

A romantic close-up photograph of a man and a woman. The woman, on the left, has long blonde hair and is looking towards the man. The man, on the right, is shirtless and has his hand near the woman's face. They are in a very intimate pose, almost kissing. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a sensual atmosphere. A semi-transparent red banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title and author's name.

WATCH ME

Shelley Bradley

SANDHAIN publishing, Ltd.

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Watch Me

Sneak Peek

Shelley Bradley

Chapter One

Who'd have known it would only take two minutes, seventeen seconds to ruin her life?

Shanna York popped the DVD out of her laptop, resisting the childish urge to fling it across the room and watch it smash into a thousand pieces. Instead, she set it gently on the table beside her and stood.

Damn Kristoff! What *had* he been thinking?

Besides looking for inventive ways to get off, absolutely nothing. That was obvious.

Life as she'd wished it to be was over. Goodbye, California Dance Star competition, which she and Kristoff were favored to win in just over two weeks. *Adios*, any chance of making World Cup Latin finals—something she'd been working to attain her entire dance career.

Kristoff knew how important this season was to her. *Knew* it. She was twenty-eight—old by ballroom standards. He was the best partner she'd ever had, which was saying something. This year was their year; everyone said so.

All it had taken was one round disc recorded just last week, according to the date in the lower right corner of the screen, and a note with a scrawled "Watch me" to shatter her dreams.

Sighing, Shanna closed her eyes and tried to think. But that only brought every image on the DVD to full, Technicolor memory. Kristoff, tall and ungodly handsome, standing above two figures, one male, the other female. He cradled each of their heads in his hands as they knelt before him. Their tongues slid up and down his erection, licked over his

balls, and occasionally met at the head of his cock for a juicy kiss.

“You like that big dick?” he asked them. They both moaned. The camera zoomed in as the woman, a stunning blonde with a starburst tattoo on her breast, deep-throated Kristoff.

The other male, a buff guy with military short hair and his own raging hard-on, stood and licked at Kristoff’s nipples. Kristoff groaned, the sound soon drowned out by the man capturing his lips and devouring them in a harsh kiss.

That was the first thirty seconds—plenty depraved by the traditional standards many ballroom judges held. Then came the middle of the clip...

Kristoff intent and focused as he penetrated the woman’s sex, plunging in for slow, agonizing strokes. A surprise, given the fact Shanna had always believed he was gay. But thrusting into the woman, he appeared like any other hetero man...until the camera panned back and showed the other man penetrating Kristoff’s ass, the forward momentum of that stroke pushing Kristoff’s erection into the panting woman.

The end of the DVD, however, was what Shanna knew really killed her dreams of being a ballroom champion. The other man, apparently at the end of his restraint, tore off his condom and stood near the woman’s sex as Kristoff so diligently pounded it. The dark-haired man watched them, yanking on his cock until semen shot out, coating the woman’s clit and wet folds. They all groaned.

Kristoff quickly pulled out of her, tugged on his erection, and came on the woman’s swollen sex, too. She dripped semen, oozed with the fluids of the men’s satisfaction. Was that enough for Kristoff? Of course not.

He grabbed the other man’s shoulders and forced him to kneel before the woman’s dripping sex beside him. Together, they licked her. Clean. Deep. Until she orgasmed against their dueling tongues. During the clip’s

final moments, the camera panned back again to reveal the fact the trio had performed all of this for an audience.

Shanna put her head in her hands and groaned. She was so screwed. If the conservative judges of ever-elegant ballroom dance got hold of this DVD... The thought of what they could—and would—do to her and Kristoff's scores at the California Dance Star made her shudder. Nothing like going from first to worst in the standings.

Even worse, as if her life wasn't messed up enough, was the fact that watching the scene had been vaguely arousing. Not that she was attracted to Kristoff—and definitely not after this stunt. But the freedom to just let loose and have wild sex, even with people watching...

Damn, she had to get hold of herself!

Where was that ass, Kristoff? He had to have known that his recent jaunts to that damn sex club, Sneak Peek, would eventually come back to haunt them. She'd warned him. Clearly, he hadn't heeded a word.

The door burst open into her small dressing room. Kristoff glided, graceful bastard. Like glass on the dance floor, which had been a treat after living with an Olympic sprinter, a world-class decathlete, a former champion weightlifter, and a pro football player. Her father and brothers, all of whom considered her a failure because she'd never been a champion. By their definition, ballroom dancing wasn't even a sport. Which made her a double loser.

This year, she'd intended to show them different.

With Kristoff's one night at that crazy sex club for exhibitionists and voyeurs, her dreams were gone.

"Three minutes, Shan. Are you ready?" From the doorway, Kristoff held out his hand to her.

Normally, that was Shanna's cue to take it and follow his lead. Not tonight.

"You goddamn idiot!" She held up the DVD. "Do you have a brain, or

did it sink into your pants? Could you not have waited to get your jollies for another few weeks?”

He frowned, looking totally unamused. “What are you talking about?”

“You went to Sneak Peek and got yourself into a threesome.”

Kristoff’s polished smile faded. “I was just, um, how do you say, blowing off a little steam. How did you know?”

“Someone filmed you, moron, and sent me the DVD. Full color, high quality, great sound, no question it’s you near a sign that said Sneak Peek.”

“Filmed me... I had no idea. And someone sent it to you?” he croaked. “You saw it?”

“Yes, along with a little note informing me that if we show up to the California Star, they’ll distribute the clip to all the judges. And you know what will happen if they do. We’ll have no chance in hell of winning.”

He cursed a popular Anglo-Saxon syllable that started with an F. Shanna shook her head. He’d already done that, thanks so much.

“I agreed to take you as my partner for two reasons: You’re a hell of a dancer, and I thought you were discreetly gay. Gay, the judges can handle. Discreetly gay, even better. Clearly, I was wrong about your orientation, so your talent no longer matters.”

Kristoff flushed. “I am, um, equal opportunity when it comes to sex.”

“I gathered that from this Oscar-winning material.” She gritted her teeth.

“One minute!” someone shouted from the hall.

Squatting, Shanna peered into the mirror at her dressing table, secured a pin holding a lock of her pale blonde hair in place, then smoothed a hand down the silver sequins of her tiny costume. God, she felt sick to her stomach. All the years of sacrifice and work... If she wanted to win—and she did—she was probably going to have to start over. New season...new partner. Damn it! She hoped her tumult didn’t

show on her face.

“We have to go,” she said. “Or we’ll be late.”

“Stop! We have things to talk about. Winning is important to me, too, and—”

“Champions aren’t late.”

“Why do you care? This is a charity event, not a competition, and I bet your dance card is empty.”

Ouch! Still, she lifted her chin, despite his low blow. “Not the point. People are still watching.”

“Not everything is work. Must you be so driven? Enjoy life a little!”

“I enjoy winning.” Her teeth hurt from grinding them together.

“Except for dance, you have no life. When did you last go on a date?”

“Are you keeping track?”

“I grow tired of your so-serious attitude. Maybe you need to go to Sneak Peek and um, how do you say, let loose like me.”

“We have the biggest competition of our careers in three weeks, and you think I need to get laid?”

“Yes.”

Shanna tried not to see red. And violet. And crimson. And magenta.

Kristoff met her angry gaze squarely. “Until you smile and be nice, you are not fun to work with. You will certainly make no money for the cause tonight in this mood.”

It might be uncharitable of her, but it was hard to think about someone else’s cause when her own was falling apart.

“Go to hell, Mr. Palavin!” She made to stalk past him.

He grabbed her arm to stay her. “You are angry. I fucked up, yes. I am sorry. Very sorry. I know what this means to you. But no matter how much I apologize, no matter that we have become friends in the past year, will you forgive me? Stand by me? By tomorrow, I believe you will be holding auditions, because everyone knows any partner who is a

liability to your ambition is quickly replaced.” He grabbed the DVD off the table. “There is a reason your dance card is empty tonight and everyone calls you the Bitch of the Ballroom. In the past, I have defended you, but now... Have a lovely time alone.”

“Are you staring at that *ramera* again?”

Alejandro Diaz ripped his gaze away from Shanna York and sent a rebuking stare to his dance partner. “*Mamá*, you’ve been listening to gossip. We do not know her well enough to know if she’s a bitch.”

But he’d looked at her enough to know he wanted her. Bad. Her soft blonde hair shone under the lights like a halo around her face. Those blue, blue eyes projected a little-girl-lost quality that made him want to hold her close and whisper reassurances. But the fiery way she moved her killer body when she danced, like she performed sex to music, made him hard as hell.

Oh, the fantasies he had about her, about taking her to Sneak Peek and melting away all that icy reserve by stripping her down, tying her up, filling her full of his cock...all while wondering if they were being watched. And she’d wonder—if others could see the rise of her pleasure, hear the gasps of her orgasms as he gave them to her, one after the other. The way Shanna danced lured men in, as if she loved having their eyes on her, as if she craved hot stares and even hotter thoughts of strangers.

Yes, he had *lots* of fantasies about her.

His mother shook her head. “Hmm. You met her once. She was not polite.”

Not true. She’d been polite, in an icy, stand-offish way. In retrospect he’d come on too strong. Been too direct. Clearly not the way to approach

a strong woman who valued being in control.

"Tonight is another night." He turned his mother around the dance floor in a gentle waltz.

And he watched Shanna. Her appearance lived up to her ice princess reputation in a short, silvery, barely-there costume of sequins and crystals. She was stiff, unsmiling, aloof. He'd love to melt her.

"There are other young, single girls here. Girls who are good. And Catholic. And yet you focus on the *ramera rubia*."

"*Mamá*," Alejandro warned. "Just because she's blonde, does not make her guilty of being a bitch."

He sighed. He loved his mother and owed her so much. As a single woman, she'd raised him with loving arms and a firm hand, since his father had left them just before Alejandro became a teenager. She hadn't given him much in the way of luxuries as a kid, but she'd made up for it by providing all the affection and guidance he'd needed. As an adult, however, he realized she was incredibly old-fashioned.

"Spending too much time at that club of yours has confused your thinking, *mijo*. Nothing but *putas* there."

Alejandro laughed. His mother didn't disapprove of the club...but she only knew about the bar and pool tables, the dart boards and the dance floor. She had no idea what went on upstairs.... Better to keep it that way.

He made damn good money as Sneak Peek's co-owner. Between that, his other stash of money, and his investments, he'd been able to buy his mother a condo and a new car, set up a trust for her, and give her a bit of luxury in the last two years. She just wanted him to settle down, marry, have babies. *Mamá* had made that *very* clear.

He would...in his own good time.

"Let's not argue." He twirled her toward the punch table, not far from where Shanna sat alone. As he looked at the gorgeous dancer again, he

had to fight the rise of his erection. Not here, not now...but soon.

His mother followed the line of his sight. “*Dios mío*, can you not look at one other woman tonight?”

No. He’d come tonight specifically to cozy up to Shanna York. What a happy coincidence that making his mother’s night would help him to make his own.

“*Mamá*, did you sign up to dance with your favorites tonight?”

She shook her head. “No.”

“Why not?”

“Alejandro, it is too much money. You paid for me to be here, and that is enough. I will watch.”

And send a disapproving stare every time he rumbaed Shanna into a dark corner? Not a chance.

“You will dance.”

He stopped her before the punch table and handed her a drink. While she sipped, he eased over to the table that held the dancers’ cards. There were still a few empty slots available to foxtrot or tango with some of her favorites. And Shanna’s card was completely empty. He smiled and wrote his mother’s name onto the empty spaces of the male dancers’ cards, wrote his own on Shanna’s in every space, and called the attendant over.

After settling dances for his mother, he handed the volunteer, a perky brunette, Shanna’s card. “I would like to purchase all the dances, as well.”

The brunette looked at it and frowned. “Hers? All of them?”

“Sí.”

“That’s three thousand dollars.”

He smiled as he handed her his credit card. “Then I will have the pleasure of knowing more children will have full bellies and be attending school, while I dance with a beautiful woman.”

The woman sent him a look that plainly said she thought he was

unhinged. “She isn’t known for keeping her partners long. You may not last the whole night.”

Wrong. But for what he had in mind, a night was all he needed.

With a smile, he finished paying, then found his mother.

“The charity dances start in five minutes, and you will be busy.” He handed her a schedule of her partners.

“Alejandro! You spend too much money on an old woman. I cannot dance so much.”

“*Mamá*, you are barely fifty. It’s only money, and I can afford it. Enjoy yourself.”

He certainly planned to.

Chapter Two

The event's emcee announced the beginning of the charity dances, and Shanna poised herself in a chair, plastic smile in place, at the edge of the ballroom floor.

People around her were beginning to pair up for the first of the dances, names and smiles being exchanged. She tossed her hair off her shoulders. That twisting of her stomach was not a pang of hurt. She didn't care if no one bid on her dances. Sitting back would give her an opportunity to observe her competition, since most of the other dancers were here...just in case she and Kristoff somehow won, in spite of his indiscreet sex life.

Tomorrow, she'd find some way to destroy or discredit that shocking DVD. She wasn't giving up on years of hard work and her dreams of being a champion without a fight.

"I believe this dance is mine."

Shanna followed the deep voice and looked up into an incredibly handsome face. Strong features, burning hazel eyes, heavy five-o'clock shadow, perfectly tailored gray suit with a vavoom red tie. Her heart lurched; this one had sin written all over him.

He also looked familiar. She stared, hesitating, but the more she thought about it, the more certain she became. Somewhere, somehow, they'd crossed paths before.

"Have we met?"

He smiled, all dazzling charm, oozing Latin charisma and hot sex. "Yes. Three months ago. The Bartolino Foundation thing."

That night rushed back to her with overwhelming clarity. This sexy

man with his killer smile flirting outrageously and whispering shocking, hot suggestions as he tangoed her around the dance floor. At the end of the night, he'd asked her out...while trying to kiss her. She'd been incredibly tempted—and that was saying something for a woman who'd easily refused every man for nearly two years. But this man might as well have the word *distraction* tattooed on his forehead. Go out with him? No way, no how. She'd refused him and disappeared into the crowd. She assumed she'd seen the last of him.

Somehow, she got the feeling she'd underestimated him.

"Ah, I think you recall that night." A smile lifted the edges of his lips.

"Alejandro, isn't it?"

"Alejandro Diaz, yes."

Shanna drew in a deep breath. Just like their first meeting, he caused an unwelcome dizzying effect, complete with revving heartbeat. *Warning!* When she dated, which was rarely, she chose safe men—guys who were rich, too busy with their own careers to be demanding, and far too dull to keep her interest for more than an evening. She just didn't have time for a relationship when she had a dance career that needed all her time and attention.

This one might as well shout that he'd be both fascinating and determined. He *would* get his way—and have his way with her.

Not if she could help it.

Steeling herself against the impact of his touch, Shanna put her hand in his. No matter how prepared she thought she'd been for the skin-on-skin contact, she'd been wrong. A wild gong of want beat through her the second her palm brushed his. She braced for the rush of heat as she rose to her feet.

"The music is starting. Shall we?" He gestured to the dance floor, then eased her forward with a hand at the small of her back.

"Sure." What else could she say? This was his three minutes; he'd

paid for them, so she owed him that. But no more.

God, not a second more.

A soft Latin rhythm began to wash through the room from the overhead speakers. Sensual, hypnotic, the music spoke of a humid summer night shared by lovers. Shanna nearly groaned. Great, a rumba, the dance of love. The one that most emulated passion and sex. Why now?

On a strong beat, Alejandro grabbed her wrist and pulled her against him. Shanna tried to stop herself from crashing into him by planting a hand on his chest. But her fingers only encountered hard muscle. Oh God, he was like a rock under that shirt, and given his mile-wide shoulders, she was suddenly sure that seeing him naked would be ten times better than a slice of her favorite sinful chocolate cake.

He hooked a finger under her chin. Reluctantly, she lifted her gaze to his. The heat in those hazel eyes fired molten gold. *Look away. Get away!* But she couldn't. Once her gaze connected with his, she was locked in, fused to him in a way she didn't understand. And didn't like.

That stare sizzled all through her...and settled right between her legs. She blinked, unable to break his gaze.

Sex had always been something she could take or leave. At the moment, she wanted to take anything he was willing to dish out.

How could he do that with just a glance?

As she drew in a deep breath and tried to find her wits, he curled a thick arm around her waist, drawing her even closer. His whole body was hard...every inch of it. From the feel of him, many inches. Shanna trembled to realize his body was every bit as interested as hers was. Thank God these dances were short.

Then he held out his left hand, palm up. Slowly, she placed her hand in his.

They began to dance. He was incredibly smooth, never dancing on his

heels, never losing the beat of the music. Wow, could he move his hips. Perfect figure eights with them. No doubt, he'd learned how to dance very well somewhere along the way.

Basic boxes quickly gave way to an open position, then a cross, which he used as an opportunity to brush his body against hers and caress her hip. An underarm turn led her right back to a basic.

Oh, this guy was good for an amateur. She had an inkling that he might be good at...other things.

"So, what brings you here tonight?" she asked, grasping at conversational straws. Maybe if she was talking, she wouldn't be thinking about how much this guy turned her on.

"Helping orphans is not a worthwhile cause?"

"It is. Most men would rather simply write a check than ballroom dance."

"I brought my mother. She enjoys these things, and it is a very small thing to do in order to see her smile."

Sexy, a good dancer, family-oriented, crazy handsome, Alejandro seemed like every woman's fantasy. He had to be too good to be true, have some terrible flaw she just couldn't see at the moment. If not...Lord, she was in a lot of trouble.

Her body temperature rose with every suggestive look, every sweep of his hand over her waist and low dive on her hip, each brush of his palm that inched toward her ass.

Damn! Why hadn't she found some man to scratch her itch in the last two years? Or even invested in a good vibrator? Maybe if she had, she wouldn't feel wound so tightly right now, so ready to jump on Alejandro and every protruding part of his body.

"That's nice of you," she managed to say.

"Not really. I knew you would be here."

"M—me?"

“Hmm.” He led her into another open position, then curled her against his body, hips crushed against hips. And she felt more than his pelvis. Way more.

“Certainly you can feel my...enthusiasm to meet you again.” He laughed, seemingly at himself.

Yeah. His enthusiasm was sizeable and very hard to miss.

Then he leaned her back over his arm in an exaggerated dip and followed her down. Until his face was an inch from her breasts. Shanna felt him exhale, his warm breath on her cleavage. Her nipples beaded instantly.

Slowly, he lifted her back upright, then spun her around, until her back rested against his chest. And he nestled his erection in the small of her back. The flat of his palm covered her abdomen, and he took her other hand in his. The gesture probably looked proprietary. It certainly felt that way.

Straight ahead, she saw Kristoff dancing with a thin, middle-aged woman with hair a dubious shade of red. He peered at her with a questioning brow raised.

Alejandro led her to swivel her hips against his, in time with the music. Kristoff didn't miss a second of it. In fact, as Shanna looked around, she realized they'd gathered quite a bit of attention.

A blast of moisture flooded her thong.

“Everyone is watching,” he whispered.

“Yes.” Her voice shook.

He bent and lifted her leg, wrapping her calf around his thigh and urging her head to fall back to his shoulder. Their eyes met, their mouths inches apart.

Shanna felt stripped down, as if she were naked under Alejandro's knowing gaze. God, if he didn't stop that, she'd melt against him in seconds.

“Men are watching you, wanting you.”

He grabbed her thigh, spun her around to face him, then placed that thigh over his hip. They rested nearly hip to hip again. As he leaned back slightly, he forced her chest against his. Still, she could not break his stare.

“You like it,” he whispered.

She opened her mouth to deny it, but Alejandro’s gaze stopped her, warning her before she could do anything foolish, like lie.

“I know you do.”

The intensity of his stare, the way in which he’d dug past her icy defenses, seemed to see the real her, and guessed her dirty secret... He was a walking wet dream.

He was her worst nightmare.

He swayed with the music in the opposite direction, bringing her body with him. With a gentle caress of her cheek, he directed her gaze back to his—all while making it look like a part of the dance.

“You know you do,” he murmured. “You love knowing that most every man in the room right now would kill to have your body against his and have a front-row seat of that smoldering sensuality you keep wrapped in ice suddenly melting in a pool at his feet.”

His words made her shake. *Oh, no. No!* “Stop.”

He performed an open step, then brought her back for a box. “Their eyes cling to you as you lure them in with the sway of your hips to the music and your femininity. Their gazes caress your breasts as your chest lifts with every move and breath. They watch the sleek movements of those gorgeous thighs and wish they were between them.”

A glance around proved he was totally right. Easily a dozen men were openly watching her and Alejandro dance, their gazes ranging from more than mildly interested to sizzling with heat. Desire vibrated deep inside her, pulsing under her clit. How wet could she get before it stained the

front of her thin costume?

And how had Alejandro known what turned her on?

Most people had only seen the driven dancer who yearned to win and find some way to make her family proud. No one else had seen the woman inside who used dance to express the sexuality she otherwise repressed. No one.

This man had seen her hidden sensuality in the blink of an eye. He'd all but mocked her icy reserve. He looked at her as if he could see past it, all the way to the fear and emptiness that fed her ambition.

Thankfully, the music ended.

"Thank you for an interesting evening, Mr. Diaz. Perhaps our paths will cross again." Not if she could help it.

Still, he didn't let go, continued to stare at her with that sultry hint of a smile as the music began again. "The evening is not over. I bought all of your dances tonight, for the whole night."

Shanna stared at him, wide eyed and stunned. Panicked. He'd bought *all* of her dances? She swallowed. That was bad. Very bad. Just being in his arms and hearing his words made her feel vulnerable in a way she didn't like and would not accept.

And she was stuck with him for the next three hours? Lord, she was in so much trouble.

"Why?"

"I enjoy watching you being watched and the way it arouses you. I love knowing that so many men in the room are fantasizing about slaking their lust with you—"

"You can't know what other men are thinking," she protested.

"But I can. It is exactly what I'm thinking. It is even more delicious because I alone am holding you in my arms."

Oh, God. Oh, God. "This conversation is inappropriate."

"Honesty disturbs you?"

"I'm not...I—I don't get aroused knowing that men are watching me."

"Really?"

He urged her into a cross again. No sooner than she turned to step into the next box, he pushed against her hand, sending her spinning to face the wall. Then he was behind her, hands on her swaying hips, his mouth hovering just over her sensitive neck in a darkened corner of the ballroom.

Shanna shivered as he exhaled, quivered as he gripped her hips.

Then he reached around to place his hand flat on her stomach again...but he aimed high, flattening his palm on the upper swells of her chest and smoothing his way down.

"Hard nipples," he commented. "Little edible, want-to-suck-them-in-my-mouth nipples."

She hissed in a breath, and opened her mouth to stop him, tell him to get lost...but he kept tantalizing her as he caressed his way south, down her ribs, over her stomach, until his fingers brushed the front of her costume right over her sex. He lingered. Shame and arousal crashed inside her. She closed her eyes. Her thong was about to overflow.

"You're always wet when you dance in public...like now, aren't you?"

At his touch, his words, pleasure spiked, hitting her full force, like a blast from a raging fire. She sucked in a breath. Damn it, why did he have to be right?

If he could figure that much out after just a few minutes with her, Shanna knew he'd dig deeper, quickly, into her soul, unless she put distance between them now.

"Stop," she demanded in her best ice-queen voice.

"Answer me, *querida*."

"No."

He danced her to face him again as one song segued into the next, this one a waltz.

“Do not be embarrassed. Your arousal turns me on. It’s one of the reasons I chose not to give up when you rebuffed me at the Bartolino event. I want that arousal,” he whispered in her ear, making her shiver. “I want it in my hands, my mouth, all around my cock when I fuck you and you wonder exactly who is watching us.”

