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*The Wedding Dress*  
BOOK 3

*A Sixpence in*  
**HER SHOE**  
LIZ ANDREWS

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*A Sixpence in*

Her Shoe

*The Wedding Dress*

Book 3

*Liz Andrews*

## Dedication

To Maggie Casper and Lena Matthews, I couldn't have done it without you ladies.

## Chapter One

*Damn, it happened again.*

Melanie Parsons gazed around the large artifact room in horror. To anyone else's eyes it probably looked like an overgrown storage closet, but Melanie knew where every item was located. A large cavernous room, where all the artifacts were reviewed, researched and cataloged, and until displayed, stored here as well. The room was kept at a special temperature and had diffused lighting to ensure the items were well preserved. Long tables held numerous items in various states of the process. And she could plainly see the late nineteenth century cookware was missing. The iron skillets and pots, which she had been categorizing last night, were gone.

"Harold!" Melanie's screams brought a scurrying little man running from the adjacent room. His balding head glinted in the harsh lighting and Melanie wondered for the hundredth time why he had never gone for a corrective process. It was 2089 for Christ's sake. Hair re-growth was a minor procedure, one of many developed in the last fifty years. In fact, the practice had become so common doctors were offering "makeover specials" by the handful these days.

Her assistant, Harold Gill, came to a skidding halt in front of her. "Melanie, thank God you're here. I've contacted the police. We've been robbed."

Melanie restrained herself from rolling her eyes. Harold had a knack for stating the obvious.

"I can see that, Harold. What time did you get here? When did you contact them? Did they say how long it would be until they arrived?"

Melanie slipped off her coat as she questioned him and strode toward the back room, with Harold hot on her heels.

"I arrived around seven this morning and immediately noticed the items missing. I contacted security and together we searched the room, but I knew we wouldn't find the cookware. You never take an item out of the artifact room until you're finished cataloging it. I told security, but since this was the second incident, they insisted we search. We didn't contact the police until after eight o'clock. They should be here any minute now." Harold was breathless by the time he finished speaking.

Melanie glanced at her watch and sighed with disgust. It was ten minutes after nine. The police obviously didn't think their burglary was a priority. She was sure if the message had come from some senator's office instead of the Smithsonian annex they would have gotten faster service. Unfortunately, history was dead to most Americans these days. It didn't have the prestige of science among the elite. Her department was regulated to the back rooms and bottom rungs of the ladder. Hanging up her coat, Melanie wondered if she should bother getting started on another cataloging project when the decision was made for her.

"Hello, anyone here?"

*Finally, the police have arrived.*

Melanie exited the office only to come to an abrupt halt, causing Harold, who had been following her, to run smack dab into her back. Losing her balance, Melanie pitched forward and was caught in the arms of a certifiable hunk. The man was six-foot-six and although muscular, he was certainly not fat. He had the swarthy good looks of someone with Latin descent. She gazed up into deep brown eyes that had an intensity she felt right to her core.

"Hey Torres, it looks as if you caught yourself something there. Gonna keep it or throw it back?"

Melanie gasped, suddenly realizing they had an audience. The man speaking was a few years older than she and good looking, but he couldn't hold a candle to the man who held her in his arms. Pulling away, she tried to regain her dignity.

“You okay Melanie? I’m sorry I ran into you. I wasn’t expecting you to stop suddenly.” Melanie turned at Harold’s words, a forgiving smile on her face. Although he often frustrated her to no end, the accident had been her own fault.

“It’s okay Harold, I’m fine.” Returning her attention back to the two agents, she continued. “I was expecting the police, not the UAS.”

The United Americas Securities, or UAS for short, was created thirty years earlier when North and South America formed the United Americas Coalition. The various countries realized they needed one united security force to compete globally with the European Union.

“Yes ma’am, the D.C. police contacted us as soon as they received your report this morning. Especially since this is the second burglary this month.” The other agent was the one who spoke, but Melanie couldn’t keep her gaze off her rescuer. The microfiber of his uniform clung to him like a second skin. She had to literally shake herself out of a daydream to respond to the other man.

“Did the report tell you it was only a skillet and pots stolen? It’s not as if this burglary was a terrorist plot.” Melanie’s defensiveness was apparent in her tone, which was unfortunate. She always tried to act properly, at least in public, and questioning those in authority was not proper. Although she had been wishing for prompt attention by the police, she didn’t think the burglaries were serious enough for the UAS to get involved.

“Yes ma’am, we know what was stolen. But there’s a certain pattern here we’re investigating. The report indicates all the items stolen are from the same approximate time period. We think it may be Traditionalists.” The agent paused dramatically, as if waiting for some sort of reaction, but everyone in the room remained silent. A snort accompanied the agent’s next words. “Of course, Torres here doesn’t believe it.”

Melanie’s eyes widened and her glance flew to Agent Torres. His face was grim, as if he had heard the gibe more than once.

“I think we need to investigate before we make any rash judgments.” His voice was dark and smooth as molasses. Melanie shivered, even though the room was kept at ideal temperature conditions.

“Speaking of investigating, what exactly do you need from me?” Melanie tried to return the conversation back to the task at hand and banish her reveries of the agent.

Agent Torres glanced down her body as if slowly undressing her with his eyes. Melanie had to resist raising her hands to shield herself from his gaze. She squinted for a moment, wondering if he had the new X-ray contacts, but then decided she was just being imaginative.

Although the technology allowing someone to look through a person’s clothes directly to their body had been around for hundreds of years, it was only recently a company had come out with the new portable devices. Unfortunately for them, most people didn’t wear contacts or glasses anymore because of the advances in medical technology, so when someone did wear those items it was usually an obvious sign the person was using the new contacts.

“I’ll need to see your records on the items stolen.” Melanie could have sworn Agent Torres looked almost disappointed when Harold offered to get the records for him. She watched for a moment as they both disappeared into the office.

“I’m sorry ma’am, I never did introduce myself. I’m Agent Randall Miko.”

“Nice to meet you. My name is Melanie Parsons and I run the historical artifacts department.”

The agent briefly tapped his earpiece and the hologram of a keyboard and computer appeared before him. “Just let me get some information from you.” He began typing away at the phantom keys. His questions continued, even after Harold and Agent Torres returned from the back office.

“Do you have any leads on the case? Is there any chance you’ll be able to retrieve our items?” Melanie knew she had a tendency to fire off questions when she was nervous or upset and today definitely qualified as a day where both of those attributes applied.

“We can’t release any information as of yet, but we’ll certainly let you know if we find your stuff.” Agent Miko had finally completed all of his questions and shut down the portable computing device. Melanie



assumed the system was similar to the one she used and the information, digitally stored in the earpiece, would be downloaded to the main system when he returned to his own office.

“Yes, I’ll hopefully be seeing you very soon.” Agent Torres’s comments sounded much more personal and Melanie couldn’t help but shiver again at the image it evoked in her mind. She needed to pull herself together.

“Well, thank you for your time and coming out here. We need to get back to work.”

Agent Torres gave her another scorching look as both agents left, promising to notify her if any of the missing items turned up. Although it had been a memorable morning, there was still work to be done. Melanie turned to Harold as she literally and figuratively rolled up her sleeves. “Okay Harold, let’s get to work.”

Regrettably they barely got started before being interrupted.

“Melanie, what’s this I hear about a burglary? Are you causing trouble again?”

Melanie sighed inwardly at the sight of her boss, Stan Johnson, walking toward them. The man looked like an angel, with blond hair and blue eyes, but he had the heart of a devil. He was constantly finding ways to make her life miserable.

“Oh Mr. Johnson, it was awful. I came in this morning and immediately saw the items missing.” Harold continued to relay the entire story to Stan in the most dramatic manner possible.

At the end of Harold’s litany, Stan turned viciously on her. “Melanie, this is completely unacceptable. You’re taking entirely too long to catalog the items.”

“Perhaps we should discuss this in my office.” Melanie didn’t think it appropriate to argue in front of Harold, but Stan seemed to have no compunction on the matter.

“No, we’ll discuss this right here and now. If you weren’t completing this project at a snail’s pace this whole incident would have never occurred.”

“Just how do you figure?” Sarcasm dripped from her voice. She couldn’t disguise her disgust for the man and stopped attempting to do so many months ago.

“If you didn’t spend so much time on this boring stuff and just did a cursory review, the cataloging would be done by now and all these items would be in storage. Instead we’re backed up to kingdom come with no end in sight.”

Melanie knew Stan considered old west items boring because they weren’t in the political spotlight right now. Everyone was intrigued with the late twentieth century instead. “Look Stan, I work at a pace to get the job done right and I’m not going to cut corners just because you think this period is boring. Everything needs to be cataloged correctly and as far as being in storage, that’s a joke. *This* is storage. You know we don’t have the luxury of more space right now.”

“You think you’re so high and mighty.” Stan sneered at her. “We’ll just see how much funding you get when it goes public you can’t keep items secure.”

Melanie held back the angry retort that immediately came to mind. It would do no good to argue with Stan because, in his mind, he was always right. Melanie had been given the job of department head over him three years earlier, and although Stan was the big boss now, he still couldn’t let the old slight go. He constantly picked at everything she did, trying to make her look bad. He didn’t even get the director’s position by merit, but through an appointment by one of his cronies.

Stan paused for a moment, awaiting her reply before stalking off in disappointment, muttering under his breath with a sneer. “No more than what I should expect from a member of a *Traditionalist* family.”

Melanie tried not to let his comments bother her. Although she didn’t always subscribe to the viewpoints of her family, she loved them all fiercely and usually defended them vigorously. But she knew Stan was deliberately baiting her. He would be extremely happy if she responded, and Melanie did everything in her power to make sure she never did anything to make Stan happy.

“Oh Melanie, I’m sorry. If I knew it was going to get you in trouble I never would have contacted security this morning.” Harold’s forlorn apology touched Melanie. He really was a nice guy.

“Don’t worry about it Harold. You did the right thing.” Melanie patted his hand as they returned to work.



Melanie kicked off her shoes and pulled off her panty hose as soon as she walked in the back door of her house. Reaching up, she removed the clip holding her hair in place and let her hair fall. It had been a long, arduous day, made worse not only by the burglary, but also by the attack of her boss on her character. She tried to forget about work, but unfortunately her usual tricks weren’t working. The music she ordered to play in the background should have been soothing, as well as the glass of wine she was sipping, but she was still on edge.

Setting the glass down on the counter, Melanie contemplated dinner. She was too tired to cook, but knew it wasn’t good for her health to continue skipping meals. The stress of working for Stan was really getting to her, even affecting her away from the office. It was probably time to start looking for a new job, but unfortunately there wasn’t a lot of work for historical curator types outside the Smithsonian.

The doorbell chime almost had her knocking her glass off the kitchen counter. Her nerves were definitely shot. Melanie lived in an old brownstone in the Arlington area of Washington D.C. and liked the entire low-tech atmosphere of her building. Of course, she had a state of the art security system, but no video surveillance for her. The idea of turning a historical house into a technical palace just didn’t seem right to her. It would ruin the ambiance of living in the old building.

Strolling toward the front entrance, Melanie glanced through the peephole before opening the door.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t Agent Torres.” Melanie stepped back and let Brady into the living room. “Did you come to tuck me into bed?”

## Chapter Two

Brady waited until Melanie shut the door before he turned and pulled her in his arms. "Aren't you the little tease? I've been thinking about getting you back in my arms all day. And not with an audience around this time."

Melanie smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck. Brady had to force himself to concentrate on her words when all he really wanted to do was enjoy the soft body pressed against his own. "I was shocked when I walked out of my office and saw you standing there."

"So shocked you threw yourself into my arms." Brady felt the need to constantly tease Melanie because she always acted prim and proper. He wanted her to let go and explore all those wild inhibitions he could sense just under the surface.

"That was all Harold's fault," Melanie protested, surprisingly going along with his banter. "If not for him you wouldn't have gotten to cop a feel so easily."

"*Cop a feel?* Don't tell me you're jumping on the twentieth century bandwagon."

"I heard it today on the satellite cast and thought it very apt. You are part of the security force after all."

"Maybe I need to take you downtown and make sure you're telling me the truth. We have ways of making you talk, you know."

Brady ran his hands down her back to cup her ass through the material of her skirt. Staring into Melanie's big blue eyes, he saw them glaze over at both his words and his touch. She was damn pretty, with rioting red curling hair. At work she scraped it back, trying to tame it, but Brady loved it when she let her hair down and let it go wild. Melanie

had curves in all the right places, with breasts that were more than a handful and a fine rounded ass.

He and Melanie had been dating for the last two months and they both had held back on taking the final step of sleeping together. If only he dared to take their loving to the next level. Unfortunately, he still wasn't sure if Melanie would be willing. Brady was a man who loved to be in control, both in the bedroom and out it. He wasn't willing to have another vanilla relationship, but knew he wouldn't be able to keep his tendencies under wraps once they started sleeping together. Recently, he thought he had seen signs Melanie would be willing to take that step, but it was nothing they had discussed.

"How would you make me talk?" Melanie's husky question surprised the hell out of Brady, but he wasn't one to look a gift horse in the mouth. If she wanted to play the game, he was more than willing to show her the ropes. It was if she had just been reading his mind. He just hoped he was reading her signals right.

"Well first, I'd make sure you couldn't get away." Reaching down, Brady grabbed his security cuffs off his belt loop. He knew he could be making a big mistake here, but he lived by the philosophy that a person needed to take chances when they came their way. Brady's body, heart and mind were telling him this was a once in a lifetime opportunity.

