



EROTIC TALES FROM THE LUST BASTION

NEFERTARI 9.0

MICHELE
BARDSLEY

Loose Id

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Wild Women is now available from Hard Shell Word Factory.

EROTIC TALES FROM THE LUST BASTION: NEFERTARI 9.0

Michele Bardsley

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This book contains explicit sexual content and graphic language.

Erotic Tales from the Lust Bastion: Nefertari 9.0

Michele Bardsley

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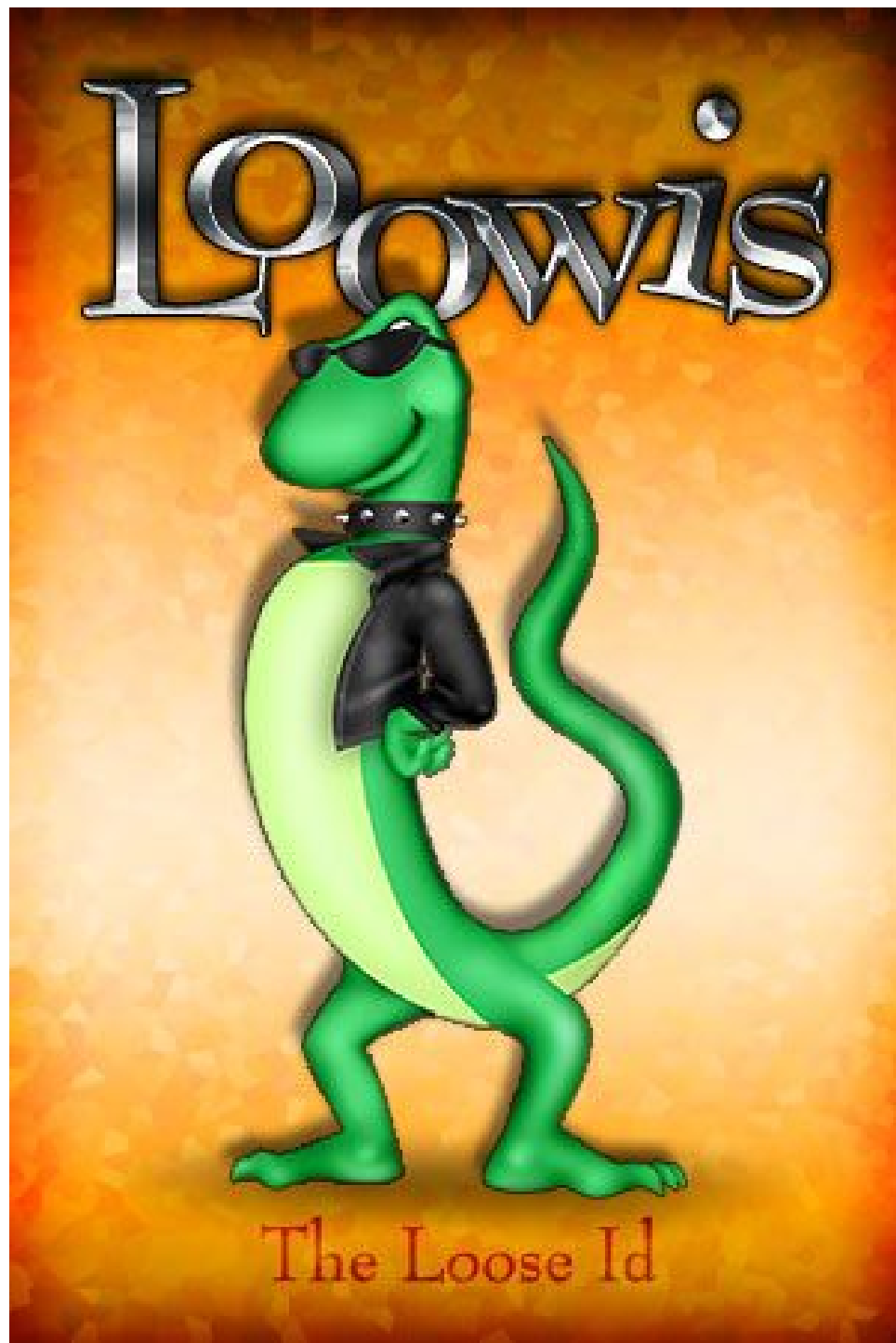
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Prologue

The night Chester P. Hiddles found out his fiancée, Diana “Boom Boom” Lancaster, was screwing his handsome, muscled, *brainless* college roommate Tad, he spent the entire night at his computer nursing a bottle of tequila.

That’s when Goddess Death, the fantasy video game, was born.

Of course, Boom Boom was very sorry that she had experienced unimaginable ecstasy due to Tad’s enormous cock. (*Honestly, Boomie*, her best friend Tiffany said later, *couldn’t you wait to fuck Tad until after the wedding?*) She was sorry because even though she was beautiful, popular, and president of the sorority Delta Delta Delta, she knew what every other beautiful, popular, and *poor* girl knew: Looks would fade ... and marrying geeks paid.

Chester was a geek, but he was a geek with self-esteem.

He dumped Diana, who ended up pregnant, married to Tad, and living in a modest two-bedroom ranch house in the suburbs. At least she did until Tad, the doofus, won the lottery. They bought a mansion, hired a nanny for their kid, and moved into separate bedrooms. These days, Boom Boom gets Botox, buys clothing she wears only once, and fucks the handsome, muscled, *brainless* gardener. Tad gets to golf everyday, buys things he never

uses, and fucks the maid, the nanny, and Tiffany. And so, quite by accident, and rather undeservedly, Boom Boom and Tad lived happily-ever-after.

Chester graduated in the top 1% of his class and was recruited by the CIA, the FBI, and Toys “R” Us for his computer skills. He turned down all jobs because, after graduation, he started his own gaming company, GameGeek.

Within five years, he was a multimillionaire.

As the years passed, Chester got engaged three more times to beautiful women who pretended to love him when they really loved what he could buy them. He always found those gorgeous, shortsighted women in compromising situations, usually with one of his employees.

His fifth engagement was to Janie Weatherall, who was rich in her own right, plain in looks, and highly intelligent. He didn’t really love her, but she was nice and she adored technology. Then she started having an affair with her father’s best friend, a professor of economics at MIT. She gave Chester a very nice, heartfelt “it’s over” speech and returned the Harry Winston five-carat diamond engagement ring.

At the ripe old age of thirty-two, Chester moved to the Nevada desert, built a glass-and-chrome mansion on Mount Charleston, invested in several cases of tequila, and worked day and night on Goddess Death II.

Until the day he got an invitation to a VIP event ...

Chapter One

Chester stared at the building, then at his invitation. He pressed the speaker button on the limousine's armrest. "Maurice, *this* is where the exhibition is located?"

"Yes, sir," said Maurice.

"It's a sex shop."

"I wouldn't know, sir."

Chester peered at the building again. It looked like a reconstruction of the temple at Karnak, all brightly painted pillars and big carved hieroglyphs. It might have been a building straight out of ancient Egypt, if passersby ignored the huge neon sign on top that blinked THE LUST BASTION EROTICA EMPORIUM.

No windows, but of course, there wouldn't be at this sort of establishment. Since it was 9 p.m. and this was Las Vegas, outside lights in garish colors blinked on and off around the building. The two huge wooden doors in the front were propped open. Two burly guards in tuxedos stood on either side accepting the invitations from men and women dressed in heinously expensive formal wear.

"Must be some shindig," muttered Chester. He'd never been good at socializing. He used to have the enthusiasm, though. The eternal optimist ... yep, that had been him until he

finally accepted that most people were mean-spirited and greedy. And worse, that women were the most devious and cruel creatures of all.

He really liked girls, too. They were soft and smelled nice and had interesting ideas. Chester sighed. He missed talking to and touching women. But Janie ... Janie had been the last straw. It didn't matter that they weren't in love. It mattered that they understood each other and that they could accept each other's limitations. They had been friends. Then she had gone and fallen in love with someone almost twice her age and who, at the time, had been married. Now she was married to the old-fart adulterer and blissfully happy ... at least according to her last e-mail. He never answered her e-mails. But he read them.

"Sir? Do you want to go home?"

Chester straightened the red bow tie of his own tuxedo. All that waited for him at home was another bottle of Cuervo Gold and the programming for Goddess Death II.

He was lonely and pathetic.

"I might as well go in, Maurice. I'll see you in a couple hours."

Before he could lose his nerve, Chester exited the limo, and marched to the guard on the left. The man's gaze flicked over the invitation; then he nodded that Chester could enter.

The lobby had a marble floor and several glass cases with blow-up dolls engaged in various sexual acts. Chester blinked as a silver-haired woman in a ball gown swept past him. He couldn't quite believe that Las Vegas's glitterati dared to show their faces in a place that was so blatantly about sex.

As he passed between two pillars that led into the main room, he felt as if an electrical current passed through his body. He stumbled to a stop, his hand resting on the first solid object he could grab, and he heaved a breath.

"Excuse me."

Chester looked up at a tall, gorgeous blonde with the prettiest blue eyes he'd ever seen. *That color of blue isn't natural.* Contacts, then. He'd learned how far a woman would go to

be beautiful. He enjoyed beauty, but he craved the reality of a woman. Her spirit, her heart ... her true personality. *Hah. If I wanted to meet real women, I shouldn't have moved to Las Vegas.*

"Sugar, you're cute an' all, but I usually like to know a man's name before we get intimate."

His gaze traveled to his fingers, which were latched onto her large breast. The gold lamé of her dress crinkled under his grip. Hastily, he removed his hand and blushed from the roots of his hair all the way to his pinky toes.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Oh, God. I'm really, really sorry."

"Sorry, huh? That's an odd name."

"Oh. No. My name is Chester. And I'm sorry about ... oh, jeez. I'm so, so, so *sorry*."

"Well, now. I wouldn't want you to be too sorry, sugar." She winked at him, then turned and sashayed away.

"Mr. Hiddles?"

He watched the twitch of those gold-lamé-encased hips as he righted himself. "She's married, right? Or someone's girlfriend? Mistress?"

The dark-skinned woman before him was gorgeous in a cat-like way. Maybe it was the slope of her eyes or the triangular quality of her nose that made him think of a prowling kitty. She dressed like Egyptian royalty, from the thin gold band around her forehead and black braids, to the long white gown that draped her voluptuous form. The thin gold leather sandals on her feet showed off the shimmery polish on her toes.

"As far as I know, Shannon isn't attached to anyone in particular," said the woman.

"So, what? She's a model? An actress? Porn star?"

"No. She's more into ... plumbing."

Plumbing? As in sinks, water, and rods? *Oh*. The woman obviously meant Shannon tended to male plumbing, which meant she was a prostitute. Disappointment was a dagger in

his heart. Chester stopped looking for the blonde and turned his attention to the cat lady.

“You know my name?”

“Of course, Mr. Hiddles. I’m very much addicted to Goddess Death. It’s quite thrilling to be any goddess I choose and rule my own world. It’s fascinating how well you’ve researched the different goddesses. I’ve been Isis, Aphrodite, Freya ... I even took a turn as Benzaiten.” She wrapped a bejeweled hand around his bicep. “I hear you’re working on a sequel.”

“Yes.” He sighed. “Are you sure Shannon is a ... a *plumber*?”

“I never said she was a plumber.” Her laughter tinkled like church bells. “By the way, my name is Bastet, but you can call me Bast.”

“The Egyptian goddess of pleasure?”

She smiled. “One of my many titles, I assure you. I’m so glad you came to my little show, Mr. Hiddles. I have something very, very special for you. It’s a piece that only a man like you could appreciate ... and, of course, afford.”

Chester reluctantly let go of the idea of finding Shannon. He might pay for her favors. A night spent with a beautiful woman who took money upfront might be much better than a lifetime spent with one who whispered lies about love and commitment while secretly emptying his wallet.

Before he knew it, Bast led him behind the cashier’s counter and through a purple silk curtain. They whipped past a small room with a chaise lounge and small table set with a tea service. Bast pushed aside another purple silk curtain. Chester glimpsed lush décor and antique furniture, and then Bast yanked him through a red-painted door and up a concrete staircase.

The room they entered was empty of furniture, decorations, and windows. In fact, the floor and walls were all black marble. Recessed lighting in the ceiling softened the stark

black. On the wall facing them, gold hieroglyphs were inlaid in a rectangle. Chester realized it was a door, but he could see no handle or buttons with which to open it.

“You haven’t been lucky in love, have you, Mr. Hiddles?”

Chester shrugged. His string of failed engagements had made plenty of society columns. He’d ceased caring what the media or the world thought about him or his so-called bad luck with women. One of the many things money could buy was silence and peace-of-mind ... and the best public relations company on the West Coast.

Bast swept across the room and stopped near the strange doorway. Her smile was mysterious, and her obsidian eyes glowed with anticipation. “Mr. Hiddles, what would you say if I told you that it’s within my power to give you the perfect woman?”

“I’d say I didn’t believe you.”

Bast’s catlike smile widened. “She’d be beautiful, intelligent, and willing to do whatever you wished in bed.”

Yeah, like a Stepford wife. He stuck his hands into the front pockets of his pants, mostly to stop from fidgeting. This woman owned and operated a business that catered to sexual needs. He’d seen the blow-up dolls in the foyer. It wasn’t a great intellectual leap to figure out what Bast might be trying to sell him. “No, thanks. Believe it or not, I like women who can think for themselves.”

“So a woman who would never age, never say no to sex, and never tell you to stop playing with your computer wouldn’t appeal to you?”

