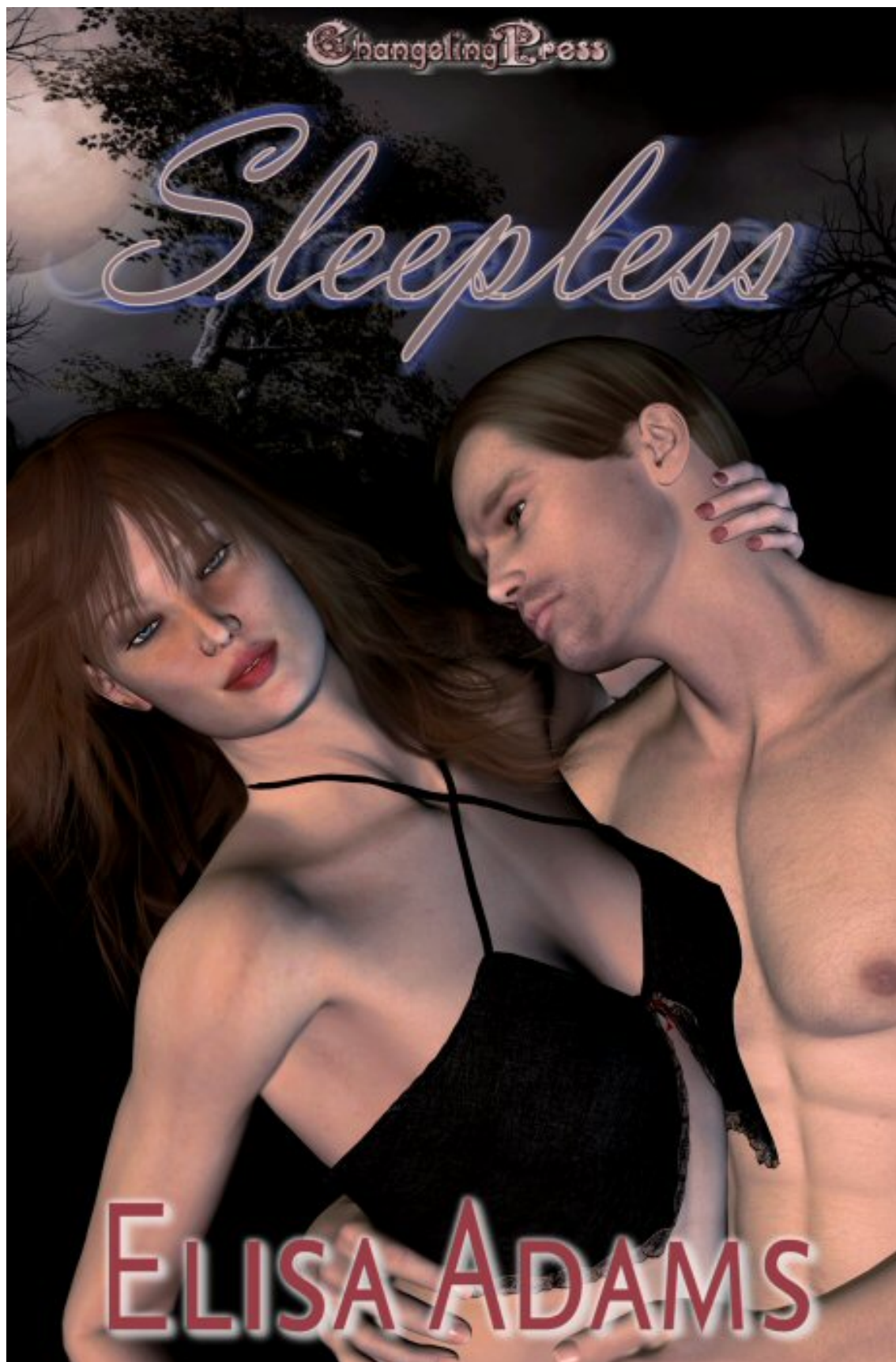


Changeling Press

# Sleepless

ELISA ADAMS



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## **Sleepless**

### **Elisa Adams**

#### *Temptation.*

Nina has the hots for her boss, Xavier, and she's sick of waiting for him to make the first move. But her attempt at seduction leads to something she never would have expected when she wakes up tied to his bed.

Zavier has his share of secrets. Deep, dark secrets that would make Nina run if she only knew. He isn't the man Nina thinks he is. In fact, he isn't human at all. He's an incubus. Reformed. Non-practicing, that is. He's been trying to live like a normal human. Which would be a whole lot easier without temptation herself sharing his office.

Nina's a temptation Xavier's trying to fight. But what's a sex-demon to do when the woman of his dreams drops herself in his arms? He can only hope she won't regret her impetuosity once she learns the truth.

## Chapter One

"Do you know what your problem is?" Nina shot Xavier a sidelong glance through the dim lighting to judge his reaction, and nearly laughed at the stoic look on his face. Typical. Sometimes she thought he wouldn't know a good time if it bit him on the ass. For the past few years, she'd made it her personal mission to show him exactly what he was missing.

"No, I have no clue what you think my problem is, but I'm sure you're going to tell me, whether I'm interested in listening or not."

His whiskey-rough voice made her shiver on the inside. How was it possible he didn't seem to realize his own sex appeal? Every woman he came into contact with noticed. She saw it happen every day, but Xavier was oblivious.

"Damn right I'm going to tell you. *Somebody* needs to. It might as well be me." The three glasses of wine had done enough to loosen her tongue that she couldn't hold it back any longer. All night he'd been quieter, more serious than usual. It was starting to get to her. "You really have no idea how to have a good time. Everything is work, work, work. No play time. No relaxation. How can you live like that? Nobody else I know can. You know, I've been thinking. All your problems can be summed up in one word."

One dark eyebrow arched in that sexy way that always made her stomach do flip-flops. He took a long, slow sip of beer from the bottle he'd been pushing around all night before he turned his attention back to her. The focus in his gaze always made her want to stammer. To melt into a puddle at his feet. A cacophony of sounds surrounded them -- glasses clinking together, top forty music playing from speakers on shelves above the bar, and laughing and chatter from the other patrons seated nearby -- but

Zavier made her feel like she was the only person in the world. He *always* made her feel like that.

He didn't mean to. She was sure of it. For all his single-minded focus, he seemed immune to some things. Namely her. Tonight, she planned to change all that. In a big way. It had taken her long enough to get up the courage. No way would she back down now.

"One word, huh?" Xavier quirked his mouth in a half-smile. "What would that be?"

*Don't hold back. Lay it all on the line and see where he takes it.*

"Sex." Just saying it made her inner muscles flutter. She had to glance down for a second to regain her composure. No sense letting him know how much he affected her. Not that he'd ever notice. Xavier Hunter was far too serious to pay attention to such minute details. Now if work had been involved, that would be a different story. He would have been all over it.

She gave herself a mental kick to stop the depressing thoughts. Tonight wasn't a night to get angry or aggravated. So he noticed his work more than the woman working with him. So what? She had it in her to change his thinking, and that was exactly what she intended to do.

She swiped a hand across her forehead to brush away the damp strands of hair clinging there. The temperature had hit ninety two days ago and showed no signs of letting up. Even though the bar was air-conditioned, the machine couldn't keep up with the throng of customers on the Friday night, trying to escape the heat and the boredom summers in New England sometimes brought.

The heat and humidity had made Xavier cranky, but the temperature had a different effect on Nina. It made her restless. Needy. The alcohol had only made things worse. She squeezed her legs together to alleviate some of the pressure. Pressure she hoped Xavier would help her take care of later.

"Sex, huh?" He repeated the word, his deep voice no more than a rumble through the air, and shook his head. "Whatever, Nina. I really don't think sex is the problem."

