

One Owner, Lady Driven

Alice Gaines

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Chapter One

There it was -- the machine of her dreams. Claire looked down at the auction catalogue in her lap. The picture of a 1957 Mannhof four-cylinder touring motorcycle looked back at her. The photo didn't do the bike justice. Sleek and muscular, the real thing reeked of power and sex. Right down to the naked man painted on the gas tank.

"Okay, go circulate," Claire said to Ted. "See if you can hear any buzz from the other bidders."

Her assistant looked around. "You can already hear the buzz. The whole room's full of it."

"A classic Mannhof goes on sale, maybe, once a decade. I'm going to have that bike if I have to kill someone to get it."

Ted's eyes widened. "If anyone but you said that, I'd think it was a joke."

"Just circulate, will you? I need to know what I'm up against."

Ted rose and walked toward the back of the crowd, while the auctioneer approached the podium and tapped the microphone. "Ladies and gentlemen, next we have item number 346. Page fifty of your catalogues. A hand-made Mannhof motorcycle, vintage 1957."

Ted had been right about the buzz. It grew until it was clearly audible. Hell, she could *feel* it in her bones. Mannhofs came along so seldom that most of the general public had never heard of them. One had caused a stir eleven years ago when a rock star bought one for half-a-million dollars. That one didn't compare to this beauty.

"This classic has only had one owner since it was built," the auctioneer continued.

The owner must have had an appreciation for the male body, or the man on the fuel tank made no sense. Completely nude, he reclined with his torso propped up on

one elbow. He was a *double entendre* of the most wicked kind -- a play on a woman taking so much strength between her legs. Mannhof couldn't have known it, but he'd built that bike for her.

"Excellent maintenance and low mileage make this a spectacular find," the auctioneer said. "We'll start the bidding at one hundred thousand dollars."

Claire didn't raise her paddle. The auction would take some time to play out, and there was no point showing her interest yet. If the rest knew the CEO of Consolidated Industries International wanted the Mannhof, they'd bid her up just for the excitement. No, she'd wait until the serious bids started coming.

One hundred, one fifty, two hundred, two twenty-five -- clearly this would top the half million Kid Dagger had paid eleven years ago. She could wait.

Ted returned and sat beside her. "You were right about this thing. People are going nuts over it."

"Did you hear anything interesting?"

"Mostly chatter. There's one guy back there talking into a cell phone in Japanese."

"Damn it. Matsumoto."

"Nippon Manufacturing Matsumoto?"

"Do you know another Matsumoto with the money to spend on a Mannhof?"

Ted whistled softly between his teeth. "And you just beat him out of the Swiss contract."

"This way if he gets the Mannhof, he gets a treasure *and* revenge."

"He knows you want the cycle?" Ted asked.

"Matsumoto knows everything he needs to know."

"The guy talking to him isn't Japanese." Ted twisted in his seat to glance toward the back of the room.

"Don't look at him," Claire said. "Pretend you didn't see anything."

Ted turned back around. The bidding had gone over three hundred thousand dollars and was heading toward four. Eventually, she'd have to show her hand, and then, they'd get an idea how serious her rival was in taking the Mannhof from her.

Matsumoto couldn't have her bike. No straight male would ride something with a naked man on it. He wouldn't dare paint over the picture, as that would lower the value. He'd stick the Mannhof in a museum somewhere, and it would never see the open road. The engine would sit silent. Such fine machinery deserved to run, to prove itself with all its power. Between her legs, with the leather of the seat thrumming against her thighs.

Heat crept up her cheeks, and a familiar breathlessness settled in her chest. Excitement. The same thrill she got negotiating a deal. All power was sexual at its core, and anyone who claimed otherwise was either a liar or a fool. She didn't suffer either gladly, and she wouldn't tolerate lies or foolishness in herself.

People made fun of her aloofness -- called her an ice queen. None of them understood the raw sensuality of power. The naked man on the Mannhof's tank did. He belonged to her, and she'd have him.

"Four seventy-five," the auctioneer called. "Do I hear five hundred thousand? Anyone?"

Claire took a calming breath and let it out. Then, she lifted her paddle. A murmur went up in the crowd. A barrier had been crossed from the everyday to the heroic. No doubt many of them had come to watch exactly this -- the most expensive motorcycle of all time going to the most insane bidder. At least, that's how the rest of the world would see it. Both Claire and Matsumoto had all their wits.

"Five twenty-five," the auctioneer said, pointing to the back of the crowd.

Ted turned in his seat. "That's the guy."

"I told you not to look at him."

"Do I have five fifty?" the auctioneer called. Claire signaled that he did.

"Are you nuts?" Ted said.

"I know exactly what I'm doing."

"Eight hundred thousand dollars." This time the call came from the back of the room. Matsumoto's man. Thinking he could scare her off. She'd been expecting this.

"Nine hundred thousand," she said calmly.

Even the auctioneer looked shocked at that. He sputtered in confusion for a moment.

"Damn, Claire," Ted said. "It's a motorcycle, not a Rembrandt."

"Mannhof made fewer than twenty of them, and this one is *mine*."

"Nine hundred thousand is the bid," the auctioneer said as if he couldn't believe his own words.

"One million," the voice called from the back of the room.

A roar went up in the room this time, and the auctioneer pounded on the podium with his gavel. "Ladies and gentlemen, please."

"Forget about it, Claire," Ted said. "Matsumoto's not going to give up."

"Neither am I." She'd have to exercise most of her stock options and cash in. That would give her enough. "One million one hundred thousand."

"One mil..." The voice in the back ended in a croak. A clatter followed -- a chair tipping over, shouts going up.

"Shit, he's collapsed," Ted said. "Matsumoto's man... he's choking or something."

The auctioneer craned his neck, trying to get a view of the commotion in the back.

"The bid is one million one hundred thousand," Claire said calmly.

"Yes." The auctioneer cleared his throat. "The bid is one million one hundred thousand. Going once..."

Claire reminded herself to breathe. In. Out.

"Going twice..."

She stared at the man on the Mannhof's tank, willing her heart to beat evenly. The man didn't move, of course, but he answered anyway staring back at her.

The auctioneer's gavel came down. "Sold to the lady in the front."

Still focused on the naked man's face, Claire smiled. *We did it!*

* * *

The Mannhof arrived in a crate on a huge flatbed truck. Next to the crate rode a forklift, firmly chained down. Not even a full crew of strong men would dare lift that crate for fear of damaging the contents.

Claire stood in the driveway of her restored Victorian and watched as the men unloaded the crate as gently as a woman holds her newborn. The foreman held out a clipboard with some papers. "Sign here."

"I want to see it."

"Look, lady, I just deliver it."

"I paid over a million dollars for that motorcycle. I want to see it."

The man shrugged. "Tony, Lou, open the crate."

The men found some tools and began unfastening the bolts that held the planks together. Once they'd removed the lid, a third man reached in to steady the bike while the other two worked on the padded cables that held the bike stable during transport. An effective plan, the arrangement had kept her baby from even touching the sides of the crate. Perfect.

With the bike free and one end of the crate gone, the man made to roll the bike onto the pavement.

"I'll do that," she said.

He stood to the side, still supporting the bike by the handlebars. Her heart thundering, she climbed into the crate, swung her leg over the Mannhof's seat, and took the handles to guide it out.

The minute her crotch hit the leather, a wave of adrenaline rushed through her. Pure excitement, pure lust. She'd expected something, but not this strong. Knees trembling, she walked the bike out onto her driveway.

"Hey, lady."

Claire looked up to find the foreman had shoved the clipboard toward her.

"You want to sign this or not?" he asked.

“Uh, sure.” She used his pen to put her name on the bottom line and then handed him back the papers. Then, she sat, savoring the feel of leather between her thighs, the gleam of sunlight off the bike’s controls, sensing the latent power between her legs as the sounds of the crew packing up to leave faded to the back of her brain. Finally, they drove away, leaving her alone with the machine of her dreams.

Only one other person had owned this bike, and that person had to have been a woman. She’d probably commissioned it sometime in the mid-fifties. During those days of enforced homemaking and repressed sexuality, what a kick-ass lady she must have been. No tuna noodle casserole or gelatin molds for this one. She’d not only had wealth, she’d had balls. What a blast it’d be to throw back a few shots with her and get her talking. But she must have died because no living person gave up a Mannhof.

Claire’d toast her memory tonight with some fine single malt. The thought made her smile. Sisterhood across all those years.

For now, she’d get the bike into the garage and out of sight of the neighbors. They’d find out about it soon enough when she roared down the street. It’d give some of them fits. Let them try to do something. Just let them.

Guiding the bike with the handlebars, Claire pushed it along the driveway and into the garage. Once there, she set the kickstand and got off.

She stepped back to admire the painting on the gas tank. The naked man still reclined there, of course. Damn, he was a hunk. Broad shoulders, muscular chest, slim hips, and... whoa... an erection. A great, big hard-on, as masculine as the rest of him and as powerful as the bike itself. She’d had a few men in her day, but none of them like that. She’d have noticed if it had been there at the auction. This had to be some trick of the light. A joke from her sister from half a century ago.

She took a few steps away, and the image of his boner disappeared. Approaching again, she still couldn’t see it, no matter which way she turned her head. Illusion or imagination? Who knew?

“I’m going to have to take you somewhere special for our first ride,” she said. “Someplace wild. You and I, alone somewhere untamed.”

She had to laugh at that. They'd have to get far away from suburbia to find someplace wild. She'd do it, though, somehow.

In the meantime, she had a conference call from the office in Hawaii in... she glanced at her watch... ten minutes. Leave the dreaming for another time. She turned and walked toward the garage door.