His words hit her like lava, sizzling her skin, charring her resistance and sanity. No one had ever talked to her like that. Between her brothers and the bitchiness she wore like armor, no one had dared.

God, even without uttering a word, Alejandro was stunning. When he talked like that, he didn’t just turn her on; he turned her inside out.

Alejandro was dangerous to her career and her focus. She could see getting lost in such a man and the smoldering promise of spectacular sex—which she’d never experienced—in his hazel eyes.

“That’s enough,” she forced herself to say.

“We haven’t started. I think about undressing you under soft lights, your back to my front and letting my hand smooth your dress from your lush curves. I ache to let your perfect hard nipples brush the inside of my palms before I roll them between my fingers. I fantasize about feeling my way lower, down to that soft, wet pussy, and grazing your hard clit. And stroking it until you come. I obsess about bending you over and filling you with my cock—all while you know hot eyes, strangers’ eyes, touch you.”

Desire pulsed, flared with every mental image he created. She could see herself naked, flushed, writhing under his hands or as he impaled her. She could feel herself dissolving at the thought of orgasming for him—and a roomful of aroused men.

This was dangerous. Bad. Wrong. *No, no, no.*

“I said that’s enough!” Her voice shook as hard as the rest of her.

He kept on, as if she’d never uttered a protest. “I am part owner of a club where you could express yourself in any way you like. In every way

that gets you off. Sneak Peek was made for women like you.”

Sneak Peek? That jolted her. The club where Kristoff’s video had been filmed in his soon-to-be-infamous threesome? The very one.

“I know what goes on there.”

A smile toyed with those sensual lips of his. “Good. If we weren’t waltzing, I would reach down between those sweet thighs of yours, and I bet I would find out you’re even wetter now than the last time I touched you.”

Shanna started to lie, tell him it wasn’t true. She didn’t trust him not to waltz her in a corner and test his theory, now that he knew her body didn’t care about being discreet, just about being wild—and watched.

“I need to use the ladies’ room.”

He hesitated, then released her. “By all means.”

She turned away, resisting the urge to run to the sanctuary of her dressing room. No, she would walk. Calmly. *Breathe in, breathe out.*

And screw charity. Alejandro had paid his money and gotten his dance—and his cheap feel. He could pat himself on the back, knowing that he’d dug up her naughty secret and rubbed it in her face. She wasn’t coming back, and he could deal with it. If she ever saw him at one of these charity events again, she’d run in the other direction. Fast.

Before she could take the first step, he grabbed her wrist and pulled her back. Suddenly off balance, she collided against his chest. Her head snapped back...her mouth right under his.

“At Sneak Peek, I will fulfill your every fantasy.”

Of that, she had no doubt. But she wasn’t going to give him that chance.

Chapter Three

“So I’ve got two choices, both really lousy.” Shanna sighed as she stirred her hot tea at the outdoor café’s wrought iron table the next morning. “Either I stick it out and hope this threat is just a sick joke or I dump Kristoff, try to find yet another new partner, and wait a season or two before we mesh well enough to win anything.”

Jonathan winced. “Don’t you think it’s time you stop dropping partners, love? Your reputation in that area isn’t exactly sparkling.”

With a frosty glare, she reminded her former dance partner, “Ending our partnership was a mutual decision.”

The handsome Aussie reached for her hand across the table. “The handwriting was on the wall. We weren’t going to make it. I didn’t want to win as badly as you did. And sleeping together was a terrible mistake.”

Shanna wanted to deny his assertion, but couldn’t. Jonathan simply hadn’t possessed her drive to win. They’d both known it. Their one night of impulsive sex had merely brought their problems to the fore.

Admittedly, sex between them had been stupid. But a late-night practice, Jonathan suffering a recent break-up with his fiancée, Shanna fearing their days of competing together were numbered, hours upon hours of nothing but sexually charged dances, with the tension between them so thick... The dam holding their restraint had burst.

Afterward, their partnership had gone from strained to doomed. Her ambition on the dance floor hadn’t meshed well with his need to check out to deal with his anguish and confusion. Shanna had realized he needed more emotional support from a partner than she’d been able to give. Their fights became hellacious. They’d said terrible things, and he’d

walked out.

In retrospect, the end of their dance partnership had been best for both of them. Jonathan's fiancée had returned, and he'd retired to married life and modeling. After a few months of silence between them, he'd reached out to her. Over the last eighteen months, they'd repaired their friendship. During that time, Shanna had been happily paired with Kristoff...until she'd seen his porn-inspired DVD.

"Let's not rehash ancient history," Jonathan said. "You came to me with a problem. Are you sleeping with Kristoff?"

Shanna recoiled. "Absolutely not! Until I saw the video, I thought he was firmly in the gay column."

"At least that's one less complication."

The early morning breeze whipped through her hair. Shanna looked down into her steaming mug and nodded. "I have to decide what to do. I don't want to lose Kristoff as a partner. Training a new one would take so much damn time. But if the judges get their hands on that DVD..."

"That would be devastating. The old crones would crucify you. The men...they'd either try to bury or debauch you."

"Exactly. I want to strangle Kristoff every time I think about what he's done. He's jeopardized everything, the stupid ass."

"In the dance department, you're well-matched. Kristoff is a fabulous athlete who wants to win just as badly as you do. Admit that much."

She rolled her eyes. "I suppose."

"Stop." He demanded. "I know you too well. Everyone else may buy that puffed-up bitch act, but we both know better. It took me years to realize you're not half as pissed as you are afraid. You're trembling at the thought of being vulnerable and of not holding that trophy so you can finally prove to your family that you're a champion. Is Daddy's opinion really more important than friendship? It's okay to stand by your friends, even if your family will disapprove."

God, he had her number. And she hated that.

“Have you taken up psychotherapy on the side, Freud?”

“Just calling your bluff.”

“No, I came to you for help, and you’re giving me hell.” She stood and grabbed her paper mug.

“Sorry,” Jonathan murmured, looking like he wanted to say more on the subject. Mercifully, he didn’t. “Do you have any other information about the tape or its delivery that might help you track down the blackmailer? Or did Kristoff know anything about how it was made?”

“No, I don’t think Kristoff has a clue. But last night, the owner of the sex club in which the footage was filmed tried to seduce me out of my panties. If the event hadn’t been for charity—”

“You know where this tape was made?”

She nodded. “A place called Sneak Peek.”

“The club for voyeurs and exhibitionists?”

He knew about that place? “Yes.”

Jonathan sat back in his chair, a taunting smile curling up his mouth. Shanna felt her heart seize. He looked at her as if he knew being watched made her wet. Did he? Did every man who watched her dance? She swallowed, horrified...and incredibly aroused.

Thankfully, he didn’t go there. “So when you danced with this bloke, did you talk to him, see what he knows about the tape and its creation?”

“No.” She’d been too busy resisting his seduction, trying to fend off his unnerving ability to see past her defenses.

“There you go.” He shrugged. “Maybe he can help you track down who’s blackmailing Kristoff.”

Shanna gripped her tea. Jonathan was right. The answer had been staring her in the face. Alejandro could find out exactly who had filmed Kristoff.

All she had to do was put herself in his path again.

God help her.

“I need your help.”

Alejandro Diaz looked up at the trembling female voice. Platinum hair pulled tightly away from a pale face. Blue eyes smudged with the bruises of sleeplessness. Shanna York. Here, in his office.

Well, didn't this make his morning interesting?

“Long trip to the ladies' room,” he drawled.

She tossed her head, lifting her chin—her silent way of telling him she would not bend her pride to apologize for having deserted him last night. Alejandro frowned...though he was silently amused.

“You came on too strong. Again. I needed to put space between us.”

“And now you do not? Today, I am supposed to forget that I enjoyed a mere two and a half dances, rather than the eight I paid for.”

“You gave that money to charity.”

“To be with you. The charity was the cherry on top.”

“You paid for the opportunity to dance with me, not seduce me.”

Why not both? he wanted to ask, but tactically retreated from that line of questioning. Starting a fight with her wasn't the way to entice her to stay. Putting up her defenses would not get him what he wanted—up close and very personal time with her.

“Perhaps I succeeded, since you have come to Sneak Peek saying you need me.”

“No. I'd still be avoiding you if I didn't need your help.” She swallowed. “Which I need now. Please.”

Hmm. She'd likely choked on that word. Shanna was stubborn and tough and wore her ice like armor. No doubt it warded off most men.

He was made of stronger stuff.

Alejandro stood and faced her. "What can I do for you? Take you on a tour? We have great facilities."

Her expression softened. "It's a beautiful place. I was expecting something..."

"Dark? Sleazy? Dirty?"

She hesitated. "Glass-and-chrome seedy. This is really...warm."

That's what had attracted him to the house in the beginning. Alejandro thanked God every time he set foot in the place that his business partner, Del, had agreed with his choice of location. Its shimmering white plaster walls glowed Hollywood golden when the sun set over the hills of Los Angeles. The expansive gardens had a charming Spanish Revival feel, complete with decorative tile that rimmed the pool and outlined the patio steps leading to the second floor. The bars both indoors and outdoors welcomed guests. Converting the house into a club had given it the feel of an intimate party, rather than a bunch of strangers getting naked together. That instant comfort level was one of the reasons he and Del had been so successful since opening Sneak Peek. That and good business sense.

Alejandro shrugged. "I took one look at the house and fell in love. Cary Grant built it in the 1920s. The previous owners started restoring it about ten years ago...and ran out of money. Del and I spent a small fortune to buy the place and finish fixing it up. I have not regretted it."

"It's gorgeous."

"As are you. Since it's clear you are not here for me to seduce, what can I do for you?"

Her charmed smile disappeared. The tense hand-clasping returned. "My dance partner and I have a...situation. A delicate one. Kristoff has been here, as a customer, right?"

"I'm not at liberty to answer that. Privacy is something we protect fiercely here at Sneak Peek. I hope you understand."

“But that’s just it. Someone invaded his privacy. They filmed him...” She shook her head. “It would be better if I showed you.”

Alejandro frowned as Shanna reached into an oversized bag hanging from her shoulder and extracted a DVD in a clear plastic case. She handed it to him with a tense expression. He popped it into his laptop.

Two and a half minutes later, his blood was boiling—more from anger than any arousal.

“Where did you get this?”

“Someone left it in my dressing room last night just before the benefit began, along with a note telling me that if we competed in the upcoming California Dance Star, this DVD will be sent to all the judges.”

“And neither you nor Kristoff have any idea who sent this?”

She shook her head. “That’s why I’m here. I was hoping you could help me. That competition means...everything to me. I’ve worked *years* to win this.”

As driven as she was, as ambitious as rumor painted her, Alejandro believed it. She had dumped three partners in the last five years. One after breaking his leg badly skiing just before dance season began. The next partner had been history when he dropped her during a lift—in the middle of a competition. The third...he was a mystery. There one day, gone the next. Alejandro’s mother had the pulse on all her favorite and not-so-favorite dancers. *Mamá* said there had been rumors of a torrid affair between Shanna and Jonathan Smythe.

Alejandro extracted the DVD, slotted it back in its case, and handed it to her. “There are absolutely no still or video cameras allowed in the club. Period. That is part of our strict privacy policy.”

“Which someone clearly violated.”

“Yes, because that isn’t security footage. If it was, it would be black and white and from an aerial view. It certainly wouldn’t be in full color and focused in tight on the action.” Alejandro rose, paced.

This was very bad news. People paid a lot of money to enjoy themselves at the club anonymously. Often high profile people. Stars, senators, diplomats. If that privacy was compromised and people found out... He didn't want to think about what it might do to their business.

"Would you excuse me?" he asked.

She hesitated, looking decidedly unhappy. "Yes."

Alejandro pulled his cell phone from the clip at his waistband and hit the speed dial button to reach his partner.

"Del?" he asked after hearing a familiar voice rumble at the other end. "We have a situation you ought to know about."

"I'll be there in five."

It was more like ten minutes later when Del sauntered in, buttoning his shirt and wearing a smile and mussed hair. Damn, it was barely past ten in the morning, but already his buddy had been getting busy. A glance at Shanna reminded him that he hadn't been busy like that in longer than he cared to admit...and he knew exactly who he would like to change that fact with.

"What's up, Ali?"

"Del, this is Shanna York. She is a professional ballroom dancer. Shanna, my business partner Del."

Shanna held out a prim little hand for a professional shake. Del, being the Frenchman he was, enveloped her hand and brought it to his mouth for a soft kiss. "*Enchanté*."

No doubt he was enchanted, but this wasn't a free-for-all.

"Back off," Alejandro growled in Del's ear.

His friend sent him a dark-eyed look of annoyance. Alejandro shrugged. Del would get over it.

When Shanna snatched her hand away, Alejandro had to smile. Classic! When had any woman ever taken one look at Del and pulled back? Never. Usually, they threw themselves at his dark stubble, wealth,

and bad attitude.

"This is Shanna's situation..."

Alejandro clued Del in, and Shanna provided the DVD for viewing again. After the clip ended, Del was gnashing his teeth and looking none too happy.

"I wish I knew who to beat the shit out of for violating the rules."

"Me, too," Alejandro agreed.

"Okay, so you don't know off the top of your heads who might have done it," Shanna said. "I'm assuming you know in which room this...event took place?"

"Yes," the men answered together.

"Maybe by figuring out who might have used the room in the last week, you can get a list of likely suspects. Do you keep records?"

"For payment purposes, yes," Del confirmed. "But that room, it's likely been used at least fifty times since that recording was made."

Shanna did the math. "Ten...events in there a *day*?"

With a shrug, Alejandro smiled. "We go through a lot of sheets."

Del laughed, the sound hearty and male.

"Oh, aren't you two cute. Freshman Frat Boy and his sidekick, Horny." She rolled her eyes. "I'm assuming you don't want it known that someone is sneaking into your club and recording your guests' most private actions without their consent or knowledge."

He and Del sobered up quickly. She was right. Business now. Pleasure...soon.

Still, his mind took a little detour. Her shock about the room's constant use was amusing, and it pleased him that she did not understand how addicting watching—and being watched—could be. Yet.

"Of course we don't want our guests compromised," Del cut in smoothly. "We could make a list of all the guests who have used this room in the last week, but I doubt it would help. In all honesty, I would

never have believed any of our members would violate such a cardinal rule. The fee to join is steep enough to attract only serious members. The rules are absolute; there is no room for gray. We also have ways of ensuring that anyone who violates our rules finds themselves unwelcome at similar clubs in the state.”

“This feels to me as if you were targeted specifically,” Alejandro said. “The note was delivered to your dressing room, so close to a major competition...”

“That’s it! Do any of my competitors belong to your club?”

Alejandro looked at Del, who looked back at him. That was the great thing about having been friends for nearly a decade. They could almost read each others’ minds. Answering the question wasn’t really giving away information...

“No. Just Kristoff. And he’s recent. He came highly recommended, and has been very active since he joined.”

“I’ll bet.” She snorted. “And here I thought he was your average, garden-variety gay man...”

Del choked. Alejandro resisted the urge to laugh himself.

Shanna swatted his shoulder. “Okay. I get from this DVD that’s not true. You two can stop snickering now.”

Alejandro couldn’t resist her ruffled feathers for another second. He was dying to soothe them...right before he melted her.

“What about any of my former dance partners?” She directed the question to Alejandro. Not that she suspected Jonathan, but the first two hated her. “Do you know who they are?”

“No and yes. None of your former partners are members.”

“Hmm.” Shanna bit a pink, bee-stung lip as she thought. “Have any of your other members indicated this breach of privacy has been a problem for them?”

“Hell no! And we’ve established that the person who took the footage

isn't one of your competitors, but it's clearly someone who knows something about your world of ballroom dance. About you and what you value."

"Yes," Del agreed. "Someone who knew that competition was coming up soon and that the judges would punish you if such a DVD was circulating. Someone who knew that competition was important to you."

"Any ideas who among your members that could be?" Shanna prompted.

Again, Alejandro looked at Del, who looked at him. "Not a clue. I could ask you the same question. Who are your enemies?"

Shanna's blue eyes darted around, as if scanning her memories. "No one else I can think of. If it's not a former partner or a competitor, I can't think of anyone who hates me enough to want to destroy me like this."

"Well, if any guest was a friend of one of your former partners or competitors, we have no way of knowing."

"True..." Shanna nibbled nervously on a hangnail, then, as if realizing she'd done something less than perfect, she stopped. "What about your employees? Any of them have access to video cameras and those rooms?"

Del shook his head. "We have four types of employees: security, maid service, wait staff and bartenders. That's it. They are paid to be invisible unless they're needed. None of those employees should be anywhere near a room when it's in use. All the watching and exhibiting is done for and with fellow members."

"So, another dead end..."

"It appears," Del agreed, then looked Alejandro's way. His buddy had the glint of the devil in his eyes. "That we need to draw this blackmailer out."

"Have Kristoff come back and do it again and hope someone makes another recording?" She sounded confused.

“No,” Alejandro said, catching on to the idea. “Kristoff has been recorded. He has served his purpose. It is interesting that whomever recorded him chose to give the DVD not to him, but to *you*.”

“Exactly,” Del chimed in. “The blackmailer is trying to get to you. He or she wants *you* to suffer. Kristoff is just one avenue.”

“So what are you suggesting I do?”

One more time, Alejandro and Del exchanged a meaningful glance.

“I think, *querida*, he’s suggesting that I arrange a scene for you here and see if we can track him through another disc and ‘watch me’ note. Or better yet, catch him red-handed in the act of filming you.”

Shanna’s jaw dropped. “Are you insane! You think I should come here and get naked and...”

“Spend a little time showing our members what you enjoy,” Alejandro supplied.

“I can’t give this creep any more ammunition to ruin me.”

“He already has everything he needs to discredit you with the judges. But I do not think he’s actually trying to prevent you from competing, as much as he’s attacking you. This feels personal, not professional. If you want to find out who is behind this, you must...expose yourself.”

“I’m not into that!”

After last night, Alejandro knew better, but now wasn’t the time to remind her. “Perhaps not. Pretend, if you must. But I believe the plan will work.”

Shanna hesitated, as if she was pondering his words. “*If* I agree to this crazy scheme, can I do...whatever it is alone?”

Alejandro couldn’t resist the grin spreading across his face. “Yes. Plenty of our members would jump through rings of fire to see you touch yourself.”

“You mean, like, masturbate for an audience?” She turned ghostly white.

“Even the thought of it makes me hard,” he whispered for her ears alone.

“Absolutely not!”

“I will be more than happy to assist you,” Alejandro volunteered.

“Yeah, I’ll bet.”

“It would be more believable and more blackmail-worthy if Ali helped you,” Del chimed in. “I will hide in the room and watch all doors, windows, and passersby—see if I can identify our camera-wielding asshole.”

Her jaw dropped. “It’s bad enough to contemplate getting naked with the Latin Lover, here. But having you watch? Oh, no.”

That horror on her face was nothing but a lie. Her suddenly hard nipples told him that. She was scared—of herself, of him, of whatever was fueling her ambition. Suddenly, he wanted to get to the bottom of it all.

“What troubles you? Is the idea too arousing?”

Shanna sent Alejandro a hard glare. “No, it’s too weird. And it won’t work.”

“What are your better ideas?”

Pausing, Shanna bit her lip. Oh, yes, she was thinking her options through.

A few moments later, she gritted her teeth. “I don’t have a better idea. But there’s got to be one.”

“This guy will return to the scene of the crime if we dangle the right bait in front of him. Catching him in the act of creating or delivering a disc is the only way to be certain he’s the guilty party.”

Pacing across the floor, her tight ass outlined in white Capri pants that made his tongue melt, Shanna contemplated in a silence broken only by her high-heeled sandals.

“God, I can’t believe I’m actually considering this. I must be out of my

mind.”

“It may be the only way to figure out who’s trying to screw up your career,” Del supplied.

“Which is the only reason I’m considering it.”

“Would you feel more comfortable if I showed you the room and all the places Del can hide in order to catch this bastard?”

Del sent him a knowing smile.

She nodded. “I’m not sure this will work, but maybe, seeing the room, something will occur to me.”

“You two come up with the plan and let me know. I need to get back to my...company.” Del clapped him on the back, kissed Shanna’s hand again and disappeared upstairs.

In charged silence, Alejandro led Shanna down a hall and up another set of stairs that led to the play rooms. At the second door on the left, he paused and eased it open into a dark room.

Beyond the handful of comfortable chairs and a long, cushy sofa, lay the far corner of the room, which comprised the stage, currently devoid of guests. The muted lights in that corner shined down on a sleek bed with four chrome posts and matching restraints.

“Oh.” Her voice fluttered beside him.

Alejandro would bet this week’s take that Shanna was envisioning herself on that stage, her pussy shoved full of his cock—and a rapt audience watching. He’d bet next week’s take that she was more aroused than she’d ever been.

“Other members sit here or look through the windows at the far end of the room and watch the scene. From the clip you showed me, I suspect your blackmailer sat in the room, here.” Alejandro pointed to a small chair in the shadows, a mere three feet from the end of the bed. “He either used a zoom lens or moved the chair closer to the bed to get the tight penetration shots. But we won’t know for sure until we catch

him.”

“I understand.” Her voice trembled even more.

Alejandro smiled to himself as he turned and pointed to a bare wall. “Through here is a doorway, accessible only from the security area. See, no knob on this side. We can position the cameras to watch this chair. Del can either watch the room from the bank of cameras or from the chairs in the far corner.”

“I see.” She cleared her throat. “If you have security cameras viewing this room, can’t you review the footage and see if anyone holding a video camera is in the shot?”

He shook his head. “They point only at the stage areas. Our primary concern here is for the safety of the players. We make sure everything that happens on stage is consensual. If there’s a hint that something is not, we bust in. But we do not regularly monitor the audience. For our scene only, we will change the camera positioning.”

“Wouldn’t the blackmailer be able to spot Del if he was watching from one of those chairs?” She gestured across the room.

“Come with me.” Alejandro held out his hand to her.

Shanna looked at it then looked at him, before reluctantly placing her hand in his. Immediately, sparks danced in his palm, down his fingers. God, he could hardly wait to get his hands on this woman.

For the moment, he led her across the room instead, to a dark pair of padded armchairs. He gestured for Shanna to sit in one. He plunked down in the other.

“In this corner, the light is too dim for anyone in the audience to discern more than a shadow. Players cannot see back in this corner. It’s a good place for Del to hide, if you want him nearby.”

“It’s dark.”

A click and a whoosh alerted Alejandro to the fact the players’ stage door had opened. He glanced at his watch. Noon. Right on time.

In walked a broad man dressed in leather pants, a half-mask—and nothing else. Colorful tattoos covered his left arm. He held hands with a woman, clutching her fingers in his.

As small as he was big, as delicate as he was strong, the petite redhead followed him to the bed. She wore a flowing floral skirt that ended at mid-thigh, a button-down blouse in a soft ivory and a pair of pink high-heeled sandals.

“Are you wearing a bra, slut?” he asked.

“No, Master.”

“Show me.”

Without pause, she unbuttoned her blouse to reveal a flat stomach, fair skin and pink nipples that stood straight out and begged for attention.

Shanna gasped. “We shouldn’t be watching this.”

“They come here knowing that being watched is not only possible, but probable. It turns them on. Shh.”

“Good,” Master praised, petting one of her breasts in reward. “Are you wearing panties?”

“No, Master.”

“Show me.”

The small woman lifted her skirt to reveal slender thighs and a pussy devoid of all hair. Beside Alejandro, Shanna tensed.

“Excellent.” The Master cupped her mound and fondled her. “Who do you belong to?”

“You, Master.”

“Who decides what’s right for your body?”

