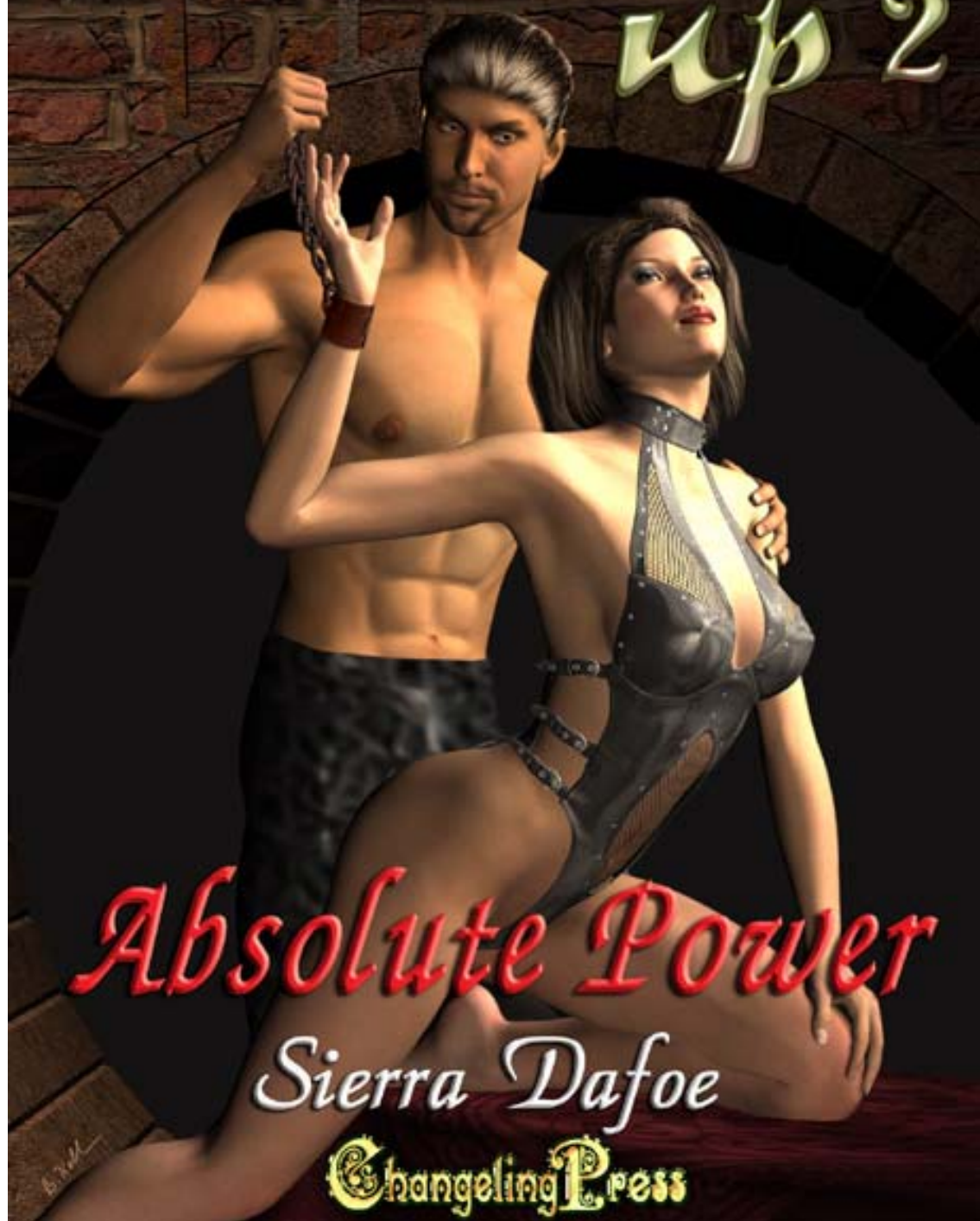


*all wrapped
up 2*



Absolute Power

Sierra Dafoe

Changeling Press

All Wrapped Up: Absolute Power

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All Wrapped Up: Absolute Power

Sierra Dafoe

Emotionally scarred by an abusive lover, Mia has vowed that no man will ever have power over her again -- indeed, it is now *she* who has power over them as a wealthy and highly sought after dominatrix. But when she hears about a strange nightclub called Dominion, run by a mysterious figure who's rumored to be a vampire, Mia begins hungering for the absolute power of immortality.

In return for fulfilling her wish, though, Fyodor demands that for one night she submit herself utterly to him, servicing not only him but the five other vampires of his cove as well! And now Mia must face the emotions she's been running from for so long -- her terror of being hurt again, and her deeply buried desire to be mastered.

Trapped at the mercy of six overpoweringly handsome vampires, can Mia find the courage to let down her guard and discover the ecstasy of submitting herself completely to their sexual demands?

Chapter One

Pathetic, Mia thought as the man stripped out of his expensive business suit, laying it piece by piece across the back of his black leather desk chair. *What a pathetic little worm.*

She tapped her foot impatiently, and Jerry -- only she never called him that; he was always *Gerald* whenever she chose to address him -- hurriedly shed the last of his clothing and knelt before her, his chest lowered to the floor and his arms crossed at the wrist behind him.

Mia snapped on the handcuffs with a *snick* and stepped back.

There was a certain innate satisfaction, she had to admit, in having a corporate CEO on his knees -- and Jerry was certainly a good-looking man, tall and muscular, with a sprinkling of gray in his freshly trimmed hair. He was, in fact, in excellent shape for a man nearer fifty than forty. Nevertheless, though, the sight of him kneeling, ass thrust in the air, quivering in anticipation of whatever she might choose to do to him made her lip curl in disdain.

"All right, Gerald. I've got a new toy for you today --"

The phone rang abruptly, cutting her off, and Jerry stiffened in obvious fear. As *he damn well ought to*, Mia thought. "Gerald, did I not tell you to have all calls held while I'm here?" Planting one of her stiletto heels against the flat of his shoulder blade, she pressed downward.

"Yes, Mistress, you did, but..."

"But?" Mia dug her heel in harder. "*But*, Gerald? There are no 'buts.' I gave you an order. You disobeyed. You'll have to be punished, now."

Below her, Jerry Hubert, owner and CEO of Hubert Industries, moaned in mingled terror and longing. The phone continued ringing. "Mistress, my secretary wouldn't have put the call through unless it was urgent. Mistress, *please...*"

Mia rather liked the desperation in his voice. She let him squirm another moment and then said, "All right, Gerald. I'm putting it on speakerphone."

She pushed the button and turned away to the plate glass window as Jerry gritted, trying to project some semblance of composure even as he knelt naked and handcuffed on the floor of his office. "Hubert here."

Mia grinned in genuine amusement. The way Jerry Hubert's voice changed from groveling submission to the muted growl of an industrial lion was a riot. And she could change it back in an instant, with barely a word, any time she wanted.

That knowledge pleased her.

"Jerry? It's Rick Morena."

Mia glanced over, recognizing both the voice and the name. Morena was the mayor's personal aide -- and another of her clients. She wasn't at all surprised that they'd know each other. Mia liked powerful men.

Wealth alone wasn't enough for her. It never had been, although she certainly liked the lifestyle she'd earned for herself. No, it was power that drew her. She liked men with clout, influence. And best of all, she liked having power over them, the power to do to them whatever she liked.

She could never understand how Jerry, how any of them, could like being subjugated to her every whim, caressed or humiliated or chastised as the fancy struck her. But clearly he did -- his cock was so hard it strained up against his torso, twitching slightly with every beat of his heart.

Lazily, Mia trailed her hand across the carved wooden box displayed prominently on Jerry's desk. Jerry's eyes glittered as he watched her. In that box were all the toys she'd selected for him. Butt plugs. Restraints. Dildos. A cock ring. An interesting device she called a "pincher" -- something like a nipple clamp, but meant for an even more tender part of the male anatomy.

She flipped the box open, and saw Jerry swallow nervously.

"Listen, Jer," Rick was saying, "His Highness is worried about some of the provisions in the appropriations bill."

Selecting a medium-sized dildo, Mia lubricated it thoroughly and strolled past Jerry, her stiletto heels clicking on the polished oak floor. She smiled again as he turned his head, watching her, his eyes wide. She enjoyed the terror in his eyes -- a terror mixed with anticipation -- as he struggled to keep his mind on Rick's words.

"I really thought we could sneak this one through, no problem, but some damn reporter's tumbled to the implications..."

Smoothly, Mia spread Jerry's ass and inserted the tip of the dildo, hearing his breathing deepen.

"Jer? Jer, are you listening?"

"Answer him," Mia murmured even as she cupped the curve of his ass, pulling it higher. Slowly, she worked the dildo deep into his rectum.

"Yes, I'm listening!" Jerry's voice was hoarse with desire. Mia liked that. "Damn it, Rick, I thought you said you were going to keep it quiet."

"Look, I tried, Jer. But you know how it is these days, with the way things are in Washington and all. It's a witch-hunt."

Pushing harder, Mia sank the dildo in all the way, and Jerry gasped.

"Jer? You okay?"

Bending low over his back, she raked her crimson fingernails up his spine and whispered, "Keep talking."

"Fine, Rick. I'm fine. What do you suggest?" He bit his lip as Mia glided the dildo in and out, fucking him slow and deep. She could tell he was trying not to groan.

"I dunno. I think we might have to shelve this one -- for now."

"No."

"Jer..."

"No, I said, damn it!" His face clenched in ecstasy as Mia wrapped one hand around his cock, stroking it as she increased the pace, plunging the dildo into him with

a ferocity that made him arch back to meet her. He panted, forcing himself to continue the conversation. "Look, Rick, let's meet tonight, see if we can straighten this out."

"All right. Eight o'clock?"

"Sure."

Mia seized his balls and squeezed -- hard. Jerry bit off a shriek. "Not -- not eight. Oh, Christ. Nine?" Mia squeezed again, lightly this time, and prodded his ass with the dildo.

"I'm not sure I can make it that late..."

"Well, I can't do it any earlier, Rick."

"Fine. Nine, then."

Mia released Gerald's scrotum, and he whispered gratefully, "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Rick sounded puzzled. Reaching over, Mia flicked off the speakerphone.

"Why not eight?" Jerry asked.

Quick as lightning, Mia grabbed his balls again, grinding them in her hand till he writhed beneath her, whimpering. "You tell me, slave. Why not eight?"

"Because... because it did not please you, Mistress?"

"Very good." She released her grip, and Jerry cried out in mingled shock and relief. "Now..." Opening the carved wood box, she took out a newly purchased toy -- an enormous remote-control vibrating dildo with a suction cup on the end. She fastened it securely to the floor a few feet in front of Jerry's executive chair. Then she unsnapped his handcuffs, removed the dildo she'd been using, and handed it to him. "Clean it."

She sprawled comfortably in the chair as he took it into his private washroom and washed and dried it thoroughly. When he was done, and had packed it away again in the box, Mia pointed to the monstrous dildo on the floor beneath her feet. "Now, Gerald, I want to watch you fuck yourself."

"Mistress," he whispered, his eyes wide, "it's too big!"

Her eyes narrowed in immediate displeasure. "Did I ask your opinion, slave?"

"No, Mistress."

"Would you prefer the alternative?"

His gaze dropped, and he flushed. "No, Mistress."

"*Now*, slave."

Immediately, he dropped to his knees at Mia's feet, taking the tube of lubrication she tossed him and smearing it over the dildo which was shaped like a massive cock, veins and all. "That's right," Mia purred, "rub it, Gerald. Caress it." She watched his own cock stiffen again as he slid his fist up and down the shaft, which was almost as thick as his wrist. His fingers played over the huge, rounded tip.

"That's enough," Mia snapped. "Mount it."

Swallowing nervously, Jerry positioned himself over it and slowly lowered himself down. She could see the concentration in his face as he sought to encompass it, tilting his hips back and forth as he slowly worked the huge tip into his rectum. "It burns," he whispered.

"Good. I want it to hurt. And you want to do whatever I want, don't you, Gerald?"

"Yesss," he hissed, forcing himself lower on the enormous thing. His breaths became gasps, and the blood drained from his face as it slowly invaded him. Mia could see his entire body trembling from the strain. Cupping his cheeks, he spread them wider, and Mia pressed the remote, watching him arch in shock as the vibrations pulsed through him.

"Now," Mia commanded, "touch yourself, slave."

She watched, eyes slitted, as he caressed his cock, his motions growing jerkier as he lifted and lowered himself on the monstrous dildo, sending it deeper and deeper into his ass.

"You like that, don't you?"

"Ye... yes, Mistress."

It was obvious, from the grimace on his face, that it hurt -- and yet it aroused him, too. The pain of it, and the humiliation, both. That was something she could never understand, how her clients could enjoy their obedience so.

She never had, no matter how many times she'd heard that hateful question whispered in her ear. *Oh, you like that, don't you, Mia?*

Even now, his voice haunted her, rousing the old, desperate rage which had flooded her every time she'd heard that question. Mia gritted her teeth, trying to push away the memory. *Bastard, you fucking bastard...*

A hard, angry impatience unfolded in her gut as she watched Jerry's motions become more and more frantic. "Faster, slave," she growled, and twirled the vibrator's remote up to high. The executive bucked, his back arching, his head thrown back in agony as he savaged his shaft, his whole body shuddering with exquisite pain.

"Come on, Gerald, harder. I want to see it *hurt*."

He moaned as he complied, sliding one hand down to clench his balls. Mia narrowed her eyes further, letting her vision blur until it could have been anyone before her, anyone at all, even...

Even Kyle.

Well, she wasn't Kyle's meek little Mia any more. *She* was the mistress now. She was the one with the power -- and she knew how to use it. Turning her attention back to the man in front of her, she lifted her leg and stepped down on Jerry's shoulder.

"Deeper, slave! Take it, *now*. Take all of it," she spat, both hating and reveling in the control she had over him, over all of them, these politicians and businessmen and CEOs, these powerful men that she collected like playthings. With a howl of agony, Jerry drove himself downward, jerking like a fish on a hook as the dildo split him open.

He hung there, quivering, impaled on the massive thing. Reaching out, Mia tilted his chin up so she could see the agony on his face, watch the tears roll down his contorted cheeks. "Yes," she murmured. "Yes, Gerald. Now make yourself come for me."

A hot stab of anticipation shot through her groin as she leaned back, watching his hands clamp mercilessly on his cock, squeezing it so tight she could see the tip turning purple. He shrieked with pain as Mia dug her heel into his balls, and thick, streaming jets of come burst from his throbbing shaft. At the sight of it, Mia felt her own

orgasm lance through her, freeing for one crucial second all the rage and fury and helplessness that wound like a tangled, burning, impossibly knotted thread deep through the core of her being.

