



ADVANCE REVIEW COPY



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eBook ISBN 1-59426-523-2

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Chapter 1

"So, what are *your* exciting plans for the long weekend?"

David Argeld heard Ox Edmundson's hopeful question as he came out of his office. He paused. *Bad idea, Ox, old boy. You'll put her on the defensive. If you're going to make your move, you want to come off smoother than that.*

Then he saw whose back was to Ox at the fax machine and frowned. *I take that back. If you're going to make your move on Jeannie Lin, you need the perseverance of a bloodhound, the meekness of a mouse, and the conservatism of a Yale B-schooler. A seven-foot intern that calls everyone, women included, "dude," hasn't a chance in hell.*

"Not much," Jeannie's quiet voice responded.

"Ever been to a freestyle monster truck rally?"

A quick shake of her head, a grab for a small pile of paper, and Jeannie was slipping past Ox and sidling into her office.

David nodded at Ox. He glanced through the cracked doorway of Jeannie's office, spotting her long-fingered hand moving deftly over the mouse, her gaze fixed to the monitor screen.

The unfortunate Ox sighed, waved to David, hitched his laptop case over his shoulder, and left.

Oh, buddy, I feel for you, I really do.

This wasn't the first time he'd watched a victim of unrequited J-lust hang his head in defeat. Nearly every single guy at the Minneapolis Legal Advocacy Group had given her

their best moves, and all had come away dateless. About eight months ago, shortly after Jeannie had been hired into the small public interest organization, he himself had succumbed and asked her out. To dinner at Goodfellow's, no less. Goodfellow's was really too upscale for a first date, especially on a civil lawyer's salary, but Jeannie was worth it. Despite her reputation, David was sure he'd hooked the lure that would get her.

He hadn't even gotten a direct answer. Not so much as an acknowledgement. Instead, she'd smiled strangely, ducked her head, swerved around him, and avoided him ever since. That's what he assumed, anyway, since after that he only caught sight of her at meetings or on her way somewhere.

"I can't believe she dissed you," John Bakers, in for his monthly pro-bono, gibed after word reached him of David's rejection, witnessed by the gossip secretary. "Here you are, Asian too, not to mention the suavest stud in these parts."

"Me, suave?" David drawled with faint sarcasm. He let the "stud," and the "Asian too" go unchallenged, though both irritated him. He supposed John couldn't help being a blue-blood Pilgrim descendent raised in a sheltered New England family—unlike David, whose mother was South Korean and whose Scottish father had lived in England and Canada before coming to the States. It would serve no purpose to try to explain that David's bloodline would mean little to a second-generation Taiwanese woman. John saw people in black, white, yellow, and little green aliens.

"Oh, yeah," John said. "You're the slickest talker this side of the bar, and I'm not talking about your professional life. Everyone knows, pal."

"Knows what?" He hadn't been able to disguise his annoyance then, but John just laughed and slapped him on the back.

"That you're a genius with women. Just ask Quadruple Orgasm Linda."

David had restrained himself—again. It was true he'd been with the executive from a neighboring office, and in the course of their time together she'd experienced a quadruple orgasm, several of them, actually. But he didn't blab about women, even women who knew the score—or in Linda's case, broadcast it. It was she who'd told tales of their Olympic-class romps, perhaps hoping to turn on future bed partners. In doing so, she'd managed to turn *him* off. The sex was good, but discretion and privacy were better.

He also hadn't responded to John's crudeness because Jeannie Lin happened to be passing at that exact moment.

Even now, David remembered her reddened face, the tight, awkward steps she took as she walked past him. She'd obviously heard the end of their conversation—and maybe all of it. And just as obviously, his chances of ever getting her to go out with him plunged instantly to zero.

Now he was lucky if she even looked straight at him. Of course, he couldn't be certain whether it was personal or not. David had observed her closely these past few months. He suspected that the quietness others breezily attributed to a kind of "Oriental mystique" was actually shyness.

And not just a little. Her shyness bordered on the pathological. Except when dealing with clients and legal matters, Jeannie never looked anybody in the eye. If she ever tried for one of the small private firms, where the motto was "schmooze or lose," she'd lose. He wondered that she hadn't gone into some solitary career, like after-hours security. She even seemed to find the occasional group lunches awkward, and sat as far from the others as she could.

Her shyness and her unrealistic standards about men meant

that he was pretty much SOL.

And that, he told himself, was for the best. Because it was obvious Jeannie wasn't a casual lay. The last thing he needed, for another decade at least, was a serious relationship. He needed lovers who understood that he would eventually drift. Not just between partners, but cities as well. During his adult lifetime, David had lived in twelve cities, nine in the States, plus Rotterdam, Toronto and Vancouver. This was no accident; he planned on living in a good twelve more.

His roaming tendencies weren't something he hid. His colleagues and local friends knew he'd gotten his JD late in life; they also knew that, at thirty-nine, he had no intention of staying where he was longer than a couple of years. After that, he might study Russian in St. Petersburg, or spend some time on the Reef with friends, or, hell, he'd never been to Tokyo. He might even follow in his parents' footsteps and take up alternative healing therapies on the European circuit.

Eventually, it might be nice to have children. But as for settling down, he was nowhere close. Perhaps he never would be.

He poured himself a cup of coffee, then went to inform the secretary, who was bundling up in her parka, that he'd be staying late again. "At least till ten, so I'll lock up." The secretary nodded, used to David's irregular hours. This weekend wasn't much different from the rest, just because it was the MLK holiday. He tried to always take a long weekend for play, and worked harder the rest of the time to make up for it.

Back in his office, he shut the door and sat down to check his e-mail. Three new messages had come in the last hour, besides the usual allotment of spam: one from a new client, one purchase receipt for a DVD he'd ordered online, and the third from BadiniSweet.

"Well, hello, sweetheart."

David deleted the junk and the retailer's e-mail, impatiently read and saved the client's, then pulled his chair in, sat back, and opened BadiniSweet's.

Several years ago, David had joined a private alumni listserv and "met" BadiniSweet, a young woman who'd graduated seven years after him from one of his West Coast almae matres. She'd authored one short "lurker" e-mail he'd found intriguing. He'd e-mailed her privately and they'd hit it off, becoming fast e-pals.

He'd never met her, never learned her real name, never even seen a photograph. All this he found wholly frustrating. Furthermore, sometimes months went by between her e-mails. But he was always glad to get them in the end, and saved them all in a folder he called *BSweet*.

He smiled slowly, scanning the message. It looked like she was in one of her "wild moods," which were a new thing. She had them only with him, she assured him coyly. He didn't know if he believed her, but she lived fourteen hundred miles away in Issaquah, Washington, and he'd never had a chance to check out how authentic she was. Hell, she could be a guy, for all he knew.

Though he seriously doubted it. Her e-mails, well, they just sounded feminine. And transparent. She was very open, at least with her emotions. Concerning details about her life, she was less forthcoming, but after all this time, David no longer wasted time being suspicious. He figured it would have been easy for her to lie. Instead, she brushed over parts of her life she didn't care to focus on. What she did focus on was always interesting enough for him decide against demanding full disclosure. He didn't want to turn her off.

