



PHANTASIE

An Ellora's Cave publication written by

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Warning:

The following material contains strong sexual content meant for mature readers. PHANTASIE has been rated NC17, erotic, by three individual reviewers. We strongly suggest storing this electronic file in a place where young readers not meant to view this ebook are unlikely to happen upon it. That said, enjoy...

Author's Note

The stories in this book are fantasy only, taking elements of BDSM and D/s, without faithfully following a classic relationship. Neither story is intended to be a completely accurate portrayal of a real BDSM and/or Dominant/submissive relationship, which is much more than someone surrendering control to another.

To learn more about the elements of a true power exchange relationship, visit shadowfind.com and drmsrealm.com.

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Prologue

Serena couldn't hold back a whimper as the plane jerked when it encountered a pocket of turbulence. She grasped the armrest and closed her eyes, convinced she was about to die.

"Relax," said the calm voice of her seatmate on the right, by the window.

Serena turned to look at the woman beside her, noting the startling contrast of the carefully applied makeup and razor-edged bob style of her ash-blonde hair to the khaki slacks and pink pinstriped shirt she wore. This woman looked like the type comfortable in power suits. She seemed out of her element in the casual clothing, with her hair pushed back by a pink headband.

"It's just a little turbulence," she said, smiling at Serena. "It won't hurt you at all. You just need some champagne." With a subtle wave, the woman caught the attention of the young man serving first class. When he reached their row, she smiled up at him. "My, you're a cutie."

A faint blush appeared to tinge his cheeks. "Thank you, ma'am. How may I help you?" His voice was thick with an accent, but Serena didn't know which one. He could be from Lasenbourg, their destination, or any of the nearby countries, including Germany, Switzerland, France, or Italy.

"Please bring us each a glass of champagne."

Serena shook her head. "Oh, just ginger ale—"

She cut Serena off. "Don't listen to my young friend. She needs alcohol."

The steward inclined his head. "Right away, ma'am." He moved away without a whisper of sound.

"I don't drink—"

“Make an exception,” she said airily. “You can join me in celebrating.”

“What are you celebrating?” Serena asked.

“Vacation,” she said with a grimace, as the steward returned with two glasses of golden champagne on a silver salver. He offered them their glasses before returning to his cubby at the back of the first-class section.

Serena eyed it doubtfully.

“You are old enough to drink, aren’t you?”

She nodded. “I’m twenty-three.”

She clinked her glass against Serena’s. “To new friends.”

Serena repeated the toast and cautiously sipped the champagne, finding it dry and bubbly.

“If we’re going to be friends, we should introduce ourselves.” She sipped her champagne before continuing. “I’m Regan Delaney.”

“Serena Jensen.”

“Are you married?”

Serena shook her head, feeling a catch in her throat that left her unable to speak.

“Good,” Regan said decisively. “You don’t need a man to be happy. All you need’s a good vibrator, and an occasional foray in the bedroom with an anonymous stud, right? I’ve lived thirty-four years without one, and I’m perfectly happy.”

Serena shook her head. “I don’t know. I’d like to get married.” Her traitorous heart insisted on offering up a candidate.

Regan shrugged. “If the right man came along, I guess I would too. I just don’t think there’s any such thing.”

Serena made a non-committal sound, deciding not to disagree with her new friend. After what she had been through, how could she offer a counterview anyway?

“Where are you headed?”

“Castle Phantasie. I won the trip by being the one-hundred-thousandth customer at Castle Chocolate Company.”

“That’s where I’m headed too,” Regan said. “I’m long overdue for a vacation. What do you do?”

She shrugged. “At the moment, whatever’s available. I work part-time at an ice cream store to help make ends meet while I am starting a dog-walking service...” She trailed off as heat suffused her cheeks. She didn’t need any reminders of Ian McDermott, and tried to push away his image as it blossomed in her mind.

Regan nodded. “I’m CEO of Synergies Systems.”

She blinked. “What does your company do?”

“We’re a high-tech company. We specialize in government contracts for a variety of technological needs.”

“Sounds rough,” Serena said, silently adding, *and confusing*. What she knew about that kind of thing wouldn’t fill a sheet of paper. “What do you plan to do at Castle Phantasie?”

“I’m going to get laid,” Regan said. “It’s been too long since I indulged. I may jump the first man I see.” She grinned as her eyes alighted on the elderly man and his wife across the aisle. “Once we arrive at Castle Phantasie, of course.” She touched Serena’s arm. “What about you?”

She shrugged, not wanting to blurt out she was just looking to escape.

“Maybe we’ll all see if Castle Phantasie’s reputation is deserved,” Regan said as she sipped her champagne.

Serena frowned with puzzlement. "What reputation?"

"Why, they make your dreams come true," Regan said dryly. "It's supposed to be like the fairytales. They claim Castle Phantasie grants your heart's desire."

"Hmm." Serena shook her head. "I doubt it happens, but I'm willing to keep an open mind."

"To our fantasies," Regan said, lifting her glass. "May they all come true." She didn't sound optimistic about the prospect.

Serena silently echoed her sentiment as she sipped her champagne and listened to her new friend talk about her job. She already knew her dream wouldn't be waiting for her at Castle Phantasie. She had found and lost it in the space of one night, two weeks ago.

She closed her eyes at the dart of pain accompanying the memory. She bit back the instinctive protestation of innocence as she once again remembered how Ian had ruined what she thought was their perfect night together.

She bit hard on her tongue, trying to force back the parade of images that had haunted her for two weeks. Once again, they overwhelmed her, and she was unable to keep herself from reliving the pleasure/pain of that night.

Chapter 1

Serena's Sentence

"Do you think he'd mind, Auggie-Doggie?" Serena asked Ian's full-sized Schnauzer as she rummaged through his drawer. When Auggie failed to do more than waggle his nose, she took that as consent. "I don't suppose he would. After all, I can't run around the house not wearing anything, can I?"

She lifted a navy-blue pajama shirt from Ian's dresser and slid it on, shivering as the silk slid across her nipples, causing them to harden. "Oh, yummy," she told the dog. Silk wasn't possible with her budget, and she was almost glad for the deluge that soaked them coming back from the park. If the rest of her clothes hadn't been finishing the spin cycle when she and the dog reentered the house, she wouldn't have had the excuse to borrow any of Ian's clothes.

It was decadent to be parading around his home wearing only his shirt. Maybe she could indulge in a little fantasy while she wore it. She could picture herself lying against his silk-clad chest, minutes after they had made love. In her mind, she could practically hear him whisper, "I love you." It was her favorite dream. She yearned for even an inkling that Ian felt the same way about her. So far, it didn't seem as though she was making reciprocal appearances in his fantasies.

"Yeah, right," she muttered aloud as they left Ian's bedroom, "like he's ever looked at me that way before. I'm just the dog-walker to Ian."

Auggie left several feet between them as he followed her, indicating he still hadn't forgiven her for the indignity of subjecting him to a bath in the Jacuzzi tub in the guest bathroom. His refined sensibilities must have been shocked when

she got in the tub and scrubbed him. He was strictly a canine salon-only type of dog. "Get over it," she advised him. "I couldn't let you drip all over the master's white carpets, could I?"

Auggie kept his gaze turned from her as he padded into the living room to curl up by the fireplace. Serena shrugged and detoured through the kitchen to the laundry room, switching her clean clothes from the washer to the dryer before lifting the sodden clothes she'd stripped off in the laundry room as soon as she reentered the house through the back door. She dumped them in the washer, along with Auggie's stylish angora sweater, started the load, and closed the lid.

She padded into the kitchen, noticing the hint of chill in the Pergo flooring on her bare feet. She made a mental note to turn on the gas fireplace as she went to the freezer and rummaged for the triple-chocolate ice cream she knew Ian always had on hand. She found it buried behind a box of frozen carrots and lifted out the carton.

She took a bowl from the cupboard and scooped in a generous portion before returning the container to the freezer. She plopped a spoon in the bowl and went into the living room, looking forward to a night spent curled on the couch, reading a book. She wouldn't even turn on the stereo, although Ian had a state-of-the-art system.

She would have watched Ian's house and dog without pay, just for the silence. Living with four other girls in a two-bedroom apartment made her appreciate quiet time all the more.

She spooned a bite of ice cream into her mouth as she walked into the living room. Her eyes widened when she saw Ian standing in the entryway, stripping off his soaked trench coat. A startled cry slipped from her, and she dropped the dish of ice cream on the white carpet.

He looked up, and his eyes widened.

Serena didn't know what to do first. "You're home early." When she spoke, she realized a trail of ice cream was dripping down her chin. She wiped it away with the back of her hand, but otherwise, she found herself unable to move.

He nodded, and the light caught the various shades of red and blond in his short hair. The rain had plastered it to his skull, causing it to hang forward and obscure his hazel eyes. "Something came up that forced me home early." His gaze seemed to skim her from the top of her head to the tips of her blue-polished toenails.

Serena pulled down on the hem of the top, which caused it to expose more of her cleavage. "You're probably wondering why I'm wearing your shirt," she said in a rush. "See, I took Auggie to the park, and it started raining on the way home. I had my other clothes in the washer, and, well, I couldn't prance around naked, could I?" She took a deep breath and stopped prattling like an airhead.

His lips twitched, as if he wanted to smile. "I don't see why not."

"What?"

"You didn't know I was coming home early. What difference would it make if you pranced around naked?"

The question caught her by surprise. Serena opened her mouth, searching for an answer. She finally said primly, "Auggie was here."

He did laugh then. "Augustus is rather a prude, I fear."

"I'll, um, be out of your hair as soon as my clothes dry."

He pointed to the floor. "Don't forget the ice cream."

She looked down, horrified by the dark stain spreading across the carpet. "Oh, no." Serena darted into the kitchen and ripped several paper towels off the roll before returning to the living room. She got on her knees to gather the melting ice cream into the glass bowl.

Serena's hand stilled when Ian walked over to her, standing above her. She looked down and saw he'd stripped off his shoes. Black dress socks covered his large feet, and she found herself wondering if the old adage about big feet were true.

When her gaze moved slowly up to meet his, she couldn't resist a quick peek at his package. Her eyes widened when she realized he was hard. She raised her eyes quickly, tilting her head back to look at him. "Ian..." She trailed off as his hands dropped to his waistband. She forced herself not to look down as she heard the unmistakable sound of a zipper lowering.

He cupped the back of her head, and Serena found it impossible to move. She knew she should get up and move away in an attempt to return things to a semblance of normalcy, but her limbs refused to cooperate. She kept her gaze glued to his, not missing the way his eyes took on more of a brown cast now that he was aroused. She licked her lips as he pushed gently against her head, bringing her forward.

Her gaze slipped down, and the sight of his erect cock met her eyes. In Ian's case, the saying was true, she thought disjointedly. She eyed his cock uncertainly, half-convinced this was a joke at her expense. "I—"

He kept one hand at the back of her head, but the other lifted his cock and touched it against her lips. "Put your mouth around me, Serena."

She tried to shake her head, but his hold firmed, not allowing her to move. She hesitated, torn. Her brow furrowed with confusion. Why now, after all this time? She had lusted after Ian for almost the entire two years she had been Auggie's dog-walker. In that span of time, Ian had never treated her with more than distant politeness. She wouldn't have put money on a bet that he could pick her out of a lineup of six medium-height honey-blondes.

"Serena."

She found it impossible to resist the command in his tone. It wasn't as though she didn't want him. Ian McDermott starred in her nighttime fantasies, and she often imagined he swept her off her feet without giving her a chance to protest—not that she would. She had tried to dismiss her infatuation as a crush, but that line of reasoning hadn't made her think about Ian any less often.

She took a deep breath before opening her mouth and touching the tip of his cock with her tongue. She explored cautiously, swirling her tongue around the head and corona, finding it easy enough.

"Take my cock in your mouth."

Her pussy clenched as she opened her mouth wider and moved forward to take his cock inside. She couldn't get all of it in, and when she had as much as she could take, she froze, unsure what to do next.

"Suck me."

It's like he's reading my mind, she thought dazedly as she started sucking. The carpet was rough against her knees, and she realized she still held a wad of paper towels. She dropped them and braced her hands on his thighs as she swirled her tongue around his cock, pausing to trace the vein throbbing rapidly.

She increased her suction and started moving her head forward and back. She hadn't given head before, but she had seen it done in movies. Ian groaned, and his hand tightened in her hair. Moisture pooled in her pussy at his signs of pleasure, and she grew more enthusiastic. She made a sound of protest when he pushed her away. Serena looked up at him, frowning. "Was I doing it wrong?"

His face had flushed red, and he seemed to be gritting his teeth. "No. You're doing it too well for me to last if you keep at it. You're very good."

She smiled at the compliment.

"How long did it take you to perfect your technique?"

Her smile faded at the odd question. It sounded almost analytical, but there was an indefinable note in his tone. "I haven't—"

"Never mind. Who cares?" Ian grasped her arms and pulled her to his feet. "Come with me."

She followed him into the bedroom, ignoring the voice of caution in the back of her head. She was twenty-three and had waited too damn long to have sex. She didn't care if Ian only wanted a one-night stand. She would be fine with that. Once again, she ignored the voice of doubt.

Inside the bedroom, Ian closed the door on Auggie, who had followed them. He turned to her, pulling her into his arms for a kiss. His mouth was firm and hard on hers, giving no concession to her possible lack of experience.

She felt branded as his tongue pushed through her lips to probe the depths of her mouth. Her body responded to the expert touch, even as her mind rebelled at the way he seemed to still be distant from her, despite how close they were to each other. She broke away. "Wait, Ian, I don't know about this."

He moved his hands to the top button of her pajama top. "What's to know? You want me, don't you?"

"I—" She let out a startled gasp as his fingers invaded her bare pussy. She couldn't keep her hips from bucking as he stroked her clit.

He stared into her eyes as his fingers pushed inside her. "Are you going to pretend you aren't turned on?"

She shook her head. "I do want you."

"Good." He bent his head to kiss her again.

Serena ducked away. "It's just, I'm not sure I want it like this. You seem..." She trailed off, searching for the right word. She tilted her head, trying to analyze his mood. "Angry," she settled for saying, though that wasn't quite it.

His laugh sounded forced. "I'm not angry. I just know what I want, and I'm not shy about telling you. There's a difference."

She sighed. "Okay. It's just—" Before she could finish, his mouth was ravishing hers again. Serena pushed away her doubts and responded to his kiss, wrapping her arms around his shoulders, pulling him closer. Her pussy got slicker as his fingers continued caressing her clit. She pushed against his hand, seeking relief, and she nearly sobbed when he pulled away. She watched him uncertainly as he stepped back and crossed his arms.

"Take it off."

Her hands shook as she unbuttoned the top. She fumbled with the last one for several seconds, unable to get her fingers to work. When it finally popped out of the hole, she hesitated. Serena clutched the top together, unable to let it fall to the floor and reveal her nakedness.

He stepped forward and pulled her hands away, making the top fall to the floor. He scooped her into his arms and put her on the bed.

Serena tried to cover her breasts as he stood above her, just staring at her body.

"Don't," he said firmly. "Lie back. Spread your arms and legs. I want to look at you."

Her body trembled as she slowly complied with his command. She was aware of the chill in the air as she exposed her hardened nipples. She put her head against the pillow and fanned her arms across the bed, but couldn't open her legs. A blush tinged her cheeks as she saw his gaze settle on her pussy. It didn't matter that he had just been touching her there. She couldn't part her legs and let him get his fill of looking. It seemed much more personal somehow.

Ian stared at her as he stripped off his sweater and slacks. He shucked the briefs next, tossing them in the corner to join his clothes, before walking toward the bed.

Serena's stomach clenched with nerves when he grasped her thighs and pulled them apart. She tried resisting, but he was persistent, eventually revealing her secrets.

"Why would you want to hide your pussy?" He stroked her lips, and his finger flirted with her clit before moving downward. "It's beautiful. You shouldn't conceal it under this hair. Your pussy should be smooth."

"I've never shaved down there," she said, licking dry lips.

"You will from now on."

Serena's eyes widened at his words. She ignored the demanding tone, choosing to look below the surface to read his meaning. He wouldn't care how she kept her body if he didn't intend to see it again.

But was she cut out for a physical affair? She knew the kind of women he dated. They were beautiful, sophisticated, and transient. They were always willowy blondes, who came from money and had their own interests. She'd heard Ian say to his friend Greg that he wasn't the marrying kind.

She shook her head, trying to keep herself from overanalyzing the situation. There wasn't any harm in a little casual sex. She was still a virgin because she hadn't had the time before to really date, not because she had a hang-up about sex and marriage or anything. A woman of her generation could indulge in a fling without worrying about the emotional consequences. She was smart enough to be physically careful.

So was he, she saw, as he moved to the nightstand and extracted a foil packet. He laid it out before joining her on the bed. Serena turned on her side to face him as he cupped one of her breasts and lightly pinched the nipple. The sensation coursed through her body, causing her aching pussy to spasm.

Ian slid down the bed to nestle his head between her breasts. His tongue flicked against her skin as he moved his head to her nipple, taking it in his mouth. Serena arched her back as he sucked, feeling a vortex of sensations

overwhelming her. He moved his hand from her breast to between her thighs, stroking her pussy as he feasted on her nipple.

She threaded one of her hands into his hair to anchor him against her. She writhed against him, lost in the feelings. Why had she waited so long for this? Why hadn't the few guys she'd had one and two dates with ever inspired anything like this with their tepid kisses and clumsy gropes? "Oh, Ian." She moved her other hand to squeeze his bicep as he pushed his finger inside her pussy. She stiffened at the stretched sensation, but he didn't seem to notice. Maybe she had better tell him she was a virgin. "Ian—"

"You're so wet, so tight." His tone was gruff. "I can't wait to be inside you." He rolled away from her to scoop up the condom, before rolling onto his back. "Lie on your back, with your legs spread. I'm too impatient for anything more challenging than missionary right now."

Serena rolled onto her back, eyeing his cock uncertainly as he sheathed it in latex. She licked her lips. "Look, Ian, I've never done this before."

He rolled on top of her, nudging her thighs wider. "What?"

"I'm a virgin." She felt heat in her cheeks and wondered why the admission embarrassed her.

A skeptical look crossed his face before a blander expression took its place. "If that's the game you want to play, I can do gentle."

"It's not a game..." She trailed off as he moved his hand between their bodies to stroke her clit. She thrust against his fingers as the sensations that had dulled returned in full force. "Oh..."

"Are you ready, Serena?"

She nodded, too caught up in the feelings to speak. His fingers left her clit to part her lips, and then his cock nudged against her entrance. She closed her eyes, focusing on remaining relaxed. She knew tensing up would make it hurt when he entered her.

It still hurt, despite her relaxed muscles. When he thrust into her, the pain shocked her into crying out. She opened her eyes and discovered his expression was incredulous.

“You really are a virgin, aren’t you?” He seemed uncomfortable with the idea.

She nodded, forcing a small smile. “I was.”

“Does it still hurt?”

“A little, but I’ll be fine.” She gritted her teeth as he withdrew to thrust into her again. The pain lessened with his next thrust, and as he started stroking her clit again, she forgot about the discomfort. Serena wrapped her arms around him and returned his thrusts, moaning as he pushed against her clit while burying his cock deep inside her. His next thrust was barely a movement, but it was enough to cause her pussy to spasm as he circled her clit with his finger and thumb.

Convulsions swept through her, more intense than anything she had ever experienced at her own hands, and Serena cried out. She was vaguely aware of Ian surrendering control as her orgasm overwhelmed her. She ground her hips upward, groaning as his cock spasmed inside her. Her pussy continued to clench and release around him for what seemed like hours.

It took her several moments to float down from the peak of her orgasm. Ian rolled away from her to dispose of the condom. She watched his buttocks flex as he walked into the bathroom and bit back a giddy giggle. She couldn’t believe she had just experienced her fantasy man firsthand.

The ache in her pussy confirmed the incident was real, and she stretched languorously as Ian returned from the bathroom. His cock was still semi-hard, nestling in a springy bed of auburn curls.

She patted the bed beside her, expecting him to rejoin her. Serena frowned when he remained in the doorway of the bathroom with his arms crossed. Had she done something wrong? Maybe she hadn’t been very good. That thought

stirred a spark of anger. She had tried to tell him she was inexperienced. If he were disappointed, it was his own fault for not listening.

“How much did he pay you?”

Those were the last words she had expected to hear. They were so far off the mark that they were like an alien language. “What?”

“How much did Everett Smith pay you for the documents?” He took a step toward her.

Serena sat up, searching for a means to cover her nudity. She settled for a pillow, clasping it against her chest. “What are you talking about?”

Ian’s laugh was cold, without a hint of amusement. “I defended you, if you can believe it. I told Greg it couldn’t be you. It wasn’t until his computer expert tracked down the date and time of the email that I had to believe it was you. Even then...” He shook his head.

Fear settled in Serena’s stomach like a ball of ice. “I don’t know what you mean. Please, Ian, what’s going on?”

“I thought he must have seduced you. Everett’s a handsome man, and you always seemed like an innocent. I thought he must have tricked you.” His gaze raked over her. “Only now, I know that idea can’t be right. You never fucked him. You must have done it for the money.” He walked over to the bed with three strides, grasping a handful of her hair. “I guess, as of this moment, you fucked me in more ways than one, didn’t you?”

Tears came to her eyes, prompted by his angry words and painful grip on her hair. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I’m talking about the files you emailed to EverResearch nine days ago. Do you have any idea how much you’ve delayed our nanochip project? You cost my company three million dollars in wasted research by giving him our findings. I want to know if it was worth it. How much did Everett pay you to betray me?”

“Please!” Serena wrenched away from him, leaving him holding several strands of her hair in the process. “I don’t know anything about emails or research or nanochips. I don’t even know how to turn on a computer.” She had been too busy trying to support herself to find time to learn how to use a computer, especially when she couldn’t even afford one.

He made a scoffing noise low in his throat. “You’re going to pay me back every cent of that three million dollars.”

Her eyes widened. “I didn’t do anything, and I don’t have that kind of money.”

His eyes narrowed. “Who said it had to be paid back with money?” He cupped her breast in a rough hand. “I like the idea of owning you.”

She slapped him as hard as she could. “I don’t know why you think I did this, but it wasn’t me. I would never sell myself to you.”

“No, just Everett Smith,” he said bitterly. “Why shouldn’t I get something out of the deal, since EverResearch just bridged a three-year technology gap with McDermott Industries by using my hard work? You’ll have to be enough compensation.”

She took another step back. “I wouldn’t let you touch me again for all the money in the world.”

“Fine.” He shrugged. “Enjoy prison.”

She swallowed down the urge to hit him again. “Why do you think I did it?”

