



Loose Id

Tied and True

MARIE HARTE

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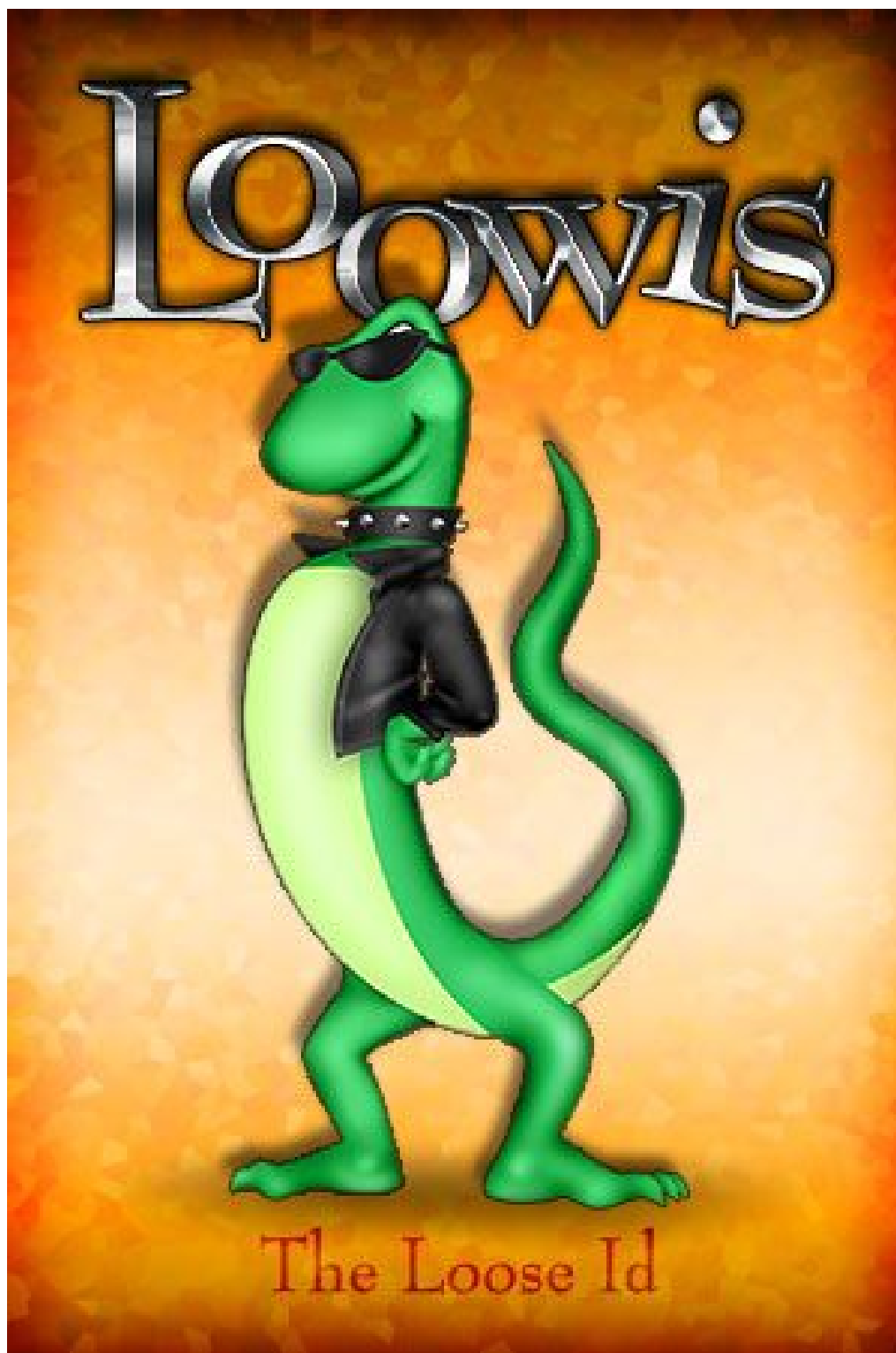
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Chapter One

“Well, friends, I finally did the unthinkable.”

Lindsay Riordan froze behind the coffee station in the main office. The deep voice doing the bragging on the other side of the wall still had the unnerving ability to make her entire body throb. *Jared Hunt*. The new guy with a killer body and a to-die-for face, who continually asked her to dinner, taking her refusals with good-humored grace.

“Yeah, I had a piece of what you’ve only been dreaming about.”

She blinked. That didn’t sound like the Jared she knew at all. However, the whistles and derogatory comments that could only belong to the idiot twins Dale Maclearn and Ken Simmons made her head ache. Lindsay had been dodging those two jerks since she’d started with the company. Luckily, they both worked several floors below her in tech services, so she rarely had to put up with them.

Which begged the question, what were they doing up here on a Wednesday morning? And why were they so chummy with Jared Hunt?

“Come on, Hunt,” Maclearn murmured. “Tell us what she was like. Those tits, they’re real, aren’t they?”

“I’ve got ten that says they’re fake,” Simmons encouraged.

She frowned. From Maclearn and Simmons she expected such juvenile behavior. Both were in their late twenties, they acted like they were God's gift to women, and they were anything but. Jared, however, seemed the complete opposite. He struck her as more reserved, despite his obvious appeal. The office wunderkind, in the last month he'd brought in two new clients that had the entire sales division abuzz. And if that weren't enough, Hunt possessed the charm, astonishingly good looks, and bearing of an office go-getter. His light green eyes promised heaven in the bedroom to any woman with a pulse.

Glaring down at her thundering chest, Lindsay wished she had some immunity to his appeal. But the best she'd been able to do thus far in his short tenure at Tron Corp was ignore him. Politely, but firmly, she'd declined several of Jared's invitations to dinner, having seen too many office relationships that hadn't worked. Lindsay couldn't say she hadn't been tempted, but now hearing him pal around with the idiot twins, she was glad she'd done her best to steer clear of him.

"Riordan is hell on wheels, I'll say that." Hunt laughed, a deep, throaty chuckle that momentarily distracted her from hearing her name on his lips. "That professional act is all fake."

"I knew it!" Simmons interrupted.

"She gives killer head, and those breasts, they're definitely real. And much more than a handful."

She blinked and lowered her coffee mug to the table. Had Hunt just said what she thought she'd heard?

"You should see what I have at home. You know how they say a picture is worth a thousand words?" Jared chuckled. "How much would a money shot of Riordan be worth?"

"No shit." Simmons whistled. "Jared, you are the man. So, when do we get to see it?"

“We’ll see. For now I like keeping that treasure close by my bed, if you know what I mean. Maybe sometime we’ll hang out, and I’ll bring it with me. But you’ll have to buy the beer.”

“Come on, man. Have a heart.”

“Is she a screamer?” Maclearn wanted to know. He sounded almost out of breath, pubescent excitement no doubt arousing the asshole.

She couldn’t make out what Hunt said next since he lowered his voice, but two loud guffaws made her see red.

That creep! That sexist jerk! While she’d been politely rejecting him, he’d been making up stories to impress *those two*! She’d been right all along to be cautious of him.

Lindsay bit her lip. It made no sense for her to feel hurt by his crude comments. And what the hell was a money shot? She’d never been out on a date with him, so it couldn’t have been an intimate photo. Unless Hunt had stalked her at home, he had to be making it up.

Debating whether to face him now and most likely scald him with hot coffee, or confront him later, Lindsay waited a minute too long. Nancy Clement, a sales supervisor, joined the men, and the discourse took a swift turn in another direction. Fuming that she’d lost her opportunity, Lindsay resolved to nip this situation in the bud.

Too bad her boss was as useless as, well, a snow shovel in Miami. He, like the rest of Tron Corp, held Hunt in high esteem, and Todd didn’t have the fortitude to deal with bullies like Maclearn and Simmons. And frankly, Lindsay had never really considered either creep worth the effort.

But Hunt’s blatant lies bothered her more than they should. Maybe it was because she had held a few secret fantasies about him she’d stubbornly refused to let go. Or maybe it irked her that a man who looked so perfect was far from the mark. Regardless, she wouldn’t tolerate his behavior.

Sexual harassment has no place in the workplace. She huffed. As if that ideal applied. The last woman to complain about harassment had been transferred out of tech services to the corporate office in Maryland. Great deal for Susie Hutchins -- more pay, a major move, a shift, and advancement. But Lindsay liked her job in Augusta. And damn it, she was one of the best logistics officers they had in the company. If anyone should move, it should be Hunt or his buddies.

Clenching her jaw, she listened as the foursome on the other side of the wall dispersed. Lindsay grabbed her mug and returned to her office. Along the way she passed Hunt, who stunned her by pasting a warm smile on his face as he murmured, "Good morning."

She glared, telling him to go to hell with a frosty gaze. He looked puzzled at first. Then his eyes narrowed as he looked past her to the coffee station.

"Lindsay," he began.

She swept past him and firmly closed her door, hoping to lose herself in her work. It usually worked. However, as she sat typing, Lindsay couldn't help reliving old hurts, mostly dealing with past slander and innuendo. The proverbial blue-eyed blonde, Lindsay knew she looked more like a California beach bunny than the *summa cum laude* graduate who'd worked her ass off to put herself through school. In college, her forays through the job market, and now here at Tron Corp...well, unfortunately, people remained the same. There were always at least one or two men who didn't sit well with rejection, and at least a handful of jealous women with catty snipes and hateful glares.

A friendly but aloof attitude provided a measure of self-preservation when dealing with these people, but frankly, Lindsay was tired of constantly having to defend herself. Her looks had nothing to do with her character, and everything to do with her parents. She didn't date much, if at all, kept her nose clean at work, and stayed away from the gossip mill. Why, then, did she continue to find herself in the midst of nasty rumors?

Enough was enough already. After leaving two previous jobs due to her supervisors' inability to accept the word "no," Lindsay refused to be treated like a victim again. She'd been working at Tron Corp for two years now, and everyone knew she kept her business life professional. Bad enough Maclearn and Simmons made crass comments. She thought she'd dealt with them effectively by ignoring them.

But Jared Hunt had gained popularity here in his short tenure. Who the hell was *he* to make up stories about *her*? Stories that people she worked with every day might believe. She could envision her hard-won reputation and career starting to crumble. Lindsay saw red. She refused to leave this job because Hunt couldn't deal with rejection.

"Lindsay," Janice, her assistant and friend, called through the door. "Do you have a minute?"

"Come on in."

Janice closed the door behind her and stood uncomfortably in front of Lindsay's desk. Even dressed conservatively in tan slacks and a pink, short-sleeved sweater, Janice shouted "different" with her tattoos and nose ring. A free spirit, she was a genius when it came to Tron Corp's logistics software and a great friend when the chips were down.

"What's up?"

"I, ah, shoot. There's no easy way to say this. I just heard Ken Simmons talking about you to Dale Maclearn. And what they were saying was X-rated to the extreme." Janice swallowed audibly. "Could there be any truth to the rumor that you and Jared Hunt were caught in a compromising position and captured on film?"

"Not unless I have an evil twin." Lindsay grimaced. "I overheard the idiot twins and Hunt earlier. But I hadn't realized they'd started spreading rumors through the office." *Already.* She fumed.

"Well, I overheard Ken and Dale whispering about it. Jared was nowhere near. So maybe it's just the idiot twins."

Lindsay chewed her lip in thought. “Janice, there’s no way Hunt could have a picture of me doing anything like...that. And speaking of ‘that,’ I have a question for you. Do you know what a ‘money shot’ is?”

“Huh?”

“I overheard Hunt telling the others he had a picture of me, and it was a money shot.”

Janice looked confused, and then blushed scarlet and met Lindsay’s eyes in horror. “Good Lord. My old boyfriend used to be really into porn.” Janice glanced around, as if anyone outside the office could hear them, and lowered her voice. She leaned closer. “The money shot is when the man, um, ejaculates into the woman’s mouth.”

Lindsay knocked her coffee to the floor. “*Shit.*”

“Yeah. Not a picture you’d want circulated around the office.” Janice looked sympathetic.

“You don’t understand. I didn’t do that, any of it.” *Though I’d fantasized about it with Hunt once or twice. Now I’d rather strangle him than swallow him, good looks or not.*

“Then maybe Hunt has a hell of a graphics program. Heck, you can make anything nowadays. My brother Photoshopped his picture next to Pamela Anderson in a *Baywatch* ad as a gag. I guess anything’s possible.”

Lindsay was horrified. Though she hadn’t been in a compromising position with Hunt, she had been a little tipsy at the last company party. What if he’d pieced together some damning photographs out of context? Pasted her alongside him in some embarrassing position? God, just what she didn’t need after all she’d done to project a professional image. “I need to get my hands on Hunt’s picture.”

Janice shook her head. “No, you need to put your hands on his computer. If he has a picture of you, it’s probably on his hard drive. And from there...well, it could be in Peru in two seconds with one touch of a button.”

Lindsay stared blindly down at the documents on her desk.

“Like I said, Lindsay, sorry to spread the bad news.”

“Yeah, thanks, Janice.”

Janice paused at the door. “You know, I heard Hunt has a date Friday night with Sara in accounting.” Lindsay looked up. “They’re going to dinner and a movie. Be gone for hours.” Janice smiled innocently. “Just thought you’d want to know.”

Lindsay stared after her friend, not quite putting the dots together. Money shot? Home computers? And what was this about Hunt going out on a date?

Her eyes widened when she noticed the memorandum on her desk. George Hower, Tron Corp’s CEO, would be making the rounds next week. *Shit*. If he heard a hint of the rumors about her, all her hard work the past few years would be out the window. Hower was a stickler for professionalism and ran a tight ship. She *had* to get her hands on that picture or, at the least, confirm that there wasn’t one, and find something to keep Hunt and the idiot twins quiet.

Janice was right. Lindsay had to find out what Hunt had on his computer. Maybe through him, since the idiot twins seemed to hang on his every word, she could blackmail them all into silence. Because lately, when Hunt said “jump,” Maclearn and Simmons leaped for the sky.

The more she thought about it, the more she liked the idea. No way would she let Hunt, the new guy, steal her thunder and ruin her in the office. She’d made a place for herself here, and refused to be the one to leave...*again*.

Lindsay was through being nice, tired of always trying to turn the other cheek. No longer would the chauvinist males in her world hold the power. She visualized Jared Hunt in her mind’s eye and smiled -- an evil grin that would have unnerved him had he seen it. A plan formed, slowly, methodically, as she pledged to be no one’s fool ever again.

* * * * *

Lindsay used the next two days to organize the details of her Friday night mission. As the daughter and sister of three Marines, she knew well how to prepare for battle. She'd sketched out a plan of attack at home following work Wednesday, and with Janice's help, had used Thursday to gather more information from Sara. After a full day's work and a hasty dinner, tonight -- Friday night -- was go-time.

