

The Lake by Moonlight

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Chapter One

Julie's nerves had been winding tighter and tighter since she'd left New York ten hours ago. They'd squeezed into hard knots when she landed in Milan, and now, in the car carrying her toward the lake, her insides churned. She barely noticed the extraordinary smoothness and quiet of the hired vehicle or the buttery softness of leather upholstery in the back seat.

She wished she'd said no to the trip. She wished she could've said no. But that wasn't really an option. Professor Antonio Farnese had asked for her specifically to come and assess the group of paintings he'd recently inherited. If genuine, they were worth a fortune, and it would be her job to convince him to donate or sell them to her museum for a reasonable price. It was a chance of a lifetime for someone so young, an opportunity that could make her career.

But really, that was only a small part of why nerves made her mouth dry and hands shake when she pulled a bottle of Perrier from the cooler.

It was knowing the real reason he'd asked for her specifically. Or maybe not so much knowing, as not knowing, but suspecting. Hoping, perhaps? Outside, twilight faded into darkness so she didn't even have the gorgeous scenery to distract her.

Too soon, the car turned off the main road, into a side one, and then into the private drive that led to the villa overlooking the lake.

"Signor Farnese will meet you on the terrace," the driver said as he opened the car door for her. "I'll take your bag up."

Julie got out and climbed the stairs to a terrace overlooking the lake. No one waited there, so she took a seat in one of the cushioned chairs surrounding a table. The professor had always had a flair for the dramatic. It didn't surprise her when the door from the house slid open, though no lights showed, and a deep, masculine voice spoke. "Thank you for coming."

"You made it hard to refuse."

"Did you want to?"

"Part of me did."

"Not the best part." His voice poured from the darkness like molten chocolate, deep, dark, and dangerously rich.

"Debatable, but anyway, I'm here."

He emerged onto the patio and approached. In the darkness she made out a tall, slim figure, in trousers and polo shirt. He walked with a noticeable limp, something new, and likely something he hated. She couldn't make out much of his features. He set two wine glasses on the table, sat opposite her, and slid one glass across to her.

Julie took a long sip of a rich, fragrant Pinot Grigio. They sat in silence for a moment, until she said, "Professor? Why am I really here?"

She could just barely discern his features. "You are no longer a student. Call me Antonio. Or Tony, if you prefer. I asked you here for an opinion on my paintings."

"That's the excuse. It's not the reason."

"Getting right to the point? Then I will too. I plan to do what I wanted to do seven years ago when you were here. I want to seduce you."

Breath stuck in her throat and her hands clenched into fists. "I'm not that naïve young woman anymore."

"And I'm not the man I was either. The eight years difference in our ages hardly matters now, does it? I'm told you're not married and not even seeing anyone seriously."

"I was engaged for a few months." She set the wine glass down. "But we broke it off by

mutual consent. He wasn't what I needed, and I wasn't what he needed." Let him read what he would into that. Unfortunately he was sharp enough to guess the implications.

He toyed with his wine glass. A stray gleam of light from the moon fell across his hand where it wrapped the glass and showed him running a finger up and down the stem. He had strong hands with long, graceful fingers and neatly trimmed nails. "You know that Sonia, my wife, died...was killed in a car crash almost two years ago."

"I heard. I sent a card."

He drew in a harsh breath. "I was in the car with her and in the hospital for a long time afterward. Her family had to have the funeral without me."

"Is that why you limp?"

He stayed quiet for a moment. "I'm lucky I didn't lose the leg entirely."

"So this whole thing with the paintings was a ruse? You asked me to come here just so you could scratch an itch?"

"There really are paintings. And I trust your judgement about them. You were the most promising and adept student I ever worked with."

"In more ways than one," she added dryly.

"That, too. But to answer your question, it's more than just scratching an itch. You know my marriage to Sonia was arranged by our parents when we were small children. We did well enough, even so, but there was much missing from our relationship. When you were here, something happened between us. It shouldn't have and I'm glad now that we never let it go too far. But it was there and we both knew it. For me, it made the emptiness of my marriage just that much clearer."

"It was impossible and we both knew it."

He took a sip of wine and hesitated over it. "Is it still impossible? Is there anything still there? I haven't met anyone else that made me feel the way you did. I'm guessing you haven't either."

"I was infatuated," Julie admitted. "I was also half afraid of you."

"And you're neither now?"

"I don't know. My life's in New York now. My career's on a nice path. I have friends and family not too far away. I have a cat who loves to cuddle up with me."

