A warm tropical breeze skimmed the filmy wrap against Delia Murphy’s long legs, like a lover’s attentive hands. The resin lounge chair creaked when she shifted, then pushed her dark sunglasses just a fraction of an inch, with a well-manicured nail, down her nose . A faint smile tipped her lips while her gaze drifted over the well-muscled man in the pool. His nut brown skin glistened as his strong arms sliced effortlessly through the sparkling water, broad shoulders flexing with each fluid stroke. How she envied the cool liquid lapping his skin.

She sighed. He was the only man who made her heart stumble a quick step, her pulse dance a jitterbug, and her other parts vibrate a tango. Already the crotch of her swimsuit was damp with her juices. She lifted the romance novel from her lap, but her eyes refused to focus on the print. All she wanted was to stare at his sexy perfection.

And she knew perfection. She was a lover of men: a woman who enjoyed their company and reveled in their attention. She delighted in the male physique wherever it could be found. Delia lifted her gaze and scanned the pool, biting back a wave of disappointment. Damn! He was gone.

Just as well. He was the only man she hadn’t spoken to in the three days on the cruise ship. He didn’t fit into her rules. Her man of the hour had to stick to his day and time, to accept he wasn’t the only man she dated. And he must never, under any circumstances, ask her for sex. That required some form of commitment on her part, and well...experience.

But the moment she laid eyes on the magnificent hottie in the pool, she grinned. He would be worth breaking the rules for. She flipped the page, feigning interest, though she couldn’t recall what she read.

“I dare you,” a smoky voice challenged.

Delia set the paperback aside, lowered her dark sunglasses, and stifled a moan of contentment. He had the voice to go with the body! His dulcet tones, all sin and silk, caressed her skin. Her nipples tightened to hard peaks.

She leaned back in the lounge chair and looked up, up, and up. God, he was even more gorgeous up close. His well-defined chest held a sprinkling of dark coarse hair, glistening with droplets of water. His biceps bulged when he ran a hand over his close-cropped hair. She followed the length of his arm down to his strong sexy abs. She flicked her eyes downward and bit back a smile.

Delia dragged her gaze to his face. His full lips curved into a smile. She bit the tip of her tongue, longing to run the edge along his bottom lip. “Excuse me?”

“To commit.”

She quirked an eyebrow. “To what?”

His smile widened. “To one man.”

She laughed. “Right. You don’t know me at all.” She inhaled, her stomach dancing inside as the soft breeze shifted, bringing her the spicy scent of his cologne softened by the chlorine. He smelled as good as he looked. If she nibbled on him, would he taste yummy, too?

“That can be changed. Jace Andrews.” He dropped one end of the towel draped around his neck and extended his hand.

Delia tried not to squirm when his rough calloused palm scraped hers. Lust simmered through her veins while her heart pounded. She held her breath when his hand lingered, and he swept a lazy caress against her skin with his thumb.

Clearing her throat, she gently reclaimed her hand. “Delia. Have a seat.” She waved a hand at the empty chair next to hers and waited for him to sit, biting her lip against the question burning on her tongue. “Why should I accept your challenge?”

“This is the first time I’ve seen you alone since you boarded.”

“You’ve been watching me?” Surprised delight coursed through her.

He shrugged, just a casual lifting of his broad muscular shoulders. She sighed in appreciation at the ripple of sinewy flesh.

“How could I not? You walk into a room and it’s like a lightning storm. A person has to admire the view.”

“Wow.” Her insides melted. No one ever said anything like that to her before, and she had heard every line conceivable. When she glanced at him, she read avid interest in his eyes, before his gaze roved over her. She shifted, a little disconcerted at his scorching scrutiny. No man ever looked at her like she was the only woman onboard.

Jace leaned forward, bracing his hands on his knees. “Well?”

“Well what?”

“Are you going to do it?”

“Do what?”

He laughed and she went all liquid inside. “You can’t keep answering a question with a question. Can you commit?”

Delia shook her head, amusement curving her lips. “Life is too short to waste time with just one person.”

He moved closer, his knee brushing hers. Tiny jolts of electricity sizzled through her body.

“Life is too short not to,” he pointed out.

She pushed her glasses onto her head and laid a hand on his arm. The muscle bunched beneath her palm. The heat of his skin infused her, making her giddy. “I never commit to a man or a relationship.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Really? So how do you get to know someone?”

Sitting back, she lowered her glasses back to her nose. Touching him unsettled her almost as much as his nearness. What was wrong with her? She never reacted this way. She couldn’t let him see how much he affected her. She could hide behind the dark lenses, but not for long. “I thought that’s what we were doing.”

He chuckled. “Is that what this is?”

“Maybe with a little flirting thrown in.”

“Flirting?”

“You know, the kind of thing that makes a man stop swimming so he can talk to a pretty woman.”

“Does that mean you’ve been watching me?”

Heat flooded her cheeks. She’d given too much away, but since she had, she might as well dive in with both feet. “Can’t help it,” she said. “You are beautiful.”

“Men are not beautiful.”

Delia drew off her glasses and leisurely perused his body. His damp red swim trunks clung to his muscular legs, doing little to hide the growing swell in the material. She swallowed hard, wondering how he would taste, and then squeezed her thighs together, hoping to relieve the nagging ache.

