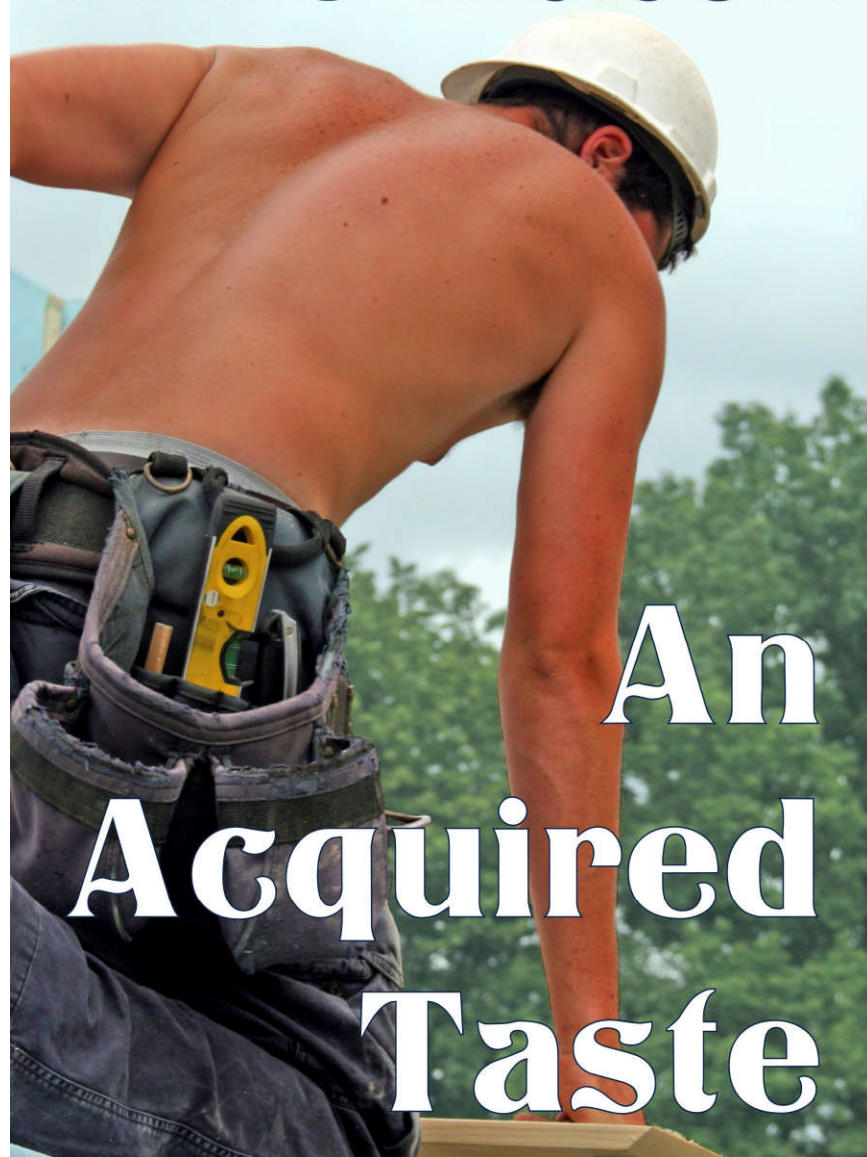


Jude Mason



**An
Acquired
Taste**

JUDE MASON

An Acquired Taste

a novella of BDSM erotic romance by

Jude Mason

AN ACQUIRED TASTE

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eBook ISBN 1-59426-945-9
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Originally Published 2006

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Phaze is an imprint of Mundania Press, LLC.



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JUDE MASON

Also by Jude Mason

Pink Ribbon
Stage Fright
Jesse's Homecoming

Chapter One

"Damn!" The word exploded before she could stop it. Since Tom's death, she hadn't been able to visit that room without tears blurring her vision, forcing her to leave. Today was no different. In the seven years they'd had together, they'd become best friends. They'd known everything about each other. He'd been the only man who truly understood her and had been willing—no, eager—to put up with her idiosyncrasies.

Hastily she turned and marched out, fighting back the feelings of loss and loneliness that had plagued her for the past six months. Softly shutting the door, she leaned back against it, and sighed.

Cynthia Lyon, hardnosed businesswoman, weeping widow, scowled. Her ragged breathing finally smoothed out. Looking up, her eyes came to rest at the corner of the dining room. She spotted a dark patch on the ceiling. "No," she groaned, and cursed again. "Damn!" She walked across the hardwood floor to get a better look and felt her anger rise.

The beam that separated the living room from the dining room looked fine, but on the dining room side there was a large, roughly circular patch that shouldn't have been there. A leak, perfect. That's all she needed. She'd thought their two bedroom cabin would be just right for her now that she was alone, but it seemed that no matter which way she turned, something happened to disrupt her life.

She walked around the large, open living room/dining room, checking for more of the ugly stains. The rich oak walls in the living room soothed her anger somewhat, and when she found no more watermarks, she was ready to let her mood improve.

The large picture window at the front of the room looked out over a lush green lawn with its island of shrubs set off to one side. The pathway leading to the river wound around clumps of bulbs and colorful perennials she'd planted the previous year. Turning away from the window, she spotted Tom's painting above the overstuffed forest green

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sofa, and felt a tug at her heart. He'd been an amazing artist, and each room held at least one of his wildlife paintings.

She circled the room and checked around the fireplace to be sure there were no discolorations around the chimney. Relieved, she carried on, passed her bedroom doorway, into the dining room again.

The oak table with its five high-backed chairs dominated the room, but the large window and the sliding glass door made it look as if she were almost outside. Two years earlier, she'd redecorated the dining room. Instead of the same wood walls as the living room, she'd put a chair rail around the room, and left the warm oak at the bottom, but the top she'd painted a calming, golden cream color. Two candleholders on the one wall framed a painting of a doe with her fawn resting beside a mist-shrouded river. It was one of her favorite paintings, but surprisingly, wasn't one of Tom's.

She did a slow turn, admiring her small world—galley kitchen, all in pale gold and burnt orange, with white frilly curtains over the sink, the door to that special room, the one she had trouble visiting, even now. Beside it was the bathroom, the door ajar, allowing some of its brightness to creep into the room. That was her sanctuary, and the one room she'd totally redone. Large, nearly as big as the spare room and too large for the size of the cabin, the Jacuzzi tub was the only thing she could count on to help her relax. She'd done the entire room in a mottled gray slate, and loved it.

Spotting Ginger, her cat, sprawled along the back of the couch, she said, "Well, Ginger, it looks like we're going to get the roof fixed." Going into the kitchen, she got a large glass from the cupboard beside the sink, filled it with pink grapefruit juice, and joined Ginger. Stroking the soft fur behind the cat's ear, she took a sip of her juice. The large feline rolled onto his side and reached for her with his front foot. Under her hand, she felt rumbling. He was purring.

"I also think it's time for that sunroom I've always wanted."

She pulled the cat onto her lap and together they watched the evening sunset through the living room window. Shades of bronze splashed across the floor as the sun slowly sank behind the distant mountains, reflecting off the few remaining rain clouds in the sky. With Ginger curled up in her lap, Cynthia thought of the calls she'd have to make in the morning.

Four years ago, they'd been financially burned when a contractor left without fulfilling his contract with them. Two months of trying to

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find him had proven fruitless. When Tom and she had tried to press charges, the judge told them they were in the right, but it was up to them to find the contractor before anything could be done. That left them with a gaping hole where the fireplace now stood, and a vow never to trust a contractor again. But, she also knew she wasn't capable of doing all the construction she wanted by herself.

Stifling a yawn, she picked up the cat and her empty glass. After depositing the glass in the sink, she checked the locks on both doors. It was a quiet neighborhood to be sure, but she wasn't about to tempt fate. Ginger leapt from her arms as soon as she walked into her bedroom, landing with a soft thud on the small chair beside the door. That was his guard post, and she stroked his head for a moment before going any farther.

When he'd settled comfortably, she straightened up and switched on the overhead light. The fan slowly turned and the room glowed with soft light. Deep burgundy carpet made the room feel warm and cozy. Large vases, filled with both dried and cut flowers scented the room. Facing the backyard was a door with a large pane of glass that opened onto a small, private deck.

Drawing the crushed velvet, deep gold drapes, she remembered how Tom used to come up behind her and wrap her in his arms. She felt a sudden pang of loneliness and need. Tom, how she wished he was there to share her bed. A subtle clenching in her pussy reminded her of how long she'd been celibate. Masturbation was fine, for a while, but she missed the touch of a man.

Slipping out of her blue silk blouse and the form fitting skirt she'd worn to the office, she admired herself in the full-length mirror. Black, curly hair framed an oval shaped face, and eyes the color of dark chocolate stared back at her. At five-eight, she knew she had more curves than was fashionable. A large bosom and way too much ass, she smiled remembering how Tom used to squeeze and caress her there.

Skimming out of her pantyhose, she tossed them into the hamper. The blue lace bra and matching panties soon followed, leaving her naked and flushed. Frustrated, but unwilling to use the vibrator she'd recently purchased, she slipped into the white silk pajamas she'd left folded on her pillow. Her nipples puckered and the damp warmth between her thighs was impossible to ignore.

She switched off the bedroom light, and climbed into bed. Cool sheets and the smell of flowers soon lulled her to sleep. Her dreams carried her into the arms she longed for.

* * * *

Morning coffee never tasted so good, she thought as she flipped through the pages of the phone book. Carpenters, construction contractors, the listings went on for pages; each one made her cringe.

Her assistant knocked softly and entered uninvited. Looking up, she smiled and nodded to the chair on the other side of the desk. She'd been expecting the slender blond man. His hair was too short; the white button-down shirt he wore was ironed to perfection, his light cream slacks looked as if he'd just bought them, although she knew that wasn't true. He was effeminate in his demeanor and gay, which seemed to make him easy to work with. There had never been any need to warn him off, or admonish his behavior.

"Sammy," she said, still flipping through the phone book, "have you had any dealings with contractors or know of one that might be trustworthy?"

"Not recently, hon," he confessed in a soft, deep voice. He crossed his legs when he sat and added, "A friend has, though. I can get you the number of his contractor if you like. Why? Are you having trouble with something at your cottage?"

"Yeah, I need someone to look at the roof. That rainstorm we had last night—well, I think I've got a leak now and I want to get it taken care of before winter sets in."

A colorful ad caught her attention: *No job too big or too small. Third generation home renovation and construction specialist*. There was a local phone number and address below the ad. "This sounds interesting. Three generations, that's got to be some kind of a record."

Sammy leaned forward to get a closer look at the ad. "Jenkins and Son and Son, cute. Can't say I've heard of them. If they've been in the business that long, I'd say they either do good work, or look damn fine." He chuckled at his own witticism. "I'll check with my friend and let you know ASAP. He had mostly interior stuff done, but it was done really well."

"Thanks, Sammy." She made a note of the number for Jenkins and sons, then closed the book and tossed it into the top desk drawer. "I'll give these others a call too. Maybe I'm ready to check out some eye candy." She laughed at her assistant's exaggerated look of shock.

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"Ms. Lyon. My goodness," he sputtered in his soft voice. He fidgeted, his fingers having a minor war in his lap, and squirmed. Finally, he laughed and blurted, "It's time, Cynthia. Six months is long enough. I'm sure Tom wouldn't want you to go through life alone."

Her breath caught, and for a moment, Cynthia didn't know what to say. Her heart pounded. She knew he was right, but it still felt as if she was cheating even to think of another man. How insane was that?

Her body, however, sent signals that it was definitely time to get back into life's forward lanes. "You're right, Sammy," she said in a hushed voice. "It's just that...Tom's death was so sudden." She closed her eyes and took a couple of breaths before going on. "I cursed the drunk driver for months. He took so much away from me, from anyone who knew Tom. Damn it, I'd planned on a lifetime with him." She bit her lip to keep from screaming. When she could finally take a breath, she added, "It really is time to move ahead."

Sammy smiled, "I'll get you that number right away. Did you call me in here for a reason or just to tell me about your house woes?"

"Actually, I wanted to let you know I'm taking the afternoon off. I'm going to make it a long weekend and see if I can't get some work done in my garden. It's mid-June and I've got more weeds than plants." She reached for her planner and flipped the page until she found the day's date. "I've got one more appointment this morning at ten-fifteen, and then I'll be leaving. I expect you out of here by two. You could use a long weekend, too."

"Great," replied Sammy enthusiastically. He pulled himself to his feet and gave her an extra swish when he waltzed out of her office. Calling over his shoulder just before he closed the door, "I'll phone my honey and let him know I'll be home early." He quietly shut the door behind himself.

Cynthia sat in silence, drinking her coffee. The last appointment for the day wouldn't take more than a half hour, she hoped. Her catering company was moving into the big league, or at least a bigger league. She'd contacted one of the big chain restaurants and asked about supplying their local outlet with a variety of fresh baked goods. Seems she'd come in at just the right time and they'd jumped at the chance. Her lawyers had been very impressed with the offer and urged her to agree. Today would see the final signing of the contract.

Sammy's soft knock on the door indicated that her new clients were right on time. He opened the door, ushered them in, and handed her a small slip of paper. "The number and name you were asking about."

"Thanks," she said, and rose to meet her clients.

An hour later, the contract was signed and she was free and on her way home. She was on the road early enough not to have to worry about traffic. Instead of a grueling half-hour commute, she actually enjoyed the drive. Pulling into her driveway, a smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. It was good to be home, scruffy looking garden, leaks, and all.

Once inside, she kicked off her shoes and made for the kitchen. After putting a pot of coffee on, she found the piece of paper Sammy had given her and the one she'd copied from the phonebook. His read, *Build-It, Inc.* The phone number indicated that the business was located in a town at least thirty miles away, but there was no address given. She wasn't crazy about that, but Sammy said his friend had been pleased with their service, so she'd begin with them.

Coffee ready, she got a cup and went to the phone. Dialing, she perched on the chair and waited, and waited. Finally, a harried male voice answered, "Build-It Inc."

"Hello, I've got a roof that needs either some repair or totally redoing." She took a deep breath then went on. "I'm also thinking of adding a small sunroom on the back of the house. Is there any chance someone could come out and have a look at the roof and maybe explain how I'd go about finding designs for the sunroom?"

The exasperated sigh at the other end didn't sound promising. "A new roof, maybe. A new room add-on—lady, you're fishing here for sure." Another sigh, punctuated by a yawn, then he added, "I can have someone come and have a look in about three weeks. Course by then it'll be getting close to fall and rains, so it's going to be a mess. The room—"

"Hold it," Cynthia interrupted. "Three weeks and that's not even when you'd start?"

"That's right, lady," he replied sharply.

"I'm sorry, but I really don't want to wait that long."

"I'm sorry, too." The line went dead. He'd hung up on her.

"Bugger," she exploded and hung up.

Instead of just ringing the next number, Cynthia walked outside to cool off. Her temper had flared and she didn't want to get off to a bad start with the next contractor. When she'd finished her coffee, she returned to the phone and dialed.

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"Good afternoon, Jenkins and Sons. How can I help you?" answered a deep masculine voice.

A shiver went up Cynthia's spine. "I've got a roof that's leaking. I'm not sure if it just needs to be fixed or if I need a new roof. I'd also like to see someone about designing, and building a small sunroom off the back of the house." Her words came out all in a rush; as if she needed to say it all before she took another breath, or before he growled like the last one had. Her face suddenly felt warm. Was she blushing? What on Earth for?

"Sounds like you're looking at some major renovations." He paused. She heard papers shuffling, then he went on. "I can come out and have a look in the morning, if that's all right with you?"

Blinking, surprised at how much difference this outfit was, compared to the last, Cynthia took a moment to reply, "Y-yes, tomorrow would be great. Not too early though, say around ten?"

His answer was a soft laugh first, then, "Ten will be just fine. It'll give me a break from early morning get ups, too."

"Perfect, do you need anything?"

"Your name and address might help."

"Right," she blurted, feeling about as dumb as a brick. "I'm Cynthia Lyon. The address is 162 Wavecrest. I'm south of town about fifteen miles."

"Yeah, I know it well. We're almost neighbors. I'm about a half mile north of you on Seaview."

She heard him rustling more paper, before adding, "I'll be at your place at ten-thirty. I'll be driving a ninety-nine, three-quarter ton Ford pickup, red."

"I'll have the coffee on."

"Perfect. I'll see you then."

"Bye," said Cynthia and hung up the receiver. For some inexplicable reason, she felt as if she were about to embark on something special, something good. She shook it off and went about making an early dinner. Ginger got underfoot, meowing for his dinner and some attention. She picked him up, carried him with her to the dining room, and sat him on a chair beside her. Purring, the cat circled before he curled into a ball and promptly went to sleep, for the moment food was forgotten. She checked the ceiling where the discoloration had appeared and was glad to see that it looked dry, but the stain was still very visible.

After her meal, she changed into a pair of ragged cut-off jeans, an old shirt and sandals. Her gardening gloves were in the shed at the back

of the yard, as were the tools she'd need. She loved the garden, and hated that she'd allowed it to get so overgrown with weeds. The afternoon and evening flew by as she worked. She didn't realize how long she spent at it, until the sky began to darken. The sun had touched the treetops, and would be down soon.

Muscles aching, she looked around the beds and smiled at the progress she'd made. Satisfied, she returned her tools and gloves to the shed and went inside for a bath.

She stripped just inside the door. Sandals first, kicked into the bottom of the closet. She peeled off her sweat-soaked shirt that clung to her belly and back. The cut-offs felt as if they'd been glued to her hips when she wriggled out of them. Panties and bra, sticky with perspiration were next to transparent. Nipples puckered as they hit the air.

The tub filled with water, scented with lavender oil, while she waited, impatiently. A glass of wine in hand, she was ready to relax. "Yes," she sighed when she finally settled into the warm water. Caressed by the gentle waves, she could almost forget that the house was empty but for her and the cat. Her back ached and she longed for someone to give her a massage. Her thoughts strayed to the voice on the phone, those few hours earlier—soft and deep, with a touch of humor. She felt herself blush when she recalled how dumb she must have sounded.

Her hands floated above her tummy, but with a little urging, moved to her breasts. Cupping them, she rubbed her nipples with the tips of her thumbs. An instant of pressure and each turned into rubbery pebbles. Goosebumps raced up her chest and around her neck, she shivered. Her pussy clenched. Frustration mounted as she rubbed her thighs together. She slipped a hand from her breasts and eased it down to the sopping curls between her legs. The instant her fingers slid across her clit, her hips jerked forward.

Her mind flashed to the room she loved, and dreaded, and all the things she wanted again. Cuffs, the smell of leather, the feel of the bindings—her body arched, her heart beat wildly. Tension, unbearable and exciting, legs straining, toes tautly stretched, her fingers tightened around her clit and pulled the tiny bud of nerve-filled flesh.

What did he look like? Was he as good looking as he sounded? Was he married? Her fingers teased and tormented, as those thoughts and more flashed through her mind. Water leaped and splashed, as her body thrashed. A tight, hard orgasm took her breath. With her head thrust back and her body quivering uncontrollably, she groaned her pleasure. Too

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fast, her world returned to normal. Her body relaxed, her breath slowly returned to its usual rhythm. A tug of regret that she was alone was all that remained, then that too faded.

Sitting up, she sluiced water over herself. Delicately scented soap and a large sponge made quick work of cleaning the dirt and grime away. Clean, she picked up her wineglass and sipped the tart liquid. The glass was small and after only a few swallows, it was empty. Out and dried, she padded to the bedroom with just a towel wrapped around her. Ginger followed.

"Come on, Gin, time for bed." She flicked the end of the large cream-colored bath towel at the cat and laughed when he leapt for it and missed. Skittering across the hardwood floor, he was all arms and splayed legs. He leaped onto the bed after her, and curled up against her stomach when she'd settled onto her side. Sleep came quickly; the hard work and fresh air had done their trick.

Chapter Two

Dressed in a pair of royal purple, satin lounging pajamas, with her first cup of coffee in hand, Cynthia walked out the back door onto her private deck. The sun streamed through the trees at the end of the garden, touching each flower and leaf, as if kissing it with an added touch of color. A light breeze picked up her hair and sent tendrils of it across her forehead.

It was just past nine-thirty and she wanted to spend a few minutes in peace. Settling onto a lawn chair's deep cushion, she let her head fall back so that she got the sun full in the face. Its warmth was like a longed for caress and she drifted into a light sleep.

She'd just awakened when she heard the doorbell ring at the front of the house. Placing her cup on the side table, she got to her feet and headed for the door. She stopped before she opened the door, checking that she was at least decent before she reached for the knob. Flicking the lock off, she swung the door wide.

A tall, blond, beautiful man—perhaps a year of two younger than she was—and dressed in clean but well-worn jeans, a red plaid cotton shirt, and work boots, regarded her. A smile lifted the corners of his mouth as he said, "Ms. Lyon—Cynthia Lyon?" He extended his hand towards her and waited, as if he had all the time in the world.