“You, Master.”

“Take off your skirt, lie back, and spread your legs.”

The woman complied without hesitation. Even at this distance, once her thighs parted, Alejandro could see a little silver bar passing through

the hood of her clit.

“Oh my God,” Shanna whispered. “She’s...pierced.”

“Yes,” Alejandro answered. “He marked her. Shh.”

“Pretty,” said the man in leather as he stared. “Has it healed?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Does it arouse you when you walk?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Do you rub yourself and make yourself come?”

“No, Master. You did not give me permission.”

“That’s right. I did not. You’re wet.”

“Yes, Master.”

“Do you need to be fucked?”

“Yes, Master. Please,” the redhead pleaded.

The large man said nothing. He merely walked to all four corners of the bed, restraining his submissive into the built-in cuffs.

“As a reward for your obedience, you will be well fucked.” Master snapped his fingers.

In walked another man, completely naked. Young, blond, somewhat thin—but very well hung.

“This is Micah. He will fuck you now. If you please him and obey me, you may suck my cock as a reward. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master.” The idea clearly excited her, and she smiled.

Shanna gripped the arms of her chair and stared at the trio with wide eyes. “She’s going to let a complete stranger have sex with her just because he said so?”

“He wants to watch her be fucked, and she has given him domain over her body. She obeys his commands. That is their relationship. Shh.”

By now, the blond man had a condom on his long cock and was easing onto the bed.

“Micah,” the man barked. “Test that piercing first. With your tongue.”

Micah smiled. "With pleasure."

"I will tell you when you have permission to come, slut."

"Yes, Master," she panted as Micah took his first swipe across her clit with his tongue and groaned.

The woman lifted her hips to Micah, who used the opportunity to fit his arms under her thighs and grip her, holding her wet folds against his mouth. He licked her unmercifully, insistent lashes with his tongue, and toyed with the little bar piercing the hood of her clit.

Master shucked off his pants, pulled out a wide cock with a pierced head, and stroked slowly as he watched.

Soon, the redhead was flushed and panting, mewling and pleading for release.

"Stop," said Master.

Micah lifted his head slowly, his lips wet and glossy.

The woman whimpered.

"Are you ready for Micah to fuck you?"

"Yes, Master. Please, yes!"

"Good girl. When I give you permission, you may show me how pretty you are when you come as Micah fucks you."

The woman opened her mouth to answer, but Micah thrust ruthlessly inside her sex first, cutting off all speech. Instead, she gasped, then groaned. Before she recovered, Micah plowed into her again. And again. Once more...

"Come," her master commanded.

She gasped as she orgasmed in a spectacular tensing of limbs and jolting of muscles. Micah gritted his teeth, looking like a man hanging by a thread.

"Beautiful. Micah will continue to fuck you while you suck my cock. You do not come again until I do."

"Yes...Master," she said in a breathy, high gasp just before she

turned her head and took Master deep in her mouth.

Beside him, Alejandro noticed Shanna squirming in her seat. Around him, the scent of her arousal wafted. She might pretend to be horrified, but her body told him exactly how much she loved what was happening before her eyes. How much she liked watching it. He knew from dancing with her that she ached to be watched herself. No doubt in his mind, fucking her in front of a faceless audience would completely arouse Shanna. She couldn't possibly hang onto her ice bitch persona then.

It didn't take long before Master's buttocks were clenching. He shoved his hand into his slut's red hair and thrust into her mouth. Micah had apparently gotten his urge to come under control and now pounded her like a man possessed, beads of sweat dripping down his face, his sides. The woman's skin was a gorgeous shade of aroused rose as she writhed between the two men, giving and receiving pleasure.

Soon, the Master tensed, shouted, and erupted into her mouth.

"Come," he told them through clenched teeth.

They did. Loudly, bucking and rocking and clearly enjoying the hell out of themselves.

Moments later, Micah withdrew from the woman's body and disposed of his condom. Master reached out and gave him a brotherly handshake.

"She's one hell of a fuck," Micah commented. "You're lucky, man."

Master nodded and smiled. Micah disappeared through the door from which he'd emerged. When Master turned his profile to the audience again, Alejandro had no trouble spotting the fact he was hard again. Shanna's gasp told him she'd seen it, too.

Without a word to his slut, Master released her ankles, flipped her onto her belly. As her arms crossed above her head, he urged her to curl her knees under her body, then smacked her ass a half-dozen times in harsh, rhythmic swats. The woman tensed, moaned, bucked.

Then Master reached for the table on the far side of the bed.

Moments later, he had lube on his dick and was sliding it inside his woman's rosy ass.

She moaned and writhed when he penetrated her deep, and he reached around to toy with her clit.

"You're a good girl. Watching you get fucked turns me on, but fucking you myself is heaven. You accept my cock wherever I put it, don't you?"

"Yes! Master, yes!"

Shanna crossed her legs and squirmed again. "Is he...having anal sex with her?"

Alejandro nodded. "It is another show of her submission to him."

She drew in a sharp breath. Even in this dim light, he could see her hard nipples go even harder. Oh, another something on his long list of things to do to her body once he got the chance. Alejandro managed to keep his smile to himself—barely.

"Seen enough?"

"What?" Shanna tore her eyes away from the couple reluctantly. "O—oh, yes."

He rose and helped her to her feet, then guided her out the door, back into the well-lit hallway. Flushed cheeks, very hard nipples, rapid breaths, pulse beating at her neck. If she owned a vibrator, he'd bet it would get a strenuous workout this afternoon. First time he could ever remember being jealous of plastic and batteries. He'd offer his own flesh, but if he pushed her too hard, too fast, she would run in the other direction.

"So, the scene... How does tomorrow night sound for catching a blackmailer? I will make sure the room is free then."

Shanna took a deep breath. "I haven't made up my mind."

"Whatever you wish. You are the one with a competition in a few weeks and a blackmailer with an ax to grind."

"Damn it. All right. Tomorrow night."

“Be here by nine.” Alejandro tamped down his smile of triumph with effort. “What sort of scene should I set up? Something for you to do alone?”

Shanna paled a bit more, then mustered her bravado and lifted her chin. “Maybe...you should participate, too. But don’t get the wrong idea.”

“Wrong idea?”

She sent him a suspicious glare. “I’m serious. This is business. I need to find out who’s trying to sabotage me. You need to know who’s jeopardizing your club. I’m not interested in you personally.”

“Of course not.”

“And I’m not sleeping with you.”

Who said anything about sleeping? Alejandro thought fiercely.

“Whatever you want, that is what we’ll do. Nothing more.” *And absolutely nothing less.*

Chapter Four

“You sure about this, man?” Del asked him at eight-thirty the following night as they headed downstairs.

“Yes.” Alejandro led the way down the hall, to the second door on the left, and pushed it open.

Del closed it behind him. “You want guests in here? They will flip. You’re the brains of this place. You almost never play in public. You know the curiosity. There *will* be a crowd.”

Alejandro shrugged. Generally, he watched rather than was watched, but this was about Shanna tonight, about making her hot. And she adored being watched. He knew that all the way down to the soles of his feet.

“Whatever. Mostly I want anyone here who attended in the last week, especially if they watched in this room. I emailed you a list of known members who fit that description. Start there. I’ve asked security to do the same. That way, it’s more likely our friend with the video camera will show up. But wait until nine-fifteen to unlock the door. I want Shanna comfortable. It will be easier for her to let go the first time if the only one watching when we get started is you.”

“Even if we only allow the people who have been in this room in the last week, others will follow. There will still be a crowd.”

Alejandro shrugged. Likely so, but he would deal with it. And with Shanna...

She would be very nervous when she first arrived, but Alejandro didn’t think that would last. Especially if there wasn’t a crowd right away. And God, he couldn’t wait to feel her melt against him, her body

opening to accept him deep, her pussy claspings him hard as she came. By then, she'd be desperate for the crowd to watch her come undone.

"I need to finish readying the room." Alejandro turned away, eager for the night to begin.

"Wait." When Alejandro turned back, Del went on, "You're going pretty far to catch this blackmailer."

"The club is important. We both have over a million dollars tied up in it. We cannot afford to allow anyone who would videotape players without their knowledge to continue their membership."

"Yeah. Absolutely. It's just...normally you would let security handle it. Or bring in help, if you needed it. This time, you seem to be taking a very personal interest."

"Stop side-stepping around your words. What are you saying?"

Del crossed his arms over his wide chest, looking way too pleased. "You like this girl."

"She is very sexy. Why should I not like her?"

Disbelief peppered Del's expression. "There are sexy women here every night more than willing to fuck you. You haven't played with or performed for the membership in over a year. So there's more to your decision to get on that stage with Shanna than the fact she's sexy."

Mierda. Why couldn't Del leave it alone?

Alejandro sighed. "Yes. I confess, even I am not entirely sure why I am pursuing Shanna so hard. She has rebuffed, left, and insulted me."

"But...?"

Shifting his weight from one foot to the other, Alejandro sorted through the tangle of his thoughts and feelings. It was damn uncomfortable. He was a gut-instinct sort of guy. If it felt right, he did it. That philosophy had never served him wrong. But even he had to admit that his logic where Shanna was concerned...

There wasn't any.

“She has this lost quality. I don’t want to save her, exactly. Or change her. But I cannot resist wanting to hold her. Touch her. And, of course, pleasure her. She looks at me, and her expression is like a siren’s song. A glance, and I’m hard as hell. A snap from that icy voice I know is hiding a wealth of heat, and I’m dying to lay her out, get deep, and melt her into a puddle.”

Del laughed. “You’re screwed.”

“I suspect so.”

“You’re falling for this girl. Hard.”

Was it that obvious?

“And you haven’t really touched her yet.” Del roared with laughter. “This is going to be fun to watch for more than one reason.”

“You may fuck off now.”

“Ten-four.” Del clapped him on the back. “I’ll finish making the arrangements with the other employees. The room should be ready. All you need to do is meet Shanna at the door.”

No, what he needed to do was please her, not just by lighting her senses and firing her fantasies, but endearing himself to her. Great, but how to do that? Because his gut was telling him now that he should not let Shanna out of his life.

God, she was shaking. Shanna shoved the door open and entered the cool air-conditioned space of Sneak Peek. At night, the club still had that golden glow. But instead of the homey warmth it conveyed during the day, as moonlight spilled into the windows, the club sparkled, glittered, like old Hollywood meeting today’s beautiful people, all surrounded by dazzling sex.

Del and Alejandro had captured the club’s ambiance perfectly.

Just past the club's front door, wall-to-wall bodies gyrated to a suggestive techno beat. Couples grinded, intimating sex vertically. In fact, one couple against the wall, shielded by the man's long leather duster, probably *was* having sex. No one seemed to notice or care.

The bar beyond was crowded with people drinking their liquid fortification. Several men crowded around a twenty-something woman downing shots, like they were waiting for her to give one—or several—of them a sign that she was ready for action.

The whole place oozed sex.

She so didn't belong here. Sex had never been her...thing. She'd had it, of course. A college boyfriend had been her first, but he hadn't had much experience. Nor had he understood her dancing. They'd spent the relationship fighting because he assumed she was sleeping with her dance partner at the time, which she hadn't been.

A few years later, she'd had a one-night stand after a wedding. Stupid—and awful. Downright bad sex.

Jonathan...utter disaster—right on the dance floor they'd practiced on for years. She'd clung to him out of desperation. He'd taken her body as if exorcising some demon. The whole episode had lasted less than ten minutes. And created months of pure havoc.

By tonight's end, if she wasn't careful, she would be adding Alejandro to the list. She'd said she wouldn't have sex with him. But she wondered... Would failing to have actual sex in public convince this blackmailer that they were for real? Not likely. It would probably look like a trap. They had to ferret out this jerk before the California Dance Star.

Shanna sighed. But that wasn't the only reason for contemplating surrendering to Alejandro. Could she actually resist a man that sinfully sexy, especially when he was seducing her by fulfilling her secret exhibitionism fantasy? He made her feel sexual, made her believe that he understood her. Admitting that fact was painful, but even when

Alejandro annoyed her, he turned her on. Maybe...the chemistry between them was worth exploring.

And maybe she was out of her mind.

Crossing the room, Shanna was conscious of male eyes following her. God, why had Alejandro sent her this sheer halter top, held in place by nothing more than two little bows, along with a matching wrap-around skirt? Insisted she wear a skimpy outfit in shades of soft creamy-gold that blended in with her skin?

"Hi," a voice whispered in her ear. She turned to find a guy with dimples and incredible blue eyes visually eating her up. "Dance?"

Okay, he was attractive. Who was she kidding? He was gorgeous. The way he looked at her made her burn. But to dance with him? Touch him? Hmm. The thought of getting physical with this guy—with most any guy—wasn't quite as tempting. For her, it was always that way.

Except with Alejandro.

"I—I..."

"She's spoken for tonight."

Alejandro. She recognized that deep, slightly accented voice caressing the back of her neck. And the tingle that shimmied up her spine when he wrapped his arm around her bare midriff in a gesture designed to lay his claim.

Dimples shot her a brief look of regret. "Sure, Mr. Diaz."

"She'll be around later, in the chrome room."

That information perked Dimples up. He raked her with a lingering glance. "Sweet. I'll definitely be watching."

Before Shanna could protest, Alejandro urged her forward to an employees-only entrance and shut the door behind them. The decibel level went down about a thousand percent.

She whirled to face him "You *invited* him to watch us...?"

Shanna was glad she'd managed to parlay her anger into actual

words quickly. Because once she saw his casual black shirt unbuttoned all the way down the front, exposing a healthy glimpse of hard-steel pecs and smooth bronze skin, she lost her train of thought.

“To play. Yes, I did. He is one of the newer regulars and he was here last week. Think of him as a potential suspect.”

His voice brought her gaze back up to his face, where a hint of a smile played. The bastard knew she’d been staring at him.

She needed dispassion, not lust. *Focus*. “He had no idea who I was. No concept that I’m Kristoff’s partner.”

“Not that he let on. But if he was guilty, why would he tip his hand?”

Good question. One for which she had no answer.

“Do you want to change your mind? You are not required to play this scene.”

Of course she was. If she wanted to win the competition and hold that trophy in her hand after sixteen years of hard work, she did. But that wasn’t the only reason. If she wanted to find out if she was capable of feeling great pleasure in a man’s arms, she had to go through with this. If she wanted to find out if Alejandro had been right about her desire to exhibit and see how deeply he understood her...well, then she couldn’t chicken out now.

“Just lead the way.”

With a slow nod, Alejandro grabbed her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze, then led her down the hall. Despite her nerves, Shanna had a hard time ripping her gaze from his tight ass, displayed so mouth-wateringly in black slacks. The view alone made her want to jump him. That had to stop. This strong sexual hunger wasn’t like her. Being too into him wasn’t a good idea.

Tearing her gaze away and focusing on her surroundings, she noticed they filed past some open doors containing offices brimming with computers manned by staff members. A wall clock said it was ten ’til

nine.

The butterflies in her stomach were head banging and had set up a mosh pit. She wondered if she was going to throw up before they got started.

Alejandro stopped in front of a door. “Relax. You will be fine. We’re going to handle this together.”

“Why are you being nice about this?”

He cocked a brow, the strong angles of his face dusted by shadow. The frankly sexual stare he sent her made Shanna suck in her breath.

“Certainly, it has not escaped your notice that I want you.”

How could it when the thought thrilled her so much? She shook her head.

“Good. I also want to catch the scum taking advantage of our members. You want to catch him, too, so Kristoff’s DVD doesn’t fall into the judges’ hands. It is a win-win for us both.”

That made sense.

He hesitated. “And I suspect you’re not the untouchable bitch you wish me—and everyone else—to believe you are.” He shot her a wolfish grin. “But I will find out tonight if that’s true. We are going to be very hot together.”

Before she could protest and put up the armor he’d stripped away with a single sentence, he thrust the door open and walked through.

They entered the room she had observed the Master and slut use yesterday. Only, things had changed. The chrome bed had been pushed to one corner, at the edge of the stage. The rest of the furniture had been moved out, leaving a large amount of the painted concrete floor well-lit and totally empty. The bedding had changed as well. Luxurious white and silvery linens with fluffy pillows decorated with beads and tassels adorned the bed, looking sumptuous on top of the downy blanket. A far cry from yesterday’s stark black sheets.

“What’s this?”

“I thought you would be more comfortable if we changed the room up to something softer. Something more...you.”

Normally, she would protest his judgment that she was soft. But he was right; the look of the room did reflect her more. Again, she wondered how he already knew her so unerringly.

She was touched, against her better judgment. “Thank you.”

“You are very welcome. Come with me.” Alejandro tugged her to the edge of the stage. Deep in gray shadows, she saw a lone, imposing figure.

“Hi, Shanna.”

“Del?”

“Yes. We’re ready to go. Are you okay?”

She managed to resist the urge to press a hand against her fluttering belly. It would reveal too much, make her look vulnerable. She already felt too much that way for comfort. “Yes.”

“Good. The security cameras have been positioned to watch the audience, specifically the corner in which we think the last video was made. The lighting in the audience is a bit brighter, so the cameras can capture whatever is going on. None of the cameras will be pointed at you, and Alejandro will take care of you if something unexpected happens. Security is through that door.” He pointed to the door without a handle. “Just knock, and they’ll let you in immediately.”

Wow, they’d thought of everything. “Thank you.”

“We will start slow,” Alejandro assured her. “Right now, just you and me. Del will watch. As you get comfortable, he’ll open the door. Hopefully, your blackmailer will be waiting to get in.”

Del watching them. Other strangers watching them. Now came the hard part. And the arousing part. She wished the thought of Alejandro touching her didn’t turn her on...almost as much as she wished the thought of a crowd seeing their every move didn’t make her blood race.

But it all did. Unbearably. And Alejandro knew it.

Shanna bit her lip. "O—okay."

"Good." Alejandro smiled, something ripe with both warmth and fire. In one look, he managed to calm her fears and rouse her body.

Shanna had a feeling this night would be unlike anything she could have possibly imagined.

She glanced at Del. He was a big shape sitting in the dark corner, his head cocked, his arms crossed over his chest.

"Focus on me, *querida*. Me."

Right. She gave him a shaky nod, and he tugged on her hand, pulling her body into his.

"Dance with me."

"D—dance?"

"Just dance."

He snapped his fingers. Music filtered through the room, a soft but spicy Latin tune, perfect for a rumba. In fact, it was the music they had danced to just a few nights before.

As Alejandro led her into a basic, her body brushing his with every step, her feet moved automatically to the beat. His unbuttoned shirt fluttered as he moved, offering tantalizing glimpses of hard pectorals, flat, brown nipples, hints of dark hair. Her mind whirled with tempting possibilities.

"You recall the exact music we danced to the other night?"

"I never forget a thing about you."

Seven words and she melted. On the spot. No man had ever taken such an interest in just her. Only in whether she could win. Only in her abilities, her ambition...never in her as a woman.

Shanna relaxed against him and drifted into the dance. He sensed it and spiced up their steps. After a sharp turn in his arms, her nearly bare back rested against his half-covered chest, his hot breath on her neck,

her hips gyrating against his erection. His palm flattened against her naked belly, which pulsed at his hot touch.

She turned her head, glancing over her shoulder at him. His fiery gaze was full of challenge as he slowly caressed her until both of his hands came to rest at her hips, guiding them in a movement that was pure, raw sex.

“Del is watching us. Watching you. Getting hard for you,” he whispered.

“No,” she protested automatically.

But her blood boiled at the thought.

Alejandro turned her out in a sharp spin and brought her crashing into his body again, then into a deep dip.

Her gaze snapped up to his. His face shouted dominance, mastery. “Yes.”

Her nipples went hard.

As he brought her up slowly, he curled one hand around her nape. The other he flattened between her breasts, then pressed over one. He teased her nipple with a soft touch.

Shanna sucked in a breath. Desire dropped like a bomb into the pit of her stomach. That strong face of his...all hint of teasing, of reassuring, of politeness—gone. In his place stood a man who meant to have her. Sooner than now.

He fitted his hips against hers and rocked as his lips collided with hers. A brush, a slide, a taste. Shanna followed his lead, shocked at the way her heart accelerated like a race car, zooming to hyper-speed in seconds until it pounded in her ears. He tasted of coffee and man and aggression. She opened to him, desperate for him to sink deeper.

Instead, he spun her out. She whirled away from him on instinct.

The rumba was the dance of love...but there was teasing involved. The woman hesitating, the man pursuing. Somehow she knew Alejandro

loved to pursue.

The last thing she should do was make her surrender too easy for him.

She walked away, hips swaying, head held high. For a moment, she focused on Del. He leaned forward in his chair, his posture tense. His fingers clutched the chair in front of him. She smiled, writhed, and caressed her way between her breasts, down her belly, skirting her aching sex to caress the tops of her thighs. She heard Del's indrawn breath when the music paused.

Feminine power, heady and amazing, crashed into her. This was why she loved dancing, knowing she could make men want, people feel, just by watching her body.

Then she glanced over her shoulder as Alejandro prowled closer, shedding his black shirt, leaving it forgotten on the floor. Powerful bronze shoulders snagged her gaze. His hard-muscled chest narrowed into six-pack abs dusted with a treasure trail that disappeared into the waistband of his pants. The enticing view made her mouth water. But the look on his face...hungry, unrepentant, demanding, made her shudder with want.

Damn, she was staring—and loving it.

Alejandro stopped directly behind her, so close, she could feel the heat of his body. Even though he didn't touch her, he sucked her deeper into his sexual web just by being near and sharing the rhythm of the dance.

Suddenly...a tug, a brush of his fingers. The little halter top fell to the floor at her feet.

Leaving her naked from the waist up.

Instinctively, she reached up to cover her breasts with her hands. Alejandro slid his palms down her arms, skin to skin, until his hands covered hers. He rocked against her ass, his erection insistent at her

lower back. He planted teasing kisses down her neck, across her shoulder.

Tension tightened in her belly. Resistance melted.

Then he forced her hands down, over her ribs, down her belly, right over her swollen, aching folds. His hips swiveled to the music, moving hers in time—grinding her clit into her fingertips.

“Jesus,” Del muttered from the audience.

Shanna barely heard. Sensation exploded. She gasped as the riot of feelings tore through her, leaving fire in its wake. Her knees melted. Her head fell back to Alejandro’s bare shoulder. Her eyes closed as she moaned.

One of his hands swept across her abdomen again, soft, slow...inching up, up... Until Alejandro claimed her bare breast, his palm burning her sensitive flesh. Shanna’s eyes fluttered open. The way he touched her with that slow burn compelled her to look.

Del watched their every move, his gaze riveted on Alejandro’s hand moving over her skin. Shanna knew Del saw her arousal, knew he wasn’t missing the fact she was spiked up on need and desire. Aching. And it was only climbing higher, knowing that Del couldn’t peel his eyes away.

Her nipple poked Alejandro’s palm. She ached, arched into his hand as his thumb teased the hard tip.

“Touch me,” she whispered.

“Every last inch of you.” Alejandro’s mouth strung a fresh line of shiver-inducing kisses up her neck.

Suddenly, he grabbed one of her hands, twirled her out, then reeled her back in, her chest crushed to his. Slowly, he eased her away in a rumba rhythm.

His hazel eyes flared as he took in his first clear glimpse of her bare breasts.

“Such hard pink nipples. I’m going to enjoy making them red.”

Wondering how he could all but made her heart stop. “H—how? By pinching them?”

He reached between their bodies and slid heated palms over her breasts. His thumbs cradled their aching tips as his fingers closed in and pressed, jolting her with a flash of pain, followed by a haze of pleasure.

“That is one way.”

“And b—by sucking them?”