She knew where Hunt lived, his habits -- heck, she'd even peeked at a copy of his recent physical, courtesy of her buddy in the insurance department -- and tonight's agenda, thanks to Sara and Hunt's chatty secretary, a woman old enough to be his mother, yet sincerely in lust with him. Lindsay grinned. She had no problem with Ruth dating Hunt, a much younger man, but she doubted Ruth's husband and grandchildren would feel the same.

Chuckling at her odd turn of thought, Lindsay gathered her tools and tucked them into a discreet black backpack. Pulling on a ball cap and tucking her blonde hair underneath as best she could, she resolved to keep to the shadows, grateful for the clouds and waning moon.

Fifteen minutes after leaving her place, she arrived at Hunt's home in an upscale section of town, a modest cottage on the Hill. She parked several houses down and glanced around, noting his black GTO was conspicuously absent.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Lindsay exited her car and locked it. She walked toward his home as if she were expected and tried to remain cool. The moon's ambient light was nearly nonexistent, but she wanted no chance of being noticed. Hopefully, his neighbors were used to seeing women coming and going at all hours of the night. And it was Friday, when normal people with a life were out dating and dancing.

Lindsay frowned at the thought and walked up his drive. How the hell could she expect to have a life when no one treated her seriously? Most men wanted to date her for sex and little else, and in the past, those few she'd been passably interested in had listened to the rumors about her and believed them.

Her anger returned in full force, and she hurried toward Hunt's back door, out of sight of any passersby. Studying the exterior of his home, she noted the lack of motion detectors as well as security signs anywhere along the drive. Sara'd been right. Hunt hadn't had the time to install security yet. Lindsay reached for the knob to the backdoor and was surprised when it turned easily.

"So sure of yourself, hmm? No one would dare steal from the great Jared Hunt," she murmured, her voice heavy with sarcasm.

Letting herself in, Lindsay performed a quick survey of the premises using her handy little Maglite with a red lens. A galley kitchen overlooking a family room connected to a hallway, to which a bathroom and two bedrooms were joined. The décor was masculine but plain.

Ignoring the family room and kitchen, she darted toward the bedrooms, where she'd most likely find something worthy of blackmail.

A man like Hunt would have something he wanted to hide; she could *feel* it. A man who lied to gain admiration from bozos like Maclearn and Simmons had skeletons in his closet. She just needed to find that closet.

Her search showed her a disturbingly organized man. In his bedroom, his dirty clothes actually lay in a hamper, and his shirts and pants hung divided in his closet. His shoes were all carefully grouped together, and his ties were hung to prevent wrinkles. For a moment she wondered if Hunt were perhaps gay.

Lindsay brightened at the thought. He would hate a secret like that exposed. After searching for evidence to corroborate his sexual preference and finding none, she left to search the next room. In the spare bedroom, one he clearly used as a study, she sighed with frustration when she came across a few porn sites on his computer. Porn sites -- *money shots*, she thought dryly -- but no pictures of her.

The sites emphasized large breasts and man-on-woman action. Good lord, but how did a man expect a normal woman to enjoy sex with her legs thrown over her own shoulders? She peered closer at the screen and froze when the sudden roar of a car sounded.

Chapter Two

Damn it. Lindsay glanced at her watch and noted more time had passed than she'd thought. An hour and a half of searching, and she'd found nothing. And what the hell was he doing home so early? Thankfully, she'd taken pains to leave everything as she'd found it. She gasped. With the exception of his computer. She quickly closed the file and turned off the monitor, then shut off her flashlight and slid behind the bedroom door, praying the darkness held.

She could barely see her hand in front of her face and hoped his night vision was as poor. The cloud cover nonexistent moonlight certainly helped her cause.

Lindsay held her breath as the front door opened. It slammed, and a moment later footsteps sounded in what she thought was the kitchen. Another door opened, and a soda top popped. The refrigerator. Crap. It was nearly midnight. Would Hunt putter around the house? And...oh, shit! Was he alone?

Straining, she thought she made out only one set of footsteps. He tread along the oak wood hallway with a measured stride and to her relief, passed by the spare room alone.

Lindsay exhaled slowly and waited while he moved around in his bedroom. He hummed under his breath, his deep voice making her itch to...well, to do something she'd regret.

For the first time in a long time her libido responded to a man, and said man turned out to be as bad as the idiot twins. Just her luck. Her stretch of celibacy was growing not only tedious, but frustrating as well. Why else would she still hunger for a creep like Hunt when she knew he was no good?

The sound of running water jerked her out of her reverie, and Lindsay decided to make her move. She stepped out from behind the door and cursed under her breath when the shower suddenly stopped. The hall light flicked on and gave the spare room dim illumination. Glancing around in alarm, she raced for the only hiding spot in the room, the slatted closet doors across from the spare room's doorway.

Thankfully, the hinges made no noise, and the only neighbors she had in the roomy closet were a leather jacket and a trench coat that would see little wear here in the South.

Just in time, too. Through the slats she could see the vague outline of a darker shadow in the doorway. Lindsay froze like a deer in the headlights, more than grateful when he headed toward his computer instead of the closet. The desk the computer sat on was perpendicular to the closet, and she faced the side of the monitor. Thankfully, it was a high definition flat screen, so she could see what was on it from her angle. From her vantage, she'd be able to see Jared's profile and the material he viewed. Lindsay shivered, both from nerves and excitement. What the *hell* would she have said if he'd opened the closet door and found her there? *Hi?* Her adrenaline surged, and she wiped her hands together. Perhaps tonight wouldn't be a total waste after all.

He flicked on his desk light and computer monitor, and her mouth dropped open.

Jared Hunt stood before his desk without a stitch of clothing on that beautiful, streamlined frame. Corded muscles clenched and released as he bent low, his delineated

abdomen making her mouth go dry. His arms were tight and larger than she'd thought, his biceps making her think he must lift weights, regularly. He turned away slightly, bringing attention to his thighs... Lindsay couldn't breathe. Long and muscular, he looked like a runner or cyclist. That ass looked as if it could bounce a quarter.

Jared shifted, and she couldn't blink. Holy hell! Jared Hunt had a penis both long and thick, and he was more than aroused. She should have taken her camera out of her bag and snapped a few digital pics, if for no other reason than to capture the memory of perfection. But she stood transfixed, unable to look away from such male beauty.

He finally sat, legs splayed, as he reached between his thighs and began stroking himself.

She couldn't believe it. A man like Jared Hunt jacked off by himself in the privacy of his house on a Friday night? Apparently, his date with Sara hadn't gone over well. But she knew a dozen women at work who would have taken Jared with open arms. Half as many had candidly propositioned him. So why was he here, now? Lindsay's breathing hitched, and she watched as he clicked through several files with one hand while he continued pleasuring himself with the other.

Despite the strangeness of the situation, she felt an answering need within her. Watching Hunt touch himself excited her, almost unbearably. Her nipples pressed against the cotton of her thin T-shirt, and she felt uncomfortably wet watching his hand sweep over his erection. And, God, what an erection it was. He was so thick. She could only imagine what he'd feel like inside her.

Stop it! Had she forgotten what she was doing here in the first place? And it would be beyond bad if he found her hiding in his closet.

"Lindsay," he murmured, and her gaze shot to the monitor. To her amazement, his hand increased its movement over his penis, rubbing faster as he stared at images of -- *her*. She leaned closer to the closet door, amazed at the pictures on his computer screen.

Lindsay in a plum-colored cocktail dress she'd worn a month ago to a company function. Another picture of her in office casual, a slim skirt and matching top. Another shot of her coming out of the bank. *The bank.*

She could only stare, not only amazed, but confused. Hunt had made up lies about her at work, and he was apparently spying on her. She should have been completely turned off, not to mention scared. But she wasn't. Hunt, the man who'd figured prominently in her fantasies since she'd first laid eyes on him, fantasized about *her*.

To her dismay, his desire spiked hers.

I must be freaking nuts.

Needing to leave his place before Hunt found her, Lindsay held her breath and prayed for him to finish quickly. She felt flushed and tried to look away as he pumped into his hand, but his obvious enjoyment turned her on, incredibly so. And like a Peeping Tom, she watched in horrified fascination as he came, groaning her name.

He cleaned himself with a towel she hadn't seen before. That's Jared -- always prepared, she thought peevishly, excited and frustrated because of *him*. Dammit. This whole mess was his fault in the first place.

Scowling, Lindsay saw him sigh and stand. He stared at the monitor as he shut it off. Rolling his neck, he stretched before turning off the desk light, apparently relaxed enough to leave the room and go to sleep -- she hoped.

After what felt like half an hour had passed with no further movement, Lindsay snuck out of the closet and glanced at the dark monitor. After tonight, she knew she had to return. She needed to download what she'd found and dig deeper into his computer. If he had just plain, ordinary pictures of her, odds were he might have a doctored photo or two as well.

That he had any photos of her at all was, well, just a little too unsettling for her peace of mind.

After checking the hallway, she left the room and walked quickly toward the back exit. Just as she reached the tiled kitchen floor, a battering ram knocked into her back, taking her down.

Grunting, Lindsay rolled instinctively. The lifelong lessons of self-defense drilled into her courtesy of her father and brothers kicked in, and she had her assailant clutching his groin and gagging in seconds.

“Fuck you,” Hunt whispered, groaning as he tried to roll to his feet. He slipped on a loose dishtowel on the floor and fell hard, hitting his head on the cold tile. When he made no more sudden moves, Lindsay carefully reached toward him, her heart pounding so hard it threatened to leap from her chest.

“Hell,” she muttered, completely unnerved. Hunt was out of it. No blood that she could see, but then maybe he was bleeding inside his brain. The lack of lighting was a real problem, but even more so was the fact he might really be hurt.

Making a snap decision, Lindsay reached down and gently felt his head for possible injury. She was no doctor, but aside from the lump on his head, and his subsequent unconsciousness, he seemed to suffer from no further injuries. Pleased when he moaned and began reaching for her, she grabbed his hands. “Come on, let’s get you to the bedroom,” she murmured, pulling with all her might. *Thank you, Dad, for the weightlifting lessons.*

With what little help Jared provided, she dragged him down the hallway into his bedroom. He groaned twice, and she knew she had to act quickly. Relieved he was regaining consciousness, she nevertheless was running out of luck in dealing with her “attacker.”

Urging him to help her, Lindsay managed to get him flat on his back on the bed. She found the secure ties she’d brought with her -- just in case -- and zipped his wrists and ankles to the head- and footboard, careful not to make them too tight that they’d cut off his circulation. Naked, spread-eagle, and helpless on his bed, Jared Hunt lay vulnerable before her.

Mentally, she added assault to the breaking-and-entering charge sure to come her way.

Dammit, she needed a minute to think... After this stunt, he'd no doubt up his security. She highly doubted she'd be able to sneak back into his place without the cops waiting for her. Glaring down at him, she realized she couldn't, in good conscience, leave him here alone. And when he woke up, then what? She'd be toast.

Lindsay scowled, refusing to end up the victim in Hunt's petty little battle. Despite her hostility, her eyes roved over his delectably naked body with a will of their own. So, he liked looking at her, hmm? Enough to relieve his sexual frustration, apparently. Maybe she could use that to her advantage.

I'm over the edge. This is absolutely insane. I should leave before it's too late.

But the sight of Hunt naked, and thoughts of him besting her again, pushed Lindsay into a choice she had a bad feeling she'd regret later.

Fuming at the mess *he'd* made of this, she refused to consider civilized rules anymore. Oh, she'd make sure he recovered from his head injury, but after that, he was going to do some apologizing. Lindsay reached for a thick bandana from her backpack and rolled it into a length of blindfold, then stowed the bag next to the bed.

His apology had better be one heck of an "I'm sorry." Because if she didn't like it -- and she had a feeling she wouldn't -- he was in for a real treat.

* * * * *

Jared groaned. His head felt like it was splitting in two, and the annoying voice that refused to let him sleep through the night was two seconds away from a fist in the mouth.

"Oh, good, you're awake."

He frowned, the voice eluding him. It was gruff yet husky, but the throbbing in his temple made it hard to focus on anything. And there was the fact he couldn't see. "What the hell is over my eyes?"

He blinked beneath a blindfold of some sort, and when he tried to remove it, found he couldn't move his hands. Or his feet.

"You're going to be just fine, Hunt." The voice was taunting, and he swore it sounded...odd. He inhaled, but the subtle fragrance in the air eluded him.

Gritting his teeth, he tugged again at his wrists. *Shit*. Had Maclearn or Simmons learned something he hadn't anticipated?

"Now, now, you don't want to chafe that pretty skin. It's tight enough that you're not going to escape without a knife. And the one in your nightstand is right here."

Jared sucked in his breath when he felt something sharp and cool dragged over his stomach.

"Don't worry, Hunt. I'm not going to hurt you...much."

That voice. His head swam, and he unwillingly flinched when a hand lifted his head off his pillow.

"Take this."

He refused to open his mouth and heard a sigh.

"It's Motrin from your bathroom cabinet. Eight hundred milligrams has been working for you all night. I'm not planning on killing you now, hotshot."

So he hadn't imagined someone caring for him for several hours. He began to calm down as his brain processed what he knew. Swallowing the pill and an accompanying mouthful of water, Jared smelled a hint of lemon and lavender soap from the person aiding him. The voice was husky but feminine. Add to that the soft, somewhat small hand on his neck, and...

Oh, hell. Lindsay Riordan. It had to be. But what the *hell* was she doing in his house? And why was he tied to his bed? The last thing he remembered was drifting to sleep when a feeling of wrongness hit him. Listening to his instincts, he'd found a dark shape prowling in his kitchen and attacked.

Pain, the likes of which he never wanted to experience again, followed by a blow to the head. Then...this.

"Why am I tied up?" he asked, after she slowly set his head back on the pillow. For a woman bent on harming him, she was acting decidedly gentle about it.

"Let's just say I have a few things on my mind we need to discuss if you want to see the light of day again."

She kept her voice on the low side, and the blindfold told him she didn't want to be recognized. Realizing it was her, and not whom he'd at first suspected, Jared allowed himself to fully relax. He'd play her game, for a while, until he found out what he needed to know. He'd always imagined having her the other way around -- with her tied up, naked, and under him -- but it intrigued him to see what she would do.

As the silence thickened, a sudden thought hit him.

"I'm naked, aren't I?" Nothing. "And you were here since last night?" He felt himself flush but could do nothing about it. Damn. That meant the odd feeling he'd had in his study had been on the money. He would just bet she'd seen his "performance" and had a ton of questions as to why he'd been beating off to pictures of *her*.

