

SIREN PUBLISHING

Lara Santiago

THE EXECUTIVE'S WIFE
THE WIVES TALES



SEX RATING: SIZZLING/SCORCHING

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SIREN SEX Rating

SENSUAL: Sensual romance with love scenes comparative to most romance novels published today

STEAMY: Heavy sexual tension; graphic details; may contain coarse language

SIZZLING: Erotic, graphic sex; explicit sexual language; may offend delicate readers

SCORCHING: Erotica; contains many sexual encounters; may contain unconventional sex; will offend delicate readers

SEXTREME: Excessiveness; many instances of unconventional sex; may be hardcore; not for the faint-hearted

Lara Santiago

The Wives Tales, Book 2

The Miner's Wife : The Executive's Wife : The Lawman's Wife

The Executive pays a fortune to wed, the Lawman pays a pittance to marry, and the Miner fights an enemy for his bride. Three women auctioned off to genetically bred strangers in separate venues are uniquely destined to discover love in unusual places.

Note: Each book is written to stand alone.

"With intriguing plots, sassy heroines, scrumptious heroes, and scorch-your-fingertips sex, Lara Santiago's Wives Tales books should be on every reader's must-have list." —Leslie Kelly, Award Winning Author

The Executive Wife

In the year 2076, the Tiberius Group invades all aspects of society, taking over and implementing a new plan for the good of all U.S. citizens, especially the females.

Sophie Brent loses her job at Westland Industries and is put up for auction in a corporate venue of former peers. She's the record high bid and soon-to-be-bride of the worst lecher in the company, until her boss outbids all and saves her.

Matt Westland spends a fortune to marry his former employee, Sophie. He has wanted her since a delicious incident under the mistletoe at Christmas. Secretly in love with him, Sophie is an all-too-willing partner in Matt's passionate seduction, and the two fall madly in love.

Unfortunately, Matt's power-hungry father will stop at nothing to get rid of Sophie and find a more politically connected wife to ensure that his son becomes the next president of the United States.

THE EXECUTIVE'S WIFE

The Wives Tales, Book 2

Lara Santiago



Siren Publishing, Inc.

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The Executive's Wife

The Wives Tales, Book 2

By Lara Santiago

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Prologue

*Christmastime, Earth
In the year 2075*

The wicked incident, which changed her life forever, happened just before Christmas. It was Sophie Brent's last day of work before she embarked on a long awaited holiday vacation with her family. Her very last act for this particular calendar year at work was the mandatory Westland Industries Christmas celebration.

It was her first such event, having only worked for the company for six months. The spectacular event materialized with much pomp and circumstance in the grand ballroom, which took up the entire eighth floor. What a luxury, she thought. An entire floor devoted just to in-house celebrations.

The party was in full swing by the time she made her way down from the Logistics department. Sophie was a very bottom rung junior executive. She stepped off the elevator and into the chaotic din of holiday revelers dancing, eating, drinking and generally having a drunken good time. It was hard not to be swept up in the magic of the holiday spirit. No expense had been spared to create a Christmas paradise transforming the entire floor into another world.

Westland Industries was a premiere import export business headquartered in the

heartland of the U. S. and had connections everywhere in the world. They had access to every type of exotic goods from every continent around the world. It seemed to Sophie as though everything available with a Christmas theme was displayed here tonight.

No one seemed to notice her entry, and that was just fine with her. She was probably the last to grace the party with her presence. She looked around for her supervisor. She needed to be seen by him and make enough of an impression that her presence would be noted, as this was a mandatory function.

She was also on the lookout for Orin Prichard, the senior sales VP and resident leech. He was someone she needed to avoid tonight. Sober, he was a handful. Drunk, she imagined it would be harder to give his blatant advances the big brush off. And she certainly didn't want to get caught alone with him. He'd tried to corner her against his desk on her very auspicious first day, but luckily, someone had saved her.

Someone wonderful. Someone yummy.

There was no need to dwell on that unattainable dream now. Mr. Yummy was not hers, nor would he ever be. She sighed wistfully, studying the extravagant decorations and lively atmosphere enjoyed by the very well-dressed crowd in attendance. Sophie strolled through the magical expensive themed version of winter wonderland, marveling and absorbing the sheer ambience of the room encompassing her.

The party designers had transformed the space into a giant white tundra with lots of white background and ice sculpture for the backdrop, then distracted the entire visual with detailed groupings of bright colored holiday scenes strewn about the room as if in orderly chaotic fashion. Everyone in the company was expected to dress to the nines for this annual overindulgent celebration.

Sophie was no exception, and to that end, she wore the only cocktail dress she owned, a sexy black halter number that her sister Hannah had talked her into buying from a clearance rack at a fancy department store the summer before. She brushed imaginary lint off her skirt, not caring that it was technically last year's fashion.

The texture of the soft black velvet made her feel very sophisticated and boosted her confidence a notch, as if mere rich fabric could transform her from the poor little girl from the wrong side of the tracks into a desirable debutante worthy of a man's regard.

Lord, she'd been reading too many fanciful romance novels of late. But she didn't care because it was the holidays and she should be able to indulge herself. She could dream about being more desirable to men, if she wanted.

Or to one man in particular.

Perhaps if she got tipsy enough, she might even get the guts and pretend to be a seductress. As a seductress, she could approach and speak to the object of her deep-seated fantasies. Heaving a deep sigh, she headed for the punch bowl for a booster shot of courage. She'd overheard a conversation a while back that the punch bowl was always spiked at this annual event. All the better.

After the first delicious glass, she found herself ladling out two more cups in rapid succession, consuming them one right after the other. The warm glow generated by the alcohol made her feel lighter, happier, and practically giddy. She grabbed a fourth cup

and pretended to circulate around the party to admire the decorations, but in reality, she watched for *him*.

As if choreographed in advance, the object of her sincere desire and repeated star of all her erotic fantasies entered the party from the bank of executive suite elevators. Matthew Westland, CEO and owner of Westland Industries, AKA Mr. Yummy, was now in attendance.

She stared at him surreptitiously as she gravitated back to the punch bowl. Snagging another cup of courage, she headed in his general direction to get a better look. Matthew circulated through the party, greeting his employees one after another, never once catching her eye or seeing her stare at him probably like a lovesick teenager. Why would he? He could have anyone he wanted. He surely did. There were rumors of customary late night trysts in his office with rich debutantes.

Sophie wished to be a debutante just once, so she could gain access to his private domain and find out for herself what went on behind closed doors with Matthew Westland. She concluded in her semi-drunken state that wicked decadent wonderful things took place at the hands of Mr. Yummy. She made a vow as she swallowed her last bit of her punch. She vowed to discover his most private secrets...someday.

Sophie lowered her glass with her wishful, decadent reverie still fresh and looked directly into the soulful gaze of the object of her desire. He was surrounded by a group of senior level executives. He watched her staring no doubt salaciously at him over the rim of yet another empty glass. The warmth of the smile he expressed in return, along with the sizeable amount of liquor in her system, prevented her from turning her gaze away and pretending indifference, as she would normally have done.

Indifference was replaced easily by her grinning, probably like a drunken Cheshire cat. She allowed her eyes to travel from the top of his head all the way down to the expensive shoes he wore, stopping for an extra second or two at the space below his belt. She'd heard rumors about *that*, too.

He stared back at her as if she were the only other person in the room. She watched him excuse himself and make his way towards her, and she snapped back to reality. Her smile faded momentarily. She stood there like a marble figurine with stage fright and waited for him to come to her.

The golden highlights in his brown hair caught the dancing lights of Christmas surrounding them and made her itch to bury her fingers in his wavy locks. His sapphire blue eyes distracted her momentarily with a look intense enough to hypnotize, until he flashed her a million dollar smile. Damn, he was fine. She grinned again in return.

She knew she didn't really have a chance with him, and not only because he was the boss and she truly needed her job, but also because they had disparate backgrounds. However, she just wanted to dream a little. It was Christmas after all, and with all the alcohol in her system, she decided she was due. She smiled and waited anxiously for him to get closer. The utterly magnificent scent of him hit her first, like a lustful punch to her libido.

"Merry Christmas," he said, stepping dangerously into her personal space. His hand grazed her shoulder in friendly greeting. Her heartbeat skipped once at the sensation

of his touch on her bare skin. Her eyes traveled up to the gorgeous face of the man she'd been drooling over for months.

"Merry Christmas yourself," she laughed then of course lost her balance stumbling heavily into his tall, muscular frame. Her four-inch, 'fuck-me' heels were new and drinking apparently didn't help her walk in them.

Matt caught her up in a one armed rescue. Nice build, she thought as she placed her hand on his chest then ran it up and down slightly to feel a pectoral underneath his suit. His arm remained in place around her waist as if to continue to steady her and she almost stopped breathing.

"Are you having a good time tonight?" he asked, seemingly unconcerned about her flagrant flirting or her hand on his very delicious person.

"Of course, it's a party," she told him. She laughed for no reason, unable to stop herself. She was drunk enough to be uninhibited, but sober enough to know she shouldn't be this close to Matthew Westland. Later she'd have plenty of time to curse the one percent of her mind warning her about the stupidity she displayed. But for the here and now, the other ninety-nine percent of her inebriated brain thought she sounded very witty. Mr. Yummy didn't seem to notice.

He exuded the aura of the quintessential successful executive. He was rich, powerful, and magnetic. And he smelled decadently good, too. Sophie leaned in and took a deep breath near the front of his shirt, inhaling his scent. She closed her eyes in shameless appreciation and made her own yummy noise, then smiled into his amused face realizing she'd just sniffed her boss. She laughed joyfully, too far gone on liquor to care about impropriety.

At her amusement, a slightly predatory gaze came onto his handsome face. She felt her lips part, as if making a wish. She studied his luscious mouth with eager fascination. If he leaned down to kiss her right now, she wouldn't stop him. Hell, she'd probably require surgical intervention to pry her lips from his.

"Matt!" a voice called from the loud party. He glanced over his shoulder to nod at the VP of Marketing, breaking the trance-like stare between them. When he focused his gaze back at her again, the spell was broken. Sophie sobered up a little and took a step away, realizing she couldn't be trusted with Matthew Westland, not even in a room full of people.

"I hope you have a very Merry Christmas, Sophie." He stepped away. The look of disappointment on his face touched her. She loved hearing him say her name.

"Merry Christmas to you, too, Mr. Westland."

"Call me Matthew." He flashed a grin before she left his pheromone range.

"Merry Christmas, Matthew," she whispered.

She needed to get far, far away, before her black velvet dress, which now surely smoldered, burst into flames. She exited the loud party to hide and wait for her pre-arranged taxi in the parking garage. She snagged one last very full glass of spiked punch for her journey as a consolation prize.

She slipped away, hopefully unnoticed, retrieved her purse from her office, and made her way to the bottom floor. All the way down in the elevator, she mentally banged her head against a wall for her audacious behavior in between gulps of punch. God, this stuff was great. She resisted the urge to hit the up button in the elevator and go back for more. But she couldn't because *he* was there, and she'd only want more of *him*, too.

The doors to the elevator opened with a cheerful “ding” to an empty vestibule in the basement. The tile floor, when she stepped past the doors, echoed with the clacking sound of her ‘fuck-me,’ four-inch, black velvet pumps. The ones she'd spent entirely too much money on to match her last year's clearance designer dress.

Sophie sighed and drained her red plastic cup of spiked punch. It sent a fresh warm feeling down her throat, blazing a final path of holiday spirit all the way to her stomach. She should have eaten more—correction—she should have eaten something. Her oversized cup was now empty, but the buzz of alcohol filled her up nicely. She exited the elevator vestibule to the connecting hallway leading to the parking garage.

A huge sign hung on the wall, pointing to the right of the T-shaped hallway directing the elevator occupants helpfully to the parking area. She dropped her cup in the trashcan and turned to the right at the T to head for the garage. She wasn't quite walking straight, which made her giggle all the way to the parking garage door.

She shivered, realizing it was freezing in the hallway. Damn. She'd forgotten her jacket. Glancing at her watch, which blurred slightly when she tried to keep her wrist steady, she decided she didn't have enough time to retrieve it from her office. She'd pick up another at her apartment when she collected her luggage for her trip later tonight.

Sophie heard the ding of the elevator behind her as she stood watching the blustery wind outside fretfully blow a scrap of newspaper around the street. She'd freeze her ass off once she stepped outside, but better frozen than to chance running into her boss again. If she went on a search to retrieve her jacket and ran into him again, she might get more than she bargained for...and so might he.

“Sophie?” A deep voice full of surprise came from behind her. Matthew Westland, AKA Mr. Yummy, spoke a single word and his sultry voice made her panties dampen.

She turned, not believing her boss stood there. He didn't say anything else. His gaze raked her from head to toe, as if he couldn't believe she was standing there in damp undies, either. Unimaginable need engulfed her as another hot rush of moisture shot into her underwear at his intense regard, with the unmistakable Pavlov's dog response to hearing a bell.

He pocketed what she presumed were his keys when she heard the jingle. He pierced her with an interested gaze before he glanced above her head and smiled that beautiful million-dollar smile. She looked up, and for the first time, saw what amused him. She also smiled. He dropped his head, pierced her with a seductive gaze, and closed the distance between them in a few long strides of his powerful, muscular legs.

Someone had placed mistletoe above the door. Maybe he'd done it, using the holiday tradition as an excuse to do something wild and wicked to a virtual stranger, or a lovesick employee, along a deserted hallway in the name of mistletoe.

Matthew didn't say another word. He just lowered his head and kissed her as she'd never been kissed in her life. His hand palmed the back of her head. His lips danced across hers at first before she felt the tip of his tongue on her all-too-willing lips.

Sophie, so shocked at the whole experience unfolding like a fantasy from her most recent sleep-deprived dreams, opened her mouth for him. She didn't stop him, as she should have. Not only didn't she stop him, she participated with much enthusiasm. The spiked punch was no longer the only factor in her decision-making. She just wanted a small taste. She wanted enough of a taste to place in her memory for the future. He tasted like pure sultry sin with a touch of peppermint. She slid her hands from his chest on a slow path up and around his neck and plunged her fingers into his silky hair

His arm tightened around her waist as her tongue shyly sought his out, brushing it gingerly with her own. She heard him make a noise in his throat. A sexy noise. Sophie took half of a step back to rest against the solid metal door. She pulled him along with her so they wouldn't break the seal of the kiss. The exquisite feeling and languorous warmth of his tongue exploring her mouth made a ferocious sensation travel straight down her body. A hungry sensation. Her legs opened wider as if pulled apart by the sheer force of his will.

As if they had an agenda of their own, one of her ankles slipped around the back of one of his calves, rubbing up and down once or twice before settling. This action opened her thighs further and allowed for Matthew's very impressive, stiffening cock to fit closely against her lower stomach. And still she didn't stop.

The arm around her waist, which had been pulling her tighter into his firm body, slipped down to aid her leg in its journey around the back of his calf. His hand caressed one sensitive cheek of her butt before rounding over her hip and hooking under her outer thigh. He pushed into her, and at his thrust, she felt the bite of the metal against her back.

This action made her want more, more, more.

Her hazy attention was drawn back up to her mouth. Matthew kissed her deeply, yet slowly, as if he had all the time in the world to take her on a sensuous, mistletoe-ignited trip.

His tongue wrapped around hers with deliberate strokes. She felt every lick of him now, matching the rhythm of the subtle pressure she now felt below from his rolling hips. Somehow he lifted her body up, and suddenly she felt his cock against her clit. Her very slippery clit ached with need.

Indescribable sensations ran up and down her responsive body. The very thought she could evoke a reaction like this from him made her tremble. Not to mention his effect on *her* rioting emotions. She felt the inner muscles between her legs twitch in response to his hard-planed body, overwhelming her from head to toe.

God, she wanted him. Right here. Right now.

She'd watched Matthew Westland with a perverse fascination since her first day at Westland Industries. He was a gorgeous, intelligent, personable single man by all accounts. A man she couldn't have. Her boss. The man she was now grinding her pelvis against in a common hallway leading to the garage where anyone could stumble across

them.

And this passing thought also didn't stop her.

Fearing that, on some level, once they stopped she would never again feel this way, made her reckless. She'd never have the opportunity she was taking advantage with Christmas wishes wrapped up in holiday tradition under mistletoe.

She wanted to savor every moment of it. She wanted to remember each and every smell, taste, and touch of him. So she relaxed and melted into the moment, allowing the wicked sensations to march across her body. Hearing his breathing increase in tempo as his hips ground into her to match the rhythm set only made her that much more excited. Were they about to have sex right here, right now?

Was sex allowed under the mistletoe, she wondered fleetingly? She hoped so because she wasn't going to stop.

His hand had slipped closer to her center, lifting her thigh higher. She went up on the tip of one toe to allow a better connection for his driving cock to rub her clit and scratch the ferocious itch between her legs. Had anything ever felt so good?

Her other ankle still firmly wrapped around his leg pulled him closer. His hand moved with determination from her thigh up her torso to palm her breast. She was braless. He plucked her hardened nipple through her velvet halter. She felt his hand slip between the strap of her dress and her bare skin. Indescribable warm electric sensation enveloped that lucky breast. His warm fingers brushed across her sensitized bare nipple, pausing to squeeze the pebbled tip he discovered. She moaned as the tingle of his touch rose inside her.

Ohmigod, she wanted him so much. Was she dreaming? Was she drunk? Who cared?

The friction of his cock ground expertly across her clit through her bunched skirt and nearly visible undies. If he didn't have a wet spot on the front of his pants yet, he was about to. An unexpected and extraordinary sensation burst through her, centering on her lower body and then spiraling upward to encompass her entirely, especially between her legs, vibrating her whole being.

Sophie sucked in a deep breath, broke the seal of their lips, and cried out loud at the monumental climax she experienced. Matthew's cock stroked across her sensitive clit once more and she screamed. She only wished his impressive cock had been impaled inside of her.

The sound of her panting climax echoed down the otherwise empty hallway. Then repeated gasps tore from her lips, when he kissed her face repeatedly, latching onto her hungry mouth again. Another gasp came when he trailed a path of kisses across her jaw to a sensitive spot below her ear.

Her pulse throbbed out of control. He kissed the column of her neck, her collarbone. He pulled the halter aside and fastened his mouth on top of one breast. He didn't quite reach her nipple, but then she felt his tongue lick a path between the dress and her skin. The velvet of his tongue dipped beneath the cloth. It found and stroked the aching tip.

Her dress wouldn't move far enough out of his way for him to suck on her, so he then put his mouth on her through the dress. A little shriek erupted from her as his teeth nipped at her nipple through the velvet. Meanwhile, his pelvis pressed against her rhythmically, with his rock hard cock still in motion against her still throbbing clit.

She pulsed in utter delight. Her whole body was a mass of warm sensation. She tried to catch her breath. His hands stroked her, his mouth sucked at her nipple through the velvet of her halter. She was wrapped in his arms and his magnetic presence. His mouth lifted slightly. He kissed a path to the hollow of her throat. She felt one of his hands lower to the front of his slacks. She waited for him to kiss a path back up to her mouth. She wondered if he would take her against the metal door. Yes. She wondered if she would let him. Yes. She wondered if it was wise to screw the boss even in the name of Mistletoe.

Um...okay, yes.

She batted down the glimmer of rational thinking, which started to slide into her mind, but a horrifying sound interrupted her sensual languor to replace it.

Ding.

The elevator down the hall sounded its joyful arrival. A rifle shot piercing her heart would have been less startling. The exuberant sound of loud laughing party revelers doused Sophie's warm, blissful, orgasmic experience. They were about to intrude on a holiday tradition involving mistletoe to discover Sophie and Matthew wrapped around each other sharing not only a kiss under the mistletoe, but wicked sexual pleasures. She was seconds away from discovering the long-awaited and secretly dreamed-of penetration by Mr. Yummy...

But instead, Sophie panicked.

Moments from being caught in a seductive clutch with the man who paid her salary, she'd summoned strength from the core of fear pounding through her and tore away from him. She stopped only long enough to grab up her purse forgotten in a heap next to her. She heard him grunt as she ran from him to the garage door leading away from temptation.

She flew out the door to safety, freedom, freezing breezy wind, and heartbreaking guilty loneliness.

Chapter One

Springtime, four months later

In the year 2076

Three weeks after the Tiberius Group has taken power over the U.S.

Sophie Brent wanted to die. No ifs, ands, or buts about it. Death was the preferred evil of the two bad choices she faced today.

The auctioneer started the bidding at five thousand dollars. Sophie was led to center stage in the corporate amphitheater of Westland Industries so the prospective bidders could get a better look at the *merchandise* they were here to buy.

"Six thousand dollars," the auctioneer called out, pointing to someone in the audience.

The blazing spotlights directed at the stage from somewhere above blinded her and made the spectators impossible to see. It was probably a good thing she didn't know exactly who was bidding. It wasn't like she was being auctioned off as a date for an evening to benefit a charity.

This was forever, or at least until death parted her from the highest bidder.

"Seventy-five hundred," said the auctioneer to another faceless member of the audience.

Unfortunately, the one bidder she *could* see was Orin Prichard. He sat in the front row, dead center. Sophie could see *him* clearly. She also saw him lick his moist, disgusting lips every time he raised the bid.

"Fifteen thousand," Orin said out loud even though all he had to do was raise his weenie little paddle.

Orin, a middle-aged paunch-bellied alcoholic with graying hair shaped into an unflattering comb over, was also a full time womanizing skirt chaser. And most time

successful vice president of sales in the Westland Industries, a company where *he* still held a job. He'd divorced his second wife shortly before the Tiberius Group came to power, making new monumental changes in the lives of the female citizens residing in the country.

Regrettably, Orin was a single man for today's auction of corporate females in Westland Industries, the formerly progressive company where women used to hold executive positions. The Tiberius Group put an end to female executives.

"Sixteen thousand," said a faceless voice Sophie didn't recognize from two rows back. Whoever it was, she desperately chose him over Orin.

"Sixteen thousand and one dollar," Orin said with confidence, as he puckered his lips in a jutting kiss and winked at her.

Yep, Sophie wanted to die.

"Sixteen thousand, five hundred dollars," the auctioneer called out to recognize a new bidder from the center of the audience where she still couldn't see.

The bidding petered out at eighteen thousand, but Orin didn't have the high bid. It was a faceless man two rows back, and Sophie hoped he wasn't a worse choice than Orin.

"Eighteen thousand dollars, going once. Eighteen thousand dollars, going twice," the auctioneer sang out and took a breath for the final call out.

Sophie held her breath.

But then Orin smiled deviously up at her fidgeting on stage and winked again as he said, "Fifty thousand dollars," and thus sealed her fate.

Sophie swallowed hard. Tear welled up in her eyes. No one would top his bid. Whispers of awe swept through the room. It was the largest offer to date for a woman to become a man's wife in the newly formatted society. In fact, it was twenty-five thousand dollars over the highest recorded offer ever. And that had been for a society princess last week.

Sophie was just a junior executive, or rather she had been until the Tiberius Group had convinced the country that women should stay at home to be housewives and raise children. Then they'd written it into law. Then they'd forbidden women to work. It was the first step of many new outrageous laws enacted.

Sophie glanced down at Orin. His smug face told her all she needed to know about how he planned to treat her once they were wed. He arrogantly stood up before the auctioneer even rapped his gavel. He adjusted his pants and tapped a finger on his zipper, smiling at her salaciously. Sick bastard. She'd sooner bite his tiny dick off in one snap than service him. But the thought of having her mouth anywhere near his crotch sent a wave of revulsion to the pit of her stomach. She pressed her lips together and fought to keep her breakfast down.

Orin had chased Sophie around his desk on her first day with the company. He'd explained jokingly that she'd go far if she spent some quality time on her knees in his office. It was what he referred to as the fast track to corporate success for a woman. She'd been so incensed she almost paused long enough to let him touch her.

At a foot taller and outweighing her by at least a hundred pounds, he tried to persuade her by crowding her against his desk. She was about to knee him in his balls, but Matthew Westland, the owner and CEO of Westland Industries, had saved Orin's jewels by entering the office right then. He caught Orin in his natural, wicked, reptilian environment.

Sophie asked Mr. Westland right then and there if his definition of fast track was the same as Orin's. He assured her it was not and threatened to castrate Orin if he ever heard a whisper of rumor regarding his behavior. Sophie's heart melted for Matthew in that moment.

Orin, on the other hand, had glared at Sophie from that day forward whenever he saw her. If she became his wife today...he'd certainly make up for lost time. Her 'if' statement wasn't even an option. A bid for fifty thousand dollars became a 'when' sentence waiting to happen.

Sophie had been so very grateful to Matthew Westland for rescuing her on her first day. Her melted heart turned into a healthy crush, but she kept her feelings to herself.

Well, mostly she had. He was the tall gorgeous boss, after all, and she was a junior executive and never the twain shall meet. With the small exception of a scandalous drunken interlude she shared with him in a certain hallway under some mistletoe.

Her last and best sexual memory.

Now her mind went to her two bad choices for today, death or marriage to Orin Prichard.

"Fifty thousand dollars, going once," the auctioneer said excitedly, since he had a record bid. "Going twice," he said quickly.

Sophie wished he'd slow down. The auctioneer sucked in a quick breath and raised his gavel to pound as he sealed her fate.

"One hundred thousand dollars," said a loud, deep, familiar voice from the very back of the amphitheater. Sophie let out a huge audible sigh of relief as Orin turned angrily towards the back of the room.

Sophie couldn't see her savior but recognized his powerful voice. The last time she'd heard it was in the hallway leading to the parking garage during the company Christmas party. Right after he'd brought about her most powerful orgasm.

Mistletoe hanging in the hallway had started 'the wicked incident' as she'd later referred to it. Her panting climax, combined with the inopportune timing of party revelers, had ended it.

She flashed to the memory of peeling her satisfied body away from Matthew Westland, the owner and CEO of Westland Industries. Upon reflection, she remembered he hadn't actually said anything, he'd just moaned. She'd fled the corporate offices, straightening her clothing, while moving on rubbery legs away from the chief executive officer of the company where she worked, too fearful to look back and see if he'd followed her.

With his hundred thousand dollar bid, he'd just bought the right to finish things

up with her. She couldn't help the zing of thrill, which ran down her spine...or the sultry, moist feel of her panties.

* * * *

Matthew Westland bid a staggering sum to procure a wife. His father, former senator John James Westland, was going to absolutely shit a brick when he heard the news.

That wasn't the primary reason Matt had done it, but it was a nice side benefit. He offered double the floor bid so he could get the wife he wanted.

Sophie Brent.

Beautiful. Intelligent. And not the cock tease he'd momentarily accused her of being that salaciously infamous night of the Christmas party. Orin called her that under his breath regularly. Matt was ashamed that the thought glanced through his mind at the time.

He'd been about to unzip, free his ready cock, and go for it against the wall, thinking nothing more than how good it would feel to slip in and take her. He'd wanted her from the first time they met. But she was his employee, one of his best, and he wasn't the kind of man who crossed that line.

Sophie tore herself away from him the night of the Westland Christmas party moments before he would have been caught red-handed banging an employee. Against a door, no less. She'd saved him.

He'd cursed himself for releasing her enough to get away. He'd cursed himself for almost getting caught. Mostly he'd cursed himself for the fact she'd never approached him afterwards. He wanted to apologize, but she went to great lengths to avoid him after Christmas. He left her alone, adding to his own misery and longing for her every day afterwards.

She probably thought he was exactly like Orin. He was lucky she'd just avoided him these past four months and hadn't pressed charges. Corporate sexual harassment charges were very hard to prove even before the Tiberius Group take-over. Now it was impossible because women weren't allowed to work.

"One hundred thousand dollars going once," the auctioneer said in a quivery voice. Matt walked to the podium to collect his bride. She squinted into the audience. Apparently, she couldn't see him, but she wasn't chewing on her lush lips any longer in apprehension. Did she remember his passionately growling tone of voice from the Christmas party and forgive him, or was it just that anybody would be better than Orin Prichard?

"One hundred thousand dollars going twice," the auctioneer said with more confidence.

Matt got close enough to focus in on Orin's belligerent face, which followed his progress down the center aisle to the stage. He wondered briefly where Prichard had come up with the fifty thousand dollars he'd bid. Prichard was a gambler, among other things. Must have had a rare winning streak, Matt thought dismissively.

Oh, well. Too bad, so sad. Orin didn't deserve her, and Matt had waited a long while to approach one Sophie Brent with the intention of making her his bride.

After Matt had gotten to know her within the parameters of their work environment, he found she was intriguing not only to his libido, but to his business acumen, as well.

The fact that she was beautiful beyond words was merely a bonus.

Sophie Brent looked like a temptress born from a vivid sexual fantasy. Her striking shoulder length wavy blonde hair, surrounding smoky gray eyes that fairly smoldered with raw passion in everything she did, framed a drop-dead gorgeous smile, which lit up her face when she laughed. Matt knew from working with her she was also very intelligent and had very unique ideas regarding her approach to solving his logistics problems.

He'd been trying to figure out a way to have a relationship with her and still keep her as an employee. When he got the heads up about what the Tiberius Group planned, he'd gotten distracted by the world at large. It would've been much easier to marry her, if they'd already had a relationship before the take over.

Once she'd been dismissed from Westland Industries for her gender, he hadn't been allowed to contact her. She'd only been brought back to this corporate forum at the behest of whatever male relative was selling her off. He'd been relieved to see her name on the list of former female executives coming back to be sold off like so much cattle at today's auction.

The Tiberius Group had received an anonymous memo with the brilliant idea to keep things simple by putting unmarried women on the auction block at whatever work place they'd haunted prior to the reorganization. It became known as the Working Woman's Auction Memo. It was a hated memo that applied to all women in the country. But it had served his purposes very well in his wish to obtain Sophie as his wife.

This morning his horoscope told him to "Seize the Day." So he had.

"Sold to Mr. Matthew Westland for one hundred thousand dollars," the auctioneer stated loud and clear, thus sealing his future.

There was a loud buzz of conversation in the room, which Matt ignored. His eyes focused only on his future bride. His mind was alert to all the sexual delights he had planned for later today...on their honeymoon.

* * * *

Sophie didn't want to die anymore. She was saved. Orin turned around to glare at her. One strand of hair had escaped the confines of the swirl plastered to his bald head and hung limply down the side of his face. The look he gave her after being defeated by Mr. Westland radiated pure waves of unrelenting rage.

Yeah, how dare she allow herself to be bid on by someone with more money, the nerve of her? The lock of greasy hair hanging unattractively to his chin made Sophie even more grateful he wasn't about to be her—what was it the crazy new world order referred to this as?—her *lord and master*.

Orin looked the exact same way as he had on her first day of work. His nostrils flared in righteous indignation at having been thwarted by Matthew...again.

Sophie had needed her job because she helped support her mom and sister. She'd been fortunate Mr. Westland had agreed that Orin should be castrated instead of rewarded. She might have faced termination for failure to get along with her peers in any other company.

She and Mr. Westland exited Orin's office, but she'd scurried away from his magnetic presence before she did something inappropriate, like throw her arms around him, latch her mouth to his luscious face, and refuse to let go. No, she'd saved that for a few months later at the Christmas party. A vibrant thrill ran through her at the memory of his hard-planed body trapping her against the metal door to the garage.

The auctioneer cleared his throat impatiently and motioned her off the stage urgently, as if she should hurry because he'd just made a bunch of money on her. She instead sauntered to the steps, earning his frown. She resisted the urge to stick her tongue out at him as she passed behind him on stage.

"If you would step over here, sir, we can officiate the contract," the Tiberius representative said to Sophie's future husband at the foot of stairs off the stage.

The contract of marriage these days had a whole different meaning. Promising to love and honor *et cetera* went by the wayside to be replaced by who got what percentage of funds spent for the bride being auctioned off.

Sophie's worthless scum of a father, a sperm donor at best, got to have a whopping ninety percent. Eight percent went to the auctioneer, and finally two percent went into the coffers of the Tiberius group. A cut they told everyone they earned by officiating the contract and ceremony joining the couple in matrimony. Plus the forty-eight hour body scan done to ensure consummation of every union. They certainly didn't want people getting married to escape Tiberius persecution.

Men being forced to have sex with whomever they married supposedly made them more cautious about their ultimate choices. But Sophie only understood the rules favored men, and they could do as they pleased regardless of their initial choices. An uncontrollable and unwanted urge to weep came over her and she fought to stay serene.

The official Tiberius marriage broker stepped up and motioned impatiently for Sophie to come off the stage. It was time to meet the groom. As if he read her mind, Matthew Westland looked up at her, still paused on stage, and smiled lightly.

From behind her, Sophie heard the auctioneer say, "We'll start the bidding for the next bride at five thousand and see where it takes us." She paused at the head of the steps and gazed at her groom.

"Hello," he said warmly and held out his hand.

Sophie remained quiet, fighting tears threatening to spill over burning eyes as she descended the few steps. If she so much as uttered one word, she'd burst into loud, uncontrollable sobbing. Her desolate mood stemmed from the narrow escape with the deviant in the front row along with the general horror of the auction. Unqualified and here-to-date unknown relief now raced through her, making her very emotional. A single

tear slipped out and ran down her face before she could wipe it away.

“Why the tears? Is there someone else you would prefer to marry?” he asked in a low voice, taking her arm.

Sophie reached up and wiped away moisture and shook her head. “It’s the whole auction situation I find disturbing.” She then added quietly, “And if I ever find out who authored the Working Woman’s Auction Memo, which put me up for sale in my own damn company, I’m going kick his balls up his ass.”

Matt’s eyes widened briefly, but didn’t acknowledge her response. He simply led her to a room behind the stage where the funds would be paid and the ceremony performed. Sophie could smell his expensive cologne as they stood together, the scent of which sent her right back to last December and the wall she’d been pressed against when he’d kissed her that first time...and then...more.

Sophie watched him out of the corner of her eye. Her whole body vibrated with the memory of the last time they were together. He saved her, again. Maybe he remembered the kiss at Christmas. Maybe he felt something for her.

“Thank you for saving me.”

His sudden sardonic smile startled her as he whispered, “I didn’t actually do it for you.”

“Then why would you marry a veritable stranger? I can read the papers. I know you have...well, other choices.”

“You aren’t exactly a stranger,” he said, leaning in close, whispering in her now sensitive ear. “I know exactly how you taste, how you smell, and especially how you feel in my arms when you scream in climax. It’s an intriguing combination. One I found I couldn’t pass up.”

Sophie closed her eyes and felt her face go hot in memory of that supremely gratifying sensation, which had stabbed through her at his assistance long ago, as if she were experiencing it all over again. “I didn’t think you remembered. You never...” Her head bowed and she found she couldn’t finish the sentence.

“Neither did you,” he stated coolly as she felt his arm circle her shoulders.

“You were my boss,” she snapped with accusation in her tone, still unable to look him in the eyes.

“Yeah, that was my excuse, too. But it isn’t an issue any longer.” He squeezed her shoulder once and pulled her closer. “Is it? Are you ready to marry me, Sophie?”

This time she looked in his beautiful blue eyes before answering. “Yes. I would be...grateful to marry you.”

“I don’t want gratitude.”

“What then?” She sounded breathless to her own ears.

He laughed before he said, “Well for starters, I’d like to finish what we began in the parking garage hallway. That particular experience, while gratifying in many ways, has always seemed a bit incomplete to me.”

The combination of his warm, sexy body pressed up close, his sultry voice caressing her senses, and his decadent I-want-to-fuck-you-this-second cologne wafting all around made another rush of moisture accumulate between her legs in readiness. Sophie's heart beat so thunderously in her chest, she couldn't speak. She took short breaths to calm herself, but with it came Matthew's sexy scent, the fragrance of which made her insides quiver in long awaited need.

He leaned in suddenly, right into her personal space. "And then I'd like to do it some more. And then some more after that."

"Oh..." Sophie managed to say as a rush of air whooshed out of her lungs. He remembered, all right. Her sex rampantly thrummed for his further attention. And now she owed him in more ways than just the one.

What would he do with her if he had a bed at his disposal instead of a metal door in a parking garage? The better question, what would he do with her *first* since he obviously wanted to finish what they started? Sex was what they had started so long ago. She was ready to get started on *that* right now. Once they were alone, would he finally impale her with his oft-whispered about amazing cock, all the way to her collarbone? Whew, she hoped so. Another gush of wetness shot between her legs and her sex clenched with desire, wishing desperately that his cock was already imbedded inside her to squeeze in pleasure.

Sophie gazed into Matthew's volcanically and very sexually charged eyes and put a smile on her face which she hoped would convey her eagerness to participate in whatever plan he had ready.

She found herself very excited at the prospect of paying up again and again...and again, if he wanted.

Chapter Two

Matt wanted Sophie. It was as simple as that. He'd wanted her from the first time he'd seen her in Orin's office when the letch had cornered her backwards over his desk. She'd avoided both him and Orin after her auspicious first day, but Matt watched her from afar. He wanted to fire Orin, but sexual harassment cases were impossible to prove and almost as extinct as the principles of the Twentieth Century justice system where it originated. It would have been a waste of time to bring charges.

Smart, beautiful Sophie was also spunky, but she hid it. He'd been half in love with her before the Christmas party, but afterwards, he endured regular wet dreams at night after the holidays he'd wanted her so much. No other woman seemed quite right afterwards. Certainly not the boring society women his father had paraded before him these past few months in an attempt to marry him off to a family with political power. If Sophie's father had been in politics, it would have been so easy to get his father on board. Pity. Matt had to maneuver several people and sneak around to get what he wanted. And that was one Sophie Brent as his bride.

"Sign here," the Tiberius group representative said efficiently, pointing to a signature line on the marriage documents. "And here."

Matt signed over the substantial bid amount via electronic payment. Sophie managed to look embarrassed and relieved at the same time as the transaction was approved.

"When do I get my money?" asked a man from behind him. Matt turned to observe the man who looked completely down on his luck. He looked vaguely familiar, but Matt couldn't place him. Sophie knew him though. She shuddered in response as the man came into their close circle. Matt decided he must be the male relative selling Sophie off in matrimony.

"The funds will be available by close of business," the Tiberius representative said to the familiar stranger. The relative had a grizzled face surrounded by greasy unkempt gray hair and his clothes smelled slightly of fish.

“Well, now, aren’t you glad I put you in this auction after all, girly?” the stranger asked Sophie. “I think you made out just fine. Yes, I do.”

“Do not speak to me,” she grated out. “Just take your money and go.”

“Now, is that any way to speak to your father?” he asked her in a harsh tone.

“I don’t have a father,” Sophie replied.

“Now, *that* just ain’t nice, girly” Sophie’s father grabbed her arm with a snarl in his voice. Matt immediately grabbed the old man’s fingers and removed them from Sophie’s arm, crunching them tight.

Sophie’s father had the same color of eyes that she did. He looked at Matt with surprise and said coldly, “You aren’t her husband yet.”

“You’re right. Would you like to give back the money and try the auction again?” Matt asked him, releasing his fingers.

Sophie’s father fisted his hand and sneered, “That ain’t gonna be necessary. Guess I’ll just move on to finding my other daughter a husband.” He smirked at Sophie and turned his back to leave the room.

“Wait!” Sophie grabbed her father’s shoulder and stopped him. “Don’t marry Hannah off so fast. She’s not experienced with men and...”

“She’s a woman in need of a husband,” her father said, cutting Sophie off. “And I’ll do what needs to be done.”

“No, please...Hannah is...well, uncomfortable around men. Please don’t marry her off to someone who will abuse her. She needs someone quiet, with a respectful nature towards woman. Oh, and someone not too tall. She’s afraid of tall men—”

“A father knows what’s best for his daughters. Even that new Tiberius Group says so,” he interrupted her again. Matt heard Sophie take a deep breath. She was about to explode on the man she didn’t think of as her father.

“Why don’t you bring Hannah back here?” Matt asked. Sophie and her father both turned towards him. “Perhaps I could help you select a suitable husband here in town. Then your daughters could reside in the same city.”

“Very generous of you, Westland. I’ll think about it,” Sophie’s father said quietly, his forefinger and thumb stroking his whiskered chin as if pondering Matt’s offer. More likely, he was counting on getting another hundred thousand dollars.

Matt didn’t think he could find anyone who’d pay that much, but he could find someone who would be right for a younger sister who was ‘uncomfortable’ around men. He could certainly find a short man who wouldn’t abuse her. Besides, the gratitude now radiating in Sophie’s eyes was payment enough for him to follow through.

“Shall we say two weeks from today? You can bring Hannah and be our guests for a wedding celebration at our home.” He reached into his inner jacket pocket and pulled a business card, which included his private home address. He handed it to Sophie’s father.