He took a deep breath, seeming to be trying to rein in his temper. “We knew something was up when EverResearch filed for a patent for a prototype of a chip almost exactly like the one we’ve spent three years developing. Greg knows an electronics expert. He cracked into EverResearch’s computer files and found the email from my home computer, sent nine days ago. I was out of the country, so it couldn’t have been me. You were the only one here then.”

She shook her head. "It must have been the pregnant woman."

His eyes widened. "What?"

"There was a woman with a flat tire last week. She asked to use the phone. She said her cell was dead." Serena closed her eyes, struggling to recall more about the woman's visit. "She also used the bathroom. I remember thinking I should check on her, because she'd been in there a long time, but then she came back into the living room. A tow truck arrived a few minutes later, and she left."

He snorted. "Not a bad spur-of-the-moment lie, Serena. Kudos for that."

"I'm not lying." She stamped her foot against the carpet, realizing she was completely naked, without even the pillow covering her. She had to fight the urge to cringe away and hide her nudity. "I can describe her."

His eyes narrowed. "Go ahead." He crossed his arms, and his posture suggested he wouldn't even give her the benefit of the doubt.

"She had dark hair, cut short around her neck. She wore a black maternity dress, and she was probably six months pregnant."

"Sure." He yawned. "If you're done lying to me, let's discuss reimbursement."

"Fuck off!" Serena whirled away from him, running into the kitchen and through the laundry room. She fished clothes from the dryer and pulled them on, not caring if they matched. She was aware of Ian watching from the doorway, but ignored him until she had the rest of her clothes in a plastic bag.

When she walked past him, she kept her head held high. He touched her arm, but she shrugged him off as she entered the living room. Serena lifted her purse from the entryway table when she got to the door, pausing to turn back. "You're wrong, Ian."

"Uh huh. You aren't getting off scot-free, Serena."

She threw open the door. "Do your worst. It can't be any more awful than today." She walked away without looking back, letting the rain wash away the tears streaming down her face.

* * * * *

"Serena?"

She blinked her eyes open at Regan's voice. "What?"

"You must have dozed off." She smiled. "We're about to land."

"Oh, thanks." Serena sat up, straightening her profusion of curls. She had to clear her mind of thoughts of Ian. She tried to assure herself he didn't really mean his threats. His anger would eventually burn out. This vacation had been fortuitous, giving him a chance to cool down and see things logically. It also gave her the chance to regroup before returning to New York. There had to be a way to convince Ian she was innocent. She just had to calm down to find the solution.

Chapter 2

Following the bellhop, Serena's eyes widened as she entered the suite assigned to her. After her first sight of the Baroque castle, perched on the side of the mountain, and rising several stories in the air, she wouldn't have believed she could be impressed with anything so mundane as a room. She was wrong.

The burgundy carpet absorbed each step of her sneakers without a sound. Red and gray wallpaper covered all the walls, and it looked like authentic silk. The sitting room contained a sofa and chairs grouped around a large fireplace. Two doors led off the room, and she assumed they were both bedrooms.

"Can I get you anything else, ma'am?" he asked in heavily accented English.

She turned back to the young man who had set her cases by the door. "No, that's everything." She opened her purse to extract a Lasenbourg four-marc, the equivalent of a five-dollar-bill, and passed it to the uniformed man. "Thank you."

He inclined his head before leaving the suite, closing the door behind him with a soft click.

Serena ignored her luggage in favor of exploring the suite. She went to the first door and twisted the antique handle. She stepped into the room, finding a double bed covered by a printed quilt, a nightstand, dresser, cheval mirror, and another door. She walked through that door, into a sumptuous bathroom with a sunk-in Jacuzzi tub, glass shower stall, and double sinks. The colors were sand and lime, and the combination looked good together.

She exited through the other door and entered the master bedroom. This room was larger than the last, with a king-size bed, including privacy curtains.

The carpet was a light-gray shade, and the furniture was delicate Queen Anne-style. She walked to the door across the room and opened it, finding a walk-in closet. She giggled, imagining the contents of her lone suitcase trying to fill this space.

She walked to the dresser with the built-in dressing table, touching the wood polished to a high sheen. She sighed, wondering how she had ended up here—in a foreign country. What luck had led her to Castle Chocolate that day for a piece of chocolate-peppermint bark? Okay, she knew the answer to that. It would be her weakness for all things chocolate. She grinned at the thought that she was finally getting something in return from her addiction.

Serena walked to the bed, eyeing the curtains. They were dark-burgundy, spun from heavy linen, and she wondered if they blocked out light as efficiently as they appeared to. She didn't like sleeping in pitch-blackness, so she would probably leave the curtains open.

She grasped the curtain at the foot of the bed and slid it back. Her hand froze in mid-air when she heard the door behind her opening. She dropped the curtain and turned around, not knowing whom to expect. Ian was the last person she thought to see emerging from the bathroom. Her eyes widened, and she asked the first question that occurred to her. "Where did you come from?" As she asked, her feet propelled her away from him, toward the other door.

"The closet in the guest room." A cool smile graced his lips. "Don't bother trying to run, Serena. There's nowhere to go."

His voice, so calm and collected, made her shiver. She stopped in mid-step and tilted her chin. "I'll call security then. You'll be the one leaving."

Ian laughed as he pushed aside the side curtain and stood up. "The owner of the hotel is a friend of mine. Johan helped me set up this whole thing."

She frowned. "What thing?"

He sighed. "Did you ever stop to think how a tiny chocolate company, owned by an elderly couple, could afford to give away a vacation like this?"

She shook her head, denying his words. "I was the one-hundred-thousandth customer." Now that she thought about it, it did seem suspicious though. The store was tiny, with just the couple working every day. Why hadn't she questioned her good luck before? She wasn't stupid, but she had been distracted. She swallowed the lump in her throat and squirmed under the disdainful look Ian was giving her.

He laughed again. "I doubt that shop has seen a thousand customers in the last year. They were more than eager to help me set up a romantic surprise for my girlfriend, so I could propose to her."

Serena glared at him. "You can't do this to me. I'm leaving."

"Your ticket won't be valid for seven days, remember?" He gave her a cold smile. "I doubt you have the money to buy a return ticket to New York...at least not readily available."

"You can't do this to me," she said again. Why wouldn't he believe her? She shook her head. "Why won't you believe me, dammit?"

"Because you're a little liar." A trace of anger had appeared in his cool façade. "You sold me out, which means you owe me."

She shook her head more forcefully. "I didn't—"

"Enough. I don't want to hear your fairytale about the pregnant woman again. I have something for you."

She watched warily as he extracted vertically folded papers from the inside of his suit jacket. She refused to take them when he walked forward and handed them to her. Serena gasped when he lifted her hand and forced her to grasp them. "What is it?" She refused to look at them, clinging to the irrational hope the papers would disappear if she pretended as though they didn't exist.

“Read them.”

Reluctantly, Serena opened the package. The legal jargon confused her, but it looked like an arrest warrant. “What is this?” Her voice had taken on a screechy pitch.

“Extradition orders and a warrant for your arrest when you return to New York.” He was cold as ice when he explained.

Panic welled in Serena, and she struggled to take a deep breath. “I don’t understand. I didn’t do anything.”

“You’ll have to convince a jury of that.”

A tear slid down her cheek. She tossed the papers on the bed. “Please, Ian, don’t do this. I didn’t take anything from you or sell it to that other company.”

A glint of satisfaction appeared in his eyes. “I thought you might say that.” He extracted another vertically folded paper from his pocket. “Your alternative.”

Serena opened it with trembling fingers. It didn’t take her long to absorb the contents. She looked up at him. “You can’t mean this.”

“I certainly do.”

She burned with humiliation. “How many people saw this contract?”

Ian’s expression remained impassive. “Greg drafted it, with my input. Not only is he a fine Vice President, he also has a law degree.”

She thrust the paper at him, dropping it when he wouldn’t take it. “I won’t do it. It’s crazy.”

He lifted a brow. “Come on, Serena. You know you want to.”

She didn’t like the husky inflection in his tone. She hugged herself. “Why would I want to? No sane person would agree to be someone’s slave for a week.” But she couldn’t deny the flutter of excitement that accompanied the thought of finally having her fantasies fulfilled. She would have Ian to herself for an entire week. Would he fall in love with her during that time? She firmed her mouth,

reminding herself that he hadn't even noticed her until he thought she had cheated him.

He chuckled. "You wouldn't be my slave, Serena. You can still think for yourself."

She shook her head, refusing to accept punishment for something she hadn't done. No way was she going to give Ian that kind of power over her, regardless of how her heart raced at the thought of having him in control. "The contract said I had to submit to all your...sexual demands."

He knelt to pick it up. "That's not slavery. And you did read the sixth clause, didn't you? It offers you an out if things become too intense."

She snatched the paper from him and read it again. "Some out. If I utter the safe word, the contract is null and void, but the extradition order goes into effect." She stiffened as he walked closer, pressing his body against hers. "What're you doing?"

"It's not a bad thing." His breath fanned across her neck. "I'm a dominant lover, and I know you want to be submissive."

She shook her head. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't I?" He breathed against her ear. "Your roommate was more than willing to let me search your part of the room for fifty dollars."

Her eyes widened. "Why would you do that?"

"I wanted hard evidence before I involved my friend at the NYPD."

She swallowed. "Then why are you doing this? You didn't find anything."

An angry note appeared in his tone. "But I did. I found your savings account book, and I had Greg's friend run a history on the account. I found it very interesting that a hundred-thousand dollars was deposited into your account the day before you emailed my files."

She tried to whirl around, but his hands clamped down on her arms, holding her immobile. "That's a lie. I went by the bank before flying out to get some spending money. There's less than a hundred dollars in there now. You can call and verify it."

"I don't need to. You had the money wired out the next day. Greg's computer guy tracked it to the Caymans, but then lost it."

A bubble of hysteria rose in Serena's throat, making it difficult to breathe, much less speak. She forced herself to say, "How would I even know about wire transfers or the Caymans? It's not true. Someone's setting me up."

"Maybe the pregnant woman," he said with evident skepticism.

"It can't be admissible to a court," she said firmly. "You broke into my room."

"True enough, but the detective working the case already confirmed the transfer of the money. It will be a big point at your trial."

"Why are you doing this?" she cried with frustration. "And why did you bring that stupid contract? Was it just to torture me?"

He pulled her more closely against him, cupping her ribcage with one hand, while the other remained locked around her arm. His thumb barely touched her breast, with just enough pressure to let her know it was there. "Oh, no. I found something else during my impromptu search."

She trembled, dreading what he would reveal.

"In the back of your closet, I found your little secret."

"Oh, God," she whispered. "Please, it's just a harmless fantasy—" She broke off before accidentally blurting out he was the only one who ever appeared in those fantasies with her.

Ian cupped her breast. "Imagine my surprise when I found your collection of books. Did you know we have similar tastes? *Diary of a Submissive* is one of my

favorites. Tell me, do you think it's really based on a true experience as the author claims, or do you suppose Miss Z just has an active imagination?" He flicked his thumb across her nipple.

"Don't make me do this, Ian." Shame scorched Serena's cheeks as she acknowledged the quiver of excitement she experienced at the thought of having Ian completely dominate her, as he had so many times in her nightly dreams.

"You don't have to. You can choose a trial."

She sagged. "What kind of choice is that?"

"Make your decision, Serena. It's the last one you'll be making this week, if you take the smart option."

She shivered at the hint of menace in his tone. Was he just playing the part of the dominant to prolong her suffering, or did he really practice that lifestyle? Why would he be content to own her for a week when he could see her in prison for years? She voiced the question when it crossed her mind.

"You took something precious from me. Not just money and hard work. You took something that was mine, something that ensured the stability of my company." He kissed her neck before continuing. "I want to take something from you, and that's your freedom of choice. You chose to betray me, and now you'll have no choice in what I do to you for compensation."

She swallowed a lump of moisture. "Do you use pain?" She felt him shrug.

"Not usually with experienced submissives, but a certain amount is frequently required for training. Do you like pain, Serena?"

She shook her head. "I don't really like any of it. It's just a fantasy," she repeated.

Ian's laugh held a rough edge. "Haven't you heard Castle Phantasie makes your dreams come true?" He finally released her, turning her around to face him. "Now, what will it be?"

Her lips trembled, and she clamped them together, taking a moment to calm herself. How bad could a week be, as opposed to years in prison? Whoever had set her up must have done a meticulous job. Either way, she was going to have to pay for something she didn't do. It wasn't fair, but what choice did she have? "I'll sign the contract."

"I thought you would." He appeared pleased as he handed her a pen. "There's a writing table in the corner."

"I know," she said sullenly and stalked to the table, slamming the contract on the table. She hesitated. "What's the safe word?"

"Guilty." He practically purred the word.

Right then, as she scrawled her signature, she vowed she wouldn't make an admission of guilt for something she was innocent of, no matter how far he pushed her. "Bastard," she muttered under her breath, as she tossed the decorative quill pen on top of the contract.

He tsked his tongue. "Such names, Serena. Which reminds me, when we're not in public, you'll address me as Master."

"I won't—"

"Be quiet," he said firmly. "When we're in public, you're allowed to call me Ian."

"Gee, thanks," she said, making no effort to hide her sarcasm. "You actually plan to let me out of the room?"

He grinned. "Of course, pet. You need to learn how to submit in all situations."

She bared her teeth at him, resisting the urge to call him several vile names that would make her mother in Peoria cringe. It wasn't concern for her mother that prompted her prudence, but rather the knowledge that she now belonged to

Ian until Sunday night. She didn't think he would hesitate to punish her for not obeying him. "What now?"

He cocked a brow. "What now, what?"

"Master," she said with ill grace.

"Like a good pet, you need a collar."

Her wide eyes followed his smooth gait to the closet, where he opened the door and stepped inside. He returned with a small trunk that she hadn't noticed when she inspected the space a few minutes ago. "I have everything we'll need right here." He set the trunk on the bed and opened it, revealing a variety of restraints, toys, and contraptions Serena didn't recognize.

She took a step back when he lifted what looked like a leather collar from the trunk. She wasn't sure what it was, because it featured a golden chain attached to it, along with fine gold ropes that draped oddly. "What's that?"

"A harness. Take off your clothes."

She crossed her arms over her chest, instinctively recoiling. "No."

"Don't defy me, pet." His expression hardened. "No isn't a word in your vocabulary for the next week."

With shaking hands, Serena lifted the hem and pulled off the short cotton dress she wore. She dispensed with her tennis shoes and ankle socks before looking up again. She shivered when she stood before him in white panties and a chain-store bra.

He shook his head. "All of it."

"I don't want—" She bit down on her tongue, holding in her complaint. She turned away from him to remove the bra, a task made more difficult by her shaking hands. She gasped when he turned her back to him before she could remove her underwear. She felt a stir of hope that she could keep them on.

"I want to watch you. Don't turn away from me again."

Serena grasped the waistband and pushed them down quickly, before she could lose her nerve. She looked up when she heard him sigh.

“You didn’t shave.” He shook his head and laid the harness on the bed. “Come with me.”

Her eyes widened. “Why?”

He scowled at her. “Don’t question me, and don’t forget my title.”

A dart of rebellion stirred in her, and she almost ended the charade right there. Only the thought of admitting guilt for something she hadn’t done made her continue. “Yes, Master.”

He led her into the bathroom. “Get in the shower. I’ll join you in a moment.”

With a glower of resentment, Serena entered the shower stall. She made faces at him through the frosted glass while she watched his silhouette strip before padding to the sink and removing something from a drawer. Why hadn’t she done a more thorough inspection when she explored the suite? She might have realized he was here and could have left.

Only to have him catch her somewhere else. Ian wouldn’t give up until he felt she had compensated him for her supposed betrayal. He was beyond listening to reason.

He opened the door and stepped in, holding a can of shaving cream and a package of tiny razors.

“What are those...Master?” She remembered to tack it on at the last second.

“Bikini razors. I came prepared.”

She held out her hand, and her eyes widened when he slapped it lightly.

“I’ll shave you.”

She shook her head. “Nnn...I’m not comfortable with that, Master.”

“Too bad.” The words were harsh, but his tone was gentle. “What I want you to do is put your foot up on the seat and hold the showerhead with both hands once I turn on the water.”

She bit back further protests, wondering why she had thought submission was so sexy. It was a pain to not be able to protest anything—though she doubted they were forming a classic dominant/submissive bond. There was a level of implicit trust in a true relationship that she didn’t share with Ian.

He fiddled with the faucets, and hot water cascaded down her back. She backed up against the stall and propped her foot on the booth built into the shower. Then she grasped the showerhead, locking her hands around it.

Ian sat on the bench and turned sideways. “Yes, this should work nicely. Remember not to fidget.”

She nodded and steeled herself.

Before Ian smeared on shaving cream, he paused to stroke her pussy lips. “You’re wet. Did our little chat excite you?”

She squirmed, refusing to answer.

“Serena?” He smacked her lightly on one buttock. “Answer me.”

“Somewhat, Master.”

He chuckled. “Good. I want you to enjoy this experience.”

She snorted.

Ian looked wounded. “I do. It wasn’t until I realized your interests lay in this area that I even contemplated drawing up that contract.”

“You implied otherwise the night we had sex...Master.”

He shrugged. “You were right when you said I seemed angry. My blood was boiling that night. I didn’t know whether to fuck you or throttle you. Either way, I never intended to let you get away with what you had done by fucking your way out of it.”

“Must you keep saying that word?” she demanded. “I hate ‘fuck’ in that context.”

He tilted his head. “What should I call it? Making love? Do you really think we made love that night, pet?”

“No.” She still had a shred of her pride. He didn’t ever have to know how infatuated she had been with him, how she had unsuccessfully fought against her crush changing to deeper emotions. That was before she knew what he was truly like. His behavior had cured her of the burden of her burgeoning love—hadn’t it?

“Fine. Fucking it is.”

“Whatever. So, what changed your mind?”

Ian shrugged again. “It’s so hard to find a true submissive without the bother of a long-term relationship. I have the perfect opportunity to train you.”

“It hardly seems worth the bother for a week.” She forced herself to sound bored.

He chuckled. “I intend to pack a lot of instruction into this week.” He shook the shaving cream can and shot foam into his hand. “First lesson is, keep your body as your Master likes it. That means a shaved pussy.”

She tensed as he slathered the cream on her pussy. It felt cool and tingly against her skin, and her juices flowed again as he took time to smooth it on slowly. She didn’t relax at the pleasure, knowing the razor came next. She had always been fascinated with the idea of submitting. The thought of mild bondage aroused her, but she had shied away from S&M. It wasn’t her thing. She didn’t know much about it, but she presumed a razor could be involved.

“Calm down. This won’t take long.” He removed the safety guard from the first small razor and brought it to her pussy. He tautened the skin before making the first swipe with the blade.

Serena tried to remain calm as he shaved her with embarrassing thoroughness, even parting her lips and shaving the hair growing on the inner edge. She didn't move until he put away the razor. She slumped forward, releasing the showerhead.

"Wash yourself." He handed her a bar of hotel soap. He leaned back, watching as she rinsed away the shaving cream before lathering her pussy with the soap.

When she finished and rinsed, she stood before him, waiting for her next order. She rebelled at his commands, but couldn't deny his take-charge attitude excited her on some level. So far, being submissive wasn't too bad.

"Come here. Stand in front of me."

Serena stepped forward, standing a few inches away from him. Her eyes widened when he stood up and pointed the showerhead away from them before kneeling on the floor of the shower. When he put his hands on her thighs and brought his face close to her pussy, her knees trembled.

"Has anyone ever eaten you before?"

"No, Master."

He made a noise that sounded like pleasure. "Would you like me to lick your pussy?"

She nodded.

"Ask me to."

She hesitated, torn between the desire to feel his tongue on her and the thought of asking him to do it. "Please," she whispered.

He slapped her thigh lightly. "You can do better than that, pet."

She squirmed as he leaned closer, blowing his hot breath across her inflamed pussy. With the hair removed, she was much more aware of each sensation. She

could only imagine how his mouth would feel on the hypersensitive flesh.
“Please, Master.”

“Please what? Tell me what you want me to do.”

She closed her eyes, determined not to look down. “Will you lick my pussy, Master?”

“Yes, pet. Tell me how you want it.”

Her eyes popped open. “I don’t understand.”

“Do you want long, slow strokes, or do you want me to lick you with little flicks? Do you want me to tongue the inside of your pussy, or should I just lick your clit? Do you want me to suck on your clit?”

She considered the options, not certain what to choose. Finally, she decided to go on instinct. “I’d like you to...” She trailed off, wondering why he was asking what she wanted. He was the “master”. Why would he get her input? Her brow furrowed as she contemplated the situation. Her eyes narrowed. Was this a test? “I want you to do whatever you would like, Master.”

A hearty laugh issued from Ian. “Very good, pet. That was exactly the right answer.” He caressed her leg. “Put your foot on the bench again.”

Serena propped up her leg, widening her thighs. Her breath came in short pants as he pressed his mouth to her pussy. His tongue sketched her slit, moving across her smooth lips before pausing to flick against her clit. She cried out at the pleasure, and her hands found purchase in his hair. She thrust her hips against him, bringing his mouth more fully against her.

His tongue snaked inside her, running the length of her pussy from clit to opening. He paused to delve inside her, and Serena arched her back. Her legs trembled as his tongue swept up her again, pausing to outline her clit before trailing across the hood. “Oh, Ian, I can’t stand this.”

He withdrew enough to speak, and his breath washed over her wet pussy. "Yes, you can, pet." Then he swooped forward and sucked her clit into his mouth.

Serena's knees refused to support her. Her foot slipped from the bench, and she fell against him. Ian's hands supported her, but he withdrew his head. She bit back her objection, eyeing him with trepidation as he steadied her before getting to his feet. He didn't speak, and his silence unnerved her. She lowered her head. "Have I done something wrong, Master?"

"No. Come, pet." Ian shut off the water and took her hand, leading her from the shower. Serena reached for a towel, but he pulled her away, toward the Jacuzzi. "Stand here." He positioned her near the lip of the tub while he stepped down and started the faucets. Then he handed her a plastic pillow. "Lie down with your ass on the lip. Put this under your head."

Excitement swirled in her when she realized he was going to finish what he had started. Serena stepped down into the tub, onto the bench. She aligned her buttocks at the edge and lay back, propping the pillow under her. Water droplets clung to her skin, and the cool air in the room caused her to shiver. She could feel her nipples hardening to the point of pain, and she whimpered when Ian tweaked one.

"Are you cold, pet?"

"Yes, Master."

Ian chuckled. "You won't be for long. Spread your legs."