“I don’t want a robot.” Chester examined the room to keep from meeting Bast’s gaze. “I want someone who has a soul. I don’t care if she ages or if she’s too tired to have sex or tells me to get off the computer.” In fact, he would do almost anything to have a woman who would do all those things.

“You want someone who loves you.”

“Yes. And I want someone to love.”

“But you don’t believe in love anymore, do you? Maybe you’d settle for someone who liked your company and didn’t want your money, isn’t that right?”

Chester nodded. Of late, those had been his exact thoughts. He’d given up on love, but hell, was it too much to want companionship?

The door slid open. Through it, walked a caramel-skinned beauty with brown eyes, ruby lips, and long, dark hair. She was also naked.

Chester swallowed the knot in his throat and licked his suddenly dry lips.

“This is Nefertari nine-point-oh,” said Bast. “She’s a very special kind of sex doll.”

“Doll?”

“I’ve spent a number of years perfecting -- well, I should say I’ve spent a number of years paying very smart men and women to perfect -- a sexual being that can offer all the qualities most men require for a satisfying long-term relationship. And there is, of course, a male version of this model.”

Chester’s gaze traveled Nefertari’s perfect body. He was only five-ten, but he stood a good half-foot taller than her. Her breasts were the size of large grapefruits, the nipples the color of cocoa. Her waist was tiny, her hips gently flared, and her pussy had a Brazilian wax job. *Jesus*. Chester’s heart tha-thumped, and sweat pearled his brow as he catalogued random things about Nefertari. Her finger- and toenails were painted the color of dark chocolate. Her legs were long and sleek. Her face was heart-shaped and reminded him, oddly, of a Valentine’s Day cookie.

His cock liked this sex doll. A lot.

“She looks and feels like a real woman,” said Bast.

“Except she doesn’t have a soul.” Chester regretted that Nefertari wasn’t real. “Besides, science is years away from creating anything remotely like her.”

“Really?” Bast smiled. “The evidence is staring you right in the face. She could be your partner, Chester. The companion you long for. She doesn’t need to eat or to sleep. She’s at

your beck and call. She won't leave you for the gardener or for the MIT professor. She doesn't care about your money."

Oh, how he wanted to believe that Nefertari 9.0 was the answer to a lonely man's prayers. It seemed too easy an answer. Can't find a real woman? Then make one! And yet, the idea of a remote-control companion appealed to him. What the hell was the difference between a woman who *pretended* to care and a sex doll that was *programmed* to care?

"Why not take her for a test run?"

The right wall went up, and out came a big, round bed with black silk sheets and big, fluffy pillows. Chester looked at Nefertari, then at the bed. His cock, already half way to hardsville, went to Overload Capacity. Despite all the protests from Chester's brain and heart, the dick had made a decision. It really wanted to fuck the sex doll.

Bast patted Chester's shoulder. "I'll be back in an hour. Then we can discuss the arrangements."

What the hell. "How do I turn her on?"

Bast grinned widely, but apparently decided not to use such an obvious opening for a sexual joke. She handed him a small black remote. "Four buttons. On, off, rest mode, and mute. Have fun, Mr. Hiddles."

She disappeared through the door they'd entered, shutting it quietly behind her. Chester inhaled a deep breath, pointed the remote at the sex doll, and pressed "on."

Chapter Two

Chester watched as the woman blinked, then stretched and yawned. Her head swiveled as she took in the room. Her gaze swept over him, then the bed. She held out her hand.

“Hello. I’m Nefertari.”

He put the remote into his pants pocket and clasped her fingers in his own. “Chester Hiddles.” He felt weird addressing what was the equivalent of a talking sex toy, but she seemed so ... alive. So real. Her hand was warm and soft in his. He couldn’t hear the whir and click of motors as she moved, and her voice sounded smooth and sultry, not electronic at all. Was it possible such technology existed? Was she truly ... well, an android?

“Do you wish me to use endearments, Chester? I can call you honey, darling, sweetheart, baby, or love muffin.”

Chester laughed. “No, thanks. Well ... maybe you can use darling. But not love muffin.”

“Parameters set. Please indicate favorite sexual positions.”

“Men and woman figure out what they like and don’t like by being together.”

Nefertari smiled sweetly. “I will do anything you ask, Chester.”

Yeah. I only have to program you to do it. He pushed aside the depressing thought. *Screw this.* Chester strode to the bed and disrobed. He made up for his lack of height by

working out. He wasn't a gym nut or anything, but he had good muscle tone. And his Mr. Happy wasn't huge, but it could do the job, damn it.

"Nefertari, do you have a nickname or an endearment you like?"

She blinked rapidly. He realized she was processing his request. "You may call me Tari."

"Oh. Okay. I like that. It's ... uh, nice."

"Thank you." She joined him by the bed, her fingertips stroking his chest. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the sensations created by her touch. It had been a long time since he'd been caressed by a woman. "Chester, darling ... do you desire a blow job?"

Chester did, indeed, desire a blow job.

As the beautiful and willing Nefertari sank to her knees and wrapped her fingers around his cock, he took a whole nanosecond to wonder about the folly of sticking a vital part of his anatomy into what was essentially a machine. What if she malfunctioned? What if she applied the wrong kind of pressure? What if she -- *oooooh!*

Her mouth was warm and her tongue talented. She had no qualms about taking him all the way; her bobbing acquiescence made him groan. His eyes rolled back into his head, and he forgot to breathe.

So, okay. *Okay*. Tari felt like a real woman.

Her mouth was hot and wet and receptive. As she licked and sucked his cock, she played with his balls, stroking and gently squeezing. Sensations raced from groin to spine, sparks of pleasure that burst like mini-fireworks ... the kind that happened before the main event.

"That ... feels ... *amazing*."

She said nothing, which was understandable considering that the speaking part of her was inordinately busy. If he hadn't known that she was just a sexy robot, he might believe

she was enjoying herself. She seemed sorta worked up. She was moaning and licking and rubbing and acting enthusiastic. Her efforts increased -- so much so that his brain shut down.

His fingers wove into her soft hair, a steady point of reference as he abandoned playing nice and pumped into Tari's willing mouth. "Tari! Yes! Yes!" He was close to coming. Damned close. Just a few ... more ... thrusts ...

Tari's hands clutched his thighs and then ... *then* an electronic hum issued from her lips. It vibrated up and down his cock, straight into his balls, and OH, BABY. He came. Hard. He clutched Tari's head as his seed spurted and spurted and, *hell*, spurted some more into her mouth with the ferocity of a volcanic eruption. Okay, so his ejaculating semen was not exactly the same as spewing lava, but hey, it was darn close.

He was sweating, panting, and, after that Olympic-worthy orgasm, limp. Post-orgasmic shivers claimed him as she sucked him dry, cleaning and licking and soothing him. When he finally came to his senses, he let go of the woman's hair and stood, swaying like a palm tree in a hurricane. Nefertari still knelt at his feet, her head bowed as if she were a slave waiting for the pharaoh's command. That scenario made him uncomfortable. "Tari?"

"Yes, Chester darling?"

"Are you ... uh, okay?"

She looked up at him. "Yes."

"Stand up, please."

She rose fluidly, gracefully. He was astounded at how well she moved. No whoosh of pistons or grind of gears. She was, from all appearances, a woman. She looked at him, her gaze steady and her chin tilted.

"Quit looking all compliant."

She did the rapid blink thing, then looked at him. "I do not understand the request."

"Never mind."

“As you wish.” Her lips curved into the same sweet smile. “My database indicates that after ejaculation, men prefer a back rub, a nap, or a drink. Which do you prefer?”

All of those options sounded really nice. For one single moment, Chester allowed pure, selfish, indulgent male fantasy to claim his thoughts. Tari would do anything he wanted, when he wanted, where he wanted, and how he wanted. And she would never whine, nag, or wheedle. She would never say no. She would never lie.

She would never love.

Nefertari *was* just like a Stepford wife. A gorgeous, willing robot. She would, as Bastet promised, deliver pleasure. No muss. No fuss. But part of the joy of making love was giving as well as taking. Nefertari was not meant to feel pleasure. She would allow him to do whatever he wanted not because it would make her feel good, but because she was programmed to do as he asked. The very idea made him feel sad, and a little nauseous.

He pushed the “rest” button on the remote. Tari shut her eyes and stilled. With a deep sigh, Chester sat on the edge of the bed, staring at what should be the answer to his relationship problems. If he couldn’t have love ... then wasn’t Nefertari 9.0 the next best thing?

Not really.

He knew, in his heart, that to take Tari home and create a pretend relationship with her was wrong. She was a walking, talking receptacle. He laughed softly. So *that’s* what bothered him. She reminded him of every vapid, pretty girl he’d dated. They, too, had been receptacles -- cute, fluffy sex toys. They did and said what he wanted not because they enjoyed it. Not because they wanted to do it. Not because they loved him. Those lies were traded -- for money.

His thoughts drifted to Shannon, the sexy blonde with the Southern twang. *The plumber*. At least prostitutes were upfront. You paid for what you wanted. End of transaction.

He glanced at Tari. His doubts had come full circle. Now he was just re-treading mental territory. What was the difference between buying a prostitute's time and buying a sex android? For either one, he'd pay for their services. Both were emotionless; neither a prostitute nor an android would offer love or affection.

Chester looked at his watch and realized the hour was almost up. He'd spent most of it in miserable contemplation instead of testing all of Nefertari's *abilities*. He got dressed and once again sat on the bed to wait for Bastet. He should leave the room, find his hostess, and say, "No, thanks." But it seemed callous to leave Tari. And to feel that way about a machine made him feel stupid because it was *stupid* to think Tari would be hurt if he left her alone. *God, I'm such a nerd.*

When Bastet returned, she looked at a forlorn Chester, then at the rest-mode Nefertari, with raised eyebrows. "She did not please you, Mr. Hiddles?"

"Well ... uh ... yes. And no." He handed her the remote. "I'm very sorry, Bastet. She is compliant and beautiful and ... almost real. But she's not for me."

"Ah. The lack of soul you spoke of." She nodded. "There is an upgrade available. Would you be interested in acquiring this model if she displayed emotions?"

Chester looked at Tari. She felt like a real woman. She looked like a real woman. Hell, she even smelled like a real woman. How had they imbued it ... er, her, with that floral scent? And underlying it, that indefinable essence that suggested feminine sexuality? If she showed emotion -- not love, surely, but desire and need and joy ... hmmm ... maybe he could be satisfied with that.

"Still worried about the technology? Not only does Nefertari come with a lifetime money-back guarantee, you also receive maintenance and upgrades as part of the package."

"She's very expensive, isn't she?"

"Oh, yes. *Very*. And the upgrade I spoke of ... we're in the final testing stages. You would receive a beta version, which we would, of course, monitor and debug as needed."

Bast put a hand on his shoulder and whispered, “Just think ... you can have the woman of your dreams.”

The amused gaze of Shannon with those impossible blue eyes flashed in Chester’s brain. She had wavy blonde hair and skin like cream and had filled out that gold lamé dress extremely well. He glanced at the inert form of Tari. She was Shannon’s exact opposite -- small and dark and pretty and robotic. He shook his head. “I’m not sure I’m ready to give up on a human woman.”

“Then think of Nefertari as a solution for the interim. We can program her so that she not only participates in your favorite pursuits, but she also understands them. She’ll be able to converse with you, cook for you, and make love to you.” Bast waved toward Nefertari 9.0. “And with the upgrade, you’ll get the responses you crave. I guarantee you, Mr. Hiddles, that she will change your life.”

Chester grimaced. “I don’t know. Can I try her with the upgrade?”

“Of course.” Bast took the remote and used it to put Nefertari into ... well, whatever lay behind the dark silence of the strange door. “I’ll contact you as soon as she’s ready. In the meanwhile, please join the party. Try the lobster quiches. They’re divine.” She blew him a kiss, then bustled out of the room.

Feeling vaguely depressed, Chester sat on the bed. He didn’t want a lobster quiche. He didn’t want to be at this party. He didn’t want a sex-bot. Well ... maybe he wanted a sex-bot. But definitely not a lobster quiche.

The door opened. Chester stood up, feeling like a boy caught in a sorority girl’s bedroom. Shannon the Plumber.

His heart quivered, then beat a rapid tattoo “You’re so beautiful,” he said.

“Why, thank you.”

“I’m truly sorry, I ... well, I didn’t know you were ... *you know*. And when Bast said you liked plumbing --”

Shannon rolled her eyes as she swished across the room. “Bast loves to mess with people’s heads.”

“If she had just told me you were the upgraded model, I would’ve signed a blank check.”

She paused a couple feet away and peered down at him. The left corner of her mouth quirked. “Hold on a minute, darlin’. You think I’m ... what?”

Chester gazed at her. God, she was perfect. The cute accent, the gorgeous eyes, the curves outlined by that dress ... she seemed to shimmer with life force

“Mr. Hiddles? Hel-lo?”

He blinked. “Uh, sorry. Bast said she was going to see about the upgrade, and you showed up.”

“I see.” She crossed to the bed and sat next to him. “You’d sign a blank check for little ol’ me? What could you possibly hope to get from me that the other, um, model couldn’t provide?”

“You have a sense of humor. A nice smile. A glow to your eyes that ... by the way, are those contacts?” He laughed and shook his head. “Never mind. I guess they can make your eyes whatever color they want.”

“So it would seem.” She leaned closer, and the scent of peaches wafted over him. How could a robot smell like peaches? “You were saying?”

“I like you.”