"I'm pretty strong. If I wanted to fight you, how would you subdue me?" If Brady thought Melanie was teasing him, he would have backed down in a second. But all the signs were apparent she was looking forward to whatever he had to teach her. She was breathing heavily and licking her lips as if in anticipation. Brady could imagine Melanie using her mouth on him in numerous ways. His cock, responding to his wayward thoughts, pushed at the confines of his uniform pants.

"Like this." Brady swiftly turned her in his arms, grasping her arms and pulling them behind her. He snapped the security cuffs on her wrists before she even finished her gasp.

"Hmm, that was pretty sneaky of you. But you still need to get me to talk."

Brady turned Melanie around, needing to see her face, to make sure she was okay with where this night seemed to be heading. Pushing her back against the door, he pressed his hips against hers, allowing her to feel his straining erection. Melanie's eyes were wide and her breath came in short gasps. Her nipples were hard as they tented the fabric of her blouse.

"Even though I never would hurt you, I just might have to see how much you could take before you would talk." Brady was still trying to come to terms with what was going on here. It was if his fantasies and reality had suddenly collided. They had never talked about their sexual proclivities, but he wouldn't have pegged Melanie as a closet submissive. Yet here she was, egging him on. He hoped she was serious and not just playing some kind of twisted game.

"I think I could take a lot from you, Agent Torres." Even though Melanie's hands were restrained behind her back, she found a way to touch him. She pressed her hips into his and rubbed her breasts against his chest. Whispering into his ear she added, "Why don't you try me out," as she gently bit his lobe.

Before Melanie could change her mind, Brady leaned down and flipped her over his shoulder, with her head hanging down over his back and her ass in the air. Holding her tight around the legs he turned toward the stairs, mounting them swiftly. Stopping abruptly, he realized he had no idea which room was hers.

"Last door on the right."

It was as if Melanie knew just what he was thinking. Wordlessly moving down the hall, Brady found the room she indicated.

"Lights on low," Melanie ordered and lights immediately illuminated the room at the dim level she indicated. A large Shaker style bed dominated the room.

*She must be from a moneyed family to have so many antique pieces of furniture.*

Lightly dropping her on the bed, Brady knelt beside her, staring down into her face. He knew he was probably crazy, but he had to make sure she understood what she was doing.

“Is this really what you want? I need to know.”

Melanie smiled then and nodded her head shyly. Her face was blazing, but her voice was steady. “I want you to dominate me, Brady. I didn’t want our first sexual experience together to be a lie. I want...no, I need this.”

That was all Brady needed to know. They could talk later about the details, but for now, he needed this as much as she did. “Okay, baby, I’ll give us both just what we need. But if you get scared, or need me to stop, you say...‘history’.” The one thing he had learned was the importance of having a safe word in a dominant relationship. It helped clear up a lot of potential misunderstanding later down the road.

Melanie nodded, but Brady wanted to make sure she knew what to say. “No, tell me.”

“If I need you to stop or want to take a break I have to say ‘history’.”

“Good girl. Now roll over.” Melanie immediately rolled to her side and Brady released the cuffs. They didn’t go far though since he had plans for them later. “How do you feel?” Brady asked as he gently rubbed Melanie’s arms and wrists, returning circulation to the limbs.

“Okay. Excited. Nervous.”

“Those are all good feelings, baby. Just remember, if it doesn’t feel good, you let me know.”

“I will.” Melanie sat up and clutched at his shoulders. “Do you realize we haven’t even kissed tonight?”

Brady chuckled at her blatant come-on. Who was he to turn down such an offer? Bending his head, he pressed his lips to hers, gently easing her mouth open with gradual pressure and slipping his tongue inside. She tentatively met him, move for move, their tongues dueling in a mating dance. Melanie loved to kiss and drive Brady crazy, but he wasn’t going to let her distract him, not tonight.

Breaking the kiss, Brady fought to catch his breath. “Lie back on the bed, grasp the headboard and don’t let go.”

Melanie lay back as ordered and reached above her head to take a spindle in each hand. The movement drew her breasts up, as if offering them to Brady. He swiftly unbuttoned the silky material, baring her

breasts to his gaze. The cups of her bra were sheer and he could see her dark areolas and nipples through the material. Exposed to the night air and his gaze, her nipples were hard little points.

Brady cupped each breast, one per hand, enjoying the feel of the soft flesh. He had tasted her breasts before, but never had they looked as sweet as tonight. Leaning down, he circled a nipple with his tongue before sucking it into his mouth, fabric and all. Melanie groaned and arched her back, straining to push herself more fully into his mouth. But as ordered she continued to hold onto the headboard.

Releasing the nipple with an audible pop, Brady turned his attention to the other breast. He pinched the nipple between his thumb and index finger and then rolled it back and forth, watching the little nub of flesh engorge with blood at his ministrations. Melanie whimpered, but again pushed her chest toward his questing fingers as if begging for more. Her eyes were closed, but the look on her face was one of pure ecstasy.

Leaning down, Brady soothed the tortured nipple with a swipe of his tongue. "You don't have to be quiet, baby. Tell me what you like, how it feels. I want to know everything."

Her eyes flew open at his words. "Oh God, Brady. It's so much. The feelings are...too intense for words, but at the same time, it's still not enough. I want more."

Cupping her breasts again, Brady lightly ran his thumb back and forth across her nipples, continuing to tease her. "You're very sensitive here. Have you ever thought about getting pierced?" Brady could just imagine driving her to climax with nipple stimulation alone. His cock, already painfully aching, jerked at the thought.

"Yes, but I've always been too scared. I've heard the sensations are wonderful though."

"I'd love to see you pierced. But I don't know if I could keep my hands off during the healing process." Brady continued to taunt and tease, rolling and pinching her nipples as she writhed on the bed.

Finally allowing her respite, Brady sat back for a moment to view the magnificent sight. Melanie was still gripping the spindles of the headboard tightly, her breasts straining against the sheer fabric of her



bra. Her movements on the bed had caused her skirt to ruck up her legs, exposing her thighs and just a hint of her panties underneath.

“Let go of the headboard and sit up here for a minute.”

Melanie slowly released the headboard, flexing her fingers for a moment before sitting up. Brady helped her slip her blouse off and then turned her slightly to release the hooks of her bra. Tossing the garments to the side, Brady turned Melanie back toward him, sweeping her fiery hair away from her face. “Still okay?”

He worried he was pushing her too hard, too fast. Although she said she wanted this, Brady had the feeling this was her first encounter of dominance. And truth be told, most of his encounters had been mild experiments of his own. In fact, he only had one long-term dominance relationship.

“You’re not chickening out on me already, are you?” Melanie smiled and stroked his face.

“Not on your life. Now stand up.” Brady stood and helped her up, turning her so she stood in front of him, her back to his front. He swept her hair back, exposing her neck, and leaned down to lick the sensitive area behind her ear. Grasping her waistband he unhooked her skirt, letting the material fall to the floor.

“I’d love to see you in some thigh-high stockings or garters and heels. Lying spread eagle on the bed and tied down, helpless to move. Then I’d run my hands up your silky legs to your sweet pussy, soaked with cream.”

Melanie moaned at his words and ground her hips back against his erection. “Would you lick me?”

“Not at first. I’d tease you a bit, until I had you dripping on the bed. Then I’d part your folds and discover all your hidden treasures. And just when you were ready to come I’d stop for a moment and then bring you back to your peak, over and over again until you were begging for me to let you come.”

Brady parted her thighs as he spoke, pulling her legs apart, exposing her dampened panties to his questing fingers. He rubbed her clit through the material. She tried to close her legs and trap his hand tight against

her, but he wasn't going to allow her to get away with trying to be in control. He wanted to decide when and how she would come.

"Someone is being a very bad girl." Brady pulled his hand from between her thighs and hooking his fingers in the material of her panties he pulled them down her legs.

"What?" Melanie shook herself from her passion-induced haze, seemingly unable to comprehend his words or actions.

"Who is in control of your body, Melanie?" Brady wanted her to realize just what his form of dominance meant. He would control every aspect of their sexual relationship and she needed to understand that now, before things went any further.

"You are."

"And who decides how and when you come?"

"You do."

"That's right. I think you need a small punishment just as a reminder. Get on the bed, on all fours."

Melanie quickly scrambled onto the bed, arranging herself just as he requested.

"Do you remember your word?"

"Yes." Although low, her voice was still strong. Brady was sure she wasn't necessarily scared, probably just a bit worried about the unknown.

"Widen your legs for me." Melanie did as he ordered and Brady reached out and stroked a finger through her slit, gathering the moisture there and bringing it to his lips to lick. "You taste heavenly."

Melanie glanced over her shoulder, watching him as he licked his finger. She had a little Mona Lisa smile playing about her lips and Brady knew, even though she didn't know what exactly was going to happen next, she was ready for it.

## Chapter Three

Melanie couldn't believe she was kneeling on her bed, awaiting a spanking from Brady. One of her most persistent, all-time fantasies was coming to life right before her eyes. She trembled from the force of the realization of what was about to happen.

"Lower your head."

Brady's order had her panting for more. Why his orders made her willing to bend over and spread her legs she had no idea. Usually when someone tried to order her around it made her hackles rise. But the need to be sexually dominated was her secret, one she had only most recently admitted to herself.

Melanie lowered her head as ordered and waited to see what Brady did next. This whole evening had spiraled out of her control as soon as she had thrown caution to the wind. She'd sensed Brady might be the one to fulfill her desires, but until tonight she had never been willing to bare her soul so completely.

The time seemed to stretch interminably as Melanie waited for Brady to do something, anything.

*Smack*

The swat on her ass wasn't painful. But the surprise of the blow pushed her body forward and Melanie almost lost her balance. Preparing for another smack Melanie was shocked when Brady caressed her, covering her heated ass with the hand that caused the burn.

"Did you enjoy that?"

Melanie nodded shakily, but apparently Brady wasn't satisfied with her non-verbal communication.

"Tell me, what did you like?"

"I don't know, I just liked it."

"Was it the spank you liked more or the fact you gave up control?"

"I...uh, I liked both."

Brady chuckled, but didn't say any more. Once again he dipped his hand into her cream. Stroking, he brought the moisture back towards her rosette, rubbing back and forth, but never penetrating her. Melanie gasped at his caresses, trembling at the force of her reaction. She wanted to scream at him to push his finger inside her, although she had never desired anal sex in her life.

"Not tonight, but soon. I'll take you there. And you'll take me, deep inside."

Melanie moaned at the picture he was painting in her mind. She could see herself, as if watching a movie, with Brady behind her and buried in her ass, thrusting deep as he stimulated her clit. Pushing back against his teasing finger she groaned as he pushed the tip inside her.

"I can see you like the idea, sweetie, but we'll have to work our way up to this." Brady slipped his finger free and patted her upturned ass. "Unfortunately we still have your punishment to finish. I won't be distracted this easily."

Melanie could hear Brady step back and braced herself for the next blow. He didn't disappoint, landing his first swat within seconds. Alternating the blows, first on the right and then left cheek, he methodically spanked Melanie's ass until it felt as if it were on fire. Brady stopped for a moment, his breathing ragged.

"I can't stand anymore, please Brady, fuck me." Melanie couldn't believe the words coming from her mouth. She never begged. But she was begging now and she didn't care. She craved completion. He controlled her, dominated her, punished her and now she needed him to fuck her.

"Who's in charge?"

"You are." Melanie lifted her head, turning her pleading gaze towards him. "Please."

"Lucky for you, I'm in agreement."

Brady pulled her upright until she was kneeling on the bed, looking him in the eye. She realized at some point, while she was on all fours, Brady had stripped and he now stood before her naked. Unbelievably she'd never heard him, too wrapped up in the sensations he evoked in her.

Glancing down, Melanie noted Brady wasn't unaffected by their love play. His erection was dripping pre-cum, the silky liquid dragging across her belly. She reached out to grasp him as if drawn to a flame.

Brady gasped as her hand closed around his pulsing cock. It was warm and throbbed with the beat of his heart.

"Can I taste you?" Melanie instinctively knew she should ask and felt a warm glow as he nodded his approval.

Sliding off the bed, Melanie sank to the floor in front of him. She licked up his shaft and back down again, tasting him. He had a clean musky scent that made her crave more. Moving her lips up his cock, she allowed the tip to slide into her mouth. Just holding the head, she sucked hard, flicking her tongue around the slit at the top.

"Yeah, just like that." Brady grasped her hair, wrapping it in his hands. He didn't push her face onto his cock or pull harshly, which encouraged her further. Melanie rarely performed oral sex, usually finding no man was worth the effort, and most were downright assholes about it, basically trying to fuck her face. But Brady seemed very appreciative of her endeavor and she figured he was probably just the type who would return the favor—a true rarity.

Sucking his cock more fully into her mouth, Melanie reached up and cupped Brady's balls, squeezing ever so gently. He moaned in appreciation, his hips jerking toward her. She coated his shaft with saliva, easily sliding his cock in and out her mouth. The grip on her hair tightened and his hips were pumping in rhythm to her movements. Melanie lightly raked her teeth over the head of his cock and Brady shouted hoarsely, pulling back from her.

"That was great baby, but I don't want to come in your mouth. I want to come in your sweet pussy. Do you have protection?"

"I have inhalers in the drawer." Grabbing the combination birth control and disease prevention inhalers, they both quickly took a puff of the drug that would protect them for the next twenty four hours.

Pulling her up, Brady briefly kissed her before pushing her back toward the bed. Melanie lay on her back, arms above her head. Although she wouldn't ask, she wanted to feel restrained when they had sex for the first time. As if reading her mind, Brady grabbed the security cuffs he'd used earlier. Pressing a button on the side, the cuffs expanded, so they could be looped around a couple of the spindles of the headboard. This allowed Melanie to have her hands slightly apart while still being locked into place with just one pair of cuffs. She was pretty sure they hadn't been invented for this purpose, however. The thought made her giggle.

