on her every desire.

She jolted at the sound of the doorbell. How had he gotten here so fast? Had she been stalling that long? There wasn't even time to put up her hair. She ran a comb through the damp tresses and headed for the door. She would make an excuse, feign sudden illness. By the time she turned the knob she had her speech rehearsed.

"Doug, I'm really sorry," she began. "But —"

Doug silenced her with a kiss — deep, hot and possessive. Her bare toes curled. She felt her resistance crumbling instantly.

Protests turned to moans as he explored her mouth with his tongue. She accepted, as helpless as she was hungry.

His cock was rock hard against her.

Damn, how would she get rid of him now?

"We'll talk later," he said, allowing her to breathe for a moment. "I need your body first."

"What about my needs?" she said.

"What about them?" His fingers slipped beneath the robe and searched for her erect nipple through the material of her pajamas.

Helaine tried unsuccessfully to stifle a moan.

Doug smiled broadly, having made his point. He pulled her robe down over her shoulders. She whimpered half-heartedly.

"You have on too many clothes, woman."

"I was trying to keep things from getting out of hand."

"It's too late for that. Way too late."

She shook her head. "You keep forcing things, making it all or nothing. What if I want nothing?"

His fingers were working the buttons of her pajama top. "You don't know what it's been like for me without you, Helaine. I have honored your request, kept my distance,

but I miss you so much—your smile, the scent of your body. And don't tell me I don't know you. I know enough to want to spend the rest of my life with you."

"That's foolishness talking."

Doug bent to take tip of her breast into his mouth. "Marry me, Helaine."

Helaine writhed as his tongue flicked her nipple. He began to suckle, making her teeth chatter. "You...you want sex, not love."

"Sex is a part of it," he agreed, going for the other nipple. "I have never wanted a woman like I want you. But it's so much more. You make me crazy, adventurous—hell, you turned me into a hero like Jake."

She caressed his head, running her fingers through his hair. "You already were a hero, just by being yourself, with your crazy sense of honor, all the little ways you keep your life neat and in order. I have never seen a car as clean as yours, not even a new one."

"I'm Car Vac Man," said Doug, moving his hands under the waistband of her pajama bottoms.

She stiffened. "Don't—"

"I'm going to take you, sweetheart. I'm going to love you until dawn."

"What about your job?"

"I'll call in sick." Doug found her clitoris, massaging it with his fingers.

Helaine gasped. "Oh, Doug, I have missed your touch. It has to just be for tonight, though—tomorrow we will talk?"

Doug swept her into his arms. "If you mean talk about getting out of marrying me, the answer is no."

"I haven't said yes," she pointed out.

He cradled her. "You will," he said with a confidence that made her pussy gush.

"You are pretty sure of yourself."

"You bring it out in me."

"I think I've created a monster."

"That's Master Monster to you. Now, which way is the bedroom?"

Helaine pointed him in the right direction.

A few moments later he deposited her on the bed. "Get naked," he ordered.

"Yes," she heard herself reply. "Master." She kept her eyes on him as she removed the pajamas, baring her tingling flesh. Doug took off his shirt and sneakers, socks and jeans. His chest looked as good as she remembered, his body lean and muscular.

His cock stood upright, hard and ready.

For her.

"How do you want me?" she whispered.

"Hands over your head, wrists crossed, legs...open."

Helaine assumed the position, baring herself. The look on his face told her how much he wanted her. She wanted him just as much. And not just for tonight. He would still have to convince her about the marriage thing, but she expected him to win.

She wanted him to win, actually.

Whatever challenges lay ahead in a relationship, they would face together. For now, she would have his cock, his flesh, his male heat.

Doug came to her, possessing her body in a single, smooth thrust, without preamble. She was ready for him, more than ready. Her sex lips parted, taking his cock to the hilt. Her muscles clutched him. Fingers digging into his back, she encouraged him to begin his motions, the plunging in and out, which would bring them both to satisfaction. His tongue found her nipple and then her earlobe. He worked her flesh masterfully.

Pinning her hands in one of his, letting her know he was her loving Dominant, he used the other to mold her left breast. The pressure felt so good.

He was moving in and out of her, fast and furious. Neither of them would be able to hold back – the need was too great.

She knew the moment he came and her body followed suit, a spectacular synchronized orgasm, limbs intertwined, sweating and writhing. They rode the wave until they collapsed into each other's arms.

The moment was perfect. They fell asleep that way, leaving the talking for tomorrow.

Chapter Eight

Jilly was lying bound on her back in bed, spread-eagle, a fluffy pillow elevating her pert behind.