This had to be the most embarrassing moment of his life. But he'd be damned if he'd let her see that. He was actually thankful the blindfold was in place.

"You have interesting taste in porn, I'll say that," she said after a moment, her voice amused.

Of all the instances he'd imagined when confronting Lindsay Riordan, this had never entered his mind.

The first time he'd seen her, his first day of work at Tron Corp, he'd fallen in immediate lust. But ever the consummate professional, he'd ignored his desire and focused on his job. After several weeks had passed and he'd earned the same rejections she'd given

everyone else, he'd turned to the rumor mill. Funny thing, that. Gossip had turned his investigation in a completely new direction.

A hand trailed up his thigh, and he sucked in his breath, stunned. Wearing the blindfold enhanced his other senses, and her hand felt like a satin whip that beat at his need. His cock hardened in an instant, and he wondered what she thought about him.

"Well, well. Apparently last night didn't get it out of your system after all." He heard what sounded like a snick, and alarm replaced his desire.

"Shit. Tell me that's not a camera."

"It's not a camera."

She was lying. He knew it. She *had* overheard him with Maclearn and Simmons on Wednesday. He'd tried to talk to her about it, but she'd refused to speak to him. Considering she usually put him off, Jared had hoped she'd just been angry for some other reason not related to his talk with "the boys." But if she'd heard him, she was no doubt pissed as hell. Maybe he'd do better to tell her the truth and let her...

"Ah," he moaned, arching into the fist that now held his cock with ecstatic tightness.

"I believe you like this. At least, you did last night."

Incredibly, she began priming him, pumping his cock with her small fingers. He couldn't help moving with her, aroused beyond measure that Lindsay Riordan had her hand around his shaft and was stroking him to oblivion.

"More," he couldn't help saying. "Harder."

She complied, and he lost all reason.

"You like a firm hand, don't you?" He moaned and thrust up, and she stopped. "Don't you?"

"Yes," he gasped, grateful when she started again. Hell, she was setting him on fire. He felt so hard he wanted to burst. Fluid leaked from his tip, making her hand slide over his shaft with wonderful friction. Her touch was like nothing Jared had ever felt before and

being tied up and helpless while being pleased was a huge turn-on he would never have expected.

“You want to come, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Your balls are tight, your cock impossibly hard. Like steel, velvet steel,” Lindsay murmured, and he could hear the arousal in her voice.

She pumped him harder, making him pant.

“Yeah, baby, make me come,” he urged, thrusting into her hand. He was so hard, so wet and ready. God, he needed it. He was so close...

She stopped.

“Don’t worry, stud. We’ll get back to that real soon. I’ve got a few things to do in the meantime.” She chuckled. “Don’t go anywhere.”

Chapter Three

Lindsay leaned her head back against the wall outside Jared's bedroom, grinning at the curses pouring from his mouth. Oddly enough, he said nothing directed at her in particular. Just foul words describing his immense frustration.

She squirmed, so wet she felt as if she'd come herself. Lindsay fanned herself and closed her eyes. Jared Hunt was an Adonis, and touching him had been an exercise in pleasure. But watching him reach toward fulfillment, seeing his muscles strain for relief, had been as much an act of erotic art as having sex with him would have been.

"Yeah, right," she mumbled. She'd wanted nothing more than to strip naked and sink over that rock-hard erection. Between her contraceptive NuvaRing and the glimpse she'd had at his medical form at work showing him to be as clean as a whistle, she had no fears of any sexual repercussions. And hell, she'd been in a dry spell for what felt like forever. She wanted an orgasm so badly she could taste it. But that might mean giving Hunt pleasure, something she didn't intend to do for some time. If at all.

Lindsay pulled away from the wall and smiled. Though physically tired from the strain of his attack -- her hip was bruised -- and the adrenaline rush from breaking into his home and fighting with the big guy, she felt more alive than she had in years. She could only thank

her lucky stars she'd nailed him in the groin last night, or he would have mopped the floor with her.

Having studied him sprawled out on the bed, she couldn't help but dwell on his perfect build. Six-feet-four inches of prime male flesh and not an ounce of fat on him, which explained the difficulty involved in dragging him to his bedroom last night. She'd never have landed him on the bed without his help.

But once again prior planning had saved the day. Bringing those secure ties had been genius. One never knew when they'd come in handy, as her older brothers were fond of saying. Of course, she highly doubted Derrick and Andy had intended for their little sister to use them on a naked man in his own house.

"Hey, out there!" Hunt shouted.

She frowned. Maybe she should gag him. She didn't want the neighbors getting curious. Entering the room, she couldn't help staring at him.

"Yes?"

"I have to go to the bathroom."

She smiled. In the wee hours of the night she'd thought about that. "Okay. I'm going to cut two of your ties, which should allow you to roll onto your side. Then you can hold this bucket and go."

He sputtered, and she chuckled, masking her laughter with a cough. If he hadn't guessed her identity by now, he wouldn't as long as she kept talking to a minimum and in a deep voice.

"I'm not pissing while you watch."

She snorted. "You masturbated while I watched. What's the difference?"

The color rose high on his cheeks, and she wanted to run her fingers over his whiskered jaw. What damned fine genes.

Jared clenched his jaw tight. "I said --"

“Relax, *Mary*,” she drawled the common taunt her brothers used on one another. “I have no desire to watch you. I’ll cut two of your restraints. Just yell for me when you’re done. But I’m not coming in unless your blindfold is on and you lay back on the bed, hands and legs apart.”

He grimaced and after a minute nodded. “Can I at least have some clothes?”

“No.” Shoot. Her voice sounded a lot huskier than she liked. She was going for a disguised sound, not an aroused one.

Hunt said nothing, waiting.

She carefully cut his left ankle and wrist restraints, leaving the bucket on the bed within reach. “You have two minutes.”

Leaving the room, she knew he’d take off the blindfold to see what he might learn about her. Fortunately, she’d taken pains to remain anonymous. Using blankets, she’d darkened the room to a heavy shade. She could still see him under the muted light of the bathroom, which she’d left on for him to see by, but when she returned she’d turn it off again. And once he was safely tied again and blindfolded, Lindsay would remove the blankets. *The better to see you, my dear*. She laughed.

Lindsay entered the bedroom after several minutes and noted his stiff posture on the bed. The small bucket she’d found under his kitchen sink sat on the nightstand.

She dumped the bucket in the bathroom and then paused. This would be the tricky part.

“Put your blindfold back on. And not one move, genius, or I hit the “send” key on your computer, sharing your wonderfully naked and bound image to everyone in your mailbox.”

He put the cloth back over his eyes and remained motionless, tense, but she could see her bluff worked like a charm. And was she ever glad for those restraints. Quickly grabbing two more secure ties from her bag, she refastened his wrist and ankle, conscious not to hurt

him by making the restraints too tight, and grabbed a nearby chair to sit on. Stripping off her ball cap, she ran her hands through her hair.

“Now what, Lindsay?” he asked quietly.

She froze, and then shrugged with a sigh. With a man as intelligent as Hunt, the odds were he would have figured it out sooner or later. She dropped her disguised voice but refused to remove his blindfold. His lack of sight gave her an odd sense of power, and she planned on keeping him under her control.

“Who’s Lindsay?” she teased. “I’m just a helpful neighbor who was passing by.”

He snorted. “Give me a break. I know what this is about. And I tried apologizing to you the other day --”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He sighed, his throat so tempting, so strong. “I need to tell you something, Lindsay. I’m not who --”

She interrupted him by leaning in to nip at his throat. He tasted salty, so essentially male. She lingered over his pulse, sucking hard enough to leave a mark.

“Oh, shit,” he groaned and arched toward her. “You’re going to torture me over those stupid remarks, aren’t you?”

She grinned. If he only knew. She was so sick of always being good, and always getting the brunt of everything. Breaking the rules, not to mention the law, felt so very, very satisfying. And she was far from done. “Stupid remarks? Why don’t you remind me about what you said?”

“Come on, Lindsay. I was just trying to win Maclearn and Simmons to my side. And I’m sorry to say, you’re one hot topic of conversation with those two assholes.”

His tone gave her pause. But seeing him at her mercy made her doubt his sincerity. Were their positions reversed, she might say anything for a shot at freedom.

“What did you tell them, Jared?” she fairly purred. As he recounted Wednesday’s conversation with the idiot twins, she left to grab a washcloth, bar of soap, and small pan of water from the bathroom and returned to his side. “So you think my breasts are real, hmm?”

She ran a soapy washcloth over his erection, satisfied when it grew stiffer, and he groaned under her touch. She cleaned him thoroughly, all over, wanting him perfect for her play.

After several minutes, his raspy breathing broke the silence. “What are you going to do?”

She stared at him, pleased at his telling response. The man really did want her. Despite his stalker-like tendencies, the thought of Jared Hunt wanting *her* made her feel warm inside. Vanity be damned. She planned on taking something from *him* this time. A bit of pleasure, just for her.

Lindsay leaned close to his mouth and watched him lick his lips. Stifling a groan, she breathed into his mouth, “I’m going to take...a shower.”

Jared sucked in a breath. His balls ached, he wanted to come so bad. And she decided to take time out for a shower? *Fuck. Payback was more than a bitch.* Groaning at the cruel punishment he knew *Jared Hunt* deserved, he wished he’d decided to confront Lindsay about the odd happenings at Tron Corp when it first appeared she was innocent of any wrongdoing.

He lay still, taking deep breaths as he tried to ignore her lingering perfume. No longer there, yet just the scent of her made it impossible for him to relax. Hell, he felt as if he’d taken ten helpings of Viagra. If he could just get one hand free he could ease his suffering...

Sighing, he eased on the wrist restraints and concentrated on the mess at work -- namely Simmons and Maclearn -- two shitheads certain to take his mind off sex.

Doing his best to ignore the shower and the gloriously naked woman in it, Jared brought the technology specialists to mind.

Both men were in their late twenties, typical metrosexuals who believed well-groomed cuticles and overpriced suits would get them laid, provided a woman was stupid enough to overlook their massive egos and pathetic social lives. In Jared's opinion, any guy who had to brag about sex wasn't getting any. And Simmons and Maclearn were hands-down the unluckiest bastards he'd ever met.

Of course, there was that vibe he kept feeling that the two meant more to each other than they let on. Which put a whole new twist on why they seemed so pissed off about Lindsay's constant rejections. He rubbed his throbbing head against the pillow, glad the ache had dulled. But thinking about the puzzle of Maclearn and Simmons brought on an all new headache he didn't want just now.

Jared's venture into Augusta, Georgia, was more a favor than a regular job. H&R Security had a solid reputation and was growing by leaps and bounds, thanks to his and his partner, Ethan Reaper's, many successes. Ethan was currently on another case for the government -- top priority with H&R. But Ethan's cousin had married Tron Corp's CEO, George Hower, three years ago, which explained why Jared had turned a celebrity protection detail over to one of his best men and taken this task on himself.

He yanked at his wrist and swore. What should have been an easy assignment had turned out anything but. Contrary leads kept turning up everywhere he looked. At first, Jared had been convinced someone in the Tech department was responsible for leaking vital contract bid information. Then he'd found evidence to implicate a twenty-year Tron veteran in Yields and Assessments. That hadn't panned out. But then he'd hit pay dirt.

Lindsay Riordan, the beautiful ice queen who reigned supreme over all things logistical, had a trail of dirty money. Her savings account had suddenly skyrocketed. He'd found confidential documents she had no business possessing on her computer and in her office. And during his not-exactly-legal venture into her home a few weeks ago, Jared had

found an unopened envelope detailing information exchanged with one of Tron Corp's biggest competitors.

So why did he now believe in her innocence? His body heated as he recalled the tasty blouses that hugged her breasts, the knee-length skirts that showcased her ass, and the waterfall of blonde hair she always wore pulled up in a twist that made him want to see it unbound and hanging over her shoulders -- her preferably naked shoulders.

Shaking his head, Jared knew her innocence had nothing to do with his fierce attraction, thank God, and everything to do with his instincts. The evidence surrounding Lindsay's guilt was too pat, too easy. It was almost insulting that whoever was framing her kept shoving clues in his face. Lindsay had always struck Jared as intelligent, so why would she leave such incriminating evidence showing her guilt *in plain sight*?

Simply put, she wouldn't. And the fact that someone wanted her implicated sent up warning signals. His last two leads had been confusing and almost too obvious, as if the guilty party needed practice in how to point out someone culpable of traitorous intent. The more Jared pondered the matter, the more he looked to the technology specialists. Most of the evidence had been electronically doctored, so who better to compile the information than the experts so familiar with the company?

And Maclearn and Simmons weren't exactly being subtle. They talked about Lindsay constantly, their immature lust grating and growing more annoying daily. Everything Jared had done prior to Wednesday's crude conversation to bring the two dickheads into his confidence had failed. Lindsay had been the key that turned them.

Now the assholes thought he was "the man" because he'd supposedly bagged their sexual fantasy. Not that he necessarily disagreed with their choice of desire. Shit. His cock stiffened again, and when he heard the shower stop, it grew harder.

Lindsay Riordan was any man's wet dream come to life. And he should know. He'd had enough of them since meeting her two months ago. Tall, leggy, blonde Lindsay possessed

clear, sky-blue eyes, sexy, pouty lips, and breasts that made his mouth water. The fact that she possessed intelligence and a sense of humor to go along with her physical assets was incredible, including the fact she was still single. After learning about her many rejections, and the fact she'd turned *him* down, Jared had wondered if she might be gay. A woman didn't look like Lindsay and not have at least one man on the side.

He still had a hard time figuring her out. She was *normally* very nice, pleasant to everyone, even the creeps who kept coming on to her at work -- not including himself in the creeps category, of course -- and she followed the rules to the letter, making her supposed decision to turn traitor to the company baffling. Even before the recent hefty deposits into her savings account she'd been financially well-off.

"Missed me, did you?" her sultry voice interrupted his musings.

"I don't get you. I would never have pegged you as a woman to do this." He jerked his hands and feet.

She chuckled. "There's a lot about me you don't know, Jared Hunt." The bed dipped, and he caught his breath. "For instance, did you know how angry I was hearing you lie about me to those jerks, Maclearn and Simmons?"

"Lindsay, I have to tell you why --"

"And did you know I planned this whole thing out? Down to every detail," she murmured. Jared could feel heat alongside him, and barely contained a primitive growl at the erotic sensation of having her body so near. Then she rubbed her skin against his, and he groaned when he realized she was naked, too.

"That's right, Jared. I'm not wearing a stitch of clothing."