"So you think this is funny, huh?"

Melanie decided she wanted to play. Blinking her eyes, she lowered her voice sexily. "Oh, Agent Torres, you've got me in a *very* precarious situation. What do you plan to do with me?"

Brady knelt on the bed between her legs, slowly pushing them apart. Gently massaging her calves, he stroked his way up her legs to her inner thighs. Melanie's breath hitched as he reached the apex, but then he abruptly stopped, keeping his hands on either side of her pussy.

"Well Miss Parsons, you do seem to have yourself in a very sticky situation. As to what I have planned, hmmm, there are so many possibilities. I really want to eat this sweet cream I see your pussy drowning in, but I don't know if you deserve such a treat. Besides, I don't think I can wait until I fuck you. We'll have to take a rain check on that, okay?"

"Okay." Melanie's response was breathy, barely a whisper. Although she'd love to experience his brand of oral sex, she was just as anxious as him, anticipating the sex between them. She had a feeling she would have many future nights at Brady's tender mercy.

Brady leaned over her, kissing her mouth hungrily, twining his tongue with hers in an intricate dance. Breaking the kiss, she watched as he sat back and fought to regain his breath. Reaching down, he cupped her breasts, kneading softly and pinching her nipples before

rolling them between his thumb and finger. Her hips arched off the bed at the stimulation. Melanie could feel his cock dripping pre-cum and rubbing against her skin. She wanted to beg him to fuck her before she went insane with longing.

"I won't lie and tell you I'll be gentle. It's been a long night and my control is at the breaking point."

"Take me Brady, please. It's what I want too."

Positioning his cock against her sex, Brady slid in, her body opening and accepting him with one thrust. For an instant she thought time had stopped. She had been waiting for this moment for what seemed like an eternity and now he was finally inside her.

Brady began fucking her slowly, with long, measured strokes, pulling almost all the way out before plunging in again, filling her up completely.

"Fuck me hard, Brady, please." She didn't care if she was begging.

Pulling back, Brady began thrusting harder, pushing her legs up until they were practically hanging over his shoulders. Her clit, super sensitive at this point, vibrated with his every downstroke. He was able to sink into her even deeper in this position, hitting a place she never knew existed. Her body rocked with shockwaves of pleasure as she orgasmed.

Slowly lowering her legs, Brady sped up his plunges. Melanie tightened her vaginal muscles, wanting to give him as much pleasure as he had given her. His moans grew louder as he stiffened and ejaculated inside her before collapsing in a heap. Melanie lay there, her legs restlessly stroking the backs of his thighs, wishing for this one moment her hands were free and she could touch him.

Eventually regaining his composure, Brady rolled off her and sat up. Stretching above her head, he released the security cuffs and gently massaged her arms.

"Are you okay?"

"More than okay, I feel fine." Melanie reached up and stroked his face, amazed by the look of relief she saw there.

"Stay right here, I'm going to get you cleaned up." Brady hopped off the bed and was out of the room before she could tell him where the

bathroom was located. She could hear him opening a couple of doors before he eventually found it.

Returning quickly, Brady pressed a warm washcloth against her well-used flesh, cleaning the evidence of their encounter. Pulling back the covers, he tucked her into bed before returning to the bathroom. She felt loved and cherished by this man. Melanie hoped she wasn't reading more into this night than just a happy man who was excited he finally got some. The uncertainty of the other person's reaction was one of the reasons she'd never revealed her desire to be dominated. Relationships were hard enough without the added pressures of her particular cravings.

As Brady returned to her room for the second time, Melanie sat up, propped against her pillows and the headboard behind her. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he looked at her intently for a moment.

"Are you tired?"

Melanie thought about his question a moment before answering. "A little sore, but tired in a good way, like when I've exercised. Why?"

"I was wondering if you were up to talking for a bit."

"Sure, what did you want to talk about?" Scooting over she made room for Brady to join her on the bed.

"I was wondering about those burglaries."

Melanie's mind tried to wrap around the words coming out his mouth. Worried they were going to have the big relationship talk, she was shocked by his thought process.

She had the best sex of her life and he wanted to talk about work. *Ugh, men!*

"So what about the burglaries?" Fine, she was willing to play this game for awhile—be the little woman who asked her man about his day.

"We're never going to catch these guys unless we set a trap for them. And I think I've got the perfect bait."

"Really?" Melanie was surprised. Brady had never seemed very interested in historical artifacts before.



"It just so happens I know a woman who has a dress from the very time period the thieves seem to be interested in. Think I might convince her to let me use said dress?"

Melanie's eyes narrowed. She didn't know how he'd found out about the dress, but her radar was going off double time.

"What do you know about dresses?" Maybe she could bluff her way through this.

"Come on Melanie, I've seen it. When I was looking for the bathroom I opened the room next door and saw the dress hanging there, wrapped in the special polymer you use to preserve old stuff. And I saw the date on the tag you had attached, 1878."

Melanie's heart clenched at the thought he'd seen the dress. Although she shied away from her family's traditionalist values, it was the one thing from her childhood she'd brought with her when she moved from home. The dress represented all the things she thought she abhorred about the historical role of women, but in her heart she loved it. It was a bit embarrassing Brady had found out two of her biggest secrets in one night.

"That dress is a family heirloom. I can't just hand it over to you to use as bait in some scheme."

"It's not *some* scheme."

"Brady, did I ever tell you the history of the dress?"

"No." Although only one word it held a wealth of emphasis and Melanie could almost hear Brady's question, "what did the history of a dress have to do with their conversation?"

"It was a very modern dress for its time. Matilda Chandler was a mail order bride and her mother made the dress so she could have a real wedding. Afterwards, she wrote letters to her children, telling them about the need to preserve the history of their family and her outlook on love. Other letters were written by the women in the family who wore the dress and passed down through the generations."

Brady realized this was the true spirit of the Traditionalist family, the preservation of the history. It was one of the reasons he had been drawn to Melanie.

“We actually lost the dress and letters for a time early in this century. But a lovely young woman found them and, after reading the letters, she did everything in her power to find the family and send them back to us. And if I lose the dress now...”

“Do you trust me?”

Melanie squirmed as she considered his question. She’d just allowed him to restrain and spank her, giving up complete control to him. Could she trust him outside the bedroom as well?

She sighed heavily before replying. “Yes, I trust you. But I still don’t see what trust has to do with anything.”

“If you trust me then you’ve got to realize I’d never do anything to hurt you or the dress.”

“I suppose.”

“You suppose right. It’s getting late, we better get some sleep. Lights off,” Brady ordered and although she hadn’t invited him, he snuggled down into the bed, pulling her back against him and wrapping his arms around her. “Besides, I noticed it’s a wedding dress according to the tag and you might need it in the future.”

## Chapter Four

Brady walked into UAS headquarters the next morning, feeling mighty satisfied. Spending the night with Melanie had been all he'd hoped for and more. After she fell asleep, he lay cradling her in his arms, with a feeling he'd never experienced seeping into his heart and soul. At thirty-three he had given up on finding a woman who was sexually compatible with him in the bedroom and intellectually compatible with him everywhere else.

Not that he'd be limiting his sexual interactions with Melanie to the bedroom.

"Well, well, well. Looks like Torres got laid last night. Who is she and can you tell any stories?"

Brady sobered instantly. He didn't know his new partner, Randall Miko, too well yet and certainly wasn't planning to share any stories with him. Hell, he hadn't even told the man he was steadily dating anyone.

"What's up, Miko?"

"No stories?" Randall lifted his eyebrows, laughter playing over his face. "Okay, fine, work it is. Take a look at this."

Randall walked over to his desk, bringing something up on his holo-monitor. As Brady approached the desk he saw a still hologram of Melanie's workroom, with a shot of her frozen in time.

"What's this?"

"Play back date/time stamped zero, three, seventeen, two thousand eighty nine, seventeen eleven."

The hologram began to play.

Brady watched as Melanie pulled on her coat and picked up her purse. "Harold, I'm heading out, only ten minutes late." Melanie began

walking through the large room and Harold, who had been out of the picture at the beginning of the shot, stepped into view.

“Have a good time tonight, Melanie.”

Melanie looked startled for a moment. “How did you know I was going out?”

Harold’s blush could easily be seen in the holo-picture. “I overheard your side of the conversation about going out to dinner at *Ma Moitié*. Are you going for a girl’s night?” Harold had a hopeful look on his face.

“No actually, it’s a date.” Melanie waved good-bye and they continued to watch as Harold finished putting items away, his head lowered in dejection.

Brady winced slightly. He had taken Melanie to the new French restaurant for their third date. It was also the first time he had an inkling there might be something more between them.

“As interesting as this is, what are we looking for?” By now Harold had also left and they were staring at an empty room.

“Wait for it. I wanted you to see the beginning so you knew the difference.”

Suddenly a bright light flashed on the screen, blinding them for a moment.

“Forward twenty.” The screen jumped forward twenty minutes, staying brilliant for a few another few seconds before suddenly returning to normal.

“Okay, I saw the bright light. What does it mean? I don’t see a difference.”

“These are the security vids from the night of the first burglary. I compared them to the ones from two nights ago and the exact same phenomena occurred in both vids. The techies speculate the bright light was a low level electro-magnetic pulse that knocked out the surveillance equipment for approximately twenty-five minutes.

“It would have to be pretty minimal. Did it affect any other equipment?”

“Not that we can tell so far. This was a very specific job. They didn’t care if someone knew when they were there, they just didn’t want to be identified.”

Randall shut down the security vid as Brady sat down at the desk directly across from him.

“I still don’t see why we’re even involved in this. There aren’t any leads tying these burglaries specifically to the Traditionalists and certainly not to the Purists. Would Purists even use an EM pulse?”

Purists were a radical splint cell group of Traditionalists that had eschewed all modern technology, to the point they lived in communes out in the middle of nowhere. They had protested numerous times on Capital Hill, asking that their *nation* be recognized as sovereign from the United Americas. Unfortunately, Purists had also been linked to a number of terrorist events, usually minor acts that caused more nuisance than injury or harm.

“Who else would want a bunch of pots and pans?” Randall rolled his eyes and then groaned. “Heads-up, boss man is coming this way.”

Brady turned to see Captain William Turner bearing straight for them. Although he always seemed to have a permanent scowl on his face, he looked particularly pissed off today at something—or someone.

“Torres, in my office now.” Captain Turner kept walking, right past them and headed toward the office at the end of the hall. Randall stood up when Brady got to his feet and the captain turned for a moment. “I didn’t request you, Miko, so sit your ass back down.” The captain turned back, swiftly walking towards his office.

Randall immediately sat, shock written all over his face. “Damn, you must be in a pile of shit up to your nose. Good luck man.”

Brady had no idea what the problem could be so he didn’t even waste time trying to speculate. He’d find out soon enough. Reaching the captain’s office he knocked briefly before entering, closing the door behind him and standing at attention in front of the desk.

“Do you even know who you’re fucking?”

Of all the things the captain could have said, this was the one thing Brady wasn’t expecting.

“Excuse me sir, but I have no idea what you mean.”

“Well, let me enlighten you. Melanie Parsons, of the Philadelphia Parsons, comes from one of the biggest Traditionalist families in this country. Her family goes back to the wild, wild west of the 1800s. Is this starting to ring any bells for you?”

Brady stood in shock. His little Modernist was from a Traditionalist family? And a rich one it seemed. Melanie had often spoken of her family, but she had never given this kind of detail before. It suddenly explained so much. Why she had a historical wedding dress hanging in her house for one thing.

“You seem a bit surprised, Torres. Didn’t your girlfriend tell you her family was in opposition to our government? In fact, her father just offered a hundred thousand dollar donation to the campaign of any Traditionalist who runs against a Modernist in the upcoming election. In any election in the United Americas. That’s a hell of a lot of money, son.”

Brady didn’t care what Melanie’s family did or who her father contributed money to. And he would deal with her keeping secrets later. Instead he decided to focus in on the one thing he could deal with right now.

“Are you having me followed?”

The captain looked up at Brady’s question and laughed. “Have you been listening to me? I just told you your girlfriend and her family are raging Traditionalists, you’re investigating radical Traditionalist groups and all you can ask me is if we’re following you?”

“Sir, Article 71 of the United Americas revised code clearly states that all members of the UAS must be informed if they are to be put under surveillance unless they are directly suspected of a criminal act. So I ask you again, are you having me followed?” Brady was barely holding on to his temper. If they suspected him of a criminal act his career was over.

“Now don’t get torqued, Torres. We’ve been following the Parsons woman and the agent at her house last night recognized you. He immediately came to me, so there are no worries this will get around. But we’ve got a real problem here. You can’t continue this investigation if you’re personally involved with one of the suspects.”

“Melanie’s a suspect?”

“She had access to the items stolen and she comes from a Traditionalist family, so of course she’s a suspect.”

“Sir, I know for a fact she is incapable of this. Besides, she was with me the night of the first burglary.”

“She may be working with other members of a group. You can’t assume just because you’re fucking her she’s innocent.”

Brady took a menacing step forward. “If you insult her one more time I won’t be responsible for my actions, *sir*.”

“Stand down, Torres, or you just might find yourself working in Alaska tomorrow.”

Brady stepped back, but he was ready to make good on his threat. Melanie might have a few secrets, but Brady was sure he knew the real woman inside. And she was no terrorist.

“Now I’m willing to put your involvement with Ms. Parsons to good use. If you can get us some evidence of wrong doing...perhaps we can work out a deal.”

“Sir, I am stating again for the record that I believe in her innocence to any involvement in this crime. In addition, I was planning to tell you I have an idea for catching the thieves in the act.”

