

# The Naked Butler



# **The Naked Butler**

## **Tuesday Morrigan**

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**It's the beginning of the year and Marilyn is already having the year from hell... emphasis on hell. Her perfect boyfriend left her for his male secretary; her editors told her she was minutes from getting the knife; and the brand new car she bought just got wrecked by the city's latest masked defender -- the Bellissimo Bandit.**

**With her thirty-sixth birthday staring her in the face, Marilyn makes an oath to stay away from men -- translation, no sex. Unfortunately for her, her best friend sends her the perfect gift to help her get out of the literary rut that has placed her writing career on the line. When she wakes up to find her birthday gift standing on her doorstep in a tight tee and an even tighter pair of jeans, she is sure Rosalinda's gift is a gag. Unfortunately for her, her gift -- The Naked Butler -- is hers for a whole fourteen days.**

**Marilyn's not sure she can keep her oath to herself when there is a very healthy, sexy, nearly naked man willing to do her every bidding. But the real question is... what is she going to do when she finds out that the very Bandit she hates might be the same Butler she lusts after and needs?**

## Chapter One

### The Inspiring Gift

*I'm dying.* That was Marilyn's first thought when she woke. Her second was, *I'm going to kill Rosa.* She felt like hell and Rosa was to blame. The two Long Island Iced Teas had gone straight to her head. Then she had made matters worse by drinking more liquor than her petite body should consume at the strip club.

One fleeting memory broke through the alcohol haze that clouded her brain. She remembered stuffing dollar bills into a firefighter's G-string.

Marilyn struggled to get out of her king size bed, landing on the floor with a thump. Her cry of outrage rebounded on the walls. With one hand to her throbbing skull, she made her way to the side table, muttering curses all the way there.

When she found her purse she dug into the black leather bag for her wallet. The little clutch flipped open almost of its own volition.

Her cards were there. Her driver's license was there. But there was no cash.

She'd spent every single dollar.

"Son of a bitch," she groaned. She'd taken out a hundred dollars at the ATM. Now she had nothing to show for it. Hell, she couldn't even remember what she knew had been a damned good lap dance from her firefighter.

*Damned Long Islands!*

*Damned Rosa!*

She started to stumble her way to the bathroom. She could feel the birthday cake she had eaten the night before struggling to make its way back up. She was going to retch... all over her newly installed eggplant carpet. She ran the rest of the way to the restroom. She almost didn't make it.

When Marilyn was finished retching her guts, she splashed cold water over her face. One look in the mirror told her she was going to need a lot more than ice cold water. She looked like absolute hell.

Almost instantly, the fragmented memories came back. She'd been up on stage, dancing, when she turned and smacked right into the pole. Unfortunately, she wasn't quite as drunk now. With a bottle of aspirin in one hand and a glass of water in the other, she decided she was spending the day in bed. She wouldn't even be able to open her laptop, let alone sit at it long enough to finish her lifestyle column or start the scene in her next epic erotic romance. She was en route to her bedroom when the doorbell rang.

*Kill me now. For the love of God, just kill me now.* "Please God, don't let it to be one of Rosa's obscene gifts. Please God. Please God," Marilyn muttered to herself as she made her way to the front door.

Marilyn looked at the man on her doorstep, looked around him, and attempted to look behind him for her gift. But there was nothing devastating waiting in the wings for her. No chocolate men, no giant dildos, no sex swings... no wildly inappropriate birthday gifts. She gave a silent thanks to God. Apparently Rosa had forgotten to send her whatever embarrassing gift she had found this year.

"Can I help you?" she asked the man on her doorstep. There was no clipboard in his hand. She had never seen a delivery man quite like him. He was obviously lost. What a shame. Men like him were what inspired women to read her novels.

He extended a large hand. "Hi, I'm Dante, your Naked Butler. Ms. Rosalinda Hernandez ordered me for your birthday."

\* \* \*

The woman in front of him looked like a birthday girl who had had a little too much fun last night.

Marilyn was built along the lines of her infamous namesake. She had a true hourglass figure with large breasts, a slightly rounded belly, and large hips.

And he was receiving a perfect view of her figure.

Marilyn Mao was standing in the doorway, wearing the remains of last night's outfit. Bra, panties, and garters. The stockings had apparently goes astray along with her dress.

"Ms. Mao," Dante said with a cough. He was enjoying the view, but it wasn't right to let her stand there wearing close to nothing on her doorstep. Especially since some of her elderly neighbors were starting to peek through their windows.

"You know my name. Dear God. You weren't fucking kidding."

"Ms. Mao?"

"Oh, stop calling me that." Her hands wildly swept through the air. "That's my mother's name."

"Marilyn, inside... now," Dante ordered. It was one thing to let her stand on her front porch in her underwear. It was another thing for her to walk out and converse with the neighbors in her bra and panties.

"Why are you yelling? And who the hell do you think you are?"

"Are you still drunk?"

"What?" she screeched.

"Where are your clothes?" he growled as he forced her back into her house.

Marilyn looked down and stared at her body as if she had never seen it. "Oh... my... God... oh... my... God." Marilyn's brown eyes snapped up to connect with his. They widened immediately. "Don't look at me!"

"Fine," he ground through clenched teeth. He turned and gave her his back.

He could hear the soft sound of her feet hitting the bare wooden floors as she made her way down the hall. He turned when he heard her groan. And turned right back around when he caught sight of Marilyn's barely covered backside as she bent over and eyed a stubbed toe.

"Son of a gun," Dante growled. When he closed his eyes to quell the rising lust surging through his system, he found himself immediately picturing Marilyn's backside bent over the arm of his sofa, his fingers thrusting into her pussy.

He needed to get laid.

Since that wasn't happening anytime soon what he really needed was an ice cold shower. He headed in the direction of where he hoped the kitchen lay. Ice cold water might do the trick. Hell, he might just stick his head in the freezer. He'd seen way too much white creamy skin, and the fire that surged in his veins as a result of the sight was atomic.

He was supposed to be beating the women off with a very big stick. He was, after all, the "Naked Butler" as his business cards read. The problem was women wanted nothing more than a temporary relationship with the Naked Butler. Dante grimaced. They wanted even less to do with a masked crime fighter. Too bad he loved both his day and night job too much to give either up.

Dante was still contemplating his lack of a love life when Marilyn walked into the kitchen. Thankfully, she was fully dressed -- in a tight-fitting sweat suit. Unfortunately, it hugged all the right places.

"Uh, Mr. --"

"Dante. Just Dante."

She took a deep breath and let it out. "Hi, Dante. I think we should talk." Then she turned and headed out of the kitchen and into the adjoining living room. Dante had no choice but to follow. From his position, he got to watch her ass the whole way.

She sat on the couch and patted the seat next to her. He stifled his smile as he took the offered seat. He could see her mind working. She was trying to figure out how to get rid of him.

"I understand that Rosa hired you to be my... butler," Marilyn said softly, her voice trying to be consoling. "But I can't have a butler. You can't stay. I don't have the time for a butler. You have to go." She jumped up from her seat and headed toward the front door.

She was halfway to the door when she turned back to him. He still hadn't moved an inch. Dante had no intention of leaving.

"You're fired." Her raised midnight eyebrow emphasized her point.



"You can't fire me," he said, lounging back in his seat. "Ms. Hernandez hired me. Only she can fire me."

Marilyn stared at him for several seconds before striding over. The stiff movements of her body told him she was prepared to fight -- a tiny, angry Amazon warrior princess ready to do battle. "You're supposed to be my butler. I don't want a butler. You are therefore fired."

He shook his head and gave her a slick smile. "It doesn't work quite that way. I've signed an employment contract. For two weeks I'm Rosalinda's employee, and she is the only one who can fire me."

She stomped out of the room, apparently to call Rosalinda. Then she was yelling at Rosalinda. Judging by the sounds coming from the bedroom, Rosalinda was yelling right back.

He really couldn't afford to get fired. He had a debt to settle.

Marilyn came out of her room to stand in the hallway staring at him for several seconds. Then she groaned. "Oh, hell!"

Apparently he still had a job.

The shrill sound of the phone ringing cut through his thoughts. Marilyn walked across the room and picked up the phone sitting on the side table. "Hello."

Dante closed his eyes and shifted in his seat. Marilyn's voice had slithered over his body and caressed every erogenous zone. His gaze snapped back to Marilyn at the sound of her outraged scream. "What do you mean you're not going to cover my claim? I appealed that decision. It's not like I had a choice. The damned Bellissimo Bandit made me get out. I don't have the money to fix my car without the insurance!"

Marilyn slammed the phone into its holder and slumped onto the sofa. "Great. I've got no car and no money."

Dante grinned at her. "Yeah, but you've got a Naked Butler, with a car, who's willing to drive you around for two whole weeks."

"I guess that's a plus," she muttered.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Devil in Hot Pants**

The doorbell rang at 7:45 am. When Marilyn opened the door, she found Dante standing on her front step. She closed her eyes and groaned. "What are you doing here?"

Grinning, Dante leaned against her doorjamb. One mountainous shoulder invaded the sanctity of her personal space. She took a step back, glaring up at him with squinted eyes. The smile on Dante's face was irritating to say the least. She hated the happy people. And Dante, judging by the grin on his face, was one of the happy people.

"I'm starting to believe this isn't going to be a healthy relationship, boss."

"What... are... you... doing... here?" she asked through clenched teeth.

"Suit or no suit, Marilyn?" One cocked eyebrow dared her to pick an answer... at her own risk.

"How about no butler?"

"That's not an option, sweet cheeks." He stepped past her into the hallway. "Remember, only one woman can fire me."

"Sweet cheeks? How dare you?!"

He leaned low. "Oh, I dare."

"I hate you," she growled, turning on her heel.

His big, muscular body seemed to take up the small hallway. "Suit or no suit?" he asked again.

Marilyn stared at him for a few seconds contemplating the question. He obviously wasn't going to leave her alone. She was a sucker for a man in a suit. She had a long history of dating lawyers and businessmen. She'd even dated a stockbroker once. And then there was her ex. "No suit, definitely no suit."

"Okey dokey, boss." The shrill sound of his whistle as he walked away ignited an urge to scream.

He moved with masculine grace. His every action spoke of refined efficiency. He reminded her of a cat, a large prowling cat. Yes, Dante reminded her of a panther. And something told her that the big cat liked to play with his prey.

Twenty minutes later, Dante walked into the kitchen. She glanced up from her laptop as he entered the room. Her jaw dropped. "Where are your clothes?"

Dante winked and gave her a roguish grin. "I'm wearing them."

Her eyes widened as she took in Dante's clothes, or rather lack of clothes. His long, strong limbs had been appealing in a skin-tight white tee and a pair of blue jeans. Naked, Dante was a sexual feast from Aphrodite herself.

The skin-tight shorts Dante wore molded to his body. She could see everything Dante had to offer and boy, did he have a lot to offer. Hell, she could see the dimples on his left ass cheek. Her gaze moved from his tight butt up the strong, taut planes of his back, then drifted over to his pecs as Dante made a dramatic spin. She scanned the rippling, chiseled lines of his six-pack abs before landing on the bulge that sat between his muscular thighs.

It was the biggest bulge she'd ever seen. Marilyn sputtered for a moment before her mind came up with sensible words. "What you're wearing isn't 'clothes.' It's... it's... it's... underwear!"

"This was your choice, boss."

"My choice?" she gasped as she eyed his almost nude body. "I didn't tell you to take off your clothes."

There was an unholy twinkle in his cognac eyes. "No, you didn't tell me to get naked, which is why I'm wearing the shorts."

She stared at him openmouthed for a few seconds. Dante grinned at her apparent confusion. "Remember, I asked suit or no suit?"

"This," she said, waving a hand in front of his pelvic region, "is what I get when I say no suit?"

“Should have gone with the suit, sweet cheeks.”

Marilyn could feel her face heating up with anger and embarrassment. A man in a suit was dangerous, but a hot man in even hotter hot pants was devastating. “You’re an evil, evil man,” Marilyn growled, grabbing her laptop and fleeing the kitchen. She was not going to be getting any work done with Naked Boy standing over her. “Wear the suit next time!”

She was definitely going to need to regroup. And to think she had been doing so well. Between last night and this morning, she had gotten a decent amount of work done. It appeared that the muses were willing to work with her today.

She was not going to think about where her muses had come from. The only thing she was sure of was that her productivity had nothing to do with Dante. It suddenly occurred to Marilyn that the soft sound she heard was his footsteps following her. Marilyn looked over her shoulder and regarded Dante. “Don’t think I’m letting you in here,” she stated before closing the door behind her. She could hear his soft, rumbling laughter through the closed bedroom door.

She really hated him.

Twenty minutes later when Marilyn had gathered up the notes on her latest erotic romance, she walked out of her room and almost collided with Dante.

She peered up at him from beneath her glasses. It took her a moment to realize why he was blurry. Her glasses were crooked. She watched with wide eyes as Dante’s long, tanned fingers reached for her. He quickly straightened her glasses. Marilyn glared at him for a second before walking around him.

“You’re supposed to say thank you.”

She whipped around and snarled at him. “Look, I know you don’t understand this but I have two, yes two, deadlines and they are swooping down on me very quickly. I love Rosa, but she doesn’t live in the real world. You are not helping.”

“Not yet, at least.” His voice did amazing things to her. Then he destroyed the sweet mood by grabbing the loose-leaf sheets of paper on top of her laptop.

“Chapter One, the heroine, Jennifer, meets Thomas, the hero.”

Marilyn needed to get those pieces of paper back before Dante realized what he was reading. She bodychecked him, slamming her shoulder into him.

He didn't move an inch. The man was built like a brick wall. And he felt like one too. Marilyn rolled her shoulder and felt pain streak through her arm.

Dante grinned down at her. "That wasn't very nice," he said before turning back to her notes. He flipped a page over and read the other side. After long moments, he handed them back to her. "Nice and steamy. I can see why Rosa hired a Naked Butler for you." He leaned so close his moist cinnamon-scented breath wafted over her face. "Do you want me to help you research this?" he said, pointing halfway down the sheet.

Marilyn knew exactly where he was pointing. The first sex scene between the hero and the heroine. Her cheeks reddened as she pictured Dante doing the same things to her. She shook her head, hoping to dispel the images that flittered through her mind. She had to get away from Dante as quickly as possible. The man was wreaking havoc on her senses. If she wasn't careful she would embarrass herself and all of womankind by asking him to please fuck her.

"Come on, sweet cheeks. I won't even make you beg for mercy."

Marilyn practically ran to the living room. She knew it was childish and foolish, but the truth was she really needed to get away. One thought and bam! She was breathing hard and her panties were wet. She dropped everything, laptop and all, on the couch, grabbed the phone, immediately dialing Rosa's number.

"Hello?" Rosalinda's soft Texan accent drawled. Marilyn had known Rosa long enough to know when she was laying it on thick.

"Fire him now!"

"I take it things are going well over there?"

"You have to fire him. If you care at all about my sanity, you will fire him now."

"Why?"

"Why?" Marilyn screamed. "Did you miss the part where I'm losing my mind?"

"What exactly is he doing that is so bad?"

Marilyn couldn't help but picture her best friend checking her nails as she dangled her above an open flame. "He's wearing hot pants."

"Hot pants?"

*Oh hell*, Marilyn groaned. "Yes, hot pants. Rosa, for the love of God, do something!"

"What's so bad about a gorgeous man running around in hot pants?"

