

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ELLORA'S CAVE
Quickies

PHOBIA

Nikki Soarde

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PHOBIA

Nikki Soarde

Chapter One

Dani stood at the bedroom window and gazed out into the thick, black Halifax night.

“What’re ye thinkin’, me bonny lass?” asked a silky voice, very close to her ear. A pair of warm arms encircled her waist, and his hands slipped beneath the edge of her camisole. “Be ye thinkin’ of carousels and clowns? Ponies and peonies? Or perhaps buttons and bows? These be thoughts befittin’ a lady such as yerself.”

She rolled her eyes. “No, Luke. I’m not thinking about any of those things.”

He nuzzled her hair. “Well then, perhaps ye should be. What could be so bad as to steal the smile from yer lips?”

“Stop it, Luke. I’m not one of your five-year-old patients that you can cheer up or put at ease with a fake Irish accent and a few pretty words.”

Restless, she shrugged off his arms and walked to her dresser.

“It’s not really fake. I was born in Ireland, you know.”

“You came over when you were four, for God’s sake. You just use the accent when you need to charm someone.”

She looked in the mirror and noticed she’d forgotten to take off her earrings. She hooked her long blonde hair behind her ears and popped the back off a gold hoop. “I don’t feel like being charmed, tonight, okay? Tonight I feel like being treated like a grownup.”

Out of the corner of her eye she saw him rake a hand through his thick crop of black hair.

“Okay,” he said, his voice low and patient. “I’ll lose the accent and treat you like a grownup if you’ll come clean and tell me why you’ve been in such a funk all evening.

You hardly smiled at supper, not even when I told you my best knock-knock joke. I don't know why—"

"A man died today. He died while I stood there and watched. His heart stopped and his eyes closed and I stood by and did nothing. I have trouble thinking about clowns and carousels in the face of something like that."

He moved in behind her and she met his eyes in the mirror—his Arctic-blue eyes that had an annoying ability to see right through her.

"Did you do something wrong?" Even without the accent his voice was seductive, like silk sliding across her senses. "Make a mistake that cost him his life?"

"No. He was terminal, and he had a Do Not Resuscitate order." She removed her other earring. "But that doesn't really make it any easier."

"It should."

"Well, it doesn't."

He began rubbing her shoulders, his thumbs digging deep into tension-saturated muscle, and despite her best efforts, she felt herself begin to melt.

"You carry too much on your shoulders, babe." He nuzzled her hair and she felt the gentle rasp of a day's worth of beard against her neck. "Being a nurse in an Intensive Care Unit isn't easy, but you need to leave it at the hospital. You need to stop bringing the pain home with you."

She wanted to shrug off his touch, but found herself leaning back against him. She closed her eyes and savored the hard ripple of muscle against her back. "Easy for you to say. You just make faces at kids all day."

He chuckled and the reverberations seeped into her. "I do more than that, and you know it."

"Yeah, well..." She really preferred not to think about what he did all day, and didn't know what had possessed her to even bring it up. If she'd known his occupation

when she met him, she would have steered clear, never would have given him a second glance. But by the time she found out...it had been too late. She'd already fallen. Hard.

"Some of those kids have real problems," he continued, "and the dentist's chair can be very frightening. It's important to me to make the experience as positive and non-threatening as possible."

At his words, images of high-speed drills and cold steel needles crept into her thoughts and a shudder passed through her.

He skimmed his hands down her arms, bent his head and kissed her bare shoulder. "Sometimes, if I'm lucky, they even have a little bit of fun."

A nervous laugh tickled the back of her throat. "Fun? With a dentist? You must be inhabiting a parallel universe."

He nipped at her skin. "I don't usually hear *you* complain."

"What I *meant* was —"

"By the way, have you made an appointment yet?"

The nervous laugh was doused by a splash of panic. "A-appointment?"

"Yeah." He skimmed a finger along her jaw. "You know...for that tooth you cracked last week?"

She'd been eating some of her mother's infamous peanut brittle and had chomped down on a particularly stubborn hunk of hard sugar. She'd experienced a brief flash of pain, and Luke had insisted on performing an inspection. He'd discovered a crack in one of her molars—one with a very large and very old filling—and had immediately started pestering her about having it fixed.

"Uh...no," she hedged, reaching for her hairbrush. "I completely forgot."

He frowned, his eyes drilling into her as she ran the brush through her hair. "Forgot? How can you forget something like that?"

"It doesn't hurt so what's the rush?" It only bothered her when she chewed directly on it. Other than that...

"It's a big friggin' crack, *that's* what's the rush. If it's not looked after it could get worse. You could lose the whole tooth."

"Don't be so melodramatic."

"Do you want me to do it?"

She almost dropped the brush. "You? You're a pediatric dentist."

"Teeth are teeth. I could –"

"No. I told you before. I have a perfectly competent dentist. An *adult* dentist. I just have to call him and –"

"So do it."

"I will. Next week."

He bent down and, hooking one arm beneath her knees and another around her waist, scooped her off the floor.

The brush clattered onto the dresser.

He grinned down at her and she glared back. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Tomorrow."

She blinked. "What?"

"Call him tomorrow."

She rolled her eyes. "You're such an old woman."

"Dani."

"Did I hear a threat in there?"

"Maybe." He waggled his eyebrows. "Definitely."

"Call him or what? You'll throw me into the harbor or something?"

"Not exactly what I was thinking, but thanks for the idea. I'll have to remember that."

She narrowed her eyes. "Stop manhandling me. You know I hate it."

“Liar.” As he walked over to the bed, she silently acknowledged the truth of it. And silently thanked the tooth fairy that the subject had changed.

She ran a hand over his chest, through the fine spattering of hairs and over a pair of nipples that hardened at her touch. He felt warm, smelled of spices and musk. “It’s just not fair, you know.”

“What? What’s not fair?”

She leaned in and kissed his chest, flicking her tongue over his nipple and tasting his sweat. She heard a soft groan and murmured against his skin, “I’ve been going to the gym three times a week for the past year and I still can’t do a single chin-up.” She looked up at him. “You do nothing. You sit around in a chair all day, and yet you’re built like Zeus or something.”

“I don’t do *nothing*. I jog.” He shrugged, smiling evilly. “Can I help it if I’m genetically superior?”

“Really?” she teased. “To what?”

He glared at her. “You’ll pay for that.”

“Mm hmm. Whatever. Now let me go.”

“I don’t think so.”

She put up a token struggle but he clamped her against him. He held her firm, immobile, his arms like velvet-lined vises.

“Why not? What do you plan to do with me?” She tried to sound suspicious and perhaps a little fearful.

“Why, have my way with you, of course.”

“Oh, really? What if I don’t want to?”

He threw her on the bed and pounced, straddling her and pinning her wrists against the pillows. Those vibrant blue eyes had darkened, taken on the ominous glint that always set her heart to pounding.

“Are you asking me to stop?” The silk in his voice had taken on an edge, one that hinted at hidden power and raw hunger.

She licked her lips and watched him watching the motion of her tongue. His grip on her wrists tightened and she felt his cock harden against her thigh.

“Answer me, dammit.”

“Yes,” she whispered, her chest heaving. She was mesmerized by him, by his eyes and by his strength. Captivated by what he’d become, what he’d transformed into in a heartbeat.

This wasn’t the lighthearted Luke who put on corny accents and donned clown noses in order to entertain anxious children. This wasn’t the professional Luke who attended conferences and taught classes in advanced dentistry techniques. This was another Luke, one that remained hidden to all but a very few—a very special, very intimate few. This Luke was passionate and powerful, dominant, dark and just a little bit dangerous. In this Luke she sensed the outer edge of some deeper pain. She understood that kind of pain and, perhaps because of that, felt herself being drawn to it.

He was the most fascinating and exciting man she’d ever met.

“Yes, what?” He bent low and tasted her lips, tracing her bottom lip with his tongue and then drawing it lightly between his teeth, tearing at her composure, scraping away a little of the veneer she habitually wore.

His cock was nestled against her pussy and she fought the urge to arch her hips against him. “Yes. I mean no,” she whimpered. “I mean...I want you to stop.”

“I don’t believe you.” He gripped both of her tiny wrists in one large hand and reached beneath a pillow with the other. “Why don’t I believe you?”

He pulled out his prize and her eyes went wide at the contraption that dangled from his fingers. “What’s that?”

“This is my new best friend, and your nemesis.” He flicked his wrist and she heard the distinctive click of metal as the device sprang open. Steel handcuffs lined with black velvet.

“I...I don’t know about this.” They’d done some experimenting, toyed with a little bondage, but had always improvised with strips of soft cloth ripped from old sheets or other linens. It had always been light, playful. The thought of something as ruthless as handcuffs, lined with velvet or not, sent a little shiver down her spine.