"Yes," she replied as her gaze skimmed from the top of his wavy, golden hair, down over deep-set eyes, well-shaped straight nose, and full lips to the square jaw, and further still to his wide chest and muscular arms with the shirtsleeves rolled up to his elbows. His waist was narrow, as were his hips, but his thighs bulged even through the jeans. The bulge nestled between his thighs trapped her attention and took her breath.

"I'm Caleb Jenkins, from Jenkins and Sons."

Cynthia tore her gaze from his midsection and felt herself flush. "Yes, you're early." Her voice was a little harsher than she'd planned. She reached out and took his hand. Past him, she spotted the Ford truck and knew it had to be the man she'd talked to on the phone. Taking a deep

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breath, she gathered her control and again looked into his eyes. They were hazel. The lashes were lighter than his eye color and swept seductively over them when he blinked. "Would you like a cup of coffee while I show you around?"

"You read my mind," he said cheerfully. "Yes, please."

She dropped his hand and stepped aside, allowing him to enter. Without a word, he bent and unlaced his boots, sliding them off before stepping off the tile foyer. Gray wool work socks emerged, and the boots he placed to the side were scuffed and paint splattered.

"This way," Cynthia said, and pushed the door closed before walking towards the kitchen. She felt his eyes on her.

"Nice house, you and your husband must really like it," he said innocently.

She stopped dead. Her thoughts had been a million miles away from Tom. She turned and as calmly as she could, replied, "I'm a widow. My husband died six months ago. He was hit by a drunk driver."

Caleb had been so close behind her that when she stopped he'd almost walked into her. She saw his discomfort from a mere few inches away. He quickly took a step back, giving her space. "I'm so sorry," he stammered. "Please accept my condolences. I had no idea."

"I know you didn't, how could you?" She gazed up into his eyes again and forced a smile. "Come and get that coffee and I'll show you where I think I've got a leak in the roof."

"Yes, ma'am."

He followed her into the kitchen, waited while she poured him a large mug, and had offered him cream or sugar. He refused, saying he preferred it black. "All right, where's that leak?" he asked after he'd taken a sip.

"Over there." She pointed to the dark spot on the ceiling on the other side of the room. "To me, that looks like a leaking roof." She watched him walk across the room and peer up at the ceiling.

"Yes, you're right, that's what it is. Any idea when the roof was checked last?"

"On the paperwork I've got, it says twelve years."

"I'll have to go up and have a good look. Hopefully, you're only going to need it patched. If not, then a new roof, depending on the tiles you've got up there." He lowered his eyes and asked, "You also said something about a sunroom?"

"Yes," she moved through the dining room to the sliding glass doors. Opening them, she nodded for him to follow her. "Out here. I'd like to be able to open these doors and have a room that's all windows."

Again, he followed her. When they stood out on the lawn, Cynthia turned and looked back at the house, and at him. He was well worth looking at, and she felt a twinge of excitement. She thought he'd look amazing naked and in cuffs.

"On that side is the master bedroom, with a door leading onto that deck." She pointed to her room and went on, "I'd like that deck covered in. I'd also like the room to extend across to enclose that double sliding door." She slowly swung her arm along, indicating how far she wanted the sunroom to extend.

Caleb took a sip of coffee. A thoughtful look came over him, as he looked at the back of the house. "Do you have the original plans for this place?"

"Sure do," she answered and went inside for them. She'd pulled that folder out of her filing cabinet and left them on the dining room table. She grabbed the blue cardboard tube and turned back, only to stop and look at him again for a moment. He really was a hunk, standing out there in his sock feet, gazing up at her roof and drinking coffee. *Come on, girl, business now, fun later, maybe.*

"Here you are. We knew the couple who had this place built, so we lucked out when it came to getting these when we bought the place." She held them out. When he reached for them, his fingers brushed hers. She jerked her hand back as an electrical shock jumped between them.

Snatching the paperwork before she dropped them, he blurted, "What the—"

"You felt it, too?" Cynthia rubbed her hand.

"Sure did." He smiled. "You okay?"

"Yeah, just surprised me." She became aware of her nipples rubbing against her satin top. They were as hard as dried raisins, and as sensitive as her suddenly aching clit. Shifting her legs, she realized that her inner thighs were wet.

"Have you got a ladder handy, or should I run out and get mine from the truck? I'll need to get up there and find out where the problem is." He put his coffee cup on the nearby table and slid the rolled papers out of the tube. It took him just a moment to locate the blueprints and uncurl them.

"Huh?" She looked up at him, her mind lost in the uncalled for and unexpected feeling of excitement. She cleared her throat, focused on

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what she was supposed to be doing, and replied hurriedly, "Yes, right over there, at the side of the shed." She pointed to the left side of the garden shed.

"Good," he said, and returned to looking at the drawings. "These are good. It looks like you've got twenty-year roofing. Unless there's been consistent storm damage, I should be able to patch the leak."

"That's if I hire you," interjected Cynthia, feeling as if the conversation was getting out of her control.

He looked up at her, surprised. There must have been something in her eyes, or posture, because he quickly dropped his and replied, "Yes, of course, ma'am."

She smiled at the color that crept over his face. "Why don't you go and get the ladder so you can check the roof?"

He didn't say a word, just handed her the drawing and went to get the ladder. She watched him move as he walked towards the shed. He had a very slight limp, as if he'd sprained his ankle and it was still healing. He had a tight, hard butt. Idly, she wondered if he'd ever been spanked, but quickly pushed that to the back of her mind.

He easily pulled the metal, extension ladder from its hooks on the side of the shed. Carrying it back to the house, he turned it so it was upright, and laid it against the rich brown, cedar siding. "Be right back, I'll need my boots for this."

She went to her chair and watched. When he came back outside, his boots were in his hand. He slipped them on and laced them tight. Then he was up the ladder. She heard him moving from one side of the roof to the other.

"Found your problem," he shouted from near the center of the roof. "A branch came down and damaged a couple of shingles."

Cynthia got to her feet and held a hand up to shield her eyes. "That's it?"

"Yup, you lucked out. All I have to do is get a half dozen shingles up here. I can have it fixed in no time. That is, if you hire me," he added with a touch of tease in his voice. He rose from his squatting position and went to the edge of the roof. He looked at the gutters and how the roof had been finished along the edge, then said, "I shouldn't have any trouble adding on here either."

"Okay, come on down and we'll talk," said Cynthia. She walked over to the foot of the ladder and eyed his body as he descended. The

play of the muscles in his thighs and ass made her mouth water. He moved beautifully, gracefully, and too soon, he was standing beside her.

"You said you wanted a sunroom, too. Show me about how big." He was in his own territory and obviously felt at ease questioning her.

She moved to the corner of the house, and after carefully judging how large she wanted the room, she said, "From here," then she walked past her bedroom and most of the way past the dining room, "to here."

"You mean just on the other side of that sliding door?"

"Yes, that's it," she said.

"Okay, give me a few minutes and I'll draw up a rough draft." He went around the side of the house, and she wondered what he was doing. A few minutes later, he came back with a large notepad, a tape measure, and pencil.

"I'd like as many windows as possible. That's the whole idea, lots of light. A room I can use in the winter as well."

"Got it," he replied.

"I'll be inside, if you need anything just shout." Cynthia headed for the door. It was time to get dressed properly, besides she felt as if she was going to attack him if she didn't get away from him soon.

"I have one more question before you leave. Do you want it to step down into the sunroom, or level entry?"

"Level entry."

"Okay, give me a half-hour and I'll see what I can come up with for you."

"Sounds good," she said and headed for the doorway. Each step reminded her of how wet she was, how attractive she found Caleb, and how much she wanted to be held. It had been so long, too long. By the time she entered the dining room, she was soaked with sweat. Her knees felt weak.

She went directly into the bathroom and splashed cold water on her face. With her face still dripping, she looked at herself in the mirror and smiled. Flushed and feverish looking, her dark eyes sparkled. "Okay lady, it looks like you're ready to notice men again." The ludicrous remark made her laugh. *Notice*, she thought, *I'm damn near ready to jump the guy*. She dried her face, and headed for her bedroom.

On the way, she spotted him again, sitting comfortably on one of the lawn chairs. He was concentrating on his drawings and didn't notice her. He scribbled lines, erased them, redid them until he seemed more or less pleased, then he'd go on to the next.

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"Oh, baby, you are gorgeous," she whispered.

A few minutes later, she was dressed in a pair of loose cotton shorts and a matching white tank top. She sat in the dining room, with another cup of coffee and watched Caleb. Thoughts of her special room flashed into her mind, and she felt her face heat up again. Before her mind could get too lost in that fantasy, she saw him walking towards the door. He tapped on the glass.

Opening it, she ushered him in. Again, he removed his boots.

"I've got two ideas here," he said, and laid two sheets of paper on the table.

Cynthia leaned over and was amazed at how intricate his drawings were. Each design had its good points: the first was more sleek and modern, with vinyl siding and long, slender, vertical windows lined up like cordwood, the other was exactly what she wanted. Huge picture windows and natural wood siding, the roof extended out over the lawn, and would allow her to sit out even if it rained. It was simple, yet stylish, and still had a country feel to it.

"This," she pointed to the second drawing and smiled. "This is it. You must have read my mind."

He laughed, "Well, to be very honest, it's a lot like the one I built for myself."

"Really?" She looked at him with new appreciation. He wasn't just a pretty face. "Your wife must love it."

"I'm not married. I haven't found a woman who'll put up with me yet."

"I see." Her imagination kicked into high gear. She had to force herself to calm down. "What's this all going to cost me?"

"I'll do the roof for free if I get the job for the sunroom," he said evenly. "Like I said, it's a matter of replacing half a dozen shingles. I'll check in the attic before I leave, but I can't see it being a problem."

"Okay, what about the sunroom?"

"That's easy. I'll charge you for materials, plus my hourly rate."

"And how long will it take to complete?" She suddenly felt nervous. She'd had trouble before and wasn't about to let it happen again.

"Three weeks," he said confidently. "You'll need permits for the electrical. I'll take care of everything."

They went over his diagrams for a couple of hours and drank a pot of coffee between the two of them, while they fine-tuned his design. As they worked, Cynthia felt her attraction to him grow, her desire to control

him mounting. She tested him, in subtle ways, stepping too close to see if he'd move away, asking him to pick up a paper she 'accidentally' dropped. Several times, she brushed against him, and each time the same jolt of electricity caused her to shiver. She noted his erection—ignored his discomfort, even when he surreptitiously turned and adjusted himself.

When she was satisfied, she took a deep breath. "I've written up a contract. It's probably a little different from anything you've seen before." Her heartbeat increased. Would he go that one extra step she required? "I've been stung once by contractors, I can't afford to have it happen again."

"No problem."

"I want a schedule. I want to know when things are supposed to be done. I don't want excuses—I won't *accept* excuses. Any delays and you'll be punished."

"Punished?" He looked mystified, a little rebellious perhaps, but she also noticed a glint in his eyes.

"Yes. Physically punished," she said. "If you keep to the schedule you provide, you'll get paid for the job, exactly like you would for any job. But, if there are any delays: trouble with deliveries or materials, anything, it's up to you to get back on schedule."

Caleb blinked. He opened his mouth to say something, but nothing came out. He swallowed. He shuffled his feet. His voice shook when he finally replied, "How often are you planning on checking this schedule?"

"Every Friday evening." She smiled when he nodded. She had him. "Punishment, if there is any, will be dished out on Saturday morning."

"May I ask what kind of punishment you have in mind?" A flush began at his neck and rapidly crept up his face. He looked into her eyes, but lowered his in a matter of moments. His blush deepened.

"It will depend on what's behind schedule and how upset I am."

He glanced up at her. By the look of frustration on his face, she knew he'd obviously hoped for more information.

"Wait here," she said, and went to her bedroom for the contract she'd drawn up. Each step added to her excitement. Her pussy ached and itched. She wanted to rub herself, and smiled because it had been so long since she'd had those feelings. The man was hooked. He seemed to crave what she offered without even knowing what that was.

The contract lay on her bedside table. It was a single sheet of paper filled with straightforward legalese; she'd made two copies—one for her, one for him. It stated that the contractor agreed to adhere to the schedule

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that he created. Each Friday, after the workday had concluded, she would compare the schedule with what he'd achieved that week. If he had not completed tasks that were scheduled, he gave her permission to physically punish him. Punishment could not leave permanent marks on his person, or disable him or interfere in any way with his enjoyment of life.

Picking up the papers, she glanced over them again before going back to the dining room. He sat at the dining room table, waiting for her. He looked eager, but also a little confused and apprehensive.

Holding a copy out to him, she said, "Read it carefully. I want to see your schedule before you sign it."

"Yes, ma'am," his voice was huskier than it had been. He read the contract through once, then he read it again. His mouth sagged open, but he must have realized it and slammed it shut. Carefully placing the paper on the table, he asked, "When would you like to see the schedule?"

"As soon as possible. No later than Monday." She moved around to the other side of the table. She wanted to watch him. She already loved watching him squirm. He seemed to be doing quite a lot of that at the moment. He kept shifting in his chair, moving from side to side, and then tucked his legs under the table. She saw him lift up a little and as his hands were out of sight, she could only assume he was readjusting himself into a more comfortable position.

"I'll have it for you by tomorrow night. I'll also have a proper set of prints done up for you on Monday." He'd returned to business and she allowed him to guide the conversation. "I've got to get permits, but that won't take long. You're not building a separate structure, just adding onto an existing one. I should have those by Tuesday, Wednesday at the latest. I'll get that roof fixed while we're waiting."

"I like your style. You've got the job, if you want it. Our business is done for the day," she said and rose to her feet suddenly. "We can't do anything else until I see your schedule, and we've dealt with the contract."

He got to his feet so quickly that he tipped his chair. He made a wild grab to keep it from going over. The flush returned. He stammered, "Yes, I want the job. I'll phone you in the morning, if that's all right."

"No, I'll phone you and let you know when I'll be available tomorrow evening."

He gaped. It seemed he wasn't accustomed to being told what to do. It was also apparent from the bulge in his jeans and the brilliant flush,

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that he liked it. "Yes, ma'am. I'll be waiting for your call." He picked up his preliminary sketches and got his boots from the back door. She followed him through the living room and smiled when he squared his shoulders. He must have realized she was watching him. Once he got into his boots, he straightened up and looked at her, but didn't say anything.

She opened the door. "I'll talk to you tomorrow."

He stopped halfway to his truck and looked back at her, as if he was about to say something but thought better of it. He waved and got into his truck.

Chapter Three

Cynthia spent that evening in a blur of reflection and arousal. Memories of Tom and their life mixed with visions of Caleb and the things she wanted to do with him. Her bath turned into another bout of masturbation, and she marveled at how quickly she reached orgasm. Tired, she thought she'd fall asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow, but it didn't come for the longest time. Finally, she drifted into a troubled slumber where she found herself immersed in a land of dungeons and flesh. She felt herself tossing and turning, and the frustrated lust that wouldn't leave her alone kept her from the deep sleep she craved.

Just as dawn's first light poked its way into her room, she drifted into a deep, dreamless sleep. When she woke, the sun was streaming into the room through windows where the curtains billowed in the breeze.

She stretched and yawned, arching her back until she felt a touch of ache. She turned onto her side and checked her alarm. It was nearly eleven. A smile spread across her face. Caleb would be wondering.

She lazed in bed for a few more minutes, enjoying the feel of the sheets on her naked skin and the fresh smell of trees and garden. It wasn't often she got to sleep in. She couldn't remember sleeping in this late.

It was eagerness to make the call that finally dragged her out of bed and towards the bathroom. A hot shower, finished with a quick spray of cold water, completed the waking process. Dressed in a pair of green cotton shorts and a white T-shirt, and with a towel wrapped around her hair, she wandered into the living room. She opened the drapes and headed for the kitchen. Before she did anything else, she made coffee. With the machine bubbling away, she picked up the phone and dialed Caleb's number.

After only one ring, his soft voice answered, "Hello."

"Hello, Caleb," she said. "This is Cynthia Lyon."

"Oh, hello. I've been waiting for your call." His voice had risen to an excited pitch. "The finished drawings are ready whenever you'd like to see them."

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"Wonderful. And the schedule?"

"I've got that just about done. I said three weeks and I'll stand by that." There was a pause before he added, "Of course, I've never had quite as much of an incentive before."

"I'll expect you this evening, say around seven." She kept her voice even, although she was trembling with excitement.

"I'll be there."

"Do you wear shorts, or cut-offs?" The question had popped into her head out of the blue, but as soon as she'd said it, she smiled. He'd look good in shorts.

"Uh, yeah, I wear cut-offs when I'm working if it's hot."

"Good, wear a pair this evening."

"Yes, ma'am." His voice had dropped to a whisper. She was sure that he sensed what was happening.

"I'll see you then," she said, and hung up the receiver.

The afternoon dragged by. She spent a few hours working in the garden, transplanting and weeding. Every so often she stopped to stretch her back, and think of the evening ahead. She got most of the bulbs cleaned up, but the larger shrubs would need more work later on in the season. The Hydrangeas needed pruning badly, but that too would have to wait.

Around five, she stopped to put her tools and gloves away. She was famished. The yard looked a hundred percent better than it had in months. A sense of satisfaction made even the broken fingernails and sore knees seem trivial.

She took a quick shower and put on a soft, lavender slip dress she hadn't worn for a couple of years. Feeling refreshed, she had a dinner of cold ham and sliced veggies while sitting out on the deck. A cold beer finished off her meal beautifully. She'd almost finished the dishes when there was a knock at the front door. Looking at the clock over the stove, she knew it was Caleb—right on time.

She made him wait for a few moments while she finished wiping down the countertops. Drying her hands, she went to the door and pulled it open.

As she'd requested, he'd worn a pair of loose cut-offs, and a white sleeveless tank that showed off his lean, musculature beautifully. Instead of his work boots, he had on sandals. He had very little body hair, at least none showed at the top of his shirt, and that on his legs was sparse and

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light colored. In one hand, he held a folder, the design drawings and the schedule, she assumed.

"Come in," Cynthia said and stood aside, allowing him just enough room to brush past her. He smelled of soap and man, and she inhaled deeply as he went by. His shoulder nudged her breast when he bent down and removed his shoes. Her nipples puckered, as if eager for attention.

Pushing his sandals to the side, he straightened up. "Here's the drawings and the schedule." He held out the folder.

She left him holding it while she looked him up and down. When he blushed, she reached out and took the proffered offering. Without looking into it, she closed the door and headed for the dining room. She tossed the folder on the table, and went for coffee, asking, "Coffee, would you like to join me?"

Caleb hurried after her. Nodding, he said, "Yes, please."

Pouring two cups, she brought them to the table and sat at her usual chair, looking out of the large glass doors. He moved to take a seat beside her, and sat facing her, his legs not pushed under the table but extended towards her.

"Okay, let me have a look at these drawings first." Opening the manila folder, she flipped through the papers and picked out three sheets with drawings on them. She spread them out and peered at them. They were good. He'd provided her with three views, each giving her a different angle as well as the measurements. She loved the number of windows he'd managed to fit in, and he'd even added some color that lent to the outdoors feel to the room. The sliding glass door she already had would be re-used in the new room.

"It looks wonderful," she said. She set them to the side in a small pile. "This is the schedule?" She indicated the remaining papers.

"Yes," he replied. "Three weeks, laid out so it's easy to read. I hope it's what you wanted."

She pulled the large sheet of graph paper closer and unfolded it. He'd laid it out so she could see what he should be doing by the day and the cost at each step. Scooting her chair forward, she went over the day-to-day stuff, and smiled when she noted how detailed the spreadsheet was. He even had it down to when the light switch covers should be put on.

"Looks very good, very detailed," she said looking up at him. "Have you thought about the contract?"

"Yes," he shifted uncomfortably in his chair, and she glanced down. The crotch of his cut-offs was stretched tight across an impressive bulge. "I'm sure I can keep to my schedule, so I don't have a problem with signing."

"Good." Cynthia reached into a folder she'd left on the table and pulled out both copies of the contract. Handing them to Caleb, she watched him read it again. She'd made it simple, straightforward and to the point, no frills, and no escape clause.

He sat back and took a deep breath. "You have a pen I can use?"

She pulled out the pen she'd tucked into her folder. Handing it to him, at first she didn't let go. He tugged, but when she didn't release it, he looked up at her with his wide hazel eyes. She winked and let the pen go. He blinked and for an instant looked confused, but then lowered his eyes. He shivered.

"The start date will be Monday, the fifth. That means you have to have it completed on the twenty-sixth."

He nodded, and filled in the dates. She watched him scan the paper again, and then he signed the first copy. It took only a few moments for him to fill in and sign both copies. She took the pen from him, lightly brushing his fingers with her own then signed just under his signature, and dated it. She handed him one copy, which he tucked in alongside the other papers he'd brought, and slid the other into her folder.

"Monday it is. I'll have copies of the schedule made up today and the design." He picked up his coffee, and his hand trembled.

Excitement or was it something else? She wondered. "You said you'd need to get permits, will those take long?" She turned her chair towards him. Her legs nearly touched his. Seductively, she crossed one over the other, and slid her toe down his shin.