Sweat popped out over his brow. He knew she was still pissed at him and was deliberately making him suffer. Already he burned to fuck her. Soft hands trailed over his thighs, up his cock, and rested on his abdomen.

“What do you want?” he groaned. “I’ll apologize. I’m sorry. Very, very sorry. If you’d just let me explain,” he rasped, as she took him in her hands and began stroking the underside of his shaft.

“Why, Jared? Why would you be here on a Friday night when you could be out screwing any woman you want? You have to know how attractive you are. Why would you sit alone at a computer, looking at pictures of me as you come over your hands?”

Her words were killing him, making him shudder at the need overtaking reason.

“God, Lindsay. You know I want you. Stop torturing me, and let me go. I swear I’ll make things right.”

“Yes, you will.” She leaned closer to whisper in his ear. “I’m tired of the lies, of the rumors.” Her breasts touched his chest, and he leaned into her, brushing against her taut nipples. “So you’re going to apologize, and you’re going to mean it.”

He nodded. “Whatever you want, Lindsay.” She began rubbing herself over him, her nipples scoring his chest with heat, her thigh grazing his cock, sliding in the fluid that leaked from his tip. Then Lindsay opened her legs and sat astride one thigh, riding him and coating his leg with moisture.

“Shit,” he growled. “Lindsay, baby, I promise I’ll explain everything to those assholes at work. I’ll tell everyone I lied. Just please, stop this, and take me inside you.” Jared couldn’t believe he was begging, but she had him so hot, so lost to truly *feel* her.

“I have a better idea,” she purred. Crawling over him, Lindsay straddled his neck so that her scent, the sultry essence of woman and sex, drew him close. “Make *me* come. You owe me,” she breathed.

“Oh, yeah,” he sighed, nuzzling her curls as he reached for her sweet pussy with his lips. “I’ll make you come, Lindsay. I’ll make you scream.”

He nestled between her folds, spreading her with his tongue as he coated his mouth with her essence. God, she was so hot, so wet. And her aggressiveness only spiked his already

aroused state. Needing to taste her, Jared greedily nuzzled her flesh, searching and finding her clit easily.

“Oh, ah,” she groaned, pressing into his mouth.

He was in heaven.

Her clit was full, near to bursting as he eagerly lapped and sucked on the swollen nub. Jared drank in her aroused cries as hungrily as he devoured her cream. Harder he stroked, trying to penetrate her with his tongue, but he couldn’t get as deep as he wanted at this angle.

As if reading his mind, she shifted, and he drew her clit deep, nipping and pressing until she writhed over him like a woman in the throes of orgasm.

“Jared, more.” She rode his mouth, her clit impossibly tight. “Please, Jared, more.”

He grinned and complied, edging his teeth over her flesh and swallowing the gush of honey that jetted from her pussy. Fuck, but he wanted inside her as she spasmed, wanted to feel her body clasping his as she came.

“Jared,” she cried and shook, coming over his lips, exploding like a nova, as he lapped up every drop.

On and on she shuddered, her grip on the bed’s headboard rapping the wood against the wall. Moments later, Lindsay eased up from him, making him miss the sultry evidence of her passion.

“Oh, Jared,” she breathed in his ear. “That was incredible.”

He trembled from the effort not to thrust into *something*. Christ, but the sweet taste of her made him harder than stone. He’d been close to coming just from that alone. But he had to admit even this torturous frustration had been more than worth it.

“You’re still aching, aren’t you?” she whispered, kissing her way down his face to his lips. “Mmm, I taste me on your mouth.” She sighed and deepened the kiss, making him crazy.

Her mouth pulled and pushed, teasing and dragging on his tongue until he was sure he would come, and without any more help from her.

“Jared, baby, you deserve a reward,” she promised. And as her mouth moved steadily south down his body, desperation threatened to break his silence about how close to the end he was. One touch of her mouth and he’d erupt.

But his conscience suddenly demanded he warn her. *Stupid principles*. “No, Lindsay,” he said thickly. “If you put your mouth anywhere near my cock, I’m going to come. I’m so close as it is...”

Her breath whispered past his chest down his navel, until he could feel the heat from her mouth over his shaft. “I know.”

She took him inside her mouth so suddenly he swore, and then she sucked him so hard he saw stars. Unable to stop himself, he thrust once, twice, and then came powerfully, shaking with his release. The act was liberating, but the image in his mind, of her taking him deep in her throat, prolonged his orgasm.

He continued to pulse, filling her luscious mouth with his cum. He was in what felt like a frozen arch, his shaft still firm even as she milked him dry. She lifted her mouth off him in a slow, shivery movement.

“You taste good, Jared. Like warm, sticky candy.”

He groaned, clutching hard at the bedrail. “Lindsay,” he uttered in a hoarse voice, still not recovered from her heavenly touch. “I can’t... That was...”

“I can tell. But that’s only the beginning. I think you owe me more than one climax, don’t you?” He heard the grin in her voice, knew she’d want more, and thanked Ethan a million times over for the opportunity to help Tron Corp.

“Yeah, baby. I figure I owe you plenty more,” he growled.

Chapter Four

Lindsay stared at him, licking her lips as she studied his naked body. She'd shifted the heavy curtains over his windows and could now see the hard body lying calmly beside her.

Resting her gaze on his penis, she had to admit to being impressed. Seeing him last night had been erotic, but she'd never considered going down on *him*. Taking her to heaven should have been its own reward, but she hadn't counted on hungering for him. Taking him in her mouth, swallowing him, had been emotionally intimate, binding her to him in a way she hadn't expected. Of course, his fantastic tongue and skillful mouth didn't hurt any.

Desire for more had hit her hard, amazing considering how intensely her climax hit her. Gazing at his lips, Lindsay ran a finger over the full, red flesh and shivered as she recalled the bliss he'd taken her to so unselfishly, so completely. And he'd been turned on by it, she knew, as evidenced by how hard he'd been. The few forays she'd had into oral sex had been nowhere near as mind-blowing as her experience with Jared.

Touching his cock made her hot, but tasting him had rekindled her fire. Knowing she made him that hard was as much an aphrodisiac as taking him in her mouth. Mmm, just thinking about sucking him made her squirm.

Hell, she desired him again, but she wanted more than his mouth. Should she take him inside her? Ride him? The thought teased her imagination, but she found she needed more than a captive body beneath her. Yet, what if she let him go, and he turned on her?

As if reading her mind, Jared smiled and suggested, "Why don't you release my ankles? Or my wrists? If you're worried about me being pissed, don't be. I feel boneless right now. The only thing I want to do is taste you all over again."

His shaft stirred, and she stared at it with hunger.

"Come on, Lindsay. At least remove the blindfold."

She hesitated, suddenly unsure. It was one thing to hold the power, to have done the incredible and tied up a dominant man like Jared to use for her pleasure. But to have him see her, to know he watched her helpless desire, would put her in a position of vulnerability she didn't feel comfortable showing him. Sure they'd had sex, but it had been at her whim. *Just a game*, she reminded herself. The fact that she had to work so hard to convince herself to keep things light worried her. It made no sense, but there it was.

"I don't think so," she said slowly.

Before the sex, Jared had been a weakness. Now, he was more, an intimate part of her she felt surprisingly loath to let go. And how stupid was that? One stint of sex and she was seeing happily ever after? She knew better than that and blamed her unruly hormones, ignoring the clamor of her heart that said differently.

If she hadn't been so confused, and so damned hungry for his body, Lindsay would have demanded an explanation for his behavior Wednesday. But oddly enough, she realized she didn't want to know. She liked this Jared much better than the lying braggart. And it made her pause to reconcile the many similarities between this guy and the salesman everyone at work continually praised, the man she thought she'd known.

She shook her head. Reality was an ugly heartbeat away. Now, however, for the first time in her life, she indulged in a fantasy, one that had her tying up her lover and driving him insane with lust.

This Lindsay Riordan didn't step aside when she'd been wronged, and she loved the sense of strength pouring through her veins.

Smiling, she felt so pleased with herself she ignored the small sense of disquiet that she'd forgotten something important.

* * * * *

Needing time to clear her mind, Lindsay distanced herself from the temptation tied up in the bedroom and fixed herself and Jared some lunch. She had yet to put on any clothes, liking the hedonism of being naked in his house, and in front of him, no less. That he knew she flaunted herself gave her a sense of command that pleased as much as it aroused.

Humming under her breath, she finished the sandwiches and grabbed two sodas, balancing everything carefully as she returned to the bedroom. Along the way she noticed what had bothered her last night during her brief surveillance.

Jared's home looked comfortable but not lived in. His walls were bare. No family pictures decorated the space, and even the furniture seemed too neutral, as if it had come with the house. And maybe it had. She shrugged and continued to the bedroom. Though Jared was a marketing genius at work, he didn't necessarily have to be a domestic perfectionist as well.

Entering the room, she noted his calm, even breathing. Disappointed, she nevertheless knew he needed the rest. He'd had a rough go last night, not to mention the subsequent bondage and sexual frustration she'd put him through today.

"Poor guy." Lindsay smirked and left his food on the nightstand. She nibbled hungrily at hers, studying him and wondering exactly what it was about him that had heated her blood from the first minute she'd laid eyes on him.

Okay, so he had height. She was a sucker for tall men, being close to five-eleven herself. And he had muscle. Dear Lord, he had muscle. A broad chest tapered into a lean waist. Taut abs, thick arms, and ropy forearms complemented his strong thighs and toned calves. The man could have modeled for *Muscle and Fitness*, and she couldn't stop staring as she ate.

All her life Lindsay had been told she was pretty, but she had never understood precisely why men found her fascinating. She had blonde hair and blue eyes, big deal. So did a million other women, women more attractive than her. And so what that she'd been cursed with large breasts? Nowadays, anyone could fit into a C-cup with the right doctor. Good genes were responsible for her trim frame -- that and her fair share of maintenance aerobics.

Yet since puberty, boys, then men, refused to leave her alone. To her consternation, she'd felt little attraction for the opposite sex. Maybe it was the false praise, the inability to trust another to see past the surface into the woman within. Looking at Jared brought her issues into perspective. Lindsay had seen more attractive men, but Jared packed an unmistakable wallop that made him nearly irresistible to anyone in a skirt. And she wondered if he knew of his hold on women -- on her -- or if he felt as unsure as she did. After all, if Jared had been that vain about his looks, he sure as hell wouldn't have been pleasuring *himself* when he could have been enjoying any one of the available women from work.

She felt overly warm and drank her soda. The memory of him staring at her image on the computer when he'd touched himself kept resurfacing in her mind. He'd been so beautiful reaching climax, so incredibly hot while staring at pictures of *her*.

Lindsay squirmed. She wanted him again, as if she hadn't experienced an earth-shattering orgasm a short while ago. The small niggle of guilt that crept up when she stared too hard at his restraints left her. A small grin graced Lindsay's lips. This whole mess was his fault, in a twisted kind of way, and this was her fantasy, damn it, her right to extract a bit of

revenge for being treated like an object. She might be taking sexual advantage, but he'd found as much pleasure, if not more, at her hands -- or rather -- Lindsay licked her lips, her mouth.

She grinned wider, pleased with her rationalizations. Jared was hers for another thirty-six hours, and she intended to use that time to her satisfaction. She walked to his side and knelt close, placing her lips on the pulse at his neck. She kissed him slowly, sucking and teasing, until she felt an increase in the flutter of his heartbeat.

Inhaling the subtle scent that was Jared, the raw blanket of sex that clung to him like a second skin, she continued over his neck to his chest, focusing on his nipples that, as she licked, tightened into small knots. She kissed him, laving the taut flesh until he awakened, groaning her name, arching into her touch. His muscles rippled as he fought the restraints, but he didn't argue, merely urged her for more with his body.

Gratified she could so enhance his desire, Lindsay whispered all the things she wanted to do to him as she reached down and stroked his turgid erection. His breathing increased until he was panting, pressing hard into her palm.

"You're so hot, Jared," she said, nipping his earlobe and making him beg for more. "So thick." Her hand slid over him easily, rubbing his silken flesh.

"I need to move, to touch you," he groaned. "Please, Lindsay. Cut me free."

Glancing at his feet, she decided to meet him halfway. Cutting the bonds off his ankles, she tossed his knife to the floor. "That's as free as you're going to get for a while. Now ease back and relax," she said, her voice throaty. She wanted to taste him again. Moving down his body, Lindsay breathed over his penis and made him writhe.

Taking him fully, she began sliding him in and out of her mouth, stroking with her tongue and raking her teeth ever so lightly under his crown. He shouted and pushed deeper, making her groan. She felt as desperate as Jared acted and decided to fix their problem with undue haste.

Releasing him, Lindsay straddled his groin and waited, sliding over his arousal without allowing penetration, her body completely wet and needy. "I'm going to ride you, baby. Long and hard," she promised, taking the tip of him inside her. "And you're going to come inside me."

"Lindsay," he groaned, his voice harsh. "Fucking do it!"

She rocked, taking him inside, little by little. Helpless to do more than thrust as high as he could, Jared trembled, ordering, asking, and then pleading with her to take all of him. Sensing he'd reached the end of his endurance and perilously close to coming herself, Lindsay sank over him. Up and down she pressed, slamming onto him and grinding her clit into his pelvis.

"So good," she breathed, as she quickened her pace, noting his encouraging motions, his jerking hips and clenched buttocks. "Oh, Jared."

She needed... So close to the edge... Reaching down, Lindsay rubbed her clit and swore she felt him swell inside her. Coming, she cried out and clenched him tightly, dimly aware of his shout as she continued to ride him.

Finally stilling, she stared at him through half-closed eyes. His nipples were tight, and his chest flexed as he panted, as if he'd just run a marathon.

"Shit, Lindsay," he rasped. "You're going to give me a heart attack." Jared groaned, and she smiled. "Now, please, take these things off." He shook his hands. "I need to touch you."

"Not a chance. I'm having too much fun with you at my mercy. Come on, Jared, admit you've thought about being tied up and seduced."

"Actually, I have. But in my fantasies, I'm the one doing the tying, and you're helpless under me," he rumbled. "I'm not going to ask you again, Lindsay."

Something in his tone made her sober, and she glanced at his ties with alarm. Seeing them intact, she relaxed and kissed him firmly on the lips. Feeling him inside her, she squeezed him tighter and warned, "Don't ask again. My answer is still no. You'll be freed

before Monday so you can go back to work. And our time will be over.” She paused, not wanting to, but needing to make sure he understood.

If only she knew which Jared she clung to, the hard-working man she respected or the mouthy rumor mill trying to impress his juvenile associates. Recalling too easily his chatter with the idiot twins, she frowned. “Jared, don’t even think about mentioning this time together to anyone. I’ll not only deny it, but everyone at work will get a glimpse of the great Jared Hunt naked and stiff as the day is long.”

