

MASTER OF TEMPTATION

EXCERPT

"So there is no other man in your life?"

Caro eyed Max with puzzlement. "Why would you ask?"

"I'm possessive enough to want to be your only lover," he admitted.

He could hear her sharp intake of breath, could see surprise flit across her face.

A moment later, though, her chin lifted. "If you think to use me merely to pass the time and relieve your boredom, you can abandon that notion at once."

Max shook his head. "Dealing with boredom has never been a problem for me. During the war I grew accustomed to long hours of waiting between battles and learned to develop vast reserves of patience."

"Then what are you about?" Her eyes narrowed. "Are you are trying to provoke me? Or to provide a diversion? I don't require a seduction to distract me, I assure you."

"Provoking you wasn't my design, but I want very much to be your lover again."

"Why?" Her tone was challenging.

"Because ever since a certain moonlit night," Max replied honestly, "I've been obsessed with a ministering angel. I need to know if what I felt for her was real or merely a fantasy."

For a long moment Caro remained silent while she struggled with disbelief. "I told you, you were suffering from the stresses of war that night."

"Perhaps so. But my mind doesn't seem to respond to logical arguments. Nor does my body." His gaze dropped to her breasts. "Does yours?"

No, certainly not. She had little control over her body's sensual reaction to him.

Lifting his gaze, Max smiled in satisfaction, as if guessing her thoughts.

After a searching glance, she shook her head. "I understand your problem, Mr. Leighton. It was merely a fantasy that night. You were affected by Cyrene's spell. That is why you found me desirable then — and why your imagination is playing tricks on you now."

Max leaned an elbow against the ship's railing. "You claimed Apollo created your enchanted isle, but it's pure myth, of course."

"Probably, but the legend is one I have always found appealing. Apollo cast a spell over the island to create a lovers' paradise, and even now Cyrene has an inexplicable effect on all who come there."

"It affects mere mortals, you mean."

"It makes them feel passion. That is why you think you wish to become my lover again."

Taking her elbow, Max turned Caro to face him. "Did you feel passion that night, angel?"

She flushed. "Well... yes... but I was affected by the same spell."

His gaze examined her face intently. "I think what we both felt that night had little to do with any spell." He took a step closer. "And I don't believe you are as sanguine as you pretend now."

He reached up to stroke her cheek in a gentle caress, making Caro feel a sudden heat. She drew back abruptly.

"It burns, doesn't it, my touch?" he murmured.

Yes, it burns.

When she remained silent, Max's eyes darkened. "I promise you, I don't intend to let you forget what it was like between us that night."

Their gazes locked. The air was suddenly charged with a heated current, and Caro found it difficult to breathe.

The hot attraction sizzling between them grew stronger, more intense. Then Max raised his hand again, letting his thumb brush her lower lip.

His touch was as searing as a bolt of lightning. The warmth spread through Caro, feeding her nerves little shocks of desire. It left her skin tingling with raw, sexual awareness—

Alarmed, she took a step back.... and then stopped herself, tilting her chin up instead, refusing to be intimidated.

"Don't worry," Max murmured, a smile flickering over his mouth. "I'm not about to ravish you here and now."

Excerpt from *Master of Temptation* by Nicole Jordan
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