No one would ever have power over her again. She'd sworn that, years ago. No one would ever use her.

It would be she, now and forever, who did the using.

* * *

Sighing, Mia sat on the edge of the tub and pulled off one of her stiletto-heeled boots. Behind her, water splashed into the bath, easing the knot of tension in her belly.

She couldn't say she *liked* what she did for a living -- she found it impossible not to despise the men who paid, and paid exorbitantly, for her services. In fact, Mia speculated, it was probably precisely *because* she despised them that she had built up such a reputation.

The judge, for example. She'd called him upon leaving Jerry's office, demanding that he drop everything and come drive her home. She'd allowed him to service her with his tongue during the limo ride, forcing him to kneel, his pants pooled around his knees, between her thighs. When they'd stopped, she'd refused to let him cover himself as she got out, knowing that the possibility of being seen -- and recognized -- would only add to his excitement.

It was the sort of humiliating touch at which she excelled, like forcing Jerry Hubert to store his play toys in a carved wooden box on top of his desk, right in plain sight. What if someone, curious or just bored, flipped it open? She liked to imagine how he must quiver, how he must feel a small electric shock of terror every time someone approached it or asked about it or even simply looked at it.

Still, underneath that satisfaction was a vague, restless emotion, one she'd never had a name for. It was as if somewhere deep inside her a small, starving, wordless creature whimpered, yearning to be fed. For a moment, in the silence of her opulent apartment, Mia could hear it as clearly as the plaintive cry of a seagull.

Then the phone rang, and she thrust the awareness of that cry far back down into the depths of her mind. She let the answering machine pick up the call as she added a dollop of foaming vanilla-scented bath soap to the rushing water. A California state senator, calling to reschedule an appointment -- she'd have to think of an appropriate punishment for *that*, she thought as she stripped off the rest of her clothes and moved to the vanity, seating herself before the mirror. She pinned up her thick chestnut hair, tilting her head as she regarded herself in the mirror, studying her features.

She'd never been -- and never would be -- a beauty. But she had clear, smooth skin, decent cheekbones, a rather pointy chin. Impish, Wallace had called her once -- not that feminine beauty was exactly Wallace's forte. Her eyes were a cool, guarded blue, sharp and penetrating. It was hard to remember how vulnerable they'd been once, vulnerable and full of torment...

Scowling, she turned away from the mirror and slid into the hot, foamy water. She leaned back in the steaming water, allowing her eyes to fall shut, letting her mind float.

You like that, Mia, don't you? Come on. Say it. Say it.

Mia jerked upright, her heart pounding. Jesus! It had been so clear, as close as if he'd been speaking right in her ear. When the phone rang again, she shrieked, then picked it up hesitantly. "Hello?"

"Mia, darling, it's Wallace." Mia relaxed back against the smooth marble of the bathtub. Wallace's lilting voice was soothing, bringing a sense of normalcy with it. "I just dropped off your dry-cleaning, and I'll be going to the market tomorrow. Is there anything special you want this week? I understand they've got some fabulous salmon on sale."

"God, no." Mia made a face at the steamy mirror. "I hate salmon. Get me some truffles instead."

"Now, you *know* you only get chocolate when you're pms-ing. You made me promise."

"Well, now I'm making you un-promise."

Wallace chuckled. "Girlfriend, you pay me six hundred dollars a week to ignore you when you say things like that. Oh, and I changed the laundry delivery day to Tuesdays -- I hope that's okay. My weekends are getting a tad bit busy."

"Oh?" Mia cocked an eyebrow. "Would that mean there's finally a man in the picture?"

"Only in my dreams, darling, so don't go getting jealous."

"And who is this dream man?" Mia smiled at her reflection. Wallace fell in love more regularly than the tide came in.

"He's a bartender. Don't laugh."

Dutifully, she choked back her reaction. "Is he actually a bartender, or another Brad Pitt wannabe keeping his head above water while he waits for his big break?"

"Girl, Brad Pitt has wet dreams about looking this good."

"Really? I'm impressed. I didn't think anyone would ever replace the Bradster in your affections."

"Neither did I."

There was a strange note in Wallace's voice, a sort of wistful ebullience that, for all his various crushes, Mia had never heard there before. "So, where does this Adonis of the martini shaker work?"

"At Dominion." Mia's lack of reaction must have tipped him off, because Wallace gasped in affected shock. "Oh my God, you haven't heard of Dominion? It is *so* the rage! They say the owner's a..."

"What?" Mia demanded. "C'mon, Wallace, what?"

Wallace dropped his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "They say he's a vampire."

Mia did laugh, then. "God, Wally, hasn't the Anne Rice thing been *done*?"

"And done, and done..." Mia could just picture Wallace's artfully dismissive shrug. "That one'll never die. But this is different. It's... There's something about him, Mi..."

"I don't know," Mia murmured teasingly. "Maybe I shouldn't let you go, then. Letting my personal shopper hang out in a nest of vampires..."

"Clave, dear. They're called claves. And I am not, and never have been, one of your clients. The only orders I accept from you are starch, no starch, and Chinese take-out. Besides, Aleksi's dreamy."

"I thought it was the bartender you were lusting after."

"Aleksi *is* the bartender. God, I wouldn't go near Fyodor if you paid me."

The shudder in Wallace's voice was wholly unfeigned. Mia laughed again, but it was more to push away the trickle of uneasiness his tone had roused than because his reaction amused her. "Oh, come on, Wally. You've been watching *Interview with the Vampire* again, haven't you?"

"I have *not*. I still can't believe Brad ever stooped to making a film with Tom Cruise. And mock all you like, but I think Fyodor'd have even you wearing garlic and Grace Kelly scarves and quaking in those thigh-high boots of yours."

"Hah! I quake for no man, as you know quite well."

Wallace muttered something -- it might have been "*Pity*." Mia ignored him. "And don't show up with any interesting hickeys tomorrow, either."

"I wish." With a last sigh, Wallace broke the connection, and Mia hung up. She leaned back, stretching her arms out along the smooth white marble rim as she mused.

It wasn't like Wallace to cry wolf, even over something as silly as this. For all his playful theatrics, he was a hardheaded realist underneath. He'd had to be, Mia knew, growing up in rural Idaho of all places, in the sort of town where "his kind" too often ended up as a statistic in an Associated Press news report. It wasn't hard to guess what he must have gone through before he'd escaped, just as she had, to L.A.

No, Wallace wasn't the type to jump at shadows.

He was much more than her personal shopper, too. He'd been her first friend in L.A., letting her sleep on his couch for three months while she'd forced herself to hold down a waitressing position just to keep afloat. The restaurant had been the sort that used designer china and catered to the very, very rich -- but it had been a hideous job

for all that. One night, after the manager had chewed her a new asshole for some minor infraction, she'd gone off the deep end on a customer, showering him with abuse. But instead of demanding she be fired, the man had invited her back to his apartment, and that night Mia had found herself introduced to the lucrative world of the dominatrix.

Now, she paid Wallace a ridiculous sum for running her errands and doing her shopping -- a job which took him perhaps five hours a week. But it didn't matter. He was still, if truth be told, the only real friend she had.

Vampires, huh? Mia smiled as she leaned back into the water. The fading bubbles gave off a tiny hiss as they dissolved around her.

What would that be like, being bitten by a vampire? They made it look so sexy in the movies, but the idea made Mia shudder, imagining fangs puncturing the skin of her neck -- *it'd be like stepping on a nail*, she thought. *Or maybe a thumbtack. Yuck.*

Okay, maybe the bite part wasn't so appealing. But *being* a vampire? She could see certain advantages to that. Immortality. Yeah, definitely appealing. And...

Mia stretched out, letting the warm water lap along her body. She could feel it playing through the chestnut curls of her sex, tugging lightly at them. The sensation was pleasantly arousing.

As was the idea of sinking *her* fangs into somebody else's neck.

Oh yeah. Oh yeah, she could go for that.

With a sudden sense of decision, Mia picked up the phone and punched in a number. "Wallace? What did you say the name of that club was again?"

Chapter Two

Stepping out of the limo, Mia felt a sudden wave of diffidence. It seemed an odd part of L.A. for a trendy nightclub. The grimy, dilapidated warehouse nestled just south of the freeway appeared at first glance to be utterly deserted, and she was half inclined to get back in the limo, go home, crawl in bed, pull the covers up, and forget the whole thing.

Besides, there was no such thing as vampires. No matter what ridiculous superstitions Wallace had inexplicably fallen prey to.

Then she noticed the fenced-in lot, tucked into the shadows at the far side of the building. Through the slats, she could see the gleam of chrome. No matter how deserted the place looked, *something* was drawing people down here -- the lot was crammed to the gills with Jags and Vipers and BMW convertibles.

As Mia watched, a cute maroon Mercedes purred down the street, pulled up to the gate and honked once. From the corrugated tin shed beside the gate, a lean, good-looking lot attendant emerged, dressed in black leather pants and a silk shirt that exposed a good deal of his muscular chest. He was more than good-looking, she saw on closer inspection. He was, in fact, paralyzingly gorgeous.

Jesus. And he's just the lot attendant? Mia stared, dumbfounded. *No wonder Wallace likes this place.*

A fur-wrapped starlet stepped out of the Mercedes -- if she thought about it, Mia was sure she could even dredge up her name from the supermarket tabloids -- and handed the keys to the stunning young man. Then she slid around the corner of the building and, hauling open a plain metal door, slipped almost furtively inside.

Just as quickly as that, the street was empty again. The gate clanged shut, the lot attendant disappeared. But when the starlet had pulled open the door, Mia had caught

the muted thud of music from somewhere deep inside the building. Intrigued, she waved the limo away and strode down the narrow alley between the building and the fence.

There was no sign on the utility door, just the one word painted in the sort of stenciled-on lettering you'd expect to see on a cargo box or a Dumpster. *Dominion*.

Well, obviously their advertising was by word of mouth. Mia could appreciate that -- hers was, too. Pulling open the door, she made her way down a poorly lit hallway to a steep set of metal stairs.

At the bottom was a massive steel door set on tracks. It looked like the entrance to a factory freezer, but from behind it came the thud of music, louder now. And just outside it, sitting on a stool, was a positively gargantuan bouncer, his arms crossed over a chest that looked as broad as an ox's.

"What've you got in there?" Mia asked, grinning. "Godzilla?"

The man didn't even crack a smile. Muscles rippled under the leather vest, which was all he wore for a shirt as he slowly looked her up and down. "Cost you fifty bucks to find out."

"A fifty-dollar cover charge? You gotta be shitting me."

"No. Dues. Dominion's a private club, you know."

"Ah." She *did* know -- or at least she could guess the reason for the chicanery. As he took her money and rolled open the heavy door, Mia was unsurprised to see a man and a woman having sex on a raised stage just inside the entrance.

The woman was bent over the stage rail, her blonde hair falling down around her face and her full, heavy breasts swinging slightly as the man, standing behind her, thrust into her with a kind of dreamy abandon. A handful of patrons, drinks in hand, surrounded the stage, observing the scene closely. One woman even reached up and cupped the blonde's breasts, fondling them with evident relish.

Rolling her eyes, Mia descended the broad steps leading down past the stage -- and froze, suddenly aware of a sense of power beating at her, as immediate and

undeniable as the thudding bass of the music. It seemed to sear straight through her, into her very bones. Trying to trace its source, she looked around the club.

It was huge. The shadowed room seemed to stretch for a city block at least, with pillars soaring up into darkness far overhead. Gas torches burned at intervals, lending an almost medieval air. There were three other stages, all occupied as the first one was, and a fourth suspended by wire cables over the large center bar. At the far end of the room, Mia could see a dance floor, packed to overflowing with gyrating bodies, many of them in varying states of undress.

All of it seemed blanketed by that strangely tangible force of personality. She'd had a similar, if nowhere near as overwhelming, sensation on meeting some of her clients; an impression of *presence*, of strength -- an impression that had invariably crumbled as soon as they knelt before her. But this was a power beyond anything she'd ever felt. It permeated the place, lurking in the shadows, a dark, potent energy that manifested itself in the beat of the music, the flare of the torches, the hedonistic cry of the woman on the stage as she reached climax.

Fyodor. That was the name Wallace had told her. *God, I wouldn't go near Fyodor if you paid me.*

Her decision to come down here had been half lark, half curiosity. Now, for the first time, Mia found herself wondering if the rumors might actually be true.

She scanned the crowd impatiently, but there was no one from whom that steady sense of power could possibly be emanating. She *did* see movie stars and film producers, tycoons and politicians and even a few of her clients -- all the jaded and famous and fabulously wealthy of L.A.'s elite, caught in the orgiastic thrall of Dominion.

The sybaritic atmosphere seemed almost uncanny, even to Mia. She saw the starlet she'd watched outside now gyrating on the dance floor in utter self-abandon, her limbs loose, her movements unselfconscious, seemingly unaware of the men who ringed her like so many circling sharks. The carnality was overwhelming -- and yet there was something more, something *deeper*. Mia thought suddenly of fabled rituals,

sacred orgies, virgins deflowered on altars before silent, watching gods. Her gaze lingered on the face of the starlet whose eyes were closed in a sensual delight that seemed almost devout, like the face of a priestess caught in the rapture of holy sacrifice.

And then, beyond the dancers, she saw another door.

This one was guarded by two men, equally as massive as the one outside the entrance. As Mia watched, a buxom young woman, her prodigious charms bared almost down to the nipples, approached the door and was summarily turned away.

Mia bit her lip. *Fyodor*. If he was anywhere, he was on the far side of that slab of steel.

Keeping her eyes on it, she angled toward the bar intending to order a glass of wine from a man whose classic features were so surreally beautiful that she smiled and said, "You must be Aleksy."

He grinned back, revealing even white teeth and a dimple, by damn, in one sculpted cheek. "Guilty as charged. What's your poison?"

She ordered a glass of pinot, glancing as she did so at the stage above the bar. On it, two men were kneeling with a woman on her hands and knees between them, servicing them both at once as they plunged in synchronized rhythm into her mouth and cunt. The sight of the woman trapped between them, her mouth working eagerly, sent a swift, disturbing throb of heat through Mia's groin.

Oh, you like that...

Hurriedly, she averted her eyes, and watched two more women and one man in turn approach that forbidding door. Watching closely, she noted a slight pause between the obvious request and the equally obvious rebuttal, a pause in which the guards seemed almost to cock their heads as if listening to some distant voice.

Transmitters. Of course. But that meant...