"You know," she said to her stalwart husband, who had pulled up a cushiony armchair to keep her company. "I don't think when the book says that the woman needs to lie in an elevated position after intercourse to increase the odds of conception it means that she needs to be in bondage."

"I don't want to take any chances on you moving. Besides, you look good tied up."

"Fine," she sighed. "But you are going to be the one to explain to the doctors why I have rope burns from our baby-making exercises."

"Doctors understand these things," Jake insisted.

Jilly eyed him hungrily. He had one leg over the edge of the chair, his cock and balls insolently displayed. She knew from the tightness of his testicles that he was not done baby-making for the afternoon.

Truth be told, she really didn't think there were going to be fertility problems. A man like Jake could make a woman pregnant just by looking at her and on her side of the family tree it had not been unusual for women to have seven or eight children in a lifetime.

If anything, they were apt to end up with twins or triplets.

"So you feel those little guys swimming around in there or what?"

"I'm not sure," she teased. "I think they might have stopped off for a beer somewhere on the way."

Jake raised a brow, his eyes full of mischief. "You know, I was reading the book again today and I found something we missed."

"Oh?" This was going to be interesting.

"Uh-huh." Jake reached with a muscled arm to the nightstand and pulled out the dreaded silver chain.

"Oh, honey, no..." She pulled uselessly against her bonds. "You know how sensitive my nipples get when I'm ovulating."

Jake dangled the clamps, connected by the gleaming links. She had nightmares about those clamps. On the other hand, she tended to crave them, especially when in heat.

"That's not a very positive attitude. You want to get pregnant or not?"

"Nipple clamps do not get you pregnant," she protested.

"They increase blood flow. That's got to do something," he reasoned.

"Sure, it does. It pisses me off."

Jake bent over and planted his lips, softly suckling the very nipple he wanted to torture.

Jilly groaned. "You do not fight fair, you know that?"

He sat up. Her nipple was glistening, throbbing. He blew air across it, making her moan.

There was no way around it. She was going to end up begging.

"How about if we make love again," she tried to distract him. "I bet you're ready."

"We have to wait, according to the book. We'll work on the blood flow now."

Jake went after her other nipple, flicking it with his fingernail. "Unless you want me to stop."

Jilly curled her toes and clenched her fists, helpless. "You know I don't want that, damn it!"

"What *do* you want?" He kissed her forehead. It felt like a hot branding iron.

She moistened her lips, hoping he would take them next. "I want you to do things to me"

"Like what?"

"C-clamp my nipples."

"I thought you didn't like that." He nibbled at her earlobe.

"I changed my mind," she groaned.

"You sure?"

Sadistic bastard. "Yes, please, yes."

"Because if you'd rather watch television or something..." He pressed her nipples just hard enough.

"No...oh, god, Sir, please, I need the pain. Take my nipples, put them in steel..."

Jake smiled, as smug as you please. Why not? She was his woman, his wife, his best friend, his devoted sex slave and soon to be mother of his children. "I never refuse a lady."

Jilly would never let another man do that to her. It wasn't as easy as it looked. You had to go slow and you had to apply it to the plump center, not the tip, which would be real torture. The clamp was cold, clean and hard edged. It bit down, under his control. The tension increased. She gritted her teeth, adjusting. The throbbing started.

"Good girl," he whispered, indicating the first one was done.

She moaned, reaching up for a kiss. He gifted her lips, playing with them just the way she liked. The combination of the pressure above, the sting on her nipples and the aching emptiness in her sex was driving her wild. She would need sex soon—desperately.

Jilly arched her back so he could put the second one on. She was his good girl now, his obedient toy and she would take this for him.

She felt another sharp flash of pain followed by a deep burning. The sensation spread across her chest. The intimacy of it, having such a deep and personal place under attack was indescribably sexy.

Plus there was the way he looked at her, knowing how he owned her and how she was doing his will. BDSM submission was a proof of love, a commitment you couldn't find in vanilla relationships. It might not be for everyone but it was a great blessing for a chosen few.

Some people called it a compensation for abusive histories, a twisted norm for hopelessly broken people. But it made her and Jake happy and it hurt no one. Who in their right mind would call such a thing bad? Only the evil, the truly demented hell-bent on twisting the world into their own godforsaken image.

"Jilly, I don't know what I ever did to deserve you," he said, gazing down with so much love in his eyes it made her hurt inside—a million times sharper than the clamps. "But I sure do thank my Maker."

"It works both ways, baby."