He snapped a cuff around her left wrist and then hauled her to a seated position. Her breasts ground against his chest as he snapped the second cuff into place, securing her hands behind her back.

“I don’t recall asking your opinion.” His grin was wicked, his eyes haunting.

She opened her mouth to protest, but he stole the words from her throat. His kiss was fierce, hungry, demanding. He overwhelmed her body and dissolved her will.

He would never make her do anything she truly objected to, but he pushed her—hard. The fact that he pushed her to the edge of her tolerance, that he flirted with the dominance and control, was an aphrodisiac the likes of which she’d never experienced before. It was so foreign, so different from who she was, like dipping her toes into the bubbling froth at the edge of a dark, unknown ocean. She wanted to know what lay beneath the surface—needed to know.

He sank his fingers into her hair and held her there as he ravaged her mouth with his tongue. By the time he pulled away she was gasping for breath and gleaming with sweat.

His hands still embedded in her hair, he gazed at her. “God, you’re beautiful.” He combed his fingers through her thick mane, allowing the strands to drizzle from his hands. “Your hair is the color of buckwheat honey, and your eyes are like a mythical sea. Did I ever tell you that?”

“No,” she breathed, her eyes drifting closed at the gentleness of his touch and the splendor of his words. “I don’t think you did.”

Suddenly a jolt of electricity zinged through her and her eyes flew open. He'd slipped his hand inside her panties and begun massaging her clit. The sensations were so unexpected and so intense that she squirmed in an effort to get away from him.

He wrapped an arm around her waist, holding her tight as he increased the pressure, kneading her clit between two fingers. "What's wrong, babe? Too much for you?"

"Luke," she pleaded, uncertain what she wanted. She arched her knees, driving her heels into the mattress as she sought some sort of reprieve.

He held her firm. "Is this what you want, babe?" He drove two fingers inside her and she arched her back. She struggled against the cuffs but they didn't give an inch. "A finger-fuck? Is that what you want?"

She shook her head, her voice lost in the pounding surf of her blood.

"No?" He was so deep inside her, caressing her clit with his thumb, but it was only to tempt and tease. She was sure he was trying to drive her insane.

He murmured in her ear. "Then tell me what you want. Say the words, Dani."

He withdrew his hand and she groaned her frustration. "I want you."

"Not good enough." His hand was underneath her camisole, palming her breasts, tweaking her nipples. "I need more."

"I want you to make love to me."

He ripped away the camisole, tearing the straps and silk and leaving her naked and vulnerable. "Still not good enough." He gripped her by the hips and lifted her, setting her back against the mound of pillows propped against the headboard. He got off the bed and slipped off his briefs, letting them fall to the floor and revealing the fullness of his erection. "Is this what you want?"

She nodded.

"Then say it."

"I want your cock inside me."

He returned to the bed, crawling over to her on all fours. Shoulder muscles rippled, biceps flexed. He gripped her thong and tugged that away as well. Instinctively she tried to close her thighs, but he grabbed her knees to prevent it. "Deep inside you?" he asked, stroking her pussy with the backs of his knuckles.

"Yes."

"Do you want me to fuck you?" He pressed her knees further apart, bent down and laved her clit, dipped his tongue inside her.

"Oh God. Please."

"Please what?"

"I want you to fuck me."

"You do, eh?" He sat up, his face now even with hers, touching her with nothing but the heat of his gaze. "Do you want it soft and sweet, Dani? You want me to screw you like I'd screw a prim little virgin with petticoats and primroses in her hair?"

"No," she breathed. "I want it hard. Hard and fast."

"Well then, you're going to have to give me something in return." He raised himself to a kneeling position and Dani knew instinctively what he wanted. She wanted it, too, but decided to play the game.

She blinked, studied his cock that was even with her face and then lifted her eyes to his. "No. I...I can't."

He narrowed his eyes, but beneath the irritation she could easily see the glint of humor. And excitement. "You can, and you will."

She shook her head, but he caught her head, framing her jaw with his palms. "Open up, babe. I want to feel those hot, wet lips on me."

"Please," she murmured, even as blood pulsed through her pussy and she felt the dampness seep into the sheet. "Please don't."

His thumb brushed across her lips. "Just open up. Open wide and I'll do all the work."

He pushed his thumb between her lips and she allowed it, opening slightly to accommodate him. At first it was just his thumb. She licked it, tasting him as well as herself, but then it was replaced by the head of his cock. She wrapped her lips around him, sucking and licking as he eased himself more deeply into her mouth. He sank his fingers into her hair and held her still as he drove a little deeper.

“That’s it,” he said, withdrawing and pressing deep again. “That’s what I want.”

His rhythm increased, his thrusts grew deeper, stronger, but she made no protest, taking everything he gave her and only wanting more. Her teeth raked over him and he groaned his pleasure. She did it again and he paused. He released her head and withdrew from her mouth.

“You’re an evil wench,” he said, his smile wicked, his eyes dark. “You’ll have to pay for that.”

“I will, eh? Well then –”

He grabbed her by the shoulders and pulled her forward, tossing her to the bed like a rag doll. She landed on her stomach, her wrists still bound, leaving her helpless and vulnerable.

He pushed her legs apart and moved between them. He traced the curve of her buttocks, exploring and admiring before leaning over her so that his chest brushed over her back and his cock nudged her ass. He slipped a hand between her belly and the mattress. “Lift.”

“But my wrists.”

“You want it easy? You want me to release you?”

“Yes.”

“No.” And then he gripped her hips and raised her off the bed. He plunged into her without warning and she sucked in her breath in surprise and delight.

She braced her knees against the bed, needing the leverage to support herself and meet his thrusts – his thrusts that were, as promised, fast and hard and strong.

He supported himself with one hand, but the other moved around to brace against her belly, and keep her steady in the face of his assault. He drove still deeper, harder, leaving her gasping and weak. Just when she thought she couldn't take anymore he parted the lips of her sex and ground a finger against her clit.

She sucked in a breath and held it as the waves of pleasure throbbed through her and she pulsed around him. He pressed her clit a little harder and thrust so deep she thought she would burst.

At last he came, pumping himself dry and letting out a low moan of ecstasy. A moment later he collapsed on the mattress beside her and she rolled onto her side to see him grinning at her. He reached out to stroke a breast. "I guess I should take those things off now."

"Uh huh." She grinned. But then she considered. "But maybe not completely."

"Huh?"

"Go get the keys and I'll tell you what I have in mind."

Chapter Two

Luke poured himself a second cup of coffee and sat down at the table with the Thursday edition of the paper.

Thursdays he ran evening hours so didn't start until noon. Normally that meant he spent a leisurely morning, sipping on coffee, nibbling fresh croissants and reading the paper from cover to cover. This morning, however, wasn't working out that way. The coffee was bland, the croissants stale, and nothing in the paper interested him. He'd been distracted, his temper simmering ever since he got off the phone a half hour ago.

He glanced at the stairway and willed her to appear. If he didn't know she'd been up partway through the night, shuddering and fighting tears thanks to a vivid nightmare, he would have been up there already. Last night he'd hugged her close and stroked away her tears. Now he wanted to storm upstairs, drag her out of bed and scream at her, demanding an explanation.

He took another sip of coffee and considered adding a dollop of brandy to it to steady his nerves, but decided against it. Not a good idea for some distraught mother to smell liquor on her child's dentist's breath.

He turned to the sports section and had just read the last of the hockey scores when he heard the soft tap of slippered feet on the stairs. He lifted his gaze and watched her over the rim of his mug.

Even wrapped in a fluffy terrycloth robe that hung to her knees and snuggled up to her chin, she was still sexy. Blonde hair tumbled past her shoulders, and long lashes framed a pair of sea-green eyes that could suck a man in whole. Her body may be obscured beneath the robe, but the way she moved never failed to captivate him. She carried her petite five-foot-nothing frame like a dancer, as if she were composed of light and vapor rather than flesh and blood. Her delicacy, however, was an illusion. The

facade of creamy skin and rounded curves hid a will of iron, and a strength of character that astounded him.

“Good thing,” he murmured, his voice muffled by the cup. She would need that strength to deal with him today.

She stepped into the kitchen. “Good morning, lover,” she said, her smile a mischievous reminder of the previous night. She filled a mug and turned around, leaning against the counter as she sipped. “I woke up and you were gone. I thought being cuffed together would keep you with me, at least until I woke up.”

He flipped a page in the newspaper. “I was restless and I knew you needed some extra sleep.”

When she said nothing further he looked up from the paper to find her studying him. Her eyebrows were pulled together in concern. He’d tried to keep the angry undertones out of his voice, but doubted he’d succeeded.

“Is something wrong, Luke? You sounded...angry.”

Bingo! He took a deep breath and decided to just plunge right in. “You lied to me.”

Her eyes went wide. “What? Lied to you?”