“Two weeks? Sure. That’d be just fine. Meanwhile, I’m on my way to try my luck

in Sin City, Las Vegas.”

“What about Hannah?” Sophie asked.

“She’ll be going with me, for luck,” he said and turned his back on her, walking away as if he didn’t care one iota for his daughter’s welfare. Matt hadn’t realized Sophie’s own father had put her up for auction. He’d noticed the name Dennis Hoskins on the paperwork and until now had assumed it must be an uncle or nearest male relative, as required by the Tiberius Group.

“Mr. Westland, you and your bride-to-be can go on to the ceremony room. It’s been set up down the hallway in the corporate conference room,” the Tiberius representative said.

“Shall we?” Matt held out his arm to her. She gave her father’s retreating back one last glance and then nodded at Matt.

Matt led her to the ceremony room. He wanted the ritual behind them as quickly as possible. And if he could then get her out of the building without being seen, he might just pull off his big secret plan with his senator father none the wiser.

At least until it was too late.

The ceremony was quick, as Matt had requested. When the officiator had pronounced them husband and wife, he’d kissed her lightly on the corner of her luscious mouth. Anything more would have caused a serious block of wood to form between his legs. He wanted her, but she was his wife on paper only. He needed to make her his wife in the important sense...in the flesh to be exact.

“Thank you,” Sophie said as they departed the room back into the amphitheater, where some other poor soul had just been sold for fifteen thousand dollars.

“For what?” he asked distractedly. They needed to get out of here.

“For Hannah,” she said quietly.

“More gratitude?”

“Maybe.” She smiled at him shyly, but Matt knew she wasn’t always shy. She could be very friendly given the right circumstances. Like mistletoe and a drink or two, or six.

“I can’t wait to get you alone,” he said, trying not to sound like a pervert.

Sophie gave him a wide-eyed look of blatant passion in return, which sent a sexual zing down to his balls and tightened them in preparation for their honeymoon. She was about to say something else, but a door burst open at the back of the amphitheater.

Former senator John James Westland had arrived and Matt’s escape was thwarted.

* * * *

Sophie’s head was spinning. Matthew had been pushing her towards a side door exit near the stage when someone entered the back of the large room, creating a loud scene.

“Where is he?” a man barked, striding down the center aisle with a purpose. In his

wake were several reporters and cameramen. Sophie thought he looked familiar but couldn't quite place him for a moment. Then she heard one of the reporters ask the commanding man a question.

"Senator Westland, are you aware your son just spent a record amount on the woman he married today?"

"We'll see about that," the senator thundered, spotting them across the seats.

"Matthew!" Senator Westland bellowed and made beeline for them.

"Damn it," Matt said, giving Sophie a defeated look. "Listen to me, Sophie. We're married. Nothing he says can change it, okay?"

"Matthew, what have you done?" the former senator stepped up close to the two of them, giving Matt an evil stare.

"I got married," he said simply, locking gazes with his father.

Matthew's father then looked down his blue blood nose at Sophie as if she were something he'd just scraped off the bottom of his shoe. "And who is she?" he asked as if it didn't matter, because she wouldn't measure up to his standards regardless of her lineage.

"I'm Sophie Westland," she said, extending her hand with a bright smile in place. "Nice to meet you...Dad."

The former senator did not shake her hand or speak to her, but she saw the glimmer of a smile on Matthew's face. After the bad day she'd already had, she wasn't in the mood to be talked down to by a pompous ass. Even if he was her new father-in-law.

"Whom do we need to speak with in order to annul this travesty?"

"I'm thirty four years old. I can pick my own wife," Matthew said.

"It's apparent to me you cannot. How do you expect to run for office without the support of a government official? It is imperative you marry someone in your own...class." He paused before uttering the last word to give Sophie a distasteful glance.

"You know what? You are a vulgar, hateful man." Sophie couldn't stop herself from speaking. "You don't even know me. Stop talking about me like I'm not even here. It's rude!" She felt the sudden pressure of Matthew's hands on her shoulders.

"You do not even understand your place," the ex-senator said, glaring at her. "What did you do to trick my son into marriage?"

Sophie shrugged. "A few blowjobs under his desk." Something about hateful people brought out her bad side. She'd always been able to shock the vilest of people if she felt they deserved it. The senator was her definition of worthy.

"You little piece of white trash—"

"Stop." Matthew cut him off. "Leave her out of this. You're angry with me. Talk to me."

"You are throwing away your chance at the presidency."

"I never said I would run for office. That's your world. I'm still not interested. I have a business to run."

"Your *business* is barely viable this past quarter."

"Well, I lost several key employees recently." Matthew glanced at Sophie. Had she been one of his key employees?

"You mean women," Matthew's father spat out.

"Yeah, half my executive staff isn't allowed to work for me any longer."

"They're better off."

"I know *I* am," Sophie popped up. "Now, I can get off my knees and onto my back."

Matthew hid a smile behind his closed fist, pretending to cough. She'd had a very colorful roommate in college and learned much with regard to speaking candidly to deserving snobs.

Matthew's father gave Sophie an evil look and turned back to Matthew smugly, "Andrea needs you. I know you two broke up, but you need to go see her right this instant."

"Why?"

"Who's Andrea?" Sophie asked.

"Matt's former fiancée." His father smirked. "Unlike you, she's a lady."

"Lady or not, I take exception to my husband trotting off to visit his former fiancée five minutes after he's married me. Go away."

"You should learn to hold your tongue and further temper your abrasive attitude. You do not dictate anything, young lady. You would do well to learn your place."

"I know my place." Sophie slipped an arm through Matthew's with familiarity, hugging up close to him and smiling sweetly. "It's with Matthew, my husband."

"Perhaps I should tell her what kind of man you really are, Matthew. As your new wife, she *should* know the truth about you." He gave Sophie a smug look. She wondered what he meant when Matthew's face morphed into a rigid, angry mask.

* * * *

Matt separated himself from Sophie and marched his father several steps away. Sophie didn't need to hear about his ex-fiancée colored with his father's praise. She also didn't need to learn about what kind of man he really was.

"Keep your mouth shut. I mean it. If you tell her, then I tell the world. It won't serve your purposes either, if others know about...my past." Matt glanced at Sophie then looked back at his father. "How did you know I was here?"

"I have my ways." His father smiled imperiously.

Matt wondered which of his remaining employees had ratted him out. Not many knew he intended to be here today. Orin Prichard's name flashed in his mind.

“What do you want?”

“I want you to ask Andrea to be your wife.”

“No, thanks.”

“She and the governor will most assuredly press charges to get this unfortunate marriage annulled.”

“On what grounds?” Matt had no doubt his father was up to something but didn’t want to know the details. He wanted to get on with his honeymoon.

His father took a deep breath and let it out slowly with a look suggesting that Matt should acquiesce without question. “Andrea has admitted to her father that you two had consensual sexual relations at Thanksgiving, and again at Christmastime. She’s no longer pure. You need to marry her because she takes precedence.”

“Listen to me carefully. I’m never going to marry her, not for any reason.” Matt couldn’t believe the lengths his father would go to in order to pretend he could get him to run for office. “Besides, it’s too late. I’m already married!”

“Then get an annulment right this instant and go beg Andrea to be your wife.”

“That’s not going to happen. Andrea was no longer pure well before any ‘relations’ I had with her at Thanksgiving or Christmastime.”

“She says otherwise. If you dispute it, a court will decide for you. Until then, you won’t be able to consummate today’s farce of a marriage.”

“The hell I can’t. Good-bye.”

“Does this mean the honeymoon is over already?” Sophie asked from behind Matt.

“No.” Matt put his arm around her shoulder. “Come on, Sophie.”

“You were with someone else at Christmastime?” Sophie asked him. He didn’t miss the hurt in her tone of voice.

Damn his father anyway. If they’d had only finished the marriage ceremony one minute sooner, they would’ve made a clean get away.

“It’s not what you think. I’ll tell you about it later, Sophie. Let’s go.”

“I’d think about it if I were you.” Matt’s father gave Sophie a smug, I-know-something-you-don’t-know stare.

“Why?” she asked

“If you go off with him, you’ll still lose him as a husband in a court battle against Andrea. And it won’t even matter if you get knocked up.”

“Why?” Sophie’s eyebrows scrunched in question. “I’m already married to him. My legal marriage takes precedence over whatever Little Miss Pampered Princess wants.”

Matt knew that money talked, and Andrea’s father was richer than God with more clout than the current president. Still, Matt didn’t want Andrea. He wanted Sophie.

“The woman with the status of governor’s daughter will always win over white trash in court, especially the newly enacted Magistrate’s Court.” Senator Westland straightened as if about to give an impromptu stump speech. “Matt will be forced to marry you off to someone else when you lose. Is that what you want?”

“So rich Andrea the princess loses him, but I marry him in good faith, and I’m the one out the door?” Sophie crossed her arms as a sudden frown creased her face. “Surely you don’t expect me to believe that. I have a college degree. Oh, yeah, and a brain.”

The senator took a menacing step towards her. “Brains won’t help you in this world, little girl.”

“Enough.” Matt stepped between his spunky new bride and his overbearing father.

“Matthew, please. Get in my limo. We’ll go to the house. You can talk to Andrea and sort this whole thing out peacefully.”

“No.” Matt hugged Sophie closer with the sudden fear that if he didn’t hold on tight, he’d lose her.

“Get in the limo or I’ll have this marriage annulled right now! I have the power to do so, as you well know.” The senator gave Sophie a satisfied smirk. “However, I’d prefer to see you do it all on your own, and very publicly.”

Matt pressed his lips together to keep from saying what he truly wanted to. No doubt one quick conversation between his father and a Tiberius official would, at best, have Sophie back up on the stage to be auctioned again. Or at the very least, Orin Prichard, the second highest bidder of the auction, would become Sophie’s new husband before the hour was finished.

Matt wouldn’t allow that to happen.

Thinking over his dismal options, he decided to get in the limo. He needed to consummate his marriage to Sophie before his father made good on his threat. Senator Westland would, of course, want Matt to trash Sophie in public by divorcing her or just selling her outright.

Unfortunately, Matt knew if he made it to his father’s house without sexual intimacy in his marriage to Sophie, the senator wouldn’t leave them an opportunity to do so. It was time for Plan B. The one he’d just dreamed up four seconds ago. Not as viable of an option since it depended on Sophie’s cooperation, but now it was unavoidable.

“All right, fine. I’ll ride in your limo because Sophie deserves it,” Matthew said, “but I’m not changing my mind. And even if you find a way to annul this marriage, I’m not going to marry Andrea. That’s a promise.”

“Asher, go with them and I’ll meet you at the house. I need to make a statement to the press.”

“Wait a minute. Why does Asher need to come with us?” Matt asked.

“Chaperone,” Matt’s father smiled deviously. “Wouldn’t want you to do anything which would ruin your choices now, would we?”

Chapter Three

“Why do we need a chaperone again?” Sophie asked as they exited the Westland Corporate amphitheater and into the adjoining parking lot.

“I’ll explain in the car.” Matt gave his father’s political aide, Asher, an angry glance as they approached his father’s stretch limousine.

“And will you also explain about the fiancée you had at Christmas?” she whispered. “The one you neglected to mention when you had me pinned against the wall in the garage hallway.”

Whoa, *that’s* what she was upset about? He thought of the possible Christmas sex Andrea was accusing him of, sex that he didn’t remember participating in because he’d been so upset at losing Sophie. He only remembered his own foolishness at letting Sophie get away from him that night.

“I didn’t have a fiancée at Christmas. I promise. That’s my father’s delusion.”

She stopped halfway to the limo. “Do you swear it?”

He turned to her. “I swear to you, Sophie, I never asked Andrea to marry me. Only you.”

She nodded but promptly asked the question he didn’t want to answer. “Did you sleep with her? I mean...after we...you know.”

Matt wasn’t sure if he had or not. He’d gotten pretty drunk directly after the luscious hallway encounter. He figured the truth might set him free in this singular instance.

“The truth is, all I remember is getting rip-roaring drunk after letting you go. I should have followed you, fallen to my knees, and begged for your forgiveness before I pleaded with you to stay with me. I didn’t hear the elevator full of people like I assume you did.” His eyebrows went up and she blushed. “I don’t know if I ended up with Andrea. I hope not. I only remember being with you that night.” He raised a finger to

brush a tendril of hair that had blown over her cheek, pausing to stroke her face once. He focused his gaze away from his task to her beautiful gray eyes. "I swear."

They remained in an intense staring contest, as she seemed to mull over his response. After a full thirty seconds, she said, "Okay, then." She smiled up at him, grabbed the hand he offered, and they resumed their walk to the limo, hand in hand. Matt was a lucky man.

Senator Westland's limo was the largest in the city. Sophie's eyes rounded as they approached the black stretch vehicle. Matt's father never spared any expense where his image was concerned.

"You should consider doing what your father is asking, Matthew. It would be for the best if you had a more politically connected wife." Asher tucked his synthetic fiber newspaper under his arm to get into the back of the limo ahead of them.

He proceeded to get comfortable on the bench seat across from the limo's well-stocked bar. He was also going to be only an arm's length of the two of them once they got inside. Matt refused to listen to a commercial on what his father expected of him for this journey.

* * * *

"You can ride up front with the driver," Matthew told Asher, sliding in behind Sophie in the back of the luxury limo. She settled on the ultra soft seats and smiled as she stroked the supple leather with careful fingertips. She'd never ridden in a limo before. It probably wasn't genuine leather, but it felt good all the same.

Matthew left the door propped open and gave Asher a dismissive tilt with his head.

"My instructions are clear, Matthew. I ride with you until we get to the mansion." Asher reached over to procure a crystal decanter of what looked like brandy. Sophie guessed this because he poured a liberal amount into a brandy snifter. She had lost track of time, but still wondered if it wasn't just a little too early in the day to be drinking.

"Then move to the far end of the limo. I do not wish to converse with you during the trip," Matthew said in an acidly condescending tone.

"As you wish." Asher carried his snifter and newspaper to the seat right behind the driver but still faced them. The stretch limo was very long and if they were to try to carry on a conversation with Asher, they'd have to raise their voices. The thought made Sophie relax a little. Soon, Asher opened up the daily paper, held it up over his face, and ignored them.

Matthew pushed a button on the armrest and music began to play, further hiding any noise or rustle of paper from Asher.

"Don't react to what I'm about to say to you, okay?" Matthew leaned in and whispered in Sophie's ear. She glanced up to his determined face and nodded. Now what? She darted a look back to Asher. He apparently hadn't heard them or was patently ignoring them. Either way, it worked for her.

"We need to consummate our marriage before we make it to the mansion," he

whispered.

To her own credit, Sophie's only reaction was a widening of her eyes to saucer proportion. His implication was clear. He wanted to have sex in the back seat of the limo while some pious associate of his father's looked on.

"And we only have about twenty minutes to accomplish this," he told her.

Sophie turned her wide-eyed stare away from her feet to his face. She mouthed the word 'how' and her eyes shifted to Asher sipping brandy, his head still hidden by the paper he read, seeming to ignore them. Matthew looked over and closed his eyes, sighing.

"Carefully," he mouthed back, then leaned in and whispered, "It won't be the experience I planned, but it's imperative for our future."

"I don't think I can do it," Sophie whispered back.

"We have to."

"No. We don't." Sophie was *not* about to have sex while someone watched. She'd go back to wanting to die again.

"If we don't, my father will find a way to annul this marriage. Once we fulfill the dictates of the Tiberius Group, it will give us leverage."

"Leverage?" Sophie barely listened to him. The implication of having sex in front of someone overshadowed anything else he said. She jumped as his warm hand landed on her bare thigh.

"Please, Sophie, trust me." Matthew slid his warm hand up under her short skirt. "We don't have to completely undress. I just need to come inside of you."

"Come?" She whispered the word, knowing full well what he meant. It was so shocking for the given context, she couldn't believe she'd said it.

"When the Tiberius Group comes to check the validity of our marriage, at the forty-eight hour mark, they will do a body scan on you. The scan must show I've ejaculated inside you at least once during that time period or other options can be put in place," he patiently explained.

"Can't we sneak off after we get to your house? Maybe a closet?" Sophie tried to think of another way. Surely there was one other way to accomplish the inevitable consummation. In their case, all they needed was an empty hallway and a sprig of mistletoe.

"We won't be left alone. And my father has lots of security." Sophie looked into his eyes. His resigned expression told her this was the only option left. The regret in his eyes was plain to see as he silently pleaded with her to accept this extreme plan.

"Asher isn't likely to allow this," she said, allowing the resignation to color her voice.

Had she just agreed to this?

"How is he going to stop us—or rather, me? It'll only take me a few strokes."

"Good to know." Sophie smiled lightly and watched him bite his inner cheek

presumably to suppress the grin he was not quite hiding.

The grin faded. He zeroed in on her face with a sincere expression. "Once we assure our future together, I'll make it up to you. I promise."

Sophie winked at him. "That's what they all say," she murmured.

He leaned forward and one whiskered cheek brushed hers. "I'm going to kiss you first. Once I slide you down to the seat cushion...don't fight me, okay?" His barely audible tone caressed her sensitive ear.

"Tell me why and I'll cooperate," she whispered back. The scent of his cologne signaled a salacious memory from Christmas and made her want to start peeling her clothes off...almost.

"Why?" His fingertips were tickling her upper thigh under her skirt.

She almost forgot her own question. Sophie couldn't quite understand why he would go to all this trouble for her. "Why me? Why did you want to marry me and not the rich, connected princess your father picked out?" She still saw herself as the woman his father had seen. She didn't have a single connection to her name. She wasn't rich. Blatant insecurities from a life as a 'nobody' reared up and overcame her. She worked her ass off for her chosen career only to be auctioned off today like a piece of furniture.

Matthew kissed her ear. His whisper filled with tender emotion as he answered, "I'm infatuated with you, Sophie. Don't you know that? I have been since the day we met. I haven't wanted any other woman since you stormed out of Orin Prichard's office on your first day at Westland Industries."

"Oh," she managed on a sigh. His utter sincerity touched her. Matthew Westland was a man used to getting what he wanted, no doubt. But he wanted her, and so she allowed herself to be swept away in the romance of the moment...so to speak.

"Let me kiss you for a minute or two and then I'll take care of the rest. We need to finish before we reach the gate to our property. Time is running out."

Sophie nodded and with the movement a curtain of her hair brushed against his collar.

"I promise I'll never say this to you again, but please don't make a sound." She nodded her understanding yet again and felt a blush creep up to her face. No moaning or screaming out loud like she had under the mistletoe. Otherwise, the other occupant might lower his paper and stop them from completing their tryst.

The only thing worse than getting caught, she decided, was getting caught and failing to succeed in their task to secure their future.

And given the choice, she sincerely wanted a life with Matthew Westland, whatever it took.

Matthew twisted his head and placed his lips on hers, seductively teasing them open with a single lick as his hand moved further up her leg. Nimble fingertips buried themselves quickly under her skirt. His tongue quickly wrapped around hers in erotic plunder. He grabbed her underwear and tugged them down a few inches. She stifled the

urge to suck in a sharp breath at his bold actions and concentrated on his lips to forget where she was.

Don't make a sound, don't make a sound, don't make a sound, she chanted to herself.

Matthew had the most luscious mouth. It took all her focus to not react like she wanted to. A moan of appreciation bubbled up in her throat wanting to escape. His fingers niggled their way between her legs and stroked once, the sensation of which sent a sharp longing through her body. She was embarrassed to be wet for him already. She'd moistened up with supreme gratitude upon hearing his deep rich voice say, "one hundred thousand dollars."

Not because she cared about his money. She honestly didn't. No, she realized right away that with his generous bid, she'd get the opportunity to finish up what they'd started under that sprig of mistletoe. She was about to get her Christmas wish after all, albeit four months later than expected.

Moistening up was not hard for her to do when Matthew Westland said anything. Besides, it wasn't as if she hadn't longed for him aching through each and every lonely night since the Christmas party months ago. His magnetic presence enveloped her as powerfully now as it had back then. Sophie focused on the memory of their first sexual encounter instead of the distinct possibility Asher was about to catch them banging quietly in the back seat of a luxury stretch limo, no less.

She'd relished every lip-licking erotic moment with Matthew against that metal door, but afterward in the gray reality of January when the mistletoe had been thrown away, she was horrified at her actions. She experienced her first man-in-the-same-room induced orgasm. But when he'd reached for his pants to give her what she wanted, the ding of the impending elevator sounded through her like a twelve-foot diameter gong. She shoved him off and ran to escape being caught. She should never have let things go so far and yet a part of her also pouted about having been interrupted.

Her cab to the airport had arrived miraculously at the very moment she'd launched out the metal door. She'd jumped in the taxi, locked the door and told the driver she was late for her flight. She'd been breathing hard and she remembered the taste of Matthew Westland still on her lips as the taxi pulled away.

She hadn't looked back, afraid to see that he'd come after her. She was afraid that if he had, she wouldn't have been able to resist him. If he'd so much as crooked his little finger, she would've swum across frigid lake water to kiss him one last time. She knew her fatal weakness, and his name was Matthew Westland.

Her hand brushed the barely damp spot on the halter of her sexy velvet Christmas party dress directly over one lonely aching nipple, as the cab pulled away. A shudder had run through her, a shudder of needful, shameful want. She wanted more, craved more, of Matthew's touch. But at that particular time, she couldn't have it. He was her boss for God's sake.

Matthew Westland was not an avenue she could explore. At least, not until now.

Sophie zoomed back to the present and the luxury stretch limo. The desperate

need to consummate her humiliating auction-induced marriage to her former employer was in progress. She was wrapped around her boss—no—Matthew, her new husband, about to have sex as quickly as possible so his father wouldn't marry him off to someone more politically connected. Not the dreamy honeymoon she'd envisioned, but she understood the necessity. Matthew promised to make it up to her. Actually, he already had against a metal door under the mistletoe.

Matthew kissed a path from her lips to her throat as he pulled the crotch of her panties aside. She felt his fingers slip inside of her very moist aching core, ever so slightly brushing past her clitoris, and she stifled the urge to jump through the tinted skylight she noticed in the ceiling of the limo. She was wet and ready for him, and now he knew it, too.

Should she be embarrassed? No time.

Matthew shifted silently on the seat and prepared to mount her. Her legs were spread as wide as they would go across the leather seats now caressing her half-naked butt. She managed to relax and opened her legs wider. She opened her eyes and caught sight of the not-distant-enough newspaper in her view. It only made her tense up again, so she turned her face away and buried it in Matthew's shoulder.

She couldn't believe Asher couldn't hear them. Matthew already had his zipper undone and she hadn't heard it. She felt the ridge of his enormous cock resting on the inside of her thigh. Another thrill ran through her at the knowledge she was about to find out if he was as big as she suspected. Her first feel of him was a memory from back under the mistletoe. Those oft whispered rumors of his impressive size were not at all exaggerated...then or now.

"Ready," he whispered. She turned away from his shoulder to look in his face and nodded her assent. She held his sexy gaze until Matthew lowered the lids of his eyes seductively, and pierced her to the hilt with one very deep and very satisfying thrust. She sucked in silent breath of unbelievable pleasure as he quickly stroked inside her again, and again and again. The immense thickness of him penetrated and stretched her core to the limit with each deep stroke of his cock. Her body accommodated him...barely, but he kept up the pace of his thrusts even as she wondered what his definition of a few strokes was.

Sophie melted into the smooth rhythm of his powerful thrusts, relaxing to allow the pleasure of it to seep into her tingling body. She pushed her hips forward to meet his next thrust and his cock seemed to slide even deeper. Whisper quiet, Matthew drove his cock inside her yet again. The angle of his thrust almost stroked her clit with every other push and the stirrings of a bone shaking climax grew within her.

The combined scent of the leather her half-naked butt rested on with Matthew's unique scent of starched shirt and fuck-me-now cologne tinged with the acrid knowledge of being caught caressed and yet heightened her senses. Thrust. Stroke. Thrust. Stroke. Matthew was about to make her climax. She held back fearful she'd scream like a banshee if the wash of climax took her suddenly. Thrust. Stroke. Thrust.

God, he felt incredible. Better than she ever thought possible. She'd wanted his cock buried inside her desperately back in that empty hallway. With him driving

repeatedly into her now, sending bolts of delicious sensation deeply inside her core, she was on the verge of release. Sophie held back even though she wanted to sing, moan, and scream.

Oh, God, did she just make a noise?

Sophie heard the newspaper at the other end of the small space rustle. This was quickly followed by a choked gasp and the sharp thud a brandy glass being dropped hitting the carpeted floorboard of the limo.

“What the fuck?” Asher screeched, trying to stand as his crumpled newspaper fell aside in the center of the limo aisle.

Chapter Four

“Exactly,” Matt said aloud, breathing hard as he pumped inside Sophie twice more swiftly until the powerful sensation of exquisite release overtook him. He thrust his cock deeply one last time and released a long awaited ball-tightening climax inside his wife, Sophie. The vise tight grip of her pussy made him want to continue making slow sweet love to her for a few more hours. Unfortunately, they’d been caught *flagrante delicto*. He figured they would be. Matt tried to be upset, but he felt too damn good at the moment. It was amazing he’d been allowed to finish at all given that he’d lasted for many several strokes longer than expected, so he was doubly satisfied with his most recent actions.

“Get off her. What did you just do, Matthew? I can’t believe your audacity.” Asher’s voice was still in shriek mode.

Matt barely heard him. His head swam in pleasure as he tried to come back down to earth from the magnificent climax vibrating through him. Poor Sophie was trapped beneath him. One of his legs had slid off the seat and onto the carpeted floor, but they were still deeply connected. His cock already wanted more and remained hard despite his long-awaited and exquisitely satisfying orgasm only moments ago. Trying to think about benign things to get his cock to cooperate wasn’t working. His randy dick throbbed inside Sophie wanting more of her deliciously wet, tight pussy. Now, please.

“Are you okay?” he managed to whisper to Sophie. He felt her nod and pulled back to see her face. The tears trailing down her pink cheeks caught him off guard. He clenched his stomach from the pinch of pain at the thought of her crying. His cock finally cooperated...slightly.

“Oh, God, did I hurt you?”

“No. I just...” she sniffed. She was embarrassed, of course. He was an idiot.

Matt found a reserve of strength and lifted enough to turn his attention to the incredulous look on Asher’s face. Asher knelt on the carpeted floor. One knee still rested in the large puddle of his spilled brandy.

“Turn around, you pervert.”

“Pervert? Pervert!” he screamed. “I’m the pervert?”

“I said turn around,” Matt barked.

Asher shifted to the limo’s side bench, facing away from them. Matt could almost see steam rising from his head. He sat with his spine ramrod, straight arms crossed in anger.

Matt slid his finally softening cock out of Sophie. He kissed her mouth once for reassurance and knelt before her to block her view. She sat up, pulled her legs together quickly, all the while straightening her clothing with visibly shaking fingers. He felt like a total shit heel watching her silently wipe the tears from her face and get composed.

Matt zipped his pants back up, turned, and sank wearily into the seat next to her. He put an arm around her back and pulled her across his lap to comfort her. He settled her head on his shoulder and wrapped his arms around her, squeezing her tight. Sophie snuggled up close, her face buried in his throat, her arms securely around his neck. After a moment he felt the shiver of her body as she began weeping quietly in his collar.

“I’m so sorry, Sophie. I should have found another way,” he whispered to her.

“It was...probably...the only way. I’m fine, really,” she whispered back, her voice catching more than once. Matt rubbed her back as he kissed her face and hair. He’d make it up to her. Nothing could keep them apart now.

* * * *

“We’re at the gate,” the driver’s voice came through the intercom in the back seat of the limo several minutes later.

“We’re almost home,” Matthew whispered in her ear. “I’ll take you to my private wing as soon as we step out of the car, okay? We’ll stay the night and tomorrow I’ll take you to my house. It isn’t as grand as the senator’s but it will be all ours.”

Sophie couldn’t speak without running the risk of sobbing so she nodded into his collar.

“I’ll make this up to you.” He kissed her forehead tenderly. “I swear it.”

Sophie didn’t have a response. Her tears were due to her own embarrassment. She was the one who gasped in pleasure, causing Asher to lower his paper. Technically, it was her fault they’d gotten caught.

Besides, what would make up for a voyeuristic experience in the back of a limo? She just hugged Matthew closer. He squeezed her tight in return. They’d certainly had an auspicious beginning to this already odd marriage. A corporate auction, one hundred thousand dollars spent, and then fucked quickly and quietly in a limo with a lazy chaperone sitting ten feet away. A chaperone who’d caught them in the act.

Had they even been married an hour yet?

The limo came to a slow stop. Sophie opened her eyes and saw the shape of a large house through the tinted glass window. Matthew kissed her lightly on the lips and gave her a concerned look. One she could see was full of guilt. She tried to smile for him.

He moved her off his lap and scooted over to the door. He reached for the handle, popped it open, and stepped outside. He looked every inch the rich powerful, successful executive he was.

What on earth was Sophie doing with him?

He bought you, that's what you're doing here, said a fearful voice down deep in her soul. *You better hope he wants to keep you.*

Matthew held out his hand and Sophie gratefully grabbed it as she stuck her trembling legs out of the vehicle. Asher gave her an evil glare as she exited the limo, which only made her smile inside.

“Matthew! There you are. I’ve been waiting for you, darling.” Sophie heard the squeal of a female voice close by as she stepped from the limo. She stood in time to see a brunette beauty attempt a launch at Matthew. Sophie could see her lips forming into smooch mode with the intention of planting her fire engine red lips on his.

Sophie moved between them just as Matthew’s free hand came up to fend the brunette off. Jealousy had never been an issue for Sophie. She’d never been a jealous woman, but she never had anyone worthy enough to covet. Now, she did.

“Who is this, Matthew?” the brunette asked and tried to edge her way towards him again.

Sophie crossed her arms. “I’m his wife, so I suggest you keep your hands off.”

“But that can’t be!”

Matthew’s hands caressed Sophie’s shoulders softly. “Andrea, I’d like you to meet Sophie Westland, my wife.” Sophie leaned back into her husband. “Sophie, this is Andrea Kane.”

“You can’t be serious. Did you talk to your father, Matthew? I have to tell you—”

“I already talked to my father, and the answer is no, I wouldn’t marry you even if I was still available, and you know exactly why.”

Matthew slid his hands down Sophie’s arms and grabbed one hand. He led her away from the gaping-mouthed debutante. They crossed the expanse of elaborately designed flagstone decoratively placed directly off of the driveway on the way to the huge southern styled porch with huge two-story columns supporting a three story mansion.

As he’d told her before arriving at the senator’s mansion, there was an abundance of thick-bodied, scary looking security men stationed just about every ten feet. They passed five men in uniforms before they even entered the house. Two more were stationed just inside the ornate double doors of the entry. Once inside, she saw two more on the upper landing. Then she registered her first look at Matthew’s father’s house.

Sophie barely noticed the expensive Italian tile gracing the floor of the humongous entryway. Instead, her gaze followed the grand staircase circling the enormous room. The room was easily as large as her high school gymnasium. In the center of the space was a single iron pedestal holding an elaborate fragrant bouquet of

flowers, the cost of which certainly exceeded the total price of construction for her high school gym.

Sophie looked around Camelot and wondered how she was ever going to fit into Matthew's life. She wanted to be more than his unworthy wife. Consummated marriage or not, even Sophie wondered what she had ever done to deserve Matthew and this life. Senator Westland was never going to abide her staying married to his son.

"Is there a bathroom close by? I'd like to freshen up a bit." Sophie still gazed around the impressive, palace-like home.

Matthew led her across the tile to a tall ornately carved door on the right opposite the stairway. "Here you go."

"Thanks. I'll just be a few minutes."

"Take your time." Matthew kissed the hand he held before releasing it.

Sophie stepped into a guest bathroom to rival any she'd ever seen in her life. The space was at least half as big as her whole apartment. The room swam in beautiful white and gray swirled marble tile. There were dark green and maroon accents including the luxurious towels hanging on an ornate gold metal towel rack.

Sophie hated to mar the pristine space, but she took the time to tidy herself up after her adventurous first ride in a limo. The mini sponge bath made her feel much better. She touched up her make up and gazed at herself in the mirror. What on earth was she doing here?

Sophie Westland was her new name. There was even a document stating that very thing somewhere in Matthew's briefcase. "Mrs. Matthew Westland," she said out loud. Her words echoed in the otherwise silent bathroom. "My name is Sophie Westland." More echoing ensued, and while she liked the sound of her new name, she wondered if keeping it permanently would be an option.

If she'd still been in high school, she would have practiced writing Mrs. Matthew Westland repeatedly in one of her notebooks. A childish thought, given her current circumstances. Sophie lost track of the time as the reality of her new circumstances intruded in her mind. A smile curved her lips in the mirror. Matthew Westland was her husband. She didn't know how long she stared at her reflection in the mirror over the ornate sink. A part of her knew she was hiding out. She needed courage to face her new life.

After a quick pep talk, she decided it was well past time to make an appearance. She couldn't stay in there forever, although it was very peaceful and appealing. Andrea was somewhere out there with Matthew, probably chasing him around. She put a hand on the doorknob and a smile on her face. Glancing back once, hating to leave her private sanctuary to whatever faced her beyond the ornate wood door, she turned the door handle and exited.

Matthew stood close by the bathroom and smiled when she emerged. Sophie joined him, then stared endlessly at the beautiful surroundings. She heard loud voices from outside as Matthew's father and Asher suddenly entered the foyer. Asher leaned in close, talking a mile a minute as Senator Westland's face got redder and redder. Andrea

followed behind the two men, sniffing loudly as big crocodile tears stained her perfect face.

“They did *what* in the back of the limo?” Senator Westland asked in a thunderous tone. Matthew stepped closer and put an arm around her shoulders as the senator sent an evil look her way. It mirrored the one Asher gave her.

Asher certainly hadn't wasted anytime tattling on them to Senator Westland. Sophie wondered how Matthew's father had managed to have a press conference and then make it to the opulent house in such good time. Did bastards like him have brooms to ride like witches?

“We consummated the marriage,” Matthew said evenly in response to the senator's question. He promptly turned Sophie towards the wide white and gray marble stairs, which wrapped around the large entryway in a circle and led her to the steps.

Senator Westland's face turned so red it almost looked purple. “You have ruined your political chances immeasurably. Why would you throw your life away like this?”

Matthew stopped and responded, “I got married to a woman I care about. I don't view that as ruining my chances or throwing away my life.”

“We'll see about that.” Senator Westland ushered a tearful Andrea into a parlor to the right of the auditorium-sized entryway.

Matthew took Sophie's arm and led her up the staircase. She knew she gawked at the beautiful house all along the way but couldn't stop.

“I'm sorry,” he said, interrupting her wayward thoughts.

“For what?” There were so many possibilities: the marriage, the limo sex, the ex-girlfriend trying to kiss him, the cranky new father-in-law.

“For everything.” He squeezed her hand once as they climbed the last few remaining stairs.

They crested the top of the grand entryway staircase and turned right down a long hallway with seemingly endless doors. Rich wood rubbed to a high sheen lined the walls along the grand hall. Huge colorful paintings hung as if displayed in a museum complete with lights to highlight each work of art. Sophie knew the place must be over fifty years old to have genuine wood products gracing the structure.

She asked herself a recurrent question. What was she doing here? Glancing at Matt, she remembered. She loved him. She'd been in love with him for months, maybe even since the first time she met him in Orin's office. For the first time, she didn't have to hide her feelings. Matthew Westland was her husband until death parted them.

A thrill ran up her spine as it occurred to her that Matthew was leading her to his bedroom. Butterflies danced in her stomach at all the sensual possibilities she might encounter once they arrived at their destination. She took a deep breath and with it came her new husband's delectable scent.

Sophie felt a little like Alice in Wonderland the further he led her down the opulent hallway to her future, “Do I really get to stay with you?”

“You’re mine. I’m never letting you go.” He squeezed her hand once his tone was resolute.

“Do we have to live here?” Sophie walked past a painting she was certain she’d seen in a museum once.

“No. We’re just spending the night. My place is further away and not as set up to repel the media as my father’s house.”

The media was something Sophie had never had to deal with before.

“Am I going to have to get a food tester for when we visit?” Sophie wasn’t stupid. She realized many of Senator Westland’s problems could be solved by her unfortunate demise.

“You have nothing to fear from me or my father. He’ll come around. Give him time.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to run for president? I wouldn’t want to hold you back.”

“Trust me. I don’t want to run for public office. That’s my father’s dream. He lost his big chance due to his own lust and a tell-all book by his former secretary slash longtime mistress. I don’t want to fulfill his self proclaimed lost destiny.”

“What *do* you want?” Sophie walked hand in hand with Matthew.

“I simply want to run my business. I built it up from almost nothing to what it is today. Now, if I can just manage to keep it intact with all the unfortunate political and social changes I have to live with lately.”

“Well, if you need any help at the office, I’ll volunteer.”

“I’m counting on it. I wish women were allowed to work. If they were, I’d have you chained to a desk in procurement before you could say kiss me.” He stopped before the last door on the hall and smiled.

“Kiss me,” she said. So, he did.

The kiss he gave her was hot and steamy with lots of hard thrusting tongue. He released her long enough to open the door to usher her inside. She turned as they stepped together into an equally impressive bedroom. It was decorated in an unmistakable masculine format. Dark woods and deep rich colors of blue dominated the room with one very large exception.

The expensive pink set of matching designer luggage piled in the center of the wood lined space was definitely out of place.

“I don’t think your father is going to give up as easily as you think. He’ll look for another way to get what he wants. Andrea is crying a river downstairs. At what point do we move her stuff out of *your* room?”

“It’s *our* room, and the luggage goes immediately.” He headed for the pile. He picked up the first offending piece he came to, which looked like a small make-up bag.

“I don’t think I belong here, Matthew.” This forlorn statement stopped him. He

turned back to her with a stern look, clutching the small bag like a football he was about to launch.

“I don’t ever want to hear you say that again. You’re my wife. On paper and most recently in the flesh.” Matt hurled the pink case out the open door as if to punctuate his statement. The sound of its subsequent crash actually lifted her spirits.

“I want to believe. But why do I feel that obstinate forces are against us?” Sophie smiled and approached him, wanting so much to belong to his world.

“Because obstinate forces *are* against us.” Matthew took a step in her direction a dimpled grin lit his face. “We’ll just ignore them, okay?”

Sophie placed her arms around him and hugged him close. “Okay,” she whispered and kissed his chin.

“I’ll do everything in my power to deserve you, Sophie.”

Matthew lowered his lips to hers and kissed her passionately. His tongue slid around her mouth slowly and methodically. She allowed herself to be hypnotized by it. As they kissed, he danced her backwards towards the bed. His hands ran over her backside, which heated up quickly. The warmth of his fingers massaging her hips now thrust back into him with desire. He stuck a hand under one thigh and hitched her leg up as if in memory of their first experience in the hallway.

All they needed was a metal door...or perhaps a nice big bed would do. Sophie heaved a deep sigh and thrust her tongue in his mouth. He seemed on the verge of making things up to her. But instead they stumbled into the remainder of Andrea’s misplaced luggage, almost losing their balance. Matthew grabbed her firmly with one arm secure around her waist, keeping her from tripping to the floor.

Sophie gripped his arms to get her balance. She looked down at the luggage as all her insecurities surrounded her at once and sighed. “Like I said, I don’t think this marriage will be as easy to preserve as you think.”

“Fucking...pink luggage.” He released Sophie so fast she stumbled backwards trying to stay on her feet, wrapping her arms around one of the posts on the four poster bed. He cursed and picked up another designer bag and threw it overhand through the door to bounce against the other small one in the hallway. He picked up two more large pieces of pink luggage, one in each muscular arm and heaved them towards the door.

Sophie had no doubt he wanted to throw them out as he had the other two, but perhaps he didn’t want to incur a hernia, as the two he now carried appeared to be heavier. Instead, he strode across the room and shoved the luggage out into the hallway. He turned and did the same with the remaining three pieces of luggage. The final piece, a garment bag, he waddled up before he threw out the door, hopelessly mangled to land on the large heap outside their room.

Matthew banged the door shut and locked it, slamming a dead bolt into place. He turned to Sophie and registered her wide-eyed look. He was acting like a barbarian, a gorgeous hunky sexy barbarian that she wanted with every moistening fiber of her being. She watched as he took a visibly calming breath and approached her slowly. Stealthily.

“You aren’t afraid of me are you?” He took another deep breath and she watched as he released his hands from the fisted position.

“Of course not. You don’t think I look like a piece of overpriced, pink luggage, do you?”

