# My Virtual Lover Madelaine Grant

# My Virtual Lover

By

# Madelaine Grant

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

My Virtual Lover ISBN: 1-55410-726-1 Copyright © 2006 Madelaine Grant Coverart by Martine Jardin

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

> Published by eXtasy Books 2006 Look for us online at www.extasybooks.com

This is dedicated to my husband for his patience, support, and understanding during the writing of this book.

# New York, 2025 CHAPTER J

**L**ooking back, I can't believe I could have been so gullible. They were all in on the plot – my closest friends and my lover – and I never had any suspicions until the very end. Red flags waved, but I didn't notice them.

The whole episode began with a perfectly innocent conversation one hot August afternoon with my best friend and business partner, Trish Lewis. We were relaxing by her pool that afternoon. Perhaps I was feeling sorry for myself and my defenses were down. That's the only way I can rationalize everything.

Trish and I go back a long time. We were college roommates and, four years ago, joined forces to open an upscale art gallery, Andelew.

Trish started the conversation with a strange question. "Val, what would your ideal man be like?" She was stretched out on a chaise lounge touching up her nail polish.

"My ideal man?" I snickered. "No such animal exists."

"You sound bitter. Bet you're having Tony trouble, huh?" Trish raised one tanned leg and examined her silver painted toenails. "What's he done now?"

"It's what he *hasn't* done," I muttered, turning onto my stomach on the adjacent chaise. "He's a workaholic—either staying late at the office or traveling out-of-town on business. In the past month I've only spent *three* nights with him. *Three* nights out of thirty."

"Well, that's better than nothing," Trish offered.

"It might as well be nothing. He was so tired he fell asleep on me."

"You sound frustrated." Trish giggled. "So tell me, Val, what you like in a man, if you could have a choice."

"He'd be there if I needed him, that's for sure," I said, giving the subject some thought. "Yes, he'd have to be dependable ... that's very important. And he'd have to be sensitive to my feelings, too, and a good listener. Tony pretends to listen but then I catch him sneaking a look at the football scores or the financial page. It's very annoying."

"I'll bet. So what else would you like?"

"What would I like? There are so many traits that are key. Let's see ... loyalty, of course. My ideal man would have to be faithful and protective. Not controlling, but looking out for my welfare." Sighing, I glanced at the kidney-shaped pool in front of us, the turquoise water glittering under a late afternoon sun. The smell of almondscented suntan lotion mixed with late-blooming roses tickled my nostrils.

"Of course," Trish nodded. "You've made a good start. Just 'blue sky' it. Make believe you could custom order a man. What else would Val Anders want?"

I turned over and lowered my bathing suit straps to get an even tan. "He'd have to be intelligent, cultured, able to converse about the things that interest me—art, music, books, theater—you know what I mean."

A lovely day and a lush scene. *Why was I feeling so down?* An image of Tony Chapman rose in my mind. The one and only vacation we'd had together had been to Italy last summer. In fact it was just this time last year. What a marvelous two weeks.

I glanced down at the opal ring on my finger glowing out of a delicate gold filigree setting. Tony bought it for me on that unforgettable Italian holiday. It was one of my prized possessions. Would I ever be that happy again?

"Uh huh. You haven't said a thing about his physical appearance. Don't you care about that?"

Trish's voice interrupted my musings. Startled, I considered her question. "You're right. I guess I took it for granted he'd be good-looking."

"Like Tony?" Trish asked softly.

I grimaced. "Let's leave Tony out of this. When I think of him I see red. He makes me so angry. Talk about indifference."

"Okay, okay. I won't mention the idiot. So, this ideal guy of yours – describe him."

I closed my eyes and tried to picture the kind of man that made my pulses race. "Dark auburn hair, wavy, a little long—warm green eyes. Yes, definitely green eyes. A firm mouth that smiles often and a dimple in his cheek. And did I mention a sense of humor? Humor is definitely one trait that I require. Oh, and of course he'd be tall, at least six feet, and broad shouldered, too. And athletic ... good at tennis, swimming and riding. He'd have a deep, pleasant voice, easy to listen to. There, that should do it."

Trish rolled over onto her side and grinned. "That's quite a list. But you haven't mentioned one important factor."

"What? I thought I covered all the bases."

"Sexual attraction—the chemistry between a man and a woman. You haven't said a word about that."

I shrugged. "That's a given. I mean, if there's no heat between us, it doesn't matter what he looks like or how nice he is."

"You're right. I didn't exactly have that in mind." Trish sat up and gazed out at the manicured lawn surrounding us. A lone gardener was clipping bushes in the distance. "What I meant was, what kind of lover would be your ideal? Some women enjoy the masterful, dominant kind while others prefer the affectionate, sweet type of lover. What's *your*\_preference?"

I rolled over and gave Trish a long stare. "You're cooking something up ... I can feel the vibes. Are you trying to match me with one of Scott's friends? If so, you can forget about it. Tony may be absent a lot, but he's definitely still on my radar screen." There, that should shut her mouth.

Trish laughed. "Stop being so suspicious. And no, I have no intention of sticking you with one of my husband's pals. They're a stuffy bunch, anyway. Seriously, though, between you and me, what type of lover appeals to you? Do you like to be dominated? Some women enjoy that sense of surrender." She turned to give me an inquisitive look.

What a strange question for Trish to ask. But I still didn't hear any warning bells. I pondered her query for a few long minutes. "Let me think about it," I murmured, half closing my eyes.

"Sure, take your time." Trish picked up a paperback to read.

#### CHAPTER 2

**J***id I like to be dominated?* The question started my heart racing as memory brought a scene to mind.

Last Christmas Tony and I spent some time visiting his family in upstate New York. Our days were filled with skiing and our evenings spent gathered around the large dining room table enjoying hearty meals and lively conversation. Our first full day on the slopes was exhausting for me. After dinner I made a beeline for the hot tub, which was relaxing, but caused me to be sleepier than ever.

"Tony, I'm heading to bed early," I announced.

"I'm about ready too," he replied.

Together we mounted the stairs to our bedroom on the second floor. The four poster bed with its fluffy down comforter looked inviting. I changed into a long flannel nightgown and slid under the covers.

"Goodnight," I murmured, ready to turn over

and sleep. Sex was the last thing on my mind. Not so with my love, Tony Chapman.

Tony stripped out of his clothes, adjusted the lights to leave one small lamp glowing and then sat next to me on the bed. Leaning over, he kissed me, stroking some tendrils of long brown hair away from my face. "Val, sweetheart, I know you're tired but I also know you're going to enjoy what I've planned for us."

I turned to give him a puzzled stare. His dark blue eyes had a decidedly wicked gleam and the corners of his mouth quirked in a half smile. What did he have up his sleeve?

"Tony," I half groaned. "I'm totally exhausted. Can't it wait for another night?" All I wanted to do was crawl under the comforter and sleep.

He shook his head and, at the same moment, pulled the quilt off and settled it at the bottom of the bed. Then he shifted me into the center of the four poster, slid the pillows out from under my head and settled his compact, muscled frame astride me. "All you have to do is totally relax and leave everything in my hands, Val. You do trust me, don't you?" His expression was serious.

Bewildered by his actions, I was too fatigued to ask questions. "Of course I trust you," I replied, stifling a yawn. Was he getting ready for a pillow fight or something? My clouded brain couldn't seem to think straight. Still on top of me, Tony reached over to the adjacent night table, opened the top drawer and pulled out what appeared to be several long, silky-looking red braided ropes—the kind that hold drapes back, and a white silk scarf.

Without another word of explanation, he looped a circle around each of my wrists with the red silk cords. The other end he positioned on the bed posts behind my head.

"What are you doing?" I exclaimed. My pulses were beating fast and a queer heat radiated from my belly.

"Putting you in a position where you can't move," he said, adjusting the ropes to hold my wrists over my head. "Relax, Val. I won't hurt you. And you will enjoy it. Trust me."

Again those words ... 'trust me'. Did I trust him? Yes. I had to say I did. He'd never given me any reason to doubt his motives.

"Okay," I muttered, much too tired to argue with him anyway.

"Good." He smiled as he turned and fastened two more silky cords, this time from my ankles to the posts at the foot of the bed.

I was tied up, spread-eagled, with only my nightgown for cover. I suspected that covering wouldn't last long.

He bent his head and gave me a long, passionate kiss. "Val," he whispered. "The walls

are pretty thin, your cries when you climax will rouse the house. So, I have to put this scarf over your mouth. Don't be frightened—I'll take it off after we're finished. Okay?"

My heart began beating wildly. "Please, Tony, don't do that. I'll be quiet ... I promise." The thought of being gagged terrified me.

"I can't take the chance, darling," he said tenderly as he covered my mouth with the silk scarf.

I started to cry out, but the scarf muffled my sounds. I was completely at his mercy—and we both knew it.

"Relax, sweetheart. Just surrender your will to me. You won't be sorry."

With those words, he knelt between my outstretched legs and rolled my nightie up slowly to my waist.

I shivered, more from fear than any chill, until Tony began trailing a line of kisses from my navel to the curly mound between my thighs. With his tongue he licked the folds of my sex and then the tight, sensitive nub of my clit.

A wild heat spread from my core to every part of my body. I twisted, pulling at the cords, trying to retreat from his teasing tongue. But I was trapped and for a moment I panicked. What was he going to do? Anticipation and fear struggled within me. Tony must have sensed my alarm. "Val, dearest, please don't be afraid. You must learn to trust me. I would never harm you."

He raised my nightie to expose my breasts and started to suckle one and then the other, nibbling and nipping. The sensations were stunning—a stream of fire radiated from my hard-tipped peaks to my wet, hot core. Moaning, I turned my head from side to side, bucking my hips forward and back. The rising tension was almost unbearable. I was a prisoner, completely and utterly dominated, every sensation was magnified a thousand times by my submissive position. It was thrilling and scary and spectacular, all at the same moment.

Liquid heat poured from my smoldering center as Tony slowly stroked every sensitive spot, sending me into a delirium of ecstasy. Twisting and pushing my hips forward, I arched up, trying to capture his tantalizing fingers.

When I thought I couldn't bear it one more second, Tony raised my buttocks off the bed and thrust his hard, full shaft deep into my hot, open cunt, filling me to my very womb. Thrusting and pulling back, he rode me until I exploded with a force I'd never imagined. His release soon followed, his seed spilling into me. He sank down, holding me close.

"Val," he whispered hoarsely, "Oh, Val. I love you so."

I felt his heart beating against my drenched body, his shuddery breaths sounded in my ears. I moaned as he slipped the scarf away from my mouth. He kissed me, long and hard, running his tongue gently over my lips. Then he released me from my silky restraints and gathered me in his arms.

It didn't take long to sink into a deep sleep.

## CHAPTER 3

" Have you given the matter enough thought? Do you like being dominated?"

My heart was still beating and my face felt flushed from the vivid memories flooding my mind. The gathering moisture between my thighs didn't help. "It all depends," I said, trying to compose myself. "If I completely trusted my lover, I wouldn't mind being dominated. But there would have to be a high level of trust. That's for sure."

We were silent a few moments, I pondering our unusual conversation and Trish, seemingly absorbed in applying more suntan lotion.

"How about some iced tea? Could you go for a glass?" Trish asked, changing the conversation abruptly.

I was glad for the break. Too intense for a hot afternoon. "Sounds good to me."

Trish pulled a remote out of a nearby beach bag

and clicked on it. "Mikey will be here with our drinks in a few minutes."

I shook my head. "You still enthralled with all your robotic help? I'll bet that gardener is one, too. Am I right?"

"Yeah, he's the best. He works a twelve-hour day without a stop. All he requires is an electric charge and some oil for rusty joints. What a pleasure."

"I prefer human help—you can keep your machines." Trish and Scott were big on new inventions. Their house was full of the latest gadgets.

Trish snickered. "You're so old-fashioned, Val. When are you going to join the 'in' crowd? Everyone's using robots nowadays."

"Maybe I am, but they give me the creeps. Some of my friends prefer their robotic pets to real dogs and cats. I even have a friend who has a robotic canary and several robotic goldfish." I pulled a long face. "Give me a break—how interesting can machine birds and fish be?"

Just then Mikey, one of the small household robots, made his appearance, holding aloft a tray with a pitcher of iced tea and two glasses. He lowered the tray carefully onto a snack table next to Trish and waited for further instructions. Mikey was an advanced breed of robot—part human looking, part metallic. His body was made of flesh-colored aluminum with features clearly delineated. He wore regular boy's clothing since he stood only four feet tall.

"Good job, Mikey," Trish said. "You can go back now."

Mikey turned and marched to the Lewis' modern stone and glass house.

Trish poured some tea and handed me the glass. "Better than a housekeeper, believe me."

Maybe she had a point. I still wasn't ready to give in to the robot craze. "Now if I had a robotic driver, that would be something. I hate city driving."

"Me, too," Trish agreed, sipping her tea. "We're the ones commuting to New York while you live in Soho. That's not a bad commute to midtown. What's your gripe?"

"You forget when I'm transporting paintings or sculpture to the gallery, I take the van and it's a bitch, believe me. By the way, I know we're not supposed to talk business on our day off, but did you get a chance to view those images from our new German artist? They'll blow your mind."

Trish chuckled. "You mean Hans Schmidt, the conceptual artist with a penchant for porcelain plumbing? Yeah, I did see some of them. The installation is going to require a master plumber, with all that water flowing in and out. It's quite a piece of work—I think it will be a sensation and, if

we're lucky, there'll be a collector out there just dying to acquire it."

"I love his title, "Intimate Water Works" ... What an imagination. All he's missing is a busty nude taking a shower."

"Hmmmm, how about using a robot for that? It might work." Trish narrowed her eyes, deep in thought. "Next time I talk to Hans, I'll mention it."

"Don't look for trouble," I warned. "He's one of our temperamental artists ... I wouldn't want to offend him."

"Don't worry," Trish assured me. "I'll be tactful."

"You? Tactful?" I snorted. "That'll be the day."

She laughed and we both settled back for a relaxing sunbath. I reflected on our different working styles and realized how fortunate we were to complement one another rather than clash. When we first started the Andelew Galleries four years ago, I wasn't sure we'd be able to coexist in the same business.

But we each found our niche and kept out of the other's hair—a good formula for success. Trish handled marketing and money matters while I dealt with the artists and scouted for new and exciting talent. Next month would see the opening of our most ambitious show to date—a conceptual show with Schmidt and several other avant garde sculptors. I'd been working on this particular exhibition for the past year.

"Do you expect Tony to make the opening?" Trish asked casually.

"He'd better," I replied crossly. "If he's planing to be away again ..." My voice trailed off as I considered that very likely possibility.

"Don't worry. I'm sure he'll manage *something*," Trish said in a soothing tone.

Later I would find out just what that *something* would be.

## CHAPTER 4

arrived home the next evening after spending the night at the Lewis'. As I entered my loft apartment in SoHo, the flat panel screen in my hallway came to life and Tony's image appeared.

"Val, where the hell are you? I've been calling all day. I'm flying back tomorrow evening. How about dinner together? Call me when you get in."

Well, that was a pleasant surprise. I hadn't seen Tony in two weeks. He'd been on a business trip to Southeast Asia. Quickly I punched in his number. A bland voice instructed me to leave a message. Forget it. I hung up angry with myself for feeling hopeful. Tony most likely was out with a gorgeous oriental maiden half his age. He'd made a point of telling me how attractive the young women were in Thailand.

The more I thought about Tony's frequent absences and his penchant for sizing up every woman in sight, the more appealing my 'ideal' man became. I reviewed my conversation with Trish that afternoon. Could I ever find a man with those qualities I admired? Or would I compromise my standards and put up with someone just to have a warm body in my bed?

I was definitely compromising by having a relationship with Tony that was so far from perfect it wasn't funny.

I had just fallen asleep when the phone rang. Damn. Should I bother answering? Well, I was already up, so why not.

"Hullo?"

"Val, did I wake you?" Tony sounded apologetic.

"Yup. So what else is new?" At this point I didn't care if my sarcasm was obvious.

"You sound grumpy. Where've you been all day? Out with another man?"

Of all the dumb questions. "Sure. Absolutely. Out with all three of my lovers. Any other questions?"

"Okay, okay. Sorry I mentioned anything. Seriously, where were you? I tried calling from 9 a.m. on." Tony sounded sincere.

"I spent the day with Trish relaxing by her pool. The city's too hot—we're having a real heat wave or don't you remember August here? Of course, it must be beautiful weather where you are." I sounded snippy, but I couldn't help it. He could offer to take me along to some of these exotic locales.

He chuckled. "I remember. You forget I'm a native New Yorker. And, yes, it's been lovely weather. Wish you could have been here with me."