Turn me on.

Huh? The words crept softly into the back of her mind. Faint but clear. She looked around. No one there.

"Were you talking?" she said to the man on the gas tank. Great, now she was having a conversation with a painted image. Maybe she could talk him into getting that enormous boner back.

Chuckling, she walked to the garage entrance and reached for the automatic door button.

Start my engine and sit on me, the imaginary voice said. *You know you want to.*

"All right, now, that's enough." She spun around, and something jingled in her pocket. The keys the auction house had sent the week before. Hell, she had ten minutes. She'd spent over a million for the Mannhof, and she'd never heard the engine. Why not turn it over and listen to the pistons purr?

Leaving the door open so the exhaust could escape, she walked to the bike and straddled it. After turning the key in the lock, she kick-started the engine. Although badly out of practice, she got it going the first time and gave it some gas. An awesome roar filled the garage. Oh, yeah. Sweet.

Slowly, she lowered herself onto the seat so she could feel all that power against her body. The same rush went through her as when she'd first sat against the leather, only now, the effect came amplified. The pistons churned, and the whole bike vibrated. She closed her eyes and let her mind wander to the open road. The Mannhof devouring mile after mile as she watched the sun climb higher in the sky. All around her, the air flew by, swirling into all the secret parts of her body. Caressing her breasts with rough fingers.

If only she could ride naked, with nothing more than boots and gloves to direct the controls. Fucking the entire universe, orgasm after orgasm as the world flew by. Ultimate power -- imposing her sexual will on everything around her.

That image faded, and another one took its place. Fucking a real man this time. The man on the gas tank. Both of them stark naked on a hilltop with the sun beating down on them. She'd sit astride him, guiding that monster cock inside her. Heat would sear her shoulders and breasts as he thrust up into her, grinding himself against her clit until she came with a shout. Then doing it over again. Again and again. Shit, she needed that.

She opened the throttle, giving the engine more gas, and leaned forward until her clit rubbed against the seat. Even through her jeans, it sent powerful vibrations against her already aroused flesh. A million dollar vibrator. She would have laughed if she could breathe.

Her mind wandered again -- to her pool this time. Her bent over the edge while he entered her from behind. The water churning around her breasts with the force of his thrusts. His own grunts of animal lust while he rubbed her clit as he came with a force that made her follow, screaming.

The real climax hit, starting deep inside and cresting. Desperate, she gunned the engine as her pussy clenched and then exploded into massive spasms. Now, now, and *now*.

When it finally ended, she turned off the engine and sat, gasping for breath. Sanity returned. She'd had an orgasm -- the most powerful in her life -- sitting fully dressed in her garage. If she got that aroused out on the highway, she'd have to pull over or run into a tree. One way or another, she'd have to plan a long trip to see what the bike could do. Right now...

She glanced at her watch. Shit. Late for her conference call. Oh, hell. She was the CEO. They could all wait.

She climbed off the Mannhof and walked to the garage door. Before closing it, she glanced back one more time. Impossible, but in a distant part of her brain, she could still hear the engine hum.

* * *

Will felt human life spread slowly through him. First transformations took time. Hadn't Klaus Mannhof told him that many times during the construction? He had to switch from the senses that had guided him as a machine to the senses his biological organs would give him. Before, he'd seen with the magic his Designer had given him. Soon, he'd see with human eyes. He needed to find patience somewhere, but this took so damned long.

Smells came first -- oil, car upholstery, paint from some cans in the corner. Garage smells. Exactly what Klaus had told him to expect. Then, sounds. A clock ticking, faint noises of nighttime insects through an open window. After what seemed like forever, he had eyes to open, and he looked around to find himself in the large garage where the woman had parked him. A luxury sedan and a wicked, low-slung sports car shared the space with him. Wealth. No matter, material things meant nothing to him.

He watched the last traces of his own change as metal turned to flesh and leather to skin. A heart pumped blood through him, much the way his pistons pumped. Air filled his lungs. He lay on the concrete floor, breathing it in.

So, this was a human body. Not as powerful as his machine identity, but strong in its own right. Different and more complex, just as the feelings were richer. He'd observed the world around him before, but not with all the color and inflection. He'd enjoy being human.

Running his hands over himself, he found smooth skin and coarse hairs on his chest. Muscles worked beneath the surface, contracting and relaxing. Time to test them.

Using his arms to help him up, he rose to his feet. The world lurched, and he almost fell, but he stayed upright, gathering strength and balance. In a moment, he stood tall, his shoulders thrown back. One step and another, and his movements grew

easier and more fluid. He could run now if he wanted. He could crouch and leap -- things his machine body could never have done. What freedom. If he needed the speed and power, he could change back. As Klaus had told him, the changing got easier with each transformation. Truly, he was blessed.

He was also aroused. Klaus had given him all the best equipment, and now the male part of him -- his cock -- stood straight out from his body. It throbbed with all the energy of his pistons. This, too, he could enjoy.

Now, to find the woman.

Chapter Two

Will's skin homed in on her body heat the moment he stepped inside the house. Upstairs, directly over the back entryway where her balcony overlooked the swimming pool and gardens. He could have climbed the rose trellis or even scaled the walls if he'd had to, but stairs were so much easier. A narrow set of steps led upward, so he took them, his footfalls silent against the boards. At the top, he found a corridor that ran the length of the house to the front. Hardwood floors with an Oriental rug runner disappeared into the distance with delicate side tables holding vases of flowers. Wealth, indeed.

The sound of her breathing came from the room directly on his left. Soft, yet audible. This close to her, her warmth washed over him like sunlight on the open road. He wouldn't sense another woman this way, but Klaus had tuned him specifically for her. Only his true owner could wake his human side. Tonight, he'd found her.

The male parts of his brain -- his mortal wiring -- performed the automatic responses to her presence. Chemical reactions alerted nerves, which then sent signals throughout his body. His breathing grew rapid and shallow, and his skin grew extra sensitive. Signs of sexual excitement. Klaus had taught him about this. His goal was to make the woman feel the same way. Then, she'd take his cock into her body and make them one.

He touched that part of his human form, placing his fingers around the shaft and stroking. The contact sent a jolt of sensation all the way to the base of his spine. Pleasure. Physical pleasure. Hot and urgent. The woman would give him even more.

He moved his hand away, lest he stimulate himself too much, and tiptoed to the door to her bedroom. As soon as he had it open, her scent washed over him. Sun-drenched meadow, full of wildflowers. Herbal and sweet. He breathed deeply, taking

her perfume inside himself. Like a key opening a lock, the smell of her made even more connections in his brain. More chemical reactions, more nerve pulses. All through him, all along the length of his cock. It stiffened further, throbbing. It ached to be inside her, probing and thrusting, bringing them both pleasure even Klaus hadn't had the words to explain.

He tiptoed to the bed and stared down at her. Her expression was soft in her sleep, her mouth in a gentle smile. Not the woman who'd raced his engine and given herself an orgasm this afternoon. This woman waited to give as well as take, even if she didn't know it yet.

She murmured something and rolled onto her back. The covers fell off her as she did, revealing one naked breast. She slept in the nude. How wonderful.

He reached down to touch the flesh and found it impossibly delicate, like flower petals. The tips of his fingers slid over her skin, sensation zinging along the nerve endings there. When he stroked the nipple, it hardened into a stiff peak.

Her dark eyes opened but didn't focus for a second. When they did, recognition showed in her face. "You. The man on the Mannhof."

"Ich bin ein Traum."

"Trau..."

"I'm a dream," he whispered and he lifted the covers and slid in beside her. "Just a dream."

Her eyes drifted closed. "A dream."

He leaned toward her and took his first taste of her lips. Sweet like berries. Drugging like wine. Teasing them gently, he brushed his mouth over hers to the corners and then back. Her lips parted, and her breath mixed with his as she answered. First softly and then with more urgency. Her heat and scent rose all around him as he kissed her. As he found his way through a haze of sensation, he slipped his tongue between her lips to taste them. In response, she ran her arms around his neck and pulled herself upward to answer with her own tongue. Someone moaned -- his own voice, laced with hunger. Klaus had been right. No words could describe this. He closed his eyes so that

his other senses could take over -- scent, touch, the sounds of her breathing growing ragged. They'd entered an altered reality, a universe all their own.

One of her hands slipped from around his neck and went exploring. Over his shoulder, down his chest, creating a space between them while her fingers traced his ribs. He held his breath as darts of pleasure trailed after her caress. Almost too much, her touch burned like fire and then ice. When her hand closed around his cock, his whole body went rigid. This was too much. He needed to be inside her when the madness came. Above all, he needed to satisfy her. His whole being existed to satisfy her.

Trembling, he removed her hand from his too-sensitive flesh. Gazing into her face, he kissed her fingers and then the pad of her thumb. She smiled, her expression hazy. After kissing her once more, briefly, he began explorations of his own.

The space under her chin smelled like heather. He drank in the scent, running his lips along her skin at the base of her throat. He found her collarbone and dipped his tongue into the hollow above it. She made a sound that was half-laughter, half-sigh. Approval, though, and permission to go further. On he went, to the valley between her breasts. Soft flesh everywhere. Feather soft. Whisper soft. Her chest rose and fell with building arousal. He circled one nipple with his fingertip and listened to her answering gasp. Bolder now, he took the peak into his mouth and suckled until it had hardened. Not neglecting the other breast, he stroked it and toyed with the nipple.

"Oh!" she cried. "That is so good."

He smiled, looking up at her, while he continued to caress her breast.

"I need..." she said, "please... touch me."

