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An Ellora's Cave Publication

Treva Harte, Sherri King,
and S.L. Carpenter

Twisted Destiny

A Valentine Anthology

TWISTED DESTINY

An Ellora's Cave publication written by

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Warning:

The following material contains strong sexual content meant for mature readers. TWISTED DESTINY 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...

Prologue

Marisha tapped the fingers of her right hand on the laminated tabletop in a rapid tattoo. She twisted her left arm to look at her watch for what must have been the twentieth time. Twenty-five minutes past. They were late. Marisha might be a punctuality freak, but neither Sam nor Michelle ever seemed to care about time.

Marisha realized what she was thinking and snorted. What difference did it make if they were late? It wasn't like any of them had to be on time for anything anymore. The worst had finally happened. They'd been hoping something would change ever since the rumors started a few weeks ago. But the office gossip had been only too right.

Sam walked into the diner. For once she looked subdued, with all her impish charm gone. Even her wildly cascading wine-red hair looked more somber and restrained than usual. She gave a half-hearted smile at the waiter's hello and walked directly to their usual booth.

"So. They really did it." Sam dropped to the bench seat and twisted her bracelet nervously. "I mean, we knew it probably would happen but..."

"But not to us. Not to all of us." Marisha took the lukewarm coffee she'd forgotten to drink and sipped to ease the ache in her throat. "Where are we ever going to find jobs around here?"

"I don't know. We aren't, I suppose. The economy sucks."

"Yeah."

Michelle came in next, carrying a small wrapped present.

"Happy birthday, Samantha." Michelle shoved the present into Sam's hands before taking her usual seat next to Sam.

"Oh no! It's your birthday! What with everything else, I forgot!" Marisha said. "I'm sorry, kid. Hey, the dessert is on me. Cake all around, right? I'd order champagne but I don't think the place offers any."

She gestured to their usual waiter who nodded back at them. Paul knew what they always ordered for lunch.

Sam blinked back tears.

"Thanks. I didn't expect anyone to remember after all this." Sam's fingers toyed with the ribbon on her present.

"Hey, c'mon you guys. It's just a stinking job. We're young, we're smart, we're healthy." Michelle's smile wobbled a little bit before she said, "We can still attract studs. C'mon. It's Valentine's Day. We'll go out, we'll party, and by tomorrow we'll forget we had any problems at all."

"Right." Marisha sounded skeptical. "Like I do that any year. And, of course, this year I'm in a particularly partying mood."

"You haven't had any wild and crazy Valentine's Days? C'mon. Tell the truth," Michelle urged, leaning forward. "This is us girls. This has always been one of my favorite holidays. Long, dark nights, guys who show up with candy and other sweet treats. Tell me I'm not alone here." She sat back, a look of anticipation on her face.

Usually Michelle could make them laugh. Usually they got in a good mood after the weekly lunch they'd started when they first met at work. Today though, Marisha could feel her already sour mood get worse.

"Well, I don't remember anything good. I hate February. Actually I can't remember a really good Valentine's Day I've ever had. If I did, it would just make me feel worse anyhow. Because that wouldn't be *this* Valentine's Day. This one is about as bad as it can be." Marisha tore pieces from her napkin as she slumped against the back of the booth, a grumpy look on her face.

What would these friends of hers say if she told them she'd never had good sex with anyone, anywhere? Other people seemed to manage just fine, but the idea of opening up to a man—literally and figuratively—was something she just couldn't do. Hell, her fantasies were a million times better than anything she'd ever managed with someone else in real life.

Marisha thought about saying the words out loud.

But Sam had already nodded and leaned forward. "Listen, I'd take a different Valentine's Day myself. I don't even care if I got your guys with treats, Michelle. I just want something different. That doesn't seem like a big birthday wish, does it? I used to want lots more for the 14th of February. But I'd take different this time. Nothing can be this bad."

"Aw, Sam—" Michelle began.

"Never mind. Nothing will be different. I'm destined to have rotten luck this birthday." Samantha sighed. "Valentine's Day and my birthday. The double whammy."

"Well, I'm doing something different. I have no job here now so I'm taking a trip home. If I'm really lucky, maybe I'll find a guy on the train and never come back. Now, c'mon, you two. I know things are tough, but nothing is so bad that a good hard cock won't help. You two need to find a few of them quick." Michelle was saying the things she always said, but there was a funny note in her voice.

"You're leaving? What happened to—?" Sam asked.

"Exactly what you always said would happen, Marisha. Forget him." Michelle swallowed. "I intend to."

The other two looked at each other. They knew how much Michelle had counted on her boyfriend. She hadn't talked about a trip before this.

"I'm really, really sorry." Marisha was. Things were pretty sorry all around.

"You want to talk about it?" Samantha spoke up at the same time.

Michelle bent her head over the table, her blonde hair hiding her face for a moment. The other two waited, wondering if she would break down. Not that Michelle ever did that, but this day wasn't exactly normal. Michelle finally looked back up with a big, fake smile on her face.

"No. It will just make me mad. Or cry. I don't want to cry. I intend to enjoy myself without him. Loser. I'm leaving his ass."

"Damn straight." Marisha wasn't sure what to think. The guy was an asshole. Everyone else had agreed on that when Michelle wasn't around. But Michelle had put up with him for a long time. What could he possibly have done to make her leave him now, just when everything else was so bad? Jerk.

"You'll find someone better than him." Sam patted Michelle's hand.

"Super damn straight." Michelle stood up. "Maybe I'm fated to meet a new guy on my trip. At any rate, it beats moping here. Right?"

OUT OF TIME
by
Treva Harte

Chapter One

"I don't have a job. Soon I won't have my condo. Now I get reminded I never even have any really great sex. Thanks a lot, folks. Some friends you are." As she mumbled the words, Marisha saw her bus pull away from the stop. She was just a little too far away to flag it down. "There you go. I've missed the bus all the way around. I always have."

She saw a few people passing by give her a curious glance. Yeah. Welcome to her life. Her good friends only made her feel worse while they tried to cheer her up. She was an unemployed, unattached thirty-four-year-old who was about to call her mom and stepfather and ask to come live with them for a while. Now strangers were avoiding her on the street while she muttered to herself. Life couldn't get much worse.

Marisha decided walking home wouldn't be so bad. She might as well get used to living on a very, very tight budget. How much would her unemployment cover anyhow? If she moved fast, it wouldn't be dark before she got to her condo—the one that would soon have the for sale sign in the front.

She'd worked long hours on her supervisory job. She'd been willing to come in and provide support on holidays and weekends and late nights. That had earned her the down payment on her own place. She'd picked out every piece of furniture carefully in her new home, painted the walls herself to get them just right. So much for careful planning and hard work. If she got her asking price for the place, she might break even.

"Mom will say I should've gotten married. *When your great-grandmother was your age, back in the Old Country, she had grandchildren. I told you not to be so picky in college,*" Marisha mimicked, pushing her thick, dark hair back from her face as she strode down the street. Her thick, dark, now sweaty, hair. "I was surrounded by computer engineering majors in college, Mom! Then I spent my whole working life around them. There's picky and then there's settling for something sub-human."

Marisha was about three quarters of the way home when she realized life could—and was—getting worse. It was already more dark than light, and there were two men walking behind her. They sped up when she did. She didn't want to find out what they would do if she slowed down. There was still some traffic on this street but she knew she was coming up to a patch of warehouses and office buildings that was deserted after five.

Gawd. She didn't have anything to hand over if they did rob her. If that's what they had in mind.

Marisha kept walking briskly while she pulled out her cell phone. One more month before this got cut off, too. But she had it now. That was the important thing.

"Timmy?" He always answered his cell phone. That was the joy of knowing a telephone lineman. They answered phones.

"Hey, gorgeous."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't have time for that right now. Are you at the gym?"

"It's early evening. I'm not on call. So, yeah, I'm at the gym."

"Do me a big favor, Timmy?"

"Anything, babe."

"Listen, I'm about four blocks from you on Dulin Street, heading home. I could use a little backup here. There are some guys following me."

Tim's tone shifted from flirtatious to fierce. "I'm there. Be *careful*, huh?"

Timmy was one of the good guys. She'd known the boy ever since she babysat him in junior high. Marisha grinned, remembering how pissed he'd been back then that someone just four years older than he got to be in charge. However, he'd grown up quite a bit since then—*quite a bit*—and she was sure his presence would take care of the current situation.

"Hey, bitch!" The voice was much too close to her shoulder.

Oh, no! She whirled, cell phone in hand, and didn't think twice about her next move. She slammed him hard on the nose. The phone made a strange, evil hiss as it cracked into the man's face. So did the man.

"Shit!" he yelled, his face contorting.

Then everything went black.

* * * * *

"What ails her?"

"She has a bump on her head. Mayhap she fell."

The voices sounded odd. The words weren't quite right. More importantly, she had a headache. Marisha touched her head and winced. She had a sore spot, all right. She could feel dried blood in her hair.

"Aspirin," she grunted.

"Did she call me an ass?" one voice asked, affronted. "Fine words for a serf!"

"Why are you all standing here?" another voice imperiously cut through the chatter. "Have you nothing better to do? I can find more tasks for you all."

"Pardon—" "My lord, we—" The obsequious voices tripped over each other in haste.

"Go!" Imperious snapped. They went.

Marisha opened her eyes. Oh, damn. Double vision. She could see two pairs of strong legs, enclosed in tight green chausses that left little to the imagination. She saw two sets of muscular-looking thighs. And she could damn near see what the twin cocks

on those studly males were made of. Their brown tunics just cut off what her blurred eyesight strained to see.

"You're not—" Her head warned her to whisper. Marisha whispered. "You're not identical twins, are you?"

"You may address me as Lord Stephan, serf."

"You can address me as Marisha."

"An odd name. It has a foreign ring. Are you from here?"

"I don't know where here is exactly, but I know I'm not from it. I was named after my great-grandmother, by the way." Marisha shut her eyes again. "Could you talk more quietly? My head really hurts."

"I am lord of this castle and I am your master. I do as I wish." The voice softened. "And I believe you look white enough to swoon. Where are the women when you need them?"

Marisha felt herself being lifted, held securely in the air. God, he was strong. She forced herself not to sigh. It must be the concussion she had to have, but she was weak enough to suddenly realize she'd always wanted to be picked up and carried off by a—
by a lord of a castle and her master?

* * * * *

"Are you all right? Damn it, Marisha, you are all right, aren't you?"

"Timmy boy." Marisha kept her eyes shut but the voice was familiar. Thank God. Her hallucination was over. Not that Lord Stephan wasn't gorgeous. But so was Tim, and Tim appeared to be carrying her, too. "It's you."

"Yes. "

"What happened after I smashed that one guy in the face?"

"Well, it looks like you broke his nose. Don't worry, sweetie. I finished up the job as well as I could before the police came."

"Idiot. They could've had guns." She should have thought about that before she called him. But Tim seemed indestructible. After all, he stood six-foot-three in his bare feet and still looked the football player he'd been.

"Naw. Just knives. Don't worry. There was no problem." There was a certain satisfaction in Tim's voice.

"My head still hurts." Marisha decided to open one eye. Things were a little blurry but she could see Tim looked as big and powerful as ever. There might be a bruise or two, but that could be her eyesight. He looked good. He always did. Too bad they were just pals. Too bad he was just a baby. A big, gorgeous, powerful baby, mind you, but too young for her.

"That's why I'm taking you to the emergency room."

"No. No money for the deductible. I just want to go home."

"Bad idea, Marisha."

"I wanna go home!" Marisha felt her stomach threaten to empty after that shout. She shut her one eye tightly. "Please, Tim."

"Aw, damn, Marisha. I always give in when women do that."

"I know. Please."

"You'll tell me if you start to feel worse, won't you? I can trust you to do that?" She could see how hard he was trying to make the question seem casual.

"Sure." She wasn't sure if she could feel worse. Then again, the last time she'd thought that she'd been badly wrong. "I'll call. If not you, then my mom."

"Right. You're not calling anyone."

Marisha realized she'd probably gone too far with that last statement. Tim knew exactly how she felt about asking her mom for anything, especially now that Mother had remarried. All the old mother-daughter closeness had evaporated once Marisha and her new "dad" had started to clash.

Damn it, why did she think she could lie to someone who had known her forever?

"I'm going to stay at your place with you tonight, babe. I'll give you that much time, but if things don't look good soon I'm taking you to a doctor." He placed her head, very gently, on a car seat headrest.

Marisha felt a little bit like crying. Tim was almost like Mom used to be, tucking her in at night when she was a kid with a cold. "Aren't you going out with someone tonight?"

"Nope."

"Liar."

Tim always had someone to go out with at night. Especially for Valentine's Day. She felt him smooth her hair off her head.

"I'm staying *in* with someone tonight, babe. You."

* * * * *

When she opened her eyes again, she was in the dark. Literally. She could barely see anything. Marisha disliked that ordinarily, but with her head throbbing, the blackness felt soothing. She heard something move near her.

"Lord!" She gasped. Who the hell had followed her this time?

Wait. No need to panic. Tim had promised to be there. She was home in bed, probably.

"Yes, Marisha. 'Tis I." That wouldn't be Tim. He wasn't a '*tis* kind of guy.

She heard Lord Stephan rustling in the room. At least she hoped it was Lord Stephan. She had a feeling this wasn't a tidy, pest-free castle. "I thought I wouldn't be here when I woke up." Marisha sighed.

Light from a torch flared high up in the air. The man looked down at her, his face eerie in the flickering light of the flame. He looked big and grim and ferocious. He looked like a warrior who would be perfectly willing to kill. Marisha swallowed. That was exactly what a medieval nobleman was.

Why was she finding that sexy?

"Marisha, there is something odd about you. I cannot describe it, but I know I have not seen your like before." The man's voice hardened. "Are you a Saracen?"

Saracen. Marisha tried to remember the romance books she read as a teenager that had knights and ladies and...Saracens. A Saracen was good or bad? If she could just think clearly! She sat up, holding her head. So far, she was lucky. It didn't fall off. In fact, except for a strange, floating feeling, she felt all right.

Saxons and Saracens. Saxons were good. So...Saracens were bad. They got beheaded and things, didn't they?

"Definitely not." She must be hallucinating or whatever you did when you had a concussion. But just to play it safe, she didn't want her head really taken off before she recovered.

"But you are foreign. Your accent, your choice of words, everything is odd." His hand gripped her shoulder, tightened for a moment. He pulled her to her feet without missing a beat. "I take threats to my keep very seriously, wench. Why are you here?"

"I don't know!" Marisha wailed. "I don't want to be here."

The grip on her shoulder gentled. His hand rubbed her back. "Stop that weeping, wench. I cannot bear for women to cry. Not even serf women."

"Not even foreign wenches?"

"So you are foreign..." His voice hesitated. Marisha found herself rubbing her back against that hand, and not just for the relaxation it was providing her tight muscles. In fact, she was getting tenser by the moment. The man sighed. "Especially not foreign wenches. I had no idea of my hidden weakness for them."

His mouth against hers should have been a surprise. Instead, Marisha found herself moving into the kiss, pushing her tongue against the lips that opened when she demanded it, touching her tongue to his. She felt him shiver. He pulled his mouth from hers for a half second.

"What are you doing?" He sounded more stunned than disapproving. "Most women are not so bold —"

"Am I most women?" She eased back into their kiss, slipping her tongue against his, and he stopped talking. He shivered again. His hand slid up under her shift, and his thumb scraped against her taut nipple. Marisha shivered then. She was naked under her shapeless dress. Very, very naked. Achingly naked.

She stood on tiptoe, reaching for what she craved. Damn, he was hard as steel and she didn't mean his armor. But he was too tall. His cock was jutting forward but hit her too high to let her rub against him where she wanted to. Oh, she wanted to desperately.

She dug her fingers into his shoulders this time and began to inch up his legs, like someone might try to climb up a pole. She heard him grunt, once, and then his hand reached under her rear and pushed her up further. Her legs encircled his waist at last, his strong hands steadying her exactly where she wanted.

Who said they were from the Dark Ages? This guy was bright. Bright enough to figure out exactly what she wanted and take care of things. She was feeling something really hard. Marisha slid her hungry clitoris against a thickening shaft. Thank God he wasn't wearing mail. Yeah. Oh, yeah. That was just hard man. A great deal of man.

Marisha pushed her hands into the tight auburn curls on his head. She loved the way his hair felt, crisp and tickling the palms of her hands. She loved the prickly rasp of his not-quite-shaved face. She bit the strong chin and then went back into an open-mouthed, slow kiss. His kiss had started all this. She wanted more. The man was quite a kisser.

He grunted and then, with a quick twist of his hands, he pulled her dress up above her waist. Marisha waited, half-eager, half-nervous. Nothing more happened at first.

He didn't touch, he just looked. When was he going to do something?

Realization hit. He was doing something. An exciting something – exciting for them both. His breath rasped as he stared. As she stared back, Marisha squirmed. Her nipples were tight and eager. She was already wet, but his gaze was getting her wetter.

He must know how aroused she was. What was he planning to do next?

When did she wait for a man to do anything?

"Take my dress off." She tugged at it.

"All off?" He sounded startled.

Didn't he ever have sex naked? She'd never read any history about what happened when medieval knights had sex. Maybe that was too kinky for them. Well, he could learn something new because they were getting naked. From what she could tell so far, she definitely wanted to see this guy in the raw.

Marisha ran her hands over his shoulders then let them drift down to his ass. Mmmm. Nice ass. Tight, muscular, and tailor-made for her hands. She was hallucinating beautifully.

His cock dug into her. This hallucination was getting even better.

"Yes. All off. Then start on your own clothing."

* * * * *

He hesitated before following her commands. Did she know what she was doing? She looked so wide-eyed and fragile. Her head must hurt. But her kiss wasn't delicate. Her legs, wrapped around him, were strong. On the other hand, she'd been muttering. She was probably feverish.

She rubbed herself against him again. God, *he* was starting to feel feverish. Reluctantly, he put her back down on the floor. A little space between them might be the right thing right now.

She squeezed his butt hard, then her hand went further, reached between his legs. How the hell did she know just where to touch? Okay. She won that particular argument.

He began to take her clothes off, just the way she demanded. His fingers paused over that soft skin, just so he could take a breath and admire. Marisha was so damn beautiful. With clothes and, oh yes, without them. Just looking at her had made him ache sometimes, even though she was oblivious. She didn't seem oblivious now. Hell, if it took a concussion to make her think he was worth seducing, he couldn't get too upset about her injury.

Marisha brushed her head against his shoulder and winced. She shut her eyes a moment, her mouth tight.

He was wrong. He could get upset over her wounds. She was hurting. He didn't want her to hurt. She was precious.

In all the time he'd known her, she'd never seemed to realize how precious she was. Even when she was just a friend, a man got interested around her. Even when she never noticed how dry a man's mouth got when she looked at him and smiled. Even when she missed how hard a man's cock got.

He couldn't take advantage of her. It didn't matter that he'd been dying for a chance to get into the closest bed with her ever since he was a teenager. The older high school girls would torment him with their giggling, their tossing hair, their boyfriends. Marisha was worse than all the rest. She didn't flirt. She didn't tease. She was just there—her dark brown eyes so knowing, her swaying hips issuing an invitation he was too young to accept. Marisha didn't kiss other high school guys in the halls because she went out with college students.

He'd been a lowly high school freshman, with a voice that still squeaked when he got nervous. Hell, it always squeaked around her. He had been desperate to make her notice him like a man back when he was fourteen. Not that he'd known how. Then again, things hadn't changed much as they got older. He never had figured out how...until tonight.

Tim took a deep breath. Slow down. He had to slow down. It didn't count that those endless kid fantasies didn't match up to what she was like in reality. She wasn't one of those cute little plastic doll cheerleaders. She wasn't cute. She wasn't coy. She never had been. Marisha was real. She screamed woman and hot sex. Oh, God. Narrow waist, perfect tits, seductive lips, sweet pussy. Sweet, sweet pussy.

His cock demanded to see if that pussy was really as good as it looked. Tim clenched his fists.

Even if she was a wet dream finally come true, this wasn't right. She wasn't herself. If they kept going, once she was back to her senses she'd kill him. He'd deserve the slow, painful death she'd give him, too.

Meanwhile her fingers slid under his waistband and unerringly rested on his anus, pressing gently. Where did she learn to do *that*? Women never just knew how to do something like that. They had to be coaxed and shown and – Marisha slid just the tip of her finger inside. Oh, yeah. She had to be coaxed, all right. That finger coaxed and teased and promised more.

Tim grunted. He tried to ignore his erection but it was getting very difficult to do so. Marisha's touch made him insane.

No. Marisha made him insane. Her eyes were gleaming at him in the dark, looking at him. Devouring him. She wanted him. He could feel the pounding of his heart. The pressure in his cock. The sensations in his ass. His whole body was in tune to what Marisha wanted.

If they weren't supposed to do this, why the hell did it feel so damn right, then? Perfectly right.

"Hurry up. I want to see you naked, too." She almost pouted. He looked at those wet lips. "Fair is fair."

He shoved his pants down as fast as he could. He was as insane as she was, without the excuse of a concussion. But he'd stop before things went too far.

Sure he would.

* * * * *

"You are not cooperating." Marisha knew she was pouting. She never pouted. Then again she wasn't usually a serf standing naked in front of a medieval nobleman with a hard-on.

"What do you wish me to do?"

Why was he asking her? Shouldn't he be threatening her with a whip by now? Dragging her off to a dungeon? After all, she was just a lowly peasant and she'd demanded he do what she wanted. Marisha slipped the tip of her tongue between her lips. His gaze followed her movement as if he were mesmerized.

Hmmm. Then again, maybe even big bad lords got tired of bossing the serfs around. Maybe they enjoyed a little change of pace. She put her hands on his chest. His naked, rippling with muscles chest. She could feel his heart beating fast under her caressing hands. Testing her theory, she pushed.

He fell back on his elbows. A big block of man like that didn't fall backward when someone her size pushed unless he wanted to fall back before her. Hmmm. Mmmm.

Marisha crawled very slowly on top of that big male body and let herself slowly, very slowly down. The tips of her breasts rubbed slightly against his chest when she

whispered, "You're going to like having me tell you what to do, aren't you? Almost as much as I'm going to like telling you."

The breath in his chest rasped out. She felt his hard-on jerk against her thigh. Marisha chuckled. Round one goes to the lowly serf. "Do you want me to tie you or are you able to obey me without bonds?" she asked.

"I know not."

"Well, I guess we'll bind you. Just to be safe."

"This is wrong..." His voice sounded uncertain.

"It will feel right soon. Trust me." He simply had to trust her. She was starting to think she might die if she didn't have him helpless before her soon.

He had an ornate bed. She could half-see, half-feel the carvings on the bedposts. The solid wood bedposts. Marisha used his chausses to secure one wrist and stopped to admire her work before she ran her finger slowly down his restrained arm. He shuddered. The dress worked for the other arm. The tunic and his sword belt went for his legs.

"I could have used the belt elsewhere," Marisha mused out loud.

"Hey!"

Marisha laughed. She could really get to like this guy. She ran her hands up his thigh. Hard muscles. His leg twitched against the knots that held him. She liked how he struggled to see if he could get free. Most of all, she really, really liked his body. His trussed up, beautiful body.

"I don't usually do stuff like this—hell, I *never* do stuff like this." Marisha licked his collarbone, savoring the unique flavor of his skin. "But I recently decided I've been playing things too safe."

She trailed her tongue down from his strong neck towards that flat stomach, pausing to swirl it around each male nipple, eliciting a deep groan from her captive. Yum. It was almost like having dessert. "Where has it gotten me?"

She nipped at his bellybutton. His hips rose and fell.

His cock was so tempting. It jerked forward, eagerly, just from having her look at it. The head already had a drop of cum on it. She wanted to explore that cock. If she wanted, she could take hours tracing the throbbing vein that ran up that stiff length. She could make the head of his cock slick with her mouth and his cum and her juices. Oh, yes. Hours. She could imagine how he'd thrash and struggle before he realized he couldn't do anything but take what she gave him. She wanted to play and tease and torment—

She could do whatever she wanted with it. His cock was all hers now.

"Where?" Lord Stephan's voice sounded strangled. "Where has it gotten you, Marisha?"

She paused, looked up at his flushed face. She could feel the intensity in him, even though he said nothing more.

Oh, why wait?

"Nowhere near as nice as here." Marisha fastened her mouth around that hungry erection.

* * * * *

Her mouth knew what suction made him want to scream. Maybe it was good she'd tied him down, because he was already anxious to jam his cock into her as hard as he could after just a few fleeting seconds of her playing. That was a bad idea. Finesse. This needed a little finesse—oh gawd!

He swore when her lips tightened around the head of his cock. His fingers clawed at his knots, trying to free himself.

"Oh, God, Marisha! I can't stand it. That's so good." Tim heard himself almost whimper the words.

So much for finesse. But when Marisha chuckled, the vibration humming erotic sensations against his cock, he forgot to be embarrassed as he writhed.

No one had ever tied him up before. He hadn't even known how much he wanted to be. But for once he wasn't going to have to worry about being too forceful, too clumsy, not reading the woman right. Marisha could do whatever she wanted to him and all he had to do was respond.

Her tongue tickled at the head of his cock and he felt his stomach—and everywhere else—knot up. Oh, God, was he responding!

Marisha raised her head. He saw her, her lips red, a drop of his pre-cum glistening on her cheek, and he was ready to explode. But she looked uncertain. He couldn't explode until he knew what was wrong.

"This is all right, isn't it? You like it?" She sounded almost as uncertain as she looked.

"Yes," Tim hissed out through clenched teeth. "If I like it any more, the show is going to be over too soon, though."

He could feel the sensation spreading from his balls up to his cock, fiery, eager. God, he wanted her mouth back on him. He wanted her any way she would allow.

"You can't provide more...show? A big, strong man like you?" Marisha grinned at him. All hesitation was gone now. Her lips curved knowingly. "Bet it will take a little longer next time. That's fine with me."

That did it. From somewhere he found control. He gulped in air, feeling almost steady again. A sudden surge of—he couldn't even describe what it was—washed over him. He was strong. He could keep going forever.

Tim gazed at the bewitching woman bent over him. "You like it slower? Don't worry about later. Try me this time." He knew it was a challenge.

She smiled. A wicked smile. One that made him want to be free just so he could bite at that tempting lower lip. Well, maybe so he could bite some other things. But he could wait. She'd make it worth the time he spent—or the time before he spent.

"I will. Let's try something else now. Something for just me." She climbed off the bed and stood up.

What the hell? Where was she going?

Chapter Two

This couldn't be her. She had a strange feeling that her head was detached from the rest of her, watching a little dizzily as she stood in front of a stranger. This person who was almost her slicked her hands down her shoulders to her breasts and then teased already taut nipples. She was safe, of course. The stranger was tied and watching, just watching, as she slid her hands slowly down her stomach, pausing at her thighs.

"Go on." His voice echoed in the room, echoed through her head.

She was safe. She was in control. But why did she want to obey his command?

Marisha's fingers teased at the curls of her pubic hair. His chest rose and fell hard when her fingers moved inside, to where she was warm and very, very wet. Someone was gasping. Him. It was Lord Stephan, wasn't it? Even though she found it hard to get enough air suddenly, he was the one being affected by the sight. Right? Marisha spread her legs open a little more, went a little slower.

"You don't mind that I stopped...to do this?" Her voice was hoarse. One finger stroked between the labial folds, even as she spoke. She knew she couldn't stop.

"I do not mind anything anymore. Go on." His voice sounded ragged. "But you need not hurry. Let me enjoy this."

The gasping seemed to fill her body as Marisha teetered, her fingers toying, wetting, teasing. The first pangs of satisfaction began to fill her and she tensed, her eyes drifting shut. The tingles were mild at first, tugging at her clit and gradually spreading and warming her. She could feel her nipples pulsing.

"No! Look at me!" he almost shouted.

She struggled to open her eyes, panting now, and watched him watch her. She circled her nipples, teasing them the way she imagined he would if he were able. They were so sensitive it almost hurt to fondle them.

"I want to taste you, to touch you that way, Marisha." It was as if he could read her mind. His voice promised wonderful things. "I want my hands where you are most tender. I want my teeth to make you scream with want."

Marisha smiled, though her lips felt tight against her own teeth. She was close. Too close. He was tempting but—

"But not...yet." They chorused the words.

They were both sweating as she continued her fingering. Faster now, increasing the friction. Her pleasure grew watching his cock twitch in harmony with her body. His awareness of her increased her awareness of him and of herself.

He would be able to tell as she fell over the sexual cliff, plunged into the sharp joy of completion. She wanted him to know. Sharp pulsing in her body filled her up, made her shake. There was nothing gentle now in her need. When had she ever come in front of a stranger?

But disturbingly exciting as it was, she was safe. He was tethered by physical bonds, by their mutual pleasure. It was almost, *almost* like being alone. But better. Much better because he watched.

Almost. Oh, yees. Almost there. He made a harsh gasping sound, the sound she wanted to make. She just didn't have enough air left in her lungs to scream.

"Oh. Ohhhh!" Marisha moaned. She couldn't take any more. Shudders spread through her body.

Pain began to replace pleasure.

"Are you all right?" His voice changed, grew sharp.

She tried to speak but her head was pulsing now, almost as sharply but not as sweetly as her clit had been a moment before.

"*Damnation*, Marisha!"

She felt her body grow lax.

"Talk to me!" he roared.

Her eyes widened as she saw him bunch his powerful muscles, pull his huge shoulders forward with a hard jerk. His bindings snapped as if they were toys that he was too big to use.

My God, he'd been able to free himself all this time. She hadn't been nearly as safe or in control as she'd thought.

Was there a storm out? Or was it the concussion? For a moment she thought she saw lightning blaze up around him. Then he caught her tightly as she swayed.

"Are you ill?"

"No. Not really. I just want you this time." Marisha slid her hands around his waist. Rubbed herself against his body.

"Then I suppose you'll have to have me. I cannot stand much more. Not even for the bed."

His voice was rough—with lust or exertion or annoyance? It didn't matter. She inched her legs up. He grunted, then used that strength of his to hold her against him, to walk them both across the dark room and ease her against the cold stone wall.

"Good. I can't stand much more either." Marisha whispered the words against his ear and then licked the tip of that earlobe.

His cock answered her invitation immediately, pushing through her wet welcome as he entered her. Marisha gulped. Was she ready for this?

"All right?" he whispered, pausing.

She nodded.

She hadn't had anyone in a long time, so for a moment his cock was painful. But she was wet enough and he paused just long enough so that the pain eased, ebbed, turned into a delicious fullness within her and caused a pleasant friction as he began to move against her.

"Beautiful," he said.

She couldn't wait. She cried out. Once. Twice. His cock began to move faster, rougher, but it was already over for her.

She convulsed with pleasure. So good. Had it ever been this good?

Then the pain poured back into her body and the world went dark.

* * * * *

"Bastard!" Marisha opened her eyes to glare at whoever had just put icy cold water on her face.

"I'm sorry. But you had to come to. I'm calling the doctor."

Marisha moved her head slightly. It throbbed a little, but she felt better. Tim stared at her as if she was going to keel over any moment. She tried smiling at him.

"Don't. I'm fine. Pretty fine." Her attention was diverted as his hand reached out to touch her forehead. "Tim, what happened to your wrist?"

She stared at the angry red welt on it.

"I hurt it a little."

"When you took care of those guys after me?" She frowned at the puzzling injury.

"Don't worry, babe. You need to sleep. I'll keep an eye on you."

"You sound funny."

"You look funny. I think you're getting a black eye."

"Great." Marisha scowled even as her eyes began to shut once more. "I really needed to know that, Timmy."

* * * * *

His whole body was filled with adrenaline and frustration. No one had ever gotten him this excited and then fallen asleep. Asleep! He checked again. She hadn't passed out this time. Marisha was snoozing.

Damn her. She'd satisfied herself, scared the hell out of him and then left him here with a mixture of lust and terror and tenderness. He'd pulled out when she keeled over. After all, he was a gentleman. Sometimes. When a wild woman didn't make him forget. The gentlemanly gesture almost made him want to cry, though. He'd fit so damn well in her...

But Marisha was ill. He'd forgotten that for a little while. She looked fragile now. Not like the amazing seductress he'd watched less than a half hour before.

She needed protection and sleep.

Damn it.

Tim began to pace. If he were home, he'd probably use the punching bag for a while, lift some weights. But he was in Marisha's bedroom. She wasn't too girly in her decorating tastes, but she didn't have any weight bench around either.

What she had was cool sheets on her bed, the scent of female in her room, the hint of sex in how she was tangled in those sheets. God, he wanted it to be more than a hint.

What had he been thinking of? He couldn't trust her judgment right now. He was an idiot to have listened to her and taken her here. To promise her he wouldn't take her to proper medical help. To try to have sex with her. What was he thinking of? He ought to call the doctor now, while she slept. God, he hoped she was asleep and not—

"Tim?" Marisha whispered.

She stretched out a hand. Crooked a finger. The sheet fell, inch by tantalizing inch, off her shoulder. Just his luck. The sheet fell off one of her pretty breasts next, baring it. He knew he gaped at that display as if he'd never seen a woman before. She didn't cover herself again.

He shouldn't. He knew she was more asleep than awake, even though she was issuing a tempting invitation. She couldn't follow through on her gesture and he wouldn't let her even if she could.

But he slid into the bed with her, holding her against him. Nestled against her, he thought maybe he could finish off the night this way without climbing the walls. She sighed, her breath moving against his neck. One breast rested against his arm as if it had found just the right spot to lay.

Maybe he was insane.

She was soft, he was hard and he expected a restless night, to put it mildly. Instead his body adjusted to lying next to her as if it had been made to be there. That triggered a warning, somewhere off in the back of his mind. Before he could act on the alarm, he was pulled into the same deep sleep Marisha appeared to be in.

* * * * *

The dreams were a bitch, though.

They weren't about sex, which he had expected.

Nothing about that sleep was what he expected.

He was thrown into a vortex. A dark vortex where violent colors erupted in front of him combined with even more violent, not quite recognized images. Lights flared up before his eyes as he swayed into the whirlwind of sound and distortion.

Danger. He could feel it, almost palpably, on his skin. It menaced, then retreated, lurking, waiting to attack again. If he only knew where the danger came from—but it was everywhere and nowhere.

He wasn't afraid. Not for himself. But the danger threatening his woman terrified him. He had to keep her safe.

He awoke with a start, his hands scrabbling for a weapon. Tim blinked. He didn't remember just why he needed one but the need still felt overwhelming. The distant smell of sulphur made him gag. He had vague memories of fire pouring over his head and shielding Marisha with his body as scales lashed near them. Steel had blinded him as it whistled near his head. All the while he had moved—lumbered—as if weighed down.

He let his breathing slow back down to almost normal.

"That was a hell of a nightmare," Tim said aloud.

It was early daylight. He reached out to check how Marisha was...

She wasn't. The imprint of her body was still on the sheets. He could catch the scent of her body on the pillow. But she was gone.

* * * * *

When Marisha woke up this time, the room held light. Not much light, but light nonetheless. The tiny slitted windows let in just enough sunlight for her to adjust her sight and cautiously raise herself on one elbow. Something was different this time. She couldn't quite figure out what it was, but there was a new feel to the room. It seemed more solid, more real.

Marisha looked across the room and saw her medieval nobleman kneeling, the reddish-brown curls of his hair covering his face as he bowed his head. He raised his face after several long, silent moments, crossed himself and rose. He turned toward her, his face severe, half in shadow.

When he saw her staring at him, Lord Stephan smiled. For a moment the severity was gone. God, he looked handsome. Even mischievous, with the lift in his eyebrows inviting her to laugh along with him. Then the mischief was wiped away, along with the smile. He looked harsh and formidable.

"At last you have awakened." He didn't come near her. "I wondered if you would feel better this morning."

"I think so." If she was awake and feeling better, then she must not be hallucinating. Was that better?

"You gave me a delightful farewell." His hand finally reached out, brushing her hair from her face. "One I had never imagined any woman could give."

"Farewell?"

"I have work today. Wish me well?"

Marisha frowned. "Of course. But what kind of work?"

He didn't answer her. Instead he lifted her up. When he kissed her, his mouth suddenly, unexpectedly hungry and fierce, she opened her lips to him. She wasn't sure

that was smart, but she also couldn't help it. What he wanted, she wanted, too, even if she didn't quite understand the desperation in his kiss.

"You fell asleep last night. It was fascinating, what you did. But we did not finish." He whispered the words against her lips. "Now I have no time to take what I wish."

His hands reached down, lifted her breasts, brought her nipples up to his mouth. He kissed one, bit the other. Marisha's breath caught in her throat at the twin sensations, each different, each thrilling.