So why don't you invite me? I felt like screaming at him. Instead, I swallowed my rage and concentrated on the fact that he would be back the next evening. "What time does your plane arrive?"

"Seven-thirty. After you pick me up at the airport, we could stop for dinner. Sound okay with you?"

What could I say? I did want to see him. Who knew how long he'd be around this time? "Fine. I'll be there."

After I hung up, I started thinking about our conversation. Tony definitely took me for granted. That much was pretty obvious. We'd had an intimate relationship for over three years and, though we had separate residences, were seen as a couple by our friends and business associates. Did I want more than this? I pondered the question. I liked having my own space and being in control of my life. But something was definitely missing. What was missing was another story. I'd have to think about it.

Tony was not my 'ideal' man. He didn't have most of the qualifications I wanted in a partner. He would have to change quite a bit before he could measure up to *my*\_expectations.

Still mulling over the puzzle of my life, I finally drifted off to sleep

\* \* \* \*

"Guess what? I can spend the night," Tony said, winding his arms around me.

I had a sarcastic comeback at the tip of my tongue. Somehow I managed to control it. "That's great," I replied. "One night with you is equal to a thousand with someone else," I added.

We walked out of the airport arm-in-arm. Anyone viewing us would have thought we were starry-eyed honeymooners. What the heck, I might as well enjoy the moment.

"You brought the van. Good. Now I can stretch out and catch some sleep on our way to the restaurant." Tony yawned as he lowered the passenger seat and closed his eyes. "Even first class is cramped for long trips."

"You could spend more time in the States. Why do you have to travel halfway around the world?" I slid into the driver's seat and started the engine.

"Because, sweetheart, that's where the best deals are made." Tony leaned over and planted a loud kiss on my mouth. Then he reclined once more, ready for his nap. In less than five minutes, he was sound asleep. I looked at his face, so ruggedly handsome in repose. A lock of dark brown hair fell over his forehead. He had the longest eyelashes and the most kissable mouth. The rest of him wasn't half bad either. My eyes sliced a glance down his broad chest to the firm stomach and, below, to the zippered fly of his smooth fitting tan pants. Was there a slight protrusion or was it wishful thinking?

Sighing, I trained my eyes back to the highway. But I couldn't direct my errant mind. A sensual fantasy took form and began unwinding like a film reel.

Tony's hands were tied behind his back as a group of women, clad only in animal skins, marched him into the forest. I was the leader and directed the others to lash him to a tree.

*He was begging for mercy. "Please don't hurt me – please let me go."* 

I took no notice of his cries. "Strip him," I ordered. "Let's see how big his cock is. Maybe he'll set a record." I laughed and the others joined in.

"You can't do this to me," he cried, twisting every which way, trying to escape.

"Oh, no," I said. "We'll see about that."

Two women held his hands while I tied them together over his head and then to the tree trunk. With his feet spread apart, we tied his ankles with rope and to neighboring tree trunks. With a large hunting knife, I began slashing the clothes off his body.

He groaned and cursed us, but we didn't care. We'd captured him and we were determined to have our fun.

Finally he was stripped of everything. I ran my hand down the length of his firm, muscled body to the wreath of dark curling hair surrounding his hardened cock. "I'll bet you can get stiffer than that." I stroked the swelling member.

*He tensed and shuddered as I rubbed the two heavy globes underneath.* 

*"Let's measure him," one of the women shouted, "before he sprays his load."* 

"Not yet," I said. "I want him to have a hard cock for a long time before I give him any relief."

Tony howled when he heard my words – but I didn't pay any attention. He was my prisoner and I would torment him as long as I liked. His engorged cock throbbed in my hand, swelling and hot to the touch.

"Are we there yet?" Tony's husky voice snapped me out of my reverie, just at the crucial moment.

"Uh, almost. I thought you were sleeping." God, if he could guess what I'd been imagining.

He sat up, adjusted his seat and gave me a sideways glance. "Are you all right? You look a little flushed."

A little flushed! That was the understatement of the year. My body tingled and my panties were soaking wet. I took a deep breath and tried to compose myself. "I'm fine," I said. "It's been a busy week – I'm a little beat myself."

"Good," he grinned. "Then you won't mind if I fall asleep on you tonight." His large hand reached out to touch my knee. He gave it a light squeeze and sighed. "Although I've been dreaming about fucking you 'til you can't take anymore."

The composure I'd been struggling with collapsed at his words. The warmth from his hand spread through my whole body, opening up the floodgates once more. How soaked could my panties get without staining my skirt?

"I wouldn't mind," I murmured as I turned off the highway and headed to the small Italian restaurant, one of our favorites.

His hand crept from my knee to my inner thigh. "An appetizer before dinner could be arranged—if you were interested," he caressed my bare skin.

I shivered and my breath quickened. If his hand explored any higher, he'd know the extent of my arousal—which made me feel vulnerable. Still, the thought of having his cock deep inside me was irresistible. "I'm interested," I whispered. "But where would we go?"

He leaned over and brushed a kiss on my cheek. "Behind the restaurant there are some dark places. We'll find something."

A few minutes later we parked in a very private spot. Tony lowered his seat once again. "Take off your panties and sit on top of me," he ordered.

I shimmied out of my wet undies, threw them on the backseat and climbed astride him.

Tony's hand slipped under me as he explored the pulsing core of my sex. "You're ready for action," he chuckled, as his fingers found the slick opening.

I'd been ready for a long time—too long. I opened his belt buckle, unzipped his fly and reached in to feel him. His cock was rock hard and hot to the touch. "You're about ready, too." I exposed his full erection and the two firm globes underneath

He lifted my buttocks and his engorged cock found my wet, pulsing core. Slowly he entered me, burying himself up to the hilt.

"Ahhhh," I cried. "Sooooo good."

The night was balmy and we'd left one window open. Cool air fanned my bare bottom as I rode Tony, clenching and releasing, rubbing and stroking, our passion mounting 'til I couldn't stand it any longer.

A wild cry escaped me as a series of hot, wet spasms exploded within me. I shuddered as the ecstatic vibrations traveled throughout my body.

Tony climaxed, sending his semen deep inside. "Ahhhh, Val," he gasped, pulling me close.

Our two hearts beat furiously for a few long minutes. "I've been waiting for this," I whispered,

nestling my head against his shoulder.

"So have I, love," he answered, as he tenderly kissed me.

We were resting comfortably against each other when I felt his body tense. "Stay still," he ordered.

A light flickered somewhere above my head. Had the street lamps come on? "What is it?" I whispered.

"Probably a security guard prowling about," he said softly.

I started to rise, anxious to cover myself. He pushed me down. "Keep low-maybe he'll pass us."

No such luck. A flashlight shone in on us. Tony's hands covered my bare ass as he tried to shield me.

"What's going on here?" A shadowy male form stood outside the van.

"Everything's okay. We're just resting a moment before having dinner," Tony replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

My face heated up while a bubble of laughter rose in my throat. The guy would have to be pretty naïve to believe that.

"Well, be careful," the voice continued. "There have been some auto thefts around here recently. Pull your vehicle closer to the restaurant before you leave it."

"Sure thing. Thanks for the tip," Tony replied.

The light faded as footsteps retreated. "I'm sure he guessed," I giggled. "You and your appeteasers."

"Appetizers," he corrected me. "And you have to admit you've a better appetite now." He gave a playful slap to my rear before releasing me.

"Here are your panties," he grinned, reaching to retrieve them from the backseat.

"Oh, I don't need them," I said hastily. They were sopping wet, anyway.

"I'll keep them with me." He stuffed the lacy briefs in his pants pocket, giving me a knowing stare.

He knew – my cheeks burned, but I didn't care. The memory of our thrilling 'appetizer' would warm me during the lonely times ahead.

## CHAPTER 5

**D**uring dinner Tony told me all about his new business ventures setting up manufacturing franchises in various Southeast Asia cities. "Business is booming," he said, cutting into a thin slice of veal piccato. "The workforce is well educated and eager to please. I'm looking forward to some lucrative seasons."

I nodded and murmured appropriate sounds. Tony loved an audience and as long as I didn't fall asleep on him, he was pleased.

"So how's the gallery?" Tony finally turned the talk in my direction. We were at the dessert stage, savoring spumoni and expresso.

"Wait 'til you see our new show," I said. "It's a conceptual one with international artists like Hans Schmidt and Arno Gulin. They've been written up in all the art magazines."

"That so?" Tony quirked an eyebrow as he

sipped his coffee. "Are we talking mega bucks here?"

I paused. Tony had a habit of equating success with monetary value. To me there was more to success than how much money one made. "Let's say there are several pieces selling in the six figure range," I replied, leaving the exact figures a mystery. "I'm expecting a huge turnout. You'll be there, won't you?"

He hesitated. "Don't know, love. It all depends on this Australian deal I'm coordinating. If it works, I'll be 'down under' for almost a month. Sorry about that."

I shrugged, as if it didn't matter. But it did. Tony would be gone for weeks and miss the best art opening I'd ever planned. Damn him.

That night, lying in Tony's arms, I listened to his steady breathing and thought about the future. Or did I have a future with him? I was thirty-six and had never married. Before I met Tony, there'd been a few long relationships, but none had inspired me to try for a deeper commitment. Tony, at forty-two, could boast of one marriage that had lasted eight years. He'd been divorced for six years and had no children. Was he gun-shy, afraid to commit again?

Or was I the one too afraid to trust? Did having children enter into the equation? If I wanted any,

I'd have to speed things up before my 'biological clock' ran down.

Oh, well, I sighed, snuggling in his arms. His strong, lean frame, rock-solid underneath me, gave me a sense of well being. The musk male scent of his body and the springy texture of his chest hairs soothed my jangled nerves. When he found time for me, Tony was one great guy.

Could jealousy be a useful tool? Maybe Trish had a point. Maybe Tony would treat me differently if a rival were in the picture.

No. I'm not very good at playing games. Tackling two relationships at the same time would be a bit much.

Or would it?

A picture formed in my mind. I saw the two of us, Tony and I, lying close together on some exotic beach. Another man, tall and broad shouldered, walked towards us, water dripping from his bronzed skin.

"Hi, Val," he said, coming to stand next to me.

Who was this gorgeous hunk? He seemed to know me. I struggled to remember.

Tony sat up with a smile. "Glad you could join us. We've been looking forward to being with you."

My ears perked up. This was news to me. Perhaps he was one of Tony's business associates.

"Val," Tony turned to me. "Brian will be

spending some time with us. Remember we talked about a threesome recently?"

Now it all came back. We'd discussed the possibility of another person joining us. I gave the handsome stranger my full attention. Not bad, not bad at all.

That very evening I was courted and fawned over by Tony and Brian. Later we retired to our luxurious suite overlooking the sea. Would I take turns making love to each of them ... or would it be a triple coupling?

Here my mind came to a screeching halt. Up to this point in my life I'd had no experience with a menage à trois. Did I fancy such an arrangement?

I couldn't seem to find an answer.

Little did I guess how the next few months would see me tackling just this very thorny, and horny, situation.

### CHAPTER 6

**h** ndelew Galleries buzzed with excitement on opening night. Hundreds of friends, art lovers and, hopefully, collectors had come to view the conceptual show I'd worked on for the past year.

"Stupendous!" Leroy Winston proclaimed. "This is truly remarkable. What an imagination."

We were standing beside Hans Schmidt's monumental Intimate Waterworks piece. The conceptual sculpture occupied one quarter of the space in our main gallery. A replica of an oldfashioned commode was suspended at a 45' angle by pull chains from the ceiling. Adjacent to it hung a shower stall, also at an angle, enveloped by a frosted plastic shower curtain. Within the stall a busty nude woman soaped herself with a vermilion puff. Water from the showerhead splashed over the woman and, from a drain hole, was recirculated and sent to the white porcelain toilet. The water whirled around in the toilet bowl with a whooshing sound. Every few seconds the toilet flushed itself and shot a water spray back to the shower stall, completing the cycle.

"It's his *piece de resistance*," I said, nodding my approval. Winston was one of the collectors I'd cultivated over the last year. He and his wife were in the process of building an enormous home in upstate New York. An architect friend had clued me in.

"That flow of water is amazing. Look at the arc he creates from showerhead to toilet bowl," I said. "And don't you just love the background pieces – the old-fashioned porcelain sink, that medicine cabinet mirror and the pink chenille rug?"

"And the way the rainbow springs out of the arc. How did he achieve that incredible effect? Or is it a state secret?" Winston lowered his voice and glanced around.

"Oh, no. I can tell you about the rainbow. It's done with a prism capturing light and spreading it throughout the spray's arc. You can't imagine how long Hans worked on that particular effect." I'd been at the gallery during installation and knew the hours of work to create that rainbow.

"Marvelous piece of work, I must say. The whole scene is so reminiscent of those oldfashioned bathrooms—even the sink. He must have scouted high and low for the right items." Winston looked truly impressed. "I must have my wife see this." He waved a hand to draw Mrs. Winston's attention. She smiled and walked towards us.

Loretta Winston didn't walk – she sidled over – her six-foot curvaceous frame in stark contrast to Leroy Winston's short, stout figure. Straight, shoulder-length blond hair swirled around bare shoulders, contrasting with the chic fire engine red cocktail dress.

"Loretta, my dear, I'm going to buy this piece for the entranceway to our new home. What d'ya think?" Winston's pudgy face beamed with satisfaction.

Loretta studied the porcelain sculpture for several long minutes. I waited anxiously for her response. If Leroy wanted the piece and she didn't...

"It's missing something," she finally said.

"What's it missing?" he asked.

"The toilet looks empty. You've got this woman in the shower so why not a man on the throne? You know, with his pants around his ankles. That would make the piece much more realistic."

Winston considered her suggestion, then turned to me. "I think Loretta's got something. Can Schmidt add a male figure to the piece?"

I shrugged. "I don't see a problem with that. While it's in the gallery, we'll leave it as is. For your installation, he can add another figure. Of course, there'll be an additional charge." "Not a problem." Winston looked delighted. "Please introduce us to the artist. I'd like Loretta to take a photo of us together."

"By the way, there is a charge for installation," I added. "The artist and a master plumber will be needed to transport and install the piece."

Winston waved his hand. "Money is no object when I want something. Make all the necessary arrangements. You'll have a check for one half the price before I leave tonight."

I had to find Trish to report the good news. A sale of this magnitude on opening night was a real coup. Scanning the crowd I spotted Trish's curly blond head. Engrossed in a conversation with two men, she couldn't see me waving. I moved closer wondering who the men were. One of them was of Japanese origin and the other, a tall, broad shouldered man, had his back to me.

"Trish," I called out as I approached the group. "I've some good news."

She turned to give me a broad smile. "So do I."

I came closer, intent on announcing the sale. "Intimate Waterworks" is sold. Leroy Winston just purchased it."

"Wow!" Trish reached out to grab my hand. "Good job, partner. Now I want you to meet some friends of mine. Mr. Steve Ushimo, this is Val Anders. And Val, this gentleman is Peter Flynn, one of Scott's associates. Steve and Peter recently flew in from Japan. I invited them to our opening."

I shook hands with Steve Ushimo and then turned to Peter Flynn. For a half second I froze. There was something eerily familiar about the good-looking man in front of me. Before I had a chance to search my mind, he'd reached out and clasped my hand.

"So good to finally meet you, Val," he said in a deep, resonant tone. "I've heard many wonderful things from Trish and Scott."

He held my hand a little longer than necessary, but I didn't mind. His clear green eyes and the chiseled perfection of his features mesmerized me.

"Flattery will get you everything," I murmured, wondering what my friends had told Peter.

Peter smiled and a dimple appeared. "I certainly hope so," he gave me a pointed look.

Where had Trish found this gorgeous hunk? She'd been holding out on me. I'd have to question her later.

"Your gallery is extraordinary," Steve said. "We've been enjoying the piece with the trains. Very innovative."

"That's Arno Gulin's work. He's a genius at creating electrical displays," I said, still conscious of Peter standing close to me.

"He knows how to create the illusion of speed with those flashing lights," Peter remarked. "Very true," I agreed. Peter must be an art connoisseur, I decided. That was an astute observation.

"Val, why don't you show Peter the rest of the show?" Trish suggested. "Steve and I have some business matters to discuss."

"Fine with me," Peter said quickly, taking my arm.

"Uh, sure," I murmured, wondering what Trish and Steve were involved in. I soon forgot all about them as Peter adroitly moved me around the gallery. His interest in each of the artworks seemed genuine and his comments were always interesting.

"What line of work are you in?" I asked him as we sipped at the glasses of wine he'd procured for us.