Yes. Klaus had designed him well, it seemed. His human form as well as his machine form and the ability to change. Though he'd never done this before, he knew exactly what she needed. Drawing out her need, he slowly lowered his hand past her ribs, over her belly, to her pelvis. She sighed and lifted her hips, guiding him. Finally, he parted the lips of her sex and stroked it.

Perfectly attuned to her arousal -- as he'd been designed -- his own excitement grew. Soon, she'd take him inside her, and they'd both take the ultimate ride.

Her sex moistened, hot juices caressing his fingers. He found the seat of her desire -- the bud of her pleasure -- and rubbed it. In response, she moaned and opened her legs, begging for more. His cock throbbed, beating in rhythm with his heart. Soon. Soon, they'd join.

Still stroking her clit, he rose on one elbow and watched the play of passion on her face. Her lips had parted, and she took quick, shallow breaths. She seemed in a trance, her eyes closed, but with a look of total concentration on her features. When he slid a finger inside her, she gasped, and her hips rose again.

"Oh, God," she whispered. "Oh, God."

"Do you want me?"

"Yes. Please, yes."

Now, he could join with her. He'd been designed and created for this perfect moment. Trembling, he placed himself between her legs and guided the tip of his cock into her wetness. Fire raced through his veins, pleasure so intense it stole his breath. Only through the force of will did he manage to keep his eyes open to watch her face while he sank slowly into her.

She gave out a little cry. Surprise, joy, escape from reality. Her muscles gripped him, and his own reality slipped. Sensations beyond his understanding. She owned him, owned his cock, owned his whole existence. Now, he could have what he'd been created for.

He began moving inside her. In and out. Driving them both. The wind whistled by as it did on the wildest of rides. Pistons thrusting, the road beneath him. Perfect freedom. They rode each other now -- him moving faster into her depths, her lifting her hips to meet his thrusts. Flying, soaring, fucking.

He lost control then. The wildness inside him broke free as he pounded into her. Faster and harder, while her cries grew louder. He had to please her, but he couldn't last. The feelings were too sweet, too strong to resist. He'd climax in a moment, but if

she didn't come with him, he'd fail. Biting his lip, he fought for control, but his human body wouldn't have it. It screamed for release, every nerve at overload. If he fucked her harder, would she come then? No choice. Lust made the decisions for him.

Just as he could bear no more, her voice signaled her orgasm -- a low, soft note that built to a ragged cry. Her muscles gripped him, clenching in spasms. He'd done it. Sweet victory. He surrendered then, pumping madly until his own voice joined hers. A surge of power rushed through him, as his cock exploded inside her. Hot semen poured out of him in waves. They clung together that way in shared ecstasy for several heartbeats as the world dissolved. Nothing on Earth existed but his mortal body and the woman beneath him.

Finally, spent, he rested his face in the crook of her neck and gasped for breath.

"My God," she whispered. "How did you..."

"Hush," he answered.

"I've never done that. Who are you?"

"Sleep, *liebchen*." He raised himself so he could look down at her and stroke her face. "I'm a dream. Sleep."

"Yes," she murmured as her head fell to the side, a smile on her lips. She slept now, so he could watch her for a few moments. They'd mated, whether she realized that or not. His body had changed to something more human. He could still transform himself from machine to man and back again at will, but his senses were linked to hers. His body was joined to hers. No matter where she was, he'd feel what she felt, know what she knew. Just as the Designer had intended.

He'd go back out to the garage now and return to his machine form. He'd rest there comfortably enough until she rode him again. Tomorrow.

* * *

That had been one hell of a dream. She'd had erotic ones before -- occasionally even so hot that she woke up having an orgasm. But none of them had ever rocked her like *that* before. If only a man could do that to her in real life, he might be worth keeping

around. Hell, she'd pay for sex like that as long as he'd keep his mouth shut about servicing the CEO of Consolidated Industries International.

Nah, too risky. She'd have to stick to her vibrator for orgasms.

In fact, she could use her toy right now, as the memory of that dream made her hot enough to need it. After fumbling for a moment behind the bed, her fingers found the "massage wand" she'd bought for the purpose. Two speeds -- she selected high and placed the head against her pussy where it gave her maximum pressure on her clit. Damn, but her dream lover had excited her.

In no time at all, her senses replayed the events of the dream. His kisses -- sweet enough to make a lesser woman weep. The way he'd loved her breasts and used the right pressure on her clit. A good lover could have made her come by doing those things, but he'd given her an orgasm with his cock. No man had ever done that.

As her excitement grew, her mind replayed the sensations as he'd entered her. His massive erection entering her slowly, stretching her to accept all of him. She'd had well-endowed lovers before she'd given up on men, but none as big as her dream lover. Maybe the mere size had driven her over the edge, but more had happened than a good fucking. He'd taken her somewhere... different. Somewhere unreal where she could lose herself. The same dream state she was entering now.

Her pussy remembered him and grew wet as she approached orgasm. How he plunged into her, harder and faster as the pressure grew. She slipped into that other place, giving in to the pressure against her clit. As the sound of his roar when they came echoed through her brain, she climaxed again. It seemed to last forever as her body remembered her dream. Finally, she switched off the vibrator and lay back, her pussy still in spasms.

Then it struck her -- her cunt was sore. Just pleasantly sore, as if she'd really been fucked. As if the dream had been real.

* * *

Claire tapped the pen against the conference table and stared out the window. A perfect summer day, and she was cooped up in a staff meeting. If this bunch of clowns

ever did anything right, she could have ended this dog-and-pony show an hour ago and taken the Mannhof for a ride. Maybe if she bit off a few heads, they'd all slink away somewhere and leave her the hell alone.

"... and the acquisitions project will be back on track."

She turned to face the group and found six male faces staring back at her. All her senior executives. Over-paid, overbearing egos, all of them. Overly ambitious, too, but that worked to her advantage most of the time as it was easy to set one against another. This time, they seemed unified in expecting something from her. "All right, we'll do it that way, then."

"Uh, what way?" Henderson, senior veep of finance, asked.

"The way you laid it out, of course."

"But, I didn't, Claire. I was asking for suggestions."

"Why do I always have to come up with solutions?" she said. "Your department fucked this up, you figure out a way to unfuck it."

Not a muscle in Henderson's face moved. "Is that language necessary?"

"I'll decide what's necessary. I want you to think of three alternatives to fix this mess and report on them next week, complete with risk and cost estimates."

He scribbled something into his PDA. "Right."

She stared at the rest of them, but none of them looked back. Business school grads. What a bunch of dead wood. "Anything else?"

"There's talk of union organizing again." This from Cartman of operations.

"Nip it in the bud."

"I've kept the organizers off company property, but I can't keep the rank and file from muttering about it under their breath."

"They can mutter all they want, but they can't have a union."

"Why not let them have their unions?" Riggs from R and D said. "Then, we co-opt the leaders so they're working for us."

"No unions." She rested her fist on the table. "Fire anyone who tries to organize."

"That isn't legal," Stewart, the chief counsel, said.

"Then, find a way to do it that is legal."

"Of course." He hadn't agreed, not really. His expression said he didn't like her answer but saw no point debating it. Good. She had better things to do with her time.

"All right," she said. "Next week at the same time."

A couple of them looked as if they wanted to argue, but she glared at them until they saw reason, got up, and got the fuck out.

Only Ted stayed, studying her face in a way she'd never put up with from someone else. "Doesn't it bother you that they all hate your guts?"

"Let them go find nicer guts to work for."

He sighed. "I guess you know what you're doing."

"Damn straight, and what I'm doing this minute is leaving."

His brow furrowed. "Leaving?"

"Leaving. Going home. Kissing the rest of the day good-bye."

"But you have the Congressman in half an hour. We barely have time to make it to his hotel suite."

"Oh, shit. That's today?"

"I've been reminding you of it all week."

Shit, piss, fuck. She'd been trying to get a face-to-face with the elected asshole for months. His committee was considering a product safety bill that would increase her operating expenses by twelve percent. She had to grease the right palms in exactly the right way to get the measure killed. He had to choose this week to visit here and this afternoon to see her.

"He's only giving you fifteen minutes of his time," Ted said. "It won't take long."

"Fifteen minutes meeting and half an hour there and back."

"That's an hour and a quarter, Claire. What's wrong with you?"

She stared at him. No one talked to her that way. No one. Ted was made of sterner stuff than her expensive flunkies, though. He just stared back.

"You haven't been yourself for weeks," he said. "Ever since they delivered that motorcycle to your house. You haven't been here half the time, and when you are here, you aren't all here."

"I've been enjoying myself for a change." Riding the bike. And having those dreams -- every night now. Every night they got more vivid, the sex acts more and more elaborate. Always they ended with a shattering orgasm with his massive cock inside her. Then, him whispering endearments -- in German, of all languages -- and telling her to sleep. These days she spent half her waking time hot and breathless remembering the dreams. Only riding the bike gave her any relief. Relief she needed now, not an hour and a quarter from now.

Oh, hell. Nothing to do but meet with Congressman Greed and get it over with. But she'd leave directly from there and head toward home before one of her incompetents could create a crisis she'd have to deal with.

* * *

Will flew down the open road with Claire on his back, her sweet pussy damp against the leather of his seat. He didn't hadn't her climax this way since the first time. Instead he did that at night in her dreams now. Remembering Klaus's instructions and using every tool built into his design, he'd gotten better at satisfying her. She came more quickly now and with greater force, sometimes with such violence he had to cling to her to keep her beneath him. Her orgasms never failed to make him come, too. A side benefit for his diligent work.

Today, the second major goal. To let her know his true nature, to make her climax in her waking state and to make her do it more than once. Once her body had surrendered completely to his, he could start on his ultimate goal -- to fix her spirit.