Serena heard him turn off the faucets seconds before the jets kicked on. The hot, bubbly water caressed her calves and feet as she parted her thighs. She closed her eyes and bit on her tongue to keep from crying out when Ian settled himself between her thighs. A small cry tore from her as his tongue sought out her clit, circling it with rough strokes, eliciting a combination of pleasure and pain.

She arched her hips as he sucked her clit into his mouth. The pleasure was almost too much to bear, especially when he relaxed the suction and flicked tiny swipes across the bud. Her thrusts became frantic as Ian's finger plunged inside her, spreading her dew. She balled her hands into fists, and her nails dug half-moons into her palms. He pushed in as far as the digit would go before wiggling his finger. At the same time, he began sucking her clit again. The dual pleasure was more than Serena could accept, and she tried to pull away.

He held her steady, continuing to thrust his finger inside her, though he lifted his head to look at her. "Don't move, pet."

She shook her head, causing the pillow to slip away. "It's too much."

"Does it hurt?"

She hesitated. "A little."

His voice lowered to a whisper. "Does it make the pleasure more intense?"

Serena's eyes widened. "Ye-yes."

He didn't respond, except to return his mouth to her pussy. He increased his pressure on her clit as his finger drove into her more quickly. Serena writhed against him, feeling so many conflicting sensations she didn't know how she remained conscious.

The orgasm crashed over her like a tsunami, accelerating her heartbeat, and making her pussy spasm forcefully. She cried out with pleasure, forcing her hips up to meet his mouth. Convulsions racked her body, and the pleasure seemed to go on forever, even after he pulled away.

Before she had a chance to even catch her breath, he was lifting her into the tub with him, pulling her astride his lap. Serena's glazed eyes met his as he drove his cock inside her. She wrapped her arms around him, using him for support. The pleasure swept over her again, and she soon matched his rhythm. She leaned against him, laying her cheek on his shoulder. Her eyes widened

when she saw the opened foil packet on the floor by the tub. She wondered how long her orgasm had consumed her.

“Pet, your pussy is driving me...” He trailed off, driving his hips upward violently, filling her completely. “Does it hurt?”

She shook her head. “If I weren’t so relaxed, it probably would.” She ground herself against him, pushing down as he thrust upward. Ian gripped her buttocks, pulling her against him with enough force to almost hurt, but the frantic pace he set only increased her pleasure. She tightened her arms around his neck as his cock spasmed inside her, and she felt the warmth of his ejaculation through the latex barrier. Serena gyrated her hips, bringing on another orgasm, though not as intense as the previous.

He kept their bodies fused for several minutes before he pushed her away gently. “I’m getting hard again.”

Her eyes darted to his cock in the bubbling water, but she wasn’t able to see it clearly. “Yes, Master.”

“As much as I’d love to bury my cock to the hilt inside you, we don’t have time.”

Serena frowned. “Why not?”

“We have dinner reservations, pet.” His smile was ambiguous. “We have to prepare you.”

Serena groaned. “Dinner reservations. Oh no! I forgot all about meeting Regan for dinner.”

He frowned. “Who’s that?” Ian’s eyes narrowed. “A man?”

“I met *her* on the plane. She’s staying here too.” Serena shrugged. “We made plans to have dinner together.”

“You’ll cancel those plans.”

Her eyes narrowed. “This isn’t in the sexual area. I don’t have to obey you.”

His lips parted in more of a snarl than a smile. "I don't want to ruin the surprise, but tonight is all about sex. I'll call the front desk and leave a message for your friend. I need to speak with Johan anyway. Do you know her last name?"

She gave him a sulky glare as she mumbled, "Regan Delaney." She watched him climb from the tub, glaring at his back as he padded to the phone on the wall. She listened to his one-sided conversation, tuning out most of it, until she heard him tell the person on the other end of the line to send up the rest of his luggage.

When he turned back to her, she asked, "What luggage?" She tried to dismiss the panicky sensation building inside her. What did he have planned next?

He shrugged. "I couldn't unpack, in case you saw my clothes in the closet. I didn't want to tip you off to my presence. I brought the trunk up with me for mini-games, but the essentials – like clothes – are in my luggage." He took a robe from the hook on the back of the door. "Get out, pet. We don't have all night for you to laze in the Jacuzzi."

Her blue eyes sparkled with anger as she got out of the tub and marched to the door to retrieve a robe. His hand on her arm caused her to pause. "What?"

"You're slipping, pet. You haven't called me Master when addressing me, and you're not jumping to obey my commands." He tilted his head. "Yes, I think a little reinforcement may be in order."

She shook her head. "There's no need –"

"Shh." He pressed his fingers to her lips. "Bend over and hold your ankles, pet."

Her eyes widened. "No."

A hint of anger darkened Ian's eyes. "What did I tell you about that word?"

“I—” She broke off as he pushed her forward. She reluctantly grasped her ankles, knowing it was better to just get it over with, whatever he intended. It soon became obvious, as his hand smacked against her buttocks with a resounding crack. She cried out with shock, but the second cry came from pain, as he hit the same area again. “Please, Ian—”

“Master,” he corrected, spanking her again, on the other cheek this time.

Tears came to her eyes, and she didn’t know if humiliation or pain prompted them. How could he be so tender one moment and such a brute the next? “Please, *Master*.”

He smacked her again. “Try it without the sarcasm, pet.”

“Please stop, Master. I’ve been reminded of my place.” The words humbled her, but more discomfiting was the note of pleasure she heard in her tone. She couldn’t deny the way her pussy had gotten wet again as his hand punished her flesh. She shied away from the thought, not liking what it said about her.

He pulled her up and kissed her gently on the mouth. “That’s a good pet. Now, dry your body,” he touched her eyebrow, “and don’t forget those pretty eyes. Meet me in the bedroom in five minutes.”

“Yes, Master.”

Chapter 3

Serena had considered dawdling in the bathroom for longer than five minutes, but decided not to risk punishment again. Her ass still stung from his hand on it, even as her pussy yearned for his cock.

When she entered the bedroom, she found Ian wearing nothing but a pair of black silk briefs, hanging clothes in the closet from a suitcase. An unopened garment bag lay at the foot of the bed. He didn't look up from his task when he said, "Take off the robe."

With a small grimace, Serena unbelted the robe and let it fall to the floor. She knelt to pick it up and draped it over the back of a chair. Then she stood there, waiting for him to make his next move.

"Would you please help me, pet?"

She frowned at the polite request, until she realized unpacking didn't fall under her duties. "Sure...Master."

"Would you hang the items in the garment bag?"

Serena walked forward and unzipped the leather bag, feeling a little strange unpacking in the nude. She lifted out the first few articles of clothes, mostly shirts and pants, with a suit jacket.

Ian looked up from his trip to the dresser. "Leave out the charcoal jacket and pants, please."

She nodded and carried the rest to the closet. When she returned for the rest of the clothes, she found Ian closing his suitcase. She pulled out the other garments, and her hand stilled when she saw the dress.

"Leave that out too. You'll be wearing it tonight."

Serena eyed the leather dress, barely biting back a refusal. It looked skintight, and the only way in—or out—was through the zipper extending up the front of the black mini. She licked her lips. “Master, I don’t think I can wear this.”

“You aren’t required to think tonight. Leave it out.”

She dropped the dress on the bed and turned away, sticking out her tongue at his brusque command. She didn’t have the shape for that dress, and he would soon realize it. She took the rest of the clothes to the closet before returning to the bedroom. She looked around for her cases before remembering she had left them in the living room, where the bellhop dropped them by the door. She started to fetch them.

“Where are you going?”

She paused in mid-step. “I left my luggage in the living room.”

“It’s in the corner.” He pointed to the far corner of the room. “I carried it in.”

“Thanks.” She noticed her tone didn’t sound very grateful, but he made no comment. Serena turned to her case, but his voice stopped her again.

“You don’t need anything out of there.”

She lifted a brow. “My makeup and perfume are in the small case. Not to mention underwear.”

He nodded. “Fetch your cosmetics, but leave the underwear.”

She took a step before halting and whipping around. “Excuse me?”

“No underwear tonight, pet.” He met her eyes. “Is there a problem with that?” He opened his hand slowly before closing it with equally careful movements. “Perhaps you feel the urge to argue?”

She swallowed her refusal and walked to her carryon case, having no desire for another spanking so soon. Her bottom still tingled. She removed her cosmetics bag, but left the larger case zipped.

“Come to me.”

She turned around to find him holding the harness from earlier. Her eyes widened. "You don't mean for me to wear *that*...Master."

He gave her a small smile. "Of course I do. Now come to me."

With a heavy sigh, Serena walked over to him, dropping the bag on the bed before standing before him. She eyed the complicated device uncertainly. "What do I do?"

"I'll put it on for you. Lift your hair."

Serena swept her damp curls into a messy knot and held it with a free hand. A curious sensation seized her as he fastened the collar around her neck, putting the buckle at the back. Part of her resented being tagged like Auggie, but a darker part of her reveled in the leather cupping her neck.

"Fetching," Ian commented. He picked up the section of golden rope next. "It's velvet. Thin and sensuous, yet painful, if required. Keep your hair up. I need to attach a section at the back."

Serena tilted her head forward as he moved behind her. She frowned when she caught sight of a bead attached roughly to the middle of the rope. It was an inch or two wide, but smooth and round. Light gleamed off its amber color. She swallowed nervously, wondering what purpose it served.

Ian's hands played against her neck before moving down her back. Serena could feel the rope hanging down her back, and her eyes widened when he slipped it through her buttocks. His hand fed it through her thighs, and she realized what the bead was for as it nestled into her pussy, just below her clit. "Ian...Master...I—"

"Shh, pet." Ian brought the rope up her front and secured it through the small loop, adjusting the excess to ensure the bead stayed in place in her pussy. He lifted the golden chain with a leather cuff attached to one end. "I'm going to put this on for just a minute, but you'll be without the leash during dinner."

She licked her lips. "What does it do, Master?"

He smiled. "I'll show you. First, we clip it to the rope of your harness, through this catch at the back of the loop." As he spoke, his fingers fastened the chain to the collar. Then he attached the cuff to his hand.

She raised a brow, intrigued despite her precarious position. "So, it keeps me near you?"

"Exactly. Try to walk away from me."

Serena took a step.

"Oh, pet, go slowly. I don't want you hurt."

She frowned at the strange warning and took a few more steps, sighing with pleasure at the friction the bead induced, until she felt the rope tauten.

"Take one more step."

She did, and a dull pain shot through her anus and pussy as the rope dug into her. She immediately stepped back and turned around, giving him a look of censure. "That isn't necessary, you know."

Ian shook his head. "It is, pet. As you said, it keeps you near me." He pulled gently on the leash, forcing her to walk back to him. Ian cupped her naked breast. "You look beautiful like this, pet. You won't always be able to wear the leash, and you can't bathe in the harness, but you aren't to take this off. Ever." He touched the collar. "It marks you as mine. Do you understand?"

She licked her lips, summoning a jerky nod.

His gaze was full of approval as he rolled her nipple in his fingers before doing the same to the other one. "Let me take off the leash." He unclipped it in one smooth motion, and then reached for the dress.

Serena touched the velvet harness. "Um, shouldn't I take this off too, Master?"

"No, there's no need, pet." He handled the dress delicately, unzipping it and pulling it from the hanger. "Hold out your arms."

Serena did as he requested, conflicted by the way he treated her. The leash struck her as bordering on degrading, but his touch was so gentle as he slipped the sleeveless sheath over her that she trembled. She stayed still as he zipped the dress up the front, and she was surprised at how sexy it felt to have the leather hug her curves. She looked down, alarmed at the amount of cleavage spilling from the low neckline.

"Come look in the mirror." He led her by the hand to the cheval glass in the corner. "Look how exotic you are, pet. Every man will want to unzip that dress." He put his mouth against her ear. "Every woman will envy your hourglass shape. And you'll belong to me."

She looked like a different person. The dress molded her meager curves until she appeared almost voluptuous. The collar and parts of the harness that showed looked simply like an intricate piece of decoration. No one would realize what it was. The lines of the harness were so thin they were virtually invisible. "It's..." She trailed off, shaking her head. She couldn't find the right words.

"Exquisite." He pressed a kiss just below her ear before leading her back to the bed and pushing her down, before he knelt on the floor.

Serena sat still as he rolled black thigh-highs up her legs, held in place with lace cuffs. The short skirt of the dress left several inches of her legs bare between the hem and the garter. Her eyes widened when he produced stiletto heels from a box on the bed. "I don't think I can walk in those, Master."

"You'll learn." His fingers were gentle as he pushed her feet into the shoes, pausing to caress her ankle before returning her foot to the carpet and repeating the process. He rose to his feet. "You have ten minutes to finish getting ready."

Serena scooped up the cosmetics bag and took hesitant steps into the bathroom, cautious of the high heels. Darts of pleasure shot through her, emanating from her clit, as it rubbed against the bead. She could feel moisture

leaking down her thighs and knew the bead would keep her in a constant state of arousal.

Excitement burned in her as she tried to imagine what Ian had planned for tonight. So far, her sentence had been a study in contrasts. She wondered whether dinner would be about pleasure or pain. Both prospects excited her.

Chapter 4

There were three restaurants in Castle Phantasie, and Ian had chosen the smallest, *Intim*, with its dim lighting and soft music playing in the background. Serena had been aware of a murmur sweeping the small crowd from the moment she and Ian entered the restaurant. Even now, seated at their table, she could feel eyes on her. How much she enjoyed the experience surprised her.

“What will you have, pet?” Ian asked as he set aside his menu.

Her brow furrowed. “Whatever you want?”

He lifted her hand from the table and brought it to his mouth, pressing a kiss to her palm. “You should choose your own preferences.” His voice lowered. “There is only one area where I ask for submission.”

She swallowed down the butterflies trying to fly up her throat, stirred awake by the gentle touch of his lips. “Okay, I’ll have the stuffed pheasant.”

Their server arrived seconds later, as if he had been summoned by Serena’s statement. He spoke to them in slow, broken English. Serena didn’t particularly notice his accent. She was more taken by his sparkling green eyes and short black hair. Beautiful had never been appropriate to describe a man before, but his picture could have been in the dictionary as an example.

Serena watched with fascination as Ian switched to fluent German to order their meal. When the server had left, she said, “I didn’t know you spoke German.”

He sipped the wine served to them by the steward when they sat down. “I knew it well enough from college, but befriending Johan has sharpened my skills.”

She bypassed the wine in favor of the ice water. "He's the hotel owner, right?"

Ian nodded.

"How did you meet?"

Ian looked around their table before leaning closer. "Johan and I met online, in a certain type of chat room."

Her eyes widened. "He's a Dom too?"

Ian shook his head. "Johan prefers to submit."

She looked down at her glass. "Have you two...?"

He laughed. "No. We're just friends. We only met in person for the first time last year, but we have weekly voice chats."

"I see." She shook her head. "Not really. I don't know what any of that means. I'm clueless about computers."

His eyes narrowed, but he didn't respond as the server returned with a basket of bread.

Serena glanced down shyly as the server inclined his head in her direction. She hadn't missed the way his eyes lingered on her breasts before she looked away.

Once he had left again, Ian asked, "Do you find Konrad attractive?"

"Who's Konrad?"

"Didn't you hear his introduction?"

Serena lifted a shoulder.

"Hmm, not paying attention, right?" He seemed as though he were trying to sound amused, but there was a thread of anger in his tone.

She nodded. "He's very attractive."

"Yes." Ian sipped his wine as he eyed her with disturbing intensity. "Yes," he said again before trailing into a silence that remained unbroken until Konrad returned with their appetizer.

Serena reached for a piece of the artichoke as Ian began conversing with their server. He spoke the language with what seemed like the ease of a native, and the boy punctuated the conversation with eager nods and occurrences of, "*Ja, Herr.*"

She looked up at the eager note in the boy's voice, disconcerted to find him openly staring at her cleavage. "What's going on?"

Ian ignored her question, instead keeping his attention on Konrad, asking him something else.

Konrad nodded enthusiastically. Serena's eyes widened when she saw his cock getting hard in his black pants. "*Ja, Herr.*" Konrad looked around the tables, and then gestured to them before speaking again.

Serena took Ian's hand when he held it out, and she got up from her seat, following them through the restaurant, away from the entrance, aware of the bead sliding in the folds of her wet pussy. "What's going on?"

"I asked him if he liked your breasts. He said yes. I asked if he wanted to see them without the dress." Ian smiled down at her. "He jumped at the chance and is now leading us to a back room."

She shook her head. "No, Ian, you can't make me do this."

He frowned at her, continuing to pull her along. "Do you want to utter the safe word?"

She licked her lips. "No, but—"

"Shh, pet. I promise you'll enjoy this."

She subsided into silence as they entered double doors and turned down a hallway, moving past another set of doors that led to the kitchen. They passed

two more doors before Konrad stopped and fished a key from his pocket, speaking rapidly.

She looked to Ian for translation.

“He said this is the break room. No one will bother us until the dinner rush ends.”

Nerves twisted her stomach into knots as she followed Ian and the boy into the break room. She stood awkwardly under Konrad’s ravenous expression.

“Unzip your dress, pet.”

With trembling fingers, Serena unzipped the leather dress and pulled it open. A feeble smile found its way to her lips when she saw Konrad’s eyes darken. It was gratifying to see the surge of desire in his eyes.

Ian spoke again, and Konrad nodded, licking his lips.

He walked behind Serena, putting his arm around her waist. “He’s going to suck your nipples.”

She whimpered, but didn’t give voice to her protest. She leaned against Ian as the boy approached, crouching down so his mouth was level with her breasts. She closed her eyes as he took a hardened peak into his mouth. He lacked Ian’s skill, but his rough tongue on her nipple caused her pussy to clench.

“Do you like this, pet?”

“Yes,” she said with a gasp as Konrad bit her lightly. He cupped her other breast and twisted the nipple with gentle tugs. The flashes of pain added to her pleasure, and Serena squirmed.

Ian said something, and the man’s eyes widened. Konrad moved his head, and his gaze settled lower. His eyes widened further, and the note of eagerness in his tone was impossible to miss, despite the language barrier.

Ian bent his head to whisper in her ear. “I told him to touch your shaved pussy. I want him to see how smooth you are.”

“Please, Master, don’t—”

Ian caressed her arms. “I think you will enjoy it, and I know I’ll enjoy seeing his hand down there.” He tilted his head. “In fact...yes, that would prove...” He trailed off and nodded to Konrad, before speaking again.

Konrad’s eyes got huge, and he nodded sharply. “*Ja, Herr.*”

“What’s happening?” Serena asked.

“I want to see him lick you. Part your legs, pet.”

Panic welled in her, and she thought about pulling away. To have Konrad touch her breasts was strange enough, but to have him eat her out? She didn’t know if she could handle that.

He must have sensed her panic, because Ian said, “If you don’t enjoy it, tell me.”

“You mean use the safe word.” She couldn’t hide a trace of bitterness. She hadn’t known he planned anything like this when she signed the contract. She might have had second thoughts if she had. It was one thing to let Ian have free reign of her body, when she had wanted that for so long. It was quite another to let a stranger embrace her so intimately.

“No. Just tell me you don’t like it, and I’ll end it.”

“O-okay.” She took a deep breath, preparing herself as Konrad knelt on his knees and grasped her thighs, caressing the lace of the thigh-highs. He said something as he touched the harness, moving aside the bead. She didn’t know what he said, but he seemed excited by the sight.

She closed her eyes as his tongue shyly touched her smooth flesh. He didn’t flirt with the lips, but instead went directly to her clit. His strokes were broad and quick, but it still felt nice. Serena squirmed as moisture flooded her. She kept her eyes closed, disconcerted by how quickly her body reacted to his clumsy

strokes. An ache built in her pussy, and she began thrusting against his tongue, even as she cringed inside at her actions.

“That’s it, pet. Give into your instincts. Any tongue will do, won’t it?” Ian’s voice sounded encouraging, but his words gave Serena pause.

Konrad’s tongue became more eager, and he thrust it inside her, before sweeping downward.

Serena’s eyes snapped open as he tongued her anus. She turned her head to meet Ian’s darkened gaze, unable to hide her uncertainty. “Ian...”

“Do you want me to stop him?”

She hesitated, surprised to find the sensation enjoyable. Her sphincter tightened as his tongue invaded her, but her pussy spasmed with pleasure. “I don’t know. I’ve never...” She trailed off as his tongue left her anus to return to her pussy. Juices dribbled down her legs, and he licked them away eagerly before delving deep into her opening again. Serena gasped as his tongue speared her pussy. How could she respond to him when she felt as though she were dying inside?

She gasped again when Ian cupped her breast, rolling her nipple between his fingers. He leaned her against him to support her weight, and then reached between her thighs to circle her clit with his other hand. Konrad’s tongue continued to thrust inside her, and Serena squirmed at the combined pleasure. Ian rotated his thumb against her clit, applying just enough pain to incite an orgasm.

“Come, pet. Come now. Show me how much you like his mouth on your pussy.” There was a trace of anger in his tone.

His permission released the floodgates. Despite her internal feelings and the sense that something wasn’t right with Ian’s reaction, her body insisted on release. She cried out, and he clapped his hand over her mouth, holding her against him as the climax ravaged her. She could smell her dew on his fingers,

and Serena's senses responded by heightening her orgasm. Her body convulsed with pleasure, and she gave herself up to it, relying on Ian to support her.

When she was able to stand, albeit shakily, she eyed Konrad impassively, at a loss for what to say. Should she thank him, or should she turn to Ian and hit him as hard as she could? How could he stand to watch another man do that to her?

Konrad said something to her shyly before turning to Ian. He seemed nervous when he spoke.

Ian's expression tightened, and he shook his head sharply. His response was harsh, even in the guttural language.

Konrad ducked his head. His hand pulled at the crotch of his pants, obviously trying to relieve the discomfort.

"What did he ask?"

"He wants to fuck you." He must have felt her tense, because his voice took on a soothing note. "Relax, pet. I told him no. But would you like to put on a show for him?"

She stared at him with confusion.

"Do you want him to watch while I fuck you?"

Her eyes widened at the thought, and she cocked her head, considering. Part of her found the thought exciting, but she hesitated, remembering his touch with a mixture of shame and pleasure. She shot a glance at the boy, noting his obvious pain. "Would he be masturbating?"

"Unless he's shy or stupid," he said with a grin.

She shrugged. "I'm not sure." Why did she insist on focusing on what Ian would want? Her brain urged her to get the hell out while she still could, even as her pussy spasmed at a mental image of fucking in front of the young man.

Ian nodded. "Okay. I'll make the choice." He looked at Konrad, reeling off something.

Konrad's eyes shone with excitement, and he nodded vigorously.