"A multitude of venture enterprises," he answered, with an enigmatic smile. "Steve and I are partners in several businesses."

"I see," I said, not sure if the answer told me anything. "Where are you staying while you're in town? I gather you're not a native New Yorker."

"You're right there. I was born in Japan but spent most of my life in the States. Trish and Steve have put me up in their guest apartment. Very comfortable, I might add."

"So you're staying with them," I turned over the situation in my mind. Something was amiss, but I couldn't put my finger on it. If Tony were here, he'd spot it in a minute. But my love of a man was 'down under' for a month or so and I missed him.

Before I had time to question Peter further, Trish and Steve joined us.

"Val," Trish said, "Peter would be happy to drive you home tonight." She turned to give him a brilliant smile.

"Not necessary; I can grab a cab." I didn't want to be obligated to Peter ... or anyone else.

"It would be my pleasure, Val," Peter said quietly, putting an arm around my shoulders.

There was something warm and intimate in his tone that was hard to resist. Then again, why should I? "Okay, you win."

"That's my girl," Peter said, giving my shoulder a quick squeeze.

His words sounded strange. I'd only just met the man and already I was 'his girl'. Oh, well, he probably used the same line with every woman he met. And looking at Peter, he must have a hefty number of women under his belt.

"Val, if you want to leave a little early, I'll close up. You've done your share of work these past few days," Trish offered.

The crowds had thinned out—only a few people remained. "Thanks. I'll take you up on that." I turned to Peter. "If you're ready to leave ...

"

"At your service, Val," Peter said, giving me a quick salute. "Your wish is my command."

Well, that was a pleasant change. I couldn't help comparing him to Tony. I had to drag Tony away from gatherings. How refreshing to have an attentive man around, I thought, as Peter escorted me to his sports car and held the door open. I could use a little pampering.

## CHAPTER 7

"Usliding into the driver's seat of a sleek, lowslung, black sports car. The dashboard displayed an astounding array of dials, switches and lights.

"Sure," I said, eyeing the myriad features and wondering about his taste.

The familiar strains of Haydn's Piano Concertos #11 filled the air with stunning clarity. "That's one of my favorite pieces," I exclaimed, settling back to enjoy it. So Peter liked classical music, too; what a charming man.

Peter drove swiftly through the darkened streets of Manhattan handling the expensive vehicle with skill. The drive home was much too short.

"This is so pleasant," I murmured, as he parked the car behind my apartment. "Wish it could have lasted longer."

He stretched an arm out to encircle my

shoulders. "We'll have longer trips together," he said with a knowing smile.

His long fingers stroked my upper arm. A tingle of awareness spread from his gentle touch. I turned to give him a long, serious look. "Peter, I should tell you that I'm involved with someone at the moment. He's out of the country, but I still feel bound to him."

"That's okay, Val," he replied. "I won't try to take his place. But I could offer you some companionship and, if you're in the mood, some loving."

He ran a finger down the side of my face and over my lips. "You have the loveliest mouth." He bent his head to give me a tender kiss.

I half closed my eyes as a sense of deep relaxation flowed through me. Peter would make a wonderful lover. Still, I had reservations. Tony was sure to find out—and there could be repercussions. Then again, he *did* take me for granted. Maybe he needed some competition.

Decisions, decisions. I didn't have to make up my mind tonight. I could wait awhile and play it cool.

"Let me think about your offer, Peter. I've enjoyed our time together."

"So have I, Val," he said, smiling at me. "I'll walk you to your door."

After he left, I wandered restlessly around my

loft apartment. The thrill of the art opening was ebbing but I couldn't seem to wind down. A night with Peter would have helped me relax. I wasn't married to Tony—I shouldn't have any scruples about an occasional fling.

I'd never been involved with two men at the same time. What would it be like? I pondered the situation all night, giving myself arguments pro and con having an affair. I hadn't come to any conclusion by the time I fell into an exhausted sleep around four a.m.

When I woke up the next morning, fragments of a dream came floating into my consciousness. I kept my eyes closed trying to remember.

Peter and I were lying nude in my bed, his fully erect cock pressing into my side. I shifted to face him, giving him better access.

"Oh, Peter," I cried. "I do want you."

He kissed me, long and hard; his tongue probed my open mouth as he entered my throbbing core. We were completely absorbed in our passionate coupling so I didn't hear the front door opening. Footsteps sounded on the stairs and I took no notice. When a rough hand grabbed my bare shoulder, I screamed, twisting to see the intruder.

"So this is how you spend your time when I'm away," Tony snarled, lifting me off the bed. His dark, angry face terrified me.

"Tony, please," I begged. "It's not what you think." "Isn't it now?" he cried, reaching into his pocket to draw out a pistol and aiming it at Peter.

"No! Don't shoot him!" I shouted, as I ran to shield Peter's body.

The dream ended abruptly at that crucial point. I couldn't remember if Tony actually pulled the trigger. What a horrible nightmare! I shivered at the memory. Then and there I decided to have another lock put on my front door.

Glancing at the clock, I was startled to see the time—ten a.m. I had thirty minutes to shower, dress, gulp down breakfast and head to the gallery. Saturdays after an opening were usually busy—especially if there were any newspaper reviews.

Trish arrived at the gallery around noon with a newspaper tucked under one arm. "Guess what? We made the *Times* and the review isn't too bad."

"What do you mean, not too bad?" I reached for the paper.

"Check it out. It's controversial, which brings people in to see what all the fuss is about. By the way, how did you get along with Peter?"

Scanning the review, I didn't bother to answer. Trish was right—although not exactly favorable, it was a provocative story and would draw crowds.

Trish sat down at her computer and repeated her question. "Did you find Peter easy to be with?"

"Uh, sure," I replied, still absorbed in the

review. "He's quite a charmer. Where did you find him?"

Trish shrugged. "He's one of Steve Ushimo's protégées. Scott and Steve are involved in several business ventures. By the way, what are your plans this weekend?"

I didn't really have any. The art show had occupied my mind for so many weeks; I hadn't had time to plan any social activities. "Nothing special. Why?"

"You're invited for the weekend. We're having an impromptu gathering tonight and Peter asked if you could come."

Was Trish scheming to throw Peter and I together? How about her loyalty to Tony? The whole scenario was disturbing. "I'm not sure I want to see all that much of Peter."

"Why not?"

"What if Tony finds out I'm dating another man?" Last night's terrifying dream still haunted my mind.

Trish laughed. "If that's all you're worried about ..."

"What's so funny?" I demanded. I should have suspected something fishy going on. But I didn't.

"Tony could be gone for several months. Are you supposed to sit around pining every weekend? I'm sure he doesn't expect you to do that." "But he certainly doesn't expect me to fall into bed with another man," I replied, miffed at her lack of concern.

She lifted a quizzical eyebrow. "Have things progressed that far – in such a short time?"

Embarrassed, I turned away. I have a difficult time confiding personal things to anyone—even someone as close to me as Trish. "Who knows? He's a very attractive man. Anything is possible."

And that was the end of our conversation. Except I did agree to spend the weekend at the Lewis'. Peter would pick me up later and drive me back Sunday evening. What the heck—after months of hard work, I deserved a bit of fun.

## CHAPTER 8

The doorbell rang as I was toweling myself off after a shower. Quickly I slipped into a terry robe and ran down the stairs.

"I'm early." Peter stood at the door with a single red rose in his hand. He assessed me slowly from my wet hair to my bare feet. "Hope I didn't catch you in the middle." He grinned, a knowing look on his handsome face.

Could he guess I had nothing on under my robe? "Uh, no. I was already out." I reached for the rose. "How lovely," I murmured, pleased at his thoughtfulness. "C'mon in."

I padded into the kitchen to find a vase and fill it with water with Peter trailing after me.

"Nice setup," he said, glancing around. "I like the spiral staircase and the skylights. Good artwork, too."

"Thanks. I enjoy living here." I sniffed the rose. "Marvelous fragrance. How did you know I love roses?"

"I figured you would." He touched a velvety

petal. "So soft," he said. "Almost as soft as your skin." He lifted a finger to my face and traced a line down one side.

Our eyes met for a long moment. My heart started beating fast; he had the sexiest green eyes.

"We could linger awhile." He drew me close. "The Lewis' won't mind if we're late."

Tempting. Very tempting. I blinked and forced my gaze away. His presence was almost mesmerizing. Maybe it was his low voice or the intensity of his look. Peter had a magnetic personality. A twinge of guilt entered my consciousness. I felt disloyal to Tony and I couldn't quite dismiss that thought.

"I'd better get dressed." I eased out of his embrace. Better to proceed slowly; he was still a stranger.

"All right, Val," he replied, with a goodnatured smile. There was no trace of annoyance – which I appreciated.

Peter took the scenic drive to Westchester. This time he played melodic jazz pieces, some of my favorites. We seemed to have similar tastes in music, always a favorable sign. We talked about music, the art scene and recent books we'd read. He had an amazing memory and could quote whole sections of some treasured classics.

"Wish I could remember as much. I'm glad if I can quote one or two lines."

He laughed. "Don't feel bad, Val. I've an unusual talent in that direction."

A large party was in full swing when we arrived at the Lewis' ultra modern home. Several robotic waiters and waitresses carried platters of hor d'oevres while others handled the drinks.

"I'm not overly fond of using robots," I whispered to Peter as we made our way to the open bar. "How do you feel about them?"

He was silent a moment, considering my question. "I have no problem utilizing robotic help. Sometimes they do a better job than humans." He gave me a long, serious look.

I would remember that conversation later with much embarrassment.

I knew most of the people at the party – mostly business associates or friends from the art world. Peter was constantly at my side making certain I had enough to eat and drink. At one point he was called away by Scott and I found myself fielding questions from an acquaintance with a strong reputation for gossip.

"Val, my dear, you're looking chipper. Who's the handsome man with you? Or shouldn't I ask?" She gave me a conspiratorial wink.

"Peter's an associate of Scott's," I replied coolly.

"I see," she nodded. "And how's Tony doing these days? I hear he's out of the country." Her sharp black eyes narrowed to a feline slit. "Right," I said, edging away to talk to someone else. She was digging for dirt and I wasn't about to supply her with any.

Peter returned soon and guided me to a quiet spot. "Val, is anything wrong? You seem upset."

What a discerning man. It took Tony awhile to catch on to my moods. "Nothing important, really ... just a nosy woman wanting to know whom you were and where Tony was."

'What did you tell her?"

"Not much. But she'll concoct her own story to circulate."

He put an arm around me, bent his head and whispered, "Then let's give her something to talk about." He drew me close and gave me a long kiss.

I laughed. "Peter, you're impossible." My spirits lifted and the rest of the evening passed pleasantly.

I slept 'til almost noon the following morning and woke refreshed. No nightmares. Lounging in bed, I reviewed the last few days' events—the successful art opening, meeting Peter, the party last night. Tony would have enjoyed being a part of these happenings. Why did he have to be so far away? He was missing all the fun.

If he were here, I wouldn't be tempted by Peter's attentions. This last thought came like a splash of cold water, knocking my upbeat mood down a few notches.

A knock at the door roused me. "C'mon in," I called, expecting Trish to appear.

Peter, balancing a tray, stood at the door. "Val, hope I didn't wake you." He advanced and set the tray down on a nearby table. "Fresh fruit, muffins and peppermint tea. How does that sound?"

He smiled and that adorable dimple appeared. I couldn't help smiling back.

"Peter, how thoughtful of you." I sat up in bed and tucked the covers around me. "I can't imagine sleeping this late – usually I'm up by eight."

He sat down next to me. "You must have been exhausted."

His nearness was unnerving—what an attractive man. "Guess I was," I murmured, suddenly aware of my brief attire. "What's everyone up to?"

"Let's see ... Trish and Scott took a drive into town to do some errands."

That left the two of us alone in the house – except for the robots. I didn't count them. "I see." My pulse accelerated; my face flushed.

His hand brushed my cheek, the side of my neck and then came to rest on my shoulder. "Don't worry, Val. Nothing will happen unless you want it."

How could he know what I was thinking? He had an uncanny ability to see into my heart. I was

touched by his concern for my feelings. Tears came to my eyes. Why couldn't Tony be as sensitive? "Oh, Peter," I whispered. "You're the most empathic man I've ever met."

The next moment I was leaning against his firm chest sobbing my heart out. His arms held me close.

"It's all right, Val. Cry as much as you like. Sometimes life can be difficult."

Tenderly he stroked my hair and murmured comforting words. "You miss Tony and you feel guilty about wanting me."

He was so right it wasn't funny.

"Let me tell you something. Tony would want you to relax and enjoy yourself. If you have an affair with me, it will not affect your relationship with Tony. Believe me -I know what I'm saying."

His words rang true, for some reason. Or was I so needy I would crawl into bed with the first appealing man who wanted me? My mind raced back and forth between these two poles. Meanwhile, Peter's hand cupped my breast while his other hand ventured lower, caressing my bottom. To be perfectly honest, it felt great. What if I *was* needy? Didn't I have a perfect right to satisfy my physical desires? Tony probably had few qualms about an occasional fling while abroad.

With these rationalizations hammering away in

my head, I gradually relaxed. Peter, sensing my surrender, slipped the straps of my nightgown from my shoulders and slid the gown down to my waist.

"So lovely, Val," he murmured, touching the sensitive tips of my breasts with slow, circular movements.

They swelled and peaked under his caresses. I shivered with anticipation and a growing excitement. I didn't know Peter very well, but I did know instinctively that he would be a gentle and expert lover.

"I want to see all of you." He lifted me up to slide my gown completely off and ran his hands down the length of my body. "If I were an artist, I would paint you." His long fingers traced the contours of my belly and upper thighs, ignoring my heated core, for the moment. His unhurried but thorough exploration increased the knot of tension coiled at the pit of my stomach. He was still dressed while I was nude, adding to my vulnerability, intensifying my craving.

"Lay down while I learn what is pleasurable to you." His deep voice and vivid green eyes had a hypnotic effect; I did as he ordered. I seemed to have no will of my own.

With closed eyes I lay on my side, thighs apart, while he probed every private place with careful, measured motions. I moaned softly as he examined the folds of my sex.

"You're getting hot and wet here," he said, slipping a finger into my cunt. "Good–I like it when my touch excites you."

There was an objective, almost impersonal quality to this encounter, which stimulated my sexual appetite. A stranger was discovering everything about my secret yearnings; all I had to do was be quiet and accept this lush gift.

How did Peter know all the right moves, the strokes that tantalized me, the light touch that teased and titillated? I couldn't have ordered a more perfect lover.

Sensing my rising passion, he paused a moment. I arched my back and cried out a protest.

"Patience, Val," he said firmly. "Delaying gratification increases the thrill."

I didn't want to delay anything. Caught in a maelstrom of hot desire, I swallowed my pride and begged for relief. A thought flashed through my overheated mind. Could there be a sadistic streak in him? If so, it only added fuel to the raging fire burning within.

"Don't do this to me," I cried. "It's torture."

He chuckled. "Sweet torture." Then he lowered his head and, using his enticing tongue, whirled me into an escalating crescendo of rapture.

The release was monumental. I couldn't move my limbs or open my eyes. Tenderly, Peter stroked me, easing my return to reality.

Through half-closed lids, I noted his satisfied expression; his green eyes sparkled with pleasure as he flashed me a broad smile. "I'm happy you enjoyed yourself."

What a man! What a lover! I reached out and touched his face. "You're the best, Peter."

## CHAPTER 9

**P**icking me up in his strong arms, Peter carried me to a nearby chair. Setting me down, he pulled it closer to the table holding the tray of breakfast goodies.

"You should have a healthy appetite," he said, sitting opposite.

He was still completely dressed while I didn't have a stitch on. "What about a robe or something?" I asked, feeling self-conscious.

He rose, found my crumpled nightgown and draped it around my neck. "That should keep you warm." His eyes twinkled with amusement.

"Thanks a lot," I murmured, as I struggled to slip it on. Then I dug into the waiting repast. Everything tasted delicious. "Great muffins." I heaped on fresh strawberry preserves and wolfed down two enormous ones. "I wonder if Trish has a robot cook?"

He nodded. "Lilly is excellent. She has a repertoire of over a thousand recipes. If you want

the muffin one, I'll get it for you."

"No, thanks. I don't have much time for cooking or baking, unfortunately. Can you cook?"

He seemed surprised by my question. "I know a few dishes, but I'm not guaranteeing any gourmet delights."

After satisfying my hunger, I sat back with a sense of enormous well being. "Peter, I can't begin to tell you how enjoyable that was."

He moved his chair closer to mine. "Anytime you're in the mood, Val, I'm at your service."