Raising her head, Mia scanned the shadowed upper portion of the room, and saw the blank, smoky gleam of darkened windows ringing the club.

Gotcha.

But even as she thought it, that invisible presence seemed to latch onto her. It felt as if she'd been pinioned by a spotlight, beating down with the same force she'd felt from the second she'd walked in -- but now it was focused directly on *her*. Her breath tightened in her chest, and a thrill of apprehension crawled up her spine.

He was up there, somewhere in the shadows, looking out over his...

Dominion.

Mia smiled at the outrageous aptness of the name. But beneath her amusement, her knees were turning to water under the intensity of that gaze. *Jesus!* Whoever he was, he was more powerful than any man she'd ever met -- and she'd put some of the most influential men in Hollywood on their knees. Swallowing in a throat gone suddenly dry, Mia wondered if she actually had the courage to come face to face with the source of such sheer, unbridled power.

Standing indecisively, sipping her wine, she glanced around, feeling a coldness deep in her gut that no one else in the entire room seemed to share. What *was* he, this Fyodor, that he could wield such power?

She didn't know. But God damn it, she was going to find out.

A sudden bravado made her lift her glass to the dark opaque windows, offering a mock toast to the invisible presence behind them. Tossing the wine back, she set the glass on the bar, squared her shoulders, and swaggered through the crowd toward that forbidding metal door. Locking gazes with the guards who watched her with flat, unimpressed expressions, Mia put a little swing in her hips as she strode up to them and demanded, "I've come to see Fyodor. And I'm not used to waiting."

* * *

It was that casual, almost taunting salute that decided him.

Something about her, about the way she'd paused on the steps, had drawn his attention. Oh, most people exhibited sudden consternation upon entering Dominion for the first time, no matter how many rumors they'd heard about the club. But he sensed it hadn't been the naked, writhing bodies that had caused her reaction. No, something else had stopped her, had sent her gaze sweeping over the room, searching...

For a second Fyodor had thought he'd heard his own name echoing back at him from the recesses of her mind, like an unspoken question.

Most people bored him. They were too predictable, too shallow in the smallness of their desires. Wealth. Influence. The fleeting intoxicant of fame. How many, over the years, had approached him, eager to trade their very souls, even for the dark gift he could give them, with almost no understanding of what it actually entailed?

Too often, they saw him as the Devil incarnate, a supernatural force with which they could bargain, hoping to sell him something for which he had no use, in return for something which, ultimately, wasn't at all what they'd wanted. Why should he indulge them? They were like spoiled, pampered children, thinking their money or their bodies or an over inflated sense of their own self-importance somehow entitled them to his time, his attention.

An attention that now returned, again and again, to that small, intense figure.

She was dressed head to toe in supple black leather -- the guise of a Domme in the full pride of her power. Her halter-top stretched over full, round breasts, giving just a peek at her cleavage. Her chestnut hair was piled into a loose, classy chignon, her face below it pleasing, if not remarkable -- except for the eyes. Her eyes... yes, her eyes were really quite stunning. A deep, shadowed blue like the surface of a pond, with something watchful, almost furtive beneath.

Interesting.

There were fault lines running all through her aura. He could sense them -- scarred, brittle places that might shatter at a touch. And yet there was such vitality in her, such a coiled, intense energy. But what he'd felt most strongly was *hunger*, beating beneath that guarded, leather-clad surface. Fyodor wondered if she herself was even aware how deep that hunger ran.

Deep, he thought. Deeper than anyone he'd ever seen.

Maybe even as deep as his own.

He didn't know who she was, of course -- he wasn't a mind reader, and wouldn't have bothered even if he had been -- but she intrigued him. There was something

strangely appealing about her as if under that exterior lurked something as artless and tender as a just-unfurled flower, its delicate petals trembling under the first touch of wind.

Something raw. That's how she struck him; raw and fresh and unfinished, like a butterfly in a cocoon. All hard, gleaming shell outside -- and inside something vital and wondrous, slowly taking form. Something that made his throat ache with its incipient beauty.

What would it be like, to ease that secret beauty into being? To unfold the carapace surrounding it and expose the shining creature inside?

A pulse of desire throbbed through his groin, thickening his cock as he imagined it.

Then, raising her head unerringly toward him, she lifted her glass to him, a small gesture of bravura, or defiance. Hidden in the shadows, he chuckled, feeling the heat of his desire redouble as her gaze blindly sought -- and found -- his.

All right then. All right. If she had the courage to walk into his den, to submit herself to his sort of play... Well, they would see.

Silently, he instructed the Wardens to let her in.

* * *

Mia didn't know what she'd expected to find behind those guarded doors -- a crypt, maybe, complete with coffins and moldering skeletons and cobwebs.

Not this. Definitely not this.

The room looked more like a games room than a crypt. Along one side was a small, well-stocked bar, the kind of thing you might find in somebody's den. Which was very much what this room, for all its size, seemed like. Leather upholstered chairs were drawn before a fireplace, with a couch nearby.

A green-glassed light hung over a pool table in the center of the room, providing most of the illumination. Bending over the table, a man with long, amber-blond hair fired off a shot, sinking the ball neatly. Behind him, another man leaned against the wall

with his arms folded, watching the shot. At the far side of the room, Mia saw three other men playing darts.

"Excuse me. I..."

She trailed off as the blond man straightened and turned to her, revealing a broad, tanned torso beneath his leather jacket. He wasn't wearing a shirt. Faded jeans, slung low on his narrow hips, displayed a trail of golden hair that ran down his rippled abs from his belly button to disappear beneath the worn denim. Blue eyes -- as blue as a hunting cat's -- peered at her curiously.

Mia gulped. He was as surreally gorgeous as Aleksi, as the lot attendant outside. As the four other men in the room, she realized as they turned toward her.

God! What *were* they? They fairly reeked of masculinity; of a raw, predatory hunger that had her cunt throbbing in a wholly instinctive response. Each of them had a presence as potent as any CEO she'd ever met -- and these were men, Mia fancied, who would never deign to abase themselves before her. They'd be far more likely to demand she kneel to *them*.

For some reason the thought sent a flutter of nervous arousal through her.

But she didn't kneel. Not ever. Not any more. Squaring her shoulders, Mia spoke again. "The guards let me in. I'm looking for Fyodor."

The blond smiled; an expression that conveyed a sort of amused anticipation, like the amoral enjoyment of a cat watching the struggles of the mouse it has caught and will devour when it damn well chooses.

That thought, too, made her nipples tighten.

"Why?" His voice was cool, smoothly timbred. The man behind him -- a lean, brown-haired fellow whose shirtsleeves were rolled up, revealing powerful forearms, cracked open a beer and handed it to her questioner. He took a swig as he waited for her response, and Mia tried not to stare at the jump and play of his Adam's apple as he swallowed.

"That's not your business," she replied.

He laughed. "Honey, Fyodor's business *is* my business."

Mia crossed her arms over her leather halter, as much to hide her erect nipples as anything else. From the corner of her eye, she saw the other three men pause in their darts game to watch this interchange. "In that case, I'm sure you know where he is. So tell me."

The man's sapphire eyes flicked past her, and Mia heard a voice as deep and rumbling as distant thunder. "He's here."

Yes, he was -- she could *feel* him, a wave of pressure like a summer storm against the length of her back, making the hairs on her neck rise. Tension coiled in her belly as his voice vibrated through her, reaching deep into her bones, into the liquescent cradle of her womb. Mia froze, unable to make herself turn to face him. The blond's smile widened into a grin.

Then that low, rumbling voice spoke again. "Turn around."

Unable to resist, she did, and found herself staring into eyes that were as black and endless as a midnight sky. A dark fire flickered far down within them, a raw, ceaseless energy that held her mesmerized. He smiled, a small quirk of his lips that drew her attention to his face, to the strong line of his jaw, the coal-black brows, the stern forehead half-hidden by the ebon fall of his thick, shaggy hair.

It brushed his shoulders -- broad, powerful shoulders, encased in soft white silk. His clothing was simple, if elegant; the silk shirt, gaping open slightly to show a heavily muscled chest dusted with fine black hairs, and black leather pants. They clung to his thighs, revealing taut muscles beneath -- as well as a distinct and mouthwatering bulge at his groin.

He wasn't the tallest of the men in the room -- the one with brown hair was taller -- but still he towered over her even though she was wearing three-inch heels.

In a certain way, he wasn't as handsome as the other men, either. They were all stunning to look at, but Fyodor was darker, sterner, his features both blunt and chiseled as if carved from raw granite. There was something almost elemental about him, something with the natural force of a hurricane or a tsunami. She stood spellbound, her

gaze fixed on those harsh, craggy features despite the more conventional appeal of the others. He exuded a ferocious vitality, dominating the room merely by walking into it.

Mia had to swallow a mouthful of saliva before she could speak. "I came here --"

"I know why you came." Brushing by her, he strode to the pool table, taking the cue the blond man handed him and bending to line up a shot. His shirt hung low as he did, giving Mia just a glimpse of his muscled torso before he made his shot. The sight sent another jolt of heat to her cunt, and she could feel her furred outer lips thickening, her clit swelling. Jesus! She hadn't felt this horny since... since...

Since you left Kyle.

No. No! She'd *never* enjoyed what he'd done to her. Not ever!

Are you sure?

Luckily, Fyodor straightened just then, sparing her the necessity of answering her own question. "You came," he said in that voice which rolled straight through her, "because you want something. Something you think I can give. Now, I want the answer to Halvar's question." Mia glanced briefly at the grinning, sapphire-eyed man. "Why?"

"I..." Mia fumbled. Why *had* she come down here? Was she really going to admit to this roomful of men that she'd entertained for even a second the idea that Fyodor was a vampire? He was about as undead as undead could be -- in fact, she'd never met anyone who'd seemed so intensely alive. Even his smallest motion radiated a dark, vibrant energy. "Couldn't we talk about this in private?"

"No."

The flat, dismissive denial reawakened her anger, and Mia stiffened in defiance. "Fine. Someone told me you were a vampire. I came to see if the rumors were true."

"No, you didn't." His black, assessing gaze was distinctly disconcerting. There was no change of expression in them, as if the outrageous possibility she'd just blurted out was too implausible to even deserve a reaction. Almost idly, he bent back over the table and snapped off another shot with an easy, reflexive mastery. "You came," he continued, squatting to squint down the length of the cue, "to see if I could make you one, too."

Mia felt her cheeks flame with mortification. When he stated it that baldly, in that dispassionate tone, it *did* sound utterly ridiculous. The men around Fyodor chuckled, as if this were an old, familiar joke for them.

Fine. So she'd made an ass out of herself. That didn't mean she had to stand here and be laughed at. Raising her chin, Mia started to turn away, but Fyodor's compelling voice arrested her again. "You still haven't answered Halvar's question."

"What does it matter? You've had your fun."

"That's where you're wrong." Fyodor glanced up at her from under those black, black brows, his heavy features spreading into a wolfish grin. "My fun hasn't even started yet."

For the first time, Mia felt a sudden knifing of fear. Here she was, alone in a room with six massive, powerful men... Tensely, she started backing toward the door, lacing her voice with all the sarcasm she could muster. "I'm afraid my stupidity is going to be all the entertainment you get from me. I'm sorry to have bothered you."

"You haven't." Just like that, the amusement in his eyes was gone. What replaced it was a strange sort of heat, a look that made her breath catch in her throat, stilling her impulse to flee. "In fact," he said, dropping the cue stick to the table and closing the distance between them in two long strides, "you haven't even told me your name."

This close, the aura about him was overwhelming. Her skin prickled at his nearness, making her think again of the strange, electric tension before a storm. There was a scent to him, too, something musky and warm that made her think of jungles, of sleek, sensuous tigers hidden deep in their shadows...

"Mia," she breathed. "It's Mia."

Fyodor nodded once, his black gaze resting on her with a sort of probing approval, as if he liked what he saw and was interested to see more. He smiled slightly, the motion of his lips easing the grim line of his jaw. "That's Marcus," he said, jerking his chin at the brown-haired man who'd opened Halvar's beer, then gesturing to the three who'd been playing darts. "Damon, Jude, and Sergei. Halvar, you've met. Now..." He turned his attention back to her, and Mia felt as she had in the club, as if an

invisible spotlight had just snapped on her with burning intensity. "Tell me why a nice girl like you would want to be a vampire."

The faintly denigrating tone of his words stung her pride. "I'm not a *girl*, nice or otherwise. I'm a Domme."

"You?" Fyodor snorted. "You're an angry little girl with a whip in her hands."

Dismissively, he turned back to the pool table, his heavy shoulders rolling under the silk shirt, and Mia felt something inside her cry out in protest even as his words flayed her to the core. With one sharp comment, he'd stripped away everything she'd built for herself, every sensation of personal power she'd managed to attain, leaving her quivering in reaction -- and fury.

"I don't use whips. And my clients would disagree, I think." She had to bite her tongue to keep from spitting out a few names, just to prove to this snidely superior prick what a two-bit player he really was. "And I don't resort to false, outrageous rumors to build a reputation."

He turned back, holding her gaze steadily. "What makes you think they're false?"

What? For one heart stopping instant, Mia felt her entire universe lurch.

Taking advantage of her momentary paralysis, Fyodor came closer, looming over her, his voice dropping to a cold, almost analytical tone. "And your 'clients' are no more submissives than you are a Domme. They're playacting, just like you. A piquant little vacation from their power brokering lives. Don't even," he cut her off as she opened her mouth to protest. "I've seen it all before, Mia."

He was so close she could feel the heat pouring off his body. Her nipples tingled -- two inches closer and they'd be pressed against his broad chest. Both outraged and almost painfully aroused -- a fact which only increased the fury seething inside her -- Mia spat back, "You don't know the first thing about me."

Fyodor laughed. "No? Tell me, *Mistress* Mia, what's the first thing you think when you see a man on his knees before you? Don't bother answering. I can tell you, word for word."

"What, then?"

The corner of his mouth lifted in a sneering smile. "You think, 'Worm. Pathetic little worm.' Am I close?"

Shocked into stillness, Mia couldn't reply, couldn't even move as Fyodor lifted his hand, turning the palm outward to trail the backs of his fingers down the softness of her cheek. "A true Dom doesn't despise his -- or her -- submissives, Mia. He cherishes them." His voice dropped to an intimate murmur that she could barely hear over the thundering of her heart. "Do you know what the first thing *I* think is, when a wholehearted submissive goes to her knees before me?"

"What?" she whispered, barely able to breathe.

"Beautiful."

Something in her -- something clenched and bitter -- shattered at his words, and Mia felt her throat ache as hot, angry tears spilled down her cheeks. "You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know the first thing about what you're talking about!"