He unclenched a fist he didn’t realize he’d been holding. “I decided I didn’t trust you to make that phone call today. So I—”

“What phone call? What are you talking about?”

“The dentist, Dani. You were going to call your dentist today?”

Her lips parted a little and he thought a little bit of color leeches from her face. “Oh. I w-would have,” she stammered. “If you’d just given me a chance.”

“I gave you a whole week and you didn’t look after it, so I thought I’d be a good little live-in and make the appointment for you.”

She swallowed, set her mug on the counter. He wasn’t sure, but he thought perhaps her hands were shaking. “How did you know who to call?”

“You gave me a name once. I remember that I had to really press you for it. You said it was a foreign name and you always had trouble remembering it.”

She nodded vaguely, said nothing.

He tapped the table. “In fact, come to think of it, *you* didn’t actually say the name. I just listed colleagues that had unusual names, until you finally seemed to recognize one.”

She reached for her mug again, took a sip.

“I didn’t think anything of it at the time, but now...”

She hooked some hair behind her left ear. “You called the office and they’d never heard of me.”

“You admit it.”

“Yes.”

He vaulted from his chair. “Why would you do that? Why would you feel the need to make up some tale about a dentist, for chrissake?”

“You were hounding me, and I knew if I didn’t give you a name, you’d never leave me alone.”

“What? I don’t get it. Why not just tell me who you *do* go to. It’s not like I’ve got some professional grudge against anyone, or particularly care who you go to. I was just curious, that’s all. Why the big fuss?”

“I didn’t tell you the truth because I knew you wouldn’t like it.”

He unclenched his fist again, forced a little bit of tension out of his body. “What’s not to like? You’re confusing me, Dani. All I want is—”

“I don’t go to the dentist. Haven’t been since I was ten years old, and have no intention of going now, okay?” She slammed her mug down, sloshing coffee all over the counter. “There. Happy now?”

He stared at her and couldn't stop the laughter that bubbled out of him. "That's ridiculous. What do you mean you don't go to the dentist? Everybody goes to the dentist."

"Not everybody."

"Yes," he insisted. "Everybody. It's like getting a yearly physical, or getting your eyes checked. It's smart, it's preventative, and it's just plain common sense."

She crossed her arms and glared at him, her expression laced with outrage and...fear? "Well, I don't. I don't get cavities and I don't need to go."

He ground his teeth together. "You have cavities. I noticed at least three other fillings besides the one in the cracked tooth."

"Those were from when I was a kid. I haven't had one since."

"How do you *know*, if you've never been to a fucking dentist!"

Tears welled in her eyes and he regretted his outburst. She stepped toward him, her tiny fists clenched at her sides. "I'm *fine*." She practically shouted the word at him. "I'm fine and I don't need you and *your kind* to tell me differently." She whirled and stomped out of the room.

"My *kind*?" he yelled, storming after her. It took him all of four strides to catch up to her. He grabbed her arm and hauled her against him. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

She went very still. She didn't squirm, didn't fuss, just looked up at him with a gaze forged of solid steel. "Let go of me."

"No. Not until you explain yourself."

"I don't want to. This is very...personal. Very private."

"Like hell it is. This involves me whether you like it or not. And not just because you tossed out a veiled insult."

She lowered her eyes.

"It involves me because I care about you."

“I didn’t mean to insult you. I just...I didn’t know what I was saying.”

He softened his grip on her arm and stroked her hair. “Come on, babe. Tell me what this is all about. You said you haven’t been since you were ten. That’s almost twenty years ago. There must be a reason and I want to know what it is.”

She took a deep breath, leaned into his touch. He could feel the tension seep out of her.

“It’s...hard.”

He heard the pain in her voice and it cut him. He didn’t want her to hurt. That was what all this was about in the first place—keeping her from experiencing pain. “Take your time.”

“Can we go into the living room and sit down?”

“Sure. Would you like me to bring in your coffee?”

“Thanks, but I think I’d like something stronger.”

He smiled. “Brandy? At this time of the day?”

“Please?”

He took a deep breath. “Okay.” He led her to the living room and got her settled on the couch with a pillow and throw. Then he headed back to the kitchen for a snifter of brandy, a carafe of coffee, and wondered what she was going to tell him.

What the hell could be that bad?

* * * * *

Dani pulled the Aztec throw a little more tightly around her shoulders and made a concerted effort not to shiver. She wasn’t cold. She was panic-stricken.

She hadn’t talked about this for years. Fifteen years, to be exact. At the age of fifteen, in an act of desperation, her parents had taken her to a psychiatrist in the hopes that analysis, or possibly even hypnosis would provide a solution to their daughter’s

irrational fear of the dentist's office. In those days she hadn't been able to step into the outer office without battling an anxiety attack, complete with hyperventilation, profuse sweating and nausea. The doctor's efforts had proved futile.

She'd shared her story, sweated and cried through it, but it hadn't unburdened her as they'd hoped. And no amount of talking or persuasion or reasoning had made the slightest dent in her fear. Even hypnosis had failed, for the simple reason that she was a lousy subject. She kept asking when she was supposed to feel different. The doctor had thrown up his hands in exasperation, called her headstrong, and wished her a lifetime supply of dental floss.

"Here."

She was startled to feel Luke's warm hands on hers. He pressed a snifter of brandy into her palm and sat down beside her. He waited patiently as she took a sip and savored the burn as the alcohol seared her throat.

She balanced the glass on her knee and stared at it. She could feel his gaze on her, patient but unrelenting.

"It happened the day I got the tooth filled."

"The tooth?"

She risked a glance at him. "The one that's cracked. The one with the huge filling?"

He sipped from a freshened mug of coffee. "And you said you were ten."

She nodded.

He sipped. And waited.

"My mother dropped me off at the office and went out for a coffee. Not a big deal. I was a pretty independent kid, and it was just a routine filling. A little bigger than the others I'd had, but nothing unusual. The dentist had said it would be a good forty minutes, so she decided to take advantage of it." She sipped her brandy and allowed it to seep into her nerves. She was anxious but not close to tears, like she'd expected.

"So what went wrong?"

“The novocaine. There was something wrong with the novocaine.” She shook her head. “That’s what he claimed later, but I’ve always suspected he made a mistake and injected me with something else.”

Luke frowned, obviously skeptical.

She shrugged. “All I know is he kept injecting me with more and more...” A shudder passed through her at the memory of those needles. “And more injections, and when I was in tears, claiming that I could still feel everything, he called me a little liar, and started to work on me anyway.”

Now Luke’s eyes went wide, registering both disbelief and outrage. But he said nothing, allowing her to continue.

“It was close to lunchtime so there were no other patients in the office, and he told me to just go ahead and scream. Called me a little bitch, and said that I needed to learn to do as I was told.” She stared at her brandy. “His assistant helped hold me down. I could tell she was upset, but didn’t know what to do. He told her if she didn’t do it he’d fire her.” She let out a nervous laugh. “And then, when she still protested, he said he’d tell her husband that they’d been screwing around. That shut her up, and she held me really tight after that.”

Luke leaned forward, set his mug down on the coffee table and raked his fingers through his hair. “Jesus. It sounds like a rape.”

“In a way it was. They held me down and he worked that drill like he was possessed. It was like he was trying to pierce right through to my brain.”

Luke closed his eyes, his misery a pale shadow of her own.

“By the time he finished drilling I’d given up. I just lay there and tried to pretend it wasn’t happening. I was almost catatonic I think. I don’t really remember much of the rest of it. Except that he warned me if I told my mother he’d find me and kill me.”

Luke erupted from the couch, stalked across the room and whirled. “Who is he? What’s his name? Jesus fucking Christ, I hope you didn’t listen. I hope he fried for this.”

“I was ten, Luke. I was ten and I was scared out of my mind. I believed him and I didn’t say a word. Not that it mattered, though. Even if I had told someone it wouldn’t have made a difference.”

He moved over to her, knelt in front of her on the couch and placed a protective hand on her thigh. “What? Why didn’t it matter?”

“He killed himself a couple of weeks later. I remember my mother commenting on the obituary in the paper and saying what a shame it was. And then she said we’d have to find a new dentist. I had come close to telling her a couple of times, but after that...” She tugged at the blanket around her shoulders. “I never told her what had happened. With him dead I figured there was no point.”

Luke stared at her, his expression strangely blank, completely unreadable. “What was his name? Do you remember?”

Remember? How could she forget? “Watkins. Dr. Arnold Watkins.”

He closed his eyes for a moment and his jaw muscles flexed. When he opened his eyes again, they held a stormy combination of rage and regret.

He reached up to stroke her cheek. “I’m sorry. Dear God, I am so sorry.”

She smiled. “What are you sorry for?”

“I—I don’t know.” He stood and began to pace, his hands jammed deeply in his pockets. “For being a man, I guess. And for being in the same profession as someone who was capable of such things. I hate being even remotely associated with a monster like that.”