"Why don't you have time?" she asked. "If you are lord of the keep, you can make time do what you want." His hand reached her neck, spanned it easily. She lifted her chin to let him do what he wished. She could trust him not to hurt her.

One hand traced the pulse at her throat. He kissed there, too, then gave her shoulder a nip. His hair brushed against her skin, feeling like silk as he moved his head to attend to her. She shuddered.

"Would that it were so," he answered. "I have a dragon to slay before the sun comes over the mountains. Give me the sweetest of good-byes, Marisha. Distract me for a moment longer."

His tongue teased and sucked at the base of her throat as one hand pulled gently and then less gently at her hard nipple. Marisha shut her eyes, enjoying each nuance of pain and pleasure that he doled out. How had he become the master again?

She couldn't mind too much. He was awfully good at mastery.

Dragon?

"What dragon?" she asked.

She could believe in a concussion, hallucinations, maybe even a trip back to the Dark Ages if she had to. But *dragons*?

* * * * *

She wasn't in the room. Her clothing was on the floor and the door was locked. Her purse lay next to the clothes with the keys still inside. Damn it, where was she?

Danger. He'd felt it. He'd smelled it. Then he'd ignored it.

Fool.

Tim cursed himself as he searched the room yet again, looking for something. For anything.

"Marisha!"

Something was keeping her, hiding her. He could almost, *almost* figure out what it was from his dream.

He tried to laugh at himself. That made no sense. The dream itself made no sense. If any of his buddies ever knew he was thinking this way, they'd laugh themselves sick. He was just an easygoing guy who lifted some weights in his spare time. What made his imagination special?

But everything had changed with that dream.

Marisha had always thrown him off balance. He'd always fought to stay steady instead of admitting what she did to him. Somehow he was sure this time reaching her meant working with his instincts instead of fighting them.

Besides, she was gone. Vanished. He had nothing but elusive dreams to find her again. Who else would he call? What else could help? There was nothing and no one else.

He had to remember.

* * * * *

"Guard the keep. Let no one in until I return." Lord Stephan surveyed the crowd in the courtyard. Everyone was silent, tense. Someone sobbed softly. "God defend us."

He turned, grasped his helmet and then one of the other men called out to him.

"My lord!"

"Yes, Hugh?"

"What about the woman?"

Marisha suddenly realized everyone had turned to stare at her. The somber intentness of the crowd focused on her now. Her hand crept up to her throat. The question made no sense but she could tell she wouldn't like the answer. She didn't know very much about what was to happen next. Stephan hadn't deigned to explain further why he was going, but the rest of the crowd knew. Now she was sure that she was involved.

"There will be no woman. This I do alone." Lord Stephan was brusque.

Hugh shifted his feet, but refused to stay silent. "You need a woman. The dragon always wants a woman."

"You think me so weak that I need a woman to help defend me?"

"The dragon wants a woman. She is a stranger. Why not use her?" Hugh cleared his throat. "You know that if you fail, the next man will use her. And he will not be as likely to succeed. You are our best hope, my lord," he concluded, bowing his head.

Lord Stephan's strong face tensed even further. Finally he looked at Marisha. "Can you ride?"

She couldn't stay. Not with the people who were eyeing her as if she was a sacrificial lamb. A particularly plump and succulent one.

"If it's that or walk, I can."

He hauled her unceremoniously up on his horse. She fitted herself against him, holding on tightly and resentfully. He might have a nice back and ass, but she could think of better reasons to snuggle against his anatomy. When the horse started forward, she almost fell off.

"Hold on, serf."

They were back to serf and master again, were they? She tightened her grip, feeling chainmail underneath the loose cloak. All right. Marisha still hadn't been told what was going on, but she had the strong suspicion she was about to become dragon bait.

* * * * *

The wind was fierce. It matched his strange mood. He didn't ever remember feeling so predatory. His senses were changing, turning into something more animalistic. He felt bigger, stronger, more powerful. Invincible. Immortal. Soon the buffets of the wind meant nothing. He scarcely felt them against his skin.

His body felt clumsy. He wasn't used to moving this way. But with every step he grew more accustomed to the muscles bunching under his skin, more able to use them effectively.

He could smell her in the air, very subtly at first, then more and more keenly. Woman. *His* woman. There was danger still, but his hunt was ending. He'd almost found her. He was hungry and she was there. Waiting.

Danger again. It was there.

Danger and hunger. Fear and love. He could smell it all in the gusting air around him.

He shook his head and moved on.

* * * * *

The storm was getting uncomfortably close. Marisha buried her face against a not-very-clean tunic and gratefully let the rider share his cloak with her.

"Wait." Lord Stephan said suddenly.

"What?" She peered out from the cloak and saw an old woman standing near the horse, her hand raised to touch Lord Stephan's boot.

"Well. I have brought her. Is she a witch?" he demanded.

"Me?" Marisha squeaked. Startled, she looked down at the small woman.

Though the wind tossed her hair into her face as angrily as if the hair was a whip, the old woman smiled gently. Marisha felt oddly peaceful as the other woman turned to touch the hem of her dress. The two women waited, sharing a calm moment together. Marisha saw the woman's lips move but the wind snatched the words away.

Marisha leaned forward to ask what she meant but, too quickly, the woman stepped back. She shook her head.

"She may have bewitched you, but she is no witch," the woman said. "You may go with God, if you wish."

The wind and rain howled at her words, crashing down wet and savage on them all, and the powerful warhorse moved on.

* * * * *

She heard him murmuring words in Latin as they began to climb up the hilly path. She didn't know the words, but she knew Lord Stephan was praying again. The sounds were oddly familiar, strangely comforting in a terrifying world.

But gradually, the closer they got to the end of the road, the fainter his voice grew. The pounding in her head was drowning out everything else.

They had arrived.

She stood on the top of the hill. In the distance she heard a roar that didn't come from the storm. Tension flowed through her, tightening its knot in her stomach, making her legs tremble.

Where was Lord Stephan? She didn't know. Strangely, she didn't care. Had the old woman done something, somehow drugged or hypnotized her? A cloak of dreamy carelessness covered her, protecting her from her previous fear.

Whatever happened next was what she had waited for.

"Here I am."

"I have been waiting for you, too, Marisha."

The rain's fury changed, became gentler. She realized the wetness now caressed her face instead of savaging it. The fear was changing into something just as strong but more pleasant. She knew what would come. She wanted what would come.

The large shadow fell across her body.

"Now, Marisha."

Here be dragons.

The storm broke again, all around her.

He was strong. She was on her toes in moments, unable to move, as he lifted her up. A tongue entered her mouth, probing, flickering. The tongue had a strange feel to it—slightly scratchy. Not human. The tiny abrasions as it scraped against her mouth made her moan a little, deep in her throat.

"Finally. It took you much too long."

Limbs wound around her, supple and strong. She'd had a boa constrictor wind around her shoulders once, the snake's weight heavy enough to make her brace herself as it moved against her body. The sensation was similar this time.

Heat licked through her body, just as the tongue did. A limb wound down her stomach, tickled between her legs. It rested there, pressing against her mons. Marisha whimpered at the pressure.

"Are you afraid of me, Marisha?"

"Why should I be afraid?" She said the words aloud this time.

The pressure slipped around and around her body once again, teasing at her skin, before ending its journey as it slid delicately against her clitoris. The unusual touch

reached nerve endings she didn't even know she had. Marisha began to squirm, but the slow caress went on and on, refusing to hurry.

Finally, Marisha relaxed against his strength. She could wait to reach the final sensation the caress promised. Things felt pretty wonderful now. Then something wedged itself in the opening to her wet vagina, inching forward, slipping back. A slow, hypnotic rhythm. Everything would be all right, more than all right –

A wavelet of slow pleasure filled her, then another. She'd never come like this before, a soft, constant, very gradually increasing drumbeat of orgasm. She knew he could last forever doing this. She could teeter on the edge of explosion, but the tension only slightly increased with each jolt of pleasure she received.

"I will protect you!" The voice was Lord Stephan's, jarring Marisha from her daze.

"Nooo! Don't protect me!" But only her mind screamed the words.

She felt the blow against the dragon's body as if it was her own. Another blow landed, another jolt as the dragon curled its body around her tightly.

"Crush her not, cursed beast!"

The dragon let out a sound that was a cross between a rumble and a snarl.

"He's protecting me!"

Smoke swirled around them all, blurring Marisha's sight.

"Marisha. I love you – "

* * * * *

"I love you, I love you." The words rasped in and out, just the way his body pounded against hers. For a moment, he paused and they both panted against each other. He stared into her face, his mouth tight and angry as he said, "Damn you, I've spent years not saying that but I knew if I ever got into you – "

"Get into me again." Marisha clutched at him, gripped his waist with her legs.

She thought she heard a rumble of laughter as he thrust in again, his buttocks clenching against her heels as she pushed them hard up against his ass. She felt the slickness of his sweat against her legs as she pushed forward. She felt the hardness of his cock stroke deep and sure inside her.

"Oh yeah, oh yeah." He chanted the words into her ear.

His cock was driving her up, forcing her into a climax. She couldn't wait any longer, as she shifted even more clearly from dream to reality. From want into desperation. "Hurry." Marisha shuddered, her body losing control as she slammed hard into desire.

Flames swept over her, white-hot and consuming. As she clutched him and moaned, she heard his moan in return. He gave one last huge thrust and then collapsed on top of her. She could hear his pants mingle with her own as they tried to breathe again.

It wasn't until the fire cooled itself down, gradually, that Marisha let all the implications of real life hit her. Someone had made her come as hard as she ever had in her life. That someone was still here. She was holding onto a real man. This time he hadn't vanished.

Oh-oh. She knew who he was. Her fantasy was over. Time to total up the damage.

Marisha swallowed, then looked at her recent sexual partner. He was slowly pushing himself off of her, as if all strength had left his body. He cocked his head, letting her finish her survey. Marisha assessed him as if she'd never seen him before.

He had incredible stamina, if the way she felt was anything to go by. Muscles that hadn't been used this way since she couldn't remember when now twinged deliciously from prolonged lovemaking. Her lover had a big, gorgeous body. Chestnut hair that tumbled over his face from his exertion.

Beautiful blue eyes that were currently looking at her very warily.

This time the shape didn't shift as she watched. The eyes stayed focused on her—and hers on him.

This wasn't a hallucination this time. She was sure of that.

"Oh, shit. It's really you, Tim."

His eyes stayed wary, but his smile flashed.

"Welcome back, babe."

Chapter Three

He wouldn't leave. It was *her* frigging condo and he wouldn't leave. All he would do was shake his head and remind her she'd had a concussion. She knew she'd had a concussion. Why else would she have had sex—long, intense up-against-the-wall sex—with Tim Casey?

She paced in her bedroom. She could hear him, sitting just outside in her living room, watching TV and probably finishing off the last of the chocolate cake she'd brought home from Samantha's birthday party.

What had she done? *What had she done?*

She'd call someone. She needed advice. But who? Michelle said she was leaving. Sam was probably out celebrating her birthday—celebrating with people who didn't forget to give her a present.

She couldn't call Tim.

Marisha rubbed her forehead hard. There wasn't anyone else who might remotely understand what this whole day had been like.

Tim tapped on the door. "Are you hungry, Marisha?"

"No." Her stomach growled. "Well, not much."

"Good. I fixed you some soup. Chicken noodle."

She couldn't hide in the bedroom, refusing to talk to a man who had fixed her chicken noodle soup. She knew how Tim felt about cooking. This was the supreme sacrifice. He'd opened a can and turned on the stove just for her. Oh, hell. He really was a good guy.

She ought to change out of the T-shirt she used to sleep in. It barely covered her thighs and—then again, why? He'd seen everything by now. Why not let him see the real Marisha, with ratty T-shirt, no makeup and black eyes? That should put him off, if anything would.

"Come on in." Marisha tried to sound calm rather than grudging. "I guess it's silly of me to stay in here. We need to talk."

"Eat first. You need your strength. After all, you had a—" He opened the door, holding a steaming mug.

Oh my God. All he was wearing was his sweatpants. They were slipping down his hips. Another millimeter and she could see—

No. Steady. She was not thinking about sex with Tim.

"I know. I know." Marisha cupped her hands around the mug, absorbing the warmth. "It was just a concussion, not a death sentence. Calm down."

"I'm calm. I'm always calm. I knew you'd talk to me eventually. You play fair, Marisha." Tim rested one shoulder against the doorframe. The pants slid down a fraction.

"Yeah, but what we did went beyond playing." Marisha sipped. Salty, lukewarm soup prepared by Tim. It tasted wonderful. She had to be hungry. Tim could burn soup.

She winced. Maybe she'd been a little too hungry for a lot of things tonight. This was all her fault. Tim was still Timmy. *She* was the one who hadn't been herself. Tim ought to be the one not talking to her. She'd practically raped him.

"I sure hope so. It's not every night I let myself be tied up by a sex-crazed woman." Tim slid a hand up her arm to her shoulder, very slowly. "Laugh, babe. That was supposed to be a joke."

"Ha. Ha."

"Look at me. You act like this was some horrible mistake. Why? We're adults, we seem damned sexually compatible and we've known each other forever. What's the problem?"

He didn't sound put off. Why wasn't she annoyed about that? She needed to put him off. He was Tim. Just Timmy. Sweet and loving, but just Timmy.

"You're practically my brother!" Marisha spat the words out. "You're safe. Besides I wasn't even—" She put her hands to her mouth.

Tim's eyes looked even more wary.

"You weren't even what?"

Marisha stared at the floor.

"I wasn't even aware it was you when we had sex," Marisha whispered. "I was fantasizing. Weird fantasies, but fantasies."

"Me, too. Stuff I'd never fantasized about before in my life. Powerful stuff."

"Scary stuff."

"And sexy. Not just for me. For you, too." His hand rested, just briefly, on her breast. They both felt her nipple tighten immediately, even through the T-shirt. He moved his hand slowly away.

"I can't know I want you for sure. I mean, I was out of my head! I thought I was screwing everything from a medieval warlord to a dragon, for heaven's sake. I must be crazy. This situation is crazy." Marisha put the mug down carefully on her nightstand, refusing to look at him.

"Marisha, don't you understand? You made love to me. *Me*. For you, I am all those things. I can be all those things." His voice softened. "I even want to be all those things."

Oh God. He didn't understand. How could he?

"No, you don't! We're buddies. Okay, we had some really great sex despite being buddies. Now you've got that confused with some love thing. Tim, you're a sweetheart, but you probably fall in love all the time, and —"

"No. No, I don't." He spoke slowly and calmly, but Marisha knew when he was aggravated. His voice always dropped down an octave. "What kind of idiot do you think I am? I know when I'm in love with someone. I've known that since I was a teenager. In fact, I was in love with you then and I'm not sure I ever fell out of love with you."

Marisha took a step or two back and sat down, hard on the bed. If she wasn't careful, that foul headache was about to come back.

"You have to be wrong."

"Let me prove to you that I'm right. About everything."

"How can you prove that?"

* * * * *

How could he prove that? As he knotted the last tie around her wrist, he looked down at her. Her face was unreadable. He'd known Marisha for thirty years, give or take a few months, and he couldn't figure out what she was thinking.

But she'd agreed to be bound. That meant a lot. Marisha had never been one to let others give orders. Ever since her dad had died, she'd been that much more driven to keep things under control. He looked at her immobile body. Yeah, those ropes meant something.

Tim felt his cock jerk as he looked at her naked body laid out before him. She'd let him be the one in control this time. Her body was fantastic, but her surrender was even better.

Maybe it just meant she wanted to have sex. Maybe she figured she'd be turned off when she was totally conscious. Maybe she thought they'd both be.

Not a chance in hell, sweetheart. You wanted me before, believe it or not. You want me now. I'll make you want me.

He tried to ignore the blood heating up his cock and balls. He couldn't rush this. He needed to make all the right moves now. Start off gentle and slow, that had to be the right way. Don't scare her. Keep in control. He'd managed to do that, more or less, before this. He could keep on controlling himself.

That way he could remember to do what she wanted. After a few bouts, she'd want to keep on doing this. With him. Right?

Marisha was fire and intelligence and laughter and toughness. She was someone to cherish and enjoy and —

Marisha whimpered just a little. God. He knew it wasn't fear. His cock twitched again at the tiny mating sound.

She was female. Very, very female.

He couldn't just jump her and bury himself inside. He wasn't an animal. He looked at Marisha's thighs, her already wet pussy. Looked at her breasts and how quickly she was breathing. God, she even smelled like sex. He wanted to tear into her, to make her cry with pleasure and lust and want. He wanted to make her burn.

No. Not an animal.

Not quite yet, anyhow.

* * * * *

He looked so serious. Marisha almost wanted to laugh. Or cry. Tim never looked that intent. He was laid-back. He was easy-come, easy —

Well, maybe not that easy. Marisha felt him touch her face first and, as she shut her eyes against his fingers, she could feel her cunt beginning to cry for him. When he touched her there, and she knew, hoped, prayed he would, his fingers would be drenched.

He'd been amazing before. He'd been exciting. Her body wanted him back, even if this was the wrong thing.

His finger thrust into her slightly opened mouth. She sucked it in, bit the tip of it. She couldn't help herself. All right, her mouth was weak. The finger moved, teasingly, away. No. She still wouldn't say out loud that she wanted more.

Her nipples did that for her, puckering up at the first flick of his tongue against them. Marisha clenched her jaw tightly to keep from speaking or whimpering. She wasn't going to beg. Not even if his mouth was tracing provocative, swirling patterns against her belly and then sliding down to her inner thigh.

Not even if it reminded her of the dragon's clever tongue and what it had done to her. His breath was hot against her skin, scorching hot...

"Have you dismissed me so easily?"

"You're not real."

Sharp teeth nipped playfully at her tummy. The rough tongue caressed the tiny indentions left by his teeth, thoroughly tasting each mark.

"Real enough to make you squirm and beg. You're quite delicious that way. Especially all tied up."

Perhaps she should have expected the next entry inside her. But why? She could never have expected to be penetrated gently, thoroughly in the anus while the dragon's tongue rubbed against her pussy and clit. So many strange sensations all at once. Should she be horrified? Marisha knew she was getting more and more excited instead.

"I don't—" she tried to protest.

"Oh, you do."

A cock pressed against her lips.

Ass, clit and mouth together? Oh God. Tail, tongue and cock. This couldn't be Tim. What kind of kinky sex fantasy had she hurled herself into this time?

"If you struggle, just a little, just that way, it is more fun."

He was right. For a moment the tongue unfurled, flicked impossibly high up into her vagina. Dragon breath warmed and filled her. Marisha shuddered again, already anxious to come. The pressure inside her ass increased, a long thin tail snaking itself up inside. She sobbed against the large penis that pressed against her lips. Dragon tongue and tail together moved in unison, creating the most amazing friction.

She tried to suckle the large head of his cock but she was already too far gone. Instead she shut her eyes and fought against the waves of sensation dragging her deeper and deeper into mindless delight. But even her distracted small licks and nips swelled that cock to an inhuman size. A slow, burning drop of cum dripped out and sizzled against her lips.

She had to keep control. She wasn't even sure why anymore. But whenever she lost herself —

"Oh. Oh. Ohhhh."

The tail gave a particularly devilish twist.

Too late. Heat and excitement, confusion and joy filled her up and she could feel herself swirl away again. The dragon's three-fold assault on her only increased in tempo. Marisha pulled her head back, sobbing.

"I can't help it!" Marisha cried out. "Oh, God, I can't!"

* * * * *

Tim watched Marisha's face contort in what could be pain but what he knew by now was pleasure. He knew what she looked like when she was near climax. He knew what she did. His cock, held tight and hard in her, began to feel the quick squeezes that meant both he and Marisha were almost over the edge again. She was more than welcome to milk him dry.

Then he couldn't watch her anymore. He couldn't think anymore.

How the hell did she manage this every time? He could feel himself being turned inside out, fast and overwhelmingly. Slow? Gentle? To hell with that. God, she could make him almost faint when —

"I can't help it! Oh, God, I can't!"

"Me neither, baby. Oh God, me neither." Tim plunged in, as far he could go, sweat suddenly blinding him, need catching at his throat. His teeth clenched as his neck snapped back, every part of his body trying to push his cock in as deep as it would go. Inside her. He wanted to be so far inside her he'd never get out.

He couldn't wait. Oh God, he couldn't. But he could feel Marisha writhing underneath him. She couldn't wait, either.

He came so hard that for a moment he thought he truly had passed out. At any rate, it was a few minutes before he realized he was face down on Marisha's bed, gradually feeling his lungs start to suck air back in.

How did she do that to him? She'd been the one tied up. She was supposed to be dominated. But he was the one who had been destroyed. Right now he felt weak enough that just pulling himself up on his elbows seemed too much effort.

The grin on his face needed to be shared, though. She was going to have to at least admit what they had in bed couldn't be ignored. She wasn't going to dismiss him as young Timmy, who didn't know a good thing when he saw it. She couldn't tell him they weren't a good thing, the two of them. Slowly, almost painfully, he raised himself back up.

The bindings were there.

Marisha wasn't.

"Marisha, what are you playing at?" Tim felt a new constriction in his throat and lungs. He'd never seen red before. A few minutes ago he would've said he wasn't capable of it.

This time he was. Damn that woman.

"I'm getting tired of this!" he called to the empty bedroom. "I don't care if you can help it or not. This time I'm dragging you back and I'm keeping you here. Do you understand me?"

There was no reply. Where the hell was she this time?

Tim's fists clenched. It didn't matter where she was. He was going to get her. Once he found her...

He could feel the rage turning into yet another kind of haze, a type he was becoming only too familiar with. God, it was going to happen again. This time he willed it to happen. He was going to get his woman back.

* * * * *

When she opened her eyes, Marisha found her face buried against that none-too-clean cloak, her body held by iron-sheathed arms. She could feel the sun against her back, the horse's steady gait. Well, she hadn't gotten far.

"What did you do?" she demanded.

"You distracted the dragon. I suppose I cannot blame the beast. You are a huge distraction to any male." Lord Stephan sounded remote again, his ordinary noble self.

"You didn't...you didn't hurt him, did you?" Marisha swallowed hard.

"I hope so." The voice sounded grimly pleased. "I know not how much damage my sword can inflict on the creature, but he lay still enough when I took you from him. I did not tarry to confirm his death. It was my desire to see you safe first." She would have hit him but realized that would hurt her hand more than his chainmail.

"You're worse than he is! He wasn't after you!" Marisha felt tears begin to force their way from her eyes.

"He was after you. And after the rest of my people. He destroyed their crops and villages. He set fire to the countryside. He was a pest. 'Twas my duty as well as my pleasure to rid the place of him." The voice sounded affronted. "The rest of my people will be overjoyed to hear of his demise. Truly, they will be grateful to us both."

She'd helped destroy the dragon. She'd distracted him and he was dead.

"No! " She shook the arms that held her. "Let me go back and see how he is. He's not dead. He's just wounded."

"That I will not allow. A wounded dragon would be far too dangerous." The voice softened. "I will not let you go anyway. I lay claim to you, Marisha. I had no idea until we went on this quest how...how necessary you have become to me. The old woman was right. Methinks you have indeed bewitched me."

"I have not!" All she needed was the countryside deciding to burn her as a witch or something because she'd put a spell on their lord. Marisha paused. "What do you mean lay claim?"

"You will become mine. I shall care for you, protect you, order the servants to obey your commands. I want you with me forever."

Marisha scowled. "I'd be your personal bedmate until you got tired of me? Is that the best I get? I've had a lot of similar offers from other guys. No, thanks."

"I will never tire of you, woman. I swear. Marisha, do not frown so! I offer to you all that I can. Even if you were not..." He stopped.

"I wasn't what?" Marisha challenged.

She caught herself. Maybe he thought she was just some foreign serf, but how much better would it be for him to know what she really was?

"It matters naught. I am betrothed elsewhere. It need make no difference to us."

"Oh, yeah. Why should your betrothal mean anything? Damn! Men are all the same, no matter when they were born." Marisha sat up straighter against his arms, pushing to get away. His arms didn't budge. "Not that I was asking for anything from you in the first place except maybe a quickie. I don't want your protection or your keep or your servants or anything of yours."

His hold tightened on her.

"You know marriage is an alliance of houses and families. I met my future wife once when we were children. Marriage has nothing to do with l—" Lord Stephan stopped and looked pained. "Nothing to do with how we feel."

"What I feel is very, very annoyed." Marisha kept her voice steady.

Annoyed. Terrified for a stupid giant lizard that she'd conjured up all by herself. Scared. Lonely. Missing—well, she didn't have to decide who or what she missed most right now. Her old life. Her sanity. Ti— Her friends. All of her friends.

No matter how bad she felt, this autocrat wasn't going to try to put her life in order. She'd do that for herself.

"And not in the middle of some weird fairy tale, either!" Marisha said aloud.

She looked at the profile up above her. Brooding, stern, sexy.

"But I might stay for a while. Just until I figure out what happens next." She whispered it to the cloak but loud enough so that Lord Sexy Profile could hear.

Why did she remember the old woman then? The memory was vivid, so vivid that Marisha turned her head to see if she was actually there on the path.

There was no one, but Marisha thought of the woman's unheard words. She could almost hear them now in her memory, clearer than she had when they had met.

"...not what you think..."

Chapter Four

Lord Stephan was a man of his word. He'd told them to follow her orders and his servants obeyed. Marisha beckoned for more hot water and a woman promptly came forward with a steaming bucket. She dumped it in the tub with a splash, her mouth tight.

Lord Stephan's servants might obey her, but they didn't have to like it.

Marisha heard a faint scrabbling in the rushes below that meant something—she didn't want to know what something it was—was running underneath the covering.

Castles weren't all they were cracked up to be. Marisha made up her mind. She might not be able to argue with small rodents, but she could deal with larger pests.

"Anne!" Marisha called. "Come back here."

"Yes?" The sulky female inched a little closer.

It would be hard to do battle while bathing, but you didn't always get to pick your location for a fight. Marisha flung her wet hair back. "Fetch something to dry me."

Cloth was none too gently wrapped around her as Marisha stepped out. Damn, but it got cold in castles. And the cloth was scratchy and uncomfortable.

"Anne!"

"What?" The other woman drawled it out. Marisha could almost hear the word "bitch" added to punctuate the question. Okay, maybe that was too modern a word. She was probably a harlot.

"Lord Stephan would beat you for saying the word that way."

"Lord Stephan is my master and can beat me if he wishes. I would submit to anything he wanted." Anne glared back at her. "He can beat you as well."

"No wonder he has this stupid attitude about women." Marisha shook her head. "Anne, if I speak to him about this, all of us will be unhappy. Mind your manners and your tongue."

"'Tis not fair—" Anne stopped.

"What?"

"He could have any of us. Any of us. Why *you*? 'Tis bad-tempered, you are. You be not fair, like the ballads tell us a beautiful woman should be. Neither are you noble or accomplished or particularly young. I would wager coin you are no virgin. But Lord Stephan wants you. The dragon wants you. Other men in the castle have been eyeing you when Lord Stephan is not about."

Marisha stared at the blonde woman in front of her. Anne did look just like the fairy tales. The ones where the impossibly beautiful maiden came out of the scullery and won the prince. Marisha knew she came closer to one of the ugly stepsisters or witches.

Then Marisha shrugged. A sudden laugh hit her.

"Beats me. But that's what tells me this just can't stay this way forever. Sometime the fantasy has to end."

Anne looked puzzled, but before she could answer, a step at the door had the other women scattering. Anne looked up, gasped, and backed away.

Marisha turned her head, smiling. Only one person in this castle could produce that reaction.

Lord Stephan looked at her but she didn't see even a spark of interest. He was all grim command at the moment. Fine. Let him be that way. Marisha twisted the cloth around her a little more tightly, watched his eyes flicker down to where her covering raised up to show a hip and thigh.

Ha. Score another one for the serf.

"My lord?" She placed her fingers at the opening of the cover. "You want me?"

"I want to see you outside. " He looked her over again, very deliberately. "Dressed."

And he called *her* a peasant!

"Are you sure?" Marisha smiled.

The others in the room hushed. She didn't care about them. The tension between her and her medieval lord was what concerned her. Lord Stephan's eyes narrowed, focused only on her.

Very nice. That was just what she wanted.

"Get out, all the rest of you," he snapped.

The women began to crowd their way out.

"No. Wait." Marisha stopped them with one upheld hand. "Anne. Pour some more hot water. The rest of you may leave."

"Are you contradicting my orders, woman?" Lord Stephan asked, very softly. Very dangerously.

"I am improving on your orders, my lord." Marisha began to slide the wrapping down, bit by bit from her shoulders. "And providing a lesson to someone."

He frowned, then slowly turned his head to the rest.

"Go. Did you not hear us? All of you but Anne."

The others ran. Marisha was very aware of their audience, of the scrabbling sounds the servant was making to obey her command. They sounded like the vermin underfoot in the castle floor.

In her haste, Anne stumbled with the bucket, the steam rising up from it.

"Don't spill it, Anne." Marisha said.

Anne poured the heated water into the tub. Marisha tested it with a toe.

"It's very comfortable, my lord. Will you join me?" She dropped the damp covering and slowly eased herself back in the water. One knee hooked over the side of the tub, then the other. She knew what she looked like.

He grunted and then began to unhook his sword belt.

"Let Anne help you, my lord. It will be much faster that way." Marisha couldn't believe the purr in her voice.

He might not have known what she was doing. He was used to being dressed and undressed by servants. But Marisha knew. Anne knew. That was what mattered right now.

Marisha found something exotic, something oddly sexual in watching another woman strip him naked. Female hands over hard masculine muscle. Another woman unveiling the erection Lord Stephan had waiting for her. Just her.

Naked, he leaned over the tub and growled, "Are you satisfied, wench?"

"Not yet. But Anne may go." Marisha forced herself to stop looking at him and turned to the silent woman holding her man's clothing. "You're finished here, Anne."

"Yes...mistress." The woman muttered the last word. But she did say it.

"Thank you, Anne."

Before the door shut on Anne, Lord Stephan had slid into the large tub with her.

"Are you seeking to show your power over me, woman?" He lifted one hooked leg and bit into her thigh. "Was that your lesson?"

Marisha quivered as his tongue began to stroke where he'd inflicted the bite.

"Yes. No. I wanted to...provide some discipline to someone." She groped for the words as he moved his head and began on the other thigh.

"Ah." The amused whoosh of air brushed across her clit. "To me, perhaps?"

"No. You're welcome to do what you want to me." Marisha lifted her hips, let him bury his head in her cunt. This time she wrapped her legs around his shoulders. "I'm yours. This time."

When he raised his head to respond, she could have cried. She ached for him. She wanted him – his tongue, his cock, his fingers, *anything* – this minute.

"As, apparently, I am yours. I had no intention of starting this now, Marisha. But you make me very, very weak." One finger delicately stroked along her clit. Marisha felt her legs shake.

"Yes," she managed.

She slid her body against his, fitted them together. This time his cock slipped into her snug warmth as if it knew the way perfectly.

It did. It did. Per. Fect. Ly.

In. Out. The soft splash of the water echoed their movements. Until the soft splash began to slap hard against them as they moved faster. Until it was a raging typhoon in the tub.

Marisha watched the tendons of her lover's neck tighten as he strained forward. She had lost her voice somewhere. She couldn't cry or moan.

She could just feel. His cock caressed her cunt, his body pressed hers against the tub's side. Pleasure. Wet. Fast. Easily sliding in. Reluctantly sliding out. She couldn't breathe anymore, she...

She screamed just as he groaned.

"M'Lord! M'Lord!" A boy's high voice squeaked outside the door. "The dragon comes again! What do we do?"

Lord Stephan raised his head wearily. Marisha saw him blink, gradually process what the voice had said.

"I will be there in a moment." Lord Stephan pushed himself up with powerful arms. He looked at her, almost resentfully. "You made me forget."

* * * * *

He was in a foul mood. A real lordly temper. Marisha kept her head turned toward the horizon, refusing to acknowledge what sounded very much like the stamping of feet.

She kept her eyes trained on the smoke billowing out in the distance.

"He's at it again."

"Of that I am fully aware," Lord Stephan growled. "And worse than before, he is."

"Nothing like an angry, wounded dragon to mess up the crops and villages." Marisha thought she could hear a roar picked up by the faint breeze on the turret.

"None of my dark-haired females are safe. Nor any of the men if they try to stop the beast. My villagers are terrified."

"Ah."

"He looks for you, Marisha. I know it. "

I do, too.

"He samples the women, singes them with his breath and moves on. Before, he would leave with one of them and give us peace for months. Now he is dissatisfied with what he finds."

"Well, you could share me."

"What?" The voice thundered and Marisha winced.

Damn. This was supposed to be her fantasy. Why did she have to conjure up such a possessive male?

"Well, there is another answer." Marisha shrugged, still looking out at the distance. "Let me out of here and I'll go find him. Or he'll find me. You already have me standing here as bait. Why risk the castle?"

"No." The response was what she expected. The next words surprised her. "You look like a caged song-bird, Marisha. Yet you have only been here a day. Is this keep so terrible? Am I? Do you not believe I shall keep you safe?"

He kissed the back of her neck. She tried to ignore the little thrill she got from his gesture. His hand rested on her shoulder.

"No." She repeated the word. "It hasn't been so bad here. But—it has been a day, hasn't it. A real day. Time isn't all jumbled up anymore."

"What?"

The hours were stretching out, just like they were supposed to, all in order and logically. She wasn't flashing in and out of consciousness, jumping here and there.

But she was in the wrong place. This time she might truly be stuck in the wrong place.

"'Tis patient I have been with you, Marisha. Unusually patient." He moved closer to her, pressed against her back. "I thought you needed time to become accustomed to us. To learn who your master is."

"What? I have no master."

His cock pressed between her buttocks. As if she would simply submit, just like that, in public!

Then again, she had to admit something about the idea was...intriguing.

"You smell sweet, Marisha. I appreciate that you were willing to bathe to make yourself ready for me."

"Now, just a minute—"

"Bend over, Marisha."

She wouldn't. He might be able to order any other female for miles around to do that, but she was different.

He kissed the side of her neck. Then he bit her shoulder, hard. The pain was as wonderful as the pleasure.

She wouldn't do this. She wouldn't...but things were growing hazy again, swirling slowly around the edge of sight.

The dream-like quality to her vision came back, slowly, as she bent herself over, offered herself to him. In slow motion she pressed her arms against the cool gray of the stone walls.

Cold walls. Burning hot cock. Heat that pushed its way past her thighs, against the lips of her pussy. She sighed. He groaned as he rested there, not penetrating, but close enough to make them both know the feel of each other.

"I can tell you want me, despite your protests." His hand reached down, teased at her already swollen clitoris. Marisha twitched against him.

"I can make you tell me how much you want to be mastered."

She could hear Lord Stephan's words, the catch in his breath as he tried to speak calmly. He wanted to master her as much as she wanted mastering. But it might be fun to have to wait. Just a little.

"Make me, then."

A sudden smack on her ass made her buck. The sudden pain made her pussy even wetter. His hands held her in place when she would have straightened up.

"That was for suggesting I could ever share you," his voice whispered into her ear. "Stay where you were, woman."

"Like I said before, make me." Marisha struggled, even though she knew he could pin her there easily. Even though she *wanted* him to pin her down.

She heard him groan as his cock slid once more against her. She heard the angry rumbling roar of the dragon once again, closer than before.

"You know I can!" He sounded more pleased at her defiance than angry. He was probably tired of women like Anne.

"...do what you must..." Marisha could hear the woman's words swirling in her head as the man behind her thrust suddenly, frenziedly against her.

"...do what you must...not what you think..."

"Make me stop thinking then," Marisha said. "Because my brain tells me this isn't the right thing to do."

"Other things tell me your body knows this is right." Lord Stephan's voice sounded strangled behind her.

Oh God. She did want him. She wanted his hands holding hers against the wall as he rammed himself inside her this time. She wanted his breath to hiss sharply against her ear. She wanted his cock. She knew exactly how it would feel, thrusting hard and urgent inside her. So close. She was so close to submitting.

"I have to have you, Marisha. You truly have bewitched me. I cannot get enough."

She sighed, feeling herself ready to tumble once again into the delight and confusion that crept around them. She could see the mist of unreality sweeping over the two of them, coupled together. It was like smoke, clouding her vision. Or was that passion?

"No." Marisha dragged the word out of her throat.

* * * * *

It wasn't passion or unreality. Or no more than usual. It really was smoke.

Marisha raised one arm against the sudden heat as a blast of fire shot over the castle walls. A dragon's mouth propped itself up against the wall and showed sharp teeth in a sly grin.

"What do you think you're doing, Marisha?"

"Almost succumbing to a fantasy."

The light blinded her as the next fiery wave hit the castle walls. She was hoisted up by a large tail. The roar sounded quite grumpy this time.

