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Double Double Dare Me

Ellie
Moonwater



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MENAGE AMOUR



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DEDICATION

To my husband and son, who put up with the long hours I spend writing stories and who never read over my shoulder. For my mother-in-law who shamelessly encourages me to write romantic and write it 'hot', and to those who encouraged me to keep going even though they don't read this type of story. What more could I ask for? Good friends all.

DOUBLE DOUBLE DARE ME

ELLIE MOONWATER

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Chapter 1

Coming home should be a happy affair, but I'd only just set foot outside the airport and I was already facing down the press. Some homecoming!

"I don't believe in ghosts," I replied firmly.

"But, Miss Anstruth, what about what you said before?"

"I was obviously overwrought at the time."

"So the ghost isn't real?"

I gulped, pushing down the feeling that I was about to sink my credibility and my cover. "Of course not," I said. "While I sincerely believed in what I said at the time, I now believe—just as sincerely—that I was wrong. The Master of the Mansion doesn't exist."

I didn't see the trap until its jaws closed right over me.

"So you won't mind taking on the Derek's Double Dare Challenge, then?"

I should have recognized the voice; after going to school with him, I'd heard it every day for years while driving in to work. Derek Ottoman, also known as the Radio-Nuisance-Extraordinaire, King-of-the-Early-Morning-Sound-Wave or Shithead.

I loved his music and hated his chatter. Some people should know when to shut their mouths and put on the next song. He was as crass as they came—and his co-host, Amber Riviera, wasn't much better.

She specialized in prissy-mouthed double meanings that were cruder and more sophisticated than anything Derek brought up. Yeah, I hated Amber, too. I'd gone to school with both of them.

"Miss Anstruth?"

I knew they wouldn't leave me alone. They'd keep chipping away until I caved or fled. I couldn't flee; I had nowhere left to go. Coming home had been my last flight to sanctuary. Bridges I'd crossed in the past were still burning like oil fires. Some might never go out.

Speaking of which...

"And what dare would that be?" I asked letting a touch of temper show at what I obviously thought was another stupid prank.

There was an 'oooh' and a small cheer from the gathered crowd. Some had been fellow travelers on the jet. Guess some ties really were temporary.

Knowing Derek, he was recording the whole interview for playback later. Terrific.

"So you'll take it?" he asked.

I looked directly into his over-eager baby blues and smiled my best predatory smile. "Lay it on me, Dezzer."

It was a blatant request for some serious double-entente, but he shied from the bait. No doubt little Amber would have a shot at it later. Judging from the smirks in our audience, they hadn't missed that possibility.

Great! Now I'd just boosted the little dweeb's ratings.

"I double double dare you to spend another night alone in Wellington Manor."

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him that I'd *never* spent a night alone in the manor, when I realized that would reveal I'd been lying when I'd said the ghost didn't exist. Even though I felt my face grow pale, I kept the smile pasted to my lips.

“And I double double dare you to take a scuba tour off Whaler’s Point.”

A second ‘ooh’ rose from the crowd, and it was his turn to go pale.

I’d known Derek since kindergarten. He’d always been terrified of sharks. So terrified, in fact, that he refused to go near the sea. I felt my smile unfreeze and go from predatory to downright evil. In front of a live audience, he couldn’t refuse. And, if he did, Amber would be on him like a fly on shit. That’d teach him to pick on me as soon as I stepped off the plane.

He pulled himself together with an effort and cleared his throat. “Done,” he said, although the word came out a lot weaker than either of us expected from his radio persona. No doubt he’d thought of Amber as well.

I turned away from him and picked up my bags. The taxi had been kept waiting long enough.

“I’ll take you home,” he said, drawing his third ‘ooh’ from the crowd. He glared at them, and I laughed.

“I don’t think so,” I said. “You’ve had all the interview bites you’re getting.”

“The gear’ll be switched off,” he said, and I heard a hint of desperation in his tone. “See?” And he did it—undid his jacket, opened his shirt and switched off the battery pack while I watched. “Anything you say will be strictly off the record.”

Around us, the crowd became utterly still. They should have been shifting restlessly at the delay. After all, my cab was at the head of the rank, and Derek’s interview meant I was blocking the way.

“Well...”

“For old time’s sake,” he said.

The spell broke, and a nearby businessman looked at his watch. Reacting to his obvious impatience, my brain switched off and I took the easy way out.

“Okay,” I said.

The word was no sooner airborne than the businessman picked up his bags and stepped forward. “Then you won’t mind if I...” he began.

I stepped out of his way. “No. By all means, go ahead.”

Derek picked up one of my bags and took me by the arm. I grabbed the other bag and followed him across the car park.

“You don’t play fair,” he grumbled once we were seated in his mini and heading out to the highway.

“Neither do you,” I replied. “How’d you know I was coming home, anyway?”

“My parents talk to your parents, remember?”

I did remember. It was a legacy of our kindergarten days. Embattled moms, letting their little darlings go for the first time, meet for coffee and find a common ground. Actually, ours had discovered they liked each other, and the friendship had only strengthened when our dads had met and found the same thing. Their friendship had outlasted the bonds Derek and I’d forged in the playground; those had dissipated as we’d progressed through primary school and the whole girl-boy thing kicked in. Kids could be really horrible if you didn’t conform to their expectations.

Derek had developed his public persona then, and it had stood him in good stead when he’d hit work experience at the radio station. I kept deciding he was a shit, based on what I saw in the schoolyard, only to change my mind when I met him at the get-togethers our parents organized. We’d even dated, but I wouldn’t accept the switch he did between personalities every time we went out in public.

The one time he’d slipped up and used private information on his show had been the last straw. I’d called him several unsavory names, and he’d returned the favor by bagging me all over the early morning airwaves. The incident at Wellington Manor had been the last straw.

Anger boiled up in me as I realized he’d done it again.

“Stop the car!” I shouted and felt him put his foot on the brake. Then he glanced out the window and back at me and seemed to work out what I was thinking. His foot lifted, and the car rolled on.

“It’s not what you think,” he protested.

“How can it not be?” I asked. “You used our parents to find material for your pathetic little show!”

“It’s not like that,” he said. “It was Amber.”

“You told Amber?”

“No, Amber was at dinner as well.” At least he had the grace to look embarrassed. “She, uh, she can be pretty unstoppable when she gets an idea in her head—and she hadn’t had one for the Double Dare segment this week, so she was pretty desperate.”

I felt my anger subside. “You’re dating Amber?”

“We thought we’d try it,” he said. “It didn’t work out.”

I looked at him, and he fumbled for words. “This wasn’t the first time.”

“So you dumped her.”

He blushed. “No, she dumped me. I said what she was doing wasn’t right. She said she couldn’t stand my over-developed sense of morals and my self-righteous attitude.”

I couldn’t help it. I laughed.

He managed a smile, and we subsided into retrospective quiet.

“Look, I...” he began, just as I said, “So...”

“Sorry,” we chorused, and then waited.

“You first,” I managed, when I thought it was safe.

“No, it’s okay,” he said. “It wasn’t important.”

I just looked at him and raised an eyebrow. It took about thirty seconds for his resolve to collapse.

“I was going to say I was sorry,” he said.

Not what I was expecting. “For what?”

“For that time I talked about your mum on radio.”

Mum had developed breast cancer. She’d wanted the matter kept private. So much so that she hadn’t even told her friends. They’d been

a bit upset to find out about it from Derek's big mouth as they were driving to work. So had I. I'd hung an illegal u-turn and driven to the studio.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, his sidekick had been taking a quick coffee break and seen me coming. Security had beaten me to the studio door, and Derek had been oblivious to the commotion outside the broadcast box until he'd checked the messages on his mobile phone.

By then, I'd been roared at by both my parents and had caught the next flight to Melbourne. I'd found a job there and stayed—even after all had been forgiven. Now I was coming back for more than a flying visit, and my parents didn't have a clue what had gone on while I was away. Good thing, too.

Derek had kept his eyes on the road while all this went through my head, but now he couldn't take the silence any longer. "What were you going to say?" he asked.

"I was going to ask how you'd been," I said.

"Oh." He seemed disappointed.

We spent the rest of the trip back to North Hobart discussing the state of things. He told me about dating Amber and how he was between girlfriends, and I told him why I was really coming home. Well, I told him what I could of it; there were some aspects I was still coming to terms with. Those I was so definitely not ready to share—especially with a man I had to keep reminding myself was a radio dweeb. I mean, who knew what would come out of his mouth on air? Trustworthy confidante one minute—radio rat the next.

Mum and Dad were waiting for me when we got home. I shot an accusing glare at Derek. Someone had definitely spilt the beans. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I was glad he knew why I hadn't told them but upset he hadn't let me know about the little welcome-home party they'd planned. It reminded me he couldn't be trusted completely.

“Your things arrived yesterday—the storage yard rang us. Why didn’t you say you were coming home for good?” Mum demanded, dragging me into a hug that drove the air from my lungs. “Why the change of heart?”

“Erm... I wanted it to be a surprise,” I managed, blushing red to my ear tips.

“Well, it’s a good thing we found out,” she said. “Gave me time to set your room up as a proper bedroom again.”

“Mum,” I protested, “I’m going to find an apartment. It’s not like I can impose on you and Dad forever. I’m almost thirty, for Heaven’s sake!”

“Huh! Well you can just come in and face the music,” she replied. “There are a few of your friends who want to say hello. They say you didn’t get to see them the last time you were down.”

“I didn’t have time,” I squeaked. Truth was, I’d been avoiding them, especially the ones who knew something of what was happening in Melbourne.

“And what’s this I hear about you being engaged?” Mum asked.