The subject of this message was "Longings." All *right*. Not that any of her messages were boring, but lately her e-mails had

become particularly, ah, *savory*. She'd been going through a hard time, suffering for lust over some unobtainable guy. In her messages, she'd begun to reveal more and more of her feelings. He felt slightly guilty to be relishing the results of her unhappiness. But there it was. No matter that they were just pals, she was a woman revealing her sexual fantasies. He only wished he had her way with words, but he was a speaker, not a writer.

Gratefully, he turned his attention from work, Jeannie Lin, and all stress, to BadiniSweet.

DavidA,

I can't believe it's been this long. I meant to get back to you weeks ago. Why am I such a lame correspondent, you ask? (No, I know you wouldn't, you're always nice about that.) I really don't know what it is. Maybe I get caught up in stuff—not that it's so critical. I just keep going and doing and pushing. Same thing, day after day. I've got to break away from that! Help me, DavidA!

Here's my problem today. I know you've guessed what it is: Him. I can't stop thinking about him. Do you mind? You told me last time you didn't, that I could talk about him anytime. I wasn't sure you meant it until you said it "kind of turns you on." You were joking I guess, but anyway it made me feel better. And for the record, I don't mind turning you on. Just as long as you stay frustrated. Then we can be frustrated together. That's what friends are for, right? :-)

So I'm not going to see him for three days. Damn damn damn the holiday! I know, I make no sense. It's not like anything's likely to happen when I do see him. He never looks at me. I'm in a completely different

league. I'm not a troll, exactly, but...socially he's James Bond, and I'm the nerd girl in Real Genius.

Speaking of genius...have I mentioned how intelligent he is? No, I know I haven't—I've been too focused on other things. But he takes in things. I've been surprised by that. He's got this very witty and subtle sense of humor—not everyone gets it. It's not malicious either—no jokes at other people's expense. You can tell his mind is always busy, that he could be viciously clever if he wanted. But I guess he doesn't want to. See, I never met a man before that I found a)likeable, b)admirable and c)fascinating. In person, anyway <hint>.

And then there's the fact that he's incredibly, unbelievably gorgeous. I'm not the only one who thinks so, but most people talk about his face. His face is great. Only...this sounds so silly, but to me, his best feature is his feet. He's slim, but he has really long feet, and I can just imagine his long toes rubbing against me. And his chest, oh God. It's not bulky and though I've never seen him with his shirt off I just know it's muscular and not clumped with hair. It's silky smooth and I'll bet anything his nipples are sensitive, maybe as sensitive as mine.

Oh, damn, there they go. In case you're wondering, I have tiny nipples, tiny breasts for that matter (ugh). They're so sensitive I have to wear a bra, even to bed sometimes. I know, I know, that's TMI, not something you needed to know! But I sure wish he were with me right now. He could pinch them, maybe that would help. Ow! It really hurts!

OK, fantasy time. I keep telling myself this is

good for me. Or at least, it keeps my fingers on my keyboard. No, I'm not a prude, DavidA. It's just that I'm at work.

Fantasy...oh, last night I had this dream, this amazing dream. I couldn't remember most of it when I woke up, but I kept thinking about him while I lay there in bed. I so did not want to get up. I thought about him the whole time I mashed strawberries (don't ask) and this is very embarrassing but my bacon burned, though that's partly because I haven't yet adjusted to the gas stove. Which set the tone for the day. He's on my mind no matter what I'm doing. Work is slow water torture, the day goes on and on and these images keep ballooning out of my head.

He seems on the outside like a very conservative guy—very sleek, dark and trim—everything but the glasses, you know? But I know he's a player. So I have these images of what he'd be willing to do.

First, taking control. I mean total control. We're talking I wouldn't have to tell him what I want or when or how much or how hard. He knows. He does it all. Including taking off our clothes. Which means he does not demand that I strip off for him like some geisha girl. That sort of performance makes me absolutely cringe (is it really that erotic???)

He orders me to stand still and starts unbuttoning my blouse for me. It has forty buttons. (I bought it because it looks nice, but I didn't think about the buttons. And it's not like it's a wide neckline and I can do it like a pullover. It's very fitted.) I shiver because I'm self-conscious about how small I am. He looks serious all the time—that's part of his hottie appeal—

but his eyes are ironic and appreciative. He doesn't notice my insecurity or if he does, he assumes it's coyness. He parts the silk like a curtain and looks down at me. I'm wearing one of my chocolate colored satin bras but he can still see my nipples have gotten hard. He reaches up tentatively, like he's going to be super-gentle, and then, quite firmly, he pinches them. I start to shake. My knees kind of crumple. His fingers tighten and he reminds me to stand up straight. This hurts, but it's a good hurt, and I love being told what to do.

OK—here's the deal, DavidA. People are always telling me what to do and I'm always doing what I'm supposed to. You'd think I'd hate it. One day I probably will. I mean, Dad's about the most autocratic man you'll ever meet (can you believe he's a Buddhist?) and he makes Mom's life hell. If you don't flip out under that kind of pressure, there's something wrong, right? But I guess I'm just used to it. Maybe I'll rebel and turn into this aggressive dominatrix one day but for now, I just want someone to tell me what to do who cares about what I want. Makes no sense, but there you have it.

He raises the band over my breasts. We're in an office, the door has a frosted window. I'm afraid someone will knock. Or the phone will ring. He doesn't care. He closes his eyes and gets this hungry look on his face as he continues to rub my nipples between his fingers. I once had a lover who rubbed my nipples for, like, thirty seconds. Do you like that? he asked. I love it, I said. And he got all smug and then stopped. He totally didn't get it. This guy gets it.

He caresses me and it's so good. He opens his eyes—they're watchful—then he lowers his head and I tense, thinking he's going to suckle (which doesn't do anything for me) but it's just his tongue, just the tip, tasting, flicking, prodding. He walks backward and I follow, and then he's sitting on the edge of the desk—his desk, it's his office—and I'm facing him on his lap, and he's toying with my nipples like they're these precious jewels and he has to learn every facet. I'm in agony by now. I mean, I'm so wet, I can hear the slickness forming. I want his finger, I want his cock, I want everything.

Suddenly I feel a sharp pinching—I look down. It's a nipple clamp. No, wait, he's not that jaded that he'd keep sex toys at work, is he? He's creative though. A paper clip. Yeah, just molded enough to stay on and pinch, so, so slightly. One on each nipple. Oooh..

"How does that feel?" he asks me softly.

"Please," I say. I'm not sure what I'm begging for. But he knows. He takes them off and kisses me on the nipples again, and then he puts them on again. This goes on for a long time. We laugh and it's very sexy. The phone rings and goes to voice mail. I'm barely aware. He begins to feel the urgency; his chest is rising and falling like mad and I can smell him. I need to touch him. But when I put my hand on his crotch, he murmurs, "Nuh-uh. Be still." And then he lifts the hem of my skirt, which is already bunched at my thighs, and I can suddenly smell myself. And I feel his finger, one finger, rubbing there, directly on my clit, in circles. I'm moments away from bursting.

