

Tina Donahue's

July 2011 - TinaDonahue.com

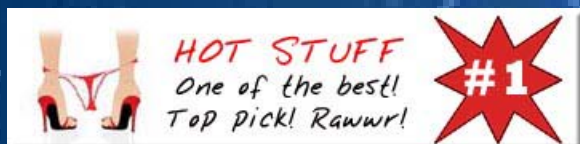
Heat with Heart



One Step Closer to Love

She's everything he escaped

...and all that he desires



MIZ LOVE LOVES BOOKS



4.5 STARS - THE ROMANCE STUDIO



FOUR STARS - SENSUAL READS



BOOKJUNKIE

Recommended by
ARe (All Romance Ebooks)



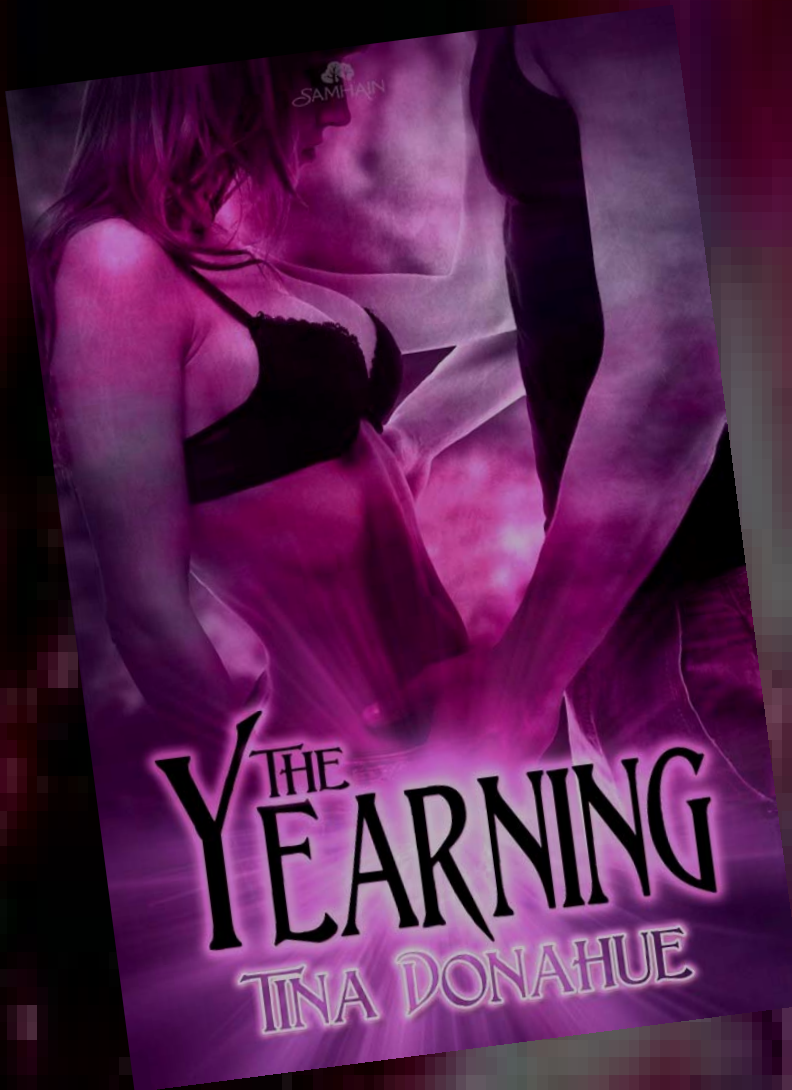
Three years ago, Kyle turned his back on a pro-football career and being the target of tabloids or gold-digging groupies. Craving privacy, he gets it at his roadhouse in Northern California until Lexi Sands invades his life. Indulged and surely phony, she's exactly what Kyle fled.

An actress since childhood, Lexi's fresh out of an anger management program, court-ordered when she lashed out at a badgering paparazzo. Weary of the press's harsh scrutiny, she sees Kyle's secluded cabin as the ideal place to hide out and him as a damn-near perfect alpha male. Deliciously virile. Protective. Principled. She offers him serious cash to let her stay for two weeks, assuring there will be no complications or touching.

Yeah, right. Passion flares, along with tenderness. Kyle recognizes how lonely Lexi really is, while she's falling hard. Through intimate days and impassioned nights, they explore their most shameless needs, until a cruel betrayal exposes their growing love, forcing a choice neither anticipated.

Ellora's Cave <http://www.jasminejade.com/p-9333-takeme-away.aspx>

The Yearning



NOMINATED FOR BOOK OF THE WEEK
WHIPPED CREAM REVIEWS



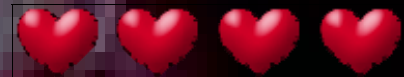
"The Yearning is the perfect blend of unbridled sex and sweet tenderness."

Sal - TwoLips Reviews

4.5 CHERRIES
WHIPPED CREAM REVIEWS

"My friends are going to love this book."

Myrtle - Whipped Cream



"A wonderful read that should not be missed."

LOVE ROMANCES & MORE

Cursed by a jealous rival over a man, Jasmine's conventional world spirals into one of insatiable desire, forcing her to seek pleasure no matter the danger. Haunting Key West's nightlife, she meets Mike, a commanding lover with psychic power and a guarded past. Desperately craving his potent masculinity, she lures then imprisons him so he's always available to feed her passion. Not about to be any woman's sex slave, Mike uses his power to secure his freedom, capturing her instead. Moved by her underlying vulnerability, he's determined to find the source of the curse and defeat it. Under his masterful rule, her ravenous yearning evolves into rapture as she surrenders to his hunger, her darkest needs, and the emotional connection that lies beyond.

<http://store.samhainpublishing.com/the-yearning-p-6248.html>

SAMHAIN - AVAILABLE NOW - TOP TEN BESTSELLER

Sensual Stranger

BOOK OF THE YEAR 2010 - EROTIC CATEGORY - BLUE MOON REVIEWS

Into his life she came—wanting...willing...wanton

It's no ordinary morning when Toni Starr arrives at Zach's garage. Flat broke, with a past she won't share, Toni's instantly taken by such a potently virile man. Direct and unashamed, she tells him she's a motorcycle performance artist who needs work and knows motors. Zach knows women, and Toni's unlike any he's met. Lushly sensuous, exceedingly assured, she'd easily be his match in business and bed. A provocative challenge that stirs him as nothing has since losing his wife. A chance he's reluctant to take, offering no more than a month's employment, then she'll have to be on her way. The hours tick by. Each word and glance intensifies their denied yet escalating desire, forcing them to surrender to passion and Toni's need for Zach's dominance. Driven by carnal hunger, conquered by yearning, they face the unforeseen truth of Toni's past and a future neither of them expected.