"Uh, no, I'll have them early Tuesday morning," he stammered. His face flushed.

She watched him struggle, not to look at her legs, but his eyes kept drifting downward. "Good, you'll be able to get started right away then. I'll expect to have a copy of the schedule in my hands before you do anything. Not that I think you'd change anything." She let the sentence hang in the air between them.

"You'll have a copy before I do anything." He shifted in his chair, his knees easing apart as he leaned forward to reassure her. He took a deep breath, and for a moment, she wasn't sure what he was going to do. He just sat looking at her, with an odd, confused look on his face. He

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finally blurted, "You never did say what kind of punishment you had in mind. Can I ask now, what you plan on doing?"

Cynthia smiled; she couldn't help it. "You may ask." She took a sip of coffee to keep from laughing at his expression. Shock wasn't quite it, but it came close.

He looked dumbstruck, confused, then swallowed nervously before saying, "What kind of punishment do you have planned for me if I don't keep to the schedule?"

She looked him over, tanned, muscular, an impressive erection straining at the front of his cut-offs. He shifted again, one hand going to his crotch, to cover his obvious excitement. The silence dragged on. She let it. She enjoyed another sip of coffee, and the sight of him squirming. Finally, she relented and answered, "The punishment will be whatever I decide. That's what it says in the contract and that's all you need to know."

"But—"

"You can leave now." Her words cut him off. She smiled sweetly at him. When she rose and headed for the front door, she gave him no choice but to do as she'd told him.

He followed her. He'd obviously never had a customer like her, and wasn't sure how to react. She waited while he slipped into his sandals, admired the play of muscles along his back as he buckled them. When he was done, he started to rise, but she put her hand on his shoulder and kept him down. Just for a moment, but he obeyed. She removed her hand and smiled when, for an instant, he stayed put before he got to his feet. He looked down at her, a little defiant, a little confused, and more than a little turned on.

She moved passed him and opened the door. "I'll see you first thing Monday morning then. I leave for work around eight, so make it seven-thirty."

He walked passed her, folder in hand, saying, "I'll be here. Thanks." He turned and looked at her, shivered, then was on his way.

Ginger bounded in and rubbed around her legs. She reached down for the cat. With him firmly in her arms, she waved at Caleb as he pulled out of her driveway.

The rest of the weekend raced by. She slept well, ate well, and felt like she was finally coming alive again. Sunday evening, she went into the spare room—that room. For the first time since Tom's death, she didn't feel the tears. She looked around, admired the clean lines of the

leather furniture, the swing, and the single easy chair. The two whitewashed walls adorned with all manner of toys and punishment devises she'd ever need. A large picture window opened up onto the side garden, but for the past few months had been kept closed and curtained. Along the remaining wall, waiting patiently stood the large wooden cross, with its cuffs and eyebolts. Beside the cross was the X-Frame, a large framework that would hold a full-grown man spread-eagle and upright. Eyebolts and hooks were screwed in every few inches along both sides and the top beam. Slowing walking around the room, she noticed the dust and cringed. "That'll never do," she said, and went for a dust rag.

Ginger wandered in behind her, and managed to get in the way as she went from one item to the next, lovingly cleaning the light film of dust from each. An hour later, she was done. The room was spotless, and she felt as if she'd crossed some invisible barrier.

Tom was really gone. The memories she had of him in that room would always touch her, but the memory of his presence didn't hurt any more.

Cynthia slept well that night, and was up bright and early on Monday morning. With a breakfast of cereal and fruit under her belt, she was just sitting down to her morning coffee when she heard the rumble of a truck. Checking the time, she smiled—seven-twenty-five on the dot. A couple of minutes later, a knock sounded on the front door.

"Good morning, Caleb," she said, noticing he'd worn cut-offs and a bright blue tank top. At least he could follow directions.

"Here's a copy of the schedule." He handed her a rolled sheet of paper.

"Thanks," she said and unrolled the sheet. She glanced at the numbers and list of tasks to be completed. They looked the same as she remembered. Rolling the paper up again, she asked, "Have you had coffee?"

"No, ma'am, but I think I'd like a rain check, if that's okay. I'd really like to get those permits. If I'm lucky, I can get them in and signed today. Then I'll head right to the lumberyard so I can get the materials I need to start."

"A rain check's fine," she said. A thought occurred to her, and she asked, "Hey, are you going to need to get into the house for anything?"

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"I'll need to get in later, yes. I may want to get in to shut off the power when I start cutting into the wall. I'll have an electrician in here later to hook your existing electrical wiring to the new addition."

"Okay, wait right here for a sec." She got her purse from the hall closet and dug into the side pocket for her spare key. "Here, this opens the back door. Feel free to use the bathroom if you need to."

Caleb took the key from her and slid it onto his key ring. "Thank you."

"Okay, I'll see you later today then."

"Yes, ma'am," he replied and quickly headed for his truck.

She smiled and closed the door.

* * * *

Her morning dragged. Business was good, great in fact, but she'd organized things so well that for most of the day she did little but answer the phone and discuss new orders. Finally, at just after one, she called in Sammy.

"You called," he smiled cheerfully around the partially opened door. The man was dressed outrageously. He wore a bright pink shirt over silky black slacks. His shoes were white loafers with gold chains strung across the tops, and looked as if he'd raided some pimp's closet. Her customers loved him, though, and he was a dream to work with.

"Yeah, I called," she laughed. "Get your butt in here."

"Oh, I love it when you're so forceful," he beamed, and then he too laughed. They had a special relationship. Each had helped the other through some tough times and their banter would have made the political correction police cringe. Sammy pulled up the chair in front of her desk and asked, "What's up, Cyn?"

"Nothing, Sammy, I just wanted to let you know I hired someone to do that work on my house that we were talking about last week."

"Oh, perfect," he clapped his hands together. "Did you use the one's I told you about?"

"Fraid not, hun," she said, "I called them and got nothing but rude. They said they couldn't start right away and to be honest, I got the impression that they didn't need the work, or want it."

"Oh, really? Well, their loss for sure. So, did you phone that other one—the three generation place?"

"Yeah, and that's who I got. And, you should see the guy who came to do the dickering." For emphasis, she licked her fingertip, turned her

butt, and made a hissing sound as if she'd burned her finger touching it. "Hot, hot, hot!"

He laughed. "Any chance he likes boys?"

"Nah, sorry, Sam, this one's mine." As she said it, she realized that she meant it. She wanted this man. "What I really called you in here about is, it's going to take three weeks to get the work done, the business is going great, and I'm doing a lot of sitting here doing nothing. So, I'm going to keep coming in for the mornings, and unless there's an emergency, I'll be leaving at noon."

"Works for me. If something comes up I can't handle, I'll just phone." He looked at her, and something of her excitement must have showed. In a more serious tone, he said, "It's about time you started to live again. This guy must be something special."

She felt a rush of excitement that she quickly tried to squash. "He's nice. I don't know, Sammy. He's just nice."

"Hey, nice is good." He reached across her desk and held out his hand. She took it and he squeezed hers. "Now take off. I can take care of the office. If anything happens and I need you, I'll call, or it can wait until tomorrow."

"Thanks, Sammy, you're a dream."

"Yeah, yeah, I know, I just wish some of those boys at the club would realize it." He puckered his lips and blew her a kiss as he got up and scampered, prettily, out of her office.

Chapter Four

With permits in hand, the construction could go at full tilt. Each morning, Cynthia got up and, after a quick breakfast and coffee, went to the office. Twice, she saw Caleb arrive and begin his days work. Once he relented and had a cup of coffee with her.

He wore cut-offs everyday and later, when she got home, she watched and grew to love seeing his long, muscular legs straining under him as he carried two-by-sixes or sheets of plywood. The play of muscles along his back when he hammered in nails, or pushed lumber around, had her breathing heavy.

The forms went in for the foundation, then the cement was poured. He sweated, but kept right on working, shoveling, smoothing it out with a rake at first then the proper leveling tools. As the sun rose high overhead and the heat increased, he'd stop for a moment and peel off his tank. That's when Cynthia lost any hope of concentrating on the paperwork she'd brought home from the office. Just watching the rippling muscles in his stomach, and the beautifully tanned chest flex when he moved, was more than enough to get her juices flowing.

On Thursday morning, she knew he'd planned to take off the forms, but the cement hadn't dried enough. His weekly schedule fell behind.

He did manage to get some work done, but by the end of the day, she could see he was frustrated. The weather was warm and humid, and should have been perfect for drying cement, but the cement mix had been too wet and would take one more day to cure enough to remove the forms. Just before quitting time, she saw him looking helplessly down at the slowly drying foundation.

"Hey, Caleb," she shouted from the kitchen window. He looked up and she continued, "Would you like a beer?"

At first, she thought he was going to refuse, but then he yelled back, "Yeah, I'd love one." He slid his hammer into the loop on his carpenter's belt, and stuck his gloves in his back pocket. Ambling over to where

she'd moved the patio furniture under the trees, he stood waiting for her to come out.

She grabbed her sunglasses and two ice-cold bottles out of the fridge. Opening them, she pushed open the door with her shoulder. One she held out to him, the other she sipped. "How's it coming along?"

"Okay, but I'd planned to take the forms off today. That's not going to happen. Cement's still too wet. If I take them off now, it's liable to crack, maybe even collapse."

"According to your schedule, you're supposed to have them off today so you can do the moisture barrier and backfill tomorrow."

"Yeah, I know." He looked at his bottle.

"Come on, let's sit down. Might as well be out of the sun while we talk." She took her usual seat and he sat across from her.

He shuffled his boot-clad feet, and settled back, trying to look at ease. It didn't work, she noticed him fidgeting. He picked at the label on the bottle, and she stared at the threads that had come loose at the hem of his cut-offs.

"You're worried about keeping to your schedule, aren't you?" She crossed her legs, letting him get a good look at how long and lean they were below the cotton shorts she had on. The halter-top left her mid-section bare and she knew he'd already checked out her breasts when she'd walked out with the beer. Dark glasses made watching him a breeze, and she caught more honest physical responses as well.

He lowered his head, and she barely caught his reply, "Yeah, but I'll hopefully make it up."

"Drink your beer," she instructed, and he raised the bottle to his lips. He took a healthy drink before lowering it, while she took a small sip. "I guess the weather hasn't cooperated with you, huh?"

"It's not the weather, it's the mix. It happens, but I never even thought about that when I made up the schedule, or ordered the cement." He sounded a little distant, as if he was thinking of something else.

"Have you given any thought to what kind of punishment I might have in mind?"

His mouth dropped open, and she realized that's what he'd been thinking of.

She took a quick sip of beer to keep from laughing.

"Uh, well, yeah," he stammered. He blushed furiously. "But, uh..."

She couldn't stop from chuckling then. "Are you worried that I might do something you're uncomfortable with?"

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"Yes...I'm not sure," he said. He lowered his free hand, trying to hide the erection that threatened to burst through his cut-offs.

"But, the thought excites you."

"Yes—no. Maybe—I don't know," he whispered.

"Drink your beer," she said and watched his hand tremble when he raised his bottle. He spilled a little, cringed when the cold liquid hit his chest and trickled down over his belly. He didn't stop until he'd emptied the bottle. Licking his lips, he leaned down and put the bottle on the ground.

"Thanks," he said. He sat back, one hand still crossed over his crotch, the other going to his chest to wipe off the beer.

"You're welcome," she said, and took a sip of her own beer. "Do you honestly think you'll be able to keep to your schedule this week?"

"No," He squirmed, and she smiled. "If the cement had dried, I'd have been fine, but now...well, I can only do so much in a day."

"True." She didn't give an inch. Checking her watch, she said, "It's quitting time. I guess I'll see you tomorrow."

Dismissed, he got to his feet and, with a worried look, went to get his shirt. He was gone before she had time to finish her beer, but not before she felt a rush of excitement between her thighs. She rubbed her legs together and shivered. She wished he'd come back and find her, but was just as glad he didn't. Tomorrow would be soon enough. The anticipation was going to drive her crazy, though.

Lying back in the shade, she contemplated the coming day and what Caleb must be thinking. When she'd finished her beer, she got up and walked around the foundation. As far as she could tell, he'd done a good job. She smiled and wondered if that was going to be the way of it for the next couple of weeks—work, then watching Caleb struggle to keep to his schedule, while she hoped he couldn't.

* * * *

Friday morning came and even Sammy seemed to sense that something was about to happen. He walked around with a bedazzled expression. Cynthia was short with him, sending him off on errands that kept him busy until after she'd left, but her frustration had gotten the better of her. Finally, she was sure to Sammy's great relief, it was time for her to leave.

"Have a great weekend, Sammy," she said as she slid one more folder into her bag. Zipping it up, she stepped around her desk and when she stood directly in front of him, she leaned down, "I've been a bitch

today, and I'm sorry. I'll be better next week, I promise." She kissed him on the forehead.

"Cynthia!" he squealed, then laughed. "Get out of here. I'll see you next week."

Laughing, she left the building.

On the drive home, she had time to relax. The tensions of the morning faded a little more with each passing mile. Excitement built, a new and different kind of tension began in the pit of her stomach and grew slowly. By the time she pulled into her driveway and parked behind Caleb's truck, the crotch of her panties was sopping. Her pussy itched.

She sat for a few minutes, thinking of Tom, wishing he was alive. Her thoughts shifted, naturally, easily, to Caleb. Tom would have liked him; she was sure. Both of them loved to work with their hands. Plus, they both made her so hot she had trouble concentrating. He would have loved that. She smiled, and pushed open the car door.

The thudding sound of hammering came from the backyard, but instead of going directly there, she went inside through the front door. The house was cool and slightly dark after the sun's blasting heat. She'd left the curtains closed and that helped.

She dropped her bag in the closet and closed the door. Slipping out of her heels, she went to her bedroom to change into something more comfortable—something sexy. Instead of shorts, she decided on a slinky little cotton halter dress that barely covered her butt when she walked. She looked in her top drawer, to bra or not to bra, and decided not. Sifting through the rows of panties, she pulled out a lacy, white thong and smiled wickedly as she pulled it up her legs. The soft, cotton back-strap nestled comfortably between her buttocks, the front barely concealed her sparsely furred bush. With the flower-print dress snugly tied behind her neck, she was ready to pounce.

Barefoot, she went into the kitchen, made herself a bite of lunch, and got a pop out of the fridge. Tuna salad sandwich and soda in hand, she meandered out her front door and around to the back. It was easier than picking her way over the debris, also easier to watch Caleb unobserved.

He was so worth watching. When she came around the side of the house his back was to her. He'd already taken off his shirt and sweat made his skin gleam as if he was on fire. He'd finished breaking the forms free of the cement and was hauling the pre-built plywood out of

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the trench he'd dug around the foundation. Muscles played along his back and thighs as he strained.

She carefully made her way to her lawn chair under the trees and sat down. With her soda on the table beside her, she ate and watched Caleb. He'd released most of the forms by the time she'd finished her sandwich and had a pile of them stacked, ready to be returned to the warehouse. A breeze picked up while she drank her soda. Her skirt lifted, fluttered for a moment then landed softly against her thigh.

"Cynthia!" Caleb had spotted her, finally. He stood gaping at her, then a smile lit up his face. "I didn't hear you. How long have you been watching me?"

"Not long," she replied, then added, "You're well worth watching, though. I'm enjoying the show." Just then, a gust of wind slid up her legs and lifted her skirt. She reached out with her free hand, about to push her skirt down, but a look at his face changed her mind. His mouth dropped open and his eyes widened.

She let the wind have its freedom for a moment longer, before very slowly, sliding her hand down over her thigh and returning her skirt to its proper place. "I see you enjoy watching as well. Am I right?"

He raised his gaze to hers, and stammered, "I'm sorry. I apologize. I'll get back to work." He turned and reached down for the next form.

"You didn't answer my question."

He looked back at her, his face coloring, "Question?"

"Yes, I asked if you liked watching."

He gulped and cleared his throat before answering, "Yes, I mean, no." He looked up at her. "Damn, you know how to get a guy going, don't you?"

She laughed, but didn't answer. "Have you eaten?"

"Yeah, I had a quick bite earlier. I want to get this done on time."

"I see. Mind if I watch?" The double meaning wasn't lost on him.

He smiled, and replied, "No, I don't mind at all." He returned to work, and she watched him sweat and strain, lifting the heavy framework out of the trench and carrying them all to his truck. He was gone for about an hour, returning them to the company's warehouse. When he came back, he'd brought a roll of waterproof membrane with him and began cutting and stretching it around the footings.

Cynthia watched for a while, but had work to do before dinner, so she went into the house. She set up her laptop on the dining room table and forced herself to get to work. Occasionally, she glanced out at him

working, and smiled, lost in thought for a few moments. Then she'd blink, and return to the numbers and order forms.

The next time she looked up it was to the sound of someone knocking at the front door. She glanced at the clock over the stove and was surprised to see it was time for Caleb to quit. A quick look at the foundation outside told her he'd been unable to keep to his schedule. She fought the desire to smile, but inside she was beaming.

She opened the door to find him standing there with a sheepish grin on his face and his tank top being strangled between his hands. "Let's go have a look at what you've completed," she said in a matter-of-fact voice. His quick, quiet nod made her smile. She slipped into a pair of sandals, and walked past him. She felt his eyes on her back as he followed her around the house.

"I didn't quite get it done, but I was close," he said when they got to the far side of the foundation.

She saw that he had managed to get two sides done completely but there on the third side, the trench was only filled in about halfway. Walking all the way around, she was impressed with what he had managed to do, but was even happier that he'd failed.

"Yes, you were close," she said when she stood in front of him again. Heat radiated towards her and she wanted nothing more than to take another step and feel his arms slide around her. That wasn't going to happen, not yet. Folding her arms across her chest, she made sure he noticed her cleavage before she added, "I'd like you here at nine in the morning for your punishment."

"You're serious about this punishment, aren't you?" he asked. She noticed his hands had dropped to his crotch, where he held his shirt stretched between them.

"Yes, I'm very serious." She looked him straight in the eyes. "That's why it's in your contract."

"Is there any way I can get you to tell me what you have planned? I mean, well, it's just not the normal thing, is it?"

"I think we've pretty much covered all this before. No, it's not common. I told you why I had this clause in the contract and you agree to it. And, no, I'm not prepared to discuss what punishment I plan on using."

He lowered his head and his shoulders slumped a little. He stood there for a few moments and she let him think about it. When he didn't say anything, she added, "Look, it's in your contract, you questioned it

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before signing it, but you did sign it. You're an adult, in full possession of your faculties, and it's a legally binding contract. If you renege on this, I could take you to court, and you know I'd win. Your choice."

He was quiet for a minute, but then he said, "I'll be here." His voice sounded harsh, rough.

"You'll want to wear loose slacks or jogging pants, and a T-shirt."

"Okay." He shifted from one foot to the other. "Well, I'd better go then." He didn't move to leave.

"Yes, you'd best go. I'll see you in the morning."

He turned and almost fled the yard. She heard his truck door open then slam shut, and the motor roar to life. He revved it a couple of times before pulling out.

Cynthia hugged herself and wondered if she was really ready to go through with her plan. She shivered. Visions of Caleb, his body stretching and sweating, reassured her that she was. The wetness between her thighs reaffirmed it, and the wild beating of her heart told her that she was more than ready. She needed to break out of her self-imposed period of mourning.

Chapter Five

Coffee in hand, she went to answer the door. It was nine, and she'd heard his truck pull in just a moment earlier. She opened the door wide, offering him a good look at her in her leathers. She'd chosen a simple black corset over the shortest skirt she had. The stilettos added half a foot to her height, and laced up to her knee.

He stood there in his loose, black jogging pants and a dark green T-shirt that hung from his shoulders. He blinked and looked from her eyes to the soft swell of her breasts, then back again.

"Good morning, Caleb," she said easily. "I see you like my outfit."

He looked at her and blinked. When he replied his voice was barely more than a squeak. "Yes, I like your outfit very much."

"Come in," she stepped aside and let him enter. This time she stroked him, from his shoulder down his back to where the outward slope of his bottom began. He shuddered under her hand, but didn't say anything. He bent to remove his sandals and her hand strayed to his behind. He gasped, but didn't try to pull away. Shoes set to the side; he straightened up, his hands easing towards his crotch.

"Hands at your sides," she said sharply.

He let his hands fall to his sides. The front of his pants tented.

"Today, you'll call me, Lady Cyn. The room we're about to visit was specially designed and built by my late husband, under my direction. If at any time you want to quit, say so and I'll stop immediately. However, if you do decide to stop me, be aware that it won't stop the punishment entirely. You didn't live up to your end of the bargain; you'll only delay your punishment." She walked around him, inspecting him, getting the feel of his nervousness and the excitement she smelled on him. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said instantly.

She was behind him, and immediately slapped his bottom. "What were you to call me?"

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He yelped and took a staggering step forward. He swung his head around, gaped at her, then replied, "Yes, Lady Cyn."

"Better." She continued her inspection and finally stood in front of him again. She looked him in the eyes, and said, "Strip."