“An idea, huh?” The captain patted his chin thoughtfully for a moment. Tapping his earpiece, the captain spoke Randall Miko’s name and connected to Randall’s earpiece. “Miko, get your ass in here now.”

A minute later there was a knock on the door and Randall popped his head inside.

“Yes, sir?”

“When I say get your ass in here I mean in my office, not hanging outside my door.”

Randall flushed in annoyance and quickly entered the office. Closing the door behind him, he came to attention next to his partner. Brady could sense Randall staring over at him but he kept his eyes forward, still trying to keep his temper in check.

“Torres here says he has a plan to catch the thieves. Has he shared this with you?”

“Uh, no sir, not yet.” Randall sounded surprised and a bit hurt, as if he’d been deliberately left out of the loop.

“Well Torres, why don’t the two of you sit down and you can let us both in on your little scheme.”

Sitting down, Brady said. “I have a friend who has an article from the time period from when the burglaries are occurring. We use this article as bait for the thieves and stake out the warehouse. Agent Miko recently discovered they are using a low level EM pulse to disrupt the security vids, so we would have to have someone on site.” Randall threw Brady a grateful look at being recognized for his work.

“Miko, when did you find out about this EM pulse?” The captain was looking at Randall thoughtfully.

“Just this morning, sir. In fact, Agent Torres pointed out this calls into question the validity of the Purist angle sir. They most likely wouldn’t be using EM technology since they don’t like technology of any kind.” Randall returned the kudos favor, letting Brady know he had been listening earlier.

“What is this *article* you have access to?”

Brady had taken a holopic of the wedding dress before he left Melanie’s house this morning. Tapping his earpiece he brought up the picture.

“It’s a wedding dress from 1878.”

“That’s a wedding dress? It’s not even white.” Randall was staring at the plum colored dress in bemusement.

“I know. I was just as surprised as you were. But I’ve been told the wedding dresses of this era were rarely white.”

“It looks hot and uncomfortable.”

Although he kept silent, Brady agreed with Randall. The dress had a high neck, long sleeves and swept the floor. It had the thick look of a clothing item made with natural fibers, rather than the cool synthetics of today.

As uncomfortable as it looked, Brady could just imagine Melanie in the dress, her waist cinched tight to emphasize the bustle on her ass. Just thinking about getting her out the dress was making him hot.



Teasing and tempting her as he unbuttoned each and every button until he had her lying exposed before him. It certainly made him realize why men of that era covered up their women.

“We aren’t looking at the damn thing as fashion experts. I want to know if it’s going to work as bait.” The Captain’s comments immediately broke through Brady’s daydream.

“I can get the dress today and take it to the warehouse. We can put out the word a new item is being added to the collection and then set up the sting operation.”

The captain sat silently for a moment, his head bent in thought, obviously contemplating Brady’s plan. Finally he looked up and addressed Randall. “Send me the information on the security vids. I think we need to follow up on this EM pulse question. If this really does eliminate the Purists, we need to have some answers. Torres, stay for a minute so I can discuss one other thing with you.”

Randall nodded and quickly exited the office. Brady knew he’d be bombarded with questions as soon as he left the captain’s office. Randall was an old-fashioned gossip and wouldn’t let him get away with ‘no comment’ regarding what happened. Brady was going to have to decide if he was ready to trust his new partner or not.

“I assume your friend with the dress is the Parsons woman?”

“Yes sir.”

“Hmm, this plan of yours better work, Torres, or you might be back to writing air traffic tickets for DCPD.”

## Chapter Five

Melanie walked into work as if she were walking on air, floating above all the flotsam and jetsam of the harsh realities of life. Brady's total domination of her body last night was a dream come true. Only two weeks into their relationship, Melanie had thought Brady was the ideal man, interesting to talk to and sexy as sin, but as usual she had been worried about that final component. Last night had erased all her worries.

"Melanie, did you hear we were on the news downloads this morning?" Harold's eyes shone behind his glasses—intent on ruining her good mood, no doubt.

"No, something good I hope?"

"It was about the burglaries and how we were getting new donations to the collection to offset the missing items. I don't know anything about new items, Melanie, do you?"

Melanie had a sick feeling in her stomach that she knew exactly what the new item might be—her wedding dress. Her sick feeling turned to dread as she spotted Stan coming into the cataloguing room. She could tell there was going to be trouble by the look of malice on his face.

"Melanie, I want to speak with you right now."

Stan strode toward her double time. Not wanting another public confrontation like yesterday, Melanie decided to send Harold out of the line of fire before Stan reached them.

"Harold, why don't you start working and I'll join you as soon as Mr. Johnson and I finish our discussion?"

Harold looked at Stan bearing down on them and Melanie could tell he was scared to death. But he suddenly straightened up to his five-foot-six-and-a-half feet, prepared to stand his ground.

"I'll support you Melanie. You won't have to face him alone." She could swear she almost saw tears glistening in his eyes. Fortunately for him, she'd rather speak frankly with Stan, something she really couldn't afford to do with witnesses around.

"No Harold, that's okay. Stan and I need privacy to discuss a few issues. Go ahead and get started and I'll join you in a few minutes. Thanks." Melanie shooed him away as Stan finally reached her.

"We need to talk." Melanie could tell she shocked him by speaking first—most likely with the very words he'd anticipated using. Stan only liked confrontational situations if he was the one doing the confronting. She intended to turn the tables on him.

"Why don't we go into my office?" Not waiting for a reply, Melanie headed into her office and took a seat behind her desk. Unbeknownst to Stan, she quickly hit the holo-vid recorder she had in her office. She wanted to ensure there was a record of this particular conversation if she ever needed it.

Stan followed her into the office and, surprisingly, closed the door. Leaning back against it, he eyed her until she felt as if she were a bug under a digital scope.

"I don't know what you think you're doing, but you won't get away with it."

Stan's off-the-wall remark had her puzzled. "I really have no idea to what you are referring."

"Listen to Miss High and Mighty speaking. Your family won't be able to protect you forever you know." Stan began pacing around the small room, driving Melanie batty.

"Stan, why don't we keep your personal feelings out of this and get to the point."

Stan flopped into the chair, leaning forward to sneer at her. "I got the news downloads about a new acquisition. Since all new donations come through my office I figured it had to be you trying to pull a fast one."

“Please enlighten me how the Smithsonian getting a new acquisition equates to me pulling a fast one.”

“Your family must be protecting you. If they donate something the news won’t be about the burglaries, it’ll be about the donation. They’re trying to save your ass. But I’m going to make sure the news crews stay on the real story—we have a curator who can’t stop losing things. How do you think that will look?” Stan had the look of someone who just pulled off a major coup.

“I think it’ll look like my boss is a moron.” Melanie had to suppress the laughter bubbling up at the twin looks of shock and horror on his face.

“You’re always trying to make me look bad.”

“I think you do a fine job of that all on your own.” Melanie was sick and tired of getting blamed for his inability to lead. “If you hadn’t cut the security budget last year there would have been guards as well as surveillance equipment and maybe someone would have thought twice about robbing the nation’s museum. Instead it’s become a free for all.”

Stan stood up abruptly, knocking the chair over in the process. His earlier bravado gone, he now looked just livid and witless.

“Listen to me. I’ll smear your name not only in this town but in every professional organization in the country. You’re a Traditionalist, and everyone knows they’re the ones who are behind these thefts. That’s why the UAS was investigating. So you better watch your step or you might find yourself not only looking for another job, but trying to fight your way out of a prison sentence.”

Melanie rose, coming around the desk and facing him toe to toe. “You know damn well I had nothing to do with these burglaries and your petty little need for vengeance is the only reason you’ve decided to put me in the line of fire. I refuse to allow you to threaten and accuse me in my own office. Get out, now!”

“You can act all brave if you want to, it won’t change the facts.”

“Exactly, and I’ve got truth on my side.” Melanie turned and sat back down at her desk, a smile of satisfaction on her face.

“Dream on.” Stan’s lame comeback almost had her in stitches. He really was a pathetic man. “Besides, I came here about the acquisition. What do you know about it?”

Melanie silently considered what to say. She didn’t really want to tell him about the scheme Brady had mentioned to her last night. For one thing, she didn’t want to reveal her relationship to the dress, let alone her relationship to Brady and the UAS. She figured the UAS had agreed to his plan and leaked it to the news media sources. But they hadn’t discussed who would know about the scheme itself. Better to be safe than sorry. Melanie decided to stick with the truth as much as possible without revealing anything personal.

“I know the item is a dress and it’s an anonymous donation. I haven’t received it yet so there is no further information at this time.”

Stan narrowed his eyes, staring at her as if he could pop off the top of her head and look inside to get the answers he wanted. Melanie remained silent, knowing if she added anything else it would just look suspicious. Stan finally gave up and turned on his heel, grasping the handle and swinging the door open.

“You better watch your back.” He spat in a final parting shot. Walking through the door he slammed it, rattling the items in her office.

“Same to you, buddy,” Melanie muttered as she ended the holo-vid recording. Just as she rose to join Harold, her earpiece buzzed, indicating an incoming message and she sank back into her chair. *Some days it just doesn’t pay to get out of bed.*

“Hello, Melanie Parsons speaking.”

“You’ve got the sexiest voice.” Brady’s own sultry voice caressed her ear.

Melanie’s insides suddenly felt molten. He could make her hot just with the sound of his voice.

“Thanks. You’re not so bad yourself.”

“No comparison, baby. I need you to do me a favor.” Brady suddenly was all business and Melanie sat up, intrigued.

“Okay, what do you need?”

Brady groaned and chuckled. “Don’t tempt me. It’s about the dress.”

"Oh, well before you ask for your favor, I've got to tell you something. My boss was asking questions about the dress and since I wasn't sure who you wanted to know about it, I kind of hedged the truth a bit."

"Good girl. The captain doesn't want too many people involved in this for fear of a leak. Anyway, I need you to go get the dress during your lunch hour so it's in your workroom by five o'clock tonight."

"Okay, but why?"

"We're going to start the sting tonight. That's why all the news media is buzzing about the new acquisition. I'm first on stake-out tonight so I'll be coming by to set up as soon as everyone has gone home."

Melanie's disappointment was boundless. She'd been hoping they could get together tonight and talk about where their relationship was heading. She felt like she was living on pins and needles in the uncertainty. She'd even planned to dress extra special in hopes that they'd be getting together.

"You still there?"

"Yes, sorry. Is there anything else?"

"Can you stick around after everyone goes home to let me in and help me set up?"

"Of course." Great, now she was a handyman's helper.

"I wish we could have more time together, but as soon as this case is solved maybe we can both take time off and get away."

"I'd like that." Melanie felt warmed by his words, hopeful in the thoughts of their future.

"Good. I'll see you tonight then."

"Bye." Melanie sat there for a moment, listening to the dial tone as Brady broke the connection between them. Finally shaking herself out of her stupor, she clicked the receiver off and headed out to begin work with Harold.



Hustling Harold out the door at five o'clock had been a delicate balancing act. The man was totally dedicated and when she mentioned she might stay late to work on some things he practically fell all over

himself to offer to stay and help her. Melanie finally had to pretend to leave. She circled around the building and came back in after she saw him get on the metro.

Walking back into the office, Melanie was startled when a hand reached out and grabbed her arm. Turning swiftly to fight off her attacker, she subsided as soon as she recognized Brady in the darkness. Smacking him in the shoulder, she pulled away.

“You scared the life out of me. How did you get in here?”

“We’re working with the head of Smithsonian security and I came down with him from the main office.”

“Lights on, usual setting.” Melanie ordered and a calming glow filled the room.

“Where were you?” Brady’s tone held a hint of something, but Melanie wasn’t sure what. Almost a combination of concern and displeasure.

“I’m not good at the cloak and dagger stuff. When I tried to get Harold out of here he wanted to stay to help.”

“The man is in love with you.”

Melanie stared at Brady in astonishment. Then she started to laugh. “No, he’s not. He’s my assistant. We’re just coworkers.”

“Take it from me, Harold is in love with you.”

Melanie rolled her eyes. “You barely know him. You only met him for what, five minutes the other day? How would you know he’s in love with me?”

“First, I have hours of holo-vids of the two of you working together. Second, a man knows these things. Third, I don’t want to talk about Harold, I want to talk about you.”

“Me, what about me?” Melanie felt like she was in a whirlwind, with Brady changing directions so fast it made her head spin.

“When were you going to tell me that you’re from a Traditionalist family?”

Melanie stood frozen in place. She’d never mentioned the specifics about her family because it had always colored every relationship she’d ever been in. Either the guys were excited to be dating a woman from a

rich Traditionalist family or they were disgusted by her family's Traditionalist values. When she'd moved to Washington D.C. she'd decided to keep her family in Philadelphia and out her love life.

"Why, does it matter to you?" Melanie waited in anticipation of his answer, hoping against hope he'd say no.

"I don't care who your family is or how much money they have. I care about the fact you felt the need to hide something from me. Do we have a trust issue?"

"No, we don't have a trust issue. It never mattered to me. I'm sorry I didn't tell you." Melanie shivered as she stared into Brady's eyes, although she wasn't frightened of him.

"I accept your apology, but I think a punishment is in order."

Melanie started at his words. "Hey now, I told you I was sorry."

"I decide when and why you get punishments, not you. Besides, you like what I do to you."

Melanie couldn't deny his words. As soon as he mentioned punishment she could feel her cream begin to flow. He didn't even need to touch her and she was getting turned on.

Pushing her up against the desk, Brady began to pull her skirt up her legs, trailing his fingers along her thighs. He groaned in appreciation when he realized she had on thigh-high stockings. As he moved his hands up further, she could tell by the flare of desire in his eyes when he discovered she was not wearing panties or a thong, but a tiny little G-string that barely covered anything at all.

"Were you expecting someone to discover this hidden package?"