"Wrong answer, I guess." Marisha said aloud. "But — "

Chapter Five

"Damn straight that's the wrong answer," Tim growled.

"Whoops. I thought you were —"

He snarled this time. "No. I'm not. I'm tired of being a fantasy. I'm real, Marisha! Flesh, blood, heart."

"I know. I never thought of you as imaginary."

"I damn near killed myself getting you back this time." Tim almost knocked over the mug she'd left on the nightstand as he strode toward her. "Don't you ever do that again!"

Marisha blinked. This was her room. She had made it back after all. Or had Tim done it for her?

"You make it sound like something I can do at will. You have just as much control over it as I have! You're the one who keeps making love to me and getting me all hot and — and — confused."

Tim stopped pacing. She thought he looked much less angry all of a sudden. Marisha relaxed just a little. Seeing Tim that mad was almost as frightening as her trips into Wonderland. After all, it was just as unusual. "I get you hot and confused?"

Marisha looked at his jaw line rather than his eyes. He had a nice, strong jaw. He needed a shave, maybe, but he looked sexy that way...

No. She was not thinking Tim and sex now. She had to put a stop to all this. "Well, I was confused to start with."

"So I just get you hot?" Tim was starting to sound more pleased than angry.

"Not necessarily." Marisha crossed her arms, hugged them tightly to her body. "You don't really do much for me when I'm in my right mind. I was hallucinating. "

"While you were hallucinating you were on my body. You seemed to like it." Tim took a half step closer. "Admit it."

"I've never had a problem with your body." Marisha took a full step back and he stopped.

"What do you have the problem with, then?"

"You're too young."

"Too young for *what*?" Tim's voice lowered again to his annoyed mode.

God help her, she was starting to think that was sort of cute.

"For anything serious. For anything stupid. For anything to do with me." Marisha bit her lip.

"Why, Marisha? Do I act that immature around you? Maybe I do. Maybe you harp on our ages so much that I start feeling too young. But I don't think that's the real reason—" His cell phone rang. "Damn it!"

He pressed the button as if he wished the cell phone had a jugular vein he could choke.

"It's not you, really," Marisha said softly as he listened to his call. Maybe he wouldn't even hear her. "It's me. My problem."

"I have to go. Damn it." Tim slammed the cell phone back onto his belt. "Emergency job. Marisha, *what's* your problem?"

Of course he heard. She was going to admit to something she'd only just realized and would rather not discuss and he heard every word.

"I don't want to lo—to be involved with you. I don't."

"I—damn it, will that phone ever shut off?" Tim tapped his finger on her chin. "This is going to be one of those long discussions, isn't it? I can't do that now. Not that I don't want to..."

"Riiiiight."

"All right, maybe I don't exactly want to. Discussing isn't what I do best. But I need to know, so hold on to the thought, Marisha. I'll be back. You know that, right? You're not sneaking away from me this time."

"I wasn't sneaking—" Marisha began.

He took her by the shoulders and kissed her. It was an open-mouthed, slow, tongue touching, pussy melting kiss. When he was done, she let her head loll for a moment on his shoulder, hoping her tongue didn't loll out at the same time.

"You're staying here. And you aren't going to give me any more bull about not getting hot for me." He gave an evil chuckle. "Babe, you're burning for me."

"Jerk."

"I burn for you, too, Marisha. Remember that while you chew on that pretty lower lip of yours and try to puzzle things out while I'm gone."

Marisha took her teeth out of her lip. Tim's alpha male routine was annoying her almost as much as the fact that Tim knew exactly what she planned to do while he was gone...

"Thoughts of you won't even cross my mind," she said. "I'm going to pack today, putter a little bit, make sure my head injury—the one that made me act the way I did before—is over. Completely over. In fact, I believe I'll take a shower. With actual hot, running water."

"Go ahead. I'll be back as soon as I can. You still won't be through with me. Nothing is over."

He walked out with a definite swagger.

And he was definitely a jerk.

* * * * *

Marisha didn't see how quickly the swagger stopped once he left her sight.

He knew Marisha. She was going to do her very best to convince herself that she was right. God knows where she would take them next.

How the hell was he going to save her next time? He didn't even know how he'd done it before.

"Don't do it, babe." Tim whispered the words as he bounded down the condo steps. "Just don't."

* * * * *

Almost. She could almost sense the shimmer of a scaly tail at the periphery of her sight. The faintest of roars echoed in her mind. Perhaps a flash of light against chainmail.

No.

Marisha sighed.

Nothing. She couldn't conjure up the images anymore.

She turned off the hot water that was finally turning lukewarm. She couldn't even pretend that the shower was a storm, pelting water down on her.

How do you explain to someone you've obviously had intense sex with that you hadn't really wanted him when you screwed him? Tim wasn't the person she longed to be with. Lord Stephan was. The dragon was. It might be sick, but she lusted after them both.

Not Tim.

Why? Why some snotty lord or a mythical beast? Why?

"I can't help my fantasies," Marisha whispered.

Her bang on the head had released all her inhibitions. That had to be the answer to all this. Or was that too easy?

Her head ached, just a little. Maybe she would take a short nap—to rest up for her next argument with Tim. If there was just a little tiny hope that she might dream of her two favorite sex partners...well, she was entitled to a little fun.

* * * * *

Thump!

The door fell off the hinges as Marisha sat straight up in bed. She stared at the dragon, who was spitting small furious fireballs. Black eyes stared into hers. Glittering alien eyes. Alien eyes that held a hurt in them that she understood.

"You came here!" Marisha gulped. "How did you manage that?"

With a sudden roar, the dragon twisted, as if in agony. "*Marisha!* This may kill me but I had to see you."

My God, what had she done? She'd wanted to see him but not like this. Not in her world, where he was so out of place. He was already fading, like a ghost, in front of her. Only the thick smoke was tangible.

"Wench! Where are you?"

Stephan too? He sounded ill.

Black smoke covered them all as Marisha groped her way toward the voices. Through gaps in the swirls of haze, she saw sparks flying from the dragon's body as it shrank.

No. No, no, no.

Then she saw a shimmer of light rest over the scales. Red lights skipped and blinked over the dragon's body. The light danced and transformed and...she saw a man. His prone body draped over Lord Stephan's.

Then the bodies began to merge.

"Please, please, please tell me I am hallucinating here," Marisha muttered out loud. "And please tell me I'm going to come out of this. That both of them are going to come out of this."

She covered her eyes, changed her mind and held her stomach instead. She couldn't help watching but she wasn't sure her churning insides could handle what might happen. The bodies entwined themselves then, with a sudden slurping sound, the two became one body.

A transformed body, but one that she knew.

Marisha fell on her knees over the one remaining body. He was lying so still. No. She wouldn't dream this. She couldn't. If he died –

A tall, muscular, frighteningly familiar body. A breathing body. Slowly the body climbed to his knees and looked at her. He glared at her, actually.

These weren't alien eyes. These were familiar blue ones.

Thank God.

* * * * *

"Yeah? So who made love to you last time?" Tim spaced the words out carefully, forcefully.

"You. The dragon. The lord." Marisha paused. "You, I guess."

"Who gets you hot?"

Marisha giggled. If only he knew how hot he had been getting her! Wait. Marsha sobered. If he had been there, he knew about the flames and smoke. How much did he really understand?

"All of you. The dragon, Lord Stephan and, well, you. You don't even know what I mean. I must sound like a lunatic."

"If you think I don't know what you mean after tromping around smelling of ashes and seeing women scream at the sight of me, then you *are* a lunatic."

"What?"

"I'm not repeating that sentence. I feel too stupid as it is."

"You were —"

"I wanted you back, Marisha. As a dragon if that's what it took."

"You shouldn't have sampled the other maidens then. Or hurt them, of course."

"*Other* maidens?"

"It's an expression. I'm as much a maiden as any other woman you go out with. Don't get cute. The point is that you were the one trying them out."

"Dragons don't have the best eyesight when it comes to picking out one maiden from another. I had to get close enough to smell and — ah — taste them."

"Clever, Tim."

Tim's exaggeratedly innocent look faded. "No. I'm not. I've done everything I know to do to make you want me, Marsha. Everything I can do. Things I can't do."

"I know."

"Things have changed now. There was a time not too long ago that I would have put up with anything you wanted for the chance to have sex with you. I would have fooled myself that I could make do with whatever you wanted to give me. I was that young before. I was desperate enough to act like a puppy around you, accepting anything you wanted to give me."

"Anyone who calls me 'babe' when you know I hate it is *not* acting like a pup — and you aren't that desperate now that we have had sex?"

"Don't. You know the real answer. Or you should. Now that we've finally made love, it's clear we're too important together to do things half-assed. You know that, Marisha, don't you."

He wasn't asking. He was telling.

"Yes. Sort of. You're important to me. You know that." She muttered the words, sulkily, not pleased that she had to go even that far. Why was Tim forcing this on them both? Why was he insisting she make her inevitable refusal so harsh? "But why can't we just go back to being friends, Tim?"

Tim laughed. "You know why." He gripped her shoulders so hard she could tell she'd have bruises by tomorrow. "Marisha, I know you can't make someone care. But you *do* care about me, damn it! Why won't you admit it to us both?"

"I *can't*."

"You *won't*. I want to know why. Marisha, you owe me."

She probably did. Even if she didn't, it was Tim. She had to answer him when he needed to know so badly.

She could do this. Even if she was getting nervous enough to start peeing her pants. "Tim, I haven't been with anyone for a long time. I mean anyone. And I haven't ever been with anyone I ever really cared about. Not like I care about you. I—I'm afraid." Marisha got the words out. "I don't like being afraid."

"You've never been afraid of anything."

"Yes, I have! I'm still afraid. Gut-deep terrified."

"Babe, don't—" Tim took a breath. "I mean go on."

No more stalling. Neither she nor Tim could stand it any more. "I had a family. I had people I loved and who loved me. Then I didn't. That hurt, Tim. It hurt more than anything you can imagine. I think having Dad die wasn't nearly as hard as seeing my mom change toward me. I don't ever want to do that again. I'd rather have nothing than have it taken away from me."

"You didn't lose me."

"Huh?"

"Wasn't I here? I stayed around 'til you pushed me away after the funeral. I came running whenever you wanted me back. You never lost me. I'm your family. Hell, I've probably been yours ever since you made me play house when I was a kid and told me I was your husband."

Marisha blushed. "Don't remind me! I made you go to bed with me. But that was just because you were the only boy in the neighborhood."

Tim leered. "Even then I could see the possibilities."

"Stop!" Marisha hated blushing.

"Babe, you'll never stop loving me and you can't change that. You could change our sleeping arrangements, that's all. I'd like to do more than play house now."

"You make it sound very simple." Marisha found herself wanting to smile. Why didn't his reminder of their childhood make her feel sisterly anymore?

"It is simple. Marisha, whether you kick me out and pretend we mean nothing to each other or you let me back into bed and we make up for lost time...we love each other."

"Like a bro—" she began, weakly. Tim merely smiled and looked—just looked—at her. Hot as the dragon's breath. As masterful as Lord Stephan. As loving as...as he always was. Always had been. Her breath sped up. Her cunt tightened.

"Like a what, Marisha?"

This was really, really scary to say. But Tim was there. He'd make sure she didn't see this out alone. He'd always been there.

"Not like a brother and sister."

"God, I hope not." Tim took his shirt off, let her look him up and down. What a beautiful chest the man had. She loved those pecs. She loved the smooth shine of his skin. She loved his nipples. Oh, God. "Otherwise we could get arrested for doing what we're going to do."

"We could get arrested for what we're going to do even if we weren't related." Marisha's smile began to hurt her face but she couldn't let it go. "Is it your turn to be bound or mine?"

"I think we need both hands free for this one." Tim began to unbutton her shirt, methodically, with his mouth. "I'm thinking this may be closer to hand-to-hand combat than a nice civilized bondage scene."

This was her laid-back Tim? Marisha felt his tongue loosen the button over her bra.

Her laid-back Tim who could transform himself into...who would risk his life for...

He pulled her legs up over his shoulders and looked down. His grin, all teeth and slyness, reminded her of her dragon.

God, he was all of them. All of them and more.

His finger probed inside her pussy, pulled back out with agonizing slowness. She watched him taste the finger, thoroughly, his eyes half-shut with pleasure.

"Babe, you taste so good. I want to eat you up."

She could feel her fingers itching to touch. She kept them at her knees just for the pleasure of thinking about how much she was going to enjoy running her hands on his face and his stomach and his cock and his balls...

"I think you're going to have to wait your turn, Tim. I'm older. I get to go first."

"I think you're not in any position to tell me anything, sweetheart." He bent and plunged his tongue, fiercely, into the center of her.

Her back arched up as she shrieked. She almost came that second, would have come that second if he hadn't pulled back.

She almost cried.

"I think you're mine now. And I think either I'm moving in with you until we get married or you're moving to my place."

"You're blackmailing me."

"Mmmmm." His tongue lazily played just outside where she really needed him to be.

"Fine. My place. It's bigger."

"I need room for the weight bench."

"The — c'mon, Tim, just a little more — clean up the storage room?"

"Maybe."

"Harder, Tim. Please. I'm begging. You know how you hate that."

"I could get to like it. You sound so good when you beg."

"I already agreed to marry you. If you really want an unemployed older woman. One who might have to relocate to get a new job. Oh, God, Tim. What more do you want? Please!"

"I want you. You. I want you crying and begging and coming for me."

"Anything. " Marisha could feel the tears forming as he danced over her clit, lightly. "Oh, God, Tim, *anything*."

"Tell me you love me and I'll make you ring like a bell, babe. Say it, woman. Time is up."

"You don't have to make me say that. I do love you."

He sucked delicately and she jumped. He looked up again.

"About time, Marisha. I thought I'd be an old man before you said it out loud." Then he resumed his devilish activities.

"Oh Lord, Tim!" Marisha twisted under his mouth. "I do."

"Say it again. Not I do. The whole thing."

She whimpered, tried to form the words as his teeth gently fastened over her clit. That didn't hurt, not quite, but if he wanted to hear her make incoherent noise, he had picked a great way to do it. Marisha's moan rasped in her throat this time.

He stopped long enough for her to catch her breath and focus back on him. She realized Tim was staring down at her as if he was unable to do anything else. Oh yeah. That was a turn on for her, too.

His eyes looked as if they couldn't stop staring at her body. Her arousal was driving him insane. Watching him watch her was making her even crazier. It was the perfect circle.

She touched her nipples, making sure they were puckered and inviting. Tim's eyes glittered. He felt invited, all right. She could almost come just from watching him fight himself.

"God, I love your tits," he said.

"They love you, too," Marisha answered.

"I want to fuck you so bad — " Tim stopped.

He cleared his throat. "Don't try to distract me. Say it again, Marisha," he demanded. "We can fuck after that."

Oh, God. Now *he* sounded dark and dangerous. She wasn't sure who was in control. She didn't know. She didn't care. Everything he said or did was making her body into one tight knot of want.

She felt his finger slipping into her ass, just the way she had done for him not long ago. The slight invasion first, then the fullness, the tender squeezing stroke, all of it made her whimper again.

Oh yes. Everything. She wanted him everywhere, his hands and mouth all over her. When he was done, she knew his cock would be next. She'd come and come and come...

He might have to physically bind her next time, to keep her from scattering all over the room in a million gobs of lust.

That would be okay, she thought dimly through the haze, because Tim could make her break into pieces and then put her back together again. Because he loved her. Because he could feel what she felt.

She thought she heard him crying, too, as he drove her hard and fast toward oblivion with his tongue and fingers. Everywhere. He was everywhere. The familiar haze began to fall over her. But this time she knew where she was. She didn't want to leave. She wanted to stay right here with Tim.

Tim. Always Tim. Just Tim.

"I love *you*!" She managed to say what he wanted just a half-second before she fell apart, crying. A second before his arms were around her and his body was in her, holding her together. Forever and ever. Happily ever after.

THE JEWEL
By
Sherri L. King

Chapter One

Samantha Gaynes tripped over her own feet and went crashing down in a boneless heap onto her couch. Her head swam dizzily and she let out an unladylike burp, grimacing when the after burn of too much Southern Comfort stung her throat. What a way to spend her Valentine's Day. What a way to spend her birthday! Drunk, unemployed, lonely and horny as all get out. It was shameful and pathetic—she knew that—but that was one good thing about being alone. There was no one around to see you when you finally hit rock bottom.

She had hit the bottom so hard that she'd fallen straight through it and found an entirely new level of low.

How could she have been so stupid—to think that the worst wouldn't happen and she'd lose her job? Everyone knew that their company was giving thoughts to downsizing, but she'd foolishly held out hope until the very last. Of course she had known better than to ignore the warning signs. She should have been putting money aside for such an emergency, should have been scouting for another job just in case. But she hadn't. She was flat broke and without prospects. The job market was pure hell because of the recession—especially for anyone in her field—so all she had to look forward to now was perhaps a job at a fast food restaurant to help her earn some living money until something better could be found.

Sam groaned as her head spun out of control again and berated herself for her pessimistic thoughts. It wasn't like her to look at the dark side of things. Her pathetic attitude must be from the affects of too much drinking. Feeling sorry for herself would get her nowhere—she knew that—and as soon as she sobered up she'd put all of these lugubrious thoughts behind her and start looking for a job. Surely there would be something for her out there in the great wide world; she just had to keep her chin up and her hopes buoyed with happy thoughts.

But first...she needed to pass out.

Her eyes became heavy and her sight grew dim. Her head swam round and round, making her feel as though she were riding a loop de loop roller coaster ride at an amusement park. At times the feeling was almost euphoric and utterly delicious—at others it made her stomach churn and go queasy. She held a shaking hand to her head, closed her eyes and laughed drunkenly. What a way to end a perfectly horrid Valentine's Day.

With one last little burp she lost consciousness.

* * * * *

Hot breath spilled over her swollen nipple just before a tongue rasped over it with torturous slowness. Samantha couldn't help but arch up against that mouth, silently urging it to take her nipple deeper, to ease the empty ache that had been inside of her for what seemed an eternity. It had been so long since she had felt the touch of a man. Too long. She had almost forgotten that ripe, heavy throb of attraction and desire that could instantly drug her body and mind more thoroughly than any hard liquor.

Countless long, powerful fingers stroked her from neck to toes, as if a hundred different hands were running over her. It was impossible for her to focus on any one area of her body as it was bombarded with so many different sensations all at once. The mouth at her nipple roved upward and pressed a slow, firm kiss against her already panting mouth, testing her response until she moaned into it with rising need. Fingers ran through her hair, sifting the strands over and over again, making her scalp tingle oh so pleasantly. The mouth on hers moved up to press against her hair and she sighed and stretched, the better to savor each and every delicious sensation that was being visited upon her body with such patient carnal knowledge.

Hands forced her thighs apart with immovable strength and she gasped. Immediately countless fingertips moved to spread her vaginal lips and stroked her wet, swollen flesh until her hips were bucking, hungrily seeking more of the sweet caresses. Gentle tugs at her pubic hair had her trembling, and the pulling and pinching of her swollen clit made her cry out shamelessly in her passion. Her nipples were hard as diamonds and straining toward the heavens as yet more hands caressed her there, tugging them mercilessly until they were as plump and rouged as juicy berries.

Sam wanted to open her eyes, to see the phantom lovers that were pleasuring her so thoroughly, but was afraid that in doing so her dream would disappear before it could reach the conclusion that she so longed for. Her mind was still fogged from the consumption of too much alcohol and surely that was why her dream seemed so real, for never had her sober imagination produced such a heady sexual vision or dream. Better to keep her eyes closed for now and savor the fantasy while it lasted, than to tempt fate and wake up too soon.

It was so erotic, the way her body was being fondled and explored by the many hands that roved over her. No part of her body was left untouched. Even the tender flesh between her toes was caressed in turn. When the feel of a hot, wet tongue laved her open and quivering sex she keened and undulated her hips against it, aching for more. The tongue lingered for a moment then pulled away and she groaned her disappointment aloud.

A deep voice chuckled and her body was spun over so that she lay on her stomach. The unexpected move caused her eyes to open in shock, but she may as well have been blind for all she could see. It was black as pitch around her, darker than a foggy, moonless night. Her senses reeled anew until she closed her eyes once more, and rested her forehead on the pillows beneath her.

Hands roved over the flesh of her back and squeezed the globes of her bottom until she was sighing and moaning once again. She dipped her back, raising her hips and presenting herself more fully for the convenience of her sexual tormentor. Again came that deep chuckle and the hands at her rear spread her cheeks wide so that the tongue could lave the puckered moue of her anus.

Rearing up on her elbows, she screeched – whether from indignation or surprised pleasure she couldn't have said because she felt both emotions with equal strength – and tried instinctively to move away. The hands that anchored her bottom would have none of that however and a gentle slap was administered to reprimand her for the attempted withdrawal. The tongue moved away, but the hands that held her did not falter from their handle on her cheeks. Instead they lifted her higher and yet more hands moved in to caress her exposed labia and anus.

Only her head and arms rested on the couch now, so that her breasts swayed beneath her as she was moved this way or that to better accommodate her phantom lovers' wills. Her entire body, front to back, head to toe, was caressed over and over again until she was weeping for culmination. Her body felt swollen, heavy and moist. It was all she could do to keep from screaming with each pass of those fingers and lips over her body, so sensitive had she become to the tiniest of touches. Never before had she been so completely aware of her own flesh, so receptive to each and every nuance of erotic sensation that was visited upon her.

This was lust. This was passion. This was pure, animalistic need...and god help her she wanted more of it.

Then, just when she thought that surely she would be driven mad with her own need, her every orifice was penetrated by long, strong fingers. Her mouth, her vagina and – *yes* – even her ass was gently stretched by these fingers so that she came with a violent shudder that wracked through her body over and over, in rhythm with each tremor of release that washed over and into her. It was enough to make her mind swim even more drunkenly, until she faded out of the dream and entered into a deeper sleep to escape the throes of her exquisite climax.

Just before her senses faded she heard a thoroughly smug and satisfied voice whisper into her ear. "You are worthy of Him, worthy beyond price. You have done well...indeed you *will* do quite well..."

Chapter Two

Samantha swam in and out of consciousness for what seemed endless hours. Her mind was a haze of disjointed and confusing images as she struggled to find wakefulness. Flashes of light and color stabbed at her brain until over and over again she was forced to swim down into the depths of sleep in order to escape the annoyance. But at last she was able to pull free from her drunken slumber long enough to open her eyes fully and assess the damage her hangover would inflict on her this morning. If morning it was and not afternoon as she feared it might be. Judging from the strength of the sunlight that filtered through the covering over her head it was probably, regrettably, the latter.

With a gasp she awoke fully and tried to claw at the sheet that covered her head. Her claustrophobia, most of the time not much of a nuisance for her, now reared its ugly head and had her in a near panic when she realized that the sheet was wrapped around her nude body, hindering her movements. She was moaning with anxiety before she was finally able to wrest the sheet from her body and fling it away. She buried her face in her hands and struggled to regain some composure over herself before moving on to face the day.

It wasn't until she lowered her hands and flung back her tangled hair that she noticed her surroundings. Having fallen asleep on the sofa in her living room she naturally expected to see her television, coffee table, and hanging collection of animation cels cheerily greeting her as she looked around. But with a jolt she realized that this was not the case. Instead of the homely, lived in space of her small apartment sheltering her, she found herself...somewhere else entirely. Suspecting her booze binge from the night before was still playing tricks with her mind, she rubbed her bleary eyes, shook her head and took another look around.

Instead of lying on her comfy couch she was reclined in the middle of a monstrously huge, round bed heaped high with creamy vanilla satin comforters and deep carnelian velvet pillows. The bed was sunken into the stark white marble floor that surrounded it, so it felt and looked as though she was swimming in a lake of pillows and mattress. It was too much for her senses to bear. She moaned and flopped back onto the mound of pillows at her back and closed her eyes again. She waited for several minutes, taking deep calming breaths, before she rose once again and dared to take another peek about her.

The vanilla hue of the bedding that cocooned her seemed incredibly rich and inviting to her wide, searching eyes.

Oh god, she was losing it. She groaned and snapped her eyes shut once more. Who was she kidding? She had *already* lost it. Too much stress and worry over the past weeks, coupled with an overindulgence of whiskey the night before had finally snapped her brain. Yep, there was no denying it—she needn't worry about looking for a job now—she was destined for the loony bin. Oh well, she sighed, and in a mercurial switch of mood that she was famous for among her friends and family, decided she might as well face this new challenge—her own insanity—with a smile on her face instead of a scowl.

It wasn't easy but somehow she managed to fight her way out of the lake of pillows and comforters to reach the edge of the bed. Because the bed was below the level of the floor she had to pull herself out of it—a clumsy task at best as the bedding was quite slippery—and rise to her unsteady feet beside it before she could risk taking a look around. The room she was in now was as different as night from day in comparison to her living room. It was indeed more suitable for a pasha than a graphic artist, with its lush designs of texture and color that made her senses reel, along with the thick perfume of spicy-sweet incense that permeated the air around her. It was by far the strangest, and most luxuriously beautiful room she'd ever been in.

The ceiling was incredibly high, perhaps twenty feet or more, and that was a conservative guess on her part. And like the floor and walls it seemed to be made of a type of marble or similar stone, as if the entire room had been carved out of a giant solid block. And from that ceiling hung silk and satin scarves of every imaginable color and hue. Some were short with elegant embroidery lining the edges, and others were long—reaching nearly to the floor—and devoid of all decoration but no less attractive because of it than the others. They all swayed gently with the soft breeze that was playing through the high, narrow windows that appeared here and there in the wall farthest from her, creating a lazy symphony of movement that was extremely hypnotic.

It was to the windows that Sam now wandered. They were several feet high but perhaps only two feet wide at most, rounded at the tops and adorned with beautiful carvings of baroque styled figures in various states of undress and sexual hedonism. There was no glass to shield the room against the elements—an oddity that brought a puzzled frown to her face. But it was what stretched beyond them that had her gasping in shock and her face draining of all color.

“Holy crap, that was some strong whiskey,” she breathed in shock as her eyes took in the scene before her. Past the open windows lay an alien landscape that was surprisingly no less beautiful or exotic because of its strangeness. Hundreds of feet below the window, glittering copper and black sands and rocks stretched in rolling hills as far as her eyes could see, soaking up the warm rays of a golden-white sun that hung low in the sky and seemed fully three times the size it should have been.

After an age of looking in wonder at this scene, she backed unsteadily away from the windows, closed her eyes and shook her head to clear it again. It was no more successful an endeavor now than it had been earlier and when she opened her eyes

again the scene before her was still unchanged. “Omigod, omigod, omigod,” she repeated over and over to herself as her senses reeled and confusion took hold of her.

Where in the hell was she? Was this a hallucination? A dream?

Sam stumbled over an incredibly thick rug and landed with a jarring thump on her bare bottom. The floor covering was so deeply cushioned it saved her from a more bruising landing and her hands sank down to the wrists into its padding as she steadied herself. All about her the floor was littered with similar rugs in various shades and textures, along with plump divans, ottomans and enormous pillows—giving credence to her first estimation of the room’s purpose as a pasha’s haven.

Wasting no time now worrying how she’d gotten here—if here was even a place outside of her fevered imagination—she rose and took flight toward the only thing in the room that resembled a door. It was a golden diamond shape in the wall, barely a foot taller than she, with a baseball-sized handle that looked alarmingly enough like a genuine, multi-faceted emerald. Sam was no expert on gemstones but the handle was definitely made of some kind of translucent green stone. It *was* a door—and she flew through it as it opened. Then stumbled to an immediate and abrupt halt, stunned in her tracks.

Dozens of women, all nude but for strange golden cages about their mouths, stood before her. Delicate chains and colored stones adorned their bodies, glinting in the light as they turned to look at her as she stood there staring dumbfounded. Well, she assumed they were all women...more than a few of them were creatures outside of her scope of imagination until now, so it was difficult to tell for sure. She knew she looked like an idiot, standing there with her jaw hanging to the floor as she looked around at them with wide eyes, but she couldn’t school her features into anything more intelligent or polite than that. This new situation was more than she could bear to cope with rationally just now.

The women moved closer and gathered about her, some being so bold as to stroke her hair or skin. She tried not to back away as a purple fleshed, six-breasted woman came forth and cupped Sam’s breasts in her webbed six fingered hands. She barely managed to hold her ground. The woman giggled and made odd twirling notes with her tongue—obviously communicating with the others—and they joined in her laughter. The purple woman tweaked her nipples with her fingers and laughed again. True to the redhead’s reputation Sam’s temper rose with her indignation over this treatment and the group’s obvious humor at her expense. The women spoke amongst themselves in strange languages and continued to grope her even when she tried to back away.

“I don’t know what you’re saying, but I doubt I’d find it funny,” she gritted out with a scowl.

The women seemed to understand her words well enough because they twittered amongst themselves and made soothing motions towards her with what appeared to be friendly smiles. Sam couldn’t help but notice that one of the women had two mouths, one had sharp teeth—another, none at all—and one even had what looked like a vagina

in place of a mouth. It was hard to tell because the delicate, golden, cage-like masks they each wore around the lower part of their faces obscured her view of them a little.

Most of the women had vibrantly colored skin, in shades of purple, yellow, silver, green, and mauve. Some were possessed of scales, others with what looked like moist, amphibian flesh. A few of the women looked as though they were made of velvet or feathers, and still others appeared as if they weren't made of any familiar substance at all...perhaps water or gas or a cross between the two. Suffice it to say these women surrounding her now were anything but human.

"Where am I?" Sam had to swallow nervously before continuing when a centaurian looking woman came forward on four hooves and patted her hair. The mythological creature seemed to be trying to comfort her, though it only made Sam incredibly skittish to be standing so close to the giant half woman half horse. "And who are you...ladies?" The last word almost didn't make it out of her mouth as she saw a sexless, anamorphic creature smile at her with tentacle laden lips behind her mask.

All about her the odd looking women began to speak in what sounded like dozens of different languages. Clicks and twirls, grunts and slithering sighs assailed her ears, but Sam understood none of what they were saying. They seemed to have no trouble understanding her, or each other though, but after a few moments they seemed to realize that their attempts at communication only confused her and quieted down.

The centaur smiled at her reassuringly and motioned for her to precede the group deeper into the room. Well, "room" wasn't exactly the right word for it, Sam thought as she looked about her. It was more like an enclosed courtyard or stadium. In the middle of the massive enclosure there was an immense, round pool filled to the brim with crystal clear water. A grand fountain erupted like a geyser in the center of it, from a set of golden sculptures. What was so unusual about this—aside from the great scale of it all—was that the fountain's sculptures depicted three headless male forms, back to back, facing outward—all nude—and the water spewed forth from their huge, erect cocks which they palmed in their sculpted hands. Sam paused upon seeing this but the giant centaur at her back nudged her forward once again and she was forced to tear her eyes from it or trip over her own feet.

The ceilings of the room were even higher than those of the room she'd just exited, standing hundreds of feet high. The better, perhaps, to accommodate the towering trees that bloomed colorfully beneath it. How these trees existed without direct sunlight, Sam couldn't have guessed, but they were real—not artificial—and they flourished in their sheltered garden. Other vegetation—strange, exotic flowers, shrubs and fruit bearing vines—decorated the courtyard, giving it a welcoming appeal. The scent of incense, flowering blossoms and fruit were heavy in the air, but not overpowering. Indeed it was a delicious aroma, this mixture, and served to calm Sam's nerves a little.

The centaur made elaborate motions with her hands and after a few moments of watching this Sam deduced that the woman was suggesting that she bathe in the pool. Her deductions were confirmed as several of the women then splashed into the sparkling waters, frolicking like children with each other and joining the centaur in

motioning her forward to join them. Sam shook her head and gave them a weak smile. She wasn't one for modesty among other women nor was she the least bit ashamed of her body, but she'd never bathed in public before and just now wasn't inclined to start the habit.

What she really wanted was to get out of here and figure out what the hell was going on.

She tried several times to convey this desire to the centaur woman, who seemed to be the unspoken leader of the bunch, but either she didn't understand Sam's awkward sign-language or she refused to comply. Either way, Sam was getting rather frustrated with the whole situation.

Just then, a great doorway appeared—from out of nowhere it seemed—in one of the walls of the room and two men strode through it. Both men were tall, with caramel colored skin and exotic features. In fact, to Sam's dazed mind they looked like the ancient Egyptians might have, if the images of antique busts and hieroglyphic adorned walls could be believed. They even dressed like Egyptians, with wide golden cuffs on their wrists and upper arms, elaborate golden collars with intricate inscriptions upon them, and long split skirts that hung low on their hips and ended just above their sandaled feet. One of the men was shaved bald so that the top of his head gleamed in the light of the room—whose source Sam had yet to discover—and the other had thick black hair that reached nearly to his waist.

Now Sam felt a wave of modesty overcome her, so she quickly pulled her long red hair forward to cover her bared breasts and surreptitiously crossed her wrists over her pubic mound to conceal it. As she did this she noticed that the women had moved forward to flank the men and were openly fawning all over them, touching them all over just as they had done to her in greeting. The bald man smiled warmly at them, patted some gently on the head, kissed others in like manner—on the head—and received their adoration with good cheer. The long-haired man, however, remained stoically reserved, merely nodding in response to the women who caressed him affectionately. The two men were completely different from each other, though they were obviously of the same nationality, and Sam could only wonder what they were doing here. Who were these men? And why did the women so obviously revere them?

As these thoughts and observations filtered through her mind, the two men took notice of her and approached. The women moved away as if instructed to, letting the men pass unhindered through their numbers, until they stood directly before her. Sam took a step back. The two men followed, taking one step only as she had, coming to rest a few feet away from her. Sam's eyes shot from one to the other and she wondered what new shock her hallucination had in store for her.

"This is no hallucination, Sa-man-tha. You are in the palace of our King and you are welcomed."

Samantha tried not to choke on her surprise as the long-haired man spoke to her in heavily accented English.

"I don't understand. I went to sleep in my living room —"

"I brought you here, as a birthday present for my Master. You have been chosen for Him. It is a great honor and one you should be proud to boast of." He offered her a deep bow and the other man followed suit with a warm smile.

"W-what? *Birthday present?* I'm not —"

The man cut her off once more and she felt her temper soar at his highhanded manner. "It is time for you to be prepared for Him. We have only so many hours before the light ends and our Master's birthday celebration will begin with the rising of the Satellite Moons. You must be made ready to please Him along with the other two."

Good lord what was going on here? All this talk of birthday presents, preparations and...the other two. The other two *what?*

The man laughed and shook his dark head, reading her thoughts again. "You think you were the only one to be given this honor, out of all the females in all the worlds in all the universe, you think you alone have been deemed worthy for my Master this year?" He laughed some more and the bald man joined in, speaking rapidly in a foreign tongue between hearty guffaws.

"Hey!" she barked out, definitely angry at feeling like she was the butt of some great joke. "I don't exactly follow what you're saying so quit laughing at me because it's not fair. Just take me back home. *Now.*"

The men's laughter ceased abruptly and they turned incredulous looks to her. The bald man, who until now had seemed the cheerier and more approachable of the two, scowled darkly and the women each looked at her with something like disappointment and pity in their eyes.

"This cannot be undone, Sa-man-tha. You have passed all tests, been chosen carefully for your many virtues and strengths and given the honor of a place in the King's collection. Already your friends and family begin to forget you back on your homeworld. No one would know you were you to return now. You would be adrift. So you see, you cannot go back home. *This is your home now.*"

Sam swallowed hard around a sudden lump of fear in her throat. "I don't understand," she managed to whisper.

"You will soon enough. Now come, we have much to do and little enough time to do it in." The man motioned for her to join him as he turned and spoke to the bald man who had yet to cease scowling at her. In fact, the man was giving her such a harsh look that she felt goaded enough to stick her tongue out at him in defiance. If the look on the man's face was any indication, he was shocked at her action and perturbed even further by it. Sam didn't care—let him be angry with her—for now she would follow the other man to...wherever he was leading her...and find out just what the hell was going on.

Chapter Three

Samantha followed the dark haired man through the magical doorway and down a long corridor that led away from the courtyard. She was highly conscious of her nudity but unable to do anything about it besides try her best to ignore it. It was difficult but she managed. Thankfully there were many distractions for her to focus on along the way.

Along the corridor stood many doors, similar in style to the diamond shaped door in her bedroom, though there were many different geometric shapes, and each sported a large jeweled handle. She would have, at any other time, been curious to see what was behind these doors but her guide led her on past them and she was obliged to follow him. It seemed a long walk but at last they came to a door. The dark haired man waved his left hand—his fingertips were encased in gold and a strange emblem appeared to be floating over his palm—before it and it disappeared as if it had never been there.

