

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Madison Hayes

Miss
DECEMBER



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Miss December

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MISS DECEMBER

Madison Hayes

Dedication

...to Pam, editor extraordinaire.

Chapter One

"Your November assignment is having trouble adjusting, Hardin. You're sure...you followed the handbook?"

The agent lifted his smoldering gaze to burn into Davis. "You've seen the visual documents," he told her.

Davis nodded, leaving her thoughts unspoken. It wasn't difficult to doctor a visual document.

"I've always been straight with you, Davis."

"I know." Davis sighed then shrugged at the man seated before her. "I'm sorry. It's not like this hasn't happened in the past. It's not like your students haven't fallen for you before. But November's having trouble settling in with her new mate. And this month's lift goes out tomorrow."

"I'll see her," he stated curtly.

"Thank you," she said, then gave him a sly grin. "I'd appreciate it...if it isn't too much trouble."

Hardin returned her gaze almost coldly. "No trouble at all."

Davis nodded again as she considered the man seated on the other side of her desk in the sterile white office. "You've gotten serious in your old age, Hardin. I remember when..." but she left the statement unfinished. Quietly she considered the man seated across from her.

At thirty-two, Hardin had proven to be the best of her agents. Tall and leanly muscled with a thick mane of waving black hair, his European features were ruggedly chiseled in a dark face. It wasn't hard to understand why he was so successful with his students—and that was *before* he turned his brilliant blue gaze on them to burn from

beneath dark, brooding eyebrows. He had an inviting mouth, she decided—long and hard and masculine, with a generous, sulky bottom lip. “Thank you,” she repeated with sincerity. “Will you see her alone?”

“No.” Hardin shook his head. “Have her man accompany her.”

“Do you want payment for November on plastic or on your hand?”

Hardin extended his hand in answer and Davis ran her palmwand over the heel of his palm, where his invisible palmcode was permanently imprinted on his skin.

“Thank you for your work,” Davis concluded. “Your next assignment will be in your cube tomorrow evening.”

“December,” Hardin said quietly.

“Yes,” Davis answered. “We’re wrapping up this segment of the project at the end of the year. This will be your last chance to get in under the wire.”

“I understand.”

“Good luck, Hardin.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Davis stood when he did. “If you’re ready, you’ll find November in Room Eight.”

He nodded vaguely, his eyes unfocused, his mind clearly not on November as he turned and left his supervisor’s office.

* * * * *

The woman was upon him before he could even close the door. Hardin looked down on the attractive, leggy blonde who was clinging to him, then lifted his eyes to connect with the man across the room. Her mate. Standing between the bed and the full-length virtual window, the redhead returned his gaze coldly, without smiling.

Pulling the woman’s face out of his chest, Hardin thumbed the tears from beneath her eyes as he held her face and he kissed her. When her eyes closed, he used the opportunity to observe her mate. With a surly expression, and his arms crossed over his

chest, the man turned to face the virtual window. The window's golden light accented his hard features. His nose was straight, his cheekbones high, his face lean, his jaw very square and his mouth set in a glowering straight line.

Good, Hardin thought. This was a situation he could work with.

Breaking the kiss, he put his finger on November's lush, trembling lips to silence her a moment. "Is this your chosen mate?" he asked her.

She nodded.

"What's he like?"

"He's not you," she said immediately.

He let the long line of his mouth curve into a smile. "Introduce me to him."

The girl looked uncertainly between the two men.

"Introduce us. I want to meet him."

With both hands behind her, clasping one of Hardin's, the blonde pulled him toward the tall redhead who turned from the window to give him a cynical stare.

"This is Weston," she introduced her mate. "Weston, this is...my mentor. This is the man I love."

Before the redhead had a chance to react, Hardin had reached out, grasped his hand and shaken it. Then with a yank, he pulled himself close to the man and put his mouth at Weston's ear. "Don't let me get away with anything," he whispered in a rough command.

Grinning at the man's wary expression, Hardin took a step backward and delivered his next words without looking at the woman beside him. His eyes skimmed the redhead up and down. "He looks like he ought to do, November," Hardin delivered with very deliberate male arrogance.

"I don't want to talk about him."

"But didn't you choose him?"

"Yes, but it's not working out." Tears rippled in her eyes as she clung to Hardin's side.

He gave her a quiet smile of sympathy. "Do you want to leave the project?"

"No! No," she repeated quickly. At his side, he felt her shudder. "I don't ever want to go back to...the way it was before."

"Then you're going to have to make it work," he told her gently. "You know I'm not a mate candidate."

She shook her head. "But *why*?" she asked, her voice cracking.

"I'm not fertile," he told her. "You know that, sweetheart. Have you given him a chance —"

"No," the redhead broke in abruptly.

"You haven't laid him yet?"

Grimly, Weston shook his head as his eyes narrowed accusingly on the girl.

Pulling November in front of him, Hardin took her by the lapels of her plain white blouse and smoothed his thumbs over the crisp fabric between his fingers. "Why don't I help you two get started," he suggested, cutting a hard grin at Weston as he reached for the top button of her shirt and popped it open.

Almost frantically, the woman shook her head. "I want *you*," she protested. "I want *you* to make love to me."

"I will," he told her. "But it will have to be the last time. Do you understand?" He cupped her chin in one hand as she nodded up at him. "I won't leave you with my memory alone," he continued gently. "Weston has to be involved as well. That's the condition under which I came here. To demonstrate that you can be happy with your mate."

"But...don't you *care* about me?"

“Of course I care about you,” he soothed, “but I don’t love you. For me, you’re only one in a large number of students, all of whom I care for – but none of whom I care for passionately.”

The redhead’s jaw hardened while Hardin popped the second button, then Weston crossed the room to shove him aside. Grabbing a handful of blouse, Weston worked the next button loose himself while Hardin let his eyes slip down to November’s breasts a lingering moment. Shooting a smile at the girl before he moved behind her, he pulled her blouse open and, as Weston got the buttons undone, he played his fingers across the girl’s pale, silky skin, dragging the blouse down over her shoulders. When Weston glared into his face, Hardin dropped his eyes into the girl’s cleavage, raising his eyebrows and lifting his eyes again to give the man a pointed look.

As Weston returned his attention to his task and continued to work his way through the buttons, Hardin slid his palms up November’s sides to cover the full rounded mounds of her bare breasts, and lowered his mouth to press against the side of her neck. The girl’s head fell back on his shoulder and her eyes closed as he lifted both breasts and rolled her tender pink nipples between the rough pads of his fingertips. With a nod to Weston, he slid his hands away, allowing them to be replaced by the redhead’s, and watched as the man gathered the plush, pliable weight into his hands and lowered his head to pull one of November’s blushing nipples into his mouth. Tilting his head, Hardin watched the man’s open mouth work greedily at November’s breast. His lean cheeks hollowed as he ate hungrily at her nipple, mauling her roughly with mouth and lips and tongue.

November gasped and her back curved, instinctively feeding her breast into Weston’s mouth as he suckled and rasped at her full, flushed nipple. Opening her eyes, she gazed up into Hardin’s smile as she remembered herself and pulled out of her mate’s embrace, then turned away from Weston to press her chest into Hardin’s. He was pleased when Weston moved in close behind the girl, his groin against her backside, his hands casing her hips possessively as his lips nudged into the hair at her

temple and his harsh, humid breath stirred a few curling strands to tremble on her forehead. "I don't love you," Hardin reminded her in a quiet voice. "Consider what that means, November. The man at your front can bring you to perfect orgasm without actually getting aroused himself. I might even have to pump myself a few times before I'd be hard enough to enter you.

"The man at your back," he whispered against her ear, "is hot for you. He's hard just thinking about you, just looking at you. He wants you. You know he does," he said, softly, letting his warm breath caress her skin. "You can feel him. You can feel his cock pressing between the cheeks of your ass—hard, insistent proof of his interest. Of his need for you." With these words, he trailed his tongue around the outer shell of her ear then prodded gently into her ear's opening as a long sighing moan wisped and hung on her parted lips. Catching the delicate shell of her ear between his teeth, he gave it a final nip before lifting his head.

Shooting a look of meaning at his male collaborator, Hardin reached for the bottom of November's straight, knee-length skirt. Together, the two men rucked the stiff fabric up her legs, their hands competing to lead and dominate as their fingers wrapped the girl's long slender thighs. Hardin played his palms over her sparsely covered pelvic wings while Weston's gaze dipped to watch his own hands smooth over the girl's naked cheeks, exposed and divided by the lace thong she wore.

"Do you want that?" Hardin asked gently. "Will you settle for that? Will you settle for sex without love, without passion? Will you settle for my perfect timing, the result of my *perfect* disinterest, when you could have the spontaneity, heat and excitement only *this* man can offer you? When you could have a man's rough touch, unanticipated and out of control, stunning your body into unexpected bliss?

"Do you want *me* to slip your lace thong down your legs with expert finesse, November? Or do you want a man to yank them past your sex in an urgent demand to reach you—to have you—and take you, eager to get his cock up against you, rub his damp flesh against yours and mark you with his scent as he drags his streaming cock

head over your belly and rubs his cum into your skin? Do you want *me* gentling you? Or do you want a man crushing into you and taking you without refinement, without reserve, without planning and completely without control?"

Hardin was aware that Weston was working her thong down over her hips, and he let him. Sliding a palm over her flat, bared stomach, Hardin slipped two fingers through the dainty curls on her rise and into the top of her cleft. Intruding between her pink pussy lips, he dipped and swirled his thick fingers into the velvet warmth of her sex.

"You're wet," he stated softly. "But who are you wet for, November? The man at your front or the man at your back?"

"You," she sobbed in a soft moan as his fingers slid between her labia to explore the damp folds of her sex with a fine control and meticulous care.

"Are you sure?" he whispered. "What feels better, November? My fingers toying with your clit or the thick length of his cock prodding between the cheeks of your ass? Because—you should know, November—while I'm *playing* with your sex, the man behind you *isn't* playing. He's dead serious. Dead serious about getting between your legs and planting his cock deep inside your cunt, reaming into you, banging into you and claiming you in a way that will make my *sex play* seem a pale game in comparison.

"Open your legs, sweetheart. Open your legs for me. Open your legs for *him*."

With a breathless sound that was scorched with need, November tried to comply but was hampered by the lace thong stretching tight across her thighs. A harsh curse followed from Weston, then a wrench of sound indicating he'd torn her panties off to get to her. Hardin slipped his fingers through the tender line of her soft, wet seam and smiled when he brushed knuckles with Weston.

Eager and aroused, his breath raging out of his chest, the redhead was intent on prying her legs apart with his large hands. Gently, Hardin continued to finger her clit, while Weston parted his fly and brought his dick into play. Seconds later, Hardin's fingers bumped up against the thick cock head Weston was now pushing through her

folds from behind her. When Weston pulled back, Hardin smiled slyly as he slid his hand deeper into her pussy and pressed two fingertips against her opening.

He was pushing it, he realized. Pushing the man at her back.

Trying for her vulva, Weston's cock head nudged up against Hardin's fingers and from the redhead's throat came a growl of warning as he tried to take her vagina from behind. There was a moment's silence as the man glared at him. "Get your fingers out of her cunt," he snarled. "The woman is mine! And her *name* is Sylvie, you arrogant bastard."

Hardin felt a shiver go through the girl and smiled, knowing that tremor of excitement was for the man fighting to claim her. Slowly, he pulled his fingers up through her wet folds to the front of her pussy, where he continued to gently massage her fattened lips with a light friction while, at the same time, Weston entered her with a harsh guttural grunt.

November met this sound with a gasp and Weston tightened his grip on her waist as he pumped his hips into the space between her legs.

Dropping to his knees, Hardin put his lips at the top of her parting cleft, planting a long, suckling kiss on the clit he exposed between the thumbs that spread her labia before gently lashing the ripe bud of flesh with the rough tip of his tongue.