"Expecting, no. Hoping, yes. Do you like it?"

"Hell yes, I like it. I think we need to do some exploring of our own tonight."



## Chapter Six

Intent on Melanie, Brady barely heard the noise coming from the other room. But the words that soon followed broke through his haze like a splash of cold water.

“Agent Torres, are you in here?”

Breaking away from Melanie, Brady struggled to regain his control. He couldn’t let himself forget he was here for a job. Unfortunately, when he was alone with Melanie good sense usually went out the window.

“In here.” Brady called out, directing security toward the office.

“Ah, there you are. Ms. Parsons. I didn’t see you leave. I wondered if you were still here.”

“Hi, John. I was just getting the dress ready.” Brady watched as Melanie pulled the dress out the carrying bag.

“Hard to believe someone would want to break in here just to get to a dress.” John reached forward as if he was going to touch the material of the dress, but Melanie pulled it away from his grasp.

“It’s very delicate. I’m still not sure if I should leave it here.” Melanie bit her bottom lip, worry creasing her brow. Although Brady didn’t like to see her worried, it annoyed him a bit that she was still concerned about his ability to protect her family heirloom.

“Everything will be fine. Now where would you usually put a new acquisition?”

“Out here.” Melanie left the office and headed into the large cataloguing room, closely followed by Brady and John. Brady watched appreciatively as her hips swayed while she walked, gently rolling with every step. Unfortunately, he wasn’t the only one enjoying the view. He

stared hard at John, cautioning him away from Melanie with just one look. John smiled in response, apparently reading the warning.

Melanie stopped in front of an open containment pod and gently placed the dress inside. As she closed the lid, Brady noted she programmed some information into the keypad and the pod sealed, preserving the integrity of dress.

“This will keep the dress safe from any harm from the environment.”

“Okay, now it’s our turn.” Brady turned to John. Squatting down, they began pulling out wires from the bag John carried.

“What’s all this?” Melanie peered over his shoulder. He could smell the sweet fruity scent of her perfume and Brady had to concentrate on answering her question. It didn’t help when he noticed John’s smirking face. The man was just asking to be punched.

“Since the thieves have been disabling the security’s technology, we decided to try some old fashioned methods. These are trip wires. We’ll set them up close to the ground and when they are triggered it will send out an alarm. The doors to this room will automatically close, sealing anyone inside.”

“Hmm, how long will it take to set up?”

“It may take us a while. You can go ahead and head home since we have the dress taken care of.”

“No, I’ve got some work in my office. If you don’t mind I’ll stick around until you’re done so we can talk.”

Brady nodded and watched as Melanie walked back to her office.

“So, you were able to defrost the ice queen.” At John’s unexpected question Brady turned back towards him.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

John held up his hands in surrender, chuckling as he spoke. “Don’t take it the wrong way, man. I’m happy for her. Just surprised. I think every man in this building has asked her out at one time or another and most, if not all, have been turned down flat. And those she did agree to see never got a second date.”

“What makes you think I’ve had a second date?”

John laughed aloud. "Come on, I'm not blind. There's a hell of a lot more than just a second date between you two. I'm not sure what I interrupted earlier, but I'd say it's a good thing the security vids for Ms. Parsons's office are disabled."

Brady was surprised at this information, wondering if there was any link to the burglaries. "Why are they disabled?"

"Ms. Parsons asked for them to be removed, but we couldn't do that so we disabled them instead. She said it was because it made her feel creepy to be watched. But I think it also had something to do with her boss. He used to 'review' the vids on a regular basis before she got them turned off."

Brady finished setting up the wires as he contemplated this new information. Although he couldn't see how it related to the burglaries at all, it still bothered him. He finally realized it was because he didn't like the idea of Melanie's boss scrutinizing her. Not only was it creepy, to borrow her phrase, Brady was jealous of any man who observed her in an unguarded moment. He didn't enjoy the fact other men were watching what he considered to be strictly his.

"So were you one of those men who asked her out?"

"No sir. If I were twenty years younger and didn't have a wife at home, I'd have been waiting in line like everyone else. Of course, I still like to watch." John guffawed at Brady's expression.

They finished the rest of the work in silence, setting up the trip wires around the dress and access points to the room.

"Thanks for your help." Brady shook John's hand in appreciation for not only his assistance with the set up, but for his earlier words as well.

"No problem. I hope you catch the bastards. They're making us all look bad." John made his way out the room, closing the door behind him.

Brady headed back toward the office and Melanie. It was time to finish what he'd started earlier. Walking into the office, Brady stopped for a moment and stared at Melanie. She had gotten comfortable, kicking off her shoes and at some point while waiting for him, she had lowered the lights and decided to lay her head down for a moment. Her hair was

spread out like a halo where she had fallen asleep at her desk with her head cushioned on her arms.

Walking over to her, Brady smoothed her hair away from her face and watched as she blinked her eyes, slowly waking up. Upon seeing him standing there, Melanie smiled up at him, causing his heart to clench in his chest. He'd never thought he was ready to settle down, but watching Melanie greet him with a smile every morning upon waking was something he hadn't known he craved until just now.

"Hey baby, you should have gone home."

Melanie sat up slowly and stretched, pulling the fabric of her blouse tightly against her breasts. At some point she must have decided to take off her bra because her breasts were clearly visible under the sheer material. Brady's cock perked up in interest at the sight.

"No, I wanted to wait for you. I wanted to find out what my punishment was going to be."

Listening to Melanie refer to her punishment in such a matter of fact way made Brady's cock more than perk up—it came to attention.

"Are you looking forward to your punishment?"

Melanie paused for a moment before answering. "I don't know. If I say 'yes' am I depraved?"

Brady pulled her up from her chair and into his arms. "No baby, you're not depraved. You control almost every aspect of your life. In this one area you are ready for someone else to be in control. That's not depravity, it is intelligence. Don't let the dictates of society tell you how you are supposed to act."

Melanie laughed softly. "You're so good for my ego. I do enjoy what we've done together and I want more."

Brady lifted Melanie and sat her on the desk, pushing her skirt up until it was around her hips and then pulling her legs apart and stepping between them.

"So you want more, huh? Is that why you took off your bra?"

"I hate wearing that thing. You'd think after a couple hundred years they could come up with a better garment to hold up a woman's breasts, but no."

"I like seeing you without the bra, your breasts straining the buttons of this poor blouse."

Brady pushed against a button, forcing it to slip free. The slopes of her breasts were on display for his gaze. Melanie squirmed as he watched her. Brady decided this would be the perfect opportunity to fulfill one of his fantasies.

"I want to see you touch yourself." Stepping back, Brady sat in the chair she just vacated, relaxing as it conformed to his body. "Unbutton your blouse."

Melanie quickly freed the rest of her buttons, allowing the blouse to fall open, exposing her breasts to his gaze.

"What should I do?"

"How do you like to touch yourself? Show me."

Melanie licked her lips, eliciting an accompanying groan from Brady. He didn't know why he was torturing himself, but watching her pleasure herself was too good to pass up. Cupping her breasts, Melanie gently kneaded the flesh before grazing each nipple with a thumb, teasing the hardened nubs. She moaned at the contact and then grasped each nipple between a thumb and finger, rolling back and forth before gently scraping the tips with her nails.

"More, show me more."

It was as if Melanie could read his mind, although it probably wasn't too difficult to figure out where his mind was. She scooted to the edge of the desk and slipped her hand inside the tiny G-string, rubbing herself back and forth, her head falling back as her strokes became firmer. Unfortunately the material and her hand obstructed Brady's view. He could hold out no longer and pushed himself forward, between her legs.

"Lay back." He ordered harshly. "I've got to taste you."

Melanie complied immediately, lying back on her elbows so she could still see down the length of her body. He loved that she wanted to watch him licking her pussy. Taking her G-string, he ripped it from her body, too rushed to be gentle.

The aroma of her arousal hit him and he salivated at the thought of tasting her spicy cream. Trailing a finger up her thigh, Brady watched as

she shivered in reaction to his touch. Moving his finger higher, he traced the crease of her pussy, gathering the juices collected there. Bringing his finger to his lips, he licked it clean, but the brief taste of her only left him hungry for more.

Brady lowered his head and ran his tongue along her slit, coming close to her clit, but not quite touching it. Melanie moaned and arched her hips toward him. Gently parting her folds, Brady explored the inner recesses of her pussy, before moving to her clit and nibbling at it.

"Yes, God, Brady, more, more." Melanie was no longer propped on her elbows, but flat on her back, her feet pressed against his shoulders as she pressed her pussy into his mouth. Sucking her clit into his mouth, Brady let her ride out her orgasm before finally releasing her clit and letting her legs fall.

Standing up, Brady quickly divested himself of his clothing until he was standing naked before her. Finally recovered from her orgasm, Melanie stared up at him, her desire banked slightly but in no way fully satisfied.

"I was going to withhold your orgasm as your punishment, but you looked so beautiful coming on my tongue I couldn't help myself."

Melanie smiled at him in thanks, but then a frown creased her brow.

"What is it?"

"I wanted you to come inside me, but I don't have any inhalers here." The birth control and disease protection devices they had taken last night only lasted twenty four hours and it was too close to that time to be sure the protection would still be viable.

"Good thing I was thinking ahead." Brady smiled, holding up the two inhalers he had pulled out of his pocket earlier.

"Expecting to get laid tonight?" Melanie grabbed one of the inhalers from him and took a quick puff as he did the same with his own.

"Expecting, no. Hoping, yes," Brady parroted her earlier words.

Leaning down, Brady captured her lips in a kiss, exploring her mouth before moving down her neck to tease the soft skin there. Reaching down between them, Brady stroked her pussy, rubbing the pad of his thumb

over her sensitive clit. Melanie bucked against his massaging digit, her nail digging deep into his shoulders.

“Come inside me now, Brady. I want you to fill me up.”

Never one to disappoint a lady, Brady grasped his cock and centered it at her heated core. Pressing forward he penetrated her slowly, inching his way inside as Melanie gasped and clawed at him, urging him to move faster.

“Easy baby, we’ve got all night.”

Melanie whimpered with her need, begging him. “Please Brady, don’t tease me. I want hard and fast.”

Brady knew he was torturing himself just as much as her, his need for her so great he was barely holding the reins of his control. He wanted her to experience the pleasure of delayed gratification, knowing that she relied on him to gain her pleasure.

Finally seated deep inside, Brady began to move, thrusting slowly at first, but rapidly gaining speed. Brady could feel the tightening in his balls and desperately began pounding into Melanie. Reaching between them, he thumbed her clit and her body arched in reaction, practically coming off the desk. Her pussy clamped tightly against his cock for one maddening minute and then a million flutters surrounded him as she came. He gave one final thrust and released his seed inside her.

Collapsing on her prostrate body, Brady struggled to regain his breath. He could feel Melanie cushioning his body, her hands gently stroking his back. The contentment he felt right now was something he wanted to have forever. Unfortunately, this was not the evening for the long term relationship discussion he wanted to have. But soon, they would be talking about their future.

## Chapter Seven

Although she'd been up half the night, Melanie walked into work with a spring in her step. All her previous doubts about Brady and their relationship had melted away and she could finally feel free to be who she really was. It was a heady sensation.

"Good morning Harold, how are you?"

Her assistant looked up from the table he'd been working at and smiled sadly at her. His usual fawning enthusiasm was missing this morning. "Good morning, Melanie."

"Harold, what's wrong? You look down today."

"Oh, nothing. Just not feeling too well."

"I hope you're not getting sick. Maybe you should have stayed home." Melanie was as dedicated as could be, but she would never come to work sick and wished everyone would do the same.

"No, no, I'm not sick." Harold bent back toward his work, giving no further explanation.

Melanie shrugged and headed toward her office. She was in too good a mood to allow Harold's bad one to ruin her day. Melanie stared at her desk, wondering how it could look so innocuous in the daylight when last night it had been so much more.

"Did you come back to work last night?" Harold's question startled Melanie from her daydream. Glancing up she saw him standing in her doorway.

"Ah, yes, I did. How did you know?"

"I saw the dress."

"Yes, it's beautiful isn't it?" Melanie smiled at Harold, but her mind was whirling. After making love last night, Brady had eventually sent her



home and stayed the rest of the night for the stakeout. Early this morning he had contacted her before she left for work, to tell her he'd removed all the evidence of the trip wires and was heading home to get some sleep. She hoped he hadn't forgotten something—which might have clued Harold into the set up.

"It's from the late nineteenth century, correct?"

"Yes, a wedding dress from that time period."

Harold nodded, rubbing his hands together. "Yes, I thought so. A perfect Traditionalist item."

"I guess you could say so." Melanie thought Harold's comment was a bit odd, but of course, so was he.

"Well, I better get back to work. Sorry to bother you."

"No bother, Harold. I'll be right out as soon as I check my messages."

Harold left the office and Melanie began scrolling through her messages. After a few minutes though, she began to think back to last night again and Brady. She wondered what the future held for them. Always eschewing her family's Traditionalist values, she was shocked to realize she was thinking about long term commitment and—she could barely even think it—marriage.

"You slut." For the second time today Melanie was startled from her thoughts by someone standing at her office door. Stan's face was red and blotchy and he stood before her practically shaking.

"What did you just call me?" Melanie stood to confront him, her hand ready to contact security at a moment's notice.

"You heard me. I saw you, last night. Here with the UAS Agent. Fucking him on this desk." Stan hit the desk with the palm of his hand, causing Melanie to jump back.

"You were spying on me?" Melanie felt sick, disgusted this pervert had watched them. "Wait a minute, I know you were out of town last night. How did you see...?"

Stan snarled at her. "You always thought you were so smart. When you had those security recorders removed from here I installed my own devices. I knew I'd have to watch you and see, I was right. You're trying to take my job."