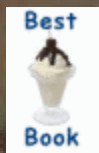


FOUR STARS - ROMANTIC TIMES

FIVE STAR REVIEW - TOP PICK - NOR



Brande - Book Junkie



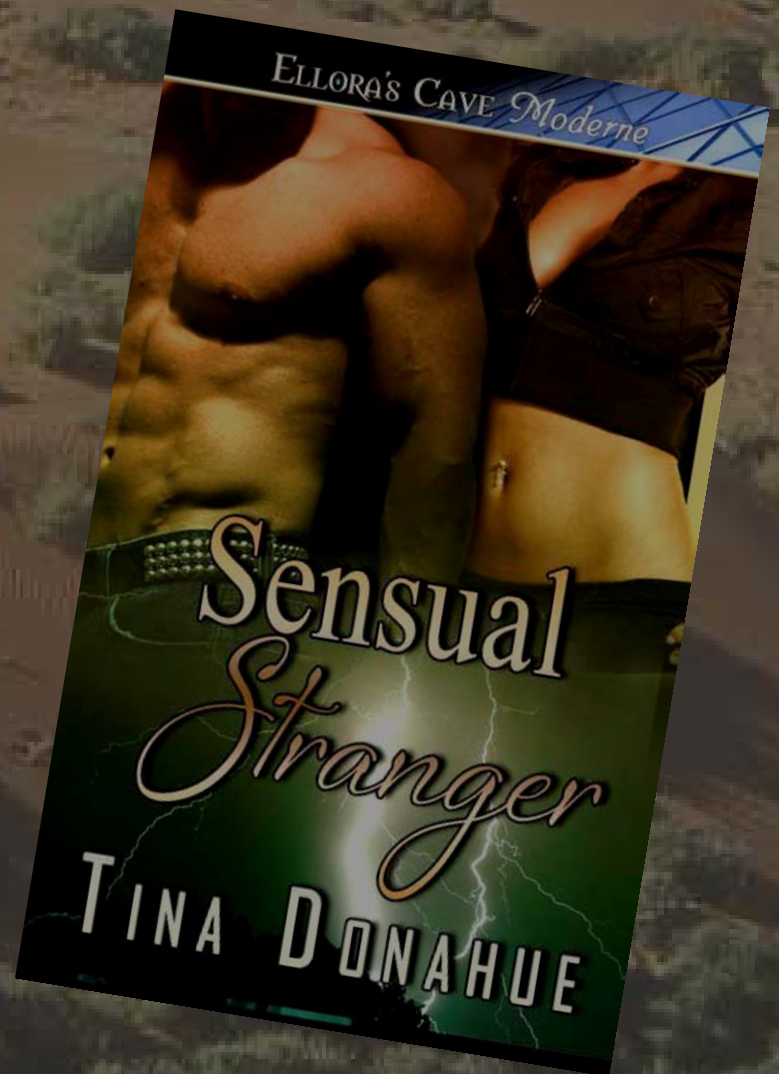
"This story is incredible."

Dahlia - [Whipped Cream Reviews](#)



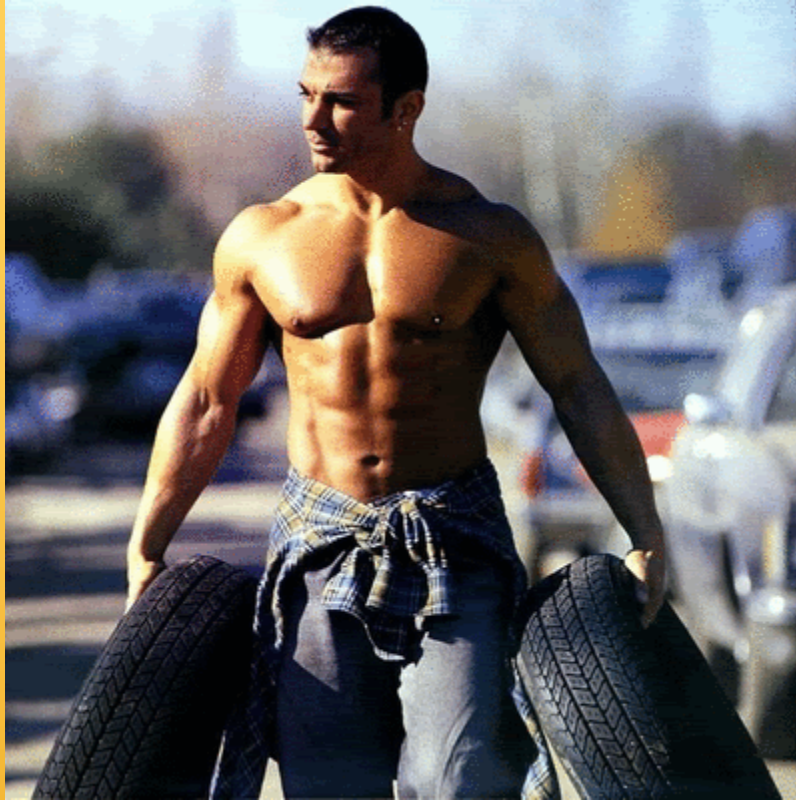
FIVE SIREN STONES

[Siren Book Reviews](#)



Nominated for Book of the Week - WC Reviews
Nominated for Book of the Month - Siren Reviews

Buy link: <http://www.jasminejade.com/ps-8932-50-sensual-stranger.aspx>



IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE THAT COUNTS

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Owned by one man. . .loved by another

FOUR STARS - ROMANTIC TIMES



FIVE LIPS - RECOMMENDED READ



“From the first pages of *IN THIS ARMS* by Tina Donahue I was captivated, more like ensnared, actually commandeering every fiber of my heart and taking it for one heck of a wild ride!”