He stops. He tells me to stand by the window with

my feet spread apart and holding my blouse open. I do. I don't know how I don't totter and fall. I am so embarrassed but thrilled about the orders. He looks at me like my skinny body is the most attractive thing he's ever seen. He begins to undress, not hurrying. Not teasing me, though—he's just not aware of himself. It's like he's totally focused on me, my eyes, my breasts, my sex. And I'm focused on him. His pants slide down, and he stands, and...he looks beautiful. I've seen only two men naked, DavidA, but him...he's not extremely tall, but he's perfectly proportioned. I was right about his chest. Sleek and brown. Only it's wetter than I imagined. He's sweating. His cock is long and smooth and twitching. I can actually see it get bigger each step he takes toward me. His balls are beautiful. I'm cold and hot at the same time, standing there like this.

He reaches out one hand and puts it between my legs. While we stare at each other, he fondles me. It's not so much exploring—God, I wish he would!—as dabbling around to observe my reactions. He enjoys that. I feel so helpless, standing there like this.

"Touch your nipples now," he tells me, and, making a frustrated noise, I do, clamping them hard with my fingers. It's a relief for a little while, but I frantically need to come.

"You're so beautiful," he tells me (well, he thinks so, right?) "Get down on your knees and kiss me."

This command should sound arrogant, and I should want to slap him, but actually, I almost explode with delight. I have fantasies of tonguing him almost daily. I've never made a man wild, never had one want me to the degree that I want him. The idea of having

that kind of importance to a man is such a turn-on. I know you don't believe me when I say stuff like this, DavidA, but I'm really not as outgoing as I seem in my e-mails. I'm—gasp—overlooked. He doesn't overlook me—well, in reality, he does, but in fantasy, he needs me. Needs my mouth.

I sink to the floor. He has a delicious smell, exotic, like nothing I've ever smelled before. I touch my tongue to his cock. He makes a contented sound and cradles my head with his palms, spreading his legs slightly to brace himself. I know many women have done this for him before; I have a lot to *live up to*.

David took a shuddering breath. What was that? The phone. He stared at it blankly until it stopped ringing. Then he expelled a harsh breath, keeping his gaze adamantly away from the computer screen.

"Well, this was a bright idea." His wry, muttering observation followed a downward glance. His left palm was pressing against his swollen cock. He hadn't been aware of it.

Now he became aware of a lot of things. The extreme discomfort of his situation. The heat of the office. The coldness of his untouched coffee. The almost dead silence outside. The time.

Unbelievable. Had only a few minutes passed? It felt like hours.

A vision of BadiniSweet came to his head. He'd never seen her, but over the years he'd pieced together a picture of her from little hints she'd dropped here and there. She was a brunette, with long hair in a braid. Slender, short. *Small breasts. Oh, God, yes.*

Determinedly he banished thoughts of sweet little breasts. He knew she wore glasses occasionally, contact lenses other

times. She never talked about her taste in fashion, but he pictured her in vivid colors and swirling feminine clothes that marked her as an exotic personality. He was sure, too, that her smile was wide and ready.

Which meant her lips were lush. Lips that were eager to go down on a man. *The man she loved, idiot.* Yeah, but she was telling it to *him*.

Why? She had to know it was torture. Okay, he admitted, he'd invited it. He liked it.

He could so easily see himself in the role she described. Just his luck, her wannabe-sweetheart resembled him almost to a T. Except for the part about his sex. His cock and balls weren't beautiful—they were big and blunt and often surprised women, who seemed to expect more slimness, more elegance. BadiniSweet's mouth would have to be very wide indeed to take him all in.

And why the hell was it even occurring to him? He felt guilty, like he was spying on her. Sure, she was telling him all this willingly, but about another guy. If she had any idea he imagined her and him together, she'd be furious. Or hurt.

Not that he normally did. There were simply times he couldn't help it. One particular e-mail she'd written last summer had described how she felt when she was being massaged all over. By *him*, of course. The man she wanted. Pretending. But it had been so real, David had felt every stroke in his palms.

Only the woman beneath his hands receiving the benefits of his deep therapeutic kneading was not always the faceless BadiniSweet. Sometimes it was a certain shy, black-haired coworker...

Don't think of Jeannie, he ordered himself. That's all he needed, to spend his Friday night fantasizing futilely about the two unobtainable women in his life. He should send a

commiserating e-mail to BadiniSweet. Tell her about *his* fantasies.

The random thought made him smile. Maybe he would.

But first he had to find out how BadiniSweet was doing on her knees.

Chapter 2

I'm not sure what to do, so he gives me graphic instructions. I do exactly what he tells me. I use my tongue a lot, keep him very wet. He stays hard, his flesh like the skin of an unripe peach. Yum. I hear his groans, he's really enjoying it. I think about how wonderful it is to give him such pleasure. I feel my own sex react, but I try not to concentrate on my erotic hurting. I want all my efforts to go to him.

It comes time for him to ejaculate. I'm not sure if he'll want to do it in my mouth. But he does. He thrusts hard and it hurts a little. I don't mind. He apologizes afterward. I can see he's worried he hurt me.

(Can you tell, DavidA, that I'm not exactly sure what it all entails? I know there's mouth action, but I'm not sure of the mechanics of it—won't I look like a bird? And the swallowing, how does that work? I've heard you can taste a man's semen, but all a person's taste glands are on one's tongue. The penis is a long organ. If it's way back there in the throat, doesn't the semen miss the tongue altogether? Or does it pool up and dribble out? Maybe if there's a lot of it. You tell me. You know these things.)

So anyway I tell him it's okay, that all my pain is concentrated in my sex—and would he please make it go away, if he would be so kind? He's real relaxed

now, and sits down on his chair—he has a large, cushy swivel chair—and has me stand in front of him. My sex is very available to him. He plays in it a while with his fingers, thumbs, lips and tongue. Oh, did I mention he had me lower my panties? Just down to my knees—and I'm holding my skirt up for him. I feel so sinful. He tells me how flushed I look, like a kid. He takes my braid then and begins to brush the ends of it over my nipples. His eyes are deep black, approving. Suddenly, as his fingertip passes lightly over my clit, I come. I scream. I can't bear it. Inside, I'm clenching, clenching on nothing. It feels so good, like thousands of pleasuring mouths are kissing me from my tailbone to the top of my spine. I wish he were inside me.

He kisses me afterwards, deep mouth kisses that hold back nothing. He tells me I'm the most beautiful, sexiest woman he's ever been with. He tells me next time he's got to be inside me—and he'll stay inside me for hours. Without a condom. (He's clean. We're both clean. And did I mention he desperately wants my baby?)

I know, I know, DavidA. I'm crazy. Nuts! I'm sure these fantasies qualify me for a freak house. Oh, God, it hurts. I'm so wet now—for real—that I've got to get up and do something. I think I have a fax coming in. OK, more later. MUCH later.

BadiniSweet

The e-mail concluded with BadiniSweet's usual quote from Duran Duran's song, "Hungry Like the Wolf." There were different lyrics for different e-mails, but for the first time, David noticed how sensual they were.

How sensual she was.

A fax coming in. Fax made him think of Jeannie. How she'd looked in her trim pencil skirt as she evaded Ox's crowding presence. How her hair, bound in a butterfly clip to her head, looked sleek and black and all too controlled.