“You’re not. You’re nothing like him, and *I’m* the one who’s sorry. I have no right to make that kind of association.”

He took a deep breath and sat down beside her, the storm in his eyes calming marginally. He covered her hand with his own. “I’m glad you told me, Dani. I’m glad I understand, but...we still have a problem.”

She blinked. “We do?”

“Uh huh. You need to get that tooth fixed. It has the potential to cause a lot of problems.”

She shook off his touch and stood. Restless, she walked to the window. The sun was already high, the sky a watery blue that indicated the day outside was cold and would likely stay that way. It was the kind of cold that stabbed through wool and fur and chilled to the bone. The kind of day where your boots made sharp crunching noises with every step. She shivered.

“I don’t care if I lose a tooth. It’s way in the back anyway. Who’ll notice?”

“I don’t mean just that.” He’d moved in behind her. “If there’s nerve damage, there could be other problems. Infection. Abscesses, and a helluva lot of pain.”

“I can take that kind of pain.”

“Well, I can’t watch you take it.” He grabbed her shoulders and urged her to turn around. “What about general anesthetic? We could book an O.R. and do everything all at once. You’d wake up and it would all be over.”

She shook her head. “Can’t. I’m not stable under anesthetic. I’m allergic to it or something. I was told that I should only allow it if it’s a matter of life and death.”

He blew out a slow breath. “Shit.”

“Luke, this isn’t your problem. It’s mine and I can handle it.”

“Damn it, of course it’s my problem. I love you and I care what happens to you.”

She shrugged. “Well, I don’t know what to say.”

“Laughing gas.”

“I wanted to try it, but...” She shrugged uncomfortably. “But it’s hard to get the mask on when you can’t even get through the exam room door.”

He studied her, his gaze soft but appraising. “It’s that bad?”

“It’s that bad.”

He nodded, his brows knit in concern and, perhaps, understanding. He turned and walked to the far side of the room. He stuffed his hands into the pockets of his grey cotton twills and lifted his gaze to hers. "I have an idea."

Chapter Three

Dani stopped on the sidewalk, planted her feet and stared at the office door that advertised, *"Dr. Lucas Shantry, D.D.S. We specialize in brightening children's smiles,"* and vowed not to take another step.

Luke's grip on her hand tightened, just enough to remind her that he was there. "Come on, Dani. You've been inside before. It's not that big a deal."

"I've been inside to drop something off, or pick you up for lunch. I always knew I was leaving again in less than five minutes, and I never told you, but even then I broke out in a sweat the moment I stepped through the door."

He moved behind her, wrapped his arms around her waist and set his chin on her shoulder, the gesture comforting and protective, but putting no distance or barriers between her and the object of her fear. "Aren't you feeling a little more relaxed? That sedative I gave you should be kicking in by now."

"I can barely feel it. You only gave me one."

"I just wanted to take the edge off, you know that. If you're out of it, this won't work. You have to be aware of your surroundings and understand what's happening."

"Listen to you." She sniffed, traced a finger over the ridges of his knuckles. "When did you get your degree in psychiatry, anyway?"

"I'm just going on instinct." He nuzzled her neck, pushed her fur collar aside and peppered a few light kisses over her collarbone. "I'm relying on what I know of you and how we are together."

He slid his hand under her short jacket and the old cropped T-shirt beneath. He'd been very specific about what she was to wear. The uncommonly mild February evening had made the choice of a miniskirt and high leather boots tolerable, if not a little unusual. His choices intrigued her.

The touch of his warm fingers on her skin was a better sedative than the drug she'd taken an hour before. His lips found her earlobe and she leaned into him, savoring the play of his tongue in the curl of her ear. "You're not playing fair," she murmured. "You're manipulating me."

"Of course I am. That's why we're here." His hand slid higher, brushing the lace of her bra. His other hand smoothed over the curve of her buttocks and brushed the skin at the edge of her skirt.

"Mmm." Her pulse had begun to jump. She tried to open her eyes, but her lids felt heavy. "Damn, you're good."

"I know."

"Do you plan to ravish me right here on the street?" She asked the question like it was a joke, but somewhere deep inside she knew that if he wanted to she'd let him. Despite the cold and the risk, she'd allow it and she was pretty sure she'd enjoy it.

His power over her was exciting, disconcerting. It would have been almost frightening if not for the trust they shared – absolute and unshakable.

"I could," he said, a finger brushing across her nipple through the lace. "It's late and there's no one around."

She felt his erection nudging her ass. Even through the double layer of fabric it was enticing.

"But that will have to wait, because right now we have something very important to attend to."

She heard the click of a lock and her eyes flew open to see the office door swing open. "What? How?" They'd been a good twenty feet away from the door a minute ago. She had no recollection of her feet moving an inch.

He grinned at her, and with a firm arm around her waist, urged her inside. "Yours is not to question why, my dear."

She didn't speak. She was too busy bracing herself for the impact of *the smell*. That odor of mingled mint and disinfectant that seemed to penetrate every inch of every dentist's office she'd ever been in. That smell alone, had the power to induce panic.

She heard the door close and the click as Luke engaged the lock. He moved in beside her.

"What are you doing?" he asked. "Are you holding your breath?"

She shook her head.

"Yes, you are. Oh, for God's sake." And then she was in his arms, crushed against him as he sealed his mouth to hers and thrust his tongue past her lips. He grabbed her ass and pulled her tight against him so she could feel his erection beneath the denim.

And then he was gone. "Luke?" she said, gasping for breath. "What the hell was that?"

"You're breathing aren't you?"

She opened her mouth to retort and then promptly closed it again. She took a tentative sniff, and then another. She smelled the familiar odor, braced herself for the expected response...and felt nothing. She took a deep breath to test her reaction further, and was rewarded with only a calmly beating heart.

She turned a questioning gaze on Luke. "I don't get it. Usually this smell makes me sick."

Luke frowned. "Have you been in here since we moved in together?"

She thought about it. She'd moved into his place about six months earlier. "No. I guess I haven't needed to since we've been sharing a place."

He nodded, as if this meant something to him. "You've gotten used to the smell through me."

She frowned.

“Remember when you first moved in? You used to complain that the odor bothered you, so I used to shower almost as soon as I came in the door. But after a while you stopped commenting on it, so I stopped worrying about it.”

“Right,” she said, trying to recall the day she’d stopped noticing the smell on his clothes. On him. She couldn’t. All she could remember was the feel of his arms around her, the taste of his lips and the scent of his skin – all spices and musk and all hers.

She smiled. “I guess you’re right.”

He grasped her hand and pulled her further inside. His smile was knowing. “Of course I’m right.” He paused, touched a finger to her cheek. “Because I love you and I know you.”

He grasped both of her hands in his and stepped backward, leading her forward until they reached the far side of the waiting area where she balked. She could see the door to the exam room. It was closed, but she knew what lay on the other side. Her tummy clenched as she pictured the hoses and wires, the light and the chair – the chair that resembled a cruel, vinyl monster.

“I can’t,” she whispered, rubbing her sweat-damp palms against her skirt.

“Yes, you can.” He drew her into an embrace, so close that all she could see were his eyes, all she could feel was his strength. “You’re smart and strong and you can do this.” He touched her chin. “Right?”

She nodded. Her stomach was still rolling, but at least it wasn’t threatening to erupt.

“Good. We’ll take our time.” He unzipped her jacket, eased it off her shoulders. It dropped to the floor. “There’s no rush. We’ve got all night. Hell, we’ve got all weekend if we want.” He began rubbing her back in strong, smooth circles.

She nodded, but an unintentional glance at the door sent a fresh ray of fear spearing through her. The nod shifted to a shake of her head. “No.” She took a step back, the nausea welling up again, her breathing growing more rapid. “Please. I need to leave.”

He grabbed her hands, held her tight. “Dani.” Her name was a command. “You promised me. You promised me that you’d try.” He moved closer. “Actually, I think you promised me that you’d *do it*.”

“But—”

“And you promised that you’d trust me.” He paused, his broad chest beneath a supple leather jacket expanding with a breath. “You do trust me, don’t you?”

“Of course. It’s just that—”

“No buts.” He pulled her forward, closer to him, and closer to the exam room door. “You trust me and it’s that simple. I won’t let anything happen to you.” They reached the door and he put his hand on the knob. “I won’t let—”

The door swung open and inside the lights were already on. In a heartbeat she took it all in. The harsh lights, the tubes and hoses, the chair, the instruments. Terror shot through her like a rifle blast and she lost control.

She wrenched her hands from his and bolted. She reached the outer door, and tugged on the handle. It didn’t budge. She needed to get out. *Now*. Through the panic she remembered the dead bolt. She reached for it and stared in shock.

“No.” The bolt needed a key to open it, even from the inside. She was trapped.