I shot a dirty look at Derek, but he shrugged and raised his hands in puzzlement. I got the ‘beats me’ message loud and clear.

“I’m not engaged, Mum.”

“But you were?”

“It was a mistake.” Oh boy, was it a mistake. You want to talk about sharks? Well, the two-legged ones are much worse than those you find in the sea. I’d told Derek my ex had been a fortune-hunting asshole; the truth was much, much worse.

Mum gave me a look that said we’d talk about this later. I glanced at the number of cars in the street and knew the party would go until the wee smalls. Derek had already disappeared, but his car was still parked, so I knew he’d gone inside to give everyone the heads-up. Quite the little dobber, our Derek. I made a mental note to get even with him later, thought about Wellington Manor, and upgraded that to ‘very even.’ A swim off Whaler’s Point didn’t even come close.

Chapter 2

Derek and I go a long way back, I think it's clear. What isn't clear is why the hell I kissed him. And I don't mean a light, thank-you-so-much-for-coming peck on the cheek; I mean a full-blown, fuck-me-later tongues-to-tonsils mouth merge. If Mum hadn't asked if we were coming up for air, in that censorious grown-up voice I knew far too well, we might have tucked in under the lavender while we explored our options.

I shivered. It had been a warm October night—what can I say? The relief of escaping Hubert's clutches and getting home safely had overwhelmed me? Derek still smelt as good as I remembered, even if I didn't trust the little twerp. And his smell wasn't all I remembered. Having him wrap himself around me was like coming home.

It had been a long time since I'd felt like that. It had been a long time, since I'd felt I could come home. Something in him had changed. The radio wasn't the center of his life any more—I'd learned that over a night of easy conversation and careful mingling. My girlfriends were as wary of him, after the whole breast cancer debacle, as they were of me, since the whole Hubert-Engagement-and-me-avoiding-them debacle.

The welcome home party had started off with good cheer, undercut by carefully covered hurt, and it hadn't gotten too much better when I'd refused to talk about what had happened in Melbourne between Hubert and me. I'm just glad I hadn't been foolish enough to introduce him to any of them.

Things had loosened up okay, once the wine had started to flow and childhood memories brought back the closeness we'd all felt

when we were younger, but I wasn't so sure how many of the girls would want to see me again. Derek, on the other hand, when the wine loosened him up, had become quite the hostess's helper.

He'd kept the glasses full, made sure the music didn't stop, and changed the subject when someone started to get catty. Who'd have known that being on radio could make him walk so lightly? It had taken until almost midnight for me to realize someone was missing.

"Uh, where's Amber?" I'd asked.

Derek had regarded me with a wine-mellowed stare. "Forgot to tell her," he told me, his face serious. "Think she'll mind?"

Mind? She'd be furious!

I'd grinned.

"Thanks, Dezzzer," I'd slurred, draping an arm over his shoulder and putting my face two inches in front of his. "You're the best."

He'd grinned back, his gaze locked on mine. "Anything, babe," he'd said and started to close the gap between our lips.

"Oh, will you two just get over it and go find a bunk already?"

Louisa had the worst timing—or the very best.

We'd broken apart and turned to look at her.

"What!?" she asked. "I'm only stating a fact."

"You need a refill," Derek had said, noting her glass was empty.

"I need a taxi."

The others had chimed in with their 'me toos,' then, and the party had wound down.

Derek had stayed with me until we'd waved the last one away, and then he'd sworn. "Shit! That was the last cab."

I hadn't been able to help it. I'd giggled. "You can always stay at my place," I'd quipped, knowing he couldn't.

"Your couch isn't big enough," he'd replied. "Let me call another cab."

He'd called another cab and then draped an arm around my shoulders while we waited. "I'm so glad you're back," he'd said. "S been too quiet without you."

“I missed you, too,” I’d replied, surprised to find it was true.

The cab had arrived and broken up what might have been an awkward moment, and I’d stretched both arms around his neck and lifted my face to his.

“Kiss me bye,” I’d ordered, and he had.

What a kiss! He’d definitely improved while I’d been away. Lips as gentle as butterfly wings, and as firm as a command, landed on mine and took control. I felt as though I was being quietly devoured, or worshipped, or something. The sensation spread from my lips to my breasts. Don’t ask me if it journeyed in between; I didn’t notice.

Once we’d locked lips and I felt his mouth moving over mine, my nipples began standing to attention, with what might have been an electric current running from their tips to their base. There were little echoes of the same current waking things up between my thighs.

When it came to the point our tongues were tasting each other and making the magic that meant the world faded away, I was pressed so tightly against him, that I felt his arousal hot and hard between us. I swear the heat of it burnt right through our jeans. I could only hope he felt the heat from me. I’d need to change my panties before the night was through.

It had been a long, long time since I’d wanted to drag a man into the bushes and have my wicked way with him. It had been even longer since I’d wanted a man to drag me into the bushes and do the same with me. Mothers have the worst timing.

“Aren’t you two going to come up for air?” Her voice had floated down from the upstairs window, making me blush with embarrassment.

We’d come apart in a hurry, and her laughter was followed by the sound of a window shutting. She could have done that without interrupting us; she really could have.

“Cab’s here,” Derek murmured, although from the way the cabbie was drumming his fingers on the steering wheel, I guessed he was listening to the radio. It looked like they were playing his favorite

tune. Either that or he'd been enjoying the show Derek and I were putting on.

We'd kissed again, lightly, promising everything we'd had before and more, and setting a match to fires I hadn't realized had still been banked. No wonder things hadn't worked out with Hubert!

I'd watched the cab drive out of sight before heading inside to bed.

* * * *

This morning I'd woken up, wondering who'd let the gorilla out of its cage and given it permission to play bongos inside my head. After showering the alcoholic sweat off my skin and brushing the fuzz from my teeth, I'd taken note of the sun and crept downstairs. If I was lucky, Mum would either still be in bed, or would have left to run some errands.

I was out of luck either way. She was in the kitchen, waiting for me. With a smile, she whipped out some crumpets and stuck them in the toaster.

"And how are we this morning?" she gloated. "Feeling the effects of the evening?"

I grimaced at her and squinted my eyes against the light. The gorilla chose that moment to perform a solo right through my temples, and I slumped at the kitchen table—so much for a quiet homecoming. Orange juice appeared in front of me, and I heard Mum fill the kettle and put it on.

With the quiet roar of it booting up in the background, the smell of toasting crumpets grabbed my innards and gave them a twist. Today was going to be a day of it. I groaned and reached for the orange juice. The first sip soothed my parched throat and settled my stomach. It took the fifth sip to get the gorilla to quiet down. By the time I reached the bottom of the glass, he'd been reduced to tapping quietly in the background.

The crumpets were buttered and dosed liberally with golden syrup, and I thanked all the stars in Heaven that I wasn't on a diet. Mum never had taken any notice of what she called 'such nonsense.' "Besides, you always liked your crumpets this way." Yeah, when I'd been eleven!

"The radio station rang this morning," she said.

"Derek?" The word was out before I could stop it, and the smile it created on my face before I could take evasive action.

Mum looked at me and raised an eyebrow. No doubt, she was remembering last time.

"Amber," she said, and the word was like a death knell. She reached for the radio. "I can put them on, if you like..."

Somehow I didn't feel like listening to the two twerps make their marks on the airwaves.

"No, Mum, I had enough air pollution when I was over in Melbourne. I came back so I could breathe."

And boy wasn't that true in more ways than one!

I shivered as I remembered how possessive Hubert had become once the ring was on my finger, possessive and suffocating. I hadn't been able to move a single step without him either by my side, or wanting to know every detail of my outing. If I'd tried the same routine with him, he'd remind me that he was the Master and I the slave.

I'd grown tired of the game long before he had. What had started out as a harmless fantasy had rapidly evolved into a reality I wanted no part of. Even those who shared our fascination with the game had taken to shunning him—and me by default. There'd been no one to turn to in Melbourne—I hadn't been there long enough to build the same sort of network I had in Hobart.

Had, I reminded myself, *had*. My friends had made that quite clear last night, and I couldn't blame them. Somehow I'd dropped our friendship back to the earliest levels of acquaintance. Oh, that's right,

I'd cut them out of the information loop and then avoided them like the plague when I was in trouble. Yeah, that would do it.

The fact I'd only had their best interests in mind didn't seem to count.

I focused on my crumpet, only to have Mum plunk a steaming cup of tea on the table in front of me and then whisk my plate away for refills.

"Hey!" I protested.

She raised an eyebrow in admonishment. "So, you're back now?" she asked.

I blushed, remembering my friends weren't the only ones I'd cut out of the loop and then avoided. "Mmmm."

"For good?"

I nodded.

The crumpets popped, and Mum took them out of the toaster.

"You want to talk about it?" She was buttering them like there was no tomorrow—the amount of cholesterol she was stacking onto my breakfast, there might not be.

I paused mid-chew. Did I? I wasn't sure, so I chewed and swallowed and took another bite.

"Not yet, huh?" Mum could read me like a book.

I shook my head and swallowed again. "Not sure," I said. "Still working it out myself."

"Oh. So," she changed gears, changed the subject, "do you want to know what they said?"

Puzzlement fogged my brain. "Who?"

"The radio. Amber," my mother explained.

I had a fair idea what they'd said, but I wasn't going to let on to Mum. I sighed. "I suppose I'd better."

"Apparently, you agreed to be a part of the Derek's Double Dare Challenge."

I'd forgotten I hadn't told her, and come to think of it, neither had Derek.

“Derek nabbed me at the airport.”