It took a moment for the word to register. She watched him and knew exactly when it did. His shirt came off an instant later and he was about to toss it on his shoes when she stopped him with a single, "Tut." He looked at her, and she said, "Fold it and place it on the chair." She nodded at the chair to his right.

He silently folded the shirt and laid it across the back. The jogging pants were next. He slipped his fingers into the waistband, and after taking a deep breath, eased them down, both the joggers and underpants. His erection caught, held the front from moving down, but only for a moment. He pushed. His prick bent, then sprang upward. Stepping free of them, he folded his pants first, followed by his pale blue jockeys and laid them both on top of his shirt.

He was hers and was just beginning to realize it. When he stood straight again, his hands first went to cover himself then eased to his sides.

Cyn's heart pounded against her ribs. She slid a finger over his chest, tweaked a nipple until it puckered hard and eager for her touch. She walked around him, touched him, and stroked his arm and shoulders. Dropping her hand, she explored the curve of his lower back and the way his ass tightened when she strayed a little lower. He tensed when she slid her hand down the crease of his bottom, and trembled when she ran a fingernail up the back of his thigh from the back of his knee to just below his ass.

But, he didn't pull away, or object.

Standing in front of him again, she watched his eyes and slid her hand across his chest. She caressed the well-muscled pecs and pinched each nipple until he gasped. Still, he didn't move or resist. The washboard muscles of his belly rippled when she slid her hand down, moving ever closer to his cock. She toyed with his belly button for a moment, and loved the way he squirmed. His erection bobbed upwards, as if reaching for her hand. She ignored it, and instead slid her fingers through the sparse nest of hair at its base.

"Spread your feet, about shoulder width," she said. Her voice had deepened, her hands trembled. If he noticed, he knew better than to say

anything. When she reached down and cupped his balls, he groaned. "Don't move," she whispered.

"Yes, Lady Cyn," he croaked.

They were warm and hung well below his body. She tightened her grip slightly and pulled down. She watched his face, gauging when the pressure became pain. When he squinted, she relented and eased off, finally releasing the nearly hairless sack.

"Whenever you enter my special room, you'll be bound in some way. Today, I've chosen to bind your hands. That may change once we're in the room and it will probably be different each time you're here." As she spoke, she went to the nearest coffee table and picked up the handcuffs she'd placed there earlier. Two, one-inch wide straps of heavy leather, two links of chain dangled from each, and a padlock joining them. "Hands behind your back, please."

"Please, may I ask something first?" He was trembling, and she knew he'd be skittish and would need reassuring.

"Of course you can. Anything."

"I've never done anything like this before. What if I need to stop you? What if I just can't take it?"

"Then you ask to speak," she said softly. "I do plan on punishing you, that's why you're here. But, I also realize it's all new to you, so we'll take it slow and I'll explain as we go." She tapped his erection then, and smiled, "But, by the looks of this, you're enjoying the treatment so far. Am I right?"

He looked down at himself and her hand. "Yes, I'm enjoying this. I've never felt like this before. But..."

"We'll take it slowly. I promise. The punishment will hurt, but if it's too much, say so." With that, she repeated, "Put your hands behind your back."

Caleb looked into her eyes and must have seen something there that made him trust her, because the next instant, his hands were crossed behind his back. She carefully buckled the cuffs around each wrist, making sure they were tight enough so he couldn't escape, but not so tight as to restrict blood flow. Just the act of cuffing him excited her. She was in control and he could do nothing to stop her. He'd given her that.

Standing behind him, she reached around, caressed his lower belly, and pulled herself against his back. The leather corset dragged across his flesh. She pushed her hips forward, her leather-clad pubes brushing his thigh. She shuddered, and closed her eyes. A tiny explosion of pleasure

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took her breath. Her grip moved to his hips and she ground her body against him.

He had to have sensed her pleasure, but he remained as he was—a pillar of masculine granite. When she regained her composure and walked around to stand in front of him again, she wasn't surprised to see his smile.

"Come with me." She took hold of his beautiful erection. The girth filled her hand and more, the flesh was hot, the blood pulsed against her fingers as she drew him ahead. At the door, she looked back over her shoulder. "Once through here, you're to be silent, unless you're asked a question or you have to stop what's happening. Do you understand?"

He shuddered, but his reply came immediately, "Yes, Lady Cyn."

"Good." She opened the door and entered, he followed a step behind.

He gasped when he saw what was inside the room. He stopped, too, but only for a moment, until her grasp pulled a little too hard on his prick. With a lurch, he stumbled after her.

Cyn loved his reaction and eased her grip to give him time to appreciate the contents of the well-lit room. The wall to the left with all manner of toys: whips, paddles and straps, and more—a closet he'd see later, if he stuck around. The cross and wooden framework dominated one wall. In front of the picture window was a bench she planned to use for breaking him in. Her chair was in another corner, soft and well worn, but still as comfortable as the day she'd found it.

"Come," she urged and pulled him forward. He followed, awe-struck but eager by his expression. She stopped in front of the bench. At that moment, it was at waist height, and that's where she wanted it. Along each of the four, wooden legs were a dozen eyebolts. The top was padded and covered in black leather.

She stood him in front of the bench and released her grip. He dared to look at her, but couldn't keep eye contact for more than a moment or two. Lowering his eyes, he stood trembling, waiting for her command.

From a pocket at her waist, she removed the key to the lock holding his cuffs together. Once she had them unlocked, she said, "Bend over the bench. Reach your hands as far down the legs as you can."

Caleb took a deep, shuddering breath, and then stepped up to the bench. He bent over it, his belly pressing into the leather padding as he reached down its legs. She moved to the other side and bent to secure his cuffs as far down the legs as possible. The first one was easy, but when

she moved to the other, he pulled away. She stroked his arm, reassuring him until he loosened up and allowed her to clip the cuff in place.

Once she had him secured, she slid her hand up his arm again, feeling the muscles tighten, then relax. His heat surprised her. His excitement was like an aphrodisiac. She felt his breath on her cheek and turned her head to see him looking at her.

Getting to her feet, she strode to the nearby cupboard and opened it. Inside, she found the cuffs and small harnesses, sex toys, and the tools she used to tease. She found the cuffs she wanted, a match to those she'd used for his wrists.

"Be calm now," she whispered, approaching him from the rear. When she stood close enough, she caressed his back and stroked the muscles along his spine. He wriggled when her hand came to his ass, but she persisted and was soon caressing the large muscular glutes. "Close your eyes and just feel my hands on you. I won't do anything without telling you."

"Yes, Lady Cyn," came his soft reply.

She stroked down the back of his thighs, easing them apart with a gentle tap of her finger. His soft groan made her shiver.

"I'm going to put cuffs on your ankles. They're exactly the same as the ones on your wrists." She squatted down beside him and slid a cuff around his ankle. Buckling it snugly, she pulled it to the side, urging him to spread his legs a little more. "There's an eye bolt on the leg of the bench. I'm going to fasten the cuff to it." There was a snick and his leg was held fast. She moved to his other side and repeated the procedure.

She stroked him continually, not only to sooth him, it excited her to do so. The back of his thighs trembled under her fingers. She slid her hand all the way down to the back of his knee, switched to the other leg, and then worked her way up. She smiled when she saw him clench his buttocks, but continued her caress.

Rising, she stood behind him and to the side. Her hand rested at the base of his spine, just above the crack of his ass. His back was damp with sweat. "How many hours do you think it'll take you to finish the job so you're on schedule again?"

He took a few moments to respond, and when he did, it was in a soft, trembling voice. "Three. I'm sure I could get back on schedule in three hours."

"Excellent. So, for punishment, the number three will be involved, plus seven, because your schedule was for a week." Absentmindedly, or

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so it would seem to him, she caressed him. In fact, she loved the feel of him, the firm, taut flesh of his ass, the smooth expanse of his back. On a down-stroke, she allowed her fingers to slip between his cheeks. His deep groan made her heart beat faster. "Ten strokes. That seems right."

She didn't immediately go for a paddle or strap, but continued toying with him. For his part, he seemed more than willing to let things go at whatever pace she decided. When she slipped her hand between his legs and cradled his balls, he eased his legs open a little more. She gently pulled and twisted them around. Then, when he was breathing like a racehorse, she released them and moved her hand to his erection. She didn't grip the shaft. Instead, she ran a finger along the length of him. He pulsed and pushed against her finger. Relentlessly, she toyed with him and teased him, until he was moaning continuously.

"Yes, ten," she murmured, and slid her other hand along his back. She pulled her hands away then, and smiled at his groan of disappointment.

"Please," came his soft whisper.

"Silence," she commanded, but was secretly pleased with his reaction. She walked away from him, leaving him to wonder where she was going, what was going to happen next, and when his punishment would begin. From the wall of paddles and whips, she selected a twenty-one inch long crop with a wide leather patch at the end. When she returned, the clicking of her heels seemed louder than she remembered. The weight and feel of the crop, as she tapped it against her thigh, echoed the beating of her heart. The closer she got, the faster came the tapping. Her breath caught and she felt her temperature rise with excitement.

"Do you want a gag?" she asked softly when she stood behind him again. "Or do think you can keep from yelling? We could have a signal if you needed to have me stop."

"No gag. Please, Lady Cyn," he said hurriedly, as if afraid she'd cut off his only means of communication.

"All right." She slid the crop over his back, letting him feel the leather. A light tap on his right cheek made him jump, but in surprise, not pain. "Ready? I'm going to count to five, and then I'll begin."

"Yes, ready." His voice was steady, but she could see sweat trickling from under his arms.

"One, two, three," She lifted the crop and took a step back, gauging where it would land, then added, "four, five."

His buttocks tensed, quivered. She waited. When his muscles relaxed, she brought the crop down. The soft swish was the only warning he got, but it didn't give him enough time to tighten up. The crop landed with a sharp slap, indenting his flesh. His head shot back, and he yelped. The muscles in his ass clamped tight and he tried to pull his legs together.

She didn't linger, but raised the crop again and let fly. She knew it was the shock that caused him to tense; not the pain. At least it was at first. She alternated from one cheek to the other, timing her strokes for maximum effect. His buttocks jiggled delightfully between each swat. His yelps turned into moans that she was sure weren't just from discomfort.

On the eighth swat, he raised his ass. She, in response, smiled and increased the force of the blow. The ninth swat landed sharply on the under-curve of his left buttock, forcing the taut globe to jump. The tenth sank into his right cheek and mirrored that last blow. Red splotches, the size of the crop's patch, dotted his bottom in a haphazard design. His groan was loud, and sounded of both desire and frustration.

Cyn's excitement had risen with each stroke of the crop. When the punishment was over, she placed the long, slender tool beside him on the bench and noticed her hand was trembling. She laid her hand on his lower back and felt him shudder. Sliding her hand down, she caressed the heat of each red mark, massaging him and easing the burning itch she knew must be driving him crazy.

"That's ten," she said, allowing her hand to stray from cheek to cheek. He tensed the muscles, but only for a few moments. "I'm going to release you and you can get dressed. I'm also going to allow you to catch up today, if you'd like. You'll have a better chance of keeping to your schedule next week."

She bent and worked the buckle on one ankle, releasing his foot. Scooting over, she unfastened the other and pulled the leather strap free.

"Thank you, Lady Cyn," he said. His voice was gruff with excitement. He eased his legs together and thrust his hips forward.

She knew he was rubbing his erection against the bench and was aching to ease that discomfort. But not this time, not yet. No matter how much she wanted to, it wasn't the right time. She straightened up and moved around the bench to his head and arms. When she squatted, she made sure her crotch was right below his face. She wanted to make sure he could smell her—to know how much he'd excited her.

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Unbuckling the cuffs, her hands trembled even more than before. Between the first and second, she slid her hands up his arms, and massaged the taut muscles in his shoulders. She felt herself gush, and couldn't stop a groan. Taking a deep breath to steady herself, she unfastened the last cuff and watched him slowly rise.

He was magnificent. His face was flushed, and he couldn't meet her eyes, but he wasn't embarrassed by his nakedness either. His erection thrust out before him, hard and dripping with the essence of his lust, reaching towards her.

She rose to her feet and stood to the side, clearing a way for him to leave the room. He took it, but not eagerly. After a half-dozen steps, he clenched his fists and she fought the urge to chuckle. The spanking hadn't been severe, but she knew he wanted to rub his bum, but not in front of her.

She followed him, not wanting to give him the chance to sneak that soothing rub. He immediately went to his clothing and picked up his shorts. A moment later, he was easing them over both his sore bottom and his rampant erection. He seemed to breathe easier then, as if just the mere act of covering his privates, and hiding his red-splotched ass, gave his pride a boost. Jogging pants soon covered his lower body, the green T-shirt, the top. He sat down to put on his socks and that's when he looked up at her.

She was still garbed in her leather, and his eyes were drawn to her cleavage. She allowed it for a moment, letting him realize what he was doing, then took a step closer. He raised his eyes to look into hers.

He cleared his throat and smiled. "I'll finish filling in around the foundation. Thank you." His smile broadened. Was he thanking her for the time to complete his work, or for the punishment? Perhaps he wasn't sure himself.

"Fine, I've got work to do, too. Feel free to join me for coffee when you're done." She stepped back, giving him room to rise and leave.

At the door, he stopped and looked back at her, a strange, bewildered look in his eyes. "Coffee, later? You mean that, don't you?"

"Of course," she smiled and let her gaze wander down his body. He was still partially erect. When she looked back into his eyes, she said. "I wouldn't have invited you if I didn't."

"Okay, I'd like that," he opened the door and headed for his truck.

Chapter Six

Cynthia returned to the playroom and let her mind replay what had taken place that morning. He'd not only accepted the punishment and enforced nudity, but had seemed to revel in it. His erection proved it, as did his behavior afterward.

She returned the cuffs to their place in the drawer. There were other sets of cuffs there, both leather and chain, even a pair of pink leatherette ones with fake fur lining. She remembered using those and her smile broadened. Tom had been furious, but she'd led him around the backyard wearing just them and the matching frilly apron. Punishment meant a great many things.

She grabbed a cloth to wipe down the leather bench, but before she got to work, she leaned down and inhaled the scent of Caleb's excitement. The bench was soaked with his sweat—a clean, masculine sweat with a hint of soap. She smiled and wiped it away with a soft towel she kept handy.

Something touched her shin. Startled, she looked down and smiled. Ginger butted her leg again, tail up, back arched, and then he meowed. "Hey mister, you're not supposed to be in here." Reaching down, she lifted the orange ball of fur and rubbed him under the chin. She gave the room a final look, saw nothing out of place, and went into the living room. Ginger purred and squirmed around until he'd managed to put his paws around her neck. He rubbed his nose against her chin.

"Good lord, what are you so happy about?" she chuckled, and made her way to her bedroom. The drapes across the glass door were partially open. She saw Caleb, shirtless and with a look of determination on his handsome face, tossing shovels full of dirt into the trench around the foundation. For an instant, she debated whether she should close the drapes.

Sitting on the bed, she put the cat down beside her and laughed when he rolled over, kicking at her hand. She rubbed his tummy and he rewarded her by stretching out, offering his belly for more attention.

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"I wonder if Caleb likes his tummy rubbed?" she said to the cat.

Ginger perked up and meowed.

"Oh, never mind." She got to her feet and went for her shorts and tank. Seated on the bed, she unlaced her shoes. She'd decided to let the drapes alone. Just thinking of him catching sight of her made her blood race.

She stroked her legs, from her knees up to the hem of her leather skirt. Was he watching? She didn't know for sure, but she hoped so, she performed as if he were. Sliding her fingers under the hem, she touched the soft, damp curls hidden just beneath. There were no panties to deter her, and he'd know that now, if he were looking. Without looking towards the door, she rose from the bed and unfastened the button and zipper at the back of her skirt. It was tight, so skimming out of it took some wriggling and pushing, which she accentuated. When it dropped to the floor, she was naked from just below her hipbones. The stiff, black leather corset contrasted sharply with the pale flesh of her lower belly and the swell of her hips. She folded the skirt and dropped it on the bed. A smile played at the corners of her mouth and she turned away from the door, not wanting him to see her grin.

Was he watching?

She prayed he was.

She ran her hands over her breasts, lifting them, squeezing the leather-cupped mounds. Her head fell back and she ground her hips into the air. She smelled herself, her musk, her excitement, and the leather. Languidly, she trailed her hands down her sides, feeling the ribs beneath the hide. Lower still until her palms met flesh, her hips, and around to the soft swell of her ass. She spread her legs and rolled her hips, enticingly—provocatively.

Reaching up under her arm, she snagged the zipper tab and pulled. The corset sagged, then fell away. She caught it as it dropped towards the floor, and tossed it on the bed with the skirt. Her skin was cold and damp in the sudden freedom. She massaged her breasts, naked and soft, her nipples, taut against her palm. The soft swell filled her palms. Shivering, she spun towards the glass door.

He was there. His mouth hung open. One hand held the shovel; the other was on his crotch. The front of his joggers tented towards her, held by his tight grip. It took him a moment to realize she'd caught him. When he did, he blushed beet-red and turned away. The shovel landed in the

dirt. Bending to pick it up, he glanced her way again, as if to see if she'd really been watching him.

She was. Inside she was panting, aching for him, but on the outside, she remained stern-looking and calm. She placed her hands on her hips, and scowled.

He blinked, looked shocked, and quickly lowered his eyes. He scrambled to work, digging furiously. Caught, he appeared to want to get the job done, and get out of there as fast as he could.

Stifling a chuckle, Cynthia sat on the bed and dressed—white cotton panties, blue short-shorts, and a yellow T-shirt, all within full view of the harried man. Barefoot, she padded into the living room and across to the kitchen. A cup from the cupboard, quickly filled with brew, then she walked out into the sunshine through the dining room's sliding glass door. Stopping just outside, she watched him shovel. He didn't even slowed down, just kept on digging as sweat poured off him.

"You'll have this done in no time at that rate," she suggested, looking at the growing dent in the pile of dirt he was working on.

"Yeah, soon," he muttered, but continued to dig.

"I'll see you inside later," she said and headed back inside. Just before she entered, she turned and asked, "Did you enjoy the show?"

His head shot up and he gaped at her. Eyes wide, he looked most comical. When he tried to answer, nothing came out at first. His face turned that lovely shade of beet-red again. "I—I..." He closed his mouth, realizing he'd been caught, and she'd planned it all.

She had to struggle to keep from smiling until she faced the door. Inside, she got out her laptop and set it up on the dining room table. The business was doing extremely well. Coordinating the produce supplies, customer needs, and her staff was turning into a full time job. Add public relations to the mix, and she only seemed to make it into the kitchen on the weekends when it was her turn to do some of the bulk preparation. Sammy did his job well, and working part time was exactly what he'd wanted. Yes, things were going along famously.

For the next few hours, Cynthia worked on her spreadsheets, crunched numbers, and phoned at least twenty of her regular markets, confirming deliveries at prices agreed upon weeks ago. She turned her attention to the more exotic suppliers: wild boar, emu, and fallow deer, checking the numbers. The list seemed endless. By the time she looked up from her screen, it was past noon and she was famished.

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She hit save. Sitting back, she stretched her arms over her head and groaned. Her back creaked. For an instant, she felt lightheaded, but it was just from sitting and working too long. She looked into the backyard, expecting to see Caleb.

He'd finished the backfilling. The yard was empty. She looked around, a little surprised that he'd gone without at least saying goodbye.

The rest of the day was unexciting: more work, dinner, with Ginger pawing at her arm as she ate. She watched a movie—an old Bette Davis tearjerker—then made an early night of it. Settled in bed, she pulled the cat in close and thought of Caleb stretched out across the bench.

Surprisingly, sleep came easily. She dreamed of his well-striped ass and how his muscles played along his spine as she caned him. He writhed and thrust his hips against the bench. She squirmed in her sleep, driving herself mad with frustration. Finally, her hands found her sex and within a wild heartbeat, a tiny explosion of pleasure let her rest.

On Sunday, she baked bread and sweet buns for the coming week. The afternoon and early evening found her gardening until tired muscles and hunger forced her in. She dined on pizza, delivered by a young man who never once looked at her face while he took her cash and handed over her medium size special. She'd teased him mercilessly, and loved every moment of it. Once she'd eaten her fill, she put the leftovers in the fridge for lunch, and headed for the bath. A long, hot bath later and she fell exhausted into bed.

Morning came with a buzz of the alarm, and her wild swing to shut it off. She hated the thing, would gladly have tossed it through the window if she could. Rolling over, she stretched and yawned. Her dream of Saturday night came back to her, and she smiled at its memory. He would look good with cane marks across his ass.

Bouncing out of bed, she slipped out of her PJ's. She was still naked when she heard a truck arrive, his truck. Her hands trembled with memories of him watching, but she rushed to dress. A flouncy orange skirt and patterned peasant blouse over white cotton panties and a strapless bra took just a few minutes to get into. She grabbed a pair of low-heeled white sandals and headed for the kitchen.