She whirled to face Luke, and found him right behind her. Rage already seeping in past the panic, she pounded his chest.

“Let me out!” She hit him again. And again. She kept pummeling him with her fists and kicked at his shins. She felt like a little girl again, trapped and weak and helpless. “Damn you! Give me the goddamn key and let me *out!*”

He just stood there, did nothing to fend off her attack. He just took everything she dished out without protest and without moving. He remained still as stone, strong as an anchor, enduring it all.

“You can’t do this to me,” she screamed. “I don’t want to do it, and you can’t make me. Let me go or I’ll...scream. I’ll call the police. I’ll...” She continued to rant and fight until there was nothing left. No words and no strength.

Exhausted and confused she dropped her hands to her sides, leaned back against the door and gazed up at him.

“Please,” she whispered. “Please let me go.”

He looked down at her with eyes as soft as the dawn, as searing as the unprotected sun. He stroked her hair. “You’re not my prisoner, Dani. You’re a prisoner of your own fear.”

Because his gaze was so penetrating, she dropped her eyes.

“And I’m just trying to help you find a way out.”

“But—”

His mouth covered hers, sweet and hot and overwhelming. She fought it at first, saw it for what it was. He wanted to distract her, weaken her with his sensuality and take advantage of the sexual power he had over her. She didn’t want to be taken in. She wanted to remember where she was and what had brought her here. Needed to remember.

But as his hands skimmed her body, slipped beneath her shirt and hot skin touched her trembling flesh, her other needs took over. Her need to have him touch her, intimately, everywhere, at once. The need to lose herself in him and give him dominion over her body. The need to surrender herself to him.

He deepened the kiss, his tongue sliding over hers, invading her even as his hand slipped beneath her skirt. She parted her thighs to accommodate him and shuddered slightly when his fingertips brushed across her panties, teasing her clit.

He broke the kiss, moved his lips to her ear. “Do you want me, baby?” His fingers eased past the barrier of her thong and touched the damp folds of her sex. “Do you?”

“Mm hmm.” She leaned into him, burying her face against his neck.

He skimmed over her clit, the touch light and torturous.

His other hand hooked around her back and held her firm, drawing her towards him. Drawing her forward. He was getting further away, and she needed to be close to him. She took a step. And then another.

“Is this good?” he asked, his fingers reaching lower, slipping inside her. Barely.

“Yes,” she breathed, eyes closed tight. “More.” But he kept teasing her, not going deep enough to fulfill what she wanted, and forcing her to seek his touch.

In the back of her mind she knew where they were headed, but she didn’t care. She just wanted.

He continued nuzzling her hair, nipping at her throat and teasing her skin with his tongue, even as his fingers did sinful things with her sex and he kept drawing her toward him. But never getting quite close enough.

At last he slipped two fingers deep inside her and ground his palm against her clit. “Oh God,” she moaned even as she heard the click of a knob and the soft swish of a door opening. She crossed the threshold, stepped directly into the depth of her terror, but with nothing but pleasure coursing through her veins. She knew where she was, but didn’t open her eyes. Not now. Not yet.

“Do you want to come?” he asked, pushing her backwards now, and down, until she was forced to sit.

“Yes.” The word was a plea.

“Open your legs for me then.”

She obliged.

“Wider.” With his free hand he directed her, manipulating her body and pushing her knees apart until she was straddling the chair. All the while he kept kneading her clit, pumping his fingers in and out of her. Slowly. Softly. Enough to keep her aroused, but not enough to bring her to climax. She writhed against him, seeking more. “Settle down, babe. Leave it all to me.”

“Luke, please. I’m going crazy.”

“I know. Just be patient.” She felt her skirt being pushed up to her hips. “Now lean back and let me fuck you.”

She settled back and was rewarded with the firm pressure of his thumb against her clit and the addition of a third finger inside her. He pumped her hard and she gripped a pair of armrests, giving her leverage as she arched her hips upward.

In between panting breaths she managed to say, “I want you.” She meant she wanted more than his hand, she wanted *him*. She wanted his cock buried deep inside her. But she couldn’t find the presence of mind, or the breath, to say all that.

He must have understood, though. “Patience. I’m saving that for later.” She sensed him moving closer, felt his breath on her face. “Are you almost there?” he asked, driving his fingers so deep it verged on pain.

She nodded, whimpered something unintelligible.

“Then open your eyes so I can watch you come.”

She hesitated, and felt his teeth nip at her lower lip.

Her eyes opened and all she could see was him. “That’s wonderful. Just for that…” He pushed deep, ground his thumb against her clit and sent her careening into the depths of pleasure.

She sucked in her breath, arched her back, and endured the sharp ache of orgasm. He watched her, his face a reflection of her pleasure as she pulsed around his fingers and dampened the vinyl beneath her. At last he withdrew his hand and smiled.

She collapsed, closing her eyes as the aftershocks rippled through her. He kissed her cheek, and she felt his finger trail down her arm. “That was amazing.”

“Yeah.” She didn’t know what else to say.

His hand paused at her wrist and then she felt the soft brush of fabric.

"You were amazing. Now open your eyes and look where you are." And then his hands were fussing at her other wrist. "You're in the chair and you're fine." Again she felt the touch of fabric and suddenly she understood. "You're just fine."

Her eyes flew open, just in time to see him finish securing her other wrist to the arm of the chair.

"Luke?" she said, tugging at the Velcro straps that held her firmly to the chair. "What are you doing?"

He touched her cheek. "You know what I'm doing. We talked about this and you knew it was a possibility."

"As a last resort!" She battled herself back toward calm. "I don't think it's necessary."

"But I do. The little show in the waiting room showed me that much."

She pulled at the bindings again. They'd been employing bondage more often over the past couple of weeks, and she now realized what he'd been preparing her for. She'd become used to it, even craved it. To the point that she'd asked for it once when he had neglected to bring out the cuffs. But this was different. She didn't want to be here, needed to feel like she was in control. She wanted to be able to leave if things got to be too much.

"Please, Luke. Take them off."

He caressed her thigh, touched her belly, as if trying to touch her everywhere at once. "Do you trust me?"

"Mm hmm." His touch was confusing her. She was gradually becoming more aware of her surroundings, but his hands on her kept her from focusing. His hands were so warm. "Of course."

"Then trust me with this." He skimmed his palms up her thighs, to the edge of her skirt that was still hitched up around her hips. "Lift up a little. I want to take this off."

Without thinking about it, she complied. He reached behind her, undid the zipper, and slowly eased the skirt down her thighs, to her ankles and over her feet. He brushed his fingers over the front of her panties. "I love black on you. It's so dramatic."

She looked down at herself and almost laughed.

"What's so funny?" He had momentarily abandoned her, stepped away from the chair and shed his jacket to reveal the muscle shirt beneath. He moved over to one of the counters and opened a drawer.

"Well, it's the middle of the night and here I am, strapped to a dentist's chair, half-naked, and you're telling me that a black *thong* is dramatic?"

He closed the drawer and walked back to her. He grinned. "I guess that is kind of silly." Then he held up a pair of scissors. "So why don't we remedy the situation?"

She swallowed. "What are those for?"

He swung his leg over the chair and straddled her. "Naked is much more dramatic than half-naked, don't you think?" He reached for the hem of her T-shirt and her eyes went wide. She was too shocked by what he was doing to protest as he began to slowly, methodically cut her T-shirt open.

Her senses vibrated with awareness.

The soft rasp of the scissor blades scraping together. The gentle tear of fabric. The cool brush of metal against her skin. The warmth of Luke's knuckles rubbing over her belly with every cut. The sensation of absolute vulnerability and just a hint of risk. It was enough to keep her senses busy, and keep her mind distracted from her surroundings. More than enough.

He made a final snip and set the scissors aside. Still straddling her, he reached for the raw edges of material, and gently, almost reverently, laid them open.

"Mmm," he said, trailing a finger over the curve of her breast that swelled above the cup of her bra. "Perfect."

Her skin shivered at his touch. "So, that's why you picked this old T-shirt? So you could cut it to shreds?"

"Mm hmm." He bent down and trailed his tongue over the soft mound of her breast. "Smooth as cream, and even more rich."

She squirmed against an unidentifiable need, but the restraints held her firm.

"Restless?" he asked, his lips brushing her skin.

"Uh...I..."

Then he pressed his mouth against the lacy cup of her bra, and she lost track of what she'd meant to say. The warmth of his breath and the dampness from his lips seeped through the material. The sensation strangely forbidden, intensely erotic. He palmed the other breast and lowered himself enough that she felt the ridge of his erection nudge her cleft. "You got a problem with that?"

Her eyes wanted to roll back. "With what?"

"With cutting up your clothes."

"Uh..." Her eyes fluttered and her pulse pounded in anticipation. "No." And then he reached for the front clasp of her bra. "How about being naked, vulnerable, and strapped to a dentist's chair? Do you have a problem with that?"