“That’s interesting, Mr. Hiddles. How can you like a person you’ve only met once and for only a minute?”

Chester looked at her. “I listen to my heart.”

Her laughter pealed, and she slapped her knee. “Oh, that’s a good one, all right. You are cute. Not a lot in the ol’ noggin, but cute as a button.”

“You don’t think I’m intelligent?” He didn’t know whether to feel insulted or astonished. “And you think I’m cute?”

“I think you are corny as all get-out. If you’re so good about listening to your heart about whether or not to like a woman, what are you doing buying a sex robot?”

“She won’t lie to me. She won’t cheat on me. She won’t break ...” He trailed off and shrugged. Why was he explaining his reasons for buying a sex robot *to* the sex robot?

“She won’t break your heart?” Her gaze softened, and he marveled at the technology that allowed her to seem sympathetic. “Most folks think love is a very complex emotion. They try to dissect it so they can figure out why it causes both sorrow and joy. They want to have it, but without any side effects. But love is a very simple thing.”

“Maybe I’d agree if I could find love.”

“Sometimes, love finds you.” Then she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him.

Chester P. Hiddles realized two things simultaneously.

Shannon the Plumber was an excellent kisser.

And she was *not* a robot, upgraded or otherwise.

Chapter Three

Chester *was* cute, and *boy howdy*, he knew how to kiss! Shannon opened her mouth under the gentle onslaught of his tongue and enjoyed every bit of his imaginative use of said tongue. So much so, her panties got wet.

They fell onto the bed, still kissing. *Sweet Jesus*. His lips were soft, and he tasted like mints, and he had one helluva long, juicy tongue. Lord, what that man could do with an instrument like that, especially on certain parts of her body. Or hell, her *whole* body. Yowzer!

Her panties went from *wowthatsgood* wet to *ohmigod* soaked.

It had been a really long time since someone had revved her engine like this. She'd spent years working on the robotic technology that would make a metallic being appear to be a living, breathing human.

She'd been around the danged things so long, she'd forgotten what it was like to give in to a whim. To feel pleasure. To be human.

And Chester was reminding her in the best way possible how wonderful it was to be not only human, but also a woman.

“Gotta ... breathe ... sometime,” huffed Chester between the constant meeting of their lips.

“Maybe ... just ... a ... break,” agreed Shannon.

They broke apart and both panted heavily, sucking in air for their deprived lungs. The tumble onto the bed had landed them side by side. Mere inches separated them. Just a movement here, a scooch there, and that space would be gone. *Hmmm ...*

Shannon traced Chester’s lips with a red-lacquered nail. “You’re cute, sugar. And you sure know how to kiss a girl.”

He blushed. Shannon felt her heart melt at the sight of the red infusing his cheeks. A grown man getting embarrassed by a compliment? Oh, Lord. If she didn’t find a flaw soon, she was falling head over heels for this guy.

“How much do you charge?” He managed to look her in the eye as he asked the odd question. She saw the lust blazing in those brown eyes. But if she wasn’t mistaken, she saw tenderness, too. He would be a good lover, she decided. Yeah. He looked like the kind of patient, kind partner who took his sweet time.

Her panties went from *ohmigod* soaked to *fuckmenow* melting.

“Charge?” she asked. Her finger trailed his jaw all the way to his neck. He had a nice neck. What she wouldn’t give to see what was under that shirt ... and those pants.

“For your ... uh, services.”

Shannon tried to shake off the fog of lust clouding her mind. What services? He’d thought she was an upgraded robot moments before he lip-locked her. “You know I’m not a machine, right? Nefertari 9.0 is a prototype. Well, prototype A. The B version will be the one mass-manufactured.”

“You work for Bast?”

Shannon nodded. “Yep. She wanted me at this shindig. I don’t normally do parties like this one. But you know, what Bast wants, Bast gets.”

"I want you," said Chester. "I don't care how much it costs."

"Uh ... what?"

"Bast said you were a *plumber*, right?"

"That's a simplified version of what I do." Shannon's neck prickled. Something about this conversation was off. He didn't know who she was. Didn't have a clue she was the inventor of Bast's sex-bots. She was the lead project engineer for the construction of Nefertari 9.0 and Imhotep 9.0 -- the female and male robotic sexual companions that Bast had commissioned when Shannon was fresh out of MIT and looking for a challenge.

And if he doesn't know this about me ... then what kind of plumbing does he think ...

Oh. Oh, no. He didn't think she was --

"What kind of services?" she asked.

"I'll hire you for the whole night. And we'll do whatever you want."

"You want to pay me for sex?"

"Isn't that what you're usually paid for?"

Shannon didn't know whether to laugh at him or sock 'im one. Hadn't she wondered if Chester had personality defects? Thinking she was a hooker plying her trade on partygoers was a damned big character flaw, in her book. Then again, maybe the flaw was hers. She was dressed in a sex-me-up dress with stilettos, and she had ravished him on impulse. And all that after Bast had told him she was a *plumber*. What a fix-a-roo this was.

"I thought you were buying the robot."

"Do you want me to?"

Shannon laughed. "Why does my opinion matter? You're the one writing the check."

"I don't know if I'll buy the sex-bot."

"Well ... why don't you know?"

"She's nice. But she's not ... enough. She doesn't have a soul."

Stunned by this assessment, Shannon sat up. Chester blinked up at her, obviously discombobulated by her sudden change. Then he sat up, too.

“Where’s it written that you gotta have a soul to enjoy sex?”

“Isn’t that just it? Part of making love is bringing the other person pleasure. The sex-bots are one-sided. Sure, it’s decent-enough sex. But it’ll never be intimacy.”

“Nefertari isn’t meant to create intimacy. She’s just a big ol’ toy,” sputtered Shannon. “That’s like expecting a vibrator or a dildo or butt plug to enjoy its function.”

“I don’t agree. Nefertari is meant for companionship and care. I bet she does the dishes and plays chess and gives head -- all without complaint and all without expecting anything in return. The perfect wife. I’m sure she’ll be really, really popular because then men won’t have to work on the emotional aspects of their relationships.”

Shannon was unnerved by his viewpoint. She’d spent years working on the technology, years creating the near-perfect human likenesses, years that she could’ve been dating or raising a family or working on more valuable projects ... and this bozo didn’t like her ’bots because they didn’t have souls? Because they wouldn’t orgasm or take pleasure in sex? And what was wrong with a multi-function robot? Imhotep 9.0 did dishes and played chess, too. Hah! He and Nefertari 9.0 represented the first true equality between genders ever achieved.

“Shannon?”

“I’m sorry, Chester. I was just thinking about what you said.” She smiled wanly. “You know, I feel a migraine comin’ on. Would you mind if we discussed my ... services some other time?”

“I’ll give you my cell phone number. Call me as soon as you can.”

He handed her a business card, and she took it from him, feeling a sizzle from his fingertips to hers. No doubt about it. They seemed to have that mystifying electric connection that usually meant wow-oh-wow sex. She liked Chester. And she really wanted to know what he wore under his shirt and pants. Maybe she’d find out one day.

But not tonight.

Tonight, she had another dick to worry about.

“You know, Chester. Maybe you should give Nefertari a chance. Even if you decide she’s not what you want, it wouldn’t hurt to give her a try, would it?”

Chester shrugged. “I don’t know.” He blinked up at her. “Will you call me?”

“Yes,” she said, meaning it. She grinned wickedly, then turned and sashayed out the door.

* * * * *

A couple hours later, Shannon padded into her bedroom fresh from a shower. She wore only her white silk robe. She’d gotten a pedicure yesterday. The polish was a pearlescent white, and centered on each toenail was a tiny blue gem. She stared at the teeny glitters as she paced and thought about her encounter with Chester. She was as crazy about luxurious carpet as she was about pedicures, and her bare feet felt swathed in cotton as she walked back and forth in front of her four-poster bed.

Aw, shit. Things were complicated. Usually, she liked complicated because she enjoyed the challenge of working out a solution to a thorny problem. The more gnarled the tangle, the better she liked it.

But *this* problem ... sheesh! First, the guy thought she was an upgraded robot. *Then* he thought she was a high-class call girl. And *then* he had the nerve to say he didn’t want Nefertari 9.0 because the robot wouldn’t enjoy sex.

“I’m pissed off because I didn’t think of it,” she grumbled. “Could be an optional upgrade. Yeah. Optional.” Hell, not everyone would want a truly responsive ’bot. Just those people like Chester. Men and woman who needed more than a perfect face, gorgeous body, and superior intelligence to buy into the fantasy.

Yeah.

So ... so ... *sooooooooo* ... what would need to be done to achieve such a result? Sensors. *Hmmm*. If she placed sensors at certain hotspots under the 'bot's skin, they would at least feel pleasure. Or pain. Simulated reaction, but still reaction. Close to, but not quite, emotion.

"Should've thought of this before," she muttered. "Sensors that would connect to the computer brain."

For all intents and purposes, the 'bot would feel.

"Yeah, that's good. That's really good. Go, Shannon!"

She'd work on the robot equivalent of orgasm. Her creations wouldn't just simulate feeling pleasure. They'd really feel the wondrous building pressure, the fantastic release of tension and fluids. *Why didn't I think of it before?* Her pacing quickened to keep up with the rapid flow of her thoughts. "Okay. Can't put a soul in a robot. I'm not God." She chuckled. "So ... what constitutes a soul?"

Soul, my left tit. Chester is wrong about the sex-bots. No one cares about a machine having a soul.

She was gonna prove Chester wrong about the sex-bots.

Her gaze skittered to the side. Imhotep 9.0 sat on the bed. He was stretched out, naked as the day she made him, and *hoo-wee*, he looked fiiiiiiiine. He had shoulder-length black hair, caramel skin, and when activated, a cock that would grow between six and ten inches, depending on the preference of his owner.

Oh, c'mon! That was a nice feature, damn it.

She crawled onto the bed and patted Immie's chest. "Rest mode off."

His eyes opened and his head turned. His gorgeous brown eyes looked at her. For the first time, she noticed the lack of emotion. Soulless, just like Chester said. Shannon pushed away those thoughts and focused on Immie.

"Good evening, Shannon," he said in a whiskey voice. "How may I pleasure you?"

"Now there's a question." She opened her robe. "I want you to play with my breasts."

“Memory accessed,” said Immie. “Downloading previous sexual engagements.” Shannon frowned. Okay. She needed to change that feature. No one trying to have sex with a ’bot would appreciate that kind of ... of *robot* talk.

“Shannon, would you like me to suck your nipples?”

“Do you want to?”

“I want to do what will please you.”

“Do you, Immie? Do you really want to please me?”

Immie hesitated, not because he was trying to find romantic words, but because he was searching his databanks for the correct answer. After a few seconds, he said, “Information incomplete. Please program appropriate response.”

“The answer to the question is ...” Shannon bit her lip. “Immie, I want you to choose.”

“Programming error. I do not understand the response.”

She cupped Imhotep’s handsome face. Perfect jaw. Perfect cheekbones. Perfect nose. Perfect eyes. So beautifully, completely, deliciously perfect in many ways.

But still a machine.

“Please choose your own appropriate response to the question, ‘Immie, do you really want to please me?’”

“Understood.” He paused as he processed the new programming. Then he looked at her, a gentle smile curving his full lips.

She kissed the underside of his jaw. It had taken years to get the texture of the skin to feel like that of real man. The team had flirted with the idea of flavored skin -- chocolate, strawberry, coconut. They tried a few rounds with prototypes, but it always tasted weird, and it never lasted longer than an hour or two.

Drawing her attention back to Immie, she drew his lobe between her teeth and flicked the tender bit of skin. *A sensor should go here.* She flicked again, and Immie shuddered just

as he'd been programmed. *Definitely need a sensor.* Damn it. It was all Chester's fault, this *wanting* her sex toy to experience genuine reactions.

"Immie," she whispered. "Do you really want to please me?"

He pressed his lips against her neck, kissing her tenderly until he found her ear. Then his tongue mimicked her previous actions -- licking her lobe, flicking the inner shell of her ear. "Yes," he whispered. "I want to please my Shannon."

"Ooooh. Now, *that's* a good response," she purred, pushing him onto his back and lying on top of him. "Make love to me, Immie."

He kissed her the way she liked to be kissed. She'd programmed him to do it. Practiced with him a hundred times to get it just right. And even though his tongue and his lips worked their magic again, she couldn't help but think about how Chester -- goofy, dumb human -- had kissed her silly on the first try.

Forget about Chester!

Think about fucking your robot!

Shannon redoubled her efforts to enjoy sexual intercourse with Immie. They touched each other; she because she wanted to feel the muscles of her lover flex under her fingertips and he because he was fulfilling his function. Once again, Shannon pushed away the intrusive thoughts. She closed her eyes and weaved a fantasy.

Immie was real.

He felt real. What he did to her was real.

"Not a robot," she murmured as she lowered her tits to his eager mouth. "Real. Oh, Immie."

He licked her nipples into hardness, his hands cupping the mounds as he suckled one taut peak and then the other. Sensation after sensation zipped from her raw nipples to clit. She rubbed her wet pussy on his growing cock. "Yes, Immie. Oh, yes."

One of his hands drifted between her thighs. A finger stroked her clitoris, and she moaned at the skittering pleasure. That finger tormented her clit a moment longer before sliding down, down, down until it dipped inside her pussy. He pushed up at an angle, touching the sensitive knob of flesh above the wet entrance to her cunt.

She shuddered. "Oh, God. Do it again."

He complied. His finger went up, rubbing and bumping, and driving her wild. "Immie! Your cock. *Now*."