"I can't concentrate."

"Have you tried concentrating on him?"

"Deadlines, Rosa. Does that mean anything to you? When I get kicked out of my house for not being able to pay the mortgage, I'm coming to live with you."

"Well, I can't fire him."

"Why the hell not?"

"Because you're freaked out, which means he's doing something right. You're always so cool and calculated around men."

"I. Am. Not!" Rosa made her sound like a robot in a relationship.

"Plus, he's helping you with your writing. He's your new muse."

"I can't concentrate. You take that to mean I can write?"

"Has he got you thinking dirty thoughts?"

Marilyn immediately pictured Dante's lips wrapped around one nipple as he thrust between her thighs. "No."

"Oh yeah, he's a keeper," Rosa said with a soft laugh. "Channel those thoughts onto paper and you'll have another hit."

"This friendship is over," Marilyn said through clenched teeth before slamming the phone back in its cradle. She turned and found Dante standing in the doorway, another of her sheets of notes in his hand. She immediately felt her face heat up.

He leaned one shoulder on the doorjamb and regarded her. "I was coming to volunteer myself if you need help working out the kinks in Chapter Fifteen."

“Chapter Fifteen?” Marilyn couldn’t seem to tear her eyes away from the arrow of curling midnight hair that disappeared into his shorts. Marilyn knew exactly what he was talking about. Chapter Fifteen ended with Jennifer performing fellatio on Thomas.

## Chapter Three

### Makes Me Wonder

*Her heart beat wildly in her chest, knocking against her sternum, making her chest feel tight with the swirling need coursing through her system as she stood in the shadows waiting for him to notice her. And then as if he heard her, he turned his dark, glittering gaze toward her.*

*He was her lover. She wanted and needed this man more than she had ever wanted or needed another human being. He was her life.*

*His wide, full lips spread into a sultry, smoldering smile that had her blinking in arousal as heat infused her system. "Damn," she whispered as she smoothed her suddenly slick hands down the full cotton skirt she wore. She could not draw her gaze away from him, especially when he stared back into her eyes.*

*Her tongue felt several sizes too large and clumsy as she swallowed heavily. He was making his way through the crowd, headed straight toward her, his long, lean legs eating up the space between them, clearing the chasm that separated her from the one man who could satisfy her every fantasy.*

*Before she had a moment to compose herself he was standing before her. She took a deep breath to calm her nerves and almost immediately regretted it. She could taste him on her tongue. He tasted like heaven, a mixture of hard masculinity, boyish charm, and sweaty nights.*

*She parted her lips to say something, anything, hopefully something intelligent, but before the words could come out of her mouth he grabbed her hand and strode through the thick crowd, pulling her behind him.*

*She gasped when she felt the hard, wooden wall at her back and his equally hard chest pressed against her front, crushing the full mounds of her breasts beneath him.*

*"I-I," she stuttered, but forgot whatever she had meant to say when he pressed his lips to hers and thrust his tongue through her parted lips. Heat infused her body, leaving her gasping,*



*and clutching for him, as her body fought to find ground in the sensual hurricane he spun around them. His tongue swept over her mouth, touching her tongue, teasing it, before boldly caressing the inner recesses of her mouth, dancing over her teeth.*

*He separated their lips for a moment, just long enough to whisper, "I love the way you taste," before once again taking her mouth in a bruising kiss that left her begging for more.*

*"That's it, sugar," he purred against her lips. His mouth moved down her face, pressing wet, hot, demanding kisses against her jaw, her neck, the soft pulsing flesh above her collarbone. He nipped her, making her head spin with shocking need.*

*"Oh God. Oh, please," she groaned when one large, callused palm found its way to her breast and pulled down her neckline, exposing her. Marilyn knew she had been testing him and fate when she had worn the low cut dress.*

*His hands skimmed over her, dancing on the areola, avoiding the nipple, determined to play with her as long as possible.*

*She stared into his dark gaze, watching him as he watched her, watched the way his touch affected her. "Damn it. Don't play with me." But the words came out as a high-pitched whine. She was desperate for him. She was always desperate for his touch. His teasing was making the hot, bubbling need worse.*

*He smiled at her, the vision dark, powerful, and smug. She started to step away, turn away from his touch when long, talented fingers grabbed her nipple and pinched hard. Unprepared for the sensual assault upon her senses she screamed his name.*

*When she opened her eyes she found him shaking his head at her. She started to question him when his other hand found the moist flesh between her thighs.*

*He shook his head no, before she could make a sound. "You have to be quiet, sweetheart. You don't want the whole saloon to know you're being fucked hard and deep in the back room, or do you?"*

*She stared at him for a few seconds, unsure of what he was saying exactly.*

*The man was about to fuck her in public, in the back room of the town's most notorious saloon, and she was going to let him. She nodded her head and whispered, "I'll be quiet. I'll be good."*

*He growled something indecipherable and lifted her skirt, revealing her naked pussy. Marilyn had not worn her drawers, as he'd demanded.*

*He took a step closer to her, pressing her harder against the wall, and grasped one of her thighs. Her skirts, crumpled between their bodies, lay flat against her chest. Marilyn blushed when she realized she was wantonly open to him. Then he grasped her other thigh. Her arms instinctively snaked around his corded neck, clinging like he was a lifeline.*

*"Have you changed your mind, sugar?" he whispered against her lips.*

*She shook her head no, unable to speak.*

*"Good." He settled one thigh over his hip and with his free hand he guided his cock to her pussy. Marilyn blinked at him. She had been too caught up in her sexual haze to realize he had freed himself. Before she could fully consider his actions, he was sliding into her, pushing past the constricted, slick walls of her cunt to fully embed himself deep within her.*

*She moaned at the tight, full feeling. He glanced at her, a smile in his eyes, and she immediately realized she had made a sound.*

*Being silent was going to be harder than she had believed.*

*His glittering gaze watched Marilyn as he surged into her.*

*She gasped and clenched her teeth. The pleasure was so intense, so demanding and relentless that she felt the need to scream his name, but she held back the urge, knowing he would stop if she did. And she couldn't afford to have him stop.*

*He smiled at her. "That's a good girl," he growled as he withdrew. Then he was sliding back into her.*

*Dear God, she screamed in her mind. Marilyn swiveled her hips and flinched when she realized she couldn't really move. With the way he held her thighs open, she was at his mercy. Almost as if he sensed her vulnerability he thrust into her, the movement hard and forceful, pressing against her G-spot with more demand.*

*And her body answered immediately, clenching around him with tightened need, a fist of desire that threatened to leave her breathless.*

*"Please," she whispered. The sound was low and hoarse. As if she had been screaming for hours.*

*"You come... when I tell you to."*

*Marilyn blinked up at him. He could not be serious. She was seconds from coming and she suspected he knew it. Her pussy felt full with the need that kept her tight around his surging cock. Her legs were shaking with the boundless pleasure that every stroke elicited. He had to feel her, shaking, gasping, quivering, but the bastard wouldn't let her come.*

*Damn him!*

*Her nails dug into the moist fabric covering his tense shoulders, securing her to him as she leaned her head back, against the rough wooden wall. A powerful streak of pleasure coursed through her, forcing her eyes open, making them widen with shock and a little feminine fear.*

*Oh my fucking God!*

*He thrust into her and glanced over his shoulder. Marilyn automatically followed his gaze. There was no one there, but in the eerie silence that surrounded them she could hear the approaching footsteps of a couple. Two people were headed straight for them.*

*His gaze caught hers and he smiled, slow and seductive. "Now," he whispered. The single word blindsided Marilyn, throwing her headfirst into a quivering climax. She was gasping, praying for breath, praying she did not make a single sound to alert anyone to the fact that she was having the most mind blowing orgasm she had ever experienced.*

*His long, hard cock thrust into her, relentlessly pushing her higher and higher up the peak of completion, until she parted her lips ready to scream out her pleasure.*

*Lights burst behind her closed eyes, her body flew into spasms, and both her heart and her pussy felt like they were exploding. Marilyn didn't give a damn if the whole town heard her scream. She was coming and she was coming hard.*

*His lips pressed against hers, stifling her scream. But she didn't care, she simply kissed him, thrusting her tongue between his parted lips with the same savageness he thrust his cock into her. Their tongues tangled, dancing together as he pumped himself deep into her with short, quick thrusts.*

*He broke off the kiss to gasp against her mouth. Marilyn didn't need to see his hard, dark eyes to know that he was seconds from coming. But one look in his feverish gaze and Marilyn knew she would be coming again with him.*

*"Fuck." The word was a whispered growl, harsh, demanding, and utterly devastating to her senses. Marilyn suddenly found herself convulsing, her pussy contracting around the length of his hard cock as he spurted his seed deep inside of her.*

Marilyn woke on a gasp. Her heart pounded in her chest with shock, arousal, and apprehension. As a writer, she often dreamed up her scenes, envisioned them as she worked literally night and day to perfect her craft, get her stories on paper, but she had never dreamed like she dreamed that night. She had never dreamed that she was the character, the woman craving her man's attention, desire, and satisfaction.

But Dante made her dream that she was Jennifer. Dante made her dream that he was Thomas. Dante, her Naked Butler, made her dream things she had no right dreaming.

With a sigh she crawled out of bed and headed to her desk. She finally knew what was going to happen between Jennifer and Thomas in Chapter Twenty-Seven.

## Chapter Four

### When Bubbles Burst

She did not like him. She couldn't like Dante the Naked Butler. She had too much self-respect for that. *A Naked Butler, for crying sakes!*

*And that little... hot... steamy... erotic dream of mine meant nothing. I mean really, what self-respecting woman would like a man like that? So he's attractive. Actually, he's hot. H.O.T.T. hot, but that was before you factored in his personality.*

"Too bad he's an ass," Marilyn muttered to herself as she placed her laptop on her desk.

Despite Dante's presence, she had been productive at the library. Her scenes had flowed so easily. Apparently she had gotten her muse back. "But there's no way in hell I'm telling Rosa that."

"Telling Rosa what?"

She whipped around at the sound of Dante's deep baritone voice. "Are you trying to give me a heart attack?"

"I knocked." He stood by her bedroom door, one large palm holding it open.

Yeah right.

"I swear I did, but you were too busy muttering to yourself to notice."

She snorted at that. Then she yawned. She barely moved fast enough to cover her mouth.

"You're exhausted. As you should be."

"As I should be?" For some reason her mind couldn't seem to process his words. It was as if the gears in her head were moving much too slowly.

He glanced at the striking silver watch on his wrist. "You've been writing for about eleven hours straight, and you were up late last night."

His full lips turned up at the corners into a sensual smile. She had never really noticed how beautiful his mouth was. It was decadent. It was erotic. It was the most kissable mouth she had ever seen. Too bad the bastard was dangerous to her peace of mind. "What makes you think I was up late last night?"

One gigantic hand cradled her cheek. The other hand's fingers skimmed under her left eye, caressing the soft skin. She shuddered under his touch.

"This tells me you were up late," he whispered as his fingers brushed over the skin beneath her right eye. His dark eyes gleamed enigmatically. "You need to sleep more."

She gave him a soft smile. He seemed so genuinely concerned. "I know."

"You need to take care of yourself, sweet cheeks."

"Sweet cheeks" felt softer and sexier than any "love," "honey," or "sweetheart" Robert had ever called her.

With shocking clarity Marilyn realized that she wanted Dante to kiss her. And she didn't just want him to press his lips against hers. She wanted him to kiss her like no man had ever kissed her. This was the feeling her heroines had for their heroes.

She wanted him.

No, she desired him. What she felt was stronger, more potent than mere want.

"Dante," she whispered his name on a breathless sigh. All the air in her lungs had dissipated with the realization that she desired this man. And she wanted him to desire her.

"Yeah, sweet cheeks?" His voice was a soothing rumble. The way he said the words told Marilyn she wasn't going to get her wish. He wasn't going to kiss her. And he regretted the fact.

Her eyes slammed shut and her head fell back. The large hands that cradled her neck massaged the tense muscles.

*It's for the best,* she thought as she melted under his touch. *If he kissed me...* She couldn't even finish the thought. Robert's betrayal had left her with too many deep scars. She was not ready to find out how Dante's touch would make her feel.

"You need to go to bed. But first... take off your clothes."

Her eyes popped open. Marilyn stared at him for several seconds before she got her lips to move. "Excuse me?"

"You're so tired you're slurring your words. Don't worry, I'm not going to take advantage of you. I want to give you a massage. It's one of my specialties."

She gave him a slow, drowsy smile. "You, Naked Boy, better not be kidding, because I'm holding you to it." She yawned again.

"Don't worry, Cheeks. I'm good for it." He pressed against her shoulders. She unceremoniously plopped down on the bed.

"Change into something loose." He headed to the door, holding it open. The look on Dante's face spoke of distinct discomfort. "Uh, you might want to leave the area you want massaged free. What I mean is..."

"I got it," Marilyn said then winked at him.

"Glad to know that even when you're exhausted you've got your fire."

A few minutes later, Dante knocked softly on her bedroom door. Even though she had been waiting for him, she jumped. "Come in," she squeaked.

He stuck his dark head into her room. "Ready?"

She nodded her head furiously. Just the thought of being touched by him made her uneasy. Massage or no massage, she was getting turned on by the thought of his large, callused hands running over her body, touching her with an intimacy that Robert had never wanted.

He walked into the room and she caught her breath. He had changed out of his suit. He wore a pair of low slung, tight jeans and nothing else.

Marilyn's eyes felt like they were popping out of her head as she devoured him. Her scorching gaze raked over his body, eating up the golden expanse of massive, male chest, hard abdomen, and a tantalizing trail of midnight hair that captured her starved attention.

God, she wanted to follow that trail with her mouth.

"I didn't want to get any oil on my suit."

"Oh." She winced. She sounded as sex starved as she felt. She shrugged out of her robe and turned to the bed, trying to think of a way to crawl onto it and keep her dignity intact. It wasn't going to happen.

Dante sucked in his breath. She turned and caught his gaze. His face was a mask of hard lines and even harder arousal. "On your belly, Cheeks," he growled.

She immediately flopped down. There would be no tempting of the beast. Although Lord knew she wanted to. She wanted to do something very bad and forget about her vow to stay away from men. She wanted to get as close to Dante as physically possible. She wanted him inside of her. It was official. She was in heat. She was a bitch in heat.

Marilyn stilled when she heard Dante moving behind her. She wanted to turn and see what he was doing, but found herself paralyzed.

"Ready?" Dante's soft, scented breath tickled her ear.

She nodded. Her thick tongue wouldn't allow words to come out. Time seemed to stand still as she waited for him. And then his hands were on her, his palms moving over her shoulders, kneading the tense tissues. Dante's fingers worked magic, dispelling all her fears.

"What are you doing Saturday?" she muttered when he reached her lower back.

"Why?"

"If you're not busy, we could get married."

His sharp bark of laughter relaxed the last ounce of tension in her body. Then his hands moved a little lower. And she tightened up everywhere.

"Want me to massage these muscles?" Dante asked, his voice deep and soothing, as he palmed the cheeks of her ass.

"I can't."

"Come, I have something to show you."

Marilyn slid off the bed to stand before him. She gave him a saucy smile. "Show me yours, Naked Boy."

"Butler," he growled before turning and walking through her door.



That brought her up short. "Where are you going?"

"Don't tell me you can't handle surprises, Marilyn," he said without stopping or slowing his pace.