His chuckle sent shivers down her spine. The infatuation might have been relegated to the back burner all these years, but just the sound of his voice could rouse it again. "I don't know that I can compete with a cat," he admitted.

He finished the wine and stood abruptly. "I doubt they fed you well on the plane. There's dinner waiting for us inside, if you're hungry."

"I'm famished." Surprisingly, it was the truth. Despite the nerves still twisting her stomach, she was ravenous.

He took her arm to lead her into the house. The touch of his fingers on her forearm sent tingles of energy skittering along her skin. He paused at the sound of her sharply indrawn breath.

"You are well?"

"Just tired. It was a long flight but a short night."

"Then come and eat and we'll tuck you up in bed afterward."

"I can handle the bed part."

He laughed. "Of course you can."

She remembered enough of the house from her previous stay to know they walked across a large, open living area, past the formal dining room, to a smaller and more intimate nook just off

the kitchen. A simple chandelier that hung over the table shone dimly, but with enough light to finally let her get a good look at him.

Antonio was still almost absurdly handsome. The years and suffering had refined his good looks into sharper focus, making the hollows under the well-defined cheekbones deeper, and carving new lines around his dark eyes and sensual mouth. Strands of gray threaded his straight black hair, though he was only thirty-seven.

“The years have been kind to you,” he said, studying her as closely as she did him. “Kinder to you than to me. You’ve become even more beautiful.”

“Please. You’re not likely to scare off the dogs...or the women. I can’t believe you don’t have them crawling all over you now that you’re single.”

“I keep to myself mostly.” He fingered her chestnut hair. “I’m not sure I like this shorter haircut, though.”

“It’s easier to take care of and I don’t have a lot of time to fuss with it.”

He nodded and handed her a bowl and plate and pointed to the row of warming dishes on the sideboard. “Pasta’s here. Then veal rolls and some kind of green bean concoction.” They filled bowls with pasta and plates with meat and vegetables. The food deserved more attention than she gave it, but in the presence of Antonio Farnese everything else faded into insignificance. While they ate, they talked about what they’d been doing in the seven years since they’d last seen each other. She told him about getting her Master’s degree, then the job at the museum, relationships with co-workers, and amusing incidents on duty.

“I hear you’re teaching at the university again,” she said.

“Just two classes in the most recent term. Mostly just to keep my hand in.”

As the evening wore on, wine, food, stress, and exhaustion worked on her until she was all but falling asleep at the table.

He finally rose and said, “Come. You’re done in. I’ll show you to your room.”

Exhaustion ensured she slept well and long. Her phone showed it was after nine by the time she rose, and almost ten when she wandered out to the living area. The double doors stood open and she found Antonio sitting at the table on the terrace. A coffee service was set out there, where an umbrella had been raised to shade them from the sun. He poured a cup of the lovely, strong Italian espresso no coffee shop in the U.S. could quite duplicate and handed her the sugar bowl as well, followed by a basket of rolls. “Help yourself.”

“I’m sorry I slept so late. I don’t normally.”

He shook his head. “You had a long trip yesterday. And there is no rush to do anything. After breakfast I plan to walk into town. I try to do that most days if the weather is good. They tell me walking is good for my leg. It keeps the joints loose. Would you accompany me? It promises to be a fine day.”

Was there more than just a comment on the weather in those words? Julie couldn’t decide whether she hoped so or not.

“I’d love to.” She ate some of the roll and sampled the coffee, while she tried not to stare at the handsome man sitting opposite her. Instead she studied the magnificent view across the water. The lake nestled deep in Italy’s northern foothills. Cool breezes blew across it even deep in summer as it was now, contrasting pleasantly with the sun’s heat. The water itself was the deepest blue she’d ever seen. Boats of all sorts churned its surface, from the tiny fishing boats to

much larger ferries, someone's luxurious yacht and a flotilla of motorboats. "This may be the most beautiful place in the entire world."

"It's certainly one of them. I'm fortunate to have the place." He swiveled and put his feet up on the railing. He had to lift the damaged right leg to get it there. She saw the outline of a brace around his knee under the black slacks. He wore leather loafers—probably custom made for him. "My great-grandfather bought the land a hundred years or so ago, between the world wars, before the prices got so astronomical as they are now. He built the house for his wife and family and it's been our retreat ever since. Sadly, there isn't much family left to enjoy it."

"I thought your wife was pregnant when I was here."

"She miscarried a month or so later. She had some kind of internal problem that would make it difficult for her to carry a baby to term."

"I'm sorry."