Immie sat up, his back stopping at an eighty-degree angle. Unlike a mere human, his spine was made of titanium and required no leverage to stay at that angle. As Shannon slid onto the eight-inch cock, Immie's hands stroked her breasts and tweaked her nipples. His gaze stayed on hers as she took her pleasure from his enormous dick.

Planting her hands on his chest, she rode him hard. Sweat beaded her skin, and her breath constricted, but sweet God, the feel of his cock plunging into her cunt over and over brought her closer and closer to orgasm.

"Tell me what you want," demanded Immie. He moaned as his hips matched her thrusts. He sounded as if he enjoyed fucking her. That was okay by her. Right now, she could give two good-goddamns if he really enjoyed it.

It's fantasy. All fantasy.

"You know what to do," she said as she squeezed his cock with her vaginal muscles. "Make me come, Immie. I want to come on your cock, baby."

One of his hands slipped between her thighs and stroked her clit. The other stole around her hip, glided down her ass, and dipped a forefinger into her anus. Another kind of pleasure rippled through her as lubricant spurted from a tiny hole in the tip of that finger. Then the finger extended, widened as it went inside her ass. Her movements were slower this time. She wanted to feel everything.

The thumb on her clit.

The cock in her pussy.

The finger in her ass.

“Do it,” she whispered.

The finger in her ass started vibrating.

The thumb on her clit did the same.

“Oh, God. Oh, yes ... Yes!” She took his cock as deeply inside her pussy as she could and with her clit and the sensitive tissues of her ass vibrating ... the orgasm roared through her, blinding her, stealing her breath, and singeing her skin. “Oh, Immie. I’m coming, oh, yeah, baby. I’m coming on that big cock.”

Her cum soaked her thighs and his, and even as the monster orgasm faded, mini ones rippled through her. After a moment, Immie removed his fingers and retracted his cock. Shannon slumped forward, smiling as Immie wrapped his arms around her.

“Immie, you are the best fuck I’ve ever had.”

“Thank you, Shannon.”

She rose up a little and looked at him, grinning. “Who needs a real man when I have you?”

He blinked at her, then a second later said, “Information incomplete. Please program appropriate response.”

Chapter Four

Three weeks after Chester attended the party at The Lust Bastion, he found himself the new owner of Nefertari 9.01. Bast had delivered the sex-bot herself, promising that the upgrade had been performed and tested.

“She has the emoti-chip,” said Bast her cat-like smile a little too wicked. “But it is, as I told you, very new. If you notice any bugs or kinks, shut her down and call me. She’s also been outfitted with voice command and hot-spot sensors.”

“Sensors?”

“When you touch her or she touches you, she will really feel it and really react. Your Nefertari has emotions and true sensory touch.”

“Ah.”

Bast laughed. “Everything you could ever want in a woman.”

“You mean everything I could ever want in a sex toy.”

That night, he stood in the doorway of his bedroom and looked at the gorgeous machine that now inhabited his space. Tari sat on his huge bed, a circular silver-sheeted modern monstrosity that one of his ex-fiancées had purchased. Since then, he’d always felt like his bedroom was the set of a bad science fiction movie. Lots of shiny metal and sleek

lines and weird lights. But he'd never really cared enough to change it. Hell, he rarely noticed his surroundings, which was why his girlfriends had changed the styles of his previous homes without him blinking an eye.

Come to think of it ... his current house was just a mish-mash of furniture that had been purchased by former lovers. The interior designer had come into the new house, taken those pieces from storage, and created a magazine-cover kind of place.

Mish-mash. Wasn't that a metaphor for his pathetic life? His bad luck with love?

Chester undressed, all the while looking at Nefertari. Her eyes were closed. And she was very much naked. He couldn't say he *wasn't* attracted to her. What man wouldn't lust after a gorgeous woman who'd been made for his sexual pleasure?

Well, hell. He wasn't *dead*.

"I can't believe I bought you," he said as he sat next to her. He was naked, too. Should he try out his new sex-bot, or just go to sleep? He touched her hair. It was silky soft, flowing through his fingers like an obsidian waterfall. "I must be crazy." He leaned down to kiss her shoulder. Just like real skin. And her scent ... almost a woman's essence mixed with that incredible floral perfume ... God, he liked the way she smelled.

Chester had paid ten million dollars and change to purchase Nefertari ... and he would've paid a 100 times more than that for Shannon's phone number.

Three weeks and she hadn't called. Bast refused to tell him anything about Shannon. Not her last name, phone number ... nothing. She'd laughed and said, "She's not for you, Chester."

Not for me? What the hell did that mean? He had enough money to hire someone to find her. He had the kind of computer skills that would allow him to track her down through less-than-legal means.

But he wanted her to *want* to call him. To see him. To be with him.

He wanted to kiss her again. Talk to her. Find out what she loved and hated. And give to her those things she wanted most, but couldn't have. He wanted to make her dreams come true.

God, he just wanted *her*. As pure and raw as he'd ever wanted any woman. She did something to his mind, to his heart that he couldn't figure out. He'd never felt this way about a woman. Not ever.

And yeah, he had thought about -- *a lot* -- what it would be like to make love to Shannon. He'd imagined all kinds of ways to find pleasure with her. And that sultry Georgia voice had promised ... well, to call him, but still there was something implied, at least he hoped so. He would admit, too, that he'd thought about whether or not Shannon would play with him and Nefertari. Every guy's fantasy. Sheesh. Just the idea of taking Shannon *alone* made him hard. Made him forget about Goddess Death II. Made him put down the Cuervo.

He thought about watching Shannon and Nefertari as they pleasured each other ... as they stroked *him* with hands and mouths ... as he sucked Shannon's nipples while Tari went down on his cock.

He shuddered as the images flashed in his mind like an old movie.

Sweat pearled on his upper lip and his breath shallowed. His cock was rock-hard, ready for action. He wrapped his hand around the length and squeezed, then slowly stroked.

Oh, how he wanted to make love to Shannon. He wanted to worship her like the goddess she was ... wanted to be her slave. Her pussy would be tight, wet ... he'd plunge his cock into that sweet cunt ... and fuck her over and over and over ... until she came on his cock, all slick and throbbing ... *oh, yeah!*

Would she scream?

Would she beg for more?

Would she love me?

Groaning, he opened his eyes and let go of his dick.

“Fuck.” He fell back onto the bed and looked up at the silver ceiling with its recessed multicolored lighting. Those lights blinked on and off like a frenetic UFO’s. *I really need to change my bedroom décor.*

Prostitutes weren’t in the business of love. And he couldn’t bear the thought of Shannon smiling at him in pity as he offered his heart to her. He didn’t care how she made her living. He could give her so much more. She would never have to do anything she didn’t want to do.

Chester sighed, feeling the throb of frustrated lust.

He’d learned enough about women to know that love could be bought. The *lie* of love could be bought. It hadn’t been enough before ... so why would it be enough with Shannon? He had thought himself in love with other women. He’d allowed himself to fall under the spell of love. The idea of love.

Maybe love didn’t exist. Maybe people just got together because they had stuff in common, and they had enough attraction to have great sex and that was it. Maybe the kind of soul-deep love that people searched for just didn’t fucking exist.

Suddenly, it all made sense. If love didn’t exist, if love was just a social lie created by people who didn’t want to be alone, then he could just stop wishing for it and stop searching for it.

Love doesn’t exist.

Chester laughed. He felt better in this second than he had for years. He understood. He *finally* understood what everyone else in the world, including his ex-fiancées, had known all along.

He sat up and took Tari’s remote off the nightstand. Then he remembered she had voice command now. “Uh ... Tari on.”

She didn’t move. Crap. Where was the instruction book? He tapped her shoulder, but she didn’t react. “Okay. Um ... Nefertari awake!”

Oh, well. He'd figure out the voice command later. He clicked a button on the remote, and the robot's eyes popped open. Tari looked at him and smiled. "Good evening, Chester darling. How may I pleasure you?"

Chester blinked at her. He hadn't thought beyond the idea that he was horny and that Tari was a sex-bot. "What are your suggestions?"

"You like fellatio."

"True. I also like a lot of other things."

She tilted her head and smiled at him; he realized she was accessing her databanks. Then she said, "I will do whatever pleases you." Her eyes went liquid as she trailed fingers down his chest. "I will give you anything you desire."

"Anything?"

"Yes," she purred. She pushed him onto his back and straddled him. "I want you," she said. Huh. She sounded like she meant it. Her fingers felt so soft, so warm. Almost real.

Would almost real be enough?

He reached up to cup her breasts. He brushed her nipples, watching in amazement as the buds tightened. Okay. That was impressive. Tari let out a sigh. "That feels good."

Sensors. That's what Bast had said. Tari could feel now and react to actual touch.

She rubbed her pussy on his cock and moaned. "Oh, Chester darling. It feels so good."

"Why don't you try it with me inside you?"

Chester heard the crack of thunder at the same moment Tari took his cock into her slick, tight cunt. He shuddered at the sensations that rippled from his balls. Her pussy somehow gripped him in such an erotic way that when she moved, he almost tipped over the edge.

"Slow," he managed between clenched teeth. "God, Tari, you're going to make me come."

“Touch me,” she begged, “and I will come with you.”

He didn’t think too long about why a robo-babe needed to come or even if it was possible. Thrusting his thumb against her clit, he stroked. She gasped. Her movements quickened then ... “Oh, Chester!” As she came, the strong pulsations of her cunt milked his cock to an incredible orgasm. The intense pleasure fogged his mind and tensed his body. His fingers dug into her thighs.

A few moments later, she lay next to him, her fingers sifting through the brown curly hair on his chest. “You were wonderful,” she said. “Thank you.”

Chester realized what a fucking hypocrite he was. He found pleasure with Nefertari, but she still creeped him out in a way he couldn’t verbalize. Something was wrong about a fake woman. And no emoti-chip or skin sensors or simulated orgasms could match making love to a real woman.

The rain beat on the windows, making him feel drowsy. Just as he drifted into sleep, he heard a tremendous CRASH.

Leaping out of bed, Chester hurried from room to room in the upstairs. Everything was intact. He ran downstairs and checked out the living room, formal dining room, game room, and finally, the kitchen. Through the windows that overlooked the two-acre backyard, he saw the huge pine tree that had a smoldering cracked base. The top of the tree had hit his roof and it leaned like a drunken sailor against the house.

“Shit.” He ran upstairs to put on a robe. Tari sat on the bed and looked at him with liquid brown eyes. “I’m going downstairs to check out a tree that’s fallen.” Chester looked around. “And you just do ... well, whatever.”

“May I go with you?”

“I ... uh, yeah, sure.” *Why the hell would she want to go with me?* Maybe she was programmed to learn more about her owner and her new home environment. Yeah, that was probably it.

In the kitchen, he grabbed a flashlight from the pantry and headed out the door that led to the backyard. The tree wasn't wide, maybe a foot or so, but it was tall. He flashed the beam over the pine. There was no way he could pull off the tree. If lightning had hit it, he was lucky the damned thing hadn't crashed through a window. Chances were good that it had probably damaged the roof.

Tara, still naked and apparently undaunted by the persistent rain, stood next to him and watched him assess the tree. "I like how the rain feels," she said. "I think I would like to fuck you again."

Chester grinned. "That's an excellent --"

CRREEEEAK. Chest looked up to see the pine snap, the largest portion swinging down. He closed his eyes and raised his arms defensively, even though his body knew it was too late to avoid getting hit by the tree.

Except he didn't.

He heard a crash in front of him, so forceful it shook the ground. Behind him, he heard a *ka-thunk-roll-ka-thunk-roll*, then a huge, ground-sucking SMACK. After a few seconds, Chester opened his eyes and stared at Nefertari.

"The tree was going to hit you," she said. "You had a twenty-seven-point-seven chance of surviving the impact."

"Jesus." He almost vomited. His heart pounded wildly and sweat poured off his brow. "*Jesus.*" He licked fear-dried lips and looked at Tari. "You saved my life. Thank you."

"You are welcome."

Chester looked behind him. The other part of the tree had rolled off the roof and onto the grass. He turned and looked past Tari's shoulder and saw that she had heaved the largest part of the tree at least fifty feet away. Wow. Maybe having a robot around wasn't a bad idea after all.

"Darling," purred Tari, "let's make love."

“Out here?”

“I like how the rain feels,” she repeated. “Let me make you feel good again.”

She dropped to her knees and sucked at his cock, her hands stroking while her tongue swirled. He’d almost died a minute and half ago, and the terror that still beat in his blood took a while to melt into desire. The rain was relentless, too, soaking his skin, forcing his eyes closed. But Tari was tireless in her efforts. As his cock hardened in her talented mouth, she slipped a finger between his thighs and right into his ass.

“Tari!” He wasn’t sure if he was using her name as permission or admonition. The finger sheathed all the way inside, then pumped with the same ruthless efficiency as her mouth on his cock. Then ... oh, God ... *then* the finger vibrated as it fucked his anus.

His hands fisted into her hair, and he pumped into her mouth ruthlessly.

Pleasure wound through him, tightened so sweetly. He shoved deeply into Tari’s mouth. “Oh, God. I’m coming!” The orgasm roared through him, sucking away his ability to breathe, his ability to think.

He sagged to his knees, his hands slipping to Tari’s shoulders. She looked at him, her eyes somehow more human-looking than ever before. She smiled winsomely and said, “I love you, Chester.”

Chapter Five

“The emoti-chips go wonky after water submersion,” announced Lee Kim as he sat down at Shannon’s paper-strewn desk. His eyebrows rose. “How can you find anything?”