He stilled, his body tense, but he said nothing. She squelched the small measure of guilt for threatening him after the pleasure they’d just shared, but *he’d* been the one chatting it up with Maclearn and Simmons. He’d been the one who insinuated that he had a naughty picture of *her*.

“Just so we understand each other. Now, lie back and relax.” Petting his chest, she relaxed when he took a deep breath and settled into the bed. Yawning, Lindsay eased off him and moved next to him. “Just give me an hour or so, and I’ll show you a few things that will set your hair on fire.”

Chuckling, she snuggled closer to his heat and threw an arm around his chest. Lindsay hugged him tight, wishing he was as perfect as he felt inside her. She sighed. Would that he were.

The minute Lindsay’s breathing evened into sleep, Jared tugged his hands free from the restraints he’d been working loose for the past hour, ripped off his blindfold, and carefully substituted a pillow in place of his body for her to hug. He eased out of the bed, stifling a groan at the pain in his stiff arms. Working the blood flow back into them, Jared flexed and released his muscles as he stared, for the first time, at Lindsay Riordan in the flesh.

His mouth dried as his gaze caressed her the way he soon planned to, with hands that itched for erotic revenge. In retrospect, it was probably a good thing he’d been blindfolded.

Had he seen her like that, those full lips, rosy breasts, and long, sleek thighs, he'd no doubt have broken out of his bonds earlier. As it was, it had been all he could do to remain in her control, succumbing to her teasing. Her sexual torture had made him desperate while she'd ridden him.

Christ, he'd never come so hard before, or for so long. He couldn't believe she made him so crazy. But looking at her, he could readily imagine their next time. And what a next time it would be.

His eyes narrowed as he traipsed carefully out of the bedroom and down the hall to the second bathroom. After seeing to his needs and taking a quick shower, Jared cleared his bedroom of the stale sandwich and returned to the kitchen, suddenly ravenous. He grabbed a bite to eat and made a few phone calls. He should have checked in with Ethan last night, so he hoped his buddy wouldn't think anything was amiss by his silence.

As luck would have it, Ethan had been too busy on his current project to bother with him. A call to their secretary assured Jared he hadn't missed much, and he returned what messages he could before leaving his office behind, far behind, in his new list of priorities.

Returning to his bedroom, he saw Lindsay was still curled around his pillow. She murmured his name and hugged it tighter, causing his heart to stutter.

What the hell was that?

He felt a moment's panic that he'd fallen in way over his head on what had started out as a small job. Hell, the woman didn't even know his true reason for being here. Or his real name.

Jared's toe nudged something cold on the floor, and he felt a measure of relief, his attention thankfully distracted by the small knife and black backpack sitting near the bed. After several moments spent perusing the pack's contents, he smiled a slow, satisfied grin as he withdrew four more secure ties. Noting the time, he decided to give her a few hours of uninterrupted sleep before awakening her to a "new day," with newer rules.

He'd hoped she would release him, that she'd allow him to show her he could be trusted. But no, not his Lindsay.

His Lindsay. Mulling the words, he found to his surprise that he liked the sound of them.

His Lindsay was a stubborn sex goddess with little room in her heart for forgiveness, apparently. She'd taken him to heaven but refused to let him stay there. Damn, but the images she'd stoked in his brain as he'd wondered what she'd do next had nearly killed him.

But now...Jared gave a wicked smile. Now Lindsay would have plenty of time to regret her actions. And he'd make her listen to the truth if he had to gag her. His cock stiffened, and he rubbed the well-used member, amazed he was still so hungry for the stubborn woman. As long as he'd come, as perfect as it had felt to be inside her, Jared wanted her yet again, right now, but had to content himself with waiting.

No matter, he told himself, and sat down in a chair to study her while he killed time. Jared tapped the secure ties against his knee. Soon he would have Lindsay at his mercy. He hadn't been lying earlier when he'd admitted his fantasy of tying her up. And now that she was nearly in it, he wondered how many times he could make her come while she sighed his name. He studied the contented look on her sleeping face, affection tugging his heart. How was he going to prove to her that Monday was just another day, but their relationship... Oh, hell. Why not be honest with himself? Their *relationship* had progressed to a whole new level, one she would soon be powerless to refuse.

Chapter Five

Lindsay woke on her back with her arms stretched above her head. It took her a moment to regain her bearings, and when she did, she panicked.

“Shit.”

“Shit is right.” Jared Hunt towered over her, his jutting penis stiff and eager, his lips curled with humor, and his eyes glowing with satisfaction. “I told you I wasn’t going to ask again.”

“Jared,” she cajoled, as she twisted her wrists, only to find them tied with her own equipment. Damn. That had been sloppy of her. She *knew* she should have tied him tighter, but she’d been determined not to cause him any undue pain. *Idiot*. “You know you deserved a bit of harmless payback for what you said about me to Frick and Frack at the office. Admit it.”

“I do,” he said easily, rubbing his flesh as he stared down at her.

Look away, please. Unable to break eye contact, she was completely ensnared by his hungry gaze. Blindfolded, he’d been more a fantasy than a person, just as he’d made her out to be in his discussion with Maclearn and Simmons. But now she couldn’t help seeing the real him. Her heart hammered with more than worry at his nearness. She was deeply in lust,

and scarily growing more and more drawn to the handsome devil, despite her inner plea to remember his callous words.

Damn her conscience. It refused to shut up. *But everyone at the office really likes him. And he never had one bad word to say about anyone until you overheard him on Wednesday. He even took your rejections in stride.* Lindsay's heart beat faster.

"Do you know what I was thinking about when I was touching myself last night?" he asked, his voice throaty.

Lindsay licked her lips and cleared her throat before she could answer. "Wh-what?"

"I was thinking how gratifying it would be to come inside your slick heat. About how hard I could push into your wet pussy, how long I could make you come around me."

Lindsay bit her lip to hold back a groan. Why did he have to be so sexy and so damned hot when he talked frankly like that? Her attention settled on the large hand covering his shaft, and she had an unquenchable urge to swallow him again.

"That's right, baby. You want this in your mouth, don't you?"

She said nothing, a little embarrassed to be so obvious. And she knew she and Jared had gone far beyond "embarrassed" hours ago.

"Tell me, Lindsay. Tell me you want to suck my cock, to swallow my cum. All of it."

She shifted in sexual frustration, feeling deliciously wet and strangely uninhibited under his gaze. "I want you, Jared." She stared into his light green eyes. "I want to feel you shudder when you come, to taste you as you slide down my throat, so creamy and sweet."

He increased the friction on his penis, and she wondered if he meant to mark her with his cum. The thought aroused her further.

"I'm going to do to you what you've been doing to me since I met you," he answered silkily, showing another side to the charming, affable Jared Hunt. This man seemed dangerous, controlling, and he thrilled her to the quick. "But first I need a measure of control, one you're going to provide."

He knelt on the bed, moving up her body to straddle her neck, his cock imposing and large before her. "Lick me," he growled. "Suck my balls, my cock. Make me want to fuck that pretty mouth until I come."

Lindsay was on fire. She'd always wanted to try being dominated, not the heavy stuff, but a little play like this. Now she couldn't believe what she'd been missing. She felt so aroused. His mere words and nearness made her want to come. Had he felt the same, when she'd had him tied up and at her mercy?

Staring up at his lust-glazed expression, Lindsay opened her mouth and stroked him with her tongue. He moved with her, and she shivered at the touch of his balls on her cheek and began licking and sucking the velvety sac with a generosity that made him moan out loud. Jared tilted his pelvis and put the tip of himself in her mouth, as if waiting to see what she would do.

She smiled, then sobered as she stared at his beautiful shaft. Licking her lips, she opened wider. He pushed forward, cursing when she began urging him deeper. Clutching the headboard with an iron grip, Jared began thrusting inside her mouth, slowly but surely, his girth growing until she had no thought for anything other than his shaft.

Thick, hot flesh filled her, made her breathless with desire. She tasted salty sweetness and knew his climax neared.

"Fuck, Lindsay. You're so good." He groaned, pumping faster. "I'm coming."

He shot into her mouth, and she greedily swallowed him, squirming on the bed for the release she desperately needed. Watching him come was a heady stimulant, and one that stoked her desire to feel the same, free of any constraint.

"Don't worry, baby." Jared withdrew and lay over her, blanketing her with his body. His penis was still semi-hard, moisture beading at the tip as he rubbed it over her middle. "I'm going to give you exactly what you've given me. Pleasure until you want to die from it."

He smiled then, his expression one that made her nervous. “Now, now,” he teased and lightly grazed his chest against her breasts. Sparks of pleasure feathered throughout her body. “We have plenty of time to make love, Lindsay. The question is, how soon after I put my mouth on you will you come? And how many ways can I take you before you finally stop being so stubborn and listen to what I have to say?”

Three orgasms later, Lindsay still couldn’t catch her breath. With his hands and mouth, Jared had taken her to heaven again and again. But he refused to put himself inside her. Frustration at the lack of joining made her climaxes pleasurable, but not quite enough. She needed his complete penetration for full satisfaction.

“Lindsay, honey, I have never seen anything more beautiful than you in climax,” Jared murmured, as he pressed kisses along her neck. “You are so open, so incredibly sexy. And you taste so good.”

She blushed, amazed she could feel self-conscious after the things he’d done to her -- and she to him. His quiet question surprised her.

“Why did you turn me down so many times before?”

“Office romances never last. And they make work an awkward place to be.”

When he spoke again, his words were casual, but she could feel him tense beside her. “So you had an office romance that went bad? Some guy broke your heart?”

“No.” She saw Jared’s jaw relax and frowned. “Why should you care?”

“It matters,” he said thickly, running his hands through her hair. His large, blunt fingers stroked with a gentleness that soothed, making her want to curl into him, and she closed her eyes, relaxed. “So why aren’t you in a relationship now? It’s not like any guy with half a brain is going to turn you down.”

She frowned, opening her eyes to see his light green ones full of curiosity. “Who says I’m not in a relationship now?” At his knowing look, she huffed. “Oh, that’s right. You’ve been stalking me. Obviously, you know I don’t date.”

“But why not?” He looked baffled. “You’re smart, you’re funny, and you’re obviously gorgeous.”

Lindsay stared, her mouth dry. Good lord. Yesterday she’d wanted to brain him. A bit of flattery, and she melted. He thought she was smart and *funny*? “You think so?”

He nodded.

“Most men don’t see past the blonde hair and breasts,” she said wryly.

“You forgot the baby-blue eyes.”

She narrowed her gaze. “When I get free from here --”

“I’m just teasing.” He chuckled. “But I can’t complain about having you at my mercy. Christ, this is a dream come true. A naked Lindsay Riordan tied up in my bed.” He shook his head. “Are you sure I’m not dreaming?”

“Untie me, and I’ll pinch you.”

“Ha, ha. I’ll untie you when you let me apologize for the other day.”

She stared at him, aware the intimacy between them had strengthened, and it was more than just sex. Warmed, yet still wary of where this might take her, Lindsay nodded.

“You have to promise to keep this secret, just between us. I’m trusting you with vital information that could hurt Tron Corp if it becomes known in the company.”

She frowned. “I promise. Tell me already.”

“My name isn’t really Jared Hunt.”

That, she hadn’t been expecting.

At her silence, he continued. “It’s Zachary Jared Hunter, a mouthful, I know. I co-own a security firm in Seattle. H&R Security.”

"I don't understand."

"The head honchos at Tron Corp suspect a traitor in their midst. Someone within the company has been leaking bid information to its competitors. And with this new government bid on the table, we, H&R, were called in to stop the leak, *quietly*."

"You're kidding me."

"I wish I was. But I have to admit I'm glad Tron Corp's having problems. If I hadn't taken this assignment, I never would have met you." Jared trailed his fingers over her neck to her breasts, teasing the nipples into taut peaks. "Baby, you have no idea how happy I was to put you in the clear."

"What?"

He sighed at the obvious shock in her gaze. "I had to assume everyone at Tron Corp, with the exception of the CEO, was a suspect. After a month, I had mostly narrowed down the field of potential traitors to a dozen. And then some surprising leads turned up."

"Leads?" Lindsay had a bad feeling she knew where he was headed.

"Two suspects didn't stand up under further investigation, and I found myself pointed in your direction, despite my desire to see you innocent. Someone at Tron Corp is setting you up to take a huge fall, Lindsay. And unless I can find out who that is, you're going to be in some serious trouble."

"This is insane." Lindsay flexed her arms and glared at her restraints. "Do you think I can lose these now?"

He shook his head. "I'm not crazy. Until I explain this, I'm not letting you free to knee me." Jared winced. "Or do anything else detrimental to my health. Sorry, baby, but you're going to lie there and listen to what I have to say." His eyes were hard, his jaw clenched, and he looked every inch a dangerous man -- one that made her heart race.

Sighing, she tried to ignore the fact they were naked as they discussed her future. Could her life get any more bizarre? "Go on."

He relaxed and had the nerve to smirk. "I knew you'd see it my way. I followed the trail set for me and found you to be a very sloppy criminal, a trait completely at odds with the woman I've come to know. You're too smart to leave a paper trail, or an electronic one, for that matter, in your office."

"What are you talking about?"

"And the mail in your home was blatantly planted."

"What mail?"

"The evidence addressed to you from Marker National, a hefty payoff for bid information on Project Runway for Uncle Sam."

"Please tell me this is a joke."

"I wish I could. I have the letter in my briefcase under the bed, if you want to see it. Bottom line, I began to grow suspicious at your apparent laziness. I couldn't see any personal vendetta against Tron Corp, which meant your motive had to be financial. Yet from what I saw in your bank accounts, you don't need the money."

"No, I don't." Lindsay struggled with her wrists, incredibly angered at the thought of someone besmirching her good name. What? It wasn't enough to label her the office "blonde" anymore, now she had to be a corporate spy and thief?

"Fifty thousand hit your savings account a week ago."

The blood drained from her head, and she stilled. "Fifty thousand?"

Jared nodded and stroked her tense abdomen. "And the collective evidence against you is pretty damning."

"Then why haven't you done something about it before now?" Was he possibly toying with her? But how could he be after today, when he could have treated her much, much harsher instead of gifting her with mindless pleasure?

“I told you, Lindsay. I believe in your innocence, and I don’t like being made a fool of any more than you do.” His tight lips and dark scowl told her he meant what he said. And despite the situation, joy took root, the knowledge that he believed in her liberating.

“So, do you have any idea where to look for these traitors?”