"Oh my Lord," November whispered, inching her legs wider as she grasped Hardin's shoulders and leaned forward a little, arching her back to receive Weston's cock more deeply. "Oh my Lord," she repeated, her eyes wide, her teeth worrying her bottom lip as she turned her head to stare at the ginger curls at Weston's groin, to watch his thick root retract several inches then slam into her again. Her eyes lifted to her mate's face where she watched his lips twist, his eyes narrow with each thrust he brought against the rounded globes of her bottom, watched his eyes focus on the root of his own cock, then watched his gaze lift to meet hers.

Without warning, she was yanked away from Hardin's face as Weston lifted her off his dick and turned her to face him, crowding her toward the room's bed. November

backed up before the man's advance as he edged her closer to the bed. One of his hands clutched the top of his pants, while the other wrapped around the long, flushed length of his cock. Seconds later, November was laid out on the bed and Weston was thrusting between her legs as she whispered and murmured and pleaded, goading her mate forward.

With a hand on the door lever, Hardin grinned as he watched November's legs wrap around Weston's hips, her hands pulling at his buttocks, urging his hips to plow and take and fornicate her open pussy. Her low choking moans were a clear indication of her need – and of her choice.

Davis was waiting on the other side of the door as Hardin pulled it closed behind him. He shot her a hard grin. "Another satisfied customer," he imparted. "You catch any of that?"

"All of it." Davis nodded. "You certainly have a way with words, Hardin. I hope it helps you with your next assignment."

Hardin nodded, rubbing the back of his neck. "Thanks," he threw over his shoulder as his long legs took him down the hall.

Chapter Two

Wearily, Hardin opened the door to his cube. When he closed it behind him, he leaned against the door, staring into the room without seeing. December. It had been a long year, he thought, then pushed himself away from the door to walk across the room toward his small kitchen. Stopping at his system panel on the counter, he pushed a few buttons, grabbed an unmarked bottle and poured himself a short drink of unauthorized alcohol. On the other side of the cast-iron counter, the visual document he'd called up opened on his aluminum coffee table and for a moment he stared at it before reaching into the cupboard for a can. Absently, his attention fixed on the visual, he reached for his drink and swallowed the liquor then went through the movements of opening the can and finding a spoon. Carrying his dinner out of his kitchen-eat, he set his food on the low table where a small image of a woman leaned back on her elbows and spread her legs on the table's smooth surface. Tilting his head, he frowned at her. She wore nothing but a pair of electric blue panties that were a brilliant splash of color across the pale curve of her full hips.

Returning to his kitchen, he poured himself another drink and carried it back to place it on the low table beside the woman's image. Dropping onto his dark leather couch and picking up the can again, he watched the document. He was halfway through his meal before he ordered, "Replay 90." Immediately, the visual document backed up ninety seconds and replayed as he watched.

The room was silent except for the thick rasp of his breath and the occasional command to back the visual and replay. Without finishing his meal, he placed the can on the table as, stretching back on the couch, he dug his fingers into his crotch and rearranged the thick pile of sex at his groin. Several minutes later he stood and, without

removing his eyes from the visual, he headed across the room to his dressing case, shuffling through the top drawer.

Frowning suddenly, he pulled his eyes from the document and slammed the drawer shut, then yanked at the drawer below it. A frenzied search produced nothing and he dropped to his knees as he moved on down to the next drawer.

A breath of relief filled his lungs as he reached into the drawer, then headed back to the couch with a pair of silk panties clutched in his large fist. Throwing himself at the couch, he sprawled on his back, and lifted a knee to rest against the back of the couch as he continued to watch the visual at the same time that he used his left hand to pull his fly open. There was a faint ripping sound as the adhesive strips parted, then he reached into his slacks to pull out the long, heavy weight of his cock. Rubbing the silk panties against the edge of his mouth, he put one foot on the floor and let his legs fall open as his right hand traveled slowly down his body and over his groin where he wrapped the scrap of pale blue silk around his straining erection. Pumping himself slowly with his right hand, his left curled to hold and finger his balls.

For a long time he watched the image on the table, his right hand wrapped around his dick and moving with increasing velocity as he forced his cock toward completion, his breath growing more ragged with each frictioning drag of his fist.

Abruptly, he stopped – blinking hard.

With his breath harsh and laboring in his chest, he got to his feet and took two stiff steps toward the projected image. Choking down on his flesh, his fingers gripped his dick then started moving again. Pistoning his hand down the length of his cock, Hardin's eyes were glued to the tiny woman sprawled on the table as his dick flashed and spurted to splash at the image. As he continued the punishing action of his fist, he levered his shaft downward and his cock continued to surge and empty onto the table. Eyes blinking, chin on his heaving chest, he considered the product of his lust shining on the long aluminum coffee table – a large erotic puddle glinting between the splayed legs of the tiny woman displayed in the visual document.

Rousing himself with a shake, he used the panties to wipe the table then headed for the facility where he splurged on a three-minute shower, using at least one full minute of that time to thoroughly wash the pale blue scrap of silk. The panties were in his hand as he exited the facility. Three seconds in his micro dried the underwear and he rubbed them against his cheek as he crossed the room, then returned them to the top drawer of his dressing case.

Pushing the drawer closed, he blew out a sigh as he turned and considered his room. The rest of the evening he spent straightening and cleaning his cube in preparation for his new student, who would be arriving in approximately twenty hours.

* * * * *

Twenty hours later, Hardin was turning out of the elevair and striding down the corridor toward his cube. Stopping outside his door, he reached for the handle and held it a second while the electronic eye read his palmcode. When the handle glowed green, he pushed the lever down.

Hardin drew in a breath and held it, blinking as he closed the door behind him. Quietly, he stood watching the woman tied to his bed—his assignment for December. Although she appeared drowsy, she was awake—the drug used during her abduction was just beginning to wear off.

As he'd requested, she'd been stripped down to her panties. He tilted his head as he observed her. They were plain white cotton bikinis.

As he watched her, she shook her head several times, trying to focus on him while she squirmed to maneuver herself into a sitting position. At that point, she realized she was bound to the bed's headboard. Her mouth dropped open in quiet surprise as she frowned at her bindings then returned her puzzled gaze to his face.

Hardin continued to stare as his blood pounded dully in the background, surged through his veins and rested heavily in his groin.

She was unlike other women. In a world populated with physically perfect humans, this woman stood apart. In this day and age—his day and age—women were uniformly beautiful, turned out of the Uterine Labs like plastic baby dolls to grow into perfect mannequins with long slender legs supporting designer-name bodies. Their facial features were artistically composed to please the eye. Their eye color, skin color and lips were all carefully coordinated—chic accessories for their perfectly molded faces.

But this woman was none of those things. Her body was lush, generous and soft. Her alley cat eyes were filled with a keen intelligence absent in most beautifully empty faces. Her lips were a dark smear of red on a face several shades too white. Her hair was neither gold nor ebony nor fire. Instead it was autumn leaves chasing the sun.

In short, she was an anomaly, a bit of a lab error, a less-than-perfect human being who had somehow squeezed through the cracks during the birth process.

Finally expelling the breath he held, Hardin tilted his head to the other side and watched her with intense interest. He knew she would surprise him with almost every word, every action. She would have a cutting wit and, even more exciting, a bit of a temper. Initially, she would fight him but when she finally gave in, there'd be a level of sinful eroticism in her surrender that would scorch his balls and reduce his dick to a lovesick lapdog. He knew that when he finally got his mouth between her legs, she'd taste like sweet sin, dark and intoxicatingly addictive. And when he finally took her, he'd drown himself in the deep, soft folds of her body as she surrounded his sex in her thick, hot, liquid heat, racking his cock away from his body, her thick pussy wedged between his dick and his groin as the cushioned length of her vagina enveloped him in a luscious fleshy hug and his balls pressed against the warm, full pillows of her ass.

And when she came! When she came, the plush line of her cunt would close on him and brutalize his shaft in a tight, unforgiving fist. Inside the hot clasp of her sheath, long, pulling pulses would suck his cock to completion, forcing him through a blisteringly hot orgasm nothing less than soul-scalding. He'd shoot into her as he threw his hips at her, taking her as deeply as he could, as hard as he could, slamming into her

and holding hard inside her clenching channel as his head hung over hers and his cock emptied inside her.

And afterward, after he'd filled her with his cum and her cunt had taken everything he could throw at her – and everything she could bear – he'd fall asleep beside her, his cock head resting just inside her vulva, his lips on her forehead, one hand spread out to clutch her bottom while his other caged one of her rouge-tipped breasts, his body pressed against hers, demanding, even in sleep, to claim every inch of contact humanly possible.

She was what an agent like he would consider a natural. She was born to copulate. Without thinking, he licked his lips and rubbed them together in a restless gesture of unslaked hunger, thirsting to latch onto the puffy mounds of her nipples and draw one of them halfway down his throat with a rough sucking statement of possession. Everything inside him shifted, became edgy and needy as his hand clamped on the door handle behind him and he fought his body's demand to get his hands on her soft, giving flesh, to pull her under his body, get on her and get his dick inside her.

With his eyes resting on the rounded flesh of her hip, he pictured himself between her legs, pulling her thighs wide, watching the lips of her sex as they parted, moist and creaming as he slid his hands up the inside of her legs. He imagined his hands teasing lightly at the outer fringes of her sex, playing through the dark cloud of curls on her mound and dropping into her pussy as he opened her with his fingers and dragged them up through her thick, swollen folds until her body twisted with need.

His eyes closed as he held the image in his mind – his hand spread in the small of her back as he rose over her, spread her wider with his knees, and took her cunt with a deep thrust of his thick, rigid cock, fighting his way to the back of her vagina, stretching into her luxurious velvet-lined channel with a brutal thrust of his hips. Ripping into her as her cunt rippled around his erection and milked – hard. Milked him to a head as his cock erupted and flashed inside her, pumping her channel full of his release.

Filled with the fiendish urge to penetrate and pump, Hardin's fist tightened on the door handle as his cock thickened and he fought the inclination to straighten his penis with his hand. He didn't want to alarm her.

* * * * *

Pulling her bottom lip through her teeth, Kansas narrowed her gaze on the man across the room, standing just inside the door. He was beautiful, but then most men were. Generations of genetic refining had produced humans with pleasing proportions, coordinated eye-skin color and a *lot* of blondes. This man was dark, however. Black hair and blue eyes. Internally, Kansas shrugged. There were plenty of those, as well.

He wasn't so much different than any other regular, everyday male beauty. Except perhaps for the deep, haunting glow in his eyes, alive and vital and just about on fire as his gaze burned down her body like a lick of flame. A few strands of his waving hair slid down his forehead to screen eyes that blazed like storm-swept, tropical seas.

He was attired in the best that standard issue could offer. His T-shirt was very white and new and looked expensively soft where it clung to the muscles that ripped across his chest. His black canvas slacks hugged his long legs loosely but lovingly as they stretched down his calves to bunch in a few folds above his dark slip-ons.

As he stood there, his hard, curving lips tipped upward at one corner then parted to give her a reassuring smile that exposed the edge of his very straight, very white teeth. Automatically, Kansas pressed her lips together in an unconscious attempt to hide her own somewhat-less-than-perfect teeth. Two hundred years ago, they'd have never even been noticed. Today, the slightest flaw was considered an eyesore.

Despite the fact that she had woken to find herself almost naked and tied to a large bed, she wasn't exactly afraid. Violence, aggression, and even passion had long since been bred out of humans. There was no such thing as murder anymore, although she'd read of it in some very ancient 'tronic books still available at black-market sites. She'd

read about anger and fighting—war—and agreed they were barbaric. The suffering they'd caused was the reason certain human traits had been eradicated.

But she was...uneasy. Something about the man who stood smiling at her made her uncomfortable.

Or maybe it was something about *her*. In an odd way she felt unsettled within her own skin. A stranger to herself. As if a new female persona were stirring to life within her, blinking its eyes open to an intense, unsettling emotional awareness of the very masculine creature standing before her.