“I’ve got a system. What do you mean the emoti-chips go wonky? That’s stupid. We tested ’em for everything.” She poked through a stack of files and pulled out the one labeled Emoti-Chip Testing.

“Not prolonged exposure.”

“Define ‘prolonged.’”

“Ten minutes.”

Shannon rolled her eyes. “You’re telling me the protective casing is affected by water after a mere ten minutes?”

Lee looked at her. He had dark brown almond-shaped eyes, spiky black hair, and a body to- die-for. He was brilliant and buff. And deliriously in love with his wife of ten years. “That’s what I’m saying. The emoti-chip is placed in the neck, right? The ’bot’s skin is really absorbent. Ten minutes getting persistently soaked, and it goes wonky.”

She flipped open the file and looked at the information gathered from the water tests. “We only tested up to five minutes of submersion. Shit. We should’ve kept testing in

increments of fifteen minutes. At the very least we should've gone to an hour. Damn it. Bast and her constant pushing and prodding."

"You ever take Immie into the bath?"

"Duh. But not with the emoti-chip installed. Except --" Except last night they spent a good deal of time in the hot tub. And that had been the first time he'd been in water with the emoti-chip. "Well, it's not like we've gone into mass production. Just Immie and the Nefertari model we sold to the gazillionaire."

Chester Pettigrew Hiddles. She hadn't forgotten about him. It had been a little more than three weeks since she'd seen him. She really did want to call him, but she'd spent eighteen-hour days at the lab perfecting *his* version of the sex-bot. Okay. So she'd been a little reluctant to pick up the phone. She often thought about their kiss and about what it would be like to kiss him again. To feel him inside her. Her heart skipped a beat. Yeah. Well, hell. Maybe it *was* time to give Chester a call.

"I'll take care of it. We'll just remove the chips for further testing and replace them when they are ready. Screw Bast's timelines. I'm not being chinchy on anything else just so she can get richer. The woman already owns half the world."

Lee grinned then stood up. "You're the boss."

"Damn straight."

* * * * *

"Immie?" Shannon put the keys on the antique hall tree. She hung up her lab coat on a brass hook and looked into the mirror. Exhaustion mapped red lines in her eyes. The emoti-chips hadn't been ready to install. Doing prolonged exposure tests led to other tests, which led to other unknown problems. They weren't ready. Hadn't been ready. But she still let Bast talk her into pushing up the timeline by months. The sensors, on the other hand, seemed to work perfectly.

The spicy scent of curry wafted into the foyer and effectively stopped her musings. Yawning, she followed the delightful smell all the way to the kitchen. She hadn't eaten a real meal in weeks. Had her housekeeper cooked? Once in a while Estelle left a casserole for her. Entering the kitchen, she stopped just inside the door and stared.

Imhotep stood at the stove dressed in faded denims and a KISS T-shirt. As she tried to figure out where the hell he'd gotten clothes, she realized he was *cooking*. On the butcher-block island sat a big bowl of fragrant jasmine rice.

"Immie?"

He turned, flashing a smile so real she was momentarily stunned. She swallowed the sudden knot lodged her throat. "What are you doing? Where did you get those clothes? What the hell is all this?"

"I found a recipe on the Food Network website for vegetable curry. You said that was your favorite, right? I got the clothes last night at this great online vintage store. They overnighted my order. I have five other '70s rock band tees and two more pairs of jeans. Cool, huh?" He tapped a wooden spoon at the edge of the pan and turned around to face her. "Wait till you see my new underwear. Tiger stripes. Gro-*owl*." He waggled his brows, then sauntered across the room and gathered her into his arms. "I missed you, Shannon. How was work?"

"Uh ... not quite as exciting as it was around here," she said faintly. The wonky emotichip had turned her sex toy into the closest thing to a boyfriend she'd had since ... well, since she was in college. He kissed her -- no, he damned near devoured her -- and she felt her body react to Immie's attentions. Well, shit. She'd programmed her hot spots into his databanks. He knew exactly how to turn her on ... and how fast he could do it.

While her body busied itself with its own pleasure, her mind spun with questions and hypotheses and concerns until she was dizzy.

Maybe that's why she didn't protest when she found herself stripped naked and lifted to the butcher-block island. And she didn't exactly say no when Immie sucked on her nipples and parted her legs. And ... okay, she didn't protest when his cock slammed into her and brought her to an explosive orgasm.

What was more surreal than an unexpected home-from-work fuck was eating an unexpected tasty meal prepared by the same man. A master lover and a master chef. Impossible. Imhotep was a robot that should be in her bedroom on rest mode.

After the meal, Immie took her into the living room. They sat on the couch like two regular people sipping a very good chardonnay. Immie drank from his wine glass. The 'bots could do limited consumption of food and liquids, but she worried about Immie eating a full dinner and drinking alcohol. If she could get him to shut down, she'd open him up and clean out his insides. That would have to wait, though.

Cautiously, she asked, "Why aren't you on rest mode?"

"I didn't feel like sleeping. All that sex in the hot tub gave me energy. You were out like a light, so I did some surfing on the 'Net."

"And bought clothes."

"I'm naked all the time," he complained good-naturedly. "And I like being naked around you, but I need clothes. Everybody needs clothes. Want to go to a movie?"

The abrupt change of subject scattered her thoughts. "Movie?"

"Yeah. We've never been out together."

"Immie ... you're a ... a *robot*. I created you to be a pleasure companion for humans."

He blinked at her, and she thought he was processing the information. Relief whispered through her. Good. *Just let me shut you down, buddy, and we'll fix this mess.*

Then Imhotep laughed and slapped his thigh. "That's a good one, Shannon. Me? A robot? Yeah, right."

* * * * *

“Where are you going, Chester darling?”

Chester cursed under his breath, then looked over his shoulder. His grip on the doorknob loosened. “Just need some fresh air.”

Tari smiled indulgently. “I still don’t see the difference between the air in the house and the air outside. Oh, well. I’ll get my jacket.”

Damn it. He shoved his hand into the left pocket of his Dockers and palmed the credit-card sized cell phone. In the last forty-eight hours, he’d lived the life of a kept man. Tari followed him everywhere. When she wasn’t making “suggestions” about his choice of pants, the way he lounged on the couch, or how he chewed his food, she was seducing him like a horny bridesmaid at a wedding reception.

The lightning storm had knocked out phone lines and the DSL and the phone company still hadn’t fixed the problems. Using his cell phone out of Tari’s hearing had been *impossible*. Every time he tried to leave the house, she was suddenly there. He wanted Bast to retrieve her freakazoid robot. NOW.

As Tari pulled on the purple leather jacket, he contemplated the white half-top and jeans she wore. She’d discovered some boxes with clothing previous girlfriends had left at one time or another. He’d lied about why he had women’s clothes even while he wondered why he had to fib to a sex-bot.

The problem was, Tari didn’t seem to think she *was* a robot.

“Ready, Chester?” She asked as she crossed the room to join him. She wrapped her hand around his bicep and grinned at him, her gaze filled with adoration. They walked out the door, down the concrete steps to the driveway, then across it to the path that led to a community park. “You know what I’d like to do?” she asked.

Chester stifled the urge to sigh. Instead, he looked at Tari’s too happy expression and said, “What?”

“I want to make love to you --”

Yeah. There's a big surprise.

“-- while someone else watches.”

Whoa. What?

They'd arrived at the park. It was empty. On a weekday morning, the park was almost always abandoned, though sometimes a mother or two would arrive with their toddlers. Chester often took morning walks through this area. It wasn't so much that he was a nature nut, but he did like the crisp feel of air in his lungs and enjoyed hiking through the high grass and tall trees.

Today, though, Tari led him to a picnic table. Before he realized her intent -- and as much as she liked sex, he *should* have -- she had wiggled off her jeans and bent over the table. Her beautiful round ass lifted and his traitorous cock stirred. “Tari!”

“We haven't made love in almost two hours.” She sounded petulant. With a huff, she stood up, turned around, and dropped to her knees.

“No,” said Chester, trying to slip out of the clutch of her arms. “Someone might see us.”

“I know! Isn't that exciting to you?”

Not really.

She unzipped his jeans and pulled out his cock from the slit in the boxers. Really, he should be ashamed that Tari could coax his cock into hardness, but she could and without too much effort. It was that mouth ... that vibration-licky thing she did. He could be dead, and she'd probably still manage to give him an erection.

“Yummy,” she said. She leaned over the table. “Okay. Fuck me. And if we're lucky, someone one will come to the park and see us.”

“You mean like a mother and her children?” asked Chester. His penis deflated like a just-popped balloon. “Hell, no!”

“You’re a prude.” She straightened and yanked up her jeans. “You’re a big, mean, selfish *prude!*”

Stunned by her childish assault, Chester opened his mouth to defend himself. Then he realized arguing with a sex-bot was pointless, and shut up.

“Ooooh! You! *Argh!*” Lifting her chin, Tari stomped away in the direction of the house. Watching her go with a huge sense of relief, Chester retrieved his cell phone and flipped it open. The screen lit and a message flashed: “Operation failed.”

“Goddamn it!”

By the time Chester got to the house, he had a plan. He’d get in his car and drive to The Lust Bastion and yell at Bast. They could have his money. He didn’t care about the millions. He had more. He wanted his life back. His no-sex, no-love, no-robot life.

Chester hurried up the driveway and paused when he noticed that Nefertari stood in front of the garage. Hauled up in her very strong hands by a jean jacket was the voluptuous and pissed-off Shannon the Plumber.

“Tari!” he yelled, running to her. “Put her down!”

“I can’t believe you would cheat on me,” said Tari, her voice sulky. “With her. She’s a cheap floozy.”

“Voice command nine-oh-one-oh-three,” said Shannon.

“That doesn’t make any sense,” said Tari. “Why are you shouting numbers at me?”

Chester’s heart climbed into his throat. Why *was* Shannon shouting numbers at her? Tari shook her prisoner, and Shannon’s neck snapped back. Shit!

“Tari, I’m not ... uh, cheating on you. Shannon is ... um, here to watch us.”

“Watch us?”

“You know ... watch us --” He gulped. “-- make love.”

Shannon's eyes widened. He smiled at her weakly, hoping his go-with-it expression got through to her. She pressed her lips together, then managed a chuckle. "Yes. I'm a *prostitute*. And Chester asked me to drop by and ... uh, do whatever you want."

"Oh, Chester!" Tari dropped Shannon, who let out a startled yelp as her ass met the concrete. Chester couldn't see if she was okay because his arms were suddenly full of the excited sex-bot. "And I called you a prude!"

Chester flinched. God, not only had Tari almost killed the woman he wanted to get to know better, she'd announced he wasn't a hot bed partner. The sex-bot rained kisses on his cheeks and chin.

"Why don't you go into the bedroom and get undressed?" He pulled her arms from his neck and managed another smile. "I'll tell Shannon what we want and uh ... pay her."

Tari giggled and ran up the stairs to the porch. She stopped, turned, and waved at Chester, then bounded inside. The minute she was gone from sight, he grabbed Shannon's arm and hauled her to the black Jaguar XLS. "Nice wheels. Let's get the hell out of here."

"I thought I was supposed to watch you make love to your sex toy." She sounded both amused and angry.

"She went nuts. She's ... clingy. And horny. All the time. I can't shut her off, and I can't get a moment's peace. The storm blew out my phone and my Internet. My stupid cell phone hasn't charged. Thank God you showed up." He opened the driver's side door and she slid into the seat. "Wait a minute. Why did you show up?"

"Long story," said Shannon. She wouldn't meet his gaze; she blew out a breath. "Was Nefertari exposed to water for more than ten minutes?"

"In the storm. I went out to check on a downed tree, and it almost crushed me. Tari saved me from becoming a pancake; then we ... Well, yeah, we were out there probably twenty or so minutes."

"The emoti-chip goes wonky after water immersion."

“How do you know --” *Plumber*. Bast had said Shannon was into plumbing, and he’d thought that was her coy way of referring to Shannon as a call girl. Now, he understood what she really meant. “You worked on the sex-bots.”

“I created the sex-bots. I’m the chief designer and the project’s team leader.”

He processed this information and felt the heat of embarrassment creep up his neck. “Why didn’t you tell me? You let me think ... oh, God.” He looked at her, at her peach skin and blonde hair and guileless blue eyes. “Why did you kiss me?”

“I like kissing, and you curled my toes.”

“I ... I did?”

“Yes, darlin’. I’m sorry I didn’t call you. Or tell you the truth. I’ve been working my ass off on getting the emoti-chips operational and installing the sensors.”

“Chester!!!”

Tari’s annoyed screech forced Chester to look up at his bedroom window, which was located above the garage. The window was open. He saw her face pressed against the screen. She punched it; the screen flew off and skittered across the Jag’s roof. Shannon screeched and popped up out of the driver’s seat. “You’re gonna pay for that! Nobody hurts Baby.”

“You named your Jag ‘Baby’?” asked Chester.

“*She-yat!*” answered Shannon. “Get in the car! Get in the *fucking* car!”

Chapter Six

Thud! Thud! Chester's gaze swung from Shannon's stunned expression to the hood of the Jaguar. A very naked, very pissed-off Tari stood on it. Hands on her hips, she glared at them. Holy crap. She'd *jumped* from the window to the car. "Where are you going?" she shouted.

Chester dove across Shannon's lap and crawled into the passenger seat. Shannon slammed shut the door and pressed a button that auto-locked all doors, then jammed her key into the ignition switch. Tari bent down and slammed a fist into the front windshield. The glass held, but cracks fanned out from the spot that had taken the brunt of Tari's hit.