Brande - Book Junkie

“If you are looking for a book with an emotional punch, that has enough twists and turns to keep you guessing, then I highly recommend *In His Arms* by Tina Donahue.”

Lillie - RR&H Novel Thoughts & Book Talk

“*In His Arms* is at times dark and raw. Tina has delivered a story that not many authors, especially those who write romance, would think of writing. This is one e-book I recommend everyone download.”

Kate - Babbling About Books and More!



FIVE HEARTS - THE ROMANCE STUDIO



FIVE TEA CUPS!

HAPPILY EVER AFTER REVIEWS

Abducted and delivered into sexual slavery, Lori has surrendered her will in order to survive. For more than a decade, she's been known as Summer, a lovely submissive, her owner's possession until he gives her to his newest lieutenant, a mysterious man called RJ. Commanding and virile, RJ dominates without cruelty and possesses without threat, engendering a mixture of safety and passion. In his strong arms, Summer enjoys carnal pleasure she's never known and tenderness she's craved. In his heated gaze, she experiences a sense of recognition she doesn't immediately understand until it proves dangerous in a way she could never have imagined. Bound by desire and their growing love, RJ traverses the shadowy world of human trafficking, risking all for Summer's freedom only to learn she harbors a fateful secret that threatens to tear her from him, leading to an irrevocable event that risks both their lives.

Lush Velvet Nights

FINALIST - EPIC 2011 AWARDS

When wanton desires
& love demand all. . .

During the day, Adriana's a lonely corporate heiress, helming a supermarket empire. At night, she hires escorts, scripting provocative fantasies of kidnapping, lust, submission and endless longing. It's all she has to excite her until she meets Nathan Wynn. Tall, blond and muscular—like a modern-day Viking—Nathan's a labor relations attorney representing Adriana's union employees. His imposing presence intensifies her basest desires. When he protects her from an escort he believes is an attacker, she knows he's wonderfully dominant and unrestrained. Fascinated by Adriana's underlying sensuality, Nathan brings her to his secluded mountain estate, determined she submit fully to his hunger. At a gentleman's club, he makes certain she denies him nothing. Engaging in a seductive sexual journey, Nathan's caught off-guard by his stunning need for Adriana. An attraction he fears because of past events in his life. A growing emotional connection she will not let him deny.

FIVE SIREN STONES - SIREN BOOK REVIEWS



REVIEWER TOP PICK

"...a must-read!"

Kim Early
The Pagan & The Pen

FIVE ANGELS - FALLEN ANGEL REVIEWS



"Lush Velvet Nights is a winner." - Bella

FIVE STARS - JERR



"OMG! Lush Velvet Nights is a great read!"



A Word from Tina



Hey, all!!

Another busy month.

I finished with my editor's edits for *Unending Desire*, my newest erotic paranormal romance that will release from Samhain in October. I also got the cover - WOW!!! It is amazing...very sexy, sultry and mysterious...just like the story. As soon as I can, I'll show it to you.

On another WOW moment: The middle of last month, I received a call about the Holt Medallion contest. As all romance writers know it's an extremely prestigious competition, and I'm happy to report that my erotic romance *Deep, Dark, Delicious* won an Award of Merit!!! Yay!!! That made it one of the top FIVE finalists in its category. I couldn't be more pleased or honored.

Right now, I'm working on my current WIP, another contemporary erotic romance. However, this one has a lot of suspense and two Alpha males to die for. Yep, that's right - two.

I'd love to tell you more, but I have to wait until it's finished and contracted. All I can say at this time is it's definitely one of the hottest tales I've ever told.

For now, relax and enjoy my newsletter, especially the free reads. And be sure to enter my monthly contest. The winner gets hers (or his) choice of one of my award-winning, bestselling backlist.

Until next month!

Tina



(This was from one of the romance loops on my paranormal *The Yearning*)

I just read this a little while ago (finished it about two weeks ago) and I have to say I really liked it. One of my favorite parts was how real the paranormal aspects were. You never questioned them. They fit right in with the world building. For a first time paranormal author I was really impressed with how easily and seamlessly she created that aspect of the story. Of course the story was great and the characters were very well written, as all of Tina's books are. Tina also always writes the most amazing descriptions. Her description of the club where Jasmine and Mike meet was so real I could almost smell the beer and hear the jazz band. Not to mention the story was hot, hot, hot (my favorite kind). I'd definitely recommend it to anybody. Great job Tina!

Willa

Thank you, Willa!

Tina

Tina -

I just had to buy *Take Me Away* after reading that great synopsis. I finished it a few moments ago and it was really good! And hot :) Look forward to reading more from you...

Maija

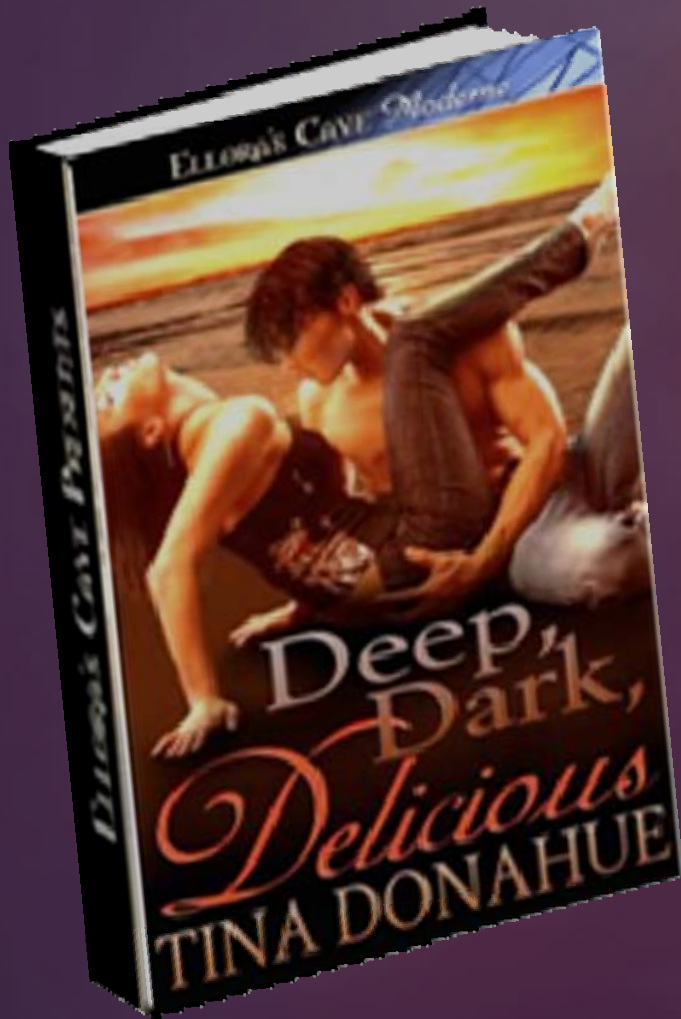
Maija -

I'm so glad you enjoyed *Take Me Away*!! You made my day.