He glanced down at the bottle wrapped in his hands, allowing her a moment to study him. He hadn't changed in the past six years she'd known him, since they'd started working together. Still the same dirty blond hair, cut short and kept impossibly neat. The same seldom-smiling, serious mouth with full, sensual lips that held so much potential. The strong jaw, straight nose, and cheekbones any woman would die for. And those warm, green eyes framed with thick lashes a few shades darker than his hair... it was enough to send a shiver skittering down her spine. With looks like that, he could have any woman he wanted. In truth, they fell all over him any chance they got.

But he ignored them all.

Except Nina. She was his confidant. His employee. His friend. That had to count for something, but most days, it didn't feel like much.

Determined to make him see things her way, she leaned in, her hand on his arm, and whispered into his ear. "I'm serious, Xavier. You need to get laid. A good, hard fuck. You need to relax before the stress causes a stroke."

"Not interested." He spoke the words, but his shudder told a different story. Something dark, almost feral, passed across his gaze. Still, he refused to take the bait. Instead, he brought the bottle to his lips and took another big swallow, setting it back down on the bar with a thud. "Not that it matters, but we've been through this all before. You know I can't concentrate on anything when I have a big project I'm dealing with at work."

She rolled her eyes. He could be such a stubborn jerk sometimes. Didn't he notice he had a warm, willing woman sitting right next to him? A woman who knew him better than anyone else in the world. She knew just what made him tick -- and just what would set him off. That kind of knowledge could make for some pretty amazing sex.

"Yeah, I know we've discussed this. At great length. It's been months since you've been with a woman. You told me yourself you haven't even been dating. Don't

you think you're due for some action?" She ran her fingernail down the side of his neck, from his earlobe to the skin of his collarbone exposed by the open buttons at the top of his navy blue golf shirt.

Zavier hissed out a breath.

"Stop, Nina. Just stop it, okay." His harsh, clipped tone brooked no argument, but she'd long ago learned how far she could push him before he really got upset. She still had a little room to play.

"I'm not stopping now. Not yet. It's your birthday, for God's sake. Your fortieth. You should be spending it with a willing woman."

*Like me.* She let out a frustrated sigh. He hadn't noticed her as a woman in six years. Tonight certainly wouldn't be the night he did. Not with him in such a foul mood.

He shot her a sidelong glance, offering her his first genuine smile of the night. "Again, not interested."

Didn't it figure? She took a sip of her wine and punched him playfully in the arm, fighting to keep up the friendly, goading ruse when she really wanted to pull him close and kiss him. And more. But he, apparently, *wasn't interested*.

"You could have any woman you want here. Any of them."

"I don't want just *any* woman."

Nina couldn't help the little thrill that shot through her at his words. Was he talking about her?

No. Of course he wasn't. She was starting to realize he wasn't the kind of guy who knew how to take a hint. She'd have to spell it all out for him. As soon as she screwed up the courage to do it. "Why not?"

"I don't do one-night stands."

"What's wrong with a little casual sex?"

"There are more important things in life than instant gratification."

"Says the big, bad alpha male who refuses to wait for anything. Ever."



He started to speak, but she raised her hand to stop him. "Hear me out. You don't have to be serious all the time. It's okay to have fun once in a while. Sex is supposed to be fun. Just find someone. Take her home. Get yourself off a few times so you can come in to work happy on Monday morning."

A hint of a smile danced at the corners of his lips. "Crass words for a lady, Nina."

"You've always told me you find my honest approach to life refreshing."

"And I do." He turned to her, gave her a small grin. "But we're very different. I can't bring some stranger home with me. I don't work that way. I learned a *long* time ago that casual doesn't work for me. It needs to mean something. I won't have it any other way."

She blinked at him, disbelieving even though she'd heard the litany before. She'd never met a straight man with those kinds of values before -- until she'd crossed paths with Xavier. He'd opened her eyes to a lot of things, and she hoped she'd had the same effect on him. "Even just for one night. One weekend. You only turn forty once. Let go and be the man your inner gigolo wants you to be."

He stared at her, his expression stoic, for what seemed like an eternity before he finally burst out laughing. "It isn't that simple."

"Actually, it is. Trust me on this one. I know what I'm talking about." She gestured to the other side of the bar with her chin. "What about that redhead? She's been eyeing you all night. Go over and talk to her."

"Isn't going to happen."

"Oh, please. Stop being so damned stubborn and go talk to her. Better yet, take her home and screw her. Trust me. You'll feel so much better in the morning."

"You know what? I think you might be right." He pushed up from his stool and smoothed down the front of his pants.

A frisson of disappointment sparked inside her at the thought of him going off with another woman, but she tamped it down. She'd tried. If tonight wasn't her night, it would come. The tie around his neck was like a noose. Like a chain holding him in

some uptight prison. If she could find a way to loosen that tie -- and the man wearing it -- everything else would fall into place.

He was a good man. The best. He deserved to be happy, even if it would kill her to see him with someone else.

*Come on, Xavier. Take the bait and be happy and relaxed for once.*

*Before the employees at your computer consulting firm decide to kill you.*

Zavier's gaze moved to the redhead Nina had so *kindly* pointed out. It took all of two seconds to dismiss her as a possibility. Too polished, too put-together. Too plastic. He preferred his women a little more real.

He turned his attention to Nina, who was looking down at the bar, swirling wine around and around in her glass. Someone like her. That was what he wanted. No, not someone *like* her. He wanted *her*. Had for a long time. She was as real as they came, even if at thirty, she was way too young for him. Long, light brown hair currently in dozens of tiny braids trailed halfway down her back. Fair, fair skin with a dusting of freckles across her nose. Big blue eyes that were wild, yet strangely innocent at the same time. Her full, wide mouth never failed to turn him on. She wasn't his type but that's what made it so perfect. He hadn't been able to get her off his mind in six years.

She thought she knew him by now, but he wasn't who she thought he was. If she knew the truth, she'd forget all about her crush. Hell, who was he kidding? She'd never speak to him again. The idea of losing her didn't settle right. She meant too much to him. He would rather have her as a friend than nothing at all. He'd long ago resolved to keep his hands to himself as far as she was concerned.

Tonight, she was making his resolution damned near impossible.

The way she was goading had him hard as a rock and more turned on than he'd ever been. The pull between them was far too strong to ignore any longer. She wanted him. Now. He'd seen it in her eyes. Who was he to deny a woman what she really wanted? She'd pushed and pushed and pushed. Zavier had reached the limit. What she'd done tonight, the things she'd said, the way she'd looked at him... any normal

man would have had her under him in bed by now. He gave himself credit for being able to hold out this long. For years she'd slowly been chipping away at his resistance. The smart thing to do would have been to get rid of her when she'd first become a problem. Now it was way too late for that.

He might be able to control himself, to keep her from finding out the truth, but did it really matter? Hiding his true self had become almost too difficult around her. If she wanted it all, everything was exactly what she would get.

He downed a last sip of his beer and pushed the bottle away. Nina thought she was being so clever. He had a few surprises of his own.

"You're really going to do it?" she asked, her tone tinged with disappointment. "You're really going to take a woman home?"

"Yeah. Looks that way." He moved behind her, placing a hand on the bar on either side of her body. He leaned in until his cock pressed against her back and his lips pressed against her ear. "Come home with me, Nina. Let me fuck you all night long."

Nina's breath left her lungs in a whoosh, her mind trying to wrap around Xavier's words. Dirty, provocative whispers that were so unlike him it made her pulse kick into high gear. She darted a furtive glance around the bar, pinched her arm hard to make sure she wasn't dreaming. She wasn't. She'd have the bruise to prove it in a few hours.

Finally able to catch her breath, she spun on the stool and let her gaze meet Xavier's. "You've got to be kidding me."

A sensual smile curled his lips and turned her knees to mush. Luckily, she was sitting or she would have ended up in a heap on the floor. "Not exactly the reaction I was expecting."