A nagging thought jiggled in my mind. Why hadn't Peter demanded some relief? If I climaxed before Tony, I knew he expected reciprocal treatment. "Peter," I began, a bit hesitantly, "don't you want me to satisfy you? Aren't you the least bit frustrated?"

He threw back his head and laughed. "Oh, Val, you look so earnest. Don't be concerned about my needs; I have excellent control." Then he tipped up my chin and kissed me. "Whenever you're ready for more sexual experimentation, let me know. There are many possibilities we have yet to explore."

His husky tone and sensual glance promised a plethora of erotic experiences should I choose to follow that path.

I sipped the rest of my tea, mulling over his invitation. "Very enticing," I commented.

"You're the one who's enticing," he said, picking up my hand and kissing it lightly. "And adventurous, I'll bet."

"I do like trying new things and traveling to exotic places." I heaved a long sigh. "Not that I've had many chances. I've only been to Europe once – actually Italy. Tony took me for a two week holiday summer before last. It was wonderful."

Mentioning Tony's name, I couldn't help wondering how he'd react if he had viewed Peter pleasuring me. He was bound to find out – especially if I took Peter up on his tempting offer.

"We'll have to correct that lack in your life," Peter said. "Think about some of the places you've always wanted to explore. I'll take you to as many as you have time for."

"Really?" I know I sounded skeptical.

"Absolutely. I pilot my own plane and we can take weekend jaunts to destinations all over the world. Tell me where you'd like to go." He held my hand and caressed it gently.

There was something about our conversation that triggered an indistinct memory of another talk I'd had recently, though for the life of me, I couldn't seem to place it. "That sounds too good to be true." God, there were so many places I'd like to visit.

"It is true, Val," he said. "Pick a destination and we'll fly there next weekend." He looked and sounded sincere. "Don't you have to attend to your business interests?" I could just imagine Tony putting me ahead of his money ventures. Ha. That would be the day.

"Your desires take priority," he said, raising my hand again to kiss my palm.

What a delightful man. I'd never had anyone tell me that I came first.

Where would I like to go? I considered the question for several long moments. "There are so many places —I love islands and I've always wanted to visit the Greek Islands." Tony and I had almost made it on our Italian trip, but there hadn't been enough time. "Also the Caribbean, the Hawaiian Islands, New Zealand — I could go on and on."

He laughed. "Let's start with one at a time. You mentioned the Hawaiian Islands and I've always wanted to go there, so next weekend we will. You've made a good choice. There's only one thing I would ask."

"What's that?" I inquired uneasily. Was there a hidden agenda somewhere?

"That you travel light ... one carry-on bag. Period. Besides, you won't need much clothing." He shot me a suggestive grin.

In my mind's eye, I pictured the two of us carousing around the world, making love, having adventures, exploring different cultures and countries. There were endless possibilities

"I'm so glad I met you, Peter." I leaned over to give him a kiss.

He framed my face with his hands and looked deeply into my eyes. "I've waited a long time to meet someone like you, Val. We're going to be so good together."

And I believed him. How could I resist those stunning green eyes?

\* \* \* \*

I returned from my weekend at the Lewis' not only relaxed, but also rejuvenated — in body, mind and spirit. Peter proved to be a wonderful companion as well as a marvelous lover. We went horseback riding, played several sets of tennis with Trish and Scott and hiked for hours in the woods.

The only jarring note happened on my return. When I switched on my message board, Tony's image flashed on the screen. "Val, give me a call when you get in." That was it – short and simple.

My stomach did a flip and my palms grew sweaty. I'm not skilled at lying and, if Tony questioned me, I'd probably tell him the truth.

I could ignore his message – pretend I was still at the Lewis'. Yes. That was the wisest thing to do. Thankfully, I hadn't allowed Tony to install sensors in my apartment that would permit him to visually scan my rooms.

"Why won't you?" he'd demanded.

"Why do you need to check up on me?" I countered. "I don't want pictures of me floating about the world. What if I walk around in the nude?"

He'd grinned. "That would be great. Besides, whenever I phone, you can observe me. And it's not a question of trust—I miss seeing you, that's all."

I almost gave in—then I caught myself. He could arrange his schedule to be with me more often—I was certain of it. Why make it any easier for him?

After an unusually sound sleep — I'd disconnected the phone- I woke early and headed to the gallery to meet Trish. Officially we were closed on Mondays, but there was always scads of stuff to catch up on without the intrusion of the public.

Trish was already there when I arrived – unusual for her.

"Trish, you beat me to it. Did you rise at dawn?"

"Actually, Scott and Peter were leaving early and gave me a ride. Come and sit down a minute. We have to talk."

Her serious tone and expression gave me pause.

"What's up?" I asked, shrugging out of my jacket and slipping into a chair. "Has anyone reneged on a sale?" Winston could have canceled that huge purchase and stopped payment on his check.

"Nothing to do with the gallery," she said, not quite meeting my eyes.

"Good." I breathed a sigh of relief. "So, out with it. You look like you've heard some bad news."

Trish rose and paced up and down the small office. "It's not that simple. I haven't given you all the information about Peter that I should." She halted and sliced me a cautious glance. "I wanted you to have a perfectly wonderful weekend."

"And I did," I exclaimed. "Peter's one amazing guy; we really hit if off. Don't tell me—he's married and has six kids."

She gave a short laugh. "Nothing that simple."

"Well, out with it. I'm on pins and needles." Whatever it was, I could live with it.

She sat down and drew her chair over to me. "Scott and Steve Ushimo are partners in a Japanese company experimenting with humanoid robots. A recent scientific breakthrough has allowed them to begin creating very advanced life forms that appear to be human – but are not." She paused and gave me a pointed look.

Puzzled, I stared at her. "I don't understand. What does that have to do with Peter? I know he's involved in business dealings with Scott and Steve." Then a thought occurred to me. "Is there something irregular going on? Did he embezzle funds?" Peter seemed sincere and honest, but I didn't know him all that well.

She shook her head. "No, nothing like that."

"Then what?"

"This is going to be difficult—I know you have an aversion to anything robotic, but here goes. Peter Flynn is Ushimo's latest invention—an advanced humanoid robot who seems human in every respect."

To say that I was shocked is putting it mildly. I sat in stunned silence for a full minute trying to digest this incredible news. I'd spent an entire weekend being wooed and won by a robot! Impossible.

"I don't believe you," I said flatly. It couldn't be true. Peter was flesh and blood, like me. He had feelings, deep feelings. There was absolutely nothing machine-like about him. On the contrary, he was one of the most human people I'd ever met. "This is some kind of a joke, isn't it?"

With a queer grimace, Trish rose and paced about again. "It's not a joke and I'm sorry if the news upsets you. I wanted you to have some fun; you seemed so down these last few months." She halted and gave me an intent look. "Does it really make all that difference? Aren't you having the time of your life with Peter? What does it matter if he's not exactly like us? In some ways he's far superior to most of the humans one meets. Don't you agree?"

I couldn't argue with her—Peter was far superior to any man I'd ever met. But a robot? It would take awhile to accustom myself to this turn of events. "Does Peter know he's a robot?"

"Yes. He's aware of his status. In fact, he's proud to be the most advanced life form ever created."

Suddenly I remembered the brief conversation I'd had with Peter about robots and the remark he'd made. Something about robots doing things better than humans at times. Now it all made sense.

"Does Peter know I've been in the dark about his,

"Yes. He agreed with us initially about keeping his status a secret. But now he's decided it would be best if you knew the truth. And I agree."

I let out a long breath. "Well, this beats all. I'd never in a million years have thought I could fall for a robot."

Trish gave me a sober glance. "Will this news change your plans? Peter is looking forward to piloting you around the world. He talked about visiting the Hawaiian Islands next weekend."

Surprisingly, I still wanted to go with him. Part

of me was in denial about his robotic status. I'm sure of it. Besides, this might be the one chance I'd ever have to travel. "I have no intention of altering our plans. Robot or not, he's more fun to be with than anyone I've ever met."

"Including Tony?" Trish asked softly.

The stab in my heart was unexpecte4. "What's Tony got to do with it?" I said angrily. "He had every opportunity to be with me—and he chose otherwise. I've a perfect right to enjoy myself."

Trish nodded agreement. "I'm sure he'd want you to."

It was a strange answer—one I would recall later when the entire situation became clear to me.

## CHAPTER 10

fter the astounding news about Peter's robotic status, the rest of Monday proceeded smoothly—until early afternoon when I received two phone calls.

Tony called first. "Val, I've been trying to reach you all weekend. Didn't you get my message?"

"I haven't been home. Was there something important you needed to tell me?"

"Not really. Where were you? Your phone rang busy all night. You might want to check on it."

Something about his skeptical tone indicated he suspected I was fibbing and had the phone off the hook. I didn't really care. "Sorry you were inconvenienced, Tony. I spent a delightful weekend at the Lewis'. You missed a great opening and a super party."

There was a moment of silence. "Glad you're having fun, Val. I wouldn't want you sitting home alone while I'm away."

"Isn't that considerate of you?"

"Don't be sarcastic. You know I'd have been there if I possibly could. I should be wrapping things up here in a few weeks. Then we'll take off for a long weekend someplace."

He sounded so sure of me – I wanted to bust his bubble. "If I'm available," I said loftily.

"What's that supposed to mean?" he demanded.

No point in having a long distance argument. "Why don't we talk about it when you return?"

"Fine. I'm looking forward to it. By the way, I purchased a few pieces of aboriginal artwork. Thought you'd enjoy adding them to your collection."

*Very considerate.* "Thanks, Tony. Can't wait to see them."

And the conversation ended pleasantly enough. Late in the afternoon Peter called.

"Val, hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Of course not, Peter. What's up?" I was talking to a robot—I needed to remind myself of that fact.

There was a moment's hesitation. "Has Trish spoken to you about me?"

"You mean about your, uh, robotic status? Yes."

"Val, I'd like to talk to you. How about dinner tonight? I'm sure you have lots of questions about me. I'd like the chance to answer them."

You're darn right. "Okay."

Later that evening Peter arrived at my place.

This time he'd brought a long-stemmed white rose. "For peace," he said, handing it to me. "Are you very angry with me?"

He looked so contrite; my heart went out to him. "I'm not angry—just confused, I guess. I mean, I never had any dealings with a robot before." *I never made love to a robot, either*.

"We'll talk over dinner. I'll try to answer any concerns you may have."

We drove to a small seafood restaurant overlooking the river. "I've heard their fish chowder is the best," he said, taking my hand as we headed for the entrance.

I gave him a quick, sidewise glance. Could Peter really be a robot—albeit an advanced one? He seemed so human ... and so damn attractive. I could feel the warmth from his hand traveling to every part of my body.

"We'll order first and then talk," he said. "Shall we start with some steamers?"

I love steamers. Now how did he know that fact? He was a puzzle. "Great."

Peter ordered a bottle of white wine, also one of my preferred vintages. "Now what exactly did Trish tell you?" he asked, settling back.

I recounted most of our conversation, leaving out my surprised response.

"Don't tell me you weren't shocked." He gave me an intent look. I couldn't lie to him—even though he was a robot. "You're right," I admitted. "At first I didn't believe her. I thought it was some kind of a joke."

He regarded me soberly. "It's not a joke, Val. I'm the closest thing to a human ever created, but I'm not a human. Before we proceed in our relationship, I didn't want you to be under any illusions."

The waiter arrived and poured some wine for us. I took a long sip before answering. "I don't know what to say, Peter. I've never been in this position before – this is all new territory."

"In some ways, it's new for me, too. I've never dated or made love to a woman before."

"You mean I'm the first one?" I could hardly believe what I was hearing. He was such an expert lover.

He nodded, and gave me a tender smile. "The very first."

It took a few moments for me to digest this information. "How did you learn to be so good in bed?"

He chuckled. "With you everything comes so naturally. I seem to know instinctively what pleases you. Perhaps we were made for each other."

A trite phrase, but coming from his lips it sounded so right. This whole scene was bizarre. Here I was having dinner with a robot and he seemed more real to me than almost anyone I'd ever met.

The steamers were served and we halted our conversation to sample those tasty morsels. While munching away, I couldn't help wondering about a few basic facts.

"Peter, do you have the same digestive functions as humans? I mean, do you ..." I hesitated, wondering if my question was too personal.

"Yes. In most ways I am identical to a human. There are a few differences, though." He paused, a serious expression spread over his face. "You have a perfect right to know about those differences."

I sensed this was a difficult issue for him. "Look, Peter, if you'd rather not talk about it, it's okay."

He downed some wine and twirled the stem with his long fingers. "It's not easy to talk about, Val, but I want you to know me—no secrets between us." He paused and fixed me with those deep green eyes. "I'm not able to reproduce, meaning I can't have children. That's one dissimilar feature."

An element of sadness tinged his voice. I reached out to touch his hand. "Oh, Peter ... that's not very important. You have so many other things going for you." And I meant it.

"Thanks, Val." He caressed my hand. "I also

have no past ... no roots, as you call it."

I pondered his statement. "What does that mean, exactly?"

"Well, most people know their parents and other kin. I have no family."

The enormity of his words almost bowled me over. No family ... no parents. Even though my folks lived thousands of miles away, I knew who they were. I knew where I'd come from. How would it feel to have no past? I could hardly imagine it. Tears came to my eyes.

"What can I say?" I whispered, squeezing his hand. "I never thought about that aspect of being a robot."

"Most people don't, especially our creators."

Was there a bitter note in his tone? It's hard to say. He seemed resigned to his fate and accepting of its limitations.

"Are there pluses in being an advanced robot?" I asked, hoping there were.

He brightened immediately. "Oh, yes, many pluses. I have supersensitive abilities such as an extraordinary memory bank. I've been programmed to speak six languages fluently and am able to travel around the world with perfect ease. I know the geography and history of our planet from earliest times to the present. I have more physical strength and stamina than the average male—I can run faster, play harder and maneuver my way around many obstacles, both physical and mental. And that's only the beginning." He sat back with a pleased expression.

"Wow. What an impressive list of powers."

"On the whole, I come up ahead," he said. "My abilities make up for my lacks."

He was so right. "I'd say so—and I'm really looking forward to our weekend together."

"So am I, Val." He leaned over and touched my cheek lightly with his finger.

A shiver of anticipation went through me. "I'm even splurging on a new bikini."

"Great. Something in peach or pink." He eyed me closely for a moment. "With your chestnut hair and amber eyes, those colors would suit you best."

I did look good in those hues. "You're so observant, Peter. I should take you shopping with me."

"Not a problem. I'd love it."

The image of Peter accompanying me on my shopping spree to pick up a bathing suit and some new lingerie caused me to giggle.

"What's so funny?" he demanded, grinning along with me.

"Everything," I said. "This whole situation. But I'm beginning to relax and enjoy it."

"That's what I've been waiting to hear." With those words, he leaned over and kissed me. "We're going to have some great adventures together. Now that this robot stuff is behind us, the rest is gravy."

"You're so right, Peter."

## CHAPTER II

The silver plane winged its way across the continental United States and over the Pacific. All I could see for miles was the intense blue of the sea.

I sat next to Peter in the cockpit marveling at his ease in handling the sleek jet.

"Peter, you haven't told me anything about our destination — only that it's one of the Hawaiian Islands. Where exactly are we headed?"

He laughed. "Don't ask so many questions. I want to surprise you."

"There's very little that hasn't surprised me in the last few weeks," I reminded him somewhat tartly.

"I know, I know." He grinned at me, those wicked green eyes flashing desire and a certain deviltry. That's the only way I can describe his look.

"You're a rogue, you know that?" I retorted.

"Practically kidnapping me with hardly any clothes."

"Now, Val, I did allow you one bag. As you can see, this small jet has little storage space."

Which was true. Our two bags fit nicely behind the cockpit. I couldn't have added much more luggage.

"By the way, I appreciate your adhering to my baggage rules. I'm sure you'll have ample to wear." Again, that wicked grin.

I flushed and felt the heat descend from my face to my toes. Thank goodness the plane was airconditioned.

The jet soared through the clouds at an astronomical rate of speed. Peter assured me this was one of the fastest planes in operation.

"Do you pilot Steve and Scott around the world?"

"For one passenger, this plane is ideal. When it's the three of us, I use a larger jet."

"How did you learn to fly with such expert ease?" I was asking lots of questions, but I couldn't help my curiosity.

"I was programmed to fly ... simple as that. And now, Miss Curious, if you'll reach behind your seat, you'll find a thermal pouch with our dinner. It's a four-hour flight from New York to Hawaii and I wouldn't want you to starve."

"Oh, Peter, you are considerate."

We'd left New York Friday evening after I finished work at the gallery. Trish's parting words as she said goodbye set the tone for our first weekend together.