Would he still be so coy if she dropped to her knees and sucked him deep into her mouth? Though she’d never given a blow job, he inspired her. She returned her gaze to his face and found a smirk on his totally kissable mouth.

This man made her long for sparklers and bottle rockets, something more than a passing whim. Her attraction to him had the potential to become more, and that could never happen. Delia sighed. Any type of commitment went against her rules now.

She hadn’t always had those rules, but ever since that night in Vegas with her ex, well it was the quickest and shortest time anyone had been married or annulled. From that moment, she vowed never to get that involved with any man ever again. After all these years, the pang of that betrayal left her a little raw and skittish.

Still, maybe...A niggling suspicion made her worry she might get in over her head, but she couldn’t resist. Despite his protest, he *was* beautiful. His physique alone was worth staring at, and if a mere conversation had him aroused... And four days from now she would never see him again.

“Give me one good reason why you won’t accept my challenge.” His velvety voice whispered through her thoughts.

“That would go against the rules.”

“Rules? You have rules for dating?”

She smiled. “You don’t?”

Jace shook his head. “I can’t say I do. So what are these rules, Delia?”

She curled her toes at her name in his sensuous tone. She could listen to him all day. She blinked, realizing he’d just asked her a question. “Oh right,” she rushed on breathlessly. “Just three rules. First, you aren’t the only one.”

“I bet that goes over well,” he said dryly.

“When coupled with ‘I won’t sleep with you’ and ‘stick to your day and time,’ my rules work out pretty well. Just two consenting adults enjoying the moment.” She held a breath. Telling a man the rules never bothered her before, but with Jace they almost seemed offensive.

Several agonizing heartbeats lapsed before she glanced at him. Tension eased from her body, and she slowly exhaled at the twitch of amusement on his mouth.

He raised his eyebrows, a speculative gleam in his dark brown gaze. “Then maybe you’re not doing it right.”

His comment conjured all sorts of wicked images of his mouth on her breast, his fingers circling her swollen clit as she begged for more.

“I’m not dating right?” she gasped.

He raked her body with his eyes, lingering on the curvy swell of her breasts against her bikini top before skimming to the apex of her thighs. She stifled a moan as another trickle of liquid pooled between her legs.

“We both know I’m not talking about dating.”

He rested a large hand against her thigh and brushed lazy circles along the sensitive skin near her knee with his thumb. She inhaled sharply at the sparks zig-zagging through her veins.

“So how ‘bout it?” Jace smiled. “Commit to one man for the rest of the cruise.”

She laughed, tugging off her glasses and setting them on top of her book. “Did you have someone in mind?” A sigh escaped her lips when he inched his fingers higher up her thigh.

His hand stilled. “Yeah.”

Her pulse raced when he slid his gaze down her body a second time, and his continued touch did nothing to alleviate her predicament.

Delia moistened her dry lips. She should leave before she did something stupid, like fling herself into his arms and demand hot, sweaty sex.

“I should go.” She stood, grabbing her book and glasses.

Jace stood as well and clasped her hand. Butterflies took flight in her belly. He tugged hard enough to pull her off balance and she stumbled against him.

“Hot date?” he asked.

Delia stared into his eyes, her heart hammering at his closeness. “I...” She couldn’t push anymore words across her dry tongue.

“You’re just going to run?”

The challenge in his voice pricked her feminine pride and she straightened. She had to let him know she was still in control. “You never said who you had in mind,” she countered. Instead of stepping away, she moved closer. Every time she exhaled, her breasts brushed against his chest. Tingles trickled down her spine, but still she didn’t step away.

He smiled wolfishly. “I can’t believe you haven’t figured out who I have in mind.”

“I want to hear you say it,” she said.

“You do like a challenge.”

She grinned. “Who said I didn’t?”

“Good, ’cause here’s one more.” He dropped a kiss on her upturned mouth.

She should have pushed him away, or stepped back, but she couldn’t. She was rooted in the moment. He was too delicious, his mouth too hot and demanding. She savored the spicy taste of him, the firmness of his lips and the heat of his tongue.

She rose on tiptoe when he dragged her closer, drifting her hands to his biceps and squeezing. He was kissing her. He was really kissing her, and the sensation was better than she anticipated. She melted into him as he grazed his fingers along her hip, his erection leaving a damp impression on her thigh.

Moaning, she slid her hands over his shoulders and locked her fingers behind his neck, needing more. She lifted one leg, curled it around his thigh and shivered when his hands cupped her bottom, pressing her firmly to the hard length of his stiff arousal.

Reality sliced through her haze of lust when a crisp breeze cooled her heated flesh. She was wrapped around a complete stranger. In broad daylight. In public. Delia lowered her leg, jerked from his arms, and pressed her fingers to her kiss-ravished mouth, dazed. He reached for her. She shook her head and stumbled backwards on wobbly legs, the smooth wood deck skimming her bare toes.

If he touched her she would kiss him again and that couldn’t happen. The attraction she had for him was too powerful and could easily spiral out of control.

A self-satisfied smirk twisted his mouth. “So how about we finish this conversation over dinner?” He grabbed the towel draped around his neck.

She barely heard his question, yet answered. “Okay.”

“Really?”

She nodded. He looked like he was he going to kiss her again and she stepped farther away. She needed to regain control, even though her body raged for more. “It’s not like we’ll ever see each other after the cruise so you have my undivided attention, Jace Andrews. Make it count.” She spun on her heel and sashayed away.