His gaze was like an inferno burning her up as he dipped her back over his arm, arching her breasts toward his mouth, fusing their hips together. God, she could feel every inch of his thick erection pressing right against her sex. She ached in a way she never had before and never imagined she could.

Then he lowered his head and sucked her nipple into his mouth.

Hot. Wet. Wild. Thrilling. Sensations screamed through her body as he suckled her, his mouth pulling, tugging, creating friction that zipped right from her breast to her clit until pleasure tightened, converged, pounded at her body.

Shanna clutched his shoulders, praying the sensation would never end.

After a long, lingering lick, Alejandro eased away from her breast and stood her upright again. “That is another possibility.”

“Do you... W—would you bite them?”

He didn’t even answer, just bent to capture her breast in his mouth again, the hot silk of his tongue over the sensitive bud giving way to the tug of teeth—and a bolt of pure fire straight down to her sex.

Oh God.

“Yes!” The word slipped out of her mouth. Surrender in one syllable. She knew it. So did he.

She was going to give him anything—everything—he wanted tonight.

Alejandro straightened and smiled down at her. That expression

captured her, but he enthralled her when he slid his fingers into her hair, scattering the pins holding her French twist everywhere, and ravaged her mouth.

Need, impatience, aggression, the promise of unbelievable sex—it was all there in his kiss. His tongue stroked hers and stoked the fires leaping inside her, sending her higher and higher.

Alejandro had barely touched anything below her waist, and already she was screamingly close to orgasm. He'd already brought her closer to the pinnacle than any of her other previous lovers. Damn, what would happen when he actually laid her down on that sumptuous bed and covered her body with his? When he filled her up with every inch he taunted her with even now as he rocked against her?

Panting, mewling, Shanna grabbed his face with clutching fingers and pressed her lips harder against his. God, it was stupid and dangerous...and she couldn't wait to find out just how good he was going to be.

Chapter Five

Shanna panted, clinging to Alejandro when he lodged his thigh between hers and urged her to swivel her hips against him.

Thick bolts of need speared her belly, slicing down her legs. Her blood turned thick. The wanton within her demanded more. Shanna aimed to make sure she got it.

She wasn't the Bitch of the Ballroom tonight. She was just a female surrendering to the hot sensations her lover's touch roused. How it happened, she didn't know. Why now and with this man, in this situation, was a mystery, too. But for once, she felt like a woman. Not just an athlete, a dancer, or a competitor. Just a woman in touch with her sexuality.

Orgasm approached hard and fast. Tension built between her legs. Heat fractured her thoughts. She moaned, feeling Alejandro's hands at her hips, urging her on, and Del's hot stare burning her back.

As she climbed up, up, Alejandro lifted his mouth from hers and sent her a deliciously wicked smile. God, the man could melt steel with that look. And she was nowhere near that solid.

"You ache." He didn't ask; he stated.

"Yes."

"You are wet."

No doubt, he felt her wet folds through the thin fabric of his slacks, and the friction it provided was driving her out of her mind.

"Yes."

Then he reached around her, gliding rough palms over her bare ass as he lifted her skirt to her waist. Shanna knew Del could see her cheeks

and the delicate white thong bisecting them. She swore she could feel his stare burning her backside. And she knew it affected him because he groaned.

That sound reached between her legs and jolted her. Why it turned her on so much to excite Del she couldn't explain. And didn't want to know. Tomorrow, she'd likely be mortified. Tonight, she just didn't care.

"Do you like knowing that Del is eating up your ass with his hungry gaze?" Alejandro rasped in her ear. "That he's so hard for you and would kill to be in my place right now?"

Shanna couldn't help it; she whimpered.

"That's right. But he will not touch you. He will watch and he will want, but *I* will take every sinful pleasure your body has to offer."

The man flat knew how to talk. With a few choice words, he utterly unwound her.

Then he tugged on the skirt's tie, slipped free the button. Her skirt fluttered to the stage. She wore only one very damp thong.

He lowered his hands to her hips again, forcing her sex down on his thigh once more. To the music, they swayed. His impressive erection brushed her belly. Her need to come grew, expanded until she was moaning, muttering words of nonsense and need.

"Please. Please!"

"I will give you everything you can take. Then I will give you more."

He barely finished whispering the promise when he bent her back over his arm, arching her breasts up so he could feast on them again. Her nipples were so hard under his tongue, and no matter how he licked, suckled, bit, she only wanted more.

Shanna had never been greedy with sex. Never really wanted sex. To be so lost in the moment, in the sensation—stunning, amazing. For all the time she'd wondered if she was "normal" because she didn't respond to a man's touch, she now had her answer. She responded to Alejandro.

To Del's eyes on her. To the forbidden burn of everything they had planned tonight.

Still bent over Alejandro's arm, Shanna opened her eyes to lock her stare with Del's, to entice him with what he couldn't have. And though the room was upside down from this vantage, she could not miss the small crowd filing in. Men. More than five, less than a dozen, they all had tense bodies, hot eyes.

"Fuck, she's hot," murmured a total stranger.

Del stood in the middle of them, fists clenched at his sides. "She is that."

"They want you," Alejandro murmured against her neck. "And I want to show them what they're missing."

Before she could even process what he meant, Alejandro spun her around to face the audience. Oh, God, they stood a mere three feet away. So close she swore she could feel their hot breaths on her skin. She recognized Dimples there. His smile was gone, replaced by seething want and an erection a blind woman could not miss.

He and the rest of the crowd were focused on her bare breasts, loose and heavy as Alejandro forced her hips to maintain the rhythm of the music.

Collective groans rushed up, mirroring the rush of desire inside her. Could she actually come simply from being watched?

Since she frequently had trouble orgasming during masturbation, the thought of simply letting loose here, now, was a wild, heady one.

Alejandro slid his palms down her arms, still behind her, rocking to the beat of the music. Then he lifted her hands above her head until they encircled his neck.

Another chorus of groans erupted from the audience. A quick glance down proved the new pose raised her breasts, made her nipples stand straight out like an invitation.

“Don’t move,” Alejandro commanded. “Just feel. Just let go.”

She gave him a shaky nod, wondering, eager—aching—for whatever he planned next.

Shanna didn’t have to wait long. A moment later, his fingertips trailed down the side of her breast, across the flat of her abdomen, and disappeared right into her wet thong.

He gave her no time to absorb the fact he was fondling her in public—and that she loved it—before his fingers zeroed in on her clit. A brush, a rub. An amazing spark. Tingles danced through her sex, in her belly, down her thighs. The tension ratcheted up until she could barely breathe.

“You going to come for them?” Alejandro whispered in her ear.

She nodded erratically.

“You going to come for me?”

“Yes!” She bit her lip to keep from screaming as the ache deepened into something nearly unbearable.

With the music throbbing in her ears, Alejandro’s fingers shoving her past the breaking point, with nearly a dozen sets of hot male eyes and thoughts enveloped in only her, Shanna came apart.

Her hoarse cry erupted above the music. Her eyes closed, and pleasure washed over her, sharp, golden, unbelievable.

Nothing had ever been like that. Nothing had ever prepared her for the addicting rush of pure sensation lighting up her body. *Oh. My. God.*

Alejandro took her down slowly before extracting his hand from her panties. When he did, she looked down to find his fingers soaked with her cream.

He gave a satisfied chuckle in her ear. “This is how I want you. Dripping wet for me.”

She gasped as he anointed her nipples with her juice, then whirled her to face him. With long, languid swipes of his tongue, he licked her

taste away with a moan that reverberated deep inside her, stirring the ache back to life.

Shanna was shocked when he stepped away and took her hand in his. Suddenly, she was aware of being almost totally bare, while everyone around her was half-clothed or more. She *felt* naked. Vulnerable. Yet oddly strong. She glanced between Alejandro and the tense, shuffling audience.

“That’s it?”

He leaned in, looking to the world like a lover planting soft kisses just below her ear. “If you want it to be. We certainly gave the blackmailer something to film.”

Yes, but was it enough? And was that really the reason she was contemplating the words about to come out of her mouth?

“I want more.”

Alejandro pulled back enough to glance down into her face, his stare delving deep down into hers. “Are you sure?”

All she knew was that she wasn’t ready for tonight to end. She nodded.

Gently, he grabbed her wrist and placed her hand over his erection. Damn, he was hard. And very large. Oh, wow...

“I’m dying to feel you around me,” he whispered. “Your mouth, your pussy... Tell me what you want. How much of you will you give me?”

The real question was, could she actually hold anything back?

Shanna felt her way up his cock, to the catch of his slacks. She flipped it open, and he sucked in a harsh breath. Another groan from the audience spurred her on. With slow torture in mind, she eased down his zipper, taking her sweet time.

“If you have a ‘no’ on the tip of your tongue, say it now.”

Shanna leaned closer to his primal male heat, her mouth hovering above the hard nub of his brown nipple. She flicked a sultry gaze up to

his face, latching onto his burning stare. “Never heard the word.”

Brazen. When had she ever been that? Or aggressive or hungry or dying to feel a man’s animal heat burning her up? Never. For years, she’d poured her passion into dance. When she performed, she could express all her pent-up feelings through the movements of her body and the interaction with her partner. In real life...she’d never put a tenth of her passion into sex. Tonight—now—she wanted to change all that.

Alejandro had compelled her to.

She closed her mouth around his nipple and nibbled him with her teeth. He groaned long and loud. Holding in her satisfied smile, she pushed his pants down over his hips, sliding them down his thighs.

His sex sprang free, so hard it nearly lay against his belly. So long, it reached toward his navel. So thick, she wondered if she could actually get her hand all the way around it. So perfect, she knew that once he sank deep into her, she’d know the most amazing pleasure, not just of her life, but beyond her fantasies.

Shanna fell to her knees. She could hardly wait.

When his slacks reached his ankles, Alejandro was very glad he hadn’t bothered with anything underneath.

He was even more glad to see Shanna on her knees, eyeing his cock.

Alejandro took himself in hand and guided the weeping head closer to the red haven of her lush mouth.

He barely anchored his palm around the crown of her head when she opened wide to take inch after inch inside the stunning, wet heat as she cradled him on her tongue. *Dios mío!*

She sucked hard, and he felt her all over his cock. The head nudged the back of her throat. Her tongue swiped the sensitive underside of his cock, swirled around the swollen head.

Heaven; she was exactly that. Sleek. She was built for long, sweaty,

intense fucks—and to show off for the audience that would soon masturbate to the sounds of her orgasm.

About that, he had no doubt.

To his left, the audience watched. Moaned. A few guys were adjusting themselves. Others had given up and were already stroking their own cocks. A few women had wandered into the room, and he hoped they understood there would likely be a line a mile long to fuck them if they stayed.

Then Shanna drew back, her tongue laving the head of his cock, igniting a maelstrom of icy-hot tingles in his balls, down his spine. He stopped thinking completely. Too full of sensation now, he fucked her mouth slowly as she whimpered around him, her fingers locked on his thighs...slowly inching up to his ass.

She took him to the back of her throat again. Her nails dug into his skin, and the hint of pain pushed him closer to the edge of pleasure. Damn, he was going to come if she kept that up.

A part of him wanted to rush into the ache and explode on her tongue, down her throat, just for the joy of watching her take him, swallow him.

But he wanted to fuck her more. Way more.

Gritting his teeth, Alejandro pulled out of her mouth. She protested with an unintelligible groan, but he bent and grabbed her waist, lifting her until she stood. Whirling her away from him, to face the tall, chrome bed post, he forced her to bend toward it. Then with his fingers over hers, he clasped her hands around the pole.

“Hold on. You will need to,” he growled in her ear.

Bending quickly, he found the condom in his pocket and rolled it on, counting the torturous heartbeats until he could be balls deep in the sweet heat of her pussy. Seven seconds. That’s all it took until he gripped her hips and thrust inside her.

Scalding hot. Fist tight. *Madre de Dios*, he wasn't going to last. But by damn, she was going over the edge first.

Bracketing harsh fingers on her hips, he pushed his way inside. Shoved hard. It seemed to take forever. Her pussy was so swollen, and if he had to guess, she had not had sex in months, maybe longer.

That was going to change. No way would tonight be the last time he fucked her. No way would he wait weeks, or even days, to feel this again. She'd be lucky if he would wait hours.

The way he felt at the moment, he did not think such luck was on her side.

Jacked up on an overload of sensation and a burning need to come brewing at the base of his spine, Alejandro took a deep breath and plunged into her slowly. Hell, it wasn't helping his concentration to see guys jacking off to the sight of Shanna's naked body. Or one of the women in the room with her skirt around her waist and a man's cock buried inside her as she straddled his lap.

Tearing his gaze away, he focused on the long line of Shanna's naked spine, her mussed golden tresses spilling across her narrow back. He couldn't *not* touch her.

Lifting one hand off her hip, he reached around her body and toyed with her breasts, pinching one of her responsive nipples. She gasped, and Alejandro felt his primitive side take over. He sank his teeth into her neck. He squeezed her other nipple. Her body responded instinctively, tightening on his cock. She was close.

Thank God. So was he.

Gliding his palm down her belly, he buried his fingers into the sparse curls between her legs. *There*. Her clit stood up, hard and swollen, pleading for attention. He wasn't about to say no.

He swiped his fingers across her bundle of nerves. She moaned, tightened again. The friction of moving inside her was about to blow the

top off his head. But he kept moving.

“Do you see them watching you?” he snarled, on the edge. “Do you see them wanting you?”

“Yes,” she cried. “Yes.”

“I want you more.”

“Oh, God,” she gasped. “Alejandro!”

He strummed her clit once more. “You are going to come.”

Damn, he was trying so hard to hold it together, he was cross-eyed and slurring his words. But she understood.

“Yes!”

And then she did, clamping down on him, massaging his cock with the pulsing walls of her sex. His self-control didn’t stand a chance.

The sensation started deep in his gut and dropped with heavy need right into his balls. Pleasure climbed up, up, up his cock until he found himself shouting his throat raw in release.

He clutched her tight, pumping his way through utopia, with just one thought rattling through his fevered brain:

Mine.

Chapter Six

Tango music throbbed—kind of like Shanna’s head. The insistent beat of the dramatic music echoed off the hardwood floors and bounced off the mirrored walls of the studio. Her feet ached. She was hot and sweaty after three hours. And really annoyed. She and Kristoff were *not* having a productive practice.

And as much as she hated to admit it, Alejandro kept invading her thoughts every three seconds. How could she miss him so much after a mere two days? Why couldn’t she stop thinking about the way his hands felt on her, his unique scent that smelled like midnight and man, all wrapped in pure sex. Why hadn’t she stopped remembering the way he’d looked at her—as if she meant something—before she thrust her clothes on in a rush. Why could she still see hurt on Alejandro’s face when, a few minutes later, she abruptly darted out his door?

“I have never had to say this to you,” Kristoff broke into her thoughts, “but if we are going to win, you must concentrate. You know this, yes? The tango, it is strong and passionate, not lethargic and distracted.”

Damn Kristoff for stepping on her last nerve.

Shanna thrust her hands on her hips. “If I’m distracted, it’s because I’m still trying to figure out how we’re going to keep that DVD of yours out of the judges’ hands. And guess what? The fact that’s even a problem is not my fault.”

“I made a mistake. I have apologized. Either forgive me or find a new partner. Or have you been holding auditions behind my back?”

In the past, that comment alone would have been enough to push her over the edge. She would have told Kristoff to spend his time at Sneak

Peek and stop wasting hers. Then she would have begun auditioning partners the very same day. She didn't need this crap. Seriously.

So why didn't she walk away?

Kristoff was, in a word, amazing. A powerful dancer, determined, dedicated. He brought a glamour to their dancing she'd been lacking with Jonathan. The ladies loved him. He oozed charm even when making his matador face during the Paso Doble. He was spirited, and normally, he made practice fun. And yes, she wanted to find a partner with whom she could finish her career.

That wasn't why she didn't want to lose Kristoff, though. During their time together, he'd become...almost a friend. She tried very hard not to bring her emotions into her dance partnerships, but Shanna knew he hadn't intended to make a mess of things. She hated the thought of turning her back on him and proving his suspicions about her right.

In the past, it had never bothered her to be known as the Bitch of the Ballroom. Now, for some reason...it bothered her. A lot.

"Shut up and dance," she snapped.

"We can still win."

They could, if they didn't have the DVD hovering over their heads. But why bring it up again? It wouldn't change their situation. Still, she usually would have added the dig just to remind him exactly how he'd screwed up. Today, she didn't have petty in her, not when there was a bit of kicked puppy in his expression.

Damn it, had the handful of orgasms Alejandro had given her softened her that much? Shanna stiffened her spine. She couldn't afford to think with her heart—not if she wanted to win. And winning was all she had, even if it sounded so...empty. No, she was just tired or something. She'd worked too hard to lose focus now.

If she couldn't figure out who was behind this blackmail before the competition, she was going to have to cut Kristoff loose. Period.

“We can win if we get that DVD out of circulation. I’m working on that.”

“Is that why you went to Sneak Peek and performed a public scene with Alejandro Diaz?”

Shanna nearly choked. It hadn’t occurred to her that Kristoff would find out. In retrospect, she should have known better. He was a member there. Clearly, someone had told him.

He laughed. “I heard it was very hot and that you had a rapt audience.”

“I did what needed to be done.”

Yeah, she’d done whatever she had to in order to achieve that first orgasm, and the second. She’d barely resisted his offer of a third, which he’d promised to give her in his bed, just the two of them on soft satin sheets.

Bad girl!

“And you did it very well, I hear.”

Shanna rolled her eyes and turned away so he wouldn’t see her cheeks turning pink.

But she wasn’t fast enough.

“You’re blushing. You?” Astonishment laced Kristoff’s voice. “I have never seen you do such a thing.”

It was rare, and all because Alejandro had blown her away, and she wasn’t sure she had recovered yet. She had never craved sex or ached for any man. Until Alejandro. Last night, before she’d lost herself to the sensations of self-pleasure, she’d wondered exactly what Alejandro had done to her and why she was so fascinated by him.

How was it possible he’d gotten under her skin so quickly?

Pretending to walk across the studio nonchalantly, Shanna sought her bottle of water and took a deep drink, then turned toward Kristoff. “Apparently, our plan wasn’t good enough. We didn’t catch anyone in the

act of filming us, as we'd hoped. No one has sent me another blackmail disc or threatened me as a result of the whole thing." She shrugged. "I guess it was a waste of time."

But it didn't feel like a waste, given what he'd done next...

After the scene had ended, Alejandro had pressed a button to drop a partition between them and the audience. Shanna heard the watchers filing out, which filled her with a sense of both loss and relief.

Then Alejandro had turned her to face him and taken her into his arms. For a simple hug. He'd said not a word, asked for nothing else. Just held her, stroked her hair, for several moments. She hadn't had that in a long time. Years. Her father and brothers certainly never gave affection. And she had wanted it so bad.

She'd clenched her eyes shut, resisting an urge to crawl deeper into his embrace and cry for all the fear—and conversely, the bliss—soaking her body. In the aftermath of their sex, her emotions had tumbled, jumbled, whirled all around. Up was down, backward was forward; nothing made sense except holding onto him.

Somehow, she'd managed to restrain her tears, yank herself from his arms, and don her clothes.

Within minutes, Del emerged into the room with the unhappy news that security had been scouring the footage of the event and found no one in the audience with a camera of any kind.

After Del left, Shanna had lost it. Tears had fallen hard and fast. But silently. She didn't think Alejandro had noticed.

She'd been wrong.

He'd swooped her up into his arms. "Don't cry."

She'd been weak, and Alejandro had felt so strong when he'd settled her against his powerful body, in the shelter of his arms, and kissed his way down her face. He'd been so tender, as if he'd known exactly what she needed. He'd ripped right through her fragile barriers. She'd opened

up to his whispered words and gentle mouth...

Then he'd taken her hand and led her out of the main house, down a pathway hidden by tropical plants and climbing ivy, softly lit by the full moon, then pushed his way toward a luxurious cottage.

His private quarters.

Being alone with him when she was so emotionally raw...not smart. Downright scary, in fact. Even the idea made her heart race, her palms sweat.

Clutching her keys, Shanna had mumbled something about a fictitious early-morning practice and fled.

The pain etched on Alejandro's face haunted her, but it was done. They were done. Now, she needed to get her mind off of the repeated messages he'd left since and focus on dancing. She had the biggest competition of her career to prepare for. He had a business to run. Why he continued to pursue her, she had no idea. They had nothing in common.

Except great sex.

"Earth to Shanna," Kristoff joked. "Are you with me?"

"Yes. Sorry. I have a headache." That wasn't a lie actually...just not the whole truth.

"Sorry. What should we do next about...the problem? Perhaps you should seek out a new partner."

He looked so sad at the prospect. Something in her chest twinged, and she shoved it aside.

"We don't have time to talk about this now. You have to be at work in two hours, and I have to meet with the costumer shortly. Let's focus on today."

"It would not hurt you to talk to me. Do you want to replace me? Do you want to talk about what happened at Sneak Peek?"

As her brothers would say, oh, hell no. "Talking will not win us any

trophies. From the top.”

Using the remote control, she started the music again and got into position. Sighing, Kristoff assumed his pose and they danced for another grueling half hour.

Until the door to the studio swung open unexpectedly.

Alejandro strolled into the studio looking dark and yummy and like a man with an agenda in mind—that started with getting her out of her clothes.

Shanna sucked in a breath. “What are you doing here?”

“I assume your phone is broken, since you have not returned my calls.” He arched a brow. “So I decided to find you.”

“We’re practicing.”

The protest was automatic. His presence here, so unexpected, raised her defenses. Thank God. She needed those barriers against him. Another hour with the man, feeling as weak as she had while he touched her, and she’d collapse against him and... *Shiver*. She’d admit that she cared. Be vulnerable to him.

Not on her agenda. In fact, it was totally unacceptable.

“You will win because we will discover exactly who has been blackmailing you,” Alejandro vowed.

“The security tapes turned up nothing, you said.”

“That is true. And I assume the blackmailer has not contacted you, or you would have let me know.”

“Yes, I would have.” And she would, no matter how much talking to him would have tempted her to do more...much like he was doing now. “But nothing so far. So we have nothing else to say.”

Alejandro looked like he could see right through her bluster and wasn’t put off in the least. Damn him! Why couldn’t he cringe, like most people?

“How did you find out when and where we were practicing?” she

demanded.

With a sweep of his hand, Alejandro outted Kristoff as the culprit.

She whirled on her partner angrily. "This is practice time, not social hour. What the hell were you thinking?"

"That if I did not tell him how to find you, he would end my privileges at Sneak Peek."

Shanna gritted her teeth. Fabulous. Yet another shining example of a man thinking with his penis. Apparently, it had never occurred to him—or he didn't care—that she had not wished for Alejandro to find her.

"I have been thinking," Kristoff said, "since your first effort to draw out the blackmailer did not solve the problem, you should try again."

"Try again?" Her jaw dropped.

Kristoff nodded. "Stage another public scene. The word about it is out now. People in the community are buzzing about you two. If you give advance warning, I believe the person responsible will come."

Shanna considered Kristoff's words with dread—and excitement. More of Alejandro's touches, his wild sort of lovemaking... So very tempting. She hadn't just liked what they'd done together; she had basked in it. And had been aching for more since.

No. More of Alejandro would only addict her further to the man. And while she didn't know him well, she doubted he would settle for a woman whose schedule was as demanding as hers. Someone who spent nearly every day dancing in very suggestive ways with another man. And Alejandro would expect a great deal emotionally of the woman he called his—certainly more than she was comfortable giving. He had to see her limitations.

So why was Alejandro pursuing her?