Mum finished drowning the crumpets in golden syrup and passed me back my plate. “And?” she said. “Honestly, this is like pulling teeth!”

“Amber put him up to it,” I said, though why I was defending the little dweeb, I didn’t know. “Apparently, she heard I was coming over and thought it’d fit the bill nicely.”

Mum sighed and turned around to face me. Leaning back against the bench, she said, “Come on, Katie. It’s not like you to hold out on me.”

I looked at her and blushed even harder.

She sighed. “Well, it wasn’t like you before...” She waved a hand helplessly.

I knew what she meant. She meant ‘before the breast cancer,’ ‘before the Derek incident,’ ‘before you ran away to Melbourne.’

She was right. There had been a time when a morning-after breakfast would have had us chatting like girlfriends—no matter which of us had needed to talk. It had been how I’d found about the breast cancer, a little girl-to-girl chat. I hadn’t had anyone to do that with since, well, since before.

“I’m sorry,” I said, picking up another crumpet—they don’t taste so good when they’re cold. I bit, chewed and swallowed, letting the physical act of eating buy me time.

Mum put another pair of crumpets in the toaster—for herself, this time. I could tell from the honey she readied on the bench; she didn’t like golden syrup the way I did. It was her method of giving me space to think.

“When I got to the airport, I went to catch a cab.” I ignored her reproachful glare. I know they would have picked me up if I’d told them which flight I was coming in on. What I didn’t tell her was that I’d been planning on using the cab ride home to compose my thoughts—something I hadn’t been able to do with Derek driving me back.

“And Derek was waiting, with the microphone and the usual crowd of radio junkies. You know, the ones who’ll do anything to get their voices on air. And then there were the people waiting for a cab, of course. Anyway, before I knew it, he was interviewing me, asking if I was afraid of ghosts.”

Mum made a disgusted noise in her throat.

I grimaced. “He dared me to spend another night alone in Wellington Mansion.”

To her credit, Mum looked horrified. “But, sweetheart, you know what sort of a wreck you were after the last time! You can’t do it again. If I’d known what they were planning, I would have told them.”

It was a good thing she hadn’t, I decided.

“It’s okay, Mum. I don’t mind.”

“But...”

I sighed again. “It’s my own fault; I told them I didn’t believe in ghosts.”

“Oh, Katie, you didn’t.” Her dismay was apparent.

“Mm hmm,” I said, nodding as I kept eating the crumpet. To have answered right then would have given her a great view of my partially-masticated breakfast and, mother or not, I was sure she didn’t deserve that, no matter how I happened to feel.

When my mouth was clear again, I asked, “So, what did the radio station want?”

“They wanted you to call them back so they could let you know what arrangements had been made for tonight.”

“Tonight!?” I yelped.

“Yes, tonight. Apparently Amber thought it would be a great idea if you spent the night alone in Wellington Mansion on Halloween. That’s tonight!”

Only now did I register the big jar of sweets in the center of the table. Along with lying in wait for a breakfast chat, Mum had been filling it for the trick-and-treaters who’d stop by tonight. There

wouldn't be many; it's not a big custom in this part of Australia, but Mum liked to be prepared.

I went pale. I know I went pale, because I felt the skin on my face grow numb and cool to the touch. Now this wasn't fair! I'd only touched down a little over twelve hours ago! No way could they do this to me!

Okay, so yes-way they could do this to me. They could do it because they knew I had no prior commitments. There was no new job, just a week of apartment-hunting. I'd said as much to Derek last night, so I couldn't just make up some excuse about starting work tomorrow and needing to get a good night's sleep—which I knew, for sure, I wouldn't be getting in the mansion.

After all, the ghost hadn't been called the Master for nothing. He'd been the one responsible for me taking to Hubert quite as quickly as I had. If the Master hadn't given me a taste of bondage when I'd gotten separated from the mansion tour group and locked in overnight, then I'd never have visited *Fire 'n' Chains*, a club that had become the cornerstone for the Melbourne BDSM scene. It was a surprise for the uninitiated patron who walked in off the street, a veritable eye-opener.

It had been where I met Hubert.

That night in the mansion had been unforgettable. I'd talked to mum about it, and my boyfriend of the time. No prizes for guessing who that had been. I guess Mum's breast cancer hadn't been the only thing he'd blabbed about on radio. Man! Why had I kissed him last night?

I reached for another piece of crumpet only to discover my plate was empty. I'd eaten four of the instant-fat-pills in one sitting! Too bad. I'd need the energy if I was staying in the mansion tonight. Wiping my hands on a napkin, I picked up my lukewarm cup of tea.

I was going to the mansion—tonight!

Chapter 3

There was no delaying it. With the crumpets feeling like lead in my stomach and the tea souring on my tongue, I headed out into the hallway.

“Where are you going?” my mother asked.

“To call the radio station,” I said, closing the kitchen door between us. I tried not to hear her cross the room behind me and turn the radio on. I tried not to hear the far-too-cheerful natter of my two most-hated people having far too good a time at what would soon be my expense. It was time to dive into humiliation city and let the pain begin.

“Katie!!” Derek exclaimed in his best radio-announcer-asshole’s voice.

“Dezzer!” I replied, trying to match his spirit and not let my fear show. “You rang?”

“Is that her?”

I could hear Amber’s voice, loud and clear down the line, and echoing out of the radio in the kitchen.

“Could you turn the radio down?” Derek asked. “We’re getting playback here.”

In the kitchen, Mum dimmed the volume so I could no longer hear them.

“Give me the phone, Derek,” Amber said, and I heard a growl in her voice.

“No,” Derek shot back. “I picked up the phone. I get to talk to her first.”

“You already did—at the airport!”

“Doesn’t count!”

“Does too!” Typical of their level of entertaining dialogue, if somewhat cleaner than most of what came out of their mouths.

There was the sound of a scuffle. I held the phone away from my ear.

“Does not!”

“Does too!”

More scuffling. The rattling smash of a coffee cup hitting the floor was followed by an ‘Oof’ from Derek and the scrimmage of long nails on the receiver.

“Hello, Katie, dear,” Amber purred in my ear.

It was obvious to see who’d won the latest skirmish.

“Hello, Amber,” I replied, struggling to keep my voice neutral. I’d much rather have been talking to Derek.

“So, do you accept the dare?”

I sighed. “I accepted it yesterday. Maybe you heard about that on the radio?”

In the kitchen, I heard my mother snicker.

Amber ignored my jibe. “Well, sweetie-pie,” her voice took on a definite sneer, “here’s how it’s going to play. Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Derek’s going with you.”

“But, I’m...”

Amber cut me off. “You *will* be alone, Katie-dear.”

I hated the way she ran my name and the endearment together. Was this woman deliberately trying to piss me off? Oh, wait. This was Amber. Of course she was. I stayed quiet, signaling her to continue. No anticipating what ‘witty’ remark she’d have waiting if I spoke now.

“And you’ll be on film.”

Again I opened my mouth to protest but decided not to give her any more room to have fun at my expense. My silence was

unexpected. I could tell by the way it dragged on, before Amber reluctantly filled the space.

“But don’t worry, sweetie; there’ll be no room for shenanigans. You’ll be staying in the bedroom you curled up in that night you lost your tour group and got locked in, and *Dezzer* will have the lounge room. And you needn’t fear freezing to death, either. There’ll be no excuses for needing to cuddle up to stave off the cold. Oh no. There’ll be a nice warm fire in each hearth.”

“Great! I’ll bring the marshmallows!” I quipped. “Will I need a toasting fork, or does that come supplied?”

“Just bring enough for me,” Derek chimed in. “We might be in two different spaces, but you can still share your goodies.”

It was an unfortunate statement to make in front of Amber.

“Now, now, Derek. There’ll be no sharing of any goodies. You’ll be in separate rooms, remember? No communication, sharing or salivating together. She’s spending the night in the mansion *alone*.”

“Spoilsport,” Derek muttered.

“And as to goodies, dear,” Amber continued, ignoring him, “the *Four Seasons Supply House* is making up a dinner basket for each of you, containing some of their trademark treats. A light snack of smoked salmon and cracked pepper crackers, with Tasmania’s best gruyere as an entrée, accompanied by a hot steak hot pot, and finished off by an Apple Isle turnover for dessert. They’ll also throw in cutlery and crockery, a picnic basket and one of our local pinots. I do hope you like a little red. They say it makes the world go round, and Tasmanian wine is among the best in the world.”

It was a shameless plug, and we all knew it. I didn’t mind; the radio had to make its money some way—especially if it was wasting it on wages for the likes of these two. The Four Seasons was one of the best food specialists in the state. Derek and I were being spoilt, and we both knew it. With any luck, the ghost would leave us alone long enough to enjoy our meal.

Amber, however, wasn’t finished.

“And, of course, what’s a night out in a haunted house without a breakfast at *Pier One*. It’s not normally open that time of the day, but for you, and Radio 701 FM, it will be. And all they’ll be expecting is the tale of how you survived. We’ll be broadcasting live from the moment you walk through the doors!”

“Wonderful!” I said, trying to mimic her tone of faux bonhomie. “Let’s call it a date!”

Amber gave a low chuckle that hinted at naughty and would make all our listeners think of seduction. “Oh, no, dear,” she admonished. “That would imply you expected someone to meet you there—and as the only possibility is the Master of the Mansion, you’d have to admit he was real the first time round. What do you say, sweetie? Is the Master of the Mansion real? Or were you as overwrought as you claim?”

I’d been overwrought all right, and I was rapidly getting that way again. I wanted to reach down the telephone line and wring Amber’s perfect pink throat. Instead, I swallowed my mounting anger and said, “I was overwrought, Amber, and it’s not nice of you to remind me about it.”