Tina

***At the worst time in her life. . .
she meets a man who'll turn her world upside down***

FINALIST - EPIC 2011 AWARDS / AWARD OF MERIT - HOLT



Eden DeCarlo may have narrowly lost Miami's best chef competition and the prize money she desperately needs, but she has caught the eye of dangerously virile Rafael Zayas, one of the judges and a wealthy restaurateur. Despite her vow not to let any man derail her life, Eden's captivated by Rafe's imposing masculinity, then challenged by the business deal he offers. He'll invest in her new venture if, for one month, she can satisfy his culinary expectations and the sexual attraction they both feel.

Dominant and unashamed, Rafe knows what he wants when it comes to carnal pleasure and will spare no seduction to have Eden in all the ways he demands – naked, wanting, submissive. Within thirty days, he will teach her the delights of yielding to passion, relinquishing all control to him and fulfilling her deepest, darkest and most delicious desires.

A wickedly sensual feast. . .4 Stars Romantic Times

BUY LINK: <http://www.jasminejade.com/ps-8080-50-deep-dark-delicious.aspx>

FIVE STARS - REVIEWER'S TOP PICK - NOR (Night Owl Reviews)

***A must read for those who love an emotional journey for both the hero and heroine. "Whipped Cream - 4.5/5 rating
Nominated for BOOK OF THE WEEK***

"This delicious tale did more than whet my appetite. . ." Seriously Reviewed - 17.5/20 rating

". . .a sinfully delicious and erotic story with two highly passionate lovers . . ." Book Junkies - 4.5/5 rating

"I was sad when this story ended. . .it's a story you must read." Rebecca Rose - 5 Blue Roses

Water Cooler (Happenings & Other Stuff)



WHERE I'LL BE & EVENTS ON MY BLOG IN JULY

<http://www.tinadonahue.com/blog/>

JULY 6 - I'M BLOGGING AT ROMANCE BOOKS 'R US

JULY 12 - KATHY KULIG IS BLOGGING AT MY SITE

JULY 13 - TERESA NOELLE IS BLOGGING AT MY SITE

JULY 17 - BETHANY HALE IS BLOGGING AT MY SITE

JULY 18 - I'M BLOGGING AT SWEET 'N SEXY DIVAS

JULY 19 - NINA PIERCE IS BLOGGING AT MY SITE

JULY 28 - JEAN HART STEWART IS BLOGGING AT MY SITE

JULY 29 - MICHAEL MANDRAKE IS BLOGGING AT MY SITE

DETAILS & CONTESTS POSTED ON MY BLOG

She's wanted him for years. . .

Now's her chance to make her wicked fantasies come true

FINALIST - 2011 EPIC AWARDS



When tall, dark and delicious Adam Farrell crosses Danni's radar at a trade show in Vegas, it's not lust at first sight. He's been the star of her wicked fantasies for a while, pleasuring her in acts of domination and submission that leave her breathless. Aching for his masterful touch, believing she'll never have it, Danni indulges in a public sex act Adam alone witnesses. What follows is a night of wild and unrestrained passion in his powerful arms. It's only the beginning.

An undisclosed business deal has turned Adam from competitor to Danni's new boss. His hunger for her is absolute and he'll make her fantasies seem tame as he takes her in ways she never imagined – whenever he wants, wherever he desires.

Seduced by Adam's plan to mix exquisite control with adoration, Danni's swept into a sensual adventure she can't resist. Until corporate politics intrude and she learns what Adam's been hiding to protect her. . .a secret he's long feared will tear them apart.

PRAISE FOR ADORED

Four stars - *Romantic Times* - Second Place Winner - NEC RWA Contest

“...the fantasy scenes are that hot and the real love scenes between Danny and Adam are even hotter. A truly beautiful love story.” Lilly – [I Do Not Want to Wait, I Want the Book Now](#)

“Fantastic!” Brande – [My Foolish Wisdom](#)

“I loved this!” Angelika Devlyn - [Alternative-Read.com](#)

“...erotic & imaginative.” Stacey Krug - [Siren Book Reviews](#) - FIVE SIREN STONES

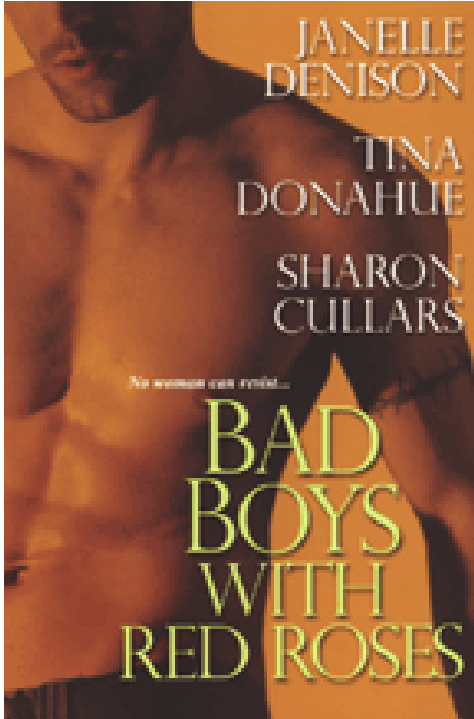
ELLORA'S CAVE – MODERNE AVAILABLE NOW IN EBOOK AND PRINT



Free Reads

TEMPT ME, TEASE ME, THRILL ME - CHAPTER 4 EXCERPT

LET THE GAMES BEGIN - CHAPTER 4 EXCERPT



TEMPT ME, TEASE ME, THRILL ME

True to her word, Julia called later that night. "What happened?" she asked in way of a greeting.