"Don't give a thought to the gallery or business or anything mundane. Have an adventure that you'll always remember."

Memories. Precious memories, I mused. That's what this trip is all about. Storing up enough adventures to last me a lifetime. At the same moment, I found myself conjuring up an image of Tony. What would <u>he</u> think about this brash outing with Peter?

A stab of remorse at my infidelity was soon replaced by anger. He could have prevented this if he'd only been around. No, I wasn't going to ruin my one chance for exotic travel by castigation.

Unearthing the pouch, I opened it to find two overstuffed lobster salad sandwiches and two iced lattes. One of my favorite combinations.

"Peter, you are so perceptive. You seem to know exactly what I want. It's amazing."

"That's my job, Val," he said with a serious expression. "To find out what you want and provide it."

His answer was both comforting and provocative. I felt cared for and protected in his company. At the same time, I couldn't help wondering how he knew so much about my likes and dislikes. Had Trish clued him in? Or Scott? Or was he simply a very perceptive man? With those extraordinary powers, he must be able to read my every mood.

If only Tony had such powers.

The jet descended rapidly leaving the clouds behind. Since we'd traveled through several time zones, it was early evening when Peter began the final descent.

"Look out the window, Val. You'll see the islands any minute now."

Sure enough, small landmasses came into view. Strips of golden sand hugged the shores while foamy waves kicked white froth against the dark blue sea.

"We'll be landing on Kaua'i in a few minutes," Peter said.

"Kaua'i? So that's where we're headed." A wave of excitement flooded over me. "Oh, Peter, look at those cliffs."

"That's Waimea Canyon. It's quite spectacular. We'll explore it tomorrow, I promise you."

In another few minutes the jet touched ground and we were on terra firma. I wondered how we were going to get around. But I needn't have given it a thought. A driver with a rugged-looking vehicle was waiting for us.

Peter shifted our bags to the back seat of the Jeep and handed the plane over to the man who'd

met us.

"You're good at travel arrangements," I murmured, as we sped away from the small airport.

"It takes some planning, but with my background, it's no big deal."

Nothing seemed to be a 'big deal' with Peter. There were never any hassles or strife. Relaxed, I leaned back against the leather-upholstered seat, ready for whatever awaited me.

\* \* \* \*

Luxury – pure luxury. I stood in the middle of our thatched-roof villa and marveled at the décor. White slip-covered furniture and sea-grass floor mats, combined with tropical plants and hand painted tiles, gave the rooms a holiday feel. Sunken baths, outside showers and decks with plunge pools completed the picture.

"Oh, Peter," I cried, overwhelmed by the lavish accommodations.

He came up behind me and put his arms around my waist. "Like it?" he whispered in my ear.

"Like it? I *love\_*it," I exclaimed, leaning back into his embrace. "Can't wait to take a swim."

"Why wait?" he murmured, his hands slowly moving up to cup my breasts. "There's no time like the present moment."

I'd worn a simple black cotton dress and jacket for the trip. Peter slipped the jacket off and tossed it onto a nearby chair. Then he unzipped my dress and placed his large, warm hands on my bare skin.

"So smooth. You have the loveliest skin," he said, easing my hair away and pressing his lips against my neck. He unhooked my bra and slid his hands around to caress my loosened breasts.

A shiver of anticipation ran up my spine. "Should I change into a bikini?" The way things were heading, I had a premonition I wouldn't need it.

Under his nimble fingers, my dress slipped to the floor and my bra was tossed to who knows where. "Why bother?" he asked in a husky tone.

Clad only in panty hose, panties and high heels, I waited for his next move with a fast-beating heart.

Turning me around in his arms, his intense green eyes appraised me. "I love to look at you, Val," he said, as he rubbed the pads of his thumbs across the sensitive tips of my breasts.

His words and erotic touching ignited a hot lick of flame at the pit of my stomach. "Oh, Peter," I whispered, "you do turn me on — no doubt about it."

His mouth quirked in a half smile as one of his

hands stroked down and slipped under my panties and hose to rest on my belly, for a moment, before proceeding lower.

A soft moan escaped my lips as his long, skillful fingers found the small nub under the mound of curling hair. He fondled me with slow, sure stroking, unleashing a wet, warm surge that soaked the bottom of my panties. There was no way I could control the passion juices once they started.

My hands gripped his shoulders as I stood there trying to exert some control over my runaway lust. Fully dressed, he was calm and collected, master of his desires. The contrast between us only fueled my rapture even as I valiantly strove to stem the rising tide.

His mouth descended on mine, his tongue probing and exploring my inner recesses as his finger sank into the liquid heat of my core. Like a bolt of lightening between two magnetic poles, my whole body sizzled with a fiery need.

Peter must have sensed my desperate attempts at restraint. Lifting his mouth from mine, he said quietly, "Val, let yourself go. Don't repress what you're feeling. I want to give you this enjoyment."

Bending his head, his lips teased the taut nipples of my breasts while his fingers tantalized the throbbing, moist folds of my sex. A lethal combination. A deep groan rose in my throat as I capitulated to the raging torrent vibrating through every part of my body. "Peter," I cried, as the crescendo mounted and whirled me into an ecstatic frenzy, releasing waves of hot, wet spasms that shook me from head to toe. Too marvelous to describe.

## CHAPTER 12

swam under a moonlit sky, without my bikini. The warm waters of our private pool and the fragrance of the flowering plants lulled me into a dream-like state. Peter swam beside me with long, lithe strokes. Sometimes he'd splash me playfully, waking me from the trance I'd fallen into.

"Val, you look like you're sleep-swimming," he teased.

"I'm so relaxed; I think I'll float away." Looking up at the indigo heavens studded with sparkling lights, I couldn't help the sense of unreality taking hold. Was this scene real or was I dreaming?

"Peter, pinch me."

"Pinch you? Why would I do that?"

"To convince me I'm not imagining everything ... that this is not part of some invented daydream."

He threw back his head and laughed. "Oh, Val, you're so funny."

But he did swim over to pinch my rear - not

once, but twice. "There, are you satisfied?" he teased, hoisting me up into his arms. Then he flipped onto his back, with me on top. His firm body held me easily as he lazily floated about. "This is real, Val, although it's only for the weekend."

The short time limit on this holiday was probably wise, I decided. It would make every minute memorable.

After showering together outside, Peter wrapped me in a thick, soft towel and carried me to a wide hammock set up between two massive trees.

"Wait here," he ordered. "I'm bringing us out some dessert."

I had absolutely no desire to be anywhere but swaying to and fro in that comfortable hammock waiting for him to serve me something delectable. Every care and concern had vanished from my mind. What kind of dessert would he bring, I wondered, with child-like simplicity?

He returned with a large tray filled with sliced tropical fruits – mangos, pineapple, papaya – dishes of shaved coconut ice with pistachio cream and tall glasses of cold, minty tea. Sitting next to me on the hammock, he insisted on feeding me delicious morsels of the fruits and ices.

"You have to save some for yourself," I finally protested. "I can't possibly finish all of this."

"Don't worry," he assured me. "Anything you leave, I'll take care of." True to his word, he wolfed down every bit I couldn't eat. Then he stretched out next to me and we both sipped our drinks from colorful straws while the hammock rocked us.

"That looks like the Big Dipper," I announced, my eyes cast upwards. "Do we see the same stars down here as in New York?"

"Pretty much. Except here there's less pollution so everything's more brilliant." Then he proceeded to point out the various constellations with their prominent stars.

"I can't get over all the knowledge you've accumulated," I said. "You're like a living encyclopedia."

That analogy made him laugh. "I hope I'm more interesting than that."

I snuggled into his shoulder. "Oh, yes, Peter ... you surely are."

To say that I slept well is an understatement. I literally didn't move from the moment I hit our king-sized bed to the next morning. Peter had gone for an early morning swim. When he returned to wake me, His sun-bronzed, nude body glowed with vigor.

"Val, time to get up." He gently caressed my back and shoulders. "It's a glorious day and there's so much I want to show you." Through half-closed eyes, I surveyed the muscled magnificence of his form. With one finger I traced the contours of his arm. "You're like an Apollo," I whispered.

"Then you are Aphrodite," he replied, kissing me.

I couldn't resist the temptation to touch and admire him. My hands smoothed over his firm flesh. I should have been satiated, but viewing him naked in the early morning light stirred my libido. Venturing downwards, I caressed his large cock and the full globes beneath, feeling pleasure when his cock stirred and lengthened.

In another moment, he stretched out beside me. "Our excursion will have to wait," he said, lifting me on top of him. "Since you started this encounter, I'm putting you in charge."

This was a new twist. Usually Peter took over, instigating and leading me. Now it was my turn. What would I like to do?

For starters, I wanted to tease and titillate him, make him cry out his need the way I usually did. I slid down until my face was level with his fully erect cock. Using my tongue, I stroked the tip and then the sides of his sex, finally taking all of him into my mouth.

I heard him groan and experienced a vicarious joy in his pleasure. But I wasn't finished. Next, I cupped those solid globes underneath; alternately stroking and licking them, watching them harden even more.

"Val," he growled. "You're turning me on too fast. Slow down."

Not on your life. With fiendish delight, I increased my stroking. The shoe was on the other foot; I wanted to see Peter lose control for once.

"Let yourself go," I crooned. "Just enjoy yourself."

"You vixen," he cried, as he exploded, spewing his milky stream all over me.

I didn't mind ... not one bit. Triumphant, I sat astride his thighs, relishing this reversal of roles.

He pulled me down on top of him and held me close. "You planned this, didn't you?"

"No, Peter," I protested. "It was spontaneous. I couldn't resist your magnificent physique."

He chuckled and rumpled my hair. "Give me a few minutes and then I can satisfy you."

And he did.

\* \* \* \*

Peter drove the jeep up the winding road of the Waimea Canyon to Koke'e State Park.

"Did you know Kaua'i is the oldest of the major Hawaiian Islands? How about six million years old?"

I was duly impressed. "Gorgeous scenery," I

said, gazing at the lush foliage.

"Wait till we reach the overlook. Then you'll see some spectacular views. We'll be 4,000 feet above the coast."

He was so right. Stunning vistas of soaring cliffs and deep valleys formed a panorama I could never have imagined.

"This place has everything — sandy beaches, coral reefs, rare flowers and a waterfall that's second to none. We'll see it later," he promised.

Meanwhile, I busied myself taking photos from every conceivable angle. I'd brought a tiny camera and planned to snap as many photos as possible. Photography had always been a love of mine and here was the perfect opportunity.

"Let me shoot some of you," he suggested.

Peter had a good eye for composition – what didn't he do well – and he shot some excellent pictures.

"I'll have to photograph you nude," he said with an impish smile.

"No way," I retorted.

"Why not?" He looked surprised. "Are you ashamed of your body? It's very lovely."

His words gave me pause. "I don't like pinup type pictures," I explained.

"Neither do I. The photos I have in mind would be nothing like that. Think about it; I'd like to have some mementos of our trips together." That made sense. "Fine. In that case, I don't mind."

Wailua Falls cascaded eighty feet down from a sheer ledge. The Falls were actually twin cascades, as they were separate at the top and plunged in a dazzling display of waterpower to a clear pool below.

We stood for several long minutes in silence at the sheer force of nature.

"Look, a rainbow," I cried, catching a glimpse of the full spectrum of colors. Much more striking than the rainbow in Hans Schmidt's Intimate Water Works. "Oh, Peter. This is so beautiful. But I don't think my camera will even begin to capture what I'm seeing."

"Don't worry. There are postcards in town with great photos of the Falls; they're very famous."

After hiking some of the trails, we headed for lunch at the Kilohana Plantation. It turned out to be one of the island's most elegant restaurants. We ate outdoors and, afterwards, explored the grounds in a horse-drawn carriage.

Peter drove us to a secluded beach for an afternoon of swimming and sunbathing. Although we hadn't brought our suits along, swimming in the nude seemed second nature to me. Thinking ahead, he'd stored some towels and a blanket in the Jeep. Emerald green lawns and groves of ironwood trees set off the golden sand and turquoise waters.

An idyllic retreat – one I would remember for years to come.

## CHAPTER 13

The last night before we left Kaua'i, we cuddled together on the hammock. A full moon leant a special aura to our beautiful surroundings.

"What is it, Val?" Peter asked. "You seem sad."

He was so right; I *was* sad. "We have to leave tomorrow." In the short time we'd been here, I'd grown very fond of our private pool and luxurious accommodations. The delicious breakfasts and exotic snacks left discreetly on our deck in a special thermal container were an added bonus I would miss.

"Aren't you forgetting something?"

"What am I forgetting?" I asked, tipping up my chin to face him.

"Our next holiday. We'll be taking off in just a few days."

Of course; how dumb of me. "You're right. I feel better already. Where are we headed?" I didn't think he'd tell me, but I could ask.

He chuckled. "Always curious. You'll have to

wait and see."

"But I'll need to pack."

"You won't need any more than on this trip." He caressed my bare back and buttocks. After our recent swim, we were both nude underneath an enormous terry towel.

The hammock swayed gently as we lay contentedly in each other's arms. I would definitely miss this place, but the thought of our next adventure buoyed my spirits.

We were back in New York by Monday evening. Peter brought me right to my door.

"Do you want to stay?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Not tonight. You need your beauty sleep and I have work to do. I'll call during the week and, don't forget, I'll expect you to be ready Friday evening for our second holiday."

After a long goodbye kiss, he left. My apartment seemed empty after he'd gone. I wandered around, sorted through some mail and checked my phone messages. Nothing from Tony – which was a relief, but also a surprise. Had he forgotten me?

I couldn't help picturing him cavorting around Australia with a curvaceous blond on his arm, and in his bed. I started to grow angry at the very thought of his gallivanting when I suddenly realized I was doing the very same thing. That thought brought me up sharp. I tried to rationalize my affair with Peter as a matter of need, my need for companionship and sexual satisfaction. If Tony had been around more, I wouldn't have succumbed to Peter's charm. Feeling somewhat justified, I took a long, leisurely bath and went to bed.

\* \* \* \*

Trish was waiting for me at the gallery when I arrived Tuesday morning.

"Well, you're looking tanned and terrific," she said, the minute she saw me. "How was your holiday?"

"Fabulous." I wasn't about to go into any personal details – my private life was strictly that – private.

She wasn't satisfied with a one-word answer. "Was Peter a good companion? Did you get on well together?"

"The best," I said, settling in at my desk and rifling through some mail and messages. "I can't wait for our next adventure. By the way," I sliced her a quick glance; "Did you hear from Tony? There weren't any messages from him at home."

Trish shrugged. "Not really. He phoned Scott about business, but I didn't get a chance to talk to him. Were you expecting his call?" "No, not exactly." Still, it bothered me that Tony could let so many days go by without inquiring about my welfare. I couldn't mean very much to him, after all. Which was annoying and a relief at the same time. If he didn't call, I wouldn't have to lie. But I did feel neglected.

Tony phoned on Wednesday when I was at the gallery. "Hi, sweetheart." His voice sounded far away. "I miss you. What have you been up to?"

A leading question. I hemmed and hawed about this and that, not saying very much.

He didn't pursue the matter, which was strange. He's usually quick to pick up on topics I'm trying to avoid. In hindsight, I should have been more suspicious. As it was, I considered myself lucky to avoid any prolonged questioning. It would have been difficult to account for three whole days away without lying.

"I'm sending off a package for you," he said. "So be on the lookout."

That was a nice surprise. At least he thought of me now and then. "What is it?"

He chuckled. "You'll see ... it's a surprise."

All the men in my life wanted to surprise me. Well, only two at the moment. "Okay. I'm eagerly awaiting it."

We said a tender goodbye and he promised to phone again soon. Then he added a few words that definitely should have alerted me. "Remember, I don't want you sitting home and pining away. Go out and enjoy yourself."

But I didn't give those words much thought. Besides, I was *not*\_sitting home and pining. That's for sure.

As planned, Peter picked me up Friday evening. I had my small bag packed and ready for takeoff.

"This will be a shorter flight, so we'll stop for dinner on our way to the airport," he said.

Still no word on our destination – but I was becoming accustomed to surprises.

We dined at an intimate restaurant specializing in French cuisine. Peter ordered our meal in fluent French — bouillabaisse, a marvelous fish stew, salad and a freshly baked baguette.

"Dessert will be en route," he informed me, as he carried out a closed bag of goodies.

I was not about to protest. Every meal or snack with Peter had been delicious. Sure enough, we enjoyed mouth-watering chocolate eclairs and iced espressos midway over the Atlantic Ocean.

"We'll arrive in less than two hours," he said. "A lot less than our Hawaiian flight."