* * * *

He sighed his relief at her lighthearted statement. “No, I think you look like a tasty treat.” Matt took a step closer. He gave her shapely body a once-over look and couldn’t help but lick his lips visibly in appreciation.

Had it only been less than an hour since he’d buried his cock in her hot body in the back of a limo? He still owed her at least an orgasm. A big one. Like the powerful one he’d experienced. Damn, he simply looked at her and got granite hard. Every single time.

Today was the first time Matt hadn’t forced himself to fight the urge. Finally able to give in to his passion and his ever-ready erection when in her presence, he’d taken her...deliciously and completely and, unfortunately, semi-publicly in the limo. But now she was his and they were all alone behind a locked door.

“Surely you won’t throw a tasty treat out of your room, will you?” Her smile was sultry and made Matt want to wrap around her goodness and never emerge.

“Nope, I eat tasty treats. Savoring them on my tongue until they melt.” Matt made his way towards her, his dick leading the way. He saw her glance down at the front of his slacks tented with his rampant arousal.

Sophie’s face filled with color and yet she smiled seductively. “Think anyone will knock on the door?” she asked as he stepped directly into her personal space.

“Not unless they have a death wish.”

Sophie glanced over his shoulder at the door a moment and then shifted her gaze to his, asking with an amused lilt in her voice, “That’s a deadbolt, right?”

“Yep.” Matt pressed into her as he held her gaze. His hands slipped around her back to hold her tight. “I think it’s time I started making things up to you.”

“Do you?” Sophie tilted her head back, perhaps in deference to their height difference. He leaned down and pressed his lips to her forehead. He kissed a path down to her lips via one soft cheek.

“I do,” he said and moved a hand down to her lush derrière. Her face still tilted upwards towards his, but now she sported an expectant look. He leaned in and pressed his mouth to hers chastely, but she set the speed when she opened for him, murmuring his name in surrender. He tasted her need as she wrapped her soft tongue around his. Her hands circled his waist, pulling him closer. She wanted him all right. If the delicious sting of her fingernails piercing the small of his back were any indication of her eager desire, she was ready.

Matt slid his hands down past her luscious ass to her thighs and lifted her up with ease, pressing her open legs against his yet again rock-hard cock. Once her legs were

wrapped around him, he slid a hand up to her back and popped her bra strap through her shirt. He carried her to the massive bed he used when he stayed in his father's house. This would be the first time he'd brought a woman in here. He should wait and take her to his own house to do all the things he wanted to do to her but found he lacked the willpower to leave this room. Not until he heard her moan, or better yet scream, in climax at least once. Maybe twice.

"Sophie, my love, you're so beautiful. I promise to make you delirious," Matt whispered and placed her by the bed. Her only response was a delicious, breathy sigh. She stood on wobbly legs as he undressed her hurriedly. Her head tilted back as he stroked her nipple while taking her bra off. She moaned when he slid her panties down her legs and kissed just below her belly button as she stepped out of them.

Once he had them both naked, he pulled the sheets back and placed her on them before crawling over her. He pressed his body to hers, suppressing a shudder of ecstasy. It was their first flesh-to-flesh encounter. His cock rested at the drenched entrance to her body. Liquid, warm and slick from her pussy, coated the head of his dick. It was all he could do not to slip into that tight, inviting space and thrust until they both screamed in climax, but he held back even as his cock tried to stretch forward. Matt would take pleasure in delighting her first. She deserved some quality sexual foreplay and an orgasm or two without an audience. He stroked his fingertips down her sides before he shifted to expose her body. He wanted to lick and suck on her nipples for starters. His mouth landed on the soft sensitive flesh directly below her ear. Light fragrance from her skin and hair wrapped around his senses, prodding him to taste her flesh there, too.

"Matt...I...oh, you feel so...oh...good. I knew you would." Her husky whisper caressed his libido all the way to his balls as her hand slid across his back and down to his ass. His rabid cock trapped between them pressed against her thigh, throbbing against her soft flesh and almost letting go in bliss.

Matt luxuriated in the feel of her soft body still half underneath his. He barely held back his imminent climax as her hands delicately caressed his back. He kissed a path back to her face before he whispered, "Feel free to make as much noise as you wish."

He'd never wanted a woman as much as he wanted his own wife at this very moment.

Matt kissed her mouth, swirling his tongue in her warm depths before retreating. He trailed wet kisses down her neck on a mission to capture the peak of one breast. He licked her nipple once, eliciting the delectable sound of her quick intake of breath. When he planted his mouth around the tip and sucked on her, she cried out. Her fingertips dug into his back and his cock throbbed against her thigh in near completion.

Matt shifted further off her delectable body before he came on her leg. He ran his hand down to her slick pussy with the intention of seeking immediate entrance with his fingers. As before, when she'd surprised him in the limo, she was already slick, wet, and ready for him. He stroked his thumb across her clit. She bucked her hips upward and her hands dove into his hair. He sucked harder on her nipple in a rhythmic motion set to the same tempo as his thumb stroking her below. He slipped two fingers inside her passage and she rode them. Her breath came in panting gasps now. The sound made him hard

enough to puncture a sheet of steel.

Matt moved slightly and his cock came in contact with her thigh again. The sensation of her sweat slicked skin nearly drove him over the brink as he listened to her sexy excited voice while he pleased her.

“Oh, Matt,” she cried out. “Oh, my God.”

Matt nipped at her tip once and continued curling his fingers inside her as his thumb stroked her clit. His other hand rested on the breast he wasn't sucking on. He plucked at her other nipple until she arched off the bed and loudly climaxed, moaning over and over. “Oh, God, Matt. Oh, God!”

He basked in his ability to pleasure her in a bed instead of in a public hallway. Just as she'd pleased him in the not-so-private limo they'd arrived in.

Her pussy muscles clenched around his fingers once more in post release. God, she was tight. His cock thumped against her leg in anticipation of entering the space where his fingers rested. He kissed a path from her breast to her mouth. Her hands went to his face as he consumed her for a few minutes before pressing ardent kisses down her throat. He kept kissing downward, pausing briefly at one breast, but had another destination in mind. He kissed his way to her curls, the musky scent of which was driving him insane. He wanted to taste her. Burying his face between her legs, he took a long lick ending at her clitoris and delighted in the small scream she let out.

“Matt...” she panted in that low husky tone.

He didn't respond he just clamped his mouth around her clit and sucked on her until she arched her back and screamed again. He plunged three fingers inside her pussy and felt the sweet, wet heat surround them, at the precise moment the climax rolled through her. He rose to his knees before her open legs, his cock leading the way again, wanting to do nothing more than ram inside until ecstasy took him. But he had a particular position in mind. Would she let him do what he wanted?

“Sophie?”

“Umm. Hmm.”

“Turn over. I'd like to try something.”

“Anything you want,” came her breathy response as she turned over. The sight of her delicious ass just about made him spew his wad, but he held his desire in check. Matt lifted her hips until she was resting on her knees, her derriere almost in line with his ready cock.

He'd never cared for the term doggie-style, but he certainly enjoyed the position. Not to mention the easy access to dangling breasts he could reach for while thrusting deeply and repeatedly. His cock pumped forward in unrestrained desire. Matt hadn't had the opportunity to utilize this position for a long time. He missed it and wanted Sophie to love it.

“Are you ready?” Matt asked, stroking her back with one hand as he stroked his own cock with the other. With her murmur of compliance, he came up close behind her and placed the head of his throbbing cock against her clit and stroked her. She moaned

and backed into him, trying to connect as he rubbed their respective sensitive parts together in foreplay.

After teasing his dick for a moment, Matt entered her slick, tight sheath with only the head of his cock and then an additional inch or so. He put his hands on her hips, one palm on each round fanny cheek, his fingers splayed over her hips, intending his first thrust to touch her womb. Surging forward, he slid all the way inside with one sure stroke. Sophie arched her back once he was fully seated to the balls. Her beautiful hair flipped and danced across her lean back. He reached down to grab a handful as he tunneled inside of her pussy once, twice, and again.

Pleasure zipping up his spine in electric jolts from the intimate contact, he reached around to finger her clit, wanting her to come for him while he thrust deeply inside her body from behind. The silky feel of her hair slipping through his fingers prompted him to secure a handful closer to her scalp. The scrumptious scent of their lovemaking drifted up from between their bodies and mingled with her perfume to tease and arouse. Three deep satisfying thrusts later, he had a hold of her head with soft tendrils of her hair wrapped securely through his fisted hand as the fingertips of the other danced across her clit. All the while, he powered his cock from tip to balls slowly in and out with a strength of will he never knew he possessed, then in and out again.

Sophie made a shrill keening noise and stiffened. Her lovely back arched in sudden release and when Matt felt her inner muscles undulating across his dick in climax, he lasted only two final strokes before growling his release in wild pleasure.

Matt bent over, unable to hold his satisfied body upright any longer. His mouth found the space between her shoulder blades to taste her slick skin between kisses. He wasn't the only one panting in pleasure.

Sophie was even more incredible than he'd imagined and certainly worth the long wait he'd endured to have her as his one and only.

His wife...in the blissful flesh.

Chapter Five

Sophie wondered if it would be fatal to feel so good. Matthew, still bent over behind her and intimately attached, kissed her shoulder blades murmuring soothing things while his hands roamed her body, stroking here and there. She'd never felt so decadently fabulous in all her life.

"Matthew?"

"Yes, love."

"That was amazing."

"I'm so glad you liked it." His mouth caressed the center of her back, kissing a path down her spine. She felt his penis slip out of her. She wanted him back inside already.

"Did *you* enjoy it?" She turned her head to look over her shoulder at him.

"No. Let's do it again." He laughed and nipped her shoulder once. "Of course, I enjoyed it. Am I forgiven for the limo ride home?"

"Maybe."

"Maybe?" He stopped his nurturing of her back and flipped her over. Before she took her next breath, he covered her with his body and kissed her mouth passionately and repeatedly never giving her a chance to speak.

"Now, am I forgiven?" He rained kisses across her lips and chin.

"Yes. You are forgiven. But I hope you won't find any interest in voyeurism, because I'm not likely to be talked into it again."

"No problem. I can't believe I didn't have performance anxiety. Now, you see how desperate I was to make you mine in the flesh."

"I hope we get to stay together."

"We will. Forever. You're stuck with me."

A flicker of doubt from Sophie's memory betrayed her. She wondered if her father had told her mother it was forever when they got married. When push came to shove, Sophie's father said whatever he had to in order to achieve his goal. She was naturally distrustful of men in general. She'd lived with hard lessons growing up through her mother's pain.

Her gut said Matthew was the opposite of her father. Or was her over-satisfied libido speaking now? She closed her eyes and wished she could be sure her husband was the man she wanted him to be, and not a replica of her father. The painful memory of finding out her father was a horrible, despicable man entered her mind just then.

The very day Sophie had turned eight years old, she'd skipped downstairs to find her mother, shoulders slumped forward, crying over a letter crushed in her shaking hands. Sophie hadn't made her presence known. On the kitchen table in front of her mother rested a large package she'd apparently recovered from the mail. There were large pictures and official documents spread over the matching homemade placemats.

Sophie had seen the mailman from her bedroom upstairs and come rushing to see if there was anything for her. It was her birthday and maybe her daddy had sent something for her that year. Her best friend Anna had gotten a puppy from her daddy who lived far away.

In the package, Sophie learned much later, was not a present for her, but instead divorce papers from their father. Her sister Hannah had been nearly seven, her brother Jonathan almost six. Sophie got close enough to see the pictures were of their father. He was naked with another woman.

Sophie had snuck out, pretending she hadn't seen anything. By the time she'd entered the room the second time, her mother had hidden the evidence. Sarah Brent had wrapped her arms around her oldest daughter, wished her the happiest of birthdays, and told her how much she loved her, even while she'd surely been mending her own broken heart.

Sophie had never wanted to endure a broken heart over a man. She vowed to never fall in love. But it was too late. She was already falling for Matthew Westland. And had been since the day she'd met him. He hadn't done anything despicable...yet, and perhaps he wouldn't, but she tried to keep an even perspective. Matthew was a man in a world that favored men in all aspects. She should reserve her final judgment for later.

"But you aren't really stuck with me. You could choose to get rid of me if you wanted, and I would be powerless to stop you. Even consummating the marriage only buys me a year of certainty." Sophie spoke the words circling her mind without meaning to voice them.

Matt rose up off of her and stared into her eyes. "I'm not that kind of man. I won't let anything part us, especially not since I've tasted you. No one gets to eat you but me." He smiled mischievously and hugged her close, burying his face in her throat for a sloppy kiss.

He sounded very sincere. She hoped nothing changed him. She hoped Matt's famous father would bow to the inevitable but feared he was much like her own sire. He wouldn't likely be stopped until he got exactly what he wanted.

And it wouldn't matter who got hurt along the way.

"Sophie. What are you thinking?" Matt's concerned voice caught her attention.

She reached up to stroke his handsome face with her fingers. "I'm thinking we'll have to stay united against our ruthless fathers."

"We'll win." Relief softened his features. He kissed her forehead once before pressing light kisses down her face to her lips.

Even with all the embarrassment she'd endured, it had been too easy. They'd have to watch their backs and dodge knives everyday from now on. Sophie wanted to win. The thought of triumph circulated briefly in her mind before she succumbed to Matthew's teasing mouth raining kisses across her parted lips.

* * * *

Matt drifted off to sleep, curled around Sophie after making love to her slowly a second time. He was awakened a short time later from a lusty dream involving Sophie and a large steamy shower, when he heard his cell phone chirping. He sat up searching the darkening room for where he'd dropped his pants. He noted the digital clock displayed a time still early in the evening.

His phone stopped only to start up a second time. Matt crawled over his gorgeous, sleepy wife and retrieved his phone. The caller ID showed one of his father's many numbers.

"What!" Matt growled into the phone angrily.

"Matthew, I'd like to speak to you in my study." His father's cultured, serene voice grated his nerves.

"I have nothing to say to you." Matt glanced over his shoulder watching Sophie sleep. He moved to the bathroom so as not to disturb her in case the call became a loud argument.

"Please, son, just hear me out. Come down to my study so we can discuss this. After you hear what I have to say, then if you want to say married to...your present wife, so be it. I just want to point out a few facts you may not already know."

"I won't change my mind, and her name is Sophie Westland."

"Yes, well. I believe I deserve to be heard, Matthew. Or are you afraid something I say will make you change your mind?"

"I have no doubts about Sophie. If I come down, I won't discuss marriage to Andrea."

"Fine. Just come down to my study. Please."

"Right." Matt hung up and took several deep breaths to calm his rioting anger. He slipped out of the bathroom and approached the bed. He leaned over and kissed Sophie on the mouth. She stirred awake, opened her eyes, and smiled at him.

"Who was on the phone?" she asked.

"My father wants to have a chat with me in his study." Matt leaned against the

edge of the bed with one hip.

“Why?” Sophie sat up clutching the sheets to her chest.

“Probably to give me the ‘I’m disappointed in you’ speech. It won’t be the first time.” He crossed his arms and sighed. “I also suspect it won’t be the last.”

“Want me to go with you?”

“No. I’ll be right back. You rest up. You’ll need your strength later.” He kissed her mouth again and searched around the floor for his clothing. He didn’t bother to button up his shirt. He didn’t plan on being gone long.

* * * *

“What is so damn important to interrupt me from my wedding night?” Matt asked as soon as he opened the double doors to his father’s richly appointed study.

Matt registered the disapproval of his father’s gaze from twenty feet away. He arrived in his socks with no shoes and his shirt was only buttoned up half way. His slacks were hopelessly wrinkled.

“Matthew, really. Could you have at least dressed properly?”

“I’m dressed properly enough for my own motives. What do you want to talk about?”

“Andrea has something she’d like to say to you.”

Matt hadn’t seen her until too late. Damn his father anyway. “I have nothing to say to her either,” he said and turned to go.

“Matt, please hear me out.” Andrea’s pleading voice stilled him. She rarely pleaded with anyone. She demanded things. Pleading was a new sound he’d never heard from her, and he sighed once before he stopped and turned back to listen.

“I know you’re still angry about the last time we spoke. I’d like to tell you something, if you’ll let me.”

That was the understatement of the year. Matt truly wanted to leave, but he leveled a gaze at her. Perhaps she needed to get something off her chest. Fine. It wouldn’t change anything, but he wasn’t such a beast he wouldn’t allow her to apologize. Perhaps she needed closure or something. He wasn’t angry. He didn’t care enough about her to be angry.

“I’ll leave you two alone to talk.” His father exited the double doors winking at Matt as he passed. Matt resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

“Come and sit with me Matthew.” Andrea patted the sofa next to her. Her placating tone put him directly on his guard.

“I’m fine right here.” Matt didn’t trust her. All it would take was for her to throw herself on him at the precise moment his father jumped back in the room with a camera.

“Are you afraid of me?”

Matt sighed deeply not hiding his anger. “What do you want to say, Andrea? You

have five seconds.”

“I wanted to apologize, of course. Please don’t be cross with me. I know the last time we saw each other was difficult.”

“Difficult? No. It was embarrassing for you, maybe, but not difficult. Especially not for me.”

“Well, I’d been practically coerced, you see...”

“Coerced, my ass.” Matt laughed. “Here’s what I remember, Princess. Several months after a fairly unsatisfying drunken episode together, which I don’t even remember very clearly, I found you naked and spread eagle in *my* office, on *my* desk, with some far-too-young-for-you junior executive’s face buried between your legs. I also heard what you shouted about me. Remember? You said I lacked the ability to satisfy you because I was far too old for your discerning tastes. The only difficult thing for me was replacing the desk you used. I only wish you’d found a different office for your rendezvous and spared me the visual of the two of you.”

Her face turned crimson. “I want to tell you something, Matthew...you *are* too old. I never wanted to be with you in the first place. If it weren’t for my father pressuring me into your life, I’d never give you the time of day, and furthermore...”

Matt listened to her spew for what seemed like an hour about all his failings and why she ultimately wouldn’t marry him even if he were the last man on earth. He wished she could have wound down faster. He was hungry and wanted to shower off the memories of his past.

He glanced at his watch and decided it had been time enough. When Andrea took her next deep breath, he purposefully looked at his watch, tapped the face twice and left her on the study sofa still screeching. He’d been gone for almost half an hour and he missed his wife. Sophie didn’t screech when she spoke. He wanted nothing more than to immerse himself in his luscious wife for the rest of his days. Starting right now.

“Matthew. How did everything with Andrea go? Did you two reach an understanding?” His father suddenly shot out of the hallway leading to the kitchen.

“Was that what we were supposed to do? Kiss and make up? You are unbelievable. That’s never going to happen.” Matt mounted the stairs, taking them two at time until his father’s voice stopped him.

“I don’t understand why you can’t see reason. With Andrea at your side, her father the governor at your back, and my political connections, you would be the most powerful president this country has ever seen.”

“Stop flattering me.” Matt turned leaning on the balustrade. “Let me make it clear to you. I don’t want to be in politics. I never did. Not even when *you* were senator. I always hated it. I will never willingly choose a life in politics.”

“Matthew—”

“No. Stop talking. Sophie and I are leaving tomorrow.”

“You can’t leave yet. The Tiberius Group representative will be here day after

tomorrow to check...your wife out.”

“Her name is Sophie. Come on try it once. So-phie.”

“Once it has been ascertained that woman shared conjugal relations with you, then you’ll be free to go.” His father ignored him. “Why don’t you just stay here for a couple of days? The press will be all over you if you leave now.”

“I don’t trust you. I’ll take my chances with the press. We’re leaving tomorrow morning after breakfast. I’ll direct the Tiberius representative to my house to conduct the necessary body scan.”

“As you wish.” His father acquiesced and sauntered back into the study. Matt couldn’t help his anxiety at his father giving up so easily. He’d have to be on guard. Especially up until they left tomorrow.

He meandered his way back to his room by way of the kitchen, taking a tray up for their dinner. Once inside his room, he placed the tray on the flat chest at the end of the bed. Sophie sat up suddenly in half sleepy surprise.

The sheet she’d previously had clutched to her to hide herself slipped down to reveal a lovely, rosy-tipped breast. Matt sat next to her at the edge of the bed and leaned in to take a lick of the nipple being presented. Her moan made him stiffen and forget about dinner. He felt her hands slip into his hair and pull him forward on top of her, but then she halted and lifted her head.

“Wait. I smell food.”

“I brought a dinner tray up with me. Are you hungry?” he asked before things went too much further.

“Starving. What did you bring?”

“A variety of things. Come on, I guess I can let you out of bed long enough to eat.”

Matt handed Sophie an old, navy-colored silk robe of his. They sat down to eat at the small table located directly in front of the large unlit fireplace situated along one wall.

“What did your father want?”

“The usual. Andrea was down there on the pretense of apologizing to me, but it was just another ploy by my father to sway me to consider her for a wife.”

She blew out a long sigh. “Were you swayed? I mean, she is rich, connected, and fairly pretty. How come you don’t want to marry her?”

“Besides the fact that I’m already happily married to you? Well, let’s see. The biggest reason is that I caught her spread eagle on *my* desk at work late one night after hours. The junior executive she was connected to had his face buried very enthusiastically between her legs.”

Sophie’s eyes widened. “Well, I guess that would do it. Were you angry?”

“Hell yes, I was angry. I had to call in my executive secretary at one in the morning and pay her triple over time to re-type all the papers Andrea oozed love juice all

over in her zeal to fuck a guy several years her junior. I don't want to talk about her any more, okay?" Sophie nodded and their meal moved to less incendiary topics of discussion.

During the course of the meal Sophie's oversized robe slipped half way off one shoulder.

"Would you be willing to go topless for dessert?" he asked with a smile.

"Depends on the dessert."

"Fresh strawberries with a side of rich, thick chocolate dipping sauce."

"If it were anything but chocolate, you'd be out of luck." She blushed a pretty pink from waist to temple as she peeled the robe away to reveal the upper half of her gorgeous body. He lifted the lid off of a bowl of strawberries and another off a warmer with melted chocolate. Picking up the berry on top, he dipped it into the chocolate, swirling it around, thickly coating it along with the tips of his fingers, and led it to her mouth.

He watched as she closed her eyes and opened her lush mouth in anticipation of him inserting it in for her bite, but he had another destination. He ran the tip of the berry across one of her bared nipples, smearing chocolate around the tip. Her eyes shot open to his smiling face.

"Matthew! I wanted that chocolate."

"Too bad. You have to share. Here." He placed the strawberry at her lips for a nibble. "You eat your dessert your way, and I'll eat mine, my way." He then clamped his mouth over her chocolate-covered nipple to suck and lick off the creamy, warm treat.

Four strawberries later, she had partially licked-off chocolate on both breasts, on her belly, and on one inner thigh. Matt reached for a fifth strawberry, but she stopped him with her hand in the bowl.

"It's my turn. Take your shirt off," she demanded with a determined look in her eyes.

He removed it quickly, and before it hit the floor, her borrowed robe slipped off completely. She straddled him, naked, and proceeded to stroke a layer of warm chocolate across his collarbone. She immediately followed it with her warm, wet tongue and a happy noise.

"You taste so good, Matthew. I knew when I named you Mr. Yummy, I was right." Then she wiped the berry down his throat and licked him repeatedly until he was completely devoid of chocolate. She popped the strawberry in her mouth and savored it.

"You called me Mr. Yummy behind my back?"

"Only to myself." She reached over to the chocolate bowl and dipped her finger in without a berry this time. She brushed her finger over his lips and followed quickly with her tongue, lapping at his mouth seductively. When the chocolate was gone, he grabbed her hand and sucked the remaining chocolate off her finger.

When an obvious bulge in his pants reared up in between them, she looked at the

chocolate bowl again before traveling back to below his belt with a question in her eyes.

Matt cocked his head to the side in mock protest and pretended to be frightened. "Don't even think about that. The chocolate is way too hot."

"It is not, you big baby. You put it on my nipple."

"That was from the top of the bowl. I'm sure the bottom is scalding."

"Is not. Strip down and prepare to be chocolate-coated!"

"Only if you blow on it." Her delighted laughter surrounded him as he stood and stripped slowly. When he was as naked as she was, she dipped her finger in the chocolate and swirled it around until it was thickly coated while he watched in wicked fascination.

She formed her mouth into a tight small "o" and blew on the chocolate as if to cool it down for placement on his dick, which was already standing at attention for her. He bravely endured her brushing cooled sauce all over the tip of his happy cock.

It wasn't too hot, and besides her tongue was hotter. She licked chocolate off the very tip of the head while he watched. Then she spread some more all over and placed her finger in her mouth as she knelt before him, mimicking what she was about to do to his cock.

She opened her mouth wide and devoured him as he tried to stay on his feet. When he'd been thoroughly licked and was completely chocolate-free, she sat him back in the chair and straddled him again. The wet, hot seam beneath her curls was the hottest creamy treat yet as she impaled herself completely. She rode him until he exploded directly after she climaxed screaming his name.

Once in bed later on, Matt curled around his sleeping wife and knew he'd never been as happy as he was in this moment. He tightened his arms around his Sophie's perfect form and knew he'd fight tooth and nail to the death anyone foolish enough to step into the path of their bright future.

* * * *

Breakfast the next morning was a stilted, horrible, polite, conversation-ridden affair. Sophie didn't have much of an appetite but drank some coffee to get her brain started. Morning wasn't her favorite time of day anyway. Staring across an expanse of expensive wood grain at a woman leering at her new husband didn't help her attitude.

"Are you still leaving today?" Matthew's father asked civilly from his end of the table.

"Yes," Matthew answered in a clipped tone.

Andrea started sobbing and had to have one of the many security guards hanging around lead her from the table and out of the room. Matthew ignored her exodus, but the senator gave him a sour, disapproving look. Sophie didn't know what his father hoped to accomplish by leaving Andrea in his household to blubber at every meeting.

"She still loves you." Matthew's father said as if reading her mind. "Are you sure you won't change your mind and reconsider Andrea for your wife?"

Sophie wished to be anywhere else than in this situation here and now. How dare

his father ask him that while she sat in the room? What was she, a piece of furniture? Matthew took a deep breath, blew it out, and ignored his father's remarks. Sophie found she wasn't nearly as tolerant.

"Hello. I can hear you. My husband doesn't want to marry your weepy princess. Why don't you marry her yourself if you like her so much?"

Senator Westland looked at her like she was a repugnant bug. He placed a wounded look in his eyes and sent it to Matthew as if to express what a supreme embarrassment Sophie was.

"I have a wife I love. The marriage is consummated. Move on."

"Matthew, I wish you would see reason—"

Matthew stood up so abruptly his dining chair flipped backwards to the floor with a crash. "Let's go, Sophie." He extended his hand to her.

Sophie sprang up as if someone had goosed her and grabbed Matthew's warm fingers. They left behind their unfinished breakfast along with Matthew's father sputtering and shouting in their wake.

Sophie wore her clothing from yesterday as Matthew rushed her up the wide staircase towards his bedroom. She'd been hoping her luggage would be delivered by now. It had been left behind at Matthew's corporate headquarters directly after the hasty wedding ceremony the day before.

She'd washed out her underclothing in the opulent sink in Matthew's bathroom earlier. They were mostly dry this morning. Hopefully, her clothing would catch up with her one of these days.

"Matthew, could we stop at my apartment? I need to get some clothes."

"Sure, but let's get out of here. I sense a plot afoot. We should be wary—"

"Matthew." Andrea sprung out at them as they topped the stairway and rounded the corner of the hallway leading to his room. The mascara on her carefully made up face was running under her red-rimmed eyes. "Why won't you marry me? Don't you know how much I love you?"

"Get out of the way. We're leaving." Matthew pushed Andrea aside. Sophie trailed along in his wake, hand still laced through his.

"But what about last night?" Andrea wailed. "I thought after we made love in the study, you would reconsider our being together."

"What!" Matt turned around so fast Sophie ran into him.

Andrea took the opportunity of his pause of shock to throw her bony arms around his neck and kiss his face. Matt turned his head and got an open mouthed kiss from Andrea on his cheek.

Sophie reached up and grabbed a handful of Andrea's hair, but she held on for dear life, smearing lipstick on Mathew's face. Sophie pulled once again as hard as she could one handed and yanked Andrea away from a stunned Matthew. Andrea spun away but didn't leave.

“Are you crazy?” Matthew turned wild eyes to Sophie, shaking his head no. “I did not have sex with her in the study last night.”

“Why are you lying?” Andrea wailed.

“I’m not lying. Listen, I don’t know what you think you’re doing, but it won’t work. Sophie, let’s go. Now.”

Matthew grabbed her hand, pulling her towards his room. Sophie looked over her shoulder, but Andrea had already left the hallway. Very curious.

Once they reached the end of the hallway, Matthew tugged her into the room, shut the door behind them, and locked it. He grabbed her to him and leaned into her against the bolted door. Lifting his arms, he rested them near her head, cocooning her in the shelter of his arms. His forehead touched against hers. He took several deep breaths.

“I need to know you believe me.”

“I believe you,” she said.

“Why? I don’t know that *I’d* believe me.”

Her lips lifted in a smile. “I didn’t smell another woman on you last night when you came back up here with the food. More specifically, I didn’t smell Andrea’s gag-worthy perfume anywhere on you last night.” Sophie took a whiff of him and curled her upper lip. “But even after one short embrace, I can easily detect it now.”

Sophie wiped some of Andrea’s red lipstick off him. He grimaced and began wiping at his face himself.

“We’ll leave this evil house as soon as I wash off her stench, okay?”

“I’ll help you.” Sophie followed him to the bathroom. She couldn’t wait to get out of the senator’s house. Matthew was right. Something was going on there. Something sinister. She didn’t want to find out what it was or that it could tear them apart. Matthew may have paid for her, but she was the luckiest wife alive and she wanted to stay his wife.

Matthew sported a look of wonder as she stripped his clothing off, one piece at a time. She turned on both showerheads in the large walk-in stall and pulled him inside once the steam swirled in lazy circles around the room.

“I swear I didn’t even touch her last night,” he said again when she grabbed the soap and lathered it up between her hands.

“I know. Let me wash you off.” He watched as if hypnotized as her fingers worked up a rich lather. She started with his face, but soon after began spreading soapy bubbles all over his chest and neck. He stood still-as-a-statue as if waiting for what she would do next.

So she lathered some more soap in her hands and washed his dick and balls until he was hard as the marble in the shower surrounding them. She pushed him under a showerhead and rinsed him off, giving him a devious smile. She allowed the soap to slip out of her hand and on to the tile at their feet.

“Oops,” she said and bent over as if she were going to retrieve it. But instead, her mouth ‘accidentally’ fell on his rock-hard erection. Then she wrapped her hand around

the base of his impressive cock and went to her knees to fully express her sympathetic understanding of his innocence. She hoped he knew she believed him with the pressure of the suction she applied.

He allowed her to suck on him for a minute or two and then tried to pull her off, but she suctioned on with one goal in mind. Bring him off. His hands tangled in her hair as his breathing became harsh and erratic. He stopped trying to remove her mouth, but one hand went to the shower stall as if for balance.

The only other noise he made was the guttural sounding climatic one when he came.

Sophie smiled to herself as Matthew pulled himself together still resting his butt against what had to be chilly tile. His eyes closed, he panted and yet grinned like a fool. She'd put that grin on his face and reveled in the power to please him. She knew he hadn't expected it and that made it all the better.

"When I catch my breath," he gasped. "I'm going to wash you off, too, but I'm also going to do wicked things to you until you scream the walls down."

Sophie stood under one of the shower heads, allowing the spray to massage her back. "I'll let you."

"Thank you for believing me." He removed himself from the wall of the shower and took one long step until he was pressed against her chest to groin. "Now, turn around."

It was Sophie's turn to grin. "Is it wicked time already?"

"Turn around." His million-dollar smile was in place, but along with it was a predatory gleam that gave Sophie a thrill at the immediate possibilities.

Sophie turned and placed her hands against the tile. Matthew stepped up behind her and palmed both of her breasts, kneading lightly in massage. He adjusted the spray behind them as his knee came between her legs, signaling her to spread them wider. So she did.

Steam from the shower fogged the space they shared as Matthew released one breast to grab a bar of fragrant lavender scented soap from the ledge. He lathered the skin of her chest, legs and back, trading it between hands to cover her in foam. The infinite tenderness of his massage made her quiver with need.

His cock, which was already hard again, rested at the slit between her legs. She lowered her head to see and shifted her hips so his cock slid across her clit. The rumble of his laughter startled her.

"Patience," he said and kissed her bare wet shoulder. He deposited the soap on the ledge again, put his arms around her and rubbed himself against her, his chest to her back, the soap making them slippery together.

One of his hands slid from her waist to her clit to stroke and rub. The action surprised her, but not as much as having his cock suddenly enter her wet slit from behind.

"Oh," Sophie groaned as pleasure shot through her.

“Don’t let go of the wall,” Matt whispered in her ear as he thrust slowly in and out of her, his finger dancing across her clit. His other hand brushed across her soapy breasts, flicking her nipples with his nail, the sensation shooting straight to her clit where he still rubbed. His mouth kissed a path along her shoulder where he hadn’t put any soap all the way to her neck still bent forward.

“Watch while I play with you,” Matt whispered again.

Sophie opened her eyes and trembled in bliss, watching his hand between her legs...the other at her breasts. The slow slide of his immense cock thrust in and out of her body slowly and to the same rhythm of his hands and mouth.

Without warning, he slammed his cock inside of her and bit down lightly on her shoulder as his busy hand between her legs rubbed her to a screaming climax. Her legs sagged at the release, but he held her close until she could stand on her own again. He hadn’t stopped pumping his glorious cock inside of her for the duration.

Sophie placed her hands back on the wall of the shower, her legs trembling. “Fuck me, Matthew. I want to feel you come inside me.”

He growled, hugged her close and did what she ordered him to do.

Chapter Six

Matt was a lucky son of a bitch. Sophie was the best choice he could have for a partner in the increasingly difficult world in which they now lived.

He'd always been progressive about women's rights, at least until the Tiberius Group had come to power and fucked everything up. He kept his opinions to himself. It was safer to say nothing than to disappear or go to jail on trumped-up charges. He watched it happen to several powerful men across the country, men who had overestimated their importance and underestimated the power of the Tiberius Group.

They'd infiltrated key places and unfolded their plan point-by-point. "Put up or we'll shut you up" was their prevailing motto. They had the powerful political positions locked up. They had the all important finances to take over, and most importantly the muscle to carry it off, for now.

Matt made friends with other like-minded men in his limited social circle before the takeover. However, he didn't trust anyone completely. That would be suicide. He organized a group of unmarried men in his company to spare the former female employees from the public auction house or worse, the Tiberius Institution for orphaned women. He considered this a fate worse than death because if they had children, they'd be separated from them. At least in an auction, either public or private, a woman was allowed the privilege of motherhood.

Matt reassured his single female employees prior to the auction, but he hadn't spoken to all of them. He hadn't gotten a chance to talk to Sophie. He wanted to believe she would choose him if given the chance. He went to great secretive lengths to get what he wanted, hoping Sophie was interested.

And he'd done this all behind the scene, spending vast amounts of funds to subsidize the marriages so his female employees wouldn't suffer any more than they already were, including the procurement of his own wife.

His biggest secret was his involvement in the infamous Working Woman's Auction Memo Sophie adamantly hated. It stated simply that in order to expedite the

rampant and numerous single former working women out there with no man to care for them, any woman who had held a job would be auctioned off in the place of business where they had previously worked. Matt was the sole author of it. He should tell Sophie what he'd done, but the only time it came up, they weren't married yet. Given that she wanted to kick the author's balls up his ass, he felt his best course of action was to hide his creative memo-writing abilities for the time being. Some day he'd tell her the truth. He wrote it so he could save her, marry her, and most importantly, keep her in his life.

Orin Prichard hadn't gotten a wife at the Westland Corporate Auction, thankfully, which had been another goal of Matt's. The female employees he'd wanted to protect were now safely attached to decent men. Orin having fifty thousand dollars to bid at the Westland Corporate Auction crossed his mind again. Where had Orin come up with that kind of money?

In the very near future, he planned to initiate a gathering of his former female executives here at the company. Then they could contribute, if they wanted to, from the safety of their homes, as if he had stay-at-home employees. It would work. He'd have his female executives back one way or another. He'd been able to warn each one with the exception of Sophie. She'd been avoiding him like the plague, right up until the day the Tiberius Group forced her to stay home.

Now that his plan was in motion, he'd explain everything to her and finalize the details. In two days, when the Tiberius Group representative came to check the consummation of their marriage, he and Sophie no longer had to worry about his father and Andrea. Thirty-six more hours until the body scan. It couldn't come soon enough for him.

Sophie had scrubbed him down in the shower to rid him of Andrea's stink, as she referred to it. Then she'd done some other wildly imaginative things in the shower to prove she believed completely that he hadn't done the nasty with Andrea. Not every woman would've given him the benefit of the doubt in that volatile situation, let alone a blowjob in the shower to express her undying loyalty.

Having her order him to 'fuck her' afterwards nearly sent him to his knees. Even now he re-lived the incredible sensation of climax.

Matt glanced over at Sophie in the passenger seat of his hybrid Jaguar. He was a very lucky man indeed. Steering around a slow moving vehicle ahead on the road, he was glad he had the forethought to keep a vehicle at his dad's for escapes such as the one this morning.

Petroleum usage cars were heavily restricted. He was allowed to keep his since he'd put a custom energy-saving Thorium-Z-fueled backup operational system in it. His father was part owner of a Thorium-Z mining station on one of the moons of Mars.

It helped to be a former senator's only son, occasionally.

"Where are you going?" she asked when he missed the turn to her apartment and sped towards the downtown part of the city.

"We're going shopping."

"Shopping?"

“Definitely.”

“I haven’t gone shopping in a long time. I used to go with my sister, Hannah. She and I could always find the best deals.” She turned to him. “Do you really know someone nice for her to marry?”

“Yes. His name is Paul Brody. He’s a mid-level accountant. Sort of shy, but very non-threatening.”

“Yes, I know him,” she said. “Thank you.”

“Sure. Why is your sister afraid of men?”

“Probably because our father is such a prick. We all grew up in the wake of what he did to our mom. We lived practically hand-to-mouth until we left home for college. It took me six years and a couple of part-time jobs to earn enough to get my degree. Hannah swore she’d never marry or allow a man anywhere near her money once she was on her own.”

“You know she won’t be allowed to manage her own finances any longer.”

“Yeah, I know, but what’s worse is she won’t be allowed to finish college and earn anything anyway. And she worked so hard, too. She was less than a semester away from graduation. She wanted to teach but...” Sophie didn’t finish her sentence. There was no need.

“What did your father do to your Mom, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“He married her for her money. She worked for years and accumulated quite a nice chunk of change. She could have retired at the age of forty and lived the good life. But my father found her five years beforehand and pretended to love her.

“He insisted they marry when she got pregnant with me, but she kept him out of her primary accounts. Thirteen months after I was born, Hannah came along. On Hannah’s first birthday, my mom was seven months pregnant with my brother, Jonathan. Her doctor told her any more children after Hannah would be a risk to her health, but my father said he really wanted a son.

“Against doctors’ orders, she got pregnant a third time. My father convinced her to sign over a part of her accounts to him for safekeeping. He told her he wanted to ensure our welfare, the lying bastard prick.”

“I’m guessing he didn’t want to ensure anyone’s welfare but his own.”

“That’s right. He cleaned her out the next week. He not only took all her carefully saved money, but as a bonus, he managed to get authorization for several large co-signed loans first.

“After he left on a supposed business trip, my mother was notified as to her new financial status and crushing debt load. He managed to gamble it all away so she couldn’t even sue him to get it back.”

“He gambles?”

Sophie nodded morosely. “My mom had to go look for a job at eight months pregnant. She went in to premature labor on her second week back at work.

“Luckily, her boss was an old friend of the family and he helped her out. She had three babies under the age of four and she was only worried about us growing up without a father. She always said she got the better end of the deal. ‘All your father got was money,’ she would say, ‘I got three wonderful kids.’”

“I wish I could have met her.” Matt remembered he signed Sophie’s bereavement paperwork over a month before the take over. When she returned back to work, he wanted to seek her out and comfort her but believed his advances might be met with hostility.

“Me, too. She was remarkable. I wanted to work so she could retire. She died before I could. I wanted to ensure Hannah graduated and got a good start in life, but I failed to do that, too.”

“I’m so sorry, Sophie.”

“For what?”

“For the general shit women are being put through because of the Tiberius Group. I wish I were in a position to stop it, but I’m not. I’d be put in jail like everyone else who has spoken up. I hope it doesn’t make you disappointed in me.” Earning her regard was something he wanted from her desperately, especially since his hands were tied by the Tiberius Group in so many other ways.