"Not much," Cait said. "I wanted to run over his Harley, but—"

"Be serious."

Cait was being serious. She had wanted to run over Sean's bike so that he had no way to get home, except with her, which was no big surprise. The man was driving his way through her resistance straight to her heart and soul. First it was the wedding, then the auction, then horseshoes. Where in the hell was it all going to end?

"Hey, you still there?" Julia asked.

Of course she wasn't all there. Her body was at work, her soul in romantic limbo, her heart in her throat and her mind on Sean. "I'm a little distracted."

Julia's breath caught. "He's there with you."

"Would I be talking to you if he were?"

"I would hope not," Julia shot right back. "Of course, you are kind of weird when it comes to men."

"I'm careful."

"Yeah, right. Careful is not signing up at the Boston Strangler website for a date, or," she added quickly, "not jumping into a new relationship before you've gotten over the last one. Far as I can see, you don't have any—"

"Okay, okay, okay," Cait said, then sighed. "I'm kind of scared."

"Kind of?"

"Look, I don't want what happened to my parents happening to me."

"How could it? You don't even date."

Maybe not, but that didn't mean her life was totally bland. After today's horseshoe-fest with Sean, Cait was still having trouble uncurling her toes. "I'm handling this in my own way, thank you."

"Not if you hurt Sean."

"Hurt him? What about my getting hurt?"

"He won't do that," Julia assured, then interrupted, "He's like Tim. And Tim

wouldn't do that."

"Well, no, not with another woman, but hon, statistics do point to the fact that Tim will be leaving you one day."

"Not a chance. He knows that if he dies before me, I'll kill him."

Cait wasn't certain whether to laugh or sigh.

"Don't cancel," Julia said, her voice suddenly serious. "If nothing else, at least have this one dinner with him."

By Monday morning, Cait had more or less decided to do what Julia asked, not that that had actually been a factor. Cait was already so goofy with need that by the time court ended Monday afternoon she was practically drooling as she waited for Sean's call.

By Monday night she still hadn't received it.

By Wednesday afternoon, Cait was beginning to wonder if the man was going to cancel on her. Maybe he was having second thoughts, with those having started at Tim's birthday party. Maybe that's why Sean had left so abruptly.

Or maybe he was just too busy to call because he had to go to a second job to pay for that outrageous bid.

Either way, Cait couldn't stand the suspense any longer and called Julia to get Tim's office number.

"No, you can't have it," she said, then asked, "why do you want it? Don't tell me you're canceling!"

Cait didn't. She had something else in mind.

Sean had just pulled off his shirt and was tossing it to the side when Matt, his partner on the force, stopped dribbling the basketball. "Hmmm," the guy said, putting the ball under his arm, "now there's something interesting."

The other cops on the court glanced to where Matt was, the public street bordering this area.

Sean pulled off his sunglasses and tossed them on top of his shirt. "Are you goons gonna play this game or leer at jailbait?"

"This babe's a little older," Matt said.

"Not too old," Nathan said.

"Actually, just right," Charlie said.

Sean rolled his eyes. Despite the waning sun it was still too hot to play anything but dead. Still, he needed to run off some steam, if the guys would just focus.

They huddled together instead.

"Why isn't she moving?" Nathan asked.

Sean went to one knee on the toasty concrete and tied the laces on his right Reebok. "Could be she's a crime scene."

Matt shook his shaggy head. "Nope. This babe's definitely alive."

"And staring at Logan," Charlie said, then asked Sean, "you being surveilled?"

He hoped not. As he ran a list of former girlfriends through his mind, Sean pushed to his feet, looked over his shoulder and felt his heart instantly pound. *Cait?*

She remained framed in the driver's side window, her hair stirred gently by the scant breeze, her lips parting as her gaze trickled down him, lingering on his naked chest, then lower to his running shorts.

Whoa, buddy, Sean warned his quick erection, *not now*. What was she doing here? How in the hell had she even found -

The basketball hit the side of Sean's head. He glared over his shoulder at Matt, who was not intimidated.

"Who's the babe?"

"Babe?" Sean growled.

Matt's expression finally went uh-oh. "Lady?"

Much better. "None of your damn business."

Charlie started humming *Love is in the Air*, until Sean glared at him.

"Hey, Logan," Matt said, "she's getting out of her car."

Sean's knees went instantly weak, while his head swam. Cait's being here just couldn't be good; but if she thought he was going to make this easy on her, she was dead fucking wrong.

He wanted her, he was going to have her, and she just better understand that.

As he finally faced her, Cait paused. In that moment, the edge of her beige silk blouse and oatmeal-colored skirt fluttered in the breeze, while her expression grew downright scared.

Aw hell. Sean's heart demanded he offer some comfort. Thankfully, his resolve said *no fucking way*. If she had come here to cancel, he was not going to make it easy on her.

As the guys shifted from foot to foot behind him, Sean held his ground. He didn't move. Hell, he could barely breathe.

At last, Cait reached him, but remained on the other side of the chain-link fence. "Hi."

Sean's heart ached at her vulnerable tone. "Hi."

Cait glanced at the guys, then back at him. "Can we talk?"

Not here. Not now. Didn't she know that? Probably not. He held back a sigh. "Sure." Before Sean went around the fence he glanced at Matt and the others.

They looked intrigued, but also embarrassed.. At last, they moved away and started playing their game.

The moment Sean reached Cait he took her arm, leading her farther down the street until they could not be overheard. Releasing her, he asked, "How'd you know I was here?"

"Tim."

That was a surprise. "Is he all right? Is Julia all —"

"They're fine. I came about our dinner."

Okay, that was no surprise, so Sean didn't comment. No way was he going to make this easy on her.

"You didn't call," Cait said.

Huh? That's why she was here? "I had planned to call you later tonight."

"To tell me what?"

Wasn't it obvious? That he adored her, that he needed her, that he was going nuts not being with her. "That I've arranged for a table at the Lilac River Inn."

"Kyle's place?"

"Well, more like his, mine, and the rest of our brothers and the bank since we all own a stake in it."