His eyes narrowed, whether in pain or regret she couldn't tell. He took a sip of coffee. "We should have divorced. She should've had a chance to find a man who would make her happy. I was not that man."

Julie hesitated but then asked. "Why not? You're rich, handsome, intelligent, personable, and kind. What more could she want?"

He turned to her with a surprised look that changed into a smile. "Sonia wanted travel and glamorous parties and socializing with many people. She would've made an excellent wife for a politician. Not for a man who prefers reading to parties and small intimate gatherings of good friends to talk about art and music and books rather than big affairs with celebrities. I was not the right mate for her."

Julie studied him and wondered how any woman could find the man anything less than devastating. He looked even better in the light of day. His dark eyes were large and ringed with absurdly long eyelashes, nose long and thin, and lips perfectly shaped. Perfect for kissing. *Dear heaven, that was not a thought she should indulge.* His looks combined with his intellect and wit made him the most attractive man she'd ever met.

It seemed the talk about his past made him uncomfortable, for he stood abruptly and said, "But come, let us not waste the pleasant temperatures sitting here."

The walk into town was about a mile, but involved scaling a fairly steep hill. Fortunately, living in New York meant she was used to walking fair distances and she coped with it easily enough. Antonio used a cane, but appeared to have little trouble walking. The town wasn't large but had a few shops, including a pharmacy where he stopped to pick up medicine and a large outdoor market, geared mostly for the tourists who flooded the area in summer. She bought a few trinkets, including a pretty bracelet of amethysts.

They stopped into a café for more coffee and pastries before setting off back to his villa. While she asked him about his work teaching and some research he was doing on a few lesser-known seventeenth century Italian painters, he took her hand and held it through most of the journey back. The easy intimacy of it sent shivers of both longing and fear through her.

At home, he introduced her to Signora Lazarini, his cook and housekeeper who came in daily to do light cleaning and sometimes prepare the midday and evening meals when he was in residence. "I've already told her no dinner today," he said to Julie. "This evening I want to take you to a favorite restaurant of mine not far from here. But right now, let's go out to the garden. It was a favorite place of yours when you were last here, I recall. It was neglected for a while, but I've had it redone. I think you'll like it."

The garden had been a favorite escape during the times she'd spent time here with other

students during breaks. A cool, quiet corner had been a perfect place to sit and read or just meditate on life.

He led the way out to the terrace, then down a set of stairs to the walled garden on the side of the house away from the driveway and street. A profusion of colors, textures and scents almost overwhelmed her. She didn't know the names of most of the flowers, but she did recognize the red and yellow roses in the corners and the spikes of lavender in boxes. Plants filled the small area except for one corner where a pergola supported some kind of vine and sheltered a two-seat swing beneath it.

He took her hand and led her around the area, introducing her to zinnias, marigolds, poppies and assorted other things. After the tour, they retreated to the swing, where they rocked quietly together. Antonio put an arm around her shoulders and drew her closer to him. Julie sighed, breathing in the scents of flowers and the man beside her, leather, spice, and something essentially male, reveling in the feel of his hard body alongside hers. She sighed. Wanting him was stupid and foolish. A casual fling might work with some other man, but not with him. If she let herself care, her heart would be broken. They lived on different continents.

“Antonio, I think—”

A buzzing from his pocket interrupted. He pulled out his phone, glanced at it, and said, “Lunch is served.”

Saved by the buzzer?

Over a lovely meal of pasta with a white wine sauce, a selection of meats, and a delicious cassoulet of assorted vegetables, he kept the conversation light, talking mostly about the lake region, the development of it, and efforts to preserve its beauty from over-development. As they finished he said, “I like to have a siesta now, and then my physical therapist will be here for a while. Be free to nap, to read, to walk around, or whatever you wish. I'll meet you on the terrace at half after seven and we'll go across to Tremezzo for dinner.”

Julie did lie down for a bit but was too restless to sleep. Instead she got up and took a book out to the terrace. Even a novel from one of her favorite authors couldn't compete with her disturbed thoughts. Seeing Antonio Farnese again roused again the confused longing she'd felt all those years ago. As part of her graduate program in art, she'd spent a year studying at a university in Milan.

Antonio had been her advisor as well as teaching a couple of required classes. She'd been fortunate to be part of the group of foreign students he invited to stay with him and his wife in their lakeside villa during the long university breaks. She'd spent a lot of time discussing art and just about everything else with him. His intelligence, warmth, and kindness left those times burned into her memory. Coupled with the way he occasionally looked at her, by the time she left, attraction had grown into a deeper, if futile, infatuation that teetered perilously close to love. He'd spoiled her for other men.