On her way through the living room, she looked out into the backyard and smiled. He was there, in his usual cut-offs and loose tank top, work socks, and boots. He was strapping on his belt, tools swinging against his legs, while she switched on the coffee pot. Would he come in? She wondered.

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While the coffee brewed, she went and brushed her teeth, washed her face and ran a brush through her short, curly hair. The sun had given her a healthy tan, even though she'd applied and re-applied sun screen while she worked in the yard.

The coffee pot made its usual grumbling sounds of finishing, and she hurried out for her first cup. On her way, she noticed Caleb had already begun working. He had several two-by-fours balanced across his shoulder and carried them into the shade under one of the oaks and piled them. He didn't stop to see if she was there, just went back around the house to his truck.

Cynthia chuckled. He would not willingly come in. Not yet, at least. She turned off the coffee maker and filled her travel mug. She grabbed an apple, her bag, and her purse, and headed out the door.

* * * *

The week seemed endless. Each day she rose and had her coffee, and watched Caleb get to work. The deck went on, the floor joists looked like a giant abacus stretched across the cement foundation, and then he built the walls with their big gaping window. Those began on the floor, the studs, measured and nailed, and then he raised and positioned them, then finally, he nailed them down. The outer walls came next, plywood in four-by-eight sheets, which he measured and cut to leave the window openings. The rafters arrived and he carried them to the backyard. Piece by piece, he stacked them in some kind of order. When they were all in place, he set up a ladder and began the slow process of getting them onto the top of the structure.

The rafters took a day for him to position just right, then nail into place. To her, it was like an enormous jigsaw puzzle that he fitted together, cursing and swearing, until the final piece was secure. Sheeting in took next to no time, but still it was Wednesday afternoon before he started that. The windows arrived later that afternoon, and he had them carried inside the new room.

He came in only once to have coffee with her, and that was late on Thursday afternoon. She'd changed into her usual shorts, but had on a strapless tube top instead of her usual tank. She'd been working since she got home and was lost in the plans of an upcoming wedding her company would be catering. A soft tap on the wall beside the open sliding glass door made her jump. She spun around and there he was, shirtless, covered in sweat, and smiling sheepishly.

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"Yes?" she asked, smiling back at him. She hit save on her laptop and turned to face him.

"Is coffee on? I need to talk to you."

She pushed her chair back and rose. "Sure is, you want to come in or should I come out there?" She got another cup and filled it, then added more coffee to her own.

"Come out, I'll show you what I've done today and we can talk out in the fresh air." He said that last with a smirk. The door and half the wall was gone, fresh air flowed aplenty.

"Right, fresh air," she muttered, handing him his cup.

Turning, he walked out the door and across the new floor until he got to the outer wall. He took a large step and landed on dirt.

Cynthia followed, bare feet smacking on the plywood floors. When she got to the doorway, she saw that he'd turned and held his hand out for her. She took it, and stepped down onto the dirt. She didn't release his hand, but held onto it as she walked around the structure.

"You're supposed to have the roof on and the windows in by Friday, right?"

"Yeah, that's right." He was nervous. She could tell that by the way his voice quavered. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

She cocked her head, eying him. "Is there a problem?"

"Well, yeah." He looked away, then took a deep breath, and added, "I can get the roof on, and most of the windows in, but I know I won't be able to get them all done."

"And you're telling me this, why?"

He gulped, obviously not wanting to say anything more. Finally, he blurted, "Are you going to spank me again, like you did last Saturday, if I don't keep to the schedule?"

"It may not be exactly like last Saturday," she admitted, looking him in the eye. "But, you'll be punished if you don't keep to your schedule. That was the agreement, remember?"

"Yes, and I'm not trying to wriggle out of it. I—uh—"

"You what?" She let go of his hand and took a sip of coffee.

"On Saturday morning...I have...I have an appointment I can't break, with my dad and his father."

"I see, a meeting of the clan about the business, I assume." She looked away, released his hand, and walked around the side of the construction. It all looked very good and she was impressed.

"Yes, we have a meeting once a month," he said, and nervously took a drink of his coffee.

"I can't keep you from that. Business is business, and that's got to come first." She looked back at him, and scowled, "But, you should have said something before you signed the contract."

He gulped, and shifted his weight from one foot to the other, "Yes, I know. I'm sorry."

"Sorry won't do. Whatever punishment I decide on, will be doubled. Does that sound about right to you?"

"Doubled?" he exclaimed, and gaped at her. "But—uh...." He closed his mouth, blinked and took a deep breath, and then said, "Yes, it sounds reasonable. I should have said something."

"Fine. Are you done for the day? It's five, so it's past quitting time." She walked to where she'd grouped the lawn chairs under the trees, and sat down. The breeze fanned across her legs and made her shiver. Her nipples tightened and ached. She placed her cup on the table between the chairs, and stretched her hands overhead, easing the stiffness of sitting for hours at a keyboard. She pushed her chest out, arched her back, and felt it creak as tension drained away.

"Yeah, I'm done for the day." He raised his cup and took a large swallow of coffee, and then said, "I'd better get going, you'll be wanting to get your dinner." He put his cup down, reached for the ever-present tool belt around his waist, and pulled on the loose end. The belt tightened, and then sagged. He caught it up and stood looking at the construction.

"I haven't even thought of dinner yet," she said. Feeling more than a little horny from the days of watching him work and trying not to react to his animal magnetism, she eased her knees apart. "Sit—at least finish your coffee."

He shuffled forward. He smiled and dropped his tool belt as he eased himself into the chair opposite her.

Perfect, she thought, fanning her knees opened and closed, just a little. Goose bumps raced up her inner thighs. She wondered if he noticed.

He reached down, picked up his cup, and held it on his lap, shielding his crotch. "You know I'm nervous," he admitted. "Last Saturday. Well—I've never had anything like that happen before." He said it all in a rush; as if afraid he'd chicken out if he didn't.

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"I figured as much." She leaned forward and picked up her cup, giving him a peek at her cleavage. "You also seemed to enjoy what happened. Am I right?"

She knew she was. She judged that he did too by the way he fidgeted with a stray thread at the hem of his cut-off's. He must have realized what he was doing and stopped then glanced up. "Yes, you're right." His voice was hoarse. He sat back and stared into space, as if remembering exactly what had happened. "I would never have dreamed I'd like it. More than like it."

"You're a hard worker, Caleb. To be honest, I didn't expect to go there with you." She smiled at his sudden look of surprise, and went on, "We haven't had time to really get to know each other, but I'd like to."

"You're not like anyone I've ever met." His voice had steadied. He sat up straight and squared his shoulders. Obviously, he was used to being in control. It showed in his work, in his demeanor around her when they discussed business. But, when they got to a more personal level, he was unsure, and that wasn't the norm. "I've never felt so—Christ! I'm not sure what I feel." He chuckled, and that seemed to ease the tension between them.

"Caleb, I do understand." She reached forward, her fingertips barely reached him, and she stroked his arm. Tiny sparks of electricity jumped from him to her, and back. Her fingers trembled. Her breath caught in her throat. Shuddering, she gripped his arm to stop the incessant jarring sensation. "At first, I just wanted to make sure I didn't get burned again. You saw the fireplace inside?"

"Yeah, nice job," he replied.

"Well, it wasn't at first. The guy we hired came and did the preliminary stuff, took the money and left us with a hole in the roof, some framing and a pile of bricks." Cynthia's temperature rose as she relived the anger she'd felt. She stroked Caleb's arm a final time, and the tension left her. "The guy skipped town. We found out later that he'd done the same thing to about a dozen others in town."

"It's contractors like him that give the business a bad name."

"Yeah, I know. But, I just didn't want to take the chance." She sat back in her chair. A little shaken by the way her body reacted to his, she took a swallow of coffee before continuing. "That's why the punishment is in the contract."

He didn't say anything for a few moments. Then he asked, "Did you and your husband do that kind of thing? The spankings I mean?"

"Yes, Tom was a submissive. He loved nothing better than to spend an evening serving me." She smiled at the memories and wondered how Caleb would look naked at her feet. "If he didn't perform as well as I thought he could, or even if he did, sometimes he'd be punished. That was always up to me. We'd talked a great deal about what we both wanted and we'd agreed on almost everything."

"You mean he was your slave?" he asked incredulously.

"No, not a slave." She chuckled at his naiveté. "Tom was my husband; we just enjoyed a little D/s from time to time. Well, maybe more than a little."

"D/s? Why do I get the feeling I'm in way over my head here?"

Cynthia laughed. At first, it was just a chuckle, but in a matter of seconds, it broke into an uproarious, belly laugh.

"It was funny, but I didn't think it was that funny," he said, but he too was chuckling.

"It—it, wasn't." She assured him, but her laughter went on. "It's just...well, I haven't had much to laugh about for a long time. Thank you."

"Now, I'm really worried. First you spank me, then you make me feel as if I was some teenage boy who doesn't know his ass from a hole in the ground, and now you're thanking me for making you laugh at my inexperience."

"Baby, I'm not laughing at you, believe me. I'm laughing at us, both of us. Inexperience is a good thing. I'll get to show you all the fun things. That's if this, we, go anywhere." She shifted in her chair; the pleasure of his company had her excitement growing by the moment.

"I hope it does," he blurted. "I'm sorry. It's been a while since I was this attracted to a woman."

"And the spanking?" she asked. "How does that make you feel?"

He looked at her, his face unreadable. "At first, I was really uncomfortable. I've never been in a situation like that before. But, it was a matter of honor. I'd signed the contract knowing what might happen."

She let him think for a minute then asked, "Yes, and..."

"And when you were cuffing me to that bench thing, I got turned on—really turned on." He drained his coffee cup and put it back on the table. Leaning back, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

Cynthia sensed he was about to tell her something important, perhaps something he'd only just realized. She sat quietly; patience was something she'd learned paid off tenfold.

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"When you teased me, I thought I'd never be able to keep from coming. I've never had a woman do that before. I've always been in control. I'd never dreamed that a woman could do those things." He stopped, but only long enough to peek at her, then take another deep breath. "I've had fantasies about a woman taking control. I always just thought it was my perverted mind. I guess I'm pretty unsophisticated."

"Maybe it's just that you've never found a woman who could take control."

"That might be, too. To be really honest, I haven't dated as much as you might think. I've worked pretty steady ever since I got out of school, even before I was finished school. There hasn't been a lot time for women."

"Doesn't have to be a lot of women, just the right one," she said softly.

He blinked, looked at her closely. "You're right, of course. Maybe I just needed a little patience."

"I'm looking forward to Saturday." Her words had a magical effect. His face turned crimson, he seemed to blush at just about everything.

"Yes ma'am," he murmured, "so am I."

"I guess it's time for you to go. Job's done for the day, and I've got to clean up."

Caleb got to his feet, his hands covering his front. When he moved, she saw the bulge, but didn't say anything. He picked up his tool belt, and headed to his truck. At the corner of the building, he turned and shouted back, "See you in the morning."

"Good night, Caleb." She shielded her eyes from the sun, and raised her free hand. "See you tomorrow."

Chapter Seven

Friday, and Sammy had arranged for her to meet with a new client just before noon. A group of lawyers wanted to have lunches catered daily to their building's courtyard. At eleven, Sammy showed Mr. Dobson into the conference room. Mr. Dobson was an older, silver-haired man with a paunch, and was accompanied by a much younger woman. Ms. Sims was his aide, and had a knack with numbers, something he couldn't seem to bother himself with.

"Would you like me to have Sammy bring coffee in?" Cynthia asked as she seated the couple.

"Yes, black for me and sweet for Jean here," boomed the hefty man. His voice was deep and loud enough to rattle the windows. He filled his chair to overflowing, and with his arms crossed over his chest, he seemed a most formidable man.

"Sammy," she called, just loud enough to carry into the outer office.

He poked his nose in and said, "Yes, ma'am?"

"Coffee all around would you—black for Mr. Dobson, sweet for Ms. Simms."

"I'll be right back." He vanished but only for a few moments, returning not only with coffee for three, but he also brought in a small platter of savories. After offering coffee to their clients, he placed the platter on the conference room table and quietly left the room.

"If I may ask, what prompted you to come to us for this service, Mr. Dobson?" She always liked to find out if a previous client had referred them, or if her advertising had brought in more work.

The meeting took more than the allotted hour, but it would bring in both welcomed revenue, and some good PR, so she didn't rush them. The aide took notes, and provided numbers and clearly defined guidelines as to what their firm required. The last half hour proved to be more of a fending off unwanted attention by an over-exuberant male chauvinist than business, but it was all part and parcel with being a female in

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control. It annoyed her, but she put up with it for the sake of her employee's paychecks.

Finally, she ushered both of them out and breathed a sigh of relief when Jean, Ms Simms, smiled and shrugged her shoulders as if to say, 'sorry'. Cynthia almost felt sympathy for the woman, but knew she was quite capable of taking care of herself. She'd also handled her boss' advances deftly throughout the meeting.

She packed up her weekend's paperwork and slung her bag over her shoulder on her way out. She'd gratefully accepted Sammy's offer to clear up the office, and was soon on her way home.

Traffic crawled. At a stoplight, she shrugged out of her jacket and unfastened the top button of her white silk blouse. With the windows wide open, and the radio blasting alternative rock, her blood pounded with a growing excitement of the weekend ahead.

When she neared the house, she noticed Caleb's truck was in the driveway, blocking her from parking in her usual spot, but she knew he'd have a good reason. He'd better, or she'd make sure he paid dearly. Smiling, she wondered if he was looking forward to Saturday morning as much as she was.

She parked near the road, grabbed her purse and the work she'd do over the next couple of days. Heading into the house, she heard hammering from the back of the house. When she walked in, she realized it wasn't from the back, but from the roof. The steady slap, slap, slap of the nail gun echoed hollowly.

She dropped her purse by the door and slipped out of her shoes. Paperwork landed on the coffee table as she made her way through into the dining room. Opening the sliding door, she saw that the windows were in. Walking through the room towards the back, she saw rolls of roofing paper and stacks of shingles just outside the soon to be back door. Caleb, dressed in a pair of loose fitting khaki shorts and tank, was climbing down a ladder a couple of feet away from the doorway. When he caught sight of her, he smiled.

"You're in a good mood," she said, and hopped out of the doorway onto the lawn. Her feet sank into the cool grass and she couldn't stop a sigh of pleasure. She wriggled her toes and hummed her appreciation. Turning around, she looked at what he was working on. He'd lugged two rolls of roofing paper onto the roof, and was obviously on his way down for more.

"Yeah, I'm in a great mood," he said cheerily, "the work is going well and I just might get this done—as long as nothing comes up." He said the last as he walked in front of her towards the next roll. With ease, he bent down, wrapped his hands around the large black roll of felt, and lifted it onto his shoulder.

Cynthia backed up a couple of steps. "Wouldn't dream of interrupting you." She laughed and watched him for a few minutes. She loved watching the play of muscles in his thighs when he climbed the ladder. His tight ass swayed seductively from side to side, and she glanced up at his face to reassure herself that he wasn't doing it on purpose.

She moved over to her lawn chair and made herself comfortable. She thought about getting a cup of coffee, but decided that she couldn't get too comfortable, or she'd stay too long. She really did have to get some work done.

The felt roll didn't take long, an hour tops for him to roll it out and staple it. Caleb made sure it overlapped by at least a third of its width and smoothed it out before slapping the staple gun rapid-fire along one edge.

She left him then and went inside. The remainder of the afternoon, she worked with her laptop at the dining room table. Every so often, she glanced out the window and either saw him carrying shingles towards the ladder or simply heard the slapping of the nail gun. Hours passed: she drank coffee, called several of her employees to check on their progress, spoke to a few of her clients to arrange meetings or confirm dates, and watched Caleb work and sweat. Her excitement got the better of her a time or two when she happened to glance outside and saw him stretching his back, almost posing for her. Her hand crept between her thighs; her fingers sought and found entrance into her panties. She rubbed the tight knot of her clit and squirmed deliciously, until moments later, she exploded in a gasping instant of pleasure.

Sighing, she pulled her hands free. She was both tired and energized; an odd feeling, but one she loved. Looking at the laptop screen, she shuddered. Work, numbers, it was hard to concentrate with the continual slapping of the nail gun. She rubbed her temples, inhaled the musk scent that clung to her fingers. A quick glance outside ensured her that she was alone. But as soon as that thought crossed her mind, she wished he'd been watching.

She looked at the clock over the oven and saw that it was nearly quitting time. Close enough for her anyway. She saved her work, closed

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the laptop, and cleared the pile of folders off the table. Once everything was put away, she wandered through the new room and out onto the back lawn.

Caleb was nearly done. Damn. He had one foot on each side of the roof's peak and was laying the angled toppers, one after another. The smack of the short roofing nails biting in seemed louder in the open air. Three per topper, and his rhythm never slowed—lay it down, adjust, and then slap, slap, slap—repeat.

Cynthia stood under the trees and watched him slowly shuffle along. Long legs stretched taut as he bent and moved slowly along the roof. Her heart thumped. He'd get it done, she was sure.

It wasn't long before he straightened up and stretched his back. The last topper was on, adjusted, and nailed. He'd kept to his schedule and a satisfied smile lit up his tanned, sweaty face.

"Hey," she called and waved when he didn't at first spot her in the shade. "Are you about ready for a beer?"

His smile widened and he yelled down, "You betcha. I'll be right down; I just want to toss this stuff off the roof." He slipped the nail gun into a holster on his belt and reached down for one of the cardboard boxes that had held the shingles. She walked into the house, just as the first empty box landed on the grass.

In the kitchen, after rinsing her hands, she took two ice-cold beers out of the fridge and then retraced her steps outside. She was a little disappointed that he'd finished. No, she was a lot disappointed. Saturday wouldn't be nearly as much fun as she'd hoped. In fact, she'd been anticipating it all week. She wondered if he felt the same.

When she walked outside, he was gathering a large bundle of cardboard and plastic ties. Arms filled, he said, "Go get settled in the shade, I'll just run this out to the truck."

"Okay," she said, and watched him go around the side of the house. Sighing, she went to sit on her chair in the shade. The chair was cool against the back of her thighs and shoulders, and felt wonderful after being cooped up inside for hours. It was fantastic to just sit and stretch, and feel the warmth of the afternoon. Dappled sunlight flashed across her legs like butterflies in the breeze. She put one bottle on the table, and took a sip from the other. The crisp bite at the back of her throat when she swallowed was another welcomed sensation.

She lowered the bottle in time to see him walk around the side of the house towards her. His step was light and his face shone from the smile plastered across it.

"You did it. You're back on schedule," she said, fighting to keep the disappointment out of her voice. Reaching down, she picked up his beer and held it out to him.

When he was close enough, he took it. "Yep, I didn't think I'd be able to. Everything just went right this week." He put the bottle to his lips and raised it high.

She watched his throat move as he swallowed. Sweat glistened on his neck and chest; a droplet caught her attention as it trickled from the hollow in his throat down between the wide bulging pecs she suddenly wanted to lick. Wild thoughts raced through her mind. Dragging her eyes off him, she took another swallow of beer.

"I guess I'll have tomorrow off," Caleb said.

She glanced up at him, and saw something. Was that disappointment? "Yes, you'll have the day to yourself, well after your meeting." She nodded towards the chair across from her, and he eased himself into it with a groan.

He sat gazing up at the roof. "Man, that was a tough one. I really didn't think I'd get that roof on in time." He took another swallow of beer. Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he added, "Just having the single ridge like that, made it easier."

"Hey, would you like to go out tonight?" She heard herself ask suddenly.

"You mean a date?"

"Yeah, I guess I do. My treat—call it a bonus for keeping to your schedule this week."

He cocked his head and looked at her, a sly grin on his face. "I think I'd like that. You have to let me run home first though. I really need a shower and a change of clothes."

Laughing, she nodded. "I noticed, you're covered in sweat and it's a good thing there's a breeze."

He chuckled. "You sure have a way with words, ma'am."

"Call me Cynthia, for crying out loud. I've just asked you out on a date, and we're not in my special room."

Mention of the room made his expression soften. He lowered his eyes, and in a very soft voice, said, "I kind of wish we were."

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Cynthia let the remark go. She wanted to give him some time to think about the room, what his actions meant, and what could have been. She raised her bottle and took a long drink of the cold beer.

"I think I'll run. I really need that shower." He got to his feet, quickly emptied his beer, and put the bottle on the table between them. "Thanks. That really hit the spot. I'll be back in about an hour, is that okay?"

"Sure is, dress in something nice, we'll do The Chalet."

"All right, something nice." He looked surprised. The Chalet was one of the nicer eateries in town. "I'll do my best," he said and tried on a smile again. "See you in a little while."

"I'll be ready."

He turned and headed off. She watched his long, lean body as he moved gracefully away from her and felt another pang of disappointment. She sat in silence, listening to the distant rumble of his truck, while she finished her beer. When she was done, she went into the house. "What to wear, what to wear," she muttered as she walked into her bedroom.

* * * *

"You look spectacular," she said when she opened the door.