“So, sweetie, are you still afraid to go back to the mansion? Scared of spending a night on your own—or not, as the case may be?”

I swallowed and prayed the sound couldn’t be heard down the line.

“Of course, not, Amber, dear. But how about you? I notice you’ve palmed the job of keeping an eye on me onto Derek. Not afraid of a lonely little mansion, are you?”

She laughed, and it wasn’t nice. I’d obviously hit a nerve. Again, I heard my Mum snickering in the kitchen. She didn’t like Amber either.

Amber’s response killed any mirth we might have felt.

“Sweetie! It’s so nice of you to ask, but my love life’s on the rampage, and I have a hot date—unlike some we could mention.”

Bitch.

“Now,” she purred, “I’m sure you’ll want to know all about the cameras. They’ll be set up in the lounge room, the bedroom, and in the connecting hallway. We’ll even have one in the washroom area of the ladies. That’s to keep an eye on you and make sure no hi-jinks happen. We wouldn’t want any pranksters to spoil our night of fun.”

“Derek will watch you on a monitor in the lounge room, so if you want a little private *girl* time, I’d suggest waiting until you got home.”

Double bitch.

“Any questions, dear?”

What I wanted to ask was if she found it hard work, or did it come naturally and, when she answered, ‘what,’ to reply, ‘being that much of a bitch.’ What I did was bite my tongue and keep my angry words firmly behind my teeth. It was much safer that way. Amber had a lot more practice in the realm of bitchiness than I ever hoped to attain—and good luck to her. She was going to need it.

Rampaging love life, indeed. If she was lucky I’d never find out that she’d really taken herself to the movies and then spent the rest of the evening at home, alone, and having a bit of ‘girl time’ herself.

“So, sweetie-pie, the limo’ll pick you up at six-thirty, and we’ll have you and Derek all tucked in by dusk. How does that sound?”

“Super!” I managed, matching her tone sneer for sneer.

I’m not sure who hung up first. I do know it was a race to get the phone down.

I stood in the hall for a long while, resisting the urge to bang my head against the wall I was leaning against. That would wake up the gorilla again, and the tea and orange juice had only just convinced him to give it a rest.

What I was trying not to think about was how much fun Matthias was going to have with *two* people in the house. He’d shown a certain amount of creativity when it had been only one, but I’d had the distinct impression that he’d done it all before. Two warm-bloods in his frigid realm just might excite him into a whole new dimension.

With any luck, it would excite him right out of this one and into the next.

Derek was in for a surprise and a half!

Down the hall, the kitchen door opened, and Mum peered round it.

“Are you all right, dear?” she asked, then covered her mouth with her hands as she realized she’d just mimicked Amber’s endearment.

Her guilty gesture made me laugh, and I waved her apology away. “It’s all right, Mum; she’s always like that. In fact, she could have been far, far worse.”

Mum looked like she wanted to say more—a whole lot more, but she didn’t, and I was grateful. With an obvious effort to change the subject, she said, “I’ll help you pack for tonight.”

The packing took the rest of the morning. I was still a bit seedy when lunch time came, but Mum’s cooking picked me up, and the brief nap I had afterwards went a long way to restoring my equilibrium. It also meant I was unconscious and not awake to worry about what the coming night might bring. Getting my Melbourne flat ready to hand back to the landlord combined with the flight back and the party had left me more tired than I thought.

Mum woke me at four. It was barely enough time to get ready for Derek’s Double Dare Challenge. There was no time for nerves. I was still blow-drying my hair when the limo pulled up in front of the house. It gave me enough time to wonder how Master Matthias would cope with the cameras.

To hell with Master Matthias! I’d started to wonder how *I* would cope with the cameras, especially if the Master of the Mansion had the same visitor’s schedule he’d had the last time.

Derek and Amber came to the door together.

I watched them from my bedroom window. From the way the scowls on their faces dissipated as they each raised a hand to belt on the door, they’d been arguing about who’d do the honor of collecting me. Obviously neither of them had won.

Mum opened the door but didn't invite them in. Instead, she called me from downstairs. Unheard of! My mother was the most gracious lady you could ever hope to meet; she'd never keep a guest waiting on the front step. It was interesting to note that she didn't consider either of them guests.

"So, are you ready for a big night out?" Amber asked.

From the pitch of her voice, I could tell there was a tape-recorder rolling somewhere under her coat. I smiled.

"You bet!" I answered, my smile becoming broader when a frown of annoyance crossed her face. "Are you?"

"What?"

That response had clearly caught her off guard.

"Ready for your big night out?" I asked, smiling sweetly. "After all, your *rampaging* love life must be chafing at the bit with this little interruption."

"Don't worry, sweetie," Amber replied, saccharine overtones creeping into her voice. "My love life will carry on just fine. It can handle the small amount of time it'll take to drop you two off. The question is, how long will it take to kick-start yours when you go screaming to Derek for help?"

I felt the smile freeze to my face and watched Amber arch an ever-so-bitchy eyebrow at me. All I could manage was: "What if he comes running to me?"

Amber turned away. "If he comes running to you, you still win the bet. After all, you didn't seek out company, and he'll only come to you in a moment of terror. And I can assure you," she said, playing with the corner of Derek's jacket collar, "as long as it has nothing to do with sharks, our Derek doesn't scare easily."

She headed back towards the limo. About halfway there, she stopped and turned around again. "You know?" she said. "You never even asked what the prize was."

I gave her my best blank stare. It wasn't hard; she'd caught me completely by surprise—again. "There's a prize?"

“Yeah, baby,” she said. “It’s a radio contest. There’s a prize. It’s a romantic weekend for two at the Cradle Mountain Lodge. This time of year, it’s just peachy. Very little chance of being snowed in. Luxury accommodations all round. All you’ve got to do is actually find someone to share it with. Now, what are the chances of that?”

She didn’t wait for a reply but spun on her heel and got into the limo.

Well, that took things to beyond bitchy, and I wasn’t going to do a thing about it.

Chapter 4

The ride to the mansion didn't get any friendlier. For the most part, I just shut my mouth and tried not to give Amber any more sound bites than she'd already dragged out of me. That tactic annoyed the hell out of her, but it sure was fun for me. Derek sat, looking from one of us to the other and trying desperately to stay out of the line of fire.

His trepidation made me smirk. It served him right.

We were glad to get to Wellington Mansion and out of the tense atmosphere that had started to brew during the trip. The techno-geeks had already been there, and the cameras were set up to record our entry and Amber's farewell at the door.

"See you two lovebirds later," she said, then, "Oh, I forgot. There'll be no loving tonight; you'll be in separate rooms. I'm off for a night out on the town."

And then a night at home with your vibrator, I thought, but I didn't say it out loud. No telling what she'd do with a statement like that.

"Your room's on the left," Amber told me and then leaned in to Derek. "And yours is the first door on the right."

When she turned her attention back to me, her gaze was malicious. "I'm sure you know the way. After all, you wouldn't want to keep the *Master* waiting, would you?"

"You're right," I said, picking up my sleeping bag and slinging my backpack over my shoulder. Lastly, I lifted the hamper provided by *Four Seasons* and turned my back on her. Not a wise move with

Amber, but I didn't see any daggers around, so I figured I was safe. "You have fun on your *hot* date."

I doubted she had one, I really did, but I wasn't willing to put it into words just in case the bitch wasn't lying through her far-too-perfect teeth. I was very tempted to ram her dental work down her throat, but I could see the hallway camera happily whirring away as it recorded our entrance, so it probably wasn't worth the court battle that would ensue.

I mean, how could I prove I was innocent of assault, when they had me on camera throwing the punch? I shrugged and moved swiftly towards the ground-floor bedroom. I forget whose it had been, but they were long dead. I was very, very sure it had never belonged to Master Matthias, but he'd been completely at home in it nonetheless.

Behind me, I heard Derek pick up his things and open the sitting room door.

Amber the Expert had called it a lounge room. In reality, it had probably been the drawing room, the smoking room, or the parlor. If I'd been paying attention on the tour, I would have been able to give it its proper name. As I'd been too busy wondering who was watching me, I hadn't—and, boy, hadn't that been a mistake!

Settling my gear on the bed, I made sure the bedroom door was closed and locked. That way there'd be no 'accidental' visitors. I made sure the camera recorded every move as well. Now they'd know if I ran screaming to Derek, because I'd have to rip the door off its hinges to do so.

Dusk was settling over the grounds outside. I watched it cloak everything in soft, gray overtones and then observed how the night turned it completely black. There was only the sliver of a moon tonight, and it did nothing to brighten the landscape. I pulled the curtains closed, shutting out the night and any prying eyes. The fire lit the room with orange and yellow light, and I didn't bother with the kerosene lantern on the bedside table. Happy Halloween!

Dinner was everything Amber had promised it would be, although she hadn't mentioned the twin thermoses of coffee and hot chocolate, or the after-dinner mint. I took as much of my time as I was able, given I was expecting the Master's transparent form to swirl up out of the floor at any moment. Once he arrived there'd be no time to eat, and I was determined to enjoy every bite.

Besides, it helped pass the time.

As it was, the Master didn't choose me as his primary target—and that was going to disappoint the radio station no end. With the camera in my room, happily flashing its red light at me every time I moved, I had to laugh when a startled shout came from down the corridor.

I turned to face the lens and said, "Well, at least I'm not the first one to scream."

The laughter died from my face when I heard another voice speak soothingly to Derek. Frowning, I made my way to the door and turned the key. I wasn't going to go running to him, but it would be easier for him to get to me if the door wasn't locked.