"I'm sorry. It's just... You're acting..." She let her voice trail off, unsure of what to say next. Her body was crying for her to take him up on his offer, but her mind warned her to slow down and find out what he was all about.

This was just too wicked to be true. Here she'd been trying to seduce him, and he'd managed to turn the tables on her.

"Like *you*?" he finished, arousal dancing in his eyes.

She nodded.

"I thought that's what you wanted."

His tone held a taunting edge, only increasing her need for him. She loved a challenge. Xavier was proving to be her biggest one yet. But at the same time, her gut tightened. This was a side of him she'd never seen, and she couldn't say it made her comfortable.

"I don't know what I want."

The smile deepened, accentuating the dimples in his cheeks. "I think you do. I think you want this as much as I do. Why don't you save us both a lot of trouble and admit it?"

She frowned at his sudden directness, even as a curl of lust swirled and dipped in her stomach. Yes, she wanted it. Wanted *him*, more than she'd wanted a man for as long as she could remember.

But that didn't make it right. Something about him was off tonight.

When they'd first met, she'd spent way too much time trying to keep her attraction to him a secret. He'd apparently been doing the same thing. He'd never been so bold. So sexy and demanding.

Unless it was the alcohol talking.

No, it couldn't be that. He'd had a single beer. Even less than she'd had, and she was still able to function properly.

There had to be some other explanation.

She stood and ran a hand through her hair. "Why are you doing this?"

He tugged her against him, his cock nudging her belly. She gulped. A quiver raced through her pussy. By the time she realized he was about to kiss her, his lips had already settled over hers in a firm, fierce gesture of possession.

His hands cupped her waist, drawing her closer than she would have thought possible. As his tongue stroked into her mouth to flick and brush against hers, she had the strangest sensation she was melting into him. They were becoming one. Her heart sped up and a line of sweat broke out on her brow. Lord, the man could kiss. He devoured her.

She leaned in, giving it her all, until he pulled back, his eyes dark and smoky.

"This is something I've wanted for a long time, Nina," he told her, barely-controlled lust raging in his gaze. "Tell me you want me too. Come home with me tonight."

Despite every warning, despite knowing she'd have to face him at work on Monday as his office manager, she whispered, "Yes."

## Chapter Two

Zavier barely made it the whole way back to his house without pulling over and attacking Nina. She smelled so good, like flowers and spicy, aroused woman, that he had trouble keeping his hands to himself. His cock ached, ready to bust through his zipper, but he did all he could to ignore it. She might think she wanted wild, unbridled passion, but he doubted she'd want it in a two-seater sports car. The king-sized bed back at the house just screamed to be put to good use.

Then again, the woman had no idea what *wild* passion was really all about. He would show her tonight. He wouldn't -- *couldn't* -- have it any other way.

He pulled into his driveway, slammed the car into park, and jumped out. By the time he reached the passenger side of the car, Nina was standing in the driveway. She closed the door and turned toward him, licking her lips. He wanted to follow the movement with his own tongue. He would. That and a lot more. Tonight was all about what Nina wanted. She'd been teasing him all evening, tempting him without even realizing what a mistake she was making. He'd reached the breaking point. He'd let her have her way for a little while, but then it was his turn to play. Xavier took his playtime seriously.

He had a feeling they wouldn't make it into the house. Not the first time.

He gave a quick thought to calling her a cab and sending her on her way, back to the bar to pick up her own car and head home, but he dismissed the thought almost as soon as it came to him. Even knowing this was a mistake, stopping was no longer an option. Maybe it had never been. He'd known he wanted her from the second he'd seen her. Six years had passed of wanting and waiting, of trying to control a hunger that wouldn't be denied. Tonight she was his. He just hoped he'd be able to make her understand what it meant when the time came.

He pushed her against the car and kissed her, his lips hard and unyielding against hers. He let out every untamed instinct inside him, the ones he'd tried to ignore for so long. Nina brought out the worst in him, but it might turn out to be the best thing that had ever happened to either of them.

Nina clawed at his clothes, her long nails digging into his shoulders. She bit his lip hard enough to make him groan. He broke the kiss, leaning his forehead against hers, panting. No matter what happened, he had to hang on to some small thread of his control. If he didn't, all hell would break loose. Forget driving him over the edge slowly. She didn't even realize it, but she'd just given him one great shove. His hands clenched into fists. His fangs, long-dormant but not forgotten, threatened to burst from his gums.

He'd always known she was wild. He just hadn't realized how deep that streak ran until this moment, with her wrapping a leg around him and drawing his hips right up against hers -- out in the open for any neighbors who might be looking out their windows to see.

Normally, he would have cared, would have put a stop to things before they went any further, but tonight he was too far gone to give it more than a passing thought. This was how she wanted him. Her taunting and teasing had brought him to this place. It was a bad place, but it felt oh-so-good. Even now a small smile curled his lips. *Welcome back*, he thought to the beast roaring inside him. *It's been a long time*.

Too long. He just hoped Nina would be able to forgive him in the morning. There would be no restraint tonight.

He sealed his lips over hers again, his tongue probing, roughly demanding entrance. She acquiesced with a sigh. His hands skimmed up her sides until he'd reached her breasts. They weren't large, but they were round and soft and fit perfectly in his hands. He cupped the globes of flesh in his palms, his thumbs playing across her nipples. They peaked under his touch. She whimpered into his mouth.

She was so damned responsive. His body was tuned in to every sound, every slight movement. Her scent was like a tangible thing, reaching out to wrap its long, slim

fingers around his neck. All the while she arched against him, pushing herself closer, not knowing how her responses taunted the beast. If she kept it up, she could very well kill him.

He wrenched his mouth away to trail his lips down her neck. She tasted womanly and sexy in a way that made his knees shake. He braced a hand on the hood of the car to hold himself steady, and with the other hand took her nipple between his thumb and forefinger and rolled the hard bead of flesh. So hard, so ready for him, and damn, he wanted to put his mouth there and suck.

Her hips ground against him. *Jesus*, he thought he might lose it right then and there. She had no idea how strongly she affected him, or how close to the edge he'd been since they'd left the bar. She'd said sex was his problem, and she'd been right. It had been too long and she felt so damned good. The rush of holding her, of kissing her, filled him with a sense of power he hadn't known in way too many years. There had been other women since... that time when his life had changed, but none who affected him like Nina. None of them had driven him crazy. She tempted him back into his old life, even though he swore he'd given it up for good. She also made him crave things he had no business wanting. If she had any clue what he really was, they wouldn't be standing here together right now.

The air was thick with humidity, coating his brow in a thin layer of sweat. Nina's skin was dewy, moist, and he ran his fingertip along the line of her collarbone. He slipped the strap of her tank top off her shoulder, tracing the skin there with his tongue. Her fingers tightened against his shoulders, balling the material of his shirt in her fists.

He glanced down to see the top of her breast was visible above the lowered neckline of her shirt. The fangs broke free of his gums, elongating with the familiar searing pleasure-pain. Without giving it a second thought, he leaned in and licked the soft curve. The taste of her exploded on his tongue. Her heartbeat echoed in his ears, and the temptation proved to be too great. He didn't even stop to think before he sank his fangs into her soft flesh.



The sound that escaped Nina was half moan, half scream. His body tightened in response and he lapped at the wound he'd created. If she looked down, she would see what he was doing and struggle to get away from him, but instead she'd closed her eyes. Thank God for small favors. No way could he stop, now that he'd tasted her.

Her nails dug into his shoulders. If he hadn't been wearing a shirt, she would have broken the skin. The thought made him even harder. His cock pushed against his zipper, fighting to get free. With one last, long stroke of his tongue, he closed the wound and moved his lips further up her body. No sense chancing her finding out the truth so soon. Of course, she'd find out eventually, but not yet. Not until he was forced to reveal it.

"Zavier. The neighbors..." Nina whispered, her eyes opening.