She stuck out her tongue at his back. The gorgeous bastard was really bringing out the worst in her.

He stopped in front of her bathroom door and cocked his head toward it. "Check it out."

She chewed her bottom lip. "What is it?"

"Just open the door, Cheeks."

She threw the door open quickly. No slow, trembling fingers for her. She was a firm believer in ripping the bandage right off. She wanted to get the surprise over with as soon as possible.

She just hoped it didn't go as badly as Rosa's birthday cake fiasco. Marilyn stepped into the bathroom and gasped. It wasn't going to go as badly as Rosa's birthday cake fiasco.

"Oh... My... God."

Her bathroom looked like a sensual dream come true.

Dante had placed candles around her claw-foot tub and on top of every shelf and ledge. Marilyn took a deep breath. They were scented candles. Her bathroom smelled like sugar cookies. She sighed, closed her eyes, and took another deep breath. She turned to Dante. "This is beautiful. I can't believe..."

He shrugged one shoulder. "I'm glad you like it. I figured you deserve to have someone take care of you once in a while. And while I'm here..." His words trailed off.

Marilyn blinked back the tears that threatened to blind her. *You will not fall for the Naked Butler who is being paid to take care of you. You will not!*

Dante walked past her and over to the tub. He turned the hot water handle. "I wasn't sure how hot you wanted it or how high you would like the water."

She padded over to him in her bare feet. "Thank you very much," she whispered.

He looked up and his dark eyes searched hers for long moments. Then he broke into a wide smile. "You're welcome." With that he turned and walked out of the room.

Marilyn stood in the middle of the bathroom for several seconds staring at the door. She numbly turned to the tub. It looked so beautiful. Dante had even dropped white rose petals into the effervescent water.

She dipped her hand into the water. It was the perfect temperature, not too hot and not too cold. Within moments, she had settled herself into the tub. She closed her eyes and allowed herself to relax.

Marilyn immediately pictured the love scene she was in the middle of writing. Instead of Thomas's face she saw Dante's. She owed him. It had been so long since she had taken a soak. She was always dashing somewhere or working toward some deadline. She never had a moment to relax, but Dante had given her that moment.

She smiled to herself. If he kept it up she just might start to like him.

*Who are you kidding? Start?*

The truth was there was something about Dante that made her think of danger, danger to herself, especially.

Danger to her heart.

And falling in love with a man who made you think of danger was just plain old stupid.

*Even if he did fill your bathroom with scented candles and set up a rose petal bubble bath?*

Her lips turned down at that. Was she doomed to fall for him?

There was no denying the attraction she felt toward the man. But it was the rare sweetness that hid beneath his playful, irritating antics that made her heart skip.

"But it's just a little skip," she muttered to herself. She could not allow herself to fall for her Naked Butler.

She grabbed the loofah on the tub rack beside her foot. Skip or no skip she had to stay emotionally detached from Dante. Considering how bad a fiasco her relationship with Robert had turned out to be, she needed to be wary of men.

Even dangerous, attractive, funny men.

Two sharp raps against the bathroom door startled her. She jumped in the tub and water splashed over the edges.

"Marilyn, are you okay?"

She glared at the door for several seconds before responding. "I'm fine." She muttered too low for him to hear, "Now that I've gone and had a heart attack."

She quickly crossed her arms over her chest when Dante opened the door. He walked into the room with his eyes closed. "Are you fully covered by the bubbles?"

She thought of all the things she wanted to say and discarded each one. She was naked in a tub full of bubbles. Now was not the time to pick a fight. "Yes."

He slowly opened one eye and peeked at her. "Good," he said before opening the other eye. "I forgot the champagne." In one hand he held a bottle of pink champagne. In the other was one of her flutes.

She smiled at him. "You're very good at this. You must do this a lot."

He smiled sheepishly at her. "Actually I've never done this for a client before."

Her mouth dropped open. When she realized what she was doing she snapped it shut. *He's never done this for a client.*

She couldn't think of anything past that. Luckily, Dante spoke. "It wasn't part of my original plan, but it felt wrong without it." He held out the champagne glass. Marilyn glanced down to make sure the bubbles kept all of her secrets private, before taking the flute from his outstretched hand.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome." He filled the glass with the pink champagne.

"Once again, thank you," she said with a nervous laugh.

Her gaze connected with his. The fire burning there made her shiver, even though she was in a tub full of hot water. It was that unnerving. She nervously licked her lips. His deep, mahogany gaze followed her tongue's movement. When she was sure her heart couldn't take any more of the sexual tension brewing between them, he met her eyes again. "Want any help washing your back?"

She stared at him open-mouthed with shock. She blinked once, twice, but couldn't get the image of his hands on her body out of her mind. And this time it wouldn't be as innocent as a massage. Her grip tightened on the loofah. She licked her suddenly dry lips and tried to think of a polite way of saying, "Don't touch me, because I just might combust."

"Don't worry, boss. I'm not that kind of Naked Butler."

The slow, heated smile he gave her set off an atom bomb in her belly. Thick, shooting spirals of heat exploded deep in her abdomen and pussy. Marilyn suddenly wished he *was* that kind of butler.

"Okay," she whispered.

Dante slowly walked the few feet to her. When he walked past Marilyn to stand behind her, she desperately wanted to turn her head. It was a natural instinct she didn't give in to.

Her eyes fluttered shut when he placed his palms on her slick shoulders. They easily glided over her shoulders. His touch was the softest thing she had ever felt. And the most arousing. She couldn't help the soft purr that slipped through her lips.

His hands moved down the wet plane of her back until he reached the curve above her ass. He massaged the delicate skin there. Marilyn was surprised to find the small of her back was incredibly sensitive.

She leaned forward and his hands moved lower. One finger feathered the line of her ass.

"Oh my."

"Hand me the loofah, Cheeks."

Marilyn came up from beneath the haze of sexual intoxication she had been under. The moment her foggy brain processed his words her face burned at the nickname he had given her. Cheeks meant something more... naughty now that he had been playing with her own ass cheeks.

"Excuse me?" she croaked out.

"Hand me the loofah, sweetheart." His voice was so deep and sultry, she felt the deep, rolling heat of his own arousal down to the tips of her toes.

Marilyn looked down to see that she was gripping the loofah like it was a lifeline. She loosened her hold and silently passed it over her head.

She could hear him dipping the sponge in the bathwater. Then the water was running over her skin as he used it like a bucket. He slowly washed her back, her shoulders, her collarbone. Every swipe, every glide of the loofah against her flesh felt like an erotic caress.

And then he really did caress her. Marilyn heard the distinct plop of the loofah hitting the water seconds before Dante's hot, hard hands covered her breasts.

She froze for a second before sinking into his touch.

"See, there you go, sweetheart. Relax."

She sunk into the sweet heaven of his voice, allowing every muscle in her body to soften with his words, with his touch. She softly purred as she leaned back against the slick bathtub. She shivered when her heated skin touched the cool ceramic.

"Cold," she muttered to herself before continuing on her path toward the decadent pleasure Dante's voice promised.

"Don't worry, Cheeks. I'll warm you up." The hands on her breasts cupped the soft mounds, weighing them, before massaging them in a circular motion. Her body heated under his touch as his hands skimmed over her, touching, rubbing and caressing her breasts, her areolas, her nipples, just lightly enough that she purred for more.

"Dante," she groaned.

His fingers found her nipples and pulled lightly. "Better?" he whispered into her ear.

The slick feel of his wet fingers on her moist flesh was an erotic touch unlike anything she had ever felt. The water didn't allow for the friction she was used to, but it forced her to feel every callus on Dante's hard hands.

"My God," she gasped.

"Much better," he groaned.

One hand plucked her nipple while the other drifted down her body, to settle on the soft tuft of curls between her legs. "Come on, Cheeks. Let me help you relax," he growled seconds before his teeth tugged one earlobe. His mouth felt so hot, so decadent, and it did indescribable things to her body. Marilyn couldn't help herself.

Besides she wanted Dante to help her relax. She started to spread her legs for him. She stopped suddenly. "Tell me your last name."

"Why?" This time she could feel his breath on her neck. She tilted her head, giving him more room. He heard her silent request and licked a moist, heated path down the length of her neck. She shivered and moaned for more. "Why?" he repeated.

It took Marilyn a few moments to figure out what he was talking about. "I need to know your last name. I never allow relaxation without knowing the last name of my relaxer."

"Pizzimenti."

"Mmmm." The hand on her breast had pinched and twisted her nipple. Untold pleasure spiraled from her breast to every erogenous zone on her body.

"Oh my goodness."

"Dante Pizzimenti. Now, let me play so we can both feel good."

Marilyn spread her legs for him.

"Good girl." His voice was so rough, so strained. Apparently, Marilyn wasn't the only one falling under the arousing spell of their bathroom play.

"Relax me," she whispered softly before reaching behind her and pulling Dante closer to her aching body.

"You minx." Then his fingers were parting the slick petals of her pussy to reveal her heated center. Marilyn shivered when one finger lightly touched her clit.

"Oh my God." His finger felt so good. His touch did wonderful things to her body. She clutched the rim of the tub and held on for dear life as Dante rubbed his finger across the swollen head of her clit.

She shivered and groaned his name. He plucked her clit and slid one finger deep inside of her. "Son of a gun," Marilyn groaned at the feel of him. She felt like she had waited a lifetime for him to enter her.

"You're so hot... and wet." She could feel his breath on her ear. It was moist and tempting. She wanted to feel his lips, but didn't dare turn to him and ask for his mouth, so she moved her head closer to his mouth. His lips brushed over her ear, back and forth, before nipping the flesh.

A second finger joined the first at the same time his finger skimmed over her clit. One of Marilyn's hands let go of the tub's rim. She held onto Dante's hand, the one playing with her clit, and pressed it closer to the wet heat between her legs.

But Dante wouldn't allow her to control the pace. "Say it, Cheeks, and I just might give it to you."

"Harder."

"Say it louder." His voice was so soft, so low, it was almost a purr.

"Fuck... Harder, fuck me harder!" Marilyn screamed when Dante complied and thrust his fingers deep into her clenching pussy. She lifted her hips and spread her legs even wider, allowing him to touch her more deeply. Her legs shook and her body jerked with spasms. "I'm coming," she screamed as her body erupted in an inferno of infinite desire. Pleasure like none she had ever experienced before consumed her body.

Dante continued to stroke her as she came down from her high. Her body shook several times under his touch. He continued strumming her clit until her body was so weak she could barely breathe let alone shudder.

His hands slipped from between her thighs, and moved over her belly to cup Marilyn's breasts. He softly molded and massaged the sensitive mounds. She closed her eyes and allowed the soft, comforting feeling of Dante's touch to run through her system. She was surprised his touch didn't necessarily arouse her as much as it relaxed her.

Then again, her body was probably too exhausted from that amazing orgasm to become aroused. Marilyn's soft chuckle at this thought quieted into a soft snore as she

fell asleep. Sexual satisfaction and Dante's soothing touch were too much for her to ignore.

She woke when Dante lifted her from the tub several minutes later. Her eyes slowly fluttered open to gaze up at him. "Can't let you freeze, now can I?" The corners of his full mouth were tilted in a smirk.

"No, you can't," she muttered before leaning her head on his shoulder. Dante had wrapped her in one of her oversized thick towels; held in his arms as she was, Marilyn had never felt so safe and secure. The soft sound of his naked feet hitting the bare wood floor was the only sound between them as he carried her to her bedroom.

When he placed her in her bed, Marilyn immediately nestled into the soft haven of her sheets and blankets.

"Marilyn?"

"Huh," she muttered into her pillow.

"The towel, sweetheart. It's wet. You have to give it to me."

"Then I'll be naked."

"But you are in bed, under the blankets."

That seemed to make sense to her. Marilyn turned over and unwrapped the terry cloth from her body. She handed it to him from underneath the blankets.

Dante took the wet mass from her outstretched hands. He leaned over her and placed a soft, cool kiss against Marilyn's forehead. "Goodnight, Cheeks. Dream of me, 'cause Lord knows I will be dreaming of you," he muttered softly, but loud enough for Marilyn to hear. His words were her last thought before falling asleep.

Marilyn would dream. She would dream of the man who had selflessly given her so much pleasure. Marilyn would dream of Dante Pizzimenti.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Bitter and the Bandit**

"I can't wait to read this book," Dante whispered.

Marilyn's wide dark chocolate eyes connected with his.

Dante followed the sweep of her pink tongue as she licked her lips. He wanted to follow her tongue with his own. He wanted to taste her mouth. Dante immediately felt his cock rise and harden. He'd handled Marilyn's breasts, touched her pussy, made her orgasm with his hands, and he hadn't kissed her.

Damn. Damn. Damn. He wanted to kiss her so badly it felt like his life depended on pressing his lips to hers.

"You're never going to read it."

Her words caught him off guard. "Why not?"

"Keep your voice down." She darted a glance around the library.

"Why not?" he whispered this time.

"I can't let you read it. It's too private." She turned back to her book and pulled it just a little closer to her face.

"Marilyn..."

"Yes, Dante," she said into the gigantic history book.

"Look at me, Marilyn."

"I can't."

Dante had to force himself to keep his face straight. He desperately wanted to smile. "You just looked at me."

"Yes, but I had talked myself into it. I know I shouldn't tell you that, but..."

"Look at me, Cheeks."

Her bleached blonde head slowly lifted and her eyes connected with his.

"Did you sleep well?"

A bright blush stained her cheeks before spreading to her whole face, neck, and shoulders. It was the cutest thing Dante had ever seen. "Yes... I mean I didn't sleep any worse. I actually slept really soundly. I'm... I'm going to shut up now."

"Marilyn?"

"Yeah?"

"Last night was beautiful."

"Uh... yes it was."

"I'm going to read your story, Marilyn."

She blinked up at him. "Why?"

"Because it's a part of you and I want to get to know you."

"Oh."

Dante smiled at the dumbfounded look on her face. "So can I read it?" *Can I get to know you?*

"How can I say no to you now? I guess I better finish it quickly so you can read the whole thing."

"I guess so." Dante suspected he was falling for his assignment. Apparently the blue balls were getting to his brain.

A woman's soul-wrenching scream vibrated through the air, cutting off whatever he was about to admit to himself.

Marilyn lowered her book. "Did you hear that?"

"What?" he asked in his best confused voice.

"Did you just hear a woman scream?"

"I thought you were writing a romance. I didn't know there were murders in romances, or is she screaming for a different reason?"

"Never mind," Marilyn said before slumping back in her seat, obviously disappointed.

“Don’t worry. You can do it. You can conquer that story.” Dante headed for the restroom. He could feel Marilyn’s gaze following him. He winked at her before pulling the door shut and locking it.

The last thing he needed was for someone to see him changing. His secret identity was everything. If the Squad found out he had allowed someone to learn the identity of the Bellissimo Bandit, they’d have a fit.

Dante jerked the suit jacket off. The sound of his heartfelt curse vibrated off the slick tile walls. He quickly got the tie and button down shirt off. The problem was his pants. He had ignored the arousal that came with being around Marilyn. Unfortunately, ignoring it didn’t mean it didn’t exist.

He had a monumental hard-on. That little fact made it difficult as hell to get his zipper down.

“Son of a bitch,” he growled as he moved his dick away from the zipper. After long moments, he was wearing only his Bellissimo suit. Lucky for him the Squad designer had created a suit he could wear under his butler’s outfit.