I couldn't help it, I had to open the door and stick my head into the corridor. The voice continued, deep and smooth and soothing. Master Matthias. I was almost jealous that the ghost had chosen to show himself to Derek first, but I'd been right. The Master was certainly pleased to have a third person in the house.

Waving at the hall camera, I crept out of the bedroom and moved on silent feet down the corridor. October or not, I was beginning to regret not bringing slippers. The wooden floor beneath my soles was cold, and away from the radiance of the fire, the air had a slightly chill quality to it.

Autumn in America, in Australia, October was the second month of spring. The weather was still undecided, switching between winter and summer and its own balmy self throughout the day. With a clear sky, it would be cold tonight. I'd forgotten Tassie was like this. More like the northern hemisphere, in its seasons, than the rest of Australia. I'd get used to it again.

Tucking my hands behind my back so it was obvious I wasn't touching the door, I leant an ear against the timber paneling. Now that I was closer, I could hear the faint swish of cloth and the indistinct rattle of chains that had accompanied Master Matthias's presence the last time I'd seen him. That was all very well, but I wanted to hear more.

"I'd like you to go visit Katie."

"I can't," Derek protested. "She's supposed to spend the night alone here."

"She was never going to spend the night alone," Master Matthias told him, his tone darkening with a suggestiveness that must have had Derek gaping in silence. "She knew that when she chose to return."

"Wha'd you mean, she knew that?"

"I told her I'd be waiting for her when she came back. It was only a matter of time."

There was a smug satisfaction in the ghost's voice that should have had me screaming in fury, but it didn't. It felt good, somehow, to know he'd expected me back, that he'd waited for me to return. I bent down so I could peer through the keyhole.

Master Matthias hadn't come to me; he'd chosen Derek—but he wanted Derek to visit me. The very thought sent a wave of awareness rushing over my skin. I felt my nipples tighten into the hard little buds that had so pleased him the last time. I felt a sense of anticipation heat my belly and start creating moisture deep inside. His voice flowed over me like dark chocolate.

"I've been waiting for her for an age."

Derek gasped, and I felt my eyes widen in surprise. Master Matthias had reached forward to cup Derek's cheek in his palm.

"Please go visit Katie," the Master said. "I need you both if I'm to be free of this world tonight."

He began to fade, as he always did, leaving Derek still gaping at the place he'd been. As the radio man raised a hand to rub lightly at

his cheek, I was certain that Master Matthias turned slightly towards the door and winked.

It should have horrified me. After all, he still had his chains, and the ancient suit still fit him like a glove. He still had a wonderfully muscular chest filling out his white linen shirt, and I knew that a lovely set of abs lay just beyond his waistband. The hard line of his erection showed briefly against his trousers, and I knew I'd been right about not getting much sleep tonight.

"You have until midnight to make up your mind." His voice made both of us jump, and my gasp made Derek look towards the door.

Taking no more time than it took to notice the camera beside him was covered with a thin rime of frost, I hurried back to the warmth of my room. What was I going to do now? I was certain Matthias wouldn't appear until Derek had made his decision to join me.

And what had the Master meant when he said he needed the two of us to get free of this world, and why tonight?

I wondered how long it would take Derek to make his decision as I sat in front of the fire and stared into the leaping flames.

I'd forgotten to bring the marshmallows.

Chapter 5

It took Derek until eleven o'clock to make up his mind. I can't tell you when he made the decision that, maybe, he did believe in ghosts, and, maybe, he wasn't going to run screaming into the October night, but he made it, and I heard when the parlor door quietly opened, followed by him padding down the corridor.

As his footsteps got closer to my door, I felt a growing sensation of cold emanating from the hallway, and Derek drew in a long chattering breath. His hand rattled the knob on the door, testing it, I guess, to see if it was locked. When he found it wasn't, I watched it turn.

The sound of glass shattering made us both jump—if the way the door shuddered as Derek's oath cracked the silence was anything to go by. My guess was that Master Matthias had just broken another camera.

Derek was halfway into the room before he realized he probably should have knocked. He paused, looking around, taking in the unlit lamp, the remains of my picnic, and the two thermos cups of coffee I had poured when I'd heard his door open. I'd set the sugar and milk close by and dug out a teaspoon for us to share.

"Hi," I said and watched as a tremor of fear jolted through him. "You look like you've seen a ghost," I added, unable to resist the sudden sense of mischief tickling my insides.

I almost regretted the cheap quip when I saw his face. The term 'white as a sheet' came to mind. That, and the way his pupils almost blotted out the dark blue of each eye, didn't bode well for him. I was surprised he hadn't wet himself yet.

“Hey,” I said, “you okay?”

Derek gently pushed the door closed, seeming to take refuge in the action of making sure it had shut firmly and then locking it behind him.

“No funny business,” I warned him, wagging my finger in mock seriousness. “We’re on TV.”

That didn’t even bring the glimmer of a smile to his face. It didn’t bring any change from the semi-serious look of wonder that he’d worn when he came in.

“Coffee?” I asked.

His nod looked like an automatic response as he crossed over to sit opposite me. I handed him the cup, waiting until he’d wrapped both hands around it before letting go.

“Sugar?”

Again, he nodded, and the cup didn’t move.

“Two?”

“Yes... please.”

Well, that was an improvement. He seemed to have found his voice.

“Milk?”

“Please?”

Ah, now he sounded a bit better. His voice was smoother, and the coffee had stopped its jerky sloshing in the cup. He took a sip, and then another.

I attended to my own coffee and watched his trembling subside.

When he was halfway down the cup, he spoke again. “Thank you.”

“Are you okay?”

He took another sip, deepened it and turned it into a gulp. “Fine,” he said.

I decided to push him just a little. “You don’t look fine.”

“No,” he said. “Trust me, I’m okay. I’m fine. All good. Honest.”

I let him sit there and stew. It was obvious he was working up to something, and I didn't feel inclined to help him. After all, he'd gotten us into this mess, and there wasn't a hope in Hades he was going to be able to get us out. No, that privilege belonged to Master Matthias.

We drank our coffee in silence, and then I poured him another brew. How much coffee had the people at *Four Seasons* expected us to drink anyway? And I hadn't even started on the hot chocolate. It took him half the second cup before he broached the subject.

"I saw him," he said, his voice soft with awe.

I played dumb. No way was I going to make this easy for him. He was the stupid prick who'd used my past against me. There was a hook, and he was most definitely on it. I decided to let him wriggle a bit longer.

"Saw who?"

He looked at me in disbelief. "Him!" he exclaimed, as though it was obvious.

It was, of course, but I wasn't going to tell him that. Uh uh, not a chance. I looked him in those baby blues and nodded, as though encouraging him to go on. "Uh, huh..."

Derek stared at me, and his eyes narrowed as he finally caught on. "You know exactly who I mean," he growled, and I chuckled.

I would have done more, except that Master Matthias joined in my laughter and appeared abruptly in front of the fire. I wished he hadn't done that. It wasn't that it made him hard to see—it didn't. What it did do was diminish the heat coming from the hearth.

There was a pop and a tinkle, and Radio 701 FM lost another camera. That it was the last camera in the house didn't escape me. Oh goody! Now we had Master Matthias all to ourselves—or, rather, he had us. This was going to be so much fun. Not!

Master Matthias was obviously suffering none of our nerves. His laughter died into a gentle smile, and then into a look of such seriousness that I was suddenly without mirth.

“I’ve come to ask you a favor,” he said.

Once again, his voice was working miracles on the inside of me, and the sight of him was almost enough to set my nerves alight. Both Derek and I looked at him without saying a word. Me, because I had nothing to say.

I’d expected to be petrified. I’d thought I’d be the one running screaming into the night, or that I’d go catatonic, my mind curling into myself so it didn’t have to face the reality of the Master’s existence, or his chains, or the way he could uncoil his essence in stunning similarity to a whip, caressing the lash over tender skin without drawing blood. I hadn’t realized I’d missed him this way.

Derek, on the other hand, didn’t say anything because he was still in the stage that wavered between outright denial and the abject terror of acceptance. The way he was opening and shutting his mouth meant the words had just stopped working, and he had something he really wanted to say.

We both stared up at the Master and waited for him to continue.

“As you know, I’m a ghost,” he began. He actually sounded like he was reciting a lesson for two really slow students. Ghosts 101. Hell, he hadn’t bothered before, so I didn’t mind. Anything that would get the evening started.

“And ghosts are spirits that are usually trapped in your realm of existence because of unfinished business.”

He paused, and I found myself nodding. Thus far the simple tales of the media were holding true. Matthias cleared his throat. Odd, it was the first time I’d ever heard him sound embarrassed.

“My unfinished business is of a rather personal nature,” he said.

Now he had both of our attention. Ghost business could get personal?

He turned to me.

“Katie has some idea of my, ehem, proclivities, and, I gather, they’re somewhat more acceptable in your day and age than they were in mine.”

His words had Derek's eyes glued to my face. No doubt he was starting to remember some of the details I'd let slip about the last time, the details he'd merrily shared with the 701 listening world and most of the state.

I glared at him.

Matthias continued on regardless. "Well, that didn't stop me from exploring most of the activities that excited my attention—right up until an angry fiancé discovered his betrothed shared my fascination with a horse whip and a riding crop and shot me."

Ah, that explained a lot.

"Of course, he then employed the horse whip and riding crop to his beloved's backside, followed by a thorough job of reclaiming her."

He paused, and a look of admiration swept across his face. The heavy line of his erection grew more delineated as his mind wandered back to the time of his death. His tone, when he continued, reflected the admiration on his face. "I couldn't have done it better myself."