"Don't I?" His eyes were so deep, so dark... They filled her entire world, her entire *universe*, holding her spellbound. "Tell me why you came here tonight."

"Because I want to be free, damn you! I won't be used. I *won't* be controlled! Not ever. Not ever again." Gritting her teeth, she swiped at her wet cheeks, but the tears cascading down them didn't even slow. Furiously, she glared about the room, at the walls, the pool table, anywhere but at *him*. Fyodor. He made her feel like exactly what he'd called her -- an angry little girl. An angry, *hurt* little girl.

"Mia." Fyodor lifted a hand to her shoulder. His voice was a caress, low and velvety, as gentle as the fingers lightly tracing her bare skin. "Mia, look at me."

Jutting her chin, she lifted her head, daring him to laugh at her, to mock her. But there was no mockery in his eyes, only a deep, comprehending compassion. "Mia..." The way he said her name, so tenderly, as if he knew everything about her, knew her with an intimacy no man had ever even approached...

Yeah. Most con men are charismatic, aren't they? Using her rage as a lever, she pried her gaze from his, drawing back as she did so -- no matter how much her body wanted to plaster itself against his, feel the hardness of him pressed against every inch of her...

As if responding to her awkward withdrawal, his tone became matter-of-fact. His hand dropped away from her shoulder. "If that's what you want, yes. I can give it to you."

"I don't believe you."

Fyodor smiled slightly. "I don't blame you. But I can -- I can make you so strong no man will ever be able to use you again. I can make you invulnerable, Mia. If that's what you truly want. The only question is, what are you willing to do for it?"

"Nothing," she replied coldly, feeling her tears finally dry up. "Nothing, because you can't. It's a lie. It's all lies."

"I never lie." His smile was gone now, his eyes as dark and unreadable as the secrets hidden in men's hearts.

"Fine." She bit off the word. "Prove it."

"Are you sure?"

Mia folded her arms defiantly over her chest. "Yeah. I'm sure. Show me." *If you can. Come on, asshole. If you're really a vampire, then come on and...*

Fyodor stepped back, and Mia smiled in triumph -- a triumph that was oddly laced with disappointment. *See? He really is just a...*

Then he crouched, his powerful thigh muscles flexing beneath the black leather of his pants, and leaped higher than any human could possibly have done, springing out of her range of sight. Gasping, Mia tilted her head back to see him clinging like a spider to the high ceiling, his shaggy black hair falling down around his face as he bent his head back to look directly down at her. That was impossible. He was huge -- no man his size could hold himself like that!

Only he wasn't. His hands were spread flat on the ceiling, not even grasping. Mia's heart lurched in her chest, and an icy terror washed through her.

Fyodor let himself fall, arcing in the air like a gymnast to land, cat-light, on his feet in front of her. Straightening to his full height, he gazed at her coolly. "That was one of the few things -- the *very* few things -- that Coppola got right."

Behind him, the others chuckled again -- another familiar, longstanding joke. Mia fought down her instinctive panic and said coldly, "That wasn't what I meant."

"I know. You wanted me to bite you. You wanted to get what you came for that easily." He stepped closer, his voice dropping to a growl that was half-threat, half-promise. "But it's not that easy, Mia. Nothing worth having is ever that easy."

Chapter Three

She was staring up at him, her body quivering with fear, indignation... and something more. Her pupils were huge, dilated fully as if she were terrified, or extremely aroused. Or both.

But she hadn't bolted for the door, Fyodor noted. Not that it would have done her any good in any case -- the Wardens would only let her out on his command, and he had no intention whatsoever of letting her go yet.

"What do you want, then?" she demanded, both terrified and angry. "I'm willing to let you drink my fucking *blood*, for Christ's sake! Isn't that enough? Isn't that what you want?"

Her breasts, cupped firmly by the leather of her halter-top, heaved with each breath. Fyodor let his gaze linger on them a moment, and on the smooth, creamy skin of her bare shoulders, remembering the feel of it. Nice. Every inch of her, he was certain, would be just as smooth, just as soft. She wasn't made for hardness, this one -- and her body knew it as thoroughly as his did. He could smell the warm, enticing scent of her, could almost taste the excitement that sent her blood racing, pulsing in her throat, her belly, her crotch...

Yes. He'd been right about her, right about the rigid mask she put on like a shield. It was too hard, too inflexible -- it was an overcompensation. And exactly the opposite of what lay beneath.

Her flesh knew the truth. It quivered, practically begging for his touch every time he drew near her. It was her mind and her heart that were terrified of her natural desires, desires that had obviously been used against her by someone. Some nameless bastard who'd thought it would be *fun* -- he practically spat the word in his mind -- to break her.

The fury welling through him surprised Fyodor. It had been centuries since he'd bothered to feel angry about anything. In fact, Fyodor realized, it had been centuries since he'd bothered to *feel*.

Slowly, consciously, he relaxed his hands, which had knotted themselves into fists without his being aware of it. He gazed down at her, almost wonderingly. What was she, this Mia, that she could make him feel such things?

It wasn't only compassion he was feeling, either. His cock was straining against the tight leather of his pants, trapped at an angle that was growing more uncomfortable by the second. And when he thought of what he'd have to do to free her from her fear...

Fyodor shut that line of thinking down before his growing erection got any more painful. Besides, it was time -- more than time, actually -- to answer her question. "No, that's not what I want. That's what *you* want. And I'm willing to give you that. But to earn it, *Mistress* Mia, for this one night you are going to service me... and every single member of my clave. You are going to obey my orders, fulfill my every whim. You are going to do every and any thing I tell you when --"

Her head jerked up, her eyes widening in outraged denial. "You bastard! You goddamned --"

Fyodor cut her off coldly. "Call me whatever you like. I don't care. You want the absolute power I can give you? Then for one night you will give me absolute submission."

He saw her freeze, shocked into stillness partly by fury, partly -- although he knew she couldn't admit it, even to herself -- by a subterranean jolt of desire. A desire, he suspected, made even more powerful by being suppressed for so long. Her gaze flicked past him, roving over his five companions before returning to his face, a painful yearning he doubted she was even aware of lurking deep beneath the skepticism in her eyes. "And if I do, how do I know you'll keep your word?" she demanded.

"I already told you, Mia. I don't lie."

"And that's all the reassurance I get?"

No, he wanted to say. He wanted to do whatever would make this easy for her, whatever would help her take that first step out of her hard, bitter shell. He wanted to force her, even, if that's what it took to make her face everything inside her, everything she was hiding from. But he couldn't. The impression that had occurred as he'd watched her in the club -- the image of a butterfly, taking shape inside its cocoon -- returned to him forcefully.

If he split the cocoon too early, he knew, the delicate thing inside might die.

He couldn't do this for her. He couldn't help her or force her or reassure her into taking that first step. She was going to have to do that for herself. Nevertheless Fyodor found himself whispering in his mind, urging, *You can do it, Mia. I will be here. I will protect you.*

It wasn't gentleness she needed, though. And gentleness had never been his strong suit, anyway.

"You have no idea," she breathed, "what you're asking."

Fyodor smiled grimly. "Actually, sweetheart, I do." He kept his expression cold, disinterested, despite the fact that the air between them was crackling with an energy he hadn't felt since... since...

Anastasia.

The name whispered through his mind, and Fyodor couldn't help it -- he closed his eyes. Pain lanced through him, still as fresh as the day she'd died in his arms, gutted by a Cossack's blade.

So brave, she'd been. Too devout to ever accept the salvation he'd offered, she'd shaken her head wordlessly, even as her life's blood had drained from her, refusing to become something that, for all she'd loved him, she could never see as anything but the blackest evil. Helpless, he had watched the light in those clear, gray eyes dim and go out.

Anastasia. So gentle, so beautiful.

He'd loved no woman since.

Forming his face into a mocking sneer, Fyodor said, "You know where the door is," and turned coldly away.

"Wait."

At that one, tremulous word, desire rushed through Fyodor, beating painfully in his groin, an aching counterpoint to the agony in his heart. Across the room, Halvar's gaze met his, bright with an awareness of the strange tensions flowing through the room.

Mia spoke again behind him. "You promise, if I do this..."

Turning back, he gazed at her flatly. He could see the battle going on inside her, but he didn't, *couldn't*, make it easy on her. Part of him wanted to send her away, wanted to disappear into the dark and brood over his reawakened pain. But he'd started this game -- and Anastasia was dead. Centuries dead.

Would he ever be free of the pain of that?

There was pain in this woman, too -- he could understand that. He could even, in a way, respect it. For a moment, something stared out of her eyes at him, something frightened and hungry and almost unbearably vulnerable. Then it was gone again, slipping back into the shadows as her gaze hardened and she drew herself up defiantly. "All right."

She was going to fight him, he realized. She was going to fight him every step of the way. Good. He needed the distraction. Smiling viciously, he commanded, "Take off your clothes."

Glaring, she reached behind her to unzip her halter. Fyodor heard the others behind him, moving closer, and glanced back over his shoulder. Halvar stood grinning, the pool cue loose in his grip as he watched, his blue eyes glittering with enjoyment. Marcus, always the loner, leaned back against the wall, hands shoved in his pockets. His brooding gaze flicked to Fyodor's, a question in the hazel depths of his eyes. *Is this really what you want to do?* they seemed to be asking.

Suddenly, Fyodor wasn't so certain. But every thought of turning her away fled as she loosened her halter and her breasts, warm and full, tumbled out of the heavy

leather. Immediately, his cock sprang to full erectness, straining painfully against the tightness of his pants.

They were large -- not enormous, but more than big enough to overflow his hands. No silicone here, he could tell. Her nipples were large also, a flushed, dusky pink that made him yearn to take one in his mouth and suck it like candy. The areolas were already crinkled, the tips contracted into hard, upright points.

Was she telling herself, he wondered, that it was only nerves making her nipples stand up? Was she still trying to convince herself that this didn't arouse her?

Yes, she was -- one look at her clenched jaw, her averted eyes, was enough to tell him that. Fyodor smiled to himself. Let her fight a little longer, then.

Tugging the leather cat suit downward, she revealed the smooth, creamy plane of her stomach, the delicious indentation of her navel...

"Stop," Fyodor breathed, fighting against the sudden dizziness inside him. He could see the first chestnut curls of her sex, peeking over the black leather. Christ, he hadn't even touched her, and he was so hard!

She glanced up at him, her eyes hard with loathing. "Whatever you want," she sneered, dropping her hands to her side.

"Did I tell you to speak?"

Her chin jerked up. Her eyes blazed. Fyodor shook his head warningly. "I told you, Mia, absolute submission. You will do nothing that I do not tell you to do. And everything that I do."

She lowered her eyes, her jaw still clenched rebelliously. "Good," he murmured. Ignoring the impatient throbbing in his groin, he stepped forward, curving his hands around her breasts, cupping the weight of them. Her nipples hardened further under his palms, and Fyodor could feel her chest heaving with each breath. He flicked his thumbs across the taut, upright points and she gasped, her back arching slightly. Immediately, she stiffened in fury at her own self-betrayal.

That was all right. That was, in fact, just fine with Fyodor. There were layers and layers of defenses here, he knew. But they had all night.

Smiling, he moved behind her, drawing her back against his chest and cupping her breasts in his hands. Her ass was snuggled up against his thighs, the lovely dimple at the top pressed against his full, aching balls. Sliding one hand down to her hips, he pulled her more firmly against him, and felt a hot, impatient flare of need.

Slowly, Fyo, he told himself. Slowly.

Bending down, he nuzzled her neck, feeling the tightness of the muscles there, the way she held herself rigid, denying the sensations coursing through her. He trailed his lips down the side of her throat, and she jerked in his arms. Immediately, he tightened his grip on her breasts, holding her still.

"Look at them," he whispered in her ear. Glancing past her, he grinned at the five men poised about the room, their eyes gleaming avidly. Damon. Jude. Sergei. Marcus. And Halvar, of course -- Halvar who'd been with him longer than any of the others. "Look at them, Mia, the way they watch you. The way their bodies strain toward you, eager to taste your flesh. Is there not," he said softly, "a certain power in that?"

She didn't respond, of course -- he hadn't expected her to. But he felt the tiniest shift in her muscles, a change in the quality of the tension flowing through them.

It was a small thing, but it was a start.

Squeezing the warm fullness of her breasts, he added, "And you *will* pleasure them, Mia. You will give them everything they desire; your mouth, your cunt, even..." He nudged his hips forward, and felt a quiver go through her. "Even your ass."

With a look, he summoned Sergei and Jude, and tilted his head to watch her as they approached. Her eyes widened, her gaze flicking back and forth between the two of them; Jude with his close-cropped brown hair, his high, sharp cheekbones, his eyes like clear water and full, sensuous mouth; Sergei who towered above her, almost as tall as Fyodor himself, with his rolling, bull-like shoulders and gladiator build.

Grinning, they stood before her, looking down at her breasts. "Suck them," Fyodor ordered tersely. As they dropped to their knees, opening their mouths, he lifted those delectable mounds to their waiting lips.

* * *

Mia stood rigid, tensing every muscle in her body against the onslaught of sensation. She was trapped between them, surrounded. Fyodor's strong hands kneaded her breasts, and she could feel the rock-hard ridge of his shaft all the way from her tailbone to the small of her back. *Christ!* Her imagination projected an image of that cock, what it might look like uncovered, jutting from the ebony curls of his groin.

Fiercely, she shut her eyes, willing away the picture.

But that only made her more conscious of the mouths working her breasts, the tongues flicking over her nipples in unison. Then Jude, the leaner one, trailed his teeth lightly over one aching nub even as Sergei drew her other nipple deep into his mouth, tugging at it hungrily. Desperately, Mia bit back a moan, reaching instead for the fury she'd felt when Fyodor had made his offer.

All right. All right, so she'd do it. She'd do anything the bastard wanted -- for a night. One night. But she *wouldn't* enjoy it. She wouldn't let him use her. She could do this and still retain control -- of herself at least, if not of him. She would *choose* to obey him -- but she wouldn't let him make her come.

Gritting her jaw, she forced her mind away from the sensations, ignoring the delectable ache building in her breasts, her cunt, her clit... Instead, she made herself name musicals. She'd liked musicals once, a very long time ago. *Oklahoma. An American in Paris. South Pacific.* Opening his mouth wide, Jude sucked her breast into his mouth, closing his jaw around the curving flesh. Jesus! *Chicago. Cabaret.* That Sondheim one... Damn it! She knew the name perfectly well...

"Open your eyes," Fyodor whispered. Even when he spoke softly, his voice rumbled through her. The sound made her clit pulse. Damn him!