"Don't care." He suckled at the spot where her neck met her shoulder. God, she was sweet. Sweet and hot. His gut tightened. His cock ached. If he didn't get inside her soon, he'd burst. Sharp need filled him, urging him to take her right that second, neighbors be damned.

Bunching the material of her skirt up to her hips, he lifted her up and settled her ass onto the hood of the car, spreading her legs and fitting himself between them. He cupped her mound in his palm and even through her panties he could tell she was wet. So friggin' warm. His cock would slide right inside her.

The thought made him quake. How long had he been waiting for this moment?

Too long. Lately there had been far too many sleepless nights, lying awake, stressed and unable to relax. Those nights would end. Nina was worried about the neighbors, but Zavier was only thinking of himself. Of the pleasure he'd find when he sank into her pussy. Fuck. It would feel like home. She felt like home. Had from the very start, but they were too different for anything between them to work. He needed to focus on the here and now and forget what would happen tomorrow.

He pushed her insubstantial lace panties aside and ran his fingers along her slit, eliciting a shudder from Nina. He glanced up to look at her. She'd dropped her head back. Her lips were parted. Her lids had once again dropped closed.

He thrust a finger inside her. She wriggled against his touch. Her eyelids snapped open. "Wait. Don't you think we should take this inside?"

*Not a chance in hell.*

"There isn't much light here, and the neighbors aren't close enough to see anything." He pressed his thumb against her clit and stroked the little nub hard. Nina moaned. "Besides, if anyone would go to the trouble to watch us out here in the middle of the night, they deserve a little show."

Her eyes widened in a very un-Nina-like fashion. "Zavier..."

She protested, but at the same time, she tightened her inner muscles around him. Her tongue darted out to lick her lips before she snagged the lower one between her teeth. Watching her mouth brought to mind illicit images of those lips wrapped around his cock while her head bobbed up and down. His knees went weak.

"No more talking. I have to have you. *Now.*" The urgency coursing through him made his fingers go numb. Every cell in his body screamed for blessed relief. Not just the rush of sexual satisfaction, but something deeper. Soul-searing and world-altering. A relief unlike anything he'd ever felt. He'd heard the stories from others of his kind. There was one woman for each of them. A woman who could make all the need and hunger go away. Up until tonight, he'd dismissed the stories as fairy tales. Now a kernel of hope took root inside him. Could it be possible he'd finally found his salvation?

He backed away long enough to unzip his pants and free his aching cock, and then he pushed inside her, seating himself in one long thrust.

Nina braced her hands on the hood behind her, one leg around his hips. Her face was flushed, her bangs damp with sweat. A trickle of that sweat ran down her cheek. He swiped it away with his finger. Stilling, he brought his hand to her lips. Nina licked at his fingers before sucking one deep into the cavern of her mouth. Her movements were sensual, the swirl of her tongue over his skin taunting him. Threatening to break him down. He eased back a few inches before slamming inside her.

His hands on her hips, he pulled her toward him to meet every thrust. The feel of her wet warmth around him made his head spin. He leaned in and captured her mouth again, his tongue dancing with hers. Soon he had to break the kiss, unable to match the rhythm of his tongue with the harsh, erratic strokes of his cock inside her pussy. *Ah, hell.* Nina didn't know how right she was. His problems all boiled down to sex. Sex was, after all, what had started everything all those years ago. He'd managed to ignore his baser instincts for nearly a decade, and it had taken one woman five minutes to break down all the walls.

Though his body tensed in anticipation, he could already feel his mind relaxing. Everything went away, fading into the distance until his world became Nina -- and the hunger. Soon the two mixed, joining in his mind. What he needed... it was all for her. And he *needed*. More than he ever had. Sex had been a game before. It had now become everything.

She ran a hand down his chest, pushing his shirt out of the way and resting her palm on his hip. Her fingers gripped him there, squeezing and adding to the intense pleasure of finally being inside her after so long. Something snapped within him. He couldn't hold back any longer. Everything he felt about her, everything he wanted to do to her came pouring out in a rush of sensation.

Zavier tugged her hard against him, ramming his cock into her over and over. If she wanted soft and gentle, she was out of luck. He didn't have it in him tonight. Maybe not ever. At least not with her. From the second he'd seen her the day she'd walked into his office for an interview six years ago, she'd stirred the wild and animalistic side of him. There was no turning back now. Hell, who was he kidding, there'd never been. He'd been a goner the moment she'd smiled at him the first time.

"Zavier." His name left her lips on a sigh. The elbow supporting her buckled and she straightened it again, seeming to catch herself at the last second.

*Damn it.* This couldn't be comfortable for her. He stopped moving. "Am I hurting you?"

"No." She smiled up at him. "I know you'd never do anything to hurt me."

He almost laughed. She didn't know him nearly as well as she thought she did. He could be a selfish bastard at times. Tonight was one of them. He had no intention of stopping. He'd just have to find a way to make her a little more comfortable.

He pulled her hand away from his body, urging her backward until she was lying across the hood. Glancing down to where they were still joined made him swallow hard. Such an erotic sight, his cock buried to the hilt in that sweet pussy, her wetness coating them both.

He lifted her legs, bending her knees and placing her feet on the hood. Her heels slipped a little as she tried to push her legs off the car. He grasped her ankles, not giving her an inch. His paint job would pay the price for those heels, but it was worth it.

"I'll scratch the paint," she said as if reading his mind, trying to sit up.

He put his hand on her stomach, splaying his fingers across her ribcage to hold her in place when she would have moved. "I don't care. Leave your legs right where I put them. I want you just like this."

He'd care tomorrow when the harsh light of day washed over the car's paint job and highlighted the damage he'd surely caused, but right now, he had other things in mind.

Forcing himself to hold still while he waited for her to relax was pure hell. She stiffened, her muscles contracting around him, and all he could feel was her wet warmth surrounding him, trying to draw him deeper when she didn't even realize what she was doing. If she kept it up, he'd come and it would all be over too soon. He hung his head and closed his eyes, willing himself to hold off, willing Nina to relax and accept this.

"It's just paint, Nina. Nothing important."

"Are you sure?"

Her words drew a harsh laugh out of him. "Hell, yes."

Finally, *finally* she relaxed. Already he could feel her quivering. Trembling. She was close. Balanced on the edge. It wouldn't take much at all to nudge her off. He would love to watch her fly as she came apart in his arms.

He pounded into her and she wriggled on the hood. He reached between her legs to stroke her clit, eliciting a long, low moan from her. Nina cried out, her muscles clenching and unclenching around him as she came.

Her pussy milked his cock, trying to pull him deeper. Still he thrust, trying to get a hold of himself, wanting to enjoy every exquisite second of his time with Nina. He'd never felt more alive.

The warm summer breeze whipped across his neck. Sweat poured off him, running down his face, making his shirt stick to his body. If he'd been smart, he would have taken her inside and made love to her like she deserved, in bed in the cool air, but he hadn't been able to wait. One of his strengths -- his single-minded concentration -- was also his greatest weakness. Especially when it came to Nina. He would never be able to get enough of her, no matter how much he tried.

Nina shuddered under him, her body still calming, and grasped his wrists. Her thumbs stroked the insides, just over his pulse, and she smiled up at him. The look in her eyes held so much heat. So much challenge. He didn't back down from a challenge. That was all it took. He came with a harsh groan, every muscle in his body tensing. The orgasm seemed to go on forever, dragging every last drop of energy out of him. His legs buckled. His head spun. His hands hit the car hood and he leaned over her, panting, eyes closed as he tried to catch his breath.

After what felt like an eternity, but could only have been a matter of minutes, Nina's soft voice brought him back to the present. "Are you okay?"

*Not even close.*

"Never been better." He pulled out and adjusted himself back into his pants, glancing around the few darkened houses in the neighborhood to make sure no one was watching. Now that the urgency to have her had passed, his back stiffened. What the hell had he been thinking?