"And you need us to help you, how?" I asked, swallowing against the sudden dryness of my mouth. Amazing how it could be so dry, when other areas of me were just starting to get wet.

My question brought the ghost's gaze to my face, and he bent down so that the frostiness of his breath chilled the tip of my nose. It made me remember that other parts of him were just as cold, and that sent a whole new quiver through me. I felt myself clench in anticipation and saw him smile. Whether or not he could guess what was passing through my mind, or along the walls of my pussy, was not something I wanted him to answer.

"I need you," he said, gently grasping my jaw between his thumb and forefinger and squeezing. His digits traced icy paths as they lingered in letting go. "And you," he added, looking at Derek. "I need you both. I don't know what you call it in your time, but the French named it a *ménage à trois*."

That was it! I felt a definite spike of desire peak both nipples against my shirt. Electricity ran along the underside of my breasts. Energy coiled in my belly. My lips parted as I looked up at him, and then I glanced nervously across at the radio announcer.

He seemed just as non-plussed as I did. His gaze was fixed firmly on Matthias, and his mouth hung open as though he'd thought of a question but couldn't quite get it to pass his lips. When he noticed me looking, he closed his mouth and swallowed.

"A ménage," he whispered. "That's what holds you here?"

Matthias's lips firmed into what might have been disapproval or regret, and he shrugged, making his aura quiver. "Truth be known," he said, "I'd have crossed over long ago without the experience, but the laws that govern us state that if an unfulfilled desire is strong enough at our death, then it can hold us. What most don't know is that the desire holds us, even when our minds pass beyond it. It's soul deep, and her fiancé was a very handsome man. It would have been the high point for both of us."

He was silent for a long moment before he spoke again.

"Of course, it wasn't the done thing. Neither was sharing. Or horsewhips. Or riding crops. Or wooden paddles. Or chains. And he shot me before I could ask."

There was something comical about the ghost's almost bewildered despondence, and I suppressed the urge to giggle at its plight. One look at the seriousness on Matthias's face, and the urge died.

He hadn't intended to be amusing.

I glanced apprehensively at the camera, noting its cracked lens and frosty glass. I doubted it would be able to record another image. It's sound capability, though... I nudged Derek.

"Er... that thing," I said, indicating the camera. "Is that recording?"

Derek's eyes widened as he glanced from me to the camera, and then to Matthias.

The ghost shrugged his shoulders as if to ask us what we expected him to do about it. When we looked at him harder, he sighed as though we asked too much and lashed a strand of crystalline essence at it.

I watched as the essence sank through the camera's outer shell, vanishing out of sight, and then snapping rapidly out as Matthias reeled it back in. There was an unhealthy grinding sound from inside the camera, followed by an expensive brown smell. Okay, that pretty much sealed it—it was well and truly broke. Its recording days were officially over.

I breathed a sigh of relief, mirroring the sound that escaped Derek's lips as we realized that what was about to pass between us would remain private. Well, as private as the radio rat allowed it to remain. Judging from the look on his face, though, that might be very, very private. I was starting to get the impression that there were more things sacred than I'd at first believed. Well, well, well—hadn't time changed things!

He was watching me again. They both were.

I looked from Derek to Matthias and back again. "What?"

"Well," Matthias said, "I rather think we'd like to hear if you'd consider it, although there is something I want to know more."

His voice grew deeper, stroking along the inside of my mind in a way that caressed my body. Things tightened; things came slowly awake. My flesh felt alive with anticipation.

I knew the question that rode the Master's mind. How could I not? It had haunted me since the day I'd fled his presence. It had nibbled on the edge of my thoughts since Derek had issued his dare. Had I brought them? Was I willing to take him up on his offer?

It was an offer that he'd made as he'd dressed me, his hands soothing the rapidly fading welts on my skin, his tongue tasting the salt of my sweat before he covered its path with cloth. It was an offer I'd managed to sublimate in Hubert's arms—until things had turned sour. I'd thought of it every day.

Without answering, I turned to the bag I'd packed. I'd refrained from wearing his gift to the house. Somehow it seemed too precious a thing to share with the nastiness in Amber's eyes, and I hadn't been one hundred percent sure she'd miss its significance.

It tinkled merrily as I opened its wooden box and took it out. Bells. Golden bells—on a golden chain. Without looking up, I rolled down my sock and fastened the chain around my ankle. Then I stood, feet shoulder-width apart, hands behind my back, looking down at the floor.

There was a sense of absolute stillness from before me.

I resisted the urge to look up and gauge my Master's reaction. I'd made my choice. What Derek chose to do next was his decision.

When Master Matthias spoke again, his voice was soft. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, my Master."

I felt him turn away and knew he surveyed Derek.

"And you?" he asked.

For a moment, I heard uncertainty in his voice. For a moment, I held my breath, waiting for Derek's answer.

I heard Derek swallow, then, "You want me," he said, "to join you, with her?"

"Yes."

"In a threesome?"

"Yes."

"And she's agreed?"

"You can ask her if you like."

Derek shuffled to his knees and placed his hands on my hips. It put him at a perfect height to bury his face in my stomach and lick his way downwards. It put him in a perfect position to stretch up and tongue the underside of my breasts.

"Katie?"

I frowned as his voice broke into my fantasy. If he'd bent forward a bit, he could have licked me all the way...

“Yes, Derek?” It was impossible to keep the irritation from my voice.

“Um, you’re saying you want to do this? With me? And, and him?”

I sighed. “Yes, Derek.”

“Why?”

I looked towards Matthias for permission. The rules had changed when I’d donned the anklet. At his nod, I tried to explain.

“Derek, this is what your dare led to. This is what I knew it would lead to when I accepted it. I just didn’t expect you to be along for the ride. I thought I’d be here alone with him.”

“And you agreed?”

I’d never heard a grown man’s voice squeak before. Perhaps it was the surprise that I’d known there was a ghost who’d want...well, what Matthias wanted, and that I’d still chosen to go ahead with the dare.

“Of course.”

“But we were dating at the time!” Derek protested. “Are you telling me that you and he...”

“Yes,” I said. It was a simple statement of fact, but he looked like I’d slapped him.

“But we were still going out together!” he said.

I shook my head. “No, we weren’t, Derek. I hadn’t said yes.”

“We were going to be.”

“I hadn’t decided,” I said, “and Matthias can be very persuasive.”

I didn’t realize what I was about to do until I’d done it. My hand lifted from my side and traced its way down from my shoulder to my breast. My fingers brushed across my nipple and then back down to my side.

Derek didn’t know what to think. He looked from me to Matthias and back again.

I reached my hand towards him and cupped his cheek. “Don’t tell me you don’t want to help Matthias,” I said.

His face changed color. First it blanched white, and then it flushed a deep unbecoming shade of red. Neckline to hairline, it went scarlet, taking a long moment to fade back to its normal tanned tones.

“I, I’m not sure,” he said, his eyes sliding away from mine.

He turned his head to one side and then brought his gaze back to Matthias. “How long can I have?” he asked.

Matthias’s lips quirked. “There’s a half hour until midnight,” he said. “You must join us before the clock strikes twelve.”

Derek stood slowly and crossed to the fire.

Matthias crossed to me.

Chapter 6

I watched him come, standing as he'd taught me, gasping as he passed right through me. There are no words to describe how that felt.

My head came up and my lips parted. My eyes caught Derek's gaze, and memory flashed between us. Those red-wine-flavored kisses and the smell of lavender rising from the newly-watered garden. My mother's voice floating down from the window above.

The long-denied desire that lay between us.

Matthias's fingers trailed up the nape of my neck and gently pushed my head forward. His cold, cold hand landed in a stinging slap on my backside. If he'd been alive and warm-blooded, I'd have barely felt it. As it was, he was dead and incorporeal and his hand went right through the thick denim of my jeans to sting one of my ass cheeks.

"Naughty, naughty, naughty," he murmured. "You know I shall have to punish such outright disobedience."

His fingers slid deeper, ignoring denim, ignoring cotton, ignoring warm living flesh. They probed me from the inside, ethereal where they pierced my flesh, solid and soft where they stroked the walls of my channel. I cried out, drawing a look of concern from Derek.

Matthias withdrew his hand and slapped me again.

"I'm going to chain you at the end of the bed," he murmured, stroking the inside of my thigh.

I moaned.

"Your hands will adorn the crosspiece between posts, and your feet will barely touch the mattress. You'll be the perfect height."

I didn't need to ask what I'd be the perfect height for. I already knew, just as I knew that his chains would be cold and warm, bitingly

hard and padded, all at once. Just as I knew that he wouldn't tie my legs apart—not at the beginning, not to start. That would come later.

I felt the buttons of my blouse slide undone as he drifted through me again, turning about on himself and raising my chin so that his lips closed over mine and his body solidified against me. It didn't cross my mind to resist.

His lips were cold, like ice from the grave. They numbed my mouth beneath them and sensitized it to their every movement. I felt my knees quiver as he claimed me with his tongue.

Its tip traced its way along my lips and then dipped gently, persistently inside. The last of my buttons surrendered. His hand cupped the back of my head. His tongue delved past my teeth, lapping against the interior of my mouth, reminding me of what he intended to do later, between the folds of other lips. He plundered me, and I could not bring myself to resist.

And then I remembered the game.

Reluctantly, I fought him with my mouth, tangling my tongue against his, trying to drive it out. My hands lifted and pushed against his chest—his now solid chest, which crushed my breasts beneath its solidity.

He laughed. "Minx. You know I'll have to punish you for that."