Serena knew Ian's choice when he lifted her into his arms and carried her to the sofa in the otherwise utilitarian employee room. He didn't even take off her dress as he laid her on the couch, with her buttocks on the edge, and her upper body cramped against the contours of the sofa.

He removed protection from his pocket and sheathed his cock before plunging inside her. Serena closed her eyes and arched against him, enjoying the fullness that accompanied his possession. She put her arms on his back and urged him to go deeper into her pussy. She could feel Konrad's eyes on her and heard him unzip his pants. His presence increased her arousal, and her pussy flooded around Ian's cock.

"Watch him, pet."

She obeyed Ian's dictate and opened her eyes, turning her head in Konrad's direction. He was furiously stroking his cock, as his eyes remained glued to where their bodies had fused. His face was bright red, and he was grunting with the effort.

It made her want to giggle for some reason, and she turned away, locking eyes with Ian as he thrust inside her over and over. He alternated between shallow and deep thrusts, going fast one moment, and slowing down the next. When Konrad cried out with his orgasm and shot his gism on the floor, Ian was still going strong.

Serena's pussy contracted around him as he drove deep inside her, and she thrust upward. A second orgasm washed over her, making her pussy clench around his cock. She heard Ian groan. The cords in his neck stiffened right before his cock spasmed, and his warmth spread through the condom. He collapsed on top of her, pressing a kiss to her forehead before holding her in his arms.

Her racing heart gradually slowed, and she realized Konrad was still with them. He had crawled forward and laid his head on the arm of the sofa. She moved a hand from Ian's back to stroke his hair, much as she would have Auggie's fur, and resisted the urge to tell him he had been a good boy.

With a sigh, Ian withdrew from her, standing up and closing his pants. "You can dress now, pet."

She got up on shaky feet, surprised when she almost fell on the high heels. She had grown accustomed to them, or so she had thought. Ian's hand steadied her, and she fumbled with the dress's zipper, using that as an excuse to avoid his gaze.

Konrad had gotten to his feet, and he was shaking Ian's hand, thanking him profusely.

Ian nodded, and then whispered something to the boy before Konrad nodded in return and left them.

"What did you say?" Serena asked as Ian came to her to straighten the harness to fall midway between her breasts. She ran a hand through her hair to restore order once he stepped away.

"I told him this is one of those stories everyone brags about, but I warned him not to repeat it. I told him Johan was a friend of mine, and it would get back to me." He shrugged. "His silence isn't much to ask in exchange for tasting your pussy."

She made a non-committal sound, not anxious to speak to him. She was still aching at this new mental image of herself as a wanton creature that could respond to anyone. She followed him to the door of the break room without speaking. The bead caused almost unbearable friction against her still-sensitive clit. It was another reminder of the prurient activities she had engaged in during the last few minutes. She reached for the handle as he stepped aside, but his hand on the door stopped her. She looked up.

“Did you like it?”

She nodded. “He wasn’t as good as you, but it was definitely enjoyable.” She said the words smoothly, even as she questioned the truth of them. Had it been pleasurable? She couldn’t deny she had been aroused by Konrad’s touch, followed by his voyeuristic eyes on them, but she didn’t know if she could get past what she had done. What she had become, all for Ian.

Perhaps the incident wouldn’t have affected her so deeply if she knew Ian loved her, and it had all been for pleasure. However, she knew he didn’t love her, and she didn’t know what had motivated him to bring another man into their relationship. She couldn’t reconcile what she had done with what she had always believed about herself.

His eyes were serious as he leaned closer to her. “I’m glad you liked it, but I want to remind you this only happens with my permission.”

She frowned. “I don’t understand.” Was he telling her what she thought he was? Did he really think any man would do for her? Did he really think she was the kind of woman who would balance multiple lovers? What an idiot he could be, considering she had been a virgin until he fucked her.

He touched her collar. “You belong to me. If I choose to share you, that’s one thing. It’s another for you to cheat me.”

As if she would deliberately seek out such a scenario again, after her mixed feelings from this encounter. Anger and the need to appease him warred inside her. “I only belong to you until Sunday.”

Ian’s mouth tightened. “Fine. Until then, you’re mine, and I expect you to act like you are.”

“It was your idea to let another man touch me.”

“Yes, but he didn’t fuck you, did he?” Ian’s hand moved between her thighs in a lightning-quick move, and he thrust a finger inside her. “This is my pussy.

You gave it to me. I trust you've read enough about dominant/submissive relationships to know what that means."

She nodded. "I'm giving you total control of that aspect of my life...until Sunday." Her lip curled. "Just don't expect me to trust you."

He snorted. "Why would I expect that? I can't trust you." With that, Ian moved his hand from between her thighs to open the door. He turned down the hallway, not waiting for her to catch up. He bypassed the dining room and headed straight for the lobby, apparently having lost his appetite – or maybe just his desire to eat with her.

Chapter 5

By the time they reached their suite, Serena had caught up with Ian. She swept past him to enter, anxious to remove the dress and shower. The door slammed behind him, and she cried out as he jerked her into his arms, pressing her buttocks against his cock. He was hard again. How could he want her after the words they had exchanged?

He spun her around and slammed his mouth on hers. This kiss was pure punishment, but Serena jerked with surprise when her pussy moistened as his tongue invaded her mouth. She was as angry as him, and maybe more so. She threaded her fingers into his hair, tugging him forcefully closer. As she did so, she moved forward, pushing against him until momentum tipped him back. His back hit the door with a thud, but he didn't seem to notice.

Ian clenched her buttocks and pulled her lower body closer to his. His cock thrust against her stomach, and Serena shifted impatiently. His fingers tightened, digging into her skin painfully through the leather. She pulled his hair to get him to lift his head. When he did so, he loosened his grip. His eyes burned into hers, sizzling with anger.

She glared back. "I don't appreciate you treating me like that. You let another man touch me."

"You didn't mind. Your pussy was wet and pulsing. You came in his mouth." He sounded accusatory.

She ground out a wordless sound of frustration. "What did you expect me to do when you forced me into that position? You ordered me to come! My body responded. It would do the same with anyone."

His eyes narrowed. "Anyone? Are you that much of a slut?"

Serena's breath hissed through her teeth, and she recoiled from him. "I guess I must be. I like it when you touch me."

Ian moved quickly, stalking forward as he caught her in his arms, half-carrying and half-dragging her to the bed. He pushed her down less than gently and stripped the dress from her body. His movements were stiff with anger when he removed the harness and tossed it onto the floor beside the dress.

Serena kicked out at him as he shifted her higher on the bed and straddled her. She fought him and tried to fight the knowledge that she wanted him. She was angry at his treatment, but more than that, she was hurt. He had watched as another man touched her. It didn't matter that she had physically found the experience pleasurable. Inside, she had writhed with humiliation. It seemed important to give him an equal measure of pain. "I don't want you. I've had enough."

Ian tore off his jacket, tie, and shirt, not even bothering with the buttons. They popped off as he ripped, landing without sound against the bed and carpet. "Sure you don't." He reached down between them and cupped her pussy, dipping his finger inside. Then he brought it to her face and smeared it across her lips. "Taste your arousal. You're aching for me. If you really don't want to fuck, you know the magic word."

Tears came to her eyes. "No. I won't do this. I won't fuck you, and I won't confess to something I didn't do." She pushed against him with all her strength, but he barely moved. She tried to blink them back, but the tears suddenly streamed from her eyes. "Get off me. Please!"

Ian stilled, and then his fingers were gently brushing the tears from her eyes. "Don't cry, pet. What's wrong?"

She looked at him through the haze of her tears. Although she was certain it was because of the moisture in her eyes, his expression was gentle. "You hurt me, Ian," she said in a whispery voice.

He stiffened. "Was I too rough? I'm sorry, pet—"

She shook her head, swiping at the tears he didn't catch. "How could you let that man touch me like that, when I belong to you? I didn't like it." She saw his mouth open, and she said, "Don't you dare contradict me. Yes, I enjoyed it physically, but it hurt me, inside. I don't like what you made me into with that. I don't like how I was. I won't do it again."

Ian eased off her. To her surprise, he pulled her into his arms and brushed a kiss against her forehead. "I'm sorry, Serena. I had no right to do that. I should protect you, meet your needs." He pulled her into his arms, settling her on top of him. "I didn't like the way you looked at him."

She shook her head. "It didn't mean anything. He's a handsome young man, but I didn't want him."

"I was punishing you for my reaction." He brushed a strand of hair from her face. "I'm sorry," he said again. "I won't do that to you again."

She hesitated, trying to gage his sincerity. She had never known Ian to lie. He could be an intractable bastard, with a cruel streak, but he was honest. She nodded. "All right." She stared down at him, frowning when she realized he was uncertain what to do next. She was in the same situation herself. Did she reach out to him, or should she get up and put some distance between them? She didn't think he would release her, even if he felt guilty, and she found herself reluctant to be released.

Tentatively, she bent down to brush a kiss against his mouth. His muscles loosened as he relaxed. When he didn't push her away, she deepened the kiss and lowered her torso to rest against his. She whimpered when he turned his

head, but it was only to shift their positions again. Once more, he straddled her, but not with the air of anger he had displayed before.

His kiss was gentle when he brought his mouth to hers. Serena closed her eyes and surrendered herself to his kiss, moaning when he cupped her breasts and thumbed her nipples. She arched against him, and her smooth pussy encountered the barrier of his slacks.

He feathered kisses across her cheek as his hands left her breasts to go to his waistband. Ian pulling away from her followed the rasp of his zipper. Serena opened her eyes and watched as he got up and stripped off his pants and briefs. He retrieved a condom from his pants pocket and sheathed his cock before returning to her. She held out her arms, welcoming him as he came down on top of her.

Serena cupped his face and sat up partially to kiss him. She parted her thighs when his fingers slipped inside her pussy, stroking her clit and opening until she was flooded with desire. "Master," she said in a breathy whisper as he parted his lips and brought the head of his cock to her opening.

"Who do you belong to, pet?"

She gazed up at his intent expression, surprised to see need in his eyes. She didn't hesitate. "You. Only you."

He thrust inside her, filling her. His strokes were quick and deep, as he swirled his fingers across her clit. "Mine," he said several times. Each repetition was increasingly guttural as he thrust into her more forcefully.

"Yours," she confirmed each time, as she met him thrust for thrust. As the sensations increased, she dug her nails into his back, anchoring herself. When Serena's pussy spasmed around his cock, she looked up in time to see him throw back his head and give voice to his pleasure.

A wave of emotion swept through her, bringing tears to her eyes. She didn't know what prompted the tears. Joy or anguish at the revelation that hit her? She

couldn't deny it any longer, at least not to herself. Her attempts to talk herself out of it, to avoid it, had all failed, despite everything he had done to her.

She was in love with Ian.

He thrust into her deeply as he came. His gaze locked with hers, and he said, "Mine," once more.

"Yours," she said, not letting her gaze stray from his. As his cock spasmed, his eyes closed, and she mouthed, "Forever." She didn't resist when he kept going. All that mattered right then was the two of them. She wanted to forget the contract and his accusations. She let herself pretend his love was as real as hers, as she obeyed his every whim.

* * * * *

Ian watched her as she slept. The air of innocence surrounding her was at odds with the fact that she had spent the last two hours fucking him in every way he demanded. He had pushed her hard, he acknowledged, but he had been tender too.

Why? Was it because he was embarrassed to have hurt her, or was there more to it? He winced, remembering how his heart had spasmed when she said she belonged to him. He wanted that to be real and permanent. He wanted her to have submitted because she chose to, not because he left her little choice. His original goals seemed to have blurred in the reality of actually possessing Serena.

He shifted in the hotel chair, and the leash attached to the cuff on his wrist swished against the covers. She murmured something and buried her head deeper into the pillow. A soft smile curved her lips before her face disappeared in the silk. Her dreams must be pleasant.

He scowled, wondering how she could find anything pleasant to dream about under the circumstances. Perhaps she was imagining how she would spend the money she had received from EverResearch for betraying him.

His stomach churned, and he clenched his hands into fists, attempting to avoid what he was thinking. It pressed on him anyway, hammering away at his conscience until he admitted to it. It didn't fit. She didn't seem like she was cold-blooded or grasping. The air of innocence that had shrouded her for the two years he'd known her seemed genuine.

Was she so consummate an actress that she could pretend to enjoy his touch, while still maintaining resentment at the way he had forced her into this agreement? Serena had been a virgin the first time he had sex with her. If he had entertained the idea that it was an act, the smear of blood she had left on his sheets proved otherwise. How could she have remained pure in body, but not in her soul? How could she be the woman Greg's contact painted her to be?

It didn't make sense. His instincts told him something was wrong with his conclusion. Ian didn't like to admit to being wrong, but knew enough to follow his instincts. He had to figure out what was erroneous with this situation, and before Sunday, when she slipped away from him for good.

His hand rose of its own volition to stroke her hair. He had looked a long time for a woman to complement his tastes in the bedroom. She sometimes chafed at submitting, but he knew enough about her to know she also enjoyed the parameters he had established. She wanted him to be dominant.

That didn't fit. If she were innocent, she should recoil from him, not embrace his every command. A wry smile flashed across his face. Okay, she hadn't exactly embraced his every order, but she usually complied.

When he had set out to prove to himself that she was fickle and unfaithful, by forcing her to acknowledge her attraction to Konrad, she had complied, but with a subtle hint of defiance. He knew she wouldn't have allowed Konrad to fuck her, even if he ordered it. He now knew she had hated that she had responded physically to Konrad. So why did she submit to him, unless she felt guilty or had seized the chance to avoid punishment?

Yet, how could she still seem so innocent? His hand slipped from her hair to her cheek. He rubbed the silky-soft skin, smiling as she nuzzled against his fingers, without waking.

She was a mystery, and he knew he had to solve it. The need to possess her drove him, more so than with any other woman he had taken as a lover. It would be all too easy to fall in love with her. He ignored the tightening in his stomach that indicated he might have already done so. He refused to allow his emotions to come into play until he was satisfied with her guilt or innocence.

If she truly were guilty, her greedy little heart should jump at the chance to remain with him, if he decided to extend the contract. He would offer the enticement of financial security and a lavish lifestyle if she seemed to equivocate.

He swallowed a thick lump in his throat, imagining how difficult it would be to win her trust again if she were innocent.

* * * * *

Serena awoke alone, and the various aches in her body reminded her how she had spent the last two hours of last night, before falling into an exhausted sleep—as if the images weren't burned into her mind. She shivered with a combination of pleasure and dismay, remembering the things she had done with Ian, how she had willingly submitted to his every demand.

Where was he? She stretched and sat up, eyeing the room for signs of him. She turned her head and saw a note lying on the pillow. She lifted it, scanning the short missive.

Serena,

Something has come up. I'll try to return before Sunday. Wait for me, regardless of how long I'm gone. I've left money and a credit card for you. Buy something sexy for my return.

Ian

Her eyes widened when she saw her name, instead of pet. Anger washed away her surprise at the small concession, and she wadded the note into a ball. She wasn't going to wait for him, no matter his imperious command. Her contract ended Sunday, whether or not he was there. He didn't seem to have any qualms about leaving her, even after their night together, so why should she stay?

She was determined to leave, and he had provided the means. She lifted the Platinum card from the stack of Lasenbourg marcs, leaving the bills where they lay. She reached for the phone on the nightstand and had the operator connect her to the airport. Within fifteen minutes, she had booked a flight home for later that afternoon.

As she packed her things, she tried not to think about the way she had responded to Ian yesterday. Even when angry with him, she had been unable to deny her desire. She shook her head, trying to tell herself it was an aberration, that it meant nothing. Her body had responded to his experience. It was nothing more than that.

Still, she couldn't deny a tug of regret when she carried her cases to the door of the suite and turned to look back. Her gaze swept over the room, falling inexorably on mementos of their stay. The rumpled sheets carried the scent of their bodies. The pillow bore the imprint of her head, but not his.

Serena took a deep breath and forced herself to exit the master bedroom and go into the sitting room. She told herself not to think about being in Ian's arms as she waited for the bellhop to arrive. The key to forgetting was returning to New York and denying this had ever happened.

As the doorbell rang, she admitted to herself that it would be more difficult to accomplish than she wanted to contemplate. It would be a long time before

she recovered from the sentence Ian had imposed on her. More accurately, it would take her a long time to forget how eager she had been to serve.

Chapter 6

Serena lifted her head from where it rested against her thighs when she heard a guard approaching her cell. She watched impassively as the door opened when the woman waved a wand by the electronic keypad. She wondered what was in store for her today. Since her arraignment and imprisonment at Rikers a week ago, no one had come to her cell except to bring food or take her to the shower room.

“Get the lead out,” the big guard barked impatiently. The fabric of her uniform stretched taut across her massive bosoms. “You have a visitor.”

She frowned as she got to her feet, feeling the thin fabric of her prison jumpsuit protest as she walked forward. “Who is it?”

The guard shrugged and indicated Serena should walk faster. She complied, staying beside the woman, struggling to match her long strides. She wondered who had come to visit her, praying it wasn't her mother or grandmother. With her grandmother's bad hip, she didn't need to make the trip from Peoria, and Serena couldn't bear the humiliation of having her mother see her incarcerated. That was why she hadn't told either of them about the arrest.

The guard led her to a private room and unlocked the door. She didn't speak as Serena slipped past her. The key turned in the lock while she approached the scarred metal table and took a seat. Her nose wrinkled at the stale layer of cigarette smoke clinging visibly in the air, and she sat as far away as possible from the overflowing ashtray.

The other door opened less than a minute after she arrived, and Serena's mouth fell open when she saw Ian enter, carrying a manila folder. The squalor of the place didn't diminish him in his neatly pressed white shirt and khaki slacks.

She almost hated him for that, as her mouth watered at the sight of a familiar face—even the face of the man who had put her here. She tried to deny the way her heart leapt with excitement at seeing him, while she tried to pretend she hadn't fantasized about him every night of the past week, even knowing it was his fault she was arrested.

He took a step inside and froze. "Serena? You look awful."

She glared at him, aware of how frizzy her hair was, and the way she smelled, having shunned the showers as much as possible during the past six days, remembering horror stories of prison life. "What do you want? Have you come to gloat?" She bared her teeth at him.

He abruptly started walking again, stopping only to sit in a chair beside her. "You aren't supposed to be here."

She refused to meet his gaze. "I tried to tell that to the detective who came to my apartment to arrest me, but he didn't listen." She shrugged, mentally drawing into herself. "When you can't meet bail, this is where you end up." Finally, Serena met his eyes, allowing her anger to show. "Do you think I'd be here if I had one-hundred-thousand dollars, Ian? Or do you think I'm maintaining the appearance of innocence by staying at Rikers?"

He shook his head and slid the folder across the table. "I know you're innocent. I'm working on getting you out now. Unfortunately, only a judge can dismiss your case, but I'm posting bail so you don't have to stay here another day."

She lifted a brow at his rushed words. Her fingers opened the folder, and she stared at a stack of documents with a lot of words and symbols. "What are these?"

"An electronic trail from my computer to EverResearch's. This was what incriminated you to begin with." He tapped his fingers on the table, looking disconcerted. "But the evidence didn't match the personality of who I thought I

had come to know the last couple of years. During our time together at Castle Phantasie, you weren't at all what I expected. I couldn't believe you could be that kind of woman. You're smart and sweet, and endearingly innocent in many ways. You're a good person, Serena."

She eyed him impassively, not allowing a hint of hope to darken her eyes. After the shock of ending up in jail, she didn't dare put any faith in his words. "What are you telling me, Ian?"

He threaded his hand through his red hair, mussing the style. "I left you in Lasenbourg to examine the evidence again. This time, I brought in my own electronics expert, and he told me most of the papers I had seen were bogus. It didn't make sense, so I went to Greg, wanting an explanation..." He trailed off, and his hazel eyes shifted out of focus.

She held her breath, unable to completely disregard the spark of hope burning in her chest. He must have discovered the truth, or he wouldn't be here. "And...?" she finally prompted, as his silence stretched.

"He had company." Ian's lips compressed, and he seemed to be gathering his thoughts. "A black-haired woman named Patty...Smith. She was pregnant."

A sigh escaped Serena. "She was the one who emailed the files."

"More than that, she's Greg's fiancée and Everett Smith's sister. He broke down and told me everything. They've been living together for about a year, but kept it hidden. Everett and Patty convinced Greg to help them boost their research division by stealing from my company."

Despite her anger and resentment, she felt a stir of pity for Ian. His best friend had betrayed him. She knew the pain of betrayal all too well, and her mouth firmed. "So I'm free?"

He nodded. "You will be once the judge sees this evidence. She'll dismiss the case, and that will be the end of it."

"When can I leave?"

“As soon as the paperwork is completed to finish your bail. About five minutes. You’ll have to appear in court in two days, for formalities, but then you’re cleared.” He bowed his head, muffling his voice. “I’m sorry. I owe you so much.”

She shifted with discomfort at his thick tone and searched for another topic, knowing she wasn’t ready to forgive him yet. “What will you do to Greg?”

“He’s agreed to testify against EverResearch for a reduced sentence. Since Patty’s pregnant, part of our agreement is her name is left out of it.” A thread of anger underlay his bland tone. “Their patent will be revoked, and our company will apply for it. Essentially, McDermott Industries got their product back. It only cost me my friend...and maybe the woman I love.”

She flinched at his hesitant words, struggling to avoid his eyes as he raised his head. “Don’t do this—”

“I’m an idiot. How could I have ever believed it was you?” He cursed. “I knew you were an innocent from the first day I saw you walking Mrs. Ortiz’s ridiculous dyed-purple poodle. That’s why I was never more than distantly friendly with you. I didn’t think you could accept my lifestyle.”

She shook her head, resisting the childish urge to clamp her hands over her ears. She didn’t want to hear Ian’s heartfelt confession. Serena wanted to cling to her anger. “Shut up,” she demanded.

He ignored her. “I told myself I couldn’t have anything to do with you, but I still bought Augustus and hired you as his walker. I kept telling myself if I waited a few years, until you were older, maybe I might stand a chance. Maybe I could even give up the need for control.” Ian sighed. “Everything changed when I thought you had betrayed me.”

“Yeah, it was suddenly okay to use me however you wanted,” she said with a viciousness she couldn’t mask. “However you wanted...whatever you wanted.”

'Yes, Master'," she mocked. "And what did it do for me? Not a damn thing! I still ended up in here."

"If you had stayed at Castle Phantasie —"

"Don't you dare blame me for this," she shouted. "I told you I was innocent. Jesus, Ian, I slept with you before you ever accused me. You used me, just because you were angry." She leapt to her feet and started pacing the confines of the small room. "You wanted me to pay, and I have. If I were innocent before, I'm certainly not now."

"Please, Serena, I want to make it up to you. I'm in love with you."