He'd cleaned up beautifully, and stood before her in a charcoal sports jacket over dark slacks and a royal blue shirt he'd left unbuttoned at the neck. His wavy blond hair was still slightly damp. A lock dangled over one eye. Clean shaven, and smelling of some rich musky cologne, he was a smiling vision of her perfect date. In one hand, he held a long stemmed red carnation.

"Thanks, I hoped you'd approve." His voice was husky, his face slightly flushed.

"Just let me just grab my shawl and we'll be off. I made a reservation for seven. That should give us plenty of time to get there." Cynthia got her purse and a lacy black shawl from the table just inside the door. She noticed her hands were trembling, and she shivered when she slipped the shawl around her naked shoulders. The little black slip dress she'd decided on had been hiding at the back of her closet, but seemed perfect for the evening. The feel of silk brushing across her skin was a pleasure she'd almost forgotten.

"You look gorgeous," Caleb blurted when she stepped out of the door. He offered his arm, and waited while she locked her door.

"Thank you," she said, and slid her hand under his elbow. Her perfume mingled with his cologne and a cloud of fragrance surrounded them as they made their way to a sleek, gold, '69 Dodge Charger. "I was expecting your truck."

"The truck belongs to the company. The car's mine," he explained. He took her around to the passenger side and opened the door for her. Even when she got herself seated comfortably, he didn't release her hand. For a moment, he just looked at her.

"Uh, I'll need that hand eventually," she said, chuckling.

"Sorry." He released her, but only after he'd curled her fingers around the carnation he'd brought. He bent forward, kissed her fingertips, and added, "You're just so beautiful. I can't stop looking at you."

"How sweet, thank you," she purred, and held the flower up to her nose. It had been so long since a man had paid attention to her. She smoothed her skirt, making sure he got a glimpse of cleavage. "Better get in or we won't even get there." She winked at him, giving him a saucy smile.

Straightening up, he closed the door and hurried around to the driver's side. Once settled behind the wheel, he glanced at her as he started the engine. "You have me feeling like a teenager again—awkward and unsure of myself, which just isn't me."

"Nice to know I can still get to a man," she chuckled. Crossing her long, stocking-covered legs, she admired the strappy sandal she'd worn—another find from the back of her closet.

A few moments later, they were on the highway heading towards city center. Soft music from the CD player added to the seductive mood. By the time they arrived at The Chalet, Cynthia was feeling the effects. Her heart hammered against her ribs, and her skin itched in that special way that told her she was alive. Her face felt warm and she wondered if she was flushed. She hoped so. Even her pussy felt as if it wanted to party.

Caleb pulled into a parking spot at the side of The Chalet. He revved the engine, and then shut it off. The next thing she knew, he was at her door, swinging it open. His hand extended towards her, and when she took it, he helped her out.

The Chalet parking lot was nearly full, and as they made their way towards the door, he guided her with a hand on her elbow. He opened the large oak door for her, ever the gallant, and smiled as she brushed passed him into the dark interior of the foyer. Wallpapered in rich sculptured

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green and gold tones, with dark wood accents, the entrance was a warm, welcoming space. A slender, balding man in his early fifties, dressed in eveningwear approached them with a smile. "Welcome to The Chalet. Do you have a reservation?"

"Yes, under the name Lyon, for seven o'clock," replied Cynthia.

He went to a small desk beside the door and opened a large leather-bound book. Running his fingers down the columns, he finally said, "Ah yes, here you are, two for dinner at seven. You requested a window table if possible, is that right?"

"Yes, that's right. Whoever I spoke to, assured me that there wouldn't be a problem."

"Quite right, but you're a little early so I'm afraid your table won't be ready for a few minutes." He smiled, looking from her to Caleb, and extending his hand towards an opening to the left. "Would you care to wait in the lounge? Perhaps a drink before dinner?"

"That sounds perfect, thank you." Caleb said, and again, took her by the arm.

She allowed herself to be guided, enjoying the firm grip he had on her arm. She reveled in his sense of confidence. They took a step down into the lounge. Soft velvet covered easy chairs surrounded round, glass tables in the small, intimate room. The muted lighting gave the room a sensual feel, as if only lovers would dare enter. Her shoes sank into the chocolate-colored carpet, and she would have loved to take them off and wriggle her toes into the deep pile. Caleb ushered her to a table in the farthest corner, and held her chair out for her.

A middle-aged, uniformed waiter approached as soon as they were both seated, and bowed, saying, "What can I get for you this evening?"

"Gin and ginger for me," she said.

"Would you have beer from the local breweries?" Caleb inquired and put his elbows on the table.

"Yes, two, the first is a dark ale, very full bodied, the other is a honey ale both are—"

"The honey ale please," he replied before the waiter could elaborate.

"Very good sir." The waiter turned and left, but was back before they could begin any kind of conversation. Deftly, he placed a highball glass in front of Cynthia, and then poured a bottled beer into a frosty mug and set it down in front of Caleb. "Will that be all?"

"Yes, thank you," she said. "We'll be going in to dinner as soon as our table is ready."

"Very good, ma'am. I'll run a tab for you and transfer it to your waiter when you're called." He disappeared then, leaving them in their quiet corner.

"This light makes you look even more amazing," Caleb said.

"Thank you. You're quite the flatterer."

"It's easy to flatter someone like you. I'm still feeling like that teenager." He chuckled and took a sip of his beer. It must have been good because he closed his eyes and sighed.

"Are you glad you kept to your schedule," she asked softly.

He glanced at her, but for a moment didn't reply. When he did, it was obvious that he'd given the question some thought. "Yes, I'm glad, in one way. It shows you that I'm capable, reliable. I hate falling behind, it shows a lack of professionalism, and that's not something I'd like to be associated with." He stopped there, but only for a moment. The next came out in a softer, more thoughtful tone. "But, in another way, I'm very disappointed. I can't stop thinking about what happened last Saturday."

"You've already mentioned how much you enjoyed it," she said, in as equally soft a voice. Tread lightly, carefully, she told herself. "You said you'd never experienced anything like it before, right?"

"Yeah, that's right."

"But, is it something you'd like to experience again?"

He looked deep into her eyes. His eyes shone, lashes pale from exposure to the sun, framed the hazel depths that spoke to her of passion and desire. "Yes. It's something I'd like to experience again. But only with someone I trust." He took a swallow of beer, his gaze still locked with hers.

Cynthia admired his poise. "Trust—yes, that's huge when it comes to this kind of play." She was about to add more, only the Maitre d's approach caught her attention.

He stopped beside the table and bowed. "Excuse me, your table is ready."

"Thank you," she replied.

"Would you please have our drinks brought in?"

"Certainly ma'am," he said as he pulled out her chair. "If you'll follow me."

Caleb took her arm, and together they trailed behind the slender man. He took them through an archway into the dining area. The décor and atmosphere was the same as the lounge. He guided them to an alcove where a table sat next to a large bay window overlooking a fountain.

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Caleb held her chair, and when she sat, he bent and kissed her on the shoulder. She shivered with pleasure, and reached up to touch his face for a moment. She found her hand held while he turned and briefly pressed his lips against her palm.

"Yes, you're a devil," she murmured, just loud enough for him to hear. He released her and moved around to the other side of the table.

The Maitre d' introduced them to their waiter, John, a young man in a crisp white shirt, dark slacks, and a white apron. He handed them menus, explained to them what the specials were and then left them to each other. As he walked away, Cynthia pulled her shawl from her shoulders and hung it over the arm of her chair, then glanced around. The table nearest them was a good ten feet away and, at the moment, empty.

"You mentioned trust," she said, laying her menu on the table. "Yet, you allowed me to cuff you. I made you helpless, and yet you hardly know me."

Caleb set his menu down as well and looked at her without answering right away. He steepled his fingers, and rested his chin on his fingertips, then said, "Yes, I know, and I've thought about that all week."

"Yes—and?" Her stomach was in knots. Even though they were so new together, she felt as if he was willing to share a great deal with her already.

"And, I don't understand it, but I know I can trust you."

She cocked her head. Trust had to be earned, and took time, or that's what she'd always believed. "You might think you trust me, but until boundaries are pushed, you really don't know."

"That may be true. It probably is." He leaned back in his chair, and reached for his beer. A long swallow, a thoughtful look, and he added, "I'd really like you to help me push those boundaries."

John, their waiter, interrupted any further discussion with his arrival. "Have you decided what you'd like to order?" he asked.

"The special for me, please," Cynthia said easily. Food was the last thing on her mind, but she wanted to keep up the charade.

"I'll have the same," Caleb said. His voice sounded strained, as if he too had other things on his mind.

"No appetizer?" John asked politely.

"No, not for me," both replied together.

"Very well, thank you."

"John," Cynthia said, and he looked directly at her. "Don't disturb us again until you bring dinner, please."

"Very well, ma'am." He bowed and left.

"It appears we'll both have to wait for another week to test anything," said Caleb. He smiled—a cheeky, mischievous smile that she knew was a challenge.

"Yes, it's a shame you'll have to wait, isn't it?" she countered and watched his smile vanish. Two could play that game, and she was much better at it than he was. She took a sip of her drink, savoring the tang of the gin. They sat in silence for a few minutes.

The waiter appeared, their dinners in his hands: Chicken Kiev, roasted garlic potatoes and a medley of mixed vegetables, lightly dusted with herbs. Cynthia leaned forward and breathed in the rich aroma. She looked across at Caleb, and watched as he thoughtfully picked up his cutlery and speared a carrot.

They ate in near silence. He seemed to be deep in thought and she let him come to whatever terms he would. She was sure he'd open up more when he was ready. There was a lot for him to think about, and a lot of it was new territory.

She'd just picked up her napkin and was wiping her mouth, when he said, "I'm sorry I've been so quiet."

"It's understandable," she said, and dabbed the corner of her mouth. "This is a lot to take in and it looks like it's just hit you."

"Yeah, I think it has." He picked up his glass and took a drink of beer. "Cynthia, you're an incredibly attractive woman. You've shown me a whole new world, and to be honest, it excites me. But, it scares hell out of me too."

She sat silently, letting him talk. She understood his reluctance, his fear, and her heart reached out to him, empathizing. His submissiveness had no part in his day-to-day life, it couldn't. His business decreed that he be firm and forceful, and she loved that contradiction in him. They'd need to talk, a lot, over the next while, and she looked forward to explaining, and exploring his limits.

"You're not just a customer." He looked into her eyes and added, "At least I hope that's how you're feeling."

"I am," she reassured him. Reaching across the table, she opened her hand, palm up. His joined hers, and the touch was magical. "I haven't felt anything like this since I met my husband. When he died, I wasn't sure I'd ever find someone who was interested in the same kind of lifestyle."

"I'm interested," he blurted, and then took a breath before adding, "but I'm also unsure. We're going to have to take it slow."

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"Let's get out of here." She pushed her chair back and rose to her feet. Picking up her shawl, she held it out to him. The implication didn't go unnoticed, and he immediately got to his feet and took the shawl. She turned, and an instant later, his hands caressed her shoulders. He stood behind her, his body close enough for her to feel its heat. His breath on her neck caused goose bumps to race down her arms.

"Thank you, Cynthia," he whispered, and then his lips pressed into the nape of her neck.

She shuddered. Her face felt hot. Her nipples tightened and when she took a deep breath, her dress dragged across them. Sighing, she nuzzled against his face. Then he slipped away, leaving her wanting more. Yes, he really was a devil.

She strode from the dining room into the foyer. He trailed behind; close enough to have his hand on her hip.

The Maitre d' stood at his post, and bowed when she handed him a credit card from her purse. He was there, Caleb, one hand on her hip, the other on her shoulder. Close, so close his thigh touched hers. So close, his erection brushed across the swell of her ass.

The slender Maitre d' handed her back her card, and she signed on the dotted lines. Her hand was steady—surprisingly steady, when her blood was on fire.

The evening was warm, the sky just turning from daylight to twilight. Red streaks reached across the horizon. She watched him closely as he navigated through the evening traffic. Sure and with ease, he soon had them out of the rush and onto the side street that led to her house.

Once he'd parked, he escorted her to her doorway. Again, the gallant, he took her hand, and while she stood enchanted, he kissed her palm. "Good night, my lady, thank you for a bewitching evening," he murmured, turned, and a few moments later, he was gone.

Chapter Eight

She slept wonderfully well, and awoke the next morning, her mind filled with thoughts of Caleb. She pulled Ginger onto her stomach and stroked the cat until he purred with pleasure. Dinner the evening before had been just what she needed to set a spark into her life. It really had been too long since she'd been out, or had any interest in a man, or had one interested in her. She closed her eyes and if it had been possible, she'd have purred along with Ginger. Caleb, strong, easy going, had a streak of masculine strength that took her breath. The strong silent type, she chuckled. Then her mind flashed to the image of him bent over and bound to the bench.

She shuddered, and pushed Ginger off to the side. She had work to do, and lying in bed fantasizing, wasn't going to get it done. It was her weekend to make meat pies, by the dozen, which she'd then freeze for later cooking and distributing. Her freezer held all the ingredients she needed; it was just a matter of making the pastry and putting it all together.

A shower first, and she forced her mind to stay focused on work. There'd be time enough later to concentrate on her hunky contractor. Her weekend went by faster than it had any right to, and Monday morning found her pushing her head under the pillow, not wanting to get up. Saturday had been all work and Sunday had been almost as bad. The good news was she'd managed to get all of the paper work done for the lawyer she'd talked to on Friday, and three other clients she'd been putting off.

Groaning, she peeked out and saw the sun reaching across the floor towards her. She remembered pulling the curtains closed the night before, but with the window open, the breeze had blown them partially open. Outside, she heard noises, and knew Caleb had already begun his day's work.

She climbed out of bed and padded over to the window. Peeking out between the curtains, she saw him carrying a sheet of drywall. Dressed in

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cut-offs, T-shirt, and work boots, his sun-bronzed skin glowed in the sun. He climbed the single step to the new room and let the sheet drop, flat to the floor. Without stopping, he turned and went out, for the next sheet.

Cynthia yawned, stretched, and headed for a shower.

Ten minutes later, dressed in a yellow print cotton dress, she walked into the kitchen for her morning coffee. She was running late, so wouldn't get the chance to talk to Caleb except to wish him a good morning, and to hand him a cup of coffee just before she left. He smiled and told her that the electrician was due at eight. He left the cup on a windowsill, and went for the next sheet of drywall. They met again as she was leaving, each wishing the other a good morning.

When she got into her car and started it up, she sat for a moment, watching him drag another sheet of drywall out of the back of his truck. His shoulder muscles rippled and she could see the strain in his thighs. A beautiful man, she thought, and put the car in reverse.

* * * *

Sammy was his usual cheerful self when she walked into the office. Dressed in purple from top to bottom, he looked like a fashion model gone crazy. He'd even gone so far as to color the tips of his hair to match.

"My lord!" she blurted out when she saw him.

"You like?" He beamed and did a sultry spin, one hand on his hip, the other at the back of his head.

"Sammy, I don't know how you get away with it, but yes, I like."

"I knew you would, honey."

Tossing her purse into a drawer, she laid the bag, with all the work she'd done over the weekend, on her desk. Sammy sat in the visitor's chair, his legs crossed as he relayed morning messages to her. Another meeting with Mr. Dobson—a short one, thank heavens—to sign papers and make sure the menu she'd organized was to his liking. It went well, and he only had enough time to make one pass at her, which she fended off easily. Returning calls and a trip to a new poultry supplier on the outskirts of the city took up the rest of the morning.

When she returned to the office at noon, Sammy had a couple of files set aside for her to take home. That was it for the day, and she cheerfully left her purple clad assistant to take care of business.

There was a white, service van in the driveway when she got home, so she parked on the street. On its side, she read 'CR Electric' and knew she'd have lights in the addition soon. She entered the house and saw that

the sliding glass doors that had led from the dining room to the new room were gone.

"Yay," she muttered, excitement taking hold. She dropped the files and her purse on the table. Kicking her shoes off, she headed towards the dining room for a better look at what was going on.

Men cursed, something slid across the floor. "Fuck!" came Caleb's familiar voice.

It was followed by that of someone she didn't recognize. "Yup, it's fucked. You measure this or just guess?"

Cynthia looked across the room and watched Caleb and an older, dark haired man wrestle with the sliding doors, frame and all. Leaning against the door jam, she waited to hear what the problem was.

"I assumed the slider was standard size," he said, a note of frustration in his voice. "Hang on; just hold this up for a minute." The electrician steadied the door, while Caleb pulled his measuring tape out of his belt, and measured the frame. "Shit," he muttered. He turned and measured the opening, then said, "Shit, shit shit!" he cursed again. "Two inches wider, why would anyone make a door two inches wider than standard?"

"We got it on a sale," Cynthia interrupted.

Both men jerked around to face her. Caleb's mouth dropped open and the older electrician smiled. It was one of those kinds of smiles where you know it's not you in trouble, and you might get to watch someone else's ass fry.

"What's up, Caleb?" she asked innocently and crossed her arms under her breasts.

The electrician's eyes scanned down, and fixed on her chest. Caleb just stared at her. He closed his mouth, and swallowed then answered, "I didn't measure this door. It's two inches wider than standard."

"Yeah, I knew that. We got it for a steal. It was supposed to go into a friend's house, but he changed his mind and wanted French doors instead. He offered it to us at a screamin' deal just to get rid of it. Tom put it in himself." She loved how this had turned out. Who knew an odd sized door would come to have such an impact on her. Just watching Caleb's face was a prize. "So, how was your meeting on Saturday?"

The innuendo wasn't lost on him, he'd messed up, and she'd caught him. He glanced at his helper before replying. "Fine, the business is booming. I've got another job lined up right after this one's finished."

"Good." She turned to the electrician. "Are you done here?"

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"Uh, yes, ma'am, all wired and the inspector had time to drop by right away. You have no idea how lucky you were on that one."

"Excellent, so you can head off to your next job then. I'll give Caleb a hand with this, when he gets the measurement right." She walked over to where the man held the frame and took over from him. As long as it was balanced, the weight was next to nothing.

"I'll hit the road then," he said, after making sure she could handle it. He said to Caleb, "Thanks for the job, man. I'll be seeing you. Give me a call on the next one."

He'd apparently already stowed his gear in the van, because he headed out right away. She heard the van start up and pull out of the driveway.

"So, it seems you should have been here on Saturday after all."

"It would seem so. I'm really sorry, Cynthia. I just never dreamed the measurement would be this far off."

"Yeah, I figured that."

"So, what happens next?"

"You know I'll have to punish you for messing up. I'm going to assume you're telling the truth. It just doesn't make sense for you to lie about this, so I'm not going to add any extra."

"Thank you. I think."

"We've already set aside Saturday mornings for punishment times, so make sure this Saturday is free."

"Yes, ma'am." He'd been standing with his hands clasped in front of himself. At first, he didn't look into her eyes, but when he said that, he did. She saw nervousness, but she also saw desire lurking in their depths.

"Let's get busy and get this door in. I can hold it upright, but I'm not sure how far I can help move it. Can we lean it against the wall?"

He hurried to help her shift the large framework and sliders until they could rest them against the wall. Every time he touched her, electricity flared between them, as it had since they'd met. When they were sure the door wasn't going to fall over, she said, "I'm going to get changed and get some work done. Call me when you need a hand getting this thing into place."

"Okay, thanks." He continued watching her, and she got the impression he was somehow judging her. Finally, he shrugged and turned back to the gaping hole that was the wrong size.

She went into her room to change into a pair of khaki colored shorts and a matching tank top. Padding through the dining room, she put on a

small pot of coffee and dragged out her laptop. She glanced through the doorway and watched him for a minute: measuring and marking where he needed to cut. He looked toward her once, then sheepishly looked back at what he was doing. He'd screwed up, and knew he'd have to pay.

She'd entered about half her data, when he knocked on the trim around the doorway. "I'll need some help now. Are you sure you can lift one end of that thing?" He nodded towards the large metal frame. "I can get someone over if you—"

"No, I'll be able to do it. I'm sure, honest," she assured him and got to her feet. She slipped into a pair of running shoes and followed him. He'd taped the sliding glass door open; so one end would be lighter, by far, than the other. She gripped the lighter end, raising it just off the floor. He lifted his end and shuffled them both towards the opening.

"Easy..." He drew out the word as he guided the bottom of the frame into the space. "There. Just hold it steady; let me do the work, please." He flashed her a smile, and worked the entire framework in. It didn't take more than ten minutes and the door was in place and secured.

She stepped back and watched him pull the tape free. Sliding the door closed, he turned and faced her. "Thanks, Cynthia. I've got to take a run into the building suppliers and pick up the insulation. I'll tack a sheet of plastic across the opening before I do any of that though. You really don't want fiberglass floating into the main part of the house."

"Do you do all the insulation, or do you have someone come in?" she asked.

Sweat glistened off his face and chest—his shirt, long since stripped off and tossed over the lawn chair he'd claimed as his. Even the waistband of his shorts was dark with sweat. "I do it. But, I'm going to grab one of our student helpers." He chuckled and added, "We have two students who are thinking of getting into the trade. We pay them minimum wage and they get a taste of what it's like. This is a lesson we all have had to learn."