Apparently not much. Years of being careful, of keeping the beast locked firmly in its cage, had just been thrown away for what? A quick, hot fuck on the hood of his car?

No. It was so much more than that. He was lying to himself if he thought otherwise.

Nina seemed to sense his hesitation. She scooted off the car, righted her clothing, and drew him close for a long, slow kiss. Her hands were everywhere, trailing down his chest, stroking over his zipper. By the time the kiss ended, his cock had started to stir again and a long-ignored burning had settled into his gut.

"You don't look very happy," she told him, a knowing smile on her face. "Feeling guilty?"

She knew him so well. *Too* well. Yet she really knew nothing at all. "Yeah. I shouldn't have... we could have... Hell, you wanted to go inside and I said no. I should have listened to you."

"I'm glad you didn't. It was amazing, Xavier. The best ever."

The slight teasing tone of her voice made him smile. The breeze tossed her bangs around and she reached up to push them off her forehead. At that moment, with her standing in front of him on shaky legs and her clothes askew, she'd never looked more beautiful to him. He'd been half in love with her since day one, and tonight only made those feelings stronger. She seemed as caught up in the moment as he felt, her eyes still glazed with passion and her cheeks flushed pink and moist from the humidity.

A dog barked in the distance, breaking the spell. Xavier stepped back and took Nina's hand. "The air conditioning is on inside. Why don't we head in, grab something to drink, and cool off a little?"

He could use a cooling off right now. In more ways than one.

## Chapter Three

Nina leaned against the kitchen counter, watching Xavier as he moved around the room. She'd expected him to give her a quick glass of water and take her right to bed, but he'd surprised her, instead offering to pour her some wine. Hesitation was etched in his every movement. A little bit of guilt assailed her. Maybe she shouldn't have goaded him at the bar. Then again, what did it hurt to show him he could loosen up and have a good time? He might be a little uncomfortable about it now, but he hadn't felt that way outside. He'd taken charge. In a big way. Her pussy was still trembling. He'd bitten her. Hard. It had hurt, but at the same time, it had stirred an instinct she didn't know she had. Yes, he'd bitten her, and she'd loved every second.

Now he bent to grab a bottle of red from the built-in wine rack under the counter, and her gaze trailed to his tight rear end. The man was beautiful, so sensual, and he didn't even know it. All strong, lean muscles and sandy blond hair. And his eyes... so green and captivating that a woman couldn't help but get lost in them. She'd found herself lost in that gaze so many times over the years, and he hadn't even noticed.

But she wasn't thinking about his eyes tonight. She had other thoughts in mind, and they all revolved around the events that had happened outside. *Outside*, of all places. Nina smiled. She got giddy all over again just thinking about it. Her nipples beaded and she licked her lips.

Xavier stood, opened the wine and poured her a glass, offering it to her.

"Thanks." Though she didn't really need anything else to drink, she was grateful to have something to keep her occupied. The night so far had been one big surprise after another. Her hands shook a little as she brought the glass to her lips and took a small sip. "This is good."

He gave her a sheepish smile. "You know I don't know anything about wine. It was a gift."

One she'd given him on his last birthday. At the time she'd bought it, she'd been hoping he would invite her over to share it with him, but Xavier didn't usually drink more than the occasional beer or two. Tonight, he chose to drink with her. That meant more than she could ever tell him. "Whoever bought it for you has good taste. A woman?"

The smile grew, taking on a sensual edge. "Maybe. Jealous?"

"Should I be?"

"Never. You have nothing to be jealous of. There's no one else in my life right now."

"I know. You tell me all the time how you aren't seeing anyone." She took another sip before setting the glass on the counter and walking over to him. She wrapped her arms around his neck and placed a kiss on his cheek. "I'm not worried."

"Do you want to watch a movie or something?"

She had to bite back a laugh. Leave it to Xavier, the most unromantic man on the planet, to suggest a movie at a time like this. All she had to do was glance down at his zipper to see he was hard again, and yet, he seemed to be stalling. "Do you need more time to recover?"

Her taunting words had the desired effect. His eyes darkened. All hints of humor dropped from his expression. Within two seconds he'd turned her around and pressed her into the wall next to the fridge. His heavy erection prodded her belly, making her want to squirm against it. "What do you think?"

*I think I'm in love.* No, she didn't *think* she was. She *knew*. She'd always known Xavier was the man for her. Right from day one. They were complete opposites, but that didn't matter. He was perfect for her. He could keep her grounded and she'd keep him from working himself into an early grave. Opposites didn't always attract, not in the real world, but sometimes they did, and it was magic.



Magic had definitely happened out in his driveway, whether he chose to ignore it or not.

She reached her hand between them, stroking up and down along his zipper. The moan that slipped from his lips made her grin. This night was just getting started. If he thought they'd have time for a movie, he had another think coming.

She slipped her thumb inside the waistband of his jeans and boxers and stroked it over the head of his cock. His hips surged forward. His hand came up to rest on the wall next to her head.

With a final stroke, she pulled her hand out and ducked away from him. Having been to his house often over the past few years helped, since she knew the layout of the place and didn't have to ask him where anything was. Standing in the doorway leading toward the stairs -- and the master bedroom she knew awaited -- she beckoned for him to join her.

He didn't disappoint. He followed her up the stairs, but she didn't lead him into the bedroom. Instead, she took him into the bathroom across the hall.

"What are we doing?" Xavier asked, glancing over his shoulder toward the open bedroom door.

*Always expect the unexpected with me, Xavier. But then again, you already knew that, didn't you?* Over the years she'd known him, while their working relationship had slowly been morphing into friendship, he'd often complained about her unpredictability. Odd how that seemed to irk him. It was his stability that had drawn her to him in the first place.

"I'm feeling very dirty." She ran a fingertip down his chest, scraping the skin through the coarse fabric of his golf shirt. "I think we should get cleaned up."

"You want to take a shower?" The look on his face was so confused she had to laugh.

"No, not a shower. A bath."

The bathtub had to be one of the best features in his house. It was a corner unit that easily fit two people, and she planned to put the space to good use tonight. There

was something she'd always wanted to try, but hadn't had the nerve. After making love with him in the driveway, on the hood of his car, her bravery level had skyrocketed.

She closed the drain and started the water. While she waited for the tub to fill, she turned to Xavier and started untucking the hem of his shirt from his waistband. He lifted his arms and she helped him strip out of the shirt. He kicked off his shoes.

Anticipation built inside her, reaching the point of frenzy in no time flat. This moment wasn't about her, though. It was about him. About what she wanted to do to him once she had him in the bathtub. All night she'd been dying to get a taste of him.

She stroked her hands down his sides, rubbing and caressing until she reached the zipper of his pants. She unzipped them and pushed them down his legs, kneeling to help him out of the rest of his clothing. When he was naked, she stepped back to get a good look at him. The man was perfect, his skin tanned and his muscles toned from his daily runs and the amount of time he spent working on the outside of the house he was fixing up. She would never get enough of looking at him. Never get enough of touching him, or of having him touch her.

"What about you?" he asked.

Nina smiled in answer. She unzipped her skirt and let it fall to the ground. "You want more?"

He nodded.

The tank top was the next to go. She tossed it into a corner by the door. Now she stood before him in just her panties and her high-heeled sandals. Xavier leaned against the vanity and let out a harsh breath. "Damn. You're beautiful, Nina. Now lose the panties."

So impatient, but then again, what had she expected? Xavier was an instant gratification kind of guy. If he didn't think he'd get immediate satisfaction from doing something, he didn't bother doing it at all. Making him wait for it would be fun, but patience wasn't one of her strong suits either. She shimmied out of the panties and tossed them to him. He caught them in the air and set them on the vanity counter.

Stalking over to her, he leaned in and kissed her.

He broke away from her lips a few seconds later, trailing little, open-mouth kisses down her throat, stopping to nibble and suck along the way.