He picked up the pants and fished out a small folded black bag. Dante placed the suit in the waterproof bag and shoved the bag into the toilet tank, under the black bobbing ball.

Dante headed for the window. He quickly levered himself up and slipped out, smiling when he hit the ground with a soft thud. Slipping through windows was getting easier and easier every day.

If only he had gotten this much practice climbing in and out of bedroom windows in high school.

Since he didn’t have Bella, his bike, he had to run. It cost him precious moments. He was afraid he wouldn’t get there in time. A man was dragging a struggling woman into the dark alley just across the street from the library. As Dante ran, he pulled his taser from its holster and fired. The attacker jerked and stumbled in surprise and pain as the jolt hit his shoulder. He let go of his victim.

Dante reached them before the attacker could regain his equilibrium. He grabbed the man and punched him in the face. Dante turned to the woman and yelled, "Go, now. Go to the library and have them call the police."

The woman stumbled before gaining her footing and running like her life depended on it. She looked back over her shoulder and screamed, "Watch out!"

Dante only had a moment to react to the warning. He ducked and felt the air sweep past him as the knife the attacker wielded glanced past him. He stepped back, barely evading the next strike. The man's movements were clumsy and slow. He was still disoriented from the zap of the taser. Dante kicked out with his left foot, hitting the man in the same shoulder.

"I'm tired of you do-gooder bastards," the man growled before lunging at him.

Dante sidestepped the knife blade and brought his hand down hard against the attacker's arm in a chopping movement. The man screamed in pain and grabbed his arm. Dante took advantage of the man's preoccupation and kicked out his knee. The masked man immediately fell to the ground.

Dante planted a knee in the man's back. With a quick, practiced maneuver he had the man handcuffed.

Marilyn ran into the alley. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Excuse me?" What the hell did she think he was doing? Playing cops and robbers?

"You careless bastard."

Dante's eyes widened with shock. He picked the masked man up off the ground. "Why am I a careless bastard?"

She folded her arms under her breasts. He could see that her nipples had hardened in the chill autumn air. His cock stirred in the confines of his tight, supple, leather pants. "You could have hit her."

He stared at her for several seconds. "I'm a bastard because I could have hit her?"

She shook her head at him. "You don't care about anything but capturing the bad guy, do you? You don't even care that you could have hurt the woman you were supposed to be helping."

"No, he doesn't." The masked man threw in his two cents.

Dante couldn't help shaking him. Hard. He took several steps toward Marilyn, dragging the cuffed man behind him. "I don't put innocents in the way of harm. She was never in danger of being hurt. I'm an excellent shot."

Marilyn didn't back down from the challenge. They stood toe to toe. She lifted her head and stared up at him. "Excuse me if I don't think she would have appreciated putting her life on the line when all she has to rely on is *your* word about *your* excellent skills with a taser."

"Look lady, I don't know if anyone told you this, but I'm the good guy."

"Are you really? How's a girl to know when you go around shooting men in the shoulders and wrecking civilian cars?"

Dante snorted. His eyes squinted as he looked down at her angry face. "For one second you really had me convinced you cared about that woman's safety. But this has nothing to do with her, does it? This is all about your precious car."

"No, this... is all about you," she said and jabbed one little finger into his chest. "This is about your disregard for those around you, the people you're supposed to be helping." She emphasized every other word with a poke.

"Look, lady," Dante rumbled in a voice that sounded like the thunder before the storm.

"Stop calling me that. I'm not your lady," Marilyn snapped.

"Thank God for that," Dante thundered before wrapping his free arm around her waist and pressing her body against his. His mouth descended upon her lips with a deep hunger that shocked him with its intensity.

His lips moved against hers. She murmured something soft. Dante thrust his tongue into her mouth to sample the honeyed interior. Her taste rolled through his body, exciting him. He thrust in and out of her mouth, stroked her teeth and flicked her

tongue. "Oh God." Her fingers tangled in his hair, pulling Dante closer for a soul drowning kiss.

"Mr. Bellissimo."

Dante came to back to earth in a mind-jarring rush at the sound of the officer's voice. He jumped away from Marilyn, away from the heated embrace they had been sharing in the middle of the alley.

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Marilyn saw the action. Her face, so full of arousal and awe, crumbled into a mask of disgust and anger. Dante immediately wanted to go to her, tell her he wasn't repulsed by their kiss, but by the fact that their first kiss had occurred in an alleyway with a criminal at his feet.

But he couldn't go to her because he wasn't Dante, but the Bellissimo Bandit, and the Bellissimo Bandit didn't know Marilyn like Dante did. The Bellissimo did not share Dante's feelings for Marilyn. Therefore the Bandit could not tell Marilyn how much their kiss had affected him.

He turned and regarded the officer.

## Chapter Six

### The Super O

When Marilyn got home that night she was mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted. She had never felt so down and out in her life.

*As your sixteen-year-old niece would say, Marilyn, you suck at life. First you started to fall for the Butler, who you let cop one hell of a feel.* She blushed at the memory of Dante's hands between her legs.

*And then there was the damned Bandit.* She groaned when his masked face skittered through her mind. If only the kiss hadn't felt like heaven.

*Too bad you were the only one who felt that way.* There was no denying the look of self-disgust on his face. The Bandit had been repulsed by the fact that he'd touched her.

Marilyn closed the front door behind her. She suddenly wished she had not asked Dante to drop her off. She did not want to be alone.

She glanced at her watch. It was nearly ten o'clock. But she didn't feel like sleeping. She was too... aroused to even think about sleep.

For one moment she considered dispelling some of the sexual tension humming through her system. She immediately discarded the idea for the same reason sleep was not an option. Marilyn was sure that if she masturbated or slept she would see *him*. And the last thing she needed was to see the Bandit either when she came or slept.

She headed straight to the kitchen and pulled out her laptop. Marilyn figured she could keep writing until she couldn't keep her head up. Then she wouldn't have to worry about seeing either the Bandit or Dante in her dreams because at the moment she was pissed as hell at both of them.

They were both bastards.

She lifted the screen and pulled up her manuscript. She scrolled to the only scene she was capable of working on at the moment. Marilyn felt ridiculous writing it, but she knew it was some of the best stuff she had ever written. She had finished the scene and was halfway through reading it over when the doorbell surprised her. Marilyn glanced at the clock. It was near midnight. "Who the hell?" she murmured as she made her way to the door.

She looked through the keyhole. The crazies had been known to come out at night. Plus, considering her day...

Marilyn's mouth dropped open when she saw who was standing on her stoop. She yanked open the door. Dante ran his fingers through his hair and held up a bottle of wine. "You didn't look so good when I dropped you off, so I figured I'd check up on you."

She stood wide-eyed in the doorway for several seconds. Her brain was so frazzled and exhausted it took her a moment to process what he said. When she did she assumed she had imagined the words, so great was her need for him. "Excuse me?"

"I'm not even sure why I'm here. I just know that I didn't think you should be alone. Or maybe I didn't want to be alone," he muttered in response.

After several more seconds he gave her a cocky grin that made the butterflies in her stomach fly around as if they were on acid. "Aren't you going to let me in?"

Marilyn considered the question for half of a second. According to the butterflies in her stomach and the muscles clenching in her sex, if she invited Dante into her home, she would be letting him into her bed.

She stepped aside.

He closed the door behind him and locked it. Marilyn took the bottle of wine and made her way to the kitchen.

"I'm sorry about this evening." Marilyn's hand stopped halfway to the top shelf that held the wine glasses. Dante leaned above her and grabbed two glasses. She turned to him.



"Why would you say that? It's not like you're responsible." She took the empty glass he held out.

"Aren't I? If I had --"

"What?" she said, cutting him off. "If you had been there you would have been able to stop the Bandit from sexually harassing me?"

He jerked and spilled some of the wine he was pouring into her glass. "Sexual harassment? Don't you think that's a little harsh?"

She grimaced at him. "No, I don't," she said with a shake of her head. "He had no right to touch me that way."

"I think you got off lucky. You could have been hurt. You had no reason to go into that alley."

"I thought there was someone who needed my help and I went to help her."

Marilyn could feel the anger simmering under his skin. It was evident in the hard planes of his face, in the burning light in his dark eyes. "And what do you think you would have done to save her if the Bandit wasn't there?"

"Are you defending what he did?" One dark eyebrow arched to emphasize her question.

Dante stared down at her for several seconds. Marilyn was so close she could see his nostrils flare and his eyes darken in anger. The man was livid. "I'm asking you what you would have done. How could you put yourself in that kind of danger?"

"Did you drive all the way over here to yell at me?"

He blinked at her and seemed to quell his anger. "No. I didn't. I'm sorry." His voice was still a growl that slid over Marilyn, but its touch was different, more caressing, more arousing.

"Dante?"

"Yeah?" He seemed to hear her pleas for comfort. He wrapped one arm around her shoulder. All traces of his anger were gone.

"Kiss me."

He had just taken a sip of his wine. He choked on it, before croaking out, "Excuse me?"

"You heard me." The confidence she had been feeling was nonexistent. Like his anger, all traces of it were gone.

"I want to make sure you won't claim I sexually harassed you."

Marilyn thought he was toying with her, playing with her emotions, and then she looked into his eyes and realized he wanted to make sure that she got what she asked, and only what she asked for.

"Dante, I want you to kiss me, make love to me." She put her glass on the kitchen counter and placed her hands on the hard planes of his chest.

"Just making sure," Dante whispered against her lips before his mouth brushed against hers.

Marilyn opened her mouth for his kiss, for his tongue, and allowed herself to slip under the wave of desire she had been battling since he walked through the door. She clung to him, threading her fingers through his midnight hair.

Dante's fingers grasped her hips, lifting her and placed her on the kitchen countertop. Marilyn heard the sound of glass hitting her marble counter. Her hip had knocked over her wine glass. It wasn't until the wine seeped into her sweatpants that she understood exactly what happened.

Dante seemed to notice the moisture at the same time. "What the hell?"

"Island," she whispered against his lips. He paused for a scant second before picking her up and carrying her to the island.

When he set her down, she teased, "Now, you have to take off my pants. They're wet."

Dante simply grabbed the elastic band of her pants and pulled them down, placing wet, hot kisses against the beating pulse at her neck. Then his hands moved up her thighs, her belly, to settle on the firm mounds of her breasts. Marilyn was suddenly very thankful she had taken off her bra when she came home from the library, because all that was standing between her and Dante's hands was a paper-thin old tee shirt from

undergrad. His hands felt deliciously warm on her breasts as he massaged them and plucked her nipples.

She gasped against his neck. Her hands moved to the hem of his shirt and slid up the sculpted valley that made up his six-pack stomach before settling atop his beating heart. Marilyn gave a devilish smile before she captured both flat nipples and tweaked them.

"Son of a... No more games."

One hand moved under her panties to touch her swollen sex and brushed against her clit. Marilyn shivered. Dante growled her name before pulling the panties off.

"No more games," she whispered, pulling off her tee shirt.

He held her neck, lifting her face for his kiss. His lips, hot and hungry, devoured her sweet mouth. She moaned against him when his hands covered her breasts. He skimmed both thumbs over the engorged buds of her nipples before plucking them.

His deep, pleasuring kiss ignited a feeling of urgency that left Marilyn panting for him. Her hands drifted down his front until they landed on his zipper. She quickly unzipped his jeans and pushed them down his hips. Next came his boxers.

Marilyn moaned against Dante's nipping lips when her hand brushed against his naked cock. She shivered at the feel of his long, thick length.

Marilyn felt like she had been waiting an eon for him, to be with him. One small hand wrapped around the length of Dante's thick shaft. She moved it up his cock until her thumb brushed against the mushroom-tipped head.

"Condom. Now!" Dante shivered, reached into his denims' back pocket and pulled out his wallet. He started to open it when Marilyn brushed her index finger over the slit in his cock's bulbous head. He dropped his wallet in her naked lap.

"Where is it?" Marilyn asked as she flipped through the flaps in his wallet. She shook it. "Never mind," she murmured when the condom fell in her lap. Dante lowered his head and brushed his lips against her mouth. Marilyn instinctively opened herself and deepened the kiss.

She fluttered when Dante's fingers danced on her thighs. He grabbed the condom from her hands and quickly sheathed himself. She gasped when he pushed himself deep inside her pussy. She was so slick, so wet, that it only took one thrust for him to fully embed himself inside of her.

She groaned when he was fully seated inside of her. He moved his hips pulling his cock out of her a few inches. Her fingers dug into the taut muscles of his shoulders.

"Mmmm," she moaned.

His fingers pressed against the cheeks of her ass. Their long length placed them dangerously close to the division between her buttocks. He moved his hand and one finger pressed against her rosette at the same time that he surged back inside of her.

She opened her mouth to scream his name, but his kiss muffled her voice. The emotions she was feeling were so strong, so demanding, she needed to scream to the rafters.

Marilyn savagely broke off the kiss and groaned. Her lips pressed against the sweat-slickened skin of his neck. Her passion-glazed eyes caught sight of one vein bulging with the intensity of the desire coursing between them. Marilyn couldn't help licking a hot path on top of the pulsing vein.

Marilyn's moan drifted between them, coasting on the pungent air as she swallowed the salty taste of Dante's skin.

Dante pulled out of her until only the bulbous head of his cock was sheathed inside of her. She yelled his name, dug her nails into his shoulders and begged him for the satisfaction she could only find in his arms. His answering wicked smile was a flash of mischievous desire. Dante thrust into Marilyn's clinging wet heat with a powerfully deep surge that sent her flying over the edge.

Her eyes fluttered shut and her mouth opened to let forth a deafening scream as she convulsed beneath him. Her vaginal muscles clenched so tightly as she came that Marilyn felt as though her body was imploding on itself. Her nails dug into his shoulders so deeply that she drew blood when she climaxed.

Her orgasm was like nothing she had ever felt. Even the orgasm in the tub didn't compare.

When she came down from her peak, her eyes slowly opened to gaze at Dante. The hard look on his face was almost frightening. She gasped when his long fingers tangled in her hair, lifting her face for his kiss. He thrust his tongue into her mouth to tango with hers. After a few heated moments, Dante broke off the kiss, growled her name, and pressed his sweaty forehead against hers.

Then he pumped himself into her. She was so sensitive, so sexually aroused that with every thrust she climbed to the peak she had just descended from. She screamed her satisfaction seconds before he groaned her name.

\* \* \*

Marilyn woke the moment his warm, callused fingers brushed against the thatch of hair at the top of her thighs. He whispered her name before placing a soft, hot kiss against one knee. Marilyn groaned his name and spread her legs.

"That's it," he groaned in a voice as deep as the ocean. His fingers tightened on her thighs and spread them further. Marilyn felt the soft strands of his hair on her skin seconds before his lips pressed against her nether lips.

His velvet tongue licked a path down the slit of her pussy before making its way back to her clit. He flicked the turgid head several times, until she was slick and wet with her desire. Then when she was screaming for mercy, he moved up her body to place a searing kiss on her lips.

Marilyn could taste herself on his tongue. She moaned when he unclasped her legs from the small of his back. She immediately felt bereft, needing the sensation of his hard skin caressing hers. Marilyn watched as his muscular, honey-colored arm pulled open the top drawer of the nightstand and retrieved a small, red package. She knelt on the bed.

Dante came to stand beside her, heavy cock bobbing in the air. She eyed it, fascinated. She hadn't actually had the chance to look him over.

He was beautiful.

And he was hers.