She opened the throttle to full, going much too fast for safety on this winding road. The broken line beneath him became a blur, and the wind whipped at him as it sped by. Light and shade alternated at blinding speed as they'd turn one curve to look out over the city below and then dipped back in among the trees. On any other bike, such driving would be suicide. Even on the world's finest bike, one slip-up would mean

a fatal crash. She'd made a few mistakes so far, but Will had corrected them. His intelligence allowed him to.

But she didn't know that. She obviously had a death wish. That fit with the rest of what he knew about her.

She slowed, finally, and pulled over to the side of the road. A trail led up and off the pavement. She took it slowly, but even so, his tires kicked up pebbles and dust as they went. At a spot that gave a spectacular view of the city and the bay in the distance, she stopped and turned off the engine. After setting the kickstand and removing her helmet, she dismounted and walked to the edge of the cliff. Her movements were always so fluid after a ride, her shoulders relaxed from the tension of her work day. She appeared almost soft, feminine, even in her leathers. Wisps of dark brunette hair had worked free of her braid. Rosy cheeks and full lips gave her pale face color.

His mind reached out to hers. *Now, we talk.*

Her head snapped around, her eyes wide. "Is someone there?"

It's I, lieblich but you won't find me that way.

"You," she whispered.

You remember me.

"How could I forget?"

I'm waiting for you. In those bushes. Come find me.

She bought the deception and walked away and out of sight enough for him to change before she realized the ruse and returned. The transformations came easier now -- metal turning to muscle, wiring to nerves, fuel to blood. Soon, he was breathing fresh air, and now he could feel the sun on human skin and look out over the city with human eyes. How odd that humans valued these senses so little. He stood with his feet planted on warm earth, drinking it all in, as he waited for his mate to reappear.

* * *

What the fuck? Not only did she not find the man from her dreams in the bushes, but when she got back to the clearing, her bike had disappeared, and some naked lunatic stood there, smiling at her.

"Who in hell are you?" she demanded, dropping her helmet to the ground. "And where's my motorcycle?"

"Hello, *liebchen*."

That voice -- his voice. No, this wasn't happening. This guy was some kind of stalker.

Somehow, he'd followed her here without her seeing. Now, he'd taken the Mannhof, probably loaded it into a truck somewhere, and he had a crazy idea she'd give him her body, too. She'd give him a knee to the groin if he tried anything. Right now, she was going to get her bike back and then drive off to find a cop.

"Keep your distance, pal," she said. "You haven't broken any major laws yet, but if you touch me, all bets are off."

That seemed to puzzle him, as his brow furrowed. "I thought you liked it when I touched you."

"You've never touched me, and you're not going to do it now."

"I know this is confusing. But you must recognize me."

He made no move to get closer, so she stood her ground and looked at him. He did look familiar with his flowing blond hair and blue eyes. The broad shoulders, narrow hips, and powerful legs also conjured memories of something -- if only she could remember what. His cock hung limp. Even so, the whole picture fit with a recent erotic experience.

"You've admired me for weeks now. Ever since the auction."

"The auction?"

"When you bought me."

"Okay, pal, that's it. You're nuts."

"Really, Claire. Trust your own senses."

Her eyes went wide. "You know my name."

"Of course."

That wasn't so strange, really. She headed up a large corporation. Lots of people knew who she was and what she looked like. This one had been following her around

for months, probably, waiting to get her alone. She should have hired bodyguards, after all, and she would the moment she got back to the office. Still, she *did* know him.

"You're Claire Wilcox," he said. "You live at 34 Janeway Lane. Your bedroom is at the rear of the house. You've decorated it in desert tones, and there's a picture of your mother on the wall. But no picture of your father. Why is that?"

Holy shit. He hadn't just been following her around. He'd gotten inside her house. Inside her bedroom! Her guts turned to water. The freak was dangerous.

"Why do you look so scared?" he said. "You know me, too."

"I never saw you before in my life."

"Not as I am now, but you have seen me."

"Look, this is getting us nowhere. Return my motorcycle, and we can both be on our way." Her way would be right to the police department to report this lunatic.

"You disappoint me, *mein Schatz*. Think."

"I'm done thinking. I'm done talking. Give me my goddamned bike."

"Remember my fuel tank?" he said softly. "My human image was painted there."

The naked man on the fuel tank. That's where she'd seen this guy before. He was right. The image matched him perfectly. But how could that be? That image had been done fifty years ago. The bike had had one owner, and she'd kept it in the original condition. How could someone have painted the exact way he looked now if they did it fifty years ago?

"You're remembering now, I think," he said.

"It doesn't make any sense."

"Must everything make sense?"

"Yes, of course, it must." No. Yes. Oh, hell, what did she know?

"I've visited you every night since you took possession of me. You must remember that."

"That's idiotic. People can't possess other people."

"In the usual way of things. But, we aren't usual, you and I."

"You're not. That's for sure."

"You're not so afraid of me now, are you?"

She glared at him. "I'm not afraid of anyone."

"I've come to you every night. I've given you pleasure and shared in it."

The dream man. Maybe they hadn't been dreams. Maybe this nutcase had drugged her and fucked her every night. Shit, just when she'd thought she'd found something good in life, it had to turn out to be a fake. Just a stalker getting his sick jollies at her expense. She'd let him do it. Sometimes she'd begged him to do it. Fuck.

"You're smarter than the average lunatic, I'll give you that."

His expression clouded again. "I don't understand."

"You don't have any diseases I should know about, do you?"

"What are you saying?"

"You managed to get around my security system and into my bedroom. You fucked my brains out."

"We didn't fuck. We made love."

"Whatever you call it. I have the right to know if you've given me something that'll kill me."

His lips tightened into an angry line, and his eyes flashed sapphire fire. "Are you truly so hard?"

"Don't fake outrage with me. You broke into my home, not the other way around." He'd made her believe in magic, too -- for the first time since she'd discovered there was no Santa Claus and you couldn't trust people who said they loved you. It had felt good for a while. When would she ever learn?

"I didn't break into your house. You bought me, as you were fated to do. You resist that fate at your peril."

Well, shit. Now he did sound threatening. He might have remained harmless if she hadn't questioned his lunacy. Now, who knew what danger she'd have to get herself out of?

"Don't look that way at me, either," he said. "I would never hurt you, *liebchen*, and you know it."

"All right. Just give me my damned bike so I can go home."

"I can't give you your damned bike because I *am* your motorcycle."

Chapter Three

Okay, now this was seriously twisted. The guy had gone from crazy to delusional. As calmly as she could, she took a few steps backward. But, if she ran, would he chase her? Would that trigger him to violence?

"I know it's hard for you to understand," he said. "But Klaus Mannhof designed me to be a motorcycle *and* a lover for you."

"The cycle was built fifty years ago. You're thirty-five, tops."

"I'm actually only weeks old. As a human, I came to life in your garage."

"You've been in my garage?"

"I spoke to you. Do you remember?"

What the hell was he talking about? No one had spoken to her in the garage.

"I said, 'Turn me on'."

The voice. She'd been getting ready to leave when the voice had said that to her. The same voice that had sent her off into the bushes just now when he'd been standing here. Not a real voice, but sounds inside her own head. People couldn't project their voices into your own skull, could they? Some kind of ventriloquism? None of this made any sense.

"I loved you for the first time that day," he said. "I know you remember that."

Oh, shit. She did. She'd turned on the bike's motor and used the vibrations to masturbate. Had this stalker watched her?

"Look, I think you've misunderstood a lot of things," she said.

"I understand everything about you, Claire."

"But you don't. It's all been a mistake. You spied on me when I thought I was alone. You got the wrong idea, and then, you somehow managed to get into my bedroom, and things got carried away."

"We both got carried away. It was glorious."

"It's over." She took a breath. "You need to take your medication, and I need to get back to my business. Nothing personal. It just has to end."

He sighed. "You don't believe me?"

"That you're part human and part motorcycle? No, I don't."

"Then, I'll have to show you." With that, he lay down on the trail -- his naked back against the dirt and pebbles. Maybe he'd put himself into some kind of trance, and she could escape to the road to flag down help.

He didn't start chanting or anything, but after a few seconds, the air around him began to shimmer. It warped and rippled the way quiet water does when a pebble drops into it. The waves seemed centered around his mid-section and radiating outward until the space around him came to life. Deep inside the vision, changes started happening. The skin on his back turned black and then became rubber. Tires, complete with treads. From that, metal appeared and grew upward -- wheels with silver spokes, fenders, and an engine at the center. A seat developed on top of that -- sleek, black leather -- finally, a headlight, controls, and handlebars. The Mannhof stood there, engine running, where the man had been.

Do you believe now? that voice said.

She approached the bike, her hand outstretched. If she hadn't seen the transformation with her own eyes, she wouldn't have believed it. Her palm sensed normal heat coming from a running engine. The handlebars were metal, the seat leather. All as they should be, right down to his own image painted on the fuel tank. Impossible.

As she stood there, the air distorted again, and the bike became indistinct. She jumped backward and then took more steps behind her. When her foot hit something, she fell, landing on her ass. Only a few feet away, the change reversed itself, leather, metal, and rubber turning back into flesh. Speechless, she sat and watched.

Finally, the man opened his eyes and stood up. "Now that you've seen with your own eyes, you must believe."

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"I'm your Mannhof. The Designer made me for you."

"How?"

"I don't know." He shrugged. "Magic?"

"But, why?"

"That I do know. For this."