“I’m not disappointed in you. I know nothing can be done right now. Give it time. It’s a flawed system. The world can not run smoothly with men alone in the workforce.” She laughed. “Some women will have to work. It’s inevitable. I heard they’re already making allowances for certain professions.”

“Doctors, nurses and most medical technical jobs so far, but they’re severely restricted as to going out unaccompanied by their...men. Some secretarial work is being allowed on a case-by-case basis. I’ve applied to allow several of the secretarial pool at Westland Industries to remain. It’s pending, like everything else.”

Sophie turned sideways in her seat to watch him. “You don’t need to take me shopping, you know.”

“What makes you think I’m doing it for you? Maybe I want to watch you do a personal fashion show for me. Then you can strip down and I can help you get dressed again.”

“That’s so sweet of you.”

Matt glanced over at her smiling face and winked. “That’s me, sweet as sugar.”

“Where’s *your* Mom, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“She lives in Europe. She has since the split with my father when I was ten or so. She used to come back twice a year to visit me, but I won’t let her to come back to the States with the Tiberius Group foolishness. Now, I correspond with her.”

“Why didn’t she take you with her when you were ten?”

“My father wouldn’t allow it. He had big plans for me. He always has, especially after his own fall in politics. Having a mistress with a ‘tell all’ book is bad, but divorce is

death for a politician. Even divorce of one's parents is difficult to overcome in the political ring these days."

"But you still don't want to be president, even with your parents' non-divorced marital situation."

"Nope. I like what I do. I built my company up to what it is today with my brains and my own two hands. I love the fact I'm good at putting people together into successful teams, which then make my business ideas even better. I wish my pool of potential employees hadn't just been cut in half."

"Before the Tiberius Group take over, every woman I knew wanted to work for Westland Industries."

"Why is that?"

"Because it was one of the few places where women still got fair and equal treatment."

He winked at her again. "I'm glad *you* came to work for me."

"Me, too. Especially yesterday."

Matt smiled but didn't respond. He orchestrated yesterday to get exactly what he wanted as he tried to convince himself it was different than what the Tiberius Group had done.

* * * *

The Tiberius representative sent to do the body scan looked harried. He didn't seem to want to spend a long time and hurried the process along with obvious haste. The device he carried looked like the wand they used at airports to do bonus scans of those people who failed the strip-down-and-walk-through-the-box initiation.

He ran the body scan wand two inches away from Sophie's clothing, down her body from chest to knees. Then back up again. It had a peculiar foul smell like burning plastic. It made a beeping sound, and as it passed over where Matt guessed her uterus would be, the beeping became a solid tone. Matthew hoped that was a good noise.

"I've finished my results," he told Matt.

"The test shows you *have* copulated with your wife within the past forty eight hours as required."

"Great. Now that we've complied, I can get Sophie's paperwork for permanent status as my wife."

"Normally that would be true, but there is another matter."

"What other matter?"

The representative looked at Sophie pointedly. "Perhaps your wife would be more comfortable in the kitchen."

"No, she would not..." Sophie stood and Matt had no doubt she'd blast this government toad to kingdom come.

“You may speak freely in front of her,” Matt said and sent a placating look to remain quiet.

“I don’t advise it.” The representative put his magic copulate-o-meter away. Sophie stuck her tongue out at his turned back. Matt gave her a give-me-a-break stare.

“I’m not asking for your advice. Tell me why I can’t get my permanent marital paperwork.”

“Well, I made a stop at Senator Westland’s house before coming here today.” He gave Matt another pointed stare as if to say, “Trust me, you really don’t want your wife to hear this.”

Matt exchanged a knowing glance with Sophie. They both obviously wondered what evil Senator could be up to now.

“I told you specifically I would be at this address today. Why did you need to go to my father’s house?”

“There has been a formal complaint lodged against you, Mr. Westland. It seems you’ve had carnal relations with another female within the past forty-eight hours since your marriage to this woman. It complicates things for you.”

“What!”

Mathew couldn’t believe it. The complaint didn’t have to be true. It would also hold up his permanent paperwork for an indeterminate length of time until a magistrate had the time and inclination to look at it. Damn his father anyway. He should have expected something devious and underhanded. Now he’d have to prove something he knew he didn’t do. How could he convince Sophie to believe him yet again?

Sophie’s face went white. She shut her eyes and took a long step back away from the two men. The Tiberius representative gave Matt an, ‘I told you that you should have sent her into the kitchen’ look.

“I most certainly did not have carnal relations with another woman,” Matthew said in a quietly seething tone. He turned to Sophie who already shaking, her face turning to a disturbing tomato red color.

“My equipment is not malfunctioning, sir. I did a triple check to verify the status of my handheld device.”

“Well, you need to do another triple check, because it isn’t working. I only had sex with my wife.” Matt directed this comment at Sophie, willing her to believe him.

“I’m afraid with the formal complaint registered by the other woman’s father, it will be for the Tiberius Group Magistrates’ Division to decide. And you should know, the other woman is the daughter of the governor of the state. She will most likely take precedence over your wife if no viable proof to either side of the complaint is brought forward. You should be prepared to find another husband for her.”

“But there is no way they can prove I did something I didn’t do.”

The Tiberius representative shrugged his shoulders and turned towards the door as if to leave. Sophie made a high-pitched noise and sat down. She put her face in her hands

and started sobbing. Matt was afraid if he tried to comfort her he'd be dismissed or maybe punched in the mouth for his trouble.

"I didn't do it, Sophie, I swear I didn't touch her."

"I know...hic...but it won't matter. She's the governor's daughter, so I'm the one who'll be screwed in the end no matter what you did or didn't do."

"What are my options?" Matt asked the Tiberius representative before he could get away.

He shrugged his shoulders again as a response. "You'll have to find a way to prove your innocence. But my testimony won't help your case. I show ejaculate inside the other woman containing your specific DNA. The proof is undeniable. And there is something else."

"What else could there possibly be?"

"The governor's daughter is pregnant. She carries a child which would have been conceived on or very close to the week of Christmas."

Sophie stopped crying and gave Matt a very disturbed look. The implication was clear. Whether he remembered the experience or not, it was very possible Andrea carried his child from his drunken Christmas pout at letting Sophie go.

"The child might not be mine. When can a test on the fetus be done?" Matt asked.

"Oh, they won't allow a test on the child until after it's born. Your fate will be decided by the magistrate long before that, I'm afraid.

"You may be asked to annul the marriage in favor of the other woman carrying the child."

Matt closed his eyes. "I'm the only husband she's ever going to have. What if Sophie's pregnant by the time of the hearing?"

"My scan says she's not pregnant yet. But as I said before, this will certainly be a matter for the Magistrate Core of the Tiberius government to decide. The laws are new and being amended day to day. I can't say for certain how your case would turn out.

"I know, with other cases pending, that timing has a big part in magistrate decisions regarding two women being pregnant by the same man. You know, first come, first served, so to speak." He then chuckled far too long over his stupid, insensitive joke.

Matt couldn't speak. He couldn't see anything except his father's neck between his hands. He shuffled the representative out the door and followed behind him on a path to straighten this out right now. Matt was going to have a little chat with his father.

Sophie ran out of their house after him, calling his name. The Tiberius representative almost had a cow on the front lawn. He pointed an accusatory finger at Sophie and ordered her back inside. She was not allowed to leave the residence unaccompanied. Matt didn't want her to see him strangle his father so he motioned her to go back inside.

"Matthew. Please." He heard her call to him. He turned back, shook his head and motioned her to get back inside by pointing his finger firmly. She'd be angry, but he was

stirred to a bloodlust by his father's actions. Sophie didn't need to witness his ruthless side. At least not anymore than she already had.

His father needed to understand how serious he was about not being pushed. He'd have to keep his hands in his pockets as a warning not to pummel them against anyone.

Matt had a few things to share about Andrea's proclivities, and he wasn't hiding them to spare her feelings any longer.

* * * *

"I don't know how you made this happen, but it won't work. I won't get rid of Sophie."

"It will be up to the Tiberius Magistrate Division to decide now. You should get used to hearing the words Mr. President," Senator Westland said smugly.

"Wait until they find out you had me biogenetically bred for politics. Then the people you cater to won't be so happy to put me in office as President. You know, a genetic freak like me."

"You won't tell them, Matthew. It would force you to give up your commerce license as well. And I know how much that foolish business you inherited from your mother's people means to you."

"You don't hate my business because I inherited the start-up company from Mom's family. You hate that you aren't allowed to profit from it. It burns you up that I didn't fail like you originally predicted. I made a success of it, all on my own, without a single contact or penny of help from you."

"Thanks to the genetic head start I gave you. Don't forget that."

"Oh, you won't ever let me forget."

"Does your little slut wife know about your genetic history? Perhaps if I plant a bug in her ear about how you came to be as talented as you are, she might not come so willingly to your always ready cock. Did you ever think of that?"

Matt took a step dangerously close to his father standing next to his desk, fighting the urge to use his fists to make his point. "You already know I'm not engineered with that, and if you make me lose Sophie, so help me God, I'll make you sorry."

"I doubt you have the power to make me any sorrier than I am right now. I am in possession of undeniable evidence that you fornicated with Andrea. I'll show the magistrate if you force me to. Andrea will swear you two had a carnal relationship in the study when I stepped out, the same night of your unfortunate marriage to that other woman." His father moved around and seated himself sedately behind his massive ornately carved and very illegally obtained wooden desk.

Matt took a deep breath to calm himself, and with it came the pungent lemon scented wood cleaner always present in his father's office. "Andrea likes younger men. She doesn't want to marry me. I'm too old for her. I just came over to warn you so you won't embarrass yourself in court."

Senator Westland unfolded his hands from their restful position on his desk and

fisted them. “It doesn’t matter what Andrea wants. The governor and I will not be stopped. He wants you to marry Andrea, as do I.”

“I do not want to marry her. Ever!”

“It won’t matter. We have proof. The magistrate will rule in favor of the governor. Save yourself the public humiliation, Matthew, and agree to dissolve your marriage with that woman. Find a nice husband for her, marry Andrea, and I promise to do everything in my power to help keep your business up and running while you are off in Washington.”

Matt closed his eyes wondering why he couldn’t get his own flesh and blood to listen to him for once. He leaned over the pristine top of his father’s desk, placing his hands flat on the edge of the desk blotter. “I can keep my business up and running just fine. I don’t need you.”

“Marry Andrea and, with the governor as an in-law, you can have both a political career as the president and still have your business once you finish the limited three terms now allowed. You and I will be set for life.” Senator Westland sat back in his genuine leather, also illegally obtained, executive’s chair, folding his hands over his indulgent rotund belly. “Why won’t you bend to your inevitable future, son?”

“Because I never wanted to be like you. I hated you for what you did to Mom. You have a lot of nerve calling Sophie names when you did worse once upon a time. You fucked up your own chances to be President a long time ago. You should have died a horrible political death long ago. Mom protected you because you threatened her using me, but I don’t have to do anything you dictate. And I won’t.”

“You are underestimating me, Matthew. It is a mistake.” The senator stood abruptly, his eyes glazed over in a rush of feral anger. “Let me tell you my prediction. After the hearing, you will finally be rid of the white trash female you married. You will either find her another man to marry or perhaps you’ll put her in a Tiberius sponsored institution along with all the other women who have no man to find them a husband.

“You will come crawling back to me in order for me to help you attain political backing to make a run for the presidency. Andrea will be the mother of your child already in her oven as we speak, and when all this comes true, I won’t even make you beg me for help.”

Matt shook his head. Most people didn’t know about the senator’s volatile temper. Matt knew about it though and he didn’t care at the moment if he roused his father into a bloodlust. The senator and the governor could rant and rave all they wanted, but Andrea surely wasn’t pregnant with his child. If she were, why was he just finding out about it now? There was no physical way it was possible from the night he married Sophie. He didn’t care what undeniable proof they had.

Chapter Seven

“When are you going to start talking to me again?” Matt asked Sophie when he returned to their home. She stood pensively in the doorway to the kitchen.

“I never stopped talking to you. You left me alone here to go speak with your father. I just stayed in the kitchen where you left me. I don’t think I’m pregnant yet, but I am barefoot,” she said, looking down at her feet planted on the edge of the kitchen tile.

“Very funny.”

“No. But perhaps a good sense of humor would help us in our situation.” Her smile was genuine. “I know you didn’t have carnal relations with Andrea on our wedding night. Therefore, anything else they come up with is likely suspect. We just need to think up a way to fight them.”

“How am I so lucky that you believe me?”

“Well, I know the kind of father you have. I have one just like him. Ruthless. A man who will stop at nothing to get what he wants, even if he has to cheat. What’s not to believe?” Sophie shrugged her shoulders as if it was completely obvious he was telling the truth. “Besides, I remember licking chocolate off of several places on your body on our wedding night once you returned from the study. Do you sincerely believe I would have done that if I had smelled another woman on you?”

“I love you, Sophie.”

“Do you? I can’t believe you said that to me. Aren’t men supposed to wait until their woman says it and then hem and haw a little before admitting any feelings? If you don’t watch it, you’re going to lose your membership to the He Man Woman Haters Club.”

“I was kicked out of that pussy organization years ago, and I still love you.”

“Well, I love you, too. I really do. I have for a long time.”

“Why, because I pleased you against a wall in hallway at work, then fucked you

for the first time after we married in a stretch limo while someone watched us? I'm wondering what else I can do to win your heart.

"I'm running low on ideas, but perhaps later on I could do you on the front steps of our residence while the neighbors watch and rate us like Olympian contenders?"

Sophie laughed. "Oh, Matthew, you're going to turn my head."

"Well, I'd like to strip you down and do wicked things to you. What are my chances, do you suppose?" He approached her cautiously with a smile. She responded by giving him a visceral look.

"Better than average since you're so talented at it. Don't you want to talk about your visit with your father? What happened?"

Matt felt his face drop, betraying the memory of the genetic history remark his father had made earlier.

Supposedly, he was a better lover, more stamina, *et cetera*, than the average man because of his genetic improvements, but he'd never know. His father had put him in the genetics program very secretly as a child to have implants, well before he'd ever experienced a sexual encounter. And while he'd never had any complaints, he'd heard stories about stamina in various locker rooms. He knew he could go several times in a night if he wanted to. Perhaps he owed that to his genetic improvements. Perhaps not.

It wasn't like he'd had so very many women to make a statistical study. He'd been pretty selective of his bedmates in his adult life since his father's unfortunate experience in the press, which had ultimately ruined the senator's career. But Matt would never know if he was better in bed because of the freaking implants or if he had his own natural abilities. He preferred to believe he was naturally talented.

At least he knew he didn't need sex to fuel himself like some of the other more unfortunate members of his secret biogenetic brotherhood. He felt sorry for those genetically engineered to require sex or suffer in pain until they were able to copulate. He knew there were some evil men lacking souls who took what they wanted by force because of the genetic implants.

It was the reason the program had been shut down years before, and those left with the implants were made pariahs in the process. As a result, now years later, very few men admitted to being genetically-engineered. And when they did admit it, very few listening understood without inserting their bigoted beliefs.

Matt personally hated his secret, even as he harbored self doubt and wondered if he would be where he was today without them.

"Why the angry face?" Sophie cocked her head to the side.

"It's nothing." He forced a smile and took her quickly in his arms so she wouldn't see the worry in his eyes. He kissed the top of her head and wished he could predict the future. He was suddenly very afraid he would lose the battle with his father and Andrea in court.

It was a battle, which was patently inevitable now, and being herded through the system quickly, probably due to the political power players of his father and Andrea's

father, the governor.

The court order waited for him upon his return from his father's house. A representative of the magistrate met him at his front door to hand him the packet of lies. The official papers called for him and Sophie to be present in ten days for a hearing at the local Tiberius magistrate to determine who would be his permanent wife.

He was prepared to file a counter motion and deny that Andrea's child was his. Then he could demand a paternity test upon the birth of the child before any permanent wife could be named for him, but he didn't know if it would save him. He sincerely hoped the child she carried was not his.

The bigger worry was that the magistrate would decide that 'just in case' the child was his, he should dissolve his marriage to Sophie and force his marriage to Andrea, until such time as a determination could be made. The best he could hope for was having the permanent paperwork put on hold until the birth of the child. But it would be worse for Sophie in the courts if he waited for the birth.

If he resigned himself to his father's will, he could choose a husband for Sophie himself in advance. If he waited, she would be placed as a ward of the magistrate and her fate would be decided by another auction or placement in the Tiberius institutions. The choices seemed to be either rock or hard place, with regard to Sophie's future.

There would be doubt in the matter of Andrea being pure, since he could enlighten the magistrate about Andrea banging one of his junior executives on Valentine's Day. But that threat wouldn't save him if he'd actually gotten her pregnant at Christmas. He was such an idiot. If there was ever a night when he shouldn't have gotten rip roaring drunk, it was *that* night.

After watching Sophie run away from him in the parking garage hallway, he'd had to hide his almost painful erection from the crowd of partiers as he watched the outside doors close behind her. He hoped the people streaming down the hallway were as drunk as they sounded, coming exuberantly around the corner from the elevators before seeing him. He couldn't chase her and let his employees have any knowledge of what he'd just done with her.

He'd gone and fetched an expensive bottle of scotch out of his office and sucked down half of it, feeling sorry for himself and knowing he wouldn't pursue Sophie after the holidays either. "She's an employee," he'd said out loud after each and every sip.

Matt had a vague recollection of seeing Andrea in his office that night, standing above him, but not much more. He'd woken up alone the next morning in his father's house without a clear recollection of how he got there. His father's limo had been called to drive him. He assumed Andrea had called the driver. Matt never spoke with Sophie again until the day she was auctioned off in the corporate amphitheater.

"What happened with your father?" Sophie asked, breaking his morbid reverie into the past as they retreated into their living room.

"I don't want to talk about it. It makes me too angry. I need to calm down."

She sidled up to him and placed a hand around his waist. "Okay. What can I do to make you relax?"

“Just love me. It’s all I need for now.”

He felt her hand shift from his waist and slip down to his crotch. Damn. Her fingers stroking him through the material made his cock spring to life in no time.

“Does this relax you? Or should I think up something else?”

“No, you’re doing a great job.”

He felt her lips touch his throat and he throbbed once in her hand through his slacks. She unzipped him quickly and grabbed hold through the thin layer of his boxers. He took a startled breath. She found the open slit in his boxers and his knees buckled slightly as her soft fingers caressed his cock.

“Now that I have you where I want you, what are my chances of asking for a favor?” she whispered as she continued stroking him bare-handed.

He pressed against her hand wanting to wrap around her and forget about his day. “You can have absolutely anything within my power to give.”

“I want to work.”

“What?”

“I want to have a job. I thought of a way to help you and do what I want if you’ll allow it. Bring some things home to me and I’ll work on them and send them back with you. At least I can use the expensive education I worked so long and hard to get. I promise I won’t tell anyone.”

“Okay. You can work.” He was losing his ability to think clearly as her fingers wrapped methodically and rhythmically around his marble-hard cock.

“Really? Somehow I expected more of a fight. Aren’t you going to at least give me a lecture on how women need to stay home and make their man happy?” She clenched her hand around him in a vice grip, making him want to throw her down on the sofa and have his wicked way with her for making him so happy.

“Just keep your hand moving, and I’ll be perfectly happy. Or if you’d like to fall to your knees and used your very talented mouth, I won’t stop you.” He chuckled remembering her very talented mouth.

She stroked him, running her thumb over a very sensitive place. He was about to explode in her hand but fought it. He’d always been able to repeat sexual encounters in a short period of time. Sophie made him into a teenaged quickie master.

He leaned heavily into her, unable to speak coherently for a second as her fingers stroked the ultra-sensitive place on his throbbing head.

“Oh, now, I surely couldn’t ask you to allow me to give you another blowjob. You must be sick of them by now.”

He placed his lips on her neck and kissed his way to her face. “Trust me, I’ll never be sick of your mouth on me.”

She laughed and sunk to her knees before him and placed her mouth around his cock where her hand had been only moments before.

“Sophie, I was only kidding...” He stopped talking and sucked in a surprised breath when he felt his cock slip between her lips. He sat down on the sofa quickly before his legs buckled. She followed him down, never losing the suction.

God, he was a lucky son of a bitch. It was his final thought before he erupted in utter bliss.

* * * *

The next morning Matt went to work as usual and considered his plan to bring Sophie here tonight. Salacious thoughts of her from the past two days kept him occupied when he should have been concentrating on his business. There was a knock at his office door to further distract him from today's schedule.

“Come in,” Matt called out. His regular executive secretary still awaited her work visa and an arrangement with her husband to have him shuttle her to work and escort her inside before driving himself to his own job across town. The Tiberius Group was a pain in Matt's ass but he wasn't alone.

Paul Brody timidly opened the door and entered his office carrying a sheaf of papers and a manila folder. He'd worked for Westland Industries for over ten years in accounting. He was also the very man Matt needed to talk to regarding Sophie's sister Hannah.

Matt motioned for Paul to sit in one of the chairs before his desk. “Paul, good to see you. I've been meaning to call you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Westland. What did you need?”

Paul was a very quiet shy nervous sort of man, but he was very intelligent and ever dependable. He lowered his not-too-tall frame cautiously into the chair before Matt's desk his face questioning. He would make a good husband for Sophie's sister Hannah. Shy and not too big for a girl 'uncomfortable' around men. Perfect. At least Matt hoped so.

“I wanted to make a proposition regarding my wife, Sophie.”

“Sophie?” The color came up in Paul's face at the mention of her name. “Your wife?”

“Actually, it's regarding Sophie's sister, Hannah.”

His eyes widened and his free hand fisted. “What...what do you need from me?”

Paul seemed slightly uncomfortable, but Matt pressed on hoping he wouldn't have to do too much persuading to get Paul to offer for Hannah.

“Hannah needs a husband. I was hoping to talk you into getting married.”

“Married?” Paul looked away and studied the corner of Matt's desk. “Oh, I don't know.”

“Sophie says Hannah is...well sort of shy with men. The truth is Paul, I thought I'd play matchmaker and set you two up together.”

Paul was silent and still avoided Matt's eyes. “I never planned on getting married,

Mr. Westland.”

“But would you consider it since the world has gone crazy?” Matt watched as Paul chewed over the question. “I’d consider it a personal favor.”

“I don’t have lots of money to...buy a wife.”

“I can arrange something.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Great. What did you need to see me about?” Matt gestured to the papers in Paul’s hands.

“Oh, yes, I found...well something disturbing and odd in the accounts.” He fanned the papers in front of Matt. “As you can see, fifty thousand dollars was removed from an offshore account three days ago. That’s the disturbing part.”

“What’s the odd part?”

“It was put back yesterday.”

“Put back? The money that was missing was returned? Are you sure it wasn’t some mistake and then correction?”

“Yes, sir. The thing is...I wanted to tell you myself because...well the paperwork points to me as the most likely suspect in this matter.”

Matt gave Paul a sharp look. If fifty thousand dollars was missing, Paul Brody wasn’t the most likely suspect. Orin Prichard coincidentally had the exact amount to bid on Sophie three days ago at the auction. Matt rarely believed in coincidences.

“I’ll look into it, Paul. Thanks for bringing it to my attention.”

“I’ll consider your offer of Sophie’s sister. Let me think about it.”

“We are having a dinner party in a couple of weeks. You can meet her and decide.”

Paul shuffled out looking very nervous. Matt studied the paperwork for an hour before he scooped it all up and headed to Orin’s office.

Matt barged inside to Orin’s lush, overindulgent office space without knocking. Orin was tipped back in his chair with his feet crossed on his desk speaking into his wireless ear bud phone. Startled when Matt popped the door open, he almost tumbled over backwards.

“What the hell do you want? I’m sick of you bursting into my office without the courtesy of knocking.”

Matt looked around and shrugged. “What’s the big deal? I know you can’t have any women cornered in here since they aren’t allowed to work any more. I’m sure they’re all resting at home enjoying the break from being chased by you.”

“Why are you here, Matthew?” Orin tipped forward, his heels slipping to the floor, and pulled the ear bud from his head, tossing it to the desk amidst the clutter.

Matt flung a sheaf of papers onto his messy desk covering the phone. “It has been

brought to my attention that someone embezzled fifty thousand dollars out of Westland Industries offshore accounts the day before the auction. Anything you want to tell me, Orin?"

Orin's comb-over looked on the verge of melting down his face. He quickly slicked it back into place as he'd done a thousand times before. "What are you implying?" More color came up in his already flush face.

"Let's see...how much did you bid to take a wife? Would that be fifty thousand dollars?"

Orin sneered. "Are you accusing me of embezzling, Matthew? I should sue you for libel."

"It isn't libel if it's true! So tell me, Orin, where did a gambler like you get fifty thousand dollars if you didn't steal it from the company?"

"None of your goddamned business!"

"If it's my money, I'd say it's my business."

Orin brightened suddenly. "Maybe I won it."

"It did occur to me, but if you had won that much, it would be in the media. Sums over thirty-five thousand are reported, you know. Or perhaps you don't since that's not how you came up with that much money." It was Matt's turn to sneer. He had Orin by the short hairs.

"Fuck you, Matt."

"No thanks. Why shouldn't I fire you, Orin?"

"Don't bother. I quit!"

"Even better."

"You'll be sorry. I'm the best salesman you have."

"I'll try to go on." Matt rolled his eyes not hiding his sarcasm.

Orin strode out of his office leaving the door ajar in his haste, shoving men out of his way as he departed. Good riddance, Matt thought with satisfaction until an uneasy feeling encompassed him. Orin hadn't actually confessed to taking the money. Matt expected him to be smug about getting away with it for this long. Unexpected reaction.

No matter, at least it was one more worry stanchied.

* * * *

Matt took Sophie to Westland Industries after close of business the next night. His smug smile and amplified wink at the guard about what was going on in his office with his wife late at night was apparently enough to keep security from asking any further questions and didn't prompt them to visit his floor at night either. This pattern continued all week.

Each night, Matt ushered Sophie to his office, pretending extracurricular activities instead of what was really going on. Sophie unlawfully working for him. She toiled

happily on a special project in the job she used to hold when she was allowed to work for him. She picked up as if she'd never been forced to leave without missing a beat and continued her brilliant progress each night, with no one the wiser.

The preliminary hearing in front of the Tiberius magistrate was also the same day he'd invited Sophie's father and sister to their home. He arranged the dinner party and promised to find Sophie's sister a husband.

Tomorrow would be a big day for them. Matt hoped Sophie was still his wife when her sister and father showed up, expecting him to provide a husband with a large dowry.

Tonight, he watched Sophie working away at his desk like a slave on a plan to help him manage his unruly inventory. He waited for a phone call from Paul Brody, Hannah's intended future husband.

This past week, Sophie had worked tirelessly in his office until after the night cleaning crew was gone. Then she'd make her way down to her own office and the files still remaining there to finish up her self-appointed nightly tasks. Tonight, after a couple of hours, she checked her watch and stood to reach a paper on the corner of his desk.

When she promptly bent over his desk, her lovely ass was in the perfect position for a favored sexual romp. Matt stood without having remembered doing it, but then studied the surface of his desk and the memories of Andrea spread eagle shrieking in passion helped douse any romantic feelings he had for tonight. Besides, he had a phone call appointment. He didn't want to be interrupted in the middle of anything to begin an important conversation. One he didn't want Sophie to overhear.

"Something on your mind?" She looked over her shoulder with a salacious smile on her face. He still stood as if ready to launch into action and Matt knew she'd be only too willing to let him do whatever he wanted. But the memory of finding Andrea here with one of his junior executives ruined it for him. Even with a different desk in place.

He sat back down. "No. Nothing on my mind."

"Are you sure? I can think of some things."

"I'm sorry. I just have certain memories about previous sexual activities, which went on in here. Memories that I hadn't planned on explaining to you."

"Oh." Her eyes widened. "You mean I'm not the first in here and..."

"No, you're the only employee I've ever chased down a hallway or wanted to corner in my office." He paused, not meaning to sound so dramatic when he said, "It's something else."

"What else?" Sophie's frown brought him out of his foolish traipse down bad memory lane.

"I caught Andrea in my office with another man."

"While you were dating her?" Sophie's incredulous look of compassion registered deep in his consciousness.

"No, I never 'dated' her. She hung around me primarily because her father wanted

her to make herself available to me. In fact, she used to be involved with a young executive here named Bart.”

“So are they still together or was it a fling?”

Matt huffed. “Don’t know, don’t care. I just remember that she was screaming about how inadequate I was as she ground herself into the hungry mouth of the twenty-year-old intern she was fucking in ‘my’ office. This is the woman my father feels is perfect for me.”

“And I guess you were a gentleman and didn’t disclose her bad behavior, right?”

“Not yet. However, the time may be coming.”

He saw her eye the desk with distaste on his behalf.

“Oh...and I replaced the desk, by the way.”

“Good. What did you do to the other one?”

“I gleefully set fire to it out on the back dock. I loved that desk, too.”

“Good for you. I would’ve done the same thing. Only I probably would’ve added some marks with an ax before I lit it up.” He returned her smile. “What did she say about you? I can’t imagine you being inadequate at anything. I only ask because I don’t want to make the same mistake.”

“She finds me too old for her tastes.”

“Too old? Are you kidding? That’s it?” Sophie’s brows narrowed in question. “Isn’t she your same age?”

“Yes, but she prefers much younger men.”

Sophie’s eyes squinted even further as if in disbelief. “You’re not exactly over the hill yet, Matthew.”

“Twenty-two is pretty much over the hill for Andrea. And I’m well past that prime age.”

Sophie pondered his statement for a few moments before cocking her head to the side and promptly turning an inquisitive look his way. “What else does your father have on you?” She crossed her arms as if she knew something.

“What do you mean?” He scanned her face to see if she already knew his genetic secret.

“Why is he so smug that he thinks he can get you to bend to his will? There must be something else?” She arched an eyebrow at him in question.

He shrugged. “It’s a secret.” Was he sincerely about to open up about his ultra secret genetic enhancements?

“Ooh, I love secrets. I won’t tell. I promise. I can keep your secret.”

“I don’t know. It’s a pretty big secret. And I don’t know if I’m quite ready to tell you yet. I don’t want you to look at me...differently.”

“I won’t. I promise.” Her face showed extreme curiosity regarding his ‘secret.’ She moved gracefully across the room and sat on the sofa, patting the space next to her in invitation. Her heartfelt curious face made him want to share with her. And he needed to tell her anyway, since it might come up once they were in front of the magistrate pleading to stay together. He should assess her feelings on the genetically-enhanced beforehand.

“All right, brace yourself. No, never mind. I need to tell you why first. You see, my father wanted me to be President and follow in what he felt were his preordained footsteps. He was on the fast track to the presidency when I was about eight years old.

“In his final term as senator, he suffered through a sexual scandal after smugly dismissing his long time mistress and secretary. Bridget had been with him since he’d been in the campus political scene in college.”

“Was she a woman scorned?” Sophie asked with wide interested eyes.

“Yes, among other things. She was also a woman who’d given up a lot due to all the promises my father had fed her over the years. She had quietly understood how he needed to marry my mother whose family was wealthy. But ultimately my father underestimated Bridget.”

Sophie snorted. “Most men in my experience underestimate women all the time.” Her tone was snidely off-handed until she perhaps realized he was included in the category of men. She quickly turned to him and added, “But you don’t.” She smiled and gestured for him to continue.

“Thanks. Well, as you probably know from all the sordid news coverage, Bridget had kept a series of diaries containing every moment of their time together, which she then released to the media frenzy surrounding the big scandal of the moment.

“My dad weathered the course for a little while during the remaining two years while he was in office, but his party turned their back on him the day he left. He was smart enough to get the information in advance so he could make some preparations with his waning power before he went down all the way. I was included in his plan to get back into the saddle one day.”

She leaned forward with interest. “What did he do?”

“When I was ten, after my mom was sent away, he had biogenetically engineered enhancements done on me,” Matt watched her eyes widen again, “so I’d be a shoo-in for politics one day and able to realize the dream he lost with his mistress.”

“Really?” Her voice sounded full of wonder, not contempt. Good sign.

“You’re not disgusted?”

“No. Why would I be? I think it’s cool. Besides, you were underage. It wasn’t your choice. It was your father’s. Now, if you’d felt the need at age thirty to make these improvements, then I might have a different opinion. I guess I view genetic enhancement later in life much like steroid use in athletes. It’s cheating.”

Matt’s eyes widened in surprise at her attitude. “I see.” As a rule people could be placed in one of two groups on the subject of genetic enhancement: fearful or jealous. The cheating category would now have to be added to the list.

“Do you have to keep the treatments up?”

“I used to, up until fairly recently as a matter of fact, but not any more.”

“I thought it was life long.”

“For some it is. It depends on the work done and the age the implants are introduced. If the work is done before puberty, then after twenty years or so it becomes ingrained into the structure of the body or something like that and almost no further maintenance is required.

“I have very minimal enhancements. My father didn't want them easily detected. Now that I don't have to take treatments any longer, if anyone does a body scan it reflects any enhancements as natural to my body and its natural structure.”

“What was done to you?”

He tapped the side of his head with a forefinger. “I have added business acumen wired in my brain pathways, and I strategize better than the average guy. Why?”

She smiled deviously. “Well, when I was in college, my roommate told me her older brother had been enhanced, but not until he turned eighteen because their parents forbade it. He wanted to be a super lover, and in order to achieve his goal, he lived at the forbidden facility.”

“That was the first enhancement they outlawed because if you get that particular enhancement after puberty, there is a small risk of turning into a sexual vampire.”

“Sexual vampire? What is that? And do you have it?”

“No, I don't have it. Quit drooling. It's where sex is required, almost like fuel for the man enhanced. Ninety-nine percent of the guys on that treatment were fine, but that other dangerous one percent, the ones they called sexual vampires, didn't have any compunction about taking what sex they needed by force...genetically enhanced force.”

“I think maybe you have a little added sexual something.”

“Why?”

“Because you're so big. Admit it. You got the penis enlargement package, didn't you?”

He shook his head slowly back and forth. “Uh-uh, that's all me, babe.”

“So you say. But I say it's all mine, at least for now.”

“I'll never argue with you about that, now or later.”

“Good. How about if we go to my old office so I can test out all your genetic enhancements.” She smiled. “Perhaps you'd like to get under *my* desk.”

“Are you really okay with me being genetically different? I mean, it's a secret, you understand. If the Tiberius Group finds out, I'll lose my commerce license and my business.”

“I know, but it isn't like I've never heard of it before. When I was a kid, it was all the rage. I was just jealous they wouldn't allow girls to participate.”

“Do you know someone who’s enhanced?” Matt asked, quirking an interested eyebrow.

“No, but I overheard my mother telling someone she wished she could afford to have my little brother enhanced so he’d have a better chance in life, but the treatments were only for the rich or famous.”

“Probably a good thing she wasn’t able to afford it, as it turned out later. Once the implants are introduced into the body, they can’t be removed. Since it was outlawed, those with the implants must keep them secret now.”

“Yeah. And besides, my brother’s in law enforcement now. He would have been kept out of the government police academy program if he’d been enhanced. And it was always his dream to be a lawman.”

The phone on Matt’s desk rang, keeping him from commenting. Hopefully, it wouldn’t become a problem with regard to his secret genetic enhancements and her lawman brother’s sworn duty to report it if he ever found out.

Chapter Eight

“Are all parties present for the hearing?” the magistrate’s clerk asked in the direction of the assembled group.

Matt stood up to speak, but his father beat him to it. “Yes, we are all here and we have been for quite some time now. We are ready for the process to begin. Is it going to be much longer?” He sounded supremely impatient and blatantly looked at his watch in a superior attitude that had never served him well, but Matt knew he never listened to anyone who told him so.

Andrea sat at the opposite table in the courtroom with her father, dressed in a prim and proper nun-like dress of country blue, her rounding belly already jutting out like his worst, girl-in-trouble teenaged nightmare.

“I’ll summon the Magistrate directly.” The clerk exited the room for only a moment. When he returned, he heralded the arrival of the Tiberius magistrate in a formality, which immediately annoyed Matt. However, he imagined everything about this day in court was about to annoy him.

Last night, when his phone started ringing, he’d directed Sophie down to her office with a promise to join her as soon as possible, promising they’d sexually christen the desk in her old office.

The call he’d gotten was indeed from Paul Brody, the man he’d selected to be a husband for Sophie’s sister, Hannah. He and Paul had spent almost an hour working out several details, including financial payment, in preparation for the dinner party to meet Sophie’s sister and the subsequent ceremony planned for the next day afterwards.

Then he’d cleaned up his desk and gone down to meet Sophie in her old office to participate in some creative sexual games on her desk. He’d been in a relaxed mood until entering the hearing room this morning. Matt hoped his increasingly sour mood would improve for tonight’s guests after what promised to be a very infuriating court hearing today.

The magistrate for today's debacle was surprisingly young given the significance of the position he held. His tall, rounding body looked even more massive in the dark blue robes he wore, carrying what must have been well over three hundred and fifty pounds on his substantial frame. But his manner was completely businesslike as he gathered official looking papers in front of him. He shifted his dark-rimmed glasses closer to his face before he spoke to the group.

"In the complainant matter before this court today, Governor Tobias Kane has set forth a grievance that accuses one Matthew Westland of morally corrupting the virtue of his daughter, the co-plaintiff, so named as Andrea Kane. The first incident in question allegedly took place during Thanksgiving and the next was during the Christmas holidays, resulting in the basis for the second charge of paternity as she is carrying a child at this date in time from the second offense.

"There is a third charge of adultery, as the co-plaintiff has tested positive for the defendant's DNA in her vaginal canal after the defendant had already married another party. Is this correct, and do I have all the relevant facts in this case, Governor Kane?" the magistrate asked with officially proper decorum oozing forth to the room.

"Yes," the short thin stoic governor said curtly. He then directed a cool angry gaze over to Matt and Sophie standing alone in the defendant's box. Even Matt's father stood over by his pious old crony friend, the governor. Senator Westland's self-satisfied smile spoke volumes as to his publicly held loyalties in this matter regarding his only son.

Luckily for Matt, the media filling all the available seating in the court behind him was not allowed to have cameras or recording equipment in the chamber during the process. But they'd fight a hoard of them on the way out of the building afterwards.

"What do you have to say in your defense, Mr. Westland?" the magistrate asked evenly.

"I do not clearly remember the event at Thanksgiving, but I don't dispute it. I have no memory of corrupting Miss Kane's virtue during the Christmas holidays, and I do not believe the child she carries is mine. I most emphatically deny any relations with her since I got married to my wife.

"Furthermore, Miss Kane never told me herself she was pregnant or carried my child in the past several months. She certainly would have been aware of her status. I believe this to be a ploy by my father, in collusion with the governor, to destroy the happy marriage I now share with my wife Sophie.

"I further maintain these lies are told additionally to embarrass me in the public eye, thereby ruining my reputation as a businessman. To that end, I've filed a countersuit against the three of them for defamation of character against me and my wife."

"I see," the magistrate said and made several scribbled notes on an unseen piece of paper at his elevated bench. "We'll address your countersuit at the end of the current complaint hearing. What atonement are you seeking from Mr. Westland, Governor Kane?"

"I want him to marry my daughter and give his child a name, of course. She is due to deliver in five months. I will not allow the taint of a bastard child to grace my

household while Matthew Westland shares his life with another woman.”

“You are aware he is already legally married in a Tiberius-sanctioned union, and his permanent paperwork is pending this hearing?”

“But he got my daughter pregnant long before he married *that* woman. And he had relations with Andrea the same night he got married to his precious wife, as they spent the night in the same house, I might add. The Tiberius body scan proves that.”

“Yes, I have the report here.”

“I don’t care what the report says, I did not have sex with Andrea the day I married Sophie,” Matt responded angrily, coming to his feet.

“What about the incident at Christmas, Mr. Westland? Do you deny a sexual relationship with Miss Kane four months ago?”

He took a deep breath and focused his eyes piercingly at the magistrate. “My response to that question will likely hurt and offend Miss Kane and her family.”

“We are here to ascertain the truth. Speak now or hold your tongue and I’ll render my decision without any response from you.”

“As you wish. I had a sexual relationship with Andrea Kane long before Christmastime. I used archaic condom protection on the single occasion we had sex to shield us from exchanging body fluids. I was not her first lover then, nor was I her last after the ‘alleged’ incident during the Christmas holidays, which I do not remember participating in.”

“You are a liar!” The governor stood up, his face purple with rage, pointing an accusing finger at Matt.