She wrapped her hand around the stalk of his cock and watched as the large organ grew. "Impressive."

"It gets better." He pushed against her shoulders and grabbed her thighs. Marilyn found herself hanging off the edge of the bed. Her ass was barely supported. Before she could move back to resettle herself, Dante was between her thighs, nudging his cock at the entrance of her pussy.

"Oh hell." He felt larger, wider than she remembered. Or maybe she was just sore.

And then he was fully inside of her. "Fuck, you're tight."

She felt tight. She felt like he was stretching her to her limits. He felt absolutely wonderful. Marilyn clutched Dante's biceps as he thrust into her. She closed her eyes and moaned at the feel of him pushing past the tight fist of her pussy muscles. Heat streaked through her body. She was hot, sweaty and full of passion. The pleasure that he elicited with his thrusts started at her pussy and spread through her body. He speared her over and over and over again, pushing her higher.

With a gasping cry Marilyn reached her elusive peak and cried out Dante's name.

"One more time," he groaned, thrusting in and out of her tight pussy, pushing her back up the cliff she had just departed. When Marilyn was sure she was going to die from pleasure overload she exploded. She cried out a wordless scream as her body shattered and her pussy muscles tightened almost painfully with her pleasure.

Seconds later, Dante shouted and climaxed.

## Chapter Seven

### Pretty Gossip

Marilyn had not been at the park for more than five minutes when the young man approached her. She watched him stride up to her, thinking of all the possible reasons why this young, gorgeous man could be approaching her.

None of them were plausible. The last time Marilyn had been approached by a good looking man, he turned out to be a paid-for gift from her best friend that she could not return.

"Hello," she said seconds before he reached her.

He waved in response and took the seat across from her at the little table. "Hi. My name is Michael."

"Hi, Michael."

He stared at her. She could feel him trying to figure out what she was thinking, what she was hiding behind her glasses. "Aren't you going to tell me your name?"

"Should I?"

He laughed. "In this day and age, when you can't even trust your mother? No, you shouldn't but I'm asking you to take a chance."

"I've learned not to be the trusting kind."

"You're right. I came over here because I was curious."

Marilyn waited for several seconds for him to continue speaking before taking the bait. "Curious about what?"

"What a pretty girl like you is doing alone in the park with her computer."

"Typing."

"And may I ask what you're typing?"

"You may ask, but you're not going to get an answer."

"A woman with secrets. I like it and I'm intrigued."

She laughed at his playful manner.

"Why the park?"

Marilyn shrugged. "The library is out of the question and the house has too many distractions. The park seemed a good idea, at least before I was interrupted."

"Why is the library out of the question? No offense, but it seems like the perfect place to get work done."

"I had a little run-in there," she muttered before turning back to her computer.

"What happened at the library?"

"It wasn't anything really."

"Were you at the public library last night?"

"Why?"

"I was just hoping that you weren't the woman the man was attacking." There was so much emotion in Michael's voice. He seemed genuinely concerned.

"No, I wasn't that unfortunate. I was just lucky enough to meet the Bellissimo Bandit himself."

"Well, that must have been interesting."

"Interesting is the word."

He paused. His forehead wrinkled with confusion. "What happened?"

"Let's say I'm not part of his fan base."

"Are you the woman the officers found with the Bandit?"

"Yes, I'm that slut." Marilyn had been embarrassed and angry when she woke to find a picture of herself on the front page of the city newspaper. Luckily, the article had not named her. Not that she hadn't received a million calls from those who knew her personally.

"It's hard to compete with the Bellissimo Bandit. You must have been..."

"I wasn't exactly planning on it." She chewed her bottom lip. Why did it feel wrong talking to this man about the Bandit? But unlike everyone she knew, he wouldn't simply paint the Bandit in the best light.



From behind her glasses, she looked at Michael critically. "What do you know about the kiss?"

"Well, from what I read and heard, the cops came to apprehend the attacker and found him on the ground and the Bandit kissing a woman, who didn't appear to enjoy his attention."

"That's one way to put it."

"How would you put it?"

She eyed him dispassionately. She had been having one hell of a week and no one seemed to want to hear about it except this man. So... "I felt like I was being sexually assaulted. I mean there I was in the alleyway trying to save some woman I heard scream and the next thing I know he's grabbing me and kissing me."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. As far as I'm concerned that damned Bandit is no good guy. I mean first he wrecked my car, which neither the city nor the Bandit is willing to pay for, and then he kisses me in a dark alley, holding me against my will."

"You must be traumatized."

"Traumatized? No. I'm pretty freaking pissed."

\* \* \*

Thirty minutes later Alexander walked away from Marilyn. He looked left and right. Only when he was sure no one was watching him did he approach the white van parked across the street. The door immediately slid open.

A buxom brunette stood in the doorway. "Michael?" she asked, one brown eyebrow cocked.

He flashed a smug grin. "I figured it was a lot more approachable than Alexander. Plus, I was worried she might recognize my name from the paper."

"Lex, you're assuming she reads the paper."

"True, she does write for our enemy." His eerie smile nearly split his face. "That fact alone makes this coup all the more sweet."

"I think you'll get the corner office."

"I better get the damned office. Hubert has waited a lifetime to cream the *Daily Chronicle*."

## Chapter Eight

### Taming the Shrew

“What the hell are you proposing?” The cold, hard voice thundered through the room. Even the shadows that cloaked the board members seemed to shrink in fear of his icy anger. She glanced at The Bastard with emotionless eyes. The shadows had shifted enough to allow her to see his bottomless midnight eyes. They were so dark and cold, they reminded Sabrina of the abyss that sinners feared falling into.

They reminded her too much of a cold, endless hell.

Sabrina stifled the urge to swallow and instead took a silent, but deep breath. Her hands clenched into fists beneath the heavy, wooden desk. She focused on the carved emblem of the Squad in the center of the table for a few moments, just long enough for her to compose herself.

She didn’t dare allow The Bastard to see how he affected her.

She had known she wouldn’t be well received. She’d expected his frigidity, but the cold blast against her heated skin was still utterly shocking.

“We are losing the public,” she said in her strongest authoritative voice. Whether he liked it or not, she was a member of the team. And had a right to voice her opinion.

“And it’s your job to make sure we have the public on our side. Are you saying you can’t do that?”

He was purposely insulting her. It was obvious that he didn’t respect her, didn’t want her there, and didn’t believe she was capable of doing the job that they had hired her for, but the vigilantes weren’t making it easy. They kept breaking their own rules.

She eyed him the way a predator would look at another, one that was slightly more dangerous. The Bastard lacked the morals she lived by.

He had made this fact very clear over the last couple of months. He would do anything and everything in his power as Chairman of the Board to remove her from the Squad.

She gave him a sharp smile full of bright teeth.

“Even the best publicist would have a difficult time convincing the public that the Squad and its members are interested in helping them when one of them is sexually molesting women in dark alleys.”

A deafening silence thundered in the room at her words. Several of the board members grunted and shifted in their seats. For one long moment, Sabrina was worried she had said too much, gone too far. The Bastard had finally pushed her over the edge.

“I have to admit that this does look bad, but taking him off the streets?”

Sabrina turned to the source of the voice and almost knelt at his feet in thanks. Instead, she emphasized her point. “What separates you from the criminals that you guys hand over to the police?”

“We’re the good guys,” another voice chimed in. The room burst into laughter at that.

Sabrina shook her head. “No, you’re not the good guys. You are the guys the public sees and believes do good. You all are the men and women the public trusts.”

“Are you saying we’re losing the public’s trust?”

“I’m saying if you don’t do something very soon, you will. And once you lose that there’s no going back.”

\* \* \*

Dante didn’t see Ryu walk into the training room. He didn’t even notice he wasn’t alone until the other man was literally right in front of his face. Dante leaned back against the training dummy he had been using as his target.

“You’ve been benched.”

For several seconds Dante assumed he had misheard the other man. It was difficult to concentrate when all he could think about was the way Marilyn’s mouth had

felt on his, how her lips had hungrily tasted him, how they had devoured one another when they finally came together.

"What?" he said before attempting to put the dummy back. Mark, the Squad's trainer, was very particular about where things belonged. He always wanted everything in its place.

"You've been benched. The Squad voted less than an hour ago."

This time Dante heard Ryu. "What the hell are you talking about, benched? I didn't get my shit stolen. I didn't crash anything. I --"

"You sexually harassed a civilian," Ryu said, cutting into his tirade.

"She isn't a civilian. She's Marilyn." Wait until he got his hands on...

"She's Marilyn," Ryu said softly. The smirk on his face didn't make Dante feel quite comfortable.

"Lay off it, man." He ran a hand through his dark hair. "Benched?" he muttered as he regarded the other man. "Really, benched? I mean... was it really that bad?"

"Don't ask me, man. I barely understand what happened at the meeting."

"Ryu?" He could feel when the other man was lying and right then Ryu was lying. There was something he didn't want to tell Dante.

"You never should have slept with the Squad's publicist."

Dante's mouth tightened with anger. "They benched me on the recommendation of a publicist who has never worked in the field? She wasn't the Squad's publicist at the time. She was *a publicist*. And trust me, if I'd known she was the one Law had recommended I would have stayed clear. Plus, it was a one-night stand and she was the one who didn't want to be with a man who made his money tending to others' needs."

The compassion and understanding Dante saw in Ryu's eyes didn't make him feel better. It made him feel like hell. "To be perfectly honest, Sabrina was very convincing. For a second, even I thought about benching you. The thing is, man, she had some good points. Our reputation is the only thing that separates us from the bad guys."

"It is your only asset."

Dante turned and glared at Sabrina. "I hope you're satisfied," he said softly before pushing the dummy back in its final resting place. "There's one less vigilante in the field because of you."

The sharp clip of Sabrina's heels sounded with every step she took toward him. "I hate to break it to you, lover boy, but this is not about us. This is about the Squad. The public thinks you're a menace thanks to your girlfriend's interview with that rumor rag, *Hot Truths*."

Dante glanced up just in time to see Ryu backing out of the room. When Ryu realized Dante was watching him, he saluted and mouthed the words, "Good luck."

He turned back to Sabrina. "I need to be in the field. I'm an agent, a vigilante, for God's sake."

"I know how much this job means to you."

"Do you?"

She placed a hand on his shoulder. He was forced to look down in her eyes. "I do understand, Dante, but you've become a liability to the other men and women who love this job."

"What am I supposed to do, just quit? Leave it all behind? What the hell would you do?"

"You don't have to quit, love. You've just got to do damage control."

"Damage control?"

"You have to get her to take back her complaint, change her mind."

"You don't know Marilyn." The woman had a grudge against the Bellissimo Bandit. She wasn't going to listen to the "Bandit." She was more liable to try and strangle the Bandit. And Dante couldn't come to her as the "Butler," because of the whole secret identity issue.

Sabrina smirked at him. "I've never known you to back down from a challenge."

"This woman is not a challenge. She's impossible."

"Take some advice from Shakespeare and tame the shrew."

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Green Karma**

Marilyn was mad as hell and she wasn't going to take it.

She could not believe her luck. First the man she was... sleeping with tried to convince her that the asshole known as the Bellissimo Bandit was, in fact, not an asshole. Then as if her day hadn't been bad enough, her bastard ex had called her out of the blue.

She lifted her head to the sky. "Look, I know we're not supposed to complain, but I'm not sure I can handle much more. Just give me a break."

All she wanted to do was bail out Robert, head back home, and finish her chapter. She was so lost in thought picturing her next scene that she didn't realize her cell phone was ringing until the man in front of her yelled, "Lady, pick it up already."

With clumsy hands Marilyn searched for the damned sliver of metal that was the latest rage in cellular technology. She flipped it open.

"Where are you?"

She melted at the sound of the voice. Even if he was angry as hell.

"At the Main Street police station."

"What?" Dante yelled.

Marilyn could barely hear him. She wasn't surprised when she lost her signal. "Excuse me," she called to a cop. Mere moments later, he had her fill out some paperwork, make bail, and then he was leading Robert to her.

Bailing Robert out of jail didn't make her feel anything but sorry for him.

He looked so rumpled, scared and shell-shocked. "Marilyn," he said before reaching out to her. She instinctively took a step back to avoid his arms. They were not

on hugging terms. They had stopped being on hugging terms when she had found the sex tape Robert and his lover/secretary made together.

"You're out of jail, you've got all your limbs, and I have two deadlines to make. It was nice seeing you again, Robert." She softened the words with a strained smile.

"Marilyn, sweetheart, I know you're mad at me. I've done some things that were not nice to you."

"You call sleeping with your secretary and taping it using my video camera *not nice*, Robert?"

Robert glanced around nervously and took a step toward her. Marilyn had to stifle the sigh on her lips. The man had always been a little dramatic for her tastes. "We can talk about this when we get home, sweetheart."

"Home?" She shook her head. "I'm going home. You're going wherever you're going, but your home is not my home."

"Marilyn," Robert whined. "I don't have anywhere to go. Allan changed the locks to my condo."

She stared at him for a few seconds, trying to figure out how his reasoning made sense. It didn't. "So go to a hotel, Robert. You cannot stay with me."

"I know you're mad at me --"

"Look, you left me for him. You cannot come to me for help. The answer is no. Plain old no."

Robert glanced at the cop behind him and shuddered before turning back to Marilyn. "But I don't have any money. He took everything," he said in a high-pitched voice that grated on her nerves. She really hated it when he whined.

"The answer is still no. No, you cannot come to the ex-girlfriend you cheated on for help. No. No. No."

Robert grabbed her arm and pulled her to him. "Damn it, Marilyn."

"What the hell is going on here?"

Both she and Robert froze at the sound of the soft, deadly voice. She slowly turned her head until her eyes collided with the source of the menacing sound.



"I thought you were in trouble," Dante said. Even if she hadn't heard the anger in his voice, she would have known exactly how he felt by the way he stood with his legs wide apart and his arms crossed over his chest. And then there was the stone-carved face he gave them.

To my left, angry Alpha male, she thought before licking her lips. "Robert and I were just about to leave. Separately."

"Who the hell is he?" Robert asked.

Marilyn saw Dante glance at the hand that held her. "I suggest you let her go," he said softly.

"Who the hell are you?" Robert asked Dante. Marilyn closed her eyes and prayed for a savior. Preferably, neither man. They were both too testosterone driven at the moment to satisfy her needs.

"Who the fuck are you?"

Marilyn's eyes popped open at Robert's coarse words. Dante's gaze connected with hers. They asked her the same question Robert had just asked him. Who was he?

"Uh," she muttered as she chewed her lip. *Dante is the man I've been having wild, uninhibited sex with...* "Dante is my... boyfriend."

"Boyfriend?" Robert screeched.

Dante's dark eyes flickered back to the hand that held Marilyn. Robert must have noticed the other man's penetrating gaze because he gasped, let go of Marilyn, and pushed her away. She stumbled and started to fall. Dante's strong hands caught her seconds before her knees would have hit the hard concrete floor.

Marilyn suddenly felt the need to blink back the threatening tears in her eyes. His large, warm hands were on her shoulders, comforting her with his presence. And as much as she hated to admit it, she was reassured by him. She threw her arms around his waist and pulled his hard length closer to her.

Dante's hands moved from her shoulder, skimmed her back, until they were on the plump curves of her hips. He pulled her closer, so that she nestled in to the tight embrace.

"I'm so glad you're okay," he whispered into her hair. She looked up at him and saw real concern in his eyes. At that moment Marilyn realized just how strongly she felt for Dante.