I had a gut feeling we'd be landing on one of the Greek Islands. But I kept my lips sealed. If Peter wanted to surprise me, I'd go along with his plans. Just before he started our descent, he turned to me with a knowing look. "You've already guessed we're headed for the Greek Islands."

How did he ascertain that? I hadn't given him any hints ... unless he was a mind reader.

"You don't know which one, though," he continued with a smile.

That was true. "How did you know that I knew?"

"Because, Miss Curious, you weren't asking your usual amount of questions." He gave me a playful poke in the ribs.

This time I was wearing jeans and a sweater. I hadn't needed that black dress on our last holiday. I hardly dressed in anything except shorts, tee shirts and jeans. Even my bikini had been superfluous, although I'd taken it along again, just in case.

We landed at a small airport on Mykonos. A driver was awaiting our arrival with a small, sports car.

"No rough roads here," he said, as he flung our two bags onto the back seat.

I wondered about our accommodations – would they be rustic, as in Kaua'i or entirely different. But I didn't ask. By now I trusted Peter's taste completely. Everything he'd chosen had more than suited me.

We drove through small towns of white

washed houses until we arrived at our destination — a three-story contemporary villa perched on a hill overlooking a large body of water.

"Here we are," Peter came to a stop. He retrieved our bags and I followed him inside.

"This is the top level," he said, as we entered a large living room furnished with modern pieces, mostly white, and some striking artwork. He dropped our bags inside the door of an enormous bedroom, also furnished with sleek, light-colored furnishings. "And here's the 'piece de resistance'. With a flourish, he slid open the ceiling to floor glass doors.

We walked out onto a terrace boasting huge pots of colorful flowers. An illuminated rectangular pool was set into the center of the terrace. "From here you can see great views of Panormos Bay. It's too dark to see much now, but in the morning it will be spectacular."

All of the rooms opened out onto this magnificent pool. There was an outdoor dining area on the terrace as well as a completely furnished kitchen and indoor dining room. We explored the other levels — the bottom level contained a small gym and a sauna while another bedroom and a game room were on the second level.

"What a lavish setup," I said. "You are spoiling me, Peter."

"You're worth spoiling." He took me in his arms and held me close. "What do you say to a swim?"

Of course, that's just what I wanted, too. This time I didn't even consider the bikini. Our pool was hidden and private – perfect for swimming in the buff.

Instead of a hammock, we found an enormous chaise lounge that was perfect for the two of us to cuddle on. The night was cool so Peter brought out a cotton quilt to cover us.

"Peter, this is super." I stretched out next to him and sniffed the air, the scent a mixture of sea smells and the perfume of flowering plants.

"There are extraordinary beaches on this island, especially on the northern coast. We'll explore some of the less crowded ones tomorrow. Most of the tourists are here during the summer months, but now we'll have the island almost to ourselves and the weather is still fine."

Something woke me very early the next morning. I remember a jumble of dream images, none very clear. Once up, I could not go back to sleep. Peter was stretched out, dead to the world.

Slipping out of bed, I padded quietly onto the terrace. The first gray streaks of dawn showed as I walked across the wide verandah to see the view. I could make out the outline of water and shore, but little else; it was still too dark.

The warm waters of the pool beckoned and I was soon floating around, eyes closed, relishing the total silence. I didn't hear Peter until he was right beside me, his hand caressing my stomach.

Startled, I opened my eyes. "Peter ... thought you were sound asleep."

"I missed you," he said, with a tender smile, letting his hand glide over me, stroking the inner parts of my thighs. He placed both arms under me, drawing me close.

"It's so peaceful," I murmured, resting my head against the firm wall of his chest.

Peter's mind was on other things beside peace. "This is how I want to photograph you, floating about with your hair spread out around you. I'll wait until it's light. Meanwhile, I have to get you in the mood."

"In the mood for what?"

He flashed one of his wicked grins. "For being photographed as the sensual woman you are."

And then he proceeded to caress and tantalize every erotic part of my body until he had me aroused and eager. There were steps leading into the pool at one end. He floated me over and sat down on one of them, positioning me to sit astride his thighs.

"Hold onto my shoulders," he ordered, lifting my buttocks slightly to allow his erect cock to enter me. "Ah," I moaned softly, as he filled me. This was a new experience, making love under water. It was at once weightless and grounded by the deep contact.

"Put your legs around me," he said, "and hold on tight." With those words, he shifted from a seated position to floating on his back with me securely affixed.

His sheer physical strength was amazing. I could hardly believe he could float about with my weight on him and still make love with consummate ease. His hands moved my thighs up and down in a steady rhythm, reaching into the deepest recesses of my womb. I wanted to take it slow so this incredible experience would last a long time.

His provocative movements soon put me over the top and I cried out as fiery spasms shook my whole body. His climax followed mine and, for a moment, I thought we'd both sink under the water. But he steadied himself and I held on for dear life.

How long we floated like that, still joined, I have no idea. But it was heavenly. Later, we wrapped ourselves in huge soft towels and stretched out on our lounge to watch the sunrise.

"You can see the view," he said, nibbling at my earlobe.

I couldn't move a muscle. "Not yet ... I'm so

sleepy."

I did fall back to sleep. When I woke, the sun had risen on a glorious day. Now I could appreciate the magnificent panorama before me – clear blue waters, tiny, pastel-colored houses hugging the shore, low lying purple hills in the distance and white sails dotting the harbor.

True to his word, Peter photographed me in the water, on the chaise lounge and silhouetted against the rock wall surrounding our verandah.

We had our breakfast overlooking this beautiful scene before taking off to search for the perfect beach.

The next few days, we explored the golden sandy beaches of Panormos and Agios with their low dunes and crystalline waters. We ate our meals at small tavernas where the owners, usually a husband and wife, cooked and served. Often we were invited into the kitchen to choose our entrees. One evening we dined on Moussaka, a baked meat custard with layers of potatoes, onions and ground meat with a lovely custard sauce. Another time I tried a lamb stew with lemon roasted potatoes. Greek cooking uses lots of lemon and oregano. For dessert, their baklava was heavenly – thin sheets of phyllo alternated with ground nuts and honey. Yummy.

I took many photos of the old, white washed windmills, a symbol of Mykonos, and of the

charming towns and small, blue domed churches.

One morning Peter announced we'd be taking a taxi-boat over to Delos, a small deserted island nearby.

The trip by boat was a bit choppy. "Concentrate on the horizon," Peter advised.

This worked and I didn't get seasick.

"Delos was one of the most important spiritual centers of Greece," he informed me as we started our tour. "In fact, according to mythology, it was the birthplace of Artemis, the goddess of hunting, and Apollo."

"So this is where you came from," I teased.

We had our own private tour guide who took us through the many temples, theaters and houses of that long ago civilization. I couldn't get over the beauty of the mosaic floors in many of the houses.

"They're in such good condition and what great craftsmanship." Archeology had always fascinated me and I enjoyed our visit to the archeological museum on the island.

Much too soon, we were back at the airport for our return flight. This time I didn't allow any sadness to mar the trip. After all, we were embarking on another adventure in just a few days.

## CHAPTER 14

Tony phoned me at the gallery on Thursday afternoon, the day before I was to leave on my next holiday.

"Hi, sweetheart. Did you get my package yet?"

For some reason, the sound of his voice gave me the jitters. "N-no, it hasn't arrived."

"It should get there soon, hopefully before I do."

He was coming back? When? The palms of my hands grew sweaty as I contemplated his imminent arrival. "You're coming home?" I asked cautiously.

He chuckled. "Didn't you think I would? My plane gets in Tuesday night. I expect you can pick me up, as usual. I'll fax the details to you."

Tuesday night. He'd return Tuesday night. My mind worked feverishly to take in this unexpected news. At least his return wouldn't interrupt my weekend holiday with Peter. That was a relief. I should have distrusted the timing of his return – just one day after we got back – but I didn't even think of it. I was too busy with trying to figure out how I would handle the two men in my life.

I was pretty quiet the rest of the afternoon. Trish picked up on my preoccupied state.

"What's up, Val? You've been a veritable Sphinx the last few hours."

I decided to confide in her; she'd find out soon enough, anyway. "Tony's coming back Tuesday night and I'm not sure how I'm going to cope."

She nodded sagely. "The plot thickens." Then she added, "I'm sure all will work out. Maybe Tony and Peter will get along well."

Her words surprised me. I couldn't conceive of any way that Tony would accept me running about the world with another man — even if he was a robot. Besides, I'd long since ceased thinking of Peter as a robot. To me, he was simply Peter, a warm, caring man whom I adored.

In retrospect, I can see why Trish was so unconcerned; she'd been in on the plot from the beginning.

At the time, I was very troubled about my conflicted feelings. On the one hand, I was angry with Tony for abandoning me for so long. I blamed *him* for my infidelity. Then I started blaming *myself* for being weak and allowing Peter

to worm his way into my heart and my bed.

How was I possibly going to explain my behavior to Tony on Tuesday night? Should I continue to hide my involvement with Peter? *Could* I hide our relationship?

These questions whirled around in my head all afternoon. By the time I arrived home, I had a monstrous headache.

A large package waited outside my door. It symbolized Tony's coming arrival and my heart thudded. Gingerly, I carried it inside and decided not to open it until my head stopped pounding. I lay down with a cold cloth on my face, trying to calm my overheated nerves.

I was just beginning to doze when the phone rang, jarring me into wakefulness. "Hullo?"

"Hi, Val. Are you all right? Your voice sounds funny."

It was Peter — and for once I was not in the mood to talk to him. "I've a terrible headache, so if you don't mind, I'm not going to talk long. I want to sleep awhile."

There was a pause and, for a moment, I thought he'd hung up on me. "Peter, are you still there?"

"I'm here, Val. Just wondering if there was anything I could do to help. Shall I come down and stay the night? I could give you a massage that might relieve your headache."

No. No way did I want to see Peter. I'd end up

telling him about Tony's return, revealing my acute state of anxiety. "I'd rather be alone, if you don't mind. All I need is some sleep. I'll be fine in the morning. Good night, Peter." I held my breath, hoping he'd take the hint.

"As you wish, Val. Take care of yourself. I'll pick you up, as usual, tomorrow night."

I let out a relieved breath. At least he hadn't argued with me; I couldn't have handled that. But trying to get back to sleep was impossible. Fully awake, I ambled out to see Tony's package sitting on my dining room table. What could he have sent?

I ripped open the box and removed scads of packing material. Several layers of tissue paper were wrapped around a bulky shape. I pulled them off to find a velvety-looking kangaroo with a baby 'roo peeking out from its stomach.

For a moment, I was speechless, staring at the creatures, mother and baby. I picked them up and held the cuddly animals close to my heart while tears pricked at my eyelids.

How sweet of Tony to send me these adorable stuffed animals. How thoughtful of him to remember how much I loved the teddy bears that sat on the chest in my bedroom. I sat down on a nearby chair and hugged the 'roos, burying my head in their soft brown fur.

A host of childhood memories flooded my

mind. I saw myself as a child of nine holding onto my favorite teddy bear as I received news of my beloved grandmother's death. Then there was the time I was about eleven and was in the hospital. My mother brought me a new teddy bear to keep me company. The comfort those bears gave me was immeasurable.

"Tony," I whispered out loud, "how did you know I needed this?" I pressed my face into the kangaroo's soft body and cried for several minutes, relieving my stored up distress.

A strange thought hit me. Would a robot feel the same way about a stuffed animal? I didn't think I could ask Peter that question.

That night I went to sleep with the 'roos snuggled right beside me.

\* \* \* \*

We took off Friday night and, as Peter's silver jet whirled us into the 'wild blue yonder', I couldn't shake the consciousness of Tony's impending arrival. If Peter noticed my abstracted mood, he didn't comment on it.

"Aren't you curious about our destination?" he finally inquired.

"When you're ready, you'll tell me, although I have an idea we're headed south."

"You're right, Val. We are flying in a southerly

direction. Want to take a guess? I'll give you a hint; it's not an island. Since we've already explored two marvelous ones, Kauau'i and Mykonos, I wanted to show you something different."

"Something different ... well let's see ... perhaps Mexico or one of the Central American countries."

He nodded. "Good guess. You're almost there. Try a little further south."

I turned to him in surprise. "Then it has to be one of the South American countries, a country with mountains. That's why you had me bring hiking boots and a warm jacket."

He laughed. "That did give you a clue. Yes, we're headed to a country with a wide range of landscapes — vast deserts, mountain lakes and volcanoes, glacier fields — you name it, this country has it."

"I have to be honest, Peter. South America is not one of the continents I'm familiar with. Give me another hint."

Peter thought a moment. "All right, this should do it. One of the greatest South American poets comes from this country." He turned toward me expectantly.

One of the greatest poets ... I racked my brain. Then it came to me. "Pablo Neruda — so it must be Chile. I loved his long poem, "The Heights of Macchu Picchu". It's one of my favorites."

Of course, Peter recited most of this long poem to me.

Chile. I hadn't expected our adventures would take us there. But I was game for anything.

We landed at a tiny airport outside of Santiago, Chile's capital. A driver with a sturdy vehicle awaited us, as usual.

"We'll be staying at Portillo, a ski resort just north of the city," Peter said as we sped on our way.

"Is it still skiing season?" I asked.

"Not exactly, but the views are spectacular."

He was so right. Even at night I could glean an idea of the terrain – rugged mountain trails seemed to lead straight up to the star-studded skies.

Our accommodations were simple but luxurious, a chalet type ski lodge with its own sunken hot tub on the wide, outside deck. The clear night air was surprisingly cool.

"No wonder you told me to take a warm jacket. We must be pretty high up."

"How about ten thousand feet above sea level? It may take a day to get used to the thinner air. We'll go slow tomorrow."

The next morning when I ambled out to our deck, I gasped at the view — mountains surrounded us on three sides. In front of me was a

magnificent lake, the Laguna del Inca, I later found out. It is of unknown depth and freezes over in winter.

"Oh, Peter, this is so incredible," I exclaimed as he joined me.

He smiled at my enthusiasm. "I thought you'd enjoy this."

After a hearty breakfast, we took a drive to see Pablo Neruda's home at Isla Nigra. We passed several seaside resorts on the Pacific and took the time to stroll along the beach. The waves roaring into shore were formidable – not exactly the balmiest waters to swim in. Neruda's home overlooked a particularly rough stretch of beach where the waves crashed against humped rocks rising suddenly out of the white sand.

The seafood in Chile was astounding. We dined on machas — razor clams — lightly baked with Parmesan cheese, shrimp, oysters, mussels, octopous and the famous king crab. Peter recommended we try a Chilean favorite, caldillo de congrio.

"How do you like it?" he asked.

"Delicious," I said, and it was.

He hadn't told me what was in the soup, which was just as well. "All right, what's in it?"

"Well, onions and potato and conger."

"Conger?" That didn't sound familiar.

"It's an eel, Val," he grinned, watching my

expression.

Oh, well, I'd had stranger things to eat ... and it *was* good.

The following day I needed my heavy jacket, sun block and a wide-brimmed hat. We trekked on horseback to explore the many nooks and crannies of the high Andes. Peter hired a guide as the trails go up very steep, huge hills topped by barren rock. We passed lakes where blocks of snow floated. The atmosphere was so dry and clear it seemed you could see to the end of the world if the snow capped peaks were not blocking your vision. There was something about the majestic silence that high up that was humbling.

We were making our descent and, once back at our lodge, we'd only have one more night together. I could see the sadness in Peter's expression. "We still have tomorrow," I consoled him. Did he have a premonition this was our last trip together?

That night we soaked in the hot tub and gazed at the twinkling stars. "This is so beautiful, so peaceful," I murmured. "I can't thank you enough for these very special holidays, Peter."

He bent to kiss me, smoothing my hair back from my face. "These have been some of the happiest times of my life, Val."

And I knew he meant it.

Peter drove me home and, instead of kissing me goodbye, as usual, he asked the question I'd hoped not to hear.

"Val, would you like my company tonight?"

For a moment I froze. This was the last thing I wanted. Tony was due back the next evening. I needed time alone to make the transition from one lover to the next. How could I handle this without hurting Peter's feelings?

I took a deep breath. "Can I take you up on your offer another time?"

He gave a rueful grin. "So, you're tired of me already."

"No, Peter," I started to protest.

He stopped me with a kiss. "It's okay, Val. I know you have things on your mind. I've sensed it all weekend. Do you want to talk about it?"

His voice was gentle and, for a brief moment, I almost considered confiding in him. "You are perceptive, Peter. Let me sleep on it; perhaps next time we get together."

"Till Friday, then," he said, and left.