“Gentleman, sit down!” The magistrate banged a large gavel twice to make his point. “As you may or may not know, this is a preliminary hearing to decide whether or not to proceed with the case further. I find there is probable cause to continue. We will adjourn for today and reconvene five days from now. At that hearing, you both will be tasked to bring your individual undeniable proof of your respective point’s of view. I will render a binding decision at that time.”

“Your Honor, Mr. Westland should not be rewarded with five more days with his current wife when my daughter suffers the shame of a pregnancy out of wedlock, a pregnancy for which he is responsible. You can take my word for it.”

“We are not here to take your word for it, Governor. You brought a complaint to me to decide your fate. Guilt or innocence on the part of the defendant in this case has not been established. Bring your proof in five days and I will ponder the evidence from both sides before rendering my decision, which will be permanently binding.”

“What about an appeal?” Senator Westland stood up next to the governor to direct his inappropriate question.

“Appeals have no place in the justice system,” the magistrate said with a distasteful look on his face directed at Matt’s father. “However, if either party feels in any way slighted by my forthcoming decision, they may have one single appeal to the

Superior Magistrate. I'll warn you though, the Superior Magistrate has not overturned any magistrate decisions brought forth to date."

The magistrate banged his gavel and lifted his large, imposing frame out of the squeaky chair to retreat to his private chambers. The audience of media and journalists behind them erupted in to a loud confusion of questions and shouts. The uproar gave Matt a headache, but not as much as the one which had pounded through his brain when he announced and admitted to, with Sophie listening, the single previous sexual encounter he remembered with Andrea.

He'd wanted to tell Sophie how meaningless the Thanksgiving interlude was and assure her that one kiss from her meant far more than one bad screw with a former girlfriend. Sex with Andrea Kane had been a waste of even an archaic condom, but he hadn't wanted any part of himself to come in contact with Andrea. If memory served, he'd ultimately fantasized about a certain smart, beautiful junior executive he employed to finally get off. In his drunken state, he'd thought he was with Sophie. He'd pulled back to see Andrea's very angry face.

He'd been fairly inebriated that night. A regular occurrence back then to keep himself behind his self-imposed line and away from getting his arms wrapped around Sophie. If Andrea hadn't come to him in the first place and refused to take no for an answer, he would never have had sex with her. His cock had been hard from fantasizing about his untouchable employee. When Andrea had suggested they get naked and sweaty in his office, his first inclination had been to tell her "no thanks." He should have gone with his initial gut reaction, but his judgment had been impaired from too much scotch whiskey.

He'd just found out about the Tiberius Group's plan to take over. He knew then they'd probably succeed easily and everything would change within the next six months. He'd started scheming as he drank. He'd written the first draft of the Working Woman's Auction Memo that night along with notes on how he could save his business if half his executives were forced out.

Matt still hadn't found the courage to confess to Sophie about the memo he'd written. Or what he'd done in the name of saving his female employees. He knew in his heart that she wouldn't view it as he did--the only way he could conjure up quickly to save her.

Matt stumbled upon the true reason he'd done everything possible to put himself in a position to come to Sophie's rescue. The Working Woman's Auction Memo opened up the single opportunity he'd had to corner her and gain the chance to prove how good they'd be together. A piece of information he'd already tucked away in the recesses of his libido for many months. A fact he'd suspected from the first time he saw her angry determined face in Orin Prichard's office.

Sophie had acted like Matt saved her back then, too, but the truth was, he'd saved Orin from her. Matt had no doubt that, looking at her stubborn face, she could have kicked Orin's balls straight up his sorry ass and out his ears.

Matt hoped all his secrets remained secret at least until he could explain to her that his motives, while self-serving, had been to ensure their future and not for

humiliation purposes.

He hoped she wouldn't kick *his* balls straight up his ass and out his ears when she found out everything he'd done in the name of saving her for himself.

* * * *

Sophie sat in front of her dressing table mirror putting on the new jewelry Matthew had graciously given her for tonight's dinner party. He told her to name her favorite precious stone. She looked into his deep blue eyes and made an easy choice. The elegant sapphire ear drops, necklace and bracelet set gracing her skin now looked perfect with the dress she wore tonight.

Her black silk, strapless cocktail dress had a slit up the side high enough for Matthew to have easy access to the jewel between her legs should he want to reach in for a quick stroke. The very thought of his hand up her dress combined with the word 'stroke' made her face warm and she saw the faint blush in the reflection before her. She shifted, wondering if she'd ever think of Matthew with out getting moist. She sincerely hoped not.

"You look good enough to eat." Matthew stepped into their huge bedroom and approached her slowly. "Are you excited about tonight, and do I need to relax you? Because I'd be happy to loosen you up a little, you know."

He was dressed in the sexiest power suit she'd ever seen. Even sexier than the one he'd been wearing today for court. And he'd looked fabulous in court.

"Oh, I don't know. Do you think we have enough time?" She stood up from the mirrored dressing table and turned to face him as he stepped close and dropped a kiss on one bare shoulder.

He laughed. "We always have enough time for relaxation." Kissing his way along her shoulder, he grabbed her waist with both hands and pulled her tight up against his toned, muscular body.

"But will your relaxation process destroy my hair and make up?"

"No promises," he whispered. His breath tickled her ear and sent a very warm electric pulse down to the dampened panties under her dress. She wore a scrap of lace, which barely qualified as an undergarment. The silk stockings she wore were held up with a sexy lace garter belt. She wore her 'fuck me' four-inch stiletto heeled shoes. Everything she wore with the exception of her jewelry was black. Sexy black and either silk or lace.

Matthew kissed her neck gently on the very sensitive place below her ear while his hand slid from her waist to her bottom. The thong panties, or perhaps better termed, scrap of under garment fabric she wore, didn't cover either cheek. His warm hand felt decadent through the silk of her dress.

His hand moved quickly once again sliding past her butt, down to the hem of her dress and up underneath before she took her next breath. The slit on the side gave him the ease of access he'd probably been thinking about when he bought it for her in the first place.

She moaned and let her head fall back when she felt his talented fingers already between her legs, stroking her through the now very damp lace of her panties.

“Want me to stop?” he whispered, his fingers pausing below momentarily for her to answer.

“Don’t you dare,” she panted and was rewarded as his finger niggled its way between the small scrap of lace to stroke her sensitized clit directly. She lifted her leg and wrapped it behind his calf to give him easier access.

Her knees wobbled slightly so she reached an arm up around his shoulder to hold on. She felt the ridge of his cock through layers of clothing press into her hip bone and wondered how she could get it inside her body quickly, but then lost the thought as he unzipped the back of her dress, loosening it enough at the top so he could kiss a path down to her now uncovered strapless black lace bra, which then magically popped open to reveal her bare breasts.

His mouth covered her peak in the next smoldering instant, sucking the hardened nipple between his teeth and tongue, the sensation of which drilled down to where his fingers strummed her to the edge.

“Matthew,” she whimpered ready to blaze on into oblivion. But she didn’t want to take the trip alone. She reached for his belt, trying to loosen it one handed, which she did as his fingers still circled and strummed her clit, building her imminent release closer and closer. She got him unbuttoned, unzipped, with her hand down his pants wrapped completely around his rock-hard, impressive cock, apparently before he realized what she was doing.

He moaned against her breast before releasing the suction of his mouth unexpectedly as his finger slid off her clit when his body convulsed once at her intimate touch.

“See how you like it,” she said in a breathy voice and stroked him once, running her thumb across the spot she knew was most sensitive. His growl of pent-up passion also showed in his eyes when he suddenly stood up to his full towering height over her.

“No, I want to see how *you* like it,” he whispered. His glance over her shoulder made her wonder what he was thinking, but a moment later she figured it out. He pulled her against his body, lifting her up and lightly slammed her against the closed closet door. It wasn’t metal, but the warm wood against her partially bare back was unyielding all the same.

This put them in the same position from Christmas in the hallway against a door. All they needed was mistletoe to complete the scene. Or perhaps not. She felt his warm hands on either bare thigh, her legs were spread open, the skirt of her dress bunched around her hips. Her bare ass rested against the door. She was moments away from exploding in climax.

The color of his eyes had deepened to an even richer blue, piercing her soul in its intensity. The look registered as frightening, but she wasn’t scared. She was instead very needy and wanted him with a single-minded ferociousness. The one she felt every time she came within pheromone range of her husband.

She felt his rigid cock slide between her legs and across the drenched black lace, stroking her clit through the thin material. Her legs clenched around his hips in reflex at the sensation. Matthew pulled the lace away from her sensitive nub, and she felt the tip of his impressive shaft enter ever so slowly inside, pressing her against the door. It felt as if he got halfway to her womb before he retreated and then thrust in again with more force. His growl of appreciation sent a flutter to her tummy. She caught a flash of black color across the room and realized she could see their reflections in her vanity mirror.

Matthew's face was buried against her throat, one of her breasts exposed with his fingers brushing across the nipple, his pants loose against his hips and he thrust rhythmically inside her as he held her against the closet door. The vision so powerfully erotic, she couldn't help but watch her face in the mirror. Her eyes closed halfway, just before she heard herself scream Matthew's name, finding oblivion and a body-clenching orgasm the likes of which she'd never felt before. Waves of pleasure rolled through her as every muscle in her body clenched in release.

Sophie opened her eyes again to that vision of Matthew pumping into her, his thrusts coming faster, now powering inside her slick, wet body, the feel of her lacy panties still providing a slight resistance, rubbing her with each withdrawal and pump forward.

"Harder," she heard herself whimper. "Oh, God, harder." She watched as he increased his pace as she'd requested. The thick feel of his cock inside stretching her as she watched him impale her was almost too much, but she couldn't close her eyes.

Matthew pulled back from kissing her neck to kiss her face and noticed her distraction. He turned slightly to see her focus at the mirror. Now they were both watching the action against the closet door in the vanity mirror.

A growl of pleasure issued from deep in his throat and his next endless thrust felt like it went to her ribs. He pulled out and powered in again as they both watched. A satisfied noise issued from his throat, and then his eyes closed. His movement stopped as he held her pinned against the door. His breathing came harshly against her bare shoulder for several long moments before he seemed to recover.

Ding dong.

The sound of the doorbell downstairs made Sophie jump. It was hours before the scheduled time for the party. She sincerely hoped it was the caterers and not their guests downstairs.

"At least whoever that is has better timing," Matthew said in a lazy, amused tone.

Ding dong.

"But they're impatient."

Chapter Nine

Matt straightened his clothing as he flew down the stairs of their home. He left Sophie in her glazed over, recently satisfied state as she stood resting against the closet door. He went to answer the front door for the caterers who were there early to prepare for tonight's dinner.

He directed them to the kitchen and then held the door while several cooks and assorted other wait staff came in to set up. After a long while, he returned to the bedroom to see Sophie fresh from another shower. She was dressed like a fantasy from a lingerie catalog in a new black lacy ensemble. His dick twitched. He checked his watch again to see how much time was left before their guests were expected. He'd gladly relax her a second time.

She had moved from the door and stood in the black lace bra and barely there lace panties with the garters and stockings, trying her best to smooth the wrinkles out of her dress. Shaking her head, she darted into the closet door they'd just christened and came out with a mini iron.

"I should kick your ass, but your relaxation process was just so amazing." She smiled at him and started pressing the dress, now flattened out on the bed.

"I'm going to ask again. Are you excited about tonight with regard to seeing your sister?"

"Yes, I can't wait to see Hannah. I haven't laid eyes on her since Mom died. I hope my idiot father hasn't scared her, or worse, smacked her one."

"I hope not, either. Was he abusive to you?" Matt realized he probably should have asked sooner. He'd never found violent force a particularly good way to influence people. He tried to use his genetically engineered brain to work through the dilemma so he could take steps to solve the problem. But if he ever found out for certain Sophie's father had struck her, he was prepared to lay the bastard out on the dinner table tonight and stick forks in him until he was done.

She shrugged. "He threatened to smack me a couple of times, but I mostly did my best not to piss him off. Hannah, on the other hand, can be a little stubborn."

She finished touching the dress up and stepped into it, motioning him over to zip her up. He placed a kiss on her shoulder and fastened the dress.

"You're beautiful."

"Thank you." She turned in his arms. "So are you."

"I hope Hannah likes Paul."

"I'm sure she will. I know Paul, and in my opinion, he's perfect for her."

"He seemed reluctant to get married at first. I think it was because he didn't have lots of money to offer. I hope your father won't expect another hundred thousand dollars." The sour look she directed at him made him quietly apologize. "Sorry."

"Not your fault. He's the prick, not you. And he better be grateful to get anything, the louse."

"Well, after dinner I thought I'd call all the men into my study for brandy and cigars and contract signing. Tomorrow, we can go have the official ceremony and everything. Okay?"

"Thank you so much, Matthew. I can't tell you how much I appreciate all you've done." She hugged him and buried her face in his chest holding on as if for dear life.

Matt hoped Sophie never found out he'd supplied the money for Hannah's dowry to Paul. It made him feel like a pimp, but it wasn't the first time he'd taken money earmarked for investment into his company to use instead under the heading of good will spending.

It was the very same plan he'd come up with to ensure all his single female employees found good husbands. And more importantly, to save Sophie.

Good God, he *was* a pimp. He essentially got men to spend money to buy women.

Paul understood the dire circumstances and had been in Matt's private circle of understanding at Westland Industries. Matt figured it was the least he could do to make Sophie happy after all she'd put up with for him. She wanted her sister safe and close by. Besides, it was a small request in the great scheme of things He'd do everything he could to make it happen.

"I love you, Sophie. And everything will be fine tonight. Wait and see."

* * * *

The evening couldn't have gone worse if they'd planned it that way. By the time the dinner party was supposed to have started, it was already too late to save it anyway.

Sophie ushered in Paul Brody ten minutes before her sister and father were due to land at the local airport. Matt had invited him early to discuss some work-related things. Sophie spent the time alone arranging last minute details for her family's stay.

Matt had already sent a private car and driver to wait at the airport and bring her family directly to their home. The driver called about the time their guests were expected,

to inform them that Hannah and her father hadn't been on the flight, which had already landed and deplaned completely.

After all the things Hannah had told her about the Las Vegas experience, she got a severe case of bad feeling in the pit of her stomach wondering what had gone wrong. She found out soon enough when the doorbell rang two hours after the guests of honor were supposed to have arrived.

Looking at the security camera feed, she saw her father standing alone, but then saw him motion to someone behind him. Hannah probably had to remain two steps back at all times.

The bastard.

Sophie answered the door to Dennis Hoskins standing alone on her doorstep. He looked like he'd been on a 'lost weekend' drinking binge of epic proportions. He wore dirty, smelly clothes and looked like he hadn't shaved or bathed for a week.

Matt stepped past him through the door to take care of the driver. He winked at her over his shoulder, behind her father's back, in seeming assurance. She was able to relax for about a nanosecond before all hell broke loose.

"So this is the fancy place you live now. Did good for you, didn't I, girly?" Dennis Hoskins said with misplaced pride and stepped across the threshold of their home. His greedy little eyes immediately sought out every item of value in the vestibule as if to assess the value for later theft. Sophie was appalled and glad Matthew wasn't there to witness his bad behavior.

"This is my home. Do not believe for one second you are welcome here beyond one night. Once we settle everything for Hannah, you will not be welcome here any longer. Do I make myself clear?" Sophie whispered angrily. He sneered as he passed by her, failing to wipe his shoes on the rug, thereby trailing mud and what looked like straw across the tile floor.

"Well, now, we only need one night here and then we'll take ourselves to greener pastures, girly."

"We? What do you mean?"

"There's been a slight change in plans. Now, all I need from you is a small stake for tonight and directions to the nearest lucky casino. Then I'll be out of your fancy-pants, hoity-toity residence."

"Sophie?" came her sister Hannah's anguished voice. She turned to greet her little sister, who threw her arms around her, sobbing in uncontrollable fits even as she started trying to talk, making no sense whatsoever.

"I...dog track...lost bet...stranger...I didn't say 'I do'..." Sophie wrapped her big sister arms around Hannah and shushed her sister's choking incomprehensible words, stroking her hair to calm her down.

Over Hannah's shoulder, Sophie saw a stranger enter her home followed closely by Matthew. At first, she thought the stranger was the driver carrying luggage but noticed Matthew had two bags he managed alone. Matthew wore the furious face he used when

he spoke to his father.

If Matthew was that upset, something must be devastatingly wrong.

Good Lord, what could be amiss now?

Paul Brody entered the foyer from the library just then with a sincere smile, watching Sophie comfort her sister. He gave Hannah a concerned look from head to toe and smiled as if he already approved. Sophie was momentarily seduced into thinking things would be just fine, once Hannah settled down.

"I already found a husband for her," her father announced blithely. "This here is your sister's new husband, Reggie. We met at the dog track where I had a little streak of bad luck. After the wedding at the track ticket office, Reggie helped us with bus fare on the final leg of our journey.

"Otherwise we'd still be stuck at the track wondering how to get here." He laughed like Reggie had saved them from a lengthy, unavoidable delay. "Now, like I said before, all I need is a small stake to build up my miserable finances, and I'll be on my way. Do you have any cash handy here in the house?"

Only the sound of Hannah's occasional sniff echoed in the room. It was a foreign sound, which tore at Sophie's soul because her sister rarely cried about anything. It was a good thing she had a hold of Hannah or nothing would have stopped her from killing Dennis Hoskins with her bare hands in the silent-as-the-grave entryway to her house. The new information bombshell circulated around trying to find a place to land in Sophie's mind.

Had she just heard what she thought she had?

She opened her mouth to speak as the horror of the news registered in her brain and a multitude of questions choked her mind, rendering her speechless for a moment.

Her father had already married Hannah off? To a stranger at a dog track for what amounted to travel money here? Because he'd apparently already gambled away all the money he got for her? And the extra money she'd sent without Matthew's knowledge, as well? After all the trouble Matthew had gone to in preparation for tonight to hand over more money her wretched father didn't deserve in the least?

Sophie started shaking as the magnitude of her father's audacity sunk in fully. She separated herself from Hannah with only one clear thought.

Kill him. Kill that miserable excuse for a father of theirs.

Matthew's hands clamp onto her shoulders. She wrenched herself from him, throwing a dirty look over her shoulder that he would dare stop her justified murder, and took another step in her father's direction. Matthew's snagged her around the waist and pulled her back against his chest. Perhaps he read her mind and didn't want to bail her out of jail tonight before the appetizers were served.

"Let me go!" she snarled.

"Not on your life. Take your sister up to her room so she can freshen up. Take a few deep breaths and calm down. When you return, we'll eat dinner. There's no need to

let the food go to waste. It's done. Your sister needs you now." Matthew's civil voice of reason eventually permeated her vengeful intent.

Sophie looked at her sister. Hannah's red-rimmed eyes and general miserable countenance distracted her from her idiot father long enough to calm her down a notch or two.

"Thank you, Matthew." She took a deep breath and went into mother hen mode for the sake of her sister.

"Gentlemen, let me show you my library. We can have cocktails until the ladies are ready for dinner," Matthew suggested smoothly to the other men in the room. Sophie gave her husband a wan smile over one shoulder as she led Hannah to the staircase. He winked at her in response. Matthew *so* didn't deserve this tonight. He especially didn't deserve it after the day he'd had with the magistrate and his own miserable father.

"Well, now I guess I could stand to have a fancy cocktail and a bite or two of food before Reggie and me head out to try our luck at making our fortunes in this fine town of yours." Her father followed Matthew out of the foyer into the dining room down the hall, Reggie something directly on his heels.

Paul Brody gave Sophie an uncertain glance before looking down at the marble floor. He didn't say anything but turned and followed the other men down the hall. Poor Paul. This was the second wife he'd lost out on from the same family.

Sophie hoped Matthew never found out what she had done to try and save herself on the auspicious corporate auction day. With rumors of the Tiberius Group take over imminent, she'd withdrawn her life savings and the balance of the money from her mother's life insurance and given it all to Paul Brody with the intention of having him bid on her the day of the Westland corporate auction.

Paul had been the one in the audience that day with the final high bid, before Orin had said the words, fifty thousand dollars. That heart stopping moment had been followed quickly by Matthew's, save-her-life hundred thousand dollar bid. She didn't know how he'd feel about Paul if he knew the truth about that day. She certainly didn't want to ruin a good business relationship between them.

Paul had the most to lose, but she assured him she'd never tell. She met him on the sly at Westland Industries a week ago at night in her office and told him to use the money to buy her sister, but he refused. He gave her money back and told her he already had money for Hannah. But now, with her sister married off to a stranger, he'd have to go elsewhere if he wanted a wife.

"Let's go up and wash your face. You'll feel better. Okay?" Hannah nodded and they made their way arm in arm to the guest bedroom.

* * * *

Matt already had a pounding headache. He entered the library, which he also used as his office when he worked at home, to entertain tonight's special guests and to pretend her father wasn't the biggest prick who ever lived. He glanced at Paul who had a defeated look on his face.

Poor Paul.

He'd tried to recruit his lead accountant for the corporate auction, but at the time, Paul had acted as though he already had someone in mind he wanted to marry. Matt had seen him leaving the corporate amphitheater as his father the senator had entered but hadn't thought too much about his appearance. He wondered who Paul had wanted to bid on for a wife. At the time, he'd been focused on saving Sophie from Orin, but now something niggled at his memory. He cast it aside to offer his vile in-laws a drink.

"What'll you have, gentlemen?" Matt asked. He stepped up to the built in cabinet bar and poured a healthy tumbler full of whiskey for himself.

"Got any decent gin?" Sophie's father asked.

"Of course. Reggie?"

"Vodka, make it a double, no ice." Reggie's squeaky high nasal voice made Matt clench his teeth. The man had a voice like fingernails on a chalkboard.

Poor Hannah.

"Are there any good places for a man to try his luck close by?" Dennis asked, accepting the drink.

"Actually, my father is part owner in a riverboat casino called The Lucky Gentleman. It's docked at the river about a mile from here." Matt hoped Dennis would get the hell out as soon as possible and take Mr. Screechy with him. He took a big swig of whiskey and realized if his head pounded now, tomorrow morning would truly suck if he drank much more. But he figured, realistically, he needed to be slightly under the influence to face the rest of the evening still yet to come.

"About that stake I need for later on tonight," Dennis said. "You keep that extra cash in here?"

"I keep my money in a bank," Matt said, taking another deep drink to curb his tongue from saying what he really wanted to. He knew he'd pay the price in the morning.

"Well, what am I going to do for cash then?" Dennis Hoskins asked petulantly.

"If you'd made it here tonight without marrying Hannah off for bus fare, you could have had fifty thousand dollars." Matt felt the alcohol in his system loosen his tongue just slightly. "I find I'm not even remotely concerned where you get your next stake."

"Where's the money you had ready?" Sophie's father glanced around the room as if he'd find a stack of cash lying about for him grab and go.

"Paul over there was the one who had the money. But since you're all out of daughters to marry off, I guess you're out of luck."

"Surely a rich man like you has some extra cash he could afford to part with."

"I already gave you a hundred thousand dollars for Sophie two weeks ago. You won't get another penny from me."

Paul suddenly put his drink down on a side table and turned to the group.

“Suddenly, I’m not feeling well. Since I’m not needed here any longer, I’d best be getting back home. Thanks for inviting me to dinner Mr. Westland. Give my regards and apologies to your lovely...wife.” He turned and strode out of the library before Matt could stop him.

He took two steps towards the door and then decided to let Paul go on alone. What could he possibly say to him to make up for tonight? Nothing that would matter. Besides, he didn’t want to leave his father-in-law unattended, who would no doubt rob him blind. He’d speak to Paul at work. There would be time enough to re-hash tonight’s debacle.

The lead caterer, who also acted as butler for tonight’s ruined dinner party celebration, stepped up to the library door and asked, “Would you like me to begin serving, sir?”

“Yes, I would. Thank you. Let’s go gentleman. Dinner is served.”

Sophie and Hannah came down a few moments later to join them, but no one spoke a word. Everyone just ate their food in complete silence, the sound of silverware scraping against the china, the only sound in the room.

Dennis Hoskins managed to make it fifteen minutes before asking for money. “Sophie, are you going to tell your husband to give me a stake or—”

“Get out!” Sophie stood slowly, her face turning very red, the fury unmistakable.

“What—”

“I said get out.” Sophie had her butter knife gripped in her hand threateningly. Matt had no doubt she’s use it, given the least provocation...or request for money.

“I guess I know when I’m not wanted. Come on, Reggie. I’ll just get a line of credit once I get to the casino. Let’s go out and celebrate the nuptials by getting filthy rich.”

Matt decided it was a good thing they didn’t want to include Hannah in any nuptial celebration. He wouldn’t have stopped Sophie and her weapon of choice, a butter knife. Her father and Reggie left, slamming the front door behind them.

An hour later, the night from hell was finally over, and Sophie had tucked Hannah in the guest bedroom to sleep. Unfortunately, early the next morning turned out to be even worse, and not just because Matt had the worst headache in the world history of pain.

Ring. Ring.

Matt grabbed the phone up before it had a chance to jangle mercilessly in his throbbing brain again. He’d been right the night before. He shouldn’t have had anything to drink.

“Hello,” he growled into the phone. Sophie didn’t stir.

“I’m sorry to bother you so early, Mr. Westland,” the caller said. “We have a Dennis Hoskins here at The Lucky Gentleman casino. He claims to be your father-in-law and is requesting you to cover his substantial losses for this evening. The amount is just

over one hundred and fifty thousand dollars.”

“Tell him he can go to hell. Don’t call back here.” Matt hung the phone up and promptly lapsed into a troubled, headache-ridden sleep.

Two hours later he got up to take some pain medication for the pounding headache that plagued him. He shut the light off in the kitchen, and the front door bell rang.

“Yes,” he said to the two community lawmen standing ominously at his door. He assumed it had something to do with his father-in-law. Matt crossed his arms over his chest, preparing to be belligerent if they even mentioned the name Dennis Hoskins.

“We’re looking for a woman named...Hannah.” The taller of the two men said, checking an electronic device.

“She’s asleep.”

“I’m sorry, sir, but she needs to come with us.”

“It’s almost six o’clock in the morning.”

“Her husband is in jail for unpaid gambling debts, and he’s asking for her. Could you get her for us, please?”

“Wait here,” Matt said and closed the door, leaving the lawmen to stand on his doorstep.

He passed his bedroom on the way to wake Hannah and glanced at the door to his bedroom where Sophie slept blissfully unaware of this latest twist. He should probably wake Sophie too, but she’d be upset. He felt his wife had suffered enough with the magistrate hearing and dinner with her father last night, so he let her sleep.

Hannah answered the guest bedroom door looking like she needed more sleep, too. He explained quickly about the lawmen at the door. She nodded, perked up, and met him downstairs ten minutes later dressed and ready to go.

“What’s this about?” she asked the taller of the two lawmen.

“Your husband has requested your presence. He’s been arrested for failure to pay a gambling debt. You’ve been named as collateral in his trial. He’s asking for you, ma’am.”

“I’ll accompany her,” Matt said and took Hannah’s arm in his hand to escort her out the door.

“Are you a blood relative?” the shorter of the two officers asked.

“No, but—”

“That won’t be necessary, sir. You aren’t authorized to accompany a female who’s not a direct blood relative.”

Hannah turned to him and patted his hand. “Don’t worry. I’ll be okay. Tell Sophie not to worry, either.” She then smiled at him warmly and departed.

Matt watched her step away with the two lawmen on either side of her. A hollow

Lara Santiago

bad feeling stabbed his stomach to match the pounding in his self-abused head. He knew deep down in his soul that as Hannah departed with them, he should never have let her go. Then again, what choice did he have? None.

Fucking Tiberius Group.

Chapter Ten

“What do you mean she’s gone?” Sophie asked once seated at the kitchen table as Matthew poured her a cup of coffee. She’d slept late into the morning, unusual for her, but the nightmares she’d had all night had not given her restful sleep. She dreamed about that butter knife she’d wanted to plunge into her father and carve his heart out all night long.

She’d woken up with absolutely no clue as to how to help her sister. Matthew put a cup in front of her and dropped another bombshell.

Hannah was gone.

“Her new husband asked for her and two community lawmen came and escorted her to the jail where he was presumably locked up. I couldn’t stop it. And before you ask, I tried to go along, but since I wasn’t a blood relative, they wouldn’t allow it.”

“But when will she be back?”

“I can’t answer that. I called a few minutes ago, and they refused to divulge any information to me as I’m still not a blood relative.” His exasperation was evident, but she was too worried about Hannah to care.

“We need to go down to the jail and bring her back. Or better yet, we’ll get my father to bring her here and—” She shot up out of the kitchen chair to run and do...something, anything.

“Sophie...” Matthew grabbed her shoulders and faced her towards him to gain her full attention before she exited the house on a mission.

“What?”

“Your father ran up a big debt last night at a casino using my name to get a line of credit. The casino called to collect at four in the morning and I declined to cover his very substantial debt.”

“So?”

“I imagine your father is also in jail and unable to escort your sister anywhere. Have something to eat, get dressed, and then I’ll take you there. Okay?”

Sophie gave him a nod then closed her eyes. When would the nightmare end? She took two steps forward and rested her weary head on Matthew’s chest. She slipped her arms around his waist to feel the measure of assurance his proximity always gave her.

“Thank you.” Sophie clung to him and refused to break down and cry an ocean full. She hated to be weak and girly but really wanted a single something to go right. She wouldn’t stop worrying until her sister was safely back here with her.

Matthew didn’t say anything. He just held her tight.

Two hours later, Sophie was assured only that her nightmare would be on going.

Hannah had been placed in the custody of a mail order bride company serving off world locations. Reggie something, her husband of less than one day, had annulled the marriage and signed her over as payment of his large gambling debt from the night before.

Hannah, they were informed by the mail order bride company, was already on a cryo-ship headed for a moon of Mars mining colony in space to marry a Thorium-Z miner. At Sophie’s insistence, Matthew offered to pay the debt for Hannah upon her return but couldn’t because he was already married. There were rules, apparently, regarding only single men being allowed to purchase mail order brides.

“How could her husband annul the marriage just like that?” Sophie asked.

“Cause he hadn’t popped her yet.”

“Popped?” Sophie asked, hoping against hope the man didn’t mean what she thought he did.

“I think he means they didn’t consummate the marriage,” Matt supplied smoothly.

Yep, that was what she thought it meant all right. Poor Hannah.

“And he was lucky, too,” the mail order bride representative said confidentially. “That other fella he was with last night got popped outright for not paying his debt.”

“Popped?” Sophie asked again, wondering how many more definitions of popped there were going to be forthcoming, hoping once again it didn’t mean the same thing as the first one.

“You know, they gave him some cement over shoes if ya get my meanin’?” He gave them an exaggerated wink and then ran his thumb across his neck in the universal meaning of throat slitting death.

“They killed him?”

“Yep. Heard tell it was one of the owners himself that gave the order. Every gambler knows you don’t run up a tab you can’t pay, lest you want to get popped.”

* * * *

Matt had no doubt if he were to ask, he’d find out Senator Westland had been the ‘owner’ in question. Sophie slumped her shoulders and gave up right then. He could see

the defeat in her posture. He'd already known he wouldn't be able to buy Hannah back. And the truth was he didn't have that kind of capital to spare to get her back anyway, at least not without being forced to sell his business, which was what he would have had to do to save her father.

They retreated in silence back to their home. Sophie said nothing on the trip back.

So Hannah was gone to parts unknown off world and Sophie was no longer speaking to him because of it. It wasn't fair, but Matt figured she deserved to burn some anger off in peaceable solitude, so he made himself scarce. He sat at his desk in the library, feet propped up, wondering how long before their tumultuous life would settle down.

Damn her father anyway. And goddamn his father, too.

Later in the day, he woke from dozing at his desk when the phone rang. He picked it up before the first ring finished sounding to keep Sophie from being further disturbed.

"I need to speak to Sophie Brent," said the strange male voice over the phone.

"Who is this?" Matt growled.

"This is Jonathan," the stranger growled back. "Put her on the phone."

"I don't let my wife speak to strange men." He hung up. But then his conscience started beating on him. Who was Jonathan? Should he know that name from somewhere? He couldn't think clearly from his hangover. The phone rang again and he and Sophie picked it up at the same time.

"Sophie! Are you okay?" came the voice of Jonathan the stranger once again.

"Jon? Is it you?" Sophie said with relief and delight evident in her voice, leaving Matt supremely jealous for which he had no right.

"I told you, asshole, I don't let my wife talk to strangers. Sophie, hang up right now."

"No, you hang up. This is a private conversation, one I'm sure you don't care about." Sophie promptly ignored his demand and began speaking to the other strange man on the line. "Jon, I need you to do something for me."

Matt ripped the phone out of the wall in his study and headed upstairs to force her compliance. If he had to, he'd rip that phone out of the wall as well. He wasn't allowing a strange man to speak to his wife. But by the time he'd barged into their bedroom, she was saying her farewells and telling the stranger Jon she loved him. A knife to his heart would be less painful than Sophie being in love with another man.

"I won't let him inside, Sophie."

"Really? What a surprise. Another member of my family barred from the residence."

"Family? Oh, shit, that was your brother, wasn't it?" Matt's ridiculous anger deflated immediately. He was being an ass.

"Yeah. He's a Federal Interstellar Lawman. I've sent him after Hannah. If that's

all right with you.”

“I’m sorry, Sophie. Please, let’s not fight any more. The last two days have been difficult for both of us.”

“I feel so completely hopeless, and I hate that feeling. I’m used to solving all the problems.” Sophie sniffed and her face crumpled into tears. She sat down on the bed her hands over her face. He sat down next to her and pulled her into his arms.

“How could you not front the money for her, Matthew? How could you let them take her?”

“I was never offered the opportunity to buy Hannah back. I was only called on to pay your father’s gambling debts. He ran up a hundred and fifty thousand dollars using my name to secure the line of credit.

“I refused to pay for your father, not your sister. Her husband Reggie had complete control over her destiny. He’s the one who sold her to the mail order bride company. I knew I couldn’t buy her, because I’m already married to you. I’m sorry. If I could have done something I would have, I promise you.”

“I know. I’m sorry. It’s just so unfair to Hannah.” Sophie lifted her head from her hands and rested it against his shoulder “I’d like to kill my father all over again.”

“You don’t need to say sorry to me. And if I could, I’d help you kill him all over again.”

Her head burrowed into his chest and she murmured, “Thanks.”

“That gratitude again. Do you have enough to allow my return to our bed?”

“I didn’t kick you out of our bed in the first place. I don’t have the authority to. Besides this is your house, Matthew. I’m only the little woman. Should I endeavor to be barefoot and pregnant, too? Because all you have to do is order me around.”

“Stop it. I wouldn’t have the balls to order you around and you know it.”

She smiled briefly then her face sobered. “The meeting with the Tiberius Group is in three days to determine whether you have to get rid of me. Perhaps we should spend what remaining time we have together wrapped around each other. You know, just in case the unthinkable happens and I end up on a cryo-ship on the way to a moon of Mars to marry a Thorium-Z miner.”

“I won’t marry you off to someone else,” he said adamantly.

“I hope you get to make that decision.”

He didn’t say the words out loud, but he hoped so, too.

Matt pulled her into his arms suddenly and kissed her as if it would be the last time he would ever see her. He wrapped his tongue around hers, licking her, tasting her, and loving the way she fervently kissed him in return. He felt her unbutton his shirt quickly from the bottom to the top. Her hands spread over his chest, leaning in to kiss it once before she moved to divest him of his pants. He returned the favor and in minutes they were naked and rolling around the bed as if they hadn’t seen each other in a month, having pulled each other’s clothing off in record time. Their legs tangled as groans of

need bounced off the walls of the bedroom. Her hands alternated between grasping handfuls of his hair to pull his head closer, grinding her mouth harder against his and skating down his back scratching a path to his ass, pulling at him there, too.

Matt pumped forward when her fingertips pulled at his hips as if not caring if his cock was actually inserted inside her body at the time or not. The desperation he felt was unfounded, but he wanted her with an intensity he'd never known with another woman. Sophie was the only woman he'd ever craved. He was smart enough to know she was the only woman who would ever have this impact on him. He knew it the first time he'd laid eyes on her. Just as he knew he'd surly die inside, if she was ever taken from him.

Matt ran his hands down her soft undulating body, not stopping until he hooked a hand around one thigh. He pulled her legs open so he could bury his needy cock in her slick, wet pussy and pump inside of her until she screamed his name in pleasure. But before he could, she gained the upper hand and wrestled with him until he was on his back. His eyes opened in surprise at her aggressiveness. Not that she ever just lay there and let him do her, but she was about to fuck him like an animal in rabid heat if the noises coming from her throat were any indication. And he was going to let her with appreciative glee.

The ferocious make-up sex had just begun.

Sophie twisted herself on top of him, straddling his hips with her own. She leaned down as strands of her blonde hair tickled his chest. Her hands slid from his shoulders to his hands and pinned them to the bed. His cock snapped to attention between them and bobbed happily at Sophie's dominant position. She smiled as if she felt him get hard for her and gave him a positively scorching gaze. Her eyelids closed halfway and she promptly moved her hips back and forth, running her creamy wet hot pussy lips up and down his dick. She continued to watch his reaction while her gray eyes fairly smoldered and seductive moans escaped her lips. Sophie undulated as if in palpable pleasure with each stroke against the full length of his cock. Without warning, she slid forward allowing the head of his dick to slip between her warm lower lips and quickly shifted so that she impaled herself on his cock all the way to his balls.

The sudden vise grip of her warmth around his cock forced his hips to surge deeper, which spontaneously garnered an animalistic moan from Sophie. She leaned forward, her perspiration covered breasts and firmed nipples pressing into his chest. Her hands released his fingertips to grip his shoulders so she could leverage another withdrawal off his cock, only to slam down for yet another deep stroke.

Matt interrupted his panting to grunt at the sensation of pre-orgasmic bliss, trying to hold his climax back. He slipped his hands into her hair and brought her mouth down to his. Stabbing his tongue between her lips to the rhythm she set in her apparent goal to get him off quickly brought whimpering sounds from her. Matt stroked his tongue against hers wildly until he felt the clamp of her orgasm grip his cock at the same he released. A growl issued from him and she half whimpered half screamed into his mouth as he grabbed her close in simultaneous climax.

Matt wrapped his arms around her and lowered her, still pressed to his chest, down to the bed. He held her so tightly, she probably couldn't breath, but he found he

couldn't loosen his hold.

"I love you, Sophie. I'll never let you go. I swear it," he said when he could speak.

* * * *

Matt hoped he'd assured his future with all the running around he'd done the past three days. He was feeling very confident. He'd done what he usually did when presented with a difficult problem. He let his genetically-engineered brain solve it for him. He was about to win this hearing and have the charged dismissed. He had the undeniable proof to do it, too. Then he planned to go about making things up to Sophie. They'd spent every moment possible together in each other's arms for the past three days, and he smiled in memory.

He was so deeply in love with her, he wasn't sure he'd want to continue on if he couldn't have her at his side.

The magistrate entered with the usual pomp and circumstance. He swept the room with a glance before he settled his sizable girth in his squeaky chair.

"Let's get started. What proof do you bring, Governor Kane?" He leaned back slightly as if to get comfortable for the story he was about to hear. Matt had no doubt it would be a nice fictional account of what *really* happened. He wished he could remember it for himself.

"I beg the Court's indulgence, Magistrate. You see, my daughter came to me only a couple of weeks ago with the news of her unfortunate status. In fact, she only came forward when the pregnancy could no longer be hidden. She was embarrassed, as you might imagine, by the deplorable incident. She is a shy girl and has been much taken advantage of by Matthew Westland, I'm afraid."

"Again, what proof do you have of this, Governor Kane?" the magistrate huffed in a tone which sounded like, 'Get on with it.'

"Well, my word as a gentleman and leader of this great state should have some weight, don't you think?"

The governor had adopted the same pompous, prick attitude that Senator Westland displayed regularly. Matt didn't think the magistrate looked in the mood for it. Perhaps this would go even better than he expected.

"Your word as a gentleman is not in question, sir. Do you have proof of this incident or not?" A murmur rose among the spectators and the magistrate leveled a stern look out at the court audience before turning his gaze back to the governor.

"Yes, Magistrate. I understand the rules you and I are both governed by. Therefore, I am reluctantly forced to submit a digital video of the incident in question. It has been generously provided by my good friend and father of the defendant, Senator John Westland. It was taken in his home during the holidays and caught Matthew and Andrea quite by accident on one of his intruder alert cameras. Also included is the separate second incident on the day of Matthew's current marriage."