She met him on the terrace promptly at seven and he took them across the lake on his boat. Dinner was lovely, with good food, good wine, and live music from a string quartet. When they got back to his villa afterward, he asked, “Will you join me for a night cap, or are you too tired?”

“I'd love to.”

He went in to get wine and glasses. Again he left most of the lights off, bathing the terrace in moonlight and the faint glow from other buildings. Strains of music drifted across the lake and a soft breeze caressed her face.

When he'd returned and had poured wine for each of them, he held up his glass and said, “Thank you for coming all this way. It's good to have your company again.”

“Pro—Antonio, you were honest last night about your motive for bringing me here. I need to be honest, too, and tell you I don’t think this is going to work. I have done a couple of casual flings in my time, but I don’t think I can do that with you.”

“Why not? There is an attraction between us, is there not?”

“Of course there is, and that’s the problem.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I could never have a casual fling with *you*.”

He was quiet for a moment. “You’re concerned about the difference in our ages? Or is it my leg?”

Anger at his obtuseness sharpened her words. “I’m *concerned* about my *heart*.”

“Ah.” She felt his gaze on her, and it was almost a physical caress. “So you are unwilling to take a chance?”

“How can there *be* any chance? We live on different continents. You’re rich, handsome, sophisticated. I’m just plain old Julie.”

He reached across the table to take her hand. “Julie is neither old nor plain. She’s beautiful and warm and vibrant, and very likely too good for a broken-down old wreck like myself. As for where we live, if it is right, there will be a way.” He paused to take a sip of wine. “But if you wish to go now, we’ll look at the pictures tomorrow, and we’ll get you on the next plane after that”

Julie’s heart dove down into her gut at the thought of leaving him again so quickly. Especially when there was a possibility...

“No. I don’t want to go yet.”

The music swelled from across the lake.

Just enough light played around the area to let her see his smile. The sweetness and joy it held pierced her like a dagger to the chest. Life was full of risks, she reminded herself, and the greater the risk, the greater the potential reward. His chair clattered as he pushed back from the table and stood. “Dance with me,” he demanded. He held her chair as she stood, then waited while she walked into his arms.

“Can you dance? With the leg?”

“I certainly can’t dance without it.” A charming chuckle accompanied the words, reminding her that his sense of humor was one of the things that drew her to him. “Truthfully, though, I wasn’t really much of a dancer before the accident.” He wrapped his arms around her and she put her hands on his shoulders. “I am, however, reasonably good at swaying in place. It serves.”

It did. For some time, they did nothing but move lightly together, and it was as close as Julie had ever gotten to heaven. Tucked firmly against his body, with his arms around her waist, she reveled in his warmth and firm hold, breathed in his scent—a blend of some expensive, spicy male fragrance and the man himself—and listened to the thump of his heartbeat.

She had no idea how any relationship between them could work, but moving with him, surrounded by him, feeling the proof of his desire for her pressing against her, she really didn’t care. When he bent forward to kiss her, she stopped thinking at all and let herself just feel.

His lips brushed gently across hers at first, but became more demanding as she softened and opened for him. His tongue swooped in and brushed over her teeth and around the sensitive tissues of her gums. Something inside her came to life and began to tap dance on her stomach. Tingly heat rushed along all her nerves, and settled in her core.

His arms tightened around her and his hands moved down to her rear end, cupping her buttocks to urge her closer.

“Tonight is just for anticipation,” he whispered in her ear. “And a bit of adventure. Are you feeling adventurous?”

“What did you have in mind?”

Without completely releasing her, he removed his tie, unbuttoned his shirt, and shrugged out of it. Then he said, “Take your blouse off. And whatever you’re wearing under it. I want to dance with you topless.”

Heat rushed through her and her pussy swelled. “Oh. Wow. That’s so... kinky.”

“Adventurous,” he corrected. “We’ll try kinky later.”

“Oh.” She reached for the buttons of her blouse. Her fingers shook with a combination of nerves and excitement, making it harder to unfasten them, but she finally got the last one undone and shook the top off. Her bra hooked in back, but that took only a moment to undo before she tossed it aside too.

“*Dio Mio.*” He said it on a gasp. “You are even more beautiful than I dreamt.”

She walked toward him. “You’ve dreamed of me?”

“Often. More often than you could guess.”

Her heart gave an odd little lurch in her chest. Then he reached out, pulled her toward him, and wrapped his arms around her again. Her breasts were crushed against his chest, though the difference in their heights meant her nipples were several inches below his. Still, those sensitive tips brushed against soft hair and warm skin. The wonderful sweetness and raw intimacy of the position made her shiver.