How he'd like to stand her in front of him and play with her sex. It would be so pretty. Smell so fragrant. She wouldn't be able to look him in the eye at first, but then...

He groaned. Now *he* hurt. Bad. And his hand was gripping the fastening of his fly. Whoa! This was *not* the place.

Might as well try BadiniSweet's therapy, he thought. He inhaled long and slow, then put his hand on the mouse and clicked Reply.

Hey Sweet,

You really are, you know that? Whatever it is you do for a living, you need to quit and start a career writing erotica. You just made my day. ;-)

Seriously, you worry too much. E-mail often, or not at all—I'm easygoing, you know that. Tell me all your hopes, fears, whatever—you know I'm here for you. As for breaking free, sure, I'll help. You've got my long-standing invitation to come down to Minnesota. So do it, while I'm still here.

Are you sure, by the way, that I "know these things?" For all you know, I may be a monk. Yeah, well, maybe not a monk. OK, I admit it, I'm one of those guys who do find the sight of a woman stripping erotic. I don't know about a "geisha girl" performance. One of the most provocative things I ever saw was a woman who took off her skirt, shoes, nylons, and panties. That's it. She did it casually, over the course of

the evening. The whole time she kept on her fuzzy turtleneck. So it doesn't have to be like a belly dancer wiggle-rama. Would you be offended if I said that I am 99% sure you'd like it, in optimal conditions? (Use your excellent imagination...)

You don't need to apologize for not being some bad-mama in leather, Sweet. My father used to tell me—don't try to be what you should, try to figure out what you are. Pretty different from your old man, hey? Anyway, who knows about the future....crazy things could happen. You could go off to see the Wizard, I could settle down. <g>

One thing I have to say—you make this guy sound like a serious superman. Fantasy's fine, but give the guy a break if it ever comes to that. It's not that easy to be a top—even in your fairly vanilla-ish fantasy. Your mind needs to be working almost clinically while you're reading the woman and controlling your own arousal—this takes a hell of a lot of discipline. Not that I'm doubting the stamina of your truelove. But you may be better just sticking to fantasies, unless you're willing to be disappointed. To take a purely academic example—I know that if I was presented with the object of my fantasies, with her pretty little breasts peeking out at me behind her shirt, her expression full of lust, I'd have to take care of some preliminaries. Namely, a jerk-off or two, just to gain control enough to make her happy.

I'm being blunt here—hope you don't mind. I sense you can take it. ;-)

While I'm on the subject, I wonder if you'd return the favor, and let me ramble on about a sexual fantasy

of my own. There's a woman I've been burning for, and she's not likely to go to bed with me anytime soon. So all I've got are these mental videos I play. Let me know...We're on a two-hour difference, with you on the West Coast, but I plan to be here till late.

David

DavidA

Oh God, I don't know, I guess. OK, let me have it. Who is she?

BadiniSweet

BadiniSweet,

No one you know. <g> Seriously, she's the sexiest woman I've ever met. Our schedules don't coincide as much as I'd like. But when I do see her, I'm fairly useless. It's ridiculous, because she's all wrong for me. Very conservative, very in-the-background, very intimidated, no sense of humor—totally unlike you.

Except physically...you sound a bit alike. She, too, has small breasts. She's soft-spoken, with gorgeous brown eyes, midnight black hair, and the most exquisite rear end. But her best feature—hey, you like your guy's feet? You should see my darling's knees. They're a little knobby, and totally adorable. If you met her, you'd think she was the sweetest, most serious and timid creature around. Maybe she is. But that turns me on like crazy. I know—or my arrogant male brain assumes—that if I got her in bed, I could make her howl like a dog. Luckily, she won't give me the time of

day. Because this could be serious. And as you know, I'm not exactly a permanent type of guy.

So the fantasy...here it is. Read it and weep.

She's tied on the bed. Naked. Somebody else did it—pirates, right? They took her prisoner and I, as captain of a large boat—or whazzit, ship—have rescued her. Only I'm too busy sword-fighting to deal with her, so I leave her for a while. She's terrified, I can see when I come back to the cabin to check on her. The gag is hurting her, but I don't want her screams to draw attention to her, so I pat her stomach reassuringly and go do my manly battle fighting.

I come back after it's all over. Her eyes are bulging. I loosen the gag and drip some water—no, ale—into her mouth. She coughs, then chokes. I help her by releasing her bonds. But she's too weak to move, and I don't want to put her on my ship. It's damaged, for one, and the crew is, uh, taking it in for repair. (I don't know what the hell that means. Don't rag on me, okay?)

"Give me some clothes, please," she begs me. (Too cheesy?)

"I have nothing that will fit a petite lady," I apologize. "Besides, you're very lovely, and I prefer you without clothes."

"Please don't hurt me," she pleads.

"I won't," I say, rubbing her nipple. It perks up and she gasps.

"Oh, don't! I'm a virgin!"

"Are you?" This excites me. I don't know why, I just get so hot at the idea that I get to teach her all about sex. "Prove it," I challenge.

"How?" she gasps. (I know, she's gasping all over the place, but I'm a speaker, not a writer, okay? Deal.)

"A small test," I say. I shift her so my knee is between her legs and, while she watches wide-eyed and helpless, I screw one finger into her. She's so tight I really have to work it in. But there it is, her cherry. Her expression is classic—a mixture of shock, embarrassment, and excitement. And discomfort. Suddenly getting a clue, I press on the pad below her belly. It's taut. I realize I've been a heel. She has to go to the bathroom. Or should I say she needs to "relieve herself?" Whatever. Maybe this is a modern ship. Although then there wouldn't be pirates.

Anyway, I help her off the bed—she's real stiff from lying there so many hours. I show her the chamber pot. She uses it, blushing. Now she feels better, and is grateful to me. When I put her on the bed again, she's trembling.

I just read back over what I wrote, and it's pretty lousy. Crude, like porno. How do you do it, BadiniSweet? How am I supposed to convey in words how I feel about her? I make her sound like this dumb innocent child. I don't think of her that way. She's got a brain, and it works overtime. I do think of her though as somebody who doesn't know what she wants yet. Unawakened.

She is so hot. I want to smell her. I want her on all fours, her rear end in the air, her labia exposed to my gaze. I want to make her come, and come, and come, till her little passage is one big, ongoing contraction, and then squeeze inside her slowly—not to tease—I've got to go slow. Women, I've learned, are delicate

creatures. :-) I have the feeling she'll be real tight, too, almost as tight as a virgin, if not actually one. Once I'm inside her, I want to do what you wrote at the end of your e-mail. Stay there for hours. As long as she wants it. I think I really could stay hard for her.

Just a few minutes ago I saw her—just a glimpse. I got semi-hard. It happens all the time. I think some people in my office think my dick is just that big.

So yeah, I work with her. That sucks, doesn't it? And after your e-mail, which by the way made me think of her, I wished she were here, sucking me off. She has a small mouth, but very full. Beautiful, neat white teeth. She could just, if she opened wide, surround me.