“How...?” Sam tried to find the right words to ask how he’d performed such a trick but lost the thought as she saw what was beyond this new doorway.

A room, seemingly carved whole from the fieriest of diamonds, lay before her dazed eyes. Within it, dozens of odd golden devices—the purposes for which she dare not guess—decorated an area surrounding a large steaming pool of water. The pool was lined with what looked like pure gold, so that the golden hued water reflected dazzlingly against the diamond walls that ensconced it. It was so bright and blinding—this room—that Sam had to squint her eyes to see her guide as he motioned her to follow him into it. But once within it, the light seemed to dim to a bearable wattage, and Samantha was able to see clearly once more.

“This is the preparation bath. Here you will be made ready for our Master’s Collection.”

At that moment, the bald man entered behind them with two other women in tow. One of the women had skin the color of bubble gum with matching eyes and hair—a monochrome confection of palest pink—while the other was covered almost from head to toe with a pelt of thick, white fur. What little of her skin could be seen—her breasts, belly and pubis—was a beautiful, shiny ebony color that contrasted wonderfully with her snowy pelt. The two women moved to join Sam before the dark haired man and, surprisingly enough, looked far more comfortable than she felt she did.

The dark haired man was reading her mind again. “To give you your due, Samantha, these two have had more time to grow accustomed to their new role in life. I only hope that you will adapt as well as they have.” This last was said with an unmistakable hint of warning in his tone.

"Are all of you mind readers around here?" she asked unsteadily.

"No. You need only accept my intrusion into your mind. It is part of my job, I guess you would say, to know what you are thinking at all times."

"And what is your job, exactly?" she couldn't help asking.

"Forgive me for not following the formalities, Sa-man-tha. You are a unique individual and have thrown me off my pace with your questions." He gave a small chuckle. "I am The Collector, you may refer to me as such, and my job is just that—to collect. I scour the universe in search of new additions—such as yourself—who are worthy of a place here in the King's palace."

"And what is my place? Am I supposed to be a slave or something?"

"Of course not!" He sounded insulted at the very idea. "You are to have a high place at court. You will be a consort to our Master and treated with great deference. Your every wish shall be granted, your every comfort seen to with great care. You will be provided for all the rest of your days. You will never have to work again, never have to suffer or worry."

"Oh be still my heart," she scoffed, not believing his words for a second. "And what's the catch, oh great Collector? I'm sure that there is one."

"The *catch*, if you want to consider it thusly, is that you must always be ready and prepared to accept our King should He have need of you."

Sam felt her eyes bug out of her face as realization dawned. "You mean I'm going to be a prostitute?"

The bald man spoke rapidly then, gesticulating with angry motions towards her but directing his words to The Collector. It was obvious that he was displeased with Sam's words and attitude.

The Collector ignored the other man and with a dangerous glint in his eyes addressed her once more. "You will not be a prostitute! You will be a Beloved One. You should be honored by this, not angered. I will forgive you your insulting behavior because I know much of your culture—having studied you for nigh onto a year now—and am aware that your kind does not have such honored ones among them. You have no King, no higher court, and therefore do not understand the great honor that has been bestowed upon you.

"Sa-man-tha, you have been chosen out of countless other women, out of countless other worlds across the universe, for this honor. It was your unique beauty that first drew my eye—your vibrant coloring, red hair, green eyes, and white skin—but after I began my study of you it was your unique personality that decided me on my choice. You are loyal to your friends and family. You revel in life's adventures and are not afraid to enjoy them to their fullest. You have a strong character and will, and above all you are capable of compassion and understanding in a world where such things are often scoffed at or misunderstood.

"The new life I have gifted to you is not one of suffering or worry—as you would be doing now after the loss of your livelihood—but of pleasure, happiness and joy. My

Master will treasure you as He treasures all of His Beloved Ones and will shower you with all the creature comforts that are His to give. You need only yield to Him, love Him, and all of your days you will be cared for and given your every heart's desire."

"But what if my heart's desire is to return home? Will that wish be granted to me?" she gritted out.

"No, and why should it? Is it not better to reside here in safety and comfort, than back on your own world where there is dishonesty, poverty and sorrow? It is better that you put this thought of return from your mind now, because it can never be. You are here with us now, and here you shall remain."

Her own world? Holy moly, she was in far deeper than she'd thought. What to do now but let her anger give her courage and ignore the fear that threatened to take over. Better to focus on the most direct issue at hand and worry about the rest later, she thought. "I. Will. Not. Be. A. Whore!"

The bald man interjected again, spitting out his words, clearly enraged by her attitude.

"And just what the hell is he saying anyway? It's hardly fair that everyone can understand me in this place, when I can't understand anyone but you."

"Let me rectify that immediately then, Sa-man-tha," The Collector gritted out impatiently. He then placed his hand over her head, golden tipped fingertips splayed wide, and the strange branded symbol floated over his palm once more then was gone as quickly as it appeared. Sam noticed that the golden caps on his fingers were each connected by intricate, hair-thin chains that crossed over his fingers and palms numerous times, forming a sort of glove over his hand. This image branded itself into her brain for later study. The Collector withdrew his hand then and quite suddenly Sam could understand what the bald man was saying.

"—not worthy of this honor! She is disrespectful and undeserving of her place in the Collection."

"Be at ease, Cerebus. Give her but half a chance to grow accustomed to her place. Have I once failed the King in all my years of service? Trust me to know that all will be made right in the end," The Collector said, obviously trying to calm the bald man's tirade.

"*Learn my place?* Learn my place—how can you talk like that and tell me I'm not going to be a slave. You're already treating me like I am!" she shouted.

It was then that the furry woman stepped forward and laid a soothing hand on her arm. "Do not be frightened red hair, for there is nothing to fear. You do not yet understand and so your anger must be forgiven." The woman's pearly black eyes beseeched the men before them to hear the plea in her voice on Sam's behalf. "Please be at ease until you know more of this new world which you have been asked to be a part of."

The woman's words and demeanor automatically helped to cool Sam's temper and she couldn't help but feel grateful to her for it. The woman was right—anger would get

her nowhere just now – and all of her questions and doubts would be allayed enough if she could find a little patience and see how the next few hours were to play out. Unfortunately patience was not something she was known for having an abundance of. It would take a lot of self-control to sit back and watch things unfold before she completely blew her top. But she would do it if she had to...and it looked as though, right now, she had no choice but to do otherwise.

“I will not be a whore,” she reiterated.

“We are not asking you to be,” The Collector said gently. “You will soon see that your indignation is misplaced. We do not want to subjugate you Sa-man-tha.”

“My name is Samantha,” she slowly pronounced it for them, “or just plain Sam, to save time.”

“And this is Cerebus, keeper of the Collection, or Collection master. It will be to him that you will make all your needs known.” The bald man gave Sam a hard glare and she was of the impression that he really didn’t like the thought of catering to her just now. “And these two females are Ferd,” the pink woman nodded and offered a shy smile, “and Haliatyde Se Duri’ann an Malvindosaide.”

The furry woman smiled, too. “Since you like small names, you can call me Hali if you like.” She pronounced the word Hah-lee, giving it an exotic, foreign sound. Sam repeated it to her and greeted them both with her own smile.

“Now, enough of our talking. We have much to do. Let us begin your preparations.” The Collector waved his hands and there appeared before them a table heaped high with food laden dishes. “Eat now, so that you have the strength to face the hours ahead, for they will be busy indeed.”

* * * * *

“First will come the cleansing. These waters are highly medicinal and will calm your nerves and ease any aches you may have so that afterward you will feel refreshed and free of all stresses,” The Collector said some time later.

Cerebus led Sam, Ferd, and Hali into the giant sunken pool. When he entered the bath before them his long skirt floated up about his waist, as he hadn’t bothered to remove it beforehand, and Sam frowned as she began to suspect that he meant to assist them with their bathing.

“Do not worry, Sam. You have nothing to fear,” The Collector murmured at her back. “Cerebus is here only to help you. It is his duty and privilege to do so.” Sam had to bite her lip to keep from voicing her thoughts on that assessment of Cerebus’ feelings towards her.

The water was pleasantly warm when Sam stepped into it and the steaming vapor that rose up from it possessed a sensual aroma that lulled her senses. When she stood in the deepest part of the golden tub, along with Ferd and Hali, the water reached just below her breasts, lifting the hair that concealed them and baring her to the gaze of anyone who cared to look. Oddly enough, this didn’t trouble her now as the comforting

waters worked their special magic on her inhibitions and worries. Cerebus moved to Hali, took her gently up against him and dipped her backward over his arm—as if baptizing her in the waters—until she was completely submerged. Then he pulled her slowly back up, gave her a kind smile and moved on to Ferd. He repeated this process with her, once again gifting her with a soft, kindly smile before moving on to Sam.

When Cerebus came to stand before Sam, the warm light of welcome in his eyes vanished completely and he was perhaps less than gentle as he lowered her into the water. As the liquid closed up over her head she felt her entire body relax, though she hadn't even known she was tense, and her blood throbbed with a delicious, tingling warmth as it pumped through her veins. All too soon Cerebus plucked her up from the water's embrace and, without the smile he had bestowed upon the other two women, left her, went to the edge of the tub and climbed out.

He turned and motioned for them to follow him and it was then that Sam noticed the same strange glove adorning his left hand as the one she had seen on The Collector's—golden caps for the fingers, connected by thin golden chains that crossed over his palm. Other than her initial noting of it however, she gave it no more thought. She was too relaxed now to think on anything so inconsequential as a man's jewelry.

The three women exited the bath and Cerebus gently towed off Hali, then Ferd and lastly Sam, though he was a bit more brisk with her. If Sam had been any less at ease just then she would have laughed at the bald man's obvious show of displeasure with her. He was treating her like a child, giving her a taste of his parental censure because of her earlier attitude—though now she wasn't sure why she'd been so irritable a few minutes before—and he was clearly expecting her to hang her head in shame in the face of it. But she felt no shame, only warm acceptance of her current position, despite Cerebus' irritation with her.

Cerebus next took a large crystal bottle filled with oil, poured a dollop into his palms and began to rub them down with it. Sam could only watch as each woman purred and stretched beneath his hands as he stroked them, before he came at last to her. His hands were warm when they touched her, even the golden metal of his glove. He massaged her from neck to toe with the oil, which smelled of honeyed almonds, soothing her muscles until she was arching against each pass of his strong, firm palms, eager for more. When at last he was finished, her skin felt softer than she'd ever known it to feel, and she was flushed a healthy pink from all the pleasant friction his hands had made upon her flesh.

"Now comes the time for your new vestments." The Collector's voice broke through her thoughts and Cerebus led them deeper into the diamond walled room, away from the steaming bath, to an area where strange golden gadgets were laid out and waiting. "These are the only coverings you need ever wear, unless the King should decree otherwise. Lie down, all of you."

Sam glanced down, along with Ferd and Hali, and saw three narrow piles of velvet pillows appear at their feet. As one they moved to lie down upon them and Sam couldn't help but snuggle her head into the deep cushioned softness. It was heavenly,

this bed, especially when she felt so relaxed and heavy limbed. Perhaps she could even catch a quick nap, she thought, uncaring that she'd only just awakened from sleep. But no, it was not to be. Cerebus was moving towards Ferd, with tiny golden rings in his hand and Sam was too curious not to watch the scene as it unfolded before her.

Cerebus laid a small golden loop down upon Ferd's erect pink nipple, waved his gloved hand over it slowly, and magically – when he moved his hand away – the ring was pierced neatly, and painlessly it seemed, through her flesh. Ferd smiled up at Cerebus and he responded in turn before moving onward. Hali was next, receiving the same piercing as Ferd – a golden loop through her nipple – though she toyed with hers as Cerebus moved over to Sam. As Cerebus laid the golden circlet onto her nipple, Sam felt enough of her natural self return so that she laid her hand over it before Cerebus could complete his magic.

"I don't want to be pierced," she said in a husky voice she normally wouldn't have recognized as her own.

"What you want and what will happen, at this juncture, don't necessarily have to agree with each other," Cerebus said flatly, with no small amount of irritation burning in his dark eyes. He waved his hand over hers and beneath her palm she felt the puckered flesh of her nipple seem to rise up and swallow a small portion of the hoop. She took her hand away and looked down at her breast. Sure enough, the golden ring was pierced cleanly into her flesh, though it hadn't hurt in the least. Cerebus gave her one more, dark look and turned away.

Next Cerebus retrieved three long, delicate golden chains. In turn he attached one end of a chain to their nipple rings, trailed it down over their ribs and stomach, then wrapped the rest of the length around their waists, securing it at the last with a tiny jeweled lock that was no bigger than Sam's pinky nail. The jewels on the locks matched the eye color of the wearer, Ferd's was cotton candy pink, Hali's was a pearly black, and Sam's was an emerald green. If it weren't for the fact that Sam strongly suspected it was some sort of brand she might have found the jewelry quite beautiful, in an exotic and otherworldly sort of way.

The three lounging women were fitted with wide, golden arm cuffs. One was affixed to Sam's upper left arm, another on the wrist of her right hand. It was the same for Hali and Ferd. They were given narrow wire necklaces, also made of gold for these men obviously treasured the stuff, to wear about their necks. Another delicate chain was attached to their necklaces and then to their arm cuffs so that when their arms or necks moved about even the slightest bit, a trail of fine gold flashed in their wake. They were given golden earrings, thin chains that trailed to their shoulders and were weighted at the ends with the tiniest of jewels – again colored to match their eyes. Sam's ears were already pierced but Hali's and Ferd's were not and again came the waving of that gloved hand as Cerebus magically affixed the jewelry to their ears. All of this preparation must have taken a good solid hour, but it was clear that they were far from finished as The Collector spoke once again.

"There is but one official rule that you each must follow here at the Palace, and that is this; under no circumstances are you to ever allow the entrance of man or beast into any of your orifices. Beyond eating or drinking you will at all times wear a Veil, to keep your mouth locked away from the insertion of foreign objects. And unless in the presence of the King, or when nature deems it necessary, you will always be fitted with an anal and vaginal plug so that you will at all times remain chaste for Him."

Before Sam could sputter her indignation over this "rule", Cerebus moved forward and blew some sort of brown powder into her face, which smelled of honeyed almonds just as the massage oil had. That quickly, after she'd breathed in the dust of this powder, her objections were gone and a wave of carnal heat rushed through her body like wildfire. The other women were given the same puff of brown powder into their faces and they reacted just as Sam did. They writhed upon their beds, spreading their legs wide and arching their backs as if posing for a lover. Sam moaned and bucked her hips and vaguely noted that Hali and Ferd followed suit.

"We call this *phuq* dust. It comes from the treasured Nipey seed after it has been harvested, aged, and ground into a fine powder. It is a potent aphrodisiac and we use it here only to prepare you for the comfortable insertion of your chastity plugs," The Collector informed them gently.

Sam felt the lips of her sex splayed wide by the hand of Cerebus and arched up against his gentle fingers, craving more of the contact on her aroused tissues. Cerebus seemed to soften towards her then and brushed his fingers over the soft hairs of her pubis in a soothing manner. She felt a warm probing between her legs, looked down and saw the sleek golden dildo grasped between Cerebus' golden brown fingers slip between her legs and into her pussy. Her channel felt stretched for only a moment by this dildo before her muscles relaxed and welcomed its intrusion into her body eagerly. The plug was held in place within her by the use of two long chains that wrapped about her hips and waist and was fastened with yet another jeweled lock at her naval. Cerebus then moved to the other women and repeated this process.

When Cerebus returned to her he knelt between her splayed legs and gently placed the soles of her feet upon his shoulders. He leaned in against her, pushing her rear up off of the pillows so that he was given easier access to insert a short, thin butt plug into her anus. The plug's dry intrusion made her gasp and jerk away so that Cerebus removed it and went to retrieve the bottle of oil, which he had massaged into her skin earlier. He rubbed some of this oil into the soft puckered flesh of her ass with two blunt fingers and attempted to insert the plug once again. After a few moments of uncomfortable resistance her anus seemed to quiver and then the warm golden probe was sliding tenderly into her. Sam felt spitted, impaled, but was so completely aroused by the whole ritual that it was a welcome feeling indeed.

After the insertion of her chastity plugs, Sam lost track of time and before she knew it she was fitted with one of the grids that she had seen upon each of the women earlier that morning. The mask, or Veil as The Collector had named it, was light as a feather but strong as steel as it rested just below her nose over her mouth and jaw. It wasn't

fastened in any way that Sam could easily discern, but hovered immovably over her face in such a manner that nothing could enter her mouth without its removal.

Jeweled anklets were fastened about her ankles and she was given thumb rings that matched. Cerebus brushed her hair patiently until it glistened—which couldn't have been easy considering how tangled it was—and she was given a vial of perfumed oil with which to scent herself. The scent was indescribably beautiful—fashioned solely for her by The Collector she was told—based on her special personality and physical attributes. Ferd and Hali were also gifted with their own unique scents.

Cerebus then waved his hand over Ferd and Hali's pubic mounds, magically removing any and all traces of hair from their sexes. The King, it seemed, liked his women bald between their legs. However, at the last, The Collector instructed Cerebus to leave a small swath of hair upon Sam's mound, and Cerebus did so. A patch of hair in the shape of a diamond graced the top of her pubic bone and with a last wave of his hand tiny rubies were weaved into her fiery red pubic hairs, leaving her sex to glisten and twinkle with every slight nuance of movement. Other than that her pussy was now completely bald and smooth to the touch, as if the hair had never been there. She felt beautiful, decked out in her new finery, swollen and ripe and utterly feminine.

It was only later, after the effects of the *phuq* dust had long faded, that she would lament the loss of her normal reactive self during these proceedings.

Chapter Four

“Now that you are prepared you will join with the other women of the Collection and be brought forth to meet our King. He is most anxious to see His newest Beloved Ones and if you are lucky He will choose some of you to entertain Him tonight in His private chambers.”

Lucky? Sam was not so far under the *phuq* dust’s influence that she couldn’t still give a sarcastic thought to The Collector’s words. *Who would feel lucky to be used by some boorish royal guy who’s obviously quite too full of his own importance? Certainly not me!*

But she couldn’t quite voice the words, even though she longed to—if only for her own amusement to see the indignant look on Cerebus’ face that would surely greet her comments—and she was silent as The Collector led them from the room. The plugs that filled her were surprisingly comfortable and she was able to walk with ease. In fact, she practically forgot that they were even there. The tingling spell of the *phuq* dust still coursed through her veins and surely that helped. Her pussy was gently thrumming, her clit swollen and wet. Her nipples were hard as pebbles and her breasts were heavy and aching. Her mouth, she knew, was pouting behind her mask, full and yearning to be kissed. All in all her body was deliciously aroused, not quite to the fever pitch it had been right after the *phuq* had been administered, but still softly awakened to desire.

After a long walk through yet another winding corridor the group came upon a grand entranceway marked by hundreds of different geometric symbols etched into a set of immense solid gold doors. The Collector waved his hand and the doors swung outward, away from them, and they proceeded beyond. What greeted them was beyond anything Sam had ever seen. Before them, at the end of a room that must have been the size of a football field, was a shining throne made of a rainbow of jewels piled high with gorgeous soft pillows and swatches of silk, satin and velvet. The throne was several feet up off of the floor, on a raised dais littered with thousands upon thousands of flower petals. Soft music sounded in the background, otherworldly and ambient, reminding Sam once again of the Egyptian or perhaps Arabian facets to her surrounds.

At the foot of the dais lounged several women and as she drew closer Sam noted that they were bedecked in finery that was similar to hers, though their “chastity plugs” were noticeably absent. One of the women had three breasts and each of her nipples were pierced and chained. Another woman appeared to have two sex organs between her spread legs—a penis and a vagina—and the penis was pierced by golden bars three different times through the glans in a Prince Albert position. She also sported a guiche-styled piercing—a horizontal golden bar at the base of her small scrotum—with jeweled weights attached at the bar’s ends. Each woman was uniquely different in shape,

coloring and form, and Sam was struck dumb by the sight of so much exposed alien flesh.

Inevitably Sam's eyes rose up the dais and settled on the reclining figure of a man who sprawled lazily out upon the throne. He was very tall—Sam could easily discern that even though he reclined—lean and long of limb. His fingers were especially graceful, artistic looking on his broad palms, bedecked with jeweled rings and the same type of golden tipped glove that The Collector and Cerebus both wore. His hair was the color of dark sorghum syrup. Thick and long it trailed down in a fat braid onto the pillows beneath him and was woven with the occasional tiny jewel or glistening threads.

His face, hidden partially by shadows, was an exotic study of slopes and planes. He was possessed of a high forehead and flaring sculpted brows. His eyes were rimmed with a thick line of sooty black kohl and they turned up like a cat's at the corners. His eyes were a dramatic contrast against his dark caramel skin, light and translucent, they were the color of watered down sherry. His lashes were long, no doubt at least an inch in length—enough to make any vain woman go positively green with envy—and they gifted him with a borderline androgynous look that oddly enough made him appear that much more exquisitely masculine.

He wore a large jeweled golden collar about his neck and matching cuffs on his toned upper arms. His torso was tightly muscled but not heavily so. His nipples were dark and small on his hairless chest, like tiny chocolate drops, and they kept drawing Sam's eyes no matter that she valiantly fought the urge to gawk at him. He wore a long glittering ebony skirt, split high on one side so that as he reclined his one bent leg was bared from foot to hip, exposing yet more of his beautiful honeyed skin. The skirt rode dangerously low on his hips giving hint to the fact that he was quite possibly hairless all over his taut, exotic body.

Instantly Sam was attracted to the man and she was exquisitely aware of her own jewelry adorned nude body as she and the other two women were led closer to the throne. The plugs in her body felt heavier now; more noticeable as her erogenous zones began to vibrate with arousal. If just looking at this man caused her juices to flow, Sam grew breathless to imagine how potently his touch might affect her.

Perhaps being a love slave wouldn't be so degrading a chore as she had initially thought...for a short while anyway. Or maybe it was the aftereffects of the *phuq* dust making her feel this way, Sam couldn't be sure of her own reactions it seemed.

She hadn't even noticed when the other women of the Collection had come to join them, but suddenly she was surrounded by dozens of women who were all quite clearly preening for the attention of the King. Sam ignored them as best she could; she had eyes only for the man on the throne as he rose up on his elbows and regarded those in the room about him.

Cerebus moved forward and sank to his knees, bowing his head before the King. "Happy Birthday, My Master. Your Collection is ready and waiting to join you in celebration tonight, prepared especially for this joyous occasion."

Slowly, in graceful motions like a giant jungle cat, the King rose up from his position on the cushioned throne. An enigmatic smile played about his delicately sculpted lips as he descended the steps of the dais in his thong sandaled feet. He came to a stop before a round, green skinned woman who couldn't have stood higher than four feet at most. With a flourish he swept aside the front panel of his skirt, unashamedly exposing his phallus—Sam couldn't get a good glimpse of him as she stood behind too many taller females, though not for lack of her trying—and pulled the woman's plump face towards it. Even though Sam couldn't precisely see what was going on she could clearly hear the unmistakable sounds of the woman's greedy suckling as she went down on her Master's cock. The King must have removed the woman's veil to have free access to her mouth.

The King petted the woman's head as it bobbed over his erection, and though the scene was shocking in the extreme to Sam—she who had never seen such a public display as this beyond the occasional pornographic film, which was viewed only in the privacy of her own home—she couldn't help feeling a growing hunger unfurl within her because of it. After a long moment the King gave one final pat to the woman's head and pulled his cock free of her mouth with an audible popping sound. He gave her a soft smile and moved on past her, easily righting his clothing as he went.

"She is the King's favorite just now," said the centaurian woman who'd been so nice to Sam earlier that morning. She stood now by Sam's side, dwarfing her with the mass of her four-legged horse body.

"I can understand you," Sam said with a smile.

"I know. I hadn't realized this morning, at first, that you weren't yet given the gift of understanding us. My name is Keln, by the way."

"Mine is Sam. You say that woman is the King's favorite? Does he have many or just the one?"

Keln laughed softly and leaned down to speak more quietly in Sam's ear. "That depends. Some nights He picks almost half our number and pleasures each to within an inch of their limitations, and others He only picks five or six and pleasures them but once or twice a piece. But recently He has been choosing an equal ten, and Dennota—the short green woman—is always among those ten. Our Master likes to be suckled and Dennota is His most talented mouth apparently."

"Were you...captured...like me?" Sam asked, more than a little hesitant to broach the subject.

Keln sighed and shook her head a little sorrowfully. "It is perhaps best if you do not view your being here as the result of a capture. Think more along the lines that you have been chosen, blessed even. Life here at the palace may seem strange to you at first—it did to me too, in the beginning—but it is one of luxury and ease. We are all lucky to be here, cared for by the most powerful ruler on this world, our every wish granted by Cerebus—our keeper."

"What world is this?" A lump of fear almost choked off her words. The thought of being on an alien world was not one she would grow accustomed to any time soon.

"It is named Valeo. It is a planet in the Ysault Dimensional Plane, in the middle of the Sord Star System. Quite far from where you are from, I dare to guess."

Another solar system! Good grief, how could this be happening? How was she ever going to get back home?

"Are you from around here?"

"No. I am far, far removed from my place of birth. But do not pity me," Keln rushed on as Sam sent her just such a look, "I am much happier here than ever I could have been back on my native soil. Here I need never worry or toil. And whenever I am called on to entertain my Master – which I am sorry to say is only rarely now – I am more than happy to do it. Eager in fact, for He is a spectacular lover. I love Him. We all do. You will soon too, if you but let yourself."

Sam highly doubted that. He was a sexy, appealing man – there was no doubt of that – but love him? She'd never loved anyone in her life, besides the love she had for family or friends. She very highly doubted an autocratic harem owner could inspire such a depth of feeling from her.

Just then she caught a glimpse of him through the crowd, standing before the heavily pierced hermaphrodite. The King was stroking the woman's small penis with one hand and diddling her large clitoris with the other. It was obvious that he didn't find such a thing as the fondling of male sex organs taboo...or perhaps the fact that the penis was in fact owned by a female made it okay in his book. Whatever the circumstance, the woman was obviously enjoying herself as the King massaged her two sex organs, if the newly engorged length of her cock was any indication of her arousal. A few more strokes and the woman gave a heavy moan, coming onto the hands of the King, gushing pearly liquid from both her cunt and her cock as she shuddered before him in release. Cerebus came forward at once with a towel and cleaned his Master's fingers and the King moved deeper into the crowd of women.

For the first time Sam was afforded a full look at his face. He was indeed a work of contrasts with smooth unblemished skin, sharp high cheekbones, a lushly curved mouth and hard stubborn jaw. His eyes were quite pretty, outlined as they were by kohl and long dark lashes, but they had a decidedly bored look within their sherry depths, which surprised Sam. How could a man of such obviously hedonistic leanings such as Himself be bored while surrounded by so many ready and willing females?

How indeed?

As the King proceeded through the throng about him he paused here and there to fondle or be fondled by his women. But never did he kiss any of them and it seemed a significant thing to Sam. A kiss was the gentlest, most affectionate of all sexual overtures. A lot could be learned about one's partner through a kiss. Love itself could be won or lost with the power of a small kiss. So why did the King not bestow them, at least to the favored in his Collection? Did kisses mean nothing to the people of his race?

Were kisses only practiced among humans, perhaps? Surely not, Sam scoffed at the idea. How sad life would be indeed, here on Valeo, if there were no such things as kisses.

The Collector came up behind her then and herded her forward where she joined Ferd and Hali. "These are the newest members of your Collection, Master, your birthday presents."

The King turned away from the woman whose single breast he was presently fondling as the Collector spoke. His eyes roved lazily over them as he approached, but at the last settled unflinchingly on Sam. His eyes took in the fiery warmth of her red hair, the bright emerald of her eyes and the porcelain white of her skin as if he'd never seen the like of it before. With a sinking feeling Sam realized there was a good possibility that he hadn't; she'd yet to see a woman even remotely resembling herself within the Collection. The sinking feeling was because she wasn't quite ready to be noticed by the King. And she certainly didn't want to be noticed because she was considered "odd" or "unique" in her coloring and shape among the other women of his harem.

Dramatically the King walked up to Sam, standing impossibly – proudly – erect as his long legs closed the distance between them, ignoring the other women at her side, and came to stand almost on top of her. Her eyes were only just level with his nipple and it was a little disconcerting to have him standing so very close to her.

Against her will, Sam's eyes rose to meet his as they burned down onto the top of her bent head. She felt dwarfed by him, dangerously so, especially when he began to slowly circle her – almost touching her with the bared skin of his chest as he prowled around – studying her entire form. Never had Sam been so aware of her nudity as she was then, and the chains and jewels that dangled on her form seemed suddenly heavier under his perusal, like brands of ownership instead of decorations. At last the King came back to face her, locking his eyes to hers once more. She couldn't help a spark of defiance from entering her gaze and she was too angry to think of the folly such a sign of spirit might be in her current situation.

All she could think about was how he dared to treat her like an object, as if she had no feelings or say in the matter. Looking her over like a vase or painting he wished to purchase...but then he had *collected* her, hadn't he? It was no different than if she *had* been a piece of art that happened to catch his fancy. He saw her as such and would treat her accordingly. Well she would have none of it! The other women of the Collection might be resigned to their station as the King's playthings, but she would be damned before she joined their adoring ranks.

The King sidled up even closer to her, so that their skin was just barely touching. He bowed his head, seemingly entranced by her hair, and softly pressed his lips to it. One of his hands came around and lightly settled on the flare of her bare hip, making the chain that was fastened about it jingle slightly as it was caught between them. Sam tried and failed to suppress a shudder of pleasure at his gentle caresses and had to reassure herself that the loss of her control was most likely due to the lingering affects

of the *phuq* dust and not to any real attraction she might be feeling for the King. The King pulled back, sent her a dangerous, enigmatic smile, lifted the hand at her waist and placed it on her unadorned breast.

The heat from his golden-gloved hand scorched her breast nearly to the point of pain, sending shivers of forbidden desire through her entire form. A second more of the erotic torture and he pulled away. Without a second glance in her direction he turned around and threaded once more into the crowd of women, heading back towards his throne. Sam looked down at the breast he had touched and was surprised to see it was now encased in a solid cup fashioned from a bright green emerald. She pulled at the jeweled stone cup, but it would not budge from her skin even the slightest as a result of her efforts. How the odd covering stayed in place Sam couldn't have guessed, but she assumed it functioned no differently from the veil that even now hovered immovably over her lower jaw and mouth.

What did it mean, this jewel over her breast, for surely it meant something? She was given too little time to ponder it. The King's voice broke out over her thoughts—stunning her with its husky beauty—and instantly commanded all of her attentions. "I have made my choice. Let the birthday celebrations begin."

There came then an outpouring of murmurs and cries from the women that rose in volume to a dull roar.

"Fates, Sam, but you've surprised us all." Keln was at her side once more, smiling brilliantly.

"What do you mean?"

"I have been a part of the King's Collection for nearly seven years and never have I known Him to choose less than five partners for an evening. Let alone during a birthday celebration."

Sam felt a sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach. "Keln, suppose—just for a moment—that I am totally in the dark about all of this and explain to me as plainly as possible just what the heck is going on."

Keln laughed, though not unkindly, and patted Sam's hair soothingly. The woman seemed fascinated by her hair. "Well, for one thing, tonight we will celebrate the King's birthday. It is a very special event as you can see by the revelry about us—for many reasons. Every year The Collector finds new females to add to the Collection and gives them to the King as gifts, so we all get to celebrate the new additions to our family.

"Also, tonight is the night that the Satellite Moons will be at their highest peak in the sky. This is important because the natives of this planet believe the two moons will promise a fruitful season among mated couples—and it is also significant because this event only occurs once every three years. I say you have surprised me, Sam, because the King has crowned you His jewel for the night, evidenced by that jeweled cup over your breast—you alone will receive His attentions in the royal bedchamber this night. He has found such favor in you—you, who are new to our family. The King, you see, generally

prefers His jewels to be older, more seasoned members of His Collection. I hope you're ready for a magical night indeed."

Sam reeled. "But I don't want to be chosen," she whispered, going white.

Keln's eyes filled with soft compassion. "Do not be afraid, Sam. The King will see to your pleasure in all ways. He is caring and tender. He will not hurt you."

"Doesn't it matter that I am unwilling?"

"Unwilling! But why would you not be willing to give and receive pleasure? Are you," Keln's voice dropped to an incredulous murmur, "untouched?"

"No," Sam hurried to say, though on second thought she wondered if it might have been better to lie and say that she was. "It's just that I would prefer to be given some choice in the matter of who I have sex with."

"If given a choice would you not find some attraction to our Master?"

Sam wouldn't lie to this woman who was so clearly kind and open. "Well, probably, but it would be different because then I wouldn't be *forced* to choose him. Do you see what I mean?"

"What I see is that you are determined to dig in your heels about this when to do so can only cause you harm in the long run. Do not dwell on the past. Embrace your new future here at the palace. Embrace your new King. Who knows, you've already impressed Him quite a lot, perhaps one day He will choose you as His *chastity keeper*."

"And just what is that?" Sam asked in exasperation. Just when it seemed she was gaining a small understanding of the place, she was thrown some new tidbit to dwell on and mull over.

But Keln wasn't given time to answer her as the King's voice boomed out over the murmuring throng of people once again. "Cerebus, bring my chosen Beloved Ones to me, posthaste. I have great need of them."

Almost immediately Cerebus was at Sam's side, ushering her to the throne beyond the crowd and away from Keln, who waved goodbye to Sam as she went. As they went, the hermaphrodite, the one-breasted woman, and Dennota—all of whom had been fondled in some way by the King Sam was quick to note—joined them. Too soon they were on the steps of the dais that led up to the lounging King on his throne.

"My beauties. Come. Join me here on my pillows." The King's voice was like a velvet finger trailing down Sam's spine and she shivered. With one last, hard look of warning in Sam's direction, Cerebus left them alone with the King.

Sam didn't know how to react. She felt cornered and had to fight the instinctive urge to flee as the King's translucent eyes settled unwaveringly upon her. He must have seen some of the indecision on her face because he gifted her with another of his enigmatic, but not wholly unkind smiles and turned to Dennota instead, motioning her forward.

"I have a longing for your mouth, Beloved One," the King said and swept aside the front of his skirt as he had done earlier for the green skinned woman. It was then that

Sam was afforded her first view of the King's sex. It was a mighty weapon indeed and she felt positively faint just by looking at it.

He was massive in both girth and size, at least twelve or more inches in length and so thick that she couldn't have possibly wrapped her fingers around it comfortably. Sam had never been one to find a man's penis attractive in and of itself, but the King was possessed of the most beautiful cock she had ever seen. It was a delicious caramel color, golden and smooth. His testicles were heavy and—as she had suspected—completely hairless as was the rest of his form. There was a small golden bar pierced delicately through the base of the head on his shaft, and it glinted in the light a scant second before it was enfolded in the plump lips of Dennota's mouth.

The King looked at Sam once more as the green woman's head began to bob up and down on his phallus. "Do you like what you see, Beloved One?" he asked her silkily.

Sam looked away, refusing to answer him, and he laughed at her show of spirit. But, too soon, the sounds of Dennota's suckling reached Sam's ears and she couldn't contain her curiosity for long. She glanced back and discovered that the King was waiting for her to do just that.

"Come here," he beckoned and reached out his gloved hand to her.

Against her will it seemed, Sam felt her feet moving her to him and then his hand was resting on her waist.

"Your skin is as soft as the finest down," he murmured raking his eyes from her head to her toes.

Uncomfortable under the intense amber gaze of the King, Sam looked away and studied the room about her. All throughout the throne room, men—who looked much the same as the King, The Collector, and Cerebus so presumably they were all natives of Valeo—and women mingled sharing much talk and laughter. They seemed deferent—respectful—to the King and curiously unfazed by the fact that he was being orally pleased by a woman between his legs; stroked and fondled by still two more at his side. Footmen brought out golden platters piled high with aromatic food and drink, to the delight of all in attendance. Exotic music was played at a pleasing volume and the revelers enjoyed much dancing. Sam had never seen such a carefree and easy bunch of people. They were all quite obviously happy to be there in the presence of the King and each other.

The King drew her attention once more. "You needn't be hesitant or afraid with me, Beloved One. I will treat you with great care, you have my word on that."

"I'm not afraid of you," Sam bit out, ignoring the shiver in her body as the King's fingers stroked lazy circles on the skin of her waist.

"Good," he said and pulled her forward. When she was close enough, the King bent his head and buried his face against the swell of her belly. Sam gasped and jerked back reflexively.

"Ah, you smell as good as you feel, though I had little doubt that it was so." The King's eyes glittered wickedly up at her as he allowed her a small retreat.