“You’re cold?” he asked, drawing her even closer.

“No. Definitely no.”

“Good.” He began to sway again, sort of in time with the music still drifting from across the water. Julie rested her head on his shoulder, and breathed in the scent of him.

“Julie, *cara mia,*” he murmured. His face was buried in her hair, but then he drew back enough so he could kiss her forehead, beside her ear, and across her cheek to her mouth. In the lovely, soft darkness of the Italian night, he became her world, all she could see, hear, feel, smell, and taste. Her blood raced through her veins, fizzing with exuberant joy.

They swayed together, occasionally stopping to kiss or touch for some time. After a while, he sat in one of the chairs and drew her down onto his lap. His arms came around her again and hands cupped her breasts. He caressed and sometimes squeezed. His fingers traced around her nipples, tapped them, circled and occasionally pinched. Her breath grew rapid and arousal tightened her pussy with each electric zing his touches ignited. She wasn’t alone in her need. His breath grew harsher and deeper, and the end of his bulging cock nudged at her bottom. Yet he seemed content to sit that way for a long time as the hour got later.

When the music finally stopped and lights began to go out, he whispered, “Let’s go in.”

She asked no questions, but followed him inside. He stopped in the living area, and asked, “Come to my bed? Not to make love, not yet, but I want to sleep with you in my arms.”

Sleep? He could think about sleeping? But an inelegant yawn chose that moment to break free. It was very late and she was tired.

“Lead the way,” she answered.

Chapter Two

They really did just sleep, spooned together in his huge bed, and it was one of the best nights of sleep she ever had.

She woke to an empty bed, but made her way back to her own room to shower and dress before heading out to the veranda. Antonio waited there with coffee and rolls.

“Would you like to tour the lake by boat?” he asked. “I never tire of exploring it. There are many inlets, and hills, and small towns to visit.”

She agreed. They loaded drinks and food onto his boat and spent the rest of the day poking around various corners of a lake that was much larger than she’d realized. In places tall, steep hillsides, heavily wooded and surprisingly quiet, shadowed the water. In one such isolated cove, they stopped for a while and kissed. At his request, she hadn’t worn a bra, so when he worked his hands under her tee shirt, he cupped and rubbed her breasts. He pressed her back on the seat, pushed up the shirt, and leaned down to take one nipple in his mouth. He held the other between his fingers, pinching lightly while he brushed his tongue around it until the shocks and heat from his clever mouth drove her nearly insane. She squirmed and squealed and begged for more. He obliged, going back and forth to give each side its due. When he took one tip between his teeth and bit down, gently, then harder, she moaned and worked her fingers into his soft, brown hair, holding tightly to the strands. When he sucked in a harsh breath and drew back, straightening up and moving to the boat’s controls again, she swore under her breath in frustration.

How did he do it? She knew it affected him, too, yet he pulled back. He just laughed when she asked about it, and said, “Anticipation makes the payoff sweeter.”

“I’m not sure it’s making me any sweeter.”

He chuckled again as the boat began to move. They visited a couple of small towns, pulling up to rickety docks, and walking a little way among cottages and small shops. At one stop, they had luncheon in a tiny local restaurant that served delicious soups. The owner came out as they were eating and greeted Antonio like an old friend.

“You bring all the girls here?” she teased.

The owner’s English was better than she expected. “Oh, but, no,” he insisted. “Signor Antonio comes alone when he is here. Is good to see he has company now!”

Afterward, they resumed the tour of the lake, stopping at one of the larger towns where they docked and went up the street to the town center. They ducked into several shops and Julie bought a few trinkets for family and friends. Despite her protests, Antonio purchased a necklace she’d exclaimed over.

Following that stop, they rode around admiring the scenery for another hour or so. They talked and laughed and enjoyed each other’s company on the trip. Then he pulled up to a rickety dock in an out-of-the way cove. Oddly, there was no town or any signs of a dwelling nearby.

“Trust me.” Antonio extended a hand to help her out of the boat after he’d tied up the craft. “It’s worth the stop.”

She raised an eyebrow. “If you say so.”

He grabbed a backpack from the boat without saying anything more. A footpath led from the dock over a low hill and then into a stand of trees that shadowed the way. He took her hand and they walked together silently through the quiet woods. Only gradually did she notice when the area became less silent, and a low roar penetrated her awareness. Then they emerged into a clearing at the bottom of a steep hill to see the source of the noise now grown to a mix of roar, splashes, and gurgles.