My lips parted in a smile, and he took the invitation, recognizing the surrender as he closed his mouth over mine and did his best to devour me. As his lips and tongue worked their magic, his hands slid my blouse from my shoulder and unhooked my bra. The two of them landed on two different parts of the floor, and I was glad I'd remembered to draw the curtains.

There were certain things that no peeping Tom had a right to see. My body divesting itself of its clothes while I kissed empty air was one of them. No matter that I could see and feel the Master, I doubted others could be as lucky.

Doubted, that is, until Derek gasped.

Matthias lifted his mouth from mine, ignoring the needy whimper of protest that followed him. "You can watch, or you can join us," he said. "But I don't know which role you'd prefer."

"Role?" Derek sounded as though he was having trouble catching his breath.

"Yes," Matthias said, "What would you rather be? The Master or the slave?"

"I, I don't know. What would you like me to be?"

And Matthias laughed.

"Undress," he commanded, and I sensed his delight at having two of us to please him.

"Now you," he said, turning to me and taking me by the arm. "I think I'll turn your ass to the fire and watch the flames reflected on your cheeks. The bed will give me better access to your breasts, and the fire can light the way for the lash."

"Will you beat me, too?" Derek asked, and I held a breath of surprise when I realized he was sliding into the role of slave as easily as I had. I'd bet a lot that this never came out on radio. It was a side of him I'd never seen.

Matthias's glance raked him from top to toe. "I might," he said.

Derek dropped the last of his clothing on the floor beside the picnic basket.

I half-turned to look, letting the sight of him fill my gaze and feeling more juices flow in response. I'd forgotten. I'd forgotten so much. He still worked out, judging from the tone on his abs and pecs, and half-erect, he was as wonderful as I remembered. I let a little longing fill my eyes and saw his cock twitch when he recognized the invitation in my stare.

"Come and help me," Matthias commanded.

Derek came to do his bidding and, together, they hung me from the cross beam of the four-poster. When they'd stripped off my shoes and socks and peeled my jeans from me, they stood back to admire their handiwork.

“Kneel,” Matthias commanded from behind me, and I heard Derek hit the floor.

The chill in the air intensified, and I knew the Master had divested himself of his clothes. The cold air around him always grew colder when he was naked. It had something to do with his energy, but I couldn’t work out what. Cool fingers stroked me.

They ran down my back, following the curves of my waist and caressing the globes of my buttocks. They traced their way down my legs and up the inside of my thighs. They ran along my biceps and across the sensitive flesh of my triceps. They arced over my hips, stroking my belly and parting the folds between my thighs.

I gasped, and they probed more deeply, finding the little nub that was already starting to peer out of hiding. They plucked my nether lips apart and sank their coolness into my body, working in and out, until moisture coated my depths and Matthias chuckled at the discovery. His hands swept up and took a nipple each.

Before I could steel myself against it, they squeezed and pulled, tweaking those sensitive buds to the point of pain.

I yelped, and his hands let go. I felt him step back and trembled. I knew what was coming. I dreaded it, and desired it.

“No!”

Derek’s shout reached me just as the lash cracked down, leaving a line of ice and fire along my back. It was pain and pleasure. It was followed by a tongue, soothing the sting, caressing the welt it had left. I knew it would come again, when the tongue finished its ministrations and left me hanging.

“Come here, boy,” the Master grated, and I heard Derek shuffle forward. “You voted to be my slave, when you were not master enough to tell me what you wanted. Tell me, do you know what you want now?”

There was only silence in reply.

“Suckle me,” Matthias ordered.

Derek said nothing in reply, but I remembered when Matthias had last given me that order. I'd knelt before him, his erection bobbing before me. 'Suckle me,' Matthias had commanded, and I'd obeyed, but not in the way he'd expected.

First I'd traced my way down his length with my tongue, then I'd reached under him, wrapping my tongue around one of his balls and pulling it into my mouth. It had been cold to the touch, but not too cold. It had tasted... I searched my mind for the term, as Matthias groaned.

I imagined my ghostly lover, then, his ethereal fingers buried in Derek's tawny surfer locks, while my radio man moved his lips down and over his shaft. I thought of the slow thrust of Matthias's hips accompanying the movement and wondered if they'd forget about me. I hadn't known Derek had been with men. There was so much I didn't know about him, so much he hadn't let me see, before.

The lash stung me again, this time moving down my back. There was another groan, and I thought I heard Derek chuckle, then the lash struck again. After a fourth strike, I heard Matthias's hoarse command, "Stop!"

What the pair of them were up to now, I couldn't see, but the lash did not sing out again, and shortly afterwards, two sets of arms embraced my waist. Two tongues soothed away the pain of my welts, and two sets of hands roamed my flesh.

"Let's get her down," I heard Derek say.

"No," Matthias answered, "let's taste her first."

I could feel him standing behind me, now, the icy aura of his presence causing my back to ache where the welts raised small ripples on my skin. Movement in front of me caught my eye, as Derek clambered across the flowered coverlet and came to a stop in front of me.

Master Matthias folded himself in close, wrapping his arms around me from behind, sliding his hands over my flat tummy, and bringing his fingers to my labia.

“Drink,” he commanded, opening me to Derek’s gaze. I watched as my radioman accepted the invitation, leaning into me as he brought his mouth to those parted lips. I felt his mouth graze my clit, and then his tongue drove out to find the opening hidden below it. The feel of it making its way inside me drove a soft cry from my mouth, one that turned to moans of approval as he reached around me to pull me to his mouth.

He suckled me.

I imagined it was the same rhythmical way he’d suckled Matthias, but then his tongue began to lap at the juices that flowed at his touch, and I realized I was wrong. This was different. I felt things beginning to tighten and clench, and my body jerked against its bindings. My soft moans turned into whimpers as Matthias began stroking along the inside of the lips he held apart, and Derek lapped and drove his tongue into me.

“Bring her to the edge,” Matthias directed, and Derek obeyed.

His tongue, and the hands massaging the cheeks of my ass, brought me close, and then they stopped. I growled in frustration as Matthias’s chains disappeared. Drawing me onto the bed, the ghost passed through my flesh and knelt before me, Derek at his side.

“Pleasure me,” he said, wrapping his hand in my hair and drawing me down until my lips touched the tip of his cock.

Smiling, I dipped my tongue out and touched the slit that was before me. He grew still. I dabbed my tongue out again, working my way round the mushroom-shaped cap, working my tongue under its rim in tiny flickers of movement that had him gasping. Smiling even more broadly now, I continued to tease him, closing my lips just over his head, and then drawing back.

“Take her!” he said, and I felt Derek behind me.

Where Matthias was ice, ice cold, the heat of Derek’s erection was like a searing brand. His hands grasped my hips and pulled them up until they were at the right angle. I closed my lips around Matthias’ cock again and felt his hands in my hair.

“I should have taken a hairbrush to your ass until it matched the color of the firelight,” he growled and pushed himself further into my mouth.

I opened wider for him, wondering at his patience until I felt Derek parting my folds and pressing his way just inside. They both paused, and then, as if by some pre-arranged signal, they both thrust forward.

I cried out with the joy of it. Derek’s warmth filled me, stroking me all the way in, until I could feel the heat of his sac against my thighs. It contrasted with the cool length of Matthias in my mouth, sliding down my throat as I opened for him. For a moment both my men rested, and then they pulled back, and drove in again.

It took me several strokes to grasp the rhythm, and then I did. I felt the tension in my channel spiral, the way my muscles tightened around Derek’s cock as he slid in and out of me. I tasted the wonderful otherworldly musk of Matthias as I moved my lips along his shaft, felt them both tense and then heard their cries of release, just as my own orgasm roared through me.

Warmth flooded my passage, and cool sweet musk soaked my throat. I swallowed, my voice joining theirs in an oddly muted song of completion. When it was over, and we rested in a tangle of human heat and otherworldly cold, I wondered if it had been enough. Was Matthias still with us, or was he free to leave? His presence made me realize that, if he was free to go, he wasn’t taking the option. I felt the chill of his hands start to roam over me and groaned.

“It’s not over yet,” he murmured. “That was just for starters. Tell me, do you have a virgin ass?”

I thought of Derek. We’d never reached the point where we’d felt comfortable about exploring that side of our sex life. Maybe if we’d dated a little longer...

And, as for Hubert, well, he’d intended to take my virgin ass on our wedding night. He’d been spending money, hand over fist, on the well-wrapped secrecy of a new playroom. He hadn’t understood why

I'd wanted a say in it. It was one of the straws that finally shattered our relationship.

I sighed. "Yes, Master."

"We'll take it slow, then," Matthias said and continued stroking.

It didn't take long before he discovered my nipples pebbling against his touch and bent his head to one aching tip, while his hand caressed the other. It was only when I heard Derek's moan of half reproach and half desire that I realized what his spare hand was up to. When Matthias gasped in surprise and then relaxed with an acquiescent moan, I drew meaning from Derek's voiceless silence.

We pleased each other gently. My hands found life enough to roam, to touch and to caress. Matthias attended my breasts until I almost screamed from the sensation of his touch. Derek alternated between us, his hands creating ripples of pleasure in our nether regions, his tongue following in their wake. Between them, they brought me to the brink again...and then, they stopped.

I writhed against them as they withdrew. When they did not return, I propped myself up on my elbows to see where they'd gone. It wasn't far. The two of them had stretched across me to lock lips with each other. Their eyes were closed as their mouths moved in harmony, and I imagined their tongues meeting within. I sighed, and their eyes opened, their faces parted, and they turned their attention to me.