"How do you feel?" he asked, and she was surprised by her body's warm response to the sound of that deep, rich rumble.

"I'm just a little cold."

"I'm sorry. I'd forgotten that you—just let me adjust the climate."

His long legs took him across the room to his counter where he pushed a few buttons on the panel set into the cast-iron surface.

Licking her bottom lip, Kansas took in the room.

At twenty-five feet by perhaps twenty, his cube was *huge* by any standards—at least four times the size of the cube she shared with three other people. He actually had what looked to be his own kitchen-eat as opposed to the food delivery chute in place at her own cubeblock. What was even more amazing was the window. Although the lower portion of the window was covered by a full blind, blocking any view it might provide, a glorious wedge of light shot through the top portion of the large rectangle where a wide strip of clear glass confirmed it was a real window, not a virtual window like the small oval in her cube. Following government edicts meant to ensure the conservation of natural resources—and considered an unnecessary waste of energy—glass windows had been pretty much designed out of buildings long before her production date. Virtual windows could be programmed to present a precisely accurate view of the outside, but most people selected an enhanced view—everything in the same place, but cleaner, brighter, prettier and more colorful.

The man would have to be a government contractor, Kansas decided, making at least two mil a month. "If I had my clothing back, I might be warmer," she suggested, hoping it didn't sound like she was arguing.

"I can't do that," he told her.

"Why?"

His head came up quickly and he turned to look at her, a warm, interested fire in his eyes, as though she'd said something delightfully amusing. "I'll explain everything in time."

"Can you explain," again she hesitated, "why I'm tied?"

He nodded and smiled, a wicked affair that made her shiver—a strange and unexpected sensation.

"To keep you from leaving."

She nodded. This seemed like a reasonable explanation, if somewhat...insufficient. She fought the urge to argue, knowing that no one else argued, knowing that she wasn't *supposed* to argue. It was this tendency of hers to question, along with her appearance, which labeled her an anomaly amongst her coworkers. Something had probably fallen through the cracks when her DNA was arranged.

A lot, actually.

A lot had fallen through the cracks. She was too large. Too tall as well as too wide. It was almost impossible to find clothes to fit her in the standard issue outlets. Her hair was neither blonde nor sable nor auburn nor chestnut. Instead, it was somewhere between the color of straw and dry windblown leaves. And her eyes, which probably should have been blue or green, if everything had gone according to plan, were brown rims on greenish centers.

The three men she shared her cell with were, like her, just a wee bit on the anomaly side of normal. Just...*not quite* like everyone else. And everyone else was pretty much

uniformly the same. Beautiful, trim, evenly proportioned with rich hair tones and vibrant eye colors—just like the man standing before her.

“I’m hungry,” she told him and he nodded apologetically.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “but you can’t eat today—or tomorrow.”

Kansas thought about this for several moments before daring the question. She’d never gone a day without eating before. “Why?”

The man strode toward her and pulled a chair up close to the bed’s edge as he dropped into it. “Because of the inhibitors.” This time he didn’t wait for her question before going on. “All of the food in our food delivery systems is charged with inhibitors.”

“Inhibitors?”

“To inhibit off-standard behavior,” he told her.

Frowning at him, she tried to understand. “What do you mean by off-standard behavior?”

He sprawled in the wide, comfortable chair with his legs open, a natural stance for males and her eyes settled on one of his knees. She’d always thought it strange that, even after ten generations of human life without sex, a woman would still cross her legs when she sat and a man would open his—wide. The woman always circumspect and withholding. The man always available and offering. Her eyes were drawn to a flash of light and her gaze slid sideways to rest between his legs, where a bright brass rivet shone at the very base of his fly. Purely functional and meant to hold the thick layers of canvas together, it nonetheless seemed artfully placed. For some reason, she couldn’t pull her eyes from the interesting point of light. His eyes followed hers into his crotch and she watched his fingers stroke the rivet a few times before sliding up over the thick mound at his groin.

“The inhibitors stifle any natural...passion you may have.”

"Passion?" she exclaimed immediately. "But that doesn't happen anymore. Passion, violence, anger and jealousy are stripped from our DNA during our birth design."

"I'm not talking about that kind of passion," he told her quietly and went on to explain. "I'm talking about the body's natural physical response to...arousing stimuli." He took a deep breath. "I'm talking about sex."

Kansas felt her eyes grow wide. "Sex!" she exclaimed, finally nervous. "Sex is obscene! Nobody does sex anymore. Nobody *normal*! There's no need. People are designed and generated in Uterine Labs! Why would anyone *want* to have sex? It's dangerous, dirty and...and messy. It's porno...it's porno...technic!"

"Pornographic," he corrected her gently as he nodded and a few strands of black hair slipped down to shadow his left eye. "That's what a lifetime of education has led us to believe. You're right. Most people—normal people—don't do sex, although you must know it's available on the black market for a price. And you might have heard about fasters—people who starve themselves for several days and do dark things to themselves...as well as others.

"But you've been brought to me to be reconditioned. I'm going to change your mind about sex. Are you afraid?"

"Yes, *I'm afraid*," she shot back and realized immediately that was a mistake. A normal woman wouldn't have been afraid. Puzzled perhaps, confused, but not afraid.

Kansas had spent the entirety of her existence trying to fit in, trying to be normal and she was damned if she was going to let this man destroy a lifetime of work. Dabbling in, *even talking about sex*, would move her right out of the Anomaly Category on the social scale and straight into the Shunned for Life Category. "Are you going to do sex to me?" she squeaked with a hard swallow, her chin trembling as she pulled on the wide straps that bound her wrists to the bed's headboard.

The man grimaced. "We're going to do it together."

Now she was alarmed! Now she struggled. Scrambling back on the bed until her bottom was competing for a place amongst the pillows, she pulled on the bindings that

spread her arms and fixed her wrists to the headboard. Frantically, her eyes went around the room, looking for some means of escape. "Listen," she said anxiously. "You look like a nice man, a normal man —"

"I'm not," he cut her off. "I'm not normal. At least not what you've come to believe is normal. You live with three men," he said abruptly.

"Y-yes?"

"And they're normal?"

"Next to you? Yes! They're *infinitely* normal."

He blew out an impatient breath. "Have you ever noticed them?"

"Have I ever — *What?*"

"Have you ever noticed them? Have you ever been aware of them? Have you ever been interested in them? Have you ever looked at one of them and felt...anything?"

"Anything like what?"

"*Anything at all!* You've seen them naked." He challenged her, almost angrily. "When they were naked did you ever feel anything...here?"

Kansas followed his hand as it dropped into his groin and cupped to hold the heavy mass of male equipment inside his dark canvas slacks.

"No," she answered immediately, though she felt her cheeks warm.

It was almost the truth, she told herself. Only...her version of the truth was just a shade imperfect—like everything else about her. One of her cubemates—Jansen. Some mornings he would wake up hard. His penis. It would soften again after he used the facility, but while it was hard, she would find her eyes drawn to the long, stiff flesh swinging at the bottom of his lean torso. And she felt...something. Something hard to describe. Something that tickled her senses deep within. Something like hunger or thirst.

She would order a soft drink along with something to eat.

It always went away...eventually.

"No," she repeated stubbornly and the man's mouth curled up at one side in a challenging smile. He didn't believe her.

"You'll be with me a week," he informed her. "And during that time I'll be your instructor."

"My instructor?"

He smiled at the interruption as though she couldn't have said anything that could have pleased him more.

"Yes," he said. "I'm going to awaken you. I'm going to teach you how to feel."

Chapter Three

"You'll call me mentor," he instructed her brusquely. "And I'll refer to you as December." Evidently anticipating her next question, he held up his hand. "You'll never know my name and I prefer not to know yours. You're my December assignment, hence, your name.

"Let me explain what I'm going to do to you. When I'm done, I'll tell you why." He smiled at her reassuringly. "Are you warm enough?"

Edging a bit further up on the bed, increasing the distance that separated them, she nodded warily.

"For two days you won't be able to eat—today and tomorrow. That's to clear your system of the inhibitors. I won't touch you today. There'd be no sense in it since you wouldn't feel anything. Sometime tomorrow you'll reach the stage where you might be receptive to my touch."

He drew in a breath.

"Tomorrow I'll touch you," he said, his eyes glowing a soft blue fire, and she wondered at the awed tone of reverence in his voice just before he shook his head and his eyes focused on hers again. "Nothing alarming," he added quickly. "Just my fingers on your lips, across the side of your breast perhaps, or along your hips. If you respond well to that, I might smooth my hand down over your bottom and...pull you against me."

Her chest rose and fell with thick, heavy breaths, which she attributed to fear. "Why?" she croaked out in a soft whisper. "Why would you do that?"

"Because it will feel good," he explained to her gently. "The next day, we'll try a kiss."

"A kiss?"

He nodded patiently. "I'll touch your lips with mine." His eyes slid down her neck to rest on her breasts. "I'll...touch you other places as well – with my lips."

She shook her head at him, certain he was mad.

"I'll run my lips into the hollow at the base of your neck and kiss the pulse that rests just beneath your smooth, satin skin. I'll kiss your nipples, your breasts. I'll spend a long time on your nipples," he murmured as his legs shifted further apart. "Then I'll go to work on your belly button. I might even use my tongue."

"And you think I'm going to *sit still* for all this?"

He shrugged. "Probably not. You'll remain bound and tied until I'm certain you won't run."

"Until you're certain I won't run? That will never happen," she stated with fire.

His nostrils flared and his eyes flamed an instant before he dragged his gaze from her chest and refocused on her eyes. "It will happen sooner than you think," he soothed. "On the third day, you'll see me naked. I'll lie beside you and let you get used to me undressed. I'll...touch you just about everywhere. And I'll kiss you everywhere I've kissed you before, as well as a few new places. We won't take the next step until I'm sure you're ready."

"Ready?" Kansas asked, dismayed at the tremor of alarm easily discerned in her voice.

"On the fourth day, I'll open your legs," he said in a soft rush of breath. "And we'll see how far we get. If I can get you wet with a little rubbing and touching –"

"Wet?"

"Your opening, your vagina, will dampen when you're aroused. It will be your body's way of preparing itself for a man's entry. If I can get you wet," he continued, "I'll let you feel my cock nudging through your folds. This is all new to you, and strange, but I can assure you it will feel good in a way you've never experienced before. We'll go slowly and I won't give you any more than you can take."

"On the fifth day, I'll taste you. I'll finger you first. I'll prepare you with my fingers," he explained when she frowned at him. "I'll use my fingers between your legs. I'll finger your labia open and play with your pink, folded sex until you writhe beneath my hand and my fingers are sliding through your wet pussy. Then I'll go down on you. I'll put my head between your legs and take your sex in my mouth." He gave her a warm smile. "I'll use my tongue and lips to kiss and suck and lick into your pussy. I'll do that until I feel the inside of your legs relax, until you open for me."

"Open for you?" she choked out.

He nodded. "At some point, you'll stop fighting. I'll know when that happens. Your body will tighten with excitement and need but your legs will relax and open in a natural plea for a man rising to take you. Your pussy will be sweet and wet, your cunt soft, aching for a cock stretching inside it.

"Then we'll stop," he delivered abruptly.

Despite herself, a wisp of a groan escaped her lips.

In response, he tilted his head to observe her, his expression suspicious. "Before the end of the week," he finally continued, "you'll have your first orgasm."

Breathlessly, she shook her head. "Orgasm. What's that?"

The man's eyes closed as his fingertips came together and his lips thinned between his teeth. "What's the best thing that's ever happened to you?" he queried from behind closed eyes. When she didn't answer, he made some suggestions "Chocolate? Laughter? Sunshine? Imagine sharing all of those things with your favorite person—only raised to a magnitude of ten." He opened his eyes and smiled. "That's the feeling just before orgasm. Raise that another several magnitudes and you're climaxing, sobbing with pleasure at the point of release."