"Rather them than me, that's for sure." Cynthia said and smiled.

Caleb nodded, going for his shirt. Unbuckling his tool belt, he left that on the seat and headed for his truck.

That afternoon, the insulation went in and she had the rare opportunity to ogle two beautiful men at work. The view wasn't as nice as it could have been; both wore coveralls and masks. Still, she got to see them straining and cursing while they cut and pushed the soft pink insulation into all the nooks and crannies. Caleb grew short with the

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young helper when the boy tried slacking off. She heard them arguing for a few minutes before work continued.

The afternoon went well. They got the walls insulated, and then the two men made a good start on the drywall. By the time their day was done, the boy looked like he was ready to drop. Cynthia was still at her computer when she heard Caleb's tap on the wall.

"Yeah," she said looking up from her screen. She blinked to clear the numbers from her vision, smiled when she saw him through the clear plastic. He was still in his coveralls. She could see he was tired, but he smiled back at her.

"Poor kid is about ready to collapse on me." He nodded to the boy who leaned slumped against the far door. "I'm going to run him home now. It's going well, but I know I messed up." He lowered his eyes. A moment he added, "I'll see you tomorrow morning."

"Yeah, I'll see you tomorrow." She pushed herself up from the table and went to the door in time to see them both leave. The ceiling was dry-walled and they'd started on the outside wall of the new room. Bits of insulation littered the floor, and she was careful not to touch, or brush against, anything. Refastening the clear plastic cover, she went back to her computer.

Dinner came and went; Ginger batted at her arm for his share of the chicken she cooked. Dishes out of the way, she read for a while and watched an hour of television before going to bed. It took some time, but finally, with her cat snuggled and purring beside her, she drifted into a restful sleep.

On Tuesday, Caleb got the rest of the drywall up and insulated the ceiling. Wednesday, he mudded the ceiling and walls, and went for paint and wood trim. The ceiling took a full day all by itself. He arrived early and after dressing in his coveralls and mask, he blew acoustic mud onto the ceiling. Next, he primed the trim, then painting it when it dried. Sanding, measuring, and cutting—the hours flew by. A soothing shade of cream took a full morning to apply to the walls. The floor, dark oak around the outer edge, with an inlay of gold, burgundy, and green patterned carpet in the center, looked magnificent when he finally finished laying it.

All week, she spent her mornings in the office; her afternoons at home as usual. Thursday was the exception when she had to work a large wedding. That day, she was up early and worked until long after Caleb had gone home. It was how she'd begun her career and she still loved the

pressure and excitement of doing a job well, feeding the partygoers delicacies they may never have had before, or preparing the mundane in such a way as to bring a smile of appreciation. The bride and groom were impressed, and the large tip they gave her, she shared among her crew. It was the only day she didn't check on Caleb's progress. Exhausted, she'd fed Ginger and crawled into bed without a thought of the construction.

Her alarm went off at the usual time and she groaned, and then slapped it into silence. Stretching, yawning, she cocked her head when she heard noises coming from the new room. Her heart suddenly raced. He'd be out there, Caleb, and he'd probably be thinking about what was going to happen tomorrow. She hoped that's what he was thinking anyway.

Pushing the blankets off, she rolled out of bed and groaned. Yesterday had been a long day and her muscles were stiff and ached. She rubbed the back of her neck, her shoulders, easing some of the discomfort away. "Come on, girl, get moving or you'll be late," she mumbled.

She reached for her white terrycloth robe, smiled, and decided against it. Instead, she went to the dresser, pulled open the top drawer, and found a deep blue, satin teddy she'd bought months ago, and never worn. Shaking out the wispy lingerie, she felt her cheeks grow warm and her nipples perk with excitement. Slipping into the loose fitting garment, she adjusted the lacy bodice to cover her nipples. *Cover, yes*, she thought when she looked down, *but not conceal*. The dark tips protruded like tiny beacons through the lace. She shook her shoulders a little and watched her breasts jiggle from side to side. Goosebumps raced up her arms and across her chest. She felt naughty and excited.

Taking a breath, she left her bedroom and sauntered towards the kitchen first, to get a pot of coffee on. Was he watching? She fervently hoped he was. He deserved a treat as well as a tease. She glanced through the newly framed-in doorway and saw him on the other side, dressed in his usual cut-offs, and T-shirt, nailing a strip of trim along the side of one of the large picture windows. Behind him, in the middle of the room, were two sawhorses laden with more trim that looked as if he'd cut to fit the rest of the windows.

When he turned, he glanced up, then down towards the next piece of trim. Then, he did a double take. His mouth dropped open, and he stared wide-eyed at her. She pretended not to see him, although her heart beat wildly with pleasure. She added water to the coffee maker and coffee

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grounds to the filter. Punching the ON button, she innocently raised her hands over her head and stretched. Slowly, she spun around, back arched, breasts thrust forward and barely covered by the lace.

She blinked, pretending to notice him for the first time and dropped her arms. One crossed over her chest, the other she draped over her pussy, posing for him. Her stance was much more erotic than any attempt at covering herself, and from the look on his face, it was working.

"Oh my," she said, breathlessly, "I didn't realize you were here already."

Caleb tore his eyes from her body and met her gaze. Stammering, he said, "Uh, I'm sorry. I thought I'd made enough noise to let you know I'd started work."

"Guess not," she replied. She shifted the hand covering her breast, making sure the nipple peeked out from between her fingers. "I should go shower and get some clothes on."

He nodded. His eyes had moved down to her chest. She tweaked her nipple. She had to bite her inner lip to keep from laughing when he licked his lips, as if preparing to dine, on her. With an exaggerated sway to her hips, she walked out of the kitchen and into the bathroom. Closing the door, she leaned against it and shut her eyes. Visions of him, standing there dumbfounded while she tormented him filled her mind. She stifled a groan, but didn't stop her fingers from pressing against her pussy.

She knew she didn't have time, but the sensations were so wonderful she didn't want to stop. A quick rub across her sensitive lips and she was close. Images of him watching her, wanting her, sent her careening towards a harsh, quick climax. She stiffened her fingers and found the hard nub that would send her over, and pinched. Gulping back a cry of bliss, her world exploded. Unable to get her breath, she shuddered and twitched. Her blood roared in her ears. Finally, she dragged in a ragged breath. A whimpered exhale followed a moment later.

"Damn!" she exclaimed. She took a few deep breaths and slipped out of the teddy. The shower cleared her head, and when she stepped out a few minutes later, her thoughts were focused on the day ahead. Towel rapped around her, teddy in hand, she left the bathroom. He was nowhere in sight, which made her smile.

She dressed in a fashionable skirt and blouse, her bra just visible through the soft purple material. Emerging from her room, she again looked into the nearly completed sunroom, but couldn't see Caleb. She heard his truck then, and turned towards the living room window, just in

time to see him pull out. He didn't go far, just parked on the street, and walked back into the yard.

For a moment, she was confused. But then a light dawned; he'd parked behind her and was just moving his truck so she could get her car out. She went for her coffee—had just poured it when he poked his head in. His voice was soft as he said, "Good morning. I...uh," he stammered, lowered his eyes and tried again. "I'm really sorry for staring at you."

"That's not the first time, is it?" she asked seriously. "I seem to recall you looking in my bedroom."

His head shot up, eyes wide, and he gulped. "Yes. I mean I'm sorry. Damn, you're doing it again."

Laughing, she said, "Yeah, I know. Apology accepted. Would you like some coffee?"

"I'd love some."

She poured him a cup and handed it to him. Her fingers brushed his when she passed it over. Glancing at his hand, she saw that he was trembling, and wondered. Was it because of what he'd seen, or was he thinking of tomorrow?

She took a sip of the scalding coffee, then said, "I can't stop to chat this morning. I've got a meeting at eight." Her mind shifted into gear. "I should be home by one, at least I hope so. I'll shoot Sammy if he's got me scheduled for later meetings."

Caleb nodded. "I'll see you later then."

She placed her cup into the sink and grabbed her bag and purse. Slipping into her sandals, she made sure her ass faced him and gave it an extra wiggle or two.

By the time she got to the office, she was worked up again and dying to get through the morning so that she could begin her weekend. She strode into her office to find a less than spectacularly dressed Sammy, in deep green slacks and matching button down shirt, already there and sorting through a pile of paperwork he'd obviously just put on her desk.

"Hey, sexy, are we ready for that meeting?"

Sammy jumped and spun around. "Lord, woman, you scared me witless," he cried and flapped his hands, as only he seemed to be able to do. "Yes, we're ready." He sifted through the pile and pulled out two thirds of the paperwork and handed it to her, "This is everything you'll need—from receipts to the shopping lists. I even tossed in the lunch

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receipt from that meeting John, Jr. insisted on the last time he scheduled a meeting."

Cynthia took the papers from him, and after dropping her bag and purse on the corner of her desk, she sat down to skim through it all. Fargo Realtors, as one of their oldest clients, who, under contract, had arranged to meet with her once every three months to go over meals and numbers. There were usually three of their top people at each meeting, John, Jr. being one of the less savory. But, she loved his father and knew the old man would one day retire and leave it all to his son. John, Sr. was always one of the three, and the last was a rotating senior agent who had brought in the most profit during the preceding quarter.

Flipping through the papers, Cynthia's mind wandered—Caleb, again watching her, only this time in her vision, he was naked. Her heart rate increased, and she felt a bead of sweat trickle down her spine. Suddenly, her office was much too warm, and her face felt flushed.

"Ahem," Sammy cleared his throat, and then in a playful voice, added, "Earth to Cyn, come in, Cyn."

"Oh shush," she laughed.

"That construction guy really has got you going, girlfriend." He perched his butt on the corner of her desk and looked down at her, a bemused smile on his face.

"Yeah, I guess he has," she admitted, then blurted, "he's strong and capable, and works hard and...and, I'm sorry he's almost finished the work he's doing for me."

"So, you've finally come out of your shell. It's about time."

She looked up, ready to yell at him if he was making fun of her. But, he wasn't. His face was soft and his eyes showed nothing but care and concern for her.

Leaning back in her chair, she said, "Yes, I think it's time, too..." She let the sentence trail off and they sat in silence for a few moments. Finally, she shook herself. "Okay, let's get this show on the road. Coffee's made, and I'll assume you have a platter of pastries made up and ready to serve, right?"

"You know it, baby. We're all ready to make nice for the customers."

She laughed. "Good, you're a peach, now go see if anyone's here yet. It'd be great if we were ready and they were left waiting."

Sammy bounced to his feet, and with a swish of his hand, mock saluted her. Then, in his usual flamboyant manner, he turned and flounced out of the office.

An hour later, she was deep in conversation with John, Sr., his son, and a rotund, middle-aged man who, after mumbling a greeting, said nothing other than the odd grunt of approval. The meeting went as smoothly as they usually did, and his son, John, Jr., was behaving himself for a change.

"So, let me see if I got this right. You want to keep all the salads the same, but you'd like a choice of two hot lunch items."

"Yeah," said the white haired John, Sr. "Last fall you had cabbage rolls. Everyone raved over them, so add them to the menu. Maybe a meat pie, salad combo for the other."

"You're in luck. I've just started with the meat pie production again. How about each week, I'll offer a different filling: chicken, beef, turkey, whatever's good?"

"That sounds perfect."

Cynthia made notes and added some changes to the document she had open on her computer. She switched to her spreadsheet and revised prices as well as quantities, then asked, "John, have a look at these numbers, do they seem fair to you?"

John rolled his chair over and peered at the monitor. After a minute of silent calculation, he nodded. "Fair as usual, Cynthia. This is why I love doing business with you." He sat back in his chair and reached for his coffee, and an éclair he'd been eying since Sammy had brought them in.

Cynthia hit save, added a date and her initials, then saved the file as a different name for a backup copy. She had Sammy make copies of the menu and pricing list, giving each of the three men a copy. The final chitchat between John, Sr. and her lasted another half hour and, she was sure, was what cemented their business relationship so well. John, Jr. added a comment or two, mostly inane remarks about how women made excellent cooks or secretaries, but it took a real man, or a dyke, to run a business. His father shot him a vicious look, then proceeded to ignore him completely, much to the younger man's embarrassment.

When they left, Cynthia let out a huge sigh of relief. The tension between father and son had become almost unbearable. She liked the old man, and hoped his son smartened up soon.

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She closed the files on her computer and went to work on another document. It wasn't long and she was lost in spreadsheets, customer files, and numbers. She didn't come up for air until Sammy poked his head in the door and said, "Hey you, you've been at it for hours. It's nearly two and I thought you planned on being out of here at noon."

She peered up at him, feeling thick-headed from work. It took a second to figure out what he'd said. She checked the clock and sighed. "Yeah, I'm out of here. Just give me a minute to finish up with this one document. I'll need copies for the files, but that can wait until I get in on Monday."

"Okay, hun. I'm glad I popped in." He tapped his fingers on the door, then said, "If you want, just leave me a list of what you need me to copy and I'll make sure they're done and on your desk first thing Monday morning."

"I don't know what I'd do without you." She smiled up at him. "I'll leave a list. Thanks."

Not long afterwards, she was on her way home. Traffic was light, and her thoughts shifted easily from office, to Caleb.

Chapter Nine

Pulling to a stop in the driveway, Cynthia sat in the car for just a few moments. His truck sat off to the right side. She wondered how much he had left to do. Would he finish today, or would she have to add more to the punishment he'd already earned? Was he looking forward to that punishment? Just the thought of him, and what she had planned, made her tremble with excitement.

"Come on, girl, get moving before you gush all over the car seat," she murmured and pushed open the door. She grabbed her bag and her purse. Even just scooting across the seat made her aware of her wet panties, dragging across her pussy. Walking towards the house, her thighs rubbed together in just the right way. She felt as if the slightest friction would send her soaring.

Inside, she dropped her bags by the door and kicked off her sandals. It was quiet and she wondered what he was doing. Was he still working or was he finished? Barefoot, she padded through the living room, dining room and out into the sunroom.

He was there, stripped from the waist up and sweating as usual. *Thank heavens for hot summer days*, she thought. She walked towards him, his back to her as he knelt, sanding the trim. "How's it going?"

He jerked and spun his head around. "Damn!" He smiled, perhaps embarrassed by how easily she'd surprised him. "Cynthia, you need bells on or something. I just about jumped out of my skin."

Chuckling, she moved around so she could see what he was doing. On the floor beside him was a small tub of putty and a putty knife. In his hand, he held a small square of sandpaper. "I thought all the sanding was done?"

"Most of it is," he admitted. He seemed distracted, and when she glanced down between his thighs, she saw a large bump in his cut-offs. "Wherever I put in a finishing nail, I putty, and then I have to sand off the excess and paint it again."

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"Ah, that makes sense." She glanced around at all the floorboards and saw the tiny smudges where he'd already puttied. "I'll leave you to it then. I want to get out of these clothes and into something more comfortable."

He scanned her body, as if noticing what she wore for the first time. "Okay, see you later."

"A couple of hours and you're supposed to be done. You going to make it?"

"I think so. It's just small stuff now, but it all takes time."

She went into her room, and changed into a pair of shorts and a tube top. The shorts felt too tight, the tube top, not tight enough. Deftly, she ran her hand over her breasts, imagining how it would feel if it were Caleb's hands instead. They'd bantered back and forth all week, and knowing she'd have him at her mercy tomorrow drove her crazy. From the size of the bulge she'd seen in his shorts, he was obviously having a similar problem.

She gave her nipple a hard pinch, then reluctantly pulled her hand away. She had work to do, and really wanted to get that out of the way before his day was finished. In her gut, she had a feeling that the coming weekend was going to be something special. She didn't want work to get in the way.

In the dining room, she first took a look into the sunroom and watched Caleb moving slowly along the floor. She watched his shoulder and back muscles flex as he sanded each spot carefully, and moved to the next. Looking around the room, she saw very little finish work left to be done. Pearl white sconces hung along two walls, the windowsills had all been cleaned; even the floor looked as if he'd spent some time polishing it. All that seemed missing were the switch covers and the touchup paint.

Shaking her head, she moved to the table and started her laptop. She quickly became immersed in her work. It wasn't until she saw him standing in the doorway that she realized she'd been working for two hours without a break. Glancing at the clock, she saw that it was quitting time, and he looked nervous.

"Are you finished?" she asked. Her throat felt dry, and she ran her tongue over her lips trying to moisten them.

"I think you better come and have a look." He ducked back into the room and stood facing the far wall.

She saved her work, and pushed her chair away from the table. He seemed jumpy, nervous, and she wondered why. When she stood at the

entrance to the new room, she smiled. It was perfect. She'd need to get drapes for the winter, but for the time being, she loved having it all open. Around the perimeter, the hardwood floor gleamed and the Persian rug in the center looked plush and soft. She stepped inside and did a slow spin, checking all the light fixtures and inhaling the smell of fresh paint. It was then that she spotted the plug in the far corner, and the lack of a cover.

She turned and faced him, confused.

From behind his back, he pulled out the cover and, while holding it out towards her, he said, "I didn't quite get it finished."

She blinked, and smiled again. Taking the cover, she said, "You know I'll have to add this to the punishment you've already earned."

"Yes, I know." He lowered his eyes, and asked, "What time would you like me here?"

"Ten," her voice had grown husky.

"Yes, ma'am. I'll be here."

He walked towards the door, but before he left, she said, "Don't masturbate tonight."

He spun around and faced her. Flushed, he replied in a small, ragged voice, "Yes ma'am."

* * * *

She thought she'd never get to sleep, but finally, she drifted into a dream-filled slumber. With no alarm to wake her, it was after eight when she opened her eyes. As soon as she was aware of being awake, she was excited. She checked the clock beside her pillow. Groaning, she stretched then rolled out of bed. Going towards the bathroom, she peeked into the sunroom and saw sunlight streaming through the windows. She turned and wandered into the new room. The cover lay on the windowsill where she'd placed it last night.

She smiled. He'd left that one thing undone, on purpose. Cheeky beast. He'd pay.

She showered and dried herself with a large, soft towel. Hair brushed and teeth cleaned, she was ready to dress. In her bedroom, she slipped into the leather corset she'd worn on their first weekend's punishment session. She decided on a matching, black leather thong, instead of the skirt. Stepping into the tiny panties, she shivered as they dragged up her legs. She wiggled it into place and then pulled out her boots. They'd been hiding in her closet for months, just waiting for the right occasion. Today was it. With two-inch thick soles, the six-inch

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heels looked impossible to walk in, but in fact were incredibly comfortable. She sat on the bed to pull them on and zip them up.

She slipped on a silky black cover-up and went into the kitchen to make coffee. The waiting was torture, but she loved every moment of it. She sipped her coffee and let her imagination run wild with visions of him being punished and submitting to her. Her hands trembled each time she raised her cup, and she smiled. She wanted him—wanted him more than she'd wanted anyone, except her Tom.

She was so lost in her thoughts, the doorbell's chime made her jump. She put her coffee cup on the table and got to her feet. It was ten, he was right on time. With her heart pounding, she went to the door. But, before she opened it, she took a deep breath, and gathered herself.

"Good morning, Caleb," she said in a surprisingly steady voice. "You're right on time. Excellent." Stepping aside, she ignored his stare. "Come in."

He slipped his sandals off and took a step inside. He'd worn loose-fitting, black jogging pants and a tank top that left much of his chest bare. "Thank you, ma'am," he murmured.

"I see you like this outfit as well."

"Uh, yes, ma'am. I like it very much." His hands drifted to the front of his crotch, but only for a moment. He clenched his fists and forced them to his side. His erection was already huge.

"Strip," she uttered the single word and waited.

She saw him shudder, but he immediately pulled off his tank top and folded it. Once it lay on the nearby chair, he slid his thumbs into the waistband of his joggers and pushed them down. He bent, covering his crotch with his own body. He turned away from her when he folded them and stood wearing just a pair of light blue boxers, but only for a moment. They followed the jogging pants and he quickly tossed them on top of the small pile.

The muscles along his back twitched, his glutes tightened as he turned. Tanned flesh melted into white at his middle, a sparse thatch of wiry blonde pubic hair nestled between his thighs. His erection jutted majestically towards her, and his balls hung low in their fleshy, pale sack.

She glanced up and down, inspecting him, wanting him. "You know where my special room is. Today, you're to crawl there." She took a step closer to him, and traced an imaginary line from his left nipple to his

right with her nail. A faint red line decorated his chest, and she leaned forward and kissed his left nipple.

He gasped, but remained in place.

"On your hands and knees," she said and stepped back.

"Yes, Lady Cyn," he whispered huskily and dropped to his knees. His erection bobbed, then disappeared as he lowered himself onto his hands.

"Remember, I told you whenever you enter my room, you'll be bound in some way."

"Yes, Lady Cyn, I remember."

"Good, hold still." She pulled a leather lace from her pocket and bent down behind him. Reaching between his legs, she took firm hold of his penis and carefully pulled it back towards her. The outer flesh was hot, the inner core like steel in her hand. She eased her fingers up and down his shaft; drinking in the feeling of power and control he was giving her. For an instant, she thought of leaning down and kissing the tip, taking the firm round dome between her lips and sucking the luscious pearl of dew that formed at the slit. His groan was her gauge to measure his excitement, and when it came, she wound the strap just behind the crown. Tied tight enough to remain secure, but not enough to harm him, he'd know she'd bound him. He'd know he belonged to her.