Both of them were hard, small drops of pre-cum glistening at the tips of their cocks. I swept a forefinger over each head and then sucked the finger clean. Their tastes mingled on my tongue. Sweet, savory, warm, cool, salty, the other world meeting the reality of here and now. I wanted more but, as I reached for them, Matthias seized my hands.

Raising my arms over my head until he could transfer both my wrists to one great palm, he stroked his other hand down my body. It was a brief caress, as though he realized I wanted more, and so much sooner than before. His cold fingertips worked their way into my

pussy, stroking, tantalizing, delving in and out, until I thrust against his palm. He withdrew then, laughing as I resisted his leaving. Raising those fingers to his lips, he drew every last drop of me from them, and then spread my legs apart.

Releasing my hands, the ghost centered himself above me and sank his cock deep. I cried out as its cold burned through me. My body flinched away from it and then tightened around its length. Matthias pushed deeper, his balls tantalizing my ass cheeks with their cool heat, his head dipping to take a nipple into his mouth. I gasped as his lips closed around me, the cold of his tongue washing over the peak, racing through me to join with the cold invading my passage.

The long smooth stroke of it, coupled with the tantalizing flicker of his tongue, pushed me over the edge. I bucked against him, and he began a steady pumping motion with his hips. My scream of release echoed around the room, and Matthias locked his hips against mine, pinning me until the rippling contractions subsided. When he withdrew, I whimpered with loss.

His shaft glistened in the firelight, my moisture coating it as his fingers sought the same slickness between my legs. I gasped at the touch, unable to control the sudden muscle clench at their invasion. He laughed and eased them out, drawing out my moisture and rimming the rosette lower down. He repeated the motion twice more before sliding a finger into the tightly-drawn bud, making me gasp with the cold.

I lay there, the sensation not unpleasant, but unusual.

He slid his finger out and then back in, mimicking the motion made by his cock only moments ago. His other hand reached into my pussy again and circled the inside of my channel, and then he turned to Derek.

“Come and taste her now,” he said. “She has plenty to spare.”

At first I thought Derek would refuse, but he didn't. With eyes that seemed to glow like blue beacons, he came and stretched out beside me. Rolling me towards himself, he lapped tentatively, then

closed his lips around me and began to feed. All the while, Matthias played with the opening of my ass. Between them, the sensations overwhelmed me until I came again, and I didn't notice when Matthias stretched the opening to accommodate three of his ice-cold digits.

Derek raised his head, but I was too busy recovering to understand the look that passed between them. Whatever my two lovers were cooking up would have to wait until my head cleared and my body recovered.

Of course, that's when Matthias withdrew his fingers and rolled me onto my stomach.

"Kneel," he commanded, his voice cutting through the pleasure haze, even as my body cried for more.

I knelt, aware of Derek kneeling beside me, aware of the single cold digit making its way into my ass.

"Lie down," Matthias commanded, preventing me from obeying by the simple expedient of wrapping his hand around my waist.

Derek stretched himself out on his back in front of me, his fingers stroking the rigid length of his cock as he slid beneath me. Matthias inserted a second finger into my ass and began playing with my clit.

"We're going to fill you, Katie," he whispered. "Now, take him inside you."

As he spoke, he pulled me upright against his chest, folding his arms across my chest, trapping my nipples between his fingers and squeezing. His strength supported me as I straddled Derek's waiting shaft, one hand slipping down my belly to part my labia as he guided me down.

Derek's hands rose to my hips. I sought out the head of his erection and wrapped my hand just below it, using it as way of judging my descent. He lay still as I sank slowly to my heels, ultra-aware of the frigid touch of Matthias' cock standing upright between my cheeks. Warmth filled my channel, joining with the sensation of ice in and against my ass.

“Lean forward,” the Master ordered.

I obeyed, aware of the moisture seeping to the base of Derek’s shaft, feeling it sifted and spread over my stretching hole.

Matthias’s fingers wriggled enticingly inside, stroking, while Derek groaned at the feel of me around him. I’d wrapped him in silk. He felt like tender steel.

Matthias’s fingers left me, replaced by the slow burning pressure of his cock. I gasped, and Derek stretched up, pulling my mouth down onto his, invading me with his tongue as he tasted Matthias on my lips. Slivers of sensation filled me. Derek’s hands slid from my hips, one to squeeze gently at my clit, the other to play along my thigh.

I felt the need in my belly begin to vibrate along the passage surrounding Derek’s shaft. My breasts grew heavy, tender with arousal. Matthias eased himself deeper, my ass expanding to accommodate him as I relaxed into Derek’s kiss, and growing need consumed me.

When the Master was buried as deeply as he could be, they both paused. Cautiously, I moved against Derek, circling my hips, growing accustomed to the feel of them both inside. The movement brought soft moans from both of them, and then they moved in return, and the feel of it drove coherent thought from my mind.

Searing cold and burning heat brought on a roaring storm of wanton arousal, a cyclone of need and pleasure. Matthias moved smoothly in and out of my ass, while Derek thrust into me from below. Their rhythm stuttered at first and then built into a smooth wall of sensation that had me crying out for more. I rocked between them, caressed back and front, full of them, aware of their desire for me, aware of their need mingling with my own.

The rhythm grew faster, the pace increasing until our lovemaking became a blur of their scent and touch, their words of praise devolving into inarticulate sounds of joy. Our passion surged, higher and farther, overwhelming us like a giant wave, pulling us into its current, until pleasure crashed over us.

I wanted to cry for mercy, and I wanted to cry for more. When the thunder subsided I hadn't the energy to do either.

My two men cradled me, their bodies pressed into mine, their arms wrapped around me and around each other. The harshness of their breathing subsided as my heart rate slowed. My ass felt like it was on fire. My pussy was all too aware of the subsiding length it embraced.

Derek stroked my hair. Matthias nibbled gently on my neck, his lips leaving a trail of frost in their wake. I felt as warm as the icy otherworld presence of a ghost stretched along my back would allow, and I snuggled against Derek's chest. Just as I was drifting into nothingness, Matthias lifted off me.

"It's time I went," he said.

I rolled towards him, blinking sleepily. "Wha...?"

Derek withdrew from me and helped me sit. He wrapped his arms around me, tucking me against his chest.

Matthias smiled at us both. "Thank you," he said. "Now, I'm free to go."

"But you can't," I protested. The thought of never seeing him again, of never loving him again, filled me with grief.

"Derek will take care of you for me." Master Matthias was breathing heavily as he began to fade.

"It's the light," he said. "I can see it, and nothing holds me here, now."

His smile was sweet but tinged with sadness.

"I wish I could stay," he added. "I wish I'd known you when I was alive—as impossible as that would have been. What company we'd have kept."

He stretched a hand towards me, gliding chilly fingers down my cheek and along my lower lip.

I tried to catch them with a gentle nip of my teeth.

He dabbed me on the nose with a forefinger and reached for Derek, running a hand up our lover's thigh. Derek moaned, and

Matthias smiled with rueful delight. Reaching through me, he brushed his cold hand over Derek's flaccid cock and traced its head.

Derek gasped, and his cock twitched.

"See?" Matthias said. "We'd have had long, lazy evenings together."

His image faded even further, and he held a hand up in front of his face.

"I will miss you," he said. "You both hold a place forever in my heart."

"Wait for us," Derek croaked, his voice laden with unshed tears. "Say you'll be waiting when we cross over."

"Forever." With that reply, Matthias was gone, and we were alone.

We looked at the frost-covered camera, and I wondered how much tonight's little outing had cost the radio station. The lens was cracked and misty with cold. Fortunately, there was no way we could have done it. The hazards of ghost hunting, I guess.

It wouldn't be long before Amber came knocking on the door.

With Matthias' image still imprinted on our minds, Derek and I turned to each other. The loss of our Master had left the need for comfort in its place. I shifted against Derek, and he drew me down beside him.

"Oh, Derek—"

His mouth silenced my voice and his tongue caressed beyond my lips in thoughtful strokes. His hands traveled down my shoulders and along my arms, until they grasped my wrists. In one swift movement, he rolled us over, pinning me with his hands, his mouth and his hips.

The kiss became more demanding, his cock as hard and full as it had been during our lovemaking with Matthias. I longed to touch him but he held my wrists, so I pressed against him instead. With a groan he released my hands, reaching between us to guide himself to my waiting entrance.

I opened to him, gasping at the feel of him filling me and reaching down to trace the firmness of his butt. This time our loving would be slow, in memoriam of our Master—and Amber be damned.

Outside, dawn was trying to peer around the curtain edges, and birds were stirring at the window. Inside, I found the cleft of Derek's ass and traced downward with my finger, while he teased me with a slow easy thrust that reached my center. His lips toyed with one aching breast, and his fingers caressed the other as he withdrew. When I would have screamed in frustration, he picked up the rhythm, fueling our need and increasing the pleasure until I cried out for another reason and his voice joined my own.

Neither of us heard Amber knocking on the mansion door, or her subsequent exclamation of surprise to find the cameras still iced over.

THE END

<http://elliemoonwater.wordpress.com>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I live in Hobart, Tasmania with my family, and I have lived in and seen most of the rest of Australia while growing up. From the red-dirt and spinifex around Alice Springs to the mist-covered waters of Victoria River and the temperate forest and hidden waterfalls of Mt. Wellington, I have been privileged to see the variety this country has to offer, but I find it easier to set stories where I can go research and establish a connection to the location—even if I later add a ghost or gargoyle or the sidhe to it. I've worked as a clerk, a stablehand, a teacher, and a cleaner, amongst other things—none of which are very romantic in and of themselves, but all of which feed my stories. And I write. I love to write and see others enjoy my stories, as I hope you've enjoyed this one. Dream and live; live and dream.



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