You want to know about blow jobs? OK, here's how it goes down (pun absolutely intended). At least, here's what I'd like Jeannie—that's her name by the way—I mean, what the hey, it's not like you'll ever meet her—to do. She'd start by rubbing her nose and cheek against my groin like a cat. I don't know why I like that but it turns me on completely when women do it. Then she'd plant noisy kisses up the underside of my shaft. Then she'd lick long and wide from balls to head. Sweet, have you ever had a massage where they start with that long, sweeping effleurage stroke? It's just like that. It feels awesome. Oh, and she'd be kneeling, but to avoid the bird problem, she'd be a little off to the side, head tipped. Or else I'd be lying down and she'd be perpendicular, with her toy presented before her to do with as she would. ;-)

What I like then is a little balls caressing. And some tongue action to get things rolling, so to speak.

Then she'd slide her tongue—slide, mind you, never breaking contact—up to the tip, and gently take me in. Meanwhile, one hand still cups my balls, the other kind of latches onto my base and gets a hold of the skin. (Yes, she has the amazing ability to do three things at once. Like rubbing her tummy and patting her head at the same time. I'm betting she can play piano, too.)

I'm not circumcised (I was born the year my folks spent learning healing techniques in Norway, did I ever mention that?) so this means I don't need lubricant, lucky me. She massages her mouth around me, very wetly, while her hand gently moves up and down, moving skin over shaft. Of course, after fantasizing about this so much, in real life I'd come nearly instantly. But let's assume I have my normal, impressive control (those are not my words, I swear, but those of actual, er, handlers.) Gradually Jeannie takes more and more of me into her mouth. This might sound weird if you've heard guys talk about their dick like it's an external part of them, but it feels very much "me"—you can't get much me-er than my cock. When Jeannie sucks it, she's sucking me, all the way. In my dreams, she fits it all in her mouth, even to her throat, though actually, I've only met a few women who can do that. Her mouth doesn't just bathe me, she's really sucking—the pressure and contraction are a lot like the vagina. Only it's more erotic. Not more pleasurable. *Nothing's* more pleasurable than fucking a woman, Sweet. But the wet warmth is great (you don't get that with a rubber) and the knowledge that she's really into pleasuring you does incredible things for your arousal.

You know, I want to go on, but I'm about bursting

my pants here. Loose trousers, too—that should tell you the extent of my problem. She's probably gone home by now. She works late sometimes. Her office is right next door. I want her. Is this how it is with you?

Thanks for letting me get this off my chest. Now I need to send this...and get off, period. Somehow. Maybe I'll call someone in my address book. If I can retrieve it. We had a virus come through last week and all our address lists got corrupted, but I'm told there's a backup somewhere. Yeah, I know, you keep telling me that's what my PDA is for. Soon as I figure out this synchronization gimmick, I'll try it. Jeannie was the one who fixed the office's virus, actually. She was amazing. No, thinking of Jeannie is a bad idea. Think address book. There are a couple of women who I'll bet wouldn't mind a quick romp...or a slow romp...

Or is that more than you need to know? If so, I apologize. It just feels so natural to tell you all this, after hearing your fantasies. It's cool to be able to e-mail you. Sometimes I wish I knew your name, but other times I'm glad I don't. I'm not sure I could be this close friends with a woman otherwise.

Take care, and wish me happy and multiple orgasms (yes, we get them too),

David

A few minutes after sending off the message, David was on his cell phone, punching in a number. He got Julie's voice mail. He also got Mel's, Cindy's, and Theresa's, in ludicrous succession. When at last Kristen picked up, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Hi, it's David Argeld here."

"David?" Kristen sounded surprised. He could hardly blame her. They hadn't talked since the previous fall. He was the one who'd called it off in September, due to the inconvenience of it all—turned out she lived way out in the suburbs. He'd gotten the vague sense though that she'd been put off anyway by his age—she was in her mid-twenties and looking for someone to settle down with.

"How's the traveling going?" he asked, remembering she was in international sales.

"Fine. How are you?" There was a cautious note in her voice.

"Not so good," he said ingenuously. "I could use some company. Would it be wildly presumptuous if I asked if you're free later on tonight?"

There was a long silence. He twiddled his pen, narrowing his eyes.

"That is pretty presumptuous," she said, sounding as though she were grinning.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"What do you have in mind?"

He smiled, all the while wondering why he wasn't elated. This was exactly what he wanted, right?

"Anything you want," he said. "Clubbing, dinner, your place. You choose. The order, I mean. Do you still have your fur cuffs?"

He heard her indrawn breath. Kristen was one of the many women he'd bedded who was a powerhouse at work, yet a total submissive in private. He enjoyed being dominant, and submissive, and just plain equal—basically, he enjoyed sex, however the woman got her thrills.

"Weeell," she drawled. "I suppose—"

A knocking came at the door. Startled, David sat up

straight. "Hold on." He covered the receiver and started to get up, but the state of his cock, which still hadn't settled down, prevented quick movements. He settled back and called out for the knocker to come in.

The door opened and Jeannie Lin walked in.

Chapter 3

David thought afterward he would have been less surprised if the entire legal staff had suddenly burst into the room, formed a circle, and started dancing the *hora*. Jeannie Lin in his office, right now, was simply too much to take in. He stared.

Breathing hard, Jeannie shot a quick glance at him, then over his shoulder. Her gaze finally darted down at the floor and seemed to fix there. She opened her mouth, but nothing came out.

David managed to plant his feet and turn to face her.

"What can I do for you?" He was conscious of the huskiness of his voice.

He saw a swallow travel the length of her long and delicate throat. As she struggled to form a reply, David studied her. Did her face look flushed? Her lips appeared especially moist, with red lipstick newly applied. Her ivory blouse was sleekly tailored to her torso. Through the sheer material, he could see the protruding bumps of her nipples. She wasn't wearing a bra—unless it was superfine and transparent.

Her skirt fell to just above her knees, exposing them. He noticed that she was slightly bow-legged. Her shoes were flats, black and sensible.

She looked so fragile, he ached to drag her to him, arrange her limbs around him, and kiss her.

"I—I—"

Her hands, he saw, were shaking.

"It's all right, Jeannie," he said gently. "Take your time." He meant it. He had no idea why she was here, but as far as he was concerned, she could quiver and draw in those huge breaths all evening. Anything, as long as she was talking to him. Or trying. He felt a wave of tenderness for her.

"You're...on the phone?"

He started, then let out a short laugh. He held up one finger, silently asking her to hold on. "Kristen?" he spoke into the cell phone. "Something's come up. I'll call you back in a few minutes, all right?"

The voice on the other end sounded breathless. "All right, David. But hurry."

He punched the button to end the conversation, then put the phone aside and negligently crossed one leg over his knee. He figured a casual attitude would put Jeannie at her ease. "So what's up?"

"Who's Kristen?"

David smiled easily. "A woman I see occasionally," he said honestly. *A mistake I regret now. Why did I ever think Kristen could satisfy me tonight?*

Then he wondered if being honest was a bigger mistake. Jeannie reeled back. Her hands fisted and her stance went rigid.

She looked like the last kid to be called to the team roster. He wanted to pull her into his lap and kiss her anxiety away.

"Jeannie?"