She opened her eyes.

"Watch them," he commanded.

Fuck!

He'd know if she didn't. She was certain of that. Breathing heavily through her nostrils, furious at what he was doing to her, she looked down.

Both of the men before her were stunning, each in his own way. Sergei was the prototype of every alpha male romance cover model she'd ever seen -- thick dark hair pulled into a ponytail, a strong, heavy jaw, a fighter's build. His lips seized her breast with a ferocity that made her knees tremble. Desperately, she switched her gaze to Jude.

He was leaner, more chiseled, his face gracefully sculpted -- sharp chin, high cheekbones, ivory pale skin. His mouth, full and soft, worked over her breast, kissing it, caressing it, returning again and again to lap at her erect nipple. The contrast between the two sensations, one tugging, one teasing, was driving her crazy.

But what her gaze returned to, again and again, were the hands cupping her breasts, holding them out to those two torturing mouths like a king extending his ring to be kissed. They were broad, those hands, the fingers long and slightly spatulate at the ends, the nails neatly trimmed and scrupulously clean. Dark hair dusted the back of them, trailing up to powerful forearms. She could see the play of tendons in his wrists as he squeezed, pushing her breasts further into their working mouths, and Jude and Sergei responded by redoubling their assault, suckling hungrily, their jaws working as they tugged eagerly at her aching nipples.

Damn him! Mia thought, fighting to keep her back from arching, from pushing her breasts even harder into their frantic sucking. Her clit was throbbing against the leather of her cat suit, her crotch soaked with her juices. She could feel her labia, swollen with arousal, and between them the heat of her slick wetness.

Sergei drew his head back, and for a second Mia could see the gleam of saliva coating her nipple as he paused to shed the leather vest he wore and unbutton the snap of his jeans. Briefly, she caught a glimpse of his hard, shiny cockhead, precome already coating its tip, before he leaned forward and claimed her nipple again. The jolt that went through her was even stronger for the brief reprieve and, furious with herself, Mia felt her cunt clench hungrily, quivering on the edge of orgasm.

Then she saw Sergei's shoulder move rhythmically, the muscles bunching under the smooth, tawny skin, and realized with something akin to despair that the man was jacking off.

Oh, Christ. She could picture it so easily -- his fist gliding up and down his engorged shaft, sliding up over that swollen cockhead she'd glimpsed, gathering the precome trickling from the slit, then pumping faster, lubricated with his own juices, tugging the taut skin as he devoured her breast, so aroused she could see the blood suffusing his face as he sucked eagerly at her nipple...

She couldn't take it any more. She was going to come, right now. Forgetting Fyodor's command, Mia squeezed her eyes shut.

And heard a growl of displeasure in her ear as Fyodor pushed Jude and Sergei away and seized her nipples in those strong, slightly callused fingers. Ruthlessly, he pinched them, sending a spear of agony straight through her body. Crying out, Mia felt her knees buckle as the sensation thrust her remorselessly over the edge. Her cunt spasmed, grasping hungrily for the phantom phallus she could almost imagine inside her, the inner walls of her passage tightening and releasing as everything inside her seemed to melt in a sudden conflagration.

Fyodor's arms clamped around her, holding her up even as his fingers twisted her nipples, and she hung helplessly in his arms as wave after wave of fiery ecstasy tore through her, leaving her limp and gasping, her head lolling back against Fyodor's broad chest.

"Damn you," she whispered, feeling tears start in her eyes. "Oh, God damn you."

Pulling herself from his arms, she yanked her halter up, clasp it over her breasts which still tingled from the force of her climax. Amazingly, Fyodor let her go. He stood, watching her, his eyes dark and inscrutable. If there was any expression on his face, any at all, she couldn't read it.

"This is all just a game to you, isn't it? A little *fun*. Well, I'm glad you enjoyed it," she said, practically flinging the words at him. Although for the life of her she couldn't tell whether he'd really enjoyed it or not. Been *aroused* by it, yes -- she could still see the impressive line of his erection, straining against his black leather pants -- but *enjoyed* it? She didn't know.

Somewhere deep in her mind was a nasty suspicion that maybe that was part of her anger. Maybe even a big part. And *that* frightened her even more than her orgasm had. "That's it. I've changed my mind. I don't care *what* you think you can do for me -- but I've had enough. I'm going home."

"Are you sure that's what you want?"

"Yes, damn it! Yes! I can't -- I can't *do* this!"

"Mia," he said, his voice almost caressingly soft. Soft but firm, like a man speaking to a frightened animal. "Yes, you can, Mia. I know you can."

His black eyes held her. There was a warmth in them, a velvet heat like a dark southern night with thunderstorms building in the distance. *Or like the way a panther would feel*, Mia thought, dazed. *A black panther, its body heat radiating against the palm of your hand.* "Don't give up, Mia," he whispered.

Her heart thudded in her chest, torn by so many conflicting emotions she hardly knew which one to listen to. Her blood sang in her veins, still pulsing with the ecstasy of that undeniable, unstoppable orgasm. And through her arousal and confusion and fear came one thought, clear and lucid and unmistakable. *It matters. I don't know why, but it matters to him. It matters deeply.*

Which made, she realized, absolutely no sense at all.

She glared at him narrowly, and saw him toss his head back with an arrogant little shake, his shaggy black hair falling loosely around his shoulders -- but what had flickered in his eyes at her suddenly intent scrutiny was surprise.

"Why?" she whispered, barely aware she'd spoken.

His jaw clenched, making his heavy, rough-hewn features even grimmer, and a dark, dangerous light flashed in his eyes. "I do not recall giving you permission to speak."

He hadn't. A sudden, tremulous apprehension fluttered in her belly as he strode toward her. Seizing her roughly, he pulled her against him, twisting her arms behind her back and pinning them in one strong fist. "I warn you," he whispered, his voice hoarse with desire, "this is your last chance. Leave, if you're leaving."

Abruptly, he released her, as swiftly and unexpectedly as he'd grabbed her. Mia staggered slightly, rocked by the lingering sensations of his body pressed against hers, dominating her utterly...

He smiled as she remained silent, gasping, almost unable to move. She wasn't at all sure she liked that smile, or what it entailed. "Now," he said, satisfaction rumbling in his deep voice. "Now, Mia, the game *truly* begins."

Chapter Four

Apprehension turned quickly to fear as the six men circled her. Her eyes flicked left, then right, while something cried out in her mind, *Too late!*

Instead of panicking her further, though, the thought calmed her, and she repeated it to herself. *Too late to turn back now, Mia. So do what you came here to do.*

He was right. The thought dawned on her with utter certainty. She *could* do this. Steeling herself, she turned back to Fyodor, raising her head to meet his gaze. Then she dropped her arms back to her sides, letting the halter-top fall again, leaving her naked to the waist. And waited.

"Marcus. Damon." Fyodor gestured them roughly to her, and Mia stood passively as they slid off her cat suit, slowly baring the curves of her ass, tugging the leather down to reveal her mons, sliding the heavy leather down her thighs as Fyodor watched, his gaze seeming to trace every inch of her as it was revealed. His focus lingered a moment on the sodden curls of her sex, and his breathing quickened.

Lifting first one foot, then the other, the redheaded Damon eased the cat suit over her feet, leaving her standing in nothing but her black pumps. He reached for those, and Fyodor shook his head. "No. Leave them. Now, Mia," he said, turning his attention back to her, "you will return the favor for Damon."

Dropping her gaze, she reached obediently for the buttons of Damon's shirt. "Stop!" Fyodor barked, sharply enough to make her quiver in surprise. In two swift steps he was beside her, turning her around, snapping his fingers at Damon for the belt he wore. Taking it, he pulled Mia's arms behind her, binding her wrists securely.

"But --"

Fyodor's hand came down on her naked ass -- hard. She bucked, and bit her lip. Tilting her head back, he gazed down at her, those black, watchful eyes gleaming intently. "Absolute obedience, Mia. One way or another."

Flushing, she dropped her gaze, intensely aware of the stinging warmth of his slap. Fyodor nodded, as if in satisfaction, and stepped back. "Now, undress him."

Awkwardly, using her teeth and tongue, Mia eased the buttons of Damon's shirt free from their holes. Damon stood rigid beneath her efforts, watching intently as she worked her way downward. He had a warm, almost sweet scent to him, and the auburn hairs that flecked his chest and abs tickled her cheek as she undid the last button. Gripping his shirt with her teeth, she tugged it free of his low-slung jeans, hearing him hiss lightly as she did so.

Getting to her knees in high heels without the use of her hands was an ungainly process, and Mia blushed with mortification as she heard Halvar chuckle and make a quiet comment to Fyodor. "Give her time," Fyodor replied, and Mia's blush deepened -- but from rage this time. Did he really think she was going to do this often enough to get *good* at it?

If so, he definitely had another trick coming.

Nevertheless, she leaned forward, popping the snap of Damon's jeans with her teeth, then used her tongue to tease the zipper's tab out so she could grasp it. Damon's breathing deepened and, cursing herself for being so damn compliant, she pulled the zipper downward carefully, revealing inch by inch his long, pulsing erection. Then, biting down on the fabric, she worked her way around him on her knees, yanking clumsily until she'd managed to get his jeans down over his tight, rounded buns.

Some mischievous impulse made her snake her tongue out, licking it over the curve of his ass, and she was rewarded by his sudden gasp.

"Good," Fyodor murmured. Lifting her head, she saw he'd moved closer, the better to observe her efforts. "Now his balls, Mia. Lick his balls the very same way."

Bastard.

But this time, she couldn't deny the throbbing in her clit. She'd caught a glimpse -- more than a glimpse, actually -- of Damon's balls as she'd undressed him. The idea of swirling her tongue over them sent a fresh spurt of wetness trickling between her folds.

Damon worked his jeans off the rest of the way, shedding his boots with a swift kick, and turned to face her. Then, reaching down, he drew his rigid cock up and pressed it flat against his belly, giving her complete access to those full, delectable balls.

His scent was stronger here, sweet and a little bit musky. Mia breathed it in, feeling her nipples tighten as she did so, and trailed her tongue up the furrowed skin of his sac. Damon groaned. She could see his fingers moving, rubbing up and down the length of his shaft, and something Fyodor had said to her earlier came back to her.

Look at them, he'd said. Look at the way their bodies strain toward you, eager to taste your flesh.

Raising her head briefly, she glanced around the circle of men surrounding her. Their gazes were pinned on her, devouring her curves, avidly tracing her naked flesh. Sergei and Marcus, she saw, had loosened their pants enough to caress their cocks as they watched her. Remembering the feel of his mouth at her breast, Mia snuck a look at Sergei's cock. It was as thick and solid as all the rest of him, and a sudden wash of saliva filled her mouth.

Turning her attention back to Damon, she raised her gaze to his face as she leaned forward, her jutting tongue flickering over the hard curve of one sensitive testicle, then the other. His eyes grew even brighter as he watched her, his hand closing tighter on his hard shaft.

Her cunt throbbed hungrily, and Mia rocked forward on her knees, squeezing her legs together, feeling her swollen clit pulse between them with a growing need. Faster now, she lapped at the twin mounds of Damon's balls, feeling them shift ever so slightly beneath her tongue. His groan deepened as he watched her, and his hand moved faster.

Alert for any sign of disapproval from Fyodor, Mia opened her mouth, closing her lips around one heavy, velvety testicle, sucking it lightly as she swirled her tongue over it, feeling the crisp hairs grow damp under the rush of her saliva.

"Very good," Fyodor whispered in her ear. He was bending over her, his shaggy hair brushing her cheek as he spoke. She was surprised at how soft it was -- like flax, or the silky fluff of milkweed, for all it was as black as pitch. "He's so close, Mia, so close to the edge. And you are going to let him come in your mouth."

Grabbing the knot of her chignon, Fyodor pulled her head away from Damon's crotch, and Damon gave an agonized moan as her mouth left his balls. Tugging lightly, Fyodor tilted Mia's head back so that she was sitting back on her knees, her spine arched, her jaw open wide. She stared up at Damon, who was looking down at her with an entranced intensity. Reaching out, he placed one hand on the crown of her head, holding her exactly where she was while his other hand pointed his cock toward her parted lips.

Appalled at the sensations rushing through her, Mia tried to jerk away -- but Fyodor's fingers clenched tighter in her hair, pinning her where she was. Part of her wanted to struggle -- hell, to fight like a wild cat, thrashing against them, kicking, clawing... and another part of her was excruciatingly aroused at being held there forcefully on her knees, her mouth open wide to receive Damon's seed.

Fyodor dropped to his knees behind her, his leather-clad thighs brushing her ass as he buried his hands in her hair, pulling slightly -- enough to sting a bit, but not really hurt. Damon, standing before her, savaged his shaft, his frantic tugging making his cockhead brush back and forth against her lips as his groans grew deeper, harsher.

Mia, transfixed by the sight of his fingers raking up and down his cock, noted the way it swelled even further in his punishing grasp. Then, with a sharp, high cry, Damon peaked, his hot, salty juices bursting from him as she stretched her jaw wide, thrusting her tongue out to lap the underside of his cockhead as he shot and shot into her open mouth. Thick, creamy streams of it, flooding her tongue, making her swallow again and again as his cock pulsed and throbbed.

Moaning, Mia flicked her tongue out, running it over his swollen glans, probing the gaping slit to gather every last drop. Damon panted above her, his whole body shuddering as she sucked his tip lightly. Mia's cunt, as slick and flooded with juice as her mouth, clenched in response. She felt almost incandescent with arousal, her whole body burning. Her breasts ached, hard and full; her breath hot and heavy in her chest. She wanted more -- she wanted *all* of them, right now. She wanted them to take her, use her...

Desperately, she arched her neck forward, straining against Fyodor's grasp for one last taste. Sharply, he jerked her back, chuckling, as Damon stepped away. Then Fyodor's hands slid from her hair, shaping the curve of her neck, the arch of her spine, before the warmth of his touch disappeared. She whimpered slightly in longing -- and then it was Fyodor standing before her, tilting her chin up so that she gazed into those dark, brilliant eyes, and everything else seemed to fade into obscurity.

"Oh, Mia," he whispered, his gaze bright with approval.

A foreign, wholly novel emotion stole through Mia, tremulous and unsure. Whatever it was, she'd never in her life felt it before.

What was he *doing* to her? Every nerve in her body quivered -- poised, it seemed to Mia, on the edge of some internal brink, some point where return would become forever impossible.

She gulped, watching those dark eyes, waiting until at last he reached for her, his strong hands lifting her to her feet almost tenderly, as effortlessly as if she weighed nothing at all. Turning her gently to face the others, he pulled her back against him, his arms looped about her waist as he tilted his head, whispering in her ear. "Look at them, Mia. Look at what you do to them."