He nodded his head wryly at her expression of disbelief. "Your vagina will be open and streaming, clutching on empty air, gasping for something, some sort of fulfillment you can't put into words. As you approach orgasm, you'll want something inside you. A man. A man's thick, hard flesh. His cock taken hard and deep inside your cunt."

"Sex," she breathed in a whisper.

"Yes," he answered with an encouraging smile. "Sex. But it won't happen that way the first time. The first time you orgasm, you'll have to go there alone, without me."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't be responsible for your first orgasm. I can take you close. Very close. But you'll have to take yourself the last few delicious touches over the edge toward climax."

She was silent for several moments. "You can't be responsible," she stated with more than a little of the fire that was always getting her into trouble. "You've abducted me against my will, taken me from my cube and my work, deprived me of my clothing, tied me to your bed and you can't be responsible? For what? What's left...*mentor*?" She forced the title out with more than a little cynicism. "You don't want to get your hands dirty? You don't want to be responsible for...attack...rape?" She grappled with the ancient words, not entirely certain of their meaning.

His eyebrows arched slightly as her conclusions appeared to surprise him. He shook his head. "It's not that, December. It won't be anything like rape, sweetheart. You'll beg me to enter you before I'll give you my cock. I won't push my cock between your legs before you ask for it." He shook his head again. "That's not the problem, at all, December."

He took a long breath.

"I can't be responsible...for you falling in love with me."

"Falling in *love* with you?"

He nodded, his expression bordering on guilty. "Do you know what I mean by love?" he asked keenly.

"Of course," she snapped just before she relented with a toss of her head. "At least I think I know," she muttered. "Some people who work with children grow to love them," she said, but even to her own ears it sounded more like a guess. "Some people—people with money—have pets."

"That's right," he encouraged her. "It's like that except...much stronger."

"Better?"

His eyebrows came together and she thought she caught a glimpse of pain in the shadowed depth of his blue gaze.

"Stronger," he repeated. "Like...you'd do anything to keep it—anything—including die for it. Lie for it. Steal for it. Even kill for it, if you were given no other choice."

"Passion," she breathed with slow revelation. "Love and...sex...result in passion! That's it, isn't it? That's why we don't do it anymore. It's dangerous!"

"That's it," he agreed with an almost weary nod. "And I won't tell you it isn't dangerous."

"Then, why?" her voice pleaded for understanding. "Why are you going to *do* this to me?"

"We have no choice...anymore."

"*We*?" Wildly, Kansas scanned the room, knowing at the same time she wouldn't be able to identify a sophisticated hidden surveillance system. "*We*?"

"I work for a government contractor," he said, standing. "Let me start the document." Moving to the counter he pushed a few buttons then turned to watch the visual coming up on the long aluminum coffee table.

For several moments, Kansas watched silently while a nightmare unfolded in the air before her eyes. When she shook her head in horror, he punched a button and the visual faded. "That was a Uterine Lab," he said grimly.

"What...what was wrong with them—the babies?"

"It's been going on for several years," he told her. "You may have noticed that there have been no very young children on the streets, in the parks."

She nodded.

"There are no new children coming out of the labs. As the visual demonstrated, the children are...defective. Most of them don't live more than a few hours."

Kansas watched the man as his throat worked for the next few words. "It's hard to watch," he admitted in a low voice. "I'm sorry you had to see it. But it's the only way to explain why this is happening to you, why the government is paying a high profile contractor to hire agents like me—to deliver men and women whom the contractors have established are fertile."

The man's shoulders dropped as he shook his head reluctantly.

"Willing women," he corrected his earlier statement. "Women who have been 'awakened'. Women who have relearned how to feel, who have rediscovered sex, who like sex and want to have sex. Women who don't feel guilty or dirty about it, despite a lifetime of conditioning. Women who have been convinced by men like me that sex *isn't* obscene, *isn't* pornographic. Women who can bear and rear the next generation of children.

"And while you're here, being awakened, female agents are working on male counterparts—men who are being prepared as potential mates for...you."

"But—"

"The genetics started going wrong generations ago. It's too late to unwind the DNA. The scientists have been forced to return to the beginning. It's something they should never have meddled with in the first place and can't be undone."

"But...why not just stop the inhibitors? Why not let everyone...revert?"

"The effect of inhibitors on both men and women—in their food, in their soft drinks—have made most humans sterile or almost sterile. Believe me, December, there's no other way. If there were—"

"What? You wouldn't be doing this?"

His eyes lit briefly as he grinned slowly. "I didn't say that."

* * * * *

"Are you thirsty?" he asked suddenly. When she nodded, he headed for his tiny kitchen-eat. "I'll get you a drink, then untie you so you can use the facility." Pouring water from a bottle, he rattled on. "The food you eat here is clear of inhibitors, though we still need to purge your system before you can eat. The water is safe anywhere," he instructed her. With a plastic cup in his hand, he headed toward her. "When you use the facility, you can close the door if you like. You can neither escape nor hurt yourself in there. There's no mirror, glass, cutters—nothing sharp," he told her warningly.

"And nothing I could use as a weapon," she summarized for him as he nodded.

"Nothing you could use to harm yourself either."

"Why would I want to do that?"

"Some women in your position have thought they'd rather die...at this point in their instruction."

"At this point. And later on?"

He smiled into the cup. "Those are the idealistic ones. The ones who fall in love." With one knee on the bed, he lowered himself carefully to sit beside her without touching her. Slowly, he maneuvered the cup to her mouth.

She found it awkward, trying to slurp a drink out of the cup he was holding, and before she was done she felt a cold splash and trickle that started at the top of her neck and snaked down to make a shining pearl of water between her breasts.

Apparently without thinking, her instructor reached out with a finger to catch the large drop of liquid rolling into her cleavage.

Her eyes cut quickly to his face as he realized his mistake. A brief flash of panic was at the back of his eyes and she could have sworn he was holding his breath. As his finger moved on her breast, she was surprised at the small tingle generated by his warm-rough touch. She watched his finger gently sweep the drop off her skin. Watched his eyes close as he sucked at that finger and gazed at her breasts with an expression of incredible longing. Then with slow, deliberate care, he lowered his mouth inexorably to

her chest, using his tongue to lick up the remaining moisture gleaming between her breasts.

Again, she felt the faint tingle along with a lovely shivery warmth stirring deep inside her belly. When he lifted his eyes to hers, she stared at him, stunned. "Lord of the Republic! What was that?" she scraped out of a tight throat.

"You're so sensitive," he stated in a rasping whisper. "So responsive. You shouldn't have felt *anything*...with the inhibitors still so thick in your bloodstream."

For a moment, she thought he would reach out and touch her again, but instead he stood quickly, and placed the cup on the coffee table before he reached for the straps tied off at the headboard. "I'm sorry," he told her in suddenly clipped tones, "I shouldn't have touched you." Backing away from her, he gave her a wide path to enter the facility.

Shrugging her shoulders sardonically, she indicated the short lengths of strap hanging from her wrists as she pushed herself to the bed's edge and to her feet. "You're not concerned about me hanging myself in there?"

Distractedly, he shook his head. "There's nothing in there to hang yourself from," he told her, as though she'd been serious.

When she came out of the facility, he was waiting at the near side of the bed. Stopping just outside the door, she moved her hands behind her back. "What if I promised I wouldn't run?" she offered hopefully.

"I wouldn't believe you," he countered. "Come here."

"No."

Although this word set his eyes to smoldering, he smiled tolerantly. "Please, December. You must cooperate. I don't want to touch you until —"

"Tomorrow, I know." She lowered her eyes to the floor and then raised them in challenge. "What are you going to do if I refuse?" she asked quietly.

His jaw hardened and without hesitating, he took a step toward her, grasped the straps and pulled her toward the bed. Failing to get completely out of her way, his body brushed up against hers. Together they stopped and stared at each other in breathless surprise. His eyebrows crushed together in a frown of alarm as his gaze dropped to her chest. When her gaze followed his, she stared at her tawny nipples, stiffening proudly before her very eyes. "What on earth?" she whispered in quiet awe. Her eyes cut back to his when she heard him groan.

"No," he breathed. "*No*. This isn't supposed to be happening." As though caught in the pull of some undeniable gravitational force, he dropped the straps as his hands moved slowly upward and his flattened palms hovered in the air just a hair away from touching her nipples.

Following an instinct she didn't understand, Kansas leaned forward to press her nipples into his large, cool, outspread palms and nudged a knee up against his legs. "Tell me what you're going to do to me on day six," she murmured.

Chapter Four

Her mentor took a step back, away from her. "On day six, I'll fuck you," he delivered harshly.

Kansas watched the man, his throat working as he appeared to battle some inner conflict. Finally, he took a step toward her, then another. His body came up against hers, herding her backward until her back was against the wall. One of his hands was on her breast, and she felt a tremor rip through his long frame as his fingers spread, clutching her generous weight into his palm as his other hand caught her behind the neck and tipped her face upward. As her large breast kept spilling out of his hand, he continually re-collected it, using the heel of his hand to coax it back into his fingers with a gentle caressing touch. A touch at odds with the rampant fire burning in the deep blue of his darkening irises.

For several instants his eyes searched hers, imploring, pleading for something she didn't immediately understand.

His touch, the breath-stealing nearness of his body, the demanding, possessive hold of his hand on her breast, awakened a slow, sluggish response in her body that warmed the triangle below her belly button. With sudden intuition she understood. He wanted her to stop him. He wanted her to stop him so he could move his plan forward in comfortable stages without this very awkward and unplanned deviation. But by the time Kansas opened her mouth to suggest a halt, he'd covered her lips with his.

The sensation was surprisingly pleasant, though the man seemed to be getting much more out of it than she. His heart hammered against her chest as his lips twisted on hers in stark hunger and his breath came in short, hard gasps. Finally he pulled away with a harsh moan of anguish. "No," he murmured in a low voice, his lips in her

hair. "Not again. Not after all the women and all this time." Pressing her into the cool wall at her back, the man tried to catch his breath.

"It's vital that you achieve your first orgasm without me," he picked up his earlier thread with a croak, though his words seemed to be for himself as much as for her. "*Vital*. Do you understand that, December? Everything—*everything*—hangs on that one act."

Shaking her head, she lifted her gaze to his. "I don't understand."

"I'll explain...later. Close your eyes and I'll tell you about day six."

A thumb rasped over her nipple and the man's breath was damp, humid and warm on her temple as he continued. "After I'm certain you've orgasmed without me, we'll...do sex. I'll enter you—penetrate you—my cock in your vagina."

"December." He breathed the word like a treasured memory. "I'll teach you how to welcome sex, love sex, crave a man's cock in your pussy as we work our way through every possible position and I teach you to enjoy being fucked."

"Fucked?" she murmured. "You used that word before."

"Another word for sex," he explained in a strained whisper. "When a man enters a woman."

"We'll start simple—in this bed—while I rise over you and slide between your legs. But before the end of the day, you'll be straddling me and doing most of the work. We'll do it in that chair," he added in a rich musical rasp filled with a strange tremor. "I'll put you on my cock while I drive my hips up to fill your vagina." She heard him swallow as he pulled in his bottom lip with his tongue then dragged it through his teeth. "I'll take you on your hands and knees, here on the floor, kneeling behind you, my legs inside yours, spreading your legs, opening your cheeks, pulling your vulva wide for my penetration. I'll mount you from behind as I hold your hips. Then I'll stand you up and bend you over the counter and do the same thing."

For some reason she shivered. A small flame burned just below her belly button where she felt her pulse thicken, hard and heavy as it slugged through her veins. For a

long time there was nothing but the sound of his breath, strangely harsh and loud in her ear.