"I want to help you," she said in a soft rush.

"Help *me*?" he repeated, confused.

"Get—off." The way she said it, he thought she was spitting out a rejection. But then she said, in the tone people use when they're frustrated with themselves, "No, no. Help you romp. I mean. You said that's what you want. You want a woman's mouth. I can give you that. I think. Probably."

The world spun, and for a minute, David wondered if he'd just awakened from a dream. Or been drawn into a new dimension.

"A...mouth?" he said slowly. Actually, his voice said it, but he wasn't conscious of intending to speak.

"My mouth. You said you were thinking of me. I made you hard." Her voice rose slightly with each word, till by the end, it was almost at a normal decibel.

"I never said that to you." *Did I? What the hell has happened here? Am I in some kind of science fiction universe?*

"In your e-mail, you said—"

"E-mail!" It burst out of him. "What e-mail?"

"To—ah—"

A seed of certainty began to grow in David's mind. The notion was so outrageous, so unexpected, he lost his cool. "Are you telling me," he said evenly, "that you've hacked into my computer? You've read my personal e-mails?"

Her eyes widened. He noticed she had not had eyelid surgery to create a double eyelid, as some Asian women he knew had. And that she wasn't wearing eye makeup. Only that lipstick. That deep crimson lipstick. On a flawless complexion. Oh, God.

"Hacked? I—I—"

I need her, he thought. *I need her now.*

But he really was not cool with this, especially from a damn lawyer. "You know better than anyone how much trouble you can get into for reading other people's e-mails. What were you thinking?"

"I—"

That was all she seemed capable of saying. David stood up slowly. He had to be careful not to frighten her off.

"Can I assume that after reading my e-mail to BadiniSweet just now, you got hot, and that's why you're here?" His tone was

grave, but when she nodded, he internally punched the air. Yes! Yes!

"Look at me, Jeannie," he commanded. For just an instant, her gaze flashed into his. He was startled by the naked need he saw there.

"How long have you been doing this? Spying on me electronically?"

She shook her head frantically. A few strands of silky black hair escaped from their clip. He reached behind her and compressed the clip. She flinched as her hair tumbled about her.

Oh, yes. Never in all his fantasies had he dreamed that her hair reached her thighs. He'd seen it in an elaborate French braid, once, but he'd had no idea it was this long. The possibilities swirled through his erotically attuned mind.

"Where did you get the passwords? I never wrote them down." He came close to her, close enough to feel her breath.

She shook her head again, as though she'd been struck dumb. Or brain-dead. But he'd seen her work.

"You're a whiz on that computer," he murmured, laying his hands lightly on her slender arms. "I'll bet you've programmed. Am I right?"

She closed her eyes. When she opened them again, it was to look directly into his. Without evasion.

For a full minute.

He almost came just at that. He took several deep, calming breaths, then smiled. "Do you know what happens to women who go behind my back?"

"No." The word was barely a breath. He could see the flutter of her pulse.

"Who nurture a secret, maybe even obsessive—" he dropped a light, tantalizing kiss on her lips—"passion for men?"

She shook her head—and her lips brushed his. They found

his cheek and clung. Swiftly he swung his head around and extracted a firm kiss, brief but possessive.

"Women," he panted, "who cruelly push men away?"

"I didn't—"

"Oh, yes, you did." He had to sample more of her; his thumbs sought and found the nubs of her nipples. The sensuous gossamer silk of the blouse was as much a turn-on as the mini-erections beneath.

She stiffened, then grasped his waist and shuddered down her whole body.

He liked her reaction. Just as he'd suspected, she was a simmering cauldron, waiting for the high flame. He edged her backwards against the door, forcing it audibly shut. Holding her there, he took her hand and brought it to the straining front of his pants, while his other hand moved from breast to breast.

"Naughty women," he said with mock severity, "get their nipples fussed with."

She reacted well to his teasing, her face taking on a wild look. *Beautiful*, he thought. He murmured a sound of pleasure as her palm cupped him. Luxuriating in her eager, if inexperienced, handling, he slowly unfastened and parted her blouse. *So many buttons. Does she know how that turns me on?*

Her naked breasts looked to David like two scoops of ice cream topped by small ripe raspberries. Faint red lines underneath them told him she'd recently removed a bra. For him?

"You're adorable," he told her, plucking her nipples. Her face screwed up, as if she were in terrible pain. But her hand pressed hard against him, and she seemed to lack the sophistication to mask her arousal. He could detect no effort to make her expression sexy, but in its very uninhibitedness, it was.

"Please." The word sounded wrenched out of her.

"Please what?"

"Please f—f—"

"You have to say it, sweetheart." Excitement made his whole body taut. She *wanted* to say it. *Say it, angel. Say it.*

He crowded against her, shimmying his hips, leaning back so his fingers could continue to scrape and pinch her nipples. Her gasps were the loudest sounds he'd ever heard her make.

"F—please. Fuck. Me."

"Oh, yeah. When you've been good. " His own voice was far from steady. "But you've been bad. Reading other people's e-mails—don't get me wrong—I can't help being glad you did. Otherwise—you wouldn't be here. But you have to learn—it's not right." Kisses to her face punctuated each phrase.

She went still, and he bent his head and took a nipple between his teeth and worried it with his tongue. After several minutes, he did the same to the other. Then he took his mouth away, took her breasts in his fingers, and squeezed repeatedly. He'd done this maneuver on many women, but none of them reacted quite so satisfyingly as Jeannie did. She squirmed. She whimpered. She made high-pitched sounds as if she were about to climax. He laughed shortly and stopped, even though his cock was so rigid, so primed, it was throbbing.

"Are you sorry?" he asked hoarsely.

"Sorry?" she echoed.

He tweaked her nipple sharply. "For invading my privacy."

"Y-yes. Anything. Yes."

"And you won't do it again?"

"No. Please."

He tugged her skirt up and cupped her ass, exquisitely round and as firm as he'd hoped. His fingers wedged between her thighs and probed at the heat of her panties. They were sopping, and he wouldn't be a man if his ego didn't soar.

"Why did you do it?" he demanded.

"What?"

He knew his finger, just resting there, would be driving her mad. But he had to know. As aroused as he was, he was also disappointed. Somehow he'd assumed Jeannie was ethical. Now he knew the woman he'd found so fascinating was a myth, that the real woman was nowhere near capable of threatening his bachelorhood. Sexy, yes, sexy as hell. But a voyeur...which was provocative, but how could he trust her? She'd gone too far. Unless she had a good reason...?

"Why did you hack into my computer?" he interrogated in the tone he'd used his few times in a courtroom.

"I didn't."

David eased one finger under the cloth to do a quick reconnaissance. He found her thatch exquisitely soft and dewy and had to clench his teeth to keep from groaning.

"Oh!"

He moved his finger infinitesimally. "You want me to rummage around in here?"

"I want—you."

"You'll have me—and all the pleasure you want—when you confess."

She wriggled.

"Security is a serious issue," he teased, even as he dabbed at her swollen clitoris. "Bigger than your lust, Jeannie. You're really burning, aren't you? Do all the guys get you hot, or just me?"