All of a sudden the King's eyes shuttered—Sam noticed then that the black lines rimming them were tattoos and not kohl powder as she'd thought—and he let out a soft groan. He turned his attentions then to Dennota, pulling her mouth deeper over his cock with a hand in her hair. A few seconds later he groaned again and bucked up against the green woman's mouth, spending his release within the plump seam of her greedy lips. Eagerly the woman lapped up every last creamy drop of the King's come, stroking the large, erect shaft with her hands, milking him for all he was worth. The King's hand had tightened on Sam's waist during his release but now it eased once again and stroked away the little discomfort he had caused while he relaxed as Dennota finished with him.

When Dennota's mouth left him, the King's cock was glistening wet and heavily weighing down between his knees as he began to fall flaccid. The hermaphrodite moved then between his legs, rubbing his cock with her own much smaller one. The King looked up at Sam once more and moved his hand to cup her breast in his palm. He gently flicked the golden ring in her nipple and that quickly he grew erect once more, obviously pleased and fascinated by the glittering jewelry that speared her flesh. The great length of him stabbed skyward as the hermaphrodite climbed over him and impaled herself upon his marble cock. The King pulled Sam closer and pressed his mouth to the underside of her breast as the woman rode him.

Sam was in a quandary. Her body was alive with arousal—both from the scene that played out before her and the erotic ministrations of the King's hand and mouth at her breast. But her mind was a storm of indignation at being treated with such familiarity by a man she had only just met. If *met* was even the right word for the situation—she didn't even know his name! She was afraid to openly rebuke the King's advances, his people might not forgive such a thing lightly, but she would be damned if she would return any of his affections. There was only so much she was willing to surrender at this juncture.

His back was pillowed by the one-breasted woman at his back, her arms wrapped around his chest, hands stroking his chest and belly from behind him. He raised one hand and fondled the woman's large nipple as he was fondling Sam's, clearly not one to ignore his women as they serviced him. Dennota seemed to be in her own little world as she writhed on the floor at the King's side. It was clear that she had found her own release when seeing to the King's needs and was content to be ignored for the moment.

The King seemed to notice her failure to participate in the festivities and pulled back from her breast to look deep into her eyes. "Won't you touch me, Beloved One? I need your touch so badly." His words pulled at Sam's heartstrings in a most unusual and unexpected way. It was as though he was tortured with the knowledge that she didn't want to touch him. As if he emotionally craved her surrender. But Sam pushed away the feelings, considering them an unforgivable weakness, and reminded herself that this man was too used to getting his own way. He was quite obviously spoiled by all of his women and expecting the same treatment from her.

"Is it not enough to have these three women touching you? Why not focus your attentions on them and leave me be?" Her voice was low and her words were intended for his ears alone. The last thing she wanted was to involve anyone else in this conversation.

The King's head recoiled as if he'd received a physical blow. His eyes, when they met hers, were full of angry pride and tinged with hurt, though Sam was dubious as to the sincerity of the latter emotion within their amber depths. He opened his mouth to say something but was swept away in the throes of another orgasm before he could lay voice to those words. The woman that rode him bounced up and down on his cock, crying out as her own release shook her until both her cock and cunt were creamy with ejaculate. The King's face went slack with passion and he groaned brokenly as he shuddered and spent himself within the slick folds of his partner's sex.

After a long moment the King unceremoniously plucked the hermaphrodite off of his body and set her down beside him on the dais. He turned and gave another hard glare to Sam and jerked the one-breasted woman to him with less than gentle care. He spun the woman about, bent her over and without so much as a by your leave stabbed the long, thick mass of his cock into the woman's ass. Luckily the woman appeared to have a very willing and eager ass, because the aggressive penetration of her nether region by the King was met with nothing less than a wailing moan of pleasure from her parted lips. The King pounded furiously into the woman, causing her single breast to bounce up and down vigorously with every motion. And all the while he kept his eyes locked to Sam's, clearly goading her, taunting her, as he fucked the woman before him with calculated ferocity.

All too soon the woman cried out and experienced her release. The clenching of her anal muscles milked the King of yet another explosive climax as well, causing Sam no end of embarrassment as the King's eyes remained steady on hers as he came. It was far too personal suddenly, her being witness to these acts of carnality. Where before she had merely been uncomfortable she was now excruciatingly aware of her own part that was yet to play out in this game and it was obvious that the King was deliberately heightening her awareness of that fact. The promise in his eyes spoke volumes without his even opening his mouth to speak the words.

When the woman was limp and spent in the King's arms he gently lowered her to the floor at his feet then moved to catch Sam's arm none too gently in his gloved hand.

"I have seen to their pleasure as is my duty, it would have been unforgivable of me to leave them unfulfilled. But for the rest of the night, Beloved One, you will get your wish. You and I will be a duet. Just we two. Alone. Now come!" He needn't have bothered to bark out the command, not when he so easily dragged her unwilling body behind him as he stalked down the dais and across the great throne room.

"Cerebus!" the King called out in a hard, authoritative voice. "Prepare a service for two in my chambers at once."

Sam had to tamp down once more on the primitive and instinctive urge to flee as it became clear where the King was taking her. Oh if only she hadn't opened her big

mouth, but then she never had been one for diplomacy. It seemed that she was about to reap the consequences of her actions. In a big way.

Chapter Five

The King's chamber was a direct mirror in design as that of the room in which she'd awakened just that morning. However, the color scheme was perhaps a bit more volatile, with a heavier usage of crimson and black and gold. The exotic, barren landscape beyond the high windows of his room reflected the rays of the setting sun as though a torch had been lit to the dark coppery sands.

"You are uniquely beautiful. But then that is why you were chosen I have no doubt," The King said into her ear, causing her to jump in surprise. She'd been standing there, riveted by the opulence of her surroundings for longer than she would have thought possible under the circumstances, and his voice had startled her.

"I am not beautiful," she said firmly.

"Yes you are," he responded in kind. "I have never seen such coloring." His voice grew hoarse and he reached out to capture a lock of her hair between his fingers. "You are truly one of a kind."

"My coloring is garish, I'll have you know. And it's not all that rare on my world."

"You are trying to goad me. Why?" He seemed truly puzzled over it.

"I'm not sure," she admitted and wondered over the truth of it. "I can't seem to help it. I guess I just get a little surly after being kidnapped and carted off to an alien world. Call me crazy but that's just my initial reaction to all of this."

"You have a very independent nature. That much I can clearly see and it pleases me that it is so despite your anger. Now come, let us forget our tempers—I have already forgiven you yours—and enjoy our evening repast. Cerebus has already come and gone it seems." He turned from her then and led her by the hand to a short table flanked by plush cushions on the floor, which was piled high with aromatic foods.

"Recline a bit and allow me to help make you more comfortable." Before Sam could reply he had pushed her back against the pillows on the floor and removed her veil with a wave of his hand. Then, gently but insistently, he spread her legs wide with his hand, intending to remove the chastity plugs.

"You are breathtaking," he said and kissed the seam of her sex between her spread thighs. Sam squeaked in surprise and jerked away. "Do not fear me," he implored her in a coaxing voice, gazing up at her from his perch between her legs. He dipped his head again and drew her swollen clit into his mouth, stroking the soft tissues of her inner thighs in a soothing manner. His lips and tongue were searing hot against her aroused flesh and she couldn't help the moan of pure bliss that escaped her lips. That

her body could go from uncomfortable embarrassment to full arousal in so short a span of time was shocking to her in the extreme.

There was a sudden, intense feeling of relief as his adept fingers removed the golden dildo from her drenched pussy, but it was short lived as his fingers took its place, stretching her even more fully than before. The King kissed her clit—hard—and pulled back to watch his hands move between her legs. He thrust his fingers into her three more times then withdrew them. He brought his shining wet fingers to his mouth, keeping his eyes locked to hers, and licked away every last trace of her arousal from them with his tongue. Sam moaned again but it ended in a choking sound as he neatly removed the butt plug.

“Now you can relax and enjoy your meal to its fullest,” he murmured, sending her a truly devilish look with his sherry gold eyes, quite obviously well aware that he’d left her in a state of razor-edged arousal with his erotic attentions.

“You’re a beast,” she grumbled inelegantly, reached forward to snare what looked like a slice of pineapple from her dinner tray and popped it into her mouth, eyes bulging their surprise at its robust and sour flavor. It wasn’t pineapple but it was tasty nonetheless.

The King’s eyes widened in surprise and he let out a laugh. “I like your sharp tongue, I think. Perhaps you will find that you like mine as well?” He leaned forward and licked a trail of stray fruit juice from the stubborn point of her chin before Sam could even think to move away.

“Why are you teasing me? I thought you were mad at me?” Sam couldn’t help asking.

The King smiled and toyed with a lock of her hair. “I admit I was a little taken aback by your harsh words to me in the throne room, but I am not one to hold a grudge. I can see that you are still adjusting to the thought of being here, being part of my Collection. I cannot say that I blame you for that. But in time I am sure that you will bless the day you were chosen for me by The Collector.”

“That’ll be the day,” she mumbled and rolled her eyes. What arrogance...but then he was probably used to females treating him like the sun rose and set in his pants.

The King put two fingers beneath her chin and forced her to meet his eyes dead on. “Give yourself a chance. Give me a chance. I am trying my best to woo you, the least you can do is let go of your negativity for the time we spend together tonight. Enjoy yourself. If there is one thing I believe in implicitly, it is the healing power of pleasure...and I promise you I will give *that* to you in spades.”

“What if I don’t want pleasure from you?”

“Not want pleasure? Now I know you are just joking with me.” He sent her a killer smile full of charm and the dark lure of sex. “All beings desire pleasure, a surcease of need or want, and there is no shame in that. Come, let me show you.” He leaned forward and buried his lips in the hair that draped across her shoulders.

“But I haven’t eaten yet,” she protested, stalling for time.

"What need have you of such trivial sustenance when I am in your arms?"

"Such conceit!" She started to push him away but stopped when she saw the wicked look in his eyes.

"I just wanted to get a rise out of you, Beloved One. There is no need to get physically aggressive."

"I am not getting aggressive," she growled.

The King merely laughed at her contradictory behavior and nuzzled her neck with his lips. "Your hair is the color of the brightest flame. I fear it will burn me if I am not careful. And your scent," he breathed deeply at her throat, sending pleasant tremors racing through her body, "it is enough to drive me wild with lust."

"Perhaps I should bathe it off then," she said sullenly, trying her best not to respond to the seductive tone of his voice and the close cage of his arms as they braced on either side of her on the pillows.

"A bath...yes. Let me bathe the other women from my body so that you are more comfortable in my arms." He pressed a soft kiss to her shoulder and pushed away from her, rising to his feet. "Eat your fill, my jewel, so that your strength is at its peak when I rejoin you on the pillows."

Sam expected him to leave the room for his bath and was therefore surprised when, in the marble floor behind her, there appeared a deep round pool filled with water. The King stepped into it, skirt, jewelry and all, and dunked his head under the water. When he reemerged his hair was long and loose, trailing like a cape into the water all about him. He dunked once more then exited the bath, trailing water onto the floor in his wake – water that miraculously disappeared after little more than a few seconds, as if it had never been spilled.

The King shamelessly pulled the dripping skirt from his body, exposing firm round buttocks, which made Sam's mouth water just to look at, and shook the water from his body. Moments later he was dry, his hair falling in glistening ringlets down to his knees. He didn't bother to redress, but came back to her side gloriously nude but for the golden adornments on his body.

"You were too busy watching me bathe to eat your meal," he teased her with a satisfied smile.

"You didn't bathe, you just took a quick dunk in the water!"

"And how else would you bathe?" he asked with a curious look.

"With soap and a cloth or sponge," she said with no little amount of exasperation.

The King chuckled and he responded as if he were informing a child of the obvious. "But these waters are enchanted so I have no need of harsh cleaning agents or exfoliants. You were given such a bath but a few hours ago in the preparation chamber. I assure you that I am as clean as it is possible to get."

Sam swept her eyes down his length and felt her body suffuse with the warmth of arousal.

"You like the way I look. I can see it in your eyes."

Sam huffed, blowing her long bangs out of her eyes. "You are attractive, I'll give you that. But just because you're good looking doesn't mean I'm going to hop into bed with you like that." She snapped her fingers for an example. "I'm not that easy."

"You want me," he urged.

"Maybe. A little. So what? I'm sure you're used to that kind of response from women. It doesn't mean anything."

An arrogant and wholly dangerous look entered his eyes. "It means that I can use all of my wiles without guilt. Because there is already some desire in you for me, I can do this for example," he raised his hand and blew a generous amount of *phuq* dust into her face, "in order to entice you into my arms without it feeling like an unfair coercion."

Sam's body immediately went up in flames. Her head grew light and her mind dreamy. Why she was fighting her attraction to the King but seconds before she couldn't begin to fathom, but it was better late than never to rectify her mistakes in dealing with him. She launched herself into his arms, throwing them both backwards into the depths of the cushions that littered the floor. The King's voice chuckled darkly into her ear, the delicious sound causing her body to shudder with the force of her lust for him, and settled her more easily against him. Sam's lips sought out his but he deftly turned his head before they could reach their destination. She moaned out her disappointment and settled her lips at his jaw instead.

Oh such bliss was this! Her mouth was swollen and tingling, so that by pressing her mouth against his smooth caramel skin they felt an immense wave of relief, enticing her to bury them deeper against his flesh. Her body felt heavy and thick with arousal. Her King sensed this and swept his hands lovingly down her back and buttocks, making her nearly swoon with rapture. In turn she raced her own eager hands down his firm, muscled stomach and thighs before zeroing in on the object of her greatest desire—his long, thick cock.

"Nah, ah, ah," he admonished, gently taking her hands from his arousal. "We will play this out my way this first time, Beloved One. Come. Let me show you what it is like to be loved by your King." He rose, lifting her with him—which was a lucky thing since she had no strength to stand on her own—and carried her to a large cushioned bench in a curtained corner. The bench was upholstered in something resembling leather or vinyl and was just as smooth against her skin when he laid her down upon it. He positioned her legs just so on either side of the bench so that she straddled it, leaving her wet sex open and vulnerable to his gaze.

The King turned and retrieved a large silver pitcher from its resting place beside the bench. He held it over her body for a moment then deliberately poured its contents over her body with a flourish. Silvery, glistening oil splashed its warmth onto her body, covering her from neck to feet in a thick river of the stuff. Sam gasped and instinctively raised her arms to shield herself but only succeeded in getting her hands and arms

drenched as well. When the vessel of heated oil was empty the King tossed it carelessly aside and straddled the bench so that his spread knees butted against hers.

He reached out his hands and massaged the oil into her thighs, sweeping his palms in broad soothing motions, deliberately easing his ministrations on her inner thighs so that they were more of a caress than a massage. Before long Sam was spreading her legs wider by pushing her knees against his, seeking to bring her sex that much closer to his magical hands. The King only chuckled at her motions and purposefully avoided the place that most needed his attention.

Sam moaned when his hands moved up and kneaded into the flare of her hips. That such a seemingly innocent press of his hands could bring her so close to the pinnacle of pleasure would have stunned her had she been capable of any rational thought. His hands then proceeded up to her belly, ribs and breasts. Her nipples were swollen and hard from her arousal and the slip slide of his hands over them was both a torture and a gift. The oil was positively burning against her flesh now as he rubbed her down with it, but it was such a pleasant fire that it only served to heighten the pleasure of his touch.

Suddenly the King lifted her and turned her over onto her stomach on the bench, again positioning her legs so that she straddled its girth. He pushed aside her hair and ran his oily hands down the dip of her spine. Her toes curled and she sighed, more than willing to let him continue his massage. After long, wondrous moments of his kneading the planes and slopes of her back, the King turned his attentions to her buttocks, plumping and squeezing them as if they were ripe fruits. He spread her cheeks and administered a heavy dollop of the oil into the crease and rubbed it silkily into her most delicate skin.

Soon Sam was panting and moaning with the pleasure of his attentions. Her rear rose up off of the bench, until she was presenting herself like a lioness for her mate. The King chuckled but this time it was a strained sound and then he bent forward and laid his lips to the dripping wet heat of her pussy. The thick moisture of the oil had mingled with her own arousal and created an exquisite, silky friction between the flesh of her sex and the flesh of his lips and tongue as he moved his face deeper against her.

Too soon—oh the torture of it!—his rooting mouth moved away and he turned her back over to face him. His lips came down onto one of her swollen nipples and his large sex prodded at the portal of her cunt. A moment of tight fullness and he was through, causing Sam to gasp with the shock of his heavy girth that quickly stretched her full to bursting. He was so long that it seemed an eternity that he came into her, filling her with each delicious, hard and meaty inch of him until at last his balls rested against the oiled wetness of her behind.

The King groaned long and loud against her nipple, before biting down gently upon that tender flesh until she too was groaning with the torturous pleasure of it.

“You feel like fire and silk around my cock, Beloved One,” he gasped against her breast. “Squeeze me with your muscles, tight.”

Sam did as he commanded and moaned with the resulting pleasure of her motion. Immediately she repeated it, closing the inner muscles of her vagina around his impaling thickness until she was aching with delight.

"Yes. Just like that," he moaned, clearly enjoying the movements of her body as much as she was. "Milk me with your sweet, juicy pussy."

Too soon, without his even having moved once inside of her, the clasp and unclasp of her inner muscles around him brought them both to an explosive climax. Sam cried out and raked her nails down his back. The King squeezed her breasts tightly in his hands and groaned against her chest as he filled her full of his ejaculate.

Sam was already spent and tired, but the King had no such weakness. He pulled himself free of her, glistening and still fully engorged. Without a word he crawled up her body, placed his mighty cock between her breasts, plumped the globes up with his hands and pumped himself in and out of the valley he created between them. The oil eased his way as he moved and the feel of his cock there between her swollen breasts, butting against her chin on each up thrust he made, had her wet and ready for more of him in mere moments. Sam couldn't resist palming the clenching muscles of his buttocks in her hands as he moved against her and was pleased when the King moaned his pleasure at the caress.

His thumbs stroked over her nipples with each movement he made, causing them to tingle and swell even further than before. The effects of the *phuq* dust flooded her with hot molten lust, but had nothing to do with the soft aching jerk of her heart that occurred every time his exotic eyes met hers. He was truly a master, playing her body, heart and mind with the skill gained from his life as a sex god and she was powerless to resist his potent allure.

With a mighty shout the King's hot seed spurted against her chest, breasts, and chin as he found yet another release. Breathing hard he moved down and rubbed the thick essence of himself into her skin, even smearing some onto her lips and she eagerly licked it away with her tongue. He bent down, heedless of the sperm that covered her flesh, and took one swollen breast deep into his mouth, sucking it clean.

The King threw her legs up over his shoulders and impaled her once more with his mighty cock. He pumped into the farthest depths of her, reaching her very womb and scraping against that most perfect place within her with the bar that pierced the head of his shaft. It was too soon for her and Sam fought instinctively against the approaching release that threatened to wrack her body with a mixture of both pleasure and pain. But the King would have none of that. His skillful hands reached down and rubbed into the soft wet flesh of her sex, pulling on the full, bald lips, the swollen clit and diamond threaded hair with his fingertips. Sam screamed and felt her inner muscles clamp down like a vice onto the invading flesh of the King as she reached an explosive climax. The King, unbelievably, joined her in the culmination, once again filling her to the brim with the wet heat of his come.

Sam lost all track of time as the King continued to love her throughout the long, sultry night. They did not get any rest or sleep until well after the dawn.

Chapter Six

The light of early morning stabbed at Sam's bloodshot eyes and she moaned in protest as the satin covers were jerked unceremoniously from her body.

"Wake up, my Jewel. A new day is upon us."

"Mmplf," she mumbled in response to the overly cheerful voice and snuggled back down into the pillows.

"Get up sleepy head." A hand smacked loudly against the exposed flesh of her bottom. "The day is wasting away while you sleep."

"Let it, I'm too tired to care," she grumbled.

The King laughed and lightly jerked her to her feet, tenderly brushing her tangled red hair out of her eyes with his fingertips. Sam winced as the sudden, unexpected movement caused her much used and tender flesh to protest vehemently. A silvery trace of semen ran down her leg but she was far too tired to bother wiping it away. The King had filled her; let him see the results, she thought sullenly, trying her best to forget how incredibly pleasant the night had been. How sweet and beautiful it had been, despite her initial misgivings.

The *phuq* dust had worn off sometime during the evening, but her ardor for the King had not cooled. It had only flamed brighter and hotter in the deep hours of the night.

"You are truly beautiful, my Jewel, and you have greatly lifted my spirits with your generous body and heart. I have a gift for you."

Sam's tired eyes immediately widened and grew more alert. The King chuckled once more. "I knew that would get your attention," he boasted arrogantly.

The King went down on his knees before her. His white silk skirt was split on both sides today and exposed a generous amount of caramel skin as he lowered himself and nudged apart the love-swollen lips of her sex. He pressed a light kiss to the rise of her clit and with a flourish of his hand presented her with his gift. It was a delicate hoop with a small emerald suspended by a chain dangling down from it. The King's eyes gleamed their satisfaction as she gasped in appreciation of the jewel's beauty and nodded his satisfaction at her reaction. He placed the hoop against the flesh of her clit, waved his hand over it, and when he pulled away the jewel was pierced painlessly through her flesh. When Sam moved, the dangling emerald hung down past the bald mound of her vagina and tickled against her inner thigh, glinting in the light with every movement she made.

"Do you like it?" he asked in a husky whisper.

"Yes," she couldn't help admitting, though she never would have willingly gotten such a piercing back at home. She'd never thought herself the type to enjoy such adornments.

"The jewel has a name. Sar'chesh. It is a shard from a much larger stone—Sar'cheih-a—which rests in my royal scepter and therefore makes this offering quite priceless. I hope you treasure it. As I treasure you, Beloved One."

What else could she say? The gift humbled her, if not the gesture, which she was sure he made to each and every one of his nameless "Jewels". "I will treasure it," she vowed, because it was true.

"Now come. You must return to your quarters and break your fast." The King rose once more.

"I need to bathe," she protested, feeling the sticky essence of him coating her practically from head to toe. He had loved her long and thoroughly during the night, of that there could be no doubt. He was truly an insatiable beast.

"Won't you keep my scent on your skin for a little while longer?" he asked silkily.

"But I look a mess! Everyone will see—"

"Shh. Wear my seed proudly before the others in the Collection. They will see it as a sign of your power over me, as evidence of your prowess as a woman and they will respect you highly. As you deserve."

Sam was silent as the King led her from his chambers, walking her back to the women's chambers with a hand placed lightly at the small of her back. The emerald cast that enclosed her breast still remained, feeling heavier now that the night was over. During the hours spent in the King's arms she had forgotten for a little while the situation in which she found herself. But now, with the harsh light of the morning, she remembered and was troubled.

Had her friends and family back home truly forgotten about her, as The Collector had said? True, it had only been a little over a day since she'd left, but it felt to her like ages had already passed her by. Long ages. Perhaps so much time had passed that she really was just a memory to those she'd known before. Or perhaps The Collector's magic was so powerful it could change history. She was afraid to ask and find out the truth either way.

Down through endless winding corridors they went and Sam again noticed various doors sporting large jeweled handles as they passed. She wanted to ask the King where they led to but suspected that he wouldn't tell her so she decided not to waste her breath on the question. Perhaps she would find out from the other women later. Then, too soon it seemed to her, they came to their destination. The King waved his gloved hand over an unadorned wall and there appeared in the middle a doorway through which they proceeded without pause.

The women of the Collection were already gathered and waiting to greet them. The women acted surprised to see their King escorting her and Sam had a moment to be grateful that she didn't have to face this group of strangers alone, for it seemed plain

that the King didn't normally accompany his Jewels back to their chambers after a night spent in his.

The King turned to her and before she had any inkling of his intentions he positioned the Veil over her face with a flourish of his hand.

"To keep your mouth chaste for me, Beloved One," he said softly. He went down on his knees before her, pulling her with him after one long searing look into her eyes. He laid her out before him, putting on a grand show for their audience. He trailed his fingers over the seam of her vagina, which was still creamy and wet from his many orgasms spent between her legs during their night together. He spread her nether lips wide apart, bent down, and licked the exposed flesh of her cunt with the flat of his tongue. Sam moaned. She couldn't help it. Her body was so sensitive to the slightest touch that it would have been impossible for her to find no pleasure in his erotic caress.

"And to keep your body chaste for me as well." A moment later and her chastity plugs were inserted carefully and pleurably into her nether orifices. The King tongued her clit one last time then rose, bringing her to her shaking feet with him.

The King leaned down from his considerable height over her and bestowed a soft, chaste kiss to her forehead. The back of his unadorned hand stroked lazily over the swollen peak of her breast before he pulled back and gifted her with a sultry smile. "Until tonight, my Jewel, think only of me and the untold pleasures I have yet to show you." With those last heady words of promise he turned on his heel and left the courtyard with Sam staring dumbfounded after him.

Of a sudden she was in the midst of an army of giggling females, each begging to hear some specific detail of the night she had spent as the King's Jewel. A few women were even so bold as to approach her and lick a trace or two of the King's sperm from her skin, their veils having been removed by Cerebus in anticipation of a meal no doubt, until Sam growled her displeasure over such forward behavior and they refrained from further advances.

"Let her be. Give her some space, girls, she is still new here." Keln's voice broke over the din as she moved at once to Sam's side. "Come Sam. Let us move now to the bath where we can all relax. Perhaps after your muscles have eased you will see fit to share the details of your evening with the rest of us." She winked reassuringly at Sam, who was immensely grateful to the woman for her intervention.

As one the group of women moved to the large fountain pool and entered the sparkling waters. Sam gave a sigh as the water lapped around her thighs and mons. The steaming warmth healed and soothed the chapped flesh of her tender sex almost immediately. She dunked her weary head beneath the water and was amazed to feel the last of her aches and worries flee from her as if they had never been. What she wouldn't have given for a bath like this on an early Monday morning back at home.

For the next few hours Sam and the women frolicked in the healing waters of their bath. Sam was so relaxed by the end of it that she found herself content to let the others feel her hair or flesh, as they seemed wont to do. Her hair, its color and texture,

fascinated the women and in a way it was most flattering though under any other circumstances it would have made Sam a little uncomfortable. When a hand or mouth strayed too close to her breasts or sex she pulled away – not out of shyness or disgust – but because she was still far too tender after the King’s loving to tolerate such explorations no matter how gentle they might be.

Too soon Cerebus entered the courtyard and bade them exit their bath. With a wave of his hand there appeared long tables laden down with foods of which the women were invited to eat their fill. He removed Sam’s veil so that she could eat with the others. Sam was famished and ate until her stomach was quite full, eager to try a little morsel from each exotic dish. When they were finished with their meal Cerebus offered them each a bowl of lightly scented water and a small towel to clean their fingers and mouths.

Cerebus, it seemed, was quick to forgive his earlier displeasure with Sam, offering her kind smiles as he passed just as he did with the other women in their turn. It was clear that Cerebus was a gentle soul deep down; a man loyal and committed to his King and the women under his care. Whenever one of the women voiced a need or want he was quick to see that their wishes were carried out. Not once did he deny a request and not once did he balk or complain. In fact it was clear to Sam that no one in this new world was given much to complaining or negative feeling. These people as a whole were given more to gentle pleasures and the pursuit of happiness than to lugubriousness.

Before Sam really understood what was going on the women had all moved away from the table to gather in a large circle around Cerebus by the fountain pool, lying back on pillows and cushions they had gathered along the way. Sam joined them, sitting between Keln and Ferd as they had thoughtfully reserved a spot for her amongst them. Keln’s large equine body folded down on itself so that she rested on her side with her long horse legs curled in front. It was then that Sam noticed the very human sex organ that rested between the centaur’s legs, a puffy red vagina, bald and filled with a chastity plug just as hers was. It was a strange sight, but then Sam was surprisingly growing more and more accustomed to such things.

Cerebus exited the circle and fetched two large silver tureens and several small matching bowls from an alcove in the wall. The bowls he deposited, one apiece, with the women and filled them with oil from one of the tureens. From the other he took a pinch of *phuq* dust and dashed it into the bowls. Sam wondered what new ritual was about to be played out. After long moments in which Cerebus fetched more and more bowls to provide each woman with her own, she grew increasingly more curious. When Cerebus was through and every woman had a bowl full of glistening oil, the women dipped their fingers into the bowl, spread their legs and began to masturbate, uncaring of their audience. Their golden plugs and piercings glinted between their oily fingers as they stroked themselves shamelessly and with eager abandon. Sam was shocked to her toes but – sooner than she would have guessed – accepting, because the women seemed oblivious of Cerebus and one another as they played with themselves like eager sirens.

Cerebus noticed at once that Sam was hesitant to join the group and moved to her with a concerned look in his soft dark eyes. "Is something wrong, Sam?"

"No," she said, voice husky and embarrassed despite her efforts to remain aloof.

"Yet you do not join the others."

"I'm...I'm a little sore," she admitted and was glad that it was true and she didn't have to admit to her prudish embarrassment of the proceedings surrounding them.

"Forgive me, I should have realized." He gently pushed her back against her cushions and attempted to spread her legs. Sam instinctively protested, clamping her knees firmly together.

"I will not hurt you, Sam. I just need to make sure that your flesh is soothed and healed. It would not do to have you tender and bruised when my Master comes to fetch you tonight." He smiled at her with the last words, obviously pleased that his King had found favor with her.

So Sam dropped back and allowed Cerebus to spread her legs wide apart, the better to inspect her with his dark, knowing eyes. Cerebus gathered oil in his fingertips and warmed them with his breath before laying them against the swollen flesh of her sex. The oil instantly soothed her tissues, but also awoke a need within her that had her breathing harder and she willingly spread her legs further for Cerebus' attentions. Gently, Cerebus removed the plug that filled her pussy and poured a dollop of oil into her channel with the bowl. He rubbed the oil into the saddle of her sex, the full outer lips and the soft skin within, but was careful not to penetrate her channel in any way with his fingers.

Sam sighed and began to relax beneath Cerebus' gentle ministrations. Her body thrummed with a soft arousal but after the initial starburst of sensation it dimmed and left her feeling dreamy instead of lustful. Cerebus poured another generous dollop of oil between her legs and reinserted the golden plug. All of Sam's discomfort had eased away and she was left dozing against the pillow as Cerebus moved on and supervised the care of the others in the Collection. Before long the moans of the women increased in frequency as one by one they found release under their own hands, rolling their hips into the air as if accepting the thrust of a lover.

Sam needed her sleep and Cerebus and the other women left her to it, seeming to understand without having to be told that she had gained no rest during her night with the King. It was several hours later before Sam awoke and time already for another meal. The women primped and giggled amongst themselves, preparing themselves for the King should he choose them for the night—or so Keln informed her. It was a given that Sam would be amongst the women chosen, but no one held it against her or showed jealousy that she was so favored. In fact the women seemed happy for her, perhaps a little in awe of her—she was a newcomer and that in itself was a rarity—and definitely friendly to her. Before much time had passed Sam was already feeling more and more at ease, as if she had a true place among them, as if she belonged.

The day passed by for Sam in a blur of relaxing naps and lazy swims in the fountain pool. The sun sank low on the horizon of the coppery black sands of Valeo and the Collection was once more gathered in the throne room to stand before the King. Sam wondered what kind of night lay ahead of her...and how many women she would have to join at the King's side. Though she was the King's Jewel for the night and allowed the time alone with him in his bedchamber, she knew she would not be the only woman to pleasure him at his throne. Already she was learning much about this new world around her.

The King, surprisingly, chose only two other women that night besides Sam. Keln seemed especially proud of Sam, telling her plainly that it was her ability to please the King that made him choose so few partners from the Collection. Sam had no such illusions about herself; probably the King was just too tired after his long night with her to have the stamina for too many women tonight.

The revelry of the people in the throne room was not conducive for brooding and Sam joined the King and his chosen few at the throne with fewer and fewer sarcastic misgivings in her mind. It was that easy to let herself go with the flow and simply enjoy herself as the others seemed eager and willing to do. The King greeted her with a smile and a soft press of his face into the swell of her stomach.

He surprised her and every other listening ear with his first words. "My Jewel. You are lovelier now than you were yesterday. Come. I know you are territorial so I will not touch any woman but you tonight so that you will find favor with me. I have chosen these two because they find completion with the consumption of seed and do not need further stimulation." Sam immediately noticed Dennota amongst the two women. So that was why the King hadn't needed to have sex with the woman the night before to help her find her release. "They will take the edge off of my need with their mouths," he continued. "Afterward you and I shall retire for the night." He seemed pleased with himself over the gesture and was boyishly handsome as he smiled at her.

Sam couldn't help it, she smiled back and stepped closer to him as the first woman stepped up the dais and wrapped her lips around the swollen flesh of the King's cock. Sam felt her body react to the sight and let out a soft sigh when the King's fingers moved to stroke her exposed breast. His mouth soon followed, his lips pulling and his tongue licking at the swollen flesh of her nipple. His hands gripped the flare of her hips, plumping and kneading the flesh gently. Soon he found his first release and he moaned against her nipple, vibrating it pleasantly. The creamy white milk of his come filled the woman's mouth to overflowing but she cleaned up every last drop, crying out too when she found release.

Dennota moved to follow the first woman, taking the King's cock deep within her greedy throat. The King's fingers moved down to cup the hairless flesh of Sam's sex, delving between the seam to find the silky wetness beyond.

"You're ready for me already," he sighed appreciatively against her breast before taking it deep into his mouth, suckling it with noisy abandon.

Sam was soon bucking against the King's mouth and hand, seeking more and more of the delicious torment he visited upon her. The King groaned and pulled away, throwing her a searing look from beneath his long dark lashes.

"I find myself ever eager to retire to my bedchamber," he said huskily.

The King reached down and gripped the base of his cock in his hand. Dennota's head bobbed upon him as she fucked him with her mouth and he aided her ministrations with a pumping motion of his hand. Sam watched in fascination as the King stroked himself to completion within the woman's mouth. He pulled back to afford Sam a better look as he spurted another thick wash of semen into the green woman's mouth. Dennota moaned and swallowed it down eagerly, bucking her hips, finding her own release as she did so.

The King groaned loudly, squeezing the last pearly drops of his release into the woman's mouth with his fist. Dennota licked his cock clean and moved away from him with a gentle, friendly smile in Sam's direction. Immediately the King captured Sam's hand and raced with her to his chambers, commanding Cerebus to prepare them a meal as he had the night before. Sam's body was tingling with giddy excitement.

And much as the night before, she gained no sleep until well past the dawn.

Chapter Seven

Two weeks passed and a sort of routine became the norm for Samantha. As unusual as that routine might have been in her former life, Sam found herself enjoying it nonetheless. Each evening the King had Cerebus fetch Sam from the Collection. Each night Sam and the King spent endless hours making love and sharing lovers' secrets with one another, for the King was ever interested in the life she had led before coming to him. And each morning the King escorted her back to the women's courtyard, kissed her lightly on the forehead, and bid her goodbye for the day. It would have been lovely if Sam weren't reminded each passing moment that their tryst would not last forever. She would not be his favorite for long, though the emerald cup stayed firm over her breast.

She didn't even know his name.

And since the King never called her by anything other than his usual endearments she assumed he didn't know hers either.

What a travesty that she should be losing her heart to the one man who would never want it. The one man who would never really have any use for it. He was kind and caring to her, seeing to her every need in bed and out of it, but from all accounts that was how he treated all of his women. It was why they all revered him so much.

Just now Sam and the other women were gathered in their circle masturbating—a pastime that Sam had of late begun to participate in. As the days wore on it seemed to her that she missed her King more and more with each passing hour and she needed the relief of self-pleasure to sustain her until their evenings together. Her body positively ached by the time her royal lover sent Cerebus to fetch her, weeping for the King's touch so that even the slightest shift of her chastity plugs tortured her with a mix of pain and pleasure. She needed release more and more, no matter if it was from her own ministrations.

Sam moaned and bucked her hips as she rubbed the *phuq* oil into the swollen button of her clit with her fingers. The slippery skin of her vagina tingled with each pass of her fingers and she spread her nether lips farther apart, gasping when the sensation nearly undid her completely. Cool air teased her splayed sex, contrasting with the warmth of the *phuq* oil. She imagined in her mind that the fingers touching her belonged to her King. That her clit was being manipulated not by her own fingertips but by his skillful lips and tongue instead. She cried out and rolled her hips, enjoying the feel of her chastity plugs shifting deep inside of her body. She was so wet, so swollen...oh if only He could be here with her now.

And then, as if her wish had indeed come true, she opened her eyes and there he was, staring at her from a distance across the courtyard. His golden eyes fairly blazed with heat as he watched her stroke herself to completion. Sam's sex pulsed and throbbed, as if his gaze had the power to physically caress her, and her fingers rubbed frantic circles into her clit as she approached the fury of her orgasm. She closed her eyes on a sigh and that quickly the King was at her side.