When she was finished, she straightened up and gave his ass a firm slap, "Get moving." Her handprint appeared as she followed him. When he was almost at the door, she stepped around him and opened it, allowing him to enter. Before she followed him in, she slipped her cover-up off her shoulders and hung it on the doorknob.

"On your feet. Center of the room," she commanded sharply.

Caleb climbed to his feet, and edged towards the center of the room, directly below a wooden beam that ran the full width of the room. He looked up and saw the hooks spaced every foot or so as well as a pulley directly overhead.

"Hands behind your back." She strode across the room, making sure he got a good look at her nearly naked butt, and opened the cupboard where the cuffs she wanted were stored, along with other paraphernalia. Two sets of wide leather cuffs, with two buckles, found their way into her hand. Next, she pulled out a wooden bar, approximately thirty inches long, with an eye-bolt screwed into each end.

She walked around him, the steady clicking of her heels on the hardwood floor as she paced sent her heart to beating more wildly.

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Reaching out, she trailed her fingers down his arm and across his back. He shivered. Continuing on, her hand encountered dampness, his sweat trickling down his ribs. She stepped in front of him, the top of her head, at his chin level. She stared at his chest. The rapid in and out of his breathing warned her that he'd hyperventilate if she didn't find some way to calm him down soon.

"Easy," she purred and laid a hand on his breast. Hot, moist flesh met her palm. "Take a deep breath and hold it."

He complied, but trembled.

She slid her open palm across to the other side of his chest, gently stroking him. "Let it out, and take another one." Her hand moved again, sliding lower over his stomach. "Close your eyes, just for a few moments." She lightened her caress, barely touching him, easing him into submission at a speed he could accept. "That's it, my sweet. Now, take a deep breath, easy, not gasping, just an easy breath. You know I won't hurt you. Easy. Take another. Yes, just like that."

He complied and under her hand, she felt his body lose the tenseness that she'd seen building. Her hand moved around to his hip, and then down his thigh. He shifted his weight, and muscles rippled along his haunch. She stroked, appreciating his strength, admiring his beauty.

"Be still now, at ease with me," she whispered and kissed his breast. "I'm going to cuff you. Hold your hands out in front of you, wrists together." She waited until he held his hands out in front of her, and then deftly buckled the cuffs on his wrists.

"You know you've earned punishment for two weekends."

"Yes, Lady Cyn," he said, his voice was little more than a whisper. "I hope I haven't disappointed you."

Surprised, she looked at his face and smiled. "No, you haven't disappointed me in the least. On the contrary, I'm extremely pleased with you."

He blinked and dared to look into her eyes. "Thank you. I..." He let whatever he was going to say trail off into nothing, and lowered his head.

"I'm not going to blindfold you this time." She walked behind him, and reached up for the chain dangling from the pulley. When she pulled, the links rattled as they fed through the pulley. She kept pulling, until she judged there was enough to clip to his cuffs. Holding the end, she went around him, clipped the cuffs together, and then snapped the end of the chain to the clip. He was secured.

He breathed a huge sigh.

Walking to the wall, where the pulley handle was, she felt his eyes on her. She reached for the metal handle, but before she started cranking on it, she looked over her shoulder to see if she'd been right. As expected, his eyes were fixed on her. She spread her feet apart, shoulder width and swayed her ass back and forth. His eyes followed. Gripping the handle tightly, she wound it slowly to the right. His hands rose.

When she had his hands over his head, he seemed to realize how helpless he was and, for a moment, panicked. Desperately, he tugged on the chain, jerking at it. His eyes were wide with the animal like fear of being trapped.

"Caleb," she said in an even tone. He didn't at first hear her, and she repeated his name, "Caleb."

He glared down at her.

"Caleb!" She strode over to him and stroked his back. Sweat covered and trembling, she sensed his fear. She circled him, stroking him, soothing him. "It's all right. Talk to me. If you want me to let you go, I will. All you have to do is ask. I won't do anything you don't want me to." For a moment, she laid her cheek against his chest and inhaled his masculine scent. Then, with her eyes fixed on his and her heart beating like a drum, she blurted, "Damn the contract, I want you."

The last sentence got through to him and his glare softened. "Don't let me go," he whispered. "I...I. You know I left the cover off on purpose."

Her pulse thundered in her ears. Had she heard him right? Of course she had, but she could hardly believe it. Watching his face for reaction, she said, "I hadn't planned on letting you go."

He blinked, and a smile pulled at the corners of his mouth.

"And, yes, I knew you'd left the cover off on purpose." She returned to the pulley handle and finished drawing his hands up. He was left standing with his feet flat on the floor, arms overhead, and his elbows slightly bent.

"I'm going to cuff your ankles now," she said and took the second set of cuffs. Squatting in front of him, his prick was at eye level. It had softened a little from his fear, but when she nudged it with her cheek, it pulsed several times, thickening and lengthening until it reached its full size again. She looked up at him, making sure he was watching and flicked her tongue over the swollen crown. He gasped and his hips jerked in reaction.

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"Like that, do you?" she teased, already knowing the answer. Her thong was driving her crazy. The band moved every time she did, rubbing against her anus, sending jolts of pleasure into her most private of places. The leather covering her sex was soaked through with her juices and the scent intoxicated her.

"Yes, Lady Cyn, I like that very much," Caleb replied and seemed more at ease, more sure of himself.

She finished buckling the cuffs snugly around each ankle, and then pushed them apart. She thought he might fight her again, but with no hesitation at all, he slid his feet wider apart. When she was sure the bar would fit between his ankles, she grabbed hold of his leg and stopped him from spreading any further. Two clips later, his legs were held for her. Then, deftly, she unfastened the leather strap that held his erection and tossed it to the side. She had a plan for him and the lace was in the way.

She looked up at him again, and reached for his erection. The hot, tight skin was soft; the inside felt like a granite shaft. With feather-light touches, she smoothed the satin-soft flesh up and down. His groans of pleasure urged her on. The head swelled even more, its tip becoming wet with pre-come when she found his sweet spot on the underside, just below the glans. His thighs tensed and he thrust his hips forward, eager for her to continue. That's when she stopped.

"Oh God, oh God," he chanted, his hips trembling with lust.

Lady Cyn had one more restraint for him—a thong taken from the bodice of her corset. She stood before him to unlace it. Unfastening the bow, she pulled the foot-long lace out of the eyelets, exposing more and more of her breasts as the cups fell away. Her nipples tightened when she exposed them to the cool air. Goose bumps raced across her chest and up her neck.

She knelt in front of him, the lace in one hand, and reached beneath his erection. His testicles moved in her hand, trying to pull up close to his body. Her grasp was sure and steady, easing them down into the bottom of their sack. One end of the lace held between her teeth, her nose an inch from his prick, she wound the strip of leather around the neck of his sack. Pulled snug, his balls were hers. Releasing the end of the strap from her mouth, she wound it around the base of his erection and tied it off—just tight enough to remind him of her will.

She stroked him, up and down his thighs. Cradling his bound testicles, she tickled the spot just behind them. All the while, he watched her, transfixed and moaning.

Tormented and teased, he was flushed and babbling by the time she went for her crop. The same twenty-one inch long instrument he'd felt before. She flicked it back and forth several times, slicing the air. Accepted once, she knew he'd accept it again.

She walked around him, sliding the crop along his thighs, flicking it playfully across his bottom. He watched her. His head turned and spun around when she moved too far behind him.

"Twenty strokes for last week's screw up." She'd give no quarter on that. He'd messed up and she would hold him accountable.

"Yes, Lady Cyn," he said softly, and after a moment added, "thank you."

She cocked her head and looked closely at his face, his body, to gauge his true reaction. As she watched, she noticed him pushing his bottom back ever so slightly.

"And another ten for not finishing this week," she said and smiled.

"Yes, Lady Cyn. Thank you."

She stood behind him, left patch resting on the swell of his ass. Firm white flesh, eager for the coloring, she thought, and raised the crop. He tensed, but she waited. He groaned, and relaxed the muscles.

She struck.

His back arched and a groan whispered from his lips.

Cyn rubbed the patch over his ass, spreading the small pain. Again, she raised the crop, and again she waited for him to relax before she let fly with a quick slash. The crop sank into the firm cheek. The thwack resounded through the room, and his groan was like a ballad, hummed by a lover. She alternated cheeks for the first ten; each delivered with all her strength. The next ten she administered more quickly, spreading the strokes from the top of each cheek to the crease where his leg joined his butt. After each one, she slid the patch over his ass, spreading the discomfort, and giving him just enough time to take a breath.

After every few strokes, she also touched him. She walked around him, holding the crop where he could see it, across her chest, touching a nipple; somewhere he'd be sure to look. That's when she touched him, caressed him, or pinched a nipple when he wasn't expecting it. His reactions varied, but all led her to believe he wanted more. His prick stayed hard, but she attributed that mostly to the lace she'd bound him

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with. She tested those bonds, making sure they didn't grow too tight, or his balls didn't become too cool, or his prick too cold. He thrust into her hand when he could, and she rewarded him by tugging on his balls. He groaned and eased his knees even further apart.

"Now, for the next ten," she said and went to stand behind him, to the right. She raised the crop and judged his breathing. She waited for him to exhale, then struck. Fast and furious, a steady barrage of strokes that didn't stop until she'd delivered all ten.

He couldn't scream, he had no breath. He couldn't escape, her bonds held him firmly in place. He had no choice but to endure. When the last stroke landed and she held the crop tight to his ass, he shuddered. Inhaling, he held his breath for long moments then exhaled. A shuddering sob joined the escaping air.

Stepping closer to him, she ran her hand over his back and ass. His muscles were hard under her hand, rigid with pain, and covered in sweat. The flesh was warm, hotter in the places she'd kissed him with the leather. She let the crop fall to the floor and caressed him with both hands. From wide shoulders, to his V-shaped back, the muscles writhed under her ministrations. She moved down the slope of his lower back and his muscular, taut ass, exploring and easing him back to the present.

"I haven't finished yet." Her words froze him.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

She didn't sense fear. It was more like confusion, the punishment should have been done, or so he must have thought. Two weeks of deadlines missed. Two sets of punishment dished out. What more could there be?

"You could have finished yesterday, am I right?" Her hands continued moving down his thighs and between his legs. She bent to kiss his lower back and inhaled the scent of his sweat and manhood. She flicked her tongue out and tasted his salty flesh.

"Yes, I left the cover off on purpose," he admitted.

"Why?"

He didn't answer. She didn't think he knew the answer, not at first. Reaching around, she gripped his erection and slowly worked the shaft in long, languid strokes. Her heart was pounding. The soft lips of her labia were swollen and her clitoris throbbed. Her excitement mirrored his.

"You were already guaranteed punishment. You knew that. So, why would you purposely leave something undone?"

He squirmed. She wasn't sure if he was trying to escape her touch or the questions she was forcing him to respond to. His prick was slick and hot. It throbbed beautifully in her fist. He groaned, and thrust his hips forward. "I didn't want it to end. I wanted this. I wanted you to do this to me." The words spilled out of him in a rush as if he'd had a revelation.

"Thank you," she kissed his back and then released him. She walked around and stood facing him. Reaching out, she unknotted the lace around his genitals and dropped the leather strap to the floor. She bent over and picked up the crop. "Now, for your final punishment. This is for not completing a task when it was perfectly within your power to do so. I'm going to use the crop on you, and you will not climax."

He stared at her, bewildered. "Not climax? What are you going to do?"

She didn't answer. Raising the crop, she waited for him to look into her eyes, and then struck. The leather patch connected with the shaft of his penis, just below the head. Although the touch was light, the shock must have been extraordinary. He gasped. His hips thrust forward. His erection careened wildly in the air and slapped against his thigh.

She waited for him to calm down, stroking his chest and lower belly. Again, she took aim, and while he gritted his teeth, she struck. He grunted, his hips twitched and droplets of sweat trickled down his face, and dripped onto his chest.

Four more times, she struck him on the shaft, and each time he lunged forward. She offered him pain, and he reveled in it. The crop was her bow, and he was her instrument. His cries of pleasure stopped her. If she'd struck again, she knew he wouldn't have been able to control the orgasm that lurked so near the surface.

She flung the crop to the floor and knelt before him, struggling to unfasten his ankles from the spreader bar. His cock was so near, she could have engulfed it without moving anything but her head, but she refused him that pleasure. When she rose to her feet, she was trembling, wanting him, needing him.

She walked, as calmly, and as regally as she could manage to the pulley handle and spun it. His arms dropped. Then he was free.

He took her in his arms, and while his body trembled uncontrollably, he whispered, "Don't let me go."

His heartbeat thumped wildly against her ear. She gazed up into his eyes, wide unblinking eyes that she could have gladly drowned in. "I won't. I want you, too."

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He lowered his face to hers and brushed her lips with his. Breaths intermingled as tongue flicked across tongue. Her naked breasts flattened against his muscular chest, both sets of nipples taut. He finally pulled away, and smiled down at her. "I never dreamed I'd want that, or need it."

"An acquired taste maybe." She smiled, and added, "I'm glad you do."

"Me too," he kissed her lightly again. "Can I take you to bed now?"

Taking his erection firmly in hand, she whispered, "I thought you'd never ask."

Chapter Ten

With ease, he lifted her into his arms. Naked, he carried her from the room and across the sunlit living room. The door to her bedroom loomed ahead, and with a gentle kick of his foot, he pushed it open.

"May I?" he murmured.

Cynthia laughed. "You better, or I'll have to punish you again."

"I might like it," he chuckled and entered the room.

His arms around her tightened for a second, as if he wanted to hold her in his arms forever. Stopping at the foot of her bed, he sighed and lowered her to her feet. Even then, he didn't release her. His hands trailed down her back, and his face moved close. He pulled her tight to his chest. Every contour of his body conformed to hers. Still slick with sweat, his belly with its ridges of muscles, pressed hard against her softer tummy, and his erection gloriously prodded at her thigh. His eyes seemed unnaturally bright, and then the lids drifted over them. His lips brushed against hers.

She slid her hands around his back and downward. The smooth, damp skin of his ass, more than filled her palms. She squeezed and pulled him even closer. Their kiss deepened. Lips eased apart, her tongue flicked across his and teased them open. His breath mingled with hers as he exhaled. Tongues intertwined and danced, body heat rose, as they caressed each other. The leather suddenly became a hindrance.

She pulled away. "Turn down the bedding, then help me get out of this leather."

He looked at her, and for a moment, it was like he didn't understand what she'd said. He shuddered. "Right. Christ, I'm ready to explode."

Cynthia eased out of his arms and turned her back. It didn't take long for him to get the message. Instead of the easy zipper at the front, she offered him the leather lacing at the back that held the corset together. There came a gentle tug, and then the soft whipping sound of lace being pulled through the eyelets. Another followed, and he soon had a rhythm going, tug, whip, tug, whip—and the slow descent down her

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back. The leather fell away, and the chill of the air made her shiver. His hands slipped around her and cupped her sweat-damp breasts. His thumbs rubbed across her nipples, and it took all of her determination not to allow him his way.

Taking a deep breath, she pushed his hands away and took a step ahead. Turning, she smiled up at him, and said, "Panties."

His gaze drifted down over her plump, white breasts and belly, coming to rest on the tiny thong. He dropped to his knees, erection bouncing, and reached for the sides of the thong. He tugged downward, and she wriggled. The tiny, damp, leather covering peeled away from her pussy. As he pulled the straps down her legs, his face got even closer to the tiny thatch of pubic hair she'd left.

"One lick," she whispered as she stepped out of the thong.

He looked up at her, a surprised look on his face. But, he didn't say a word, just looked back at her pussy.

She eased her feet apart, allowing a glimpse of her slit and the puffy inner lips. He leaned forward and flicked his tongue out. The tip connected with her clit, and it was as if he'd shot a bolt of electricity through her. The groan was hers, guttural, deep. She shuddered. Her orgasm lurked just a breath away.

"On the bed." Her voice didn't even sound like her. It was rough and deep, and full of desire.

A few moments later, she stood naked at the foot of the bed and he lay stretched out on his back across the crisp white sheet. The erection she ached to touch and taste, pointed towards his chin.

"Hold your cock out for me," she said, and smiled when he eagerly reached down for his shaft. She saw the muscles in his thighs tense as his fingers wound firmly around the base. The long, fat column twitched, and a thick drop of clear fluid oozed from the tip.

Cynthia struggled against the urge to rush ahead. Creeping onto the foot of the bed, she crawled towards him. Rather than move beside him, she straddled his legs, first with her arms and then with her knees. She inched higher, forearm and thigh brushing his body. When she reached his mid-section, she leaned down and kissed his hip. Her cheek brushed his hand. Looking up, she saw him staring down at her, a feverish, wide-eyed glint in his eyes. Holding his gaze with her own, she kissed his flesh again. The fine hair tickled her lips and she shuddered.

"Please." he whispered.

His hand moved against the side of her face, but she refused to look. "Please what?" she asked. She felt like she was going to explode and she knew he was there as well. She could hardly catch her breath. Her pussy clenched. She lowered herself until her slick folds barely touched his shin. Arching her back, she rubbed against him, a bitch in heat, a woman in need. For an instant her eyes closed, the pleasure almost more than she could bear. Her hips lunged ahead and her soft wetness dragged lusciously along his shin bone.

"Please, I want you." His voice was almost unrecognizable. He took a deep, shuddering breath. "I need to give you pleasure, my lady."

Cynthia opened her eyes, and turned her head. The tip of his cock touched her lips. Opening her mouth, she took the swollen head between her lips and delicately ran her tongue over the slit. The tang made her mouth water, and she instinctively sucked it in.

"Oh God!" His hand tightened and another drop of pre-come oozed onto her tongue.

She felt him pulse against her lips. He was close. She knew that if she kept it up much longer, he wouldn't be able to control the climax so precariously near to erupting. Even so, she couldn't stop from taking hold of his balls, just for a moment, and giving them a gentle squeeze.

When she removed her mouth and glanced up at him, she had to fight to keep from laughing. His mouth hung open and his eyes were squeezed shut, as if he was trying to block out what she was doing to him.

She crawled ahead, until her knees framed his hips. Rising up, she held her pussy above his groin. "Rub your cock against me." She wanted to be close when he entered her.

He groaned, but a moment later, his prick touched her. Tentatively, just the careful rubbing of a man too close to completion to tempt more; he eased his cock between her slick labia. When he connected with her clit, she lurched forward. Her hands found his shoulders, the nails taking purchase a little too deep for comfort, but she was past the ability to judge.

"Yes," he hissed and his hips jerked. Sawing back and forth, his prick dragged between her nether lips in a gentle fucking motion.

Sweat dripped down her sides. Her thighs tightened, and then trembled, as her pleasure mounted. Unable to stop herself, she reached down and pulled his hand from his cock. "Mine, now," she growled and

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replaced his hand with hers. Like a woman possessed, she positioned herself over him, and with a sigh of satisfaction, impaled herself.

"Yes, yours," he echoed her growl. His hands went to her hips, and with a strength that surprised her; he lifted her slightly. Then, with ease, he moved in her. Thrusting in and out, slowly enough to make her crazy for more, he made love to her. She sobbed for release, and was quickly joined by his more masculine grunting. She clawed at his shoulders as he teased her by making her lower body move in a circular motion, his prick stirring her in the most delicious of ways.

"Faster," she urged, desperate to come.

He responded, and thrust more forcefully into her. His fingers dug into her hips as he plunged in and out, faster with each stroke. His pelvis collided with her clit, and sent her skyrocketing into bliss. Gasping, sobbing with months of pent up desires, she climaxed. Flashing lights cascaded behind her eyes, her breathing forgotten, as a million sensations took over.

He lunged in hard, and held her against him as his own release erupted deep inside. She felt him pulse, then again, as he too gasped his pleasure.

When she remembered to breathe, Caleb's eyes opened. Smiling, panting, he released her hips and moved his hands up to her arms. He stroked her from shoulder to elbow, and then pulled her down on top of him. For her part, she went willingly. Her head resting against his chest, his heart pounding for a few moments more then slowed to a deep thumping against her ear.

"Thank you, my lady." He stroked her back and kissed her softly on the shoulder.

She turned her head around and looked into his eyes. "You're mine now."

"Yes, I know," he said softly. "But, do you also know, you're mine?"

"Of course. I wouldn't have it any other way."

"I'll put that cover on the light switch."

"It can wait. We need to talk about what's next."

"I was hoping you'd say that. Do I need a schedule?"

Laughing, Cynthia leaned forward and brushed his lips with hers. "Maybe."

JUDE MASON

About the Author

Born and raised on the West coast of Canada, Jude Mason continues to live there with her husband, their dog and their cat. She is the author of several erotic shorts and novels. Readers may visit her site at <http://www.my-haven2001.com> for more information.

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