What was going on between them was more than just sex.

She loved him.

Marilyn Mao was in love with Dante Pizzimenti. Damn. She just wished she had seen it coming. She was in love with her Naked Butler.

He slowly lowered his head, brushing his lips across hers in a sweet, soft kiss. She immediately hungered for more. His petal soft lips against hers were just enough to ignite a hunger that burned in her soul.

"Take me home," she whispered against his lips. She stood on her toes so she could touch her lips against his in a soft kiss that was nothing like the one he had given her. This kiss, her kiss wasn't meant to comfort. It was meant to arouse the senses. He pulled back from her. Marilyn looked up into his eyes and saw she had accomplished her goal.

Dante's cognac eyes had darkened to the color of dark roasted coffee. They were almost black with his desire. He grabbed her hand, turned and almost dragged her out of the room.

"Marilyn?" Robert called.

"Get a damned hotel room," Dante yelled over his shoulder as he pushed the door open. He shoved Marilyn through it. She darted a look at Robert. "Don't bother calling, Robert."

When they were standing in front of the police station, Dante pulled her close to him. "If you ever scare me like that again, I will paddle your ass so hard you can't sit for a week."

"You promise?" she muttered into his leather jacket.

"Don't you dare tempt me. I'm not in the mood right now," he said before pulling her toward the car. He held her close so she didn't feel the chill of the cold, autumn wind.

She pressed a soft kiss against his lips when he opened the door for her. She smiled. Dante was such a gentleman. Who knew chivalry still existed?

Marilyn thought of the man she'd left in the police station. Dante was nothing like him, which might explain why the emotions she felt for Dante were so different from those Robert had stirred. With Robert, she'd felt comfort. She had simply gotten used to him and had gotten comfortable with the knowledge that Robert was her boyfriend. But Dante...

She was scared that she had fallen in too deep. She was afraid that she was the only one who had fallen. She feared that she would never be able to live without him. That she needed him. He made her feel an endless, stirring rush of emotions.

He did not make her feel comfortable.

She stirred at the sound of his door slamming shut. He glanced at her before thrusting his key in the ignition. When the sound of the engine purring settled he turned to her. One callused hand caressed her cheek. "You're so exhausted. You shouldn't have come here so late. You need sleep."

She smiled at his honest concern. "I didn't have a choice. Robert just called me."

He stared into her eyes for long moments, searching for something Marilyn couldn't name. "What?" she finally asked curiously.

"Did you want him to..."

"Dante, I want you to take me home... with you."

He blinked twice before responding. "I'm not sure that's a good idea." He grabbed the wheel and pulled out of the parking lot.

Marilyn turned to the window and gazed out into the darkness that lay outside. When she acknowledged that she wanted to spend the night with Dante, more than she needed to pretend that she didn't need him, she spoke. "Why?"

She didn't dare turn around. It was one thing to ask the question. Another thing to see his face when the man she was in love with told her why he didn't want to spend the night with her.

He sighed. She could feel him watching her. When the needles down her spine got so painful she was sure she was going to scream, he spoke. "I'm not sure I can be gentle tonight."

She turned slowly to him. He was gripping the steering wheel so hard his knuckles were white. "What if I don't want gentle?"

Dante flinched and his jaw clenched tighter. "Absolutely not."

"Dante, I want to be with you. Tonight."

He was angry. Marilyn didn't need to hear the bubbling rage in his soft tone to know that. She just knew. He was enraged at the fact that he had found her in Robert's arms. Even if she hadn't wanted to be there. All that mattered was that she had been with another man.

Dante was angry and jealous.

He turned onto the highway that would take her home. "I said no. I could hurt you. I would hurt you."

"A little pain could be good. I know you. You wouldn't push me past my limit."

His gaze flickered to her. "Maybe I want to push you past your limit. Have you thought about that? Do you know what it's like for a man to think his woman is in trouble and not be able to do anything about it?" His fingers flexed around the wheel. "I'm feeling too much to be with you."

"I want all of you; everything there is that you are willing to give me. I trust you. I want you, Dante Pizzimenti."

He stared at the road. "I said no."

"Fine. If you don't take me home with you now, it's over, Dante."

He glanced at her before turning the wheel. Within a few moments he got off at an exit. "I hope you know what you're getting into, because I will take you like no man has ever taken you before, Marilyn."

"I know. I'm counting on it."

## Chapter Ten

### Power Play

Dante slowly closed the door to his apartment behind her. "Want something to drink? I have beer and wine."

Marilyn shook her head no.

"Are you hungry?"

She gave him a soft, slow smile. The lines around his full mouth indicated his tension. He grimaced down at her. "Are you sure you don't want something to drink?"

She ignored his question. "Why don't you give me a tour?" Marilyn said before heading down the dark hallway she had noticed when she entered the apartment.

"Marilyn... I'm not... We're not... I've changed my mind."

She stopped in front of one of the doors. "What's in here?"

"It's a bathroom."

"Oh. What about this one?" She pointed to the door down and across the way.

He stalled. She couldn't help the smile that split her face. "What? No tour, Dante?" It was unlocked. With a simple turn she opened his bedroom door.

She stood in the doorway for a second. Marilyn knew that once she walked over the threshold there would be no turning back. She took a breath, flicked the light on, and stepped forward.

"Damn it, Marilyn."

Marilyn murmured something noncommittal before turning from the dresser and sitting on the bed. She sat on the bed and bent at the waist to remove her sneakers.

"Marilyn."

"Cheeks." She took off her socks.

"Okay. Cheeks?" She could hear the smile in his voice.

She raised her head and caught his gaze. "Have you ever been bound?" he asked softly before turning and walking across the room. He opened the bottom drawer on a small side table against the wall.

He turned with a medium-sized bag in his hand. "Have you ever been bound, Cheeks?"

Her heart beat heavily in her chest. Her pussy moistened with arousal.

Her mouth was parched. Marilyn couldn't seem to get any saliva in her mouth. She shook her head no, knowing she couldn't speak the word.

He came to stand in front of her. "Good. I want to be the one and only man who shows you the pleasures of submission."

Dante slowly unzipped the black bag. He pulled out a handful of items and placed them on the bedside table. Marilyn's eyes immediately settled on the padded handcuffs.

The pleasures of submission.

She gulped and took a deep breath. Her gaze slid to his. He watched her for long seconds before speaking. "Have you changed your mind?"

"No," she croaked. She licked her dry lips. Her hands went to the edge of her simple white tee shirt.

"Stand up," he ordered. There was no other way to describe the tone of voice Dante used.

She stood.

Her heart beat a staccato rhythm against her ribcage. He stepped forward, closing the space between their heated bodies. His callused thumb caressed her red cheek. Marilyn could feel herself heating up with embarrassment and arousal.

She was a modern day woman who had carved out a niche for herself, a woman who was entirely independent, and she was feverishly aroused by the thought of this man chaining her to his bed and pleasuring her until she screamed for mercy. She was embarrassed about just how turned on she was by the thought of Dante's dominance.

*He hasn't even touched me and my panties are soaked.* Marilyn bit the inside of her mouth and dug her fingers into her palms. The tightness of her fists made her knuckles white with tension.

She was aroused, nervous and scared.

"Take off your shirt."

Marilyn nearly passed out from relief when he spoke. She had been waiting on a tight string for him to do something, say something. With shaking hands, she grabbed the hem of her shirt and pulled it over her head. She heard Dante suck in his breath when the tee was over her head, covering her face.

Marilyn held the white mass in her hands, in front of her breasts. Dante plucked it out of her hands and dropped it to the floor beside her feet.

"Take off your pants."

Marilyn glanced down at the sweatpants she wore. For a moment she contemplated backing out of the room and walking away from Dante. The fear she suddenly felt was so strong it almost choked her. Then she looked into Dante's eyes. The passion there wouldn't allow her to run away from the intense desire coursing between them.

She untied the strings on her sweatpants and allowed the bottom to fall to her feet. She toed the pants off to stand before him wearing only her bra and panties.

Dante took a deep breath and let it out through his mouth. "I love your body." He placed his hands on her shoulders and allowed his palms to roam over her body, down her arms before making their way back. "Absolutely beautiful."

For the first time ever Marilyn felt beautiful. The glistening desire in Dante's eyes made her feel absolutely beautiful. "Thank you," she muttered and then immediately felt foolish. "Thank you" didn't feel like the right response to his statement. But it was all she had.

His fingers brushed against the left cup molding her breast. "Pink satin looks fantastic on your skin." His index finger brushed against her nipple. It pebbled instantly.

"Dante." The word was a broken plea.

He pinched her nipple suddenly. Marilyn gasped at the shock and pleasure that washed over her body. "Is that what you wanted? Take off your bra and lie on the bed."

Marilyn unsnapped her bra and shrugged out of it. It dropped to land beside her shirt. She awkwardly crawled onto the bed.

"Spread your arms and your legs." In his palm, Dante held two pairs of handcuffs and some silk ties. She immediately complied and laid down spread eagle fashion.

He knelt on the bed beside her right leg. "Do you know how long I've waited for this? From the first moment I saw you, I wanted you... like this." He grabbed her leg and tied it to the bedpost.

"I want you to have me like this." He grabbed her other leg and tied it. She tentatively tested the bindings. Her leg didn't move more than a centimeter. She was fully bound to Dante's desire. It was the most liberating experience she had ever felt.

Dante crawled up the bed to kneel beside her head. She turned her head to glance at him. Her gaze collided with his pelvis. The large bulge there excited her. She knew what pleasure Dante was capable of when he put his mind to it, and now she was giving him free rein to pleasure her in his own way.

He grabbed her arm and brushed his fingers over her wrist. The shockingly tender touch sent shivers through her body. He placed the handcuffs around her wrist. He held her small wrist in one hand. The other long-fingered hand captured her face. "We need a safe word, something you can say when things get too... rough."

Marilyn licked her lips. "I don't need a safe word."

"We always need a safety word. Bellissimo, that's our safe word."

"Bellissimo," she gasped, shocked.

"Yes," he said with a harsh smile. "I doubt you'll be saying that in the heat of passion. The safe word needs to be something you'll only say when you want me to stop."



“Bellissimo,” she said softly, understanding dawning. No, she would never say that in her heat of passion.

One large, muscular leg swung over her waist, so that he was straddling her. Dante quickly cuffed her other arm to the bed. Marilyn’s belly muscles jumped beneath him.

Marilyn watched Dante slowly lower his dark head until his full mouth was less than an inch away from her. He stared into her eyes for long moments. Marilyn felt herself get impossibly wetter. There was nothing like staring into his eyes, waiting for his kiss. It did more for her libido than a vibrator had ever done.

She closed her eyes, parted her lips, and waited for him to close the abyss that separated them.

The sweetness of the kiss was shocking. Dante was full of so much tension and desire. Marilyn had mentally prepared herself for a bruising kiss. Instead Dante’s lips, soft and coaxing, moved over her mouth. Marilyn parted her lips and flicked her tongue against the seam of his mouth.

Dante growled something incomprehensible and opened his mouth for her. Her tongue stroked in to slide against his. She wanted more, needed more. Marilyn reached out to pull Dante closer to her. The cuffs on her wrists clinked, but her hands didn’t move. She would feel what he wanted her to feel. She would scream when he wanted her to scream. She would be entirely at his mercy.

Dante pulled away, breaking off the kiss, but not before nipping her bottom lip. She gasped at the teasing pain.

He knelt between her splayed legs and looked down at her bound body. Marilyn was so aroused she flinched when Dante placed his palms on her ankles. Her body broke out in shivers as he moved his rough, callused palms over her body, up her legs, thighs, and hips. They caressed the soft valley of her belly before molding the hills of her full breasts. She bit her lip to keep from gasping when he plucked both her nipples.

His cognac eyes darkened to a molten chocolate color. He teased the nubs again. Refusing to give in, Marilyn clenched her jaw against the groan that wanted to erupt from her soul.

He grinned at her. "So, you want to play?" he asked seconds before his hot mouth descended on her left nipple. Marilyn was so shocked by the amount of pleasure that she lurched off the bed. Dante adjusted himself so that his kneeling thighs sat under her buttocks, lifting her hips. The bulge between his jeans-clad thighs nudged against her sex.

Marilyn closed her eyes and sank into the pleasurable web Dante had spun. His mouth on her breast felt good enough to make her wish it would never end. Then there was the rough, teasing hand that played with her other nipple as he rubbed his swollen cock against her satin-clad sex.

She could feel herself running up to that ledge that promised ultimate satisfaction. With a blinding thought Marilyn realized she was going to orgasm. She panted, praying and waiting for that moment when her body would explode and shatter into a million beautiful pieces.

Dante stopped suddenly. He stopped suckling her breast. He stopped playing with her nipple. He stopped rubbing his cock against her pussy. He stopped and pulled away from her so the only part of her body touching him was her ass.

He gave her a harsh grin. "Impressive, Cheeks, but I wonder how many times you can handle coming down from a high before you scream for me."

He reached across the bed and grabbed two small items from the bedside table. Marilyn stared at his hands, trying to figure out what he was holding. "Nipple clamps," he said matter-of-factly.

She stared at him with wide eyes, wondering if she had misheard him. Then he smiled.

She hadn't misunderstood him.

Her body shook with apprehension and arousal as he leaned over her. Her gaze flickered between the clamp's open mouth and Dante's face. When the clamp was less

than an inch away from her painfully swollen nipple, he spoke. "Say the damned word, Marilyn."

She stared up at him defiant and mute. She would not say the safe word.

The air in her lungs hissed out of her mouth when he placed the first clamp on her nipple. After a moment, Marilyn realized the clamp provided much more pleasure than pain. Her nipple engorged with more blood, becoming more sensitive, more of a pleasure point.

Dante grabbed her face and forced her to look into his eyes. "Say it," he growled in a deadly, soft voice. He was so close she could feel his spearmint flavored breath on her lips. Marilyn lifted her head, so that her lips were less than a centimeter away from his. Her tongue darted out and licked the seam of his mouth. He immediately moved away.

She smiled like the cat that had caught the canary. Dante had just proved to her that he was afraid of her, afraid of what was going on between them.

There was no way in hell that Marilyn was saying the safe word, because to save her heart she would have to make Dante take her to the elusive brink of passion and push her over.

Marilyn knew that if she said the safe word, she would lose Dante.

She grimaced when he placed the second clamp on her nipple. She had to bite the inside of her cheek to keep from crying out when he licked one nipple after the other. The clamps alone created intense pleasure, but his hot, wet tongue along with the nipple clamps pushed her into the realm where pleasure was so great it felt like pain.

One hand reached between them to massage the swollen lips of her sex. Marilyn bit her bottom lip to stifle her moan. His touch felt so good. It felt so right. His callused fingers spread the lips of her pussy and pressed against the flesh between. His fingers bracketed the engorged button on top of her sex.

Then they clenched.

And Marilyn came in a blinding flash of pleasure.

She bit her lip so hard she drew blood. She steadfastly refused to cry out her pleasure. Marilyn wanted Dante and she wanted him on his terms. She would take all the pleasure he could give and enjoy every moment of his sexual dominance. She had a point to prove. She was his, whether he liked it or not.

He could not drive her away by showing her this darker side of himself. Dante's tongue stroked over her lips before capturing her mouth in a bruising, punishing kiss. She bit his lip. He pulled away and grinned at her. Dante reached across the bed and grabbed two more items. She knew what one was. He had grabbed another clamp. Which didn't make sense because she only had two nipples. And then in a flash she realized what Dante planned to do with that clamp. "You can't be serious?"