That's what worried Cait. The Lilac River Inn had been their dad's dream before he died, and his boys had put their hearts, souls and most of their available cash into that beautifully romantic inn, which was a reasonable drive from Chicago.

She rested her fingers on Sean's bare chest. "Please tell me that's not where you got the money for the bid."

He looked up from his quivering pec and shook his head.

"Your savings?"

He moistened his lips and shook his head again.

Oh my God. "Your house? You actually mortgaged your house to —"

He interrupted finally. "No. And don't worry about the money. I'm not."

She could see that. Unlike Walt, her father, and nearly every other man Cait had known, money wasn't what mattered to Sean. For the first time in her life a man — this man — put her above everything else.

She stroked those short dark hairs on his chest. "You spent far too much on me."

His gaze lifted from that stroking. "It was all for a good cause."

Mmmmm. "Did I thank you?"

"Do you want to?"

Oh yes. Lifting her hand from his chest, Cait cradled the side of his face. His

cheeks were lightly stubbled, his beautiful eyes hooded as she tilted her face and gently touched her lips to his.

The moment was so tender and intimate, Sean felt it clear to his soul and wanted more, but told himself that would have to come later.

As Cait eased back, her eyes sparkled. "I've got to go. I'll see you- "

"Saturday," he said, then told her the time the car would come to pick her up.

Those sparkly eyes got kind of cloudy. "Car? You're not picking me up?"

Sean wanted to, but told himself he had to be patient. His future and hers rested on this. "I'll meet you at the inn."

She seemed to want to question that, but finally nodded, then turned to go back to her car.

Sean remained where he was, watching her, wanting her more than he ever believed possible. At last, he moved forward, unable to help himself. *Look at me*, he thought, willing her to stop and meet his gaze one last time. To let him know that her need was as overwhelming as his.

She stopped and looked over her shoulder at him.

Sean ached to say how much he loved her. Hell, he wanted to shout it at the top of his lungs and whisper it to her for the rest of their days. He didn't give a damn about anything else, only that and her lingering resistance. She was finally sharing a meal with him, sure, but what about everything else?

With no answer to that, Sean warned himself not to push it. "Drive carefully," he called out.

Her eyes widened and then her gaze questioned as if she had expected more.

Later, he thought.

If he was trying to tempt her, it was surely working. If he was teasing her so that she'd want more, it was also working.

By Saturday night, Cait was in the back seat of the car in which she was being driven, stroking the soft petals of the lone red rose Sean had delivered to her, while her gaze kept going to the speedometer.

"Excuse me," she said to the driver, an older man who was probably the father of one of Sean's friends, "but can't you go a little faster?"

"Detective Logan wants you to get there in one piece," he answered, keeping his speed steady and slow.

Cait chewed her lower lip as her belly continued to flutter and her breathing picked up. She felt as she had the night of Julia and Tim's reception when she had made the decision to sleep with Sean.

That thought certainly crossed her mind now. Surely, he had every intention of sleeping with her tonight, right? Surely, he wasn't going to simply share a meal and some conversation with her, then roar away on his Harley, right?

He sure as hell better not. She asked the driver to please put a move on.

"We'll be there shortly," he said.

Twenty minutes later they were, with him insisting on helping Cait out of the car.

As she straightened, her gaze went to the three-story Victorian mansion that Kyle's company had renovated and expanded. The graceful structure was painted a deep lilac with snowy white trim and decorated with hundreds of tiny white lights. Cait smiled. It looked like something out of a fairytale, and was definitely a vacationer's dream. There were rooms for at least a hundred guests, a lovely dining area, and graceful porches bordered with lilacs and white roses, while the rest of the grounds were flanked by massive oaks and scented with pines.

Inhaling deeply of the fragrant night air, Cait sighed.

"You all right, miss?" the old guy asked.

She looked at him. "Oh yeah."

"Good to hear. Now you be sure Detective Logan shows you a good time."

"Don't you worry." Cait fully intended to see that Sean showed her a very nice time.

Her thoughts passed as the front doors to the mansion opened. The strains of a soft ballad floated outside as Sean came onto the porch.

Behind her, Cait heard the driver getting back into the car and leaves being rustled by the gentle wind. Next, she heard her own sigh as her gaze drifted over Sean's dark blue suit and azure blue tie and shirt.

Wow. He looked luscious. Cait smiled.

It brought Sean a step closer. His gaze lowered to her mouth and lingered before returning to her eyes. He extended his hand. He wanted her to come to him; or at least to meet him halfway.

There was absolutely no hesitation in Cait's response as she moved across the drive to the front steps.

Sean's heart soared, but he wanted more. He needed it all.

For now, he contented himself with simply gazing at the amazing halter dress she wore. It recalled the one Marilyn Monroe made famous in that old movie *The Seven Year Itch*, only Cait's version was a rich coppery color that complemented her high-heeled sandals, hazel eyes and that cloud of thick, dark hair.

Those silky waves tumbled over her naked shoulders, while the dress swirled over her curves as she moved up the steps to him.

The moment their fingertips touched, a wave of raw desire hit Sean with such force that his stiffened cock ached for her tight, wet warmth.

Cait knew. It was in her gaze as she touched his cheek with that lone red rose. It was in her voice as she murmured, "Hi."

Sean cradled her face in his free hand and gently pressed his lips to her temple. It was scented with female arousal and heat. "Hi."

She trembled.

His heart smiled at her response. He teased, "Cold?"

"I guess I should be." She turned her face to his and whispered, "I'm not wearing any underwear."

He stared as she eased back. Taking his hand, Cait glanced at the entrance and spoke in her normal voice, as if not wearing underwear in public was an everyday occurrence. "We are going inside, aren't we?"

It was a moment before Sean could speak, his balls ached that badly. His gaze drifted from her pebbled nipples to the full skirt that hid whatever was—or wasn't—beneath. "Are you trying to kill me?"

Turning into him, Cait again rested the rose against his cheek, then drew it along his jaw line. "Would I do that to you?"

Sean arched one dark brow at her playful tone. This, when his own voice sounded strangled. "If you did, I'd have to arrest you."

Her cheeks flushed and her voice lowered. "Now there's an idea—did you bring your handcuffs, Detective?"

"Never leave home without them."

"And your concealed weapon?"

"That depends. Which one would you be talking about?"