“You are a sick, depraved man. I don’t know why you think I want your job, but I don’t. I just want to be left alone to do my own job, thank you very much.”

“Then why are you working with the UAS, planning secret operations without my approval? I’ve got to say though, I was surprised by the show I saw here last night. I didn’t think Traditionalists were so...kinky.”

“You disgust me. Who’s the kinky one, you pervert? Those holo-vid recordings are a violation of my civil rights. I want them returned and the recording devices removed. Do you understand me? If they aren’t, I’m going to bring you up on charges and smear you in the media.”

“Please, I’m sure you don’t want those recordings to fall into the wrong hands. Your pretty face, and other pretty parts, all over the news media would certainly embarrass your family.”

Melanie’s face burned at the thought of her love life on display. Not only would it embarrass her family, it most likely would cause Brady to lose his job. On the other hand, she wasn’t some flighty female who was going to let this piece of trash walk all over her.

“You’ve heard my terms, now I’m leaving for the day. You can take the time to remove the recording devices and I expect to have those holo-vids tomorrow.” Melanie picked up her purse and grabbed her coat, hoping she wasn’t making the worst mistake of her life. *How could this morning, when things were looking so good, turn to crap so fast?*

Stan’s face was a comical combination of maliciousness and confusion. He obviously still believed he had the upper hand, but couldn’t quite figure out why Melanie wasn’t falling into line. *God save me from stupid people.*

“Oh, I’ll see you tomorrow all right. On the news media vids with your legs spread wide.” Stan turned and exited her office and Melanie sank into her chair, her coat and purse still in hand. She realized she was shaking, probably aftereffects from the shock of the encounter.

“Melanie, is everything okay?” Harold stood in the doorway, his eyes full of concern.

“Yes Harold, thanks.” Harold turned to leave, but Melanie called him back. “Harold, I’m going to send a few communications and then I’m

heading home for the day. If any emergencies come up you can contact me at home.”

Harold looked as if he were going to say more, but then just nodded his head and left the office. Melanie sighed heavily before tapping her ear piece and beginning her contacts.



Melanie sat working at the desk in her home office, trying to concentrate on the figures swimming in front of the computer screen. Pushing herself back, she decided to take a break. The budgets were probably all going to have to be double-checked since she doubted she even had ten percent of her thoughts on work today.

Before making good on her promise to leave for the day, Melanie had contacted her parents and sister. Forced to leave messages, she only told her parents she was being blackmailed by her boss and needed to talk to them. Worried about how they would take another scandal in the family in less than a year, Melanie decided to leave a lot more detail in her message to her sister, hoping she has some ideas about how they could cushion the blow to their family’s reputation.

Her older sister Melissa had divorced last year, the first Parsons in a three hundred year history. Traditionalist families didn’t believe in divorce. In fact, because they usually had the more rigorous commitment wedding instead of just the promise ceremony, they were required by law to attempt counseling for a period of time before divorce.

Their parents had been able to get a waiver to the law after Melissa’s husband beat her so severely she lost the child she was carrying. It was one of the reasons Melanie couldn’t understand why her family continued to cling to the Traditionalist values. Sure, her parent’s marriage had turned out fine, but as Melissa could attest, a nightmare might be just around the corner.

Thinking about marriage made her think about Brady. She had tried to contact him as well, but he must have turned off all incoming communications when he went home to sleep. Her message only said she needed to talk to him about last night. She was dreading the time when

he got the communication and contacted her, worried about his reaction. He could very well lose his job because of this fiasco.

The doorbell chiming sent Melanie flying down the stairs. Not expecting anyone, especially during the day, she figured Brady must have woken up early and gotten her message. Wiping her hands on her pants, she couldn't believe how nervous she was. That was probably why she didn't check to see who was at the door.

"Melanie, darling, are you okay?" Melanie's parents and sister stood in her doorway, waiting to be invited inside.

"Oh my God, I can't believe you're all here." Melanie quickly moved from the doorway to let them in.

"We couldn't let you face this alone." Douglas Parsons briefly kissed her cheek before enveloping her in a giant bear hug.

She thought she had been doing well holding things together, but the love and warmth surrounding her caught her emotions off guard and she began to cry.

"Hey now pumpkin, what's all this?" Her dad wiped her tears away and they sat together on the couch, with her mother on the other side.

"Why don't I go fix drinks for everyone?" Melissa went into the kitchen while Melanie did her best to get her emotions under control.

"Thank you so much for your love and support. I still can't believe you came here."

"Oh sweetheart, it's not a long trip. Besides, I want your father to kick your boss's ass."

Melanie burst into laughter. Miranda Parsons never, ever swore and to hear the word "ass" come out her mouth seemed to break Melanie's bad mood.

"What's all this frivolity in here? I thought we were going to be mopey and depressed." Melissa came into the room with a tray of drinks for everyone. Melanie jumped up to help, giving her sister a brief hug.

"Why don't Melissa and I rustle up something to eat?" Melanie pulled her sister into the kitchen, intent on giving her the third degree.

"You only enlisted me to help because you hate to cook," Melissa complained with a laugh.

"No, I wanted to talk to you. We haven't kept in touch like I wanted and for you to come down here with Mom and Dad, well...I'm touched."

"Touched in the brain it sounds like, screwing your *boyfriend* on the desk in your office."

Melanie slugged her sister in the arm before pulling food out of the cupboard. "Ha, ha. It's not as sordid as it sounds, although it looks pretty damaging on the vids."

"I'll bet. How detailed did you get with Mom and Dad, by the way?"

"No detail at all. I just told them I was being blackmailed. I figured you could comfort Mom and Dad in Philadelphia, not encourage them to come here."

"Encourage them. You've got it all wrong. I've been holding them back all day. By the way, Dad's already run a background check on your *boyfriend*."

"Will you stop saying 'boyfriend'? We aren't teenagers any more. His name is Brady. And how did Dad find out about him?"

"I accidentally let it slip. Anyway, Dad almost flipped when he found out Brady wasn't a Traditionalist. Although being an agent for the UAS has given him a slight benefit in the ratings."

"It's not like we're getting married or anything, so I don't know why they care if he's a Traditionalist or not."

"Well, be prepared. Mom and Dad both hate what happened to me and they don't plan to see history repeat itself. They are going to rake any guy you bring to them over the coals."

"Why do you think I've been hiding out here?" Melanie smiled, glad she and her sister had been able to slip back into their easy banter as if there had been no break.

"Melissa, I've got to tell you something." Melanie didn't want to break the mood, but she didn't want to have any barriers between them either.

"Okay, what is it?"

"I blamed myself for what happened to you. I never liked him and I kept it to myself. I always wondered—if I had spoken up, would it have made a difference?"

Melissa grabbed Melanie, hugging her tight. "Is this why you left town so suddenly after I got out of the hospital?"

Melanie nodded. "I couldn't face you. I felt terrible. I just wanted to live on my own for a while and get away from all the Traditionalist values I thought I hated so much because he'd hurt you so badly."

"Listen to me. First, this wasn't your fault. I probably would have married him anyway, because I was young and stupid. Second, this has nothing to do with Traditionalist values. He was an asshole, plain and simple. I just thank God he's out of my life."

"I love you, sis."

"I love you too."

Melanie and Melissa hugged, but were broken apart by the doorbell chiming again, signaling another arrival. Melanie ran to the door, knowing this time it couldn't be anyone but Brady. As she opened the door, he stood there, looking anxious.

"Baby, what's going on? I got your message and you sounded upset." He peered into her face and reached up to swipe a tear she must have missed earlier. "Why have you been crying?"

Melanie wrapped her arms around him, grateful for his concern. She just hoped he didn't hate her when he heard the whole story.

"Melanie, who's at the door?"

"It's Brady. We'll be right there."

Brady raised his eyebrows, obviously wondering what was going on.

"My parents and sister showed up after I contacted them this morning," she explained in a whisper as she stepped back to let him into the house.

"Okay. Why are we whispering?" Brady closed the door behind him, slipping his arm around her shoulders as they headed down into the living room.

"Because young man, she's giving you the heads-up you're going to be grilled."

## Chapter Eight

“Daddy!” Brady chuckled at Melanie’s outraged shriek. He wasn’t scared of Melanie’s father.

“You can start the flamer at any time, sir, but can we hold off on the grilling until I hear more about what’s going on?”

“You mean, she didn’t tell you?” Another woman, close to Melanie’s age, was barely controlling her laughter. *This must be Melissa.*

“Melissa, this is no laughing matter, young lady.” Their mother’s words caused both girls to roll their eyes. She turned back to Brady, a smile on her face. “Ignore these two hooligans. I’m Miranda Parsons and you must be Brady Torres.”

Shaking her hand as Melanie began to apologize profusely, Brady could see the love surrounding her family. He only hoped Melanie was willing to let him in.

“Brady, this is my father, Douglas Parsons.”

As he shook her father’s hand he asked, “Do all the female members of your family have names starting with an M?”

“It’s a silly tradition...” Melanie began to explain.

“Melanie, no tradition is silly. It may be odd, but we’ve enjoyed it over the years. I often tease Douglas he married me because of my name.”

“Well now, introductions are done. Melanie, you gave us the generalities earlier, but I think it’s time we got the details.” Douglas was obviously a man who liked to get down to business and quite frankly, Brady was ready to hear the entire story as well.

Melanie’s face was fiery red and her sister was still trying to control her giggles. She already knew the story, Brady surmised. As they took their seats in the living room Brady was pleased when Melanie dragged

him down beside her on the love seat. He noticed her parents took note of the action as well.

“Oh God, I don’t know how to put this so I’m just going to come out and say it. My evil boss has a holo-vid of Brady and me making love in my office.”

In the stunned silence following her words Brady kept his own immediate response to himself. He was going to kill her boss if he ever got him alone. Not only had the man violated their privacy, he’d seen Melanie naked.

Instead of letting his anger control him, Brady sat back and judged the reactions of Melanie’s family. Her sister continued to look amused, but had been able to control her giggles. Her mother looked slightly shocked, but a smile hovered around her lips, as if she were pleased by at least some part of the confession. Her father looked thunderous and Brady knew if Douglas condemned Melanie, he would be in for a fight. Brady wouldn’t stand by and allow anyone to say anything against her, even if it were her own father.

“Wait a minute. I thought you had the recording devices removed from your office.” Of all the things her father might have said, this was the one thing Brady wasn’t expecting. And neither was Melanie, it seemed.

“How did you know about the recorders? I told Mom about how creepy he made me feel, but I asked her not to mention it to you.”

“Oh sweetheart, I can’t keep secrets from your father. Besides, he needed to know.”

“*Mother.*” Melanie sighed with exasperation before turning back toward her father. “He informed me today he’d put his own in after I’d had them shut down. Supposedly because he needed to watch me since I was trying to steal his job.”

“Well, we’ve got him on civil rights violations.”

Brady was pleased to see how supportive her parents were being, but unfortunately it probably wouldn’t help. “True sir, but he could still have the vids sent out across the net before we could stop him.”



“Sleazy bastard.” Brady agreed wholeheartedly with Douglas’s estimation of Stan’s character.

“What does he want?” Melissa cut to the heart of the matter with her question. If they could figure out what Stan’s goal was they could figure out how to outwit him.

“I don’t know. He didn’t really ask for anything.” Melanie repeated the conversation she’d had with Stan this morning. “He’s always been jealous of me and hated my position in the professional community. He even tried to blame me for the burglaries. He knows something like this will ruin my reputation. Not to mention what it’ll do to the Parsons family name.”

“I think both your professional reputation and the Parsons family name can hold their own. But what’s this about burglaries?” Douglas asked with a frown, obviously just now hearing about them.

As Melanie explained the details of the burglaries to her family, Brady re-examined everything she had told them so far. He had a niggling feeling there was some important fact he was overlooking, but he couldn’t put his finger on what it was.

“You’re using the wedding dress as *bait*?” Miranda’s shocked tone pulled Brady from his evaluation of the facts.

“Mom, Brady has assured me the dress is safe. Besides, we need a low tech solution to catch these thieves.” Melanie’s defense of him made Brady realize she not only trusted him, but she was willing to stand up to her family, taking his side.

“How is Brady keeping the dress safe if he’s here with you?” Douglas’ question looked as if it caught Melanie off guard for a moment, but she quickly recovered.

“I’m sure someone from the UAS is on the job.” Her confidence in him was undeniable.

Brady nodded. “My partner is at the Smithsonian right now on stakeout duty. I called him before I came over and asked him to cover for me tonight. On another note though, I think you should know the UAS suspects the burglaries to be the work of Traditionalists.”

“You’ve got to be kidding. No self-worthy Traditionalist would get involved in anything so sordid.”

“Perhaps not, but the authorities aren’t so sure, especially when it comes to the Purist sect. “

“Those idiots. If they could, I think they’d go back to living in the Stone Age.” It was obvious Douglas had no love for the Purists.

“I don’t think the Purists can be implicated in this case, simply because of the technological issues involved.” Brady explained the low level EM pulse that was used to disrupt the surveillance equipment.

“Still, it’s disheartening to realize the government suspects us.” Miranda seemed saddened by the whole turn of the conversation.

“Most people see Traditionalists as old, rich families. They don’t understand their background or value system.” Melanie looked astonished by Brady’s comments. Although he hadn’t been raised a Traditionalist, Brady envied their tight family units and customs. It was one of the reasons he’d been pleasantly surprised by the captain’s revelations of Melanie’s background.

“You seem to know a lot about the subject, especially for someone who doesn’t come from a Traditionalist family.” Douglas was nothing if not blunt.