"Do you have any idea what you do to me?" he asked, his tone rough and sexy like honey over gravel.

Nina shook her head.

"I'll show you."

He brought his cock to her pussy and stroked it along her slit, teasing her, driving her crazy with need. She arched into the touch, raising her hips to meet each of his strokes, shamelessly clutching at his arms to steady herself. She was on the verge of coming again, and she couldn't let that happen. It was too soon. When she came again, she wanted him inside her. "The water is still running," she reminded him, giving him a playful push.

Zavier laughed as he lifted her leg, unbuckling the sandal strap and dropping the shoe to the floor. The other sandal followed. Once her feet were bare, he lifted her into the tub.

He joined her in the water, settling on the small bench seat across from her.

Nina knelt in front of him, wrapping her hand around his cock. Her fist gripping him tight, she stroked him up and down until his hips were arching toward her.

She licked her lips.

"I know that look," Zavier warned. "What are you planning?"

She didn't answer. Instead, she drew a deep breath and ducked her head underwater. She took his cock in her mouth, bobbing up and down along the length of him, drawing him in as deep as she could take him.

The experience was unique. She couldn't hear his reactions, but she could feel him thrusting toward her mouth. His hand stroked her shoulder, the top of her head, the curve of her back -- any body part exposed to the air. When she came up for a breath, she noticed he'd leaned his head against the edge of the tub and closed his eyes.

"You okay?"

His lids opened and he blinked a few times before grinning at her. "Uh-huh."

Practically speechless, just like she wanted him. She ducked under the water again, working his cock, swirling her tongue over the head. The next time she came up for air, Xavier was ready for her. He pulled her onto his lap and pushed his cock inside her pussy before she even had a chance to protest the way he'd once again wrangled the control from her. Soon any thought of protesting died on her lips.

She rode him like that, letting him fill her up, setting the pace to keep him poised on the edge of orgasm but not letting him topple over until she was ready. She reached between them and fingered her clit. Spirals of heat rushed through her and she increased her pace, no longer able to hold back. He gripped her hips and pulled her down, slamming his cock into her. That was all it took for her to come. "Zavier!" she yelled, writhing on top of him, reveling in the feeling of him pounding so hard inside her.

Her fingers dug into his shoulders, his skin slick from the water. Tiny tremors raced through her with each of his thrusts. The electricity sparking between them was incredible. She'd never felt anything like it. Only with him.

He came a few minutes later, his grip on her hips tightening to the point of pain. She'd have marks in the morning, but she didn't care. The rush of power she got from making him lose control not once, but twice, was worth anything. Cool, composed Zavier Hunter who prided himself on never losing it had lost it. To her. Twice. Before the night was over, she would make it her personal mission to see him topple over the edge into oblivion at least one more time. He really was beautiful when he was fighting his own emotions.

With a smile, she leaned in and kissed him softly before settling her head on his chest.

Sometime later, Zavier shifted under her and ran a hand down her back. "Let's get out of the water and go lay down for a while."

She raised her head. "Need a nap?"

"Hell, yes. Just a few minutes, okay? I need some time to recover. To get a better handle on myself for a second here."

She frowned at the last part of his comment, but dismissed it. He hadn't held back.

"Sure." If she had to be honest with herself, she needed a little rest, too. He'd worn her out.

## Chapter Four

Nina opened her eyes, blinking into the semi-darkness of the bedroom. Xavier had lighted candles, and the golden light from the white pillars sitting on the nightstand and dresser bathed the room in a soft glow. The bed sheet was pulled up to cover her breasts. She lay on her back, which she found odd since she never slept that way.

Zavier sat on the edge of the bed, unsmiling, watching her with a concentration that made her pussy wet all over again. Her insides quivered and her mouth ran dry. He wore nothing, and she could see how hard his cock was. A shiver ran through her body. Already she was deliciously achy. *Ready for round three, baby?* She definitely was.

"Morning," Xavier said in a voice just above a whisper. His lips barely moved as he spoke.

"Morning? Is it morning already?"

"Sort of. It's around three."

"Were you planning on waking me up, or were you going to sit there and stare at me all night?" she asked, hoping to break some of the tension. His intensity made her shake. It turned her on, but at the same time, it made a sliver of anxiety form in her gut. What did he have planned? She had a sinking suspicion he'd managed to turn the tables on her.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, ignoring her question. His gaze never left hers and she found herself swallowing against the sudden nervousness and emotion. Xavier's focus had set her off balance before, but never like this. Never so much. Now she felt completely at his mercy.

She tried to roll onto her side to face him better, but her arms were held above her head, fastened to the headboard, and she couldn't get them to move more than an inch or so. "You tied my arms."

Zavier nodded. His gaze darkened even more.

"Why?" The word came out softer than she'd intended. A frisson of warmth arced up her spine. Oh, God. How did he know so well what turned her on? Though she didn't know how it was possible, he'd been dipping into her personal well of fantasies, and had managed to execute this one so completely she hadn't even seen it coming. "Zavier? What are you doing?"

He didn't answer, but she didn't need him to. He was reestablishing control after she'd spent most of the night taking it away from him. No, not taking it away. *Trying* to. She was fooling herself if she really thought he'd let her run the whole night. It wasn't his style. He didn't have it in him to let go for that long. She'd seen it in business meetings. Seen it on the tennis court the few times they'd played together over the years.

She didn't mind. In fact, she craved it. Zavier didn't have the type of personality that let him be submissive to anyone for long, and he'd apparently reached his threshold. Nina had no complaints. Not a single one. She was so turned on now, if he blew on her in just the right way, she'd come.

She whimpered, wanting to reach out to him but unable to move her arms more than a few inches. "Zavier, please."

"Please, what? What do you want?"

"You."

"Not good enough. Tell me what you want me to do to you."

She squirmed. If he would just touch her, anywhere, she would be a very happy woman. Instead he stared down at her, looking like he wanted to eat her alive, but managing to hold himself back. "Fuck me. Please."

His mouth finally broke into a smile. "We'll get to that. Eventually."

He stood and walked to the closet, pulling out a black duffel bag. He brought it to the bed and opened it, removing a set of leather cuffs and setting them on the bed next to her. His raised eyebrows spoke of a dare, but she said nothing. She twisted a little under the sheet. She was hot everywhere, and this time, it had nothing to do with the weather. "Do you have those on my wrists, too?"

"No. I used a couple of my silk ties. I have cuffs for your wrists for next time, though, if you're game."

She whimpered. This really shouldn't turn her on as much as it did. "Okay."

He pulled the covers down, exposing her body to the cool air, and grabbed her ankles, securing one to each bedpost, her legs spread-eagle. The bindings were tight enough to restrict almost all of her movement. She couldn't raise her limbs much at all, and every inch of her body was exposed to his intense gaze.

Suddenly aware of her nakedness, she lay still, her breathing loud in her ears. The urge to close her legs was so strong it almost overwhelmed her. At the same time, she wanted to beg him to take her now, just like that. Begging wouldn't help, though. It would only make him wait longer to touch her.

It seemed like forever that he stood there staring at her, his gaze taking in everything. Nina squirmed against the bonds, impossibly turned on. He had to see how wet she was. There was no way he could miss it. He was enjoying making her wait and wonder what he had planned next.

"Do you trust me?" he asked suddenly, his tone barely above a whisper.

She frowned. It seemed a little late in the game to be asking. "Of course I do. I wouldn't be here with you tonight if I didn't."

That seemed to be all the answer he needed. He knelt between her thighs, running his hands up the insides of her legs before moving them up the sides of her body. His touch was slow, exploratory, teasing and tickling one second, stroking and caressing the next. Goose bumps pebbled her flesh. Her nerves cried out for more of his touch. She bucked her hips, hoping he would take the hint, but Xavier just shook his head. "Easy. We have hours still. I want to touch you right now."