He touched his crotch, and his cock grew to full hardness in an instant. Thick and long, with a swollen head. The huge prick that had fucked her every night. Sometimes entering her slowly, and other times impaling her with one deep thrust. The cock that could make her come as no other man had. He wasn't a dream. He was real. The man from the gas tank, the man who filled her sleep with orgasms, her own bike with all its power. He stood there now, in the flesh, ready to let her ride him again. He walked to her and extended his hand to help her up.

She took it and rose, staring into his eyes. "Klaus Mannhof made you for me?"

"Exactly."

"But what about the other woman -- the first owner?"

"I've never had another owner. Only you."

"How is that possible?"

"I'll explain later. Right now, I want to make love with you."

It was all true. This man was her motorcycle, the machine that had given her an orgasm the first time she'd sat on it. He was the man who came to her in her sleep every night and fucked her so sweetly. She could have him now in the bright sunlight. Reality, not a dream. Her pussy dampened in anticipation.

"Here?" she said.

"Just over there. A place where you can stare out over the bay while I enter you from behind."

He led her off the path and up a rise to a spot hidden behind the scrub. The wind picked up here, warmed by the sun. He stopped her for a kiss, his lips gently testing hers for a moment, before he set to work stripping her out of her leathers. The zipper

slipped downward from her throat to the space between her breasts, exposing skin as it went along.

His fingers followed the trail for a moment. "No bra?"

"I don't wear any clothes under my riding gear."

A twinkle entered his blue eyes. "I should have known."

"I like as little as possible between my cunt and the power of the cycle... that is... of you."

"That's my *liebling*."

"Did you suspect all along?"

"I knew we were connected. In all things."

He continued unzipping her leathers, all the way down to her belly. With that done, he could push the garment down and release her arms, stripping her to the waist. "I can finally see your body in the daylight."

No man had looked at her this way for years, and it took a conscious decision not to cover her breasts with her hands. She made herself stand still while he studied her, a look of reverence on his face.

The exploration went both ways, though, as she spread her hand over his chest and burrowed her fingers into the curling hairs there. He felt like steel and velvet -- hard and smooth. A faint scent of leather rose from his skin. So clean and masculine and so like him.

She let her touch wander over him, downward to his ribs and belly. He trembled slightly, as if he'd guessed her destination and prepared himself for her caress. But when she curled her fingers around his cock, he gasped and closed his eyes in pleasure.

"You really are huge," she said.

"Ah, love... your touch. I'm tuned to respond to it."

With her other hand, she cupped his balls, testing their weight in her palm. He squeezed his eyes tightly shut, drew in a deep breath, and let it out again. A man fighting for control. The sense of power over him sent a shock of pleasure through her. This perfect machine, whether driving down the road or driving himself into her, and

she could make it tremble with her touch. Slowly, she stroked him, all the way from the base of his shaft to the head, which she squeezed gently before starting the whole process over.

"Enough," he gritted. "Or you'll unman me."

She stopped stroking him. "I could do that?"

"You nearly have. Pleasure isn't complete unless it's shared."

Odd. She'd never thought of it that way, but when he said it, it made sense. She'd given herself many orgasms over the years. The vibrator was very efficient at that. At the time, she'd thought she was giving herself pleasure, but she'd only been giving herself relief from the constant, empty ache of non-fulfillment. She'd only found true pleasure with him in her bed. So, he held power over her, too. She didn't surrender power. She'd spent her whole life creating it for herself so no one could ever hurt her. Did she dare trust this man, or whatever he was?

He took both her hands in his and raised them to his lips, kissing first one palm and then the other. "I'm naked, but you're still wearing clothes."

"I'll undress."

"Let me do it." He knelt to unlace her boots and helped her step out of them. From there, he slid the leather unitard over her hips and down her legs. She put an arm on his shoulder for balance as he stripped the garment all the way off her until she stood, naked except for her socks. Warm sun and breeze caressed her skin, sliding into the most intimate parts of her body -- the undersides of her breasts and between her legs. Such a feeling of vulnerability and of freedom, too. The same freedom she felt on the open road with the bike beneath her. As though she could move through space at will and command the elements around her.

He helped her to put her boots back on and then spread her legs and pulled her to him. When his mouth closed over her pussy, everything in her mind faded away, leaving nothing but the throbbing of her cunt.

What had he said? That he was tuned to her? He had the perfect touch with her clit -- now rasping with his tongue then sucking it into his mouth. Just when she

thought she'd snap, he'd pause. When she whimpered her disappointment, he'd start again, letting the pressure build a little higher and retreating.

He did that several times -- each time driving her closer to orgasm but denying her the release. She trembled, her knees threatening to buckle, while he drove her mad.

"Please," she gasped. "Don't stop."

He stopped entirely then. "You can take more."

"Can't," she cried. "Need... to... come."

"More."

"Damn you."

He chuckled and went back to tormenting her. Hot. Wet. His mouth urged a response that would tear her soul apart if she didn't come soon. Her vision dimmed, swimming at the edges with unspent lust. Holding his head in her hands, she pushed her aching pussy into his face, desperately straining for the climax just beyond her reach. It built inside her, cresting. One more moment. One more.

The bastard stopped again and rose. "You're ready."

Her brain wouldn't find words, so she stood there, gripping his arm for support. He led her toward the cliff, to a place where two small trees grew at about arm's length apart. After resting her hands on the trunks, he walked behind her and spread her legs again. Crouching, he maneuvered his cock against the entrance to her sex and moved upward, sliding the first hard inch of flesh inside her.

She clutched the bark for balance and closed her eyes, concentrating on the pressure inside her sex. Every nerve vibrated with need, her clit throbbing, her pussy aching to feel all of him inside her. He couldn't leave her hanging like this. Not even a machine could be that cruel.

He made one movement behind her and then thrust upwards, forcing his cock into her wetness. The shock sent her over the edge, shooting her past endurance into a violent orgasm. She shrieked as she came and then lost all reason as her pussy erupted into spasms that shook her to her core. Deep inside her, his cock accepted it all -- a rock in her sea of madness.

When after long moments, it ended, she went limp. His arms circled her ribs, holding her upright.

"Am I forgiven?" he whispered.

"As soon as I'm through killing you."

"You enjoyed it, I think. Your noises give you away."

"Someday, I'll do the same to you, and you can tell me if you enjoy it."

"Then, I have much to look forward to."

She squeezed her pussy muscles around him. "You haven't come yet."

"When it's time."

"When will that be?"

"You'll know."

He was probably right about that, as strange as it seemed. After all the nights together in her bedroom, she'd come to learn his responses as well as her own. She hadn't realized it until this exact moment, but she'd become attuned to him, too. The way his erect cock grew larger as she stroked it. The way his sighs of pleasure guided her touch. The way his movements went from gentle to rough as passion got the better of him. She'd learned all those things in her heart, completely skipping her brain.

Wait a minute. Her heart? She'd never loved a man, and she never would. You couldn't trust them enough to give them any power over you. Period. End of discussion.

He pressed a kiss to her ear. "What are you thinking?"

"Nothing."

"I know you too well, *liebchen*. You just tensed."

"My legs are coming back to life. That's all."

"Liar."

"If you want to insult me, we can go home." And he could sit in the garage until she felt like dealing with his human form. *If* she felt like it.

"We're not through here." He crouched lower, pulling his cock almost out of her before thrusting upward to fill her again.

"We're through if I say we're through."

"But, do you want to be through? Really?"

He thrust a few more times, stroking her sex back to life. She ought to make him stop, assert her authority. But honestly, who could resist such a thorough fucking? Already wet, her sex coated his, making his huge member glide easily in and out. Still in control of himself, he coaxed her back into that world of lust waiting for her at the edge of consciousness. Only this time when she came, he'd join her. Her heart told her that, too.

She gazed out over the bay as he plunged into her. Below, cars the size of insects swarmed along the freeways and over the bridge to the city. Tall grasses danced in the breeze, and over it all a hawk hovered, its shrill cry piercing the silence. Above everything, the two of them might have been the only two people on earth. The eternal duo of male and female, her body accepting his to merge into one entity.

Now that her legs would hold her up, he released her ribs and cupped her breasts. They felt heavy and super-sensitive in his hands. He toyed with the nipples until they hardened into tight peaks, crooning into her ear as he worked her flesh. "Beautiful. Your whole body is so beautiful."

He sounded sincere -- awed. For a moment, she could let herself believe that he cared. Not just about using her for his own pleasure or dominating her to suit his ego. Maybe motorcycles were more honest than men, because this one really cared, if she dared to believe him.

Ich liebe dich. This time inside her head. *I love you.*

No, not that, her mind answered.

Yes, that. Always that.

His thrusts grew wilder as he strained, downward and then up. His passion was building, sending hers to soar with it. His hands left her breasts and smoothed over her belly, headed toward the place where their bodies joined. Her clit readied itself for his touch, becoming hard and throbbing in anticipation. When his fingers found it and

rubbed, she cried out. He could play her like a master, and now, his cock drove the rhythm, too. Deadly combination. Irresistible. Overpowering.

"Come again, *liebchen*."

"Yes."

"I want to feel you on my cock. Squeezing."

"Yes. I will. Don't stop."

"I couldn't."

As the pressure built in her cunt, his fingers rubbed faster on her clit. Pounding rhythms, making her heart race in response. Already, the heat had started coiling in her belly, getting ready to send fire along her nerves. She'd burst into flames brighter than the sun. Together, they'd soar high above the hawk. Any moment now.

"Come with me," she cried.

"Yes."

"Now, please."

"Yes."

His fingers moved wildly over her clit as his thrusting went out of control. Deep. Savage. She tensed, bracing for the explosion. Waiting. Not breathing. Existing only for the pressure on her clit and the huge cock moving inside her.