"A digital video?" The magistrate looked intrigued by the possibility he'd get to

view a video tape of Matt and Andrea screwing in the study. Matt would rather endure an all day caning than allow the tape to be seen in the courtroom today with Sophie watching. He'd completely forgotten his father had a security camera in his study.

"I'd like to take this opportunity to dispute the validity of the digital video they want to submit. How can I be assured the tape hasn't been tampered with?" Matt asked as he stood up to make his point.

The magistrate made a dubious face as if considering the possibility the tape was faked, but then he said, "I'll view the tape in my chambers during the recess and have my technical staff authenticate it."

"Magistrate, if I may approach?" Matt stood up, and at the man's nod he went to the bench. His father and the governor trotted up next to him, standing directly before the chin-level magistrate's desk.

"Yes, Mr. Westland?"

"Magistrate, I've not been allowed to see this tape..."

"It doesn't matter, Matthew. You have no right to dispute it," his father interrupted. "It's you on the tape. I think I know my own son when I see him fornicating with a poor innocent like Andrea—"

"Stop it, both of you," the magistrate interrupted when Matt opened his mouth to break in on his father's speech. "I'll give you a choice, Mr. Westland. Either I view the tape in private and then allow my technical staff to authenticate it, or we can set it up in the courtroom for all to see."

"Set it up for the courtroom then."

"Now see here, I will not allow my daughter to be publicly humiliated for the salacious press..."

The magistrate held up his hand to Andrea's father to stop his rant.

"In deference to Governor Kane's public persona and the embarrassment it would cause him, I will clear the courtroom of the media. However, the five you will be in attendance. Do you sincerely wish your wife to see this video, Mr. Westland?"

"Matthew, this is ridiculous. It is *you* on the tape!"

"Senator Westland, do not speak another word," the magistrate warned. "Mr. Westland, do you?"

"Of course I don't want my wife to see some doctored video of Andrea with some other guy fornicating in my father's study, especially if they created it to blame me for something I didn't do. But if it will serve justice, then go ahead. I know it isn't me. Will you still have your technical staff authenticate it? And furthermore, what qualifications do they have, if I might ask, since my entire future hangs on the balance of their expertise?"

"I have the finest staff in the state. Rest assured, if you are innocent, it will be proven." The magistrate looked past the three of them at Andrea who had lowered her head and started crying silent buckets of tears at the plaintiff's table.

“On second thought, I’ll allow Mr. Westland to view the tape with me in the privacy of my chambers. Then I’ll have my staff authenticate it.”

He stood and dismissed the court until such time as he viewed the disc.

Matt explained briefly to Sophie, who nodded and sat back down at their table to wait. He patted her arm and followed the magistrate through the passage behind his large desk and into his private space behind the courtroom. The space was large and a nice-sized wall screen was centered to the left upon entering the office. Matt watched as the magistrate gave the package to another man with a few whispered instructions.

Five minutes later, they watched grainy black and white footage of Matt staggering into the study, obviously and totally shit-faced, directed by Andrea, who was looking around furtively and most especially right into the camera that was supposedly hidden.

In the suspect video, she managed to get him on the sofa, but he fell onto it face down, one arm dangling off, a hand resting on the floor. The clarity wasn’t good and the camera was located at the end of the sofa where his head was, and not giving a very clear view of his face, but he thought he might be drooling.

Soon after, Andrea turned him over face up with much tugging and turning and apparently no help from him that night, but his eyes were closed and his face was barely visible to the camera’s view. She ripped open his shirt and a couple buttons flew off, one landing in the black, decorative bowl on the table. She unbuckled his belt and opened the front of his slacks.

Andrea suddenly got up from the sofa, stepping out of the camera view a moment. On the film, he didn’t move one drunken limb. The lights then dimmed to near darkness. Andrea returned to the sofa, and the show began. Andrea straddled him without removing her dress and immediately bounced like a pogo stick on top of the man below her, shrieking as if in a porno film that paid extra for noise. The man, almost impossible to see from the angle of the camera and the grainy texture of the film, made no noise whatsoever.

“That isn’t me,” Matt said.

“And what proof do you have of this? Do you deny it was you who staggered in at first?”

“No.”

“Then why isn’t it still you?”

“From the angle of the camera, and the sudden darkness in the room, it could be anyone.”

“Anyone, including you.”

“Explain to me how I morally corrupted the virtue of the governor’s daughter by lying there and letting her fuck me. You can’t even prove from this tape that I actually had my dick inside her.”

“Don’t be vulgar.”

“This whole charade of a hearing is vulgar. After viewing this, you can’t possibly still believe I did what I’m being accused of. If the person in that video *is* me, then I didn’t say anything to coerce her. I didn’t threaten her to fuck me or else. I didn’t do anything except lay there in a dead unconscious drunk heap and fail to stop what she did to *me*.”

“That remains to be seen. I’ll render my judgment when all the evidence is in my possession.”

Matt was incensed. Perhaps he’d do better if he filed a motion that Andrea had ruined *his* virtue. The monitor changed suddenly and Matt heard his father’s voice. The magistrate looked back at the screen. It was footage from the night he’d married Sophie. It was from when he’d been called down by his father to listen to Andrea vent.

The camera angle was exactly the same as before. It was focused on the sofa area, pointing ostensibly to the safe his father kept behind his desk. Andrea was sitting on the sofa in this angle.

The scene started when he heard himself enter the room and then heard his own voice say, “What is so damn important to interrupt me from my wedding night?”

It didn’t change from the original event until after his father left the room.

“I’ll leave you two alone to talk.” He heard his father say again and the sound of the doors closing.

“Come and sit with me, Matthew,” Andrea said on the film as expected and patted the sofa next to her.

This is where the taped veered off of reality. The lights suddenly lowered and after a few moments there was undefined movement on the sofa. Then it seemed as if the lights magically increased enough to see a man with a similar hair cut as his, on top of Andrea who then began shrieking and wailing her love for him repeatedly while the man in the film lasted about five strokes before grunting and falling on her trapping Andrea underneath him against the sofa. Then the footage went blank.

“That was definitely not me.” Matt felt suddenly very vindicated. He’d never only lasted five strokes and then collapsed on a woman...well, except for that one time in a semi-private limo with Sophie. Damn.

“It looked like you. It sounded like you when you entered the room. Do you deny being in the study that night?”

“No. I just deny everything that happened after my father left the room. I never crossed to where the sofa was. I stayed on my side of the room, then she screamed and vented about how she hated me and wouldn’t marry me if I was the last man on earth.”

“Well, someone turned the lights off and crossed the room. Did you see anyone else in the house?”

“There are lots of someone elses in my father’s house. I’m telling you the video is a fake. I adamantly deny having sex with Andrea. And to tell you the truth, after watching the first part, I don’t even believe I had sex with her at Christmas either.

“Being that sloppy drunk usually precludes *any* sexual activities, if you get my meaning.” Matt lifted an eyebrow to convey his man-to-man meaning.

“You are dismissed, Mr. Westland. I’ll be reconvening court in ten minutes.” The magistrate remained seated.

Matt took his cue and exited the magistrate’s private office. As it stood now, he didn’t have a warm fuzzy feeling about the outcome of the hearing or any certainty the magistrate would rule in his favor.

But he sincerely hoped his own ‘evidence’ trumped the tape he’d just watched.

Chapter Eleven

“I have reviewed the submitted digital tape with Mr. Westland. Currently, my technical staff is studying it for authentication.”

“I renew my strenuous objection as to the validity of the tape,” Matt said standing up swiftly, to make his point.

“Noted, Mr. Westland. Please sit down.” The magistrate sounded gruff and irate. Not a great sign. “Governor Kane, do you have any further information to add?”

“I believe the tape speaks for itself. I have nothing further.”

“Mr. Westland, what evidence have you brought today in defense of the charges brought against you?”

Matt stood up again, cleared his throat and started his defense. “I have been charged with corrupting Andrea Kane’s virtue, impregnating her during the Christmas holidays, and finally of sleeping with her the night I married my wife, Sophie. I’d like to make it clear for the record that all three of these allegations are false.

“The first piece of evidence I have to prove my innocence is a digital video of Miss Kane.” Matt nodded to a man in the audience who held the disc up. He was the top video tape technician employed at Westland Industries. The clerk collected it promptly delivering it to the magistrate.

“It’s date and time stamped the fourteenth day of February showing Andrea Kane in my personal executive office after hours at Westland Industries with another man engaged in sexual activity...on my desk.”

“He is a liar! He’s doctored a fake disc, and I won’t stand for this kind of slander against my daughter.” The governor opened his mouth to shout again. Matt saw Andrea turn her head sharply and direct an angry look his way.

“Shut up, Governor! It’s my turn to talk,” Matt said and turned back to the magistrate. “I brought my personal technician with me today from Westland Industries,

who will swear that the video you just received was never in my possession. I gave him the date and time parameters, and he pulled and transferred a copy of the video to the disc you now hold in your hand.”

“Noted, Mr. Westland. What else do you have?”

“I brought my personal physician with me.” Matt turned back to the audience and nodded to his doctor, who stood up. “He will swear that during the six-month period from late August last year and until the end of February this year, I was under his exclusive care and more specifically, I was on a very carefully monitored medication regimen which made me temporarily sterile.”

“Sterile!” Matt’s father said incredulously. He and the governor then exchanged an uneasy glance between them. The magistrate gave them both a thunderously angry look, presumably because he interrupted.

“I cannot possibly be the father of Andrea’s baby, as I was not producing sperm until at least March, if then.” Matt wasn’t going to mention that the medication was also for his biogenetic implants as a final regimen to assure continued genetically enhanced abilities.

“Is that all?” the magistrate asked. His surly tone was back, and it made Matt apprehensive.

“I couldn’t possibly have gotten Andrea pregnant at Christmas. It was physically impossible. I am not the one who corrupted her. I have her on tape clearly being corrupted by another man after our experience, proving she also didn’t consider our acquaintance exclusive.

“And I absolutely did not have sex with Andrea the night I married my wife. The tape you and I viewed was a fake. I know what happened in that room, and it is not represented on the tape the plaintiffs have submitted into evidence. If your technicians aren’t able to determine that truth, then I figure my word as a gentleman should be worth something, too. With that said, I feel I have demonstrated my innocence very well as to the charges against me.”

“We’ll adjourn until one o’clock this afternoon so I may review all the evidence. When we return, you will each be allowed to make a final statement before I render my judgment.” The magistrate banged his gavel once, raising his large frame from the seat behind the elevated bench and disappearing to his private chambers to watch more porn staring Andrea.

Sophie put a hand on his. He turned to see her speculative look.

Her eyebrows went up in question. “Sterility as a defense?”

“Yeah,” he admitted.

“Brilliant.” She then gave him a radiant smile.

“Let’s hope.”

* * * *

Sophie and Matt retreated outside the justice center building and around the

corner to a quiet exclusive restaurant where the media couldn't follow to enjoy their lunch break. Sophie sat against the ultra lush cushions of the small intimate secluded booth where they sat basking in the new-found thought that they might actually get to stay together. She thought Matt had proven beyond a shadow of a doubt his innocence.

The waiter took their order and retreated from the table as Matt turned toward her and wrapped an arm around her shoulder, pulling her close on the seat they shared. The forefinger and thumb of his other hand came up to stroke her chin. He held her face and kissed her passionately, his tongue teasing hers with careful deliberate strokes as if they were the only patrons of the restaurant. No one was in their direct view, but if she moaned in appreciation of his attention, others would certainly hear.

He paused his sensuous assault of her lips and murmured, "You're beautiful."

Sophie didn't respond because she tried to keep from moaning in public. Matt's hand suddenly slid down her body, pausing at her breast to squeeze tenderly and stroke her nipple. Seconds later, he promptly dropped his hand to her lap and under her skirt onto her bare thigh. Her sharp intake of breath produced that famous million-dollar smile. "Are you blushing?"

"I doubt it, but you tell me." Sophie palmed his cock which bobbed appreciably and grew in her hand the moment she touched him.

He jumped slightly as she squeezed his thickening cock through his slacks and chuckled. "Insatiable is what you are, Mrs. Westland. I love that about you."

"Kiss me, Matthew. I think it's all we'll have time for before our food comes."

His fingers under her skirt worked under her panties as if to contradict her comment. He gazed deeply into her eyes as he stroked her clit once before slipping a finger up inside of her body. Sophie failed to cover her moan at the sensation. His look of triumph made her glow inside as she inhaled those ever present pheromones he exuded in waves as usual wrapped around his delectable cologne. He removed his hand from her suddenly, but before she took her next breath he stuck that finger with her wetness covering it into his mouth while she watched.

"Yummy," he declared as the waiter stepped up with their drinks. Sophie felt a warm blush come up in her cheeks when it occurred to her she was becoming much too comfortable with sexual activities in public places.

She and Matt caressed each other throughout lunch despite three more interruptions from the wait staff. They ended up drooling over each other too long and had to fight through the throngs of media to get back inside the hearing room on time.

They came back into the magistrate's hearing room at about ten seconds before the one o'clock deadline. Trotting up to the defense box, they didn't have time to speak to some of the new faces now gracing the crowded audience.

The first odious person she recognized was Orin Prichard. He was over next to the plaintiff's table and conversed with Matt's father as if they were co-conspirators. Sophie watched Matt's head turn in their direction and he stared for a moment or two, but then turned away as if he weren't concerned. Sophie didn't like the idea of Orin Prichard contributing any information for the senator's side in this matter.

She then turned and glanced at Paul Brody. He sat in the very back and gave Sophie a positively grim expression as they passed before Matt pulled on her arm, propelling her the last few steps to their spot in front of the magistrate. As the clerk announced the magistrate's arrival back in the room, she noticed another familiar face from Westland Industries. She didn't know his name but knew he was a young intern still employed there.

The technician Matt had brought to authenticate the tape of Andrea was still in attendance. He also had a very dismal look on his face. She got the impression he'd wanted to speak to Matt as they'd hurried by, but there was no time.

Sophie put a hand on her middle to subdue the sudden bad feeling blazing its way across her insides. She got a chill just before she noted the row of spectators behind Matt's technician and found Orin Prichard seated comfortably now. She stifled the urge to shiver at the positively malevolent look he directed her way. Then just as suddenly, he smiled and winked at her. She knew that delighted look certainly didn't bode well.

She tugged on Matt's arm, but the magistrate entered the hearing room. Matt distractedly patted her arm but didn't look at her. His focus was between the magistrate and his father seated at the governor's plaintiff table. Everyone stood in deference and the proceedings began before she could mention all the visitors in the audience making her nervous.

"Are you ready to make your closing statements?" the magistrate asked.

The governor smugly turned to the audience. "I'd like to beg the court's indulgence, your Honor. I have new evidence to present. I only obtained this disc over the lunch break."

"What evidence is that?"

"I have a tape with some questionable activities of Mr. Westland's present wife."

"What relevance does a tape with my wife in it have on these proceedings?" Matt said angrily, standing up, releasing her arm.

"You are counter suing me for defamation of character." The governor smiled smugly once again. "I have a right to show how Sophie Brent Westland is undeserving of any protection for her character."

Sophie couldn't even imagine what tape they could have of her. She'd never even seen the inside of the senator's study. "Magistrate, I strenuously object to this 'new' evidence as being anything but more lies to perpetuate on this hearing," Matthew said.

"I have a tape showing Sophie Westland working in her former office, all alone, I might add, at Westland Industries. I believe the Tiberius Group law states explicitly she is not to be left alone in public, nor is she allowed to work without special permission."

"So what? Sophie used to work for me. And besides, my wife *can* work if she has my permission," Matt said in an even tone. Sophie could tell he was angry. But then a bigger problem became evident. How did they have a tape of her working in her office? Was there a camera in her office? And if so, how long had it been there? And why hadn't Matt told her?

“Matthew,” she said in a loud whisper.

Matt looked down at her. His troubled eyes were apologetic and gave her the answer she dreaded. Oh God, there *was* a camera in her office. She could tell by the look in his eyes.

“I’d like to show the tape.” The governor nodded to Matt’s technician, who grudgingly handed over another disc.

“No!” Sophie stood up and shouted.

The magistrate banged his gavel. “Sit down, Mrs. Westland. You do not have a voice in these proceedings beyond that of your husband.”

“You can *not* show that tape in here right now!” she stated emphatically.

Matt’s eyes widened and she could tell he thought he knew what would be on the tape she so adamantly protested. He assumed she was upset about the sexual play acting they’d done on her desk, in what she previously expected was the privacy of her office, but he was wrong.

There was something else. Something worse.

“She’s right. I protest another tape being shown. The others of me were obviously faked.”

“We used the same technique and had Mr. Westland’s own technician pull the company video within a certain time frame. Actually, the office Mrs. Westland used to work in has a motion sensor activation camera. Isn’t that right?” The governor turned to Matt’s technician who nodded morosely and sincerely looked like he wished to be anywhere but where he was right at this moment. He gave Matt an anguished look. More bad news for her.

“Sir, there may be private things on the tape that are of a confidential business nature. I must strenuously protest the viewing of this tape in open court.”

“No one wants to steal your business secrets, Mr. Westland. I’ll allow the tapes.” The magistrate motioned for the tape to be brought forward.

“No!” Sophie raised her voice. “Please do not show that tape, I beg you.”

“I will not tolerate another outburst from you, Mrs. Westland. Sit down and shut up this instant.”

Sophie pressed her lips together and stared daggers at the magistrate, but she didn’t sit down. It was a feeble protest, but she was screwed if they showed the tape.

Matthew put a hand on her arm in a comforting gesture and added, “Magistrate, my wife can’t be condemned for the sexual things I require from her.”

“You required your wife to have sex with you in her former office?” The magistrate’s bushy eyebrows went up practically to his hairline.

“What I do with my wife is none of anyone else’s damned business.”

“The tape we have does not show sexual activity, just *her* working after it was clear by the date and time stamp...she shouldn’t have been,” the governor said casually,

but from the smug tone of his voice, Sophie knew there was additional footage.

Sophie knew exactly what it was, too. Matt thought he knew, but he didn't.

"Set the screen up," the magistrate said. "Having your wife work for you is still punishable by a fine, Mr. Westland, with or without your permission. Do you know that?"

"Then I'll admit it and pay the fine. Why do you need to show the video?"

"Evidence, as rebuttal to the charges you yourself have brought forward."

Sophie was doomed. She turned to her husband and in a passionately quiet voice said, "Matthew, I can explain." His face showed his misunderstanding. He shook his head and winked at her. He sat down and pulled her down to her chair. Sophie sat on the very edge, her back ramrod straight.

A screen was lowered and the lights went off and the footage started. And she guessed it was too much for the hearing room, with all the salacious spectators, to be cleared before *her* humiliating video was shown.

The first part showed Sophie entering her office like she still worked there. She accessed her computer and began working away. They fast forwarded the tape to show how long she worked. Just as the hour marker showed on the footage, the magistrate grunted and made a notation. An hour was the punishable fine length of time for her working, apparently. Then the tape slowed back to normal speed and the door to her office opened.

Matthew squeezed her hand certainly thinking it was him about to enter her office, but it was Paul Brody instead. On the footage, she stood up from her chair and came around the desk. There was no sound on the tape, video only, and somehow that made it even worse. Matthew released her hand and twisted in his chair so he was no longer touching her.

Sophie watched in fascination like the others behind her in the audience, but soon felt tears spill over her lower lids and stream down her face. Matthew would leave her. Or he'd sell her.

In the film Paul pulled an envelope out and handed it to her. She opened it, and even the grainy texture of the video showed it was a stack of cash. She tried to give it back to him, but Paul refused. He then put his hand to her face in a loving gesture. He moved in close even as she backed into her office desk. It looked like a choreographed dance move from the point of view of the camera, although at the time, she backed away from him to distance herself.

Sophie knew Paul had a huge crush on her. He had for a long time, and while she hadn't returned his affection, she used him just the same. And now everyone would know it. She used him to save herself from marrying a stranger at the auction, or worse someone like Orin, and the money he was returning to her was her very own. It was a plan they hatched before the Working Woman's Auction Memo went in to effect. It was what Sophie had thought of to save herself and to solve her own problem. She certainly never expected Matthew Westland to rescue her.

Why would she?

Back to the footage, and the part where Paul told her he cared about her, and that he regretted not being the one to marry her. Sophie asked if he would be good to her sister, but on the tape it looked like she was returning his affection. Sophie had never felt so far away from Matthew even sitting so close to him.

Paul wanted to kiss her good bye and she'd let him...almost. She changed her mind at the very last second because she didn't want to lead him on. She didn't find him attractive in that way. Paul tried to kiss her on the lips. While she turned her head in deflection, it was hard to see anything on the video, with the exception of Paul Brody and her in a loving clench. It looked like she turned into him to accept the kiss, then both startled on the footage, obviously hearing someone in the hallway outside the room. As her final act of treachery in the video footage, Sophie shuffled Paul out of her office through the bathroom she shared with the office next door. Just in the nick of time.

Two seconds later, Matthew had come in. She wiped at her face next to her mouth where Paul's lips had touched her and turned to Matthew as if she hadn't just been in an embrace with another man. She then kissed Matthew passionately in the film. At the time, she knew Matthew was the only man she'd ever want. The only kiss she'd ever crave. But from the point of view of the film, that the entire hearing room now surveyed, it looked for all the world like she'd gotten caught about to get busy with another man, before her husband showed up to finish the job.

The tape went blank.

Matthew would of course remember exactly what happened next. They'd made love in her office...on *her* desk, and under it. And while at the time, she'd meant every kiss, touch, and murmur of love she'd expressed to him, basking in the glow of a relationship she didn't even know if she would get to keep, she knew how it looked right now in court.

Bad for her. Bad for Paul.

Bad for Matthew, too, since the room had just witnessed a video of which suggested she almost cheated on him. But she hadn't. Nor had she intended to. Given the same circumstances, she wouldn't believe her story, either.

Sophie chanced a look his way, but Matthew didn't look at her in return. His focus was on the table in front of him.

"Why did the man in the video give you money, Mrs. Westland?" the magistrate asked to the pin drop silent room. She couldn't even hear breathing.

"Don't answer that," Matthew said harshly. He'd turned only half way towards her, staring at her shoulder, and not at her face or into her eyes. Probably, she didn't want to look into his eyes just yet.

"I want an answer to my question," the Mmagistrate said in a peevish tone.

"She answers to me, not you." Matthew's anger was evident in the clipped voice he used.

"Well, then ask her what the money was for?"

“I already know what the money was for,” Matthew said in the coldest tone she’d ever heard. It was the one he usually reserved for his father. She imagined she should get used to it.

“I directed that meeting to take place. I told Paul to give Sophie that money.”

“Really,” the magistrate’s tone dripped distain and disbelief. “Why?”

“It’s none of your business, and it has nothing to do with the proceedings here today.”

Matthew didn’t speak to her, or look at her, and he most certainly didn’t touch her.

The magistrate looked very irate at first, then softened and said, “Very well. Is there anything else you wish to bring to my attention, Governor?”

“No. I’m ready to conclude my proof. I’d like my very good friend, former senator John James Westland to make my final statements, if it’s allowed,” The governor said with a self-satisfied smile.

“As long as he speaks to the case and charges at hand.”

Sophie looked around the room at the others in attendance. The spectators all glanced at her as though she were the most horrible female ever born to this world. A fallen woman who’d successfully tricked her husband into his unflinching supporting of her wickedness.

A woman who didn’t deserve a man such as Matthew.

“It isn’t what you think,” she whispered, leaning closer to him.

“Isn’t it?” He still didn’t look at her, but leaned as close as he could without touching her and began a low angry whisper. “Here’s what I think. You never needed me to rescue you at all. You had a brilliant plan all of your own. You gave Paul the money to bid on you. I remember seeing him leave the auction directly after I bid. Did he have enough to cover Orin’s bid?”

Sophie hesitated before answering a dismal sounding, “No.”

“Then I guess I saved you after all. Too bad for me. I got a wife who wanted another man. He obviously loves you. No wonder he wanted to marry Hannah, easy access to you.”

“That’s not true. I never wanted him, but you’re right, I used him. I used his feelings for me to save myself.”

“Like you’re using me?” Matthew suddenly withdrew from her without waiting for her answer.

She wasn’t using him. She loved him, but he’d never believe it now. The sudden gut wrenching idea of losing Matthew engulfed her. Then a worse notion occurred to her. The horror of winning here today, and then having to spend her life with Matthew hating her for what she’d done.

Chapter Twelve

“My son, Matthew Westland, is a great man,” the senator began, as if giving a stump speech. “He is a great leader of men. No father could be prouder of his son than I am. He runs a company he built up with his own two hands with no help from me. It’s no secret I’ve wanted my son to have a career in politics, but more than that, I wanted him to succeed. And he has, even if it wasn’t in the path I would have chosen for him.

“And much like me, he has loved unwisely. He has gone to great lengths for the woman he loves. He believes sincerely in a woman, who does not deserve his regard, as we have shown vividly here today.

“I have another piece of information only recently learned, that I’d like to share. It gave me great pride to know my son was a part of it. And it will show, without a doubt, his loyalty to the new world order. With his signature touch of compassion, my son made a significant contribution to the brilliant changes brought about by the Tiberius Group.

“I’d like to believe it will demonstrate and explain his determined character, but it will also show the creative lengths he’d be willing to go to in order to do what he believes in. This will serve us as a nation, regardless of how these proceedings turn out today.

“My son is the sole author of the very useful and effective Working Woman’s Auction Memo which the Tiberius Group has used with very great success all across this great land of ours.”

“Fuck!” Sophie heard Matthew say angrily under his breath. He turned to look her in the eye for the first time since the horrid tape of her with Paul. She felt her eyes widen in shock. Matthew had written the most hated memo in the history of the female working world?

She saw the truth of his father’s words reflected in the expression on Matthew’s face.

“You wrote that memo...” Sophie couldn’t finish the sentence. There was no need. Her wounded tone and his guilty face said it all.

“I believe Matthew would do anything for his business to ensure its success. I believe he’d do the same for his spouse. However, I do not believe Sophie Brent deserves his continued unwavering support. Please find for Governor Kane in this action, if for no other reason than to save my son from his own honorable character.”

Senator Westland sat down to hushed whispers all through the audience. Sophie tried to digest everything and then tried to keep her lunch down.

“Mr. Westland, are you ready to make your final statements?” the magistrate asked, his tone suggesting the most recent revelation was better entertainment than television.

“A minute please,” Matthew said aloud, his gaze still transfixed on hers. So now they each had something to be angry about.

“If I decline to defend myself today, the magistrate will no doubt favor the other side. If that happens, I’ll be forced to find another husband for you, quickly. I may not even get to choose. I see Orin Prichard in the audience as well as Paul Brody. I need to know if Paul is your choice...so I can make it a part of any agreement I make. Tell me now. Do you care for him? Did you want him, and I ruined all your plans by saying one hundred thousand dollars?”

“I did what I had to do to survive a certain egregious memo endorsed by the Tiberius Group for which I suffered the worst consequences. I dealt with it in the best way I could with very limited options.” Sophie hated that tears welled in her eyes. She couldn’t decide if she were more distraught at Matt being the author of the humiliating memo, or the stabbing pain of losing him.

“So do you want me to let you go? Do you want me to...sell you to him? Because I could try to do that...if you want.”

She couldn’t speak for a moment. Gathering her wits she asked, “Why did you write the memo? It was beyond humiliating.”

“The simple answer is, so I could finish what we started in the hallway at Christmas. I wanted to save you. I wanted to have you for myself. I wanted you with an unquenchable desire, and like an idiot, I wanted to be your hero.”

His eyes showed the despair she also felt. Did he believe she wanted Paul? How could he? Perhaps he’d had enough of her by now?

Sophie exaggerated a shrug her shoulders trembling in emotion. “But now you don’t want me any more because your desire for me has been quenched? Or is it because you can’t stand that you weren’t the only hero that day?”

“I simply want a woman who isn’t stuck with me because I bought her. I deluded myself into believing you cared for me from a certain incident during the holidays. That’s why I went after you the only way I could, with the only tools available to me, in this fucked up new world order.

“But I’m not the only one who wants you, am I? Everything I did was with the single driving need to possess you. I thought you might return my affection. If you don’t, well then, you’re a fabulous actress, but tell me the truth. I need to know right now. Who

do you love?"

For a moment, Matthew's face masked that of an angry spouse full of contained fury. Then his gaze became more tender, raking her face with a look she'd seen in his passionate eyes before and most recently at lunch. He loved her. But then it went back to anger again. Like he, too, was struggling with loving her, or being angry with the world at large, in which they now lived.

Sophie gathered her wits and went with her heart. If she was headed down and out, she intended to fight all the way. She didn't want Paul. Never had.

Sophie's voice quivered in a low passionate tone to make him truly understand. "I love you with all of my heart, Matthew. How can you not know that?" She threw her arms around him and put her lips to his ear so only he could hear her words. "Whatever else happens, whatever else you come to believe about me...I love *only you*. I want *only you*. I've wanted *only you* since the day I met you, too.

"I will remember every moment we shared with sincere love and gratitude for the rest of my life. Because your bidding on me was a wonderful thing I never in a million years expected you to do. I didn't even think you knew I was alive way back then. How could I have expected you to rescue me? I merely tried to find a way to survive, I swear. I never loved anyone but you, *only you*. Please, please, believe me, Matt. You have to believe me."

"More gratitude?" he whispered in her ear. His tone was playful and relieved.

"That's all you heard?" She pulled away to look into his eyes

"No. I heard it all. I love you, Sophie. You and me against the world, right?"

"Right."

"Mr. Westland, this is all very entertaining, but your minute is up," the magistrate said impatiently.

* * * *

"I'm ready, Magistrate. My final closing remarks are a plea. The only way I can truly win here today is if I get the charges against me dropped. Is that correct?"

The magistrate scrunched his substantial eyebrows in question but eventually nodded.

"I'm going to request my father ask his good friend the governor to drop these charges. If he is willing to do this, I will agree to drop my countersuit as well. I think we all know I'm guilty of only one thing here. I love my wife, Sophie. I love her with a determination that will last us no matter what happens here today. And I will never separate from her of my own free will. Never.

"So the only way I can win here today is to convince my opponents that the charges against me must be dropped. The true reason my father wants Andrea to be my wife instead of Sophie is because of that great leader speech he just gave you. He wants me to run for President of the United States. He believes sincerely that the only way a win is possible is for me to marry the governor's daughter.

“Unfortunately for him, I only want to run my business, a challenge since a significant portion of my employees aren’t allowed to work for me. My wife was a former employee. A great one, I might add. I put her to work because she is completely capable and has the intelligence to perform even under the pressure of her enforced new strictures.

“She isn’t even allowed to get credit for the procurement process she just authored for me. And it’s brilliant. The Tiberius Group representative I showed it to yesterday is all excited to get a copy of it for nationwide dispersal. But if she is taken from me as my spouse, I will no longer have custody over that process. And if I don’t have a business, that process will disappear completely. It will be unfortunate for the Tiberius Group who felt it was needed desperately for the betterment of the new world order.

“But my business aside, I have just had an epiphany today in court. Given the choice between the business I’ve sweated blood for or my wife, I’m always going to choose Sophie. She doesn’t care about my money. I could be a beach bum and she’d love me anyway.

“So today in this very hearing room, I will ask my father to persuade the governor to drop his charges or I will tell a secret, too. This big secret will have a direct impact on both my business and my potential candidacy for president.

“But guess what? I still choose, Sophie. So I have a compromise. If you drop the charges, I will reconsider your wishes for a political career and pursue them with Sophie at my side. Or I will spill all and let the chips fall where they may.”

Matt’s father roared and stood abruptly, his chair wobbling to stay on all four legs. “You’ll lose everything!”

“Matthew, no.” Sophie looked up at him with big eyes. She’d never ask him to give up his business. He winked at her reassuringly.

“I don’t care about everything. I only care about Sophie. Besides, have you considered what you will lose?” He held up another disc. “It’s yet another video, can you believe it? I watched it, too. It’s explicitly clear and details exactly what happened and who made all the decisions.” He drilled his father a satisfied smug look in return when he said it.

“This cryptic summation is obviously a blackmail scheme to get what you want, Mr. Westland,” the magistrate chimed in before Matt’s father could speak.

“Well, isn’t that why we’re all here?” Matt raised his arms in a wide shrug as if calling the angels from heaven to hear his plea. “Each of us wants something and you are the arbitrator standing at the ready to decide who wins. Am I correct? My only recourse is to compel them to drop the charges against me. That is what I intend to do. Whatever it takes.”

“Mr. Westland, if you have a disc with relevant information regarding these proceedings, you should turn it over to me as evidence.”

“No, Your Honor, that won’t be necessary,” his father said. “Give me and the governor a minute to confer.”

“Senator, Governor, what are you trying to accomplish here today?”

“Only what is best for all concerned.” His father turned to the governor with a tense face. They began a whispering match between them.

Matt glanced at Andrea and noticed she wasn't paying attention to the men next to her arguing. He also noted she hadn't yet noticed the person he'd requested be in the hearing room today. Matt drilled a look her way, and after a moment or two, she turned her attention to him. Her eyes squinted in question until Matt directed his gaze to Bart, the young junior executive from his company.

The man he'd caught in his office with Andrea on Valentine's Day.

Andrea gave Matt a coldly sneering look, but soon followed his gaze to her lover. Her eyes widened and she stood up knocking her chair aside. The next look she sent to Matt was a guilty one and filled with confusion. Her eyes told him she'd been played by her father, too. Matt had spoken to Bart and forced the truth out of him. Andrea was truly a pawn, just as he was.

“Matthew, please don't jeopardize your business for me,” Sophie said. Her eyes were still tear filled. He was about to tell her how relieved he was she didn't carry a torch for Brody, but raised angry voices from the plaintiff table distracted him.

“Your son will marry my daughter or else. He's the one who got her pregnant. I don't care what medication he was on,” the governor shouted. “That is the way we planned it and that is the way it will be!”

Matt turned to make a rebuttal, but then Bart, Andrea's lover, stood up in the back of the courtroom. He gazed lovingly at Andrea as he spoke. “That's not true, sir. I was the one who got your daughter pregnant. And I want to marry her. I have since we knew she conceived. And Senator Westland, my mother died last night so you can't hold her medical care over my head any longer. I love Andrea. I came here to make sure she knows it.”

“Oh, Bart, I love you, too,” Andrea cried out as tears fell from her eyes.

The gavel started banging at the front of the hearing room as the speculation and noise in the room rose with the drama unfolding. The magistrate looked annoyed. Perhaps he saw that he was losing his voice in the proceedings.

“He told me they paid you off...that you didn't want me.” Andrea started moving towards Bart even as her father tried to restrain her. “Get your hands off me,” Andrea snarled over the din of the courtroom.

Bart and Andrea met at the open space between the audience and the plaintiff and defense boxes in a tender embrace. “Of course, I want you,” Bart said passionately then locked lips with her in front of a very angry governor, a lively crowd, and a senator who looked very uncertain of the outcome of the pending hearing. Matt finally allowed himself to feel some smugness when he noticed Bart's hand lowered and rested on Andrea's swollen belly as if in protection of his child.

The noise level in the room reached a defining roar as the gavel banged on. The magistrate, with his ponderous and intimidating bulk, finally stood up. He was so tall that

he looked like he might hit his head on the ceiling of the courtroom.

He bent over and hammered the gavel on his bench, shouting, "That is enough! Clear the hearing room this instant. I want every one gone except the principles in this case. Sir, you are out of order. Release the plaintiff or you will be asked to leave."

Bart released Andrea but entered the front section of the room to include himself in the proceedings. Several courthouse lawmen were brought in to clear the room. Once it was quiet again, the magistrate sat down in his squeaky chair and gave those left in the room a sour look.

"I'm ready to render my decision. Do you still wish to continue, Governor, or are the charges being dropped? Before you answer, keep in mind a stiff penalty will be forthcoming if you've wasted my time."

"I do not want to drop the charges."

"Tobias!" Matt's father gasped.

The governor silenced him with a hand in the air. "The charges stand."

"Very well," the magistrate visibly relaxed and proceeded with his decision. "In the matter of Governor Kane versus Matthew Westland, my decision is as follows. I do not believe Mr. Westland corrupted your daughter during the holidays, Governor—"

"He most certainly did!" The governor, who had not sat down to hear the decision, took an angry step forward, his countenance visibly livid.

"Governor, do not interrupt me again or I will have you forcibly removed from this room and my decision read to you by lawmen as you languish behind bars."

The governor pressed his lips together in a thin line, crossed his arms in defiance and huffed out a breath.

"I further do not believe he impregnated your daughter. I've read the report and my medical source informs me the drugs Mr. Westland took would indeed have rendered him temporarily sterile.

"Now as to the final matter regarding his DNA being present in your daughter after he married his current wife. That is a sticking point with me. How else could it be in her body unless he'd put it there himself in the obvious way?"

"I can tell you how," Andrea said suddenly.

The governor turned and slapped her viciously across the face. "Keep your mouth shut, you whore. You have no say here."

Bart reacted immediately, placing himself in front of Andrea. "Do not touch her again."

"Governor, I warned you," the magistrate said quietly and motioned a lawman forward.

"Magistrate, will you please finish your ruling so the marriage between Matt and that woman can be dissolved." Matt's father stood up to insert. "Perhaps Matthew can sell her to this young, passionate gentleman here, unless he wants to put her back up for

auction at Westland Industries again. Perhaps then he could get some of his money back.”

“Senator, you are out of order. Sit down or I’ll have you removed as well.”

“I apologize to you for my daughter’s outburst,” the governor said. “Please finish your ruling, Magistrate.”

The magistrate took a deep breath and waved the lawman back to his post at the courtroom doors.

“I find there is no getting around Mr. Westland’s DNA being in her body within the forty-eight hour period of time after his marriage to another woman. I find in favor of your third claim, Governor. My punishment decision will follow my ruling on Mr. Westland’s countersuit against you. ”

The governor and Matt’s father turned and gave each other self-satisfied smiles. Andrea looked ill. Sophie squeezed Matt’s fingers tightly.

“Now, Mr. Westland, on to your countersuit.”

“Yes, Magistrate. I would like to submit this video to the court so that…”

“Wait,” Matt’s father stood angrily. “You can’t give more evidence. The magistrate has ruled. You lost. You can’t bring secret information into this courtroom which has no bearing on this case.”

“Senator Westland, you have no voice here. I have ruled on the case you shared in. Sit down.”

“Now, Mr. Westland, I will warn you. If the tape you possess is not relevant to this proceeding, I will fine you very heavily after I throw out your evidence.”

“It is very relevant, sir. My technician got a copy of the video already submitted into evidence during these proceedings. I have the original, unaltered feed of the video pulled from my father’s study, in my possession.”

“And where did you get this tape?”

“From one of my father’s guards who was forced to participate. He came to me himself after he heard about the charges against me. I believe it will explain the single remaining charge against me as trumped up and false, after which I want you to make my marriage to Sophie permanent and binding.”

“Very well, Mr. Westland. You may show your video.”

Matt sent a speculative look Andrea’s way. This film was not going to make her look good. She returned his gaze and nodded once slightly. He took this to mean she gave her consent to it being shown.

The footage began with Matt entering his father’s study on the night he married Sophie. After his father left the room and Andrea had invited him sit on the sofa, the rest of the tape played as it had actually happened. At the end of Andrea’s vent session, repeating for the court how she wouldn’t marry him if he were the last man on earth and that he was far too old for her, Matt left the room having never crossed to the sofa as he’d stated.

It was the next secret section of the taping that Matt wanted the magistrate to see.

“I see you failed to seduce my son yet again.” The senator’s voice registered from the direction of where Matt had exited a few minutes before.

“He’s obviously in love with that woman he married,” Andrea responded desolately in the tape.

“That’s beside the point. You fucked things up at Christmas royally. You need to work harder or I’ll tell your father the true identity of your baby’s daddy.”

“I’m familiar with your standard threat. Save it.”

“It’s a good thing you saved that condom he used with you at Thanksgiving or we’d be screwed.”

“If he hadn’t called out *her* name when he climaxed, I wouldn’t have. You should have seen the drunken surprised look on his face when he pulled back and realized I wasn’t his precious Sophie.

“I was so pissed at him back then, but you know...I’m not mad anymore. I should never have given that condom to you, Senator Westland. I don’t want to marry Matthew.”

“Shut up, Andrea. You’ll do as you’re told. Now, here’s what we’ll do. I’ll get the condom from the freezer and you can stick the contents up your twat and let it melt, so it will look like Matthew fucked you tonight.