The Jaguar's engine purred and Shannon slammed into reverse and shot backwards down the driveway. Tari flew off and skidded across the pavement. In seconds, she leapt up and ran -- *really freaking fast* -- toward the retreating car.

"Chester darling!" she screamed. "Chester *daaaaaarrrrling!*"

Shannon spun the wheel, the car evened out, and she accelerated. Chester held on to the seatbelt for dear life and prayed. A lot.

By the time they'd gotten off the mountain, Chester had three heart attacks and two urges to vomit. Shannon didn't let up on the gas until they arrived at the outskirts of Las Vegas.

"Where are we going?" asked Chester.

"The Lust Bastion." Shannon dug into her jean pocket and pulled out an itty bitty cell phone. She hit one button, then waited for whoever she'd called to answer. Chester looked out the rearview mirror so often, his neck nearly got whiplash. He wasn't sure that his sex-bot hadn't figured out a way to track them. The road was filled with traffic, not naked Egyptian females, so he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Not there," said Shannon. "Not fucking there." She shut the cell phone and tossed it into Chester's lap. "I can't take you home with me. I couldn't shut off Immie, either. He's the male prototype and I've ... uh, been experimenting with him."

She looked at him, apologetic. A charming blush stained her cheeks. She was embarrassed about her own use of a sex-bot? Or was she ashamed that she'd had to tell him about it? Hmmm. Interesting

"Anyway, I had to lie my ass off to get out of the house without him. I don't understand what's going on with these 'bots. I mean, well, I do ... but damn it. I don't."

"You can't shut them down?"

"No. Not even my master command code is working. It's like they're ... real." She glared at him. "You. You wanted someone with a *soul*. Jerk-off."

"Hey! I said a soul ... not a crazed need for constant attention and sexual gratification. What kind of emotions did you put in that chip?"

"Oh, shut up."

Chester snapped on his seatbelt and looked out the window. He was relieved to be away from Tari, angry with Shannon's petulance, and upset that he'd gone against his instincts and bought the sex-bot. Finally, he said, "I was lonely."

“What?”

“Lonely. As in, feeling alone, alone, *alone*.”

Shannon blew out a breath. “I know that feeling. All you have is your work to keep you company. An empty house, an empty bed ... an empty heart.” She glanced at him. “Me, too.”

They pulled into the parking lot of The Lust Bastion Erotica Emporium.

“It doesn’t look like it’s open,” said Chester.

“That’s impossible. It’s a twenty-four-hour, seven-day-a-week business.”

They got out of the Jag and hurried to the entrance. On the elaborately carved wooden doors was a large, printed sign that said: *Closed For Inventory, Will Reopen Tomorrow at 10 a.m.*

“Terrific,” said Shannon. “So, Plan A is kaput.”

“What’s Plan B?” Chester looked closely at the doors. The figures carved into the wood were engaged in various sex acts. Women and men. Men and men. Women and women.

“Hey ... is that a goat?”

“Could you focus, please?” Even so, she peered at the figures he pointed to and frowned. “I don’t know. Maybe it’s Pan. You know the half-goat guy from Greek mythology.”

“Huh. Is that a flute or a --”

“I’m such an idiot! I have a *key*. And the access code to the alarm system. Duh. I’m a freaking employee.” She dug keys out of her black purse and put one into the lock. The door opened and they hurried inside. She turned to the panel on the left side of the entrance and punched in the code.

“Great,” said Chester, “but what good is it to be inside a sex store?”

“You’re kidding, right?”

Chester cleared his throat. "You can't mean ... that we ... uh ..."

"You're so cute when you babble." She sashayed through the lobby and into the main part of the store. "What we need is a plan. And here's as good a place as any to formulate one. Besides, we need to stay put while we wait for Bast to get in touch with us. That woman has five phone numbers, and I've left messages at every single one."

"If you can't figure out what to do about the sex-bots, what kind of solution can Bast come up with?"

Shannon nibbled at her bottom lip. "I could Taser them. But that would melt them inside out -- chips, wires, electronic brain, skin ... everything. I'd kinda like her permission before I fry her multimillion-dollar projects."

"Oh. Good point." Chester looked around at the rows and rows of sex toys. On the upper level, he could see shelves of videos and books. Whiling away the time with Shannon in a shop filled with sexual delights was *not* a good idea. Nope. Heat crept up his neck, a mixture of embarrassment and prickling lust. He thought about the big round bed upstairs, the one decked out in black silk. Then he imagined Shannon splayed on it, naked, naked, oh-so-*naked*. Her blonde hair spread like white honey ... her hands cupping her breasts -- an offering to him. She was a goddess. And he was her willing, grateful slave.

"Chester?"

He jolted, looking at her wide-eyed. "What?"

"I called your name three times. What were you thinking about it?" Her eyes twinkled mischievously, as if she'd guessed the direction of his thoughts.

What would it hurt to ask her to go upstairs and play? They were attracted to each other. A lot. They were adults in a stressful situation and entitled to some fun. And what better way to de-stress than a sex marathon?

“I was thinking about food.” *Shannon pie. With whipped cream.* “Why don’t we grab something to eat?” Chester couldn’t meet her gaze. *I’m such a chicken. Chester the Chicken. Man. Bwak. Bwak. Bwak.*

“Sounds good,” said Shannon, though her voice wasn’t infused with enthusiasm.

Silently, they returned to the foyer. Shannon reset the alarm, locked the door, and they walked to the car.

All four tires were flat.

“What the hell!” cried Shannon. “We were only inside for ten minutes.”

“Punctured,” said Chester as he knelt down to examine one tire. “Kids, maybe?”

“Mean kids.” Shannon rounded the car. “These are all goners.”

“I’m guessing you don’t have four spare tires.”

“No,” said Shannon. “Were you starving? We could hoof it somewhere.” Her eyes sparkled like rare sapphires. “Unless ...”

“Unless what?”

“You ask me what you really wanted to ask me.”

Bwak. Bwak. Bwak. Chester blinked at her, his voice frozen with fear. He managed to swallow the knot clogging his throat, but his heart thrummed a nervous beat. Logically, they should be trying to figure out what to do about the rampaging sex robots. Practically, they should be devising plans and refining solutions. Ideally ... ideally, they should ... they should ...

“I want to fuck you, Shannon,” he blurted. He flushed, his face burning with mortification. “That sounded crass. I’m sorry.”

To his shock, Shannon unzipped her jeans, then grabbed his hand and pushed it against her lacy panties. Panic shot through him. They were in a parking lot! Cars zipped by on the busy street. And she was ... wet.

“Feel that? Your words did that, Chester. Tell me, sugar ... what can your cock do for me?”

* * * * *

As soon as Shannon punched in the code to turn off the alarm, Chester took her into his arms and kissed her silly. She tasted like peaches. Yeah, like warm peach pie -- all sweet and spice.

Clothes were yanked off, tossed away ... skin met skin as their mouths devoured, their hands stroked. He pressed her against the wall, his cock rubbing her slickened pussy lips, and leaned down to lick her nipples.

“We got time, sugar,” she panted. “We’ll do all the slow stuff, I promise. But right now, I need hard and fast.”

“Thank God.” Chester cursed. “Condom!”

“We’re in a sex store,” Shannon said, her voice caught between frustration and amusement.

“Stay here,” he said, running to the counter. Near the register was a display. He grabbed a box, ripped it open, and grabbed a few squares out of it. He hurried to Shannon, who was rubbing her clit and moaning. Her nipples were hard as brown pebbles. Whoa. Desire jolted through him. “Wait for me!”

It took damned forever to unpackage the condom and roll it on. Shannon looked down and laughed. “It’s not my birthday. But I’ll sure take the gift.”

Chester followed her gaze. In pink and blue, the words Happy Birthday were scrawled on the white rubber. “Fuck it,” he said as he grabbed her and lifted her up. Her legs wrapped around him as his cock pushed into her tight pussy.

“No,” purred Shannon. “Fuck me.”

She was warm and wiggly. The faster he plunged into her, the more she moaned. He loved those breathy, low sounds. His hands slicked with sweat, but he kept them pinioned under her thighs. He kissed her, nibbling those ripe lips as he fucked her.

Pleasure coiled in his balls.

God-oh-God. He was going to explode.

“Chester!” Shannon came. Her pussy clenched his cock so hard, he went over. The orgasm ripped through him as if he’d been struck by a lightning bolt.

It was about a year before he returned to Earth.

“Damn,” whispered Shannon.

“Damn,” repeated Chester.

Shannon kissed his nose. “That was divine. But how about we, as Emeril likes to say, kick it up a notch?”

Chester went to the bathroom, which was down the hall from the left side of the foyer, and disposed of the condom. Then he followed Shannon into the store. Watching her lush, naked ass sway as she wandered through the aisles made him hot for her all over again. He wondered about fucking her ass. How would it feel to stuff his cock between those gorgeous cheeks? Would she like it? He’d do anything, anything at all to please her.

“Would you like to spank me?” she asked.

Chester stumbled. “Wha-at?”

Shannon held up a small black paddle. “It’s only for light slapping. You can’t whack it really hard or you’ll break it.”

He looked at the paddle and looked at Shannon. “I ... don’t do BDSM. I’m not closed-minded or anything. It’s just ...” He lifted his hands, palms up, unable to explain that yes, he wanted to spank her ass and fuck her ass and kiss her ass, but not if it meant strolling into a lifestyle he was ill-prepared for.

“You take everything too seriously. And you overthink.” She handed him the paddle.
“Let’s enjoy the moment.”

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he admitted. “I like you too much.”

“We’re only playing,” said Shannon gently. “Don’t you ever just play, Chester?”

For some reason, he felt ashamed. As if he were somehow flawed or missing a vital piece. He wasn’t handsome or buff or the ideal-looking guy. He worked out, but he wasn’t a gym nut. He didn’t particularly like sports. He didn’t have many friends. Hell, he didn’t have any friends. He had associates, employees, and acquaintances. He didn’t know what it was like to just let go and play. It was illogical, impractical and ridiculous to spend time doing anything without purpose.

He shook his head. “I don’t play. Unless you count the joy I get from creating video games.”

“Nope.” Sympathy glinted in her blue gaze. “Do you want me to beg? Do you want me to demand?”

His pulse leapt. Chester looked at the paddle. “D-demand.”

She turned around, then got onto her hands and knees. “Spank me, Chester,” she commanded. “Now!”

He kneeled behind her, hesitating. “Will it hurt you?”

“Yes. And it’ll make me wet. Wet for you.”

Chester gazed at those two perfect, round cheeks. “Demand it,” he said softly.

“Spank me!”

The paddle smacked her flesh. The sound made him flinch and so did the red mark that marred her skin.

“Spank me!”

He whacked the other cheek. Another mark appeared. “Shannon ...”

“Feel my pussy.”

Chester slipped his free hand between her legs and to his surprise, felt her juices smear his palm.

“Want to try it with your hand? Or do you want me to spank you?”

“Maybe later,” he said, unsure if he wanted a board taken to his rear end. He dropped the paddle and, before he could change his mind, opened his hand and smacked Shannon’s pert bottom.

She moaned.

“Sorry to quote Paris Hilton, but this is *hot*,” he said, his hands trembling. “You’re *hot*.”

“Why thank you, kind sir.” She sat up and looked at him over her shoulder. “What else do you want to do?”

“I want to have sex with you forever.”

Her blonde brows rose. “Forever?”

“Yeah,” he said, meaning it. “I’m not even sure that’s long enough to do everything I want to do with you.”

She grinned. Slowly she rose to her feet and turned around. She looked at him for a long moment, then whumped him on the shoulder. “Tag!” she shouted. “You’re it!”

Chapter Seven

Shannon laughed as she dashed down the aisle, leaving behind a stunned Chester. Then she heard his feet slapping against the thin gold carpet. Though she teased him by ducking into aisles and hiding behind displays, she had a purpose. That boy was gonna have some fun.

And so was she.

By the time they'd reached the aisle filled with costumes, she'd managed to grab a warming gel that promised to taste like hot cinnamon and the opened box of condoms Chester had left on the counter.

He didn't catch her. She stopped running, striking a pose in the aisle that stopped Chester in his tracks.

"Lookie what I found!" she said, pointing at the costume of a French maid. He hurried to join her and looked at the skimpy outfit.

"Are you going to put that on?"

"If you want. Or I could be a cheerleader or a nurse."

Chester grinned. "We can start with the naughty French maid."

It didn't seem right to call the white apron, which didn't bother to cover her breasts, and a feather duster, a "costume," but after she put it on, the look on Chester's face made it worthwhile.

"Oh, no," she said, wagging the duster at him. "I do not play the naughty games, *monsieur*."

He advanced toward her and she danced back, twittering. "Please, *monsieur*. Your wife ... she will be home soon, *non*?"

"No," said Chester, stalking her. "And even if she does come home, maybe she'll join us."

Shannon giggled again. "I am not that kind of girl."

Chester plucked the duster out of her hand, then wrapped an arm around her waist and dragged her into his embrace. "If you don't do what I say, Collette, I'll have to spank you."

"Oh." Shannon smiled coyly, but her heart pounded. For a guy who claimed he didn't play, he was doing a fine job of getting into his role of perverted rich man.

"Do you need a spanking, Collette?"

"Oh, no, monsieur. No, please. Do not spank me." She belied her words by turning around and wiggling her bared ass at him. "Please! Oh, no, no, *no*!"