Blinking, uncomfortably aware of how thoroughly, for that one moment, she'd forgotten the five other men in the room, she did. It was strange how Fyodor could do that -- with one look, one whisper, he could make her forget there was anyone else in the room. In the universe, even.

Obediently, she looked at each of them in turn -- Sergei, his hand still wrapped around his thick, jutting cock; Marcus, his hazel eyes studying her with an intensity that made her shiver in anticipation; Halvar, whose cerulean gaze met hers with a twinkle of merriment as well as desire; and Jude, his lean body taut, almost thrumming with need.

Mia's cunt pulsed, responding instinctively to the naked hunger in their eyes.

Finally, she looked at Damon, who'd moved no more than a step away. In response, he reached out, his hand curving to cup her cheek. Then he traced her lower lip with a sort of awed tenderness, and for the first time Mia really noticed the soft, luminous brown of his eyes. His trembling touch made her feel delicate somehow, as if she were something rare and beautiful, something precious.

Nothing in her life had ever made her feel like that.

She couldn't help it -- she closed her eyes, her throat thickening with unshed tears. With a deep, sighing gasp, she dropped her head back against Fyodor's broad chest, feeling his arms tighten around her and the warmth of his cheek, resting against her forehead. The sensation was so strange, so surreal -- to Mia it was almost as if they were floating, encased in a weightless, fragile bubble of time wholly divorced from everything else in her life.

"Yes, Mia," he murmured. "There *is* a power here. You feel it, I know you do. And it's yours, Mia. It's what you were born to."

She shook her head slightly, still trying to deny it -- but she couldn't, any more than she could deny the unfamiliar emotions beating through her. It wasn't just the way they looked at her. It was the way Fyodor had held her, his hands clenched in her hair, cupping her flesh, offering her breasts, her body to them...

Offering what was his alone to give.

No! She froze, terrified, utterly unable to admit that what had most deeply aroused her was the feeling of being *owned*. That her body wasn't hers to command, but *his*. Fyodor's.

No!

He felt her stiffen, she knew -- his arms tightened around her, those powerful hands turning her inexorably toward him, lifting her chin. "Mia." Furiously, she glanced aside, staring at the walls, the dartboard, the door through which she'd walked like an idiot, like a *fool*!

"Mia, look at me."

Glaring, hardly even aware of the way her body quivered in his arms, she raised her gaze to his. He was watching her with that same velvet warmth, that same stormy intensity that had startled her earlier.

"Mia, why are you so frightened? Tell me."

"Tell me why it matters," she flung back. "Tell me why this matters to you."

There. She hadn't imagined it. That same flicker of surprised wariness, that same momentary vulnerability followed by a swift withdrawal. The expression in his eyes grew suddenly dangerous, and Mia's courage quailed.

"It doesn't," he said coldly -- but he was lying. She *knew* he was lying. "And you didn't answer my question."

"I --"

Oh, shit.

No, she hadn't. With a quick, nervous swallow, she remembered what he'd told her. *Absolute obedience, Mia. One way or another.*

And what would he do to her for disobeying a direct order? Her knees quivered as she realized she was about to find out.

Roughly, he seized her wrist, practically dragging her to the pool table. Yanking the comb from her hair so her brown tresses tumbled down around her shoulders, he fisted one hand in them and thrust her down so that she was bent over the pool table, her chest pressed against the green felt, her naked ass tilted high in the air.

Please, she wanted to scream, to beg, even. *Please, Fyodor, no!* She bit her lips fiercely instead, knowing instinctively that anything she said right now, anything at all, would only make her punishment worse.

* * *

Fury pounded through Fyodor, increasing the throbbing in his groin. His cock was so hard it made his head spin. Christ, what it had taken to hold himself back as he'd watched her, awkward as a virgin, tugging off Damon's clothes with her teeth! And when he'd held her, quivering, in his arms, struggling against the ecstasy pounding through her while Jude and Sergei lapped at her breasts. He could remember the feel of them even now, firm and heavy against his palms.

And then she'd looked at him with a glance that had seemed to pierce him like an arrow and demanded to know why it *mattered*!

It didn't. Nothing mattered. Not any more. Not since the night he'd watched Anastasia die in his arms.

He stared down at Mia's lush, upturned bottom, feeling the same rage he'd felt that night beat through his blood, swelling his already erect cock till it felt as hard and potent as a spear.

Such a delectable ass. And he wanted to rip off his clothes, plunge into it right now, fuck her so hard she screamed as the Cossack had screamed when he'd torn his throat out, fuck her over and over, insatiable, unending...

Raising his hand, he started to swing it down at that warm, waiting target -- and stopped himself, breathing heavily through his nostrils, his entire body shaking with outraged emotion.

What was he doing? He'd never -- *never* -- hit a woman in anger. This wasn't about chastising a disobedient submissive; he'd done that, plenty of times. And never once had he felt so furious, so out of control.

How was she *doing* this to him? How had she, all unwittingly, managed to slip past the defenses he'd kept in place for centuries, piercing the walls he'd placed between himself and the memory of Anastasia's death?

He didn't know -- but she had. Somehow, like a thief breaking open a lock, she'd freed the beast he'd kept chained so deeply inside him, the dark, dangerous creature that knew only anguish and rage.

He paused, face-to-face with the unpleasant truth -- *that* was why he'd been furious enough to hit her. Not because she'd disobeyed him, but because she was making him *feel*. She was forcing him to go places inside himself he wanted violently not to go.

Isn't that precisely what you're doing to her?

Fyodor froze, a sickly, unexpected flush of shame running through him. Yes. Yes, it was. Even more damning was the fact that he knew -- he *knew* -- what was frightening her so. Underneath that angry, brittle surface was a woman so vulnerable it made his breath catch in his throat; a submissive who yearned desperately to be set free.

And she was terrified of it.

Suddenly, he recalled the strange jolt of recognition he'd felt when he first saw her, poised on the steps leading into the club, her gaze searching the crowd. In that moment he'd have sworn he'd heard his own name echoing back at him from her mind. Like a question, he'd thought then.

Or an answer.

Maybe she's not the only one who needs setting free.

Fyodor's nostrils flared as he sucked in a sharp breath. The idea shocked him. It had taken such desperate courage for her to step outside her defenses -- and for him, truly, had he ever meant it to be anything more than a game? A way to amuse himself for a few hours?

Looking down at her, sprawled half across the table, her ass turned up and waiting for whatever he might decide to do to her, Fyodor found his chest aching as admiration and desire twined painfully together somewhere inside it.

She had *chosen* this, chosen to take the risk of allowing him past her guard, into the places where her locked, buried emotions were kept. She was willing to face her demons, however much they frightened her.

The only real question, Fyodor realized, was whether he had the courage to do the same.

Chapter Five

Panting, he stared down at her, at the smooth line of her back, the flare of her hips, the luscious, creamy curves of her ass. He could feel Halvar's gaze on him, concerned, questioning, sensing the battle that was going on inside him.

Never in his life had he felt so exposed, so vulnerable. He couldn't -- he couldn't do this. Not now. Not...

"Halvar," he said. The word was a command, and the blond Norseman, hearing it, approached. "Halvar, she needs punishing."

From the corner of his eye, he saw Mia tremble in apprehension. Halvar grinned, but there was a questioning uncertainty behind the playfulness in his voice as he asked, "Are you sure you don't want to do the honors yourself?"

Fyodor shook his head, his jaw clenching. He stepped back, watching as Halvar stripped off his leather jacket. Then, his biceps bulging, Halvar raised one heavy hand and brought it down with a smack on Mia's upturned ass. She gasped, her body tensing suddenly, and Fyodor stared at the pink mark left behind by that carefully calculated blow.

"Again," he said, managing to keep his voice steady -- but his cock flexed inside his leather pants, pulsing with each smack Halvar laid across her delectable bottom. Mia was writhing now, her body jerking at each blow. Fyodor sincerely doubted if she was aware that she was raising her hips to meet Halvar's hand.

* * *

She was though. She was *completely* aware of what this was doing to her. Her breath fluttered in her throat each time Fyodor spoke in that harsh, gravelly voice.

"Again."

Halvar's hand came down sharply across her exposed cheeks. Each well-placed slap made her skin burn a little more and sent a jolt of fire straight to her swollen clit until she was almost dizzy with desire. Her ass felt sore, hot, almost painfully sensitive, and the lips of her pussy thickened under the rain of blows until they tingled. Everything inside her seemed to center down, converging on the need that grew and grew with each guttural command, each stinging slap...

Unable to stop herself, she closed her eyes and moaned.

As if that were a signal, Halvar paused above her. In the silence, she could hear her own gasping breaths, could feel the searing, liquid heat deep in her womb. There was an expectant tension in the room, emanating, she knew, from the men -- the *vampires* -- around her.

"Put her on the table." Fyodor's voice was still cold, still dispassionate, and Mia shivered, wondering what else he would do to her, what else he would make them do to her, what else he'd make her do to *them*.

Hands lifted her, turning her, flipping her over. She heard the clatter of billiard balls being rolled hastily into the pockets, rattling down to the inside of the table -- and then she was placed upon it, the fuzzy felt soft against her stinging bottom, her arms outstretched. Strong hands grasped each of her wrists, closed around her legs, pulling them apart. A fist closed in her hair, tilting her head back, and at last Mia opened her eyes.

They surrounded her, pinning her to the table, their hard muscles gleaming in the soft glow from the green-shaded lamp. Somewhere during the spanking, the rest of them must have shed their clothes, because now they were all naked, gloriously so. Sergei and Jude each held one wrist, their rigid cocks jutting just inches from her hands. Gazing straight up, she saw Halvar above her, his blue eyes darker now, luminous with anticipation. Damon and Marcus gripped her thighs, spreading them wide. Her calves dangled off the edge of the table and between them...

Between them stood Fyodor, his black eyes scrutinizing her with an almost clinical detachment. That sense of power, of *presence*, washed over her again like an

ocean wave breaking. She could almost hear the hiss of surf -- no, she *could* hear it. Only it wasn't surf but the sound of her own pulse, roaring in her ears. His face was like granite -- hard, inexorable. He could crush her, she thought faintly, like a boulder in a landslide, huge and unstoppable.

Had she really thought, even for one second, that she could deny this man anything he demanded of her?

She writhed on the table, acutely conscious of his gaze traveling down her body, following the curve of her heaving, upthrust breasts, flicking as tangibly as fingers over her hard, aching nipples, making her arch her back, lifting her breasts toward him. But his gaze moved on, following the line of her belly down to the swell of her mons covered in soft chestnut curls, and then dropped lower, studying the parted lips of her cunt, the pink inner folds that were, Mia knew, gleaming with her juices. She could feel them slicking her cunt, pouring out of her so freely they trickled down between her cheeks, coating the tender skin between her cunt and her ass.

Almost lazily, Fyodor reached out, running a finger through her wetness. Mia trembled, holding herself desperately still, terrified to move, even to breathe, almost. What if she angered him again? The look that had come into his eyes -- for one moment he'd seemed almost like an animal, some savage, wounded creature ready to tear her limb from limb in its pain and fury...

And yet it hadn't been her he was seeing at all. Somehow, instinctively, she had known that. His gaze had seemed to pass right through her, staring straight into the source of his rage and hurt.

What had hurt him so badly? What could have clawed so deeply into his soul? Part of her yearned to know, to plumb the source of his secrets -- but another, larger part yearned only for the return of the warmth she'd seen in his eyes, the approval that had shined on her for one precious moment before she'd defied him.

She would do anything, *anything*, to regain that approval.

She didn't even care, now, about the quest that had brought her here. She could remember, barely, the compulsion that had driven her, not just to Dominion but ever

since she'd come to L.A.; the rage, the desire to punish, the hunger for revenge. Looking back at that ugly, self-righteous anger, Mia shuddered in revulsion.

My God, what was I turning into?

Not that there was anything wrong with being a Domme -- not for some women. For some, it suited them. Not her. For her it had been a repudiation, a running away from everything she was, everything she truly wanted. The arousal she'd felt, forcing men to kneel before her, had been an ugly, vengeful, *twisted* thing -- literally. She had twisted everything that was natural to her into its opposite. Into something that had trapped her more deeply than even Kyle had.

She had walled off the pain of that, had buried it so deeply she'd thought it could never touch her again. Except it had of course -- every single day. Everything she'd done for the past two years had only trapped her more thoroughly in the clutches of her memories, never allowing herself to move past them, never allowing herself the chance to heal...

What Kyle had done to her was one thing. But what she had done to herself... That was worse.

Closing her eyes, Mia let out a deep, shuddering breath. Tears stung behind her eyelids, and what welled up inside of her as Fyodor slid one finger into her hot, yearning passage was gratitude.

She hadn't wanted to be powerful, Mia admitted. What she'd wanted was to be *safe*. Invulnerable. But not even immortality could guarantee that nothing would ever hurt her -- look at Fyodor. *Something* had wounded him, torn him so deeply that part of him was still coiled like a cobra to strike, to lash out at anything that touched those hurt places inside him.

As she had done, inadvertently. And *still* he could touch her, so gently, as he was doing right now, his finger slipping deep into the core of her hunger, his thumb brushing lightly across her swollen clit. She quivered, right on the edge, her passage gripping his finger, feeling thankfulness and desire twining together inside her...

"Please," she whispered, and felt Fyodor's slow movements cease. She bit her lip, afraid to open her eyes, terrified she'd see that dark disapproval in his eyes again. Something formed in her mind, something almost like a prayer. Breathing it silently to herself, Mia opened her eyes.

He was gazing down at her, his black eyes expressionless, his muscles tense, poised. His thick, shaggy hair fell over his brows, making him seem even more like some powerful, untamed creature, a predator who could, at a whim, devour her, leaving her hollow, emptied out, stripped to a shell by the force of his appetite.

And she wanted that. She wanted it.

"Please," she whispered again, "Fyodor, please."

"Please what?" His voice was a low, intent growl. Mia swallowed.

"Please, I want... want to please you. I want you to do what you want to me. Everything you want to me. Tell me..." She stopped, frozen by the flicker of emotion in his eyes. Disdain? Desire? She couldn't tell. Gathering her courage, she continued. "Tell me what to do... Fyodor."

Strange, she thought even as she waited, holding her breath. *Strange that a man so grim and harsh should have such a gentle name.*

Closing her eyes in absolute surrender, she tilted her head back, baring her throat. She could hear his breathing, rasping heavily as if he were in the middle of a battle, not standing still as stone between her outspread thighs. For the first time, she wondered how old he was, how far back in time his memories stretched...