“Then after the body scan, I have a guard in my employ who resembles Matthew enough to pass in a grainy black and white video. But we’ll have to wait until after the body scan to stage it so you’ll have to come back here the day after. We’ll fix up a very believable tape for the magistrate hearing this case.”

“Whatever. I don’t care.”

“You’ll care when you are the wife of the President.”

“Maybe.”

The study footage suddenly ended and the next segment starring the guard resumed. There was some discussion as they arranged everything to make it look like Matt had sex with Andrea in the study. The date stamp showed the day after the Tiberius body scan.

The lights came back up in the hearing room and the magistrate looked like he was about to have a stroke, his face almost purple with rage. He took several deep breaths. Matt sincerely hoped he wouldn’t keel over and die before rendering his judgment.

“I have never seen two more scheming men in all my days. I find for Matthew Westland in all matters before me. And for starters, I’m fining both of you two million dollars each. You will be incarcerated until such time I can think of a punishment worthy of all the crimes you’ve committed here today.

“Mr. Westland, I’m granting you your permanent marriage papers.” He took pen in hand and signed a document with great flourish. He had his clerk deliver it safely to Matthew.

“Thank you, Magistrate.”

“I retract my judgment against you from the previous charges since I now know exactly how your DNA ended up inside Miss Kane. This court is sorry for any inconvenience to you.

“Furthermore, as a remuneration for the egregious charges against you in this court, I will also retract the fine I assessed you for allowing your wife to work alone in your company. In the future, Mr. Westland, make sure you are with her at all times when she accompanies you to your place of business regardless of what she does there.”

“Yes, Magistrate, thank you.” Matt would do what he wanted regardless of the edict from the magistrate and his first order of business was taking the video camera out of Sophie’s office at Westland Industries.

“Orin, call my lawyer!” Matt’s father shouted across the courtroom. Matt didn’t wonder any longer about Orin Prichard’s loyalty. He’d probably been working for his father all along. Matt continued surveying the room until his eyes found Paul Brody’s mournful expression. Paul glanced at Sophie with a last longing look and exited the courtroom with his face pointed at the floor, plodding along.

“Fifty thousand will only buy you so much, Senator. I don’t fetch and carry for anyone. Call your lawyer yourself,” Matt heard Orin say to his father.

“Why, you ungrateful wretch! I gave you a job when you got fired. Now, call my lawyer. Now!”

Matt’s father and the governor were escorted from the hearing room by several lawmen. Senator Westland complained and threatened Orin all the way out. Orin snorted once and followed them, shaking his head until he caught sight of a redhead being escorted past the door in handcuffs and in the opposite direction of the senator and governor.

Orin followed the redhead.

Matt made a mental note to talk to Paul Brody the next day to straighten everything out.

Bart and Andrea followed arm in arm as if no one else existed for them in the world. Matt was glad for them. Andrea got the ‘young’ man she loved.

And Matt got Sophie. He turned to her with a grin shaping his mouth. They’d won.

Sophie threw her arms around him and squeezed him tight. “Now you’ve done it. You’ll never be able to get rid of me now.”

“Thank God. Let’s get out of here. I need to take care of something at work, then I’ve got a surprise for you.”

“Is it a surprise involving chocolate?”

“Not telling. It’s a secret.”

“I love secrets.”

“I love you, Sophie.”

She smiled and they exited the hearing room to throngs of media, but for the first time in a long while, Matt relaxed and enjoyed having won the battle and the war.

* * * *

“I guess you’re wondering why I asked you here.” Matt sat at his desk at Westland Industries. Paul Brody had just entered, quietly plopped down in the chair across from him, crossed his arms and shifted in his seat as if in extreme discomfort. Matt couldn’t blame him.

“Not really. I know why you called me here, Mr. Westland.”

“I believe you embezzled the fifty thousand dollars for the auction and then put it back.”

“How did you find out?” Paul’s sullen gaze lifted to meet Matt’s patient one.

“I simply realized that Orin Prichard would never in a million years have put the money back once he stole it. He would have gambled it away. It’s in his nature. I’m curious though...what were you going to do if you’d won the bid on Sophie?”

Paul’s eyes broke the staring contest. “I have distant relatives overseas in Europe. I was planning to take her out of the country permanently.”

“I appreciate what you were willing to do for her, but you do understand I’ll have to let you go?”

Paul shrugged. “Are you going to press charges and send me to jail?”

“No. I don’t think that would serve justice. I will give you a good reference though.”

Matt had expected some sort of declaration regarding Sophie, but Paul only nodded without looking at him and left the office, shutting the door quietly behind him.

Sophie waited for him in her office, thumbing her nose at the women-can’t-work policy. Matt disabled the camera permanently in her office. Now he could go begin his life with her. He couldn’t wait.

They had some celebrating to do.

Epilogue

“Close your eyes,” Matt said as they stepped on to the elevator to leave Westland Industries. Sophie snuggled up close to him and gave him a mischievous look.

“If you want to get busy with me in an elevator, I want to leave my eyes open.”

“As enticing as getting busy with you on an elevator sounds, we’re just here for the ride.”

“Are there any cameras in here?”

“Yes, I believe there are.”

“Too bad. If there weren’t any cameras, then I would do wicked things to you.”

“I have no doubt about that, but I have that surprise ready for you.”

“What kind of surprise if not a chocolate one?” she asked, wanting his hands on her.

“Close your eyes.”

She did with a sigh. She felt the smooth descent of the elevator car and felt a little weightless like she was on an amusement part ride from her childhood.

Ding. She heard the doors slide open and Matt led her out. She heard the clack of her shoes on the tile and laughed.

“I know exactly where we are, you know,” she said.

“Keep your eyes shut, wife.”

Her laughter rang echoing down the hallway she knew was the parking garage.

“I love the sound of your laughter, but do you know what I like better?”

“Um, let’s see...my scream of pleasure echoing down the hallway, perhaps?”

“I knew you were brilliant.”

He stopped her and turned her. She felt the metal door against her back and a thrill ran up her spine. Maybe they’d get to recreate their historical moment in the hallway.

“Did you remember to bring the mistletoe? I can’t possibly scream without it.”

“Open your eyes.”

They were in exactly in the same spot as before. The mistletoe was above them. Matt leaned in and placed his lips an inch from hers and stopped.

“Let’s make a new memory. What do you say?”

“Okay. And in the new memory, do you get to scream in the hallway, too?”

“No, in the new memory, we kiss here very chastely, and then I escort you outside to a non-public place.”

“Okay. Kiss me.”

“Only if you close your eyes again.”

Her eyes slid shut in compliance.

His mouth swooped down on hers before she took her next breath. She closed her eyes as his tongue swirled with decadent surety between her lips.

He stopped before they had a historical re-creation of their first kiss in this hallway and led her outside, insisting she keep her eyes closed.

“Okay, open your eyes again,” he said.

They stood before the limo they’d christened directly after they’d married. But this time they entered alone in the back.

“What, no one to watch us? I mean I was getting so used to sex tapes of the two of us, it’s a little disappointing, Matthew.”

“You’re kidding, right?”

“Of course. I like it best when it’s just the two of us.” She snuggled close. “Where are we going anyway?”

“I got special permission to take you on a trip for the honeymoon we missed.”

Sophie smiled. “Where are we going for this honeymoon?”

“I’d like you to meet my mom, and then I thought we’d go to Italy. I love you.”

“Thank you, Matt. I love you, too.”

* * * *

Shortly after they returned from their extended honeymoon, Sophie received a message from her brother Jonathan. He'd found Hannah. She was alive. Jon informed Sophie he'd be returning with Hannah on the next cryo-transport ship, right after he annulled her second marriage.

Thanks heavens, Hannah was safe.

Now, if only Jonathan could find a nice husband for her...

THE EXECUTIVE'S WIFE

THE END

AUTHOR'S BIO



Lara Santiago always loved to write. However, her pragmatic, analytical side got the upper hand at an early age and informed her she should be getting a ‘real’ job and not pursuing a creative writing career.

She joined the Air Force and spent her four years of service in Blytheville, Arkansas working nights in Supply issuing aircraft parts to guys working on the flight line. Her husband discovered her there and married her to continue getting his aircraft parts quicker than all the others.

Lara soon earned a degree in the field of Logistics—a word she thinks is very sexy. No logisticians will ever be the bad guy in any of her novels.

After the military, Lara spent many practical years working at a ‘real’ job, allowing her analytical side total free rein. Then one day, the characters banging incessantly inside her brain simply couldn’t be silenced any longer. She bought a laptop with the sole purpose of writing a book to allow her creative side to express itself and to let all those characters out. Her motto...so many characters...so little time.

To those interested, Lara’s practical, analytical side is now stuffed in a dark hole and only allowed out once or twice a month to pay bills.

When she isn’t hunched over her faithful laptop, now with half the letters chipped off in her zeal to write as fast as possible, Lara enjoys reading, catching up on all her recorded television shows, and watching movies. Oh, and occasionally, she cooks for her family, too.

She hopes her readers enjoy her stories and looks forward to hearing from them—but only if they refrain from insisting she make anyone in Logistics a bad guy. 😊

Check out Lara's latest books at
www.sirenpublishing.com/larasantiago

Visit Lara's website at
www.larasantiago.com

The Wives Tales

by Lara Santiago

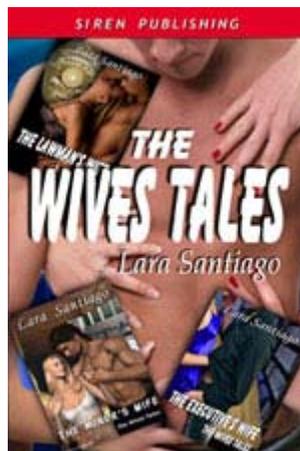
The Miner's Wife
The Executive's Wife
The Lawman's Wife

The Executive pays a fortune to wed, the Lawman pays a pittance to marry, and the Miner fights an enemy for his bride. Three women auctioned off to genetically bred strangers in separate venues are uniquely destined to discover love in unusual places. [*Erotic Futuristic*]

ELECTRONIC FORMAT



PRINT COLLECTION COMING SOON



STORY EXCERPT
THE MINER'S WIFE

The Wives Tales, Book 1

By Lara Santiago

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“The auction is about to begin,” said a twangy voice trying to sound formal, which was a complete waste of effort in a mining town barroom, Brutal thought.

“Bring out the all the girls,” said a rowdy voice from the back of the room. Thomas ‘Brutal’ Blackthorn agreed with Mr. Rowdy. He was ready to start the bidding. It was already going to take all damn day just to get a woman...he meant a ‘wife.’

Dusty, the auctioneer for today, glanced around the room once, heaved a deep sigh, and promptly left the stage as if in a huff. He returned a few minutes later with a petite Asian woman dressed like the sordid porno version of a schoolgirl complete with pigtails and knee stockings. Together they walked across the expanse of the small stage as hoots of appreciation and hollering ensued. She was led to the space next to the podium for auction. Brutal thought she looked bored. Not surprising. The women here knew how the auction worked.

Most brides sold themselves into this life because of an addiction to expensive shoes, fine clothes, and unaffordable jewelry. Most just wanted to do their time quickly and return to their credit cards back on Earth. They would take the cash they earned from marrying miners for a short time and then come right back for more. No better than prostitutes for current fashion.

Brutal wouldn't prostitute himself for anything as shallow as fashion, but he understood the reason why. It was perhaps similar to the motivation for his living on this harsh planet in a backbreaking job—the dream of a better life on Earth. However, he worked hard to better himself and wanted so much more out of life than simply fashionable attire.

Brutal had experienced a couple of other auctions when he first arrived here four months ago. He foolishly decided at the time that he wouldn't need more than a month or two to reach his mining goal and secure enough cash to live the good life. He was mistaken.

The landowners he rented his mine from had been less than forthcoming about the rate at which ore could be retrieved here when he signed the contract to excavate. But he was up to the task as long as he had an outlet for his pent-up testosterone. He needed a woman, thus the reason he was giving up a day at his mine to obtain a regular sex partner...he meant a ‘wife.’ He needed sex. And he needed it soon.

Today, said his horny libido forcefully.

The original expeditionary party who founded the society on this asteroid almost two decades ago had decided quickly to outlaw whorehouses and drinking establishments right off

the bat. They wanted a civilized operation, and to that end, built in lots of social rules early on. No drugs, no gambling, no drunkenness, no loose women or prostitutes.

The word 'no' was pretty much the standard answer for everything here.

The founding expedition members knew the value of the Thorium-Z as a replacement for fossil fuels, which was in abundance on this moon circling Mars. But they didn't want to own a rowdy, corrupt town in space. So if a miner had a woman living with him here, he had to be married to her. A few miners brought wives with them, but the majority opted for temporary wives. Probably not what the owners had in mind originally, but things changed over time.

The miners who had come to work way before Brutal got here found a few loopholes in the laws laid down—the most important being that a marriage didn't have to be permanent. They decided that marriages could be annulled, or couples could be divorced after their service was no longer required, or if the bride's previously established 'time' was up. The minimum sentence...he meant marriage...for a mail order bride here was six months, the maximum two years.

"Okay, listen up, you miners. I need to make an announcement before we begin these here proceedings. This is important, so pay attention," the senior loadmaster for the transport craft said irately. "Now, all the men who had attached wives will still get their selected women, unless you don't want her anymore. See me if that's the case."

"Get on with it, Dusty. I'm horny," said the rowdy voice from the back of the room. Laughter burst from most of the other occupants along with other grunts of approval.

"Well, keep it in your pants. There's a slight problem with the unattached females on this run."

"I know what it is," said the same rowdy voice. "They're horny, too, so get on with it." The room burst with loud laughter once again.

"One of the unattached females...didn't make the trip," Dusty said to the laughter dying down. "We weren't able to revive her from cryo-freeze. That means there is one less female up for auction today."

Brutal flinched inwardly. He needed to take a woman home today. It was imperative. At this juncture, he'd be unable to continue if...no, he wouldn't even consider the option of *not* going home with a woman...he meant a 'wife.'

"So someone's going back home with a chunk of wood between his legs today then," Mr. Rowdy said in disgust.

"When is the next transport, Dusty?" another voice inquired.

"Well, that's something else I need to tell ya about. The thing is, there ain't no scheduled bride transports, at least not at this time." Loud groans and grumbling ran through the crowd of men.

"Now, wait a minute. It don't mean they won't send one later on, but there's gonna be some changes 'cause a new group's in charge back home." Dusty went on to explain briefly the Tiberius Group's takeover and the new plight of women at home.

Interesting turn of events, Brutal thought as the auction finally began. He wondered what

other changes were going on back in the U.S. since his arrival here.

As the parade of mail order brides were brought out, auctioned off, and dwindled quickly, Brutal felt the first stirrings of true panic. Twenty-five men had appeared today to bid on the available twenty-four mail order brides in the auction. The first twenty-three had been bid for quickly and contracts were already being drawn up.

Brutal and one other man remained to bid on the final woman available. The bidding thus far had been higher than usual for these events because of the supply and demand issue. Brutal was about to bid against his arch nemesis, Erik Vander. Erik had the distinction of being the only other man at this mining colony who was taller and heavier than Brutal.

“All righty then,” Dusty said. “Here’s the final woman up for auction today. Now, she ain’t much to look at right now, on account of her fainting earlier and one of the other girls throwing water all over her to wake her up, but she cleans up nice. You can take my word for it.”

“Get on with it,” Erik’s chilling voice cut through the din of conversation from the others watching the drama.

“Since all the attached women have been claimed, there’s only one girl left for the two of you remaining. Do either of you want to back out?”

The room was completely silent until Erik said clearly, “Hell, no!”

Brutal merely glared at Dusty, certain the negative response was evident in his eyes, but he shook his head slowly to remove all doubt.

“Buck!” Dusty yelled over his shoulder. “Bring her out.”

The final mail order bride shuffled out to the podium, her face pointed to the floor. Her shoulders slumped in what could only be described as utter mortification.

She was quite a bedraggled-looking little creature with wet, stringy blonde hair hanging over her eyes. Her arms were crossed over her chest. Brutal figured she was hiding the size of her breasts under the sodden, see-through blouse and skirt she wore. *Too bad*, he thought, but then anticipation rose quickly in him at the pervasive visual of her in his bed without her garments. She looked like she’d just emerged from a pool of water. He would have loved to see that.

Someone must have thrown five gallons of water on her. Brutal glanced around the room and saw the smirking face of one of the previously bid-on females. He also wished he had witnessed the catfight resulting in the soaked girl dripping before them now.

“Make her uncross her arms,” Erik said, breaking Brutal’s trance. “I want to see her tits.”

“Eat shit and die,” came the muttered curse from the girl, which was heard by everyone in the pin-drop silence of the room.

“Now, missy, don’t insult the man who might just be your lord and master for the next two years,” Dusty admonished her before turning to the room again.

Brutal hid a smile. He loved feisty women. Erik, he knew, liked women who were downtrodden. This would be his fifth temporary wife, if he succeeded, which he wouldn’t because Brutal wasn’t going to allow that to happen. He was already planning the best way to peel off the sopping wet white blouse and skirt clinging to her trembling body. Then he would

help her warm up.

“Now, we have a provision for this unusual circumstance, believe it or not. We can flip a coin, or you two can fight until one of you is incapacitated. That means unconscious or dead,” Dusty explained.

“Fight,” both men said in unison, and each began peeling off his outer constricting clothing.

“Ask the girl which one she wants,” shouted the rowdy voice from the back of the room.

“It don’t matter which one she wants,” Dusty said in an exasperated tone. At the same time, the blonde girl uttered a resounding, “Neither!”

“Rule number one,” Dusty said, ignoring the ensuing outburst, “either of you two may, at any time, surrender your interest in the female. Rule number two, the two of you will fight for the right to marry this female until one of you is unconscious or engages rule number one as explained. Do you both understand?”

Brutal and Erik both nodded.

“First, I deserve to see what I’m fighting for,” Erik said and strode two steps over to the female, grabbing both of her arms and pulling them away to view her breasts through the translucent shirt. She kicked him in the shin. Erik quickly tightened his grip on her forearms. He then twisted them up, making her cry out and fall to her knees.

“Just the way I like to see my woman,” Erik smiled callously, “on her knees, crying.”

“Enough.” Dusty stepped between them. “Do that again, Erik, and you lose.”

Erik grunted once and released her, retreating with sardonic amusement on his cruel face.

Brutal wondered if this very last mail order bride would root for him to win now that Erik had shown her his good side. She remained kneeling on the floor with her head down and didn’t look up.

“I’d like to know the name of the woman I’m fighting for,” Brutal said in an even tone. Her head moved slightly, but she didn’t look at him.

“My name is Hannah Brent,” she finally said, raising her eyes to meet his momentarily before she looked back at the floor.

Brutal stepped over to her and squatted down. “If you want Erik, I’ll step out of the fight right now,” he said and watched her head snap up as she glared at him.

“Stomp his ass, and I swear I won’t give you any trouble,” she whispered in a trembling voice.

“As you wish. I hope you’re worth the effort, Hannah.” Brutal inhaled deeply of her scent before he stood to face Erik.

So Brutal readied himself to fight Erik, the biggest, meanest miner on the off-world planet, for the right to marry a woman temporarily. He’d fought bigger, meaner men in his colorful past and beaten them easily. It was no competition. Brutal felt confident this battle was already a victory for him, even though both men were spurred on by lust.

Brutal even more so now because he had gotten close enough to inhale her delectable

fragrance while crouched next to her. And she smelled incredible, not perfumed up like the others. Possibly due to the unexpected shower she had received, but he caught her natural scent and the light fragrance of her hair.

Need sex today, his libido commented, also responding to her scent.

Brutal wanted her. Soon. Now. He hoped he could wait until he got her back to his mine to take her for the first time. Conjugal rights were the primary reason he was marrying. Just like every other miner here.

“I’m going to knock you on your ass,” Erik mocked.

Brutal didn’t bother to respond. He pondered his best strategy to ensure he stayed on his feet before crushing Erik as quickly as possible. He and Erik circled the room twice before they just rammed into each other.

Brutal was at a disadvantage in weight and height but had the edge in natural fighting ability. He’d been a very good fighter in his younger days. In addition, he had been bio-genetically engineered to always win. He never once doubted his ability—or the inevitability of the outcome.

Erik was big, and he fought dirty, too, but Brutal knew the outcome would be in his favor. And he was right. They traded punches for a few minutes as Brutal toyed with him and pretended to be giving the fight his all, but he wanted this fight over with quickly. She waited for him. He dodged a punch to his face, ducking down before bouncing right back to tag Erik in the stomach once with a solid jab. Then three vicious punches in quick succession to Erik’s face sent him staggering into a table before Erik put a hand up on the wall to steady himself.

Brutal followed with lightening speed and pinned him to the wall. He then simply pinched a nerve in Erik’s neck, rendering him unconscious in seconds. Erik slumped to the floor in a heap. Brutal stepped away, brushing imaginary dust off his clothing. He was now ready to collect his prize.

“And the winner is Brutal,” Dusty exclaimed formally.

Brutal looked up and into the horrified eyes of the woman he had just won the right to marry in a mostly fair fight.

“Your name is...Brutal?” she said in a voice laced with fear and promptly dropped to the floor in a dead faint—again.

ADULT EXCERPT
THE MINER'S WIFE

The Wives Tales, Book 1

By Lara Santiago

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After water sluiced over both of them, removing the suds, Brutal found he was as rock hard as the first day he'd taken her. Like he had been celibate for six months and not just a day.

Brutal would never, in a thousand millenniums, forget the gleam in her eyes as she pressed kisses down his throat. She didn't retreat either. She continued kissing a path down his chest, her hands resting on his hips.

When she kissed him just above his belly button, she also slipped down on her knees in front of him. He made an inhuman noise somewhere between a growl of disbelief and a howl of jubilation when he felt her lips around the tip of his penis. He looked down to see her slip his cock into her luscious mouth, forcing him to brace his arms against the shower walls for balance. All the while, hot water blasted his back.

Brutal knew she had never done it before, but that didn't make it any less erotic to watch. And he watched her. She was careful. Deliberate. She put him all the way in as far as he would fit and then withdrew, sucking until he thought he would lose his mind in pleasure.

He could always last for hours before shooting his load, but one innocent, little temporary wife was about to turn him into a minuteman missile. Brutal felt her suck him back into her mouth again. He realized he had closed his eyes to keep from letting loose.

"Hannah?" he managed to say. He put a hand on her head to pull her off. But God's wrath, he didn't want her to stop. She was going to get a really big surprise in a second.

"Hannah!" He was about to burst. She stopped and slid her mouth off him slowly and looked up at him, smiling. He smiled back, like a lovesick puppy, he was certain. She pursed her lips and kissed the end of his rock-hard cock.

"It's okay, Brutal. I know what I'm doing. I saw a movie once," she said with utter confidence and put his substantial erection right back in her mouth. And sucked him.

Once he was as deeply embedded as possible, he felt her hands slip around to his ass and grab hold. He felt her fingernails digging in, pulling him closer and further into her mouth until

he couldn't take the seductive power of it any longer. Back and forth she sucked, harder and harder with each thrust, taking him deeply into her mouth. Her tongue darted all around his sensitive, plum-sized head as the suction from her mouth increased.

Steam swirled around him, hot water pounded his back, and Hannah was sucking his cock like a pro. He wanted to watch her, but he knew he couldn't. If he looked down at her luscious, wide mouth on his shaft, her wet hair ticking his thighs, it would be over. But God's wrath, it would feel so great to just let go.

His head dipped forward. His eyes opened, directed by his voracious libido. She pulled him inside her mouth, and that was his last coherent thought.

REVIEWS for The Miner's Wife

"*The Miner's Wife* is a story that will capture your attention and keep it. With an intriguing plot, engaging characters and explosive sex, this story has it all. Hannah's background is almost unbelievable. The quick and powerful rise of the new Tiberius Group has surprised everyone, especially the women. Their antiquated views of women and their place in society are in direct opposition to what she's worked so hard for all of her life. When she meets Brutal, she expects him to treat her in the same manner that her father and her previous husband did. But he eventually surprises her, showing her gentleness, caring and support throughout the story which she hadn't received from the men who were supposed to care for her. Brutal is a bio-genetically engineered man, who must have sex in order to recharge his batteries. I loved this! Brutal is definitely all man, strong, sexy and a hard worker. Not only does he need sex, he gets a better charge from his partner's satisfaction, and boy, does he satisfy! Hannah and Brutal are highly combustible, enjoying their sexual escapades and explorations. But what I really liked about Brutal was his caring attitude toward Hannah. He allows her the opportunity to work and show her intelligence and believed in her when no one else would. The pace of this story is just right, telling about their backgrounds then quickly moving to their relationship. With a little danger from Brutal's nemesis and a surprise from Hannah's past, you won't find one minute of boredom in this story. Add this one to your must read list and keep on the lookout for the other Wives Tales! **5 Stars**" —Trang, *Ecataromance*

"Lara Santiago has created a wonderful story mixed with futuristic elements, uncertainty of one's emotions, and a splash of danger from an evil miner. Hannah is a feisty, charismatic woman that is passionate and has a personality that readers will love. Brutal, although he can be very deadly, offers readers a possessive and protective man that is honorable regardless of the arrangement between Hannah and him. The chemistry between Brutal and Hannah is explosive, mind-blowing, and quite tantalizing to say the least. As the plot intensifies, readers will be pleased with a couple of surprises along the way. These surprises will only make the readers love Brutal more and cheer for Hannah to have what she wants. *The Miner's Wife* is a wonderful story about finding love when and where you aren't looking for it. **5 Angels!**" —Jessica, *Fallen Angel Reviews*

"*The Miner's Wife* by Lara Santiago is a great book. I love the premise and plot. I could not put the book down. There is action, suspense, and romance all combined to make a reader's heart race. The well developed characters grow as the story progresses. Brutal looks like a gruff rough miner but he has a heart of gold. His tenderness and understanding towards Hannah started my heart to fluttering. Hannah is a modern independent woman forced under the new world order's thumb. The determination and strength she possesses helps her succeed in her changing world.

The racy love scenes between Hannah and Brutal leave little to the imagination. An instant attraction bonds these two lovers and propels them into a sensual world of desire and passion. I would gladly live on another planet for a man like Brutal. Ms. Santiago has created a vivid futuristic story for the romantic. I can not wait for her next work. **5 Hot Tattoos**" —Ophelia, *Erotic-Escapades*

"I fell in love with Brutal Blackthorn in *The Miner's Wife*. He was a big ole sweet man who tried to be tough, but once he fell in love with Hannah, she was his whole world and I liked that. It made me all warm and fuzzy inside that a hero as tough as Brutal would become putty in Hannah's hands. As for Hannah, for having gone through what she did, she was an extremely strong, intelligent woman. She was in control of Brutal without him even knowing

it, and I loved that!

The Miner's Wife is the first book I have read written by Lara Santiago and it will not be the last. The storyline kept me spellbound and the romantic interludes of the characters were extremely erotic. In fact, I couldn't put this book down until I read the last word. Lucky for me, there are two more books in Ms. Santiago's Wives Tales Series, *The Executive's Wife* and *The Lawman's Wife*, that I look forward to reading! If you are a fan of futuristic books, or even if you aren't, *The Miner's Wife* is just a good, all-around read that is totally satisfying!" —**Talia Ricci, Joyfully Reviewed**

"*The Miner's Wife* will take you into a future where women are reduced to mere possessions in a male society. Hannah's plight will have you empathizing with her even as you realize how much Brutal truly needs her, and not just for his sexual desires either. They're both wonderful characters who are wronged by the very people who should have cared for them. This story is powerfully moving and truly a delight to read. I can't wait to read the other two books in The Wives Tales series. **4-1/2 Blue Ribbons**" —**Chrissy Dionne, Romance Junkies**

"This book is a never-ending adventure, and readers will find themselves wrapped up in the drama that Brutal and Hannah create. Brutal lives up to his name with a dark and sensual air that readers will love. Hannah is a free spirit who finds that maybe all men aren't alike. The love scenes are so hot, the pages almost burn with the heat. This is the first book I have read by Lara Santiago and Siren Publishing. I can certainly say that I will be on the lookout for more of this author's work in the future. **4-1/2 Hearts**" —**Angel, The Romance Studio**

"*The Miner's Wife* is a science fiction story about a future controlled by a corporation and the archaic laws that they enforce concerning women. It is a novel idea for a story even though I think I would probably be one of the first women to form a rebellion against the nitwits. There was considerable thought up into the universe that Ms. Santiago has come up with. There is a plausible explanation for the new laws and how they affect the female population. Ms. Santiago's characters are believable and very likable or despicable depending on the character. The love scenes for the most part are very, very hot. Brutal turns out to be a very gentle and caring lover when Hannah allows him to be. I am interested in reading the rest of the series to see if the women really do take to these new laws [or] if they rise up and stomp some bureaucrat's ass. **4-1/2 Stars**" —**Oleta M. Blaylock, Just Erotic Romance Reviews**

"Taking us into a world where women are no more than property and sexual tension relievers, this author pens an interesting story of a couple brought together under less than ideal circumstances. Hannah [is] a woman after my own heart even if she no longer has rights in her country, because she still shows spunk when she's not fainting. Her miner isn't half bad either because from the onset, he is willing to protect the woman he initially sees as an energy source and outlet for his needs. After making the best of their situation, these two become ideal partners in and out of the bed. With its action, passion and touching moments, readers will enjoy this [first book in] The Wives Tales Trilogy. **4-1/2 Unicorns**" —**Rachelle, Enchanted in Romance**

STORY EXCERPT
THE EXECUTIVE'S WIFE

The Wives Tales, Book 2

By Lara Santiago

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Sophie didn't want to die anymore. She was saved. Orin turned around to glare at her. One strand of hair had escaped the confines of the swirl plastered to his bald head and hung limply down the side of his face. The look he gave her after being defeated by Matthew Westland radiated pure waves of unrelenting rage.

Yeah, how dare she allow herself to be bid on by someone with more money, the nerve of her? The lock of greasy hair hanging unattractively to his chin made Sophie even more grateful he wasn't about to be her—what was it the crazy new world order referred to this as?—her *lord and master*.

Orin looked the exact same way as he had on her first day of work. His nostrils flared in righteous indignation at having been thwarted by Matthew...again.

The auctioneer cleared his throat impatiently and motioned her off the stage urgently, as if she should hurry because he'd just made a bunch of money on her. She instead sauntered to the steps, earning his frown. She resisted the urge to stick her tongue out at him as she passed behind him on stage.

"If you would step over here, sir, we can officiate the contract," the Tiberius representative said to Sophie's future husband at the foot of stairs off the stage.

The contract of marriage these days had a whole different meaning. Promising to love and honor *et cetera* went by the wayside to be replaced by who got what percentage of funds spent for the bride being auctioned off.

Sophie's worthless scum of a father, a sperm donor at best, got to have a whopping ninety percent. Eight percent went to the auctioneer, and finally two percent went into the coffers of the Tiberius group. A cut they told everyone they earned by officiating the contract and ceremony joining the couple in matrimony. Plus the forty-eight hour body scan done to ensure consummation of each and every union. They certainly didn't want people getting married to escape Tiberius persecution.

Men being forced to have sex with whomever they married supposedly made them more cautious about their ultimate choices. But Sophie only understood the rules favored men, and they could do as they pleased regardless of their initial choices. An uncontrollable and unwanted urge to weep came over her and she fought to stay serene.

The official Tiberius marriage broker stepped up and motioned impatiently for Sophie to

come off the stage. It was time to meet the groom. As if he read her mind, Matthew Westland looked up at her, still paused on stage, and smiled lightly.

From behind her, Sophie heard the auctioneer say, “We’ll start the bidding for the next bride at five thousand and see where it takes us.” She paused at the head of the steps and gazed at her groom.

“Hello,” he said warmly and held out his hand.

Sophie remained quiet, fighting tears threatening to spill over burning eyes as she descended the few steps. If she so much as uttered one word, she’d burst into loud, uncontrollable sobbing. Her desolate mood stemmed from the narrow escape with the deviant in the front row along with the general horror of the auction. Unqualified and here-to-date unknown relief now raced through her, making her very emotional. A single tear slipped out and ran down her face before she could wipe it away.

“Why the tears? Is there someone else you would prefer to marry?” he asked in a low voice, taking her arm.

Sophie reached up and wiped away moisture and shook her head. “It’s the whole auction situation I find disturbing.” She then added quietly, “And if I ever find out who authored the Working Woman’s Auction Memo, which put me up for sale in my own damn company, I’m going kick his balls up his ass.”

Matt’s eyes widened briefly but didn’t acknowledge her response. He simply led her to a room behind the stage where the funds would be paid and the ceremony performed. Sophie could smell his expensive cologne as they stood together, the scent of which sent her right back to last December and the wall she’d been pressed against when he’d kissed her that first time...and then...more.

Sophie watched him out of the corner of her eye. Her whole body vibrated with the memory of the last time they were together. He saved her, again. Maybe he remembered the kiss at Christmas. Maybe he felt something for her.

“Thank you for saving me.”

His sudden sardonic smile startled her as he whispered, “I didn’t actually do it for you.”

“Then why would you marry a veritable stranger? I can read the papers. I know you have...well, other choices.”

“You aren’t exactly a stranger,” he said, leaning in close, whispering in her now sensitive ear. “I know exactly how you taste, how you smell, and especially how you feel in my arms when you scream in climax. It’s an intriguing combination. One I found I couldn’t pass up.”

Sophie closed her eyes and felt her face go hot in memory of that supremely gratifying sensation, which had stabbed through her at his assistance long ago, as if she were experiencing it all over again. “I didn’t think you remembered. You never...” Her head bowed and she found she couldn’t finish the sentence.

“Neither did you,” he stated coolly as she felt his arm circle her shoulders.

“You were my boss,” she snapped with accusation in her tone, still unable to look him in the eyes.

“Yeah, that was my excuse, too. But it isn’t an issue any longer.” He squeezed her shoulder once and pulled her closer. “Is it? Are you ready to marry me, Sophie?”

This time she looked in his beautiful blue eyes before answering. “Yes. I would be...grateful to marry you.”

“I don’t want gratitude.”

“What then?” She sounded breathless to her own ears.

He laughed before he said, “Well, for starters, I’d like to finish what we began in the parking garage hallway. That particular experience, while gratifying in many ways, has always seemed a bit incomplete to me.”

The combination of his warm, sexy body pressed up close, his sultry voice caressing her senses, and his decadent I-want-to-fuck-you-this-second cologne wafting all around made another rush of moisture accumulate between her legs in readiness. Sophie’s heart beat so thunderously in her chest, she couldn’t speak. She took short breaths to calm herself, but with it came Matthew’s sexy scent, the fragrance of which made her insides quiver in long awaited need.

He leaned in suddenly, right into her personal space. “And then I’d like to do it some more. And then some more after that.”

“Oh...” Sophie managed to say as a rush of air whooshed out of her lungs.

ADULT EXCERPT
THE EXECUTIVE'S WIFE

The Wives Tales, Book 2

By Lara Santiago

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“I promise I’ll never say this to you again, but please don’t make a sound,” Matthew said.

Sophie nodded her understanding yet again and felt a blush creep up to her face. No moaning or screaming out loud like she had under the mistletoe.

The only thing worse than getting caught, she decided, was getting caught and failing to succeed in their task to secure their future.

And given the choice, she sincerely wanted a life with Matthew Westland, whatever it took.

Matthew twisted his head and placed his lips on hers, seductively teasing them open with a single lick as his hand moved further up her leg. Nimble fingertips buried themselves quickly under her skirt. His tongue quickly wrapped around hers in erotic plunder. He grabbed her underwear and tugged them down a few inches. She stifled the urge to suck in a sharp breath at his bold actions and concentrated on his lips to forget where she was.

Don’t make a sound, don’t make a sound, don’t make a sound, she chanted to herself.

Matthew had the most luscious mouth. It took all her focus to not react like she wanted to. A moan of appreciation bubbled up in her throat wanting to escape. His fingers niggled their way between her legs and stroked once, the sensation of which sent a sharp longing through her body. She was embarrassed to be wet for him already. She’d moistened up with supreme gratitude upon hearing his deep rich voice say, “one hundred thousand dollars.”

Not because she cared about his money. She honestly didn’t. No, she realized right away that with his generous bid, she’d get the opportunity to finish up what they’d started under that sprig of mistletoe. She was about to get her Christmas wish after all, albeit four months later than expected.

Moistening up was not hard for her to do when Matthew Westland said anything. Besides, it wasn’t as if she hadn’t longed for him aching through each and every lonely night since the Christmas party months ago. His magnetic presence enveloped her as powerfully now as it had back then.

Matthew kissed a path from her lips to her throat as he pulled the crotch of her panties aside. She felt his fingers slip inside of her very moist aching core, ever so slightly brushing past

her clitoris, and she stifled the urge to jump through the tinted skylight she noticed in the ceiling of the limo. She was wet and ready for him, and now he knew it, too.

Should she be embarrassed? No time.

Matthew shifted silently on the seat and prepared to mount her. Her legs were spread as wide as they would go across the leather seats now caressing her half-naked butt. She managed to relax and opened her legs wider. She opened her eyes and caught sight of the not-distant-enough newspaper in her view. It only made her tense up again, so she turned her face away and buried it in Matthew's shoulder.

She couldn't believe Asher couldn't hear them. Matthew already had his zipper undone and she hadn't heard it. She felt the ridge of his enormous cock resting on the inside of her thigh. Another thrill ran through her at the knowledge she was about to find out if he was as big as she suspected. Her first feel of him was a memory from back under the mistletoe. Those oft whispered rumors of his impressive size were not at all exaggerated...then or now.

"Ready," he whispered. She turned away from his shoulder to look in his face and nodded her assent. She held his sexy gaze until Matthew lowered the lids of his eyes seductively, and pierced her to the hilt with one very deep and very satisfying thrust. She sucked in silent breath of unbelievable pleasure as he quickly stroked inside her again, and again and again. The immense thickness of him penetrated and stretched her core to the limit with each deep stroke of his cock. Her body accommodated him...barely, but he kept up the pace of his thrusts even as she wondered what his definition of a few strokes was.

Sophie melted into the smooth rhythm of his powerful thrusts, relaxing to allow the pleasure of it to seep into her tingling body. She pushed her hips forward to meet his next thrust and his cock seemed to slide even deeper. Whisper quiet, Matthew drove his cock inside her yet again. The angle of his thrust almost stroked her clit with every other push and the stirrings of a bone shaking climax grew within her.

The combined scent of the leather her half-naked butt rested on with Matthew's unique scent of starched shirt and fuck-me-now cologne tinged with the acrid knowledge of being caught caressed and yet heightened her senses. Thrust. Stroke. Thrust. Stroke. Matthew was about to make her climax. She held back fearful she'd scream like a banshee if the wash of climax took her suddenly. Thrust. Stroke. Thrust.

God, he felt incredible. Better than she ever thought possible. She'd wanted his cock buried inside her desperately. With him driving repeatedly into her now, sending bolts of delicious sensation deeply inside her core, she was on the verge of release. Sophie held back even though she wanted to sing, moan, and scream.

Oh, God, did she just make a noise?

Sophie heard the newspaper at the other end of the small space rustle. This was quickly followed by a choked gasp and the sharp thud a brandy glass being dropped hitting the carpeted floorboard of the limo.

"What the fuck?" Asher screeched, trying to stand as his crumpled newspaper fell aside in the center of the limo aisle.

REVIEWS for The Executive's Wife

"Sophie Brent worked hard to obtain a good position at Westland Industries and in the blink of an eye, all her dreams went away. The Tiberius Group took over the U.S. government in 2076 and pushed women back into the dark ages. Instead of having a decent future as an executive at Westland Industries, Sophie [is] auctioned off to the highest bidder. Fortunately, the man of her dreams, Matt Westland himself, was the man with the deep pockets. Now, if they could convince his father to stay out of their marriage all might work out for the best. Matt Westland wanted Sophie for months. As much as he hated the Tiberius Group for upsetting the U.S., he was glad he had the opportunity to claim Sophie. Unfortunately, his father was determined to tear them apart.