He cupped her breasts in his palms, flicking his thumbs over the nipples. Hypersensitive due to the position and level of exposure, Nina whimpered and moved her hips. She'd never come just from having her nipples stroked before, but she wouldn't be surprised if it happened tonight.

He leaned down, one hand on each side of her body, and sucked a nipple into his mouth. He took it between his teeth, rolling gently, and Nina's whole body shook. He sucked hard, drawing her deeper. Even though he didn't touch her anywhere else, she felt him everywhere, from her head to her toes.

When he finished with one breast, he moved on to the other, affording it the same treatment. He moved lower, kissing his way down her body, dipping his tongue into her navel and running it along each hip bone. When he reached her mound, he moved his lips to the side and trailed them down her leg to the inside of her thigh. He nipped at the skin there, hard enough to make her cry out.

Her hands clenched into fists. She arched her hips to urge him to where she really needed him, but still he ignored her silent pleas. Instead he suckled at the skin of her inner thighs, first one and then the other, his thumbs running along the sensitive area at the backs of her knees.

"Please," she begged, on the verge of tears now. *"Please."*

He spread her folds with his fingers and a sob clogged her throat. For what seemed like an eternity, he did nothing. It wasn't until she groaned in frustration that he lowered his head to her and licked the length of her slit.

All the breath left her body in a whoosh of relief. The relief was short lived, though. Soon her belly tightened and curls of arousal built inside her. Tingles shot from her pussy out through the rest of her body, all the way to her fingers and toes. Nina closed her eyes, her head thrashing from side to side, but soon she found herself opening her eyes again, glancing down to where Xavier's mouth met her skin. The sight was so erotic that it made her inner muscles quiver.

His tongue did marvelous things to her, swirling over her clit and dipping inside her pussy. He took the bundle of nerves between his lips, suckling and pulling until she

felt like she'd come out of her skin. Not being able to move intensified the pleasure, driving her to the breaking point in record time. The orgasm washed over her with the intensity of a wave carrying her away from the shore. The light around her shattered into a million pieces. She closed her eyes again, bucking against the restraints, against Xavier's touch. Still, he worked her with his mouth, stroking and licking, refusing to back down, drawing shudder after shudder out of her. It was almost too much to take, but at the same time it wasn't nearly enough. She was practically mindless with the pleasure, her cries eventually turning to screams of delight.

Zavier knelt above her again and stroked his fingers into her pussy, sending another round of shudders through her. Then he replaced his fingers with his cock. He leaned over her, his body weight resting on her, and she loved the feel of it. She wanted to hold him and caress his skin, but the restraints made it impossible. She tugged her arms, trying to loosen the ties, but the more she tugged, the tighter they got. The silk bit into her wrists, and the pain only added to the pleasure. Her whole body was slick, wet with their mingled sweat and her juices. His breath, hot and ragged against her neck, made her shiver.

His thrusts were hard, inching her toward the headboard. The bonds at her ankles strained, but she barely noticed. She'd wanted him like this for so long. A small smile curled the corners of her lips. It was even better than she'd imagined it would be.

He stopped thrusting and pulled out, and she moaned from the loss of contact. Her body was shaking, all her nerves on edge. She'd become a sexual creature, nothing but feeling and sensation. Wanton and needy. Ready to beg for him to continue his touch.

"Hold still," Xavier told her, his hand cupping her cheek for a brief second. He unfastened her ankles and removed the ropes, but left the cuffs on. Then he moved up to her wrists. Once they were freed, he turned her over so she rested on her hands and knees. "Can you hold this position?"

She rocked back and forth a little, testing her muscles. It was a tough call. "I think so."

“Good. I like you like this. A lot.” He pushed his cock back into her, his hands on her hips to tug her back against him with every thrust. He moved a hand up her back, tangling it in her hair and raising her head. The position thrust her breasts out, making them swing when he stroked inside her. His cock hit her in just the right place, and with her pussy still sensitive from her earlier orgasm, small rounds of quivers raced through her inner muscles.

Their mingled grunts and groans filled the room. Nina’s arms buckled. Xavier, seeming to sense her sudden weakness, let go of her hair and pushed her toward the mattress. Her upper body collapsed, her arms hitting the sheet and her forehead resting on her clasped hands. Her breasts brushed the sheet and the softness of the fabric rubbed against her nipples, sending little shocks through them.

Zavier’s hand rubbed her hip, massaging and warming the skin, before he pulled back and brought his palm down against her ass. The smack echoed through the air.

“Oh, my God.” Her skin tingled and her pussy clenched around him. She cried out from the incredible, unexpected pleasure. He brought his hand down again, five times in succession, each one a little harder than the last. Then his touch gentled again and he was rubbing the skin, smoothing his palm over the spot.

“You like that, don’t you?” he asked, his tone rough and husky.

“You know I do.” She moaned when he brought his hand down again. Her leg muscles were starting to shake, and jolts of delight shot through her pussy. She couldn’t take much more, and he knew it. He was trying to drive her crazy.

He ran his palms up and down her thighs a few times before he reached past her hip, playing his fingertips across her clit in a featherlike motion. The touch was too soft, too gentle. She cried out, needing more. Needing to come again. Xavier seemed intent on holding her back. Finally, he pressed down and she came, shaking and moaning into the mattress. The orgasm seemed to go on and on, dragging her along on a tide of sensation, pulling her to places she hadn’t realized she could go. She curled her fingers in the sheet to anchor herself in place while the shocks ripped through her. Soon her body drooped, her breasts resting on the mattress.

Zavier pulled out and flipped her over. Legs splayed, body totally spent, she couldn't do more than smile up at him. He returned the smile with a heated one of his own, kneeling above her. He took his still-hard cock in his hand, stroking the length. Once, twice, three times was all it took to send him over the edge. With a great shuddering moan, he came, his come spurting onto her stomach. With a gentle touch, he rubbed it into her skin. The ultimate sign of possession.

Too spent to speak, she reached her arms up to him. When he collapsed on top of her, she stroked her hands over his body. Up his arms, down his back, along his buttocks. Soft sounds of contentment and fatigue left his lips. He kissed the side of her neck.

"Thank you, Nina. You have no idea what this meant to me. That was... unreal."

She smiled in agreement. Unreal. An apt description. Tomorrow, when she had to return to the real world of work and day-to-day monotony, she would have this moment to look back on. She stroked her hand over his hair, giving the strands a little tug. "Your breathing is really heavy. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." He didn't lift his head. His voice sounded thick, hoarse. She swallowed down a lump forming in her throat.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I just... nothing." Without another word, he crawled off the bed, away from her, and stalked across the room.

Confused, Nina sat up, wrapping the sheet around her suddenly cool body. What was the matter with him? "Zavier, talk to me. Don't push me away now."

"I have to. You don't understand."

She climbed off the bed and marched over to him. Oh, she understood, all right. She understood the night of magic was over. She wouldn't let him go. Not without a fight.

When she reached him, she put her hand on his arm. He jerked away from the touch. "You should leave, Nina. Now. I'm not feeling very well."

"Bullshit. You're trying to push me away."

"No."

"Then stop being a coward. Turn around and look at me."

"You don't want me to do that."

"Yes, I do. Turn around, Xavier."

For a few seconds, she thought he might deny her request. But then he pivoted, slowly coming around to face her. Her breath stuck in her throat. His eyes had deepened to nearly black in the waning candlelight. His parted lips revealed long, glistening fangs. "Now do you understand why I asked you to leave?"

No. She didn't understand at all. This had to be some kind of trick. She turned to run, but the bedroom door slammed shut before she reached it. She tried the knob, but it was stuck.

"Let me out." She spun to face him, backing against the door, hands bunching into fists. His arm was raised in front of him, fingers twitching. The sound of the door lock clicking into place echoed through the room.

"I can't let you go. Not yet."

She swallowed hard. "What are you? A vampire?"