He didn't wait for an answer. Her breathing grew ragged and her sex swelled as she watched him unhook the snap and lay the cups aside. His smile was slow and lazy – as lazy as the circle he traced around her nipple with his finger.

"Hmm." He tweaked her nipple hard enough to make her arch her back in pleasure. "Would you like me to nibble on you here?"

"Yes."

But he didn't. Instead he brushed his hand down across her belly to caress her pussy through the fabric of her thong. "How about here?" He hesitated. "Damn. I guess you're not naked after all. Would you like to be? Would you like me to rip this off and feel my tongue on your clit, here?"

“Yes.” It came out as more of a whimper than a word.

“I’m sure you would, and God knows I want to do those things.” And then he was gone. She opened her eyes to see him stride to the far side of the room and reach for a white lab coat that hung on a hook. He turned around and her breath caught as she watched him put it on. “But first you have to do something for me.”

Chapter Four

He could see the change as she focused more clearly on him and where she was, as she registered his transformation from playful lover to intimidating professional. He watched the fear seep back into her features and he hated it. He hated the fear, he hated the events that had put it there and he hated the man who was responsible for it. But most of all he hated that he had to stand by and let her feel it.

He wanted nothing more than to rush over to her, sweep her up in his arms and carry her out of there, away from her fear to someplace safe and secure where he could hold her tight and stroke away her anguish.

But he knew that wasn't possible. He'd gotten her this far by distracting her, by taking advantage of her vulnerability to him and ignoring his own vulnerability. To her. He couldn't afford to be vulnerable. He had to be the strong one—he had to be gentle yet relentless, subtle yet forceful. And this was where the true test of his resolve came into play.

Now that he had her here, now that he'd gotten her past the threshold of her terror he had to help her face it. And she had to face it directly, without a veil of seduction obscuring it. He would ease the transition as much as he could, make the experience positive and loving, but eventually she had to look around, see and accept where she was. Unless she became intimately acquainted with it, she'd never become comfortable with it. She'd never get past it.

He wheeled the dentist's chair over to her and sat down.

"What are you doing?" she asked, her voice already laced with tension. She'd gone pale, and there was a thin sheen of sweat on her body.

He raked his eyes over her, admiring. "You're beautiful, you know. Have I told you that lately?"

“Answer the question, dammit!” She squirmed in the chair, struggling against her bindings and her panic.

He stroked her cheek with the backs of his knuckles. “I’ll tell you, but first you have to calm down.”

“I can’t,” she replied, panting. “I don’t know how.”

He cupped her jaw and drew her face closer to his. “Look at me, babe. Look past the white coat and the sterile smell, and see me.”

She met his gaze, held it.

And he kept talking. “I’m the same guy you woke up next to this morning.” He stroked her cheek with his thumb. “I’m the same guy who always cooks your eggs too hard and makes the coffee too strong.”

Was it his imagination or did he see a flicker of a smile?

“And I’m the same guy who can’t carry a tune to save his life, but insists on torturing strangers on Karaoke night, anyway.”

There. A smile. A definite smile.

He skimmed his fingers down her throat, trailed along her collarbone. “I’m also a dentist, Dani. But putting on this coat doesn’t make me a monster.” He kissed her cheek. “Does it?”

Her breathing had settled. “No.”

His hand roamed further down her chest, tracing her sternum and brushing over the curve of her naked breast. “And contrary to images perpetuated by certain old movies, nothing in this room is an instrument of torture.” He skimmed his palm across her belly and felt her shiver. “Right? They’re all just...tools. And their purpose is to help you.” He teased the edge of her thong. “Ultimately, to make you feel *better*.”

She nodded, her eyes taking on a far-away, dreamy sheen.

“But, you know what?” He brushed his fingers over the wedge of material between her thighs, and felt his own desire swell.

“What?” she breathed.

“Maybe it would be good if you got a little better acquainted with some of the...equipment.”

She arched her hips, searching for a something that he so wanted to give her, but he had to wait. He had to play this out.

He kept his touch light.

“What do you mean?” she prompted.

“Let’s start with the chair, all right? I want to recline you.”

She nodded her assent. “Should I put my feet up?”

“No. Keep your legs draped over the edges.” He pressed her clit and she made a soft mewling sound. “I need easy access to your pussy.”

Keeping one hand between her thighs, he reached for the control for the chair. She jumped slightly at the noise and movement when it whirred to life, but a little firm massage of her clit eased her over that particular hump.

“There. How’s that?”

“Okay.” Tension was seeping into her again.

He bent close to her ear, breathing in the scent of her perfume. Rose petals and jasmine. “Give yourself over to me now, babe. You’re mine and I want to take care of you, but you have to let me.” His lips brushed the curl of her ear. “You have to trust me.”

* * * * *

Dani floated on the sound of his voice and the touch of his hands. Seeing him don his lab coat and take a professional posture had been startling, frightening. But having his hands on her again and feeling the warmth of his breath on her skin was familiar, as

soothing and comforting as snuggling down with a flannel robe and a mug of hot chocolate.

She opened her eyes to see him gazing down at her, his eyes as commanding and intense as a flash of lightning.

His hand cupped her breast and he brushed a thumb across her nipple. "Do you? Do you trust me?"

Her body responded, nipples tightened. "Of course."

"Good." He withdrew his hand and sat up, putting distance between them and allowing her an unimpeded view of the office. He wasn't touching her, but he was there, and she decided that had to be enough.

"So, what now?" She so wanted her voice to be strong, but she still sounded like a frightened ten-year-old.

"Now, I look at you." He reached for the light above her and flicked it on.

She winced as the bright light flooded her eyes, but the discomfort lasted but a moment. He adjusted the direction of the beam, moving it slowly down her body.

"Mmm," he said, following the light with his eyes. "I do so enjoy looking at you."

She wriggled under his intense scrutiny, as if his gaze had as much power to hold her as the bindings that tied her wrists. She felt the warmth of the light as it paused at her breasts and then traveled down her belly.

"Oh yes." The light now illuminated her thong. "This is what I want to see." He reached for the waistband and instructed her to pull her legs up and prop her feet on the chair.

"I don't know," she protested, "this feels so strange."

His expression hardened. "Do it, Dani. I want you naked—completely naked. Now."

The darkness of his tone sent a fresh surge of dampness to her pussy and she willingly complied. He gently worked the thong down over her thighs and when it had been discarded, told her to resume her previous position.

“You’re wet,” he observed, the light trained on her pussy and illuminating things she could barely imagine. He dipped a finger inside her and worked the moisture over her. “The light makes you glisten,” he said, his voice thick. “But I think I’d like you wetter.”

And then, abruptly, he bent his head and tasted her. She arched her back in surprise. “Luke! What—”

“Hold still.” He braced his hands against her knees and held her firm as he nibbled and tasted and suckled, his mouth rough at first, his tongue aggressive. Abruptly, he released her knees, inserted two fingers inside her and a sudden, intense orgasm ripped through her. She pulsed against his mouth, arched her back, and tried to sit up, testing her bindings to their limits.

At last, spent, she collapsed back onto the chair and only then did he relent. He raised his head and caressed her clit with a feather-light touch. She shuddered with a vicious aftershock. “Good.” He nodded. “Very good.”

He sat up and left her then. She was still reeling as she watched him return to his stool and proceed to fiddle with the assortment of hoses and nozzles.

“Does that mean we’re done?” she asked hopefully.

He picked up a shiny metallic nozzle attached to a long thin hose. “Good God, no. I just wanted to ease some of that sexual tension and get it out of the way.” He hit a button and sprayed something against his palm. “Before we really get started.”

Chapter Five

She blinked. *Really get started?* “Uh...what—” She yelped as a blast of tepid water hit her breast. And then another.

“Luke!” she cried. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“I said I wanted you wet.” His grin was wicked. “And I meant it.”

She opened her mouth to protest, but one look from him silenced her.

Close-mouthed and wide-eyed she watched as he continued his task. He drew circles on her breasts, raked the stream over her nipples, traced her ribs and explored her navel. The stream of water was fine but powerful. It went beyond tickling, to a point that verged on pain, tilted the scales toward madness.

She could feel the water sluicing off her skin, hear it dripping softly onto the floor. The light was still trained on her pussy, but in the ambient light of the room, her entire body gleamed with moisture.

Just when she thought she couldn’t bear it anymore, the jet of water descended still lower. Slowly, it made its way down her belly toward the ultra-sensitive area at the juncture of her thighs.

“Oh God,” she breathed. “Luke, I don’t think—”

“Quiet,” he commanded. “And lie still. I need to concentrate.”

She held her breath and concentrated on the ceiling, on the light, on the whir of the motor, anything to distract her as the stream of water traveled lower. And lower. It touched the triangle of pubic hair and her wrists flexed with the need to do *something*. But she’d given him control, surrendered herself to his will and that meant remaining still. And so she did.