He answered with a kiss. So soulful and loving and thorough that she orgasmed, right there, without a finger being laid on her.

That was surrender...that was Jake and Jilly.

* * * * *

Helaine was watching the sunrise, a cup of coffee in her hand, a smile on her face. It had been a week now that she had been living in Doug's home as Mrs. Doug Blue and she still wasn't used to the incredible beauty and peace the view inspired. Would she ever? Hopefully not completely because she never wanted to take for granted what a gift that was.

Nor did she want to take Doug for granted. He was a miracle too, no matter how much he insisted he wasn't. Yes, he was just a man and, yes, it took the bravery of both of them to overcome their fears and accept the possibility of happiness but still, she doubted she would ever be able to look at Doug without her heart skipping a beat.

Only a man like Doug could have convinced her to go through with the marriage. And what a beautiful ceremony it had been, just her and Doug and Jake and Jilly at the

courthouse, followed by a barbecue at Jake and Jilly's place. Everything about it felt right, natural and good.

Each moment since had only confirmed things. Helaine was growing ever fonder of Jilly, who was a great role model as a wife.

"There you are. I've been looking for you." Natural as the sun sliding across the plain, Doug's hands circled her waist from behind.

"I was making coffee, silly." She leaned back against him, drinking in his scent, clean and pure and manly. "Where did you think I was?"

"Don't know. Sometimes I wake up and you're not there and I think maybe you were just a dream. A wonderful, perfect dream." She turned to face him, hugging his neck. "Is this a dream?"

Blatantly, she pressed her body against his, skin to skin, nipples burning against his chest. Doug responded with a low groan. "You know where that will get you, woman."

"No." She feigned innocence. "Where?"

He smacked her ass as if he owned it—which in fact he did. "Back in bed, that's where."

"I am kind of tired still," she said, egging him on. "Maybe another time."

He took hold of her hair, bending back her neck. She was panting, openmouthed and ready for his lips.

His tongue plunged, staking its claim, conquering every inch of space, making it clear just how much sleep she was likely to get.

"Touch it," he commanded, releasing her.

She put her hand on his cock. It was hard as a rock.

"That's your fault."

"I'm a very bad girl, aren't I?" she smirked.

"Very."

Helaine stroked him, hoping for quick sexual relief for both of them. "So are we going to do something about this?"

Doug gently but firmly took her hand away. "Nice try. But punishment comes first."

"Yes, Master," she demurred, surrendering to the sound of his voice, as rich and bold as a first cup of coffee in the morning.

"You know what to bring me?" She nodded. "Go."

Helaine went into the kitchen. She had already started fixing wonderful meals in there but that wasn't the purpose at the moment. Standing on tiptoes, she took down one of the spatulas off the hook.

Her pulse raced as she brought it to her Master.

Doug was fond of rituals.

Helaine knelt and offered it to him. "Master, punish me, please?"

He stroked her hair. "Bend over the table, my beauty. Show me that ass of yours."

"Yes, Master." Helaine obediently put herself in position. Her bare breasts and belly were pressed against the glass, along with her cheek. She laid her palms down on either side of her head.

She nearly cried out as he touched the flat end of the spatula against her quivering ass cheek. "Tell me, Helaine."

Pushing out her bottom, she invoked the words of her special slavery—intimate, sexual and based on their mutual needs and consents. "Master, I belong to you. I need your love, your protection and I need your firm hand."

"I love you, my slave."

"I love you, my Master."

Doug smacked her hard, the spatula sailing through the air to land efficiently on its soft and helpless target. Helaine felt the sting, the pulsing. He spanked her again. She

knew from experience he would continue until she was red and deliciously sore. Then he would penetrate her and come in her pussy.

That was the only place he climaxed now because they were trying to make a baby. She would do it for him, out of her love and respect for him. And he would cherish their child, out of love and respect for her.

Ten times in all he leveled the gleaming metal with the wooden handle. Her ass was twitching by the end and her pussy too. She could hardly tell when he stopped because the burning continued—and the hot need. Her ass dry as a desert, her pussy like a sea of boiling lava.

Helaine moaned. Helaine wept with joy and anticipation. “F-fuck me, Master...oh...fuck me...”

Doug placed a hand on her back, centering his cock. She screamed in bittersweet bliss as he entered her, slamming his pelvic bone against her swollen bottom. The entire spanking was relived, along with every other time he had ever touched and used her.

Helaine pressed the patio floor with her feet and braced her hands. Doug thundered inside her, moving to a crescendo. She was already coming, releasing the pent up tension. Her motions left him no choice but to join her, spraying her insides with white, hot jets.