“You’re right, I don’t come from a Traditionalist family. You can’t choose the family into which you were born. You can only live your life as you need to live it.” Brady stared hard at Douglas, daring him to say something else. He was surprised at who spoke next however.

“Enough of all this boring conversation. We can’t do anything about Melanie’s boss tonight—the stakeout is covered and family values is a tedious subject. So let’s get to the good stuff. How long have you two been going out?” Melissa’s eyes twinkled at Melanie’s shocked expression, but Brady was interested in her answers.

“My personal life is just that, personal.”

“Not really, sis, if your boss makes good on his threat and tells the world about your rendezvous.” Melissa wasn’t letting Melanie escape so easily.

“Fine, we’ve been dating for two months.”

“And you’re obviously sleeping together, so the relationship must be serious.”

“Melissa!” Melanie’s eyes darted back and forth between her parents, who, surprisingly, were sitting silently watching the discussion between the sisters unfold, and Brady, who was very interested in hearing Melanie’s answer.

“What? I’m pretty sure it’s the question of the hour.”

“Okay, enough.” Douglas finally interceded, much to Brady’s annoyance. “Let’s leave these two to talk and we’ll go check into our hotel.”

Melissa looked irritated to be denied her answers, but eventually Melanie’s family said their goodbyes and Brady and Melanie were finally alone.

“So are you mad at me?”

Melanie’s question surprised Brady. “Why should I be mad at you?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I may get you fired from your job because a vid of us having sex in my office could hit the net at any time. Or maybe because my bratty older sister is practically insinuating we should be walking down the aisle since we’ve done the deed.”

Brady chuckled as he pulled Melanie into his arms. “I think I can handle it if my bare ass makes it onto the net, although having the rest of the world see you naked may put me over the edge. As for your sister, I was kind of hoping to hear your answer to her questions.”

Melanie stared up at him, surprise and doubt flitting across her face. “I never thought I’d want to get married, be committed and tied down. I never wanted to give a man so much control.”

Brady concentrated on the fact she said she “never thought”, rather than the rest of her words. He hoped, no prayed, he was right.

Melanie licked her lips before she continued. “But I wasn’t happy. Not until I met you. And giving up control in the bedroom has made me beyond happy. I love you Brady and although I don’t know what you want—I’m willing to consider marriage if you are.”

Melanie shrieked as Brady picked her up and twirled her around the room. Setting her down, Brady leaned in and kissed her, putting into

action his reaction to her words. "I love you too, Melanie. More than you'll ever know. I want to get married and start a family right away." Knowing her Traditionalist family though, he knew he'd have to ask her father for her hand.

Melanie stroked his face, her love shining in her eyes. "It sounds wonderful."

"So you're willing to give up control to me for the rest of your life?" Brady teased.

"Control in the bedroom, yes. I still get a say everywhere else."

"I've got no problem with your demands, but I want to make one thing clear. It's your sexual control I want, in the bedroom and everywhere else. So just remember, sex isn't limited to in the dark, behind closed doors and in bed."

Melanie blushed, but nodded. "It's not likely I'll forget. Especially if your bare ass makes it out on the net."

"I think you're begging for a spanking." Brady swatted her covered behind, but instead of shying away, Melanie pressed into him, rubbing against his growing erection.

"How about you come upstairs and give me what I need." Melanie's husky come-on had Brady ready for anything she wanted to dish out.



Lying in bed later, Brady felt extremely satisfied. Melanie was snuggled in his arms after a bout of exceptional lovemaking. He and Melanie had declared their love for one another and he planned to talk with her parents about the wedding tomorrow. The only dark spot on his horizon was what to do about Stan Johnson and how they were going to catch the thieves.

"Son of a bitch."

Melanie woke up at his startled exclamation. "Brady, what is it?"

"I was thinking about Stan Johnson and the thieves and it suddenly occurred to me what I had been missing all night."

"You're lying in bed with me and thinking of Stan? I don't know if I like that too much."

“Very funny. I think I know how we can catch the thieves.”

“Really? How?” Melanie sat up, the sheet riding down around her hips. Brady had to force himself to look away from the temptation she represented.

“If the thieves only knew about the official security recorders, there is a possibility the EM pulse wasn’t directed at your office and the vids may have caught something.”

“But we don’t even know where they are in the office or where the feed is going. Although I suspect Stan has it directly linked to his office computer.”

“I’ve got to contact Randall and let him know what we suspect.” Brady fumbled around for his ear piece and attempted to contact Randall, but there was no response.

“Brady, you don’t think the thieves have struck do you?” Melanie looked worried.

“I hope not, but I better get down there and check things out.”

“I want to come with you.”

“You’d better not. We don’t know what we’ll find.”

“Forget it, Agent Torres. This isn’t a bedroom issue. I’m coming.” Melanie got out of bed and began to get dressed.

Brady sighed and followed her example. He figured he better get used to the fact that although he controlled Melanie in the bedroom, he’d never be completely in charge. She was too headstrong to allow it.

## Chapter Nine

Walking into the artifact room at two o'clock in the morning had a completely different feeling than it did during the daylight hours. Melanie shivered in the dimly lit room and huddled behind Brady as they silently made their way through the aisles. Instead of the excited feeling of possible discovery she usually had, she instead was worried about what they might uncover.

Brady had tried again to contact his partner on their way over to the Smithsonian, but had still been unable to reach him. Melanie was also concerned about the fate of the wedding dress, although she still believed Brady would do anything in his power to ensure its protection. Unfortunately, not all things were in his power.

"Do you see any sign of Agent Miko?" Melanie whispered to Brady as he guided them around the areas where the trip wires were set up.

"Not yet."

Maneuvering around yet another trap, Melanie wondered, not for the first time, what possessed her to accompany Brady when he announced he was coming down to check things out. She wasn't an agent with the UAS. She should have left this work to those who knew what they were doing.

"Halt where you stand. I have you covered." The harshly ordered words came from out of the darkness and Melanie stopped, standing as still as a statue in a sculpture garden.

"Damn it Randall, it's me."

"Brady, what're doing here? And who's with you?"

"Hello, Agent Miko." Melanie called out, wondering where he was hiding.

"I've been trying to contact you all night. I thought something had happened." Brady sounded a bit exasperated and Melanie partially agreed with him. If they'd been able to contact him they never would have left the bed.

"My com got zapped on my way over here. I'll have to trade it in tomorrow." Randall finally made his way out of the surrounding darkness. "But what brought the two of you down here tonight?"

Melanie was suddenly glad of the dim lighting as she felt her cheeks blush with embarrassment. The first time she'd met Randall, Brady and she pretended not to know one another. It was obvious now they knew each other pretty well. Of course, if Stan got his way the entire world might know how intimately they were acquainted.

"Why don't we go to Melanie's office where we can talk?"

At Brady's suggestion the three of them trooped toward her office, continuing to avoid the trip wires set up around the room.

"It's amazing how much time and effort you guys put into setting all these things up."

"Technology is an efficient way to do business except when some newer equipment comes along to overthrow all the advances made. It's then people revert to the tried and true low-tech methods to get the job done."

Melanie was surprised by Randall's response. She had frankly considered him somewhat of a government automaton, nice enough, but a bit dim and not too polished. Instead he was proving to be an intelligent guy with obviously varied opinions. It would certainly teach her to not make such snap judgments in the future.

Reaching her office, Melanie ordered the lights on and they all sat down.

"So does someone want to tell me what's going on?"

"Melanie's boss has been secretly recording her in the office. I'm hoping the thieves don't know about the devices and they weren't affected by the EM pulse. There may be a chance we could figure out who is doing this."

"Well, let's go." Randall stood, waiting for the two of them to join him.

“We’ve got to figure out where the devices are hidden first and then figure out where the feed is directed.”

“I might be able to help with that.” The two men turned toward Melanie as she spoke. “If you find the devices I can possibly direct the feed to my computer, so it won’t matter where the feed was originally going.”

“I never knew you were so handy with a computer.” Melanie could almost swear Brady sounded proud of her.

“Computer engineering was my major in college for a year before I changed to history. I’ve kept up some of my skills.”

“Lucky for us.” Randall looked like he was smiling at some private joke.

Brady stared hard at Randall for a moment before turning back to Melanie. “Well, it sounds like a good plan. Why don’t you get started on figuring out if you can do it while we search?”

Melanie nodded and brought up the holo keyboard and screen as the two men began to empty her bookcases. Within minutes they’d found three devices. Just the reminder of Stan spying on her made her skin feel clammy. She tried to rid her mind of the thoughts of Stan possibly jerking off while watching her. Randall and Brady returned to their seats and Melanie half listened to their conversation while she began working on rerouting the computer feed for the holo-vid recorders.

“So how did you discover the secret recorders?”

Brady shifted uncomfortably in his seat, glancing briefly over at Melanie. “Melanie’s boss told her when he threatened to expose her by releasing the vids on the net.”

“How would watching her sitting around working on her computer all day...oooh, he got something else on the holo-vid.” Randall whistled through his teeth. “The guy sounds like a sweetheart.”

Melanie had glanced up as Randall realized what Stan might have seen, but she quickly lowered her head again when he winked at her. Continuing to work, she labored to track the feed through the internal network system. She figured Stan would be too lazy to install more than



just the devices and had probably piggy backed onto the Smithsonian network drive.

"I found it." Melanie looked up from the computer, her face aglow with accomplishment. She quickly typed some commands into the computer and the three dimension holo-screen came up, showing the views of the three devices the men had found.

"This first one doesn't show anything except the back of her head." Randall observed as Melanie blushed fiery red.

"Why don't you bring up the next view?" Brady suggested, obviously feeling as uncomfortable as Melanie about what Stan had seen recorded from the night before.

Melanie quickly changed to the second view, which was a direct frontal observation of her sitting at the desk.

"This one is no good either. I think the last one must be the one that'll show the outer room."

"I hope so," Melanie responded as she switched to the final view.

"Damn it." Brady's exclamation expressed what they were all thinking. Although a small sliver of the door and outer room was visible, it wasn't nearly enough to get a clear picture to identify someone.

"That's too bad, Torres. It was a good idea though."

Brady opened his mouth to respond and then suddenly ordered, "Lights off."

"What..."

"Shhh, I think I heard something."

Melanie sat in the darkness, her nerves as tight as a bow string. Brady and Randall stood in the doorway, peering out into the echoing room. Unexpectedly, she thought she heard something as well. Evidently the two men had heard the same thing since they nodded to one another and then slipped from the room one at a time. Brady glanced back over his shoulder as he left, his concern for her evident in his action.

Wishing she knew what was going on, Melanie had to stop herself from squirming in her chair. Any little noise could alert the thief that someone else was there. A loud clanging pierced the silence. *The trip wire had worked.*

Melanie shivered as she heard footfalls running in the outer room. Without lights, she had no idea if Brady was the one running or if it was the thief. She soon discovered the answer as a small figure entered her office. He had no idea she was in the room until he stood at the edge of her desk.

“Melanie!”

“Harold, what are you doing here?” Melanie couldn’t understand why Harold would come into work in the middle of the night. Although she was sitting here, so who was she to talk.

“I’m sorry Melanie. I’m so sorry.” Harold bowed his head in defeat as it sank in to Melanie’s overly tired brain—Harold was the thief they’d been searching for.

“Oh Harold, how could you?”

Harold didn’t answer, but turned to leave her office. Melanie couldn’t let him escape. Picking up a glass sculpture sitting on her desk she hurled it at him, hitting him the back. He went down with a crash just as Brady and Randall reached her office.

“Lights on.” Melanie stood and stared at the sight before her. Randall was cuffing Harold as Brady rushed to her side.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Melanie couldn’t believe how anti-climatic it felt. Although she was glad to see Harold wasn’t really injured, she still couldn’t believe it had been him all along.

“Why Harold?”

“I’m in love with you, Melanie.” Harold’s face was streaked with tears. “You never noticed me, always being more interested in your work. I thought I’d steal the items and then discover them later. You would have been so impressed with me.”

“Oh Harold, I *was* impressed with your work. You should have never done something illegal just to try and make an impact on me.”

“Well, it wouldn’t have worked anyway, would it?” he sneered, nodding toward Brady. “You’re in love with him. I thought you were better than a common whore.”

"Hey now, be nice." Randall ordered, pulling back on his arms, as Brady made to lunge at Harold.

"I found your ripped panties and the inhalers. I know what you were doing in here. So I decided to steal your precious wedding dress. I was going to burn it and leave it on your desk, to discover in the morning. I wanted you to suffer like I suffered."

"Guess you weren't expecting to get caught," Brady scoffed.

"You bastard." Melanie rushed around the desk and slapped Harold, knocking his head back. "How dare you pretend to be a historian and then threaten to burn an antique? You're a fraud."

Brady pulled her back as Randall held on to Harold, barely controlling his laughter.

"She's one in a million, Torres. Or are there any more like you at home?" Randall asked quizzically.

"As a matter of fact..."

"Leave my sister out of this," Melanie groused as Randall hauled Harold away.

"So I saved your dress, keeping it safe from the evil marauder."

Melanie snorted. "The evil marauder intent on terrorism just doesn't look the same when it's Harold boo-hooing about love gone wrong."

"So, do I ever get to see you in the dress?"

"If you play your cards right. Only very special women get to wear the dress and only very special men get to see them in the dress."

"I solved the mystery, saved the dress and got to kiss the girl—I think that makes me pretty damn special."

"I didn't get a kiss. Are you kissing some other girl?"

"There are no other girls for me. And as for that kiss..." Brady took her in his arms, plundering her mouth as if delving into her soul. "I will be seeing you in that dress."

## Epilogue

*Six months later*

The Parsons-Torres wedding was turning into the affair of the century. The entire Parsons clan was preparing to attend the wedding in the usual Traditionalist fashion. The surprise was Brady's family. Although not Traditionalists, they were not to be outdone and members of the Torres family were coming from far and wide.