She scowled at him. "You aren't in love with me. You only want to appease your conscience."

Ian got up so quickly that the chair tipped and fell to the floor with a crash. He rushed to her. To Serena's surprise, he didn't try to take her in his arms. Instead, he dropped to his knees and took her hand. "I know you're angry, but let me have a chance to make this up to you. I do love you. I've treated you badly, forced you into something you hated, and I need to make things right."

She squirmed, acknowledging she hadn't hated everything she had experienced at Ian's hands. "How? What will you do?"

"I'll give you anything —"

"I don't want your money." She tugged away her hand. "I don't want anything from you."

"Serena —" He reached for her again.

She jerked away as the lock turned in the key. Ian got to his feet and righted his appearance, but a flush stained his cheeks as the guard walked in.

"Bail's posted," the woman said, crossing her arms as her gaze flitted between them. "Let's go."

She turned to Ian before leaving the room, lowering her voice to a whisper she hoped wouldn't carry to the guard. "I don't want anything to do with you. If you want to make things right, just stay away from me."

* * * * *

Three days later, Serena finally got around to unpacking her suitcase. She tried not to remember the pleading expression Ian wore yesterday in court, and how he had tried to catch her eyes as she left the building. She had deliberately turned away from him and kept walking, denying her own needs as much as his.

She didn't pay much attention as she unzipped her case and began removing the clothes. Her eyes insisted on seeing phantoms of Ian, with his face contorted by passion as he made love to her. Her body responded, and she smothered an oath, wondering why she couldn't forget his touch. Surely, her anger should obliterate every other trace of feeling she might have for him, but it didn't.

She should hate Ian for accusing her and punishing her for a crime she hadn't committed. If he truly believed she were an innocent, he never would have thought her capable of betraying him, regardless of the proof Greg showed him.

She sighed, knowing the evidence must have been slick and convincing. His friend wouldn't have wanted his part in the betrayal revealed, and Greg would have worked diligently to ensure his fiancée wasn't implicated. Serena had been a convenient target, and Ian had been duped in more ways than one.

That didn't excuse what he had done to her, she reminded herself. He had forced her to become his sex slave to pay off a debt she didn't owe. He had used and humiliated her, in the name of vengeance.

But he hadn't humiliated her, except with Konrad, and he had been genuinely sorry for that. He had angered her more than once, and he had pushed her beyond what she would have considered her own limits to submit, but he

had never set out to deliberately hurt her. He had even provided an out for her, although it wasn't much of one. If she spoke her safe word, she faced prosecution.

She tossed a handful of clothes across the twin bed, not seeing their wrinkled state. Instead, she saw the note he had left, mentally reading the words once more. She kept coming back to the fact that he had left her to investigate further, driven by the inconsistencies, and acting on nothing more than his own instincts. New proof hadn't emerged to cause him to question his conclusions. Ian had double-checked because he wanted her to be as innocent as she seemed.

She blinked back a haze of tears and reached into the suitcase again, knowing she had to finish unpacking. It had been difficult to focus on anything during the past few days, and if she kept putting it off, she would never finish the chore.

Serena froze when her hand brushed against the collar and harness. She frowned as she lifted it out slowly, eyeing it as though she had never seen it before. Why had she packed it? She remembered the frantic rush to dress and pack so she could catch her flight, but didn't recall stuffing the collar into her case.

She pushed aside the suitcase and sat on the bed, stroking the buttery-soft leather. It was a sign of Ian's dominance, and she should hate to even look at it. She shouldn't feel melancholy touching it, or wish for its familiar weight again.

She should throw it away and banish the memories of Ian with it. Serena hesitated, clutching the collar in her hands. She searched for the strength to do what needed to be done, wondering if she had the fortitude, knowing she had to do it. It was the only way to be at peace again.

Chapter 7

Serena knocked on Ian's door, feeling her stomach dance with butterflies. She wondered what his reaction would be. Again, she questioned her decision, but didn't have time to change her mind as the door opened to reveal a shocked Ian. She buried her hands in the pockets of her overcoat and strove to sound cool. "May I come in?"

He didn't speak as he stepped back to allow her entrance. He appeared dazed.

She walked inside, balling her hands into fists. She heard the door close behind her, but didn't look at him as Auggie came to sniff her. She withdrew one hand from her pocket and stroked his silky fur. His tail wagged enthusiastically, and he licked her arm. She spoke baby-talk to him, lavishing attention on the dog in an attempt to avoid meeting Ian's eyes.

He cleared his throat, but she didn't look up until he spoke her name. "Serena?"

Traces of red decorated his hazel eyes, and he had new lines grooved into his skin. He looked like he had aged five years in the last three days. *Good*, she thought with a hint of malice. He deserved to suffer a little for what he had done to her. "Ian." She was amazed at her even tone, how it didn't betray even a suggestion of nervousness.

He ran a hand through his already messy hair. "Um, what brings you by?"

She licked her lips, wondering how to proceed. She had rehearsed it all mentally, but it was a lot harder to follow through with her plan in person. She shrugged. "I wanted to know..."

“Yes?” he asked as her silence stretched.

She swallowed the ball in her throat. “I wanted to know how you feel about me today. Have you changed your mind now that you’ve had time to think things through?”

He flinched. “No, of course not. I love you.”

The anguish in his tone pleased her, and she accepted the vindictiveness of her reaction with a slight sting of her conscience. It was fun to watch him squirm, but she hadn’t come to punish him any longer. Her refusal to acknowledge his existence the past few days had done that already. She nodded. “I see.” A feeling of confidence swept through her, and Serena strolled into his living room. She turned to face him, casually untying the knot at the waist of her buttoned coat. “How much do you love me, Ian?”

He looked wary. “What do you mean?”

“Do you love me enough to smother me with diamonds, offer me half your fortune, fall at my feet and worship me?” She bit down a grin at the outrageous question. She knew where she was leading, but he obviously didn’t, judging by the pained look on his face.

“I’ll give you all that and more.” His voice broke, and his shoulders bowed. “Just don’t leave me again.”

Serena abandoned her teasing at his tortured tone. Her fingers made quick work of the buttons, and the overcoat fell away to reveal what she wore—the collar, harness, black thigh-highs, and black stilettos. She walked to him, stopping when she stood a few inches away. “I’m here to stay, Master.” Her voice trembled a bit as she dropped to her knees before him, bowing her head in a submissive pose.

She held her breath, awaiting his reaction. He didn’t move or speak for long seconds, and she was aware of the clock ticking. The soft carpet became rough against her silk-clad knees, and her heart stuttered with nervousness. She was

about to get to her feet again when Ian's hand settled on her shoulder, caressing lightly.

Her eyes widened as he dropped to his knees in front of her. She didn't have a chance to say anything as his arms went around her, and his mouth settled on hers. His lips were soft and hesitant as they molded to hers. Serena parted her lips with a sigh, and his tongue slipped inside to explore her depths. Her arms wound around his neck of their own accord, and she pressed her body closer to his.

Ian broke away with a gasp. "Why? Why did you come back?"

She propped her forehead against his as she twined her fingers through his hair. "I love you, Ian. I was more than half-crazy about you even before we made love. Once I knew how good things could be between us, I couldn't stop thinking about you. I guess I should hate you, but I can't."

"You should." He pulled away, sitting back on his calves. "I'd give anything to make it up—"

Serena pressed her fingers to his lips, silencing him. "I know. There is only one thing I want from you."

"Anything," he said against her fingers.

"Forever," she said softly, feeling a bit shy. "I want to be yours." She bowed her head, unable to meet his eyes. "I want to submit to you always."

A harsh exhalation escaped him. "You don't have to do that, Serena. I'll admit I'd love to have that kind of relationship with you, but I don't want to force you into it. I can be content with the type of marriage others have."

Her eyes widened, and she lifted her head. "You're proposing?"

He nodded, looking nervous.

"Yes." Serena threw herself against him. "Yes, Master. I want this. It's my choice. I missed wearing the collar. I missed having you in control."

Ian cupped her face in his hands. "You're the one with the control, pet. You control my thoughts, my actions, my heart." He kissed her lips briefly before lifting his head. "You're everything to me."

She snuggled into his arms, comforted by his words, knowing it was the same for her. She had tried to deny what she felt for Ian, and then she had tried to ruthlessly cut it out, but she couldn't. He owned the most important part of her – her heart, just as she owned his.

Chapter 1

Regan's Recovery

Regan eyed the men in the bar, searching for Mr. Tonight, wondering how long it would take her to find one to invite back to her suite among the slim pickings offered in the pre-dinner cocktail crowd. She quickly narrowed her options down to three possibilities.

The bartender had a nice ass. She noticed it each time he moved to make a drink. His face was pleasant enough, but with a roughness of features she didn't normally go for. She wondered how old he was, guessing at least twelve years her junior. That didn't automatically take him out of the running, but it made her hesitate. Another point against him was he was working, and she didn't feel like waiting hours until he got off so she could get off.

Her gaze skipped to the second possibility, and he was enough to make her pulse skyrocket. His olive skin glowed with honey undertones in the amber light provided by the hanging lamps. His hair was thick and black, with nary a strand of gray, but there were lines of maturity around his dark eyes and mouth, indicating he was near her age. She couldn't fault his trim, muscular physique in the black cashmere sweater and khakis. In fact, the only thing she could find fault with was the brunette trying to hook up with him.

With a sigh of regret, she transferred her attention to the third option. This one had the look of an executive in vacationer's clothes. A sleek style tamed his short blond hair, and his eyes sparkled when they met hers. A grin tugged at the corners of her mouth when he lifted his drink in her direction and winked. Regan lifted her Jack & Coke to reciprocate the gesture, although she skipped the girlish activity of winking.

She was unsurprised when he got off his stool across the bar and walked over to her with casual grace. She turned her body slightly so he would have room to slide onto the stool beside her, and she prepared her “meet-the-client” smile as he sat beside her.

“Hello, gorgeous. Where have you been all my life?”

She frowned at the silly pickup line, but shrugged aside her annoyance. She didn’t care about the man’s social grace. All that mattered tonight was his cock and how well he used it. “Hello.” She couldn’t obliterate the trace of coolness in her tone, although it wasn’t her goal to drive him away. She fully intended to be in a state of post-coital bliss by morning, and she didn’t plan to be too meticulous about her partner. She would be satisfied with attractive and clean. She would be thrilled with biddable.

“I’m Barry McPherson.” He held out a large hand, engulfing Regan’s in his when he shook hers.

“Are you from Scotland?”

He shook his head. “Ireland, miss.”

She nodded, recognizing the underlying accent when he spoke more. “I’m Regan.” She didn’t offer a last name. She wanted to leave as little as possible with him, and she wanted little in return.

He sipped the amber liquid in his glass before speaking again. “What brings you here?”

“Vacation,” she said, although her tongue wanted to trip on the word. She yearned for the familiar sounds of ringing phones, incoming faxes, frantic assistants, and coolly handled meetings. The quiet of this place was too extreme. “You?”

“I’m meeting someone here.”

She nodded. “Business?”

Barry shook his head. "Not at all. She's a sweet girl I met on the Internet two years ago. We're getting married in the chapel when she arrives tomorrow morning."

Regan sighed, mentally scratching him off her list. "Congratulations." She glanced at her watch. "I really should go. I'm meeting friends for dinner." The falsehood flowed smoothly from her tongue, although she didn't make a habit of lying. Maybe it came easily because she had originally planned to meet Serena, before the girl canceled on her.

"Hold up there, miss." His hand clamped on her silk-clad thigh, bared by the short dress she wore. "No need to leave just yet. I came a day early so I'd have time for one last fling." He pushed his luck by sliding his hand higher up her leg, until his fingers rested under the hem of her dress.

Regan put her hand over his and dug in her nails. She had no problem with casual sex, but not if the partner was someone else's. "I'm not the woman you're looking for. It was lovely to meet you," she made no attempt to hide her insincerity, "but I must go." Barry withdrew his hand with a hiss of pain, and she slid from the stool, pausing only to drop a four-marc on the bar before striding from the dim interior to make her way to the restaurant.

* * * * *

It was with some surprise that she greeted the dark-haired man from the bar as he stopped by her table. She scanned his immediate vicinity, pleased to see him brunette-less. She arched a brow when he stood without speaking. "May I help you?"

White teeth flashed against darkly tanned skin when he grinned. "It is I who might help you, *signorina*." His words were smooth as honey, but made tangy with the accent shadowing each word.

Her hackles rose in response to the faint air of challenge clinging to the man. Her eyes narrowed. "How so?"

"You seem to be without a dining partner." His eyes scanned the area around the table, as though looking for a man she might have stashed out of sight. "May I have the pleasure of keeping you company?"

She assessed him for half a minute before inclining her head. She saw the hovering maitre 'd relax his posture when the man sat down. "What happened to your...friend in the bar?" she asked, as the wine steward brought the bottle she had selected.

He shrugged. "Once my eyes fell on you, she didn't interest me."

Somehow, the corny line didn't promote her irritation as Barry's had done. She sipped the wine after swirling it, and then nodded her approval to the steward. She didn't take her eyes from her mysterious companion. "Would you like a glass?"

He studied the red liquid in her glass with interest. "It depends. What vintage?"

She kept her expression as bland as her voice when she said, "It's a 1983 Staatsweingut, Steinberger Eiswein." Regan held her breath, wondering if her companion would recognize the rarity of the vintage.

He cocked a brow. "Impressive. I would enjoy a glass, but only if you allow me to purchase the bottle."

She inclined her head, wondering if he realized just how expensive it was. Well, if he couldn't cover it, she could. Synergies Systems was picking up the tab on her vacation. It was one of the perks of being CEO. "If you wish."

The steward made a production of pouring her guest a glass, and then waiting to see if he approved too. The rotund man beamed with pride when the other man nodded his appreciation.

She savored the rich flavor of the sweet wine a moment before speaking again. "Do you have a name?"

"Dante Giodarri. And you, *signorina*?"

"Regan Delaney." She didn't offer her hand to shake. Instead, her eyes devoured him, sweeping from his dark eyes, fringed by sinfully long lashes, to the strong column of his throat. Her gaze moved to his hands, and she admired the neat trim of his nails, the shape of his fingers, and the way his left hand flexed as he lifted the glass. She could easily imagine those hands gliding across her body.

She frowned at his name. She had certainly heard it before. "Where do I know you from, Dante?"

He shrugged. "We have not met. I would remember your beauty, and I'm confident you would remember if we were intimately acquainted."

His arrogant statement should have irritated her, but she could only silently agree. She didn't doubt she would remember Dante if they had been...close. Still, the need to know where she had heard his name before preyed on her mind. She cast through her memory, until the recollection came. "Yes, an article in *Forbes*. You were listed as one of the best international catches, corporately speaking, of course."

Dante's mouth curled. "I am no less desirable today."

She chuckled. "No, certainly not. That isn't a problem you have to worry about, Dante."

"No, attraction isn't a problem." His eyes caressed her face for a lingering moment, before his expression became less intense. "What brings you to Castle Phantasie, Regan?"

She might have objected to his presumptuous use of her first name, if she hadn't been calculating how to get him into her bed with the minimum of fuss. "I had an episode last week." A stir of residual fear resurrected in her chest when

she remembered the incident. In the middle of a stockholder meeting, her heart had seized before it began fluttering. She had been unable to breathe, and for nearly an hour after arriving at the hospital, she had assumed she was having a heart attack.

“What is this episode?”

She shrugged. “That was as specific as my doctor got. He told me it was an episode brought on by stress and forced me to take off some time for relaxation. My brother and his wife honeymooned here, and it was easy enough to let them make the arrangements, rather than go to the bother of choosing a vacation spot.”

A soft chuckle escaped him. “A woman after my own heart. I have to be physically pried away from my position. Only knowing I would lose my vacation days if I didn’t take them prompted me to come here.” A wry smile split his face. “Lasënbourg is close enough to Italy that I might return at a moment’s notice, si?”

She filed the bit about Italy in the back of her memory, to ask him about it later – if they weren’t putting their mouths to more creative uses by then. “What do you do in Italy, Dante?”

“My company specializes in high-tech products.” He shrugged one shoulder as their waiter approached. “Let’s not discuss business.”

She nodded her assent when the handsome young man introduced himself as Konrad and asked for their orders. She listed her selections automatically, while she surreptitiously surveyed her dining companion. Her pussy clenched as she imagined turning him into a pile of sexual putty, content to fulfill her every whim. She could hardly wait to begin, and regarded dinner as an obstacle, although her stomach grumbled quietly with hunger.

When Konrad left them, she asked, “Are you vacationing on your own?”

“Sì, there is no woman I wanted to share this with.” Dante leaned in closer, lowering his voice to a whisper. “Why have you come alone to this romantic place? Do not tell me you have no lover, for you are too beautiful to go without a man’s touch.”

She was surprised that his carefully calculated compliments could incite a shiver of excitement. Regan was aware of his tactics of maneuvering himself into her bed, but she wasn’t above responding to them. “I have no time for a lover.”

He frowned, lifting her hand in his. “That is a crime. You should make time for passion.”

Tremors of sensation flashed up her arm from where his fingers stroked the back of her hand. She admired the way their tones complemented each other—his skin a dark contrast to her paler shade, which hadn’t seen much sunlight in ages.

“There are other things that require my attention. I don’t completely ignore sex, but it isn’t usually a priority.” Why would it be, when she could gratify herself as easily with her vibrator, and without the emotional complications of a relationship, or even the time involved with foreplay?

He gazed at her with hooded eyes. “You are a woman who needs to be in control, aren’t you?”

She nodded.

“Do you try to control every aspect of your life, *mia piccola tiranna*? Do you plan every detail?”

“Yes.” Her reply was more of a breath than a sound, as his fingers glided over her wrist. How could this simple touch so ignite her senses? “What is that you called me?”

His smile looked almost feral. “My little tyrant, for you strike me as such. Have you planned your evening down to the tiniest detail, Regan?”

She nodded. "And yours."

He cocked a brow. "Really?"

She took a deep breath to bolster her confidence, although it needed little inflating. She had this man where she wanted him. She didn't doubt for even a moment that he would accept her. "Yes. We're going to spend the night in my suite, fucking each other in as many ways as we can manage."

He frowned. "I am not accustomed to having decisions made for me."

A small smile curved her lips. "You won't regret coming with me, Dante. It will be a pleasurable experience."

A flush appeared on his cheeks, and he hesitated. For a moment, there was a hint of something indefinable in his eyes. "Are you certain you want that, without knowing more about me?"

She nodded. "I came to Lasenbourg to enjoy myself. I need sex," she said bluntly, "and I want it to be with you. If you want that, come with me. If not, there are others..." She trailed off, letting the silence settle between them. She meant every word, but her heart still pounded in her ears, awaiting his response. She could find another man to satisfy her needs tonight, but found herself wanting only Dante.

He inclined his head. "I will come with you."

Chapter 2

Regan experienced an uncharacteristic bout of nerves as she slid the electronic card into the slot and stepped inside her suite. The heat of Dante's body burned into hers, transmitted through the scant inches separating them. Her stomach quivered with excitement, and she turned to him as soon as he closed the door. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer, pressing her lips against his.

They were firm and hot, and she flicked her tongue across his mouth, probing to open his lips. He grunted as she pressed her body closer, crushing her breasts against his chest, while seeking access to his mouth. He parted his lips, and her tongue darted inside to savor the sweetness of him. He tasted of the Eiswein and peppermint.

When he tried to engage her tongue in a passionate duel, Regan withdrew hers from his mouth and licked his lower lip before drawing it into her mouth and biting gently. He stiffened, and his cock poked her in the stomach. She chuckled against his mouth as she threaded her fingers through his thick hair, holding him immobile. She traced her tongue down his chin, to the column of his throat. She flicked the tip against his Adam's apple when he swallowed.

Dante tried to grab hold of her, to hold her immobile for his kiss, but Regan twisted away. She sensed his reluctance to let her take charge, but wasn't about to lose this opportunity. She needed him, but on her terms.

Once he seemed to stop struggling, she allowed her body to relax against him again and burrowed into the crook of his neck, inhaling his spicy cologne. Regan's pussy tightened as he cupped one of her breasts and flicked her nipple

with his thumb. They both groaned with frustration when she took a step back. "Take off your clothes, Dante."

He arched a brow. "I am unaccustomed to a woman issuing orders."

She shrugged. "I want to see you naked."

"I want to see your body as well." His cool tone was a contrast to the flush staining his cheeks. "I suggest we both disrobe."

Her lips thinned, but she inclined her head. She wasn't used to being denied, and rarely negotiated with anyone, but she sensed Dante was worth a bit of compromise. She reached behind to unzip her dress as Dante unbuttoned his shirt. The dress fell to the floor seconds later, and she stepped out of it.

His eyes widened with appreciation when he saw the scarlet and black teddy clinging to her every curve. Regan smiled as she ran a hand down her breast, to her stomach, then lower. She paused to flick a finger across the front panel of the panties, before tracing the line of the garter down her left thigh. "Do you like this?"

He nodded, and his hands stilled at the zipper of his pants.

"Do you want to see more?"

His answer surprised her. "Eventually. For now, I want you to leave on the teddy."

She frowned at the steely thread of command she heard in his tone, deciding conquering Dante would be more of a challenge than she had imagined. She licked her lips, excited by the thought. "For now," she agreed. "However, I want to see you without any clothes at all."

He met her eyes, and his burned with a touch of resentment at her orders when he unfastened his trousers and pushed them down, along with his skimpy briefs, in one quick move. He kicked off his shoes and stepped out of the slacks. His gaze never wavered from hers as he lifted one foot, and then the other, to

remove his socks. "Does this satisfy you, *mia piccola tiranna*?" He cupped his hardened cock in his hand, absently stroking the head with his thumb.

She nodded, deciding to be sparing with words of praise. They wouldn't inflate his ego, or help her reach her goal of controlling him. It would take more than knowing he pleased her to make this man submit. "Lie on the bed." Her pussy clenched as she imagined him lying on his back with his impressive cock jutting into the air.

He crossed his arms. "You first."

She shook her head, mimicking his pose. "Obey me, and you'll be rewarded."

He stiffened. "I'm not a dog, *signorina*. I do not heel to anyone—man or woman."

Rather than take offense at his haughty tone, Regan trailed her fingers across the smooth skin of her cleavage, glancing at him from the veil of her lashes. "Have you ever tried?"

"Yes, for a woman I cared about enough to try something new." He shrugged. "Submission doesn't suit me."

She cocked a brow. "Perhaps you didn't have the right Domme."

"Do you practice the lifestyle?"

She shook her head. "No, not as such. You said it yourself. I'm simply used to being in control of every situation."