He came down upon her like a beast covering its mate, growling and throwing aside his skirt. He removed the chastity plugs that filled her and the Veil that covered her face with deft and hurried motions. Grabbing his cock at its thick base he positioned himself at her portal and came into her with one long thrust. Sam was so wet and ready that she easily accepting his girth, her body easing his way with a spurt of heated moisture that made him groan and buck deeper into the depths of her. Eagerly and without shame Sam wrapped her legs about his waist, locking him to her as he began to rock within her.

The King breathed hot warmth into her mouth but Sam knew that was as close as he would come to kissing her. She accepted it, knowing it was his way, and savored the sweet breath he gave her with every ounce of love and passion within her. His chest was adorned with a gold plated rib corselet and it scraped against the tender flesh of her breasts with each movement he made. His hair was dressed in long thin braids and threaded through with tiny sparkling diamonds all of which tickled against her face, arms and sides. All over her body there was the sensation of his touch as every portion of his form caressed her in its way.

Deeper and deeper he moved, harder and harder, shaking her frame against the soft pillows that cushioned her. He was as close to losing control as Sam had ever seen him, obviously greatly affected by the sight of her masturbating. His forehead came down upon hers, the perspiration dotting his brow mingling with hers as he looked down into her eyes.

"Your pussy belongs to me. Only to me. Say it," he commanded.

"My pussy belongs to you. Only to you," she repeated, meaning every word with every fiber of her being.

"Who is your Master, my Jewel?"

"You are."

"Say it!"

"Master. You are my Master," she panted, clutching at him with desperate hands.

"I am the Master of your luscious pussy. No one will ever fuck this juicy piece but me. Only me," he groaned brokenly.

"Yes. Yes!"

The King increased the tempo and force of his thrusts, jarring Sam's teeth and making her wail with the pleasure that swamped her senses. The muscles deep within her sex pulsed and gripped the King's impaling weapon and she was flying.

Sam screamed and shuddered in his arms. The King threw back his head and roared triumphantly to the heavens as he too found his release. He filled her with his hot cream, continuing to thrust in and out of her as he spent himself. Sam bit into his shoulder as her climax reached untold heights and he roared again, bucking into her mindlessly. Slowly their passion abated and his thrusts eased and slowed until he was softly, gently moving his hips between her weak legs. He kissed the curve of her jaw and rested his head on her shoulder, silent but for the pounding of his heart and the rasp of his breath.

After long moments the King pulled away with one last kiss to her shoulder. He smiled down at her softly and withdrew his cock from her spent body with gentle care.

“Rest now, my Jewel. Regain your strength. I’ll be back for you tonight,” he promised.

He righted his clothing and turned to speak to Cerebus. Sam was in a daze after the whirlwind of passion she’d just been a party to. Her eyes lazily followed the form of her lover as he moved with the Collection master to a small gray woman on the far side of the circle. It was with no small amount of shock that she witnessed the King, the man who had only moments before been thrusting into her eager body, take the woman’s hand and lead her from the Courtyard.

Had the time come so soon then, that he needed other women to see to his needs? Sam’s heart constricted painfully and her eyes filled with tears. The King hadn’t even looked at her as he’d left through the doorway, his hand firmly grasping the gray woman’s as he led her through. Though she had suspected that this day would come, she hadn’t envisioned it playing out only moments after she’d been in the King’s arms. On that thought she felt her pain swell, but along with it there came a spark of anger.

He hadn’t even cared to spare her feelings! Here she was full of his come, creamy with it still, and he’d dared to claim another in plain sight of her. He knew by now how she felt about sharing him. She could only bear to share him with his sucklers – mouths as he called them – in the throne room before they retired to his chambers together. He had seemed more than accepting of her feelings on that matter, had even gone so far as to promise not to fuck another woman so long as she was his willing Jewel.

How dare he lie to her so blatantly? She seethed and dashed away her tears, ignoring the pitying look coming from Keln, her dearest friend in the Collection. Instead of dwelling on her pain at the King’s defection she nurtured the rage that was slowly gathering and building in her heart.

A plan began to form in her troubled mind.

So the King would play her false, under her very nose, without a care for her feelings? Well let him see her revenge for this inflicted injury. Let him witness her fury and retribution for her loss of pride. He had stolen her heart, forget that she had almost been ready to give it to him of her own free will. He deserved swift and brutal punishment. She would see that he received his due...

And then she would leave for home. Somehow. Someway. She must leave this place, this velvet heaven that had for a few shining, blissful weeks been her truest home.

Chapter Eight

Before the night had come to Valeo, Sam had thoroughly worked out a plan of escape from the Courtyard. She waited until Cerebus came to assist them in their afternoon bath, as was his habit. While he moved to the fountain pool, Sam brought forth the tureen of *phuq* dust she had collected from its home in the wall earlier in the day. She wasted no time getting a handful of the stuff as she'd seen him do. Instead she threw the entire contents of the jug at Cerebus' head, holding her breath as a great plume of the stuff rose about them, and waited for the madness she expected to ensue.

It did and quickly. The women, unwisely breathing in the fumes of the dust launched themselves at Cerebus, who opened his arms and went down in a pile of horny women beneath the water of the bath. Sam, still holding her breath though she was beginning to see spots, rushed forward and wrested the golden glove from Cerebus' hand while he was occupied with the women and unable to stop her. She shoved the glove onto her hand while making a dash for the wall that hid the magical door, which led beyond to the corridors that would take her to the King's bedchamber.

Finally she had untangled the chains that crisscrossed her palms and the glove was secure on her hand. She paused before the wall, waved her hand and though she had expected no less she was amazed to see the magical doorway appear before her. She wasted no time, but raced through the doorway into the corridor behind. There was no telling how long the effects of the *phuq* dust would last, or how long Cerebus would be occupied with the women of the harem.

As she ran she took note, as she always did, of the doors that lined the corridor. Soon enough she would have her answers about those mysterious doors, she promised herself. She did so long to open one of the doors to see for herself where they led or what lie beyond them, but she hadn't the time for such frivolous pursuits just now. For now she was on a mission and the rest would have to wait. Quickly she weaved through the hallways that were by this time very familiar to her and within moments she had closed the distance, standing before the side door that led into the King's chambers. Without preamble she burst into the room, fully expecting to see the King locked in an embrace with the grey woman.

He was alone, lounging back against his heavily canopied bed with an arm flung gracefully over his eyes. Sam's panting explosion into the room had him rising up with a wide-eyed look of surprise.

"What is wrong, my Jewel?" he asked with no small amount of concern and alarm. "What is amiss?"

Sam was afforded her first real look of danger and anger on the King's face as he rose from his bed and rushed to her side. The strength and nobility of his face impressed the fact of his royalty on her and almost had her thinking twice about her chosen course of action. Who knew what this King was capable of when moved to extremes?

"Where is she?" Sam demanded, throwing all caution to the wind and plunging headlong into the situation as she'd planned.

"Where is who?" the King asked, perplexed.

"The gray woman." Sam wracked her memory for a name. "Nantiqua."

The King looked at her for a long moment, searching her face. Sam wanted to squirm beneath his sherry gaze but stood firm by the force of her will alone. All of a sudden the King threw back his head and roared with a mighty burst of laughter. Sam wouldn't have been more shocked if he'd hit her upon the head with an anvil. How dare he laugh at her while her heart was breaking in the face of his faithlessness!

"Where is she?" Sam screamed, enraged at his reaction.

The King was beyond answering her, busy as he was clutching at his sides, doubling over in laughter until tears poured from the corners of his eyes. Sam rushed at him, pounding her fists into his chest in a rage of anger and hurt. The King stumbled back, not from the force of her blows, but with the force of his own mirth. He fell back against his pillows once again, taking Sam in his arms as he fell so that she joined him. He buried his face in her hair and laughed and laughed until Sam was openly crying with heartache and sadness and unchecked rage.

The King noticed the wetness of her cheeks and pulled back, his laughter immediately subsiding into chuckles. He brushed away the tears that spilled from her eyes and kissed her lightly on the nose, unable to keep from smiling.

"You were jealous of Nantiqua, weren't you love?"

Sam broke down and began to sob, hating herself for her weakness and loss of pride. "You didn't even care that I saw you leave with her right after you had your way with me." She buried her tearstained face against the bare ridge of his chest and pounded it with her fist for good measure.

"I had to leave with her. Her groom was waiting for me to fetch her."

Sam hiccupped. "What?"

"Her groom. One of my men at arms has desired a match with her for several moons now. I put the offer before Nantiqua and she accepted. They will be married in the throne room tonight and a great feast will be given in their honor."

"You mean you didn't take her back here with you?"

"Of course not, my Jewel. Did I not promise you that I would lie with no other but you so long as you would have me? Does my word bond mean nothing to you?"

"But you have so many women at your beck and call. How do I know that you haven't grown bored with me yet?"

"I could never grow bored with you." He chuckled and nuzzled her nose with his. "Especially when you throw such glorious tantrums like this. I will never know what to expect where you are concerned. I love that about you."

Sam took his face in her hands. "I don't know what I would do if you pushed me away," she said, knowing she was giving him a weapon should he ever choose to wield it. But he wasn't like that, her King. He would never willingly hurt her. More like accidentally, which was why she'd been so quick to jump to conclusions.

"You'll never have to know," he promised and did the most surprising thing he could have done.

He kissed her.

Oh it was no ordinary kiss, this. It was the kiss to end all kisses. If Sam had held the illusion that she had ever known love before, it was dispelled altogether as his lips closed softly over hers. No man on Earth could have ever hoped to kiss this way. So perfect. So much the physical manifestation of love that Sam's eyes filled once more with tears...tears of joy. The sweet, gentle press of his lips against hers caused her senses to dance and sing with euphoric delight. The flavor of his kiss was the taste of a future resting just within her grasp. A life of beauty and love and happiness, of children and grandchildren between them, and long nights spent in each other's embrace.

His mouth was soft and hot and moist against hers, a living, breathing silk at play over hers. Sam sighed, a broken sob, and his tongue slipped inside like a warm ghost past her lips. It was so gentle, this storm of love that swept her up, and her only anchor was his cradling arms cupped around her shaking body. The current pulled her deeper, the world around her growing paper-thin—like a dream—and all that she knew was the taste and feel of Him. Her love. Her King.

Sam clutched him to her tighter with a desperate aching need. Not for the physical pleasure of his bed, but for the spiritual haven of his love. How she wanted him to love her. As she loved him—more than time or place or life. More than anything ever dreamed of. He was her everything. Her always and forever.

A dizzying spiral of sensation and his lips had left hers, trembling and moist with the memory.

"My Jewel."

"Please..." She faltered, overcome with emotion.

"Please...what?" he urged softly, breathing the words into her mouth.

"My name is Sam," she said with a soft sobbing breath.

"My Sam. My Sa-man-tha. I have always known your name, but I waited for your permission to use it."

"Why?"

"It is just my way. Your name is precious above all things and I wanted you to gift it to me of your own free will."

"Please use it. I don't want to be just a Jewel to you anymore."

"You were never 'just a Jewel'. You have always and always will be *my* Jewel."

Sam leaned into him and pressed her mouth to his once more, feeling all of the same wondrous, magical things she'd felt in their first shared kiss. Such bliss, such delicious completion, this. He completed her, this man, in all ways.

Long moments later the King pulled away from her once more, breathing raggedly with the force of his own emotions. "You came storming in here like a goddess. I didn't know if something horrible had befallen you or the Collection or Cerebus —"

"Cerebus!" she exclaimed. "Oh no, he's going to hate me."

"Cerebus is incapable of hate." The King laughed at the very notion. "But why do you think he would?"

"I stole his glove and left him in a predicament back in the courtyard," she said with a look of chagrin.

"You stole his glove?"

Sam raised her hand and brandished it before his surprised eyes. "It's how I escaped the women's quarters. How did you think I got here?"

"Why would you need that to leave the women's quarters?" he asked, perplexed.

"You know. To make the door appear with the glove's magic."

Suddenly the King erupted into laughter. "You thought you needed the glove to open the door? Oh, my Jewel, you are a treasure beyond price in your innocence."

"What are you talking about?"

"The door is not magic. You do not need this glove to open it. In fact this glove has no magic—it is merely an insignia of Cerebus' station as Collection Master. The door is open to any who wish to use it. You are not a prisoner, Sam. You are free to come and go in the palace as you wish."

"But no one ever leaves the courtyard without being escorted by someone."

"That is likely because the women are content to stay where they are. The better to be served by Cerebus and have their needs taken care of with all haste."

"Oh man," she moaned, blushing with embarrassment. "I thought that because Cerebus and The Collector and yourself always wave your gloved hand around before magic happens that it was the glove that gave you power."

"My people are born with power. We wave the glove out of vanity mostly, showing off our insignia." He laughed and kissed her on the nose.

"We have to go save Cerebus."

"Save him from what?"

"The women." She quickly told him what she had done in order to "escape" her prison and make her way to his chambers.

All through her explanation the King's sherry golden eyes widened more and more with a mixed expression of shock, awe and perhaps a little bit of fear.

"Remind me never to make you angry, my Jewel," he said with a small, nervous laugh. "Come, let us save Cerebus then. I only hope there is a little of him left after the women have had their way with him."

As they hurried down the corridors, back to the courtyard, Sam gave in to the urge at last and asked the King about the doors that lined their path.

"They are the personal chambers of the women from past Collections who have chosen to stay here at the palace."

"What do you mean by past Collections? How many have you had?" Her voice rose on the last.

"Not me, Sam. My father's Collection and his father's before him and so on and so forth."

"So when you...die," she choked on the word, "the women in your Collection are allowed to live on at the palace?"

"Not exactly. When a King chooses his chastity keeper—his Queen—he releases those women in his keeping and vows monogamy with his mate for all the rest of their days together. Some women choose marriage with men at court, others a life of simple ease here in the palace, others still choose to return to their native lands, restored to the memory of their loved ones by The Collector as is necessary. A King cannot play with his Collection forever, he must breed heirs to continue the line."

"What about love?" she couldn't help asking.

"Love is very important too," he agreed with a smile, gathering her close beneath his arm as they walked on. "The most important."

At last they came before the courtyard and hurried within. The sight that greeted them was total chaos, with Cerebus trying his best to disentangle himself from a mountain of women who each wanted one thing and one thing only—him. The *phuq* dust had obviously taken care of Cerebus' inhibitions—none of the women had their veils on and many had been divested of their chastity plugs.

"Master, help me!" Cerebus cried out.

But the King was too far gone in his mirth to offer any assistance. Sam stepped forward and pulled Cerebus free, with no small amount of difficulty, and was immediately blasted with a hard glare from the much abused man. Poor Cerebus was completely nude, swollen with arousal and covered in hickeys. The women behind him turned and reached again for him but Sam pulled him away and they turned back to each other, an undulating swarm of arms and legs and swaying bodies.

The King wiped tears from his eyes and joined them. "Never have I laughed so much in so short a span of time. Thank you for that Sam. Are you all right Cerebus?"

"Master, forgive me. I have lain with your women and for that I deserve the ultimate punishment, but I beg of you, do not believe the worst of me. I did not mean to—"

"It is all right Cerebus. There is nothing to forgive."

“But my King, I have failed you most grievously.”

“You have failed no one, Cerebus. Sam told me everything and there is nothing to forgive, as this was all her doing. Think of it no more. In fact, I think you deserve some accolades for weathering the storm...that was a lot of *phuq* dust Sam used.” He laughed again. “Oh. There is one more thing before I forget—before the gathering and feasting tonight I will need to see you in my chambers. We have much to discuss.” The King turned from Cerebus and moved to Sam once more. “My Jewel. Until tonight...think of me.” He kissed her forehead and was gone, chuckling as he went.

Sam looked nervously at Cerebus and then immediately wished she hadn’t. The look on his face promised retribution—swift and punishing. The man was truly angry with her and Sam couldn’t blame him. The poor man felt he had failed his King in the worst way possible, by soiling the members of his Collection. Sam thought back to her first day on Valeo and remembered that the one rule of the Collection was that no woman was to allow penetration of her body to anyone other than her King. That most sacred of rules had been broken and Sam was to blame for it.

“Come with me.” Cerebus’ voice was as hard as steel and cold as ice.

Sam turned to run, but the man caught at her arm brutally and dragged her along behind him as he headed across the courtyard.

Sam fought him every step of the way.

Chapter Nine

Sam yelled out in the long endless dark, pounding her fists against the walls of her prison until they blistered and bled. But no one came for her. No one heard her cries. If Cerebus had planned it he couldn't have punished her in a more brutal way. Her claustrophobia was upon her like a monster, causing the unseen walls to squeeze in against her until she was mindless with fear.

How long she had been there Sam couldn't say, though it felt like an eternity had passed since Cerebus had taken her here, beyond the walls of the palace and into the glittering desert sands beyond. With a wave of his hand, Cerebus had erected a large black box – this isolation chamber – and closed her within it, snuffing out all light as he went. It was perfect, this punishment. No matter how loud Sam shouted or cried or begged, no one heard her. She was completely alone.

Sam beat her fists against the walls once more, choking and sobbing as the last of her strength began to wane. Her hands were coated in warm, sticky blood, torn and bruised and aching, but still she pounded them against the imprisoning walls, praying for someone – anyone – to hear her. Endless time passed and the walls closed further in on her. Curling up into a ball in the corner of the cell, Sam lost all touch with reality.

And began to scream.

* * * * *

"Sam! Sa-man-tha, my love, wake up."

Sam's eyes opened and blearily took in the worried face of her lover as he bent over her, wiping away the tearstains on her face with unsteady hands. Her eyes felt like swollen grapes in her head, aching and bruised from too much weeping.

"Oh, Sam, my Jewel, are you all right?" The King's words were a tangled rush as he ran his hands up and down her body as if trying to reassure himself that she was going to be okay. "You scared me so."

Sam's breath came out in a choking sob and the King immediately gathered her into his arms. His hands stroked down over her hair in long soothing motions as he began to rock her back and forth.

"Sa-man-tha, please forgive me. I did not know you would react in such a way to the punishment box." Cerebus was at her back, his voice frantic and full of worry.

"You needn't have punished her Cerebus! When have you ever used the punishment box on a member of the Collection? Why now and with my Jewel of all people? Did I not tell you that all was forgiven for Sam's impetuous deeds? I should

have you banished for this monstrous act," the King growled, never loosening his hold on Sam as he addressed the Collection master.

"I would docilely accept such a punishment, Master. It would be no less than I deserve."

Cerebus' sincerity and sorrow broke through to Sam and she pulled away from the King, wiping the tears from her face with the back of her hand. "No, Cerebus. You couldn't have known that I was claustrophobic."

"It matters not. It was my wounded pride that made me punish you, a grievous sin that. I failed you and my King with my dishonorable behavior."

"You were angry Cerebus. It was an understandable thing for you to do," Sam reassured him.

"Can you forgive me for wronging you Sa-man-tha?"

Cerebus' dark eyes were soft with their regret and Sam couldn't have held a grudge if she'd wanted to. If there was one thing she'd learned about the people on this world it was that they were nearly incapable of harboring ill will towards each other. Rather, they enjoyed a peaceful harmony amongst themselves and all those who dwelled within the palace walls under their protection. Sam would not blame Cerebus for his punishment, no matter that it was brutal, for he hadn't known how it would affect her. "It's okay Cerebus, I forgive you. I'm sorry for throwing the *phuq* dust at you and the others. I wasn't thinking straight."

"You are too kind-hearted Sa-man-tha. Worthy of our King in all ways." Cerebus bowed his head to them both.

"Don't banish him, my King. I'm all right now so there's no reason to be angry," she pleaded up at the man who held her.

"For you my Jewel, I will forgive anything if you but ask. But in the future," his voice hardened, "no one will have the duty of punishing you but myself."

"Master!" Cerebus gasped, surprised. "But that—"

"Later," he warned and Sam wondered what was passing between the two men for it seemed important. "My Jewel, let me take you now to your quarters. There I will heal your hands and heart and leave you to your rest."

Gently and carefully the King scooped her up in his arms and took her to her room as he'd promised. He laid her down into the sunken cushion of her bed and joined her, stretching out beside her. It was the first time he'd ever lain with her in her own bed.

"Lie still and relax. You'll feel a little warm but it will pass after a few moments if you ignore it." His voice was low and soothing.

The King ran his hand over the slopes and valleys of her body. Tenderly and with exquisite care he searched for any further injuries she might have sustained other than the bruises and cuts on her hands and arms. Her body did grow warm but it was a pleasant sensation, all the more so because Sam knew it was her lover's power that

swam through her, heating her. When the King was satisfied that she had no serious bruises or wounds he directed his attention to her hands.

"I think you forgave Cerebus too soon, love. Perhaps you should have made him grovel for a while first." He softly kissed the wounds on her fists, but his eyes were hard as he took in the extent of the damage.

Sam laughed but her voice was so hoarse and ragged from her ordeal in the box that it sounded truly pitiful, even to her own ears. The King kissed her hands once more and the warmth in her body centered there, making her fingers tingle and her palms itch. There was a brief moment of intense heat and Sam gasped. Before her eyes the cuts and scrapes and swellings on her hands healed, leaving behind smooth and unblemished skin after but a few brief moments of the King's concentration.

"There. All better now." The King smiled gently into her widened eyes.

"Thank you." She was at a loss for more eloquent speech, too much in awe of the miracle she'd just witnessed.

"No more pain?"

"No more pain." She smiled.

The King leaned down and pressed a small, electric kiss to her mouth. He stole her breath as he'd stolen her heart, but gave it back to her complete with all the magic of which he was capable. "You will never have to fear this claustrophobia again, Sam," he murmured. "I will let nothing harm you ever again. I vow it." He pressed his lips against hers again, softly worshipping her mouth with his.

"I love you." She spoke the words against his mouth before she could stop them.

The King's breath caught and he pulled away from her with a look she couldn't quite define. He cleared his throat but it took him two tries before he found his voice to speak.

"Rest now, Sam. When you wake up it will be time for the evening gathering in the throne room."

What had she expected? An undying declaration of love? No. It was enough that she didn't regret loving him. He was a man more than worthy of her heart, she was certain. Perhaps in time he would feel the same depth of emotion for her, but until that time she was content to have his devotion in the bedroom. He would always have that from her as well as the devotion of her heart.

The King rose from her bed and left her quarters, closing the jewel-handled door softly in his wake. Sam curled up in the downy softness of her bed and dozed, eager for the night to come so that she could be with her love again.

Chapter Ten

Sam gathered that night with the rest of the Collection before the throne and wondered idly which "mouths" the King would choose for the evening. Keln came to stand beside her as was their habit by now and Sam was almost afraid to look the centaur in the eyes after the *phuq* dust fiasco that afternoon. She needn't have fretted, as Keln was quick to reassure her.

"You should have seen the look on Cerebus' face when Faggia took him into her mouth and sucked him dry." She laughed. "I've never seen a look of horror, pleasure and guilt combined on one face at one time."

"I'm sorry you all got involved in that. I didn't really think that plan through rationally before I acted on it." Sam felt her face flush and gestured awkwardly, not knowing quite how to explain her motivations for causing the fiasco.

"Don't worry yourself over it, Sam. The Collector came and explained everything to us while you rested this afternoon."

"The Collector?"

"Yes, he and Cerebus had a discussion with the Collection before you rose."

"Oh man," Sam wailed. "Then everyone knows what an idiot I was for acting out like that."

"We all thought it was sweetly romantic, Sam. You escaping your prison with such a coup. Rushing off to avenge your bruised pride against the King while the King was innocent of any wrongdoing. It is a story to tell your children one day."

"You're not angry then?"

"How could I be angry? I myself got a piece of Cerebus and let me tell you, that made everything worth it." Keln laughed again. "He has the most delicious cock. I wonder why it took an overdose of *phuq* dust for us to notice that."

"I can't believe you just said that. Cerebus of the delicious cock?" Sam laughed.

"You know Sam, when you came here I wondered how well you would adapt to life with us. I feared for you, truth to tell. You seemed stubborn and prideful and those traits could have served you no purpose here. But you've become so much a part of our family that I find it hard to imagine how dull our lives were before you came and livened everything up. You've got the King and all of His attendants dancing a merry tune trying to keep up with you and it's a pleasure to witness. I'm glad you've found happiness with us Sam. I'm glad you're here."

"Me too," Sam murmured in agreement.

On the raised throne the King motioned for silence. Sam's eyes drank in the sight of him, resplendent in his glittering forest green skirt, golden armbands, wrist cuffs and jewelry. He was truly the most magnificent man she'd ever known.

The King stepped down from the dais and approached the throng of women that always gathered in anticipation of his choosing. He pushed through their numbers, striding purposefully, erect and proud in his bearing as he went. He was a vision of regal grace and power if ever there was one. He came to a halt directly in front of Sam and stunned her by going down upon his knees before her. Their audience crowded around them, eager to witness the proceedings.

"My Jewel, my love, my Sam. My name is Valen-Illumai. I am 41 seasons old. I rule the planet of Valeo and all of its peoples. And I love you with all of my heart. Will you keep my heart close to yours and be my *chastity keeper* for all the days of our life?"

"W-what?" Sam breathed, too astonished to even hope she'd heard him correctly.

The King—Valen-Illumai—looked to the side where The Collector was standing and some unspoken message passed between them.

"Will you...marry me, as they say on your world, Sam?" He pronounced the word marry as mah-ri, causing a smile to break out on her face. "I promise you will never want or need for anything, ever."

It took her several tries before Sam found her voice, so overcome with emotion was she. "As long as you're with me I'll never need or want anything else," she vowed.

The King smiled and rose before her, capturing her hands in his. "Then will you say yes, Sam? Did you speak true earlier when you told me you loved me? Will you be my *chastity keeper*?"

"Y-yes. Yes I will. I will." Sam felt like a blubbering fool but was too happy to care. As soon as the words passed her lips she felt it appear on her hand—a golden glove not dissimilar in design to that of the King's.

With a whooping call of triumph the King gathered her in his arms and carried her back to the throne as swiftly as he could manage. He positioned her just so on his lap, pushing aside his skirt and spreading her legs on either side of him, quickly removing the Veil and chastity plugs that filled her. "You need never wear these again. I trust you not to need them."

"I kind of got used to being filled by the plugs. It felt good sometimes," she admitted with a smile.

"You need only grow used to being filled by me, now. And that will feel good at all times, I promise you." He stroked his hands down her breasts, making her sigh and stretch beneath them.

He reached beside them for a tureen of *phuq* dust but Sam stalled him with a firm hand on his, shaking her head. He looked at her questioningly and she kissed him gently on his smooth, straight nose. "I don't need it and neither do you." To prove her point she palmed his great length in her hands, pumping him until he gasped and gritted his teeth against the erotic torment.

"I need you so much, Sam," he breathed into her mouth.

"I need you too, Valen-Illumai."

The King moved her tighter astride him and filled her with one smooth thrust of his hips. "You feel so smooth. Like liquid fire."

Sam couldn't have cared less that they had an audience. Couldn't have cared that her body was exposed for all to see as the King palmed and squeezed her buttocks in his hands, bouncing her upon his cock again and again. It was heavenly just being there in his arms, knowing that he loved her and would for the rest of their lives together. It was pure magic and as he stretched her body with the invasion of his, her heart was stretched in a similar fashion as it swelled with love for him.

The King caught her lower lip between his teeth and suckled on it, moving his body even tighter against her, until her breasts were crushed between them. Their loving was almost soft compared to what she was used to from him, a gentle rocking of their bodies as he thrust his hard cock in and out of her welcoming heat. Her clit was swollen and wet with her arousal, rubbing silkily against the hairless flesh of his sex with every stroke until she was gasping and clutching at him with passionate abandon.

His cock was so thick and heavy it stretched her nearly to the point of pain with every movement they made. It was a delicious torment to the both of them, a perfect ecstasy in every way. Just before Sam found her way to the stars she heard the voice of Cerebus in her mind and knew that the King heard it as well when he smiled at her, boyishly handsome in his happiness and joy.

"It's a bit late but...happy Valentine's Day, Sam. And happy birthday to the both of you."

The two lovers laughed and flung themselves off passion's peak, shuddering in each other's arms as they found culmination together.

LEARNING TO LIVE AGAIN

By

S.L. Carpenter

Chapter One

Michelle closed her eyes tightly, clutching the sheets. Her body jerked forward with the pounding thrusts as Keith's abdomen slapped against her ass. *SMACK, SMACK, SMACK*, echoed through the dim room. She buried her face into the pillow, stifling a moan as Keith clamped one hand on her hip and grabbed a fistful of her blonde hair in the other.

Loudly, Keith moaned, "Oh baby, it's happening, ohhhh..."

She felt his hot bursts of air across her back. He grabbed her flesh with his rough hands. Squeezing hard, Keith pulled her against him with lustful intensity.

He pulled back on his knees and grasped hard on her butt cheeks, spreading them apart. Grunting, he plunged into her again, filling her with the burning syrup of his sex. His labored breathing slowed, his cock gliding back and forth inside her.

Satisfied, Keith smacked Michelle on her sore rear and strutted into the bathroom, scratching at his hairy butt. Michelle lowered flat onto the bed, staring into the darkness with tear-filled eyes. *NO MORE!* She knew she couldn't live like this anymore. The tears trickled down her nose, falling to the pillow.

This life had become her prison.

Her torment.

She heard the shower start and Keith whistling the Beverly Hillbillies theme. *What An Asshole!*, she thought. Michelle sat up, her muscles aching. *I need to get out of this.* She threw her legs over the side of the bed. Her underwear and dress were scattered on the floor.

She was sore because she wasn't ready for sex and he didn't care to wait. Hissing, she muttered aloud, "Owww, damn, that hurts. Dumb bastard." Standing up, she saw her reflection in the mirror.

"How did I end up like this?" Holding back her tears she cried, "I deserve better. This going to be the most depressing Valentine's Day"

Her body was slender and her blonde hair fell along the slope of her neck and down her back. Looking hard into her own darkened, sad eyes, she saw her future. Looking around the apartment she saw the memories of a miserable two-year relationship.

It made her feel disheartened.

Pulling her dress up her body, she saw red marks on her hip from Keith's hands. Her ass hurt from the slapping and her body ached. Reaching under the bed, she pulled out a suitcase. Michelle made her decision long ago. She needed to get out of this

nowhere, one-sided, fucked-up relationship. She stayed because of fear, not wanting to be alone and for some reason she thought she loved him. Michelle spoke quietly on the phone hearing Keith singing in the shower. "You mind if I come over? I need someone to talk to." He can't hear me, she thought. "Thanks, Marisha, I owe you."

Her past was all a bad dream, now it was her time to act. Grabbing her purse, she looked back into the room and noticed something. There was nothing in the apartment that she wanted. It reminded her of what was wrong in her life.

There weren't too many people she trusted. She went to her friend Marisha's house. Tears fell while she told Marisha about leaving Keith.

"I just can't take it. I dread going home every night and can't live like this. He takes me for granted and treats me like shit. I don't deserve that. I went to college for four years and I'm smarter then that dickhead... What should I do?" Michelle sobbed.

Marisha sat quietly, listening to her friend's story of the way she felt and her wanting to feel whole again.

"Fuck him," Marisha said bluntly. "Good riddance, I always thought he was an asshole."

Michelle laughed through her tears, Marisha always made her smile. Even at times like this.

"I do have one thing to ask you though," Marisha leaned in with a grin, "Did he have a really little dick? I mean average or was it like a Jimmy Dean sausage? The way I look at it, if it doesn't fill my mouth then I don't even bother to see if it will fill my...well...you know."

They talked for the next few hours about men and their downfalls. Lack of commitment, no social graces, can't dress themselves to save their lives, believing that size doesn't matter. The wine helped wash away Michelle's heartache.

"Men are only good for a few things. Taking out the garbage, killing bugs and the occasional sex." Marisha laughed.

"I just wish I could find a man that knew how to...well...eat me out the right way. Keith acted like he was painting a fence. Up, down, up, down. Shit, I did a better job with my fingers."

Before taking over Marisha's couch, Michelle hugged her and could feel the first twinge of freedom. This was her new beginning.

* * * * *

Michelle told her boss she was leaving. With the layoffs, she saw it was time to go and figured it may be a sign. A good sign or bad sign, she didn't care. Michelle accepted a job offer in Ontario, Canada and wanted to get as far away from her past as possible.

Irene from work lived there. She knew that Michelle had talked about a change and was bugging her to move there. This great new job opened up and Michelle could follow her dream, working with children. She'd spent five years in college for it and

Keith had held her back. He didn't want kids or a family. Well, no more holding back and no more Keith.

Michelle was already late meeting her friends for lunch but to wanted check on her mom before the trip home. So she called her and the barrage of questions made her later than before.

"Yeah, Mom, I'm on my way."

"Do you need anything dear?" her mom asked.

"Of course not. I have everything I need, just relax. I'll see you in a few days. *Oh crap*, I have to get to the station. Love ya!" Using the trip as an excuse to get off the phone.

Going home for a vacation was her first stop. Home to where things were a little easier. Her mom was alone and it would be nice to spend time there and regroup. Maybe catch some of that lost innocence of her youth.

She had so many great memories, the girls from the cheerleading squad, the football players, the freedom from responsibilities, the football players, the fresh air, the football players, she obviously always had a weakness for football players. She even lost her virginity to a football player. He was the tight end. She had a tight end until he loosened it up after homecoming. The memories made her long to return.

Michelle checked her bags one last time because she was catching the train after meeting the girls.

* * * * *

She boarded the train, happy to finally get some "Michelle" time, to think about her new dream job. She would miss the weekly lunch meetings where they would talk about men. Especially that cute guy at Starbucks, she smiled, remembering. He really made her latte hot and steamy.

To be alone, wondering about what the future held for her and moving that far away was a big step. She'd been so stupid. *You're stronger, smarter and better than what you had*, she thought while moving through the compartments. *Never again!* She was determined, though she knew there would be sacrifices to be made.

Chapter Two

The dining car was full but Michelle found a table in the corner. She watched the crowd swell around the bar.

"What's going on at the bar?" she asked a waiter.

"It's some Valentine party thing. Most of the people there are pretty wasted," he replied and left to help another customer.

She felt out of place, but mostly, she felt lonely. For a moment, she remembered Keith. At least when he was with her she wasn't alone. She then remembered the way he made her feel cheap, took advantage of her and didn't show her any respect. She sighed, not hungry anymore, and motioned to the waiter for a check.

Michelle became shy when in unfamiliar surroundings and the little party at the bar looked fun. The people were all drinking and dressed like Cupid. All the couples kissing and laughing made her heart ache. Tomorrow was going to be a depressing Valentine's Day. *Maybe I should go join the crowd*, she thought. She wanted to join the party, but it was late. Loneliness made her sad, so she left and headed back to her compartment.

She ran her keycard through the lock, not noticing the door slightly open. Walking in, she jumped back.

"*Who the fuc...!*" she yelled when seeing a man lying on her bed. He was wearing only a bed sheet. She remembered the bar. A few guys were wearing something similar. This must be a Cupid outfit or something.

"Oh, great. I get a drunk in my room the first night!"

She poked him and he mumbled, "I'm up, Mom, I'm up, just five more minutes." Then he started snoring again. What a way to start her trip.

She refused to try to fight the guy or have him thrown out. His large frame spread across the small bed against the wall. His feet hung off the edge. She noticed his two different sandals and different colored socks. *Scooby Doo*? She thought when she saw his blue sock. The green one had *Shaggy* on it.

Her room was small. There was the small bed and a nice, red cushioned chair in front of the window for sightseeing. She stepped into the tiny bathroom. All she wore was pajama pants and a silk nightshirt that tied in front. She pulled a pillow and blanket from the small closet.

It was a beautiful night and the chair by the window seemed a nice place to sit and reflect until this deadbeat woke up. She felt safer in the chair anyway. Even if he woke up she could kick him in the nuts if he tried anything. Outside, the dark scenery floated

by like a dream. The soothing rhythm of the train gliding over the tracks helped Michelle drift off to sleep.

Her mind dreamed of better times. Romantic interludes, feelings of undying passions, the caress of a lover's touch, and some strange dream about "The Crocodile Hunter" and a koala bear. She was no longer trapped in the reality she left behind. She was now free to explore things. There was a great big world out there for her to find. Firstly, she needed to find the one person that became lost in her younger years. The person so full of fun and was in total control of everything.

She needed to find herself again.

She awoke to a thump when her head bounced against the window while the train crossed a bridge. Glancing over to the bed she saw the drunken man sprawled on his back. The light shone in from the occasional outside train lamps. They illuminated the bed with a deep yellow glimmer.