With his free hand he parted the lips of her sex and she whimpered as the water trickled over her clit. The jet teased her. He explored one side of her sex and then the other, tickling and torturing until she couldn't help but shift her hips in search of satisfaction.

"Does that mean you want it?" His voice was low and throaty.

She just groaned.

"Tell me."

"Yes. I want it."

She watched as he turned a knob, and it seemed that the force of the water intensified. For a moment she was worried. But then the jet pulsed against her clit and lights exploded in her brain as a fresh orgasm tore through her, hard and fast, as if it intended to rend her in two.

She writhed and squirmed, fisted her hands and cried out, but he didn't relent. He followed her movements with the stream of water, driving her mad as the contractions pulsed through her, died down, and then returned with resounding force.

She was still enduring little aftershocks when at last he withdrew the nozzle and replaced it in its holder. His expression was deceptively cool, only the rapid flutter at the base of his throat giving away his own level of excitement. "So. I guess that was a good idea."

"Oh God."

"Are you feeling better about..." he swept his arm in an all-inclusive arc, "...this?"

"Yes. God, yes." She honestly had to work at remembering why they were there, and why she'd been afraid. "So, does that mean we're done?"

"Hmm." He seemed to consider that. "I don't know. That seemed a bit too easy."

She arched her eyebrows. "You call that easy?"

He ignored her. "I think we still have some ground to cover."

She forced herself to relax and dropped her head back on the cushioned rest. "I've been stripped and tied, teased and showered and I've had two orgasms." Had it really only been two? Or maybe three? However many it had been it felt more like twenty. "What *ground* could we possibly have missed?"

"I need to...dry you." She watched as he reached for yet another unimaginable contraption.

She swallowed. "Dry me?"

"Mm hmm." He flipped a switch and she heard another small motor whir to life. Before she could protest he'd pressed the new nozzle against her breast and a fresh set of sensations rippled over her.

The gentle suction tugged at her skin and tickled her senses as he played it over her nipple. The sucking action was enticing, provocative, but when it was unexpectedly followed by a blast of cool air, she yelped in surprise.

"What was —"

"Air jet," he offered, his gaze intense and focused. "Quiet. This is tricky without my assistant." He bent back to his task, and was now tickling her ribs with his tiny instruments of torture. Suction, followed by a small stream of cool air that played over her damp skin and made her alternately swoon and shiver.

He touched it to her navel, the hollow above her hip, and then shifted it to her inner thigh. She writhed and squirmed, moaning one moment, giggling the next. She never knew where he would touch her next, the uncertainty of it as intoxicating as a fine Merlot.

She lifted her head to watch him and studied the two instruments — the tiny suction hose with the bent tip, and the little plastic air jet. Gradually the memories came back to her, but to her surprise they didn't frighten or upset. They intrigued. She remembered that little gadget now, but she certainly didn't remember it like *this*.

The sensations rioting through her body must have affected her mind, because she felt no fear, only pleasure. Even giddiness. As he continued his torture she tore her gaze

away and studied her surroundings in detail. The light, the sterile walls, the tray of instruments, the light board where x-rays were displayed, the mask used for administration of laughing gas. These were things that once had the power to infuse her with terror.

How was it they'd lost their power over her?

She shifted her gaze to Luke, and found him gazing at her, the suction hose poised over her abdomen. At that moment she realized exactly what he'd done for her, and she loved him all the more for it. She also knew where he and his little accomplices were headed next.

"What is it?" he asked, his eyes questioning, the pump still sucking.

She lay her head back and snuggled herself in more comfortably. She smiled. "It's gone."

He blinked. "What's gone?"

"It. The panic, the terror. I'm not afraid anymore."

He narrowed his eyes to suspicious slits. "You're just trying to distract me. You don't want me touching you...intimately with this thing." He held up the instrument and touched it playfully to her nose.

She shrugged, calm, cool, collected. "No. That's not it at all." She tilted her head. "In fact I think I'd kind of...enjoy it, but..." She let her voice trail off into nothing.

He leaned in closer, obviously intrigued. "But what?"

She drew her tongue across her upper lip. "But there's something else I'd like to do. Something I think I'd enjoy more."

Chapter Six

Luke sat in the chair, his body damp with nervous sweat, but his wrists secured firmly to the armrests. He was naked, and he was hers.

Dani grabbed his lab coat from the hook and slipped it on. The crisp cotton felt delicious and cool against her naked skin.

“Christ,” moaned Luke when she turned to face him. “I’ll never look at lab coats the same way again.”

She waggled her eyebrows. “And I’ll never look at a dentist’s chair the same.”

She stepped closer and stood beside the chair. She raked her eyes over him, studying every ripple and bulge, relishing the little surge of excitement that came with knowing he was, for the moment, at her mercy. She drew a fingernail down his sternum, through the fine spattering of dark, curly hair. She reached his solar plexus and noted that his cock stirred at her touch.

He swallowed. “So, you’re really okay? You’ve got no urge to bolt for the door?”

“Mmm.” She skimmed her palm over his bottom rib, explored the ridges of his belly.

“That’s great,” he said, his voice laced with a tension she couldn’t quite identify. She dipped her finger into his navel and then trailed it lower, following the fine line of hair that directed her downward.

There was another audible swallow. “I mean...that’s really, really great. I think we should—”

She scraped a nail down the length of him, interrupting his rant. “Why, Lucas Shantry. If I didn’t know better, I’d say you were nervous.”

“Nervous?” His chuckle was a lie. A sweet, endearing lie, no doubt, but a lie nonetheless. “Of course not.”

She curled up one side of her mouth. “Mr. Control, Mr. This-is-my-office-and-I’m-used-to-having-my-way is suddenly *out* of control. You’re at my mercy, have no idea what I plan to do, and that scares the hell out of you.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“Mmm.” She turned her attention to the array of instruments and picked up a particularly menacing one. “What’s this one?”

“Good God, that’s the drill.”

She smiled, arched her eyebrows, gave him a considering look and was pleased to see the fleeting moment of panic. She laughed and put it back in its place. She leaned in very close, close enough to smell the whisper of cologne that still hung about him, close enough to feel the energy that burned between them.

She nipped at his ear lobe and said, “Do you have any idea how much I love you for what you did for me tonight?” She didn’t give him a chance to answer. “I love you far too much to hurt you, or even make you feel uncomfortable. You went to a lot of trouble for me, took some risks, and put up with a lot of crap. This is my way of thanking you, Luke. It’s my way of saying, you did all the work, and now it’s my turn. So just lay back, relax, and enjoy.”

She turned around to view the instruments again and was surprised to hear him whisper. “I didn’t do it just for you, you know.”

She tossed him a glance over her shoulder. “What do you mean?”

“I...” He looked away. “I did it for me, too. I needed to...make things right.”

She picked up the water squirter. “Things? What things?”

He shrugged. “What that other dentist did, that...that was horrible. Inexcusable. And it reflects badly on all of us. I needed to fix that.”

“Well, I definitely think you accomplished that.”

He nodded, but his expression tugged at her suspicions. She had the distinct feeling that there was more to it, but knew better than to press him. If there was more he'd tell her in his own time.

She turned her attention back to the little nozzle she held in her palm, considered the length of hose, and the position of her *patient*. She picked up the control for the chair and hit a button, pleased to hear the whir of the motor and watch as the chair reclined. She stopped it just a few notches before he was completely horizontal, his head raised ever so slightly. "Ready?"

"For what?"

She climbed onto the chair, turned to face his straining cock and swung one leg over his chest to straddle him. She leaned forward and pushed the button, sending a tiny stream of water pulsing against his balls, and presenting him with a view of her ass, albeit a less than ideal one, as much of her backside was covered by the tails of the lab coat.

"Christ," he groaned, his hips writhing beneath her. She drew tiny circles with the water on his testicles, and then drew a slow line up the length of his cock. He glistened with moisture, but she was pleased to see that not all the dampness was due to water. A tiny bit of cum beaded at the tip and when she bent down to lick it away, she heard a softly whispered, "Finally," and then was shocked to feel his tongue lap at her pussy.

"Hey!" she protested, laughing. "How did you—" She turned around to find that he'd somehow gotten beneath the hem of the coat, his face partly covered by material as he feasted on her.

"You're..." His tongue laved her clit. "...supposed..." He dipped deeply inside her. "...to let me..." He trailed a line toward her anus. "...do the work."

Her only response was a low moan of pleasure, but she wasn't sure if it was his or her own. As much as she was enjoying his attentions, this was not part of the plan. However, rather than just shift herself out of reach, she decided on a new plan of attack.