Dante took a step toward her, and then another. He reached out to touch her cheek, ignoring her attempt to dart away. "You are obsessed with control. Look where it got you." His other hand rested on her chest, near her heart. He patted gently. "You need to surrender control sometimes, *mia piccola tiranna*."

She grinned at his silly nickname for her, rather pleased to have made such an impression on him. She ignored his suggestion. "I never surrender."

"You will surrender to me."

She frowned. "Never."

Dante tilted his head. "Those are my terms, Regan. I have no doubt you can find another man more amenable to your games, but do you want to?" His hand moved from her chest to her pussy. He cupped it in his hand. "I feel how hot, how wet, you are. Do you want to continue the search? If you can't surrender control to me, I'll leave. Not in anger, but because I am not the submissive type."

She squared her jaw. "Neither am I."

He chuckled, and his finger pushed aside the crotch of her panties to stroke her neatly trimmed curls. "When did you last try?"

Her eyes widened, and she couldn't remember. Anger stirred in her, and she opened her mouth to tell him to leave. A gasp escaped her instead as his thumb circled her clit. She couldn't resist thrusting her hips.

"What will it be? Shall I leave, or will you submit?"

One of his fingers plunged into her wet entrance, and Regan gasped again. Her body ached for release, and she couldn't deny her attraction to Dante. She just found his terms distasteful. How could she give over control to this man, a man she didn't know? A man she didn't know if she could trust.

"Regan?" He removed his hand and stepped back. Dante nodded. "Sleep well."

He took two steps before she found the strength to stop him. "Wait. I'll..." She licked her dry lips. "I'll try."

"You won't try. You will do." He spoke firmly as he turned back to her. "Now, you lie on the bed. Leave on the teddy."

Her spine stiffened at his tone, but she forced her legs to obey. She walked to the bed, climbing the two steps of the platform, and sprawled across the bed. Regan's nails carved half-moons in her palms as he walked around her, eyeing

her from every angle. She was exposed and angry. His eyes seemed to violate her as they roamed over her form, and her response was disconcerting. Rather than reacting with outrage at his treatment, her body thrummed with excitement.

“Beautiful.” Dante stepped onto the platform and sat on the bed. He stroked her arm, and his other hand splayed across her waist. “Your breasts are a banquet, and I’m a starving man.”

She squirmed at the outrageous statement. “Dante—”

“Shh.” He pushed down the straps of her teddy, and then the cups, to reveal her large breasts, tipped with rosy nipples. His head dipped down, and he took a beaded nipple into his mouth, sucking lightly.

Regan squirmed again, arching her back to push up her breasts. “Oh, Dante.” She closed her eyes as he nipped the bud before swirling his tongue around it. She groaned when he cupped her other breast and pinched the nipple between his thumb and forefinger. She gasped as he pinched harder, sending a dart of mingled pleasure and pain racing through her.

At a leisurely pace, he suckled her nipple, acting as if he had all the time in the world. His gentle treatment of that one was a strange contrast to his rougher handling of her other nipple. Regan closed her eyes, trying to separate the sensations, but found them impossible to sift through.

She lifted her arm to thread her fingers through Dante’s hair. She whimpered when he jerked away from her.

“No touching, unless I tell you to.”

Her eyes widened. “Don’t be silly. I want to touch you.”

“No.” He spoke the word not with harshness, but with a finality that left no doubt he would walk away if she didn’t obey.

Regan clamped her mouth shut, resisting the urge to argue. The prideful part of her demanded she send him away, but her pussy protested. For once, she let

the animalistic side of her brain win. She dropped her hand and tried to lie still as he slid down her body. Her thighs clenched when she felt his hot breath caressing her stomach, and she tensed with anticipation of his tongue exploring her pussy.

Dante's mouth hovered over her, and his breath caressed her clit. It swelled further, and Regan's pussy overflowed with her arousal. She arched her hips to bring her closer to his mouth, but he moved back the exact distance she had moved forward. He blew a wisp of air across her inflamed flesh, bringing another rush of moisture. He still made no move to touch her.

"Please." She hated the pleading note, but she ached for his tongue to devour her swollen pussy. "Dante..."

He didn't answer, except to raise his head a few inches.

Instinctively, Regan reached out for him, trying to bring his head down on her. "Lick my pussy, dammit."

He evaded her and stood up. "You need help with submitting, I see." Dante turned and walked away.

Regan thought he was leaving and bit back an impulsive plea for him to stay. No man was worth sacrificing her pride, no matter how big his cock, or how well he carried an air of sexuality.

He didn't walk to the door. Instead, he went into the sitting room. She heard him moving around in that room and the other unoccupied bedroom for a few minutes before returning. When he reentered the master room, her eyes widened. He held a handful of curtain ties.

She had admired the intricate beauty of the ties when she first checked in to her suite. They were a bold contrast to the white velvet drapes. Each tie was a double layer of ebony beads, extending about three feet, and ending with another foot of velvet fringe on each end. Her stomach quivered as he approached. Even as she unconsciously admired his cock, her thoughts didn't

stray from his intentions. "What are you going to do with those?" she asked, her apprehension apparent, as he sat on the bed.

"The choice is yours. I will not force you." He set aside all of the ties, except one. "You are not a woman who submits easily. You require assistance. I want to bind your hands and feet."

"No!"

He continued as if she hadn't interrupted. "I will tie you to the posts of the bed, spread-eagle. If you consent, it is for however long I want. I won't release you until *I* decide to untie you, unless you say *fermati*. If you do, I'll immediately untie you and leave."

A shiver of fear worked its way up her spine. Regan frowned, wondering if she were straying beyond the borders of fun and games with this man. He was so intent, so serious about dominating her. What if he had something more than sex on his mind? And did she have to choose between complete submission and having him at all? How unfair was that?

"What does it mean, this *fermati*?"

"You stop." One side of his mouth lifted as he looked down at her. "Or you can tell me to go. I won't be angry." A gentle smile curved his face. "I will regret I didn't get to make love to such perfection, that I didn't get to taste that patch of blonde curls between your thighs, but I will harbor no ill will. Some find it impossible to submit. I am one."

He held out the tie to let her see it. "This will hold you very well until I've finished. Go ahead, touch it."

Regan hesitantly touched the cool black beads, trailing her fingers down the strand to touch the velvet fringes. They were soft to the touch, but she knew only Dante would be able to free her if she consented. She would never work herself loose. A scene from *Gerald's Game*—her only attempt at reading Stephen King—

flashed through her mind, reminding her the restraints could be as inflexible as handcuffs.

She eyed it uncertainly, and then switched her gaze to Dante. She saw tenderness in his expression, and a barely contained sexual energy. He positively throbbed with desire, but it wasn't an oppressive sensation. Rather, it increased her own need as she sensed his urgency. She sighed and closed her eyes, laying her head against the pillow. "Don't go."

He must have interpreted the words as her consent. He lifted one of her hands to the bedpost. "Hold on."

Regan grasped it as the beads slithered across her arm. She opened her eyes and turned her head when she felt him wrapping the beads around her wrist. As she watched, he wound them around three times, until only a foot or so of play remained, aside from the fringes on each end. Those, he tied around the post.

"Jerk on it, but carefully. I don't want you to hurt yourself."

She made a half-hearted attempt to liberate herself, surprised by the way the tie resisted her attempts to pull free. She increased her efforts, but the beads and velvet held her well. "I can't free myself."

He nodded with satisfaction and tied her other wrist in the same fashion, before moving to her feet to repeat the process. Regan tried to remain calm, but she felt a moment of panic as he secured her last limb to the bed, splaying her wide. She stiffened and tugged at the restraints, feeling like a drowning swimmer.

Dante's hands were gentle as they settled on her calves. "Relax, Regan. You're fine. I won't allow you to be hurt."

As he stroked her leg, her breathing settled, and the sensation of panic faded. She had the safe word to fall back on if things got too weird, so she should just try to enjoy herself. She didn't know how much fun it would be to surrender

total control, but Dante's strength made her willing to try not being the one in charge for the first time in a long time.

"How are you? Are you with me?"

She nodded, taking another deep breath. "Yes, I'm fine." She was more than fine, she discovered with a start of surprise, as calm returned. A tingle of excitement spread through her, and the bonds on her wrists and ankles seemed to be massaging her, rather than restraining her. She couldn't deny the thrill she got from lying helpless before him, awaiting his next move with mingled dread and anticipation.

Dante seemed to be in no rush as he unsnapped the crotch of the teddy to stroke her dripping pussy. He flirted with her clit, but didn't touch it. He brought both hands between her thighs and spread apart her lips. He bent down to within inches of her pussy, studying her for a long moment before he blew a light puff of air across her clit.

Regan jumped with surprise and pleasure, feeling the bonds tighten as she stiffened. She bit down on her tongue to resist pleading with him to taste her. She knew he wouldn't pay attention to her request – might even deny her completely if she asked. She couldn't hold back a whimper as he released her and stood up.

The bed dipped as Dante sat on the side and stretched out beside her, with his feet dangling off the bed near her head. His face was inches from her pussy when he finished shifting, and once again, his breath fanned across her inflamed flesh.

She cried out with pleasure when Dante's tongue darted inside her pussy, pushing between the lips probing for her clit. She arched her hips and tried to spread her thighs wider, but there wasn't enough slack in the ties to allow much movement. She balled her hands into fists as he flicked a series of caresses against her clit. One of his hands dropped to her stomach, but he made no move to touch her breasts or bring the hand down lower to assist his mouth.

Her thighs spasmed as Dante swirled his tongue around her clit before sweeping to probe her opening. Still, he didn't use his fingers, and she squirmed, aching for him to fill her.

A small cry tore from Regan when he grazed the sensitive bud with his teeth, applying enough pressure to almost hurt. She pulled absently at her bonds, seeking to push his head between her thighs and order him to get serious.

He must have been aware of her thoughts, or maybe the sound of the beads rubbing against the brass headboard alerted him, because he chuckled against her pussy, sending tiny vibrations through her. "Be patient, Regan," he said, withdrawing. He sat up to stare down at her, but his expression revealed none of his emotions.

He lifted one of her generous breasts in his hand, and it spilled over. Dante rubbed the pad of his thumb across her nipple, applying enough pressure to add an edge to the pleasure.

To her frustration, the caress was all too brief. He released her breast and trailed his hand under to the lacey teddy pushed down past her breasts. His hand slid inside, and he raked his nails lightly across the skin of her stomach, causing her to quiver inside. His tongue followed the path of his hand as he dipped his head, pausing briefly to lave her nipple before moving on. He pushed the material down a few more inches and swirled his tongue across her exposed flesh.

He paused to trace two of her ribs with his tongue before lifting his head. Dante squeezed her ribcage lightly. "Tell me you have condoms and lubricant, *cara mia*, because I do not want to tear myself away from you even for the few moments it would take to run to my suite."

Under his hand, she grinned at the genuine hint of impatience she heard in his tone. "There's a box in the black zipper case by the sink in the bathroom. I don't have lube though."

He sighed as he stood up. "I will just have to arouse you to the point where your pussy drenches me."

His words caused her pussy to spasm, and she writhed impatiently as she waited for him to return. She wondered if he planned to fuck her already, and she didn't know how she felt about that. When she made the time for it, she liked to draw out the foreplay, but couldn't deny her pussy ached for a cock. No, not just any cock. She only wanted Dante's.

He returned soon, carrying the box and a travel-size bottle. "Baby oil will do for what I have in mind."

A flash of worry tugged at her when he said that, but she took a deep breath, reminding herself she could always say *fermati*. Her eyes widened when Dante set the items on the nightstand and climbed onto the bed. He straddled her lightly, supporting his weight on his knees rather than on her stomach or chest, as he slid higher.

She almost broke her silence when he leaned over to reach for the baby oil. A slight sound broke from her when he uncapped the bottle and drizzled the slick substance across her breasts. She watched with curiosity as he poured some on his hands and rubbed them together before returning the opened bottle to the nightstand, seemingly unable to put the cap back on with slippery hands.

She closed her eyes and arched her back as he began to knead her breasts. His touch was firm and forceful, but the roughness elicited a response of pleasure, rather than pain. Helpless moans broke from her as he glided his thumbs across her nipples in simultaneous small circles.

Her eyes opened when Dante's hands dropped away, and she lifted her head to see what he was doing. She watched as he lubed his cock with his slippery hands, and she realized what he intended as he scooted higher up the bed, until his knees were tucked in along her ribs. "Dante —"

He paused. "Do you wish to stop?"

She finally shook her head, still not certain if she wanted him to do this. She had never tried it before, always wondering how it could be pleasurable for the woman.

He shifted into position, placing his cock between her breasts before pushing them together around him. Dante's first few strokes were slow and hesitant, and he continued to roll her nipples under his fingers as he thrust inside her cleavage.

Regan got lost in the pleasure his hands aroused, surprised to find herself enjoying the feel of his cock stroking against her soft flesh, pushing against her strained breasts, while he never ceased rubbing her nipples. A flood of moisture leaked from her pussy, and she thrust her hips against the air, wishing it were her pussy he was driving into.

His thrusts increased, and his breathing became uneven. Regan opened her eyes and saw his face had flushed with desire, and perspiration beaded his brow. If the ties didn't hold her back, she would have stroked his buttocks, pushing him harder against her.

"I'm close, Regan." His voice was a strained grunt. "So close." He stopped thrusting and sat still for more than a minute. Slowly, he pulled away from her, and his hands went to the ties binding her wrists.

She looked up at him with confusion, worried he had changed his mind for some reason. "What...?"

"I've decided you don't need the teddy." He made short work of the bonds on her arms and legs, and then assisted her with removing the teddy when her fingers trembled. She started to lie back, but he held her in a sitting position. "Stand up, Regan."

Her legs were shaky as she rolled out of bed and stood. She leaned against the post at the foot of the bed, resisting the urge to bury her fingers in her pussy

and bring about a climax. Every movement made her exquisitely aware of the swollen state of her clit, and she was seconds away from begging him to take her.

“You can lie down now.”

Regan sat on the bed and started to lean back, but he stopped her. “No, lie on your stomach.”

She was too frustrated to argue. She only hoped Dante planned to finish this soon, because her pussy felt close to exploding. She rolled onto her hands and knees and scooted up the bed, lying down with her stomach elevated by the pillows Dante placed under her.

When he retied her hands, he bound them with one tie, together in front of her, and then looped it through the bar in the middle of the brass headboard. She couldn't see what he did as he moved behind her, but she soon felt him tie her feet apart from each other.

She heard him walking around the room and turned her head in his direction. She arched a brow as she saw him stop by the writing table, eye it for a moment, and pick up something he held against his leg so she couldn't see it.

The awkward angle hurt her neck, so she rested her cheek against the pillow as nervous excitement swept through her.

When he returned to her, her emotions switched more to nervousness after he said, “Let's play.” She swallowed heavily, wondering what exactly he planned to do to her.

Chapter 3

Regan started with surprise when something soft and ticklish glided down her spine. When it proceeded lower, tracing the crack of her buttocks, she gasped. The thing flicked against her anus with a teasing swipe, before feathering down to brush against the lips of her pussy. "Dante?" She cleared her throat. "What...what is that?"

"Can't you guess?" There was a thread of amusement in his voice as he parted her lips stroked the object inside her. "Soft, wispy, ticklish..."

His hints didn't help her come up with the answer. Perhaps it was because she was too distracted by the sensations coursing through her to think. Her pussy convulsed as the thing fluttered into her opening, where he swished it back and forth. She hazarded a guess, certain it couldn't be. "Is it a feather?"

A warm palm caressed one of her ass cheeks. "Very good."

She closed her eyes as the feather swirled around her clit, igniting just enough of a reaction to make her squirm and try to thrust her hips, although her feet were bound far enough apart that she had trouble moving her lower body. "Where did it come from?" she asked with a gasp.

"The writing table. It's a novelty pen, with *"Live Your Phantasie"* emblazoned on the barrel. It's supposed to be like a quill." His voice dropped an octave. "Do you like it, Regan? Do you like how it whispers to your secret places?" As he spoke, he ran the feather across her pussy and back to her anus. He parted her cheeks with one of his hands and smoothed the feather down the crease, pausing to tickle her anus.

She choked on her answer, unable to form coherent words. She tugged at the bindings on her hands, and the safe word hovered on her lips, but she bit it back. As torturous as this was, she didn't want it to stop. "Uh..."

Dante chuckled, and his hand slipped from her buttocks, taking the feather away too. She stiffened as it glided down her leg. A half-laugh escaped her when he swished it across her ankle. It evolved into a helpless giggle as he tickled the bottom of her foot. She squirmed against the bed, crying for mercy and laughing at the same time.

"You don't like this?" He sounded too innocent for her to take seriously. He heaved a mock sigh. "Very well. Let's try something different."

The feather disappeared from her foot, and Regan tensed again as she heard the clack of beads. A cry escaped her when the fringe of one of the curtain ties slapped against her buttock. It didn't hurt, but it surprised her.

He flogged her again, and she arched her hips, wishing the pillows were just a bit lower, so she could rub her pulsing pussy against them to find temporary relief. "Don't stop," she managed to say when he paused.

"Do you like this?" He caressed her buttocks as he spoke. One of his fingers traced a line across her skin. "I can see faint marks from the velvet. I like seeing that." He sounded surprised by the revelation. "I want to mark you, Regan. Does that sound strange?"

She frowned. "Do you mean brand me?"

"No." There was genuine distaste in his reply. "Nothing like that. I just want to be able to look at your ass in the morning and see proof of our night." The fringe swished across her cheeks in a teasing flash.

"Oh...okay." Regan held her breath, anticipating the whisper-soft caress of the velvet strands again. Instead, the beads lashed across her buttocks, bringing sharp pain. She cried out and stiffened. Before she could protest, Dante's hand followed in the tie's wake, soothing the flesh. She relaxed under his caress,

surprised by the way her pussy tightened with renewed need at the punishment and reward.

“How was that? Was it too much? Should I stop?”

A small smile curved her lips at his concerned questions. There was no questioning Dante’s dominant tendency, but he was also a tender lover, eager to please. “I guess you could do it again.”

After a pause, the beads slapped her skin again, but this time, she expected the pain. Her eyes widened when more moisture collected in her pussy. She was slightly discomfited to realize his spanking her was exciting. The pain itself didn’t do much for her, but more what it represented: His control. She couldn’t understand how he could make her so eager to surrender it, but she was reveling in the experience.

He alternately spanked and soothed her for a few minutes, until her buttocks stung, and she asked him to stop. Dante didn’t protest. Instead, he fetched the baby oil and massaged it into her cheeks, soothing the sting. “Thank you,” he said a few minutes later. He didn’t say anything else, but she didn’t need him to.

She assumed he would finally fuck her now, but she was wrong. Regan tensed as his slippery fingers probed between her cheeks to rub her anus. He massaged the tight opening externally, at first, before one of his fingers penetrated her shallowly. She gasped at the invasion.

He paused. “Do you like anal play, Regan?”

“I’ve never really done it.” The last few years, her partners had answered to her demands, and her control of them was more arousing than anything they did to her. She hadn’t explored much beyond oral foreplay and a few unusual positions.

“That’s too bad.” His finger pushed in a little farther. “I think I would like fucking your tight ass, but you aren’t ready for that. It takes preparation.”

His voice faded to a drone as his other hand dipped into her pussy to massage her clit. Regan stiffened as his fingers thrust into her anus and against her clit in concert, turning her into a puddle of sensation. A wordless whimpering sound emerged from her throat, but she couldn't call back the cries of passion.

She moaned when his finger slid completely into her anus, as he moved from her clit to plunge two fingers inside her pussy, thrusting ever deeper. "Dante, please," she managed to force out, "please fuck me. I can't take this."

He laughed, and his fingers withdrew. He walked to the nightstand for a condom, teasing her by putting it on at her eye level. He jiggled his cock jauntily at her, eliciting a grin from her, before disappearing from sight by walking behind her.

The bed moved as Dante climbed over the footboard to kneel between her splayed legs. Regan couldn't help an impatient wiggle as his hands cupped her hips, and he lifted her buttocks higher in the air, until her bonds tightened. She bit her lip as the head of his cock entered her pussy. She tried thrusting backwards against him, but didn't have enough room to move more than an inch.

With one smooth thrust, his cock entered her, filling her almost beyond her limits. It had been almost a year since she had a lover, and her vibrator was no match for Dante's thickness. There wasn't any pain though—only incredible satisfaction as he filled her, satisfying the deep ache in her womb. "Mmmm..." Regan wasn't capable of forming real words, but she was certain Dante understood the wordless sounds expressed her pleasure.

His thrusts were slow and long, withdrawing almost completely before sliding back into her again at a leisurely pace. Regan strained against him, trying to keep him inside her, but he ignored her movements and continued with the pace he set.

His finger returned to her anus, massaging the slick entrance again before penetrating her. The combination sent waves of pleasure coursing through her, causing her pussy walls to spasm around his cock as he filled her again. Regan knew she wouldn't be able to hold off long on her orgasm, but she wanted the experience to last.

Almost imperceptibly, the speed of his thrusts increased. His breathing grew as ragged as hers, and his cock began to pulse inside her. Regan clenched her thighs, and a cry ripped from her as Dante thrust his finger in and out of her anus in time with his cock thrusting into her pussy. The cry intensified when he brought his other hand to her pussy, cupping the mound for a moment before plunging one of his fingers inside to swirl around her clit. He pressed on the right spot, and her pussy convulsed.

Regan screamed as an intense orgasm washed through her. She was vaguely aware of her behavior and embarrassed by it, but she couldn't stop. No man had ever made her shout with satisfaction before, and she gloried in the sensations. As Dante's cock spasmed inside her, releasing his semen into the condom, she milked him for every drop, not content until the last tremors faded from their fused bodies.

Several minutes passed before their breathing slowed. Dante eased away from her and climbed from the bed. Seconds later, he freed her ankles before walking to the head of the bed to untie her hands.

Regan rolled onto her back and found the strength to sit up, wincing at the sting from her sensitive buttocks. She felt drained, but in a good way. She winced as her numbed arms and legs tingled. Dante must have realized, because he began to rub the circulation back into her feet. She smiled at him as she rubbed her left wrist with her right hand. "Thank you, Dante."

"No, thank you, Regan." He abandoned her legs to pull her into his arms. His lips were gentle as they settled on hers, moving almost shyly before his

tongue slipped inside to stroke hers. She leaned against him, stirred by the gentleness of his kiss. She shifted when she realized it had been a long time since she shared a simple kiss with a man. Usually, they were perfunctory displays, a sort of get-to-know-you that quickly led to more intimate contact.

She squirmed, thinking about how many one-night stands had dotted the past few years, since she became CEO. There hadn't been time to form a real relationship with a man, so she used whoever happened to be convenient to scratch the deep itch she couldn't quite reach when it became unbearable.