Not that she believed in the creatures, but what was she supposed to think? Those fangs -- and those eyes -- looked real. There was no way he would have had time for such an elaborate hoax.

"Not exactly."

She whimpered. "Then what are you?"

"Incubus."

"Oh, my God." She was going to die.

## Chapter Five

Zavier stood in agony, forcing himself to remain in one place when what he really wanted to do was cross the room and pull Nina into his arms. He couldn't do that, though. Not yet. Not until she understood everything.

They were in for one hell of a night.

"Do you know what an incubus is?" he asked her, unable to get his voice to rise above a whisper.

"A sex demon," Nina answered in a voice equally soft. "So what we did just now... that was all part of your plan. You're not going to kill me, are you?"

He let out a harsh laugh. Kill? She'd been reading too many horror novels. "I don't kill. I tempt, Nina. Killing isn't my job."

"How is that possible?" She blinked and licked her lips, but her fists seemed to relax a little. "How is any of this possible? Incubi kill. Everyone knows that. It doesn't make sense that you say it's not true."

Like vampires and shape shifters, incubi had gotten a bad rap over the years. Too many tales had been twisted around, too many lies had been told. It was well within their power to kill, and easily, but most did not. Most were too busy dealing with their raging libidos to think of harming humans. A sated incubus was a happy one. He'd only had a handful of lovers in the past decade, which had put him in a perpetual bad mood. "You know me, Nina. Better than anyone ever has."

She shifted, giving the doorknob another tug. "I don't know you at all."

Now he did cross the room, walking closer but not wanting to chance getting within reaching distance. He didn't want her to feel cornered. If she ran, the beast might mistake the meaning. Chasing her, at least right now with her in such a state of terror,

would be a surefire way to lose her for good. He needed to explain everything to her. If she would let him.

"You *do* know me." He stopped in front of her, fighting the urge to reach out and touch her. "I'm the same man you've known for years. Nothing has changed."

Nina let out a shaky laugh. "Except I've found out you aren't human."

He couldn't help but raise an eyebrow at her remark. "I'm just like a human where it counts."

To prove it, he closed his eyes, forcing his fangs to retreat. When his lids opened and he smiled, she gasped. "You're back to normal."

He didn't correct her, but some would argue that what scared her so much was normal for him. The ability to look human made tempting females into bed so much easier. He hadn't tempted Nina, though. She'd tempted *him*. "I won't hurt you. Ever."

"Outside you bit me."

"I did."

"You drank my blood, didn't you?"

He nodded again. He had to tread carefully here or risk losing her. "Like vampires, I need blood to survive. Not a lot. I didn't take much. You're fine."

Nina didn't have anything to say to that remark. Instead she whimpered again, hugging close to the door. Feeling the need to fill the silence, he kept talking. "I've wanted you for so long. When I told you that, it was true. I didn't dare touch you, though. I didn't want to hurt you. A while back, I met a gypsy woman who granted me the choice. I could live a relatively normal life as a regular man would, or I could continue along the path to destruction. I chose to see what I'd been missing. For the past decade, I've been living in the human world. Living as a human. I didn't want you to find out this way."

"Yeah, it probably would have gone *much* better if you'd just up and told me about it at work one day."

"I'd like to tell you about it now. Will you listen?"

She didn't say anything for a few minutes. Instead she looked him over, up and down. She seemed to search before finally letting out a harsh breath. "Do I have a choice?"

He cursed silently. If he'd just kept his hands off her, life could have gone on the way it had for years. "You've always had a choice."

"Funny, but right now it doesn't feel like it. This is totally crazy, but okay, I'll listen. I want to get dressed first, though. And I think I'm going to need another couple glasses of wine for this."

\* \* \*

Nina sat across the kitchen table from Xavier, swirling the wine around in her glass. So much for needing a drink. She'd hardly touched what he'd poured for her in the hour they'd been sitting there. Her hands were too shaky, her mind filled with too much turmoil for her to concentrate on much of anything.

"Let me get this straight. You're, like, a non-practicing incubus?" Even saying the word made her shudder. She'd had sex with a demon. A *demon*, of all things. She was still a little freaked out. Okay, a lot freaked out, but in the past hour he'd managed to calm her down quite a bit. She was on guard, but at least she wasn't searching for the nearest exit.

"Something like that." Xavier smiled, but he had a pained look in his eyes. "I don't kill, but as I told you earlier, I need blood to survive. And the inhuman part of me, the beast, is still there, always rattling its chains."

She swallowed hard. She really didn't want that creature to come out and play. Just the little taste she'd had of it earlier was enough for a lifetime. "I don't want you to let it out. I don't want to get hurt."

"Did I hurt you outside?"

She shook her head.

"Then you have nothing to worry about. It wouldn't get much worse than that. At least, not with you."



The last sentence resonated inside her and she frowned. "What's different about me?"

"I don't know. Something I can't define."

He inched his chair a little closer and reached for her hand. She didn't pull away, but she wanted to. At least she thought she did. "Don't go spewing crap about me being your soul mate or anything. I don't believe in it for humans, and I definitely won't believe it for demons."

Zavier's fingers squeezed hers. "Not soul mate, just the right woman. For many years before I walked away from my old life, I'd heard stories about there being a woman for each of us, one who could truly change our lives and turn everything around. I thought the gypsy was my woman -- until I met you. Now I know the truth."

"Why me?" she asked softly, still unsure about everything. It all seemed so crazy. It would take her a long time to come to terms with it, though she had to admit, he was still the same old Xavier she'd always known. The past hour had proved that to her.

"I don't know. I'm only sure of one thing. I love you, Nina. I have for a long time."

She tried to fight the smile, but it was no use. She couldn't hold it back. "You do?"

He nodded.

"Then why did you fight it so hard?"

"I was afraid I would hurt you."

"But you didn't. You had plenty of chances to, and not once did you do anything to hurt me."

"I told you before. I would never do anything to hurt you. But what I am... can you accept me? If you can't, we need to end this right now."

An hour ago, she would have said no. Then again, an hour ago she'd been backed up against a door thinking he was going to tear her throat out. It was nuts, but she'd been in love with the guy for years. It might take her a while to get used to the fact that he was a demon, but she'd get there. Eventually. "I can."

"Are you sure?"

Nina nodded. She'd never been surer of anything in her life.

"It won't be easy," Xavier warned, his eyes darkening. "I'll have urges."

"Like the ones you had last night?"

The pained expression finally left his face, replaced by relief. "Exactly like that. Maybe even more wicked."

"Somehow I don't think that'll be a problem." She cocked her head to the side and frowned. "Can I ask you something?"

Zavier shrugged. "Anything you want. I'm an open book."

"Where do you usually get your blood?"

"Interesting question." His shoulders shook as if he was fighting a laugh. "You wouldn't believe the black market there is for blood bags... among other things. There's a whole different world out there. I could go on all night if you want me to."

Nina held up her hand to stop him. "That really isn't necessary. I think there are some things I just don't want to know."

This was crazy. She was crazy for even agreeing to any of this. The guy was a demon. But he was still Xavier, the man she felt like she'd known forever. She'd always wanted him to be a part of her life. She'd be nuts not to take what he offered. As for the blood-drinking thing, she supposed she could learn to live with that. Nobody was without their faults, though his were a little more... unusual than any other man she'd been involved with.

Zavier touched her cheek. "What are you thinking?"

"That I'm nuts. Actually, we both are." She said the words, but she couldn't stop the smile. Yeah, most people would call her insane, but she had a feeling her life was about to change for the better with Xavier in it for good.

## **Elisa Adams**

Born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, Elisa Adams has lived most of her life on the East Coast. Formerly a nursing assistant and phlebotomist, writing has been a longtime hobby. Now a full time writer, she lives on the New Hampshire border with her three children. Visit Elisa's website at <http://www.elisaadams.com>