As much as she'd like to give in to her fears and dismiss Alejandro, what Kristoff said made sense. Maybe the blackmailer had not acted last time because he hadn't known about the scene. She and Alejandro had

done nothing to spread the word beforehand. The audience who had witnessed her coming apart in his arms had all been there purely by chance.

"I agree," Alejandro said. "I want to catch this bastard. But the choice is Shanna's."

She bit her lip. With the competition in three days, her options were running thin. And throwing away more than fifteen years of training, sweating and suffering to avoid having sex with Alejandro seemed beyond stupid, even if something in her gut was telling her to run like hell.

Before she could overrule logic, Shanna nodded. "I'll be there tonight."

Alejandro shook his head. "Tomorrow night. Give me time to spread the suggestion that there may be a repeat performance, just in case the scum does not have his ear to the ground, so to speak."

Shanna released the breath she didn't realize she'd been holding. She wanted desperately to be with him. And, at the same time, she didn't. It was so unlike her to be indecisive and conflicted, damn it. She had to regain balance, regain control.

"Fine," she announced. "I will be there at eight. We'll commence at eight-thirty. I need to be home by ten."

Turning away with a dismissive whirl, she reached for the remote control, intent on starting the music, resuming practice...and ignoring Alejandro before he noticed her trembling and made her completely insane with those hungry stares of his.

Instead, he grabbed her arm and turned her to face him. "You will be there at eight-thirty. We will commence at nine. If it takes a whole night of public performances, you will stay until we know who and what we are dealing with."

She jerked from his grasp. "Don't presume to tell me what to do."

"Shanna, can you really afford to be impractical and put on your

bitch armor with me?”

No.

“I know that is not you, and I seek only to help you,” he murmured.

Still, she raised her chin, refusing to back down. “Whatever. If it amuses you to play the caveman—”

“No,” he leaned into her and whispered for her ears only, “but it amuses me to see you hide from me and the absolute pleasure you know I am going to give you when I have you naked and under me again.”

Hours later, Shanna had showered, changed, and run errands. Life was normal...and yet she was still both seething and uncertain about Alejandro’s comments. Arrogant comments. How could the man manage to irritate and arouse her in a single sentence? For that matter, why did he always incite conflict inside her?

Argh! She needed to get him out of her mind.

Her doorbell rang. Oh, hell. She wasn’t expecting anyone. Probably someone trying to sell her something. Maybe Girl Scout cookies. One of the neighbor girls had been selling them yesterday, and the thought of indulging in mindless sugar perked her up.

Shanna opened the door.

Someone stood on the other side, all right. It sure wasn’t a Girl Scout.

“Alejandro.” His name slipped out as a whisper.

“Good evening, *querida*.”

When he called her that, she melted. Every time. “Don’t call me that.”

“Why does it bother you that I call you darling?”

“I am not your darling. We are working together to solve a common problem.”

“Hmm. We are. But I fail to see how that must be the end of it.”

Shanna opened her mouth to set him straight, but Alejandro cut her off. “I am sure you will find some reason, but for now, let’s not argue. I came to talk to you.”

With narrowed eyes, she tried to gauge his sincerity. “Talk?”

“Nothing more.”

She didn’t quite believe him, but he had roused her curiosity. What could he possibly want to talk about with her?

“Come in.” She stepped back to admit him.

Alejandro shook his head and held out his hand. “Come with me.”

“Where?”

“It’s a surprise.”

“Not the club,” she warned him.

“Not the club.”

Now, against her better judgment, she was *really* curious.

Sliding into the sandals she kept by the door, she grabbed her purse and keys off the nearby table. “Will it take long?”

“Hot date tonight?”

His words mocked her. As if he knew that she could hardly wrap her mind around her interest in him, much less imagine being attracted to anyone else right now.

“With Dreamland, yes. I’m tired.”

“And I am here to cheer you up.” He held out his hand to her again.

This time she took it and let herself out the door. “Where are we going?”

“The nature of a surprise is that you should be surprised.”

“You won’t tell me?”

He shook his head, sending her a dazzling, unrepentant smile as they walked toward the condo complex’s parking lot.

“You know that pisses me off.”

"I know you are used to being in control and making all the decisions. A little relaxation will be good for you."

People had been saying that to her for years. Generally, she ignored them.

"That's your opinion."

"You cannot change it."

"Okay, but you're wrong."

"How about humoring me, then? Pretend."

She rolled her eyes. "Whatever."

Alejandro sliced her a little smile of victory, but wisely said nothing more.

When they reached the parking lot, he lifted his key fob and pressed a button. A red, late-model Mercedes convertible beeped and flashed its lights a few feet away.

Business at the club must be *very* good to afford the old place that housed their business and four-wheeled trinkets like this.

He assisted her into the car, then rounded the car to the driver's side, and eased in. "My father was a wealthy man."

"What?"

"I saw the way you looked at my car. I believe you had similar thoughts about the club. I am answering your unspoken question. My father was a wealthy man, and he left me his fortune."

"Not your mother?"

He shrugged and started the car. "I am the only part of him my mother will have anything to do with."

"They divorced?"

"In the Catholic church, no. They separated when I was twelve." He backed out of the parking space and steered into the gorgeous summer night.

"Why are you telling me this?"

“You cannot like someone you do not know.”

He wanted her to like him?

“My father was a philandering bastard, if you wished to know why they split up. I remember my mother’s tears many nights when my father did not come home. They became my tears, too. He acted as if his affairs were both common practice and acceptable. Perhaps that was so in their generation... Perhaps it was accepted in his native Argentina...”

Alejandro was sharing something so shockingly private with her. Why?

“I do not agree,” he stated. “If you speak vows and make a commitment, it should be solid. You should mean those words.”

“True.” Was he trying to tell her he’d be faithful? Why did he think it mattered to her?

The fact he wanted to make his opinion known unnerved her. But, being honest, it also thrilled her treacherous soft side. Having a man like Alejandro in her life full time would be wonderful...but distracting. Indulging was *not* an option. Their search for this blackmailing bastard and her need to win the California Dance Star consumed her every thought and waking moment. Her commitment was to winning. Romance would just interfere.

“Take my friendship with Del,” he went on. “Del and I met in college. We quickly became friends—both outcasts to some degree, being foreign-exchange students with somewhat poor English here in Los Angeles. We discovered we shared a lot of similar interests and passions.

“So after graduation, we decided to put our degrees to work on something mutually satisfying. Del used his marketing degree and social skills to spread word of the club and promote it all around. I used my finance degree to secure the funding, run the back end, invest our profits. We operate in the black, and each year is more profitable than the last. But two years ago, I had the opportunity to sell out my half for

triple the amount I paid to get in.” He shrugged. “Long ago, I promised Del I would stay in until we were both ready for a change. I declined the opportunity.”

“That cost you a lot of money, I’m sure.”

“Losing the friendship would have cost me more.”

“You can afford to say that; you have your father’s money.”

“Not anymore. I put it in a trust for my mother. She thinks I set it up with my money. But the bastard owed her more than he could ever repay. I thought this was fitting.”

Shanna stared at Alejandro as if seeing him for the first time. In a way, she was. It was hard not to like him when he was protecting his mother and defending his friendships.

A moment later, they stopped in front of a local ice cream shop, quaint and family-owned. In a few hours, after dinner, this place would be crawling with families. But during the dinner hour, it was nearly empty.

“Ice cream?”

“I assume you like it.”

“I haven’t eaten dinner yet. I was planning to cook before you came over...”

He climbed out of the car and helped her out. “Who needs dinner when there is ice cream?”

“Who doesn’t need protein and nutrients? Ice cream isn’t a dinner food.”

Alejandro slipped an arm around her, and Shanna tried not to melt against the tempting heat of his body. Why did he have to be so damn sexy?

“I will not tell your mother if you won’t,” he teased.

“My mother died when I was four.”

She found herself choking out the words. She shouldn’t have opened

her mouth; it was only making her more vulnerable to him. But holding the truth after he'd confessed all about his parents seemed petty.

"I am sorry."

She hung her head. "I don't remember her. I have this...impression of what her laugh was like. I don't even know if it's accurate."

He squeezed her against his side as they approached the counter. "So your father raised you?"

"Along with my brothers. They are all athletes."

"Which is why you are so driven to win." It was a statement, not a question.

"Second place is nothing more than first loser. It's the family motto."

"Ah, this explains your drive to win." He turned to the teenager behind the counter. "A scoop of chocolate peanut butter and...raspberry amaretto. Shanna?"

"None for me. I have to fit into my costume—"

"She will have the same."

"I will not!"

"Then pick your favorite flavors."

"You're going to force me to eat ice cream?"

"I am going to help you take a moment away from ambition and enjoy life."

When was the last time she'd done that? Shanna thought back through the weeks, which became months...and quickly turned into years. The realization stunned her.

She hesitated, then caved in. It was ice cream, not a commitment. Tomorrow, she had a grueling practice scheduled. She'd work the calories off.

"Chocolate chip cookie dough and French vanilla."

Alejandro paid as other teenagers behind the counter assembled their cones. In moments, they were licking on ice cream as the sun dropped

closer to the horizon, with the California breeze stirring all around them.

After the first taste, Shanna moaned. "This is amazing."

He smiled. "I discovered this place a few years ago. It's part of my weekly ritual."

"Where do you put it?" She eyed his hard body, absolutely no stranger to his rippled abs.

"I make up for it with plenty of cardio and carrots the rest of the week. But life is meant to be lived, no?"

Had she ever really thought about it in that context? "I suppose so."

"You have been a very single-minded woman for many years. Dance has been your focus, your ambition."

"And my passion."

"No one watching you dance would deny that. You are very talented. You know this, right?"

She supposed. Yes, she could dance. When she watched footage of competition, she knew she held her own in a room full of talented dancers. For the past few years, she even believed she began to shine a bit brighter than them, because she practiced harder and wanted it more.

"I'm pleased with my performances."

"This ambition, does it make you happy?"

Happy? An odd question. She didn't enjoy being frustrated by the champion status she had not achieved yet. But she *would* be a champion. Once the trophy was in her hands, life would be very sweet, and the sacrifices she'd made along the way would have been worth it.

All she had to do was get dangerously close to the most tempting man she'd ever met in order to catch her blackmailer.

Still, his question unsettled her. She'd never thought of her life in a happy/unhappy context. It just was. Of course, questioning her life was too easy to do when she had a man like Alejandro in front of her,

reminding her of everything she'd been missing.

"Why shouldn't it?" she asked.

"The way that ice cream cone is dripping and the fact I've rarely seen you smile, I suspect you have spent so much time dancing, you are out of practice when it comes to living."

Dancing was life for her. So what if she didn't eat a lot of ice cream?
"What are you, Dr. Phil?"

"Just a man who would like to see you happy." He brushed tender fingertips across her cheek. "What is the worst thing that could happen if you do not win Saturday night? Or ever?"

Immediately, she wanted to reject the thought. But it was a fair question, one she'd asked herself during long nights when aching muscles, nagging injuries and loneliness had kept her awake.

"I don't know." She shook her head. "I can't let that happen. Failure is not an option."

"You cannot control what will happen."

Yeah, that's what worried her.

"So what happens if you never win?"

She hated to even think the answer. But to speak it seemed unbearably personal, and yet Alejandro had poured out a part of his soul to her. He had not mocked her when she'd spoken of her mother, or the rest of the family, or the origins of her ambitions. She had no reason to hide from him...except that he kept slipping behind her emotional barriers and it scared the hell out of her.

Why couldn't she put distance between them? Why did she even care about his feelings? Normally, she had no problem with pushing people away, but Alejandro was...different.

"I would feel like a failure," she whispered.

"You would consider yourself a failure, even after everything you have achieved?"

"Probably. I know my family would think I'm a failure. I have one brother who has been the top decathlete in the world. One has played in the Super Bowl. My father has two gold medals. I can't compete."

"Who asked you to?"

"You'd have to understand my family. For years, my brothers have endlessly tormented me."

He shrugged. "The nature of men and their sisters. Their way of showing affection is to harass you. More manly that way."

It wasn't that simple, and she didn't know how to explain it. "Family aside, I couldn't give up dancing. I *want* to win, more than anything."

"I would not suggest you give up dance. I merely think you should take the floor to indulge your joy of dance, not to pursue a trophy. The journey is the treasure, not the prize at the end."

"Now you're a philosopher?"

Alejandro shook his head and placed a soft kiss against her ice-cream cold lips. "Just a man who wants to see you smile. Will you?"

Shanna looked at Alejandro. He was so comfortable with himself. Somehow wiser than a man who ran a sex club should be. He made everything seem so easy. Even personal discussions, which she usually downright loathed, felt freakishly natural. No pressure. No scolding or telling her how to do things. No taunting her about her failures. Just a steady voice, a tender touch, with lots of insight.

Lovely...but none of that would put a trophy in her hand.

Shanna wrapped her fingers around his and smiled. "There. Are you happy?"

"I have seen more genuine smiles at a beauty pageant."

Sighing, Shanna sat back and licked at her cone. "Why does it matter to you if I'm happy or not?"

Alejandro paused, seeming to weigh his words. "You matter. I would hate to see you sacrifice everything for something that may never

happen. I suspect you gave up high school frivolity, lasting friendships, and romance for a hunk of metal and a title.”

He was right...and wrong. Being a champion was everything to her.

“This is why I don’t date.” She stood and glared down at him. “I don’t expect you to understand. No one does.”

He stood and met her glare. “You have ended more than one dance partnership to pursue winning over friendship. What has that gotten you except a bad reputation? Those partners invested in you, cared about you. You cast them aside.”

“I had to! One was so injured, it was clear he was never coming back.”

“Might he have tried harder to recover if he had a reason to and a partner waiting for him?”

Guilt sliced through her. Maybe. Likely not...but maybe. Curt had been a hard worker and possessed a drive to win. Last she’d heard, he was selling insurance.

“Martin dropped me in competition. I could not risk that happening again. I’d lost faith in his ability, and a couple without trust does not function well.”

“The drop must have been painful, and I understand why you would not want an incapable partner. As you say, trust is essential. You spent nearly two years together, yet you never gave him a chance to rebuild it between you.”

She rolled her eyes. “What are you, my dance pimp? And before you start in on Jonathan, that decision was mutual. He wanted to get married more than he wanted to dance.”

Surprise flashed across his dark face. “Really? My mother will be happy to hear that. She hates you because you ran off her favorite.”

Shanna sat again. “Ugh! Everyone thinks that. We...just knew it was time to move on, both of us.”

Speculation crossed Ali's face, but he didn't ask if she'd slept with Jonathan. For that, she was grateful. "And now, you have issues with Kristoff. What will you do if we cannot find our blackmailer in time?"

Good question. She'd been putting the decision off about her partnership with Kristoff. This was her year to win; she couldn't imagine forfeiting. But... "If we don't succeed in fishing this blackmailer out, I won't have a choice. I like Kristoff. He's talented and has a great work ethic—"

"But you have no problem leaving him behind?"

"It's business."

"And you will not let anything or anyone stand in your way, will you?"

His soft question nearly crushed her with guilt. She shoved the feeling aside. Giving up over half her life and the chance to finally reach her dreams? "No."

Chapter Seven

Alejandro paced in the security room, watching the video feed from Sneak Peek's front door. He checked his watch. Eight-forty five. People were beginning to stream in, in greater numbers than usual for this time of night on a Thursday.

The word about his scene with Shanna was out. He and Del had seen to it personally, not using names, of course...but promising it would be special.

If Shanna showed up. And he wasn't sure; she was fifteen minutes late. Where the hell was she?

"You're going to wear out the carpet," Del teased.

Alejandro shot him a dark glare. "She's not coming."

"She'll be here. You said yourself the woman is prickly and contrary for the purpose of needling you. You admitted that she likes to control her situation, so it can't have been easy on her when you told her when to show up, what to wear...and nothing about what she could expect."

All of that was true, yet he'd had a larger purpose than being a controlling jackass. "I want Shanna to lean on me. I want her to know that she can trust me."

He wanted her to see what it felt like for someone to stand by her, even if she wasn't winning.

"You can't force her to figure that out."

"Normally, I would not try, but with Shanna..." He sighed and stared at the video monitors that showed no sign of her arrival. "If I cannot find some way now to encourage her to latch on to me, she will slip through my fingers."

Del shrugged. "Why does it matter? I mean, I agree that she will be helpful in finding the blackmailer, but we can flush out the asshole without her."

"She is not just business to me; she's personal."

"How personal?"

Interpretation: How deep were his feelings? There was the question that had been plaguing him all day. Shanna meant more to him than catching a scumbag blackmailer, more than an amazing lay, more than an intriguing woman. Analyzing how it had happened and why was pointless. It was what it was, and Alejandro always trusted his gut.

"I think I am in love."

"That was fast. Less than a week." Del arched a dark brow.

"More time will not change what I feel, except to make it deeper." He sighed, knowing he spoke the truth, even as he said the words. "She is strong and vulnerable, smart, adorably stubborn and in utter need of someone to love. How can I resist?" He flashed Del a self-deprecating smile.

"How, indeed? If you intend to resist, get your poker face on fast. She's here."

Alejandro whipped his gaze up to the bank of monitors and smiled.

"Aww. She's wearing a damn trench coat," Del groused.

Laughter bubbled up inside Alejandro. "Of course she is." Her little rebellion. "But I will bet she wore what I sent her underneath."

"I can't wait for this." Del rubbed his hands together.

With blood beating a burning path in his veins, Alejandro burst out of the security office and stalked toward the front door. Del followed close behind.

Alejandro intercepted Shanna two seconds after she walked in. "Querida, are you all right?"

As Shanna strode in, she lifted her lashes and sent him a skittish

glance. "Fine. Why wouldn't I be?"

Her guarded tone set off alarm bells. So she was trying to push her armor back in place, put distance between them. Damn it. Perhaps he had pushed her too hard last night...or made her feel too guilty.

"When you did not arrive at eight-thirty, I grew concerned."

"No need."

He reached up to help her with her coat. She jerked away. "Don't. Just wait until..."

"We are on stage and I'm supposed to fuck you?"

She swallowed and sent him a shaky nod that seared his guts with panic. After tonight, she was going to turn around and walk out of his life—unless he thought fast.

"Is something wrong?" He gentled his expression.

She looked away. "This is business. You're doing what you need to do. So am I."

"Shanna, this is not merely a business dealing or 'just sex' to me. I want it to be more than that for you, too."

She shot him a deer-in-the-headlights stare. "Until Saturday, I have to focus on fixing my problem. You want me to dance for the joy of it, not for the trophy. I can't be joyful if I already know before I dance a step that I won't win."

Alejandro sighed. He'd hoped he'd gotten through to her during their ice cream date, at least in some small way. But he'd been deluding himself. She was determined to shut him out and focus on nothing but the prize.

How the hell could he persuade her to stay with him after tonight, when she would only view him as a distraction, a speed bump slowing her race to winning?

"Not to interrupt, kids," Del said, "But you need to make your way back to the room so you can get started. Showtime is in eight minutes."

Resisting the urge to rake a hand through his hair, Alejandro gnashed his teeth. He needed a minute to collect a few props and his thoughts.

“Can you show her to the room?” he asked his business partner. “I’ll be there in five.”

Alejandro didn’t wait for the answer. He brushed past them, into the security corridor, and let the door slam behind him. Dread and anger crashed into the bottom of his stomach. Unless he acted fast, this could well be his last chance with this woman. He had three minutes to figure out how to soften her heart toward him, convince her he wasn’t just out to save his business or get laid. Convince her they could be more than partners beyond tonight.

Miracle, anyone?

Del escorted Shanna through the club. She was aware of people all around her swaying and grinding to the jazzy/bluesy music. But her thoughts... Alejandro had the lock on those.

Last night and today, he’d acted like he cared. Why? She’d told him over and over this was business.

Yeah, did it feel like business when he was deep inside you, making you scream? Or when he fed you ice cream and did his best to understand you, to help you like a friend?

The man had her so confused. What should have been nothing more than a temporary arrangement for the sake of ferreting out a mutual enemy—and okay, maybe a little mutual pleasure—had suddenly become very tangled. In the space of a few days, she’d come to think of Alejandro as a fixture in her life. The thought of that fixture being removed hurt.

Dangerous. How could she focus on the competition with everything hanging over her head if she had to add new and scary emotions for Alejandro to the mix?

“Follow me,” Del said.

They crossed the dance floor and edged around a couple panting heatedly and letting their fingers do the walking. Del escorted Shanna into a long hallway. At the end, he held a door open.

One peek inside, and she sucked in a surprised gasp. This was out of a fantasy! Plush, like a pasha’s palace. Rust, gold, bronze, with accents of black and crème. An enormous bed. Pillows everywhere.

The audience would be bigger in this room. And closer. The opportunity for someone to bring in a camera was huge.

“We’ve got the security angles covered,” Del assured her before she even opened her mouth. “There are cameras all over this place. We’ve spent all day rigging it up. If someone tries to film you here, we’ll nail him.”

He eased closer. Shanna tensed. Truth be told, the man made her nervous. He was dark like Alejandro. Both men had a wide streak of bad boy. Alejandro was like a fire, hot and sometimes unpredictable, never quite tamed. But Del...he could be a very cool customer. He’d do everything on his terms, in his time, his way. And show zero emotion doing it.

Now, he gave off the vibes of a predator. Shanna swallowed and raised her chin as he sauntered closer.

“Can I take your coat?”

Feeling too vulnerable for her comfort, she unbelted the coat and stripped it off. The red corset underneath and the matching black thong, garters and stockings went way beyond suggestive. Being naked would make her feel more clothed.

Del whistled, looking her up and down, lingering on her breasts. “You look hot. Damn hot.”

She cleared her throat. His hungry gaze eating her up when she’d last been on stage with Alejandro had turned her on. Being alone with

him, having him this close, while he wore that ravenous expression...it was uncomfortable.

She shrugged to pass it off as casual. "A costume like any other."

"You and Ali got a thing going?"

Shanna looked up at him in shock. When this was over, it was unlikely they'd continue to see each other. They were from different worlds. Whatever they might have had would be another casualty of her ambition. It shouldn't bother her.

But something wretched and heavy that felt an awful lot like regret smothered her. Pain followed, but she shoved it down.

"No," she finally murmured.

Flashing her a hot smile, Del leaned in, invaded her personal space. "That's good news. Very good."

The rapacious way he watched her gave her major pause.

"When you and Ali are done here...maybe you and I could hook up?" He dragged a fingertip down her arm, leaving a scream of tingles behind.

Was he serious? Del imagined that, after having sex with his friend and business partner, she was just going to throw Alejandro over and hop in his bed instead? Not likely. "Get your hand off me."

"Why?" Del shrugged. "You said yourself that you and Ali don't have a thing going. You're a gorgeous woman. I've seen you in action, and you make me hard. I'll treat you right, make you scream. I hear you're good at switching partners. What do you say?"

He reached around her and slung his hand low on her hip, almost on her ass.

Fury erupted in Shanna's gut. She grabbed his wrist, squeezed his pressure point until he winced, then shoved his hand away from her backside.

"What the hell are you thinking? No, the better question is, which part of your body is doing the thinking for you. I'm pretty sure I know the

answer.” She cut a derisive glare in the vicinity of his crotch, then shot a quick glance to the door. Where was Ali?

“What’s the problem, baby?” He moved in closer again.

Her temper flared. *Dirt bag!*

She lifted her foot and dug her stiletto into his toes. He swore, and she smiled. “I’m supposed to have sex with your friend in less than five minutes.”

His voice was strained as he reached down to cradle his injured toe. “You don’t get sentimental about your partners. And you said you weren’t involved with Ali. If that’s the case, why shouldn’t I ask a gorgeous woman if she wants to hook up?”