Dante's mouth left hers to feather kisses across her cheeks before sweeping upward. She closed her eyes as his lips brushed against her lids, wondering if she had used Dante. Nothing about this encounter felt the same as any she had experienced in the past. Usually, she couldn't wait to get rid of a man after she fucked him, but Regan wanted him to stay, to hold her while she slept.

Had she been wrong, telling herself she didn't need a man? Regan knew she had no need of just any man, but was Dante somehow different? Was she falling for him, even though she knew nothing about him? How could that be?

Her eyes snapped open as the shocking idea occurred to her. She wasn't a romantic, by any means. She had always been too practical. Two years ago, she had been disapproving when her sister eloped with a man she hadn't known two weeks. Regan believed relationships were like wine, in that they took a long time to mature to perfection. Each partner had to know almost everything about the other before love could develop. Didn't they?

She frowned, staring at Dante's tranquil face. She wasn't going to deny what she was feeling. She was too old to hide from her emotions. She didn't know if what she felt was love, but she knew it wasn't as simple as sexual desire. Even if it threw all of her carefully ordered beliefs for a loop, she would have to explore these feelings.

"Regan?" He looked concerned. "Are you all right?"

She forced a shaky smile. "Yes. I'm just...confused." She fell quiet, not ready to discuss this unexpected turn with him just yet. "Will you stay with me tonight?" That was as close to vulnerable as she could make herself get.

He looked surprised, but didn't hesitate. "Of course. I had hoped you would ask me."

Contentment swept through her, and she could comfortably ascribe it to afterglow, but Regan knew it was more than that. She believed in honesty, and the last person she would ever lie to was herself. Somehow, in the space of a few hours, she had developed feelings for Dante.

That thought should disturb her more than it did, and she figured she would be her normal, rational self in the morning. In the meantime, she resolved not to dwell on it. She would enjoy Dante's company for the rest of the night and decide in the morning if she wanted to send him away.

Chapter 4

She awoke with the same tumult of emotions spinning through her head. She turned on her side and eyed Dante, who still slept. She couldn't hold back the smile that insisted on forming. She brushed back several strands of dark hair that had fallen on his forehead.

It felt right having him beside her. The smile faded with that thought, and she was nonplussed to discover she still hadn't returned to her pattern of fuck-and-run. She was as strongly drawn to him this morning as she had been yesterday evening. Was it simply sexual attraction between them?

She ran a finger down his arm as she contemplated what made Dante different from other men. The answer that had eluded her last night came easily to her clouded brain this morning. He was stronger than any man she had ever been with, stronger than her. He had made her lose control, had driven her beyond what she thought she could endure, and carefully guided her out the other side.

Was that all there was to it? The angst was caused by a streak in her that liked submitting? Could it be that her ponderings about forming an emotional attachment could be explained away by a throwback feminine instinct that recognized strength and clung to it? Was Dante her Neanderthal cave dweller, and she the little woman waiting to be dragged away by the hair?

She frowned at the half-baked theory, intellectually recognizing a grain of truth in the self-justification, but knowing there was more to it than ancient impulse. Dante was a combination of strength and tenderness. Surely, if her primitive self wanted only to be dominated, it wouldn't respect and respond to his gentle side.

She sighed, realizing she was no closer to figuring out this enigma than she had been last night. All she was accomplishing with her speculation was steering herself away from the L-word. Was that a good thing, or was she trying to hide from an unsettling revelation? Was she infallible as she had imagined, or had this sexy Italian wormed his way past her defenses?

He stirred, rolling closer to her, as he opened his eyes. A smile crept across his face. "Good morning, *cara mia*."

"Hi." Of its own accord, her hand moved to his chest, stroking his thick growth of hair. "How did you sleep?"

"I do not remember." He draped his arm across her hip and pulled her closer to him, pressing his hardening cock into her thigh. "All I remember is the smell and taste of you. I think it followed me into my dreams."

Regan wanted his obvious compliment to inspire her disdain, but it sent a thrill of girly giddiness through her instead. A half-giggle escaped her before she bit down hard on her tongue. "Sorry, but I didn't dream at all." That was the truth. Sleep came easily, and she had remained in a deep state all night, waking refreshed and instantly alert.

Automatically, her eyes sought the clock on the nightstand, and she realized she had slept ten hours straight. That amazed her, considering she hadn't slept more than five hours most nights for the past three years. There hadn't been time. Even on weekends she rarely got more, because there was always something to do.

"Perhaps you lacked stimuli." Dante's hand moved from her hip to her buttocks, which he caressed lightly. "Are you in pain?"

She shrugged. "Stings a little, but I didn't realize it until you asked me."

"May I see?"

She remembered his desire to leave proof of their night. Regan rolled most of the way onto her stomach, bringing her buttocks into his line of sight. Dante

drew in a quick breath, and his fingers lightly traced a line across her buttocks. "Is there a mark?"

"A few pinkish lines and one red mark." He sat up and leaned forward, bringing his mouth to her buttocks. He pressed gentle kisses across the same area his finger had traced. "Forgive me for marring you," he said when he raised his head. "It must have hurt terribly."

She shook her head. "Not at all. There really wasn't much pain. Mostly pleasure." She watched with fascination as his eyes darkened. Regan licked her lips, wondering if Dante wanted her again. She couldn't remember the last time she had made love in the morning. She didn't feel the usual compulsion to hide her guilty pleasures in the dark of night. "Pleasure," she repeated in a throaty purr.

Dante responded with another of his soul-shattering kisses, pulling her up into his arms and crushing her mouth under his before she could catch her breath or say anything else. Regan locked her arms around his neck, anchoring her hand at the back of his head to keep him from pulling away.

He drew her lower lip into his mouth, nibbling on it. His tongue stroked the flesh after his teeth retreated, soothing it. Regan took advantage of the moment to push her tongue inside his mouth. His lips sealed over hers, but he didn't try to evade her probing tongue or push her away. Apparently, she didn't have to surrender control to him all the time.

Regan's fingers buried themselves in his hair, urging him closer. She let out a breathy moan when he cupped one of her breasts to thumb the enlarging nipple. It was more sensitive than usual from the night before, and the lightest touch stoked a fire deep inside her pussy, drenching her.

Dante put his hands under her buttocks and lifted her onto his lap as he leaned back against the headboard, pulling her with him. His cock hovered at the entrance of her pussy, and she writhed against him, wanting to sit down on him

without so much as a latex barrier between them. She groaned at her practical side's reminder and tried to pull away to get a condom.

He held Regan immobile, deepening the kiss even more, as his hands stroked slowly up her sides before squirming between them to knead her breasts. She gasped and arched her back, crushing her breasts against his palms until the nipples almost hurt from the pressure. In her excitement, she bit down on his tongue, but he didn't cry out with pain. Dante only chuckled in her mouth and slipped one hand from her breast to stroke her back.

She didn't want to be soothed. Regan wanted him to excite her to a fever pitch, as he had done last night. In the cold light of morning, she had little interest in submitting to him and—more surprising—had even less interest in dominating him. She wanted to give and take, which was another new experience.

With the intent of giving, Regan broke the kiss and extracted her hands from his hair. She stared into his burning eyes for a moment before she got to her knees and scooted backward a few feet, never breaking eye contact. She could see the puzzlement in his expression as she stopped scooting and paused. When she shifted slightly and leaned forward, his confusion faded, and arousal overpowered his expression.

Regan braced her hands on his thighs and lowered her mouth to his cock. She brought one hand up to secure the base, and slowly, practically hearing his heart rate stutter with anticipation, she flicked her tongue across the head, catching a drop of his arousal. The head was even thicker than his shaft, and its deep purple color enticed her. She lowered her mouth around his pulsing cock, hearing him groan as she did so.

She paused, enjoying teasing him, and also trying to remember if she'd ever had a technique for blowjobs. As time became a precious commodity, she had wasted little of it on her partners' pleasures, assuming intercourse would satisfy

them well enough. More than a little shame accompanied that selfish memory, and she squirmed with discomfort, wondering when she had become so blasé about others' needs.

She applied pressure, sucking gently, as she stroked her hand from the base of his cock to where it brushed against her mouth, before making the return trip. Regan swirled her tongue across Dante's head, flicking it against the sensitive V, before tracing part of the corona. She stopped moving her tongue and began increasing the suction as he brought his hands to her head and thrust his hips.

She lowered her mouth as she continued sucking, taking in as much of him as she could. Regan's pussy spasmed with need when Dante uttered a wordless cry and thrust more frantically. She moved her hand from the base to caress his balls, applying just a touch of firm pressure as she increased the speed and suction of her mouth.

A shudder passed through Dante, transmitting to her where she lay across his legs, and a smile tried to appear on her lips. She wasn't going to pretend this was a selfless act, by any means. She enjoyed giving him pleasure, knowing she was the one who caused the tremor, pleased she could give him this moment. And, yes, she enjoyed the power she held over him as his cock spasmed, and his gism suddenly flowed free.

"I'm coming, Regan." His voice was little more than a harsh grunt. "You should..."

She ignored his warning as he trailed off. Regan didn't usually swallow, but wanted to with Dante. In fact, part of her reveled in bringing him to satisfaction with just her mouth and hands. She flicked her tongue over the V rapidly, continuing to suck, as she rolled his balls. With a harsh cry, Dante's cock hardened and pulsed as he shot his ejaculate in her mouth.

Regan swallowed quickly, taking in as much as she could. The taste was no better or worse than she expected, but this man made it different. She couldn't explain their connection – yet – but she would figure it out.

She pulled away slowly, making sure she slid her wet pussy across his leg as she leaned back into a sitting position. She watched him, disconcerted by the sharp lines marring his expression. He didn't look like a man who had just received pleasure. Dante looked like he was in pain. "Did I hurt you?" Was she that out of practice?

He shook his head, muttering something in Italian before switching to English. "No, never, *cara mia*. The pain is my burden. I must tell you –"

But she wasn't listening. All Regan heard was his no before the beauty of his mouth snared her attention. She blinked and shook her head when she realized he had stopped speaking. "Uh, what? I became distracted."

Dante's eyes narrowed. "You are different this morning, Regan. Softer, somehow. Last night, I was enchanted with your beauty and sexuality, but this morning, I'm more interested in your heart and mind. I want to know you." He said something else in Italian, and the way he said it convinced her it was swearing. "The situation is difficult, *sì?*"

She nodded. "Yes, it is. My life's in New York, and yours is in Italy." Regan shook her head. "I've never been interested in a long-distance relationship...before." She paused, taking a deep breath for courage. "Until you, that is. There is something...different about you, Dante. Something special."

His eyes closed, and he flinched, as though she had wounded him deeply. "No, Regan, I'm not special. I'm a bastard." When she shook her head, he said with great force, "*Sì*, I am a bastard. How will you understand my motivations?"

She frowned at the confusing statement. What motivations? She swallowed sickly, realizing her mistake. Dante had been trying to extricate himself from the

situation, and here she was, pouring out her heart, trying to make plans for a possible future he didn't want.

She groaned. "I apologize." She winced at the insecurity that crept into her tone. "I didn't mean to try to force you into anything uncomfortable, Dante. I understand this was one night for you. Please forgive me for trying to make it more." Her words, sincerely meant, sounded stilted and brittle, tinged by the embarrassment welling in her. How could she have so completely misjudged events? All he had wanted was another fuck before leaving this morning. No wonder he looked so tortured.

Dante's eyes widened. "No, that isn't what I meant. I would like to see you again, but you must understand something..."

She quickly made another intuitive leap. "Oh, God, you're married, aren't you?"

He cursed in a long stream of Italian, shaking his head as he spoke. Dante ran fingers through his disheveled hair, and he seemed to be trying to calm down. "No, *cara mia*, I am not married. If you would be quiet, I will explain—"

The shrill ring of the phone interrupted Dante. For half a second, Regan was tempted to ignore it. She blinked at that uncharacteristic thought. "I'm sorry, but I have to answer. The only people with this number are my brother and my assistant. Neither would call unless it's a true emergency."

He sighed, but didn't protest as Regan slid from the bed and padded to the phone, lifting it on the fourth peal. "Hello."

The harried voice of her assistant, Rom Crosby, crackled across the line as crisply as if she had been in her Manhattan apartment, rather than thousands of miles away. "Regan, I'm so sorry to call on your vacation. I know you have to rest, but it's an emergency."

"It's okay." She spoke in her usual business tone – calm, almost soothing, but with an underlying note of steel. "I know you wouldn't call unless it's a crisis. What's happening?"

"The Blitzheimer deal may be in trouble."

Regan's knees trembled at the grim assessment. She had spent the last six months working on a buy-out deal for Blitzheimer, Inc., knowing Synergies Systems needed a memory chip division to stay competitive, and the German company was the most accessible. "What's happening?" she repeated.

"Giovanni Corporazione got wind of our deal. I don't know how yet, but we knew we couldn't hide it forever."

"Of course." She automatically tried to soothe him, even as her brain raced with a thousand thoughts. "What do they plan?" Why couldn't they have found out after she and Blitzheimer signed the papers late next week?

"Nothing concrete yet, but word is, they're out to make a counter bid, with better terms for Rolf Blitzheimer. Supposedly, they're content to let him remain Chief of Operations at the Munich plant."

She snorted. "Ridiculous. That man's incompetence is legendary. Tell me what you know about Giovanni Corporazione."

"A new firm. They've only been around a couple of years, headquartered in Milan. Snagging Blitzheimer would be a major coup for Giovanni Corporazione. I've heard they have the VP working on the deal. He's supposed to be their top negotiator." Rom reeled off the facts quickly, as if he had studied them for hours, until they had burned into his memory.

"Who's the VP? I want to know everything you know, and then some. Get me facts and figures within the hour –"

"Already covered, as much as I could." He sounded apologetic. "There isn't much about Dante Giodarri that I could find. Most of it, I culled from an old *Forbes* article. He's thirty-years-old, single, driven. I heard he's being groomed to

take over the company in the near future, as soon as Giovanni, the CEO, feels he's experienced enough. Also, there's a hint of rumor that the CEO's daughter is part-and-parcel with the position. If he wants to be head honcho, he has to marry the girl. She's only fifteen, so he has a few years."

Rom continued to speak, but Regan tuned him out. She couldn't find the strength to turn her head in Dante's direction. She could hear him stirring behind her and assumed he must have realized she knew. She wanted to experience a surge of rage, to turn and unleash it on him, but all that filled her was cold emptiness.

She interrupted Rom. "I'll work it from my end and call you back."

"Okay. Oh, by the way, from what I've heard this morning, Giodarri's heading to Germany the early part of next week. Probably hoping to get Blitzheimer to sign on with their deal before your meeting Thursday."

"After a layover in Lasenbourg," she said bitterly. "I'll call you later." She hung up the phone without awaiting Rom's response and finally found the strength to turn to Dante, wondering what she would say. She knew what she should say, and the anger was creeping up, but the coldness seemed to be winning. The only bit of heat she felt was in the prick of tears at the back of her eyes.

He had taken advantage of the time she spent on the phone to dress. He had the grace to look ashamed. "Regan—"

She flinched at her name on his lips. "Don't say my name."

He frowned, but tried to continue. "Please let me explain."

"What's there to explain? It's obvious you decided to check out the competition before you made your move. Maybe you even planned to sabotage my deal with Blitzheimer." She blinked back the tears, refusing to let this man see her cry. "Was seducing me part of your plan, or did you just seize the opportunity to get a little pussy?"

Dante's mouth tightened. "I didn't seduce you. You told me I was going to fuck you. I offered you an out, if you'll recall. I asked if you were certain you wanted me on such short acquaintance, and later, all you had to do was say *fermati*."

She swallowed that bit of bitter truth, acknowledging her part in this. She had surrendered her pride for this man, but she wouldn't have if he had been honest with her. Regan's insides writhed with shame. "I can assure you we wouldn't have gotten past dinner if I had known who you were. I'm surprised your slime didn't ooze onto me." The way his eyes darkened with anger pleased her.

His tone was still calm, despite the blaze in his eyes. "I don't deny my intention was to meet you, but not for the reason you think. I didn't plan to sabotage your deal. This underhanded tactic of approaching Blitzheimer before he signs your contract leaves a bad taste in my mouth. Giovanni chose this approach."

She snorted. "Sure, because you're a paragon of honesty, aren't you, Dante? Does your fiancée know how you and her father do business? Will you still be fucking the competition when you marry that simpering young thing?"

"Gia is a sweet girl and doesn't deserve to be dragged into this." His quiet tone hummed with anger.

She flinched at the reprimand, realizing just how much like a jealous shrew she was sounding. It was fine to express anger at his duplicity, but Regan didn't want him to see how much it bothered her that he had someone waiting in the wings. She strove for a cool tone. "Your tactics won't work with me, Dante. I don't give up easily. I don't know what you thought our sleeping together would do for you, but it hasn't done anything except make me more determined to close the deal."

"I didn't set out to deceive you. I would like to explain –"

She waved a hand. "I don't want to hear it. I think you should leave now, so I can shower away your touch."

His expression tightened. "You really are a cold bitch, aren't you? I thought it was all a front, a wall you hide behind, but now I realize this is the real you. You stand there without a stitch of clothes, as haughty as a queen. You can dismiss me, but you can't so easily dismiss what happened between us."

She glared at him. "I've already forgotten you!"

His laugh was as cold as his gaze when it raked her from head to foot in a quick sweep. "You'll be aching for me, Regan. You need what I can give you, but you're going to deny it because of foolishness." He cursed as he stalked to the door. "Take comfort in your business acumen, *cara mia*." He spoke the endearment mockingly. "With your inability to open to another, it's all you'll have to keep you warm at night." He opened the door and stepped through, closing it firmly behind him, without looking back.

Regan stood in frozen silence for several seconds after he had left. She didn't blink until she became aware of warm moisture spilling down her cheeks. Hesitantly, she touched the tears. She hadn't cried in years, but couldn't seem to do anything else as Dante's cold words ripped through her mind on continuous replay. Why was he so angry when she was the manipulated one? What right did he have to be upset?

Chapter 5

Regan settled into the butter-soft leather of her desk chair for the first time in more than a week with a feeling of relief. She had thought that interminable vacation would never end. After Dante stalked out, her first impulse had been to go home to lick her wounds. Common sense quickly prevailed, and she had checked out of Castle Phantasie and flown to Germany, where she approached Rolf Blitzheimer a week early.

It still stung that she hadn't been able to salvage the deal. Blitzheimer wouldn't budge on the sticking point of him remaining in charge of the factory, and she had refused to entrust a Synergies Systems holding to him. Even an offer of more money couldn't make him budge, and his counteroffer of allowing Synergies Systems to appoint his assistant hadn't swayed her. In the end, Dante's company had won, despite her best efforts.

She shifted in the seat, uncomfortable admitting by that point she had been more interested in striking out at Dante and punishing him than she had been in getting the German company. There were other possibilities for Synergies Systems, and losing Blitzheimer wasn't the end of the world. Losing the competition with Dante, however, had dealt her already hammered pride a crushing blow.

Regan sighed, determined to put the experience behind her. She would just pretend as if she had never gone to Lasënbourg. She wouldn't utter Dante's name or think about him. It was a simple plan, but she was having trouble putting it in place.

She tried to cheer herself with the consolation that Giovanni Corporazione had gotten the worst end of the deal. It was only a matter of time until they ran

into trouble by leaving Blitzheimer in a position of authority. Maybe Giovanni would even sack Dante.

She sighed, finding little satisfaction in that thought. She didn't want to punish Dante on a professional level. No, this need went deeper. She wanted to hurt him as he had hurt her. The streak of vindictiveness unsettled her, but it didn't stop her from indulging in fantasies where she punished Dante for his offenses. It was strange how all of those fantasies were always sexual.

Once more, Regan sighed, attempting to shove aside her thoughts to make room for business. A stack of messages awaited callbacks, and she had to assign the preliminary research of another memory chip manufacturer to a team assembling later in the morning. She didn't have time to think about Dante or wallow in self-pity. The concept was foreign to her nature, but she had managed to adopt the practice with ease this last week.

She picked up a gold pen, a gift from her parents for her thirtieth birthday, and then tossed it across the room in a fit of pique. Why couldn't she concentrate? What was so damn special about Dante that he continued to haunt her? Why did she ache for him, as he had predicted?

Each of her fantasies of punishing Dante always ended the same way – with him turning the tables on her. Somehow, the ending of those fantasies was always more gratifying than the part where she dominated him.

If all she needed were a dominant, she was confident she could find a partner. In fact, she would find one tonight. How difficult could it be? A feeling of calm settled over her, and Regan was finally able to turn her attention to work, with hardly a thought of Dante disturbing her throughout the day. Just having a plan for getting over this sick dependence fired her up and allowed her to dedicate most of her attention to work.

* * * * *

Regan affected a pose of cool sophistication, but privately admitted she might be in just a bit over her head. The idea of looking for a BDSM club on the Internet had been a good one. Buying what amounted to a skimpy leather dress barely containing her generous breasts so she would fit in had seemed prudent. Coming to the club hadn't been a problem. Neither had entering. It wasn't private or by-invitation-only, and she had stridden to the bar as if she owned the place.

It was only after she had a ginger ale and was surveying the patrons that doubt started creeping in. Regan wished for the security of a girlfriend, to offer moral support and a quick getaway, if needed. She regretted that she hadn't devoted more time to staying in touch with her college friends and other women she had met as she rose through the ranks of Synergies Systems.

Out of desperation, she had tried Serena Jensen's number on her cell phone from a stall in the ladies' room, having copied it into her address book on the shuttle bus from the airport. Serena's roommate had said she didn't live there any longer, and she hadn't seen her. She had returned to her perch on the stool, debating about whether to stay or go.

She finished the last sip of ginger ale and decided to leave. This wasn't her kind of place. She stood out like a sore thumb. Most of the patrons weren't even wearing leather, aside from cuffs or collars. They were almost all paired off, and the few singles seemed familiar with each other. The club might not be exclusive, but it was clear everyone was a regular.

Regan took a bill from her purse to drop beside her drink and started to slide off the stool. She stopped with an indrawn breath as a man stepped up behind her, blocking her path. She twisted sideways to look at him, struggling to hide her unease. She gave him a cool smile while assessing him. He was handsome, with dark brown hair, tanned skin, and impassive green eyes. His frame was

slim, but with corded muscles. He couldn't compete with Dante, but was attractive enough for her purposes.

"I've never seen you here before." His tone was as bland as his expression, giving no hint of what he was thinking.

She shrugged carelessly. "It's my first time."

He nodded. "What brings you here?"

She shrugged again.

"Harris."

"Regan," she said, striving to match his clipped tone.