His semen filled her. She smiled and groaned and groaned and smiled. Just one, just one little guy to swim all the way up, that’s all they needed. Doug squeezed out every drop, taking no chances. “My sweet angel,” he kissed her damp neck. “My very sweet Helaine.”

“My Doug,” she sighed, quickly assuming the role of loving wife and partner.

It was there to go back to, of course, any time they wanted it—wicked domination, spatulas and crawling, ropes and chains. They would never grow tired of it and they would never grow tired of each other.

Epilogue

Jake Junior was play chasing Little Helaine again. The adults were trying not to laugh, though it was hard to miss the irony. The sins of the fathers visited on the children, or in this case the delightful, ageless drama of males vs. females.

It was Little Jake's twin sister Jennifer who tipped the balance of power, tripping her brother in the middle of the yard, thus interrupting him in hot pursuit.

Little Jake started chasing her instead.

"All right," announced their father, heading out to scoop up both toddlers. "That's about enough of that."

Jake promptly delivered Jennifer to her mother, keeping hold of Jake Junior himself. "You and me are going to need to have a little man-to-man talk, son, about how to treat the ladies."

Jilly rolled her eyes. "Like he's going to get that from you? Spare me."

Helaine had a good laugh over that, her namesake daughter having clambered up on her lap for attention.

Little Helaine was a beautiful child, with her father's sandy hair and her mother's eyes and smile. Doug was already making noise about building a twenty-foot-high fence to keep away the boys.

Little Jake and Jennifer were beautiful kids too. Although fraternal twins, they shared the same dark hair and their father's dimples. From their mother they had inherited perfect angel faces, though in Little Jake's case that face concealed a devilish ability at getting into trouble.

Jilly was certain those were Jake's genes in action, though he swore up and down he had been a model child.

A model of what, though – that’s what she wanted to know.

“Hey, give Jake a break,” exclaimed Doug, swooping up his daughter and giving her a spin in the air that sent her into a fit of giggles, totally infectious and charming. “He’s got enough trouble keeping order with two women in his house. Trust me, I know how that goes.”

“Oh, you love it and you know it,” said Helaine.

Doug did love it. “A guy could do worse,” he admitted. “Having two beautiful ladies to cherish the rest of his life.”

Little Jake wanted down. He was eying Little Helaine, her face lit up in pure glee as she played on her father’s lap. Jake finally let the squirming child go. He went right to Doug and tugged on his pants leg.

Helaine hid a smirk. “I think you might have to get going on that fence a little earlier than planned, darling.”

On that note they all started laughing, releasing into the air the sounds of their common joy and love. Jake was still laughing as he went to the grill to check on the steaks. He was doing pretty well too. He had two lovely ladies of his own and a son besides.

Who knew what the boy might grow up to become. Anything he wanted, that’s what. And the same for Jennifer too. He would fight hard to make it a good world. And what better place to start than one’s own back yard – literally and figuratively?

Jilly came up behind him, burying her head against his back. “Hey, chef man...”

He spun about to capture her. “Can I help you with something?” he murmured in her ear.

“Yes,” she whispered back. “You can fuck me silly after the kids go to bed...Sir.”

He kissed her cheek, a chaste peck. “You’ve got a lot of nerve, you know that?”

“Uh-huh.” One leg went up, bent at the knee...his happy sex toy.

His eyes said it all.

"I'm in trouble?" she guessed.

"Aren't you always?"

"If I can help it."

With that she slipped away to take care of the kids, but not before giving his ass a little tweak, just to make sure he would punish her good and hard.

Like she had to worry.

She smiled as she saw Doug and Helaine, holding their daughter between them. She was giggling again. Oh, that sound. It unleashed hope, it promised so much.

And to think Jake had brought them together.

No, scratch that. The universe had done that.

Mortals just played their parts.

And if they were lucky they got the good roles. The ones with lots of kink in them.

About the Author

Reese Gabriel is a born romantic with a taste for the edgier side of love. Having traveled the world and sampled many of the finer things, Reese now enjoys the greater simplicities; barefoot walks by the ocean, kisses under moonlight and whispers of passion in the darkness with that one special person.

Preferring to remain behind the scenes, cherished by a precious few, Reese hopes to awaken in the lives of many the possibilities of true love through stories of far off places and enchanted lives.

For the sake of love and hope and imagination, these stories are told. May they be enjoyed as much in the reading of them as in the writing.

Reese welcomes comments from readers. You can find Reese's website and email address on the author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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