The madness broke loose inside her, and she came with a rush of power that spread outward over her whole body. Powerful spasms raced through her cunt, grasping at his flesh inside her. She stiffened and screamed as the pounding stole her sanity.

Behind her, he reached his own climax. Straining and trembling, he thrust up into her a few more times. As he spilled hot come into her depths, his shouts joined hers, deafening her and adding joy to the ecstasy. Never had a moment of existence been more perfect as two bodies in synch with each other gave in to a power greater than themselves.

* * *

Claire woke up with a start and had to fight with the blankets tangled all around her to sit up. She swung her legs over the edge of the bed, put her elbows on her knees, and took some gasping breaths. The dream again. That damned fucking dream.

She'd been back in the old house -- the one on Whitson Lane in the gated community. Standing on the stairway that looked down into the living room. Her mother lay on the floor below, her face bleeding into the cream-colored carpeting. Mommy looked upward and did her best to smile. "Go back to bed, honey. Everything's okay."

Then her father turned, his hands still curled into fists, and glared up at her. His face looked like a Halloween mask of rage and hatred. "What are you looking at? Get the hell out of here."

She always woke up at that part of the dream, her mind racing. *Would Daddy hurt me, too? Would the police come again?*

Shit. She got up, slipped into a nightgown, and took the back stairway down into the kitchen. She kept the booze in a top cabinet, so she grabbed the Scotch and found a tumbler from the sideboard. Who needed ice? She poured a couple of fingers of liquor and raised the glass to her lips. Instead of drinking it, she set the drink back onto the counter with enough force to make the liquid slosh. Getting drunk wouldn't fix anything.

She hadn't had that dream for weeks. Not since she got the bike, or whatever the hell he was. The only images that had come to her in her sleep were ones he'd given her -- images of sex too good to be real. And yet, it had been real. He hadn't come to her tonight. She hadn't seen him since she parked the motorcycle in the garage after that incredible ride. Where was he?

She let herself out the back door and took the path to the garage, the flagstones cold under her feet. Once inside, she flicked on the light, looked around, and gasped. His human form stood naked by a work bench.

"I thought you were a motorcycle," she said.

"I was until a few minutes ago. What happened?"

His cock was flaccid, but still larger than life. "We need to get you some clothes."

"Did you come out here to talk about my wardrobe?"

He stared at her as if he could see inside her mind. He could put thoughts in there. Who knew what else he could do? She stared back at him until the knowing look in his blue eyes was too much, and she had to glance away. "You didn't come to my bed tonight."

"I thought we did enough lovemaking this afternoon."

"But, you could do it again if you wanted to, right?"

"I could. This isn't about sex, though, is it?"

She shrugged. "What else?"

"You're not fooling either of us, *liebbling*."

"What do you want from me?"

"I want you to face the truth."

"Truth's overrated."

He sighed and walked to her. "Let's go into the house."

"Okay."

After shutting off the light, he draped an arm around her shoulders and led her outside. His body put off enough heat to warm her skin through the material of her nightgown. She should have been cold after being nearly naked in the unheated garage, but he could have been a furnace, and the warmth gave off a surreal but comforting envelope of security that blanketed them both.

Inside, he only stopped to close and lock the back door before leading her up the stairs to her room. After slipping off her gown, he pulled back the covers for her and climbed into bed next to her.

Weak thing that she was, she cuddled up to him, burying her nose into the soft hairs on his chest. Just inches away, his very human heart beat in a soothing rhythm.

"Tell me about your dream," he whispered.

"Who said anything about a dream?"

"Don't play games, *liebchen*. Not with me."

"It doesn't mean anything. Just a childhood memory."

"Of..."

"My mother and father fighting."

He didn't say anything but stroked her back, up and down along her spine.

"He had a temper," she went on. "Oh, what the fuck? He was a nasty bastard."

"He beat your mother." It was a statement, not a question.

"Nice, upscale community. Only the best people live there. I don't know how many times my mom had to hire someone to clean the bloodstains out of the carpet."

"*Scheiss*. Did he beat you, too?"

"He didn't dare. He knew that was the one thing my mother wouldn't tolerate. She would have left him and caused a scandal."

"Didn't she care enough about herself to get out?"

"Bingo. That's the big question."

He kissed the top of her head. "I'm so sorry."

"She told me she stayed with him so that I could have every advantage. He convinced her she was nothing without him. As much as he scared her, being alone scared her even more."

"Are they still together?"

"He killed her, finally. One beating too many. I was away at college and couldn't prevent it."

"*Gott im Himmel*. What happened to him?"

"He's still in prison. I hope he rots there."

"So, that's what makes you so afraid of living," he said.

She pulled back and looked up at him. In the faint light that came through the window, his eyes glowed a crystal blue.

"I live very well," she said.

"You exist."

"I run a multi-national corporation. I have everything." She poked him in the chest. "I made enough money to buy you."

"You own me, but you didn't buy me."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"I was designed for you. I would have been yours in any case."

"Oh, sure. I would have woken up to find you in the driveway of my little shack one morning."

"The man who was bidding against you -- why do you think he collapsed before he could bid any higher?"

He said it so matter-of-factly she could only stare at him. "You did that?"

"Everything has a cause."

"Why?" she asked. "Why would a cycle builder manufacture you for someone he never met?"

"Klaus can read hearts. He designed me so that I'd find exactly the right woman and fix her."

"I don't need fixing."

"Oh, really? Then, why have you never loved?"

"It's pointless. Dangerous."

"Not all men are like your father."

"All the ones who attracted me were. They seemed romantic when I met them, but the minute they got some power over me, they tried to control me."

He sighed. "You chose the wrong kind."

"I don't like weak men."

"Don't confuse brutality with strength. It takes great strength to be gentle."

"I tried all kinds of men. They didn't even satisfy me sexually."

"I satisfy you, I think," he said.

"You were a motorcycle, and then, you were a dream. You fooled me."

"You know me now. What would be the danger of loving me?"

"Love means giving up power. I won't do that. I can't." She was right about that, damn it. Her life worked just the way it was. So, why was her stomach tied up in knots?

He pulled her closer, tucking her head under his chin. "You don't have any choice in this matter. The Designer has already decided for you."

"No one makes my decisions but me." She ought to pull away again. He could either fuck her or go back to the garage. She owned him, not the other way around. But his warmth felt too good. The beating of his heart felt so right next to her own. She'd send him away again in a moment. Just a moment longer.

"Sleep now, *liebbling*. I'll keep you safe."

"Stop telling me what to do."

"Then, stay awake. If you can."

"I can." But did she want to, really? The bed seemed to rock her gently. Inviting her to doze. She was safe. Will had said she was. Did she need anything else?

Chapter Four

"Why the fuck didn't you call me?"

"Why the fuck didn't you read my e-mails, Claire?" Ted shot back.

E-mails. She hadn't even had her home computer on for days. She'd been out riding by day and having unbelievable sex by night. She didn't need a computer for that.

Ted's mouth settled into an angry line. "You didn't read them, did you?"

"Everyone deserves a vacation."

"When I go on vacation, I tell you where I'll be if there's an emergency."

"I have a telephone. You know the number."

"I thought you were taking care of business behind the scenes. I thought you had control of things. You always have in the past."

"I'll take control now."

"It could be too late." He rose from the chair across from her desk and paced to the window. "While you've been out doing whatever the hell you've been doing for the last month, Henderson has gotten to the stockholders."

"Which ones?"

"All of them. He's been making the rounds of the country clubs, glad handing them."

"Yeah, that's his style."

"You could learn from him."

"I'm not wasting my time with people I hate," she answered.

"Tell me, Claire. Who is it you like?"

"No one. People are a pain in the ass."

He crossed his arms over his chest. "I swear, if you didn't pay me so well, I'd walk out and never look back."

"So you've said." She waved her hand in his general direction. "Why don't you tell me... exactly... what I'm up against?"

"Henderson's been telling the major stockholders that you're losing it. As proof, he tells them that you spent a million dollars on a motorcycle and you've hardly been in the office since."

"Prick."

"Maybe if you didn't treat him like shit he wouldn't be stabbing you in the back."

"He'd be a prick no matter how I treated him."

"The prick has been schmoozing with the only people who can get you replaced."

"So, I'll schmooze, too," she said. "They know me. They know I can deliver."

"There's more."

She crossed her own arms over her chest and tipped back in her chair, staring at him. "Go on."

"Two of the biggest stockholders are union pension funds. Henderson's letting them think that if he's running things he'll allow them to unionize the workers."

"Shit." The man would be a fool if he allowed labor in. He might be a prick, but he was no fool. Still, if he had the bosses in his back pocket, he could make it work for them and for himself. She probably should have tried that on her own.

Oh, hell. Henderson had one thing right. She hadn't been herself since she'd bought the Mannhof and it turned itself into a man. He'd enchanted her somehow. He'd snuck in through her dreams and drugged her with freedom and great sex -- a dangerous combination. Because of him, she'd lost the drive she really needed for the true love of her life, her company. Worse, she'd lost control of her staff. Of herself.

That had to change, starting right now. "All right. Damage control. Get me dossiers on all the union bosses, their assistants, any political ties. I want everything I

can use on them -- questionable deals, criminal connections -- anything I can use to grab them by the balls."

"I know a good private investigator."

"Get a team of them. Pay them out of the private discretionary fund." She sighed. "I'll start making nice-nice with the fat cats on the board of directors."

"Right."

"Dig me up something I can dazzle them with. Good sales figures, new products. You know the drill."

"I'm on it." He walked toward the door.