His disconcerting eyes roamed freely over her, pausing to caress her cleavage, before returning to her eyes. "You're a virgin."

She laughed. "Hardly."

"To the lifestyle. Go home. This isn't a place for those seeking a thrill."

She rebelled at his command. "I have a right to be here." Never mind she had planned to leave before Harris approached her.

He lifted a brow. "You're not a sub, obviously." He sounded contemptuous.

"I am," she countered.

He shook his head. "No, not you."

"There was a man..." She trailed off. Regan locked her gaze with his. "I enjoyed it when he controlled me. I want to try it again."

Harris scratched his smooth chin, seeming to be deciding something. "Very well. Take me to your home."

Her stomach clenched at the thought, but she forced back the urge to argue. He stepped back, and she slid from the stool. Regan removed the valet ticket from her purse as they threaded through the mingling couples. Her fingers fumbled as she extracted it, and the slip floated to the ground. She bent down to

pick it up and froze when Harris's hand settled on top of her head. She didn't move until he did, but it was difficult for her to stay in the subservient posture.

By the time the valet attendant returned with her Saab, Regan was seriously questioning herself. Harris should have appealed to her the same way Dante did, but she felt a lot more fear than excitement. She pushed back her worry and drove them to her apartment, wondering why he didn't speak. Then she wondered why she wasn't filling the silence either.

Fortunately, it wasn't far to her apartment, and she parked at the curb, as always, knowing the building's valet would park her car. She nodded to the doorman, whom she knew only by sight, conscious of the strangely silent presence of the man beside her. She wondered if the doorman knew what they were about to do, and then she wondered why she cared.

The elevator doors opened, and they boarded, finding themselves alone. As soon as the doors slid shut, Harris turned to her. "Lower your dress to your waist."

"But—" Her eyes widened when he slapped her lightly. "Just a damn minute. I'm not into that—"

"Shut up." His hands were rough as they pulled the dress down to her waist.

She screeched and tried to pull away, not enjoying having his hands on her. She was aware of the elevator stopping and the doors starting to open, but Harris pushed the "Close Door" button, keeping them shut. Regan pulled away from his one-handed grip, eyeing him as though he were a snake preparing to strike. "I think you'd better go."

"You asked for this." He sounded bored. "If you really want to lose control, I can help you. Take off your dress."

Internally, Regan rebelled against the command, even as she pushed the dress down her body, to pool at her feet. She didn't feel an overwhelming compulsion to obey Harris. In fact, she didn't feel much at all, except the need to

rid herself of Dante's memory. If all it took were another, more forceful lover, she could do it.

He nodded with approval. Harris kept one finger on the button, but lifted his hand to squeeze her breast. Not cruelly, but with enough pressure to make her wince. "The underwear."

She hesitated at lowering the briefs, but his eyes drilled into her. Regan pushed them down and stepped out of them. She stood in heels and thigh-highs, awaiting his next move.

To her shock, he allowed the elevator doors to open. "Lead me to your apartment."

Regan bent down, scrambling for her dress and panties, but the harsh crack of his hand against her buttocks stopped her. She looked up with wide eyes. "You can't mean like this."

"Don't question me."

She grabbed her dress and did her best to cover her front. Regan peeked around the door of the elevator before making a mad dash down the hallway. By the time Harris, with his more leisurely pace, caught up, she had the door to her apartment open and had stepped inside. She was debating about locking it behind herself when he pushed it open and came in the rest of the way.

As soon as he crossed the threshold and closed the door, Regan knew she had made a mistake. She was a fool to go looking for a partner like this, who practiced the lifestyle, rather than dabbled as she had done with Dante. Fear climbed into her throat and made a comfortable nest as he began unbuttoning the sapphire-blue shirt. She cleared her throat. "Look, Harris, I've changed my mind."

He regarded her impassively, continuing to strip.

She tried to keep her voice steady. "I think there's only one person I want to submit to. This sort of thing isn't really for me. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to lead

you on." As she spoke, Regan found herself backing away as he bore down on her with a glint of determination in his eyes.

When he touched her, she hit out at him. "Get out."

"No." His tone reflected no anger, and his gaze remained cool. He seemed not to care either way about what she said. "This is what you want."

"I changed my mind." He tried to touch her again, and Regan darted under his arm, ending up near the door again. "Unless you're into rape, you won't get what you want from me."

"Rape is the ultimate form of domination," he said quietly. "However, I don't believe in forcing any woman." He took a step toward her. "But you gave your consent."

"Fine, we're playing. What's my safe word? Whatever it is, I invoke it." Regan didn't like the note of panic in her voice, but couldn't rein it in.

Harris eyed her with puzzlement. "This isn't a game, Regan. There are no safe words for you—just the ultimate thrill: Your complete submission to me."

He moved quickly, pinning her against the door. Regan's breath left her in as she slammed against the wood. Stars danced behind her eyes from the blow to her head, and her stomach quavered. "No." Despite her pain and the disoriented feeling overtaking her, her voice was still strong and steady. "No," she said again. "I don't want this. I don't want you."

When he made no effort to release her, Regan's anger flared. With a wordless cry, she brought her knee into his groin, slamming into his balls. There was nothing cool or impassive about Harris's cry of pain. He crumpled to his knees, cupping his balls.

Regan took a step sideways, preparing to open the door and physically kick him out, if she needed to. She was unprepared for the joy in his expression, or the complete supplication in his posture.

“You’re dominant.” He sounded as though he would orgasm that very minute. “I submit.” He bowed his head, but the disturbing gleam in his eyes was still visible.

He sickened Regan. “Get out.” She said it with little force, knowing he would comply, even if he didn’t like it. He thought she was stronger and was prepared to yield to her. “Just leave.”

Harris maintained a slumped posture as he crawled to the door Regan opened. She didn’t know if the pain in his testicles had him crawling, or if it was another way of showing his submission. She didn’t care. She made sure he exited completely before slamming the door, interrupting whatever he had been about to say.

She crumpled to the floor in much the same way Harris had, as her strength fled. She pressed her ear to the door and heard the scrape of Harris’s shoes as he walked across the marble floor. To be on the safe side, she dragged down the phone from the entryway table and dialed the doorman, asking to be notified when her visitor left. Two minutes later, the phone rang, and he told her the man had hailed a cab.

Once she felt relatively safe, Regan returned the phone to the table and got to her feet, walking shakily into the bathroom. Aftermath set in, and she threw up. Even after she finished, she stayed on the cool tile, seized by tremors.

The realization of how near she had come to being raped pounded through her, refusing to relent. Her own stupidity had allowed a predator into her home. It was clear now that Harris wasn’t a Dom. He was a psycho using the club to lure women away to hurt them. A true Dom wouldn’t have denied her a safe word.

She had experienced enough dominance at Harris’s hands to know it wasn’t for her. Not just any dominant would do. Only Dante made her want to

surrender all control. She wanted him, ached for him. Needing him frightened her almost as much as her brush with Harris.

Chapter 6

By the next morning, Regan had pushed the incident to the back of her mind, knowing she didn't want to dwell on it, but also realizing she wouldn't ever forget it. And she still wasn't ready to face the thought that only Dante could elicit such an uninhibited response from her.

She worked steadily through the morning, clearing the backlog that had accumulated during her absence. By mid-afternoon, she had a research team looking into a Korean computer company. There was a file in front of her when the phone buzzed. She frowned at the interruption. "What is it, Rom?" she asked, hitting the intercom button.

"Uh, you have a visitor, Regan." He sounded nervous.

She glanced at her calendar, finding nothing scheduled for the rest of the day. "Do they have an appointment?"

"No, but he says it's urgent."

She removed her reading glasses and leaned back in the chair. "Who is it?"

Rom cleared his throat. "It's Dante Giodarri."

Her eyes widened, and she leaned back so far the hydraulic mechanism on her chair released with a hiss. Regan righted herself and took a deep breath, searching for a way to get rid of him. She absolutely refused to acknowledge the frisson of excitement coursing through her.

"Regan?"

"What is this regarding?" She was proud of the cool tone that emerged from her trembling lips.

Rom conferred with Dante in low tones before saying, "It's personal. He says you'll want to keep it that way."

She swallowed at the implied threat. Regan's hands shook when she ran them through her short bob, separating the strands. "Very well. Send him in, please." As soon as she hung up, she dug in her desk for the handheld mirror she kept there. Her hair appeared straight, but her cheeks were flushed with color, and she was aware of a faint tremble in her lips. She doused her breath with Binaca and hastily shoved it all back in the drawer as the door to her inner sanctum opened.

Dante strode in with confident steps, as if he had every right to be in her office. Regan's lips tightened, and she scowled at him. "What do you want?" she asked as soon as he closed the door behind her.

He didn't miss a step at her unwelcoming tone. He crossed the carpet and took a seat in the chair across her desk. Dante placed a portfolio on her desk. "We need to talk."

She arched a brow. "I think we've said everything—"

"No, you've said everything. Now you're going to listen." He took a deep breath. "First, I owe you an apology. I should have told you who I was before we made love. Second—"

"Oh, that's all?" She glared at him. "You've apologized, so I'm supposed to forget you used me." She shook her head. "I don't think so."

"I didn't use you. I won't pretend I didn't enjoy bedding you, but it wasn't for the idiotic reasons you seem to assume. Do you think I would ever believe sex could sway you from a deal, knowing you as I do?"

She frowned. "What do you mean? You don't know me."

Dante snorted. "I know you, *cara mia*. For the last three months, it's been my job to learn everything about Synergies Systems, in preparation of beating your company to Blitzheimer's." His lip curled. "Gradually, I found my interest

shifting from the company to its CEO. I tried to tell myself you were the logical person to focus on, since you would make the deal, but I knew there was more to my interest.”

Regan’s breath caught in her throat. “Oh, really?” She meant the words to sound challenging, but they emerged as a breathy whisper.

“Yes. I found you attractive, but more than that, you were lonely. I also felt alone, and I found myself drawn to you.” He shrugged. “When I had the chance to meet you in Lasenbourg, I seized it. When you offered me your bed, I made a half-hearted attempt to dissuade you, but I didn’t try too hard. I wanted you.” Dante’s eyes darkened. “I want you still. I think about you often, Regan. Have you thought about me?”

She pursed her lips, refusing an answer. Regan tapped the gold pen against the mahogany finish of her desk and eyed him dispassionately, refusing to betray even a hint of the mingled excitement and renewed anger she felt at seeing him again. “If you’re sincere, I’m sure you’ll have no trouble proving it.”

His eyes narrowed. “What do you mean?”

“Give me what I gave you.”

“Incredible pleasure?”

She snorted, pretending disdain for his answer, while writhing inside at the truth in his words. “Total surrender. Submit to me.”

He stiffened. “No.”

Regan struggled to keep her expression composed. “Very well. Enjoy your flight home. Give my regards to your fiancée,” she added a touch too sweetly.

Dante cursed. “Do you think I am a *pervertito*? Gia’s practically a child. I’m not going to marry her to satisfy Giovanni’s need to keep his company under family control.”

She ignored the thrill the news gave her. “Yes, well...”

He cursed again, more vehemently. "Why do I find you so addicting, *caramia*? You are implacable. You know how I feel about submitting."

She nodded sharply. "Yes, I do. I felt the same way. I surrendered my pride to you. I want the same in return."

He shook his head. "You would let your need for revenge cloud our future?"

"Right now, we have no future." She eyed him. "That might change if I can believe you're sincere."

The cords in Dante's neck stood out as he gritted his teeth. "Very well. What shall I do? Do you want me to crawl to you? To beg for your forgiveness? Shall I kiss your feet?"

She found all the possibilities a tad unsettling, but didn't reveal that with her response. "Perhaps later. For now, I'll be satisfied with you removing your clothes." She kept her spine straight as she got up from the chair and walked to the door, securing the lock before turning back to Dante, who hadn't removed anything besides his tie. She snapped her fingers. "Hurry it up, Dante."

With a growl, he removed his jacket and practically tore off his shirt. Regan watched his every move as she made her way around the office, shutting the blinds on the wall-to-wall windows. There was little point, as she had the top-floor office, but it gave her a chance to calm her racing thoughts.

He kicked off his shoes, muttering under his breath all the while. His hot glare scorched her as he shucked off slacks and briefs. Although clearly angered, he wouldn't be able to deny his excitement. His fully erect cock gave him away.

She smiled at the sight, pretending a coolness she didn't feel. Regan sprawled on one of the roomy chairs in the corner of the room and began unbuttoning the top buttons of her lacey blouse. She crooked a finger at him and grinned when his eyes burned with obvious anger at her request as he obeyed her. She considered commanding him to crawl, but the thought of seeing him so humbled appalled her.

Regan pulled the blouse from the waistband of her skirt and finished unbuttoning it. When Dante stood a few feet from her, she raised a hand. "That's far enough. Don't move." The tremble in her fingers was hardly noticeable as she removed the sensible white bra and tossed it across the other chair. She cupped one breast in her hand, trailing her thumb across the plump nipple. "Do you like what you see, Dante?"

He nodded, either refusing to speak or beyond words. She smiled at that fanciful thought. "Do you want what you see?"

"Yes." It was little more than a grunt.

"How much do you want it?" She cupped her other breast and squeezed them together, forming a deep pool with her cleavage. "What will you do for them?"

Dante crossed his arms over his chest and remained silent.

She tsked her tongue. "The right answer is anything."

He growled, just like a wild animal, and began to pace. "Regan—"

There was a note of warning in his tone that she disregarded. Her intention was to punish Dante for the way he had used her. She had difficulty admitting the rest of her motivation, even to herself. Thoughts of fulfilling her fantasies flitted through her mind, making her question if she were still angry with Dante.

She squirmed, not anxious to confront the reality of how much she had missed him, and how her body had craved his touch. She blinked away the thought. "Show me what you want, Dante." He reached for her, but drew up short when she uttered a harsh, "No." Regan shook her head. "Without touching me. Show me what you would do with that cock if it were in my pussy."

His eyes darkened, indicating either her words or the deed excited him. Without acknowledging her command with more than a cursory nod, Dante cupped his cock in a large hand. His strokes were firm and slow. His gaze didn't deviate from hers.

As he masturbated, Regan stood up to kick off her shoes. She stripped off her skirt, pantyhose, and underwear before returning to the chair, where she sat with her thighs spread apart, teasing him with the view of her neatly trimmed curls and aroused pussy. She didn't plunge a finger inside herself, but it was tempting as his strokes increased. Her pulse skyrocketed, and her breath came in short gasps.

Her gaze moved to his face, and she monitored the way his expression changed as he continued stroking his cock. His cheeks flushed when his gaze dropped to her pussy, and his breathing grew ragged. His hand stroked quickly now, and she knew he was close. "That's enough."

He didn't falter, but his eyes snapped up to hers.

"Stop. I don't want you to come."

With a ferocious frown, his hand slowed before stopping. His hands found purchase on his hips, and he stood before her, wearing an expression of mingled anger and consternation.

"Yes, stand there just like that." Regan scrunched down in the chair, allowing her legs to spread wider. She kept her gaze locked with his as her hand slipped between her thighs to stroke her pussy. She thumbed her clit and arched against her hand, groaning with the pleasure of touching herself, and the pleasure of having his eyes on her.

His gaze didn't move from her hand as she worked two fingers into her pussy and began thrusting. Regan arched her back and thrust against her fingers, while keeping her eyes on his cock. Drops of his excitement leaked from the tip, and his cock had turned an angry purple color. It visibly pulsed in rhythm with each thrust of her fingers.

She felt herself getting close and withdrew her fingers. Regan extended her hand. "Lick them clean."

Dante practically leapt forward in his haste to clean her fingers, supporting himself by grasping the chair arms. His tongue darted along the length of them, pausing to probe between the webs and rasp across the whorls on her fingertips. She couldn't hold in a moan of pleasure at the sensations his tongue evoked, never having imagined having her hand licked could be so erotic.

When he had removed every trace of her juices, he moved to hold her hand, pressing soft kisses to the palm. His gaze locked with hers, and he extended his tongue, slowly tracing her lifeline.

Her heart stuttered in response, and Regan found it difficult to breathe. This wasn't like the episode she had experienced before. No, this was all pleasure. So much pleasure she might die – which made it doubly difficult to do what had to be done.

She tugged away her hand. "Thanks for stopping by."

He shook his head, obviously confused. "What?"

"I've been aching with frustration the last week," she said. "You predicted that, didn't you? I can't do any less for you." She waved her hand as regally as a queen would. "You're dismissed."

Dante's mouth gaped open, and it seemed to take him a minute to gather his senses. He cursed in Italian and shook his finger at her. He punctuated the words frequently with her name, and his glare deepened each time he spoke it.

She sat without moving, forcing her expression not to betray anything. There were two possible outcomes to her strategy. Dante would comply and leave, so angry he would never seek her out again, or he would ignore her dictates and overpower her, forcing her to accept pleasure. She hid a smile at the thought, praying her calculated risk resulted in the outcome from her fantasies.

He moved suddenly, without warning, lunging forward and dragging her from the chair to the carpet. His hard body was quick to follow, pinning her to

carpet. "You're driving me insane, *cara mia*." His tone was rough with anger, but his lips were gentle when they settled on hers.

She didn't resist his kiss or touch. She yearned for both. She could admit that to herself. Dante wasn't absolved for his deception just yet, but her body didn't care about what had transpired between them, aside from the sex. It craved more.

She deepened the kiss. He responded to her overtures and kissed her almost brutally, branding her with his mark of possession. She arched against him, feeling her pussy flood with arousal as he thrust the head of his cock against her entrance. She couldn't think of anything except having him inside her as she lifted her hips, striving to take in more.

He withdrew long enough to plunge his fingers inside her, testing her readiness. The moisture he found must have satisfied him, because he thrust into her, filling her completely. Although it had been more than a week since he took her, Regan's body remembered and reacted, expanding to accommodate his girth, while still giving him a snug sheath.

She wrapped her legs around his hips and matched his thrusts, unaware of the carpet irritating her skin, or of their animalistic sounds of passion. She wasn't aware of anything except his cock plunging into her. She cried out as her pussy convulsed around him, triggering his orgasm. His fluid filled her as she arched her hips and dug her hands into his buttocks, holding him still inside her.

The contractions seemed to go on and on, causing her to cry out. Dante's voice mingled with hers, and their cries of release resounded through the office. Probably into the hallway, to the other offices, but she couldn't find the ability to care right then.

Her heart rate slowed gradually. It was only when the convulsions in her pussy faded that she was able to release the death grip her legs had on him and

let him roll away. She eyed him with what she hoped was cool indifference. "Well, that wasn't good."

His eyes widened. "What? You didn't come?"

She couldn't hold back a small smile. "Of course I came. Didn't you feel my pussy convulsing around you?"

"Sì. It caused me to come."

"Inside me," she added, "without protection."

He cursed. "You are on the pill, sì?"

Regan shook her head. "My sex life has been so infrequent that I didn't have need for it. I'm not usually the kind of person who forgets protection."

"Neither am I. Never, in fact...except with you."

She nodded. "That rules out disease then. I suppose our only repercussion might be a child." Regan shifted into a sitting position. "I'll deal with the consequences."

His lips compressed. "You would deal with my child so casually? Do I not get input on whether I want you to abort our baby?"

She blinked. "That wasn't what I meant. I'll visit my doctor for emergency contraceptive. If things...develop anyway, I'll raise the baby. You won't have to be responsible for it."

Dante sat up quickly. "I would welcome the responsibility, Regan."

"But you'll be in Italy –"

He shook his head. "Not any longer. I quit Giovanni Corporazione when I returned to Milan. My resignation had been in the works for months, when I realized marrying a virtual child was the only way to advance." A soft smile curved his lips. "It was only when I was assigned to investigate your company that I found a reason to stay awhile longer."

She wanted to refuse to believe him, simply because Regan didn't want to let him off the hook so soon, but she couldn't deny the sincerity in his gaze or the conviction in his tone. He was telling her the truth, which meant he surely had told her the truth about his forming infatuation. He should have told her of his purpose in coming to Lasenbourg and Germany, but that omission wasn't worth ruining the chance of a future together. "What will you do now?"

He nodded toward the portfolio on her desk. "I had hoped Synergies Systems would have an opening. I'm in the US on a tourist visa. I can only extend my stay by finding employment or getting married." His eyes gleamed when he uttered the last word.

She cocked her head, pretending to think. "There might be an opening in the mailroom—"

He laughed. "I believe you'll find I have many talents that are useful enough to keep me a bit closer."

"I suppose. You'll need some on-the-job training." Regan licked her lips.

"Hands-on?"

"Upon occasion." She leaned forward to kiss him, before speaking again. "Every occasion there's an opportunity," she added.

"I am pleased to be able to stay in the US." He kissed her, cupping her breast.

She gasped and broke away. "Why don't you apply for an employment visa? We'll sort out the marriage issue later."

"I would ask you for one thing, although I might not be entitled to request anything from you." As he spoke, he lifted his hands to cup her breasts.

It was difficult to think with him rubbing her nipples. She tried to clear her thoughts. "What? You want stock options, a corner office, 401K?"

"Yes to all, but this request is of a more personal nature." He continued to hold her breasts, but ceased caressing her nipples. "Would you consider not

visiting your doctor and allowing nature to take its course? I find the thought of your belly swollen with my child exciting.”

Regan’s eyes misted with unexpected tears, and she coughed, trying to clear the lump from her throat. “Yes,” she whispered. She didn’t think it likely she had conceived today, but she acknowledged the responsibility of agreeing to his request. She might end up a single mother, but her heart told her otherwise. If they had conceived a child, Dante would be there for her.

Regardless if they had conceived a child, she reminded herself, as he kissed her again. He needed her as much as she needed him.

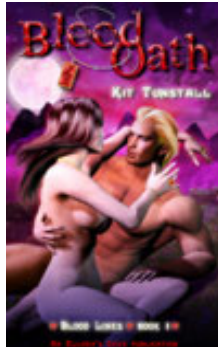
Epilogue

Ten months later...

The New York Informer **September 18**

In a lavish ceremony yesterday afternoon, Regan Delaney, the CEO of Synergies Systems, wed Dante Giodarri. He is the VP of Finance of Synergies Systems, formerly of Giovanni Corporazione in Italy, where he frequently made financial news with his innovative practices. When asked about future plans, the couple divulged their intent to start a family as soon as possible. The bride is rumored to have worn a \$200,000 diamond necklace from Cartier. When asked about the opulent jewelry, Mr. Giodarri reportedly said, "Their shine is the glitter of costume jewels when compared with Regan." Guests of the ceremony reported the couple was seldom apart. Repeatedly, our reporter heard this was a true love match. The New York Informer wishes the happy couple the very best.

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