

Pursuing Zarah by Jennifer Cole



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It's love at first sight for Jackson "Jack" Masters when he lays eyes on the curvaceous new tenant in his building, and decides she will be his. What surprises him is his best friend Lane Dundas also has his sights set on the voluptuous dark-skinned woman with eyes of gold.

Jack is willing to lay everything on the line to win Zarah's affections, even when that means sharing her with Lane. Yet every step of the way he is met with resistance. No matter what he says or does, her past prevents her from believing the sincerity of his attraction.

Zarah Elliott is plump, uncomfortable in her own skin, and a realist who has come to grips with living out the rest of her days alone and celibate. Until she comes face-to-face with the man of her dreams -- make that men of her dreams. Is it wrong for a woman to take pleasure in mind blowing sex in the arms of a handsome stranger or two, without allowing emotions to get in the way? Zarah doesn't think so. Men have been engaging in casual, no-strings sex to sate their physical needs since the dawn of time. Why can't she?

Publisher's Note: This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations some readers may find objectionable: Anal play/intercourse, ménage (m/f/m).

Excerpt

Zarah sat behind the wheel of her car, staring at the front door to the four-story apartment building and toying with her hands in her lap. Her palms were sweating, and her heart raced.

How could Marcus have done this to her? The question had played over and over in her mind from the moment she'd been forced from their—his—home. He'd said the cruelest things.

"Come on, Zarah. The miserable, cheating dick did you a favor," she said for a little encouragement. But it didn't make her feel any better. No, he hadn't done her a favor. All he had done was turn her life upside down.

From what she could see of the outside of the apartment complex, the grounds were well kept, as was the building itself. Mrs. Davis had sounded so nice on the phone. Personable. The rent

was more than Zarah had budgeted for, but it was in a nice neighborhood. If she liked it, she'd have to tighten her purse strings some.

Get your ass moving, the voice in the back of her head said. She reached for her car door handle. She walked across the parking lot and entered the building. Before she could talk herself out of it, she pressed the buzzer for the Davises' apartment.

"Yes?" came the familiar voice of the woman she'd spoken to earlier.

"Mrs. Davis, it's Zarah Elliott," she said into the speaker. "We spoke this morning about the apartment you have available."

"Of course, pet. Come in, come in."

A soft buzz sounded, and the door leading into the main lobby clicked.

As Zarah walked through and the door closed behind her, an elderly woman rounded the corner.

"Welcome," the woman said and held her hand out.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Davis. And thank you for seeing me today."

"The pleasure is ours, pet. Come, the apartment is on the second floor. Let's have a look, shall we?"

After showing Zarah around the one-bedroom unit, Mrs. Davis invited her into her apartment to discuss business. She escorted Zarah into the living room, where an elderly man sat reading a newspaper. His leg was elevated on a stool, and an ice pack rested on his ankle.

"Can I take this damn ice off now? I can't feel my toes, Rita," he grumbled when they entered.

"Zarah, this grouchy Gus is Mack. Mack, this is Miss Elliott. I was showing her two-B," Mrs. Davis said, ignoring Mack's question.

"Well, young lady, what'd you think?" he asked, folding the paper and dropping it on the floor beside his easy chair.

Feeling as if her world was about to come crashing down around her, Zarah bucked up her courage and smiled. "It's a lovely apartment. It smells as if you've just painted it. The color is very versatile." The taupe walls offered a neutral tone, and Zarah had actually pictured herself hanging an Aztec-patterned border on the walls.

"Yeah, slipped off the ladder this morning," he said, patting his outstretched leg.

"Oh my, has someone looked at it for you?" she asked.

"Jeez, don't tell me you're a fussy too," he said and waved his hand, dismissing her question.

"Well, if it's all right with you, I'd like to take the apartment," Zarah heard herself say. "I imagine you'd like a couple of references, and do you require first and last month's rent?"

"If you have it," Rita replied. "Both might be too much to come up with all at once, so if you've just got first, that'll be fine."

Reaching into her purse, Zarah pulled out an envelope containing first and last month's rent. This was the only apartment she was going to be able to see for at least a day, and she did like it. So if the Davises could accommodate her immediately, they'd be in business.

"I am looking to take possession immediately," she said. Feeling herself on the verge of tears at her weakness, her desperation, she swallowed the lump that had formed in her throat. "I'm, uh, in a bind and need something—"

"I like ya, darlin'. It's yours," Mack said. "But you'll have to give me another day. Is Wednesday okay?"