The man needed a shave but appeared like he kept himself in good shape. Tall, lean, he was actually very good looking. He wore a nice Rolex watch and no wedding ring. That was a relief to Michelle. She'd hate to be found in her room with a married man. The local newspapers would have a field day.

The sheet slid up his torso and she saw he wasn't wearing anything under it. Michelle giggled, peeking under the sheet from the window seat. She tried to get a better look by leaning forward. Gently lifting the sheet she saw a patch of black, curly hair and a long lump of flesh. The train bumped and she jerked her hand back, afraid to get caught. The man rolled a little and she saw his cock fall along his thigh. He was well endowed and the fire within her began to warm at the sight of his shaft. She looked away and grinned wide. Licking her lips to moisten them, she debated on what to do.

A devilish little voice popped up in her head. Don't be stupid, make sure your eyes weren't deceiving you. Take a closer look! That was at least 10 inches long. Come on, don't be a chicken.

Her rational voice replied, It's not ladylike to look at a man's privates. Did you say 10 inches? You should cover his penis and go back to sleep.

Michelle never listened to the rational voice much.

She looked back and her mind swept with heat. Her body reacted to the needs of a lost passion within her. Being sexually deprived in a one-way relationship, she forgot the way she used to crave the taste of a man. Her eyes grew heavy and her body began to ache. She crossed her legs, closing them tightly, making the lips of her pussy press together. Biting her lip, she pulled the blanket up around her and sat back in the chair.

Her fingers shook when she untied the string on her nightshirt. Her bosom was pink with the flash of excitement. A small dampening of perspiration was between them. Michelle opened her top and kept herself hidden in the cocoon of the blanket. Her breasts were full and her nipples strained for attention.

She looked up staring at the strange man's body. His long, lean body was tanned and his legs looked strong, all three of his legs. Michelle tugged at her nipple and

squirmed in excitement. This self-pleasure fulfilled a passion kept contained by her fears of letting go.

Michelle pulled her left leg against her chest and ran her long fingers up her inner thigh to the seam of her underwear. They were white with a pink flowery band. The moistness of her panties made them stick to her swollen, seeping pussy. She pulled them away from her labia, trying to give her pussy breathing room. Her essence trickled down her cleft when she slid her finger beneath the fabric. There was a silky feeling to her flesh as the juice from her sexual feelings awoke. Running her finger over her pussy lips made her crazy, with lust rushing through her hot blood.

She would glance up to see the man's body and his cock to be sure he didn't see her. His light snore was her sign to continue.

In the darkness she felt the folds of skin open to her finger. She toyed with the thought of jumping the stranger but that wasn't her way. In her mind she thought about it and slid her finger inside, her fantasy pictured the naked man's cock dancing inside of her. With her other hand, she massaged her breast letting it fill her hand. Her hand was his in her fantasy.

Falling into the fantasy, Michelle closed her eyes. This lover was toying with her. He caressed her clit while his cock slid between her sexual flesh. Over and over he'd swivel his hips, spreading her pussy wider. The muscles stretched for his probing.

The blanket hid her from sight, but her soft moans were obviously that of deepened pleasure. She opened her legs wider and pulling her panties down to her lower thighs, continued her journey.

She breathed deep, letting the night air fill her lungs. The cold glass of the window against the back of her head contrasted with the heat of her body. She glanced occasionally at the stranger's cock and slid two fingers inside her soaked pussy, imagining it was his hard, pulsing cock filling the void. Spreading her fingers caused her pussy lips to open wider and she sucked the fingertips of her other hand. She lowered it between her legs, massaging her clit in a circular motion. At first it was gentle and non-invasive.

"Ohhhhhh, mmmmmmmmmmmmm," Michelle stifled the need to scream out.

Her fantasy took her to thoughts of this stranger feeding on the succulent flavors within her. The direct stimuli to her tender clitoris made it firm and more sensitive. Like electric jolts, the nerve endings seemed centered on this erogenous switch. Her playful rubbing took more focus as her arm shook and her bottom lip fluttered. She was enclosed in a heat tent becoming an inferno from her body's heat rising every second. Her breathing became more labored and she began to feel the crescendo from the symphony of desire building within her.

The blanket became a tent surrounding her while she slid her panties off. She lifted one leg up on the arm of the chair and set the other on the cold floor of the compartment.

This time her fantasy was right before her. Her mind's-eye looked to see this man licking along the crease of her pussy. The hot saliva doused the fire inside. His tongue licked around her clit and her fingers followed the motions in her fantasy. She gasped and saw him thrust into her, grunting at the slippery feel of her vaginal walls. Even though her fingers felt differently, she pictured his long cock sinking in and out. Deeply stretching the wanton, hollow entryway to her passionate soul.

Cupping her pussy, she saw her lover was again pulsing into her with a fevered fury of need. Her lover grasped her swelling breasts in his hands and pulled on the nipple with his teeth making her swoon. Michelle looked out the window and watched the trees fly by as her fingers probed inside of her scorching pussy. A fog covered the window from her hot breath across it. She closed her eyes and vigorously stroked and rubbed her clit. Michelle's fantasies flew through her mind.

Tears filled her eyes. She stifled pleasurable moans. Her hand tugged at her nipples pulling each one away from her body until it sprung back. Her teeth bit down and she closed her eyes tight, tears cascading down her cheeks, and came. The waves of her orgasm washed through her pussy. Her fingers were wet with the fluids of her sex.

There was a deep calming rhythm to the train as it flew across the tracks. This was her vessel to freedom. She was going home. To a better job, better life, better times and a new beginning.

She looked over and the stranger had rolled over. *Did he see her?* She thought. What a way to make a first impression. She curled up in the fetal position and drifted off to sleep, relaxed, satisfied but not fulfilled.

Something was missing on this Valentine's Day. She needed a Valentine.

Chapter Three

Michelle woke up as the train stopped. She looked out the window, seeing it was a bright beautiful day. The bed was empty and straightened, and the door was closed. The stranger must have woke up and left during the night.

She got herself up and ready. There was a two-hour stop for new boarding and Michelle decided to go shopping. Maybe spend some time just taking in her newfound freedom. She decided to buy some new clothes, just because.

It was sunny out but a little cold. She watched couples laughing and holding each other. Feeling cold and alone, she pulled her thin sweater closed over her dress. She missed being held, jealous of the closeness of others while she window-shopped through the little stores. Looking through the window of a pet store, she saw a dopey looking Basset hound and thought of Keith. In the next window she saw a stunning Boxer that was strong, proud, and drooled. He reminded her of the stranger in her room last night.

Feeling a gentle tap on her shoulder, she turned to see nothing. She shrugged and looking back to the window she jumped back when seeing the strangers reflection

He laughed, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you."

He stood next to her, snickering at her reaction.

"It's okay, you just caught me off guard." She shook her head, blushing, and stepped back. He smiled and she gazed into his stunning eyes. Suddenly, she wasn't cold and his body blocked the wind from chilling her.

He smiled and held his hand out to her, "I'm Josh. I apologize for falling asleep in your room last night. I was so drunk from the party and missed my room by two doors. Funny how the key opened your room, too."

Michelle stared at him. He was taller than she thought, lean but athletic looking and had a wicked smile that sent chills through her.

"Where's my manners? You're cold." Josh saw her shiver and took his jacket off and wrapped it around her shoulders.

"Thanks, umm, my name is Michelle. I tried to wake you but you were *out*." She wasn't sure if he saw anything last night and felt a little embarrassed.

"You should have kicked me and got me up. I am sorry, it was a long night and I was drinking all night and always sleep like a rock when I do."

They continued their walk back to the train. She felt very comfortable with Josh. He had a mellow aura and it made her more playful and flirtatious. They joked and laughed all the while taking their time to get to the station. She breathed in the scent of

his cologne on the jacket. Her chill lifted and warmth filled her from his jacket and his company. It also made other things warm and moist.

She told Josh, "I'm on my way back home to visit my mom. The company I worked for shut down. I already have my DREAM JOB in child development waiting for me in Ontario. They're going to pay for me to finish my Masters and work at the same time. I couldn't pass it up. I love the thought of working with and helping kids. It's also the perfect reason to go back to where I grew up." Michelle looked back into his green eyes and smiled. Something about him made her feel at ease.

She didn't say much about just leaving Keith. The last thing she wanted was to seem desperate. She was relieved but not ready to jump into another relationship.

"I'm going back to see my parents for their anniversary. I was away working in the city and finally finished. Took me two weeks to nail this promotional deal. I can't wait to get back home and relax." Josh was concentrating on his career as the promotional manager for his parents' company.

They laughed and talked about where they were living and the hustle-bustle of the rat race.

* * * * *

Josh was nervous and unsure if Michelle was married or attached but mustered up the courage to ask her to share dinner with him.

"Ummm, Michelle, uhhh, would you like to have dinner tonight? It is Valentine's weekend and we won't be back in Maine until tomorrow morning."

"I'd love to," she said smiling.

They climbed back on the train and walked down the isle to their rooms to get changed and ready. Josh fumbled with his key at his door with Michelle behind him and waited to get by as a rather wide man filled the walkway. Josh stood in his doorway as she tried to get by and the man pushed her into Josh.

Michelle looked up and stared into his green eyes and without hesitating, kissed him. She slid her tongue between his lips, tasting him. Last night reminded her of emotions she missed having. Desire, the spontaneity, and a secret carefree need.

Michelle closed her eyes and Josh became lost in the sensuality of her mouth. He reached around and held the small of her back, pulling them together. Josh moaned quietly as he felt the softness of her lips against his.

The hallway was bright and people passed by and they didn't care. Her body was a perfect fit against him.

Michelle felt him starting to swell against her stomach as the intensity of their passions heated the kiss. Michelle stepped back. Flustered by her actions and feelings, she placed her hand on her chest and gasped, trying to find the right words. "I am sorry, I just felt the need to kiss you." Embarrassed, she tried to muster a smile.

"I didn't mind at all!" Josh replied, "It felt great. You sure you don't want to ummmm?"

Michelle smiled "No, I got a little carried away. It must be those green eyes or something. Let's just have a nice dinner tonight."

She wanted to be careful to not fall for the next guy that showed interest in her. She just left one relationship and didn't want to jump right into another one. Even if he smelled great, was a good kisser and had an ass to die for. His nice endowment was another plus...a *big* plus.

* * * * *

Finally ready for dinner, Michelle paused, taking a deep breath. The soft, silken, blue dress caressed her skin as she moved. Her lace bra was thin and transparent, showing her rose-colored nipples through the fabric. She fiddled to get her thong on, feeling it ride up her rear end. She liked the tightness of the thongs and how they seemed to cup her pussy like a bowl of fruit, keeping the juices in. Michelle may love how they fit in front but wasn't too keen on the way they acted like floss.

She never wore them much. Keith would beg her to put them on and even though she liked the feel against her pussy, they became uncomfortable because he'd tug and pull them.

She looked in the mirror, admiring the person looking back. She hadn't dolled up in a while but figured, *why not? A good-looking man asked her to dinner.* Her confidence was high and her freedom from Keith liberated her. She could do what she wanted with whomever she wanted and there was no guilt, no worries, no commitments, just fun. *Damn I look soooo HOT! I'd even want to screw me!*

A knock at the door shook Michelle back to reality and nervousness set in. She opened the door, Josh stood in the hall looking strikingly handsome. He was in tight black Dockers that accentuated his lower torso and a long-sleeve white shirt. The shirt was unbuttoned a little, revealing some chest hair poking out from the top. His green eyes stared at her, making her feel like she was melting. What was really melting was her thong. It became moist and warmth filled her. His gaze undressed her and she liked how it made her feel.

Desired, admired, appreciated but mostly, she felt wanted. Michelle appreciated Josh being a gentleman.

"Let me get the door." Josh scooted in front of her, opening the glass door.

Josh had other motives, checking out her ass while she walked past and seeing the other men look at her. Making sure everything was taken care of, Josh held the chair for her, ordered her dinner. He even tipped the waiter to not bother them.

Their meals came to the table and they started to open up and talk. It was like old friends catching up. They jumped right into talking about everything. The weather,

college, books they liked, Ellora's Cave publishing, and the other necessities. Time just flew by.

Michelle was enthralled at how open Josh was about things.

"I really wish I could be a photographer. I would LOVE to take pictures of a woman nude."

"I bet you would."

"No, really, not sex stuff, just pictures accentuating the wondrous splendor of the female form. I could talk for hours about what I'd do with a camera, champagne, some strawberries and Jello."

"JELLO????? You are so crazy! I'd be way to scared to ever do something like that. I'm basically a romantic nut. Julia Roberts movies and happy endings, that's me in a nutshell."

"I prefer Sandra Bullock, MMMEEEEEEOOOOWWWWW!"

They laughed and started talking about recent relationships.

"Well, she left me because I seemed to be more interested in work than her." Josh finished telling her about his last relationship.

"I think that's wrong. She should have least talked to you about it first." Michelle replied, knowing how it must have felt.

"Well, I work for my parents and it makes it difficult to try not to work hard. I'll end up with the business one day so I damned well want it to be successful." Josh paused, taking a drink then continued. "My work had me traveling a lot on business trips. I was away from her quite a bit. Of course the four times I caught her cheating on me may have been part of the problem also. It wasn't the cheating as much as who she was with. I found her with this writer holding a rubber chicken. Another time she was in my office with my secretary."

Josh shook his head laughing at the embarrassment. "Cheating with her boss was bad but they took movies and I saw them online at a porn site. The last straw was these two guys at the library. She told me they were testing the Joy of Sex positions. Personally I never saw that position before. Why'd they have an eggbeater there?" Josh hurt talking about it but still laughed.

"I just left a two-year relationship," she said, hanging her head. "I wasted all that time after college to be with a man that never cared about me. I was so stupid. I should have left long ago but was scared."

Looking at Josh, she didn't feel shy or restrained, she was just being honest. "I don't need to be a man's bitch. I just wanted to be loved and cared for. I guess I just got used to the dull day to day. He was a dickhead and treated me like a piece of property. Now I am free from him and feel good about myself. Now I just want to go back home and get my crap together then move up north. I want to start over. This dream job is going to be great. I just want some time to be ME."

Josh just sat, smiling at her.

"What?" she asked.

"That took a lot of courage. I admire that. I'm not sure I could move away from my home."

Josh sipped his drink and continued. "After I finished playing football in college I wasn't sure what to do. I had my degree and fell into my college relationship. I moved back home and started to live the standard family, kids, house lifestyle."

"You played football?" Michelle asked, feeling her weakness rise up. Something about those tight uniforms and the brutal force made her sigh.

"I played a little in high school. Played defensive back in college. Never made the pros. Loved playing though. You okay?"

Michelle parted her lips, sighing. Her mind wandered to a fantasy of Josh in his uniform. Wetness seeped between her legs and she suddenly became hot. She was aroused by Josh but needed to be careful. It was easy to become horny, but this trip was getting away from things.

"Sorry, got a little light headed."

"You done eating?" Josh asked.

"Are you?" Michelle answered.

"Not totally, I am looking at what I'd like to eat." His mischievous smile cut through her and made her even wetter.

"You know, if things were different, I'd give you a 4-course meal."

"CHECK PLEASE!"

* * * * *

Struggling with feelings and the awkward unknowing situation, they walked back to her compartment. Josh leaned down and kissed Michelle. She placed her hand on his neck and let her lips move against his. God, he was so hot to her. Inside she was on fire, but she had to contain it.

"Goodnight, Josh, thank you for a wonderful evening."

"You sure? I mean I could..."

Michelle stopped Josh from continuing. "Let's not ruin this with a torrid night of incredible, hot, passionate, earth shattering sex."

"Yeah, that would really be a bad thing," he sarcastically replied.

Josh looked down at Michelle. He kissed her forehead then raised her face with his hands and kissed her lips. His hands lowered along her sides, brushing the sensitive skin aside her breast.

"Mmmmmmm, oh yes," she murmured.

Michelle's hands found his waist and her knees weakened at the affectionate way he kissed her. Her mouth dropped open and she lifted her head back when Josh blew

hot air gently into her ear and squeezed her butt. She almost succumbed to his advances because she was already wet in anticipation for him.

"Josh, I ca...can't."

She hesitated before pushing him back. "I can't just jump into another relationship like this. It's too soon."

Looking down, Josh nodded but was obviously let down. He walked to his room and waved at Michelle but didn't turn towards her because his hard-on was making his pants poke out.

Michelle was being torn apart. What should she do?

* * * * *

Josh opened his door and Michelle pushed him in, closing it behind her.

"I thought you said..." Josh tried to talk but Michelle covered his mouth and pushed him against the closet door in the confining space of the entryway.

She smothered his mouth with her kisses and ripped at his shirt. She slid her hands inside and across his flexed abdomen. His skin was hot as she tore his shirt open to kiss his chest. Michelle's unquenched hunger was making her free from inhibitions and Josh would be her delicious treat.

"Mmmmmm, you look yummy," she hummed as she placed her hand over his lips, and bit his nipple, pulling at it with her teeth.

Josh moaned, "Damn, that feels good!"

Michelle dropped to her knees, kissing his muscular stomach. She tugged at his zipper then shoved her hand inside his pants. Grabbing his hard cock in her hand, she fumbled, trying to unfasten his belt.

"Damn belt, I hate these things!" He throbbed in her hand. She desperately wanted to set his cock free from his confining pants.

His pants fell to his knees and she yanked his underwear down. He was large and rigid. She stroked down his length with her palm, feeling the wrinkles of his flesh disappear. The glisten of fluid on the tip showed his desire. Looking up into his desperate green eyes she consumed him with her mouth. The tip hit her throat and almost gagged her.

Josh moaned and hit his head against the door. "Oh shit, mmmmmmm..."

Michelle's hunger took over and she devoured him like he was her last meal. Dragging her tongue along the vein pulsing in his cock she would let the head pop out of her mouth then suck him back in. She saw him from a distance the night before but now he was up close and personal. He was glorious to her eyes, mouth and soon to her pussy. She kissed the head as her hand stroked the length of his hardened cock.

"You are driving me fucking crazy!" Josh laughed. "This isn't fair."

"For who? You or ME?"

A wicked look crossed Michelle's face. She stroked his shaft with her hand and watched the head flex from her pulling the skin down. With her other hand, she reached between her legs and felt the wetness seeping from inside. She gently rubbed her fiery pussy, making it burn hotter for Josh. The line was crossed and there was no going back.

She pulled her thong aside, the swelling lips of her pussy were damp and needing. Her passion became more voracious. She stroked Josh's cock in her hand in time with stroking herself. Gasping for air she flicked her tongue on the tip then swallowed the head of Josh's slick cock back in. She could taste the initial flavor of his seed. Her lips clamped around the head, sucking in hard.

"Oh damn, stop teasing me! You have to let me..."

Releasing his cock from her mouth with a *pop*, Michelle stood up but held tight onto her prize. Slowly, she unfastened the buttons of her blouse.

Josh breathed heavily, watching her reveal her bosom to his appreciative eyes. He reached up, cupping her breast through the lace fabric of her bra.

Michelle squeezed his cock in her hand, feeling her pussy tingling. "Mmmmmmm, that feels nice. You like these, Josh?"

Josh undid the clasp on the front of her bra, freeing her breasts. "Oh yeah, you have wonderful breasts. Ow, don't squeeze so tight, you'll break it."

Her fleshy globes glowed pink and her nipples were a deep burgundy color that dared to be sucked on. Josh obliged. He licked all around her nipples while cupping the fullness in his hands.

A deep moan of pleasure echoed from Michelle as he teased her supple breasts. Michelle breathed in his smell. His hair, his cologne, his body filled her lungs. Intoxicated by him, she let go all the inhibitions she possessed, daring to take him against her better judgment.

The devilish little voice popped up in her head again. Don't stop. Look at this guy. He wants you so bad, can't you feel it in your hand? Just fuck him, who'll ever know?

Her rational voice replied too, *Yeah, just fuck him!*

"Josh, I haven't been with any other man in so long I don't know how to ask for . . . mmmmmmmmm," Michelle gasped.

"Just tell me what you want. I'll do anything to you," Josh said, nuzzling her breasts.

Grabbing Josh's thick hair she forced his head downward. She wanted to be ravaged, she wanted a man to treat her so wicked with passion that he would get lost in her. "Ohhhhh, right there, ohhhhhhhhhhh..."

Josh slid his tongue along the length of her slit, feeling the heat from her engorged pussy boil from his tongue's movements. "You taste absolutely incredible, mmmmmmm..."

"I can't handle a lot of...of... OH GOD!"

Josh split her labia apart and flicked his tongue against her firm clit that begged for his attention.

His deep moaning vibrated through her body. She felt so damn hot that this wasn't enough. She needed to be filled. Michelle grabbed Josh's hair, pulled him up and pushed him against the closet door again then slid her wet thong down her legs. She kicked it against the wall. It was soaking wet from her arousal by this virtual stranger.

"Damn, your pussy tasted sweet. I bet it feels better then it smells." Josh joked almost asking for proof.

The entryway of the train compartment was about two and a half feet wide. Michelle leaned against the wall and spread her legs apart then pushed her right leg alongside Josh and against the closet door. Josh stared at her exposed pussy. It gleamed from wetness about six inches from his throbbing cock. Michelle smiled and motioned for Josh to move forward, "You wanna find out?"

Josh lit up and leaned forward kissing her. His cock rested against her pussy and the searing wet lips. Michelle reached down and pushed the tip against her hot opening and felt the head of his cock spreading her labia apart. Josh put his hands on either side of her head. Michelle put her other leg against the wall and held herself up while holding Josh's shoulders. In a moment of obscene passion Josh leaned into Michelle and sunk his thickened shaft into her tight pussy.

Michelle screamed, "Oh God, ohhhhhh, damn you feel so *FUCKING* good!" and dug her nails into his shoulders. Turning to kiss him, their tongues danced while his cock filled her. She tasted a trace of her own juices and it made her flutter and shake. She really did taste good. Michelle looked down at his stomach as he withdrew from her. She saw the glistening shaft straining and it popped out. She grabbed the head of his cock and put its tip against her pussy saying, "You stay inside, no rest for you."

Josh grunted and plunged in again. His breath was hot against her neck and Michelle finally felt filled. She reached up and held the coat rack at the top of the wall and let Josh grab her hips and thrust powerfully into her. She wrapped her legs around his hips flexing her legs with each stroke.

His furious thrusts rocked her body making her breasts jiggle. Shock waves ripped through her while he slammed hard against her body, pushing her against the wall. The wall shook as the force of their sex mounted. Over and over he drove into her body, trying to get as deep as possible. She bit his collarbone and her vaginal muscles clenched his cock tightly.

"You are so beautiful, I...I just...you feel so damn good."

She clamped onto him, almost squealing in joy as she felt herself climbing higher. "Oh Josh, you feel so mmmmmm incredible. Ohhhh, I can't take much more." Tightening her muscles around him she kissed him again feeding her hunger.

Michelle licked the sweat on his chest. The salty taste made her want more.

Josh watched her as she ground against him, admiring how her body glowed with the heat.

"Fuck, I am so close," Josh panted. He was relentless, like a jackhammer, as he fucked her.

Michelle's pussy was so sensitive to Josh. She felt herself ready to explode. Suddenly everything got blurry and Michelle closed her eyes tightly and came. The thickening of her vaginal walls gushed and spasmed. She felt the fluids trickle across her ass.

"Ohhhhh, yessssssss, mmmmm yesssss..." she hissed.

Josh was grunting and she felt his cock swelling. "I can feel your orgasm, fucking incredible, incred..." Josh firmly held her ass and sunk his cock into her and exploded his seed against her cervix.

It burned Michelle but felt so good. It was hot, wet and the next few thrusts seemed easier and made her feel absolutely wonderful. She hadn't felt like this in so long that she just sighed and smiled.

Josh let her ass go and she stood before him. She looked down at his cock, still dripping and slightly flaccid. "Hmmm, well he looks tired," she giggled.

"He's happy now!" Josh said. "Ever since he saw you last night he has been thinking about you."

"Last night?" Michelle asked.

"Well I woke up last night and saw you in the chair. Damn, you were beautiful. The moonlight across your face made me realize true beauty."

Michelle blushed then laughed when Josh drew two lines in the air, like counting brownie points. "I thought you looked familiar. Then I remembered I had seen you in my dreams and fantasies." Michelle was scared he had seen her in the blanket.

"That is by far the cheesiest line I have heard in quite some time. I love it." Michelle laughed and they jumped in the small bed. Josh was against the wall and Michelle in front of him. She was relaxed and while Josh stroked her hair she drifted off to sleep in his arms.

* * * * *

The morning sun crept up over the mountains and shone in through the window. Michelle was warm and felt secure in Josh's arms. She didn't want to rush right back into belonging to someone else. She didn't really know Josh but loved how he made her feel. He grinded his teeth when he slept, making her cringe. It sounded like nails across a blackboard. She could feel his naked flesh against hers and the body heat made her back hot.

She tried to get up out of the cramped bed without waking him. Sitting on the edge she shivered from the chilly room. She was warm in bed but it was cold in the compartment. Josh's white shirt was on the floor, she grabbed it with her toes and pulled it to the bed and put it on. She couldn't button it because she ripped them off last night. The sleeve had a trace of Josh's cologne on it.

It was the beginning of a new day and it was beautiful outside. Michelle stepped toward the window. She leaned against it, watching the trees go by.

"You look beautiful," she heard Josh say.

"Thanks. Did you sleep well? You grind your teeth, damn that is an annoying sound." She said with a wink tossed back over her shoulder.

The shirt was big on her and he could see the outline of her body from the light shining through the shirt. Josh grabbed his pants off the floor and pulled them on. Leaving them unfastened and open, he stood behind her looking out the window.

She leaned into him and their contours fit together perfectly. The curve of her ass nestled against his crotch. Josh breathed in the fragrance from her hair. He looked down her body and saw her breasts.

Michelle reached back and put her hand on his thigh. She sighed and breathed in deep making her chest expand. The sunlight cast an orange hue across her body as his baggy shirt she wore opened, exposing her skin.

Josh reached his hands around her and held her full breasts in his hands. Michelle moaned softly, "Last night was really wonderful, Josh. I hadn't felt like that in some time."

He kissed her ear, blowing hot air across her neck causing her to have chills.

Goosebumps rose across her body and her nipples popped to attention.

So did Josh's cock as it rose in his pants against Michelle's ass. Squeezing her breasts in his large hands Michelle molded to his frame. She pulled her head up resting against his collarbone and closed her eyes. Josh licked the back of her ear making her moan. "Oh yes, you found a weak spot."

Michelle tried to turn around but Josh held her firm. He pushed her forward, taking control of the situation. Her knees hit the edge of the chair in front of the window. Almost falling, Michelle raised her hands in reflex and pressed them on the window.

"Mmmmmm, this is nice," Josh muttered feeling his excitement rise. She put her knees on the cushion and leaned forward pushing her ass against his stiffening cock.

"Now you found MY weakness," he said, kissing her lower back.

Josh let go of her breasts and slid his hands back to Michelle's hips. She looked behind her and saw Josh kneeling down. "Oh please, I can't handle that, Josh." His hot mouth kissed the small of her back and followed the cleft down. He reached his hand between her legs and dragged his thumb along the lips of her pussy. Her blonde hair dangled, swaying with her movement. She looked back down between her breasts.

A stifled whimper crept from within her when Josh's finger split her labia apart. He stroked the length to the perineum. Michelle threw her head back, moaning. Wanting more Michelle rocked side to side, opening her legs wider.

Josh took the cue and grabbed her ass, spreading the cheeks apart. His finger pumped in and out of her pussy making her squirm in delight. The gentle play made

Michelle giggle. Reaching her hand down between her legs, she rubbed her clitoral hood pulling it back to reveal her swollen bud.

Josh tapped against her clit with his finger. "Damn, you are so wet already." Josh held firm to the hardness in his pants. Doing this aroused him. He wanted to feel himself buried in her slippery flesh and extinguish the fire that burned inside. His thumb rested against her anus.

She wasn't one for this kind of play but Michelle felt a tingling sensation and squirmed a little. His thumb was wet from her juices and pressed along the outer rim and when he pushed his finger into her pussy his thumb probed at her anal opening.

"You idiot, that tickles. Quit teasing me," she giggled. Michelle arched her back lower making her pussy more exposed to Josh's play. She was losing control and her muscles weakened, she had to hold her balance with her other hand against the window.

He spread her lips wide and fingered her, becoming frantic to have her. "Ohhhh, I love doing this to you. It makes me want you more." Josh groaned as he refrained from grabbing himself.

"You mind if I kiss your ass?" Josh joked running his tongue along the crease where her leg and cheeks met.

"I am so damn horny, let me feel you inside me." She moaned, almost begging for a release.

Without any more prompting, Josh stood up and pulled his stiff cock out and rested it on Michelle's ass. He was toying with her needs and she loved every second of it. He held it in his hand and glided it along the crease of her ass to the wet opening of her pussy.

"Damn, Michelle, you are so incredibly hot. You make me want nothing more than to..." His words cut through her as his shaft slid between her slick lips, spreading her pussy open again. A deep groan echoed from Josh as he felt her massage his cock inside her velvety pussy.

Michelle closed her eyes and began to spasm from the ecstasy.

She put both hands on the window as Josh's body pressed against her. His long slow strokes dragged against her clit filling her with elation. Her knees weakened and she realized she was climbing into a blissful orgasmic state. Josh groaned and his body was sweating as he tried to contain himself.

"Damn, you make me so nuts," he grunted.

His hot, wet hands moved up the soft bumps of her spine as she would rise and fall to his thrusts. His body started to become hot with passion.

She felt Josh trying to control himself. He would stop and breathe out, then hold his breath in and start again. Michelle closed her eyes letting the pleasure of his cock erase all her inhibitions and allow her to let go. She loved knowing she affected him like this. Michelle closed her eyes feeling every inch of him filling her.

Josh sunk his cock into her, becoming lost in his lust, succumbing to his natural, primal needs. "I can't take this. You are so...oh, damn!"

"Make me cum, Josh, make me cum!"

With a brute force Josh grabbed Michelle's hips and plunged into her. Bending his knees he picked her up and filled her over and over.

"Oh, yes, I am oooooooooooooohh..." Michelle's body shook and she felt the abrupt ripple of her orgasm roll through her pussy and flow through her.

Josh whimpered and thrust into her again raising her body and filling her with the spewing of his seed. Michelle felt the hot juices melding with hers and she smiled happily. The fluid from their sex trickled down her inner thigh.

Josh leaned forward and kissed her back. The sweat was dripping from his forehead. At the same time they both looked out the window. They heard a clapping sound as some people at the station had gathered outside and watched them having sex. From their reaction, they must have done a good job. Michelle recognized a face in the crowd that wasn't clapping. It was her uncle.

Josh grabbed the cord letting the blinds fall, covering the window. They looked at each other and burst into laughter. "I have never been so embarrassed in my life!"

Michelle was upset. Her stern frown struggled upwards as she started smiling and giggling as Josh danced around the room. He shook his ass and swung his dick around singing "Ain't Goin' Down Til' The Sun Comes Up", by Garth Brooks. He sounded awful. She liked watching him dangling around while getting dressed though.

Michelle tried to think of a way to say goodbye. She hated goodbyes. It was always awkward.

Josh scribbled on a piece of paper by the bed then stood in front of her. Before she could speak Josh started. "This is my cell phone number and email address. I live in town, in a cottage next door to my parents."

"I know you're struggling with a tough time right now." He kissed her forehead and stared into her eyes and finished, "This trip has been a fantasy come true for me. You do what you have to do. If you decide you want to see me, call me. I'm leaving this open to you."

He held her hand and kissed her on the forehead. A last look and smile filled Michelle with hope as he grabbed his bags, stepping out the door. She looked at the paper seeing his phone number, email and Instant Messenger name...Sir-lix-alot.

Chapter Four

The ride on the train had been a good time for Michelle to regroup and figure out her life. She felt good about her decision to leave and move on. In a way she was scared to be alone, but Josh made her feel like a woman again. In the simplest way, he opened her up...in a few different areas. Her sore muscles were proof of that. Of course her uncle was quiet the entire ride home having seen his niece in a different light then he had before.

The scenery hadn't changed much since she left and Michelle was happy to be home again. Even if it was only for a few weeks. As car pulled up in the driveway her mom sprang from the house to see her.

"Ohhhh, you look so pretty. Come give Mom a hug. You need to tell me everything! How is work and the girls? How was your trip? Did you meet anybody interesting on the train?"

"Hey, tell your mom if you met anyone on the train ride."

Scowling back at her uncle, Michelle nodded and got her bags from the car. They went into the house chatting and her mom held her arm the whole way. Michelle went into her old room. Her mom had kept it just like it was except for a few craft boxes in the corner.

She was home.

"Mom, I need to tell you some things, okay?"

"Of course, dear. What's going on?"

Taking a deep breath she started. "Keith and I broke up. Actually I left him. I took a job up north and that's where I am headed. It's what I've always wanted to do." She stopped, seeing her mom wanted to ask something.

"Is this what you want, dear? Keith called saying you were going through some things."

"When did he call?"

"Yesterday. I thought it was odd. He never calls. To be blunt, I never really liked him. He acted like such an asshole."

"Why did everyone dislike him but never told me? I hate that he called here. I left him because he treated me like shit and...sorry, Mom. I did meet somebody on the train ride here, though." Michelle became warm talking of him.

"Wow, you're glowing, dear. He must be some man. So, umm, is he good at, ummm, well..." blushing, Michelle's mom held her hands apart as if measuring a fish.

"MOM!!!" Flabbergasted, Michelle burst out laughing. She grabbed her mom's hands and opened them a little wider.

"Does he happen to have a single father?"

"His name is Josh and I know it was a simple fling but I really like him a lot."

They laughed and continued their girl talk for the rest of the evening. Feeling like a teenager again, Michelle showered then slipped into her pajamas. Standing in the bedroom doorway she scurried over and plopped on her bed. It was the same but everything seemed smaller. She had been away for eight years and didn't come back much.

* * * * *

Josh climbed out of the taxi and walked up the steps to his house. He saw his mom in the front window cleaning dishes in the sink. He picked up the newspaper on the doorstep and went in.

"Hello, honey, how was your trip?" his mom yelled while he hung his jacket on the rack and set his luggage down.

"It was fine, Ma. Where's Dad?"

"Oh, he's downstairs. Why did you buy that stupid satellite system? He's always watching TV."

He peeked in the kitchen, breathing in the scent of fresh bread baking. *Hmmmm, chocolate chip cookies too*, he thought.

"Get out of here! Hey, you brat, don't eat the cookies, they're for dessert." His mom swatted at him with a towel.

Josh went to his dad's basement office. Basically it was a TV room. It was dimly lit but had a 58-inch TV, surround sound, DVD, satellite hookup and two Lay-Z-Boy recliners. Perfect for football.

Josh got to the bottom of the stairs and heard a deep moaning sound. "Mmmmm, aaahh, aaahhh, yeah baby, ohhhhh yeah, give it to me. Who's your daddy? Who's your daddy?"

"Dad? What are you doing?"

"Hey, son, come check this out."

Jumping into the other chair Josh raised an eyebrow and his jaw dropped.

"Uhhh, I am speechless. I didn't think a woman could bend like that." His dad was watching a porn movie from the satellite. They both tilted their heads to the right and became engrossed in the woman on the screen. Of course the man in the movie was more INTO her.

"I saw a new movie. It was set in a circus. Never understood how they got that many clowns in a car. Now I understand. Did you know we get five channels of this stuff twenty-four hours a day? Son, I could kiss you for the satellite. Josh...JOSH!"

"Dad, after watching this I don't want you kissing me."

Muting the TV his dad asked Josh about the trip.

"You get that contract? We really need that client. Our business will really grow from it."

"I wrapped up all those loose ends and they signed the contract the night before I left."

Occasionally they'd stop and watch some porn. It was a pleasant distraction. They started talking about his train ride home and Josh told him about Michelle.

"You're kidding, THAT Michelle? Son, she's beautiful. Her brother is an asshole for the way he treated your sister, but she was always nice. Does she know who you are?"

"I don't think so. She probably doesn't remember me. I couldn't believe it was HER. Man, I had dreamed about her for years."

"Well? What happened? Did you guys...you know."

Josh smiled, "Dad, that's personal. It's not right to talk about that."

"Okay, I respect that. I take that as a yes," he laughed.

"DAAAAMMMMMMMNNNNN!" they both yelled as they saw a woman on the TV with a set of watermelon-sized breasts and a cucumber.

"Well, son, I'm gonna go jump your mother before dinner."

"Too much information, Dad, I'll go to my room before dinner." Josh joked. "Just make sure you clean the table when done."

* * * * *

While Michelle brushed her hair she opened the drawer to her nightstand.