“On the final day, after you’ve learned to enjoy sex, I’ll teach you the finer details of how to arouse your mate, so that you’re certain to have a steady source of pleasure. You’ll learn where a man yearns to be touched, how and when. You’ll be taught to please a man with your mouth and tongue and fist—all at the same time. You’ll learn to suck cock and enjoy the salty tang of cum as it slides down your throat. You’ll learn to hunger for the sensation of a man’s release spilling over your tongue, and you’ll come to covet the strength and power of a man thickening between your lips, forcing himself to the back of your throat, strong and hard and brutally thick while at the same time helplessly vulnerable between the harsh scrape of your teeth.

“And while you’re here with me, learning all this, a mate is being trained to pleasure you in the same manner.” On this signal, the man pulled away from her, a sigh in his throat and reluctance in his expression.

Taking her ties in his hand, he led her to the bed. Submissively, she let him retie her to the headboard. When he was done, he dropped into the chair beside the bed. As before, his legs spread open and she couldn’t stop her eyes incursion into the space between his legs where the placket on his slacks lifted in a long, hard line and the glint of the brass rivet riding low on his crotch snagged her eyes and commanded her attention.

“After you leave here, you’ll spend the next three weeks meeting potential mates. Men who’ve been awakened, aroused—as you have been. At the end of those three weeks you’ll have chosen a mate. Together, you’ll be relocated to a base in the Seychelles—a new, luxurious community where you’ll live with your chosen mate and raise a family.”

For several moments she watched him. “So that’s the plan,” she said with a touch of sardonic humor. “From beginning to endpoint.”

He nodded, returning her smile a little apologetically. "That's the plan, as outlined in the handbook."

"Handbook?"

He nodded. "The handbook. It's rewritten and updated frequently but one thing never changes. Studies have proven that students who share their first orgasm with their instructors have a high risk of falling in love with their mentors. When that's the case, the initiates will often bail out of the project, choosing to return to their previous lives, lives within the cubeblocks, choosing to live without love and without sex, rather than select a mate and live in comfort on a spacious island—all free of charge, compliments of the world government."

"Do they *always* leave the project—the ones who fall in love with their...instructors?"

He shook his head. "Not always. But initiates who choose a mate, despite their love for their mentors, take years to settle in and achieve true happiness."

"That's why you must take yourself to your first orgasm. I don't want that to happen to—I don't want that to happen."

"You don't get paid when that's the case," she stated bluntly.

He blinked at her as though she'd slapped him, then shook his head slowly. "It's not the money," he said with a depth of emotion that was convincing even to her.

Kansas gazed at him, assessing his obviously heartfelt reaction. "Have you ever lost a student before?"

"Yes." He said it quickly with unflinching honesty, as though it were a great failing that he was too proud to hide. As though it were a personal fault that troubled him deeply, as if it were a crime that must be faced and confessed in the hopes of gaining some sort of strange absolution.

"Does an instructor ever fall in love with a student?" she asked with shrewd interest.

"No," he said in a low voice.

"No?"

"Not if he's a professional."

"Why not? Wouldn't you, for instance, want to live on a spacious island in the Seychelles, courtesy of the government?"

He lifted his haunted gaze to search hers. "I'm not a mate candidate," he told her and then went on in a rush. "I'm not a fertile male."

"You're not capable of fathering a child," she translated and he nodded in answer. "But you're capable of doing sex?"

At this he smiled.

"Are you capable of love?"

"Everyone's capable of love," he told her. "Love hasn't been bred out of humans."

Kansas struggled to comprehend. "You say that love is a strong passion—strong enough to incite murder. Yet, if you were to fall in love with one of your students, you'd...give her up? To another man?"

"Yes," he said without hesitation. "I couldn't condemn someone I loved to the alternative—the alternative of living a cubelife without feeling, without love, without anything." His gaze moved to the floor as his mouth settled into a grim line, his face momentarily melancholy.

"But you've never come close to love, yourself?"

He made a face as he struggled with his answer. "Honestly? Yes. I've come close." Slowly, he raised somber eyes to connect with hers. "At least five times."

She smiled at this wan joke and then was puzzled when his expression remained serious. "You fell in love with one of them." She attacked abruptly and knew she'd hit the mark when she saw the shielded pain that flickered in his eyes. "You fell in love with one of your students."

He stood suddenly, shaking his head and running both hands back through the sleek black of his hair.

"What happened to her?"

Her mentor shrugged as he turned away. "She bailed out of the project and went back...to her former life."

"She loved you too," Kansas whispered to herself. She frowned as she considered his back. "Do you ever see her? Talk to her?"

His back remained turned as he shook his head. "No. That wouldn't be fair."

"And she's never tried to reach you?"

"No."

"She loved you too much to take another mate? But not enough to try to see you again?"

"She wouldn't know where to find me. Just like you won't know where to find me, when you leave here. You were unconscious when they brought you here." Turning back to face her, he seemed to struggle to put a small smile on his face. "But, that was a long time ago," he said as he let his eyes travel over her nude body. "You're tired," he stated, "I'll let you sleep."

"Where will *you* sleep?"

"Beside you, once you've nodded off. You won't even know I'm there. Shall I cover you with the blankets?"

"No," she told him. "It feels good like this."

He nodded without surprise, letting his eyes slide down her body and rest warmly in the brown thatch of hair between her legs, then threw himself into the chair.

Chapter Five

At some point in the night, Kansas woke on her back, restless as the result of strange, evocative dreams. As she shifted, trying to rearrange herself on the bed, she felt the weight of a strong arm banding her midriff. Cracking her eyes open, she found her instructor asleep beside her, his rugged, curving lips inches from her own. “Don’t struggle, Kansas,” he muttered in a voice heavy with sleep.

He knew her name.

Startled by this idea, Kansas lay awake waiting for morning, watching the darkly handsome face on the pillow beside hers. His long face was beautifully vital and alive even in sleep, somehow sweeter with his driven nature in remission and without the dark flashes of panic haunting his eyes. His forehead was smooth and untroubled, his black eyebrows at peace as his thick, black, spiking eyelashes fluttered through some pleasing dream. As she watched, the corner of his mouth tightened into several short quick smiles and he muttered his way through a brief sequence of words, some of which included “always”, “never” and “love”.

As she watched the man’s strong, handsome features, strange, novel feelings were swirling in places she’d never taken much note of before. In her chest near the tips of her nipples, between her legs deep inside her womb, and at the base of her spine there evolved a strange liquid weakness that spread into the top of her thighs and stroked the back of her knees. As the unexpected longings gripped her body, she stared at the man beside her, knowing the longings had something to do with him—that they probably had a *lot* to do with him—and that they probably had a lot to do with sex as well. And somehow she knew that only he could help dispel the strange disquiet and gnawing hunger that had started a slow burn between her legs.

She stared at his face with sudden understanding, realizing how a starstruck student might easily become addicted to him, suspecting that a woman could become dependent on *this man* even more than the eroticism and sex he would make her a slave to.

Without consciously admitting to it, she wanted the man and his touch. Recalling the faint, intoxicating tingle she'd experienced during their brief contact of the day before, and wondering how he would feel pressed up against her today, she reached out to him, straining to reach him, wanting only to get the feel of him on her fingertips. Failing in that attempt because of the straps binding her to the headboard, she bowed her body into an arch and maneuvered her face toward his, using her lips to brush the stubbled curve of his chin in a last-ditch effort to take in and absorb some of the texture of that rough, masculine jaw.

Stretching herself to her limit, she tried to put her lips on his without much success, though her nipples did manage to reach out and capture a bit of soft jersey at their tips as she pressed up against his T-shirt. Intent on her task, her eyes on his lips, it was a few seconds before she realized he was awake and watching her from beneath lowered eyelids. Breathlessly, she stared into the heat of his blue gaze while he slowly tilted his head and placed his mouth over hers.

Pleasant didn't begin to describe the sensation that sprang to life and swamped her senses as her lips came into warm contact with the rough silk of his. Rubbing his mouth over hers with I'm-not-taking-no-for-an-answer insistence, his lips prodded and pushed and pressured hers while he grasped her upper arms in his big hands and stretched her body out then rolled on top of her. Everything was happening at once and all of it was insanely delicious. His lips were rough and demanding, his grip tight and controlling as his knee forged a place between her thighs, urging them to part, and the thick bulge of his cock crushed into her lower belly. His tongue was in her mouth, hot and invasive, temperamental and eager, as he pulled his hips upward to rub the imposing ridge of his canvas-clad shaft into her belly.

Panting with effort and growing excitement, Kansas lay caught beneath his weight, straining her neck to receive his tongue more deeply, bowing her back in an instinctive attempt to put her breasts up against his chest. At the same time, the coarse canvas stretching over his cock was burning a line into her tender flesh as he continued to drive his lower body against hers, the action a ruthless male demand for more. Kansas gasped into his mouth and her sobbing intake was followed by his own groaning rumble—the sound wrenched from deep within his chest to work its way up his throat and hang on wet lips and open mouth.

And Kansas recognized that this wasn't handbook stuff he was doing to her. This wasn't even instructor stuff. In fact, this wasn't even for her.

This was for him.

Despite his handbook and his determination to follow its maxims, despite his best-laid plans and his intention to adhere to them, despite his claims at a cool and indifferent professionalism, her mentor's resolve was crumpling beneath an elemental and primal need he could neither deny nor control as he yielded to an overpoweringly masculine need to dominate and take and have...more.

This aggressive, undeniable display of male need stirred a reciprocal female interest within her own body, aching and burning and twisting her insides with a wanton desire to have this man against her—his flesh against hers, his body using hers to satisfy his own need—as well as to address the novel yearnings and hungers that stirred to life within her.

Tentatively, she pushed her body up to meet his. The thick, heavy ridge in his groin dragged at her flesh as he pushed into her belly again and Kansas whimpered at the coarse, abrasive contact of the rough fabric grazing and scorching her skin with every scraping pass. Catching back a whimper of discomfort, she tried to reposition herself beneath his laboring thrusts when he stopped suddenly, dragged his lips from hers, and stared at her, his breath ragged and uneven.

"I'm hurting you," he groaned, his eyes closing in realization, then opening again to gaze hungrily into hers. "I'm sorry."

Wonderingly, still not understanding, she gazed up at the fire in his eyes, at the purpose, the drive. Her eyes dropped to his curving mouth—open and spilling warm hurried breaths onto her lips.

Stunned, she stared at him. Here was a man with purpose. A man who *lived* for...something. The other men she knew—the men she worked with and shared a cube with—were content, but they lived their lives without purpose.

"You...need this...sex...don't you?"

Again his eyes closed an instant as his lips twisted. "It's just that I have a lot to accomplish today and...I'm so on edge. I don't want to do something wrong."

"Something wrong?"

"I have to follow the handbook but I don't know if I can. Feeling like this. So hot. So close. So fucking on *edge*—like I'm burning alive."

She nodded as she writhed internally, moved by the tightly contained passion and honest vulnerability revealed in his coarse words at the same time that she was aroused by his pantingly hot male presence. His chest crushed into hers with every long rasping breath he sucked into his lungs while his half-closed eyes rested on her mouth, his gaze avaricious and intent.

"On the second day, you're only supposed to touch me," she whispered.

His eyebrows moved together as he nodded painfully.

"So touch me," she whispered in a faintly shaking voice. "Touch me all over and take what you need."

"Fuck," he growled in a low, needy sound of suppressed darkness. His eyes narrowed on hers as he forced out a short bark of laughter. "This isn't going to work," he told her, hanging his head and shaking it. Breathlessly, she watched his dark hair toss as it slid across his face.

She answered his growl with her own low moan. "We'll make it work," she insisted. "I'll help you." Hard, heavy breaths were racking her lungs as she lowered her gaze to search between their bodies. "Please. Touch me. Touch me with...your cock. Let me feel it on my skin. Let me feel it on my breasts, on my face. Touch my lips. Use me, mentor. Use me to satisfy your need," she begged in a whisper, recognizing how far she had fallen with the utterance of those words, and that want. How far she had fallen from her lofty aim to escape the Anomaly Category of society.

