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# ANCIENT GOLD

Cape Danger Book Four

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

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## Chapter 1

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December 5, 2019

**N**ikki Stone lay in her husband's arms, feeling cozy and warm as she began to slowly awaken. Sighing softly, she turned to face him, her mop of curly blonde hair covering her eyes. Her head rested under his chin, and the hair on his chest tickled her nose.

She giggled, and Scott wrapped his hand into her curls and brought her head upward, kissing her forehead. His stubbly chin, after a night's growth, made her pull back. His dark brown eyes were resting on her face.

"Morning, baby girl. What's so funny?"

"You."

"Really."

"Yes. Really. I'm ready to get up. And I want to go look at the desk Mellie has in her shop before we have to go to work."

He gave her an expression of mock severity. "I don't. I want to stay right here as long as possible."

"No, no, *no*. We have to go see it. Christmas is coming up in

two weeks and six days." She glanced over at the clock on the bedside table. "And sixteen hours."

He grinned. "I see. I thought you wanted to stay home and decorate today. The poor tree in the living room is still naked. Besides that, I have an urge to take off today and make love to you at least ten times in the next sixteen hours."

"Ten?" She squinted up with one eye closed.

His grin broadened. "Hm. All right, five then. But not on an empty stomach. A man's got to eat. What's for breakfast?"

She threw her arms out wide and laughed. "Me."

She was unprepared, however, when he flipped her over on her belly and began running his hands over her thighs and bottom and planting light but sharp smacks. When he leaned over and nipped the underside of her butt, she squealed and tried to move out from under him.

"Oh no, you little brat," he laughed. "You're not going anywhere until I've had my fill of you."

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MELLIE JENKINS RUSHED around the cabin, realizing she was late for work. She and Max had been busy making love and the time had slipped away. Max had called in, saying he was stopping to make a visit to gather information on one of his investigations, kissing her on top of the head on his way out.

"Be careful out there," he called over his shoulder. "It looks slick."

"I'll be fine," she tossed back. "You be careful. You're the one who drives like a bat out of—" she paused when she saw his face and grinned. "You know where."

"Yes, but I've had a driving course for it."

Mellie turned away, grumbling under her breath. "And you have an answer for everything—ow!" She straightened, when his hand connected with her bottom, and turned back. He'd been

standing directly behind her and, now, she was staring at his shirt. "Sorry, Sir."

"And you drive the same way, only faster." He tilted her face upward and bent down to kiss the tip of her nose before turning back toward the door. "Behave yourself. And be careful," he tossed back on the way out. "And call me when you get there."

Mellie shook her head. Grabbing her coat, she called the shop.

It rang several times before someone answered. A breathless voice was heard at the other end.

"Hello, Mellie's Antique Attic. How may I help you?"

"Sally? It's me. Is everything all right?"

"Yes, Aaron is just trying to get that desk in here and I'm trying to help him. It's heavier than snot. But no big deal."

"Well, I haven't left the house yet. I'll be there in a few minutes. Tell him to wait."

"Okay. I ended up walking—make that sliding—to work. See you when you get here. And be safe!"

Mellie disconnected and turned to see Max, still standing in the doorway to the garage.

"I decided to take you to work," he announced. "I don't trust your car to be able to get out of the driveway. At least mine has four-wheel drive."

"Which only allows you to get stuck in more inaccessible places. Max, I'll be fine..." Her voice trailed away as he arched a brow, and she knew it was futile to argue with him. "Coming."

She changed her mind as they approached the shop. For December, snows had come early this year. Max pulled up as close to the front door as possible and turned.

"When did you decorate the building?"

"Day before yesterday." Mellie looked up, smiling. The storefront looked festive, she had to admit, with large candles resembling old Christmas tree lights in the front. They'd look nice at night. And the greenery that framed the windows and the edges

of the building all the way up to the roof was lit, giving the shop a welcoming look. "We decided to get it done before the snow came."

"You did a good job. I hope Aaron was the one who climbed the ladder all the way up to the roof." When she didn't answer, he shook his head. "Stay put. I'll get you."

"But I can..." She stopped. He was already around the front of the car. Suddenly, as she watched his approach, he disappeared.

Mellie gasped, opening the door slightly. "Max? What happened?"

"Don't open the door any further. I'm halfway under the car."

"Oh, no! Are you all right?" She peeked down between the floorboard and the door. "Max?"

A moment later, she saw his head pop up in front the passenger window.

"Told you it was slick," he warned, rubbing his butt.

Mellie observed him, grinning. "Now you know how I feel half the time. Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm all right. Here. Give me your hand. I'd carry you but we've already seen how *I* do on this stuff. And go slow."

Hand in hand, they made it. Max took her into his arms and kissed her soundly before going back to the car at a snail's pace. "And stay off the ladder," he threw back over his shoulder. "That's an order."

Mellie saluted smartly, blowing him a kiss as she closed the door. He started the engine and drove away, looking back only once with a wink.