She almost cried out in disappointment as she felt the vampires holding her turn her loose, evidently at Fyodor's signal. Was he going to throw her out? Simply send her away?

She wasn't sure, suddenly, that she could bear that. So she held herself motionless; waiting, hoping, praying.

For a moment, she almost imagined she felt his breath on her neck, warm and heavy against her skin; almost imagined she felt the press of ivory fangs, two sharp,

tickling points above the rushing beat of her pulse. Arching her neck, she sighed into the sensation -- but it was gone. If it had ever been there at all.

Her stomach dropped, suddenly hollow, disappointment flooding like grief along her veins. He was going to send her away. She *hadn't* obeyed. She'd spoken when he hadn't commanded her to, hadn't done what he'd told her, she'd fought him and challenged him and now he was going to make her leave.

Then she heard his voice, harsh and rumbling. "Get on your knees, Mia."

The joy inside her was so acute she almost sobbed in relief. Choking it back quickly, she rolled to her hands and knees, her eyes still closed. Tilting her head back, she felt her hair spilling down over her naked back like silk.

Fyodor said nothing.

Desperately, Mia arched her spine further, lifting her breasts as high as she could, angling her ass toward him and moving her knees farther apart, displaying her swollen labia, her dripping folds, the tight pink pucker of her rectum. She sensed the sudden upwelling of his arousal like the gathering tightness in the air just before a lightning bolt and held herself still, her body trembling, aching, yearning...

Then he paused.

Please! she whispered, deep in her mind. *Oh please, Fyodor!*

"No," he murmured, almost as if he'd heard her. Maybe he had. If she could feel him so acutely that she could actually *see* his hand outstretched toward her waiting flesh, poised on the air a moment before he drew it back, then how farfetched was it to wonder if he could sense her thoughts?

"No," he repeated. "First, you will please *them*." Opening her eyes, Mia found herself staring straight into Halvar's dangerously bright gaze. She felt the others gathered close around her, each of their bodies strung with tension like a tightly drawn bow. Each of them focused on her, their energies pinning her like so many aimed arrows, ready -- *eager* -- to pierce her flesh. She trembled at the thought.

But even so, all their concentrated desire didn't begin to equal the potency of Fyodor's power, gusting over her with the force of a hurricane, holding her inexorably in the grip of his will.

Yes. Yes. Whatever he wanted. Anything he wanted. And maybe if she pleased them enough, maybe then he would let her please *him*.

That thought pierced her to her very core, and she moaned in longing. Halvar's eyes gleamed.

"Sergei, beneath her. Marcus..." He must have gestured, because Marcus moved from the corner of her vision. She felt herself lifted, strong hands beneath her hipbones, Damon and Jude locking hands underneath her ribcage and raising her into the air as Sergei stretched on the table beneath her, that thick, hard cock rising up toward her like a spear. The hands shifted on her hips, spreading her thighs wide as she was lowered smoothly down, the slick opening of her cunt coming to rest squarely on that hard, engorged cockhead. She whimpered.

"Not yet, Mia," Fyodor said. An indulgent chuckle laced its way beneath his words. "Now."

And then they were climbing onto the table with her, encircling her. She could smell each of them; Halvar's tangy, almost smoky scent, like dried leaves in autumn; Sergei's darker, earthier aroma. A smell like tanned leather -- that was Marcus -- and the clean, slightly salty smell of Jude's lithe, lean body, reminding her of the ocean. Damon, his cock nudging her right shoulder, had a scent like warm bed sheets, recently used.

Sharply, she remembered the taste of his come in her mouth, and turned her head sideways, seeking -- but Halvar, kneeling in front of her, buried his hands in her hair, forcing her face back toward the thick, turgid cock springing from his nest of golden curls. The satiny skin was stretched tight over the twin mounds of his cockhead, and Mia stared, entranced, at the gaping slit between.

On her left side, Jude grasped her shoulder, lifting her, as Damon did the same on her right, supporting the weight of her torso between them so she could raise her hands, wrap them around their jutting shafts. Jude's was heavily veined, the beat of his

pulse hot and heavy against her palm. Damon's, smoother, slid into her grasp like velvet over iron, throbbing slightly as she squeezed.

Below her, Sergei's hands came up to cup her breasts, squeezing them together even as Halvar tugged her head forward, rubbing the slick pearls of his precome across her open lips. Sergei's thick, heavy erection nudged against her folds, and she sighed -- then gasped as she felt Marcus slide his fingers around Sergei's cockhead, gathering the liquid spilling from her waiting cunt and spreading it instead around her puckered sphincter.

Quivering, she held herself absolutely still, her mind a blank, roaring emptiness of lust that ratcheted up even higher as Marcus forced her knees further apart, spreading them till fire shot along the tendons in her groin. Then she felt the steady, insistent pressure of his cock against her ass, forcing her slowly open.

Jesus! She opened her mouth to beg, to plead -- *no, no, it's too much, it's too...* Immediately, Halvar rocked forward, fisting his hands in her hair as he plunged his cock into her mouth. Automatically, Mia curled her lips over her teeth, sucking that hot, throbbing shaft deeper, flicking her tongue over the hard, curving tip. Halvar groaned, and thrust in harder.

Nor was that all. Below her, Sergei arched his powerful hips upward, spearing her in one deep, jabbing lunge. The sudden fullness made her moan, her voice vibrating around Halvar's cock, and she tasted a first salty pulse of come. Halvar froze above her, clamping his hands in her hair, holding her head still as he fought back the orgasm that throbbed in his loins, an orgasm Mia knew she could ignite with just one swallow, just one single flick of her tongue.

Instead, she held herself rigid, her hands pausing their steady tugging on the shafts that pulsed, hard and yet satiny like smooth, polished steel, against her palms. Her crotch was pressed firmly against Sergei's pubic bone, his cock buried in her up to the balls. In that moment of stillness, with Sergei's fingers clamped around her burning nipples and Halvar's erection flexing in the wet heat of her mouth, Mia realized Halvar was not the only one who was one flick of stimulation away from hitting climax.

Her clit, mashed against the iron plane of Sergei's abs, was throbbing so hard she could feel it. Her cunt was already spasming, gripping that thick shaft that filled her so deliciously. Then Marcus's hands gripped her asscheeks, spreading them wider, and with one hard, determined shove, his cock muscled past her tight sphincter and pushed deep into her ass.

Christ! The sensation was overwhelming. Gripping her hips, his whole body straining, Marcus pressed deeper, deeper, until Mia thought she would pass out. His cock invaded her, doubling the pressure on her clit as he forced her harder against Sergei's groin. Sergei growled, deep in his throat, as the pressure on his cock increased, too. His fingers moved ceaselessly over her nipples, teasing, tugging, tormenting, and Mia quivered, tears of longing streaming down her cheeks, feeling herself poised between them, almost floating, pinned in mouth and cunt and ass by the fiery, steel-hard shafts buried in her shuddering flesh.

The need inside her spiraled upward, flaring into a silent, white-hot explosion that shook her, over and over, her cunt spasming uncontrollably as saliva flooded her mouth, making her swallow again and again as Halvar groaned in agony, tugging painfully at her hair as he fought to hold back, as *all* of them fought to hold back, holding themselves as still as statues as she trembled and shook, waves of ecstasy pouring through her again and again until at last she hung limply, shuddering, even more intensely aware of their cocks buried inside her flesh as the echoes of her climax slowly subsided.

"Yes," Fyodor murmured, his voice more than ever like a storm in the distance, rumbling with the wildness to come. "Now fuck her. Fuck her till she screams in bliss."

A delicious quiver ran through Mia, hearing both the threat and the promise in his tone. Slowly, driven by her orgasm into an even more heightened arousal, the five men began fucking her.

Glancing up at Halvar's handsome face, Mia could see the laxness of his features, the complete, almost mindless intensity with which he pushed into her, sliding his cock back and forth in the delirium of a need grown so intense it was almost painful. It was

the same for the others, she could tell. Marcus's hands trembled on her hips as he plunged steadily, rhythmically, into her ass. Sergei, letting Marcus's motions pull her up and down the length of his shaft, kneaded her breasts with distracted savagery, his attention all turned inward to the sweet agony growing in his groin.

The sharp jolts of pain as he twisted her nipples reawakened Mia's own hunger, and she began asserting herself, pushing back against Marcus's thrusts, inviting him deeper. Growling deep in his throat, he took the invitation, ramming himself into her until his balls brushed her labia. Lust blazed through her like wildfire as she pictured his scrotum pressed against Sergei's, their balls rubbing together as their cocks moved inside her. From the sudden gasp Sergei let out, she could tell what it did to him.

Smiling around the shaft in her mouth, Mia let go her grip on Damon's and Jude's cocks long enough to reach for their hands, guide them down till they closed them over their erections. Then, snaking her fingers beneath theirs, she dragged her fingernails over the swell of their balls, reveling in their heaviness, before wrapping her hands again around their shafts, feeling them move to cover her hands with theirs. They clamped down, forcing her to squeeze their cocks tighter, dragging her fists up and down with a frenzy that made her hornier still.

Turning her attention to Halvar, she lashed her tongue over his engorged head, jabbing deep into the tender slit at the tip. He bucked, and a fresh spurt of precome flooded her mouth, hot and tangy. Swallowing it, she stretched her neck forward, bobbing her head back and forth along that slick, pulsing shaft. Groaning, Halvar tightened his grip on her hair and, teasingly, Mia pulled her head back.

Just as she'd hoped, his self-control crumbled. He grabbed her roughly, thrusting his hips forward as he slammed his cock into her, fucking her mouth with a savagery that sent shockwaves straight through her. Damon's hand closed as tight as a vise, rubbing her hand over his cock with a mindless determination. Jude's groans spiraled upward, growing harsher as his balls drew up tight against his groin, aching with the semen pulsing inside.

Arching her back, Mia spread her legs wider, and Marcus pistoned his cock in and out of her ass, teasing her rectum till she squeezed it tight around him. He roared, slamming his cock home, and Mia felt the first hot pulse of come flood her tight passage. Gliding on that slickness, he fucked her ass mercilessly, pumping spurt after spurt of semen deep, deep inside her. Between her spread legs, she felt Sergei's balls tighten, and then he was pounding up into her, lifting her clear off the table as his hands seized her breasts, trapping her nipples tightly between his knuckles.

The sensation was too much, and Mia moaned as Halvar dragged her face hard against his groin, his cock pulsing deep in her mouth as he jerked and bucked, his groans like heady music in her ears.

Finally spent, he released her, and Mia raised her torso up even as Sergei's peak hit him and he grabbed her hips. Tugging Damon and Jude toward her, she rubbed their cockheads over her nipples, then let go to slide one hand down to her throbbing clit, rubbing it hard as they savaged their cocks, their faces clenching in ecstasy as their orgasms burst from them, their semen shooting in thick, liquid jets over her full, round breasts.

Entranced, Halvar leaned forward, bending from the waist as he ran his tongue through their mingled juices, sucking greedily at the hard, furrowed point of her nipple even as Mia slammed herself downward. Her cunt clenched around Sergei's shaft, and then the white, roaring ecstasy was flooding through her again, blotting out everything, even the sound of her high, wordless screams.

Shuddering, she slumped forward, feeling gentle hands catch her, feeling Marcus withdraw carefully from her throbbing rectum. Her bones seemed to have melted; she couldn't even summon the energy to open her eyes.

A breath tickled her cheek, gusting lightly through her tangled hair like a warm summer wind. It was soothing somehow, like the arms that supported her, and she leaned toward that breath as easily and unselfconsciously as a child dropping her head to a warm, protective shoulder.

Then the voice, the voice that was like distant thunder, like the soft, velvet growl of a panther, whispered low and intent, right in her ear, “Yes. Oh, yes. You like that, Mia. You like that, don’t you?”

Chapter Six

What the fuck?

Fyodor watched, appalled, as Mia appeared literally to turn to stone. The blood drained from her face as her limbs stiffened involuntarily. The skin of her back, which had been so warm under his hand only a second ago, almost blazing with the heat of her passion, turned cold. Her eyes were glazed, staring at nothing.

No, Fyodor thought. Not at nothing. At him.

The man who had hurt her. Whoever he'd been.

In that moment, Fyodor could happily have torn his throat out.

"Mia," he whispered urgently. A shudder passed through her. Christ! How could her skin be so cold so quickly?

Sergei, still beneath her, started to move, and Fyodor shook his head sharply. Whatever memory she was trapped in, the last thing he wanted to do was jolt her out of it.

"Mia," he whispered again. "Mia, what is it?"

What had he said? What had he done to trigger this reaction? Casting his mind back, Fyodor fought to remember. It was difficult -- the moments just past were a haze, overspread by the arousal that had seared through him as he'd watched her, trapped by the cocks that impaled her, suspended between them seemingly in midair, like a bird or an acrobat.

He had never seen anything so beautiful in his life.

The arousal was still there, pulsing through his distended balls, throbbing along the length of his straining shaft, but he pushed it away ruthlessly, searching his mind.

Oh, yes. You like that, Mia. You like that, don't you?

Somehow, those words had thrust her down into the nightmare of her worst memories. She shuddered again beneath his palm, every muscle in her body quivering as if with hypothermia.

"Mia?" He stroked her back, shook her shoulder lightly. She didn't even notice. He could, he knew, force her out of whatever held her, could jar her back to reality -- but at what cost? Instinctively, he sensed the battle raging inside her, even though he couldn't begin to guess at the stakes.

She needed something -- not a jolt, but a *trigger*.

Fyodor's eyes widened in comprehension. Dropping his voice back to the same low, growling murmur, he repeated, demanding, "Oh, you like that, Mia, don't you? Don't you? Don't you?"

She reared up, tearing herself from his grip, seeming utterly unaware of anyone else around her. Her eyes were wide, unfocused, her face clenched in frenzy. Staring at him wildly, she bared her teeth and shrieked, "*Yes!*"

Her scream went on and on, ripping from her throat as if torn from the very roots of her soul. Furiously, she launched herself at him, her fists flailing against his silk-covered chest. Holding himself deathly still, Fyodor let her hit him over and over as she screamed in his face, "Yes, damn you! Yes! All right? Is that what you wanted, Kyle? *Is that what you wanted to know?*"

* * *

She raged at him, swearing, striking out -- and yet he didn't react. Didn't laugh as he'd done so many times, watching her twist bitterly on the twin spikes of desire and humiliation he'd impaled her on. Nor did he thrust her down, inflamed by her anguish, to mount her as she cried, hating him, hating herself more for responding to his touch.