She aimed the stream of water carefully at the sensitive area below his balls and turned up the pump, inching the jet closer and closer to his anus. She pressed his cheeks apart and when she touched the sensitive skin with the thin stream of water, she felt the muscles of his abdomen contract. His head fell back, and he uttered a soft curse.

“That’s better,” she crooned, now playing the water over the tip of his cock. “Just leave it all to—” She blinked, turned her head and stared at the object that had caught her eye. “What the hell is that? Why do you have hair mousse in here?”

“Huh?” His voice was thick and dull. “What are you talking about?”

She reached for the canister that sat on a low shelf beside the chair, but even as she picked it up she realized her mistake. She examined the can more closely. “It’s foam for fluoride treatments.”

“Yeah.”

“And this is bubble gum flavor.” She smiled, considering. “I do like a bit of bubble gum.”

“Dani?” Again a touch of alarm in his voice—alarm laced with humor. “What are you thinking?”

She shook the can and proceeded to coat his cock with light pink foam.

“Hey!” He chuckled. “If you’re planning what I think you’re planning, I think I should tell you—”

“Can you be quiet and let me work?”

He ignored her. “You’re not supposed to swallow that stuff. It’s not good for you.”

“Is it toxic?”

“Of course not. We put it in kids’ mouths for chrissake.”

“That’s what I thought.” She stopped only when he was completely coated in foam. She smiled, suddenly wishing for a camera. “Huh. Who says pink doesn’t look good on men.” She tossed him a playful look over her shoulder. “It’s definitely *your* color!”

And then, over his protests, she leaned over and lapped at the foam that covered him. “Mmm.” It had an odd flavor, not exactly like bubble gum, but close enough, and not unpleasant. After all, as any restaurateur will tell you, presentation is everything.

“Dani,” he groaned when she took him in her mouth to suck off the last of the sweet foam. She took him deep, sucked him hard and savored the taste of him.

“Dani, please.”

She didn’t have to ask. She knew what he wanted, and this time she wanted exactly the same thing. She nipped at him lightly with her teeth and then sat up. She turned around, straddling him so that she faced him and then slowly, sweetly, sheathed herself on him.

His cock filled her body, and the look in his eyes filled her soul. She saw adoration there, and love. And from him she gleaned strength. Perhaps that was what had really cured her. Knowing that he was there for her, with her no matter what, helping her take her stand against any and all demons – that was what had taken root in her and grown. In that dentist’s office so many years ago, she had felt infinitely alone, infinitely helpless. She no longer felt that way. And she had Luke to thank for that.

She leaned forward so that the lapels of the lab coat hung open affording him an unhindered view of her breasts as she rode him.

He arched his back and sought to penetrate still deeper. “Dani, I want to touch you.”

She acknowledged that she wanted that, too. She reached down and in one quick motion ripped away the Velcro that bound him. To her surprise, he didn’t reach for her breasts. Instead his hands came up to touch her cheeks. He caressed them, and then cupped them and drew her down for a long, lingering kiss. She ceased the motions of her hips, and allowed herself to sink into that kiss. She lost herself in the caress of his tongue, in the softness of his lips, and the firm feel of his fingers entwined in her hair.

At last he broke away, looking up at her with eyes that said more than words.

Her heart filled and she resumed a slow, provocative movement of her hips.

She braced her hands on his chest and gradually increased the tempo, riding him hard and watching as his eyes closed in apparent bliss. His breathing accelerated, and she felt her own excitement grow. He bracketed her hips in his strong hands and helped her find a rhythm that pleased him—that pleased them both. The pressure built and as she felt herself draw closer to the brink of orgasm, suddenly he released her hips and reached down to touch her sex.

He pressed her clit with his thumb and the world shattered. She ground herself against him, pulsing around him and struggling to fill lungs that suddenly felt too small. Waves of pleasure rippled over her, through her center and out to her fingertips. He tensed beneath her, let out a fierce groan and pumped himself into her.

When, at last, the moment passed and their energies were spent, she collapsed, draping herself over him and soaking up the warmth of his chest. His heart pounded fiercely against her own, and she breathed in the scent of his sweat and their sex.

He slipped a hand beneath the lab coat and stroked it gently down her back. “So, what now, Dani? What do we do next?”

“We get dressed, and clean up in here. And then you take me home.” She lifted her head just far enough to look into his eyes. “And tomorrow you make an appointment for me with someone that you know and respect, and we see if this thing worked like it was supposed to work.”

Chapter Seven

Luke stood in the doorway and watched as Dani settled into the dentist's chair. "You okay, babe?" he asked. "Are you really okay?"

She smiled, looking more relaxed than he felt. "Yeah, I'm fine. Really. Fine."

Dr. Dennis Montgomery wheeled his chair up next to his patient, and motioned for his assistant to prepare the mask for laughing gas. They'd agreed that despite the progress she'd made, the needle and the drill were still hurdles that might be insurmountable without a little help. She'd agreed to try the nitrous oxide, in the hopes that the little bit of sedation would ease any remaining fear and discomfort.

Dennis grinned at Luke. "You're worse than a nervous parent, Luke. The last time you looked this anxious was the night before our finals, when you realized you'd probably drunk one too many beers and you had to get up in three hours."

Dani giggled. "Luke? My Mr. Responsible went on a binge the night before his finals?"

"Oh yeah," said Dennis. "And that's not the worst of it. I could tell you stories..."

"Hey," argued Luke. "No humiliating me in front of my girlfriend, okay? I do have my limits."

"Then how about we do it behind your back?" asked Dani. "Why don't you go?"

He arched his eyebrows. "Really? You're really okay without me?"

Slowly she nodded. "Yeah. I'm really okay. Actually, I think I *need* to do this alone." She smiled. "But even if you're not here," she pointed to the floor, "you're still in here." She pointed to her heart.

He tossed a bashful look at Dennis who was looking on appreciatively. "Sorry about the mushy stuff, Dennis. Women. You know."

"That's okay. I've got one at home, too. Now why don't you do what the lady says and take off."

He stepped into the room and crossed to Dani. "Okay. There is something I kinda wanted to do today. If you're sure."

"I'm sure."

He dropped a quick kiss on her forehead, and whispered softly, "I'm proud of you."

"Thanks." She grinned. "So am I."

Luke walked to the door, and behind him he heard Dennis say, "Maybe we should start with a little review of the instruments. This device is used to rinse your mouth. It shoots out a fine stream of water that..."

The last thing Luke heard as he left the office was the sound of Dani's laughter.

* * * * *

Twenty minutes later Luke stood in another doorway, in another institution, in another part of town. The room smelled sterile, of disinfectant and illness, but sunlight streamed in through the wide bright windows, and a bouquet of daisies sat on the bedside table. The figure on the bed was still, eyes wide but unseeing. Awake, but unaware. Dead, yet still somehow alive. Luke stepped inside and dragged a chair to the bedside.

He sat down and gazed on the wizened face of the old man. It had been years since he'd been here, but his father hadn't changed a bit. The wrinkles had grown a little deeper perhaps, the eyes more sunken, but beyond that the face hadn't changed.

It was the same face that Luke remembered tucking him in at night when he was five.

It was the same face that he remembered grinning when he first learned to ride a two-wheeler.

It was the same face that he remembered contorted in rage when Luke had discovered his father's secret stash of drugs, the assortment so large and varied that any pharmacist would have been hard-pressed to identify them all.

And it was the same face of the man that Luke had found one night, alone and catatonic in the basement. His father had finally taken one pill too many and had fried his brain beyond repair. His mother had published a false obituary in the hopes of covering up the scandal, and allowing his father to live out the remainder of his days in peace. If, in fact, one could call such an existence peaceful.

His mother had remarried a few years later and both she and Luke had taken the new man's name.

In the first few years after his father's overdose there had been rumors of scandal, hints of inappropriate conduct at his father's office, and Luke had always felt a strange responsibility for his father's behavior. He always suspected that sense of responsibility had played a large part in his decision to go into dentistry, but he had chosen not to examine that decision too closely. It was as if there was something he needed to do—something he needed to fix, and the only way to accomplish that was to follow in his father's footsteps, to become a dentist and do it well. Do it *right*.

Luke and his mother had never known the full extent of his father's crimes, the full range of what needed fixing. Not until a couple of weeks ago.

"I did it, Dad," he said at last, choosing not to touch his father. He'd come a long way, but there were still barriers he couldn't cross. "I fixed something that you broke." He stood to go and knew that this was the closest he could ever come to forgiveness. "I just wish I could have fixed everything."

He walked out and didn't look back.

About the author:

Nikki lives in a small town in Ontario, Canada. In the midst of the chaos that comes with raising three small boys, working part-time as a lab tech in a hospital blood bank, and caring for her ever-adoring husband, she dreams up her stories. Nikki's work is an eclectic combination of romance, mystery, suspense and humor with characters that have plenty of room to grow. To learn more about her and her work visit her at www.nikkisoarde.com.

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