Standing around watching all the guests arrive, Brady fingered the antique pocket watch Melanie gave him for a wedding gift. He wondered if she had received her gift and worried it wasn't going to seem like much compared to the expensive watch she had gifted him with. If only he could see Melanie's face, he would be able to tell if the gift was a hit.

Thinking about seeing Melanie made Brady ache. They had practically been living together for the past six months, ever since the night Harold was arrested. Brady had paid a visit to Stan the next day and had a somewhat forceful discussion with him. The sight of Harold on the news downloads walking to the courthouse in shackles may have also made an impression. Stan willing turned over the vids to Brady with little convincing.

Stan had resigned just a few weeks later and Melanie was made director. Although the job took a lot of her time, she and Brady spent every free minute together. But ultimately, Melanie's Traditionalist upbringing kicked in and in the last week she had made Brady stay home every night, heightening the anticipation of the wedding night. Deciding to throw caution to the wind, Brady made his way through the back of the church to the area where all the women seemed to be gathered.

Although he just wanted to swing open the door, Brady forced himself to knock politely. “Melanie, are you in there?”

“Brady Torres, don’t you dare come in this room!” Melanie’s shriek rang out through the door.

“Why not?” Even he could hear the frustration in his voice.

“You can’t see me before the wedding because it’s supposed to be bad luck to see the bride in her wedding dress.” Brady could hear Melanie more clearly as she obviously moved closer to the door.

“Are you in the dress?”

“Not yet.”

Brady had to control his groan, his imagination running wild as to just what she might be wearing. “Well then...”

Melanie was openly laughing now. “Absolutely not. My mother would have a heart attack if I let you in here wearing only a corset.”

“What’s a corset?” As Melanie described the garment, Brady realized his imagination had nothing on old fashioned reality. He actually had to clench his fist to avoid twisting the doorknob.

“I was wondering if you got my wedding gift.”

“Not only did I get it, I have the sixpence in my shoe as we speak. Thank you Brady, it’s perfect. Almost as perfect as you.”

He had spoken with her mother and discovered the old tradition of the bride wearing something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue. Miranda told him the last sentence in the poem included a line about a sixpence in her shoe.

Although he had no idea what a sixpence was, Brady did some research and discovered it was an old form of money. Unfortunately, the coins were almost impossible to find until he discovered, just a few days before the wedding, that a local antique store had one. He bought the sixpence, wrapped it in a box and sent it to her home.

*Forget this!* Brady wasn’t going a second longer without having her in his arms. “I’m coming in.” Brady opened the door as screams came from inside the room. “Calm down ladies, I have my eyes closed.”

Brady reached out and Melanie stepped forward into his arms. “I need to give you one last kiss as Melanie Parsons, because soon you’re

going to be a Torres and we'll start our own traditions. Now give me a kiss."

Melanie giggled before tugging his head down into a blazing kiss. Brady pulled her close, reacquainting himself with the feel of her soft body. He couldn't wait to see what the corset looked like on her. However, he was keeping his promise to leave her sight unseen.

Breaking the kiss, Brady ran his hand down her back and smacked her ass lightly. "Get dressed woman, there's a wedding waiting on you."

*And a lifetime of happiness awaiting us.*

## Liz Andrews

To learn more about Liz Andrews, please visit [www.lizandrews.net](http://www.lizandrews.net).  
Send an email to Liz Andrews at [msliz@lizandrews.net](mailto:msliz@lizandrews.net).

*Traveling west from Boston is the adventure of a lifetime for mail order bride, Matilda Cummings—until she learns her soon-to-be husband, Dawson Chandler, has no use for a wife.*

## Something Old, Something New

(c)2006 Maggie Casper

*Available now from Samhain Publishing*

Switching places with her twin sister to become a mail order bride seemed like the thing to do, until feisty Matilda Cummings reaches the wilds of Dodge City and finds out her soon-to-be husband hadn't seen fit to meet her train, sending his brother instead.

Dawson Chandler wants more than anything to strangle his younger brother when he learns he's unwittingly signed a binding marriage contract. He's got no use for a wife, especially the tiny, prissy looking woman whose picture haunts him. A lady, polished and shined, has no business living on the Rocking C Ranch, nor with a man like himself.

Afraid of hurting a delicate woman with his rough and tumble ways, Dawson never plans to marry. After all, why should he shackle himself to a lady when he prefers the experience of a seasoned whore in the bedroom? Much to his dismay, he finds his little lady is nothing like he'd imagines. Soon, Dawson and Matilda find themselves struggling through not only their physical but emotional relationships in search of love. Will they find it?

*Book One in the Wedding Dress series*



*Enjoy this excerpt:*

Warm heavy breathing against her temple woke Matilda out of a dead sleep. Her eyes popped open of their own accord, taking in the prickly square chin belonging to a man, a man who surely should not be in her bed.

Before her brain engaged enough to stop the action, Matilda opened her mouth to scream. A large hand clamped firmly across her lips stopped the sound before it escaped. "Scream and everyone within earshot will be barging through the door."

His voice was rusty with sleep, rumbling up from deep in his chest. Dawson. Matilda breathed a sigh of relief, her mind finally grasping where she was and what was happening.

She mumbled incoherently behind the hand he still held across her mouth. He needed to move, to release her. Dawson's manly scent, the feel of him against her side, big and strong, was doing some serious damage to not only her nerves but her libido as well.

His closeness made her want to rub her body against his like a bitch in heat. He was far too potent to be so close this early in the morning. When he changed positions, moving until he lay atop of her, one leg thrown over her and his hard length against her thigh, Matilda thought she might spontaneously combust.

His gaze was heavy lidded, traveling over her face in a thorough inspection. "I'll let you go if you promise not to scream."

Matilda nodded and was at once released. "Thank you."

Dawson's lips curved. "Ever the polite one." After a quick kiss to the tip of her nose, he levered himself off her until he sat on the side of the bed. "Time to go back to your room."

Matilda's gaze darted to the window at his words. She breathed a sigh of relief at the darkness beyond the glass. Without a word, she crawled from the bed, cursing the unladylike position the movement placed her in. Matilda was nearly to the door before Dawson called her back.

“We’ll be married today.” His brows creased and a strange look crossed his face. “Have you a special dress to wear?”

He didn’t sound overly enthused by the prospect of marrying her. Matilda tried not to let the knowledge upset her. She would be a good wife and hope that over time, Dawson could form some sort of affection toward her.

“Yes, my mother insisted. It was the one thing she wasn’t willing to compromise on.”

Dawson stood. After wrapping the sheet around his hips, he walked across the room toward her.

“Good. Very good. I’ve got some things to do this morning but I’ll be back for the noontime meal so there will be plenty of time to clean up before the ceremony.”

He seemed uncomfortable about something, unused to explaining himself or his whereabouts more than likely. Matilda stared up into his face for a brief moment. It was impossible to ignore the need she had to show him things would be okay.

Allowing herself no second thoughts, she stretched up on tiptoe to kiss his jaw. With his great height and evident unwillingness to lower his face for her kiss, Matilda was left no other choice of where to place her lips.

Had she been too forward or done something to anger him? Damn, being a lady all the time sure was proving to be too much to work through on a daily basis.

She opened the door and quietly fled into the darkened hallway. Too tired to go back to sleep once in her own room, Matilda opened the trunk containing some of her belongings. Among the things still in the trunk was the wedding dress her mother had had commissioned for her.

She could hardly wait to wear it and yet it seemed almost out of place in the high prairie grasses of the public land strip, a place the Chandler family had called home for many years.

From what she’d heard, the area had no one to enforce the law. Some even referred to the public land strip as No Man’s Land since it had been turned over by the state of Texas but was yet to be surveyed and allotted

in a land run by the United States. And being so close to Indian Territory, Matilda wasn't quite sure just how many folks would choose the land as their home when and if it ever was split into parcels.

Jess had mentioned how Dawson's grandfather had settled the land long before the Comanche were sent to live on reservations, a time when war between the whites and Indians was prevalent. Matilda shuddered just thinking about the hardships both the whites and the Indians suffered through during that time.

No longer wanting to dwell on the bad, Matilda took her wedding dress from the bottom of the trunk, unwrapping it from the fine linen sheets it had been wrapped in.

The deep plum color of the dress did wonderful things for her pale complexion her mother had said. Matilda was just glad the one piece dress, with its fitted bodice, buttoned up the front so she wouldn't have to be too much of a bother come time to dress.

She idly ran a finger over one of the velvet-covered buttons as she held the dress to her body, eyeing herself in the mirror. The high neck and long sleeves were demure but the tightness of the garment would leave little doubt about her assets. Never one to be overly concerned about her plumpness or the over average size of her chest, Matilda felt a bit uneasy knowing Dawson would see her in the nude tonight.

Would he insist upon undressing her completely or would he settle for her merely lifting her nightdress and taking what he wanted. Somehow, Matilda didn't think so. Shaking all thoughts of her wedding night aside, she once again concentrated on the task at hand.

All the pleats and fringe would be hell to iron. Hopefully all that was needed to settle some of the wrinkles was a stiff shaking and the weight of the heavy skirts pulling at it while it hung.

By the time Matilda finished hanging the dress, as well as removing the rest of the items from the trunk, the day had broke. Sunshine spilled through the window of her room leaving in its wake warmth and comfort. Making her way down the stairs and into the kitchen, Matilda made a mental list of things she would need to do before afternoon arrived.

Several hours later, as she prepared for the ceremony, she prayed the large breakfast she'd eaten would stay down. Her stomach was in knots and had been for the past several hours but she was finally dressed and ready.

Matilda tucked the beautifully edged hankie Jess had loaned her into the top of her corset, happy she had everything she needed. Her mother's locket, her dress, the borrowed hankie and baby blue ribbon securing her chemise, not to mention the coin even now sticking to the side of her foot all made up the things Matilda needed to start her marriage off on the right foot.

*Azure Kerr stumbles across the find of a lifetime—a beautiful plum wedding dress she bought at auction. But will her marriage-shy boyfriend, Gavin Conner, think it's perfect too?*

## Something Borrowed, Something Blue

(c)2006 Lena Matthews

*Available now from Samhain Publishing*

Wedding consultant Azure Kerr has seen the best of what love has to offer...professionally. Personally, she's been too busy to find a love of her own. That all changes the day sexy stranger Gavin Conner comes knocking at her door.

But love, for Gavin, is a matter of once burnt, twice shy. When Azure finds a storied plum-colored wedding gown—and decides she wants to wear it—can Gavin overcome his fears and persuade her to wear it for him?

*Book Two in the Wedding Dress series*

*Enjoy this excerpt:*

An animalistic growl tore from his throat as he jerked away from her tempting mouth. The gentlemen in him demanded he step away and allow them both time to compose themselves, but the savage Neanderthal lurking inside him insisted that he continue with what they both so obviously wanted.

Unable to separate himself entirely one way or the other, Gavin held her to him. His pounding heart in tune with her own. A need like nothing he had ever felt before bore into his soul urging him on.

"Azure." He lowered his mouth to her neck, his lips, his tongue, his breath, marking every inch of skin he could find. "I want...I need to taste, touch, feel every inch of you."

Her shaky laugh was nothing compared to her tattered pulse tattooing against his lips. He wasn't the only one who had been lost in the moment. It was impossible to reach the ripe age of thirty-three without realizing when a woman welcomed his touch.

She responded, she opened, she took him into her, all with a welcoming moan, yet still something held her back.

"You don't believe in wasting time do you?" she teased.

"No, I don't."

"You move at lightning speed."

Gavin pressed his hips forwards firmly against her. Azure's nails tightened ever so deliciously in his side as she groaned in pleasure.

"Tell me you don't want me, tell me that you don't want the same thing and I'll walk away." *Limp away slumped over would be more like it.*

"Tell me that you don't want to finish what we've started."

"What you started."

"That you loved." As much as he wanted to bury his cock deep inside of her, Gavin pulled away from her, his body protesting with every step he took.

He needed room to breathe and she needed room to think. "We both know what I want. I think I have an inkling what you want, but I can't make the decision for you."

Azure slid down off the car, straightening her skirt with shaky hands. A slight breeze blew through her hair, forcing the soft ebony strands to fly into her face. Gavin curled his hands into fists to resist reaching out and stroking her hair back into place. He knew if he touched her now, he would pull her back into his arms, and to hell with whoever walked by and saw. Just the thought of having her in the moonlight had him hard and aching.

Hell, who was he kidding? He'd been hard the moment he first held her in his arms.

"You know," Azure gave a weak smile as she nervously brushed her hair behind her ear, "the right thing to do would be to shake your hand and call it an evening."

"Right for who? Better question, says who?"

"Right for me, for starters. I just met you the other day."

Gavin tilted his head to the side and studied her. She was fighting hard to come up with a reason that this was wrong. Since he couldn't think of a single one, he wasn't going to be much help to her. "Does the lack of time really matter all that much to you?"

"It should." Azure smiled, answering him more completely than she probably realized.

"But it doesn't." It wasn't a question. It was a fact.

"This is going to sound cliché as hell, but I'm not the type to have a one-night stand."

"Who said anything about this being a one-night stand?" Gavin crossed his arms over his chest, doing everything in his power not to reach out and pull her into him.

"We just met..."

"I could probably break it down for you in hours and minutes how long ago we met, but it won't change how I feel, or how you feel. This is about you and me, Azure. The rest of the world be damned. Tell me what you want and worry about all that other shit another day. I want to be with you. I want to take you home and make love with you all night." Ignoring what he'd promised himself earlier, Gavin stepped forward and took her trembling hand in his. "What do you want?"

“I want you.”

“Then that’s all that matters.”



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