“Remember my obnoxious conversation on Wednesday?” He shook his head with disgust. “Maclearn and Simmons don’t like you much. Or I should say, they’re pissed you won’t give them the time of day. Of course, the minute you do they’d be all over you. Simmons gets a hard-on anytime he mentions your name.”

“That’s gross.”

“Tell me about it.” Jared caressed her skin. His callused hands and the friction of his palms circling her abdomen made her shiver. “The thought of either one of them seeing you like this makes me want to break every bone in their pathetic bodies.”

She sucked in her breath as his fingers threaded through the tight curls of her sex. “So you were lying to trick them into your confidence?”

He stared at her through hooded eyes and toyed with her cleft, his fingers sliding through her wet arousal and grazing her clit. “I was telling them what I’ve imagined for two months. Since that first meeting at Tron Corp when I was introduced to your section, I’ve dreamed of sliding deep within you. For weeks I’ve come in my hand, surrounded by memories and pictures of you.”

His fingers parted her nether lips and plunged into her tight sheath, making her moan and arch into his touch. “I want you all the time. And this is one particular fantasy I’m obsessed with, the one where I have you tied up and at my mercy.” His voice roughened, and he began thrusting his fingers faster, harder. “In my fantasy, I control all of you. I suck your breasts, your pussy, and lick your clit until you want to scream. And when you’re helpless and begging me to finish, I fuck you hard, repeatedly, coming inside you until there’s no more you and me, only us.”

She groaned and thrashed her head, desperately seeking relief from his too-skilled digits. "Jared, please."

"Not yet." He slowed his fingers and leaned over her breast, taking one nipple in his mouth. The heat and pull of his mouth set her on fire. Tugging at her nipple, he sucked until she wanted to beg for mercy. He then turned his attention to her other breast and treated it to the same erotic torture.

"Oh, my God."

"You are so wet," he rasped, slowing the glide of his fingers in and out of her, teasing the sensitive nub between her legs. "And your tits are so big, so perfect." He sucked one, then the other, lavishing her breasts with sensual, almost painful attention. She felt so sensitive, so needy, and yet her pleasure hovered just out of reach.

"I need --"

"Beg me." He thrust violently against her leg, his shaft hot and thick. "Tell me how much you want me. Tell me you'll do anything I want." His voice shook and deepened, and she could tell he was as caught in his fantasy as she was.

"Please, Jared," she gasped. "I'll do anything you want. Just fuck me." Lindsay saw his eyes go dark with desire.

He kissed her with so much passion she couldn't think. Leaning into her, he placed himself at her wet entrance but waited while he teased her with his tongue, engaging in brutally pleasurable thrusts to her mouth that mimicked what his body would soon be doing.

"I need you so much," she managed, before he gave her what she craved.

Jared sank to the hilt inside her, making her clench him tight as he began pounding. She cried out at the exquisite sensations, her nerves taut as he increased his pace.

"Oh, yeah, baby, take me deep," he groaned and pushed harder. Pistoning his hips, he gave no quarter as he promised her ecstasy. "Your pussy is so good, so tight. Ah, Lindsay, I want to feel you come around me. Fuck, this is so right."

He didn't stop his rocking, and soon ripples of pleasure shook her as he seemed to thicken even more. Filled with Jared, with his essential maleness, she felt feminine, desired and needed.

"I'm going to come, Lindsay." He stared down into her eyes. "And you're coming with me."

He shifted his angle of penetration so that his pelvis rocked her clit.

"Jared."

"Fucking you is sheer heaven." He took her harder and groaned. "And you're so hot and wet. Come, Lindsay, with me."

She was helpless to deny his and her body's needs and shook at the force of her orgasm. Moaning his name, she clenched him tight and heard his hoarse shout. Astonishingly, her orgasm multiplied, and her bliss flowed as if forever, until she felt as if she'd died and gone to heaven.

Jared shook over her, his body fully planted within hers.

"Hell, Lindsay. That was better than anything I could have imagined." He wiped his forehead and leaned weakly over her. "I don't have the energy to think beyond 'wow.'"

Lindsay laughed, a throaty sound that was all she could manage. "Me neither."

Chuckling, he lowered himself to lean on his elbows. "I know I have to cut you loose, but give me a minute to revel in my macho fantasy. After all, you had your time with my helpless little body."

"Jared, as I'm sure you know, there's nothing little about you."

"Ah, a woman after my own heart. One who can't lie."

She rolled her eyes but didn't have the energy to tease him. All seemed right with the world, and she wished, for just a moment, this day would never end.

"We have a long way to go, Lindsay." Jared stared, his expression inscrutable. "And don't think a little thing like Monday is going to stop *us*. I have an investigation to solve, one

now circling around you.” The hope inside her shriveled, but before it could die, he added, “And I’m not through with you yet, not by a long shot.

“You, Lindsay Riordan, are mine.”

Chapter Six

Breakfast, then lunch, came and went Sunday, and Jared sat with Lindsay on the couch. Relaxed, they watched a movie like a normal couple.

She'd brought in a stash of clothes and shower gear she said she normally kept inside her car for gym workouts. And now some of her toiletries sat next to his in the bathroom, looking like they belonged there. The contentment inside him continued to grow, as did the warm feeling in his heart when she leaned closer to him.

Never in his life had he been as happy as he now was with Lindsay, and he could only pray things between them deepened. A woman like Lindsay didn't do casual sex, and despite the fact she'd explained she was on birth control, he surprised himself by realizing he didn't care if she got pregnant. His entire adult, sexual life, he'd been a stickler for protection; he was not an irresponsible man by any means. Yet with Lindsay, all thoughts but those about her faded in importance. Hell, he almost wanted a child with her so they'd be tied together forever...

Wanted a child? Jared froze at the thought, forcing himself to smile and nod at the movie when she glanced at him. Kids? He wasn't ready for kids yet, was he? Though his

mother constantly prodded her oldest child to marry and reproduce, he'd always thought of himself as too young. But hell, he'd reached his thirty-fourth birthday last month.

Jared glanced at Lindsay and wondered what their kids would be like. No doubt beautiful, with her light hair and bright blue eyes, intelligent, and introspective. Or maybe they'd be dark-haired, like him? A blond boy with his green eyes. A dark-haired girl with her mother's baby-blue gaze.

Fantasies began to build around a life in Seattle, two kids, a blonde bombshell for a wife, a successful career, maybe a dog...

"Hello? Earth to Jared?" Lindsay frowned. "Or should I call you Zachary?"

He made a face. "It's Jared. Only my mother calls me Zachary, and that's when she's ticked at something I did."

Lindsay grinned, a full-mouthed smile that made his heart flip. "You know a lot about me, but I know nothing about you. Tell me about yourself."

"What do you want to know?"

"Don't be deliberately dense, *Zachary*. Tell me about your family, your job. No girlfriends, I take it?" she asked lightly, though he heard an underlying vulnerability.

"Lindsay, how can you ask me that after yesterday? Dumb question," he said bluntly, frowning. "I'm a single, *unattached* thirty-four-year-old with a mother, father, and three sisters -- all three of whom spell 'trouble' with a capital 'T' -- on the West Coast."

"So you live where?"

"Currently in Seattle, where Ethan, my partner, and I base our business, though I'm originally from Spokane. Ethan and I met in the Marine Corps and have known each other for years."

"Marine Corps?" Lindsay's eyes grew wide, and he recalled, from the files he'd read on her, that her father and brothers had all served. Pleased they had that in common, he nodded with pride.

"I was Force Recon and left the Corps after ten years." If only he could have stayed a naïve young corporal forever... But with promotion came the distasteful political posturing, and he was old school. In Jared's opinion, getting the job done was more important than kissing some officer's ass. Unfortunately, he and his last commanding officer hadn't seen eye to eye. "Don't get me wrong, I'll always love the Corps, but I needed to get out when I did."

She nodded, her eyes bright as she watched him, and stroked his arm gently.

Damn, but that felt good.

"So you and Ethan decided to open a business yourselves?"

"Actually, Ethan had gotten out a few years before me and worked for a security firm for a while. He knew he could do a better job, so when I left the Corps he brought the idea to me. We both invested money and time, and before we knew it, we had a working, successful firm. Of course, neither of us suffer fools or bullsh -- ah, BS, so we take what clients we want and refer the others."

"And Tron Corp? How did two guys from the West Coast get interested in a logistics firm on the East Coast?" She bit her lip in thought.

Jared could almost see the wheels in her mind turning, and his cock swelled. Smart and sexy, a killer combination. He silently groaned and shifted next to her.

"Not that Tron Corp isn't great," she continued, "but it's just one of many logistics firms, and we're not that big."

"Ethan's cousin married your CEO a few years back. This is more a favor than a true business venture."

"Ah." She toyed with the neckline of his T-shirt, and his body reacted. Every nerve in his cock jumped to attention. "So it's for your friend's family that you're trying to help Tron Corp."

"Yeah." His voice sounded gritty, but damn it, she made him hard with very little effort. How did she do it? He'd been trying not to think about sex and just be with her, to

enjoy their time together. But his body didn't want to forget hers -- not when he'd just found her, so to speak.

"You're a very loyal man, aren't you, Jared?"

Her hand trailed lightly over his chest, ran over his sensitive nipples, and down the thin, soft cotton of his T-shirt to his belly. Christ, but she was killing him. Trying hard to be good was never so...*hard*.

"I try to be."

"And you say you're going to help me, because you believe in me."

"I do." He swallowed and couldn't help staring at her breasts straining against her thin, cotton shirt. She wore it over a pair of panties. That she hadn't donned a bra made him a very, very happy man.

"Then I should be able to tell you something in confidence and know you'd never share it with anyone aside from us."

He frowned. This sounded serious, but her constant petting distracted him. "Lindsay?"

She leaned up on her knees to whisper in his ear. "I've spent the last half hour staring at the television, wondering why anyone would want to frame me. And the entire time, visions of you naked kept interfering. The way your body tenses right before you come. I love the way you taste, Jared."

Her hand fell to his lap and unsnapped his jeans. Working her fingers under the denim, she clasped his cock and stroked him.

His eyes crossed, and he leaned back against the couch, grateful when she finally unzipped him, giving her better access.

"I should be too tired to make love with you again." She licked her lips, as though unsure of herself, an odd contradiction considering she had her hand wrapped around his shaft. "But I can't stop wanting you. And you're so big, so hard," she marveled, making him even harder.

“You little tease,” he growled, utterly aroused. After a few moments tolerating her petting, he knew he couldn’t take much more before he exploded.

Pinning her to the couch, he kissed her, licking at her lips and tongue until she gave him what he wanted. Angling a hand between them, he ran his fingers under the large shirt she wore and delved into her panties. Sweet, slick need covered his fingers as he stroked her clit.

Moaning, Lindsay reached for him, but he shook his head.

“On the floor, on your hands and knees.”

Excitement flared in her eyes as she quickly positioned herself. Not taking the time to undress, Jared quickly joined her and stripped her underwear from her legs. Pushing his jeans off his hips, he lifted the shirt she wore to bare her ass, palming the soft, white flesh.

“Lindsay, baby,” he groaned, fixated on her pale cheeks. “You are so hot.”

Nudging her knees apart, he fitted himself between her legs and positioned his cock at her folds. Pressing slowly, he held her hips and watched with satisfaction as she pushed back, urging him deeper.

“That’s it, take all of me.” He rubbed her ass as he thrust further, wanting to take her in ways that would most likely shock her. “I want you, Lindsay,” he rasped, loving the feel of possession that consumed him as he took her from behind.

“Jared, more.”

She rubbed against him, and he pulled out, only to thrust harder into her.

“Oh, yeah.” He squeezed her ass cheeks, groaning at the tight feel of her pussy gripping him. Over and over he pounded, as if to mark her as his own. Lust consumed him as he noted how wet she was, how much she wanted him.

“Jared,” she groaned, arching back. “Harder.”

He gave her what she wanted, dimly aware of a sudden banging at the door. But he was on fire, unable to stop, and even as he heard the knob twisting, he plunged deep and came, filling her as she milked him dry.

Sated but aware she had yet to come, he reached around for her clit.

"Jared, someone's at the door," she whispered, pressing back against his fingers.

"They can wait." He had locked the doors and closed all the drapes this morning, wanting his privacy with Lindsay before the real world intruded. "Now be very quiet when you come, or they'll know what we're doing."

Still bent over, she held him inside her, and his touch on her clit made her walls clench him tight. Shuddering, he withdrew, pleased at the semen running down her legs. He loved that he was all over her -- in her womb, on her skin.

Turning her onto her back, Jared lifted the hem of her shirt to expose her groin. Her golden curls were wet with her desire and his, and he found the sight unbearably arousing.

"Come for me, baby," he murmured and eased her folds apart with his fingers. He loved looking at her, loved seeing her this way, naked and vulnerable *to him*. Playing with her clit, he increased the pressure of his strokes, loving the way she gasped his name.

She moaned quietly, gripping at the carpet as if to hold on before she flew apart.

Unable to resist, Jared lowered his mouth to her sweet pussy and thrust two fingers deep, covering her clit while he pumped her vagina. She tasted so sexy, so right. And the thought of taking her ass, as he'd wanted to do earlier, stirred him. He continued thrusting his fingers and sucking at her taut flesh. And when he added just the tip of his pinky to her tight little anus, she flew apart. Screaming his name, she came hard, coating his tongue with cum.

Lapping it up, he continued to pump, shoving his pinky in further until she begged him to stop.

“Oh, God, oh, Jared. Stop, I --” She drew a deep breath. “Too sensitive. But -- oh, my God!”

He grinned, thrilled with her response. Hell, he wanted to fuck her again. His cock was actually beginning to get sore from so much use, yet he still wanted her.

The banging on the door came again, this time followed by a voice.

“Hunt? You in there? Sounds like some real good pussy being had.” Maclearn’s muffled chuckle froze Jared and Lindsay at once.

“Shit! Lindsay, go back to my bedroom and wait until I can get rid of him, and probably Simmons, too. Don’t come out no matter what you hear,” Jared urged quietly.

She looked nervous. “But Jared --”

“No buts. Maclearn and Simmons are assholes, and there’s no way I’ll let them drag you into their twisted games, let alone see you like this.” *Not to mention they could be dangerous.* Where Maclearn went, Simmons was sure to follow. They’d never before visited him at home, and he wondered what had brought them here today.

She glanced down at herself and blushed.

“Yeah,” he whispered with satisfaction, “that’s me all over you.”

As they stood, she couldn’t help staring at his erection. “Better cover that up, or the idiot twins might think that’s for them.”

“Very funny. The thought they might be gay crossed my mind, but they’re too much into women for that. Not to mention what they told me they want to do to you.”

“You never know.” She gave him a cryptic look before clutching her panties and hurrying into his bedroom.