Why, indeed? Del was attractive physically. She didn’t think he’d be demanding of her time, or try to get into her head and question her commitment to winning. Del would never take her out for ice cream and try to be her friend. He didn’t rip past the barriers around her heart with just a touch. He wouldn’t press her for more than sex.

But if she disliked Alejandro for all those things, why wasn’t she eager to get down with his sinfully good-looking friend?

“Alejandro is your business partner and best friend.”

“Yeah, but if you’re not into him, that makes you fair game. C’mon.”

Shanna was still processing Del’s words when he grabbed her and crushed her body against his. His mouth swooped down, capturing hers. At the first swipe of his tongue against hers, she knew nothing but panic.

And pure rage.

Twisting until she could reposition her legs, she delivered a hard knee to his balls. He backed away instantly, clutching himself.

“What is your problem?”

“I’ll tell you exactly what I’ve told Alejandro: I have the most important competition of my career to focus on. I intend to win, and anything else is just a distraction I don’t need.”

“And that’s your only reason?”

Alejandro shoved the stage door open. It collided with the wall, echoing across the stage, as he strode inside. He had the distinct impression he’d interrupted something.

In the middle, Shanna stood wearing the corset, garters and thong he’d sent her—and looking every bit as drop-dead sexy as he’d known she would. Though his dick was already hard at the thought of being inside her, this outfit added to the red blood cell count below his waist.

The righteous anger on her face made him pause. Especially when he saw Del two feet away, hunched over, clutching his balls and glaring at her.

What the hell?

“She’s got a mean knee.”

“He’s got the disposition of a man ho.”

Anger crashed into Alejandro, as if he’d been driving a hundred miles an hour straight into a brick wall. “You made a move on her?”

“Yes!” Shanna shouted.

Del tried to stand up straight. “You said she had a habit of switching dance partners. I wondered if that extended to sex. She swore you two had nothing going. If that’s true, why the hell did she kick me?”

Then his friend did something bizarre. He winked.

Alejandro frowned...until everything fell into place. Del had been testing her. If Shanna didn’t care a thing about him, Alejandro knew she would have gone for Del. Women did—in droves. Shanna had been turned on by him watching her just days ago. Why not follow through?

He had this feeling that the only reason Shanna had kneed his pal was because she had more feelings than she wanted to admit—and not

for Del.

Suddenly, Alejandro resisted the urge to smile. Hope curled in his belly, warmed his heart, made his dick even stiffer. He'd test his theory tonight.

"We have no time to argue. Let's get this party started. Del, let the crowd in. Security tells me they are lined up down the hallway. Shanna, turn around and put your hands behind your back."

With an okay signal, Del turned away and headed for the door.

No surprise, Shanna hesitated. She'd assumed he would be pissed at Del's pass. She'd assumed Alejandro would be possessive. If he hadn't known Del for years and known how his friend's mind worked, he would have been.

No, Alejandro was just going to enjoy the fireworks before he got to the bottom of whatever was in her heart. Del was just helping him along.

"Is there a problem?" he asked. "People will be filing in within seconds. We should be in position."

"Fine." She presented him with her back.

What a luscious view! Feminine shoulders tapered down into a narrow, red-corseted back. The black thong bisected a firm, creamy ass he'd fantasized about fucking. Those garters and black thigh-high stockings hugging the toned curves of her legs damn near had him on his knees.

And if he played his cards right, she would be all his.

Forcing his stare back to her wrists crossed at the small of her back, Alejandro grabbed them. With a snap of his wrist and two quick clicks, he had imprisoned her in handcuffs.

She whirled on him, murder in her eyes. "What the hell are you doing? Unlatch these! I didn't sign up for this. We didn't discuss—"

Alejandro cut off her tirade by covering her mouth with his. She struggled...for a moment. Then he swept inside her mouth, tunneled his

hands in her hair, and kissed her as if his very life depended on it.

She melted.

With a gentle nip and a soothing kiss to cover the sting, he pulled back and whispered, “We have an audience.”

Releasing her, Alejandro walked a half-circle around her and cozied up to her back, letting her feel the heat of his body and his thick erection. She gasped.

The curve of her neck beckoned, and he trailed his lips up the graceful curve and soft skin.

Briefly, he opened his eyes and discovered at least twenty-five people in the room—and more filing in. Perfect. Maybe they’d catch the asshole tonight.

Then he put everything out of his mind except Shanna.

His hands started at her shoulders, but quickly developed a mind of their own. Down they plunged, right over the curves of her breasts pushed up by the tight corset. But having those nipples covered wasn’t going to do.

In a few seconds, Alejandro brushed through the little buttons holding the garment together. It fell to the stage in a soft wisp of fabric.

Men groaned in the audience as he bared Shanna’s breasts. She tensed. Alejandro could feel her shivering. Cold? He didn’t think so. Nerves? Maybe. Excitement. Definitely. He could smell the beginnings of her arousal.

Standing behind her, he reached around and cupped her breasts in his hands, squeezing her nipples between his thumbs and fingers. Against him, she writhed, wriggling her ass against his cock. Hot shivers crashed through his bloodstream.

He was about to go out of his mind.

With a yank, he pulled the sheer thong from her body. Another collective groan rang from the audience. Guys shifted weight from one

foot to another, adjusted themselves in their pants, sat forward in their chairs. Shanna began to pant.

Alejandro dragged his palms down her abdomen. He itched to feel the silk of her pussy, see just how wet she was.

Moments later, he had his answer. Hot damn! Wet, welcoming, lush. She might be able to lie about her feelings for him, but her body couldn't.

Now was the perfect time to start testing his theory...

A quick point at Del brought his friend to the stage. Shanna tensed again. This time, he didn't think it was due to excitement.

Before she could say a word, he whispered, "I want to watch your breasts be sucked. Del will help us out."

"No," she whimpered.

"You change partners all the time. Why does it matter?"

Del approached her and pressed his body close to Shanna's. Alejandro didn't say a word, just lifted her breasts up to him.

The smile Del sent her said that he was ready for scorching hot sex, just before he bent to her.

"It just matters," she whispered. "Please no."

Lifting dark eyes to Ali, Del waited for a cue.

Alejandro had what he wanted for now. He shook his head.

With a wry grin, Del contented himself by placing a chaste kiss on the curve of her breast. But to show he wasn't going to be dismissed, he took a seat on a nearby pillow and set a scorching stare her way.

In truth, Alejandro knew they had to play along, just in case their blackmailer was in the room. But he wanted nothing more than to get Shanna alone. *Soon*, he promised himself.

Turning her to face him, Alejandro watched her stage smile collapse. She looked at him with a mixture of hurt, anger and relief. Apparently, swapping partners did matter to her. And he sensed that the sooner he got her to admit that about dance, the sooner she'd settle into having one

man in her life.

Impatient to touch her, Alejandro tore down the zipper of his leather pants and freed his stiff cock. "Suck me."

He kicked a pillow under her knees. Shanna hesitated, then sank down, her gaze on him the whole way, eyes bright with arousal and uncertainty. Then she bent her head and consumed him.

Oh, hell. Her mouth was a silken oven, soft and scorching and robbing him of breath. She damn sure knew what to do with that tongue of hers, caressing the length of his staff, curling it around the head. She sucked deep and hard, all the way to the back of her throat.

His heartbeat rattled in his chest. His ears buzzed with the excitement. Faintly, he was aware of male groans and a "fuck, yeah," from the audience. But focusing beyond Shanna's hot mouth was growing impossible.

As wonderful as it was, it had to stop. They had a show to put on for these guests—and a potential blackmailer. A blow job was all well and good but not blackmail-worthy, compared to Kristoff's show.

With a groan of regret, Alejandro cupped her cheeks and lifted her mouth from his cock. Then he helped her to her feet. In four steps, he had her bent over the huge, cushioned bed, her breasts pressed to the silk comforter. A few seconds later, he was sheathed and deep inside her.

She gripped him like no one ever had, like every contour had been formed just to clench around him. Tight.

He seized her hips and tunneled deeper. Then set a ruthless pace.

She cried out. The sight of her all spread out under him, her hands still cuffed at the small of her back, her pussy taking every inch he had...hell, he wasn't going to last long. And he didn't want to go off alone.

"I ache to play with your clit and feel you orgasm around me..." He hadn't even finished the sentence before he slid a pair of determined fingers right over the button of her nerves.

With his other hand, he gripped one of her hips. He thrust inside her again and again, dragging the head of his cock right over that sensitive spot that had her muscles tensing, shaking.

In moments, a low, feminine groan split the air. Almost there...

"Come for me," he demanded. "Come!"

With another brush and press of his fingers over her clit, she screamed. Around them, the audience groaned. Several stroked their own cocks...even Del.

Then the rippling walls of her sex contracted, tightened, gripping and coaxing him, blotting out all other thoughts. Alejandro closed his eyes and focused on her. He shouted through clenched teeth as he followed her into ecstasy.

More than one groan of satisfaction split the air within moments. Alejandro didn't care. All he knew was that underneath him was the woman he would not let go of. They had seen to business.

Now it was time for the real pleasure—and hopefully, the future—to begin.

Chapter Eight

A pleasure cloud. Heavy limbs, light head. A gentle throb between her legs pulsing as it slowly abated. Alejandro's embrace providing warmth, even as he gripped her as if he'd never let go. Ah... Shanna could happily stay here, connected to him for a while. A long while. There were reasons she shouldn't, she knew. She just couldn't remember them.

Suddenly, Alejandro slipped free of her body and broke her sensual haze. She lifted weighty lids to watch him walk past her and snap the curtains shut between them and the audience. Del remained on their side of the drape, and Shanna was suddenly conscious of her nudity and Del's dark eyes on her.

"Keep them the hell out of here," Alejandro growled in low tones.

Del clapped his gaze on his buddy, who was now buttoning his pants. "You got it. Tomorrow?"

Alejandro smiled. "Maybe the day after."

What were they talking about? She should know, but her brain was so clouded by satisfaction, and thinking was just a lot of effort right now.

Del's laugh barely registered when Alejandro turned and stalked across the floor to her. In seconds, he uncuffed one of her wrists, grabbed her up in his arms, and headed for the stage door.

"What...? Where are you—?"

"Alone." He said the word like a vow. "No one except you and me, being us together."

Just in case others could hear, she whispered, "But the blackmailer—"

"If he was here tonight, he already got what he came for. Del will call

me if they captured something on the security cameras. Now, this is about us.”

“But you said we would stay all night, if necessary.”

He stopped. “Is that what you want, for me to fuck you again for an audience? Shall we invite more people in this time?”

Sarcasm. Anger. And she understood. Something inside her rejected the notion of more audience time, too. “No.”

“Good. I’m done sharing you with other hungry male eyes.” He pushed through a door, out into a bright hall, past the open door to security. Laughing and clapping ensued from the crew inside the office, and Shanna buried her head in his neck.

“I’m naked!” she shrieked.

“They just watched us on the cameras. They are not seeing anything they have not yet seen. Which is another reason I want you all to myself.”

Shanna didn’t get another word out before Alejandro opened another door and let it slam behind him. Now it was dark, and Southern California’s summer evening sky simmered all around them in a velvet hush. Frogs and crickets hummed in the sultry breeze. The lights of the city beyond the hill twinkled and winked as far as she could see.

“It’s beautiful out here.”

“The fact I would rather look at you should tell you how I feel about your beauty.”

Shanna snapped her gaze up to Ali’s. No smile. The weight of his stare was full of gravity—and rising need.

“Alejandro, maybe we should talk about—”

“No. Tonight is about you and me, no conversation, no people, no blackmail, no cameras. I need to feel you, like I have never needed anything before.”

She gaped, totally unable to deny the breathless rush of joy at his words. Did he...care? About *her*?

There was no time to ponder the answer before he spirited her into his cottage, through the intimate cocoon of the hushed night, straight to his bed. In the shadows, she could make out its straight lines and modern flare. It was big, dark, exotic—just like the man.

Then the mattress was at her back, and he grabbed the empty cuff dangling from her wrist, and Shanna expected him to attach it to his bed somehow so he would have her at his mercy.

Instead, he attached the cuff to his own wrist.

They were joined. Together. Bound.

“Alejandro?”

He didn’t answer her. Instead, he tossed the handcuff key somewhere on the floor, far out of reach, then covered her mouth with his own.

Shanna expected his ravenous hunger, the rapacious, hard-edged, *boom-fast-now* sort of touch. She was shocked instead by soft insistence. His kiss was seduction itself. Thorough, unhurried, deeper. Unabashedly intimate, as he conveyed his every want, spoke with his soul, communicating only with his mouth.

It was impossible not to fall under his spell.

A new ribbon of desire tied her stomach up in knots as he trailed hot kisses across her cheek, down toward her neck. His exhalation felt hot against her neck, close to her ear, stirring sensitive skin. She shivered as his lips caressed her, branded her. He swept a fingertip down the arch of her throat and nipped at her lobe.

“Necesito tocarle, su cara, su piel. Su corazón.”

Shanna had no idea what his words meant, but they undid her. In that moment, whatever he wanted, she wanted, too.

“Tell me...”

He didn’t right away. Instead, he swept his mouth over hers again. The tangle of breaths, lips, tongues became a deliberate kiss of endless hunger. Eloquent, shockingly sexual as the fingers of his free hand sifted

into her hair, curling possessively around the strands. Toe-curlingly intimate as he tore his mouth from hers to stare, penetrating her with eyes like burning coals in the pitch of night. Ensnared, Shanna could not look away.

“I said that I need to touch you, your face, your skin. Your heart.”

Something both shocked and joyous burst inside her. She gasped, and Alejandro swallowed the sound with another drugging kiss.

With every brush of his lips, every glide of his hot palm, every male moan poured into her mouth, he ripped past her barriers until she opened completely to him—parting her lips wider to accept more of his possession, clutching one hard shoulder with her free hand to keep him near, spreading her thighs apart to invite him inside. She sighed when his narrow hips fit right into the curve of her body as if he’d been born to be there.

“Yes.” She arched under him, unable to hold anything back.

He fit his free hand under the curve in her back, keeping her breasts and the damp heat of her skin right against him.

“Yo le tocaré toda la noche. Cada parte de tú sabrás el se siente de mí.”

“Ali...please.”

The way he touched her, as if he had no other thought in his head except pleasing her... She burned inside her skin, yet she knew only he could save her. He would shatter her into a million pieces first, then remake her a new woman. A warning bell went off in some distant part of her mind, but his fingers gripped her hip, fitting her directly against the hard column of his erection. He wound down her body and brushed soft lips against the side of her breast.

“I *will* touch you all night long,” he translated. “Every part of you will know the feel of me.”

She had no doubt Alejandro would keep that promise.

He suckled her nipples over and over, lavishing attention on her until they stood red, swollen, so sensitive that nothing more than his breath on her induced a shiver. All the while, the fingers of his free hand whispered across her skin. Her back, her thighs, her buttocks. Even her knees, calves, and toes. Alejandro touched every inch of available skin, finally drawing her legs up high on his hips so he could toy with the sensitive underside of her knees.

Gently, he rode her clit with his erection. Not pushing or grinding. Not bruising. Instead, a soft nudge of delicious pressure in a hypnotic rhythm, one that took her higher and higher.

The kernel of pleasure under her clit mushroomed, swelled, ballooned. Shanna panted, trying to resist the searing pleasure for just another moment. She dug the fingers not bound by the cuff into the hard flesh of his back, pressing down his body, far down, until she gripped his ass in her hand.

Moonlight spilled past open blinds, swirling in on the evening breeze as he whispered, "*La piel estas rosácea, mi amor. Eres maduro y listo, sí?*"

"Tell me, Ali. Oh my... Yes!" She moaned.

"Your skin is rosy, my love. You are ripe and ready, yes?"

"Yes. Yes, now!"

He pressed against her again, nudging her clit with his cock. The cream of her arousal spread all over his flesh, and the next time he rocked against her, the bead of nerves he teased leaped at the slick pressure. Blood rushed south, pooled between her legs, jettisoning need, pleasure, and anticipation right where it impacted her most. Perspiration dampened her body. She clawed, cried in his arms.

"Who is here, Shanna? Who is in this room?"

"Us. Just us."

"*Apenas tú y mí. Ninguna audiencia. Ninguna cámaras. Nosotros,*" he breathed as he gathered the crooks of her knees into his arms. "Just you

and me. No audience, no cameras. *Us.*”

The way we always should be. The thought ran through Shanna’s mind unchecked, unchallenged, unstoppable as Alejandro paused, probed, then on a long glide, penetrated her.

His hard flesh filled her sex, sank deep, deeper, then deeper still. Making love face to face...totally different than being dominated by him for an audience. The slick rasp of his engorged shaft raked against her sensitive walls. A jolt of pleasure coiled, tightened, intensified, growing faster than she could assimilate.

“So tense, so tight, my love,” he murmured as he drew back and brought their cuffed hands up to her breast. Her palm cupped her flesh as his thumb caressed her nipple. It was as if they were seeing to her pleasure together, and it drove Shanna straight to delirious need.

All the while, the slow steady pleasure of his thrusts turned her into a wild woman. She writhed, lifted her hips, arched—anything to reach more of him, lure him deeper still into her.

Alejandro went willingly, every lingering slide of his erection inside her lifting her arousal higher. Her pulse pounded in her ears. Heat suffused her body. She could barely breathe. And she didn’t care.

For the first time in years—maybe in her life—she didn’t just feel; she was wholly alive, driven by something more than her desire for a trophy of faux gold on her mantle. She lived for today, for now.

She lived to hear the man growling words in a language she didn’t understand but adored as he strained, breathing harsh, to fulfill every promise of pleasure boiling in her body. Alejandro gripped the hand joined to his by the cuff and laced their fingers together. He squeezed her hand tight as their breaths merged, their cries mingled.

“Come for me,” he whispered.

The request from his mouth became a demand from his body as he thrust straight into her core again.

Shanna splintered into a million pieces, blinded by the brilliant pleasure bursting inside her. In the next moment, he followed her into the white-hot rush of shattering pleasure. *Oh God, oh God!* He was all over her, everywhere...inside her. Shanna doubted she could wash his possession away with a mere shower. It seemed unlikely that time and distance would completely free her from him.

She feared she'd given a piece of herself to Alejandro she'd likely never get back—her heart.

Sated and exhausted, Shanna pulled up in the driveway of the house she'd been raised in. She and all of her siblings had moved out years ago. Dad had stayed in the rambling house alone. Why, she didn't know. The place was haunted by the ghost of her mother, always smiling, always dancing around the kitchen.

She should have gone to her apartment first. Showered, changed into her clothes, had a cup of coffee before coming here. If she had stayed in Ali's bed, he would have offered her all that and more. Instead, she'd pleaded the need to use the bathroom and persuaded him to unlock the cuffs joining them. She'd waited a few minutes, until she was sure he'd drifted back to sleep, then dressed in one of his shirts and a pair of long sweatpants, then sneaked out. Not that it mattered. Ali was with her, in her, in a way that had nothing to do with the fact they'd had unprotected sex and everything to do with the fact she cared far more about him than she should.

Leaving him alone in bed had felt as if she'd torn away a part of herself. That scared the hell out of her.

The chilly California air of the early morning hadn't helped to sort out her head. She was in love with a man who would never intend to stand in

the way of her dance dreams. But how could Alejandro not, as consuming as he was? She'd barely driven two miles from Sneak Peek when she'd been hit by pain from the withdrawal from his warmth, his acceptance and tenderness.

Dangerous. She was the Bitch of the Ballroom because discipline and a ruthless dedication to perfection prevailed—and would win her that long-coveted trophy. When the music was high and the lights were on her, the judges didn't care what was deep in her heart. She'd do well to remember that.

Still, those moments in his arms... For the first time in years, maybe ever, she'd felt adored, and not because of what she might achieve or what competition she might win. She didn't have anything to prove in that moment. Alejandro cared about her. *And he shows it in amazing, creative, pleasure-drenched ways*, she thought to herself with a smile.

Then she realized she was wearing a sex-induced smile while standing in front of her dad's house on the day before the biggest competition of her career. Her smile faded.

She clutched a bag of bagels and cream cheese, along with a portable carafe of coffee she'd purchased at a bakery, and let herself into the house.

Shanna followed the smell of burned toast with a poignant smile.

She sauntered into the kitchen and looked at her father, older now, gray at the temples, his reading glasses askew, but still vital and well built for fifty-something.

"Bagels?" she offered.

Her dad plucked charred bread from the toaster with ginger fingertips, then dropped it on the counter with a curse.

Then he skewered her with a stare. "Sure. As soon as you explain why you're wearing a man's clothes, are rosy with whisker burn, and smell like sex."

Certainly nothing off about his sensory perception. She flushed. "I do things beyond work and practice at the dance studio."

"I never noticed it until today. You've always been very single-minded about winning."

"I still am. What happened last night won't happen again." She passed him the bag of bagels, hoping it would distract him.

He ignored the gesture and arched a sharp brow, as if he disapproved. But Shanna couldn't shake the impression that he was suppressing a smile.

"I suspected it would happen someday. Maybe it's the female way. Who is he?"

Shanna frowned. "What do you mean, the female way?"

He shrugged. "Women follow their hearts, which usually lead them to some man or another, who may or may not respect their desire to keep pursuing their goals."

Exactly. No doubt, he'd have complete disrespect for her if she ultimately made that choice. Her brothers, too.

"Which is precisely why Alejandro and I are...done."

"Alejandro? Do I know him?"

Shanna shook her head. "Argentinean. He owns a nightclub. We met at the benefit for the Catholic orphans charity last weekend."

God, it was weird to be discussing her love life with her father in the kitchen of her childhood at seven in the morning. She needed coffee for this.

"Hmm." Her father hesitated. "What does he think of your dancing?"

"I assume he's okay with it. Not that it matters." Shanna sipped the caffeine-laden brew and let it sink into her hazy brain.

He reached for the carafe of coffee and poured a steaming mug. "A hindrance, is he? Resenting your practices?"

"No." Not unless she was avoiding him.

“Latin men are notoriously jealous. He can’t handle your time with Kristoff and the way your partner has to touch you?”

Shanna had to laugh. “No, he knows way too much about Kristoff to be jealous.”

“So you’re just worried he’d be a general distraction?”

“He would. The other night, I was headed for a sensible dinner and an early evening to bed. Big day of practice the next morning, which is vital with the competition coming up. He came by and just assumed I’d go out for ice cream with him.”

“Ice cream. That’s a huge problem.” Her father sipped his coffee, seemingly deep in thought.

Somehow, Shanna got the impression he was laughing silently at her.

“It is! I can’t afford to blow off sleep and eat a gallon of ice cream to satisfy some...romantic notion of his.

“And then he tells me personal stuff, about his childhood and friendships. He blurts out his views that commitment is absolute and infidelity is inexcusable. Why tell me? The whole incident is taking up my thoughts that should be directed to the competition. It’s tomorrow, and last night, he kept me up half the night...”

Realizing she’d nearly spilled the details of her sex life to her dad, Shanna flushed, then continued with a safer topic. “The man is just consuming. Him just *being* steals my attention and leads my thoughts astray. Every trick I’ve used in the past to ward off would-be Romeos doesn’t work with him. He just doesn’t give up and won’t go away.”

“And you’re so tempted to let him into your life that it frightens you.” It wasn’t a question. He seemed to *know* that’s exactly how she felt.

“How...?” She grappled to find the right words. “You know?”

“Your mother and I each had lives before we married. Did you know she was a prima ballerina?”

A prima ballerina? No clue. “I knew she liked to dance around the

kitchen and she was graceful...”