"Talking to me now, are we?" The smile he gave her made her realize just how the snake had enticed Eve. He appealed to her sense of adventure.

And suddenly Marilyn was feeling very adventurous. She licked her lips. "Will it hurt?"

He opened his palm. In his hand he held a small black item. He flicked it open and revealed a blade.

Marilyn stared at it open mouthed. Her heart beat against her chest. Her mind screamed that she was a fool for allowing a man with a knife in his hand to tie her to a bed. Her heart told her to trust the man she had fallen in love with.

She licked her suddenly dry lips again.

With shockingly quick movements Dante cut off her panties. Her eyes were large as she stared up at him. Her mouth slowly spread into a smile. "Kinky," she said with a smirk. Rosa had always told her to live outside the box. And with Dante she was doing just that.

He wiped the smile off her face when he flicked his thumb over her clit. She immediately gasped.

"Bloody hell," she groaned when he pressed his thumb against her clit. When he removed his finger, it bounced back twice as large. It felt so swollen, so sensitive that Marilyn felt like she was seconds away from coming.

She caught his gaze and glared at him as he slowly lowered his head. Marilyn desperately wanted to come and he had denied her that.

She watched him put his mouth on her and it was the most erotic sight Marilyn had ever witnessed. Her breath hissed between her clenched teeth. His tongue stroked over her most sensitive flesh. She squirmed beneath him at the same time that she fought to get closer to the wet, raspy heat of his tongue against her clit.

He flicked his tongue against her clitoris. Over and over and over again, driving her higher to the peak she desperately sought.

"Oh... my... Dante," she moaned when he wrapped his lips around her clitoris and sucked hard. Her voice called a litany of sexual pleas.

Forgotten was her vow of silence. Marilyn could not contain her pleasure. Intense yearning and heat shot through her body. Marilyn's every muscle shook and jerked with the force of her pleasure. The metal handcuffs binding her clanked and rattled with her feverish movements. Her mouth parted on a breathless scream. Then she was panting, gasping for air, as he licked, sucked, and nipped at her most sensitive flesh.

"Fuck," Dante growled low and deep against her pussy.

Marilyn's eyes slowly fluttered open when she felt Dante pressing against her sex. She moaned when he slid the large head of his cock deep inside of her. His hands gripped her thighs, lifting her hips. Dante only thrust into Marilyn several times before she came in soul-wrenching orgasm.

Marilyn's climax set off Dante's. His growl of satisfaction came seconds after her scream. He fell on top of her. When both their beating hearts had resumed their normal pace, Dante lifted himself, and unlatched the handcuffs. He pulled Marilyn against him and wrapped his arms around her. She snuggled into his embrace. Together they fell asleep.

## Chapter Eleven

### Mad Batters

Marilyn waved to the security guard as she made her way out of the sparsely lit department store. She sighed before pulling her cardigan closer to her body. It was an unusually cold spring night.

Marilyn bit her bottom lip as she considered her situation. This morning when the general manager of Darcy's, the city's largest department store, had called and asked if she not only wanted the part time job at the register, but if she could start today, she hadn't been able to hide her squeal of joy.

Even if she didn't get canned by one of her editors in the next couple of weeks, which was a big assumption, Marilyn still needed a new source of cash.

Her royalty checks had been getting smaller and smaller every quarter. Due to her inability to produce a new story in over a year, her fans were forgetting her, moving on to more prolific writers.

"Wonder how many hours at \$8.75 an hour it takes to get to four grand," she muttered to herself as she made the long walk across the parking lot to her car.

"Excuse me?"

She jerked at the sound of the female voice so close to her. Marilyn hadn't even heard the woman approaching her. *Way to go, dumbass! You could get mugged and worse and you wouldn't even know until it was too late. Pay attention!*

Marilyn turned to the source of the voice. A tall, lanky redhead stood several feet away from her. "The store is closed," she said.

"I know. I just wanted to ask if you were the woman the Bellissimo Bandit kissed."

It was Marilyn's turn to be confused. "Excuse me?"

"Are you the woman the Bandit kissed? The one in the newspaper? *Hot Truths*?"

Marilyn gritted her teeth. She was in the paper. When she found that reporter... "Yes, I'm the lucky woman." Although, Marilyn didn't know what was so lucky about what happened.

The redhead turned away. "It's her."

*It's her?* Who the hell was the redhead talking to? Several seconds later Marilyn got her answer. Three women came out of the shadows. Redhead had two brunettes and a blonde with her.

Marilyn took one look at the blonde's face and turned. She quickened her steps to her car, cursing her luck with every step. Of course she had been forced to park in one of the last aisles in the lot.

"If my luck gets any worse, I'm going to trip, fall, and break something important," Marilyn muttered as she dug her keys out of her purse. Of course, her keys were at the bottom of her damned purse. She was considering dumping the contents of her purse on the ground when someone grabbed her from behind and spun her around.

"Hi there," the redhead said before flashing Marilyn a harsh smile.

Her lips felt thick and her mouth was dry. "Uh, hi," she croaked out.

The blonde stepped forward. Marilyn immediately took a step back. Her ass hit the back end of a truck. The bumper hurt like hell.

"You're the bitch who slandered my Bandit."

Marilyn flinched at the words. Obviously there was one person who didn't appreciate her opinion on the Bandit. "I'm, uh, sorry you feel that way."

"Is that her?" another woman called. Marilyn looked up to see that this woman, a chestnut-haired pixie, headed a larger group. "Oh shit," she gasped.

Things weren't looking up. Marilyn suddenly, ridiculously, wished that she had fallen and broken a leg. The Bandit followers would have probably been much kinder to her then.

The second group of ladies made their way to them. When they moved closer, Marilyn saw that several of the women held bats.

Marilyn damn near passed out. Things had gone from very bad to... hell. "Look, ladies, I'm sorry about that article. I was... I didn't mean to slander the Bandit. He's a good guy. He helped me out once. He saved that woman's life. Like I said, he's a good man."

"Oh, now you want to praise his name," one woman taunted.

"I'm not praising his name. I'm telling you the truth. I was mad. I was having a bad day. Actually --"

"We don't want to hear your lies."

One of the women smacked her bat against the palm of her hand. The sharp sound of wood hitting flesh made Marilyn shiver. She obviously could not talk her way out of this one. She opened her mouth and let forth a deafening scream.

Someone pushed her. Marilyn fell back against the truck. Her soft flesh was no match for the hard metal. Pain shot up her spine.

"It's about time you paid for what you said, whore." Marilyn shut her eyes at the sight of a bat headed right for her head.

She was going to die because she was a bitch. She was going to get her head beat in because she'd been feeling a little testy when that bastard had asked her about the Bellissimo Bandit. If only she'd kept her mouth shut.

With her hands over her head, she muttered prayers under her breath as she waited for the bat to make contact with her skull. Marilyn felt the air brush past her at the same time a woman screamed.

She peeked with one eye. She should have been at the very least bruised and broken by then. But no, she was all in one piece. One trembling piece, but one piece.

The bitches better not be toying with her. That irritating thought was enough to make both eyes open. A ring of frightened women surrounded her.

She slowly leaned away from the truck and darted a look around her. She screeched when one of the women advanced. Apparently they were no longer afraid.

That didn't bode well for Marilyn. She managed to take a few steps when she bumped against the hard plane of a man's chest. She squealed on impact. Her eyes



slowly lifted until they met the dark gaze of the Bellissimo Bandit. The moment their gazes collided, Marilyn grimaced.

“Run,” he ordered.

Marilyn stayed exactly where she was. “This is all your fault.”

The Bandit grabbed her arm and pulled her onto his signature green motorcycle. Marilyn struggled to get away until she heard one of the women scream at her. The anger she saw in the woman’s vivid green eyes made her stay on the bike.

The Bandit reached into his saddlebags and pulled out a helmet. Marilyn was getting ready to tell him she wasn’t going anywhere with him when he glared at her. Even though he was wearing a dark green leather mask that hid half of his face, the look in his chilling dark eyes left no doubt as to his mood. Her words died before reaching her dry lips.

The Bandit turned to the angry crowd. “Go home, ladies. This is not the way to defend me. Instead of fighting her, fight her words. Let your broadcasters and politicians know how much you need me and my colleagues.”

Marilyn watched, shocked, as the angry crowd transformed. She snarled to herself. It was incredible really. One woman even pulled out her Palm Pilot. Several others snapped pictures with their cell phones.

The Bellissimo Bandit smiled and threw one leg over the bike, seating himself in front of Marilyn. She scooted down the bike, desperately trying to avoid the heat from his leather-clad body. Marilyn could feel all 98.6 degrees of his body temperature. Her nipples puckered uncomfortably at the close contact.

And there was the thought of his kiss.

“Are you trying to fall off?” His muscular arm wrapped around her waist and pulled hard against his back. All of the air in her lungs rushed out the moment her body pressed against his.

“Get your hands off me.”

Instead of letting her go, the Bandit tightened his grip. He dropped something suspiciously small in a slot where the motorcycle's ignition should have been. The bike purred in reaction. "Hope you're not afraid of bikes."

That was the only warning Marilyn received before the bike took off at a neck-breaking speed. Her arms instinctively wrapped around his slim waist as she held on for dear life.

## Chapter Twelve

### The Man Behind the Mask

They rode long enough for Marilyn to feel secure in the knowledge that the murderous horde was long behind her. The Bandit pulled into an alley that looked distinctly familiar.

Marilyn got off the bike and turned toward the exit. Across the street stood the library. They were in the alley where he had kissed her. She shivered and cursed the memory. The kiss haunted her like an ardent ghost.

She turned back to him with her hands on her hips. "Don't think I don't know you staged that whole thing. I am *not* eternally grateful to you."

His mouth dropped open and he stared at her for a long, drawn out moment. Then he gave her a harsh smile that made her spine tingle and clapped. "You are something incredible, lady."

The sound of him clapping in the face of her anger made Marilyn's rage boil. She took a step toward him. "You had me there. For a moment, a quick moment, I was afraid those women were right, that I had misunderstood you, but now I see they're the ones who are wrong. They're blinded by their..."

"What?" he barked. "Finish the sentence. They're blinded by..."

"Their lust, okay! They see a hero, a man with a good body in tight leather and think, 'He's here to save me.' Well, not every woman is foolish enough to think you're Prince Charming."

He folded his sinewy arms across his wide chest. "Well, it's a good thing you're too much of a coldhearted bitch to be Cinderella, isn't it?"

The anger rolling through her veins was enough to make a volcano look like a flicker flame. "I'm sorry, Bastard Bandit. I didn't know it was a crime to have a spine and see you for the asshole you really are," she said in a deceptively sweet voice.

He took a step toward her. His voice was low and thick. "Here," he said before shoving a small piece of paper into her hands. "Since this is all you really care about."

Marilyn glanced down and read the sheet of paper. Her eyes immediately narrowed. "You think you can buy me?"

"Buy you? Lady, if I knew where you came from I would *return* you."

"What the hell is this for if you're not trying to buy me?"

"I'm trying to fix your fucking car!"

"And you think that will fix everything."

He sighed. "This is about the kiss."

"You're damned right this is about the kiss. You had no right to touch me."

He bristled visibly, glaring at her. "I seem to remember you kissing me back, Marilyn."

"I kissed you back?" she screeched. "I didn't kiss you back. You molested me."

"You can feed that sob story to the papers, but I was there, sweetheart. I know when a woman is kissing me back. And you kissed me like you hadn't kissed a man since that bastard left you."

"Bastard? How do you know about Robert? How do you know so much about me?"

He took a menacing step toward her. "I hate to break it to you, sweetheart, but unlike me, you don't have a secret identity, Marilyn Mao. I read the article. I even read your lifestyle articles. I know all about you."

"Then I think you should return the damned favor," she yelled before she grabbed the mask he wore. With a quick flick of her wrist she snatched it off.

It was incredibly easy to unmask the Bellissimo Bandit. So easy in fact, that Marilyn stared at the dark green leather mask in her hand for several seconds.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" he yelled, snatching back the mask.

Marilyn's eyes widened when she saw his face. "You lying bastard. You good-for-nothing, lying bastard. I can't believe it..." she whispered, unable to finish her sentence as tears burned her eyes.

"I didn't lie, Marilyn," he muttered before putting his mask back on. "I couldn't tell you everything." He reached for her. "Get back on the bike."

Marilyn smacked his hand away and wiped her mouth. She was so flustered she couldn't figure out what to do with her hands. When she realized she was just prolonging the inevitable, she walked to the bike and threw her leg over it, seating herself.

Dante stared at her for a few seconds. She simply stared back at him. He growled a low curse, strode over to her, and sat on the bike.

Marilyn was relieved when the soft purr of the motorcycle's engine drowned out her thoughts. She held on as Dante drove the bike through the dark city streets.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

### **When Secrets Come to Light**

Dante's hands tightened on the handles of his bike several times before he killed the ignition. Even though he had mentally braced himself for Marilyn's quick departure, he was surprised by anger that curled in his belly when she damn near jumped off the bike.

He didn't notice Chrystos in the garage until the blond giant spoke. "What the hell are you doing in suit?" he called before stepping from the shadows. Dante jerked at the sound of the other man's voice. He cursed low and deep as he got off the motorcycle.

He seemed to be doing a lot of that lately. Cursing, that is.

"You're supposed to be on the bench. Or did they finally come to their senses and let you play?"

Dante stepped forward. "No, not exactly. They don't know I went out. I'm hoping they won't find out."

Chrystos gave him a slow smile. "Well, the board won't find out from me."

"At least someone realizes you're a lying menace to society."

Dante groaned.

Chrystos glanced from Marilyn's face to Dante's and back to Marilyn. The corners of his mouth lifted into a smirk. "I take it she's the shrew."

"Shrew?" Marilyn screeched.

Chrystos shrugged one large shoulder. "Only one woman doesn't melt when she looks into his big brown eyes."

"Having a brain does not make me a shrew."

"You're the shrew all right," he chuckled.

"She melts, just not when I'm wearing the mask."

"You slimy bastard," Marilyn screamed as she swatted at his shoulder. Dante rolled his arm, surprised to find that she had actually hurt him. Either he was getting soft or he had really ticked her off.

"You're screwing the shrew!" Chrystos's laughter floated over his shoulder as he left the garage.

Dante turned back to Marilyn. He wasn't getting soft. She was royally pissed.

Her arms folded under her breasts. "So... you're screwing the shrew."

"I never called you a shrew. And that's not what this is about, is it, Marilyn?"

"I am not a shrew. Just because..."

"What the hell was I supposed to say? Hey guys, lay off her. My alter ego happens to have slept with her. Twice."

Her face twisted into a mask of fiery anger. "Your fucking alter ego?"

"Well? It sure as hell wasn't the Bandit you were screaming for. You wanted Dante, the Naked Butler."

"That's because I thought the Bellissimo Bandit was a lying bastard."

"That's because you made a decision about who he was long before you met him."

"Long before he crashed my car or long before he showed up at my door?"

"Hell, Marilyn, I had to convince you to let me stay as your Naked Butler. Do you know how many women I've had to convince to keep me before you? None. You're the only woman I know who would hate a man simply because he had been hired to do whatever she asked."

"So I didn't want you following me around while I was trying to work. You lied to me about who you are."