They'd only been married a few weeks, and it had been heaven. Mellie had never known how wonderful it could be to have such a dominant man love her with all his heart. She wondered if Max had any idea how cherished it made her feel.

"Mellie? I'm so glad you made it," said a voice at her elbow.

She turned to see Sally and jerked back to reality. "Thanks,

Sally. Max refused to let me drive. Oh, I just remembered—the desk. Where's Aaron?"

"He's here, in the back. He moved the truck up to the back door so we could bring it straight across and into the building without getting on the ice."

"Smart man." Mellie followed her toward the back. He was moving furniture out of the way to make room for the huge monstrosity when they reached the back door. Cool wind was blowing in through the opening.

"Here, Aaron. Let Sally and me get on one end. We should be able to get it inside, between the three of us."

Aaron eyed her curiously. "Just how many men did it take to get this thing in the truck at the estate sale? Sorry I couldn't be there, by the way."

"You can't be everywhere at once," she answered. "And several. And they said it was the heaviest thing they'd ever loaded, in as long as they could remember."

"I'd say they were right. But we'll give it a shot."

The desk, however, had other ideas.

"Wait." Aaron put up a hand. "Let's take the drawers out to make it lighter."

"Right." Mellie attempted to pull out the top right-hand drawer, amazed that it was so heavy. "Good grief."

"Here, let me." Aaron jerked, hard, before it moved. His brow furrowed. "Good grief is right."

After a few moments of pushing and shoving, they had the drawers out of it and had managed to get it just inside the back door. When it was finally in the building far enough so they could pull down the back on the truck and on the building, Mellie leaned back and glared at it.

"It's definitely going on the ground floor. They said it was heavy, but I never dreamed it would be *this* cumbersome." She leaned down casually and tried to pick up one of the drawers to replace it. Aaron watched her, grinning.

"What?" She noticed the side of his mouth turning upward.

"Go ahead. I want to see you lift it."

When she tried, she could see what he meant. She left it there and eyed the whole thing with distaste. "I swear," she grumbled. "Let's leave it here for now and come back later."

Sally nodded her head. "I'll make some spiced tea. If it's not good to drink, we can at least wrap our hands around it and use it as a hand-warmer."

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NIKKI EYED Scott as he got off the phone, frowning. When they'd gotten up and looked out the window, the glare of snow and ice had met them with blinding force.

"Well, sweet cheeks, there's no point in going in today. The scheduler says all of our patients but three have cancelled due to bad roads. I told her to get ahold of the rest and tell them the office is closed today."

She grinned. "Does this mean we can go to Mellie's shop and see the desk?"

His expression became wary. "In this? Tell me you're kidding."

"Please? I really want to see it. Sounds like it'll be perfect in my study."

He stared at her before setting his jaw. "All right. But not before I have a few more cups of coffee guzzled."

She grinned at him, dropping in another pod and pressing the button. When it finished, she took it, holding it out. "Guzzle away. It's nice to have a day off."

He shook his head. "I'm glad it's Brad's turn to have call today. At least I don't have to worry about being called in. He put a hand around the back of her neck, drawing her close. "And you, baby girl, are particularly adorable this morning."



She tipped her head up toward his. "When's the last time you had your eyes checked?"

He ignored her comment. "I'm taking you back to bed."

"But—" she sputtered.

Scott's dark eyes glinted down into hers as he raised a brow. "Are you arguing with your Dom?"

"Me?" she squeaked. "I would never do that."

"Right." He took her shoulders and turned her to face the other direction, planting a swat on her bottom. "Into the bedroom. And strip. I'll be right there."

Nikki put out her lower lip, but as he took a step toward her, she scurried away and down the hall, grumbling under her breath. She wanted to go to the antique store so badly, yet she thought it would be unwise to argue with him.

Scott had changed since the scare they'd had a year ago, when she and her friends had been the subject of a kidnapping scheme. Nikki had actually been the only one who had remained safe. Still, he'd become terribly strict about her safety. And since then, arguing with him did no good.

He was also stricter about other things, too. Nikki closed the door to the bedroom, lost in thought. She'd always longed for a relationship of dominance and submission, like the one her friends Meg and Matt had. They'd been married a few years less than she and Scott, but there was no doubt they adored each other.

Her thoughts moved to Mellie and her husband Max. They had the same type of relationship, and she'd seen Mellie go from a lonely widow to an extremely happily married woman with Max.

She sighed. Meanwhile, she and Scott were still finding their way. Perhaps she just wasn't the submissive type? Or was it that that maybe she just hadn't been able to embrace it fully?

She didn't know. What she *did* know was she'd gone from being able to wrap Scott around her little finger, to knowing she'd

better obey him when she was instructed to do something. He no longer was inclined to put up with her sassy mouth, playful or otherwise. This was what she'd always wanted in a relationship. But now that she had it, was she happy with it?