"And, Ted..." she said, before he could get his hand on the knob, "... thanks."

He turned and looked at her, an odd expression on his face. Surprise. As if she'd never thanked him for anything before. Well, so what if she hadn't?

Before either of them could comment, her private phone rang. She picked up the receiver. "Yeah?"

"Claire, I think you'd better come out here." Her secretary, Sarah. It was a whisper, as if Sarah didn't dare let anyone else hear.

"What?" she snapped.

"There's a man out here."

"I'm busy. Send him away."

"He's talking to Mr. Henderson."

"Who is it?"

"I think you'd better come out here and see for yourself."

She hung up and stared at Ted. He shrugged his shoulders. "What's up?"

"I don't know. But, I'm going to find out."

She rose, walked around the desk to the door and pulled it open. There in the anteroom, right next to Sarah's desk, stood Will. What the fuck was he doing here?

At least he had clothes on. A casual shirt with the top two buttons open, and a pair of slacks that looked soft to the touch. Loafers and a sweater over his shoulders, the sleeves tied to keep it on, completed a picture that some companies let their employees

wear on Fridays. Her company didn't. Such dress did not belong in a work environment, especially hers.

When Will saw her, he smiled. An innocent expression, but one that Henderson didn't miss from his position only a few feet away from Will. He smiled, too, but his smile came off more oily than anything else.

"Well, Claire," Henderson said. "You didn't tell us about this young man."

"There's nothing to tell."

Will's brow furrowed. Confusion or concern? She glared at him, warning him with her eyes to keep his damned mouth shut.

"Is Will here the reason we haven't seen much of you lately?" Henderson said. His voice practically dripped with phony friendliness.

Will's earlier expression morphed into real puzzlement. "Did I say something wrong?"

Henderson laughed and clapped him on the back. "Not at all, son."

Will looked at Claire. "I thought it was time for our ride."

Henderson's eyes widened in triumph. "Do you have something to do with that motorcycle she paid a king's ransom for?"

"You might say I came with the bike," Will answered.

She gritted her teeth. "Go home, Will."

"Home?" Henderson repeated. "This I really have to hear."

She turned on him. "Get back to your department. I'll call you if I need you."

"Whatever you say, Claire." He left the anteroom, but his laughter trailed after him.

She glared at the other two. "Don't you have something to do?"

Sarah swiveled back to her computer, and Ted slipped out into the hallway.

"Go home, Will. Now."

With that, she turned, went into her office, and slammed the door behind her.

* * *

Will waited for Claire in the garage, his stomach churning. She'd treated him like something she'd scraped off her shoe, and then she'd dismissed him. He'd spent every hour since she first awoke him trying to please her. Learning every inch of her body and how it responded. Holding her after her nightmare. Keeping her safe when her wild driving threatened to wreck them both. Loving her, damn it. Loving her with every part of him, flesh and machine.

He'd known she'd prove hard to fix. Too much poison in her mind. Too many memories to work through to find the peace on the other side. He'd been patient -- far more so than any human male would be. She'd thanked him with contempt, and in front of her coworkers. He deserved better, and he'd have better. Starting today.

She showed up finally. The purr of the Jaguar's engine slowed as she came to a stop in front of the garage. After a moment, the automatic door whirled to life and began its ascent. As soon as the car would fit through, she drove in and turned off the engine. She didn't look at him as she set the brake and climbed out. Hands on his hips, he stood and watched while she turned to face him.

"Nice of you to come home," he said. "We missed our ride today."

She clicked the remote for the door. As it lowered, she slipped the device into her purse. "I don't have the time every day."

"You need to make time."

"You need to stay away from my office."

"You treated me shamefully today."

"I'm tired. I'm going to have a few drinks, soak in a tub, and go to sleep." She headed toward the smaller door to leave, but he caught her around the waist.

"It's still light out," he said.

"It won't be for long."

"We're going to talk."

"I had a bitch of a day. I don't want to get into this now with you."

"I don't care what you want," he answered.

"All right. Let's have it." She slammed her purse on top of the Jaguar. "I feel like kicking the shit out of someone. It might as well be you."

"Why did you treat me like that today?"

"You had no business coming to where I work."

"It's part of your life. I needed to see it."

"My business has nothing to do with you."

"I was designed for you. You're my existence -- all of you."

She rolled her eyes. "What a pile of horse shit."

"Don't do that!" he shouted.

She flinched, and her eyes went wide.

"I'm sorry I raised my voice," he said.

"It doesn't matter."

But it did, clearly. He'd frightened her, no matter that she tried to hide it. That stung. She couldn't think he was like her father, not after everything they'd shared.

She recovered quickly, her face settling into hardness. "So, what did you learn from prying into my professional life?"

"They all fear you. Some of them hate you. I've never felt such hostility."

"Good."

"Good?" he repeated.

"That's how I keep control of things."

"Control is important to you, isn't it?"

She put her hands on her hips. "You put yourself right in the middle of a plot against me. Did you know that?"

"Henderson? I sensed something wasn't right."

"He's set up a buzz that I'm having some kind of midlife crisis and can't run the business anymore. He claims it's why I spent a million dollars on a motorcycle."

"No one would believe that."

"It doesn't help when a live-in boy-toy shows up and says he came with the bike."

"I'm not your toy."

"Henderson's undermining me with the board of directors," she said, as if Will hadn't spoken. "He wants my job."

"Maybe if you didn't treat him so badly, he'd feel some loyalty."

"People like Henderson only understand power." She formed her hand into a fist as though crushing something in her palm. "They have to know you can destroy them."

"That's sick."

Fury flashed in her dark eyes. "What do you know of the real world? You were manufactured fifty years ago by some old coot."

"You will not speak of the Designer that way."

"You've never had to work. Never had to prove yourself. Never had to struggle for something to make life worth living."

"You make your own problems, Claire. You make people hate you, and you push away anyone who would love you."

"Did you get that out of a quiz in a magazine?" she said.

"You're doing it right now with me."

She walked up to him and poked him in the chest. "I don't need you or anyone else."

"Everyone needs someone."

She poked him again. "Oh, yeah? I ought to sell you to Matsumoto."

"Stop it."

She pushed him on the shoulder this time. "Make me."

"I know what you're doing, Claire. It won't work."

She pushed him with both hands.

"Enough!" He caught her wrists and held them before she could shove him again. "You're transparent, you know."

She struggled to pull away, but he held her fast. "You think you can make me so angry I'll hit you. That'll prove you're right about people, and you can get rid of me."

"Look at you. Holding on to a woman. Pathetic."

"It won't work. I know you too well."

"You don't know shit."

"You want to make me into your father so that you can finally win over him. I won't do it."

"Let go of me, damn you!" she shouted.

"Listen to me," he shouted back. "You're not responsible for your mother's death."

She howled with rage and struggled so hard he had to let her go or she'd injure herself. Then, she began pacing -- up and back, up and back -- her face a mask of fury. "I don't have to listen to you. You're a goddamn machine."

"You know better than that."

"I can crush you. I can turn you into scrap metal."

"You know better than that, too."

She stopped and glared at him. "No one talks to me like this. No one psychoanalyzes me."

"It's the truth," he answered. "Face it."

"Fuck you!"

"Fuck you right back."

She screamed and lunged at him, her fists pounding his chest.

"Where's your control now, Claire?"

"Bastard." She kept punching him -- strong blows -- while tears poured out of her eyes and over her cheeks.

"You can't control me. You can't even control yourself."

"I bought you," she sobbed. "I own you."

"You don't own anything. You're not even alive."

"You will do," she said from between gritted teeth, "as I say."

"You think you own me?" He started stripping, pulling off his shirt. "You think I have to follow your orders?"

"I know I do."

"Then, prove it." He kicked out of the loafers and unzipped his pants. "I dare you."

"Bring it on, mother fucker."

"All right. Let's ride."

* * *

The bastard hadn't stripped completely before the change started. While Claire watched, his slacks stretched and ripped apart as muscle turned to metal, skin to leather. Before she could blink, he'd become a motorcycle, the engine idling at an angry roar. He wanted her to ride him, did he? She'd ride him, all right, and she'd show him who controlled whom.

The main garage door opened on its own, letting in the slanting rays of early evening light. Just enough time for a quick ride. Enough to show this arrogant asshole who was the boss.

She walked to the bike and swung her leg up and over the seat. Her naked pussy settled on leather. Somehow, her underclothes had disappeared, and she wore nothing under the skirt of her business suit. All the pent-up power of the bike throbbed between her thighs. Even as a machine, he was trying to make a point. It wouldn't do him any good.

She pushed up the kickstand and put the cycle into gear. With a roar, the engine came to life, and they hurtled out of the garage. The front wheel came up nearly to her nose, almost throwing her off, but she kept her seat and her grip on the controls. They tore down the driveway, the smell of burning rubber following.

In a few yards, the front wheel came down with a jarring thud, and the bike flew onto the city street. She turned toward the main thoroughfare through town, headed for the hills.

Houses rushed by in a blur as they broke every speed limit in the book. Wind whistled by her ears and stung her eyes. With no helmet, no visor, and no leather clothing, she was exposed to the elements. Normally, she'd never ride this way -- no sane person would -- but just this once she could fly, untethered to reality.

In a while, they'd left the city and climbed into the hills. Up here, the lavish homes ended, and wild country began. Scrub and a few late blooming wildflowers made the only color in a sea of brown grasses. Off to one side, the cliffs looked out on a spectacular view -- miles and miles of city streets and further to the bridges that arched their way into the city. The evening fog spilled over the city, but here the fading sun still warmed her shoulders. Now, far from other traffic, the bike picked up speed. Faster and faster it went, leaning into turns so far it could have tipped over. Without even her leathers to protect her, any spill here would kill her for sure.