"Robert did one hell of a job on you. You don't even realize what you're doing to us -- to me."

"Us? There is no us. The man I thought I knew doesn't exist."

"You're right. You never did try to get to know me." Even to his own ears his words sounded cold and clipped.

"What the hell do you mean by that?"

"You never asked what I do when I'm not playing the part of your naked slave."

She bristled at his icy tone. "You never told me."

"Hell, the only reason I took the job was to make enough cash to fix your damned car."

"I didn't know... I..."

"You didn't want to know. I was good enough to fuck, good enough to keep in a cursed box where all men are assholes who are only out to hurt you or fuck you."

"You make it seem like I'm the only one who didn't try to get to know the other. You don't know me either. We don't know anything about each other."

"Wrong, lady." He lifted his hand and numbered off the facts he knew about her. "You write for the biggest city paper, the *Daily Chronicle* and you happen to be its biggest attraction. You also write for Star Press, a small e-publisher. You like writing futuristic sci-fi erotic romance novels where you blend the past with the future. But you like reading historical romances. You're the oldest of four children. You graduated top of your class and you like a little pain with your sex."

Marilyn blushed. He knew more about her likes and dislikes than any man she had met. But it wasn't enough. He would never be enough. "Dante, I was just so hurt before that I... I'm so sorry," she whispered.

"So am I. I'll have one of the other vigilantes take you home." With those words Dante turned and walked away.



## Chapter Fourteen

### Selfish Girl

"Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. *Fuck!*" Marilyn screamed the moment she was sure Chrystos was off her property, using every curse word her grandmother had ever admonished. "The mother-fucking, cock-sucking bastard was right," she grumbled as she threw her jacket across the living room.

She was self-destructive when it came to men. She chose the ones who were bound to hurt her and she stayed clear of every good guy who even looked her way. The only reason she had even given Dante a chance was because: a) She didn't have a choice. She couldn't fire him and she couldn't get him to leave her alone, and b) It had been easy falling for Dante when she simply thought of him as a man who made his living as a naked butler. She told herself her emotions were based purely on lust. She hadn't bothered to look beneath the surface of those rock hard abs.

"Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. *Fuck!*" Marilyn hated being wrong. She had assumed he was like every other man she'd met and waited for him to screw up so she could break it off with him.

But the bastard had switched up the game. He was a good guy. The kind of man she'd always dreamed about. He didn't want to hurt her, use her, or control her. He just wanted her. All of her. He was more real, more flesh and blood than Prince Charming but no less disarming.

And it was his Prince Charming quality that scared the hell out of her. It was the same quality she noticed in the Bandit and hated. Beneath Marilyn's cynical, bitter outer shell lay a woman who was desperately in love with the heroes of her romances. And the Bandit reminded her too much of that perfect man she was secretly waiting for.

Marilyn sighed and placed her face in her hands.

She had royally messed up. And she had no idea how to make things better. She wanted Dante back. All of him. Both sides of the man she had fallen in love with. She wanted the Bandit and the Butler.

She wanted Dante Pizzimenti.

She jerked at the sound of her doorbell. With a jolt Marilyn realized she was sitting in her living room, crying in the dark. She quickly wiped the tears from her cheeks and headed to her front door.

Marilyn stood on her toes and peeked through the small hole. She was not in the mood for company. She was rehearsing her “go away” speech when she saw who was at her door. She blinked at the sight.

She had secretly been hoping it was Dante.

“Uhh,” she groaned as she unlocked and pulled open the suddenly heavy door. She really was not in the mood for company, but something told her pretending she wasn’t home was not going to work.

Rosa was a tenacious barracuda when she wanted to be. And the look on her face as she stood outside Marilyn’s door, tapping the toe of one ridiculously expensive Betsey Johnson designer stiletto, warned Marilyn that she was feeling particularly adamant tonight.

“What did I do wrong now?” Marilyn said with a sigh the moment the door was open.

Rosa’s fine leather heels clicked with her every pounding step. Normally Rosa walked like a supermodel, all lithe and graceful. She wasn’t walking like a model, super or not, at that moment.

“It can’t be that bad,” Marilyn groaned before slamming the door shut.

Rosa spun on one heel. “He said, and I quote, ‘I quit. I’ll find another way to pay for her car repairs.’ You made the man quit, Marilyn! What is wrong with you? What did you do? Bite his damned cock off?”

"I never had his cock in my mouth!" Marilyn yelled back, chagrined. And to think Marilyn had considered Rosa her best friend. Well, she obviously had to rethink that.

"Maybe that's the problem," Rosa muttered before stomping her way to the dark living room. "Where are your fucking lights?"

Marilyn stopped dead in her tracks, halfway to the living room. "Why would he tell you about the car repairs? Rosa, what the hell aren't you telling me?"

The living room was suddenly bathed in light. Apparently Rosa had found the switch. Marilyn took a seat in her favorite chair and regarded Rosa's pacing form. This time when she spoke her words were soft and drained of emotion. "What do you know about what's going on, Rosalinda?"

Rosa paused at the use of her full name. She turned to Marilyn with a wicked savageness. "Oh, no! Don't turn this on me. I found you the perfect man and you let him slip away because you're afraid of love."

"Yes, I did. That doesn't answer my question. What and how do you know what's going on?"

"I know everything. I've always known everything."

Marilyn sat up a little. "What do you mean know everything?"

"Sometimes I'm not sure why I even like you, let alone love you, Marilyn," Rosa said with a sigh before taking a seat on the couch. She closed her eyes. "I know exactly who Dante Pizzimenti is and what he does."

"You know..."

One hazel eye lifted and glared at Marilyn. "That he's your Bastard Bandit. Yes, I know."

"I never called him that!"

Rosa gave an indelicate snort. "You called him that several times, especially after your little car accident. The fact that you slept with him and can now see that he's more than a bastard does not change the past."

Marilyn grunted at her words. Unfortunately she could remember several distinct instances when she had used that very name for Dante's masked identity. Things were definitely not looking good.

Maybe they were both right. Maybe she had sabotaged every good relationship she had ever had. "How did you find out he's the Bellissimo Bandit?"

Rosa snorted again. "I'm the one who invented him. I named him. He's the Bellissimo Bandit because of me."

Marilyn cocked one eyebrow. "You're going to have to explain that."

"I used my fantastic skills as Kapital City's most infamous publicist to get the public on the vigilantes' side. I did it as a favor to Ramses."

"Ramses?" Marilyn asked, picturing the little boy who once had a crush on her. He'd turned into one hell of a man.

"Yes, Ramses -- my blasted brother is the leader of the defenders."

Marilyn gawked at the mass of sprawled pink silk for long seconds. She couldn't seem to get her mind to process what Rosa said. "Rosa, are you trying to tell me Ramses is one of the men who..."

"What I'm saying... is that I found a man who is sweet, understanding, compassionate... a knight in shining armor. Granted the armor was a little rusty in places but that was what made him so human, so attractive. To top it all off he has a fabulous sense of humor and the kind of body a woman could spend hours dreaming about. I found him for you. I chose you out of everyone I know to send the damned Naked Butler to, knowing you both needed each other, but you --" Rosa sat up and pointed one accusatory finger at Marilyn, "-- selfish girl that you are, could not give up enough of your comfort, your security, to let the man in so he could heal those wounds you've been carrying for years."

*Awwh, hell.* She hated it but Rosa was right. She had been too selfish to let Dante into her heart. "Oh, Rosa! I really fucked up," Marilyn cried, placing her face in her hands. "I need him back, Rosa. I can't... I need him back."

Rosa leaned up on her elbows. "How badly do you want him?"

"I'm willing to do anything to get him back."

Anything, Marilyn thought emphatically. She wanted Dante. She missed him already. But she needed him so much that she knew nothing, not even her pride, would stand in her way.

Marilyn Mao was getting her man back.

No matter what it took.

She was a selfish girl. And she had no intention of sharing her love with the rest of the world. Dante Pizzimenti, Naked Butler and Bellissimo Bandit, was hers.

## **Chapter Fifteen**

### **Crazy Little Thing Called Love**

Dante stared at the television screen as the plump blonde spoke into the microphone. He tried to listen dispassionately. He tried to ignore the muscles in his belly that jumped when she spoke about her pain, but she was making it hard to do.

Speaking of hard...

He glanced down at the steadily growing bulge between his legs. Apparently he was an absolute sucker for pain. He grabbed the remote and turned off the television. He had an appointment to keep.

Twenty minutes later Dante stood on top of the nineteenth-century warehouse building. He eyed the cold, hard structure he stood on dispassionately. He did not want to be there. He wanted even less to be there with her.

She stepped away from the outcrop of the building's stairs. "I wasn't sure you would come. Then I was sure I would miss you. I was so worried I got here an hour early." She chewed her plump bottom lip.

Dante clenched his jaw and hardened his resolve at the sight. "I saw your little display to the press. Impressive."

She stopped with her hand on the brick outcrop, lifting remorseful eyes to him. The pain in her brown eyes tugged at his heart. "I had to do something to correct my wrongs. When Rosa suggested a news conference, I realized what I had to do." She shrugged one softly rounded shoulder.

"That was nice of you. Very responsible of you."

She chewed her bottom lip again. This time Dante couldn't help wondering if she was going to break the skin with her teeth. "I know you're mad at me."

He stared at her, stone-faced.

"You have every reason to be mad." Her nails scraped against the brick wall she held onto with a tight grip. "Did they let you get back in uniform?" Her teeth came back out to attack her lip.

He sighed as he regarded her. Her presence still had the same effect on him. He could feel the blood surging into his cock. If he didn't keep a lid on his quickly raging arousal, he would be sporting the hard-on of all hard-ons. He hadn't even thought of another woman since Marilyn. "They let me suit up when the survey showed that the city was feeling less... hostile to me."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that."

"You and me both, Cheeks."

She gasped at the sound of his nickname for her. He could see the uncertainty clearly written on her beautiful, expressive face.

Dante only knew he missed her. And his foolish heart wouldn't listen when he said he didn't love her. She scuffed her foot on the rooftop. Dante looked down and realized she was wearing a pair of deadly, sexy red strappy stiletto heels. His breath caught. He immediately pictured her heels against his shoulders as he pumped between her thighs. He had to bite the inside of his mouth to stop his moan.

"Did you read it?"

It took him a moment to pull his gaze away from her feet. When he did, he saw the mirth in her beautiful brown eyes. "Yes, I found it... interesting."

"Interesting," she said with a pout. "I hope my editor likes it more."

He smiled at her. He couldn't help himself. "I didn't say I didn't like it. I said it was interesting." After a few seconds he continued. "I liked it... a lot."

"Yeah?" There was so much hope in her eyes.

"Yeah." His smile was slow and smoldering. "I really like the part where the hero, Danny, gives Mary a bubble bath she will always remember."

"I like the part where he forgives her."

"I loved that part."

She immediately let go of the wall and ran to him, red heels clicking against the brick wall. He held out his arms and she jumped right into his grasp. He laughed when she landed against him with a thud. But the woman wasn't even winded.

Marilyn grabbed his face and placed frantic kisses over every inch that wasn't covered by his signature dark green leather mask. "I knew I was being foolish the moment you walked away. I was so scared and hurt and was afraid you would hurt me, even though I knew I loved you, do love you, I couldn't... I didn't want to let you in," she said in a tumbling ramble.

"I know, sweetheart. You were scared. So was I."

Her legs tightened around his waist. "The handcuffs and the --" her tongue darted over her cherry red bottom lip, "-- the nipple clamps."

"Yeah," he said. Dante could feel himself turning red. He owed her an apology for that night. He liked his sex hard and rough sometimes, but that night... "About the... I wanted to --"

"Shh," Marilyn whispered, cutting him off. Her dark, sooty lashes lifted until her gaze caught his. "I liked it... a lot."

"You're killing me." It was incredible to find a woman who was compatible with him. It was even more incredible to find a woman who was compatible with his sexual fetishes.

"Dante?"

"Yeah, Cheeks." His voice came out thick with desire. The little siren had just moved her hips over the bulge between his legs. The fact that all the blood in his body was rushing to his not-so-little head was making it difficult to concentrate.

"I started research for my next story."

It took his lust-fogged brain way too much time to figure out what Marilyn was saying. When he did, he couldn't wrap his brain around her words. What the hell was she talking about research for?

"Let me show you what I want to research."



Dante had to stifle his groan and the desire to roll his eyes. He didn't want to research. A thought occurred to him suddenly. He gave Marilyn a wicked smile that made her blink. "How about we get you relaxed instead?"

"Trust me," she whispered before disentangling herself from his limbs. Marilyn landed with a soft thud on her feet. Then she turned and shimmied her way behind the outcrop.

He followed her swaying ass. He jerked to a stop once behind the brick wall. "What the hell?" She had obviously gone through plenty in order to seek his forgiveness. He wasn't so opposed to doing some research now. "What's this, Cheeks?" He cocked his head in the direction of her little surprise.

"This," she said, sweeping her hand out to encompass the cherry red sleeping pallet that was big enough for two, the candles and the picnic basket, "is my attempt at an apology." In the corner sat a small boom box that played the soft alto voice of a sultry jazz singer.

When he turned back to Marilyn he found her wearing only her bra, black fishnet stockings held up with garters, and those red high heels. He gaped at her for several seconds. She smiled at his stupefied face, then walked past him, bent over, and picked up a red piece of leather.

She slowly placed it over her face, careful of her hair.

Dante gave her a huge grin. She looked like a super-sexy defender. His defender. He pulled her hard against his chest. She landed with a soft giggle.

"I'm thinking of starting a new series about crime fighting defenders."

"Yeah?" His hands moved down her body and grasped the naked cheeks of her ass.

She swiveled her hips against his erection. "Oh yeah."

"And what's your defender name?" He scraped his teeth against her neck.

"I'm thinking Super Romantique."

He smiled against her neck. "I'm thinking Super Bellissimo Girlfriend or better yet, Super Bellissimo Wife."

She flinched against him and stepped back. "Are you serious? 'Cause damn it, Dante, you better be serious."

"Serious enough to go ring shopping tomorrow."

"Tomorrow," she breathed through parted lips.

"Tonight I plan on making love to my fiancée."

Marilyn smiled at him. She glanced at the dark sky. "I've never made love under the stars before."

Seconds before his lips descended on hers, Dante whispered, "You won't be able to say that tomorrow, Cheeks." He broke off the kiss and lifted her face until their gazes connected. "I love you, Marilyn," he whispered.

Tears swam in her deep brown eyes. She blinked at him and then smiled. "I love you and I will never be so foolish as to let you go again."

He smiled at her. "You better not, because I'll find you. I'll hunt you down. I am, after all, the Bellissimo Bandit."

## **Tuesday Morrigan**

Tuesday Morrigan began her love affair with romance at an early age. As a child she was always infatuated with the romance novels she snuck from her mother. Later, in high school, the public library became her sanctuary with an endless array of romance novels. Tuesday is still an avid reader of books. Thanks to shows like *Buffy*, *Angel*, and her latest infatuation *Supernatural*, Tuesday prefers her stories to have a little more grit. Her favorite genres have always been fantasy, mystery, romance and erotica, so as a writer, she tries to blend the genres to create her own personal niche. You can learn more about Tuesday, including what's her latest project, at [www.mochancreme.com](http://www.mochancreme.com) and you can reach her at [Tuesday@mochancreme.com](mailto:Tuesday@mochancreme.com)