Closing his eyes again, he rumbled another groan that was heavy with need.

"The handbook has strictly stated rules for you to follow?"

"Yes," he bit back, opening his eyes and glaring down at her.

"But there are none for me," she stated, somehow knowing that was true. Briefly, she considered how easily she had fallen off the wagon of "normal behavior". Fallen without a bounce. Then she plunged ahead. "What would happen if I wrapped my hand around your cock...while you were thrusting against me?"

When his eyes widened at the mere thought, she smiled.

"I knew this was going to happen," he complained with a moan. With shaking hands, he ripped his slacks open and got them off, then stripped his T-shirt over his head. Getting onto his knees, he straddled her hips, his cock in his hand as he moved up her body, stopping when his knees were wedged beneath her armpits.

When he rested back on his heels, she felt the warm weight of his scrotum resting below her breasts and watched his fist stroke roughly up the long shaft of his cock, the length flushed and wrapped in a bold network of dark veins. When he leaned forward, his balls swung to graze the sensitive skin of her breasts as he touched the fat, silken head of his dark cock to her lips.

Pressing her lips against the bruised color of his full cock head, she placed a soft kiss on the slit nestled into the crown and then watched a silvery drop of his release well from the small open slash. She heard him suck in a breath and whisper a curse. Then one of his large hands curled behind her head to grip the back of her skull as he

turned her face and rubbed his long length against her cheek, his testes rough-soft where they brushed her chin.

The fragile skin of his steel-hard erection was silky smooth as it caressed her cheek and all the raw, masculine power of his narrow hips was nudged up close to her face, within kissing distance. She could feel his heat captured and held in the damp, humid curls that gathered in his groin. Acting on impulse, she angled her head to press her lips into the tautly stretched skin of his groin where the thick root of his cock sprang out of tangled dark curls. "Fuck," he gasped, and with a firm hand on the back of her skull he held her kiss into his crotch, his hips rolling as he rubbed his erection against the side of her face. When he finally pulled away, his eyes were alight with a mixture of feral heat and burning pleasure. "Now watch me," he told her in a raw, edgy voice. "Just watch me and it will be enough."

Resting on his heels, he straddled her midriff and she watched his large hand wrapped around the thick length of his shaft, stroking and pulling at the tight skin as his fist moved up and down the heavy rod of flesh. His legs were spread in an indecent carnal pose as he worked his hand over his cock—dark and vein-rich—and her eyes flicked to his face where his teeth were wedged in his bottom lip. As his eyes closed, he choked back a strangled grunt and she returned her gaze to his cock, watching it jerk in his pistoning fist, spurting thick ejaculate as he levered his shaft downward and spilled out onto her breasts.

"Lord of the Republic," he whispered hoarsely as his eyes opened and he watched himself surge out onto her skin. For several moments he stared, his eyes lost in a deep, hypnotic trance, then he used the dark flesh in his hand to spread his cum over her breasts and paint her nipples with his glistening release.

* * * * *

"Don't tie me," she requested when she'd returned from the facility. He looked down at her as he considered her request. He didn't want to tie her. He wanted her

hands on him, her arms around him, holding him—not fighting him. “I don’t want you fighting me,” he eventually told her. “I have a lot to accomplish today.”

“I won’t fight you,” she told him quickly, convincingly. “I *want* you...to touch me. With your hands. With your lips.”

For a few heartbeats he was silent as his eyes burned and his throat worked. “Take those white panties off,” he finally growled.

Swiftly, she pushed them down her legs, stepping out of them when they reached the floor.

The next thing she knew, she was on her back on the bed and his hands were all over her. And it felt so good. Just the warm contact of another human body—a warm, living, very male body pressed up against hers—his hands moving to grope and grasp at every curve on her body.

She reveled in it, stretched instinctively, arched within the tight circle of his arms and felt his lips graze across the nipple of one breast—hurried and eager as his wide hand plunged between her legs. “Open your legs,” he commanded as his lips moved up to tease the corner of her mouth. She watched his gaze lower to her thighs as she separated them for the warm hand holding her mound. “Wider,” he ordered and she complied, watching him smile with a tight, hard breath.

With his face close to hers and his heated gaze on his hand in the curls at her mound, she felt her labia part beneath an exploratory finger at the same time that he sighed with rough satisfaction and dragged his finger through the moist folds between her legs.

“I’m going to play with you,” he warned her with a rough-edged voice. “I’m going to play with your sex until you’re wet. After that, we’ll have to be careful. I don’t want to go too far,” he told her. “Don’t let me go too far,” he whispered.

“I won’t let you,” she gasped back at him as his finger settled on what felt like the very center of her need.

Lightly, his finger touched that same point with tantalizing, brushing contact, nudging her toward a madness of unfulfilled need. Anxiously, wanting to cry out, wanting something she couldn't name, she shifted beneath him and he laughed breathlessly, his gaze still on his hand between her legs. "That's right, open your legs, December. Bring your knees up."

In answer, she slid her feet up the bed's surface, spreading her legs wider at the same time. "Oh, Lord," she complained in a whisper, "I want... I want..."

"More?" he suggested. And with this word, two of his fingers captured the needy bit of flesh in a gentle clamp. His fingertips were either side of the tight knot of pleasure that burned between her legs, working it with random movement that brought about a very purposeful result. "Oh, Lord," she sobbed out, stiff with anticipation, not wanting to move. Not wanting to chance any action that might interrupt the pleasure he was delivering to her open sex.

Despite this fact, she found herself twisting beneath his hand as her knees dropped slightly toward the bed and the line of her sex opened even wider, begging shamelessly for the rapacious sweep of his fingers. Begging for his strafing touch. Beseeching him to manhandle the tender, fragile stuff between her legs that made her a woman.

"That's right," he told her in a raw, uneven voice. "Move for me, December."

She groaned as she twisted. "How?"

"Roll your hips," he rasped breathlessly. "Roll your hips and pump your pussy up into my hand. Spread your legs, plant your feet and pump yourself against me."

She wanted to cry helplessly, scream wantonly and shout a demand for more. She wanted more from him. But when she started moving, her body seemed to know what to do. Her bottom lifted from the bed and rocked up to meet his glorious, gifted hand as the pure pleasure blazing between her legs increased unbearably.

His breath was hot and damp against her cheek and she watched him swallow hungrily, his blue gaze riveted on her pumping hips.

All at once there were a lot of fingers sliding inside her slippery sex and he stopped with a panting groan, the heel of his palm resting on her mound.

"Don't...stop," she whimpered, pushing her sex into his large, warm hand, pleading for any comfort he could offer her.

"Have to," he panted on a ragged breath. "You're too close."

"It feels...so good," she whimpered painfully and he smiled down on her. "I know," he murmured. "Believe me. I know." He touched her lips with his then worked his way down her body, pulling his lips and his warm breath over her skin as he made his way toward her belly button, sank his tongue into the soft cup and picked up an erotic rhythm as he held her hips and thrust his tongue hard and deep at the giving flesh surrounding the deep dimple on her stomach. She heard a deep, warm, restless giggle of pleasure and realized the breathless laughter was hers, spilling from her lips in soft murmurs.

"You like that?" he whispered roughly, lifting his head, his eyes burning into hers. "You like my tongue in your belly?"

She nodded.

"Well, if you liked my tongue in your belly button," he rasped in a low, warm voice, "you're going to love my cock in your pussy."

Immediately, he moved lower, sliding down her body and pushing her legs wider as he pulled her labia apart with his fingers and gazed, spellbound, at her open sex. She felt his gaze as though he had touched her and the length of her vagina blinked an instant then opened greedily. His throat worked as he swallowed hard. "Fuck," he whispered. "You're so wet," he murmured. "I'd love to drag a finger up through your folds to test you but I think you're too close. This is the part where you have to help. Give me your hands." Taking her hands, he guided them between her legs as he rested one of his large palms over her fingers and massaged the sodden lips of her sex. "This is where you have to take over," he told her. "Just do to yourself what I was doing before.

“No. Not like that. Get your fingers inside your lips. Open your labia for me, darling. That’s right. That’s beautiful.” Reaching out, he guided one of her fingers to a little knot of flesh high on the line of her soft, wet sex. “Now play with yourself, December. Play yourself right into orgasm.” Avidly, hungrily, he watched her open sex while she stroked at the needy little center. “Hurry,” he whispered, his hand wrapped around his thickening cock, stroking slowly. “Hurry, December. It’s all I can do to keep my dick in my fist instead of balls deep inside you. Hurry.”

Restlessly, she licked her lips as she watched his eyes—fixed between her legs.

Feeling lost and uncertain about where she was going and how she was getting there, she yearned for him in a way she didn’t understand. On some deep level, she knew that this—all of this—all that she was feeling, was because of him. The very female need clawing at her sanity was in some way connected to him, centered on him. And all at once she was certain she couldn’t do this without him—that, if she did, it would somehow be empty and useless. She wanted his touch.

Wanted his fingers in her pussy.

Wanted him doing it to her.

“Help me,” she whispered, her fingers suddenly still, her head tossing as she shook it in refusal. “Help me, mentor. I want you. I want you to do this to me. Please.”

She heard him snarl.

With a guttered wrench of male anguish he was on top of her, his cock head at the mouth of her sex as he spread her legs and prepared to mount her. His eyes were wild and feral and he grunted as he held the root of his cock, the broad tip pressing against the mouth of her sex.

Then some light came into his eyes and he jerked himself away.

Throwing himself across the room, he dragged his black slacks up his legs, pushed his feet into a pair of slip-ons and grabbed up a long coat as he pushed through the door and slammed it behind him.

Chapter Six

Thankfully, the day was cold and vicious. Slashing rain beat down at him and gave him an excuse to pull his collar up, hiding his angry face as he hunched his shoulders and strode through the storm-washed streets. Few people were out in the mean weather on the normally crowded sidewalks. No one heard him flog himself with coarse words and cruel adjectives, muttered through clenched teeth as he stalked the streets broodingly, his hands shoved deep inside the pockets of his coat.

He stopped as his head dropped back in frustration, almost screaming into the rain-drenched air. "Why can't she understand?" he shouted at the dark, miserable sky. A couple of attractive young women hurried by, averting eyes that didn't understand and never would.

"Anomaly," the first woman noted without emotion. "Waste of breathable air," she continued blandly, and her companion nodded, her eyes downcast, watching for the puddles in the street.

Defeated, exhausted, Hardin felt his shoulders slump as he turned to watch the cold women pick their way through the rain-chilled streets. Flicking his head to move black strands of wet hair away from his eyes, he shivered as he reached inside his coat to adjust the aching flesh that threatened to breach his fly. Turning slowly, he took the first few steps that would carry him back to the warmth of his cube, to the warmth of the woman waiting there, to the warmth of December.

* * * * *

When he walked through the door, she was sitting on the edge of the bed. In her hand was a pair of faded blue panties. "These are mine," she told him.

Shrugging his coat down his arms, he shook it out and hung it on the peg beside the door. Crossing the room on his way to his kitchen-eat, he nodded.

"I lost them four years ago. I...paid a lot for them. For the off-standard size...and the color. They were a...brilliant blue."

Reaching into a cupboard for a heavy glass tumbler, Hardin splashed out a drink from an unmarked bottle. "Electric blue," he grunted. "But they've been washed a few times since then."

"I lost them four years ago," she insisted.

He drank off the inch of liquor before he answered. "Five," he corrected her.

"Five?"

"You lost them five years ago."

"But...how could that be?"

She jumped when he slammed the glass back down on the counter.

"Because that's how long I've been in love with you!"

"Wh-at?"

Leaning over to reach the far side of the counter, he punched a series of buttons and Kansas watched, stunned, as a sequence of visuals popped up to hover above the aluminum coffee table. Each one documented two lovers energetically engaged in sex, their bodies pumping against each other in various poses. Kansas stared at one of the couples, their bodies overlain with a sheen of sweat, the man between the woman's legs, the thick root of his cock glimmering with moisture each time he pulled back, just before he punched into her again.