"Is that really a no?" he whispered.

Shannon looked over her shoulder. "In this one instance, no means yes," she whispered back.

His eyes widened and desire glazed those adorable brown peepers. Aw, damn. He was really cute. Her heart went pitty-pat. If she didn't know better, she'd think she was falling for Chester Pettigrew Hiddles.

She felt one hand wrap around her hip. *SLAP!* The other hand landed solidly on her ass. Damn. He was getting good at that. Lightning heat stabbed her core.

"Have you learned your lesson, my darling Collette?"

“No, *monsieur*,” she moaned. “I have not.”

He slapped her ass again. Her pussy swelled with wet need.

“What about now?”

“I need more punishment.”

“C’mere,” he said, tugging until she turned around.

His mouth was warm and soft. After some quality pressing of lips, his tongue dipped inside and swirled with hers. Heat exploded inside her stomach, spiraling down to her pussy. Her heart stalled then tha-thumped in a rhythm that stole her breath.

Just before she turned into a pile of lust goo, Shannon broke the kiss. “Wow. And I mean *wow*.”

She looked at his firm body, all the way down to the delicious cock pinned between their bodies. Her gaze sought Chester’s and in those chocolate depths, she saw desire, tenderness, and an offer of pleasure.

“Do you believe in love?” asked Chester.

“Yes,” she answered.

“I recently decided that love was a lie people told each other because it was easier than the truth.”

“What truth?”

“There is no such thing as love.”

“And that’s what you believe?”

“Not when I look at you.” Chester swept two fingers across her cheek and down her neck. Two fingers became one as he touched her areola, circling and circling until the tip of his finger brushed her nipple.

“I want to taste you,” he whispered.

Her nipple was a hard, aching point. She looked down at his circling finger and drew in a sharp breath. Chester lowered his head to her chest until his mouth was a kiss away from her nipple. He blew on it; the swoosh of air tightened the peak even more.

“Taste it already,” she offered in a trembling voice.

His lips closed over the nipple. He suckled, his warm, wet tongue swirling against the sensitive flesh. A low moan rose from her throat as hot desire jabbed at her. Her hands wound into his soft hair and she pressed him closer, encouraging his gentle assault. “More,” she said hoarsely. “Other one. Now.”

Chester obliged. He cupped her other breast and used his tongue to worship it. God, it felt good for him to cajole her nipples into response. Her cunt felt slick and ready, its occasional pulse an invitation. With his help, she shed the silly white apron.

Then his tongue flicked at the valley between her breasts, trailing down to taste her flesh. Slowly, he knelt before her and pressed his mouth against her quivering stomach muscles. His tongue stroked a long, slow line to her navel. He flicked inside it, making her giggle.

Shannon felt submerged in desire, hot and needy, and she wanted ... she wanted his cock.

Her pussy convulsed, trembled. Oh, yes. She wanted his cock again.

His hands coasted to her hips, his mouth following an invisible trail to the edge of her pussy. Oh, God. He was so close to her clit. Just a few strokes of his tongue ... maybe a slow suckling there, a nip of his teeth ...

His gaze flickered with yearning. “Shannon?”

Vaguely she remembered she’d dropped the warming gel and condoms in her eagerness to play naughty French maid. She spotted one condom near Chester’s knee. She dropped down and grabbed it. “I want you. So lie down, sugar. And let me have you.”

He did as she asked. Her body shook with hot desire as she crawled on top of Chester, her knees planted on either side of his thighs. She settled onto him, a few inches below his balls.

Shannon watched as he wrapped his hand around his cock and stroked it. Seeing his strong hand pumping his hard cock made her pulse jump. It was sexy as hell to see him pleasure himself, but damned if she was gonna let that hand have all the fun.

Tearing open the packet, she rolled the condom onto his thick shaft. "Hey ... this one says Happy Anniversary."

He grinned at her. "Well ... it *is* our second time together."

She laughed. Then her gaze snagged a package. Eagerly, she plucked it from the bottom shelf and handed it to Chester.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Oh, yeah. And look -- it comes with its own lubricant."

Chester opened the package and took out the anal vibrator. Shannon turned around and wiggled her buttocks at him. Chuckling, he pushed the tip of the mini-lube into her anus. She felt the cold squeeze of gel, then the soft roundness of the vibrator. As he worked the toy into her ass, she clenched around it, pushing down as he pushed up.

Pleasure rippled through her.

"It's in. God, you're sexy. This is sexy."

"Hmmm," she agreed.

He flicked the switch and the vibrator pulsated. Oh, Lordie. In a hurry now, she turned around and re-positioned herself on either side of his thighs. She slid onto his cock. He filled her, stretched her swollen pussy.

Chester was real. Fallible. Breakable. Emotional. *Human*.

And she was having more fun with him right now than she'd ever had with her sex-bot. Maybe because Immie had always been a tool. He looked like a guy, but he didn't act

like one. The admission hurt. She'd worked on those damned 'bots night and day for years. And for what? To replace the most amazing, tender part of being with a partner? And all this time, she'd thought Chester had been the one protecting his heart against love. Hell, she'd been doing the same thing.

Chester cupped her breasts, his fingers massaging the nipples, gently twisting. Shannon moved, increasing her pace as Chester played with her tits. The anal vibrator worked its mojo, too. She loved having her ass and pussy stuffed. And she couldn't wait to show Chester all the fun ways they could be together. But for now ...

Pleasure tumbled through her, spikes of joy radiating to her wet pussy.

His cock felt so good sliding in and out of her. Her hips pumped hard now. Chester's hands trailed to her hips, holding on so he could meet her wild thrusts.

He came seconds before she did. As he cried out her name, she went over, her pulsations so strong his penis slipped out. She rubbed her cum onto his cock, her sensitive clit exploding into another orgasm.

* * * * *

"Chester *darling!*"

Nefertari's tone was soft, menacing. Chester and Shannon stood in the video section, poking through the display of Jenna Jameson titles. They glanced at each other, both shocked ... then slowly turned around.

Shannon's heart trilled as Chester stepped between her and Tari. Even though he didn't have a chance in hell of thwarting an attack, he was willing to take the brunt of it for her. Shannon peeked over his shoulder and saw that the female sex-bot was neither naked nor seething, at least not anymore. And she'd somehow arranged transportation rather than chase them all the way to Las Vegas without clothes.

"Who are you?" asked Chester.

She noticed he was staring at the tall, dark-haired man who looked as if he stepped out of a *GQ* magazine. She blinked. *Ohmigod*. He was --

"Imhotep," replied the man in a deep, sexy voice. He looked at Shannon, disappointment in his gaze. "I received a phone call from Nefertari. She thinks that you're a prostitute. And she's very upset that you kidnapped her boyfriend."

"Immie ... how did *she* ... how did *you*?" Nonplussed, she stared at them.

"I accessed your DMV records using your license plate," said Tari smugly. "When I called the phone number listed, I reached your poor, worried boyfriend. And to think, you've been lying to him this whole time about your real profession!"

"You picked her up and drove here," said Shannon incredulously.

"Of course," said Immie. "We were driving down the Strip and saw your car. Shannon, we need to get this situation straightened out."

"You're not kidding," Shannon muttered, glancing at Chester. "Immie, I thought you were in rest mode."

"I don't want a nap!" He looked at Tari. "She's always telling me to take naps. I'm a grown man!"

Tari patted his shoulder sympathetically. "You look like you get plenty of rest without napping."

Shannon chewed on her lower lip and thought about the situation. Tari and Immie, no matter how they behaved, weren't human. They were robots with tremendous strength and intelligence. Then again, if the emoti-chips had corrupted them into believing they were living, breathing souls ... well, maybe they'd believe a few white lies, too.

"Surprise!" she shouted, startling Chester. He looked at her with raised brows.

"You followed us just like we wanted," she continued in an excited voice.

Tari frowned. "Like *you* wanted?" she echoed suspiciously.

"Yes," said Chester, picking up the drift. "This is ... for our adventure."

“Let’s go upstairs,” directed Shannon. “And we will have sex.”

“All of us?” asked Imhotep. “Together?”

“Uh ... yeah.” Shannon smiled brightly.

“O-kay,” Chester agreed.

“They’re already naked,” Tari pointed out. “I think they started without us.”

Shannon never thought the day would arrive where she’d think having sex wasn’t fun. And yet, here she was, contemplating a sexual romp with the same anticipation as contracting the flu.

The playful mood evaporated. The ’bots didn’t sense the shift in the emotional landscape, but she knew Chester did. He looked like he’d been sucking on a lemon.

“Time’s a’wastin’,” said Shannon. She marched down the aisle and led them toward the private room.

And all the while she pondered ... how the hell were they going to get out of this mess?

* * * * *

Chester lay on the big, black bed, his cock embedded in the insatiable Tari, who faced Shannon, who was, in fact, implanted with Immie’s sizable piece of equipment. As the men fucked the women, the girls bumped together. Immie and Tari were definitely enjoying the situation.

Then again, two girls touching each other was still hot to watch, especially live and in person. However, while Tari seemed to like sucking on Shannon’s nipples, Shannon had managed to touch only innocuous parts like shoulders and hips.

As he pumped into Tari, he thought about the strangeness of life. Less than a month ago, he’d stood in this same room and made a decision that had changed his life. And not in a good way. Not that he’d admit it to Shannon, but Tari terrified him. Not even his cock, usually happy to accommodate the sex-bot’s relentless needs, was all that enthusiastic about

finding itself squeezing inside her pseudo pussy for what seemed the eleven-thousandth time.

Shannon seemed to be in a similar predicament.

He caught her gaze and mouthed, "Wish it were you. Only you."

She nodded, smiled. Then closed her eyes.

"Oh!" cried Imhotep. "I'm coming, baby. I'm coming!"

"Oooooooooohhhhhh," moaned Tari. "Yes! Yes! Yeeeeeeees!"

* * * * *

The Goddess of Pleasure peered into her looking glass and frowned. Bes, a scruffy perverted immortal who stood only as high as her hips, sat next to her on the purple divan. He, too, peered intently at the looking glass.

The four people on the bed bounced and jounced against each other.

"Bast, this foursome isn't that good," said Bes. "And believe me, I've witnessed a lot of orgies."

"I can see that," said Bast, "particularly since I've been at the same orgies. Sex these days just isn't the same as it was four thousand years ago. Back then, women and men had no problem with the idea of sexual pleasure."

They stared at the mirror and looked at each other. Bast sighed. "It seemed a shame to waste the opportunity. And yet ..."

"Shannon and Chester look miserable," admitted Bes, his grubby face scrunched. "Too bad."

"Too bad indeed."

Bast snapped her fingers.

And the sex-bots shut off.

Chapter Eight

“What happened?” whispered Chester.

“I don’t know,” said Shannon.

He withdrew from Tari and the ’bot flopped onto her back. Her obsidian gaze stared at the ceiling. Shannon pushed Immie, and he, too, fell back without protest. Chester and Shannon scrambled off the bed and stared at the robots.

“Just like that?” she asked in an amazed voice. “What the fuck!”

“At least you didn’t have to Taser them.” Chester wasn’t sure what was going on, either. But his dick was sore, he was hungry, and he wanted to marry Shannon.

Shannon stared at him and laughed. Holding out her hand, she said, “Let’s get the hell out of here.”

* * * * *

The next day ...

“What will you do with them?” asked Shannon as she watched Bast close Imhotep and Nefertari into the vault.

“I’m not sure. But I think they’ll come in handy one day.”

“I can’t believe the program’s shutdown. I’m jobless.”

“But you’re also very, very rich,” said Bast as the big metal door clanged shut. She drew the purple curtain across the wall, then ushered Shannon to a small table where a tea service waited. “You don’t need a job to make your life feel worthwhile.”

“No,” agreed Shannon, smiling. “I sure as hell don’t.”

Chapter Nine

“Damn, you’re crazy,” murmured Chester.

“Only in moonlight,” said the blonde vixen. She deposited the tiny red-lace thong on his open palm, hiked up her crimson dress and climbed onto the Harley. Facing him, she settled across his lap and wrapped her legs around his waist, her arms loosely draping his shoulders.

“You always so accommodating to strangers, honey?” he asked.

“Only in moonlight,” she said again. Her blue eyes glittered as dark and mysterious as the evening sky, and her pussy pressed enticingly against the zipper of his jeans. His cock was already hard for her, had been hard for her more than half the fucking night. But with those sapphire eyes looking at him that way ... Chester felt like someone had sucker-punched him.

“You’re beautiful,” he said. A lame-assed compliment most of the time, damn it, but the God’s honest truth for this sweet thing.

“I don’t need niceties. But thanks.” She leaned forward and nibbled on his neck. His skin trembled under her mouth, under the tongue darting sensuously, dabbing the base, dipping below his T-shirt to trace his collarbone. The moan vibrated in his throat, but he

swallowed it. His hands slid over her smooth thighs, his thumbs grazing her hips. He was trying to find control. But it was gone. It was long gone.

The moan escaped when she found the sensitive spot underneath his ear. He felt her smile against his neck. She played there, kissing, licking, sucking the flesh, the lobe, her breath hot in his ear, her fingers twisting in his hair, until all he felt was sharp and shiny lust.

"I'm not a slut," she whispered. "I'm not a barfly." He felt those words against his flesh. Then she dragged her teeth along his jaw and nipped his chin. "You believe what you want. But it's the truth."

"Moonlight girl," he said, smiling.

"Yeah," she murmured against his lips. "I'm a moonlight girl."