But her mother had died years ago, shortly before Shanna turned five. In some ways, her mother was as great a mystery to her as she would be if Shanna had never met her.

“American Ballet Theater. She was set to star in the season’s *Giselle*. To this day, I’ll never know what she saw in a cocky weightlifter coming fresh off a gold medal high. I had to have been a complete ass. But she claimed to love me. God knows the sun rose and set on that woman, as far as I was concerned.”

Shanna frowned, sensing that she would not like what came next.

“You married her and—”

“Encouraged her to stop dancing. Made sure I got her pregnant with your brother so she had to stay beside me. I was a hugely selfish bastard where her time and energy were concerned. If I could take it back somehow and let her take her rightful place on stage...”

Mouth gaping open, Shanna stared at her father. *This* was the man who had driven her for years. Nothing she’d ever done was ever good enough. Second place was first loser. Quitting was the professional equivalent of a noose.

“I don’t understand.”

“I know.” He sighed heavily and sat on one of the little wooden chairs they’d had forever. “I pushed you and pushed you. I don’t think I realized until just now that I did it because I wanted to make up for what I did to your mother. She never said that she regretted her decision. But I’d catch her every so often holding her toe shoes with a wistful look on her face. I suspect she always wondered what could have been. I didn’t want you wondering, too.”

Shock ricocheted through her. Her father had intentionally killed her mother’s dance dream? And now regretted it like hell. For years, he’d pushed Shanna. As a child, she’d wanted to follow one of her brothers

into their sports, but he'd specifically signed her up for dance class after dance class. Now she knew why. But...

"You sound as if you're encouraging me to continue with Alejandro. Why change your mind now?"

He stirred his cooling coffee. "I don't think your mother really regretted her decision to leave dance and marry, but I regretted standing in her way. She...just seemed happy. Your mother used to have this certain smile when she was particularly happy. A little lopsided, with a dimple in her left cheek and a twinkle in her eye. Every time I saw that grin, I knew she was at peace with herself." Her father paused, looked up at her. "Until this morning, I'd never seen that smile on you. But there was a moment when you got out of your car. I was watching through the window. I saw that smile on your face. I'm guessing Alejandro put it there."

He had. When she pushed aside her tumult about tomorrow's competition, happiness sneaked in, again and again. The thought that, after last night, she might never see Alejandro again, gouged her with deep shards of pain. And it shouldn't. Their relationship had been short. Intense, yes, but nothing to build a lifetime on, right?

Why did she feel like she was wrong?

"He sounds like the kind of guy who wouldn't demand you give up your dream," her father said. "If he can make you happy and give you the freedom to pursue what you want professionally, why aren't you grabbing onto him with both hands?"

Her dad made that sound like a very good question. "With him as a distraction, I may never win."

"If you love him, then you lose at life without him."

"If I...divide my time, I won't be as dedicated. If I never become a champion, you won't think I'm weak?"

"Would it really matter if I did?"

Shanna paused. Thought. Alejandro's love or her dad's approval? No choice. "No. I'm an adult."

"You need a man's love more than your daddy's blessing."

She nodded. "Jason and Kyle would make fun of me if I chose to be with Alejandro."

Her dad rolled his eyes. "They'd make fun of you no matter what you did. They're convinced that's their prerogative as big brothers."

In spite of the weirdness of the conversation, Shanna laughed. "You think?"

The smile faded as something occurred to her. "I'm not sure matters with Alejandro are as simple as you think. Let's say I've played very hard to get. He may not be talking to me after I, um...sneaked out on him this morning."

"Why don't you send him tickets to tomorrow's competition? I bet he shows. I want to meet the man who managed to see beyond the Bitch of the Ballroom act."

"You're coming tomorrow?"

He reached across the table and squeezed her hand. "I wouldn't miss it for the world. Whether you're crowned champion of the ballroom or of Alejandro's heart, I'm proud no matter what."

Chapter Nine

Waiting in the darkened corner of the ballroom's dance floor, Shanna drew in a deep breath, smoothed her hair, straightened her sleeve, shifted her weight. And scanned the crowd—again.

Nothing.

“You must not fidget.”

If she hadn't been so nervous, she would have laughed at Kristoff. Why not just tell her she shouldn't breathe? “I know. Sorry.”

“You are nervous?” her partner hovered behind her and whispered in her ear. “Do you fear losing?”

The competition? No, not really. They would lose, and she'd accepted it. But Alejandro? Absolutely she feared losing him. In fact, she suspected it was already too late.

Shanna had delivered the tickets to Sneak Peak in person this morning. Del had greeted her at the door. Actually, greeted was a strong word. Met was more accurate. Reluctantly, in fact. His behavior had been considerably cooler than their last meeting. When he said he'd give the tickets to Ali, she added that she hoped he would visit her before the show so they could talk. Del had merely given her a terse nod, then shut the door in her face.

Clearly, she'd pissed Ali off enough to annoy the hell out of Del.

Alejandro hadn't come to see her before the competition. Another scan of the ballroom...there sat her father, who waved. She smiled back, but she still didn't see Alejandro's coffee-dark hair, swagger, or sin-laced smile.

Had she pushed him away one too many times? The painful thought

tightened her stomach into impossible knots. Throwing up didn't feel out of the question.

"Shanna, you are nervous about the routine?"

No. She and Kristoff were ready. Beyond ready. They knew these dances. They had perfected their chemistry and rhythm on the floor. The blackmailer's DVD would keep them from winning, but they would give their best showing.

"Or do you regret that you were unable to replace me with a new partner in time for this competition?"

Scowling at his bitter tone, Shanna glanced over her shoulder at Kristoff. Mouth pinched, eyes tight, shoulders stiff. Damn, he looked nervous. Petrified. What was that about? He was never wound up before a competition. Maybe he was rattled about the DVD circulating the judges' table?

As Kristoff continued to watch her with narrow, burning eyes, and she replayed his question in her head, Shanna finally understood.

"I'm not replacing you." She dropped her arm to her side and reached for his hand, hovering near her hip. She gave it a friendly squeeze. "I never auditioned anyone else. You were right about the partner swapping; it was stupid."

He shot her a suspicious stare. "Why the change?"

"I used to bury my guilt about dropping someone for the sake of winning. It never worked. You made me see how pointless it was." *With a little help from Ali and Del.*

"You do not seek to replace me? Truly?"

She smiled. "You're stuck with me."

Kristoff leveled his mega-watt smile at her. "For weeks, I cannot stop from worrying you plan to replace me." He squeezed her hand. "Thank you. I am happy now."

"We win or lose together, okay? Besides, maybe we haven't been

winning because we've forgotten that dancing isn't all serious. Maybe...we just need to have fun with it tonight, see what happens."

Kristoff hesitated, then teased, "Who are you and what have you done with my partner?"

Despite her nerves and her worries about losing Ali, Shanna had to laugh. If nothing else, she'd cemented one important relationship tonight. And damn if it didn't feel good.

"If we were alone, I'd slug you for that."

"There is the Shanna I know and adore," Kristoff muttered.

Just then, the music ended, and the announcer reminded the crowd of their competitors' names and number. Shanna drew in a relaxing breath. *In. Out.* They were next.

"Before we go on, I must tell you something."

"Kristoff, we're about to be announced."

"This is true, but—"

"Couple number one hundred three, Shanna York and Kristoff Palavin from Los Angeles, California."

The crowd cheer wasn't as enthusiastic as Kristoff would like, Shanna knew. She should care, she supposed, but right now, she couldn't get past the fact that Alejandro had chosen not to use the tickets she'd left him.

Which meant he'd given up on her, she feared for good.

Forcing a smile as the onlookers clapped, she walked onto the dance floor, Kristoff beside her, cradling her palm in his. They struck their pose and waited.

Doing her best to focus on the next three minutes, Shanna plastered on a smile and projected it to the crowd. The music burst over the quiet, Shanna arched, kicked, and turned.

There sat Alejandro.

His face gave away nothing, but the grin that shaped her mouth was

her first real one of the day.

He's here. Here!

And he looked incredible in a black suit, white shirt and a satiny charcoal tie.

She knew he looked even better out of the suit.

Before she whirled around to face Kristoff again, she flashed Ali a look she hoped communicated just how thrilled she was that he'd come.

Over the next two minutes, forty seconds, she and Kristoff poured their souls into the dance. And he was spectacular, as if some light had been turned on inside him. Relaxed yet crisp. Strong. God, he played to the crowd. He really was incredible. Shanna responded, acting the part of the seductive female to his commanding male in the tango.

No doubt in her mind, they sparkled, shined, brought the *WOW* to the dance floor. Shanna couldn't remember the last time she'd enjoyed dancing so much.

When the music ended, she knew they had done their best. *Knew it.* Yes, she'd love to win tonight, but if it wasn't in the cards, they would spend a year living down the scandal and practicing their butts off. They would conquer this trophy next season.

The crowd stood, cheered, their enthusiasm catching. Never before had she felt so liked by the crowd, so connected to them as she and Kristoff bowed.

She turned her head slightly to see Alejandro. He, too, stood and clapped, then bent to whisper into the ear of a small but striking middle-aged woman who shared his eyes. His mother.

Then he turned his attention back to her, fixing burning hazel eyes on her, and Shanna felt the zing and sizzle all the way to her toes.

Damn, she loved that man.

"You and Alejandro?" Kristoff asked as they left the dance floor. "You have a...thing?"

“What?”

“You looked at him as if you cannot wait to devour him, as if you are all his. Or as if he is all yours. Is that so?”

Shanna swallowed a lump of nerves. God, she hoped Alejandro’s being here meant that he’d forgiven her for running away and not believing in them... If not, she wasn’t giving up. No more switching partners for her when things got difficult—not professionally or personally.

“That’s my plan.”

“In fourth place...” the announcer droned, and Shanna listened long enough to realize her name hadn’t been announced, then clapped politely.

This was usually the part of the event that made her most nervous. How many times had she stood at the corner of the stage, trying not to pass out, praying she would not be disappointed by failing to grab the trophy again, only to hear her name announced long before the first place winner’s? How many times had she trotted out her plastic smile, like third place thrilled her, while feeling crushed inside? Too many.

But tonight...she almost *wanted* the announcer to call her name now, so she could finish this dog and pony show and talk to Alejandro. His face still gave away absolutely nothing, not anger, not joy. Had he forgiven her and come to be with her? Or had he simply come because she’d given him free tickets and his mother liked to attend? No clue. That man could probably play a mean game of poker.

“In third place...”

Again, not her name. Another polite clap. Another clandestine glance at Alejandro. He raised a brow at her, but his expression remained

utterly, frustratingly unreadable. Forget the contest results. Not knowing how Ali felt about her was killing her.

And what did that say about how much she loved him? She was well and truly hooked.

“In second place...”

Not her name again. The couple beside them swept out on the floor, and Shanna could see the woman’s forced smile hiding disappointment and the crushing blow of defeat.

But wait...if second place had been announced, and there were no other couples out on the floor...

“In first place, the U.S. Latin dance ballroom champions, couple one hundred three, Shanna York and Kristoff Palavin of Los Angeles, California!”

Kristoff squeezed her hand as he led her out onto the floor. “We did it! We did it!”

They had. Finally! Alejandro was clapping for her. His mother, too. The whole crowd did, including her father, who enthusiastically whistled like he was at a football game. It was bad form in ballroom, but she smiled, glowed and grinned from ear to ear.

Tonight, she was finally a champion.

But how had it happened, given the blackmailer’s threats?

“What about...you know?” she said to Kristoff through her smile. Maybe the threatening bastard hadn’t followed through?

Before he could answer, the emcee came forward with their trophy. Kristoff grabbed it with one hand and hoisted it up in the air, along with their joined hands. Together, they bowed.

Professionally, she had never been happier than in that moment.

“Ms. York and Mr. Palavin are now eligible to compete in the upcoming World Dance Cup Latin competition.”

Wow, a huge dream come true. And yet... Her world would be flawed,

her triumph hollow, if she didn't have Alejandro to share it with.

The emcee took the trophy from Kristoff. The lights dimmed, and as champions, she and Kristoff danced. But her mind was on Ali, the way he watched her, his face shuttered but his posture relaxed. What was the man thinking?

Soon, others crowded onto the floor. With the spotlight no longer on them, Shanna all but forced him to tango Alejandro's way.

Kristoff resisted. "I must tell you something."

"Later. I promise."

"But—"

"Give me fifteen minutes, okay?"

Before he could reply, they reached the edge of the dance floor. She turned to Alejandro's mother.

"Mrs. Diaz? Hi, I'm Shanna York." She held out her hand.

"*Ella es su novia?*" his mother asked Alejandro sharply.

"*Mamá...*" He sighed. "*Sí.*" Then he whispered something in her ear...and her entire face changed, lightened, glowed.

She turned to Shanna with a beaming smile and said in accented English. "Thank you for the tickets. Congratulations on winning, *nuera*."

Nuera? Damn she was going to have to learn to speak Spanish at the first opportunity. "Thank you. Have you had the pleasure of dancing with my partner, Kristoff?"

She shook her head and risked a shy peek at Kristoff. "He is one of my favorites."

"I'm sure he'd consider it a favor. He gets tired of dancing with me and would love your company." Shanna turned to her partner. "Kristoff?"

Her partner smiled charmingly and took hold of the older woman's hand. "Shall we dance?"

Off they went. Shanna watched Kristoff handle Ali's mother with aplomb as he led her into a waltz. The problem was, with Kristoff

engaged, well-wishers and competitors were headed her way.

Shanna grabbed Alejandro's hand and dragged him backstage, down a poorly lit, winding hallway, into an empty office. She had no idea who it belonged to—and didn't care—but she shut the door behind her and locked it.

"Hi." She smiled. "You came. Thank you."

God, could he hear her heart pounding like a hip-hop song at full blast?

"You sent tickets. This competition meant a great deal to you." Shanna heard the edge of anger in his voice, glimpsed it in his tight jaw.

"Not as much as I thought. I know that now, thanks to you." She bit her lip, wondering how bad it was going to hurt if he didn't want to hear what she had to say. "I'm sorry about...the other morning. You know, leaving you alone. For everything. Please tell me you don't hate me."

"I don't hate you."

His face still gave her no inkling about his true feelings, but Shanna considered his not hating her a great start. She rushed to Alejandro, threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him like there was no tomorrow.

Then again, unless she convinced him of her sincerity, there might not be a tomorrow for the two of them.

He kissed back. Oh, did he ever. And he tasted so good. Like brandy and a hint of cinnamon. Hot. And a few moments later, hungry, insistent as his mouth devoured hers. He threw his arms around her, banded them tight around her middle, as if telling her without words that she wasn't going anywhere again. She melted, might as well have become a puddle at his feet.

Long minutes and a pair of damp panties later, she broke away, breathing like she'd run a marathon. And unable to restrain a hopeful smile. "Does that mean you forgive me?"

“For leaving me alone in my own bed? Hmm, I may need more...persuading.” A smile toyed at the corners of his lips.

“Does tonight work for you?” She cupped his cheek in her hand, looked right into those killer eyes, and threw caution to the wind.

“I may require more nights. Many of them.”

Hope burst in her heart, so explosive, she could hardly breathe. “Ali, I am so sorry. What I did was insensitive. I know it. I knew then. I was just...scared. But I’m not anymore. And I want you to know that I care about you. A lot.”

“Care.” He quirked a dark brow. “In what way?”

Shanna knew she had his attention. Not only did she feel it against her hip, she felt it in his gaze, in the way his arms tightened around her.

“How much, *querida*?” he prompted again.

She swallowed down the tangle of anxiety and need and anticipation threatening to kill her courage. “I love you.”

Those three words had barely cleared her lips before Ali stepped around her and, with an impatient arm, wiped every piece of paper off the flat, faux-wood desk and onto the floor. A moment later, her back was against the cool laminated surface and every inch of his body covered her completely, from the bunching shoulders beneath his elegant coat, to the hard abs that rippled with every breath, to the narrow hips...with the impressive erection between.

“Say it again.” His voice was thick with demand.

“I love you.”

“And you mean this?”

Shanna let her gaze delve straight into Alejandro’s hazel eyes and she didn’t look away. “Except to my dad, I’ve never said those three words to a man. Ever.”

Finally, expression warmed Alejandro’s strong, square face. Happiness, hunger, adoration...love.

“Te amo, querida.” He dipped his head for a long, sweet kiss. “I love you, too.”

Then he kissed her again, long endless moments where Shanna felt blissfully lost in passion and joy. Alejandro’s endless caress shimmered want in every crevice, corner, and nerve ending. She wanted the moment to last forever.

With a moan, he lifted his head, his hazel eyes snapping with a hunger like she’d never seen. “What I wish to do to you...with you, to show you how I feel...” He groaned, gathering her thigh in his grip, lifting it high over his hip, and grinding against her, right where she wanted him most.

Anchoring her hands in his short, inky hair, she planted her mouth against his and devoured him in turn with another kiss that sizzled her insides and rubbed her restraint raw. “Oh...I want to touch you, feel every inch...”

“That can be arranged.” He dragged his palms up her back, down her sides. “How do I get you out of this infernal costume so I can make love to you?”

“I’m sewn into it.”

“Damn it,” he muttered, still feeling his way around her back. He followed that with a curse in Spanish that sounded melodious but was, no doubt, foul. Alejandro grabbed the neckline of the spangle-ridden dress.

“Ali—”

Shanna only got the first syllable out before he ripped the costume in two and pulled the fragments wide. Cool air hit her bare, overheated skin. Her nipples beaded at the sudden chill, then tightened again when Ali fixed his hot gaze on the rosy peaks.

“Oops.” He sent her a slow, wicked smile.

She should be concerned about the costume. And she would

be...much later. At the moment, she arched to him, silently begging for his touch. "These silly costumes are so fragile."

"Indeed." He shifted against her, pressing, his cock harder than ever as he palmed her breast. "If I had known you were nearly naked under there, I would have ripped the damn dress off the minute we cleared the door."

Stifling the explanation about undergarments being built in, Shanna focused instead on the need tightening in her belly...and lower, where her flesh melted, swelled, slickened. Ached like she'd never been satisfied.

She laughed, but pointed out, "I have nothing else to wear. How will I get out of the ballroom without flashing everyone?"

"I will think of something," he breathed and nibbled a very determined path down her neck. "Right now, your wardrobe is not my top priority."

He latched onto one nipple with those full lips, his tongue providing sensual torture that made her arch against him and struggle for a good breath. Beneath him, Shanna wrapped her legs around his hips and writhed.

"Making you scream is," he clarified.

He backed away long enough to tear at her pantyhose, making them a candidate for the trash can, then he was back, hot and single-minded, his face feral. He reached between them, his fingers impatiently tugging on his zipper—and brushing her clit.

God, her temperature was rising, so fast, so high. Ali was an inferno in her blood, and she feared she'd never get enough.

A moment later, his pants fell past his knees. In the next instant, he thrust deep, pressing her harder onto the desktop and filling every bit of her with his cock. His gaze locked onto hers and never wavered as he withdrew almost completely, then glided back inside her, all full of

seduction and friction so dazzling, her body felt like one big firecracker. The last inch of his erection he shoved inside her, startling her with a spike of pleasure as he rubbed right against her cervix, against sensitive tissues clamoring for more.

She gasped at the delicious coil of want gathering between her legs and closed her eyes. Being with Ali was like making love with a tornado. Wild, unpredictable, always strong and tumultuous. Constantly amazing.

“Look at me.” His voice was hoarse, raspy as he pulled back and plunged deep again. “Mine.”

His possessive streak shot her with thrill. He was definitely on the caveman side, and she loved it.

“Yes,” she assured as she met his next thrust, hips rising, fingers clutching his biceps, which bulged with effort as he pushed deep again. “And you’re mine.”

“Let me show you how much.” He gathered her legs in his arms and warned, “Hold tight. This will be a wild ride.”

Excitement spiked deep, striking right behind her clit as he hammered inside her once, twice... God, at a pace so relentless, the orgasm that had been dancing just out of her reach, teasing her since he’d touched her, now loomed, pooling, converging, until the pleasure bubbled out of control, exploding with mega force. It drowned her completely.

Ali smothered her cry with his fervent kiss as he followed her over the edge, his body stiffening, shuddering, against her for long moments...then sinking deep against her, as if he’d found home.

At first, he didn’t move, just peppered her face with adoring kisses.

Shanna wondered if she’d ever been happier. But she knew she hadn’t. Suddenly, she had it all—the trophy, the man...the sense of peace she’d been wanting for years.

“I’m crushing you.” Ali sighed with regret and started to rise.

“What a way to go.” She smiled. “You know, I really don’t have anything to wear out of here.”

He smiled, sharp, greedy, just like she imagined a pirate would. “Hmm. I could happily keep you naked.”

“And I would stay that way willingly if you’d keep having your wicked way with me, but, um...we have to get out of here first.”

Ali glanced around at the utilitarian office. “Agreed.”

Suddenly, he pulled away, zipped his pants, and prowled to a dark corner of the office. He grabbed a trench coat off the rack and turned to face her with a triumphant smile.

He tossed the coat her way. “Shall we get out of here, find someplace private?”

With a giddy laugh, she wrapped the coat around her and shoved the remnants of her costume in the trash. “With pleasure.”

She barely had the sash belted around her waist when Ali pressed her back against the desk. Oh, my. No mistaking the fact he was ready for round two.

“Good. We’re leaving. Now. You will come to my bungalow and stay all night?”

“Yes.” And the next, and the one after, and the one after that, if he’d have her.

“You will not leave?”

“In the morning? No.”

“Ever?”

Was he saying... “Are you asking me to...move in with you?”

He clenched his jaw. “No.”

Her stomach plummeted. “Of course not. I misunderstood.”

“My *mamá*, she would be very disappointed if we lived together. Just before you sent her to dance with Kristoff, a brilliant move, by the way, she asked if you were my girlfriend.”

"You said yes." A smile crept across her mouth.

"I did, then I whispered in her ear. Do you recall?"

"Yes, what did you say? And what is a *nuera*?"

"I told her I had other plans." Alejandro kissed her neck, her cheek, working his way softly to her mouth, then whispered, "*Nuera* means daughter-in-law." He took a little black box from his pocket. "Interested in the role?"

"You're proposing?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you supposed to be down on one knee?" she teased.

"I would rather be on top of you, always. Will you marry me?"

"YES!" She clutched Ali tight as he opened the box. She fell in love all over again. "Yes!"

"Good. I wasn't taking no for an answer."

"It's beautiful," she breathed as he stood up and slipped the square solitaire on her ring finger. Tears gathered in the corners of her eyes, slid down her cheeks. Probably ruining her mascara—and she didn't care. "When did you buy this?"

His cheeks flushed a dull red. "About four hours ago. But I have known that I love you for far longer than that."

"Me, too. I was just too afraid that love meant giving up my dream. I'm sorry. Never again."

"Together, we can face anything. Shall we tell my mother and your father?"

"Yes. Just... I want another moment alone with you." She squeezed his hand. "This is the happiest night of my life! The win, the engagement... Wow, almost too much good stuff to take in. I feel so complete."

He brought her against him for an intimate hug. "Me, too. I'll be here to share your triumphs for the rest of our lives. But..." he frowned. "What

happened to the blackmailer? He threatened to circulate Kristoff's DVD to the judges to prevent you from competing and winning."

"I know. I've been scratching my head, too. Maybe he changed his mind?"

A pounding on the door interrupted their closeness and musings. Oops...someone wanted their office back, and they'd made an absolute mess.

Shanna wiped away the mascara from beneath her eyes as Ali opened the door with an apology on his lips. "We are very sorry..."

But instead of an event manager standing on the other side, it was Kristoff.

"What?" Shanna asked. "Is something wrong?"

"I must talk to you."