"That's us!" she blurted in startled realization, amazed at the bliss on the face of her own image – and shocked at the intensity with which the man drove into her.

"That's us," he said in a low voice. "That's five...four years of us."

She looked at him, horror-stricken.

He blew out a breath. "At the end of your training, you'll be given the option to continue with the project. To pick a mate and continue. If you refuse, you'll be permitted to return to your previous life. Your memory will be wiped clean. You'll wake up—"

"In a clinic," she finished for him.

"They'll tell you you're suffering from exhaustion or that you're—"

"Subject to fits and memory loss."

Accepting this information, he nodded. "You were my best student," he said quietly. "My best student ever. The first time I slid my hand between your legs you were wet...and I hadn't done anything more than look at you.

"I'm sorry," he said in a gravelly voice of sincerity and she wondered at the man who'd been forced to make this apology at least four times previously. "I'm sorry. I just can't...accept the fact that I've failed you. You of all people," he whispered in a falling voice. "Once a year, Davis—my employer—lets me have another chance. She gives *us* another chance. And every year when we get together I'm determined to follow the handbook. But the moment I see you, the fucking handbook goes right out the virtual window, along with all my common sense and control. And every year I end up inside you, sharing your first orgasm. And every year you make the same decision. You go back to cubelife.

"Please, Kansas. Don't let me fail this time. This segment of the project is coming to a close. This is your *last* chance. Next year you'll be considered too old by one year. This is your last chance at a life. A real life! A life like our ancestors lived, full of passion and laughter and purpose!

"Don't let me fail," he scraped out in a voice of desperation.

She blinked as she stared at him. "Have I seen these...documents before? Have you shown them to me?"

He shook his head. "This is the first time you've seen them. This time I'm desperate, Kansas."

Slowly, her fascinated gaze returned to the lovers on the table.

She had never thought herself beautiful. But the woman on the table *was* beautiful, her head thrown back, her eyes half-closed, her eyebrows arched, her lips parted and panting. Her mentor stood behind her, one arm wrapped around her midriff, his fingers sprawled over a breast while the other held her chin with infinite tenderness. His lips nestled against the side of her neck and her head tilted as a small, warm smile appeared at the edges of her mouth.

Kansas stared at his image, making love to hers. "I'm sorry," she told him in a whisper. "I'm sorry I've put you through this. But I want you to do that to me. I want you to make me beautiful."

He groaned in answer, his fists knotted at his sides as he moved around the counter toward her, the lines of his body tightening with barely controlled passion. "Beautiful?" he choked out through gritted teeth. "But you *are* beautiful. Beautiful, exotic and rare. I *won't* fuck this up again," he spat out the six hard words. "No, Kansas! Every December for four years I've fought my attraction to you...and failed."

She shook her head. "Then don't fight it," she told him. "This will be our last week together?"

He nodded.

"Let me give you this week. In return for all you've done for me. In return for all you've tried to do for me." She took a breath deep into her lungs. "What if I promised to choose a mate at the end of our week together? Couldn't we just ignore the handbook? What difference would it make?"

"Maybe," he allowed, his eyes shifting restlessly among the several visuals playing on the table then finally returning to gaze at her. "Maybe...except for this first step."

She held his gaze. "Then I'll do it. I'll do this. And at the end of the week I'll choose a mate."

"You promise to continue with the program? That you'll mate and have children?"

"I promise," she told him solemnly, nodding her head. "What about you? What will *you* do afterward?"

"I have a plan," he answered.

"That doesn't include me?"

"That doesn't include you," he told her, his voice edged with determination.

She stared at him. "Tell me your name," she demanded quietly. "You know my name. Tell me yours."

Moving across the room, he backed away from her until he came up against the edge of his dressing case. With white knuckles he grasped the edge of the case, clutching it in his fierce grip. "Put the blue panties on," he commanded hoarsely, then watched intently as she pulled the faded fabric up her legs. "Now sit on the edge of the bed and spread your legs again. Pull your lips open. No," he corrected her immediately. "Put your hands inside your panties. Yes," he breathed. "Like that. Now edge the top of your panties down a bit so I can see your hands in your pussy. That's it, December.

"It's Hardin," he told her with a raw, unsteady voice. "My name is Hardin." Then he watched, heart hammering, as she played the line of her sex, her eyes on his, keening his name as she hurried herself forward and climaxed under her own hand. As he watched, his fingers worked almost without his knowledge, pulling his fly open and starting his slacks on their way to the floor.

Like a drunk, he staggered toward her, fell to his knees on the ground before her and wrenched her legs wide as he reached for her with greedy pawing hands, his fingers dragging in the hot wet crotch of her silk panties. Then his mouth was on the comfortingly familiar fabric, eating into her sex which burned behind the frail, stretched barrier as his tongue licked at the silky stuff and prodded at her soft, tender opening. Briefly lifting his mouth out of her crotch, Hardin pulled the top of the panties down far enough to get his lips sucked up against her pink, plump labia. His lips moved fervently over her sex as he dragged the dampened panties lower in order to reach her,

to improve his access and pull his tongue down through her heated, wet sex and into her pulsing vagina.

“Just a taste,” he murmured into her flooding pussy. “Just a taste,” he insisted as his hands clamped her hips and he put a long, hungry French kiss into her slit, hardly even aware that she was coming again. Her thighs trembled, her cunt spasmed and her hips bucked in his clenching grasp as he lashed her sex with his tongue and then gentled her with the warm press of his open lips.

Finally, he broke from her, gasping, as he threw himself on the bed and pulled her up to join him. He stretched his body out behind hers and dragged her leg up over his thigh with a rough, demanding urgency, spreading her wide as he lifted his knee inside hers. Shaking with a terrible, compelling need, his hand slipped into the front of her panties and fingered her wet folds cavalierly as he prodded his cock head at the damp well between her legs. The dark, slitted head of his cock pushed against the fragile fabric that barred his entrance into her cunt, the silk now slick with her moisture as well as his own dribbling wash of pre-cum. His cock burned as he shoved his rod along the silk several times and then came between her legs, surging as he emptied all over her faded blue panties.

Stunned with lust, he felt himself thicken again as he raised his upper body with one arm, ran his fingers into the puddle of shining semen and spread it to coat the worn silk that stretched across her mound. In a daze, he got his hand into the front of her panties and pulled them back, watching as he settled three thick fingers over her vulva and started a slow pumping action against the sensitized rim of her opening, allowing her need to rebuild in hungry stages, watching her clit shiver each time he plunged his fingers into her vagina and pulled on the line of her pussy. Again, she came, her cunt clasp on his fingers in a series of shuddering swallows as he shot his middle finger deep and held her entire clenching sex in his hand. As she climaxed, he pressured the long line of her sex into never-ending orgasm as he nudged a continuing, surging response from her. Just when she thought she was finished, he tightened his hold again,

dragging another satisfying contraction out of her cunt with the hard grip of his hand wrapping her sex.

"Is it...always like this?" she gasped, staring at him with stunned awe.

His gave her a warm smile. "You're special," he told her, "although a good mentor can milk an awful lot of pleasure out of a single orgasm. Draw it out. Make it last with a bit of pressure in the right place at the right time, coaxing out those last shuddering convulsions."

His fingers tightened to clamp on her pussy again and he felt her body clench again—a small lingering tribute to ecstasy.

"And it gets better...when I get inside you. When I hit your dark spot."

"My dark spot?"

He nodded as he pulled her panties down her legs and off over her feet. "Right at the back of your cunt. There's a spot that longs to be stroked, taken, beaten...fucked," he murmured, settling back on the bed, collecting her into his arms and breathing against her ear. "And it can only be reached by a man. It can only be reached...with my cock."

Wide-eyed, she turned her head to stare back at him. "I'm going to fall in love with you again," she told him with great certainty. "Probably today."

His eyes closed then opened again. "I know," he told her, smearing his lips into her temple, "but I've got five days to change your mind."

"How," she asked him, "do you plan to do that?"

He gave her a wry smile. "Fuck you silly from now through the end of the week?"

"And you expect that to work?"

He shrugged. "Not really."

She gave him a soft, tender smile. "Well, then, let's get started."

"I was hoping you'd say that," he told her as he rolled on top of her.

"What should I do?" she asked, uncertain but eager.

His eyes closed as he considered every sinful demand he could make of her, knowing she'd deliver. "Just do whatever comes naturally," he whispered, loving her spontaneity in bed, wanting her to surprise him as she had so many times in the past, with some intimately erotic act that he hadn't suggested, that he hadn't choreographed and directed.

As he lay between her legs, his cock head nudging her wet entrance, she brought her knees up beside him and opened her legs wide.

"Oh, yes," he breathed. "That will work...for starters."

Then he was inside her—finally—and he had to suck in a breath, blinking hard as her vagina compressed the long, hard length of his shaft. She shifted beneath his weight as her vagina closed around him like a velvet glove. "Isn't it...supposed to hurt the first time?" she queried hesitantly.

He smiled at her lovingly. "It did...the first time," he told her. "But that was five years ago."

"Are you...documenting this?" she asked almost shyly.

He nodded as he pulled his hips and stretched into her again.

"Play the visual for me," she breathed. "Life-sized. I want to watch you do this to me."

He stopped and stared at her, then ran his hand into her hair at her temple. "You're amazing," he told her in a voice roughened with emotion...and anticipation.

* * * * *

He left her long enough to punch some buttons on the countertop. Then, with their visual images rotating above the table beside the bed and with his massive cock fully sheathed inside her, Kansas felt his mouth, hot and hungry on her breast as he suckled and dragged on her nipple with tongue and teeth and lips. He worked her over so fiercely that she felt it like a tug of wanton pleasure at the back of her vagina where his cock stretched and filled and hammered with a promise of fulfilling violence that was

deeply provoking and wonderfully satisfying. She couldn't help the instinctual need to open her legs obscenely wide and cant her hips slightly so she could take him at the very back of her cunt where her need was greatest. The lips of her sex spread open beneath his plowing groin and she whispered in pleasure with each delicious drag of his hot, demanding flesh against her open labia. As he moved on her, she pushed her wet, needy pussy into his groin and reveled in the pleasure of his damp skin dragging at her labia, exciting her clit, while the huge width of his shaft stretched the rim of her vulva beyond bearing and his cock head pounded against her womb.

Feeling sinful and deliciously dirty, she watched the visual, watched him fucking her, watched the dark wet hair curled at his groin, the thick root of his cock stretching her open as he pulled and slammed and pulled again, his testes swinging to meet her bottom as he banged into her.

Dragging her eyes away from their pumping images, she returned her gaze to his face, hanging over hers—a dark ripped snarl on his silent lips, black hair hanging in damp strands and shadowing his forehead as his eyes narrowed with every savage thrust of his hips.

There was a fine, glimmering sheen of sweat on the smooth muscles ripping his chest as he moved over her, and each breath he pulled in was a rasping gasp of raw pleasure and an obvious struggle to prolong this wet, sliding, provoking bliss. Inside her body, her vagina was subjected to an aching madness that built with each hard cramming thrust of his cock and she pushed her legs wider again, waiting and wanting—and wanting to wait—to pull this moment of near consummation into eternity. The pleasure building inside her was deep and wickedly carnal and intimated a dark, complete satisfaction to follow. In her mad, heady need, she murmured, and he slowed, his shaft seated at the back of her cunt, his cock pulsing fiercely.

"What?" he whispered hoarsely. *"What did you say?"*

She blinked up at him and shook her head, suddenly reluctant to repeat the words she hadn't meant for him to hear. "You're beautiful too," she finally said, "when you're fucking me like this."