No, he merely watched her with a dark, silent compassion that shattered her soul. Something inside her seemed to crumple, and Mia dropped her fists uselessly, bursting into sobs as Fyodor closed his arms around her, lifting her gently off Sergei. She cried out as his cock slid from her, leaving her empty, so empty...

She'd been empty for years.

Horried, Mia stared at the reality of what Kyle had done to her; how he'd turned her very body against her, trapping her in a hell from which she could find no escape but to repudiate her own deepest desires.

And it was Fyodor who'd freed her from that hell.

Distantly, through her tears, she saw Marcus, his warm hazel eyes dark with concern, reach out to help Fyodor lift her. Even in her hysteria, she was shocked to hear a snarl rumble deep in Fyodor's throat. He clasped her almost greedily to his chest, snarling until Marcus backed off, his eyes wide. Then Fyodor cradled her against him, whispering low, soothing words that she barely heard over her sobs. "Shh. Shh, Mia. It's all right. You're safe now."

Slowly, the storm of tears eased. Her ragged breathing grew easier, until she could only lie, gasping, in Fyodor's arms, listening to the slow, steady pounding of his heartbeat beneath her cheek.

How could he hold her like that? Like she was precious, special, like she was *worth* something after everything Kyle had done to her? She felt his lips brush the top of her head, felt his hands stroking her softly, heard him murmur gentle, reassuring words until at last she hung limply, able to do nothing but feel his warmth surrounding her, soaking into her, easing the sore, tired places in her heart.

Finally, she raised her head slightly, sliding her arms about his neck. "Tell me why," she whispered. "Oh, please, tell me why it matters so much."

She felt him open his mouth, start to speak, check abruptly. He swallowed twice, his throat muscles working against her cheek. He whispered hesitantly, "Because I... Because --"

Then his entire body clenched in a spasm of pain.

* * *

Smoke, pouring from the thatch. Flames leap up. There is screaming. The high, piercing whinny of a terrified horse.

In the darkness, shapes move, people scurry in terror. The smoke rolls over everything, he cannot see her, he cannot see... And then she is pounding toward him,

her face washed by firelight, her hair streaming out behind her, and he runs, runs as he never has before in his life...

But always, always, the Cossack is faster. He is too close, and Fyodor cannot reach her before the heavy leather glove closes on the long, chestnut strands of her beautiful hair. The soldier yanks her backward, sneering over her shoulder at Fyodor as he spins her to him, one hand seizing the front of her blouse, ripping it open, while the other raises a curved, shining sword, a warning to the anguished young man he mistakes for a peasant.

Anastasia screams, flailing away from the hand that grabs at her flesh, pawing the warm, white curves of her breasts through the gaping tear in her ruined blouse. And even as Fyodor, ignoring the warning, closes the last yards between them, she lashes out, her nails raking four bloody lines down the Cossack's heavy, soot-smeared cheek, and then stares, her eyes widening suddenly in a deeper terror.

She spins away and tries to flee as he bellows with rage, but the sword plunges forward -- Fyodor sees it gleam for a second where it protrudes from her belly -- and then she is falling toward him, into his arms, and he pleads with her desperately as she shakes her head and shakes her head and then she does not shake her head any more.

The sword plunges again, but now it is the Cossack who screams as Fyodor rises, the sudden agony in his gut nothing, nothing at all compared to the fire in his heart, rises and wrenches the sword from his own body and tosses it aside. The Cossack screams and screams, and his screams do not stop until Fyodor tears his throat open and lets him crumple to the ground without even bothering to watch him fall. He is the first, only the first, of the men who will die tonight -- but the fire inside Fyodor does not die, has never died, it burns even now as he opens his mouth and he is...

* * *

He was roaring, his head tossed back, his body locked in a spasm of rage and grief that left her silent, staring. His arms were clenched around her so tight it hurt -- but Mia knew he wasn't seeing her, wasn't feeling her. She didn't move, didn't struggle, shocked into stillness by the frenzy pounding through him.

Dear God, what had *happened* to him to cause such anguish?

Glancing at Halvar, she read a mute, helpless knowledge in his handsome face, in the way his jaw gritted and his hands tightened into fists at his sides. The others shifted uncomfortably, as stunned as she was by that fierce, primal roar. There was no softness left in Fyodor, no gentleness, nothing but the pure screaming fury of a man whose life has just been irretrievably shattered.

"Fyodor," she whispered. "Oh, Fyodor."

But he couldn't hear her. His gaze was turned inward, toward whatever black, hellish past contained such pain. He was no more aware of her than he was of the room around them, the awkward, silent men, the very pool table he leaned against with her clenched in his arms.

No words could reach him, could pierce the iron grip of his agony. What could, then?

Tremulously, her heart thudding in her chest, Mia slid her fingers into the dark, disordered mass of his hair. *At last*, some small part of her whispered, reveling in the touch of it, tangled and soft as thistledown against her palms. Desperately, she pulled his head down to her even as she stretched up, brushing her mouth over the stony hardness of his jaw, his cheekbones, his taut, open lips, over and over till at last, with a sob, he dragged her savagely against him, still growling into her mouth even as he kissed her.

The silk of his shirt whispered under her hands as she slid them to his chest, feeling the mighty heart laboring beneath the firm, rolling muscles. The small black curls coating his pecs tickled her palms as she eased it open, sliding it back over his massive shoulders. With a roar, he reared back from her, tearing it off. Immediately, he claimed her mouth again, one hand reaching down to unsnap his pants as he forced her down onto the table behind her.

Her elbow jarred against the hard slate under the felt, but Mia didn't care. Reaching up, she drew Fyodor down toward her as his hand worked at his pants, baring that huge, curving shaft she'd only felt, not seen. Bringing her legs up, she

wrapped them around his waist, crossing her ankles behind the hard muscles of his ass, urging him down on top of her, *into* her...

He froze, the smooth, rounded tip of his cock nudging her entrance, his entire body going stiff as he sought to withdraw, to control himself, to contain his fury.

"No," Mia whispered frantically. "No, Fyodor, *please*. Take me. Use me. Fyodor, *I am yours*."

Something flickered in the black depths of his eyes, and then his head snapped back on his neck as he howled like a beast and slammed into her, his shaft spearing like a lightning bolt straight to her core. A fierce, electric ecstasy seared through her, and she bucked beneath him, urging him on, her arms twining determinedly around his neck as if trying to hold a hurricane.

Like a storm, he broke over her, his massive body buffeting hers, his breath gusting in her ear. He hammered down into her, splitting her open, filling her so deep Mia wondered dazedly in some part of her mind if she'd ever be able to walk again. But her body exulted in the frenzy of his passion, arching up to meet him as he rammed himself home, till his hard, heavy balls were pressed against her.

She could feel the tension gathering inside him like the slow, inexorable drive of a tsunami, and tried to brace herself, knowing all the while that it was impossible -- how could she brace herself against such elemental passion? It would shatter her utterly, she thought breathlessly, but couldn't find the strength to care.

His pubic bone ground against her clit, sending shudders through her with each punishing stroke. He fucked her with a vengeance that made her head spin, made her blood sing in her ears until she could feel nothing but his body above hers, crushing her, claiming her. She drew him down harder, her fingers clawing his back, riding him as the frenzy inside him crested, flared for one second like a sun going nova, and then crashed down over her, *into* her.

Moaning, she clung to him as her cunt clenched around him, drawing him even deeper. His cock pulsed inside her, flooding her with jet after jet of his come. Mia cried out as her orgasm lanced through her, snapping her head back as she screamed. Their

bodies were melded together, breasts mashed against his broad, powerful chest, belly pressed tight against hard, rippled abs, her arms laced around his neck, legs intertwined. She could feel his balls throbbing, sending a last spurt of semen deep into her cunt, and then he slumped onto her, spent and gasping.

She felt flayed, hollowed out, her bones turned to water. Somehow, she raised one hand to his hair, trailed it limply down over his black, tangled locks. Opening her eyes, she saw the others gathered close around them, their eyes wide and wondering. It didn't bother her -- it seemed appropriate, even, that they should have watched. Her lips curled in a small, exhausted smile as she met Halvar's gaze. His blue eyes softened, and he returned her smile.

Then Fyodor shifted slightly above her, and she turned her smile up toward him. His black eyes, though, didn't smile back, and Mia felt all the warmth inside her turn suddenly to ice.

* * *

He had honestly believed he could never care about anyone ever again. Fyodor stared down at her, shattered to the core by what she had done. She had taken all his rage, all his fury, and turned it into a desire so overwhelming he'd thought his heart might shatter with the force of his climax.

She hadn't been afraid. The emotions that had ravaged him so deeply he'd simply locked away, unable to bear them, she had borne unflinchingly, holding him in the shelter of her arms, in the sweetness of her body, as they'd torn from their prison, pounding through him, through *her*...

She had done that. Mia.

And now he would let her go.

"Mia..."

His hair had tumbled down across his forehead, disordered by their lovemaking. Gently, Mia pushed it back. Fyodor grimaced, closing his eyes. "Mia, no."

She froze, her hand paused midair, her expression carefully guarded -- but he saw the naked longing in her eyes. "No what?"

"Mia, it's not... It's not a gift, being a vampire. It's a curse. I don't... Please don't ask me to do that to you." He opened his eyes again, knowing they were full of a terrible yearning.

* * *

She'd forgotten. She had honestly forgotten what had first drawn her down here. Staring up at him, Mia tried to remember why she'd wanted what seemed like such absolute power. For the life of her, she couldn't -- the angry, twisted vengeance which had driven her for so long was gone like mist in the morning light.

He had done that. Fyodor. How could she possibly leave him?

"No. Don't make me go. Don't make me leave here," she whispered, pleading.

"Mia..."

He wasn't going to do it. She could hear it in his tone. He cared for her, yes, but because of that he would refuse to do what he'd promised. He cared, but only enough to send her away. And she wanted him to keep her forever.

"Fine." Pushing him off her, she squirmed out from beneath him and slid from the table, feeling a sudden blaze of anger. Her heart was cracking like an old china plate, and he -- he wasn't even *looking* at her. She could feel Marcus's gaze on her, and Halvar's. Damon's, Sergei's, Jude's -- but not Fyodor's.

Damn him anyway, then.

"Fine. You don't want me?" Snatching up her discarded clothes, she turned to Damon, drawing herself upright. "Then how about you, Damon, do you want me?" He didn't need to answer -- she could see his renewed erection, rising from the auburn nest of his pubic hair. He opened his mouth, but she spun away.

"What about you, Jude?" Jude's eyes, clear as water, widened, his nostrils flaring. She glanced over at Sergei, curling her lips into a hard smile. He smiled back, the sharp, dangerous grin of a predator. From the corner of her eye, she could see Fyodor sitting on the edge of the pool table, his black eyes hard as he watched her.

Brazenly, Mia dropped her gathered clothes to the floor, stalked across the room toward Marcus, whose hazel eyes widened in alarm -- and hunger. "And you, Marcus?

If he doesn't want me, will you take me instead?" Marcus paled, drawing back as she slid up against him, but his cock twitched against her belly. She cocked her head, smiling through the tears stinging her eyes, and slowly, tentatively, he smiled back.

Whirling to Halvar, Mia raised her chin, her glare challenging him. "Halvar. Tell me. What about you?"

"Enough!" Fyodor roared as he rose to his feet, seeming to fill the entire room with his simmering rage. "Enough, woman! Will you tear my heart from my chest?"

Mia stared, knowing her jaw was hanging open but unable to close it, feeling her knees quake as he towered over her, his black, brooding gaze burning down into hers. "You do not understand," he snarled. "If a vampire takes you, you belong to him utterly. Your soul is his forever. I may choose to share your body, Mia, if I so desire, but do you truly believe for even one second that I will let another possess your soul?"

Mia felt her mouth move in a small, silent *Oh*. Fyodor smiled grimly. "Are you so certain, then, that you want this? You want an eternity of exile, spent always in hiding, never seeing the sun?" His lips pulled back in a feral smile, revealing a glimpse of long, sharp white fangs. "Is that what you want, Mia? Because, God help you, you'll get it."

"I want it," she whispered.

He seized her, his strong fingers digging painfully into the flesh of her arms. "Why? Tell me why, then."

"Tell me why it matters."

"It matters because I love you." He glared at her, his body quivering with tension, his breath laboring in his chest. She was panting too, Mia realized, her body almost shimmering with longing. "I love you when I thought I would never love anything again." With a growl that rose from deep in his throat, he pulled her toward him, his head bending down to hers, his lips savaging her mouth, her chin, the soft, smooth skin of her throat...

"Tell me you want this," he whispered fiercely, his voice harsh in her ear, his fangs scratching lightly at her tender skin. "Beg me to take you, to possess you forever."

"Yes," she whispered breathlessly. "Oh yes, Fyodor, please. Take me. Make me yours. Do whatever you wish with me."

Oh, dear God, she thought faintly as he sank his fangs home, *this is one more thing the movies got right.* Ecstasy shuddered through her as he sucked at her throat. She trembled as he drank straight from her life force, consuming her, drawing her into his body, into his world. The power inside him surged upward, overwhelming, sending waves of erotic heat flaring through her, building deep in her womb even as his energy grew, and grew, and grew...

Gasping, she arched against him, her body spasming as warm, golden bliss exploded in her veins, making her cunt contract fiercely even as Fyodor lifted his head up and roared, his arms clamping around her, her blood coating his lips.

As the tremors of their joining slowly eased, Fyodor gazed down at her, his chest still heaving. Wonderingly, Mia lifted a trembling hand, touched a finger to his lips, and brought it back to her mouth, tasting her own blood. It was sweet. Almost irresistibly sweet.

Then she dropped her head to his shoulder, sighing in contentment as his arms cradled her gently. After a moment, he chuckled, the sound rumbling through his chest. "You shouldn't tease them like that, you know." Mia glanced up, and he nodded toward the others.

Their fangs had lengthened, gleaming in the soft light -- as had their cocks, she saw. Mia laughed delightedly, and snuggled deeper into Fyodor's arms. "Then I guess you'll have to order me never to do it again."

"No," he murmured, his voice rough with power and renewed desire. "I think I'd better order you to do it again, right now."

Any time you want, Mia thought deliriously, trembling at the thought of their hands upon her. Fyodor turned her back toward him, lowering his mouth to hers with a hunger that made her gasp and quiver. *For now and forever, Fyodor, I am yours.*

Sierra Dafoe

Sierra Dafoe published her first erotic romance with Changeling Press in May of 2006, and hasn't stopped since! Named a Rising Star of Romance in July by Love Romances and More, she received three 2006 CAPA nominations including Favorite Erotic Author (a fact which still has her stunned!)

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