She'd promised to talk to him in fifteen minutes. She supposed those were up. "Okay."

Kristoff paced; he looked oddly hesitant. "You are happy we won, yes?"

"Of course! Aren't you?"

He nodded. "Very."

"I don't know how, given the DVD and the threat but—"

"I did that."

"Did what?"

Grimacing, he confessed, "I created the DVD." He risked a glance at Ali. "Before you force me from Sneak Peek...I will tell you that the people in the video consented to be filmed. They are my...how should I say, boyfriend and girlfriend. We are together, and they agreed to help me."

Shanna had no idea Kristoff was in any sort of relationship, much less with both a man and a woman. Whatever floated his boat, but... "You're telling me you filmed the DVD and left it for me with the blackmailing note? *You* staged this? Why they hell... I worried until I was

sure I had no stomach left for days!”

“This, I know. I apologize. But, um... before I invest many months and years in being your partner, I must know if you will stay with me. If I pretended like the news of my...relationship reached the judges, I wondered what would you do, keep me or dump me.”

“So the blackmail...it wasn’t real?”

“No. Do not hate me.” His pleading expression tore at her heart.

A moment of anger surged through her...then died. He would never have needed to test her if she hadn’t spent years partner-swapping to feed an ambition that, in the long run, had nearly eaten her spirit and happiness alive.

“I don’t. Just don’t, um...surprise me again.”

“Now I know where I stand, so...never.” He grabbed her left hand, noted the ring there, and grabbed her in a bear hug. “Engaged?”

She nodded, her smile off the charts. “Just now.”

“Congratulations! You are happy, yes?”

“Incredibly so.” She sent Ali a warm smile, and he caressed her back in return.

“I think all will be good now,” Kristoff pronounced.

“Not just good.” Ali brought her closer to his side, and she rested her head on his shoulder. “It’s going to be perfect.”

“Are you sure?” Alejandro teased.

“I’m a champion with a great dance partner and a wonderfully hot fiancé. I’m going to grab happiness with both hands and run.”

“Really?” Alejandro challenged.

Shanna sent him a saucy smile. “You bet. Don’t believe me? Just watch me.”

“Oh, I will.” He kissed her. “With pleasure.”

About the Author

To learn more about Shelley Bradley, please visit www.shelleybradley.com or www.myspace.com/shelleybradley. Send an email to Shelley at shelley@shelleybradley.com or join her newsletter via the link from her website to hear more about new and upcoming titles.

Look for these titles by Shelley Bradley

Now Available:

Naught Little Secret
The Lady and the Dragon

Coming Soon:

Dangerous Little Secret

He promises to indulge her secret fantasies, if only she dares to accept.

Sneak Peek: Show Me

© 2007 Jaci Burton

Socialite Janine Bartolino has always been in the public eye. Managing her late father's philanthropic interests, she keeps her pastimes above reproach. But when a surprise thirtieth birthday celebration at a private club opens her eyes to wicked pleasures, and an intriguing man offers her the chance of a lifetime to indulge her every secret fantasy, Janine takes a leap of faith...at great personal risk.

Phillipe "Del" Delacroix knows what Janine wants, even if she isn't aware of it herself—a chance to explore the world of voyeurs and exhibitionists. Soon, the once staid and reserved woman transforms into a daring and passionate lover, giving Del everything he could ask for in a partner. But when something happens that puts Janine's reputation, her career, all she's worked for, in jeopardy...Del must prove that loving him is worth the risk.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Sneak Peek: Show Me*:

"Your friends thought you'd run."

She shrugged and took a long swallow of rum. It burned, but it felt good. Courage-inducing. "They're very adventurous. Me? Not so much."

"So, you're the conservative one in the group?"

"I'm hardly conservative." Boring, maybe, but not conservative. She led a wicked, sexy, adventurous lifestyle—in her fantasies. Her reality was something entirely different.

He drained his glass and set it back on the table. "Why do I get the feeling you're trying to convince me of something that's not quite true?"

“My friends, Susan, Terri and Melinda have fascinating lives. One’s an author of mystery books who travels the world researching and doing nationwide book tours. One’s an actress and the other’s a model. Their careers alone are profoundly more exciting than mine.”

“And what do you do?”

“I manage my father’s estate. He’s the late Louis Bartolino.”

“Ah. I’ve heard of your father. My condolences on his death last year.”

She nodded. “Thank you. I took over the Bartolino Foundation after his death. That’s my work.”

Del crossed his arms. “Big job for one person.”

“It can be. I handle it. Nevertheless, it hardly makes me...exciting.”

His lips twitched. “I don’t know about that. I find you intriguing.”

It would be rude to snort. “Right. Of course you do.”

Del picked up their glasses and refilled their drinks. “Being exciting has nothing to do with your career, Janine. It’s an inner quality, a glow.” He walked back to her and handed her the glass, his fingers brushing hers. She felt a zing of electricity.

“You shine like a woman who has a secret.”

“I have no secrets.”

“Is that right. None at all?”

“No.” She sipped the rum, wishing she’d never come in here. Del made her uncomfortable. He was too probing, as if he knew something about her that she didn’t. Which was ridiculous.

“We all have secrets, Janine. Sometimes things even we aren’t aware about ourselves.”

“I’m an open book. Read the society section in the newspaper. You’ll find out anything you want to know about me.”

“That’s surface. Public relations. That’s not who you really are.”

She shook her head, fighting back a laugh. “Really. You’ve known me for ten minutes. Who am I?”

He shrugged and moved away from her. "Not sure. Let's find out." He pressed a button next to the mirror and the lights went out.

Janine startled, not sure what was happening. But then the mirror glowed. No, wait. A picture was forming. What the hell was that?

It wasn't a picture. It was a two-way mirror. On the other side was a room, with a bed and a chair and nothing else.

There was a man and a woman in the room, both young and extremely attractive. The man was tall, well built, with cover model good looks. He was naked from the waist up, wore no shoes, only a pair of jeans with the top button undone. The woman had long blonde hair loosely cascading down her back. She wore only a scarlet red bra that barely contained her copious breasts, and a matching thong. She looked like she worked out, her body in fine shape. She was on her knees in front of the man, dragging the zipper down his jeans.

The blonde licked her lips, anticipation clearly showing on her face.

Janine licked her lips, too, her throat gone dry. What was she looking at? It was an intimate, personal moment between two people. She should turn away, walk out of the room, but she couldn't move. Her feet seemed to have glued themselves to the floor.

And her body's response to what she saw was off the charts. Her nipples tightened, her breasts felt hot and swollen, and her clit quivered. She was turned on in a major way, and she sent up a thankful prayer for the darkness surrounding her. What would Del think of her?

What kind of place was Sneak Peek?

As if in answer to her unspoken question, Del moved behind her, his body seemingly surrounding her, crowding her personal space. She inhaled, picking up his scent, letting it fill her. His cock was rigid against her ass as he pressed against her, letting his hands rest on her hips.

“Sneak Peek is a sex club, Janine. A club for voyeurs and exhibitionists. If you look across the room you’ll see another window. There are over a dozen people watching.”

She tore her gaze away from the couple, finding the window Del mentioned. Men and women stood on the other side of a glass enclosure, some fully clothed, others in various states of undress. Some merely observed, while there were some couples fondling each other as they watched.

“The couple you see in the other room are exhibitionists. They enjoy having sex knowing that others are watching. It heightens their pleasure. In this scenario, we’re the voyeurs.”

Oh, God. She shouldn’t be here. Not this kind of place. For so many different reasons. Her head spun in a million directions, the urge to run strong.

But still, she couldn’t tear her gaze away from the couple on the other side of the mirror, especially when the woman pulled the man’s sizeable cock from his jeans and enveloped it between her full, painted lips. The look of ecstasy on the man’s face made Janine’s breath catch. The woman’s gaze was glued to the man’s as she sucked his cock in deep. With one free hand, the woman tucked her fingers into her own pussy and began to pleasure herself.

Janine’s pussy quivered, as if she, too, could feel the sensation of finger fucking herself, could taste the man’s thick cock between her lips, could feel the heated gazes of dozens of people watching them. She wanted to close her eyes and pretend she was anywhere but here.

At the same time, she couldn’t deny that she wanted to *be* the woman on the other side of the mirror.

One lucky woman...three sexy cowboys...she's in for the ride of her life!

Long Hard Ride

© 2007 Lorelei James

Channing Kinkaid itches for a change; a wild western adventure with an untamed man. Determined to shed her inhibitions and embrace the steamier, seamier side of life, she sets her sights on hooking up with a real chaps-and-spurs-wearing cowboy.

Enter Colby McKay—bull rider, saddle bronc buster and calf roper. From the moment he sets lust-filled eyes on the sweet and fiery Channing, he knows he's found the woman who's up to the challenge of cutting loose. What rough and rowdy cowboy could resist a no-holds-barred sexual romp with a sassy young thing starring as his personal buckle bunny?

Intrigued by Channing's bold proposition of horsing around on the road, Colby impulsively sweetens the deal; sexual escapades not only in his bed, but in the bedrolls of his rodeo traveling partners, Trevor and Edgard.

Although Channing's secretly longed to be the sole focus of more than one man's passions, Colby's demand for complete submission behind closed doors will test her willful nature.

Can Channing give up total control? Especially when not all is as it seems with the sexy trio? Or will the cowboys have to break out the bullropes and piggin' string to break in this headstrong filly?

Warning: This title contains the following: lots of explicit sex, going strong long after the cows come home, graphic language that'd make your mama blush, light bondage with bullropes, ménage a trois, and—yee-haw!—hot nekkid cowboy man-love.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Long Hard Ride*:

Trevor and Edgard returned to the arena to practice roping and Colby tagged along, needing to run his horse.

Channing stayed in the room and indulged in a shower. After she'd shaved and coated her body with lotion, she wondered what would happen when her cowboys returned. Was she supposed to stay naked? Would they prefer another strip tease?

Did she really know what she'd gotten herself into?

The sound of a lock in the door sent her pulse tripping. She shoved the books in her satchel and flipped the page on her notebook.

Colby entered the room first, followed by Trevor. Edgard brought up the rear and he immediately went into the bathroom and the shower kicked on.

Trevor flopped on the queen bed against the wall. "I'm tired."

"I'm not," Colby said. His gaze traveled from Channing's bare toes all the way up her legs to linger on her face. "I'm feelin' *very* energetic tonight."

Yowza.

"Who's sleeping in the trailer?" she asked.

"Edgard," Trevor said.

Did that mean he wouldn't be joining them again? Channing was almost afraid to ask. She was secretly worried Edgard regretted having her along, or worse, that he didn't find her attractive.

As soon as Edgard finished his shower, he bid them goodnight. After Colby cleaned up, he left the room for a time while Trevor took his turn in the bathroom. With every minute that clicked by, Channing became more and more nervous.

Especially when Colby returned to the room with a length of rope in one hand, a bandana in the other, and a wicked gleam in his eye. He said, “Strip. I wanna see you bare-assed naked right now.”

Channing nodded, doffed her clothes and stood before him, feeling shy and exposed.

“You’re mighty fine, Chan. Come here and turn around.”

She crossed the room. The folded red bandana flashed in front of her eyes before everything went dark. A quick pinch on the back of her head and she was blindfolded.

Colby made no move to touch her besides guiding her back to the bed. “Sit here and wait for further instructions. You’ll do as you’re told. No questions. We clear on that, shug?”

“Yes.”

He placed a soft kiss on the corners of her lips and whispered, “Good girl. Don’t be scared. We ain’t gonna hurt you—” his teeth sank into her earlobe, “—much.”

Channing shivered.

The door to the bathroom clicked open and shut. She heard Colby’s and Trevor’s voices, but she couldn’t hear what they were saying. That was probably a good thing.

She swallowed to moisten her dry mouth. Her heart rate kicked up again when humid, soapy-scented air drifted out of the bathroom and she sensed Trevor and Colby standing in front of her.

“Here’s the deal, darlin’. We’re gonna play a little game of blind man’s bluff. You’re gonna try to figure out who’s touchin’ you. If you guess right, you get a reward. If you guess wrong, well, let’s just hope you don’t have to find out.”

Channing went absolutely motionless.

“Lay back on the bed and press your arms together above your head. That’s a girl.” Scratchy twine wrapped around her wrists several times.

Colby whispered, "It ain't too tight, mostly it's to keep your hands out of our way. If you cooperate, we'll leave them loose. The second you try to touch either of us or those hands move? We'll fasten you to the bed frame. We clear on that?"

"Yes."

Trevor said, "Spread your legs wide. I wanna see those heels hangin' off the side of the bed."

She complied.

"You're beautiful, Chan. No matter what we do to you, leave 'em like that until we say otherwise."

Channing had a flash of insight. If they talked, she'd easily be able to figure out which one was doing what. Colby loved to talk dirty, so chances were good he wouldn't be able to keep his mouth shut. She withheld a grin.

Until the music turned on.

Before she could contemplate how she'd differentiate one man from the other in the dark, a hot mouth closed over her left nipple and suckled strongly. Rough fingertips dragged up and down the center of her body. Smoothing over her ribcage and the sensitive bend in her waist. A light stroking over the pulse pounding in the column of her neck.

A work-roughened palm traced her contours, from the arms displayed above her head, down her tensed shoulders. Over the soft curve of her belly, across her hips and the roundness of her thighs. Past her quaking knees, down her calves to her ankles, ending at her ticklish feet. Those maddeningly thorough hands reversed the process with just as much sensual deliberation.

Channing began to shake with pure unadulterated need.

Then those eager hands palmed her breasts, bringing both nipples together to suck and lick and taste. Teeth nipped the tender tips, causing a pain-filled sound to escape from her throat.

The sting was soothed by pursed lips blowing a stream of cool air, followed by a warm, wet tongue lapping and curling around the abused flesh.

“Who?” a gruff male commanded.

Well, shoot. Her chances of guessing correctly were 50-50. “Trevor?”

“Wrong. Turn her over,” Colby said.

A hard slap burned across her left butt cheek.

When she protested—“Hey! That stings”—two more smacks landed in rapid succession.

“Keep talkin’ and I’ll take great pleasure in turnin’ this heart-shaped ass rosy red, shug.”

Crap.

“Got any other protests?” Trevor asked.

She shook her head.

“Good. Turn her the other way so I can get my licks in, too,” Trevor said.

She was rolled to her left side and four solid smacks landed on her right buttock. “Now we’re even. Don’t make us get out the bullrope, Chan.”

The humiliation she thought she’d feel never came. What did that say about her?

Nothing, besides she’d never been wetter or more turned on in her life.

Strong hands gripped her ankles and jerked her body down until her stinging ass nearly hung off the end of the bed. Then a cool, wet tongue licked straight up the center of her pussy.

Her hips shot off the bed.

A warning growl sounded next to her ear.

Then the mouth on her sex began a full-out assault. That clever tongue wiggled deep inside her dripping cunt, licking her from the inside

out. Then it zigzagged up to flick little whips of hot velvet across her distended clit. Her blood pulsed and gathered in that little nub, the orgasm danced close to the surface and then the possibility vanished as the teasing mouth trailed away.

Damn. She wanted to demand it return, but she wisely kept her lips pressed together.

Soft kisses circled her mound from the line of her pubic hair, to the crease of her thighs, back down to her vaginal opening. The circle of kisses became progressively smaller. Tighter. Wetter.

Channing tried not to writhe, or to grind her sex into that fleeting tongue. But when that hot, hungry mouth closed over her clit and her swollen pussy lips and began to suck them together, she flat out screamed.

Two thick fingers shot inside and stroked that magical spot as the soft suctioning grew stronger and sent her soaring over the edge of reason and into a climax so extreme she forgot to breathe. She nearly passed out from lack of oxygen to her sex-addled brain.

Once the blood quit rushing in her ears and slowed to a dull throb between her legs, she slumped against the mattress.

A gravelly voice demanded, "Who?"

God. Was she really supposed to care *who'd* brought her to such an intense orgasm? Channing licked her lips and willed her head to quit buzzing.

"Who?" the demand was voiced again.

"Umm. Colby?"

"Very good, shug," he whispered against her throat.

By night, he becomes a mysterious stranger devoted only to her pleasure...and discovers she's hiding a naughty little secret.

Naughty Little Secret

© 2006 Shelley Bradley
Now available in print and ebook

After divorcing her never-home husband, Lauren Southall plucked up her courage, dusted off her power suits, and returned to corporate life. Two years later, there's just one six-foot three, testosterone-packed problem: her ex-husband's good friend and her current boss, Noah Reeves. Lauren aches for him. No other man will do. But she can't possibly measure up to the silicone-packed professional cheerleaders he dates. So she hides her desire behind a professional persona and fantasizes.

For ten years, Noah Reeves has waited to make Lauren his. Once her divorce was final, he tracked down and hired the brilliant, dedicated woman. But when he's with her, it isn't spreadsheets and profit margins on his brain. Problem is, she's never seen him as anything but her ex-husband's pal. Now that she's finally a free woman and with him 40+ hours a week, well... he'd love to persuade her to throw in her nights and weekends.

Noah decides to romance her by day. By night, he becomes a mysterious stranger devoted only to her pleasure...and discovers she's hiding a naughty little secret of her own.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Naughty Little Secret*:

“Want you,” he breathed harshly in her ear. “So damn bad.”

His words made her belly—and something a tad lower—pulse with a ferocious beat. Lauren stopped fighting the battle she couldn't hope to

fight. He melted her. Completely. Made her dizzy. Crazy. She'd never known anything like it.

Moaning into his mouth, she arched up to him and kissed him. He answered with a groan, curling his tongue around hers, entangling them again. She invited him to take his fill. Surrendered.

The stranger didn't hesitate to take his possession deeper. He held her face in his hands gently, as if she were precious to him. But his kiss... He took her mouth again in a fierce mating, throbbing with harsh hunger. The flame of his desire ignited her even more. Lauren felt every crush of his lips and lash of his tongue against her own deep inside her, where she was now soaking and aching and praying he would replace it all with satisfaction. Soon.

She fought the cuffs, wanting to touch him, feel the sleek, hard flesh she knew lurked under his soft cotton shirt. They jangled with finality. Arching, entreating, she whimpered into his mouth. On their own, her legs parted farther, wrapped around him.

"Yes," he growled. "Give me everything."

He rocked against her again, and the ache between her legs tightened. She was on fire now. God, the heat raged inside her, demanding she know the taste of his skin, the feel of his bunching shoulders under her palms as he thrust every inch of his cock inside her.

"Uncuff me," she panted against his chest. "Please."

"Next time."

He drew back, and she felt cold without him. Until she heard the rustling of clothing. He was undressing.

This was happening, really happening. A stranger was actually stripping in her bedroom with every intent to have sex with her. Lauren would have thought she was dreaming if it didn't feel so real.

"If you touch me now, I'll explode."

A whisper of misgiving shifted through her. "I'm afraid. I—I've never been tied down."

He leaned over her, and Lauren felt his heat seep inside her, the brush of his bare skin arousing. "Get used to it. I'm going to love having you bound and under me so I can watch you come while you're at my mercy."

Oh, God. He'd already stripped down to his skin. Now, he was stripping her of her defenses. His wicked words, coupled with the confession that he wanted her badly, tore away at her patience. But something tugged at her. Something familiar about his voice. Had she heard it somewhere?

A fast, fierce kiss put an end to the thought. His clever tongue swept through her mouth and captured hers. The kiss became a tango of shallow breaths and urgency, all fueled by his buttery-rich skill. He kissed her ruthlessly, like a man with just one thing on his mind.

He was making her think about sex, too. In fact, she couldn't think about anything else.

The cacophony of sensations ricocheted through her body, settling right where she ached like she'd been without sex for centuries, not a couple of years.

"Hurry," she demanded.

"I've waited so damn long. I'm not rushing this."

He'd waited? For her?

The puzzle made no sense, but his gruff whisper shot both a fresh thrill and a protest through her. Her body throbbed like a ceaseless toothache. He was going to make her wait.

"You've flushed the prettiest pink. Everything about you turns me on." His raspy whisper throbbed inside her.

His voice...low and rough and arousing. A hint of something familiar. Should she know it?

Lauren frowned, trying to puzzle it out with her overheated brain. But he settled on top of her again, her sensitive breasts meeting the hot slab of his chest. Think tank time was over.

A light dusting of hair grazed her nipples. And he was hard everywhere—pecs, abs, cock, thighs—all taut and ready and covering her with the intent to take. Electricity sparked every sensitive spot on her skin. Lauren softened around him, her body fitting against him perfectly, molding her every curve to his hard angles. Amazing. Like pieces of a puzzle made for each other. Perfect.

She raised her hip to him. “Now.”

“I’m dying to.” The words were a tortured moan. “But I have to get my mouth on you first. I have to taste you.”

Before she could protest, his lips brushed the side of her breast. Heat curled everywhere he kissed and laved. He lifted his head, and Lauren swore she could *feel* his gaze on her nipples. More blood rushed to them, engorging them.

“Fucking beautiful,” he murmured as his tongue curled around the sensitive tip.

Pleasure washed over her, cascading down her senses like a hot fall of liquid desire. She moaned, arched toward him—and he rewarded her by sucking her breast deep into his mouth. Voracious. His hard pulls tugged the ache between her legs into something sharp and impatient. A gentle scrape of his teeth, a subtle nip, then explosions of sensation detonated all through her, and she cried out.

“So responsive,” he praised as he transferred his attention to her other nipple.

He laved it with the same care, a hard suck, a small stinging bite. The pleasure ratcheted up, the ache clamping down deep in her sex. She clenched her hands into fists. Perspiration filmed her chest. She couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t think.

Lauren could only want.

And when he smoothed his palm down her belly, yanked off her thong, and slid his hot finger through her aching wet slit, she cried out.

“Oh, hell,” he panted against her breast. “You’re bare. Do you shave?”

“Wax,” she moaned.

“That’s so damn sexy.”

It was merely cleaner to her, but everything he did was sexy. Everything he said made her feel sexy. No one had made her feel like a desirable woman in a *very* long time. She wanted more. Now.

She opened her mouth to make a demand of her own when he circled his fingers around her swollen, humid opening, sensitizing her to his touch. Before she could take another breath, he plunged two fingers deep.

Oh, God. She was dissolving. Disintegrating. Coming apart already. How much of her mind would she lose if he thrust his cock inside her?

“I knew you’d feel amazing,” he groaned.

But she barely heard. Pleasure ripped a cry from her throat. He was sending her into a spiral she had never experienced, had barely imagined in her wildest fantasies. And he thought *she* was amazing?

He twisted his fingers inside her and hooked them upward, reaching a sensitive spot in her slick channel that nearly had her coming off the bed. And if he kept touching her there, she’d be coming. Period.

Lauren thrust her hips up and pleaded, “Now. Please.”

“Soon.”

“But—”

As he thrust his fingers deep again, she felt him shake his head. No. Damn!

Soft strands of his hair tickling her skin as he shifted down, his mouth leading the way. Pressing soft kisses on her shoulder, the side of her breast, her belly...lower, she gasped, writhed, moaned.

“I’ve got to taste you.” The words were a harsh whisper against the bare flesh of her sex as he rubbed and pressed against the ultra-sensitive spot inside her. “Open for me, Lauren.”

She did, probably setting a new world record as she bent her knees, raised to him in invitation. Ready, eager, for him to envelop her, fill her...fulfill her.

“You’re damn tight,” he gritted, maneuvering his fingers into the hot depths of her sex. “How long has it been?”

She was about to explode into a million pieces and he wanted her to answer a question? “Two years, “ she gasped. “And a few months.”

“Then let’s make sure you’re good and wet before I fuck you. Because I’m going to tonight. Hard.”

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