The Wives Tales 2: *The Executive's Wife* was refreshing and scary at the same time. I'm sure someone in the world would love nothing more than to see women's rights taken away and Lara Santiago presented what would happen in detail. The fact that Sophie got the man she always wanted was good fortune, but life did not work out so well for her sister. I'm dying to read [Hannah's] story, but I was more than satisfied with *The Wives Tales 2: The Executive's Wife*. Sophie and Matt were dynamic characters that kept me turning the pages. I wanted to see more of them and the love they shared. Their sex life was stimulating and well earned. Matt's father was obnoxious as well as determined. The man just would not give up on his dream for his son. It was more like an obsession. I had to give him credit for his gumption. Moreover, he made the story more interesting. After reading *The Executive's Wife*, I am greedy for more. While I wait for the next installment, I plan to read the first Wives Tale [*The Miner's Wife*]. **4-1/2 Stars/Hot" —Sunni Farrar, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews***

Other books by Lara Santiago at

www.sirenpublishing.com/larasantiago

ELECTRONIC FORMAT

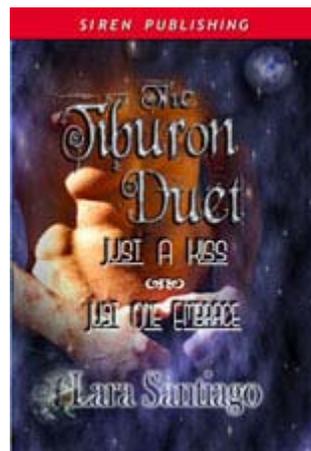


What would a woman do, and how far would she willingly travel, to love a man who made her climax with his chocolate-flavored kiss?

In *Just a Kiss*, Gabrielle travels to Tiburon unwillingly with Keller after an improper kiss. Will she be forced to reside on a planet of warrior aliens who hate her?

In *Just One Embrace*, Ellie travels to Tiburon willingly to be with Crag. When another female claims their top military commander, will Ellie be considered a worthy life-partner or will she lose Crag forever?

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STORY EXCERPT

JUST A KISS

The Tiburon Duet, Book 1

By Lara Santiago

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Gabrielle woke up lying on her back. She opened her eyes, looked up at what she presumed was the ceiling of the room she was in, and saw stars flying by. *How odd*, she thought. She couldn't remember where she was at first. A planetarium? No. It looked sort of like an alien spaceship. Then she remembered.

Oh, crap!

Gabrielle bolted upright and found herself in the exact same place as when she fainted directly after the warriors drew their fierce-looking weapons on her. How long had she been unconscious? Had they done anything to her? Gabrielle ran her hands quickly across her torso and legs, patting herself down looking for...she didn't even know what.

Probes? Recent surgery? An alien baby?

Get a grip, Gabrielle.

She stood up slowly, brushing imaginary dust off her clothes as she took in her surroundings. There was a door all the way across the room, maybe twenty feet from her, and yet the space seemed difficult to measure. If she actually started walking to the door, Gabrielle fearfully imagined it would be like a circus funhouse where the journey never ended, and she would be hopelessly lost traveling the short distance. *Calm down. Getting hysterical won't help anything.* She took a deep breath to still her wild imagination.

The ceiling was a dome of stars, so she figured she was either in a planetarium or flying through space in an alien craft. *Where are Mulder and Scully when you need them?* she thought, and then jumped nearly a foot in the air when someone moaned.

Gabrielle turned to look behind her and almost fainted again. In the center of the spacious room was a large, rectangular, cubical slab of marble. On top of this sarcophagus-shaped rock was a man lying on his back, eyes closed, arms resting to his side. A gorgeous man.

He was sleeping maybe? Or dead? She stifled an urge to run. He wasn't moving, but she could see him breathing from where she stood.

Okay. Not dead. Good. Better to be with a sleeping warrior alien than a dead body, right?

Better get closer and take a look, and not because he was simply the most magnificent man she'd ever seen. He looked like a Greek God. He was massively built. His thick black hair was short. She wondered briefly what color his eyes might be to complement his angular face.

His lips were full and sensuous. His sleek black body armor surely molded to, and barely contained, a very impressive body. No man would look this good and not have the body to go with it.

He was perfectly formed head to toes, the stuff of her wild, late-night fantasies, and the best Hollywood had to offer. She wondered why his friends hadn't made him comfortable by removing his protective coverings. Perhaps he was a warrior soldier. They all probably slept in their body armor to make a point about how bad-assed they were at all times.

Warriors were a whole different breed. Those in the circle were surely warriors. All of them were tall, too, even the women. Gabrielle looked down at her short, small body. Big men like him hardly ever noticed her. They probably never saw her unless they looked down at their feet.

Gabrielle heard him moan again. Was he in pain? Had he been wounded or something? She looked up to study his face and was startled to see he was staring at her in return. She noted his eye color immediately. He had liquid-silver colored eyes. Exotic eyes. Troubled eyes. He tried to speak, but it was, apparently, too hard for him. He swallowed with obvious difficulty. Gabrielle couldn't stop herself from moving closer to him.

"Please, must kiss..." he said in a barely audible tone.

"I'm sorry," Gabrielle said with interest as she stepped even closer to his resting form. She bent down. "Say it again." She put her ear close to his mouth. Did he just tell her he needed a kiss? Yeah, she wanted to kiss him and make him better all right. She chanced a look at his face.

The gorgeous warrior pierced her with a direct stare, mesmerizing her. "Kiss me," he whispered.

"Me?" Gabrielle rose to study his face, checking his expression for clarification. His eyes bore into her straight to her soul and deeper still. Yeah, he was talking to her. Was he reading her mind?

Gabrielle glanced around furtively and saw no one around to help him. She'd wanted to kiss him since she saw him helpless and gorgeous on the slab. *What's the harm, anyway? It's a meaningless touching of the lips.* She easily convinced herself to kiss this handsome, sleepy warrior before he changed his mind. He had beautiful lips to go with his impressive body.

"Get ready, Sleeping Beauty," she murmured under her breath.

Gabrielle leaned over him, lowered her face, and carefully placed her lips on his in a chaste kiss. He groaned and shuddered the moment her lips came into contact with his. Her mouth tingled in response to the connection with this injured, dreamy man. She drew back, worried that she hurt some unseen wound. "I'm so sorry," she uttered sincerely as his eyelids fluttered open to regard her with the molten silver gaze.

"I am not, but..." He gave her a scorching, decadent look. "Please...just...kiss me."

"Are you sure?" She looked around again to see if anyone watched her accost this helpless man. His lids lowered in a sexy, sleepy look.

Was he even fully conscious? Should she kiss him? God, he was hard to resist.

Gabrielle didn't want to force herself on the poor, injured man. Well, not exactly. But his lips were so warm and full and so invitingly electric, she dared to take another taste. Besides, he'd asked her to...twice. She was simply complying with his request...eagerly. This time, her kiss was bolder. Chaste gave way easily to carnal as her tongue valiantly traced the seam of his smooth, full lips.

He moaned deeply in what sounded like pleasure and opened his mouth to admit her impatient and inquisitive tongue. She felt the growl of his approval from the vibration in his throat. He raised a hand and brushed her arm before traveling to her head. His fingers tangled in her hair as he pressed her mouth even closer.

Her warrior seemed to enjoy his requested kiss, but there was a little problem from her point of view. A height-challenged problem.

Gabrielle, on tip-toe, wasn't close enough to this seductive man to give him the kiss she wanted to deliver. She broke from his engaging mouth, and he moaned again as if in pain, but he gave her an approving look when she crawled on top of him. Balancing on all fours, she shifted her body over his to take full advantage of the marble-hard physique. She slithered across his chest on a mission to kiss his hurt completely away. God, he felt great!

She slipped up his body until her face was aligned with his, and her breasts were flattened on his body armor. She touched his face, which was rough with whiskers. Her mouth captured his hungrily as if they hadn't stopped kissing earlier. Her tongue tangled with his in a dance of desire more satisfying than any she'd ever experienced.

Seductive. Alluring. Sensual. Engaging.

It was similar to a very satisfying sexual encounter, not that she'd ever participated in a very satisfying sexual encounter to compare it to. This experience was what she dreamed of from the reference point of pure mediocrity evident in all her past affairs. This kiss made her feel light-headed.

And yet, it was just a kiss, albeit a scorching one.

After only a minute of locking lips with this seductive stranger, Gabrielle began to vibrate with a need she wouldn't have been able to articulate even if she had been willing to stop and ponder her feelings. She wasn't going to stop this heavenly tangling of lips and tongues until she was fully satisfied. Not even if one of the others came back right now and tried to pry her off him. Not even if they threatened her with a weapon.

The stranger with silver eyes tasted like a spicy citrus rum cocktail she sampled excessively on a cruise once. He was just as intoxicating to all her heightened senses, especially the ardent ones tingling between her legs.

Gabrielle registered the stranger's hand press into the small of her back. His touch warmed her through her shirt and sent a prickle of delicious sensation tingling between her legs. The hand tangled in her hair radiated spine-tingling sensation from her scalp down her back. He alternately massaged her neck while silently guiding the angle of her mouth as they kissed.

One of his legs moved beneath her slightly. She shifted to accommodate it between her legs, enabling her to grind herself on him. As if reading her mind, he lifted his leg and securely wedged it between her thighs. She spontaneously clenched them together. A few more strokes of his tongue, and she'd crack the armor on his thigh guard lodged deliciously between her legs.

She couldn't help but grind her crotch against the rock hard surface of his thigh as his mouth made love to hers with an intensity seriously lacking in every kiss she'd ever shared. She heard herself making needful, gasping noises.

Gabrielle felt as if some intangible event were building inside the sensation ridden nerve endings residing in her body.

Something was about to happen. She could feel it.

Something fabulous.

A warm tingly feeling sparked in her stomach and welled outward, rushing an untamed awareness through the very fiber of her weary, love-starved soul. Her heart beat in an erratic fashion, too overwhelmed by emotion to merely beat swiftly during this most intoxicating kiss.

Gabrielle pressed her lips further into his and felt his body go rigid as if on the very precipice of...something extraordinary. The citrus taste of him gave way to a rich, chocolate rush of flavor in her mouth.

Gabrielle could feel her clitoris twitching as if he actually touched her there. Sensation exploded inside her in the next moment. Her hips ground forward into his in the ancient rhythm of love. A rush of heat centered between her legs as an orgasm of monumental proportion washed over her.

Exquisite! Delicious!

And the kiss went on.

The stranger beneath her groaned a satisfied sound. Her legs clenched his thigh as if in a permanent vice mode, the muscles in her body singing in the joy of her climax. Her hips arched forward into his again. This placed pressure against her clit and elicited an even greater sensation of friction to the already volatile experience she enjoyed.

Gabrielle finally broke the seal of their mouths and slumped onto his body, her exhausted muscles still aching and quivering in pleasure. Her head rested on his shoulder as she tried to catch her breath. She felt like she'd been running. Then she remembered her earlier race from the devil, which led her here and into the arms of pure ecstasy. Gabrielle snuggled up to her warrior and stroked his face as he cradled her in his arms. She closed her eyes in wonder and supreme contentment.

Boneless and sated, Gabrielle remained resting on top of his marble-hard physique, trying to recover from the most powerful orgasm she'd ever experienced. She must be dreaming.

"What just happened?" she asked when she could finally speak. She lifted her head off his shoulder to gaze into his silver eyes.

"I believe we...touched our mouths together," he remarked, then promptly lapsed into unconsciousness again as if he'd never been awake at all.

"Did we ever," Gabrielle said on a sigh. She realized she didn't even know his name. Too bad. She leaned up on shaky arms to see if he had really passed out.

"Hey, Sleeping Gorgeous." Nothing. Maybe she should kiss him again to wake him up. She put her lips on his once more and was about to lick his lips open when she heard a noise.

"What in the name of Sultana do you think you are doing?" came a lethally angry voice

from behind her. Gabrielle quickly removed her mouth from the warrior she lip-locked.

She wondered herself what on earth she was doing.

She peeked over her shoulder to see one of the warriors from the circle had silently entered the chamber. Much like the man she kissed, this warrior also had black hair, but it was longer. It brushed his shoulders and had a bold streak of blond running thorough it. Frankenstein's bride had nothing on this guy in the scary hair-do department, Gabrielle thought.

Time to climb off her unconscious love toy and explain. Yep. She'd gotten caught violating a possibly injured man. Gabrielle was still tangled around him. She wished her silver-eyed warrior would wake up and explain to his angry friend with the streak that she had only kissed him. It was an amazing, orgasmic kiss, but harmless.

Incredible satisfaction still vibrated through her as she tried to get her limbs to function. It was amazing that she felt so good. Apparently, she was so starved for affection and passion, she hadn't needed to shed even one article of clothing to experience a body-rocking orgasm of epic proportions. She had never in her life climaxed while kissing a guy. Never.

"Explain your behavior!"

"Well...he asked me to kiss him...and so I did...and well...one thing led to another...and he fainted again."

"I don't believe you. Remove yourself from him."

The streak-haired warrior drew his weapon as if to motivate her. The weapon was a big, evil-looking sword bearing foreign carved markings.

Streak, as Gabrielle nicknamed him, motioned for her to climb off his friend. She patted the injured man's cheek in a vain attempt to revive him so he could explain what happened. She herself would like to know what actually happened.

Her legs felt rubbery when she moved. She wasn't sure of their capacity to hold her weight once she tested them.

"I'm a little weak right now..." She remained where she was.

"Get down, or I will help you with the tip of my sword."

"All right! Relax. I'm moving as fast as I can." Gabrielle slowly scooted down the unconscious warrior. She dropped her legs over the edge, near a certain pair of rock hard thighs, feeling for the floor with her toes.

"You are not moving fast enough." The sharp sword point poked her once in the shoulder lightly.

Gabrielle braced herself against the slab of rock holding, in her humble opinion, the best kisser in the known universe.

In the next second, as if silently beckoned, several of the other warriors arrived in the room, stationing themselves strategically around her and the man still dead to the world.

Not good. Gabrielle turned on weak legs to face the assembled crowd of angry people. Streak started speaking, "I found this human lying on top of our injured comrade."

"Explain yourself!" demanded one of the females. She was a red-head, a veritable,

Amazon-sized female. “Could you not tell he needed rest? Why would you do this?”

“Do what? I only kissed him. Big deal,” Gabrielle said without an iota of remorse. “As a matter of fact, I might do it again if he wakes up. What’s wrong with him anyway?”

“This man has suffered a great loss. His wife died on this trip. He is grieving for her.”

Oops. Gabrielle had the decency to lower her head in abject horror. She’d kissed a man who just lost his wife. How could she have known? Why did he ask her to kiss him anyway? Maybe she looked like his wife. It was the only rational explanation she could invent at the moment. A huge attack of shame crossed her being. What was wrong with her? Why had she kissed him?

“That’s not even the worst part,” Streak said with utter disdain. “When I first entered the room, I caught her...with her lips pressed to his.”

The sound of gasps from every member in the circle of giants worried Gabrielle as she wondered what they were so bent out of shape about. She hadn’t known about his wife dying. How could she?

“You put your mouth on his?” the redhead spat out as if ejecting a distasteful flavor.

“He asked me to and...” Gabrielle started to defend herself, but no one was looking at her. They were all speaking all at once to each other.

“What will we do when Maura calls?” another female, this one blonde, said to the red-head.

“Who’s Maura?” Gabrielle asked.

“His wife,” the blonde responded in an informational tone.

“Wife? I thought you said his wife died!”

“One of them died on this mission. Another waits for his return on our home planet,” the red-head informed her spitefully.

“One of them! He has more than one?” Gabrielle did not like that piece of information one single bit. What was he, a sheik or a sultan or something? The words ‘home planet’ then caught up in her mind. These people were aliens? No. Couldn’t be.

“That’s not the problem.” The red-head was giving her a funny look.

“It seems like a pretty big problem to me,” Gabrielle huffed. “Listen, I honestly didn’t know he was married, so I’ll leave quietly and—”

“No, you may not leave. You’ve touched your mouth to his. You will have to go through a *vita parcere* ceremony with him.” The blonde female’s eyes widened as if her own words scared her.

“A vita what?” Gabrielle thought it did not sound good.

“Life partnering,” Streak said coldly.

“Life partnering! I’m not life partnering with a bigamist.” Gabrielle crossed her arms.

“Bigamist?” The two females then started yet another quiet conversation and referred to a flat-etched, silver clipboard as they whispered.

“Hello! Bigamist. Polygamist. Whatever. A man with more than one wife.” Gabrielle snorted and saw confused looks echoing all around the group of agitated warriors.

“Why are you harping on his wives? It is not important in this situation at all. You put your mouth to his for, I’m guessing, a significant length of time. Now, you will have to become his life partner as our laws require,” Streak said in an uptight tone.

“I will do no such thing.” Gabrielle stomped toward the only break in the now closing circle of giants.

“You will,” and they closed ranks on her.

“It was only a kiss,” Gabrielle whined. She looked back at the man these aliens insisted she had to partner with for eternity. He was still no help.

God, he was still gorgeous. No matter. She was not about to ‘life partner’ with someone who already possessed a harem of wives waiting for him somewhere. Gabrielle simply wouldn’t.

And they couldn’t make her.

ADULT EXCERPT

JUST A KISS

The Tiburon Duet, Book 1

By Lara Santiago

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Her eyes strayed back up. His face, and especially his eyes, displayed his amusement. Maybe he *could* read her mind.

“What are you thinking about? Are you embarrassed?”

“Maybe. I was wondering about your...size,” she admitted.

“My size?” He grinned with question in those beautiful silver eyes of his, trying to get the joke.

Gabrielle felt hot all over. “Your...uh...penis size.” She should check out that area before agreeing to anything further.

“Oh, I imagine it’s adequate enough in size to get the job done.”

“Now, there is proof positive you are not from Earth. All men on my planet think they are massive.”

“Do they now?”

“Yes. So, are you massive, Keller? Would you fill me to the brink?” She felt a sudden rush of moisture gush below as if in preparation for the possibility he might whip out his mighty cock suddenly to test the capacity of her brink and his ability to fill it.

“Do you want to find out firsthand?”

“What? How?” Another gush of wetness released between her legs, and a quivery feeling in her stomach immediately accompanied it. Yes, she wanted to find out.

Keller smiled deviously and uncrossed his arms. “We could try out some Earth-styled—live porno, as you called it.”

He crossed the boundary of her personal space and placed his hands on her shoulders. She sucked in a breath at his touch and closed her eyes to refrain from launching herself at him with her legs open in invitation. She was wet enough to receive whatever he was about to offer.

He leaned in and whispered in her ear, “I can become fully erect and easily insert my—” he paused as if to search for the Earth word “—*cock* inside you without losing control, Gabrielle. You can determine if I am massive enough in size for you to consider life partnering with me.”

“Okay,” Gabrielle said more dreamily than she should have. Her insides were liquefied with sexual need. What was she about to do anyway? She hoped she was dreaming because she would never allow a man to talk her into bed this fast in real life.

Alien or not, he was slick in the seduction department. And now, she was very slick in anticipation of testing their respective...size capacities. She wanted him with an unreasonable need guiding her. She *did* want to know whether he was massive or not. The shy voice inside spouting advice of caution and refusal was summarily overruled by her starved libido shouting, ‘Yes! Yes! Yes!’

“Come over to the table,” he said, motioning her, “and I’ll show you.”

REVIEWS for Just a Kiss

"On the run from a madman, Gabrielle accidentally stumbles onto the platform of a departing alien ship. Instead of facing death, Gabrielle is faced with a fate much worse, with just one kiss. How much trouble can one chocolate orgasmic kiss be?

Keller, the future king of Tiburon awakes from a delirium demanding a kiss. Now life mated to an irresistible earth woman, Keller defends their relationship against the racism and tradition of his people, regardless of the consequences.

Amongst orgasmic chocolate kisses and fiery chemistry, you will be totally captivated in the hilariously sweet romance of two people bound together by 'Just A Kiss.' Be warned, you may either laugh uncontrollably or need water to cool you down while reading *Just A Kiss*. **5 Stars.**" —**Suz Smith, *Ecataromance***

"*Just A Kiss* by Lara Santiago is a unique view into life on other planets. This witty and romantic tale created laughter and tears as I read it. I could not put the book down. Keller is a powerful man determined to claim Gabrielle as his bride. His sexy charm and rugged looks make him a perfect example of why we should look for life on other planets. Gabrielle is a lonely modern woman wanting something more out of life. The grace in which she handles the dramatic events in her life is amazing.

The orgasmic kisses Keller and Gabrielle share are breathtaking. Ms. Santiago captures the raw essence of erotic passion in these kisses. I would love to receive just one of Keller's kisses. The mesmerizing love scenes made my heart skip a beat. The passion this couple shares makes all the hurdles they have to jump worthwhile. I will read Gabrielle and Keller's love story over and over again. **5 Hot Tattoos**" —**Ophelia, *Erotic-Escapades***

"*Just A Kiss* is a very unique book that readers will find highly interesting and even funny. Keller is not your ordinary alien and boy, when it comes to sensuality this man has it in droves! Gabrielle gets caught in the middle of a sticky situation. She doesn't mean to get abducted, but when she does, winds up having the adventure of a lifetime. The love scenes are intense and so hot they almost steam up the computer screen. Lara Santiago is certainly an author to watch and I will be on the lookout for more of her work in the future. **4-1/2 Hearts**" —**Angel, *The Romance Studio***

"Wow! *Just A Kiss* is a text book example of cultural misunderstandings, or maybe I should say, species misunderstandings. This book has a little bit of everything: action, romance, and hot love scenes. Lara Santiago seems to have a talent for taking a look at a familiar situation and giving it a whole new twist. In this case, men and women read different meanings into what is said.

This is one tale that I recommend when you are in the mood for something lightweight, but romantic. *Just A Kiss* is a perfect read for romance lovers that enjoy humor with their stories. Keep your eye on Lara Santiago. She is showing great promise. **4 Blue Ribbons**" —**Belle Rouge, *Romance Junkies***

"While on the run from a psychotic killer, Gabrielle darts right into the middle of an alien expedition departing Earth. When Keller, an ailing warrior on board, asks her for a kiss, she is happy to oblige. She gets a great deal more than she bargained for, however—an incredible chocolate flavored orgasm and an education on the differences in language. As it turns out, mouth touching on Tiburon is a life-altering event.

Gabrielle is feisty and genial, and Keller's determination to have her drives the story. *Just A Kiss* is another great story from Lara Santiago—fast paced, hot and with just the right amount of twists to keep it interesting! **4 Kisses**" —**Loribelle Hunt, *Romance Divas***

"This futuristic novella has a quick pace and remarkable culture diversity. I could not put this book down until I reached the end. The smooth writing kept the plot moving effortlessly, allowing the focus to remain on what was happening and the subtle undertones occurring between the characters. I really liked Keller, who is resilient in his desires and needs. The fact that he is more tenderhearted than your average hero is left me with fond feelings for him. Gabrielle sticks to her guns and even though she could have been cruel and bitchy in certain instances, she didn't lash out as often as I had expected. There were a few inconsistencies that I had trouble ignoring, such as why a group of aliens who had spent months studying Earth in detail would misunderstand the Earth term "kiss." To treat Gabrielle so cruelly because she reacted the way Earthlings do seems off kilter and unfair. While it annoyed me to a degree, it also intrigued me. The fact that the Tiburon people have so many cultural differences left me looking for all the variations that make them so dissimilar. The sex is sensual and quite loving, leaving me relieved, although it did not strike my passion meter. Overall, if you enjoy books with a futuristic flair and unique society differences, *Just A Kiss* will satisfy you and leave you looking for more novels by Ms. Santiago. I'll be keeping my eye on this author. **4 Stars**" —**Francesca Hayne, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews***

"Ms Santiago has a winner in this story. Gabrielle and Keller are very realistic characters in a difficult situation. The settings on Earth and Tiburon are well described, as are the supporting characters. I laughed at the description of Gabrielle as a "puny Earthling." The plot line was very involving, and I found myself unable to put this one down until the end. **4 Cups**" —**Maura, *Coffee Time Romance***

STORY EXCERPT

JUST ONE EMBRACE

The Tiburon Duet, Book 2

By Lara Santiago

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Ellie managed to knock on her hero's door before losing her nerve. She hugged closer to the doorframe to hide from other nosey tenants who might pop out and catch her. Her ankle was still tender, but she could walk on it without limping. She still trembled from the orgasm she'd experienced in the muscular arms of a total stranger.

He rescued her from humiliation, carried her home, kissed her until she came, and she let him walk out without a word. She hadn't found Gabrielle's new number, so she still didn't know his name. The man who gave her the most powerful orgasm in literally a year walked away after her petulance, and she'd let him go. She was probably a fool to be chasing him, but she couldn't stop herself.

After several minutes of severely berating herself, she'd gathered her courage and trailed him down to her friend's old apartment,. A smart woman would have already tackled him at the front door, hauled his unconscious body into the apartment, and chained him to the nearest bed.

She raised her hand to knock again, but he opened the door abruptly. His eyes registered surprise. He motioned her inside while grunting brief responses into his cell phone.

Whoever he spoke with on the phone seemed to be doing all the talking. He closed the door behind her and leaned on it, effectively barring her escape should she change her mind.

Ellie pretended serenity and stepped further into his apartment, looking around the austere room. The furniture was sparse and obviously left from the former tenants. She recognized Gabrielle's old sofa. The rest of the space was neat if not full of worldly possessions. This man had 'temporary resident' practically stamped on his forehead. Ellie tried to back off on her judgment of him. She had no right to judge. He'd saved her from the humiliating result of her break up with Brandon, a pompous snob born with a silver spoon crammed in his mouth. The man who'd told her he loved her, and in the same breath, actually expected her to live as his mistress because he needed to marry someone more worthy of his social station.

Ellie glanced around her hero's space again and relaxed slightly. She was here to apologize, not rate him on the austere decorations of his apartment.

His seemingly temporary life only registered because, in some ways, she was reminded of the men who had shared her mother's life on a regular basis. Ellie never knew her *real* father, and her mother never talked about him.

Motorcycles, sparse furnishings, leather, and especially dangerous dark looks

encompassed many of the traits her hero shared in common with the men frequenting her childhood in the form of 'Uncles.' If this stranger possessed a tattoo and planned on leaving in the near future, the picture would be identical.

Although she did notice his temperament was less abrasive than any of the men in her mother's past. And he was sexy as hell, too.

He completed his call and turned his ferocious gaze to her. His expectant look filled the space between them. She didn't know who looked more uncomfortable.

"I...um...wanted to say...sorry..."

"Don't. You owe me no apologies. I'm sorry if I acted inappropriately."

"No, it was rude of me to chase you off. I don't even know your name." She felt a blush warm her cheeks and looked away.

"That's because when I watch your mouth, I forget what my name is," he said with self-deprecating humor.

Laughter bubbled through her.

"My name is Crag...Tyler."

"Crag," she repeated his name. "That's unusual. Crag. I like it."

"Thanks." He was absolutely, hands down, the sexiest man she'd ever seen.

"I'm Ellie Granger," she replied, then resisted the urge to stick out her hand to him. If he took it, she didn't think she'd be able to stop herself from planting her needy lips on him.

Somewhere. Anywhere. Everywhere.

And that wasn't why she'd come here. Was it?

"Pleased to meet you, Ellie." He didn't extend his hand either. The thought of his hands on her, accompanied by a vivid sensual picture, slammed into her mind, and familiar heat rose in her face again.

"Is your ankle still sore?" His gaze ran down her body to her feet. Ellie remembered his warm hands stroking her calf directly before that amazing kiss. She felt the blush come into her cheeks again.

"No. It doesn't even hurt anymore."

"Good."

This man was dangerous to all of her aroused senses. If she were smart, she'd run like the devil was after her and lock herself in her bedroom. But she'd established earlier, she wasn't smart. Otherwise, this intriguing man would already be chained to her bed. This vibrant thought made her suck in a breath at another very erotic picture now playing on the movie screen of her underfed libido. It was time to change the subject to something more mundane.

"So, I see you haven't redecorated since Gabrielle and Keller moved out."

"No, I'm only here temporarily."

Of course he was only here temporarily. That left only the tattoo question to be resolved.

“Are they friends of yours, Gabrielle and Keller, I mean?”

“Yes, Keller is my very best friend from childhood.”

“Where are you from again?” He had a slight accent she didn’t recognize. Not Irish, but something European maybe.

“Far, far away.” He smiled as if it were a game not to let her know where he came from. It probably made it easier for him to make a clean getaway. *Jeez*. What was wrong with her? She’d come down to apologize for her rude behavior, not judge him for his apparent drifter lifestyle.

“Would you like something to drink?” he asked.

“Sure.” What the heck? She followed him to the kitchen.

“Where do you work, Crag?”

“I teach a class at the college.”

“You’re a professor like Keller?” She knew her voice sounded incredulous. She never had a teacher in college who looked like Crag, or Keller for that matter. Wherever they came from, the folks must be Amazon-like in height. Both men were nearly six and a half feet tall.

“No, not exactly. I help teach a night class in self defense three times a week.” He reached into the refrigerator and pulled out two bottles of Snapple strawberry lemonade.

“Is this acceptable?”

“Sure.” Never in her wildest dreams would she expect Snapple from a man like this. She’d been prepared to gag down a sip or two of beer.

“So, if you work part time, what do you do full time? Do you go to school?”

“No, I’m on what you call...a sabbatical from my regular life.”

“Trying to find yourself?” His quizzical look told her he didn’t understand. The acrimonious childhood she’d led with her mother caused her to equate the phrase *finding oneself* immediately to, *I’m too lazy to get a full-time job*.

She twisted the lid off her drink and took a sip. It was sweet and tart, like her attitude tonight.

“No, I recognize precisely where I am,” he said as though he didn’t like it here. She should quit judging him. She didn’t know him.

A flash of their earlier kiss and her resulting physical response skated through her brain. *Wouldn’t you love to ‘know’ him though, in the biblical sense?* asked a voice from her dark side. That same voice continued to throw vivid erotic pictures into her consciousness.

He wrenched the lid off his bottle and lifted the beverage to his mouth. Tilting his head back, he drank deeply. She watched, mesmerized by the movement of his muscles as he drank.

The kitchen light caught the glint of the blond in his hair, drawing her gaze to his head. What was the significance, she mused, of having the streak of blond in his dark hair? To make some sort of statement? Blatant rebellion? Because it was so sexy? Definitely, door number three.

He lowered the bottle and directed a rapacious gaze her way. She recognized that look. It was just like the one he'd given her earlier before kissing her breathless.

Ellie stepped closer to him as if magnetically drawn. What would he be like in bed? Based on her experience earlier, she suspected she'd need days to recover from a single night with him. She took a step closer to him, and the true reason she was here lodged in her brain.

She wanted...no, needed to spend a night with a man like this. A man who could give her pleasure with no strings attached. She refused to be a mistress, but she was warming to the idea of a quick rebound relationship right about now. Then she could walk away without guilt.

She wasn't usually attracted to a man such as this, but she certainly could be. She never had the opportunity to meet knights in shining black leather in her daily life. She was the director of a prestigious and very exclusive art and antiques gallery. She'd scraped herself up from nothing to acquire the life she enjoyed.

Rich influential people with surly attitudes surrounded her every day of her life. Why was she so attracted to this dark, dangerous looking man? *Because he saved you after the humiliating break up with Brandon, and because his kisses make you climax*, said the dark voice.

Right.

Why couldn't she allow herself this one night to experience a man simply because she wanted him? It wasn't like she had to marry him. It didn't make her a slut or a mistress...or like her mother.

She missed the tender loving care of a man who knew what to do with a woman in bed. Had she ever felt that? Fleeting memories from too long ago faded in and right back out again. It was long past time for a new memory.

If Crag's kiss was any indication of his prowess in bed, well then, she wanted to be able to keep up and not disappoint him. She took a final, determined step, which placed her directly in his personal space. He didn't stop her, just watched her thoughtfully.

"What would you say if I told you I wanted to spend the night with you...tonight," she whispered. Her face heated with her own audacity.

His brows drew together in consideration but not puzzlement. He understood.

"Why?"

"I need..." To...what, feel better about herself? To spend time with a man she wouldn't have to see again? The inevitable hot monkey love, which would feel so incredible?

"What do you need, Ellie?"

"I need a man who..." she paused to find the right words, "...thinks I deserve to be treated like a queen. Can you understand?"

"Ellie." He said her name on a sigh as if there were some monumental problem with her request.

"Please, Crag. Don't make me beg you." She dropped her gaze to the floor so she wouldn't start pleading. She would simply die of embarrassment if he turned her down.

Then another more horrible thought occurred to her. What if he didn't find her desirable

and he was only being a decent guy earlier in her apartment? She was the one who requested he carry her inside. She was the one who instigated the first kiss between them. She was the one who practically demanded he kiss her that second, amazing time.

He'd played the knight in shining armor for her all evening, but that didn't mean he wanted to sleep with her. Just because he seemed like the type of man who wouldn't turn down a sexual request didn't mean he was looking to go to bed with *her*. She was so foolish. Of course, he didn't want to sleep with her.

Pin pricks of sensation dotted the tops of her eyeballs, a precursor to the tears that would fall if she didn't get out of his apartment. Right now!

She turned towards the door and her imminent escape. How far to the door? Three seconds perhaps, and she should run for it.

As she prepared to escape the embarrassment she had caused herself, an unexpected thing happened. His arms locked around her, keeping her in place before him. He then hauled her up until her eyes, now stinging with hot tears, were even with his.

"You don't have to beg me, Ellie, but I don't wish to mislead you. I'll be going home soon. It's not likely I'll be back this way again. Do you understand?"

She paused only a fraction of a second before saying, "Yes, I understand." She was about to embark on a planned one-night stand. Her first. "I'm only asking for one night, I promise." His eyes darkened in response to her hopeful plea.

Still clenched in his powerful embrace, she watched as his head dipped to her throat. She leaned back, allowing him access to the spot just below her jaw line. His lips traced a path to the sensitive place below her ear. The sizzle of his warm tongue on the pressure point sent a shudder through her. He held her as if she weighed as little as a feather.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and tried to kiss his lips. He dodged her mouth, which then landed on his whiskered cheek. He drew back, locking his eyes to hers in a heat-filled gaze. His predatory smile said he had other wicked pleasures in mind before allowing her lips to caress his. Ellie hoped she hadn't just bitten off more than she could chew.

Crag carried her, still crushed to his massive chest, into his bedroom. The only piece of furniture was the bed, and it was huge. Her eyes widened in lustful reverie when she saw it. Visions of writhing naked bodies slammed into her mind, courtesy of her libido. *Calm down*, she wanted to say. *I'm letting him seduce me as fast as I can.*

"Don't be frightened," he whispered.

"I'm not." Although, wrapped in his arms she better not be scared. She couldn't move if she wanted to, and she didn't want to until he fulfilled every one of her most recent lusty fantasies.

"Will you tell me what you like? Or should I explore you with my hands and mouth to find out for myself?"

Another nervous laugh bubbled up. "Both."

He released his grip on her and she slid down his body until her feet touched the floor. The warmth of him enveloped her. She smelled her own arousal. He whispered something else

she missed due to the staccato beat of her heart thumping wildly against her chest.

“What did you say?”

He bent closer placing his lips to her ear, “I said, let’s make tonight last in our hearts forever.”

She thought that was the sweetest thing she’d ever heard and responded with a breathless, “Okay.”

ADULT EXCERPT
JUST ONE EMBRACE

The Tiburon Duet, Book 2

By Lara Santiago

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“Will you show me this optimal position for impregnation, or do I already know what it is?”

Crag smiled. “Well, it would be a complete waste since you’re already impregnated, but if you insist, I’ll show you later on.”

“What if you forget? Show me now. I promise it won’t be a waste.”

“It’s a ceremonial union to create a child. The focus is not on the pleasurable aspects of the act.”

“Perhaps we could make it pleasurable. I’m willing to try. Tell me what to do.” Her eyes were a combination of eagerness and intent. Crag knew he’d deny her nothing.

“As you wish.” Crag motioned her closer. “First, we must undress.”

She stood by his bed and began shedding her clothing quickly. He pulled his uniform off with the speed born of a man who’d waited far too long for his deserved reward.

He approached her stealthily. Reverently. Was she really here or was he dreaming? When he pressed his skin against hers and felt her arms circle his neck, he was almost convinced she was real.

Her hand slid between his legs to stroke him as he thickened his cock for her pleasure. He brushed fingertips along her shoulders then dipped to cover her breasts. Cupping one in each hand, he flicked his thumb across her nipples as her fingers wrapped around his erection and squeezed.

One of his hands trailed down to her belly and skimmed a path to her core. He slid two fingers inside her slick opening and ran his thumb across her clit. She sucked in a breath and clenched his cock tighter in response.

“I need to lie down,” she whispered. Crag removed his fingers from her and danced them to the edge of the bed.

“Lie on your back,” he whispered. She fell to the surface, her dark silky hair fanning around her head.

“Now what?”

“Bend your knees and put your heels against your butt. Spread your legs apart.” Crag

joined her on the bed. He knelt before her. “Now, lift your hips in the air.”

Ellie lifted her hips up until it was lined up to receive his cock.

“After I join with you, and once I spill my seed deeply inside your body, you must hold this position for as long as you can. I will hold your hips up against me to assist you.”

“How long do we have to stay that way?”

“Hours and hours.”

REVIEWS for Just One Embrace

"Crag, Commander at Arms to the queen of the planet Tiburon, lost his life partner in an unfortunate accident while on a recreational journey. Suffering from survivor's guilt for more than a year, his queen finally sends him to her son Keller, who resides on earth with his earthling life mate, Gabrielle. This trip will prove enlightening.

Ellie Granger had transcended her meager beginnings to be the director of an art and antiquities gallery for the society elite. When her boyfriend of several years announces his plans to wed a socialite and retain her as his mistress, she dumps him. While stumbling through her parking lot in tears, she trips over a car stop and is rescued by a handsome, black haired hunk.

The brunette beauty and the dark stranger awkwardly enter into a no strings one night stand that leaves them both craving more. Ellie wants more of his orgasmic kisses, and Crag cannot get enough of her sizzling embraces. Unbeknownst to either, they start a chain of events that will change them both.

Ms. Lara Santiago has written a sexually charged story of inter-species attraction. Ellie demonstrates all of the qualities of an independent woman faced with unbelievable obstacles, while Crag displays all of the signs of a man in touch with his feelings. I enjoyed their wordplay, and their sexual encounters were out of this world. I found myself cheering for Ellie and felt all of the suspense and drama of the events that befell her in her quest for the man with the chocolate kisses. **5 Cups**" —Kathy, *Coffee Time Romance*

"Lara Santiago penned wonderful characters with real emotional depth in this poignant, spicy read that tugs at the heartstrings. From the opening page, she gives the perfect amount of background information so you can't help becoming emotionally vested in her characters. Her world of Tiburon and the physiology of its inhabitants engulf the reader with each exquisite detail. *Just One Embrace* demands more than just one read! This dreamy book of pure romance and chocolate kisses has earned a definite place on my 'keeper' shelf. **4-1/2 Kisses**" —Shawn, *Romance Divas*

"*Just One Embrace* tells the story of Crag of Tiburon who was introduced in *Just A Kiss*. A powerful man on his home world, Crag had to come to terms with a personal tragedy before he could find happiness, especially with a woman from Earth. Even after deciding that he was willing to risk his feelings, he and Ellie are confronted with a vindictive woman, out to steal Crag's power. I really liked these two, especially Ellie. Here was a woman who had all of the disadvantages of life, yet still made a lot of herself. I so enjoyed it when she finally stood up for herself with those around her who wanted to put her down and I fell in love with Crag myself when he helped her. This tale actually addressed several different ideas; the fear that Crag and Ellie felt in regard to falling in love, the struggle that Crag faced when deciding just what was important in his life, and the distinctions of different classes and how Crag and Ellie overcame the beliefs of others and finally learning about their different backgrounds and beliefs and how they came to terms with them. Lara Santiago's Tiburon tales are great stories that I highly recommend, especially for readers who enjoy a little fantasy, a little conflict, and a whole lot of love. **4-1/2 Stars**" —Trang, *Ecataromance*

"Reading about this alien world with its funny and unusual societal rules was great fun. Even the anatomical differences were humorous. Orgasms occur while touching lips and males secrete a chocolate flavor. Could anything satisfy puny human females better than sex with chocolate? Crag and Ellie are perfect mates, but this poor couple had so much to overcome to be together. I couldn't help rooting for them as they bravely went about jumping every

hurdle placed before them, knowing success wasn't likely even if they defeated every challenge. They couldn't resist each other sexually and their trysts burned up the pages. The story is endearingly touching and will leave its imprint on your heart as well as your face, so be prepared to smile 'til it hurts. I was delightfully entertained and undeniable aroused from beginning to end. While it was obvious the first book was about Keller and Gabrielle becoming a couple and undoubtedly contained a lot of world building, I wasn't aware of missing anything while reading this one. Certainly, *Just One Embrace* by Lara Santiago is a book you won't want to miss. **4 Stars**" —Karen H., *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

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