Scott, however, was undergoing his own set of trials these days, and she wasn't always sure how to react to him. Often, she caught him observing her with an expression of worry on his handsome face. Perhaps she was expecting too much from him. Her usual happy, sassy disposition had become guarded and, at times, obstinate.

The worst part? She had no idea why.

His footsteps stopped suddenly, outside the door. Nikki turned, still dressed, toward it, realizing he'd told her to strip and she hadn't done it. The door opened, and he stepped inside. Her eyes widened. The expression on his face was stern, as she often saw it these days, and he glanced over her.

But something in his face changed as he studied her. Scott's stern expression slowly relaxed, and he opened his arms, reaching for her.

"Come here, sweetheart."

Quietly, she flew into them, feeling them close around her. With a sigh, she leaned her head over on his shoulder.

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MELLIE WAS on her second cup of cider-based tea when she set it down and began to wander around the shop. The things she'd been able to put in it were fascinating, and she had separated it into three floors. The ground level was laid out in intricately staged areas, which she rearranged frequently with Aaron's help. The pieces on this floor were seventeenth and eighteenth-century. The old desk would go nicely in here. She and Aaron had already made a spot for it. She'd hoped to have it there before Nikki and her husband came to view it, but it didn't seem

as if it would happen now. The second floor, she had designed into nineteenth century items, and the third was mostly retro and twentieth century stuff. She loved having ancient things around her. Her late husband, however, had never wanted her to bring them home. Jim hadn't shared her love of antiques; he'd simply thought of them as just *old*.

But since she and Max had married, things were delightfully different. He was willing to trail her around the shop and admire her knowledge of the pieces she showed him. He wanted her to be happy, but had put his foot down on how much stuff she could bring home from the shop.

She wandered over toward the back of the store. There wasn't much business today, since people weren't getting out. Spotting the desk, she moved toward it.

The shop was cooler back in this part of the building. It didn't happen all at once. But the nearer she moved toward the back door, a sense of urgency began to settle in, accompanied by deep-seated sadness that affected her all the way to her bones.

Mellie stopped. What was happening to her? Was it the fact that Christmas was approaching? No, she was so looking forward to it this year. The future? She shook her head. The future with Max looked extremely bright. What did she have to feel sad about?

But the sense of foreboding descended deeper, the closer she moved to the back door.

*Help me.*

She was almost in the center of the room when she heard it.

*Wait*, she thought to herself. She didn't *hear it*. She *felt* it. Pausing, she looked around her. Was it Sally, who needed help?

"Sally?" she called out. "Do you need me?" But she could hear Sally's voice from the front of the shop. It sounded as if she was talking to someone.

The feeling of desperate urgency which settled over her grew

so potent, it shook her. Her eyes widened, and she felt a shiver run down her spine.

"Mellie? Phone call." Sally was calling to her from the front of the store.

The words sounded far away, but they registered, and Mellie turned to stare at her.

Sally studied her face oddly. "Mellie? Are you all right?"

"I'm coming." Mellie realized her voice was almost a whisper. She struggled to lift her feet to walk toward the front.

Sally nodded, but she said nothing as Mellie approached and passed her on her way.

As she reached the front of the store, however, the strange feeling dissipated, and she reached for the landline phone. She turned, glancing behind her as she picked it up. Sally was still staring at her. "Hello," she said softly, "This is Mellie. May I help you?"

"Mellie, it's Nikki. Scott and I are planning to come by and see the desk you just got in. Please tell me it's still there? I have the perfect place for it in my study already."

Nikki's usual exuberance was catching. The ominous feeling gone now, Mellie's face took on a grin.

"It's here, in the back of the shop. But I have to tell you, it's the heaviest thing we've ever tried to move. It took the three of us to get it from the truck inside, and we didn't make it any further than the back door of the shop. Even the drawers are heavy." She laughed. "The man at the estate sale said it came with its own ghost."

"Oh, how fun," Nikki laughed softly. "We're at odds today, so Scott's letting me drag him along with me. I'd love to look over your shop."

"And I'd love for you to come. It's like a tomb in here today, there's so little traffic. Just remember, if you purchase it, we'll have to get extra help to deliver it. Aaron will be here, but it might take a day or two to get the other delivery men to come."

"I'll remember. Where are you?"

Mellie gave her the address and hung up. When she turned, Sally was still watching her, rooted to the spot where she'd stood. "Sally? What is it?"

Sally moved toward her, the odd expression gone now. When she reached the counter, she grabbed a rag from one of the shelves behind it. "Since there are no customers here yet, I think I'll take a few minutes and dust some of the things on the second floor."

"Good idea." Her jovial mood restored, Mellie reached down and picked up one too. "I'll go to the top floor. Aaron, can you watch the front? I'm expecting an old friend to come and look at the desk. Let me know when they get here, would you?"

"Absolutely."

Mellie had worked her way over nearly a third of the things on the top floor when her phone jingled. It was Aaron, signaling her their clients were here.

"Coming," she called out cheerfully toward the stairwell. "Be right there."