His neck arched forward spilling his dark hair onto her face and she felt a surge thicken his cock as a series of guttural snarls almost choked him. Then his lips crushed down onto hers and he fucked her mouth with his tongue at the same time that his hips drove against her and she screamed into his mouth—screamed in long, never-ending, cunt-quenching climax.

When they woke together later, they lay wrapped around each other on the bed, Kansas on her back, gazing at the window high on the wall. Together they watched the stars inch across the sky, dragging the moon's arc of light diagonally across the dark rectangle of glass. "Have you ever been to the moon?" she queried languidly.

He nodded into her neck, where his lips were sealed against her skin. "On a school trip when I was eighteen. Why?"

"What was it like?"

He shrugged. "At the time, I was more interested in my teacher, Ms. VanderKoven." There was a moment's silence before this statement was explained. "It occurred to me at an early age that there was something wrong with me. Something seriously wrong. Every now and again my cock would get hard. I didn't know what the hell was going on...but I knew it had something to do with women." Again he shrugged. "I kept it to myself and pumped myself out whenever I could get a private moment.

"I started drinking when I was young. Black-market stuff." He laughed. "I was a mess about eight years ago—fasting for days to enhance the pleasure administered by my own hand. I was down to one-hundred-eighty pounds when I got drunk and ended up on a shuttle to Beta 4." He nodded at her wide-eyed expression. "Yeah. Our most distant satellite outpost. Two weeks out and two weeks back. Slept all the way there *and* all the way back. The passengers are put into stasis during the transfer. But I don't even

remember arriving at the satellite station. I woke up at the station back here on earth, in an office full of very angry government officials. Evidently I'd boarded the shuttle without ticketcard or passport. They were pissed.

"And I lost my job after an unexplained absence of four weeks."

"I'm sorry."

He shook his head. "As it turned out, this job came up at about the same time. It probably saved my life. And, for the next three years...and thirty-six women," she felt his smile, "I was happy. Then I met you." He nuzzled his lips against the side of her neck, sucking slightly and putting a tiny bite of pain on the skin beneath his mouth. "After that, I wanted more." He blew out a sigh. "But my sperm count is nil. I'm ineligible as a mate candidate."

"What are you going to do...at the end of this week?"

"Go on a bender," he laughed quietly. "A Beta 4 bender."

"And after that?"

"And after that," he sighed, "I'll go back to work." He rolled onto her. "But, between now and then I'm going to fuck you...oh...at least thirty-two different ways and at least fifty-two separate times."

She laughed. "At the risk of repeating yourself," she teased.

"At the risk of repeating myself," he confirmed. "But some of the positions are so good, they bear repeating."

"Oh?" she encouraged him, "which ones specifically?"

He closed his eyes as he considered his answer. There was a great deal of contentment in his expression and her heart softened to see him...happy.

Clearing his throat he answered her as he opened his eyes. "My cock in your mouth. My cock in your mouth. And...my cock in your mouth."

"Three times?"

"At least three times...before the end of the week."

Chapter Seven

Six days later, Hardin was sitting in his supervisor's office. Davis had rearranged her plans in order to work him into her schedule. Hardin had made an unusual request.

"You're sure about this," Davis asked the man seated before her. Resolutely, Hardin nodded back as Davis considered the face that belonged to her best agent.

He was still the most handsome man she'd ever seen, even in a population full of perfect men. His dark good looks were slightly exotic, just faintly...anomalous. His eyes were stunningly blue against his brown skin. Today those eyes were troubled, and tired smudges curved beneath his lower lashes, but his face was determined.

"You're asking me to erase five years of your life. That's a lot different than losing a month, Hardin. Most people can shake a month off and return to their previous lives—everything still familiar. But you're an intelligent man, Hardin. You'll ask questions. You might spend the rest of your life just trying to get those years back, trying to rediscover your past."

"I was with the program five years ago, before I met Kansas, so I'll have some basis of familiarity—something to go back to," he insisted stubbornly.

Davis stared at him for several moments. "If you're certain, then."

With his eyes on the ground, Hardin gave a determined nod.

"And you're doing this because?"

"I love her. I can't live—I prefer not to live knowing I'll never be with her." He cleared his throat. "I want you to do me a favor." Digging into the front pocket of his canvas slacks, he produced a bit of worn blue silk. For a few seconds, he stared at the silk in his hand before he placed the panties on the desk.

"If," he said, "I ever come to you, years from now, wondering what the fuck my life is worth, I want you to show me these. And tell me the story that goes with them."

"Oh geez, Hardin," Davis choked out as she pushed her chair back and opened her desk drawer. Pulling out a plastic card, she ran her palmwand over it and pushed it toward him.

"Will you do that for me?" he asked her. But Davis just pointed at the card in answer.

Reaching for the card, he thanked her then stopped as his eyes caught on the orders printed on the card's surface. His gaze narrowed on the card uncertainly, then cut to hers questioningly as he shook his head.

Davis stood and turned quickly to walk across the room. There she stopped, facing the wall and wiping at her eyes before she turned again and leaned to sit against the edge of a starkly white counter, fixing her eyes on her long legs crossed at the ankles. "Let me tell you a story," she told him in an unsteady voice.

"The story starts about eight years ago in the early years of the program. We located a very promising male prospect—a very fertile male. We discovered him while trawling the black market. That's where we come by a lot of our prospects. You didn't know that," she stated and shrugged apologetically. "The most promising prospects are already discontent and showing signs of it, looking for black-market books, trying to buy alcohol or drugs...or sex.

"We had high hopes for the man. He was recruited and trained by our very best. All that remained was for him to choose a mate. The days passed. Three weeks passed! He flirted, romanced and screwed with every young female prospect in the program but wouldn't settle down. He was creating havoc as one after another of our girls fell for him and then had trouble moving on. We needed couples, Hardin. Couples who could start new families, raise children. He was dropped from the program."

Eyes narrowed, Hardin shook his head at his supervisor.

"Then we started all over. Considering him a *hopeless case*," she smiled wryly, "at least where love was concerned – but recognizing his potential – we erased his memory and recruited him as an instructor."

Hardin's eyes widened as his jaw dropped.

Davis nodded. "You."

Slowly he shook his head as he stared at his supervisor. "I never lost my memory," he countered, uncomprehendingly.

She gave him a questioning smile in answer. "No?"

He blinked a few times as his eyes focused on the floor. "The shuttle to Beta 4," he said with slow realization. "I lost a month traveling to the satellite outpost."

Davis just continued to smile. "You were never on the shuttle to Beta 4."

His gaze swept up from the floor to burn at her accusingly. "That...was a dirty trick," he declared.

She agreed with a guilty nod. Her eyes glowed happily as her smile widened.

He stood suddenly. "But...why? Why have you let this go on for *years*? Knowing how I felt about Kansas? From the start! Or, at least, almost from the start!"

She shrugged. "You're our best agent." Taking in his expression of disgust, she followed this with a sigh and a grimace. "I've been doing my best, Hardin. I could have given her another instructor. I *would* have, except for the fact that you're a fertile male! I've been working on your behalf for the last five years. But I have supervisors too. They didn't believe me when I told them this was the real thing. One week! What's one week with one woman? They wanted to see some sort of a commitment out of you before they tried to make a mate out of you, again. To put it bluntly, we can't *use* the sort of man who would cheat on his wife and cause chaos at the base. My supervisors wanted proof that it would last." She nodded at the card on her desk. "That card will get you on the next outbound lift to the Seychelles."

He stood abruptly, his eyes wild with hope, flicking at the door then back to his employer.

“Room Ten,” she told him, then continued as he turned for the door. “And you might like to know that she kept her promise. She’s waiting in there for her first mate candidate, though she doesn’t appear to be very happy about it.”

He turned to face her again. “Thank you, Davis,” he said fervently and took a few quick steps toward her. Grabbing her around the waist he planted a long, loving kiss on her mouth, dragging a hand through the gray streak in her hair. “Thanks,” he repeated, smiling at her a single breathless moment. “And it might interest *you* to know,” he winked as he slid the blue panties off the desk and backed across the room, “that you would have been my second choice.”

With that, he stuffed the blue silk back into his pocket as he strode through the door.

Davis smiled, a mixture of pure pleased amusement and wry longing as she nodded her head at the closed door. “Thanks,” she murmured to herself, her fingers on her lips. Sighing, she moved across the room and dropped into her chair, still staring at the door. “Thanks, Hardin. That absolutely frickin’ makes my day.”

* * * * *

She had her back to the door when it opened. Standing at the virtual window, Kansas stared into it without seeing. She didn’t notice the cloudy sky crack open as the sun spilled through the gray to light the city streets. She knew that the mate candidate standing just inside the door had viewed her image and had agreed to consider her as a mate...despite her looks.

She smiled wryly.

Or maybe *because* of her looks! Since he was part of the program, he might be a bit of an anomaly himself, either in his appearance or his behavior—or both. But she didn’t care about any of that. She was committed to keeping her promise.

Dropping her gaze to her dark, knee-length skirt, she shook her head.

How could she have allowed them to wipe him from her memory...all those times in the past? Four times!

Hardin.

At the same time, she wondered how she could live without him.

But she'd keep her promise and keep his memory. And somehow she'd find her way back to him one day. Of that she was certain. Somehow she knew they would someday be reunited—just as she was certain she'd never stop loving him.

When she heard careful footsteps crossing the room, she roused herself to speak. "Before you decide about me, there are two things you should know." When the mate candidate didn't answer she went on. "I want to name our first child Hardin."

"I can live with that," he answered but she barely registered his words before she plunged ahead, determined to get her conditions out and in the open.

"And you should probably know...I don't believe I'll ever love you."

The man stopped moving and the room was silent for several moments.

"Any questions?" she followed up.

"I think I might be able to change your mind on that one," he finally said. "At least, I plan to spend the rest of my life trying."

Finally, she recognized his voice. Finally she was in his arms with a mouthful of questions—but they were going to have to wait because, at the moment, her mouth was full of his tongue.

Finally he broke from her, breathless, laughing. "And I do have *one* question," he taunted her, "*Miss December*."

She nodded her head quickly, her eyes latched onto his sexy, curving smile. "Yes," she laughed. "Yes, yes, yes!"

He shook his head. "Try to behave, December. You have to wait for the question before you can answer it," he lectured.

"Yes!" She laughed and shouted and squealed all at the same time.

"Okay," he finally relented with a grin. "In that case, Kansas, will you agree to be my mate?"

About the Author

I slung the heavy battery pack around my hips and cinched it tight – or tried to.

“Damn.” Brian grabbed an awl. Leaning over me, he forged a new hole in the too-big belt.

“Any advice?” I asked him as I pulled the belt tight.

“Yeah. Don’t reach for the ore cart until it starts moving, then jump on the back and immediately duck your head. The voltage in the overhead cable won’t just kill you. It’ll blow you apart.”

That was my first day on my first job. Employed as an engineer, I’ve worked in an underground mine that went up—inside a mountain. I’ve swung over the Ohio River in a tiny cage suspended from a crane in the middle of an electrical storm. I’ve hung over the Hudson River at midnight in an aluminum boat—30 foot in the air—suspended from a floating barge at the height of a blizzard, while snowplows on the bridge overhead rained slush and salt down on my shoulders. You can’t do this sort of work without developing a sense of humor, and a sense of adventure.

New to publishing, I read my first romance two years ago and started writing. Both my reading and writing habits are subject to mood and I usually have several stories going at once. When I need a really good idea for a story, I clean toilets. Now there’s an activity that engenders escapism.

I was surveying when I met my husband. He was my ‘rod man’. While I was trying to get my crosshairs on his stadia rod, he dropped his pants and mooned me. Next thing I know, I’ve got the backside of paradise in my viewfinder. So I grabbed the walkie-talkie. “That’s real nice,” I told him, “but would you please turn around? I’d rather see the other side.”

...it was love at first sight.

Madison welcomes mail from readers. You can write to her c/o Ellora’s Cave Publishing at 1056 Home Ave., Akron OH 44310.

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