Wondering what she knew that he didn’t, Jared grimaced and tucked himself back into his jeans. Looking around him, he saw nothing to indicate Lindsay’s presence. Unfortunately, it smelled of sex in the room, something he would have found arousing but for the arrival of Maclearn and Simmons.

Taking a deep breath, Jared strode to the door and opened it. Sure enough, Dale Maclearn and Ken Simmons stood waiting, trying to stare over him to see who might be behind him.

“Damn, Hunt. I heard a woman screaming your name. Guess you weren’t lying about Riordan, hmm?” Maclearn chuckled and shoved past him into the living room. “Oh, yeah, definitely smells like pussy to me.”

Simmons joined him, and Jared closed the door behind them with a sigh. So much for the real world not intruding until Monday.

Turning to the idiot twins -- he loved that name -- Jared shrugged. “Who said it was Riordan?”

Maclearn and Simmons looked at each other, and then back at him.

“No shit?” Simmons glanced casually around him. His mean brown eyes settled on Jared, and Jared felt a small tingle of discomfort. Something about the man seemed off. “So who were you banging if not her?”

Maclearn looked puzzled by his friend’s less-than-friendly behavior, but when he opened his mouth, Simmons shook his head. Surprised by the apparent role reversal, Jared stared at the two, realizing there was more to Simmons than he’d first thought.

Ken Simmons had a slight build. Obviously no weightlifter, the twenty-nine-year-old had a wiry toughness to him that only added to the incongruity of his geeky, yet arrogant, persona. From his initial meeting with the two, Jared had seen Dale Maclearn take charge time and time again, yet if Jared were honest with himself, he’d always felt something not quite right between Maclearn and Simmons. Something in their relationship felt odd, a small detail in the way they looked at each other, despite their seeming fascination with the opposite sex, and with Lindsay in particular.

“*You never know,*” Lindsay had said about the idiot twins’ sexuality. As he stared at them, Jared suddenly realized he’d missed a vital clue to understanding Ken Simmons, and

his unease grew as he sensed he'd greatly underestimated the pair. Whether gay, straight, or bisexual, Ken Simmons was the leader, not the follower he'd appeared to be.

"Who was I banging?" Jared repeated, deliberately looking confused. "What does it matter? One woman's as good as the next, right?"

Maclearn grinned, his mouth tight and his watery blue eyes...nervous?

Simmons merely stared. "Women are all the same, to a degree." He shifted and stepped closer to Jared, who forced himself to remain at ease. Simmons eyeballed Jared up and down, disturbingly resting his gaze on Jared's crotch. "You said you wanted to hang out with us sometime. Well, sometime is now. Why don't you go find the bitch you've got stashed in your quaint little home? I bet she'd love to play with us." Simmons sneered and grabbed his own dick, taking Jared aback at the total about-face in his personality.

Jared's instincts told him Simmons had discovered his real identity and the reason why he'd been sent to Tron Corp. Always before the quiet, seemingly submissive one in the Maclearn-Simmons pairing, Simmons now projected an arrogant challenge.

Suddenly, Maclearn shifted, and his jacket opened. And Jared glimpsed the handle of a small pistol.

The stakes had just been raised.

The idiot twins apparently knew all about him. And the one person they wanted most out of the way was in his back room.

Lindsay.

Chapter Seven

Lindsay stood with her ear pressed to the door. She could hear the three talking and wished Jared hadn't insisted she remain holed up in his bedroom. After spending so much time with him and learning about him, she had decided to hell with the rumors at work. Lindsay *wanted* to be linked to Jared, and who better to spread the gossip than Dale Maclearn and Ken Simmons?

Maybe finally getting even with Jared had pushed that sense of empowerment always lacking in her before. But she no longer intended to play the "victim." She'd previously left two jobs she really liked in order to avoid confrontation and an unpleasant work environment. But she refused to leave this job. More importantly, she refused to leave Jared alone to deal with a problem she should have fixed long ago.

Simmons and Maclearn were assholes. Plain and simple. Yet, they were also the men Jared believed behind the scheme to send her to jail. And all because they couldn't have her? That didn't make sense. She'd never before told anyone this, but she'd once caught Simmons and Maclearn in a liplock at work. Though she knew the two men would have sex with her in a heartbeat, they also seemed to have no problems satisfying each other -- and at work, no less.

Lindsay still had a hard time visualizing Maclearn and Simmons in a passionate embrace, and she frowned away the image. *That* she had not needed to remember. Lindsay had been surprised, however, that even after she'd caught them kissing, Maclearn and Simmons had continued to pursue her. Lindsay was grateful they didn't know she'd seen them together. She could only imagine how obnoxious, and even threatening, they might have become.

She couldn't have cared less if they were gay or even bi. But to "real men" like Maclearn and Simmons, apparently being labeled anything other than heterosexual was a bad thing.

"Bring her in here so she can watch the show." Simmons's loud voice dripped with menace.

Lindsay grew worried. He didn't sound right, and Jared was out there alone. Granted, physically he could probably take on both Maclearn and Simmons, but men like the idiot twins didn't play fair. And if they really were leaking information on government bids, they might be dangerous.

"What show?" Jared asked after a moment.

Damn, she wished she could see their expressions. Oh, to hell with this. Surely she could ride to his rescue. After all, she'd broken into Jared's home, tied him to his bed, and had her way with him. Just thinking about what she'd done made Lindsay grin. She wasn't about to let the idiot twins screw up her perfect weekend.

Besides, Jared had bragged to them about sleeping with her, so it wouldn't be out of place for her to be in his house, let alone his bedroom.

Going braless and showing a bit of leg wouldn't hurt for a distraction, but she drew the line at more than that. After a quick cleanup in the bathroom, she threw on her underwear. Flushing the toilet, as if that was the explanation for her delay in showing up, she sauntered out of the bedroom and down the hall.

She pasted a stunned expression on her face as she met Jared and his “friends” in the living room. “Jared? I didn’t realize you and the id -- ah, Maclearn and Simmons, were friends.”

To her relief, both Simmons and Maclearn looked completely surprised. Simmons couldn’t stop staring, his eyes flickering from her breasts to her bare legs.

Maclearn whistled. “The mother lode.” He angled for a closer look.

Jared gave her a brief glare, one that told her he was more than irritated that she’d ignored his instructions. Lindsay watched her lover change, ever so subtly, as he crossed to her.

“I told you...” he murmured and kissed her hard on the mouth, reaching up to cup her right breast. Not understanding why he would do such a thing after he’d told her he wouldn’t parade her in front of them, Lindsay struggled to be free.

Jared laughed and squeezed her harder, and then pushed her from him with a disgusted look on his face. “You’re good, Lindsay. But a fuck isn’t worth the hassle. Get dressed, and get out. I’ve things to do with my friends, and you’re in the way.”

Stumbling to find her balance, she tried to reason out his cold words as Maclearn moved to steady her. His jacket opened slightly, and she saw the handle of what looked like a pistol tucked in the side of his trousers. *Oh, shit.*

Her nerves gathered as she and Jared stared at one another; she understood what he was trying to do. Summoning some fake tears, Lindsay let them fall, adding to the dramatic scene he’d created. She needed to get out of there and summon help. Her defense moves worked well when taking an unarmed person unaware. But against someone with a gun?

Jared watched her with a scowl. A sudden pounding in her heart told her what she’d refused to acknowledge for some time. She simply couldn’t imagine Jared getting hurt, even killed. Not when she’d just found him. Anger rose to the surface as she stared at Maclearn, then Simmons. A plan formed.

Sighing heavily, she let Maclearn hold more of her weight and leaned into him, pressing her breasts against his chest. Fluttering her eyelashes, she dropped a few more tears.

"Don't cry, Lindsay." He wiped clumsily at her cheeks.

"Please don't tell me you're falling for the helpless-female routine." Jared crossed brawny arms over his chest, his eyes frosty.

Maclearn glared, suddenly "Mr. Supportive" as he hugged Lindsay. She could feel his erection prodding her thigh. Lust made a wonderful weapon, almost as good as a gun. "Shut up, Hunt. You don't want her? Fine. She's through with you anyway, aren't you, honey?"

Lindsay blinked and nodded, curling closer him.

Simmons, however, stared at her suspiciously. "Funny, but for a woman who never gave us the time of day, she's awfully chummy with you now, Dale." He took a step in her direction, his gaze shifting from her drawn face to Jared's bored expression.

"Maybe that's because you've always been so rude to me at work." She saw Maclearn watching Simmons, waiting for some word on what to do. Lindsay pursed her lips as she stared at Simmons, realizing who was truly in charge of the situation. Maclearn might have the gun, but Simmons called the shots.

"Rude?" Simmons looked surprised. "I've been honest, a lot more than you've been, you and your prick boyfriend." He nodded at Jared.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I've tried to be nice, but you're always leering, always saying things." Lindsay bit her lip, noting Maclearn's breathing beginning to rasp as he pressed harder against her thigh. *Ignore the disgust.* "At least Dale is gentleman enough to see what a creep Jared turned out to be."

"A creep, hmm? Is that why you were crying out his name just minutes ago?"

She couldn't help the blush that stole over her cheeks.

"She made a mistake," Maclearn defended. "She wants to fix things, right, Lindsay?"

“Right.” Shooting a glare at Jared, she prayed he’d follow along. Maclearn’s jacket flared again, and she urged Jared with her eyes to look down at his waist. But she needn’t have bothered. Simmons suddenly palmed a pistol, aiming it dead center on Jared’s chest.

“Fine. You want to make things okay? Tell me what you know about Hunter here. The real man behind the scenes. And while you’re at it, strip out of those clothes. I figure we’ve got nothing but time...to kill.”

Jared felt his rage begin to spiral out of control and knew he needed to relax. Dammit, why hadn’t she listened when he’d told her to stay in his room? Now he not only had to deal with two guns, he had to worry about Lindsay being hurt.

Her eyes looked impossibly blue as she stared at Simmons in distress. “You want me to strip naked?” Lindsay looked at Maclearn, then back to Simmons in disbelief. “With you here?” Her gaze fell to Simmons’s hand. “And where did you get a gun?”

“Why not?” Simmons shrugged, ignoring her question and waving his gun. “Hunt’s already seen what you’ve got, and it’s only a matter of time before you do it with Dale.” Lindsay’s eyes grew impossibly big. “We share everything.”

Jared had had enough. “Look, Simmons --”

“Now, now, Hunt. Don’t feel all left out.” Simmons crossed to Jared and grinned lazily at his body. “I’m sure we can work something out for you, too.”

Jared’s skin crawled, but he said nothing, keeping his expression blank. All he needed was a moment, a temporary distraction, to disarm Simmons. Once he had Simmons, Maclearn would fall in line. He hoped.

“I don’t understand,” Lindsay said, her feigned innocence surprisingly convincing. “What did I ever do to you, Ken? Why are you treating me like this?” She stared pointedly at his weapon. “And why do you have a gun?”

Simmons narrowed his gaze. "Don't play me for a fool. You know Hunt isn't who he says he is. Please, Lindsay. Dale and I work in Tech Services. We know all of his files have been doctored. The question is, who is he really working for, and how much does he already know?"

"Working for? He's working for Tron Corp." Lindsay looked to Maclearn, nodding as if to engage his agreement.

Simmons glared. "Bullshit. You know he's not really an employee."

"What?" Lindsay turned to Jared, looking shocked. "Is what he says true?"

Jared shrugged, playing along. Maybe he could at least put her in the clear. "So what if it is? You never really wanted the real me. You just wanted to score what every other woman at Tron Corp is after. My dick."

She stared at him, her mouth agape, and more tears fell. Shit, even though he'd explained his reason for being at Tron Corp he hoped she wasn't really buying it. But apparently Maclearn and even Simmons were beginning to.

"So you didn't know about him, Lindsay?" Simmons asked, lowering the gun a fraction as he studied her.

"I don't get it." She angrily swiped tears from her face. "What are you doing at Tron Corp if you don't really work there? Hell, you brought in two new clients just last month!"

Simmons nodded. "Yes, *Jared*. Do tell us what you're really after."

"Fine. But take her out of here. I'm sick of the clinginess, and the tears are really beginning to irritate me."

Simmons grinned, but Maclearn refused to let go of Lindsay.

"She wants to stay with me."

"Oh?" Simmons glanced at Lindsay. "What does she have to say?"

"I'm disgusted with Jared-whatever-the-hell-you-are." Her eyes shone with angry tears. "You're lucky I'm not the one holding the gun. And yes, Dale, I'd love to go home with you."

Can we leave this tired place and the asshole who owns it? Quite frankly, I don't care who he is as long as I don't have to see him again."

Dale Maclearn grinned and rubbed his hand over Lindsay's abdomen. Not quite as stupid as Jared might have wished, Maclearn narrowed his gaze and lifted his hand higher, cupping Lindsay's breast as if testing her. Lindsay, bless her, blushed and whispered something in Dale's ear that had him grinning. At a subtle nod from Simmons, Maclearn released her arm and walked back with her to the bedroom, while Jared and Simmons watched her leave the room.

A moment later, Maclearn returned with Lindsay. She was clad in jeans and a fresh T-shirt, her backpack in hand. Turning up her nose at Jared, she smiled at Dale. "Let's get out of here."

She paused at the door. *What the hell was she doing?* "Ken? You're not really going to shoot him or anything, are you?"

Simmons shook his head. "I'm going to hold him here until I can get Tron security and the police involved. I have a bad feeling Jared here is a corporate spy."

Her eyes widened. "Oh. Well, then, Dale and I can get help. Come on, Dale. I helped handle security for a while a few months ago, and I still have the head of security's number on my cell. It's in my car."

So close... Jared knew Simmons watched him, waiting for some sign Lindsay wasn't as innocent about the situation as she seemed. He huffed in disgust. "Traitor, my ass. Good riddance, Riordan, and my compliments on the blowjob. Maclearn, you're a lucky man."

Lindsay gasped and practically dragged Maclearn out the door with her.

Finally. Now he only had Simmons to contend with.

Chapter Eight

Lindsay tolerated Dale Maclearn's fondling until they reached her car. "Hold this for me, will you, Dale?"

He grabbed her backpack, and she quickly unlocked her car. "My cell phone is just in the glove compartment," she mumbled, bending over the driver's side seat to reach the compartment. She gritted her teeth as she felt his hands on her butt. For the love of...

Finding what she needed, she squirmed back out of the car and turned with a can of Mace in her hand. Surprising Maclearn, Lindsay sprayed him in the face. She watched with satisfaction as he dropped to the ground, writhing and howling in pain. Recalling his more than grabby hands, she kicked him in the balls and watched with relish as his shouts turned into mewling pleas. Reaching into her backpack, she grabbed her last secure tie and tied his left hand to the driver's side door handle inside the car.