"You," she got out, but he could tell it was hard for her. He was stroking her taut nipple and dipping just into the incredibly tight entrance of her body. Her mouth was open, her lips parted, revealing her lovely teeth, and he couldn't resist giving her a long, deep kiss with his tongue.

She jerked, her body convulsing, and he swore. Snatching

his hands away, he tried to gauge if he'd gone too far. From the desperate, blind look on her face, she was still on the edge. Good. He wasn't ready for her to come yet.

Suddenly he knew what he would do. He dragged her over to the chair and sat down, then pushed her to her knees before him. She responded like his other half, knowing what he wanted almost before he did. He'd intended to give her punishing orders, but punishment was obviously the last thing on her mind as she unzipped him tenderly. Then, to his heady delight, she was all over him. On his balls, his staff, lathering him with her wet loving heat. He sighed, leaned back, and closed his eyes. Dear God. This was better than anything. Better than—

His cell phone rang.

Jeannie didn't stop what she was doing. Maybe she didn't hear. He wouldn't answer. No way.

Unless it was the same person who'd called earlier on the land line, which meant it could be urgent.

Grimacing, he reached forward, just able to reach the thing. Jeannie made a choking sound as the movement pushed his cock too deep. Patting her head apologetically, he sucked in a breath. "Argeld," he croaked, watching Jeannie's head tilt and her mouth surround him, lips so red and full his balls tightened just at the sight.

"David? What happened?"

Kristen! He swore under his breath.

"Sorry—I got hung up," he said, staring down at Jeannie. She had gone still. Now she tried to pull away. He wouldn't let her.

"Are we still hooking up?" Kristen sounded uncertain. David called himself three kinds of ass.

"I'm sorry." He cleared his throat awkwardly. "I won't be able to make it tonight after all." He stifled a grunt as he felt

Jeannie's tongue swipe his entire length.

"Work?"

"No," he said honestly. "Just me being an ass."

An explosion of feminine laughter sounded in his hear. "I should have known. Got a better offer, huh?"

He stroked Jeannie's hair. "Sorry. I mean it, Kristen. I deserve mega-bad things."

Not a delicious tongue job. Argeld, you give new meaning to the word lucky bastard.

Chapter 4

"You really are an ass. So David?" Kristen said sweetly before the phone clicked. "Don't call me. I'll call you. Not."

He expelled a breathless laugh and then all he thought about was Jeannie. Her tongue pleasuring him, making him feel like the most powerful, worshipped man on earth. What did it even more than the satin touch of her mouth was the way she kept shooting little looks at him. Each time those dark eyes met his, he felt the connection like an extra caress, heated and deep. "Jeannie," he murmured, over and over. Her hair was sleek and thick and cool between his fingers, always falling back into place, and he used it to guide her movements.

Inexplicably, when she opened her mouth wider and tried to take him deep into her throat, he thought of BadiniSweet. He couldn't wait to tell her that Jeannie, too, was a novitiate. He could use her advice, as well. BadiniSweet always looked at things straight. She'd know if it was bastardly to allow Jeannie to suck him when it could lead to nothing permanent.

At least, he thought, being disappointed helped his control. Even when Jeannie dipped lower and sucked on his balls, he was able to prevent himself shooting his seed violently into the air by thinking, *It'll just be this one time. You better enjoy it while you've got it.*

At one point, Jeannie lifted her head and took a deep breath.

"Jeannie?"

Her eyes glittered. "Am I doing it right?"

"Oh, yes." He tugged her back to him. "You're doing beautifully. Perfect, actually."

Because she read your instructions on the Internet. That put a damper on his lust, but not for long. As he'd guessed, Jeannie's mouth was too small to accommodate his cock deeply for any length of time, but her tongue was wicked and energetic, and her hands were amazingly intuitive. Several times when her mouth was stuffed with him he found his balls gathering and had to squeeze her cheeks to still her tongue until the urge to ejaculate passed. His body began to shake with long-term built-up desire.

"Jeannie," he whispered.

His computer beeped, indicating the arrival of a new e-mail message. He twitched. "BadiniSweet," he murmured, guessing.

Jeannie said something inaudible against his cock.

A disturbing thought struck him. He stiffened and clasped Jeannie's head. "Did you read hers, too? BadiniSweet's?" It was weird to think of Jeannie invading his cyberspace friend's privacy. Weird, and just a bit arousing.

Jeannie shook her head emphatically. He groaned.

"You'd better not have," he warned her. "I'd be very...oh, God, keep doing that."

What would BadiniSweet say, David wondered, if she knew he was allowing Jeannie to give him a blow job, even knowing how sneaky she was? BadiniSweet's ethics were without question. He'd known that since her first e-mail to the listserv. That was one of the reasons he'd e-mailed her in the first place.

Now if only there was a woman like Jeannie Lin and BadiniSweet, combined. For her, I'd do anything, he thought. Sacrifice everything.

His orgasm approached, and this time, David went with it. He planted his feet, grasped her head, and braced himself. He couldn't thrust or he'd hurt her, so he concentrated on bearing

down and enjoying the pleasure. It went on and on...hot and gushing and wonderful, surrounded by female warmth, he felt it all the way to the backs of his knees. Afterwards, he drew her up onto his lap. He tried to bring his thoughts into focus.

Jeannie whispered in his ear. "I did excellent, didn't I?"

"Yeah." His terseness came from not liking how affected he was by her generosity, by the sweetness of what she'd done and the unbelievable enjoyment he'd taken from her.

To allay his guilt, he murmured an apology, and used his thumbs between her legs to give her several orgasms in quick succession. At first he was too wiped-out to watch. It was all he could do to keep his hand moving. Then as his body recovered, he began to notice little things. The sweat above her lips. Her open mouth. Her glowing eyes. It was better even than his imagination. Jeannie, coming, was like savoring a good red wine with beef. He could become addicted to the habit.

Several times, between climaxes, she panted, "David—stop. I have to tell you something."

Each time, he interrupted her. Put his tongue in her mouth. Put fingers into her sex. Squeezed her bottom. Her unedited sounds of ecstasy encouraged him to push her farther.

"Can you come again? Take it, swallow it with your sex. Try shimmying your hips, it'll feel good, Jeannie. Oh, yeah. You're so soft. I love how you feel, how you move." He told her things he'd never said to a woman. A lot of it he didn't remember afterward, only that he felt like he'd exposed his soul.

Finally she slumped against him, too weak to lift her head.

"That was gorgeous," he told her finally, dropping a kiss on her head. "Thank you."

"Happy to," she mumbled.

Some time later, after he'd recovered a semblance of mental strength, he remembered what his erotically altered body had

allowed him to forget. "Did you read BadiniSweet's e-mails?"

"Yes."

"Which ones?"

"All of them," she sighed. "All of them, David."

"I see." Damn. Why did he feel like his heart was breaking? Somehow, he just hadn't thought of her as that uncaring. He hadn't realized how much hope he'd still harbored that there was some excuse, some explanation.

"You'll be furious."

He already was, though not so much that he didn't notice the new determination in her tone. *Was* there an explanation? "Hmm," he said noncommittally.

"You see, I didn't actually read them, so much as...um..." Her voice drifted off, her eyes evaded his.