"Oh, of course," she replied. She couldn't decide if she was pleased or unhappy she had to wait another day to start her new life.

Once the paperwork and details were out of the way, Mrs. Davis handed her a key and Mack rose to his feet.

"I'll see you out, doll," he said.

Ignoring Rita's protest from the living room, Mack hobbled to the door behind Zarah and pulled it open. As she stepped through the doorway, Zarah slammed into what felt like a brick wall. The collision was hard enough to force her to exhale the breath from her body. When she looked up, she met the heated gaze of a man. A big man. A muscular man. The most spectacular piece of man she'd ever laid eyes on.

The immediate reaction of her body caught her completely off guard. Everything happened at the same time: her nipples sprung to attention, the oddest yet most pleasurable sensations zinged between her legs, and her knees threatened to give out. Never in her life had she felt as she did at that moment. She struggled to draw a breath, fighting the urge to reach up and run her fingers through his tousled dark hair. It was sexy, like he'd just gotten out of bed after a marathon sheet-tossing session. At the thought of another woman ravishing him, Zarah felt a stab of jealousy.

Jealous? How absurd was that?

The deep gray of his eyes reminded her of storm clouds brewing in the Gulf of Mexico. His chiseled jawline, lightly shadowed with a dark shading of whiskers, gave him an air of danger and mystery. His lips were full and inviting. What she wouldn't give to suck the plump lower one into her mouth.

She could tell from his clothes that the stranger was a working man. He wore a blue short-

sleeved work shirt with a "Tow Masters" crest over his right pec and the name Jack stitched over the left. The smell of the grease and motor oil smeared on his clothes didn't mask his masculine scent. The crisp, clean fragrance tickled her senses.

"Oh, excuse me," she said in a husky voice she didn't recognize. "I'm terribly sorry."

"Jack," Mack said behind her. The man in front of her didn't acknowledge Mack. His eyes were glued on her. "Give me a minute, son. I'll be right with you."

The intense heat in Jack's gaze made Zarah uncomfortable. She didn't know what to make of the look in his eyes. Was he pissed that she'd just walked right into him?

Giving in to the sense of awkwardness that prickled her nerve endings, she dropped her gaze from his fierce scrutiny. Not knowing where else to look, her eyes accidentally settled on his crotch. If the telltale bulge in the front of his pants was any indication, he seemed appreciative in his appraisal of her. Zarah squirmed with embarrassment. She was embarrassed for herself more so than Jack, because he didn't seem to give a shit he was sporting a hard-on right there in the hallway.

"I-I really appreciate you agreeing to meet with me on such short notice, Mr. and Mrs. Davis," she turned to Mack and said, trying to pull her attention away from the man.

"Our pleasure, darlin'," Mack said. "Let me walk you out to your car."

"No, no," she said. "You need to get off that ankle. I'll be fine. Thank you again." She inhaled a deep breath in an attempt to regain some semblance of control to her trembling body. "Excuse me," she whispered and skirted past the man still studying her.

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When the woman's head shot up to look at him, Jack's mouth went dry. The darker pigmentation of her skin was exotic, and Jack had the instant urge to lick every delectable inch of her. Soft-looking black curls framed her face and came to a rest on the top of her shoulders. Jack felt the need to run his fingers through the mass, if only to confirm its silky texture. She met his gaze with wide eyes, and his heart ceased beating. Her eyes weren't hazel. They were golden, a mesmerizing hue that drew him in. Her full lips beckoned him to dip his head to taste them.

His brain and cock screamed at him to toss the woman over his shoulder and cart her upstairs to his bed as fast as his feet would carry them. Despite his libido raging like he'd never experienced before, his body refused to move. All he could do was stand there and stare.

She took his breath away. No woman had ever had that effect on him before.

It was clear his intense stare made the woman uncomfortable. She dropped her gaze from his and turned back toward Mack. The huskiness in her voice was natural, not forced. Jack could tell, and it was driving him insane.

She turned toward Jack again, her full and luscious lips curling warmly, but the smile she offered failed to reach her mesmerizing golden-colored eyes.

Jack knew that look. She'd been hurt.

As she brushed past him, her forearm brushed against his. Her touch singed him. Jack had to look down to make sure his skin wasn't on fire. The hypnotic sway of her shapely hips made his mouth water. If his cock got any harder, it was going to kill him. He wondered if there was ever a time throughout history when a man had actually died from sporting a raging hard-on.