Next Friday? Who knew what would happen by next Friday? Unless Tony was going out of town for the weekend, I didn't see how Peter and I would be taking another holiday.

Things were becoming more and more complicated. I wondered how others handled multiple relationships at the same time. Was it better to be honest with each of them? Earlier, Peter had assured me our affair would not affect my relationship with Tony. But how could he know this?

The more I thought about everything, the more muddled my head became. Finally, I put the entire matter out of my mind. Whatever happened, happened.

Tuesday night I drove to the airport, still with no clear plan. I didn't know whether to confess my affair with Peter or keep mum. By the time Tony's plane touched down, I was one nervous wreck.

Tony strode toward me with a big smile. "Hello, love. So good to see you." He gave me a bear hug and a long kiss. Then he set me back a moment with an appraising glance. "Don't you look good — all tanned and healthy. Well, did you get my package yet? I should have brought it with me."

"Oh, Tony, they're adorable. I love the 'roos. Thank you so much." I gave him a quick kiss.

"I'm glad you like them, love. I remembered your fondness for teddy bears."

He took my hand and we headed to the parking area. From the corner of my eye, I stole a look at his rugged profile and thick, dark hair. Different than Peter and somehow more real. Suddenly I realized I could not go on deceiving him – I would have to tell him about Peter and take my chances.

He could leave me. At the possibility of losing him, a stab of pain shot through my heart. How would I manage without him? For the first time, I woke up to the fact that I loved this guy — truly loved him. Losing him would be a major catastrophe.

Why had I allowed myself to wander into another man's bed? Why couldn't I have been more patient? My guilt was overwhelming.

Meanwhile, Tony talked to me about his trip and all the people he'd met. "Val, dear, I promise you next time I have to be in Australia, you'll come with me. There are so many places I want to show you."

At his words, my guilt only increased. If he knew how I'd been occupying myself... I shuddered, thinking about his reaction. These were not pleasant moments.

Once in the van, Tony lowered his seat and stretched out. "I'll take a quick nap — then I'll be in shape for the rest of the night." He flashed me an intimate smile.

"Did you plan to stay over?"

"Absolutely, love. After all, it's been a long time ... too long." He reached out to squeeze my thigh. "Can't wait to hold you in my arms again. I've missed you."

Another stab of pain hit me. How was I going

to get through the rest of this night?

# CHAPTER 15

"| see the 'roos made a hit with you." Tony stood at my bedroom door surveying the furry animals on my pillow. "The little one is called a 'joey', by the way."

"I love those guys — you couldn't have sent a better gift." And I meant it. Walking over to the bed, I took the two 'roos in my arms. It was a comfort to hold them.

"What's the matter, Val? You seem preoccupied. Aren't you happy to see me?"

I looked up at him and my eyes filled with tears. "Of course I'm happy to see you. It's just that ... " I hesitated, trying to think of something. "You've been away so long and it's hard to adjust to your being back."

He walked over and drew me into his arms, 'roos and all. "I understand. Let's spend tonight getting reacquainted. How about a shower and then a midnight snack? Dinner was ages ago."

Under the shower's hot spray, we soaped each

other. Tony's hands caressed me as he explored all my secret places.

"This is what I missed most," he said huskily. "I've dreamed about touching you and making love to you."

I hadn't dreamt about making love to Tony – I'd been so busy with Peter, I hadn't given much thought to anything else. At that moment, my guilt was monumental.

We wrapped ourselves in terry robes and headed for the kitchen. "What are you in the mood for?" I inquired, searching the almost empty shelves of my refrigerator. I'd been away and hadn't caught up with food shopping.

He chuckled as he came up behind me. "That's a leading question, love." Then, peering into my refrigerator, he added, "not much here except eggs. We could make an omelet."

Luckily there was a still usable potato and an onion plus some cheese. The freezer yielded bread and turkey bacon. "I haven't been home much," I said.

"I know love; I'm glad you got out and had some fun."

Some fun! He should know the extent of it. But I was still not ready to confess my affair.

After our late night snack, we headed for bed. "You must be tired," he said, easing my robe off and taking me into his arms. "We can sleep late. I've already talked to Trish about it. She'll handle the gallery tomorrow."

I looked up at him in surprise. "When did you arrange that?"

"Just before I left Australia. I figured we needed time together. Since my plane arrived so late, why shouldn't we have the next day to rest? Do you mind?"

"No," I said. "Except it was rather high-handed of you to alter my work schedule without consulting me first."

Lifting me in his arms, he settled me down on the bed. "Where you're welfare is concerned, I <u>am</u> high-handed and I always will be. So get used to it, Val."

He stretched out next to me and, with expert strokes, caressed me until I was fully aroused. Our lovemaking was tender as we explored each other. We learned anew what had always made our relationship so vital and exciting.

Tony and I had a history together; we'd had our ups and downs, but we'd survived these. But could we survive my infidelity? This was the big question running through my mind as I lay in his arms and watched him sleep. I would have to take that chance. The very next morning, I would tell him about Peter. I promised myself I would, before falling asleep.

I woke early and padded downstairs to put up

a pot of coffee. There was still some bread and eggs left, so I made French toast. Setting a tray with the necessary utensils, I brought it upstairs.

"Tony," I shook him lightly. "How about breakfast?"

He mumbled and tossed about before opening one eye. "What time is it?" Then he sniffed the coffee and opened both eyes. "Mmmm., something smells good."

I could always count on his appetite – it is enormous. "Let's eat; then we'll talk, okay?"

He sat up, still groggy. "What do you want to talk about?"

I brought the tray over and settled it between us on the bed. "It can wait. Try the French toast; I put your favorite strawberry preserves on top."

After we finished, I took a deep breath and plunged in. "Tony, I have a confession to make. I've been involved with another man over the last several weeks. I didn't mean to start a relationship, but it just happened. His name is Peter and, for your information, he's an advanced robot."

I sat back and waited for the inevitable explosion. It didn't happen. Tony sat there with an enigmatic expression and didn't say a word.

"Did you hear me?" I asked, confused at his reaction.

He nodded. "Yes, I heard you."

"Well, don't you care?" I demanded. Could he be so indifferent to me that it didn't matter who I slept with? I didn't know what to think.

"Oh, Val, I care ... I care a great deal." He reached for me and held me close.

"In fact, I care so much, I arranged for you to have a companion while I was away. Believe me, you have nothing to confess and nothing to feel guilty about. I only wanted you to be happy."

To say I was shocked is putting it mildly. "What are you saying?" I gasped and pulled away as the full impact of his words hit me. "*You* put Peter up to this ... *you* schemed to have him make love to me and take me away?" If this were indeed true, I'd been a pawn in Tony's hands ... putty for him to mold into whatever shape he wished. Insufferable! Simply insufferable!

To say I was angry is an understatement. "How could you do such an ... an abominable thing?" My guilt vanished in an instant to be replaced by outrage — sheer outrage. I was ready to kill him.

"Val, please don't be mad at me. I only did it so you wouldn't be lonely." Tony's hand stretched out to touch my arm.

I pushed it away, furious at the deception I'd been under. I couldn't trust Tony ... and I couldn't even trust Peter. He'd been a pawn in this whole scheme, too. Another thought — had Trish and Scott been involved too? "What about Trish and Scott?" I asked, tight-lipped. "Were they in on the plot, too?" I had to know where I stood.

Heaving a deep sigh, Tony nodded. "We only had your welfare at heart, Val. Believe me, I couldn't bear to see you lonely."

"I'd rather be lonely than manipulated," I shot back. "How would you like it if I foisted a robotic woman on you?"

He smiled, a devilish twinkle in his dark blue eyes. "Frankly, sweetheart, I'd love it. From what I've heard, those advanced life forms make terrific sexual partners. But you'd know about that, now wouldn't you?"

Oh, how I hated that smile – that smug look. I wanted to wipe it off his handsome face. "You'll never know," I muttered, retreating from him to the other side of the bed. "If you don't mind, I'm leaving ... right now. Your company is not desired."

Haughtily, I rose and headed to the closet for clothes. Should I go to the gallery anyway? Confront Trish about the deception and probably get into a fight? No. That didn't appeal to me. Tony was behind this whole episode. They were simply abetting his scheme.

The whole thing made me feel stupid ... and vulnerable. They'd programmed Peter to say all the right words, make all the right moves. He didn't have any true feelings for me. It was horrible. Tears came to my eyes. No, I wasn't going to break down in front of Tony - I wouldn't give him that satisfaction.

"Why don't you leave?" I said icily. "I don't want you here anymore."

He rose and strode over to me, eyes flashing dangerously. "Don't push me, Val. Your attitude is ridiculous. I only wanted you cared for while I was away. There was never any malicious intent. From what I've heard, you had a pretty good time of it. So why take it out on me? You act as if I'm some sort of a criminal — that I've done a dastardly deed."

He stood directly in front of me, eyes intent on mine. "Let's have a truce. I'll take responsibility for being a bit high-handed and you admit to having had a fun time with Peter. Okay?"

"A bit high—handed?" I sputtered. "That's putting it mildly, don't you think?" I was not ready to forgive him — not by a long shot.

"Okay, okay, so I *was* high-handed. Don't you realize by now how much I care for you? That I'd do anything to keep you happy when I have to be away?"

His tone *was* sincere. I had to admit that much. Maybe he thought he was doing me a favor. I stood there, weighing the pros and cons, considering his appeal.

Deep down, I wanted to forgive him. Life

without Tony would be empty ... I knew that. I should exact some kind of retribution for all he'd put me through. "You'll have to make it up to me – big time." I gave him one of my severe looks.

"Anything you want, just name it." His arms pulled me close. "I do love you, Val," he murmured. "I would never hurt you, knowingly."

Which was true. My pride was hurt. I thought Peter had fallen for me of his own accord. To find out he'd been programmed to please me – and at Tony's instructions – was a blow.

"I guess I'm not a 'femme fatale' after all."

He chuckled. "You're plenty 'femme fatale' for me. How about we get back into bed and I'll prove it?"

# CHAPTER 16

**T**ony and I spent the next few days and nights getting reacquainted. Although I hadn't forgotten about retribution, I hadn't thought it through. Then it came to me. We were lying in bed one evening after he'd taken me out for a wonderful Italian dinner.

"Tony, since I won't be going on any more holidays with Peter, you'll have to escort me on an adventure. It's only fair"

"Our minds are on the same wavelength, love. I've been planning a trip for us over the Thanksgiving holidays."

I snuggled against his shoulder. "Where are we going?"

"You'll see ... it's a surprise."

Oh, no. Not another surprise. I'd had enough surprises to last me a lifetime. But no amount of cajoling could budge him.

Another thought had been nagging at me.

"What will happen to Peter now that you're home?"

"That's an excellent question." He pulled me on top and wound his legs and arms around me. "I'd been considering Peter's future, even before I came back."

Secure in his embrace, I waited for his answer, never doubting his good intentions. Was I in for a surprise!

"Val, my love," he murmured, nibbling on my earlobe. "I'm curious about Peter's abilities as a lover."

"Are you now?" I replied. "Well, I can tell you he's a great lover." Then, thinking I might have hurt him, I added, "of course, not as good as you."

There was a long pause. I assumed that ended the subject. But I assumed wrong.

"Val, I'm going to ask you to do something that you may initially object to. But I have my reasons. I want to observe you and Peter having sex."

"What?" I exclaimed, attempting to move away from him. His grip was too strong and I had to remain in his close embrace. Damn the man. He knew just how to handle me. "You must be kidding."

He wasn't kidding. Tony spent the next several hours persuading me to do something I never, in my wildest imagination, would have considered.

Finally, I gave in. "This is bizarre, you know

that. And what about Peter? Will he object?" That was my last hope. But, of course, it was doomed to failure.

"Peter? He'll do whatever I want him to do," Tony asserted. "Remember, he's a robot and I've had a hand in programming him." Then, bending his head to kiss me, he added, with a roguish grin, "and he's done a pretty good job of pleasing you, hasn't he?"

I hated to give him the satisfaction of an answer, so I remained silent. Peter and I would be the pawns Tony manipulated for his 'scientific' experiment. It didn't sit right with me, but I was tired of fighting.

"C'mon, Val, don't be upset," Tony caressed me lightly. "Maybe I can learn something from his technique so I can give you greater pleasure. Did you ever think about that?"

I hadn't and I didn't fall for his reasoning. "That's not why you want me to do this. You've a one-track mind — all business — and you want to see what adjustments you can make with your next advanced life form. Be honest for a change."

He heaved a long sigh. "You're half right. But I am curious about how Peter arouses you. Did he attract you at the first meeting? We used your 'ideal man' description, by the way." He laughed. "That was quite a list you gave Trish. I hadn't expected such a thorough enumeration. Dark auburn hair, green eyes ... "

"Stop it," I cried, poking him in the ribs. "You make me feel like a fool for falling for a programmed robot."

"Oh, Val, where's your sense of humor?" He rumpled my hair playfully. "I thought it was one of your 'essential traits'?"

"Essential traits, my foot," I muttered. Then, unexpectedly, the zaniness of the situation came through and I started giggling. "Oh, Tony, this is so crazy. Here I am being wooed and won by a robot *you* programmed and now you want to view us having sex so you can make some minor adjustments. It's too much."

That very weekend, Tony invited Peter to join us. I was nervous, at first, about Peter's reaction. But I needn't have worried.

"Peter, good to see you, old chap." Tony shook hands with our guest and led him into the living room. "First, I want to thank you for squiring Val on all those adventures. She's had a glorious time and I'm very grateful."

"No problem, Tony. It's been a real pleasure." Peter looked pleased at his compliment.

I walked over to Peter and gave him a kiss. "I'm appreciative, too. You were wonderful company and I've learned so much from you."

Peter returned my kiss and gave me a hug. "I'm

glad you had fun, Val. I've enjoyed every moment of our time together. I'm truly sorry it's come to an end."

Tony quirked an eyebrow as he viewed the two of us embracing. I didn't care — this whole thing was *his* invention. Whatever happened, happened.

"Peter, sit down a minute." Tony gestured to a nearby chair. "I need more information about your, um, technical skills and I want to propose something."

Peter seated himself and I sat down on the arm of his chair. I was determined to link myself with Peter from the first moment. Tony would be the outsider in this experiment.

Tony explained what he wanted. I watched Peter's expression carefully. Although surprised at first, he quickly acceded to Tony's demands.

"Fine with me. How about you, Val? Are you comfortable with this?"

I nodded. "I wasn't initially. But now it's okay." I couldn't help being touched by his caring attitude. "You are a dear, Peter," I murmured, bending my head to give him another kiss.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Tony's face darken. Fine with me. This whole idiotic situation was *his* idea. Wait until Peter and I really got going. Tony was in for some surprises.

"When shall we begin?" Peter asked, wrapping an arm around my waist. Tony shrugged. "Anytime you're ready. I'm planning to take notes and some photos."

"Photos?" This was news. "You never mentioned photos. I don't want pictures of me nude floating around the world."

"Don't worry. They're not for distribution. I'm the only one who'll view them, I promise you."

Could I trust him? I had to take that chance. "Okay, then," I said grudgingly.

Peter pulled me onto his lap. "Don't worry, Val. Tony's trustworthy; I'll vouch for that."

He held me close and, again, the flame of attraction between us came to life. Cradling me in his arms, he began to slowly explore the curves of my body, touching and stroking with tender care.

Purposefully, I blocked out Tony's presence and gave myself up to the pleasure of Peter's lovemaking.

He unbuttoned my silk blouse and cupped my breast in his hand, rubbing his thumb over the sensitive tip. His fingers slipped under the lacy bra to caress my bare skin.

A shiver of anticipated pleasure rippled through me. "Oh, Peter," I whispered. "That feels so good."

He slid my bra strap off and peeled the sheer fabric down, exposing one rosy peak. "So lovely, Val," he said as he suckled and teased the taut nipple. I moaned as a hot flash of desire spurted from my innermost core. I couldn't wait to get rid of my clothes and feel Peter's hard cock inside me.

He was in no hurry to relieve my need. As usual, he took his sweet time, undressing me piece by piece, until I sat on his knees clad only in panties and high-heeled sandals.

"Why don't we go upstairs to bed?" I whispered into his ear.

"Why bother?" he replied, as his finger began a downward path beneath my panties. "It's comfortable here."

And very wet, I could have added, as he probed the slick, hot folds of my sex with his expert touch. I cried out as his long finger entered me and began rubbing the highly sensitized flesh. I truly did not want to climax so soon. I wanted Peter to be nude next to me and for us to pleasure each other. But what I wanted did not seem to count. At least at this moment. Peter, as usual, took the lead and, from prior experience, I knew my protests would not hold weight. He had my ultimate satisfaction in mind; how he arrived at the desired destination was completely in his hands.