"Don't do that," he said grimly. "For once, look into my eyes as you lie."

"You know?" She widened her eyes.

"That you're nothing like you appear to be? Sure. You're one big act, aren't you, Jeannie Lin?" he accused angrily. "When I first met you, I reacted just as all the other guys did—flaming hot. You seemed to have no idea of your appeal, but you knew. You've known all this time how maddening those lips are...those breasts...even your knees. You've been teasing me. Hacking into my computer was part of some plan, wasn't it? Admit it."

She stared at him. Shook her head very slowly. "That wasn't the plan."

"Oh?" he challenged. "Then what?"

"To get to know you. To see if the man I loved was really right for me. To see if he could bring me out of my shell. To see if he could love me."

He narrowed his eyes.

"My parents wanted me to go into law," she said in a

baffling switch of subject. "Like my father. So I did. Then...you let it slip what organization you were with. And suddenly, I couldn't decide what to do."

"What organization I was with? What?" His mind wouldn't work. Why was she talking about her career?

"I've passed the bar in two states, David. Before I came to Minnesota, I worked for a small company in Bellevue, Washington."

"Bellevue?" That rang a distant bell, but he couldn't figure out why she was looking at him so expectantly.

"And...it was hell. Oh, the hours were good, and I never had to set foot inside a courtroom, but the environment...you know, you're right about programming. I've always wanted to try it; it meshes with how my mind thinks. Plus with computers you don't have to deal with people. You may have noticed I'm not at my best in social situations."

"You're shy."

"Yes. You don't know how hard it was to decide to come here and try something different. But when I found out you worked for a non-profit group, I thought that didn't sound too bad. You're right, I did lie. By omission. That wasn't my intention. I meant to surprise you. But after I got here I thought I'd made a huge mistake. You were so, well, in your e-mails you were a lot more..."

David was beginning to get a strange feeling.

"I couldn't talk to you," she said in a rush. "I didn't know you. Not the man. I couldn't deal with how you made me feel."

"Jeannie, you're not trying to—"

She was gaining momentum. "I thought you were amused by me. You always looked so remote, when you bothered to pay me attention at all. I even wondered at first if I'd gotten the right man. David Argeld—your e-mails told me who you were. But

the man I'd met in cyberspace was warm and caring and funny. I know I was being immature, expecting some vision of a man that existed in my head. The real you is a lot more than I can handle. Or I used to think you were." She smiled. "Now I *know* I can handle you."

David swallowed. "You're BadiniSweet."

She shivered. "In the flesh."

"Shit." He absorbed the knowledge, the implications. "Shit."

She jerked back.

He barely noticed. "She—you—told me about the guy you wanted. You described him."

"He was you. Didn't you recognize yourself?"

"Shit. And I told you—"

"Everything I needed to know. I couldn't believe it when you said you wanted me. I thought you were sorry for me. A lot of people are, you know."

He shook his head. "You're 'enigmatic.'"

"Right." She clearly didn't believe him.

"It's true. I know you're shy—I've known it for a long time, even if no one else has a clue. They've pegged you for a stereotype, the cool, quiet, exotic Asian beauty."

Her lips twisted. "Instead I'm the shy, passive stereotype."

That idea amused him. "Sorry, I just don't buy that you're any kind of stereotype, not after watching you in action."

She blushed. Her shyness *wasn't* an act. What she'd told him explained a lot of things. BadiniSweet's vagueness with certain details. The increased heat-factor of her e-mails of late. The coincidences. And yet... "God. You're really BadiniSweet? She's so—" He stopped, shaking his head. *She's so confident. So loquacious. So sharing. Everything you aren't. Or are you?*

"Yeah," she said ruefully. "Weird, isn't it? Meeting the physical person, when you already know or think you know

them so well?"

He saw her point. He also saw that she seemed to have completely lost her shyness. When had it happened? He couldn't remember, and decided it didn't matter. The important thing was, she was BadiniSweet, and Jeannie, and another woman he hadn't yet met, but whom he hoped to know very well starting *now*.

Suddenly, the idea of getting to know Jeannie Lin was of utmost importance. More important even than his lifetime ambition of evading commitment. Not that the idea of staying forever in Minneapolis wowed him, but hell. Jeannie had quit her job, moved over a thousand miles, and taken the bar a second time to meet him. If that wasn't a sign of flexibility, nothing was.

He shook his head at his own thickness. "I knew you had untapped lust in you. I even compared you to *her* a couple of times, especially with some of the things she said. But I thought you were ultra-conservative. I thought you wanted a mouse of a man. You certainly didn't respond to any of the guys here at work."

"I want a tame tiger," she purred. "I want David Argeld."

He laughed, tucking his arm around her, and with some effort, slipped two long fingers all the way inside her. "I was punishing you. I'm sorry, darling."

She gasped. "Well, I was hiding something. Can you forgive me?"

"Reading my e-mails like some psycho—that's tricky to forgive," he teased.

"I *never* did that."

"But I thought you had. Instead, you were hiding who you were. I kind of understand that. I mean, I hid my disappointment when I didn't let on how much your rejection got to me."

"Rejection?"

"When I asked you out, you didn't even acknowledge me.

Back in the spring," he reminded her when she continued to look bewildered.

"Were you really asking me out?" she said in a small voice. "I thought you were making fun of me."

He shook his head. "We need to work on your huge ego."

"I'm sorry for not telling you who I was. And for keeping up the pretense. I should at least have stopped e-mailing you. I felt so double-faced. But after I met you, it was almost like you *were* two different men. I couldn't stop e-mailing, or I'd lose *him*." Her voice was growing fainter as her hips began to move against his hand.

"I'm glad you didn't. And I'm glad you weren't deliberately trying to mess with my mind—"

"Oh, David, no! In fact *I* got confused. I kept forgetting who I was, who you were...after a while, I knew I had to tell you, or leave, but I didn't know how. I might have chickened out if you hadn't written that last e-mail."

"Thank God you didn't. You have no idea," he said, liking the way she got breathless at the slow thrusting of his fingers, "how much I thought about you. Jeannie Lin, that is. BadiniSweet, too, sometimes, but BadiniSweet didn't threaten my comfortable single state. Nobody has, until you."

"Do I really?"

"Do you trust me? David Argeld? Your DavidA?"

"When you do that—ah, DavidA!"

David laughed.

"Why are you laughing at me?"

"You've called me that once or twice—automatically, I guess. I thought maybe you were from Canada originally."

She giggled. It was a sound he'd never thought to hear from her. Then her face screwed up into an expression of great surprise and delight, and she convulsed.

While she was still coming, he knew he had to be in her. He guided his cock into the crease of her thighs, tucking her panties to the side.

Then he was thrusting in. The feeling was shocking. Engulfing. The humor in David transmogrified into pure exhilaration. This was where he needed to be. Always.

About the Author

Karen Harley lived in Chicago, L.A., Milwaukee, and Atlanta before moving to her current home in Seattle, where she's happily surrounded by water, caffeine, and people who make fantastic fiction fodder. Whatever she happens to be writing, her muse is the words themselves--the power of fiction has long fascinated her.

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