She let loose of the throttle some. Flying was nice, but staying alive was more important. The handle didn't move, though. It stayed jammed open at nearly full power. What the fuck?

She tried to ease off again. When the bike still didn't slow, she pushed on the control. No luck. If anything, they only went faster.

Still think you can control me? That was Will's voice inside her head.

"Are you doing this?"

Your days of absolute power over people are over.

"You're going to get us both killed."

Not if you trust me.

Trust him? He had to be out of his mind. She checked the speedometer. They were doing seventy on a road designed for thirty-five. They went into another turn, leaning so far she found herself staring at the pavement. She tried pulling back on the throttle again and even hit the brake. They squealed but didn't slow the bike at all.

Stop doing that. It's dangerous, his voice said.

"You're a fine one to talk about dangerous. Cut this shit out."

Admit you don't control me.

The ignition. Why hadn't she just turned the damned engine off? She did that, even pulling out the key, but that had no effect, either.

You have to trust me, Claire.

"You're a maniac."

Then, hang on.

They left the road, flying over a drainage ditch. On the other side, they landed on gravel, the tires spitting it up. One stone hit her ankle, drawing blood. Now off the asphalt, Claire looked around for a soft surface -- any soft surface -- that she might land on if she jumped off the bike. All she found was scrub and hard dirt, littered with more gravel. Even if she rolled, the impact would tear her up. She might have to do it, anyway, if he didn't come to his senses.

Branches scraped at her legs and arms as they crashed through the brush.
"You're hurting me."

It can't be helped.

"What do you want?"

I want you. I was designed for you.

"Okay. Cut this out. We'll go back to the house and talk."

You're lying.

"Honest. I didn't know you were so serious about this."

We get nowhere talking. Time for action.

"What are you going to do?"

If I can't have you, I have no reason to exist.

Holy shit. That was exactly what the batterer says right before he kills the wife and kids and then himself. This freak was going to kill them both.

"Don't do this, Will."

Trust me, Claire. Surrender control.

"I can't!"

It's our only hope.

She recognized the surroundings finally. They'd come up on the spot where they'd made love. From a different direction, but the same place. He raced by the area where he'd shown her his change, and followed the path to where they'd fucked. He was headed for the cliff.

"You're going to throw us off?"

Surrender.

"You'll kill me."

Trust me.

The cliff stood some distance away, but as fast as the bike was traveling, it wouldn't take long to get there.

"All right. Whatever you say. Just stop this."

Not good enough.

Panic closed in, constricting her throat until she could hardly breathe. "What do you want from me?"

I want control.

"You are in control."

Not of your mind.

"Please. I'm begging. Stop!"

Surrender.

"All right. Please."

Mean it.

"Please, God. I don't want to die."

Trust me.

"I trust you. I surrender. You win."

The brakes squealed on, and the wheels stopped turning. They still skidded forward, sending up more gravel, and so much dust it choked her and blotted out her vision. Metal vibrating, tires burning, they slid at frightening speed toward the cliff. Finally, the bike turned at a sharp angle and leaned backward away from the precipice. Unseen rocks went flying and then bounced lower and lower as they fell off the side and then plunged downward.

The bike finally stopped, only feet from a horrible death. It toppled over, throwing her to the ground. In an instant Will lay on top of her, clutching her to his human body. Blood dripped from dozens of cuts on his legs and torso, but his face held

a look of utter triumph. With one thrust, he shoved his cock deep inside her and pumped as if driven by some demon inside him.

By everything holy! His cock would split her in two, and yet it wasn't enough. She wrapped her legs around him and strained upward, grinding her pussy against him.

"Mine," he growled. "Mine."

"Fuck me, Will."

"Love me, Claire."

"Yes, yes. Just don't stop."

Her back burned where the gravel bit into it. The buttons of her blouse rubbed against her chest with the friction of their bodies. His blood soaked the silk. And yet, she needed this. Craved it. Would die without it.

His face contorted as he drove harder and deeper. The muscles of his arms bunched and trembled with the violence of his movements. "Love me, Claire."

"Yes."

"Love me."

"Yes, Will. Yes."

He came then, with a massive shudder. His mouth opened, and the sound of his engine's roar poured out of it. She joined him, sobbing, gasping for breath as her cunt exploded all around his cock. Her heart, her soul, every part of her ripped free of reality for an instant. Then, the two of them collapsed together.

"Love me," he whispered. "Love me."

"Yes. God help me, I do."

* * *

At least the crashing noises had stopped. All Will caught now when he stood outside Claire's back door was the sounds of a television playing too loudly. Plenty of screaming there, but all of it fictional. Claire hadn't even sobbed for a day now.

He'd failed. Klaus Mannhof never made mistakes, but he'd designed some fault into Will's system neither of them had guessed at. Claire Wilcox would test anyone who

tried to fix her, but the Designer had created Will specifically for her. How could he have failed?

She'd said she loved him, but she would have said anything after what he'd put her through. She'd climaxed with him, but both of them were intoxicated with adrenaline. She hadn't said a word all the way back from the hills, but the blood on her body had spoken volumes. Most of it had been his, of course, but not all. He'd hurt her body, but what he'd done to her soul was much, much worse.

She'd gone inside the house and locked the door. He could get past the lock, but he couldn't get past the message. She didn't want him.

Then, the sound of things breaking had started, followed by loud sobbing. Quiet for a few hours, and the noises had started up again.

Every sob cut a deeper hole into his heart. How could he have been so wrong? Would he ever stop hating himself?

The door opened after what seemed like an eternity of waiting. Claire's silhouette appeared, backlit by her kitchen lamp. In each hand, she held an empty liquor bottle. She glanced at him briefly and then away again as she walked down the steps toward the recycling bin. The bottles dropped in there, one shattering as it did. That done, she turned and walked into the back yard.

When he followed, he found her sitting on a masonry bench. She'd left one side empty. An invitation to join her, perhaps? The worst she could do was tell him to go away. He couldn't feel much worse than he already did.

He walked to the bench and sat down beside her. She didn't say anything for a long moment, but stared ahead of her into the light of a distant street lamp.

"Let me ask you something," she said finally. "You say you've never had another own... um, person?"

"I was designed for you alone."

"But Mannhof died before I was born."

"Not true."

"But you're a 1957, or your motorcycle self is."

"Klaus makes the same model now that he did in 1957. A wise Designer knows when he's made a great machine." Although, he didn't feel so great right now. Not even close.

"So, when were you made?"

"Shortly before the auction."

"But the auction house said you were one owner, lady driven."

"They told the truth. You're my driver, my lady."

Clearly, that confused her. How could he explain that his Designer had made him for a woman the Designer had never met? Not only that, but Klaus had known her history and what she needed to heal herself. Klaus had known she'd attend *that* auction and would pay any sum to buy what she thought was a machine. Klaus knew many things but explained none of them to anyone. She'd have to accept it on faith now if they were to have a future together.

They sat in silence a bit longer, listening to a dog barking somewhere.

"Let me ask you something else," she said finally. "Up on the hill. Would you have driven us off the cliff if I hadn't surrendered control?"

"No. I couldn't hurt you." He cleared his throat. "Except for a few cuts and bruises."

She looked at him then. Really looked at him. "You've healed."

"I recover quickly."

"Why did you do all this?" She gestured around as if "this" meant something real, hiding in the garden somewhere.

"I know it seems cruel..."

"That's not what I meant."

"I don't understand."

She gestured again. "I mean, what's the point? I'm not worth saving."

"Don't say that."

"I've thought about a lot of things the last few days. I'm a horrible person, Will."

"Ach nein, lieblich."

"I'm a bastard to my employees. I don't have friends. I've never loved anyone."
She paused for a moment. "Until now."

What did that mean? Could she possibly mean him? After everything he'd done to her did he dare hope? "I love you, Claire, if that means anything."

She looked him square in the face. In the dim light, he couldn't see clearly, but her eyes seemed to hold a shimmering of tears.

"I don't deserve your love," she said softly. "But it might be the only thing in my life that matters."

"Liebling, can you find it in your heart to love me a little maybe?"

"You'll have to teach me how to love. I haven't had much practice."

He lifted a hand and stroked her cheek. It was damp. "That's what Klaus designed me for."

She took his hand in hers and kissed the backs of his fingers. "Well, then, we only need to figure out what we'll live on. You don't have any marketable skills, do you?"

"Only loving you."

She let out a little, ladylike snort. "Not much money to be made there."

"Your business..."

"Henderson will have taken that away by now," she answered. "I spent most of my assets buying you. Oh, hell, maybe the stockholders will pay me to go away quietly."

"It's only been a few days. I'm sure Ted's taken care of things."

"I don't deserve Ted, either."

"Let's not get too melodramatic, hmm?"

"Okay." She took a deep breath. "I'll go back to work and fight tomorrow."

"That's my lady CEO."

"You can move yourself into the house." She smiled. "Except for when you're a motorcycle, of course."

"We can have our rides," he said.

"I may not be able to do that every day."

He smiled, too. "When you can't ride me by day, I can ride you by night."

She rose from the bench and held her hand out toward him. "Let's start now."

Alice Gaines

Award winning author Alice Gaines has published several sensuous and erotic works. She prefers stories that stretch the imagination, highlighting the power of love and sex. Alice has a Ph.D. in psychology from U. C. Berkeley and lives in Oakland, California, with her collection of orchids and two pet corn snakes, Casper and Sheikh Yerbouti. Visit her website at <http://home.pacbell.net/halice>