As she walked away from him and out the front door, he frowned. The color of the sundress she wore was a perfect complement to her tanned skin tone and enhanced the gold hue of her eyes, but it hung on her like a burlap potato sack. He wanted a better look at the luscious curves he knew were hidden beneath the frock.

Jack found himself curious as to why a beautiful woman such as her would hide a figure like that under a dress that was at least two sizes too big for her. He wondered if hiding herself had something to do with the sadness he'd seen in her eyes.

The thought of someone hurting the woman infuriated him. Women were to be protected and loved. Treasured. If he had a woman like her to cherish, she would never have reason to be sad. He'd spend every moment of every day worshipping the incredible creature she was. He would protect her, keep her safe, and love—

"Jack?"

Jack inhaled a deep breath in an attempt to bring his body back under control, and in that instant he caught her scent in the air. He closed his eyes and held his breath, committing the fragrance to memory. She wore no perfume. What taunted his senses was simply her and her alone. Natural, clean, teasing—

"Jack?"

In that moment, Jack wanted to taste her, even more than he had just a moment before. No, he needed to. A hand on his arm brought his attention back to Mack.

"That grass ain't gonna cut itself, son," Mack said. "Here's the key to the shed, and thanks for offering to cut it for me."

"You bet, Mack," Jack said, groaning inwardly at the strain he heard in his own voice.

"Mind getting to it before it's too dark, son? We're due for rain, so I don't want it getting any longer than it is."

Jack barely heard a word Mack said. His mind was still thinking about the woman who had just thrown his libido into a tailspin.

"And just give the key back tomorrow, Jack. Rita and I are going over to visit her brother, so

we'll see you in the morning."

"Sure thing, Mack."

"Oh, by the way, Rita put a pot of chili and some buttered rolls up in your refrigerator. She left a note for Lane to head up to your place for something to eat when he wakes up."

Yup, that was Rita. Well, that took care of his dinner. Now, if he could just do something with the raging monster in his pants. He knew what he wanted to do: chase after the woman, lay her out across the hood of a car—damn it if he was so desperate to have her that he didn't care whose car—and slide his cock inside her.

Standing there in the hall, he imagined the wet clasp of her body gripping his, the feel of her fingertips digging into his arms, or better yet the cheeks of his ass. For a moment, he could actually hear her deep, husky voice screaming out his name as she came.

"Mrs. Davis is a peach, Mack," Jack heard himself say. "You're a lucky man."

"Yeah, yeah, don't I know it? She's got a soft spot for you boys. You're good boys. See you tomorrow, son."

"Night, Mack."

An hour later, after putting the lawn mower away and locking the shed, Jack made his way up to his apartment to work off the hard-on he still had. Jesus, it had damn near killed him as he cut the grass with his dick pressing so fucking hard against his zipper. He had thought for certain the beast itself was going to burst free all on its own, and if it didn't, his flesh would forever bear the imprint of his zipper.

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An hour later, his hard-on was a little more tolerable but certainly not gone. A knock came on Jack's door.

"It's open, Lane," he called out.

A moment later, Lane rounded the corner and entered the kitchen. Jack was dishing out the chili Rita left them.

"Hey," Lane said.

"Hey. Grab the rolls, would you?"

Lane picked up the nearby basket. Once their dinner was served up, Jack poured them each a glass of milk, and the two men carried their plates into the living room and settled in front of the television.

"You seem distracted tonight, pal," Lane commented as he leaned forward to set his empty

bowl on the coffee table.

That was an understatement, Jack mused. He hadn't been able to get his mind off the exotic woman since he first gazed into her eyes. Remembering her curves, golden-colored eyes, full, kissable lips, and teasing scent sent Jack's raging libido skyrocketing. Jerking off in the shower had done nothing to ease his ache. It only made the desperate need for her deepen.

"I, uh, sort of met someone today," Jack said. Closing his eyes and taking a deep breath, he could imagine her fragrance in the air.

"Wow. She must be something else to have that effect on you," Lane said.

Jack opened his eyes and realized his hard-on was back with a vengeance.

"Tell me. It's been a long fucking time since I felt like you look," Lane told him. "And for Christ's sake, don't leave anything out."

Jack spent the next twenty minutes describing every erotic detail of the woman he'd bumped into coming out of Mack's place.

"Ah damn," Lane groaned.

"Oh yeah. My thoughts exactly, pal."

"So, what were her and Mack talking about?"

"Haven't a clue. I'd turned into this stunned fucking brainless idiot. I didn't even ask her name."

"You're an idiot," Lane choked out around chuckle.

"Tell me about it. First thing tomorrow I'm going to find out who she is.

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