Cait's answer was to ease into him, not to mention his erection, as she lifted her face.

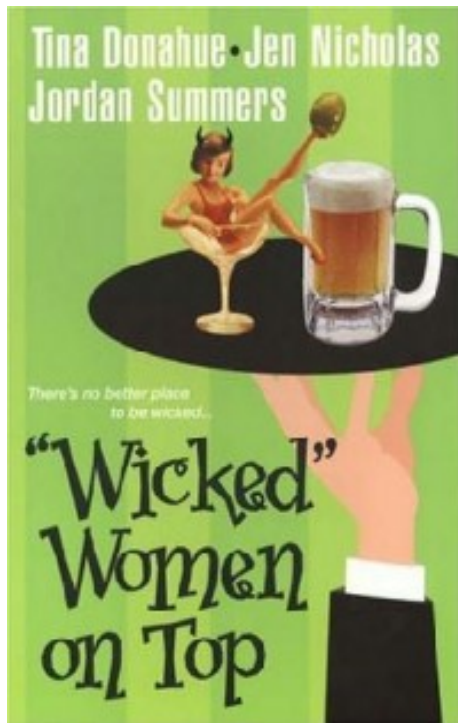
There was enough seduction in her body and gaze to make a grown man cry. And enough to make this man even more determined to have what was beyond that seduction. As far as Sean was concerned, he would settle for nothing less than love. Regaining his composure, he asked, "Are you ready to go inside?"

Ever so discreetly, so no one could possibly notice, Cait's hips pressed against his as her skirt fluttered around them both. "Are you?"

Given the look in her eyes, she wasn't talking about him entering this establishment. Damn. She was trying to kill him. He smiled. "Only if we go by my rules now."

Cait's gaze hung on his, while her voice grew a wee bit hesitant. "Sure...as long as you play fair."

Not a chance.



LET THE GAMES BEGIN

When Tiffany returned to her office, there was a stack of gaming material on her desk that would have daunted the Las Vegas casino commission. Slumping against the door, she wondered if she should just let Nick win.

Like she had a choice. No matter what she did, or the handicap he offered, he was going to have her stripped bare in three seconds flat. They'd make love, he'd continue running this place, and that would be that.

Because he'd never again trust her intelligence or determination if she didn't at least try. He'd regret having supported her at today's meeting.

She'd have his body, but not his heart or respect.

"Damn." Gritting her teeth, Tiffany pushed away from the door and went to her desk.

Five hours later, blackjack and poker terms swam in her head like narration in an X-rated romance. There was cheating, early surrender (that one she understood), straddle, face up, face down, double down, bottom pair (she didn't even want to think about that), hard hand, come hand, nuts, expectation, free roll, no limit and push.

And that didn't even begin to address the betting systems. How in the world was she ever going to learn all this?

"Ms. Taylor?"

Tiffany rubbed her temples and looked up.

Carla's smile faded. "Still not ready for the PowerPoint presentation?"

Was she kidding? Until now, Tiffany had forgotten about it. Crossing her arms over the top of her desk, she lowered her head to them.

"Ms. Taylor, are you all right?"

"No."

Carla was briefly silent. "I could have the house physician sent in if you want."

What Tiffany wanted was a *Lifetime* TV movie, a drink, and more time. What she had was this chance with Nick, something she hadn't really hoped for, not even when she had slipped her note beneath his door this morning, then pounded on it to wake him.

Inhaling deeply, she finally got tough. "Please call room service and order a steak and a glass of red wine for me, whatever you want for yourself, and lots of chocolate for both of us. And have that delivered to my suite."

The chocolate and booze didn't turn Tiffany into Vegas's newest card shark, but it certainly got Carla to loosen up.

The young woman was sprawled across Tiffany's bed, affecting the same poker face she used as an executive assistant, while she considered the hand she'd been dealt.

"The way I see it," she said, "your only real chance of winning is to wear something that puts Mr. Marlowe off his game since you can't even beat me."

Tiffany pressed her fingers into the inside corners of her eyes. After her second glass of wine, she had taken Carla into her confidence about the eleven hopeless years she had loved Nick and how she planned to change that with this bet.

To Tiffany's surprise, the girl hadn't been appalled, but was really rooting for her, and not just because Carla was crazier than she. It seemed Carla was dating one of the junior executives and thought a strip poker game might be a cute idea for his birthday.

After this was all over, Tiffany figured she'd probably make Carla a vice president. The girl had a real knack for gaming, scheming and seducing.

Of course, she was way off on what it took to permanently win a man's heart and love.

"I need to impress Mr. Marlowe with my skill," Tiffany said.

"Uh-huh."

She frowned. "I suppose you realize that unless I shave my head, then dress like a man, Mr. Marlowe is not going to be put off his game."

"I wasn't talking about clothes necessarily, but other tattoos, only these will be the kind you can peel off."

Tiffany's hand dropped away from her face. "Unless they cover me from head to toe, and I can convince him they're actually clothing that has to be taken off when he— wait just one minute," she said, interrupting herself.

"See?" Carla pushed her hair behind her ears. "You can delay the inevitable, and somehow win a few hands during it, even if it is with pure dumb luck."

Uh-huh. Despite Carla's brutal honesty, she did have a point. Of course, the means of delay didn't necessarily lie with tattoos. Tiffany pulled her laptop onto the bed, keyed in a URL for a site she'd been searching earlier, then surfed until the page she wanted came up.

She turned the laptop to Carla. "How about I wear this?"

The young woman's brows arched. "Awesome. That oughta make the game really

interesting , not to mention taking him lots of wins to remove it. But for insurance you should still consider a few tattoos.”

Or something a bit more interesting, Tiffany thought, recalling the stuff she still had from Wonder Cosmetics.

Like that fake beauty mark.

You don't need it, Nick had said earlier.

Maybe not. But he might very well like the other stuff she had in mind. If nothing else, it would certainly give her the chance to win a few extra hands through pure dumb luck.

“One other thing,” Carla said, as if reading her thoughts. “You really should consider playing with someone whose skills are even better than mine.”

Tiffany laughed. “You never played before today.”

“Yeah, I know, but I seem to have more of knack for it than you. And I was talking about someone who can give you a few pointers. If you want, I could call Danny. He’d do it for me, and he will keep his mouth shut, I swear.”