The next thing I knew, my panties were gone and I was sitting astride him. He'd unzipped his fly revealing his fully erect cock — a magnificent sight.

I wanted to sheath him immediately, but again I

had to learn patience as Peter pleasured me in other delightful ways. Finally, he was deep inside me and I cried out with a combination of relief and joy.

It never occurred to me to glance at Tony. I was lost in a world of sensual enjoyment where nothing in my surroundings could interfere. After the upward spiral to our ecstatic climax, however, I did take a peek at him.

Tony's expression was somber, almost stoic. He sat, notebook and pen in hand, trying to maintain a detached, scientific demeanor. But I could tell he was not as cool as he attempted to appear.

Good. I have to say I was pleased our lovemaking had hit a nerve somewhere. This would be the sweetest retribution of all — to make Tony squirm at his own experiment. How wonderful.

I nestled against Peter's firm chest and murmured sweet nothings for his ear alone. "Peter, that was marvelous ... you are the best."

"Thanks, Val, you're pretty terrific yourself," he said, caressing me tenderly.

From the other side of the room, we heard Tony's brusque voice. "Okay, okay, let's finish this up. Val, you can disengage now and Peter, thanks for your help. Why don't you stop back tomorrow evening and we'll try another round?"

I sat up and glared across the room at Tony.

"You mean Peter can't stay the night? This isn't fair."

There was a moment of complete silence. "Did you want him to stay?" Tony's voice was dangerously quiet.

"Absolutely." He'd asked for this menage à trois – and I was prepared to give it to him – big time. "By the way, didn't you want some photos? I don't see any camera."

"No need for cameras. There are sensors in all your rooms which can be actuated whenever I choose."

So he'd gone over my head and installed those damn sensors. An instant surge of fury was replaced by a gleeful thought — Tony would receive an extra dish of torment from viewing the pictures of our lovemaking, forever captured on film.

"How thoughtful of you," I murmured, as I slowly moved to release Peter's still firm cock. "If you'll excuse me, guys, I'll be back in just a minute."

I retrieved my clothes, hastened to the bathroom to freshen up and returned dressed in a long, flowing caftan, one of Tony's gifts from our Italian trip.

"Anybody care for some coffee and dessert?" I asked.

Tony, still scribbling furiously in his electronic

notebook, looked up with a scowl. "You look pretty content, I must say."

I crossed over to stand in front of him. "And it's all your doing. How can I ever thank you enough?" I gushed.

"Stop it, Val," he said angrily. "I don't like your sarcasm."

"And I don't like your manipulation," I replied sweetly. "So we're even. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm in the mood for coffee." I turned to Peter. "Want to come and help me?"

He rose with alacrity and followed me into the kitchen. "Tony sounds angry. Did our lovemaking upset him?"

"Yes. And it should have. He has the strangest ideas at times." I busied myself with setting out cups and plates. "His moods are not going to stop us from enjoying ourselves. Promise me that, Peter."

He drew me into his arms. "<u>Your</u> pleasure is my first priority – always has been and always will be. You can count on me, Val."

So Tony actually screwed himself when he programmed Peter. I smiled gleefully at the whole situation. There was no way Tony could win this round.

# CHAPTER 17

woke Sunday morning with two men in my bed — Tony on my right and Peter on my left. It had been a most interesting weekend. Peter and I made love several times, in different positions and locations around my apartment. All the while, Tony took notes and, I assume, sensors in each room recorded everything on film.

I must admit, I slept like a log. What more could a woman ask for? I had a virile lover in Peter who, with his powerful control and almost instant erections, could satisfy my every desire. Tony's voyeuristic pose only added to the eroticism of the situation. His expression and mood darkened as time went on. How long would he persist in this crazy scenario?

Peter slept with one arm curled around my waist. His dark, auburn hair, rumpled from sleep, framed a manly face. He was an Adonis among men. Glancing at Tony, I met a pair of intense blue eyes. His rugged features and thick, dark hair had always drawn me.

"Good morning, Tony," I whispered, extending a hand to touch his cheek lightly. "Sleep well?"

"How could I?" he muttered, "with you and that robot having sex all night."

I chuckled. "It only seemed that way. Actually, we made love once, around four a.m. We thought you were sound asleep."

"You forget how much you scream when you climax," he retorted. "You could wake a dead man."

"I offered to make up the sofa for you."

He shook his head. "I wanted to observe the two of you in every type of situation – daytime and nighttime."

"Then you must be very satisfied," I said, watching a small muscle in his jaw twitch. That was always a sign of his discomfort, although he'd never admit to it.

Tony reached out to cup my breast. Of course, I slept in the buff. He rubbed the tip with his thumb and it grew hard at his touch, much to my chagrin and his satisfaction.

"Peter's sleeping. Why don't you roll over here?" he asked softly.

Could I do that? Did I want to? I'd never envisioned myself in such a bizarre situation. But why not? Cautiously, I lifted Peter's arm and slipped out. Immediately, Tony seized my waist and pulled me on top of him.

"Much better," he growled in my ear.

The hours of watching Peter and I make love must have been frustrating for him. His cock was rock hard and huge. I'd never seen it so engorged. I touched it lightly and he groaned.

"See what you've done to me?" he rasped.

I can't say I minded. At least Tony wasn't falling asleep. "I love seeing you so ready for me," I crooned. The moment he'd stroked my breast, my juices had started to flow. I sat astride him, taking all of his length into me, enjoying every inch of his hot cock.

We were engrossed in our passionate lovemaking; neither one of us observed Peter who was watching us, until we'd spiraled to an ecstatic peak.

I'd collapsed onto Tony's chest and he was kissing me when we both became aware of Peter. It was the strangest sensation to look up and see his green eyes following our every move.

"Peter," I whispered, "we thought you were asleep." Did he feel betrayed?

He smiled. "It's okay, Val. I'm happy when you receive pleasure, from me or from anyone else."

How magnanimous! I was touched anew by his concern for my happiness. I couldn't imagine

Tony saying something like that.

Tony and I were still joined together. Now that he had me all to himself, he appeared in no hurry to release me. I have to say, at that point, I was pretty well satiated. There'd been almost non-stop lovemaking since Friday evening. All those months of frustration and loneliness had been swept away

"You know something, Tony," I murmured, twirling a finger in his springy chest hairs, "this is a slice of Paradise – two virile lovers in one bed."

"Don't get used to it, Val," he warned, an ominous gleam in his eyes.

I raised my head with a mock expression of surprise. "You mean you won't be providing me with extra lovers when you're away?"

I heard Peter laugh in the background. I couldn't help laughing, too, although Tony's dour look told me he didn't find my question amusing.

I cooked a large brunch for all of us. The day before, I'd sent in an enormous grocery order that arrived soon after. Lovemaking does spur the appetite.

"Well, guys," I said, as we devoured platters of scrambled eggs, bacon, potatoes, French toast and several pots of espresso, "are we getting out of the house today?"

Peter turned to Tony. "It's up to you. What would you like us to do?"

There was a long silence while Tony considered Peter's query. "I need some time to review the film I've recorded," he finally answered. "Peter, why don't you take Val out for some fresh air? If I have everything I want, we'll call it a day. If there's something extra I need, I'll let you know when you return."

Tony the Director was still calling the shots. Peter and I were his 'hired' help, waiting for instruction. Determined to mask my annoyance, I turned to Peter with a bright smile. "Let's head for the park; I could use a change of pace." Tony's authoritarian attitude was getting to me

Dressed warmly and outside in the crisp autumn weather, I regained some of my composure. "Peter, the weather is perfect for horseback riding. What do you think?"

"Sounds like a perfect idea."

Peter drove us to Central Park and we went horseback riding for several hours under a glorious blue sky. I had a premonition this would be one of my last outings with him.

"Peter, I'm going to miss our holidays."

"So will I, Val," he replied. "We have great memories, though. That's worth something."

To him memories must be very precious, I realized. Having no roots, no childhood and no past, he would treasure every one of our adventures.

When we returned to my loft apartment late that afternoon, Tony was engrossed in viewing our sexual activities, complete with recorded sound, on an enormous screen.

I stood there, aghast, at the sight of our lovemaking caught with such clarity and close-up detail. I knew, from personal experience, that Peter's cock was unusually large. But seeing it on screen several times bigger than life, was something else. How did I ever manage to take all of him inside me?

"Thought you'd be finished by now," I said, trying to ignore the sensual images in front of me.

"Not quite," Tony replied, hardly giving me a glance. "You're both welcome to sit down and review them with me."

"No, thanks," I muttered, heading for the kitchen.

Peter stayed behind with Tony while I put a salad together. I'd planned on a steak dinner with baked potatoes and green beans for that evening.

I was musing about the differences in men and women's visual appetites when Peter walked up behind me.

"Hi, Val," he said, wrapping his arms around me. Pulling me close, he bent his head to kiss my neck.

As I pressed against him, the full, hard thrust of his erect cock caught me by surprise. Had the viewing of our sexual activities provoked a heated response? I turned around to face him. "What is it, Peter?" I ran my hand lightly down the side of his face as I looked deeply into his bewitching green eyes.

He captured my hand and pressed it to his lips. "Seeing us making love with such abandon, I had this sudden urge to hold you in my arms. We did have a wonderful time together."

So I was right — the film <u>had</u> turned him on. But I also detected a note of sadness in his expression. Did he have the same premonition that our season of lovemaking was coming to an end?

Lightly, his hands caressed my breasts and the curves of my hips. He unbuttoned my blouse and slipped it off. In another moment my bra was tossed aside. "God, you're beautiful," he said huskily, cupping a rounded globe in each hand.

This wasn't the right time or the right place, but Peter's intense desire carried me along with him. He'd never lost his control before nor had he considered his own pleasure first. With our imminent parting on his mind, he must have made the decision to instigate another round of lovemaking.

With his usual masterly technique, he set about arousing me, caressing and stroking all my secret places. Even if I had wanted to resist him, the sheer force of his sexual desire swept away my rational mind. My arms were around his neck, my mouth was open to his marauding tongue, as he unzipped my jeans and tugged them down.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Like the crack of a whip, Tony's voice thundered over our heads.

A clear picture of what I must look like – standing almost naked in the kitchen with Peter's hard cock ready to enter me – flashed through my consciousness. I could feel Peter's heart beating furiously as he held me close.

"We were just about to make love," Peter said in an even tone.

I sensed his anger and a chill of fear ran up my spine. When I attempted to move away, he would not release me.

"No, Val, you don't have to follow Tony's orders. Remember, your pleasure is my only concern. As long as you want me, I'll be there to serve you."

Peter was bound to <u>me</u> and not to Tony. He would serve <u>my</u> interests, first and foremost. My momentary sense of power at his assertion was quickly followed by the sober realization of where this altercation could lead.

One swift glance at Tony's ferocious expression confirmed my worst fears. If these men came to blows, Peter's superhuman strength could easily crush Tony. On the other hand, Tony's far more extensive experience in life could work to Peter's detriment. Either way, I would lose.

"Peter, I don't think this is a good idea," I whispered in his ear. "I'm not really in the mood for lovemaking. Okay?"

Reluctantly, he released me. "Whatever is best for you, Val."

Hastily, I tugged up my jeans and retrieved my bra and blouse. "Peter, would you mind waiting in the living room? I want to talk to Tony, alone."

Without another word, Peter left the kitchen. Tony and I faced each other. Seconds dragged by and the tension in the room was almost palpable. Hugging my arms around myself, I waited for him to speak.

Finally, he broke the awful silence.

### CHAPTER 18

" lell, it seems you have a bottomless pit when it comes to sex. Maybe you should go into business."

His cruel words were meant to shock and hurt me and they hit their mark. I took a quick, inward breath and let it out slowly, determined not to let him know their effect.

"Let's remember something," I replied, "you started this whole, loony situation. I've been a pawn in your hands for months." He could hardly deny that charge.

He didn't even try. His lips thinned to a mocking smile. "I didn't notice any attempt on your part to limit your sexual appetite. On the contrary, you appeared to enjoy every minute. Here you are in the kitchen, supposedly preparing dinner, and what do I find?"

His derisive tone was getting to me – my stomach was roiling and beads of perspiration made my palms sweaty. "Will you stop it?" I rasped. But he was far from finished. "You with your pants down ready for action again. Are you insatiable or what?" He walked toward me slowly, his dark, wrathful look boring into me. "You know what? I don't think one man could ever satisfy you."

Standing directly in front of me, he had a jeering grin on his face that was definitely not pleasant.

I tipped my face up to meet his squarely. "And how many young women have *you* gone to bed with on your numerous *business* trips?" I asked sweetly. He wasn't going to get away with any double standards. I could give back what he shoved at me.

There was a pause while he studied me. "Is that what you think?" he said in a very quiet tone.

"What else can I think?" I cried. "You're away for months at a time with all those gorgeous Asian women around you — and you make a point of telling me about them, too." I was losing it, but I didn't care. He wasn't going to get away with accusations like the ones he'd hurled at me. I had a few of my own up my sleeve.

"So you were jealous and this is how you get your revenge — by fooling around with Peter every moment my back is turned."

I stared at him, incredulous. "*I'm* not the one jealous ... it's *you*. *You're* jealous of a robot that *you* programmed to satisfy *me*."

We stared at each other for several long moments. My heart beat like a trip hammer and my mouth was dry with fear. I didn't want to see our relationship deteriorate into a mud-slinging competition – which it was fast becoming.

Feeling overwhelmed, I turned away, leaning against the kitchen counter, my hands gripping the edge. Hunched over, all I wanted to do was disappear into the woodwork. I didn't want to fight Tony anymore. What was the point? He was going to put his own interpretation on what he'd seen — he'd never listen to me. Everything seemed hopeless. Tears pricked at my eyelids and I tried to blink them away.

The silence was interminable. Had he gone away? From the corner of my eye I saw Tony staring at me, his brow furrowed. The sneer had disappeared and was replaced by a thoughtful expression.

I waited, scarcely able to move, as the seconds ticked by. I had the distinct feeling our fate was being deliberated, arguments pro and con being weighed and balanced. And the verdict?

"This whole thing is ridiculous, Val, you know that," he said, extending a hand to grip my shoulder. "You're jealous of my supposed liaisons with innumerable women — which is a delightful fantasy but hardly accurate — and I'm jealous of a robot. Pretty amusing, isn't it?" I was not amused. "Pretty awful," I sniffed. "You'll never believe that Peter came on to me, for the first time, and I felt sorry for him because he knows he's not going to see me again and I knew it too and I wanted to make him feel good and I didn't know what else to do and..."

"Okay, Okay, Val. Enough explanations." Tony turned me around and drew me into his arms. "We've both been foolish. My ego was hurt because I thought you preferred Peter's lovemaking to mine. And you've been imagining me as the Don Juan of Southeast Asia. It is pretty funny, you have to admit."

Secure in his arms, I could see everything in a different light. "I suppose so," I said, still not ready to laugh.

He held me close and tenderly stroked my hair. "How about we have the evening all to ourselves? Do you mind if I ask Peter to leave?"

I shook my head. "Good idea." We needed time alone.

"Let's say goodbye to him together. I'm sure he'd appreciate seeing you one last time." Tony held my hand as we headed for the living room.

I couldn't help thinking that if I'd suggested we say goodbye together, Tony would have been suspicious. Then another thought occurred to me. I should be grateful Tony was jealous. Maybe this menage à trois had served a purpose after all. I gave Peter a tender kiss. "Take good care of yourself. You're a great guy and I'll always remember you."

Tony and Peter shook hands cordially. I breathed a sigh of relief when the door closed and Tony and I were finally alone.

"Were you really jealous?" I asked, sitting close to him on the couch.

He nodded ruefully. "I saw the two of you in the kitchen and I lost it there for awhile. I'm sorry if I hurt you. Believe me, you'll never be a pro."

"And how do you know that?" I asked, giving him an arch look.

He laughed. "Because I'm going to make an honest woman of you, after all these years." He pulled me onto his lap. "Didn't I mention that going honeymoon we'll be on our over Thanksgiving?" Then, seeing mv startled expression, he added, "That's the only way I can take you with me on my business trips. You know, those stodgy businessmen I deal with – I have to adhere to a strict moral code."

"You don't give me much of a choice," I said, with a big smile belying my words.

"No more choices ... and no more robotic lovers," he warned, with a devilish gleam in his eyes as he slowly began to unbutton my blouse.

Which was more than fine with me.

#### About the Author

Madelaine Grant always wanted to become an author. Her life took a detour through fine art and art therapy until she moved to Florida. Now she writes short stories and novels that highlight her love of romance.