"Oh look, my yearbook." She smiled remembering the past. She turned the pages reading the senseless notes from friends. *Have a great summer, Call me sometime, Thanks for the homecoming present.* "Mmmmm, I remember THAT home-cumming." She was 17 again and didn't have any worries except going to college.

She turned to the dog-eared page, the football team photos. Her memories made her close her legs tightly together. She looked at the large Varsity team photo looking for her old boyfriend. She stared intensely at number 87.

"Oh my god! That's Josh." Frantically she turned to the senior pictures looking for him. She found Josh's picture. "What a goober," was her first impression. She scanned the page to see if he left any notes.

"Have a nice summer. I know we didn't talk too much at school but I noticed you every day. You brightened my school experience, Josh."

Michelle fought back tears. It was so sweet. *He really filled out nice*, she thought and raised her eyebrow. Turning off her light she lay back in her bed and held her favorite teddy bear. *I think I will call you now Josh*, she thought, holding it against her chest. She stared into the ceiling with the sprinkles of light reflecting off the stucco. She finally met

someone that treated her nice and seemed to be really respectful and caring. It pained her to know she had to leave him behind. Drifting to sleep, she thought of the train and her encounter with a mystery man she had been blind to before.

* * * * *

The next few days were quiet and Michelle found herself becoming more assured that this departure from Keith, her new revelation and the perfect job was the right thing to do. She called Irene in Canada, making sure everything was in line. Her flight information was confirmed. Everything was set to go.

Her Mom wanted her to go to a friend's place with her. Michelle didn't mind. It was a beautiful day and they walked down the breezy street by the old houses of the neighborhood. It was refreshing and she could chat with her mom, woman to woman.

"So tell me more about this man you met on the train?"

"It was nothing, just a fling."

"Sometimes a fling is a good thing," her mom mused. "As long as he has a long thing."

"His name is Josh Brinkman."

Her Mom stopped and looked at her. "Josh? Uh oh. You must not have heard?"

"What?" Michelle asked confused.

"Well, Josh's sister was your brother's fiancée. Right before the wedding Josh caught your brother with Ellie McShaw in a car. You remember Ellie, she was the girl that got stuck on the gearshift of her dad's tractor. She does porno movies now. Well, to make a long story short. He told his sister about your brother and she called off the wedding. Your brother blames Josh for everything. Josh even took his position on the college football team his junior year. Your brother despises Josh! Never met the man myself."

"That was him? Oh great, Mike will kill me if he knew I had a fling with Josh. Oh well, I'll probably never see him because I'll be in Canada next week."

"Dear, I wanted some time to talk to you. Are you happy?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, I know leaving Keith must have been hard on you. He was a jerk and I should have paid more attention to you being down when you were together. When your dad passed I was alone for quite a while. I never thought of anything except 'poor me'. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember. I wish I were here more for you. I had to stay with..."

"Stop," her Mom interrupted. "I'm not asking you anything, I just want to tell you something. I am proud of you, Michelle. You are doing something I never did. You are taking a big step and following a dream. Five years of college and you take that crappy job and let that man run your life."

Her mom stopped holding Michelle's hand and looked into her eyes. "Don't end up like me, dear. *Live your life*. Don't be like your brother, get the hell out of this town and see the world. Don't let someone change your dreams. I can tell there is something else. I'm your mother and I know. You'll be fine, dear." A tear filled her Mom's eyes and she hugged Michelle tight.

* * * * *

Michelle, her brother Mike and her mom sat at the kitchen table playing cards when the phone rang.

"Hello?" A smile widened across her face. "Nice to hear your voice, too." Excusing herself from the table Michelle walked down the hall. She stopped and leaned against the wall.

"So what are you doing?" Josh asked.

"Talking to you. You lied to me. Why didn't you tell me we went to high school together?"

"I was different back then. We all were. I was sort of a geeky kid then. Played connect the dots with my pimples and couldn't get a girl to notice me much. That's why I took up football. I liked hitting people to take out my frustration. Really helped my confidence and got me into college."

Josh changed subjects, "Anyway, what color?"

"What color what?"

"What color underwear you have on? And what are you doing this Saturday?"

"I'm not wearing any and I'm going to an anniversary party with my mom."

"Well this makes it easy. I was going to ask you if you'd like to go to my parents' anniversary party but I guess I'll see you there. I'm not wearing any underwear either, just got out of the shower."

"Hmmmm, wish I was there." Michelle really did wish it. Closing her eyes she pictured him standing naked and talking on the phone. Dangling in all his glory with his broad chest, dark hair and...

"HELLO??? You there???"

"Sorry, distracted. I guess I'll see you there then. Thanks for calling."

She hung up the phone and went back to the table. "Who was that?" her brother asked.

"It was a friend." She winked at her mom. "Can't wait to go to the party tomorrow night!"

"Well, I'm not going, all those fuddy-duddies at an anniversary party. Sounds boring to me," her brother sarcastically replied.

Chapter Five

The party was dull but Michelle was happy she went. Josh was talking football with a few guys sitting on the other side of him and would turn around and look at her with a smile. The knowledge that they knew each other made the game more fun. Michelle felt out of place but Josh made her feel okay. Her mom looked over and winked. Michelle blushed and winked back.

"So, Josh. I hear you and my daughter took the train home. How was the trip?"

"It was really pleasant. The scenery was beautiful. I drank a little too much the first night with friends but the rest of the trip was really fulfilling." He smiled and continued, "The compartments were pretty small but if you use some ingenuity, you can get into the tightest areas just fine."

Michelle jerked upright looking shocked when Josh slipped his hand up her thigh.

"Ummm, your hand must be lost. Shouldn't you be eating?" Michelle smiled, whispering into his ear.

"I'm looking for finger food." Josh finished the sentence as he pressed his finger up against her panties. His thumb rested along the top crease of her moistening pussy.

"Oh, they have some finger food on the table in the living room dear," her mom piped in.

Not wanting to make a scene Michelle reached under the table. Leaning over to Josh, she whispered "Stop it, you are embarrassing me."

Josh pressed harder and looked away to talk to a neighbor sitting across from him. Michelle sat dumbfounded but suddenly became warm. Josh's thumb crept inside of her pussy with only the thin fabric stopping him from entering her deeper. Josh pulled his hand away and brought it to his nose and breathed her scent in. Michelle sighed in relief then sat upright again when he set his hand between her legs again.

Michelle couldn't take anymore. She got up to go the restroom to freshen up. "I'll be right back, Mom," she told her when she passed by. Lost, she went around the corner and looked down the hall trying to find the right door. She found the bathroom and went in.

"You need any help?" she heard the voice behind her ask.

"No, Josh, I'm fine. Don't you ever stop?"

Josh grabbed her arm and pulled her into his body, kissing her. His mouth was wet from the wine and the sweetness of the grapes seeped into Michelle's lips. Her knees buckled and she caught herself giving in.

"No, Josh, not here, you brat. Stop grabbing my ass, you goofball." She was determined to be strong even though he was being very persistent. "NO, now you go back to the table. NO, NO, NO," Michelle said as the door closed.

"Ohhhhh yes, mmmmmmmm," was mumbled when the door locked. A loud thump hit the door. Josh had gotten his way.

Michelle's mom became worried about her. She was gone a while so she went down the hall to see if she was okay. She listened at the door hearing a soft muffled moan.

"Are you alright, dear?" her mom asked.

"I'll, I'll be there...in a few minutes," Michelle stammered back.

"Poor dear, she must be feeling bad. Probably the meat loaf. I hate it when the meat loaf is soft," her mom giggled and walked back to the table.

Michelle sat on the bathroom countertop, spread wide to Josh's forceful tongue as he knelt before her. Michelle lost herself in the blur of her dark fantasy. "Oh fuck, don't stop Josh, this is incredible."

Michelle turned her head to the side against the wall-length vanity mirror watching her reflection. As Josh concentrated on her clitoris, he suckled hard and slid his thumb between her engorged labia. Michelle watched her face in the mirror and how blissfully enraptured she was in this heated moment of passion.

Her passionate juices dripped from her, mixing with his saliva. His thumb pressed on the flesh below her clit, forcing it upward and he flicked his tongue over the tip of her clitoris. Michelle smiled, seeing her reflection through half-open eyes. She loved being eaten and Josh knew her weakness.

The fear of being caught only heightened her intense arousal. She closed her eyes, grabbing Josh's head, begging him to continue. Josh slid his thumb into her pussy and stretched it open. Michelle came against his mouth when his tongue stroked the length of her clit with a long sweeping lick. Josh sucked and licked her pussy until she struggled to put her legs together. His hunger for her taste was unquenchable.

Josh fixed himself in the mirror and pinched her knee making her leg jerk. He licked his thumb and wiped his face on the washcloth. "You're a mess, you better straighten up, young lady!"

Michelle laughed and kicked him in the butt and out the door.

She tried to straighten and compose herself the best she could. She shook her head and giggled going back to the table. Josh was eating some cheesecake and talking to his neighbor again.

"Are you okay, dear?" her mom asked. "You look flushed and out of breath."

"I'm fine. It's just hot in here."

"You can say that again," Josh replied as they both smiled and she squeezed his knee.

* * * * *

Michelle looked uncomfortable while talking on the phone. "Yes, I left there a few weeks ago. That shouldn't be a problem, Irene. I can't believe that asshole ruined my credit like that. I am so happy to be out of there. Okay, okay, thanks and tell them I'll be there first thing Monday morning." She closed her eyes and shook her head mouthing the word FUCK.

"I appreciate you having all this set up for me, Irene, I owe you one." Pissed off and angry, Michelle hung up the phone and smoldered while sipping her coffee in the kitchen.

"Uh oh, what's wrong dear?" her mom asked while pouring herself a cup.

"That prick Keith ran up my credit cards and never told me, then didn't pay the fees. Just once I'd like to..." she squeezed a donut in her hand. The cream filling plopped out and she squished it. "That's what I feel like doing to him."

Her mom grabbed a paper towel, wiping it up. "Men are so messy. I wish they were the sperm receptacle once and know what it feels like. I honestly believe they think with their penis. It's always getting them in trouble and doesn't make a bit of sense."

Taking deep breaths and calming herself with the warm coffee Michelle sat with her mom and asked, "Mom, have you, ummm, you know...since dad died?"

Michelle could tell the question caught her mom off guard. "Wellllllllll, there was this one gentleman. Oh boy, he was so nice to be around. We knew each other for a long time and one day, he asked me out. One date led to another date and eventually we, ummm, how do I put this so you'll understand what happened...we fucked like wild rabbits."

Spewing coffee, Michelle dribbled it down her chin. "MOM!?!?!"

"Well you asked," her mom giggled and continued, "I loved your father. Honestly, he was the love of my life. After he was gone I was still only 50. Then I met Ross. He was really nice. He taught me things I never knew about."

"Oh my God, Ross Lassiter, the Biology teacher? He taught my Sex Ed class!"

"Yes, he was a GREAT teacher. I learned things about my body and about me that freed up all those fears of being alone and never feeling wanted again. He showed me I wasn't too old to still be a sexy woman."

"Mom, I am proud of you."

"Oh, quit it. It happened a few years back and not since. I must say it was liberating. There was a good reason he taught Sex Ed. Sure, it was a fling of passion, but it was something I needed to do for ME. My arthritis was making my hand hurt and I was using up all the batteries."

"Well, this thing with Josh has got to stop. He's a grrrrreat lover...but...I don't know. I just left Keith and I'm not sure I can trust a man right now."

"That's up to you, dear. Take that job and find yourself. This is what you want so don't regret at least trying it. You'll look back and never forgive yourself. I never did. If Josh is for real he'll let you go and be here when you get back."

Chapter Six

Josh and Michelle spent the next few days randomly meeting each other. It became obvious to Michelle that she started to have feelings for him. She looked forward to his calls and the meetings. She was a teenager all over and had a fickle crush on Josh. It couldn't last but she wanted to make the most out of the time at home.

Sometimes they would just go for walks. The park was beautiful. It was chilly but not too cold. Unusually spring-like, it made the time there that much more special. They walked, holding hands and then sat down on a bench.

"So what do you think about kids and families?" Michelle asked.

"I like the idea of a family. A few kids, a nice house. Just not sure I'm ready yet. I don't know. If I met the right woman, who knows?"

"Shhhh, you hear that?" Michelle asked.

They stopped talking and heard a quiet moaning sound in the bushes behind their bench. Being typically curious, Josh and Michelle got up and wandered around the bushes, trying to be quiet. They peeked through the brush and saw a couple in a sleeping bag on the ground.

"Reminds me of a hotdog in a bun," Josh joked.

"Looks like she's the one getting the hotdog! I wonder if it's a foot-long?"

The young lady's black hair flowed from the opening of the sleeping bag and her long locks swept the grass below her. Josh and Michelle smiled at each other and watched the lovers. A deep voiced moan from within the sleeping bag reverberated through the quiet park. A man's head popped from the opening. His face was covered with the black hair of the woman and he was gasping for air.

There was the sound of the side zipper opening and the woman sat up, exposing their semi-nude bodies. Josh's eyes opened wide as the woman threw her head back. Her large breasts sprang forward as she arched her back. She looked glorious and her large burgundy colored nipples made Josh stutter. "Ummmm, uhhh, should we leave?"

"I can really see you want to go," Michelle grinned as she watched Josh drool.

Michelle raised her eyebrow when the man reached up and grabbed the woman's breast in his massive paw. Tattoos covered his arms. He sat up, burying his face in her breasts, sucking on her nipples one by one. The woman leaned forward to kiss the man. Their mouths opened and they seemed to swallow each other's tongues in a lustful kiss. Josh crossed his legs, trying to disguise his arousal in this live porno movie.

Michelle enjoyed watching the couple, the abandon of the woman as she leaned back, stretching her breasts skyward as she rode atop this mammoth man.

His arms here huge and he was enthralled in her delight. The sleeping bag fell open and only the woman's miniskirt covered their bare bodies. The man reached down, raising her skirt and exposing her shaved pubis. A tattoo of "Tigger" decorated her pubic bone area.

Michelle and Josh stared as the large man rolled the woman over and got atop her. He lifted up and rested his large, hardened cock on her tummy.

"Yep...a foot-long," Michelle smirked.

It throbbed as he slid it back and forth, teasing her. The woman grabbed a handful of his hair and pulled him down. Smiling, the man lowered back down to kiss her. Like two animals they were lost in the instinct to have sex. The woman's breasts flattened out, except for the raised tips of her nipples that she twisted between her fingers. The man grabbed her legs, holding one in each hand. He spread her open to his hungry gaze and gritted his teeth. Positioning himself, he plunged into the woman with one deliberate, hard stroke. The woman moaned and arched her back, squeezing her breasts together.

Michelle noticed the tattoo on the man's stomach of fire rising from his groin area. He relentlessly buried himself into this luscious, sexy, dark-haired vixen. Her moaning was that of dark pleasure and was making Josh crazy. Not able to stand anymore Josh picked up his jacket and took Michelle's hand.

"I couldn't take any more. Damn, that was hot."

Michelle laughed as Josh walked fast, holding his jacket in front of himself to cover his protrusion. Josh opened her door and climbed behind the wheel of the car. Uncomfortable, Josh started the car.

"Take me home, Josh," she asked.

Josh pulled out of the parking space and slowly caught his breath. Michelle leaned down and stroked his cock through his pants.

"Did that really get to you?" she whispered as she licked the lobe of his ear, blowing gently.

"Not as much as this is."

Tugging at his zipper Michelle licked his neck and slid her hand inside the pant flap. Josh swerved the car when she grabbed his stiffened cock and squeezed the head. Unfastening his pants she opened the front and saw a spot of anticipation staining his underwear. She moistened her lips and pulled his hard cock out.

"Just get me home," Michelle said, dropping into his lap. She licked a glisten of his pre-cum with her tongue. Josh swerved again trying to remain composed.

"You want me to pull over?" he asked.

"Mmmmm, nope, you stop, I stop!"

* * * * *

Speeding up Josh fought with his focus of driving while Michelle slowly sucked his length into her mouth. The light turned red and Josh waited at the stoplight while she closed her eyes, moaning. The vibrations rocked through Josh making him shiver.

"Awwww, the car stopped. I'll have to stop." Michelle kissed the tip of his cock and licked up and down the length waiting for the car to move. She teased Josh into a manic craze.

He looked over, blinking frantically, and the town minister was in the car next to him waiting for the light. Tapping his thumb on the steering wheel, the light seemed to take forever and he struggled to keep his eyes open. He waved and whispered, "Minister Jones is in the car next to us."

Michelle deep throat his cock into her mouth making Josh strain to not stretch his legs. He curled his toes in his shoes and blasted a quick breath out.

Jamming on the gas pedal he shot through the light and hurried to her house. When Josh turned the corner Michelle ran her fingers along his inseam and sucked hard making Josh groan. "Oh crap. You don't play fair." Josh slammed on the brakes and shot his seed into her mouth. Like nourishment she swirled her lips along his stiff shaft milking him.

Michelle sat up, wiping her bottom lip and said, "Oh look, we're here. I'll talk to you later." She tapped his sensitive cock and it flinched weakly. Hopping out of the car, Michelle turned back and blew Josh a kiss.

Laughing, Michelle threw her purse on the table by the door. There was some mail on the table and she saw her name on one. She opened the letter from Canada and read it.

Attn: Ms. Walker

We are happy you are joining us and have set up your training schedule to start in two weeks on the 14th.

Enclosed is your schedule and registration for the Academy for your schooling.

From our interview last month I know you are a welcome addition. Your college records alone warranted us hiring you. This is a great opportunity for all of us here at the Institute for Child Development. Everyone is excited you are joining our winning team.

Sincerely,

Robert Carlson, PHD

Administrative Director

Michelle sighed. She felt bad knowing she thought about not going. This helped confirm her feelings to go. Everything was falling into place for her.

The next day she packed her things and set out to get on with her plan and not let anyone get hurt. Later that afternoon she called Josh.

"Josh, meet me at the Roadside Inn, tonight about 7. I don't want to go to your parents and can't stay here." Michelle held back her pain. She just needed to cut things off before they got out of hand.

"Nooo, nothing's wrong. Just...please. Just meet me there, okay?"

Chapter Seven

Michelle knocked on the hotel door. Meeting someone like this seemed seedy and cheap. Her whole reason for coming home was to regroup and start her life anew with no ties. She was going to have to let go of Josh. He was everything she ever wanted in a man but she needed to be free from everything and everyone to find herself.

Michelle pushed herself inside when Josh answered the door.

Josh was upset by all the secrecy and his passion for Michelle was bubbling to the surface. "What are you doing? Who cares if someone sees you?"

"This is a small town, Josh. I just feel cheap coming to a hotel to meet you. You have no idea about...never mind." Michelle fidgeted with her hands trying to muster the strength to tell him goodbye. She was torn between her dream to grow and become free or take this opportunity to be with a man she truly felt joy with.

"Look at me. You ask me to get this hotel and don't tell me why. Come on, look at me." Josh held her chin and made her look into his eyes. She felt a calm in him. "What is it? Michelle, tell me...please."

"Hold me, Josh. Just hold me." Michelle couldn't tell him like this. She wanted him so badly but knew she had to leave. His big arms held her tight and she felt his heart beating in his chest. The loud thumping vibrated through her. What was it about him that made her care so much? She wasn't supposed to fall for the next guy, she was supposed to meet Mr. Right up north when she got her shit together and became independent. Now all she could think about was her need for Josh.

She pulled back, putting her hands on his chest. She stared into his green eyes and unbuttoned his top button, twisting the hair poking out. "Josh? Will you do anything I ask?"

"Yes, of course."

"Make love to me. Just be with me tonight and don't ask any questions." She wrapped her arms around his waist and held him tightly. "Hold me. Just hold me." For that single moment, everything was clear to her. But she was going to leave and couldn't bear telling him face to face. This would be her farewell.

Josh turned and picked Michelle up, carrying her to the bed. His strong arms made her feel secure and safe. He laid her atop the bed and she shivered from the cold and fright in her heart.

His hands were slow as they moved over her clothes. Her eyes closed and a tear trickled down her cheek. Josh kissed her tear, saying, "Don't cry. There is only us here. No pain, no eyes watching what we do, just you, me, and some chocolate syrup."

Michelle couldn't help but smile.

Opening her eyes, she watched Josh's face light up when he unfastened the buttons on her blouse. The more he undid the more he grinned. He took the collar and spread her top open and away from her breasts. Her nipples were tight and strained against the bra. Josh licked his lips and unfastened the clasp, releasing her breasts.

"Mmmmmm, that feels better." Michelle moaned. She loved how he stared at her. Like looking past her flesh and seeing her soul. She beamed while he stroked her chest and the curves of her breasts. He scooped them in his hand and kissed the nipple so gently, it was like wind brushing them. Michelle was on a cloud. He licked across her nipples and they sprung up to meet his tongue.

"You are so beautiful," Josh replied to the moan of her body to continue.

He crawled down the bed. Pulling up Michelle's skirt, he rested his head on her pelvis. Stroking the skin of her legs, he felt her breathe deep and holding whenever he brushed her pubis. She grasped her breast in her hand, squeezing it while she ran the fingers on her other hand through Josh's hair. This was ecstasy.

Painstakingly, he rubbed the waistband of her panties making it roll down her thighs. Each time she wished he would just rip them off and ravage her. But he was taking his time. He blew across her stomach making her twitch. Her soft patch of hair waved from his breath. His finger slid under the loosened band and pulled them down her legs, tossing them to the floor.

Josh's massive hands caressed her thighs and calves making Michelle fade into a blissful state. His hands were rough and her skin soft and smooth. She spread her legs apart letting them fall open to his eyes and hands.

"Mmmmmmm, that feels nice," Michelle whispered as he drew along her inner thigh. She giggled when he wrote words on her legs. "What did you just write?"

"DINNER IS SERVED! Hmmm, this is fun," he said, smirking.

Josh grasped her knees in his hands and opened her legs wider and nuzzled against her pussy with the bristles of his unshaven face. Josh took his finger and toyed with her labia. His tongue would split the folds of skin and he'd press his finger into the small opening, barely piercing her pussy. He noticed her clit protruding and firm. Not to be ungentlemanly, he stroked it with his thumb.

Josh flicked his slippery tongue against Michelle's already throbbing clit. Her body tensed and relaxed in uncontrollable surges.

"Oh please, don't stop," she moaned.

She wanted him so bad but knew this might be the last time she had him like this. Emotions filled her heart. More alive than ever, her body was brittle and about to break from a building tension of lust, passion and even love.

Josh slid his thumb into her and felt the juicy walls becoming hot as they filled with blood from her arousal. His mouth savored her taste. Grapes from the vine have a

succulent bounty to them and she was his wine to drink. He slid in another finger and spread her walls wide to venture into the dark, wet cavern of her sex.

Josh mumbled while eating her out. The vibrations of his voice and the licking drove her crazy. "A, B, C, D, E..."

Josh rested his other hand between her breasts. Her chest expanded when she held her breath as Josh touched the perfect spot. The crest of a wave peaked close as he washed her in a bath of desire.

"Right there, right...oh God, right there...mmmmmmmm..." Her moan echoed through the room.

Josh watched Michelle breathe and gasp, desperate to let go of this enormous weight filling her. Totally on the brink of rapture, she lost control and grabbed Josh's head pulling it into her.

Josh spread his fingers apart and rubbed them back and forth inside the most sensitive area of her pussy. He pulled his thumb out and suckled hard on her clit. She spurted her juices from the tortured desires built up in her.

"Mmmmm, just like candy. Damn, you taste sweet," he mumbled while suckling on her.

She felt exhilarated, but wanted him inside of her. Michelle's need became unbearable and she pulled his hair making him move above her. She grabbed his arms and rolled Josh onto his back. A frantic rage of desire swept through her. She threw her blouse onto the floor. Her mouth salivated and she was hungry to feed it.

Tearing at his clothes, Michelle was possessed. She yanked Josh's pants off and pulled his underwear down freeing his hardened cock. She growled and ravaged his cock with her mouth, sucking hard when pulling up away from his torso. She couldn't get enough.

Popping him from her mouth she moved up his body, dragging her breasts along his wet cock. It slid between the mounds. "Mmmmm, you feel so fucking hard...I could just...mmmmmm." She pushed her breasts together, making a valley of flesh that caressed his slippery cock.

"Now this is a different feeling, I have nev..." Josh stopped as Michelle pushed him through her breasts and rested her teeth below the head of his penis. "Shut up!"

"Oh my God, what got into you?" Josh growled.

Straddling him, Michelle grabbed his cock, angling it at her hot, damp opening. "Right now, you will get into me." A demonic groan came from Michelle as she lowered her pussy onto Josh's thick, straining shaft.

Holding in a deep breath, Josh felt the muscles inside of her pussy spasm and adjust to his penetration. She was always so tight.

He felt Michelle's juices trickling down the base of his cock to his balls. She was on fire. He reached up to fondle her breasts while she ground her pelvis against his. The rocking side to side was a lovely motion that reminded Josh of the train where they met.

Michelle's hair fell forward when she looked down at him and started a steady, deep pace. She rode on him and Josh closed his eyes. "No, look at me. I want to see you," she ordered. Grabbing her nipples, Josh flicked the pert tips and pulled at her breasts making her speed her rhythm.

Michelle looked between them at the juncture of their bodies and saw him vanish into her over and over. Her pubis swelled when he was completely buried in her.

"Ohhh, myyyyy, I can fe...eeeeel your..." Michelle stammered when he thrust his hips up, making it seem he pushed against her womb. She couldn't control him, she wanted him to badly and needed to feel his fury. Falling on top of Josh, Michelle kissed him tenderly. "I want you on top," she mused.

A smile widened across Josh's face "Yes, dear." He grabbed her hips and rolled over on top of her. He dropped all his weight onto her like a limp sleeping St. Bernard.

"OH MY GOD, you're smothering me, you screwball!" Michelle tickled his sides making Josh snicker.

Josh picked himself up off her on his strong arms and stared into her eyes and lowered down to her, kissing her cheek. He brushed her lips with his and as his cock found its way into her, his tongue slid gently into her mouth. Michelle loved how he felt and moaned in pleasure as he pulled up and stretched her pussy open, dragging his shaft against her clit. Like artists painting a picture, each stroke had purpose.

"If you only knew how incredible you feel," Josh said quietly.

"I can imagine." Michelle tightened around him when he withdrew and relaxed as he slid back in. She ran her fingers up his back, feeling the muscles ripple.

The slow, deliberate pace was more making love than desperate sex. The heat between them was scorching as they perspired and Josh sped up his rhythm. Josh was grunting and she felt him become desperate and thrust harder.

"Oh shit, ohhhh, I can't hold it anymore." Josh erupted and the hot seed splashed within her. Over and over he came inside, thrusting deeply in and out. She touched his mouth, brushing her fingers over his lips. She closed her eyes and came as he sucked the tip of her finger. The slow wave submerged her in warmth. Her body felt totally refreshed in her enlightened state.

"You made a mess. You get to sleep in the wet spot this time." Michelle joked, feeling the hot ooze of their sex within her wet pussy.

Josh lay next to her and wrapped his big arms around her. They fell asleep with the dim neon lights flickering from outside. Michelle's eyes fluttered as they filled with her tears. Her heart was breaking. She wanted to stay but couldn't. Her new life was beginning somewhere else and even though her feelings for Josh were strong, she couldn't stay. This was her burden to bear.

* * * * *

Gently climbing out of the bed, she put her clothes back on. Michelle looked at the bed and Josh was lying there so peacefully. He was grinding his teeth again making her cringe. A smile crossed her face and she leaned over, kissing his cheek. This was her goodbye. She reached into her jacket pocket and pulled out a note she had written earlier. Michelle kissed the letter and placed it on the pillow beside Josh.

Opening the door she stopped. *Was she doing the right thing? Maybe he was her destiny,* she wondered to herself. All of her second thoughts would haunt her. Torn, she shut the door and walked into the blustery night wind.

Chapter Eight

Josh awoke, quickly looking around the room.

"Michelle? Michelle? Where are...?"

He lay back into the bed, stretching his sore muscles. The note fell from Michelle's pillow. Scared about what it said, Josh sat up, staring at the lipstick mark on the white paper.

Josh,

You came into my life when I was troubled and scared.

You showed me that there is more to a man than I knew before.

You showed me compassion, gentleness and desire.

You woke feelings within me long thought gone.

I can't see a train without thinking of you.

I can't explain why I must go,

I know in time you will understand.

I know you can't leave, yet I can't stay.

Forgive me for leaving like this.

Forgive me, for I couldn't face you to say goodbye.

Forgive my stupid pride because I need to find myself.

Forgive my love for you that begs me to stay.

Our paths crossed at the wrong time,

Our feelings took us by surprise and our passion was unbound.

Our lives are different but we want the same things.

Our journey will make our paths cross again, I promise you that.

XXOOXX

Michelle

Dumbfounded, Josh scratched himself and sat on the bed. He set the note down and felt his heart breaking. His whole life he had looked at Michelle from afar wondering who she really was. He wondered what she was like and now he got to experience her joy. Like a dream she was part of his life, now she was going to be gone again.

Josh picked up the phone and started dialing.

* * * * *

Josh wasn't going to let her go without a fight. He was sitting in the living room of Michelle's house talking to her mother. "I know we haven't met and you must not have a really good impression of me from what happened with your son. I have to tell you, I love your daughter. She's an incredible woman."

"You know what?" her mom interrupted. "Michelle's my daughter, and I love her, but she's confused. She was in a bad relationship with that asshole and hasn't really found her feet yet. There are things you don't know about her, Josh. She just wants to become the woman she knows she is."

Josh listened, but didn't want to hear what she said.

"This is hard for her. She just wants a new beginning for herself."

"I just wish she'd stay. I really don't want to lose her," Josh pleaded.

"Maybe because she's afraid of jumping into another relationship with a stranger. She just met you; she went from a beast to a pussycat. Well, a beefcake," her mom giggled. "He treated her so bad that she had to run away." Josh could see her Mom trying to hold in her tears for her daughter.

The front door opened and Michelle tossed her keys on the entry table and hung her coat up. Walking into the living room she saw Josh. "What are you doing here? Didn't you read my note?"

Josh stood up and walked toward Michelle. He reached to hold her hand and she pulled away.

"I just, I just didn't want it to end like this," Josh said looking into her eyes. "I won't just LET you leave. I can't."

"I'm going to leave you two alone to talk," her mom said, leaving the room.

"Michelle, I love you."

"Josh, don't do this to me! It isn't fair."

"Life isn't fair!" Josh barked back.

"I just left a relationship where I was treated like shit and never respected. You know how hard it was to leave my life there to get me here right now? Don't expect me to just drop everything I have worked for and sacrificed just to be here with you! I don't even KNOW you."

"But, I love you. I have wanted to be with you for as long as I remember. Doesn't that mean anything to you? Why can't you stay? Just tell me why! Just be HONEST with me!"

Starting to cry, Michelle looked up, "Don't do this, Josh. Don't play these fucking games with my heart. I don't know what I feel anymore. I want to stay here but I won't live my entire life living for a man's dream and not at least following mine. I'm not going to end up stuck in this God damned town with four kids and a mortgage. I can't end up like this. Why can't you understand?"

Josh was holding back his pent up emotions. He was being ripped in two and had no control. "I don't know what to say. I want you here with me and I can't leave."

"Then let me go! Please don't ruin these weeks of happiness for me. I left to find myself and I found you. You know how hard this is for me? I'll come back. I just can't stay NOW."

Upset and hurt Josh said, "Then go find yourself. I found the one thing I was missing in you. I found love. *And we're just starting!* I haven't cared this much for anyone in my life. You hit me like a tornado and all my memories and feelings were brought out. I can't help it. I don't want you to go because I don't want to lose the best thing that's happened to me."

"I can't win." Michelle put her face in her hands, crying tears of pain. "Why must things be so complicated? I just wanted to move on. I wasn't looking for any more burdens."

Red faced and wailing Michelle lashed out, "Why are you making me feel like this? If I ask you to leave you say, *No I can't, my life is here*, but it's okay for you to ask me to give up my dreams. You have no fucking idea what is going on inside of me! You're just like Keith."

"DON'T FUCKING COMPARE ME TO HIM! I am not HIM! Get that through your head." Josh stood up, his face enraged and glared at Michelle. "You do what you have to. I am here. I will still be here when you need me. Don't forget that." Josh walked out, slamming the door behind him.

Michelle fell to the pillow, crying for having to do this.

* * * * *

Standing in the shower Michelle cried. She was leaving and saddened by what had happened and the situation she'd made. She calmed a little and let the water wash away her tears. The hot water rinsed over her, cleansing her body. Depressed and hurt, she put her hand on her chest, aching inside for Josh. The void he left in her was more than just the hole in her heart.

Her rational voice popped into her head, I know, I know. He's a great guy. But you're following your dream. You need this. It's everything you've worked for.

The devilish little voice didn't say much. *WHAT? Can't I be quiet for once?*

I just figured you'd have a smartass remark, her rational voice replied.

She doesn't want my opinion, the devilish voice barked back.

"Yes I do," Michelle answered, "Really, I want to know."

Her devilish voice shrugged her shoulders, I think you should stay with him. He treats you good. He adores you. And honestly tell me the last time you had an orgasm that strong. Hell, you rolled your eyes so hard you could see the back of your head!

"Well, that's true. Stop confusing me. I'm doing the right thing. Just let me..."

Looking around the bedroom Michelle's mom asked, "Who are you talking to?"

"Nobody, just myself."

"You know your Uncle Frank talks to himself. They gave him some BIG blue pills for it. Now he sees little blue people running around his room playing hockey with flamingos." Her mom smiled, thinking how stupid that sounded.

Michelle's mom helped her pack, knowing her baby was in anguish. "Dear, are you okay with this?"

"Yes, I've worked a long time to get an opportunity like this."

"I'm not talking about the job. You know what I'm talking about."

"He can't leave and I can't stay. Who knows, maybe later...I don't want to regret what I am doing. Keith held me back and look where I ended up, miserable and feeling worthless."

"Josh isn't Keith, dear. He'd take care of you. It's none of my business, but I like him. He's not bad looking either," her Mom teased.

She held her Mom, not wanting to go. For the first time in way too long she could tell her Mom knew what she was feeling. Michelle sighed and carried her bag to the door. Looking back into the room she saw her teddy bear. She dropped her bag and went to the bed to pick it up.

* * * * *

Josh sat in his office mindlessly fiddling with his paperwork. He leaned back and stared out the window at the trees blowing in the breeze. It was a beautiful day. But he knew it wasn't perfect. Inside he knew she was gone and he already missed her desperately. The phone rang, jerking him back to reality.

"Yes, Dad, I know. I made my decision."

* * * * *

The plane terminal was busy and Michelle stood ready to check in. Dazed from confusion and doubt, she mindlessly went through the motions of checking in. Her thoughts were elsewhere. At any minute she thought she'd see Josh bolt through the airport and take her away in his arms. She knew it was just a fantasy. Life wasn't that simple.

Taking her seat, Michelle just stared out the window. She was beginning her new life and couldn't look back at woulda, coulda, shoulda situations. She was moving on.

"This is my first trip to Canada, what about you?" she heard from the man sitting next to her.

"Me too," Michelle answered staring outside. Scared to fly she closed her eyes waiting for the plane liftoff. The rumbling of the jets and the bump of the turbulence shook through the plane. Tears trickled down her cheeks as the plane steadied and she knew it was over. Looking forward she wiped her tears, laughing at how silly she felt.

The man next to her handed her a handkerchief. "I'm sorry," Michelle started, "I just left home and the one man that made me truly happy."

"Maybe you left home but the man is right here."

"How did...I thought...what are you doing here?"

"It became a simple choice between staying without you, or going with you," he said grabbing her hand. "If you don't mind supporting an out of work promotional manager, I'll make sure to do my best. At least you won't have to pay for a maid. We can work out a payment schedule. I'm not a great cook, don't mind doing housework except toilets and will try not to mix our underwear up in the drawers."

Kissing her cheek he whispered, "I can't promise I won't try your underwear on though."

As the plane pushed through the clouds they held hands tightly. Michelle leaned over to Josh, looked in his eyes and asked, "You ever heard of the Mile-High club?"

Epilogue

The waiter looked around. Then he stared at the calendar.

"No, it's Friday for sure," he said aloud. "They just aren't here."

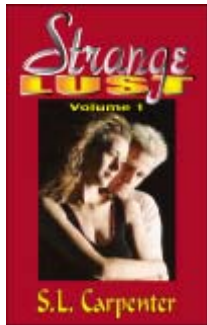
The trio's booth wasn't empty. Another couple was there, speaking and looking only at each other. He hoped they would tip as well as the three gorgeous women who used to sit there because he had the feeling he'd never see any of them again.

Where had they gone?

The waiter shrugged.

"I guess they don't need us anymore. They must've found what they were looking for."

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