She'd seen more impressive waterfalls, taller ones, wider ones, and some with much more water flowing, but the setting in these deserted hills, and a particular grace to the way the stream slid over the edge of a cliff, broke into three distinct trickles, and cast itself into an almost shimmeringly clear pool at the base made it the prettiest.

"Oh. So totally worth it," she admitted.

Antonio pulled a blanket from the backpack and spread it on the ground, then extended his arm with a flourish. "Have a seat, my lady."

"Thank you, kind sir." She took his hand and let him help her sit. He lowered himself down beside her, his bad leg making the maneuver awkward. Once he got down and stretched it out, he appeared comfortable enough. They nibbled on cheese, bread, and grapes he'd packed, and sipped from bottles of water while they watched the stream relentlessly hurling itself over the edge of the cliff.

When he lay back on the blanket, she joined him and they rested side by side. She turned to face him and studied his dear features in the dappled sunlight. His straight, dark hair was longer than he'd worn it a few years ago, and the warm brown eyes had flecks of amber and gold she'd never noticed before. Or she'd never been close enough to notice before. His smile showed straight, white teeth.

He reached out and traced her features with a gentle hand, so she did the same, brushing her fingers over his cheeks, temples, and forehead, then tracing the outline of his lips. She wanted him so badly, she wondered if she'd survive their inevitable separation. Desperation made her try to imprint his face and body in the archives of her mind, saving every last detail, including the creases around his eyes and mouth that showed a history of suffering, mixed with a continued capacity for joy.

Then he rolled a bit closer so he could kiss her, and her bittersweet musings faded into hot, sweet jolts as his lips and tongue worked her mouth. He reached under her shirt and stroked her breasts, fingering the tips until she moaned into his mouth. When his hand moved down over her stomach and pushed under the waistband of her shorts, breath clotted in her throat and nerves knotted even tighter. After he unsnapped the shorts and pulled down the zipper, Julie helped him slide them down and off. Her panties followed moments later.

It felt almost unreal, to be here in this lovely, isolated place with Antonio Farnese, the man she'd dreamed about for years. He made her body sing to his direction. He parted her legs and stroked the insides of her thighs, rousing sensations so exquisitely pleasurable, she wasn't sure she could bear them. He moved his fingers higher and higher until they reached her labia. Julie sobbed when he stroked her there. Electric zings of almost unbearable joy raced through her, stealing breath, making her heart race.

Her pussy swelled and muscles got tighter as he dipped deeper and found the super-sensitive bud within. She sobbed and moaned and grabbed at the blanket, holding it in her fists. He worked a finger inside while continuing to stroke her clit. Tension wound tighter inside until he squeezed the bud and everything went bright, too bright, and spasms of release rocked her.

He held her while aftershocks rattled her, until she calmed. It wasn't complete, though. She reached for the button of his trousers and found his hand already there. Together they wrestled his clothes off. Julie drew in a sharp breath and felt her stomach muscles clench at the site of his nude body. Antonio was himself a work of art, so beautiful it almost made her cry. The broad shoulders, sculpted chest and abdomen, long legs, and a long, scrumptious cock belonged to a man who could model for an artist.

She wanted to tell him, but couldn't find the right words. He leaned over and kissed her

breasts, then reached for his discarded trousers, searching the pockets until he found the packet he wanted.

“I love a man who comes prepared,” Julie said, rather breathlessly.

“I had a feeling this place would work some sort of magic.” He said as he rolled on the condom. He lay over her, weight on his elbows, and his cock sought her entrance. Carefully, he pressed forward, inching his way into her, until she wrapped her legs around him and urged him deeper. His moan filled her with delight, to know she could give him the same incredible sensations he’d evoked from her. She buried her fingers in his hair and drew his face closer to kiss again. Tension pulled all his muscles tight, and she began to wind up again herself. He withdrew, then plunged in, faster and harder this time. His cock rubbed over that magic spot inside that made her jerk and almost scream with each contact.

He pumped even faster until he froze for a moment, plunged harder, and let out a long groan as he came. At almost the same time she hit the peak and released.

Afterward, they lay together, panting, for some time as they drifted down from the high. Finally, Antonio disentangled himself, stood up and began to gather their clothes. Once they were dressed, he picked up the food containers and blanket. “I hate to leave,” Julie told him. “This is such a wonderful place.”

“We’ll come back again, sometime,” he promised.

By the time they got back to the boat, the light was fading into twilight. Instead of taking them back to his home, he headed for another town and took them to a different restaurant for dinner.