He wasn't above one-night stands with gorgeous women. Shit. He'd been with plenty of babes with fake boobs and empty smiles and no expectations. But this woman ... she didn't feel like that. She felt like ... freedom. Like joy.

Or maybe he was just tired of hard and fast and cheap. Maybe, just this once, he wanted something soft and slow and real. And with her, he'd have it. Always.

"Remember," said the blonde, "that I'm a strange woman you've picked up in a bar. And I'm going to fuck you."

Chester grinned. Earlier, he'd watched Shannon ... er, the blonde vixen ... in the roadhouse dive, dancing until she lost her breath, until sweat sparkled like diamonds on her body, and he'd lusted for the body. Yeah. But more than that, he lusted for her adventurous spirit. He recognized it, coveted it, yearned to siphon it from her. Yearned for her to drain him, and to fill him up again.

His hands coasted up her ribcage. The soft undersides of her breasts confirmed that she wasn't wearing a bra. She had a nice rack. Not huge, but big enough to occupy his hands. And small enough so that she could slip into a little red dress unencumbered. He'd watched

the sway of those breasts as she walked, danced, laughed. He'd seen other men looking at her, probably thinking the same lustful thoughts. And he was the lucky bastard who got to touch, to taste. He offered to take her for a ride. Led her to the motorcycle he'd chained to a tree in the back of the big, wood building that used to be somebody's barn.

And she'd handed him her panties and willingly offered a different definition of "ride."

Her nipples were already puckered. From the cool night air? Or from the same kind of desire that held him hostage? Cupping her breasts, he brushed his thumbs across the nipples, thrilled when she groaned, tensing then wiggling.

Drawing down the spaghetti straps to reveal those succulent orbs, he encircled one taut peak. She tasted good. Rich, intoxicating, sweet. Female. Her scent made his nose quiver. What was that? Flowery. He didn't know enough about gardens to pin down a particular flower. He just knew that perfume mixed with the scent of her femininity drove him nuts. He laved the other nipple, scraping his teeth over the tight bud. Her breath released, a faint moan rushing out with the expelled gasp.

"I've always wanted to fuck on a motorcycle," she said, arching to give him better access to her breasts. "You've got me so worked up, I could come right now."

Oh, man. His cock twitched involuntarily. "I'd love for you to come on my cock," he murmured against her breast. "I want to fuck that sweet cunt, baby. Is that what you want?"

Her answer was to unzip his jeans and wiggle the denim down his hips. His eager cock sprang free, willing ... way too willing ... but before he could protest or do something stupid, her fingers stroked his penis and rolled on a condom. Where the hell had she been hiding that?

He lifted her, guiding her to his dick and almost died from pleasure as her tight pussy sheathed him. "You were saying something ..." she purred in his ear, "... about fucking my sweet cunt?"

Control, what little was left, snapped. They clawed at each other, teeth nipping flesh, fingernails carving into skin. All he could smell was her ... all he could taste was her ... all he could feel was her. His moonlight girl. His midnight goddess.

“Oh, my God,” she moaned. “Please ... fuck me hard, baby ... yes, oh, yes!”

He thrust hard, deep, obeying her every command. Her orgasm nearly shoved him out, shuddering with every vaginal contraction, and even as she gasped and moaned and clutched, his own orgasm exploded ... leaving him floating and free all the way toward the stars.

* * * * *

Chester blinked awake, his cheek resting against a soft blue pillow. What a night. And his sweet, blonde vixen ... his cock was already at half-mast just thinking about her. He grinned, breathing deeply, smelling her scent. She was still on his skin, still embedded in his soul.

Damned if it wasn't time for a reality check.

He tugged on a pair of sweats and hurried down the stairs. Smells of frying bacon and fresh coffee filtered from the kitchen. He padded onto the tile floor, his bare feet snicking across the yellow ceramic.

Shannon stood at the stove, dressed in an oversized T-shirt. She had long, pale legs and the cutest toes he'd ever seen. Her nails were a deep shade of red -- the color of hearts and roses and love.

He thought about last night. About the midnight goddess. Wrapping his arms around Shannon's waist, he whispered, “Hello, gorgeous.”

“Hey there, stranger,” she murmured. “You got home late.”

“Uh ... yeah. Something smells really good.”

“Bacon is done. And I just finished the pancakes.” Shannon turned off the burner and moved the pan to the back of the stove. She turned into his arms and looked up at him. “You’re feeling frisky this morning.”

He kissed her, long and slow and deep. His hands coasted to her luscious ass and cupped her buttocks, pressing her into his stiffening cock.

Shannon looked at him, brows raised. “You want to tell me about last night?”

“What about last night?” asked Chester, whirling Shannon away from the hot stove and toward the opposite counter. He enfolded the gorgeous woman into his arms. He licked her earlobe, scraping the flesh with his teeth. “Wanna play doctor tonight?”

“Ooooh. Yes, Doctor Hiddles, I definitely need to make an appointment.” One of her hands dipped into his sweats and stroked the tip of his cock. “But you should know that I find hot guys on Harleys a big turn-on, too.”

“That’s very interesting. The biker and the barfly, eh?”

Shannon leaned forward, her sapphire gaze glittering with desire, and whispered, “Just call me moonlight girl.”

Laughing, she led him out of the kitchen and through the sliding glass doors to the right. They stepped onto the redwood patio. Sunlight sparkled through the tall pines, the sky as blue as Shannon’s eyes. He noticed she’d set the outside table for breakfast. A few feet away, the hot tub bubbled and sloshed.

“How about dessert first?” she asked.

“I didn’t know breakfast came with dessert.”

“Oh, sugar. Mine always does.”

They disrobed. Then Chester stepped into the Jacuzzi and held out his hand. She took it, and he helped her across the rim and into the hot, swirling water. He watched, dry-mouthed, as Shannon lounged on a curved seat. He sat down, too. Then he drew her onto his lap.

His cock, already half-hard, nestled in the vee of her thighs. Her head lolled back and allowed him access to her throat. She was so beautiful. He nibbled her neck. As he explored her collarbone with his tongue, she stroked the muscled ridges of his chest. Her fingers danced along his skin until she reached the hard-length of him. One hand wrapped around his hard cock while the other dipped under and squeezed his balls.

Chester moaned and flexed his hips in rhythm with her stroking. He lowered his mouth to her succulent breasts and paid homage to her hard nipples. Water sloshed as she positioned herself over his cock and guided him into her wet heat.

Grabbing his shoulders for leverage, she rode his cock, grinding against him.

“Oh, God, baby,” she moaned. “I’m so hot for you ... so ... ooooh!” And Shannon, his sweet, beautiful Shannon clenched him, her cry of release echoing into the gorgeous summer morning. His fingers dug into her hips as he pressed against her, groaning, his orgasm plunging him into heat and light ... and love.

* * * * *

Hiddles Doesn’t Piddle Around with Sixth Engagement

By Delilah Severn, Society Columnist

Yesterday, multimillionaire Chester P. Hiddles announced his engagement to robotic engineer Shannon Eleanor Brown.

Hiddles, known for his break-through and addictive video game, Goddess Death, recently sold his gaming company, GameGeek, to a private buyer. Not-so-reliable sources claim Bastet, the one-named she-ra of the adult-sex industry, has purchased Hiddles’s company. To what end? I shudder to think!

On the heels of his engagement announcement, Hiddles also revealed he was retiring so he could go “play.” This comment certainly leaves a lot to the imagination (and dear

readers, I have an excellent one!). However, given his fiancée's killer good looks, I doubt that he has a game of Monopoly in mind.

Brown, whose recent innovations have reinvented robotic technology, is a multimillionaire in her own right. She may also be the only woman on the planet smarter than Hiddles. Until recently, Brown was the lead engineer on a project so secret, I doubt the CIA could figure it out (of course, that's not saying much now, is it?). Interestingly, the project was supposedly financed by Bastet. My, my ... she certainly gets around.

While Brown has never been engaged or married, the same cannot be said for Hiddles. This isn't his first engagement. It is not even his second. Though Hiddles has been engaged five times before, he has yet to make it to the altar.

I certainly hope the sixth time is the charm.

Epilogue

Bastet, the goddess of pleasure, the goddess whom Egyptians once worshipped openly, flicked her tail as she sauntered into her inner sanctuary at The Lust Bastion Erotica Emporium. She'd spent the day prowling around as a black alley cat. A cat's perspective was so much simpler than a human's ... heck, simpler even than a goddess's.

In the blink of an eye, she morphed into her human form and stepped into a white gown. She brushed out her hair, her scalp tingling from the tugging of the brush. From her jewelry box she chose a thin gold band, which she placed on her head. Then she slipped into her favorite pair of gold sandals. Hmmm ... what to do on a lazy Wednesday afternoon?

Just as she decided to make a pot of tea and settle down with a good, naughty book, her enchanted mirror shimmered to life.

In the silver glass, she watched a slim brunette nervously enter the lobby ...

Mari Monroe entered The Lust Bastion Erotica Emporium. Nervous did not begin to describe her current mental state. Her heart pounded, sweat dotted her brow, and she felt nauseous. She was in pre-meltdown, she knew, but desperation had forced her into drastic measures. Clutched in her hand was a tiny square of newspaper she'd clipped from a freebie

paper. The advertisement was the reason she had ventured into a ... a ... she gulped ... into a *sex* shop.

She stopped cold in the foyer. *Oh. My. God.*

Marble floors and low lighting suggested a place of class and culture. The walls were painted in bright colors with images that might have been straight out of a pharaoh's tomb. But Mari seriously doubted any Egyptian tomb included no less than five glass-encased displays of plastic blow-up dolls in the most amazing, impossible sexual positions she'd ever seen.

Not that she'd seen a lot.

That's it. I'm outta here. The itty bitty sliver of courage that had gotten her through the huge wooden entrance doors dissipated like a wisp of smoke. She turned around and started out of the foyer.

"May I help you?"

The purring voice of a woman stopped Mari. She looked over her shoulder and offered a weak smile to the clerk dressed like an Egyptian princess. "I was just, uh, leaving."

The woman's sultry laughter stalled her desire to do just that. "You haven't looked through all my little treasures." She gestured toward the large room just beyond two ornate pillars. "I'm sure you will find something you like."

Running away from a room full of blow-up dolls was much easier than ignoring the bold invitation from a gorgeous creature whose obsidian gaze held a challenge. So, Mari turned around and marched through the pillars.

She felt a huge zap of electrical energy ... then everything fell into instant darkness.

* * * * *

When Mari awoke, she was draped on a very comfortable and beautifully ornate chaise lounge. Her head throbbed, and her mouth felt incredibly dry -- like she'd been chewing on

cotton. Slowly, she sat up and took in the small, dark room around her. Everything was purple. The wall, the drapery, the furniture ... a couple of green splashes and it would've been the perfect lair for Batman's nemesis, the Joker.

"How are you feeling?"

Mari blinked and realized that the woman who'd invited her into the emporium was sitting in a chair opposite of the chaise. "I feel like I've been hit by lightning."

"Indeed." The woman frowned. "It was a very powerful za-- er, faint. I've never seen anything like it. Tell me, darling ... why are you here?"

"I ... uh ..." Mari sucked in a deep breath. She was here, now, darn it. She might as well go for it. "I want sex lessons."

The woman's smile was pure sensuality. "Well, now," she purred, "you've come to just the right place."

 THE END 

Michele Bardsley

All I ever wanted to do is write. Well, early on, (after that whole childhood thing had passed) I wanted to right the wrongs of the world by the might of my pen so I took a lot of journalism classes in college and worked for newspapers. Then I became a mommy and a wife and soon, I had no time to write words or to right wrongs. I was too busy cleaning spit-up off my shirts and yelling at certain grown-ups to load the freakin' dishwasher correctly (bowls with bowls, plates with plates---it's not rocket science, people!).

The domesticated life wasn't exactly rife with gripping exposés (unless you count the time my newly potty-trained child peed in a public toilet then proceeded to announce it with loud toddler joy to the all the patrons in the restaurant) or exciting jaunts to far-off places (unless you count trips to the lobby of the doctor's office where I always find screaming, cranky pygmies fighting over the ONE available toy). Is it any wonder I turned to writing fiction? In fiction, kids go to bed on time, adults have real moments of solitude, and chocolate is calorie-free.

In 1998, I sold my first book, a romantic comedy called *Daddy In Training* to Hard Shell Word Factory. Since then, I've sold novels, novellas, short stories, poetry and nonfiction to many electronic and print publishers. My articles have appeared in Writer's Digest Magazine, RT BOOKClub Magazine, and Byline Magazine. In 2004, I signed on with the Levine Greenberg Literary Agency and my wonderful agent, Stephanie Kip Rostan.

An admitted contest junkie, I've won numerous competitions. I received the 2002 EPPIE for Best Romantic Suspense for *Midnight Intentions*. In 2003, I was awarded the Grand Prize in the 72nd Annual Writer's Digest Competition for dark suspense short story, "A Mother Scorned." This story was a finalist for a 2004 Derringer Award and also received 1st place for Best Published Short Story in the 2004 Royal Palm Literary Awards. In 1996, my romantic comedy, *Housewife For Rent*, was the Top Winner in the Silhouette Yours Truly contest. I belong to RWA, TARA, OWFI, and FWA; these organizations host contests that feed my addiction.

I was born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, lived for eight years in Las Vegas, Nevada, and, in the summer of 2004, I moved to Tampa, Florida with my husband and our two children. We reside in a lovely house with four persnickety cats who deign to grace us with their presence (as long as the food is good). I love to hear from my readers! Write to me at Michele@michelebardsley.com.