Tiffany chewed her lower lip, then grabbed her phone and handed it to Carla. “Do it.”

As Carla connected with her boyfriend and went into her baby-talk mode, Tiffany headed for the living room and her cell phone.

Nick was watching the play in Piacere’s ornate Baccarat room when a plainclothes security officer approached.

“Mr. Marlow, for you.”

Nick took the secured phone, then covered the mouthpiece and spoke to the man in a lowered voice. “Trouble?”

“She didn’t say.”

She? Nick’s mind raced over the recent women in his life, and those in the past, none of whom had ever called security to reach him. He wasn’t a saint by any means, but he wasn’t a rutting fool either. The ladies knew he wasn’t looking for love, marriage and that baby carriage.

Lifting the phone to his ear, he offered a cautious, “Yeah?”

A sultry voice murmured, “Mr. Marlow...Mr. Nick Marlow...did you do as I asked?”

Right now, all Nick could do was lock his knees to keep standing. Wow, Tiffany had a luscious voice. He was so pleased to hear it he was grinning like a fool until he noticed the security officer watching.

Turning his back on the man, Nick murmured into the phone, “Ms. Taylor...Ms. Tiffany Taylor...what exactly did you ask me to do?”

She giggled.

Even that was throaty. Nick lowered his head to hide his loopy grin.

"Mr. Marlow," she breathed, "did you have those elevators checked out like I asked?"

Elevators?

And then he remembered. "I'm afraid not." He lowered his voice even further and teased, "You see, Ms. Taylor, I was told Piacere's most senior execs were using them for unspeakable acts."

Her breathing picked up. "How shocking...then you're saying the moment they were alone the female exec pressed the full length of her body—her breasts, hips and furry mound—to him?"

Nick's brow arched at that unexpected talk. "She did. And then she suckled his neck."

"How disgraceful...did he enjoy that?"

"Enough to want more."

There was a momentary pause. "And would this more consist of nothing forbidden, nothing held back?"

You bet. He told her that.

"Then you're saying he did want to strip her bare—that is, fully and completely nude—while they were in there?"

"He did."

"And would he have then used his tie to secure her hands above her head so that her breasts were uncovered and ready for his pleasure? And might his handkerchief have been used next, along with his belt, to secure her ankles, but only after her legs had been spread wide? And once she was in that position fully opened and vulnerable to him, no part of her hidden, might he have then taken his pleasure?"

Nick's head swam with sudden images of that, while his heart hammered hard. "If she allowed it."

"And while she was naked and bound, would he have remained dressed?"

"He would. But only so that she really felt her nudity."

"While he gazed at it?"

"And tasted it with his mouth."

"And would he know where she wanted his lips and tongue to be?"

"It might be best if you told me."

"Licking her naked breasts, Mr. Marlow. Drawing her nipples into his mouth, Mr. Marlow. Making those hard, little tits so tight they ached, Mr. Marlow."

His breathing continued to pick up. "Like his balls and cock?"

"You're saying he would be hard, Mr. Marlow?"

"More than stone, Ms. Taylor. Which surely means that she would be wet."

"Then his fingers would have easily slipped over her plump lips? They would have had no trouble stroking her clit before plunging into her opening?"

His nostrils flared. "I would think not."

"And after he teased her with his fingers, would he have then moved between her legs so that he might taste that part of her with his mouth?"

God, yes. "Until she moaned in delight."

"And while she was, would he have then mounted her?"

"Again and again and yet again, driving so deep she wouldn't know where her body ended and his began."

Her sigh was very breathy as she considered that. "And this would have happened if conditions had been right?"

"If there had been time."

"How much time would he need, Mr. Marlow?"

"More than was allowed."

"So you're saying their unspeakable acts weren't long in duration?"

"Less than three minutes, I would think."

Again, she seemed to be considering that. "Then it would appear there's only one recourse left."

"And that would be?"

"We'll have to make certain not to rush ourselves the next time. Are you with me on that?"

He was, and couldn't help but laugh. "You bet."

For a moment there was only the sounds of Tiffany's sighs, and then her voice got really soft. "Hi."

He smiled. "hi."

"Are you working now, Nick?"

Not if she invited him up to her suite. Suddenly, Nick couldn't imagine a nicer place to be. "Why?"

"You are, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"Do your parents know how hard you work? Do they have any idea how smart you are?"

Okay, there was a question and a change of subject he hadn't anticipated. "What?"

"Your. Parents," she said, slowly enunciating each word. "What is the matter with

them? No, wait. That wasn't very nice. I have no right to judge them. What is the matter with them, Nick? Did they expect you to be a marine biologist?"

"Molecular," he corrected, "and yeah."

"I'm glad you're not."

He paused at that endorsement, then looked over his shoulder. The security officer was finally gone, and the players in this room were so intent on the game they wouldn't have noticed if *he* stripped for them. Still, he lowered his voice as he asked, "Have you been drinking?"

"Because I was talking about sex?"

Well, that and his parents. "Have you been drinking, Tiff-"

"Two glasses of wine. I'm allowed. I am over twenty-one. I'm twenty-seven by the way."

"You're a regular old lady," he said. "Why so many questions about my parents?"

She breathed into the phone, then said, "They should appreciate what you do."

"Why?"

She didn't say.

"Tiffany, why?"

"Because it's so damn hard."

Ah. Now he got it. "Have you been studying for our bet?"

"Are you kidding? I'll never be done studying for it. God, this stuff isn't even in English. Whoever heard of early cheating, face up surrender, bottom pair face down, hard come hand, free roll nuts, no push- are you laughing at me?"

He couldn't help it. "Honey, you've got those terms all mixed up."

"That's what Carla keeps saying. At this rate, she's going to have to play for me and she doesn't even have any experience!"

"Carla?"

Tiffany was quickly mute.

"Carla?" Nick repeated.

"My assistant. She's allowed to help. Don't you dare bother her."

"Tiffany, I don't even know her. You're not actually trying to learn to count cards, are you?"

"You don't think I'm capable?"

Given that she sounded close to tears, Nick was afraid to tell her the truth. "What I'm trying to say is, we could just—"

"I am not giving up. I can do this."

"But you don't have to."

"So now you're saying blackjack is out and you just want to strip me during poker?"



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