It was almost ten by the time they got back to the villa. They wasted no time, but headed straight for his bedroom and made love again before falling asleep together.

Chapter Three

In the morning, he told her he had physical therapy again in the afternoon, but before that, he wanted to take her to a museum in a nearby town that had a nice collection of some lesser-known eighteenth-century painters. They took off on the boat after breakfast. The museum wasn't a large one, but the collection interested them both enough to keep them there through lunchtime. Though he had a lot more experience with that century's artists, he solicited her opinions, agreed with some, and respectfully argued with others. In general, he treated her as a colleague rather than a student.

They returned shortly after lunch. She hoped he'd be willing to forego his siesta in favor of making love again, but he told her he needed the rest to face the rigors of the physical therapy session. Julie entertained herself by reading and catching up on email, but mostly she just day-dreamed.

She met him for dinner in the small dining area, and then they took coffee and wine glasses out to the terrace to watch the sunset.

"I have to go to Milan for a faculty meeting tomorrow," he said as he poured white wine into glasses for each of them. "You can stay here, or you can come with me and visit one of the museums while I'm stuck in a boring meeting. I'd love to have your company on the trip. We can spend the night in my apartment there and come back the next morning."

She took a sip of wine before answering, "You already know what I'll say to that."

He nodded and gave her one of his wonderful, sexy, devastating smiles. They spent some time discussing the various museums and what she might most like to see.

After a while, though, he got quiet. They watched twilight fade into darkness in companionable silence. He finally broke it to ask quietly, "Do you remember when you were a student, the day you went off on your own and didn't tell anyone where you were going?"

"All too well," she admitted. "It was a really dumb and thoughtless thing to do."

"You had us all pretty worried. No one knew what had happened to you. And then you came waltzing back hours later and were surprised that everyone was so concerned."

"What can I say? I was young and stupid. I remember you threatened to spank me. I deserved it."

He didn't say anything, waiting for her.

Her voice came out thin and shook when she said, "Part of me wished you would." It wasn't easy to admit.

He had the grace to recognize that it was hard. "Thank you for that. A very big part of me wanted to. Very much. And I could tell you wanted it, too. But it would have been wrong, in too many ways."

She rubbed the rim of her glass. "You know, that amazing and maddening sense of honor of yours was one of the things that made me fall for you so hard. You could so easily have taken advantage of the situation. But you were faithful to your wife."

"In fact, if not always in spirit. But that's not really the point. I would've carried through with the threat. And I would've enjoyed it. The way you looked at me then, I knew you would have too. Perhaps not at first, but ultimately you would."

"You sound very sure of that."

"Are you challenging me to prove it?"

"I believe I am," she said.

He stood suddenly, took her arm, drew her out of the chair, and led her back into the house.

They didn't go to his bedroom, however. Instead he led her down a hall to a room that appeared to serve as his office. It held a large desk, flanked by a couple of chairs, built-in bookshelves along one wall, and a pair of large leather-upholstered sofas.

"This is where I would've brought you seven years ago," he said. "There would've been a lecture first, but I think we can dispense with that."

He sat on one of the leather sofas and said, "Come here. You know what to do."

Butterflies began dancing in her gut. She trusted him not to really hurt her... didn't she? She went to him and stretched out on the same couch, positioning herself with her hips on his lap. His thighs felt firm and muscular beneath her stomach. He flipped up her cotton skirt and she heard his sharp breath, followed by a chuckle. "You are a naughty girl aren't you?"

"I try." Her panties weren't quite a thong but there wasn't much more to them. They didn't provide much protection when he smacked her left cheek and followed it with another to the right. It stung, but not unbearably. He spanked a few more times and it started to burn. At the same time, each stroke seemed to send a zing of lightning straight to her pussy. She squirmed when a harder smack burned more. After three more of those had her moaning and wriggling, he stopped and ran a soothing, caressing hand over the hot flesh.

Dear heaven, that was hot. And glorious. Exciting. Thrilling. And heavens above, she wanted him.

He began spanking again, continuing until her bottom felt red and sore. When he stopped the pounding and started stroking again, the soreness retreated and arousal took over. His rubbing brought his fingers closer and closer to her pussy. As promised, she enjoyed the glorious way the gentle strokes felt after the spanking, and any residual soreness increased and sharpened her arousal.