One down.

And then she heard a gunshot; it nearly scared her witless. Grabbing her cell phone from the floor of her car, Lindsay quickly dialed 9-1-1 and apprised the police of the situation. Another gunshot sounded. Not willing to listen to the dispatcher's demand that she

stay clear of the house, Lindsay raced toward the back door with her pepper spray in hand. She stopped and listened.

Nothing. Her nerves were erratic, but tension and fear for Jared propelled her forward. She quietly jiggled the door handle, cursing when it refused to open. *Shit*. Racing around to the front door, she listened again. *Nothing*. Taking a deep breath, Lindsay opened the door.

Jared knelt on the ground beside Simmons. He bled from a gunshot wound to his arm, and he pressed one hand into Simmons's red-stained belly. He aimed a gun at her with his other hand.

"Oh, my God! Jared, are you okay?"

Lowering the gun, he swore and turned back to Simmons. "I'm fine, but next time you might want to announce yourself. I almost shot you, thinking you were Maclearn."

"Police are on the way."

"Good, I was getting ready to call them. Simmons has lost a lot of blood, and a gut shot is never good."

They heard sirens, and Lindsay started shaking, trembling with relief and a hearty dose of receding adrenaline.

"Are you okay?"

She nodded. "Fine. But Dale's not doing so well. I pepper sprayed him."

Jared stared over his shoulder at her with a grin on his lips. "That's my girl." His grin faded into an angry slash. "Why the hell didn't you listen when I told you to stay out of sight? Damn it, you scared the life out of me --"

"Drop the gun! Hands in the air!"

The police had arrived. Lindsay let out the breath she'd been holding, glad they could wrap up this mess. Now only one question remained -- where did she and Jared go from here?

* * * * *

Jared rotated his shoulder and swore at the stinging pain.

“Did you not hear me say to take it easy for the next few weeks?” The doctor sighed with exasperation and tugged on the bandage circling Jared’s upper arm. “You’re lucky the bullet passed through the fleshy part. But no heroics for a while, okay?”

He nodded, and the doctor left. Jared looked for his shirt and saw it in tatters on the floor. Oh, well. If a little pain and a torn shirt were all he had to suffer from this ordeal, he’d say he came out on top. *And thank God Lindsay hadn’t been harmed.* As if his thoughts conjured her up, she appeared in the doorway.

“There you are. The detective told me to remind you about your statement. I already made mine.”

“It’s going to have to wait. I want a shirt, and I want a nap. What a day.”

Lindsay remained in the entryway, solemnly watching him. “Are you in a lot of pain?”

“It’s not too bad. They gave me some painkillers and a prescription for more. And the bullet managed to avoid bone.”

She nodded, her eyes focused on his bandage.

“Lindsay?” Why wasn’t she saying anything?

She glanced up at him, and he panicked. Tears filled her eyes.

“I was so worried!” Lindsay began crying and approached him slowly. She gently put her arms around him, careful not to jostle his bandage. “The thought you might be hurt just about scared the life out of me. And then to *see* you hurt...” She squeezed his waist and pressed her face to his chest. Warmth filled him, a curling emotion of love, worry, and tenderness.

“Don’t cry, baby.” Jared leaned down and kissed her forehead, her cheeks, the tip of her nose. When he reached her mouth, his lips glided over hers with a tender possession that

had her sighing his name. “We’re both all right. Let’s say we get out of here, okay? How about your place?”

She nodded. As they turned to walk out of the room, the detective in charge of the case entered after a brief knock.

“The doc told me you should be out of here shortly. And I have to say, you’re looking a lot better, Hunter.” The detective nodded to Lindsay. “Ms. Riordan.” The detective focused again on Jared. “Sorry to interrupt, but I’m taking off, and we still have a few things to resolve.”

“Detective Schroeder, can I meet you down at the station in a few hours for the formal statement? I need a change of clothes.”

“And a little time to decompress.” The short woman nodded. “Tron Corp’s George Hower verified your story, as did your partner in Seattle. With what Ms. Riordan and Dale Maclearn have already told us, Ken Simmons won’t be too happy when he recovers. Both he and his partner will be facing major prison time for attempted murder for starters, not to mention fraud and embezzlement.”

Jared frowned, his arm throbbing, and recapped for Lindsay what he’d told the detective. “From what I pieced together, Maclearn and Simmons were obsessed with you. They’d been stealing from the company for almost six months, but when they read through Hower’s messages and found his decision to use my company to investigate the suspected fraud, the idiot twins decided to pin the blame on someone else fast. That is to say, get revenge on you, the woman who refused them.”

Detective Schroeder nodded. “That’s the story Maclearn tells, too. He and Simmons weren’t satisfied with their lot in life. And with access to everything in the IT department, they figured to make it big on the company’s dime. In fact, they’d amassed close to seven hundred thousand dollars before Hunter arrived on the scene. But a month and a half ago, when they learned of Hower’s internal investigation, they panicked.”

“And started planting so many false leads.”

“Yeah. Good thing your cover was so tight, Hunter. Maclearn told me they immediately looked at you as the undercover security, but you seemed too much a company man, not to mention your background was as solid as a drum. And then, of course, there was Ms. Riordan.”

“How did I figure into this, exactly?”

The detective shook her head. “Call it bad luck, Ms. Riordan. Both Maclearn and Simmons had a real thing for you. Despite their attachment to one another, the two planned one big happy lovefest for all three of you. Believe it or not, Maclearn thinks Simmons had issues with his own sexuality, and thought the right attention from you would make him more a ‘man.’”

Detective Schroeder scowled. “From what Maclearn admitted, once they took in over a million, they planned on ditching the company and taking you with them, whether you wanted to go or not. They intended to blame you for the embezzlement, using staged evidence of your supposed ‘guilt’ to blackmail you into running with them. Maclearn mentioned South America a few times. Good thing Hunter stepped in.”

“Yeah, lucky me.” Lindsay smiled at Jared.

The detective smiled at them in turn. “Cops are great believers in luck.” She glanced from Lindsay to Jared. “Now if you two don’t mind, I have some paperwork to start. And it’ll be a while before I put the final details to rest.”

Jared nodded. “I’ll see you tomorrow morning, then, if that’s okay.”

“That’s fine.” She waved and left, and they exited the room soon after the nurse handed Jared his discharge papers.

Leaving the hospital after a quick stop at the pharmacy, Jared dozed in the car while Lindsay drove to her place. He didn’t recall much of their conversation. The next thing he knew she was nudging him awake.

“Jared? Time to get up.”

Stumbling into her house and then her bedroom, he fell into her bed and sighed at the soothing feeling of her thick, down comforter and fluffy pillows. The bed smelled like her, soft and feminine, and he settled into a deep sleep.

When he next awoke, it was to see Lindsay hovering over him, staring down at him with a loving look on her face. She stroked his cheek, and he turned into the caress, kissing her palm.

She smiled and stepped away, as if to let him fall back asleep.

“No, don’t go.”

He couldn’t explain his driving need to hold her, to feel her in his arms. The scare he’d suffered earlier -- when Lindsay had rejoined him in his living room where there’d been two armed crazies just itching for an excuse to pull the trigger -- had showed Jared how much he truly cared for her. The months of him wishing they could be together, of fantasizing about her, only to realize reality was far better than the fantasy, suddenly came to a head.

Reaching toward her, Jared cursed at his lack of mobility. The painkillers had not only numbed his injury, but his situational awareness as well.

“Easy, Jared. Move slowly.” Lindsay sat next to him on the bed, soothing his strain by gently running her fingers through his hair, over his face, and down across his collarbone, her touch feather light and sensuous.

He wrapped his left hand behind her neck and pulled her close for a kiss, groaning at how good she felt. Telling her without words how much she meant to him, Jared teased her lips and tongue, licked at the warm recesses of her mouth with loving strokes. Despite the throbbing in his arm, he wanted -- no, needed -- to be inside her.

“Make love to me, Lindsay.”

She cupped his face in her hands and tenderly returned his kiss. Discarding her clothes and then his, she joined him on the bed. Instead of returning to his mouth, however, she

kissed her way down his neck, running her hands over his chest. Pinching his nipples, she elicited a groan out of him. And when she pressed her breasts against his chest, he arched into her, desperate to join her.

“I have to have you,” he panted, urging her over him.

He reached a hand between her thighs and sighed as he felt the evidence of her desire. Hot and wet, she sank down, their union sheer perfection. She clearly felt it as well, for she murmured words of love in his ear as she leaned close, rocking over him and pushing down hard.

When she straightened, he fondled her breasts with his left hand, frustrated he couldn’t touch more of her the way he wanted to.

“Don’t worry, Jared. You just lie back, and let me do all the work.”

So beautiful, so caring. He would never forget the courage she’d shown today, or her unflinching loyalty when she’d come back to try to “save” him. If he hadn’t already loved her, today would surely have pushed him over the edge.

She rocked faster over him, and he moaned. Heat flowed through him, centered at his cock, and traveled throughout his body. An ache burned in his loins, and the need to come loomed precariously near as he watched the most beautiful woman in his life ride him, magnificent in her desire.

“Jared,” she panted, clutching his chest. “I need you so much.”

“Not as much as I need you.”

He gasped as she shifted ever so slightly; he couldn’t hold back any longer. Shuddering, he shot into her, aware she came along with him. Clenching him tightly, she enhanced his orgasm as she milked him of everything he had to give.

Utterly spent, he lay beneath her, his pain all but gone as his body throbbed with pleasure, with love.

She let him slip from her body and rolled next to him, her breathing harsh, but said nothing. He grabbed her hand, clutching her smaller palm tightly in his. Jared wanted so badly to tell her how he really felt. He wasn't one to hold back, had very little patience in fact, but he didn't want to screw this up.

In a few more days he would have to return to Seattle, to his partner and their business. But for the life of him, Jared couldn't imagine living without Lindsay. He now understood that *she* was the reason he'd waited so long to marry. What he didn't know was how Lindsay felt.

Sure, she didn't do casual sex. But nothing about this weekend had been casual, or typical. Her strength and notion of payback appealed to his "eye for an eye" mindset. Lindsay Riordan had looks, brains, and better yet, she was no one's doormat.

And she absolutely loved her job.

Could he ask her to move out West with him? Would she think him completely insane? They'd known each other for two months, but it was only this weekend that she had really come to *know* him. And there was so much more they both needed to learn about one another. Making love with her six ways from Sunday didn't guarantee him a say in her future, much as he might want it to.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said, her husky voice stirring him again.

He sighed. "Trying not to think about leaving this bed." He turned carefully, watching her reaction. "I'll have to return to Seattle soon."

"Yeah."

Yeah? What did "yeah" mean? "What about you?"

Her eyes widened. "Me?"

"Have you ever been to Seattle?" he asked casually.

"Uh, no. I haven't."

“It’s a beautiful place. A little rainy, but that just makes everything greener. The climate’s cool. I noticed at work you drink a lot of coffee. In Seattle, there’s a coffee shop on just about every corner.”

She blinked at him before a slow grin settled over her lips. “Sounds like you’re trying to sell me on Seattle.”

“And they have some really fine men out there.”

“Oh? Do tell.”

He scissored a thigh over hers, trapping her effectively under his weight as he scooted closer. “You know, I have contacts at Tron Corp. A few days ago a certain CEO was mentioning how much he’d like to expand his business, into, say, the West Coast. Seattle’s prime for a Tron Corp handhold.”

“Hmm.”

He ran his hand along her waist and up to cup a breast. “Yeah. And you know, Tron Corp isn’t the only company out there needing good logistics folks.”

“Just good?” Her hands closed over his growing erection, and he groaned.

“I meant great, incredibly talented logisticians.” Almost purring, Jared couldn’t help thrusting into her able hands.

“Then maybe I should think about moving out there. Or at least scoping out the possibilities.”

“The possibilities are endless. And I’m sure you could find a guy in no time who wouldn’t mind your average looks and so-so body,” he teased, cursing under his breath when she cupped his balls, enflaming his desire. “Hell, I’m sure the minute you land in the airport some good-looking guy will snap you up and offer you a marriage proposal, and all from gazing into those gorgeous baby blues.”

Her hands stilled, and she stared at him.

“Hell, Lindsay, don’t stop. Just say yes and put me out of my misery.”

“Say yes?” Her eyes narrowed. “To what, exactly?”

The teasing suddenly turned very serious, and he blew out a harsh breath. “To hell with it. I know it sounds crazy, but I can’t imagine returning to Seattle without you. You are so much better than my fantasies, Lindsay. So much more than I ever thought I’d find. I’ve been waiting my whole life for you.” She said nothing, and he panicked.

“Shit. Look, I don’t want to rush you. But you could at least come out to visit for a while, see if you like it there. And don’t do it for me, do it for you. Expand your horizons. A woman as smart and sexy as you can have her pick of jobs. Did I mention they pay better in Seattle?” He was growing desperate.

After a tense moment, a grin slowly lit up her face. “So you’ve been waiting your whole life for me? That was beautiful. Did you mean it?”

“Did I mean it?” Annoyance took root. “Why the hell else would I have let you tie me up and take advantage of me? Not to mention not running your tight little ass in for questioning the moment I found all that planted evidence against you? And the months spent dreaming about you, trying to charm you when I could have had you in bed from day one...”

She rolled her eyes. “And I used to think you were charming.”

He didn’t laugh; the topic was too near to his heart.

Lindsay pursed her lips in thought, dragging out his nervous anticipation. “I could be persuaded to move to Seattle. But I’d need two things first.”

Anything. As long as she’d be his. “What?”

“First, I’ll need some time to see where this leads. As much as I might think I love you, I need to be sure. And if it turns out you’re as good as you look,” she teased, “I’ll expect -- hell, I’ll demand -- that proposal.”

He immediately relaxed, his body on fire with joy. *She loved him.* “The second?”

“I want a ready supply of secure ties -- and the right to use them whenever I feel the need.” Her eyes twinkled with naughty intent.

“Like I said before, Riordan.” He tasted the promise of tomorrow in her kiss. “You’re hell on wheels.”

 THE END 

Marie Harte

Marie Harte is an avid reader who loves all things paranormal and futuristic, but especially all things romance. Reading romances since she was twelve, she fell in love with the warmth of first passion and knew writing was her calling. Twenty-three years later, the Marine Corps, a foray through Information Technology, a husband and four kids, and her dream has finally come true. Marie lives in Georgia with her family and loves hearing from readers. To read more about Marie, visit www.marieharte.com and check out her blog at <http://www.marieharte.blogspot.com>.