A few minutes of that and he lifted her off his lap, laying her back on the sofa, tore off her panties, and pulled a condom out of his pocket before shucking off his own trousers and briefs. He rolled on the rubber and climbed on the sofa with her, a little awkwardly with his injured leg. It didn't hinder him, though, when he plunged wildly into her, pumping hard right from the start. The spanking had her so aroused, she was more than ready for his vigorous plunging. She moved with him, pushing up to meet each of his strokes, driven by the need that strung her tighter each time his cock filled her. They thrashed wildly together, making the sofa rock with their desperate hunger for each other.

When the climax hit, it was like cresting a mountain and sliding down the other side. She screamed and Antonio roared. They lay together for a long time afterward, panting, jerking, and finally settling into the profound peace of an experience unlike anything she'd ever known.

The next day, he drove them to the city after breakfast, and introduced her to his apartment there. It was nowhere near as luxurious as the lakeside villa, but still nice enough for a bachelor. She enjoyed the day visiting a couple of museums, and the evening even more, when she got to discuss what she'd seen with Antonio. Their loving was explosive as well.

He had another meeting in the morning, so they didn't get back to the villa until mid-afternoon. It occurred to her that she was scheduled to leave in two days, and wondered why he seemed to be putting off showing her the art work that was the ostensible reason for her visit.

She brought it up with him that evening. "You've kept me entertained and preoccupied with other things, and waited until my next-to-last day before showing me the pictures you brought

me here to look at,” she said. “Why?”

His expression puzzled her: fear mixed with chagrin, as he hesitated. Finally he answered, “Because when you see them you will know.”

“Know what?”

“My secret.”

“Your—”

“You heard.”

“But I don’t understand.”

His expression grew darker, tense and worried as he said, “Come.” She went with him to the office where he’d spanked her. Without saying anything more, he pressed a hidden switch and a section of wall slid open to reveal a small room beyond. The low hum of a dehumidifier suggested its use, a supposition confirmed, when he slid a series of drawers open and lifted several framed canvases from them. He carried them out into the light of his office, and laid them on a table. “Take a look,” he suggested, nodding to the canvases.

Julie crossed to the desk to study the paintings arrayed there. It took her only a few moments, as he’d known it would. “Did you have some of the art students at the university paint these for you?”

He laughed harshly. “They’re a little better than that. They were working artists.”

“Why go to all that trouble?”

“Because I needed a reason to get you to come. Something you couldn’t afford to refuse.”

“You couldn’t just have asked?”

“Would you have come? Honestly?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’ve waited too long already,” he said. “We—Sonia and I—had talked about a divorce before the accident, but it hadn’t gone very far. Then after, I had a long recovery, and I wasn’t willing to consider contacting you until I knew if I would still have two legs. I had to get this set up and time it right.”

“I’m not sure I know what to say,” Julie admitted. “I’m a bit angry that you think it would make any difference to me whether you had one leg or two.”

“Not to you. To me,” Antonio said. “But I think I would’ve taken the chance with you anyway. I love you. I have for years. I know you have doubts about whether this can work, but I don’t. I want to show you that it can. I am committed to teaching this fall, but I’m planning to take some time off after that to do research for a project I’m developing. I can do much of it in New York. If you’re willing you can help me find a place to stay. But I can’t wait that long to see you again, so I hope you’ll let me bring you here again when we both have the time free. After some time in New York, we should both know whether there is a future for us together.”

“I desperately hope you’re right,” she said. “I love you too.” She leaned into him and kissed him. “I’m glad I came. My boss will be disappointed, but I’m not.”

“Maybe not,” Antonio said. “A moment.” He disappeared into the vault again and came back with a portfolio from which he withdrew some drawings, each encased in its own protective envelope.

She sucked in a breath when she got a look at them. “These are genuine? What’s the provenance on them? I didn’t know Veronese did any sketches for his banquet paintings.”

“They’ve been in my wife’s family for generations. Well documented and authenticated. I’m willing to loan them to the right museum, however.”

“I’m pretty sure I know one that would be very interested.”

Antonio smiled and pulled her into his arms. “I expect the negotiations to be very interesting. You’ll undoubtedly have to make a few more trips here to convince me.”

About the Author

Katherine Kingston

Katherine Kingston has a wild and crazy imagination that she sets free to rummage through the past, present, future and other worlds entirely. That imagination comes back with a lovely assortment of ideas for characters, plots, settings and events. The result is stories in many different settings, ranging from the medieval period to the far future to places that don't actually exist except in her fantasies. They all include a sizzling hot romance, usually with kinky elements.

A former computer programmer and magazine editor, Katherine now works part time and spends the rest of her day writing. She lives in North Carolina with her husband of many years, and has three grown children and several grandchildren.

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