

An Ellora's CaveRomantica Publication



[www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com)

In the Arms of Danger

ISBN # 1-4199-0661-5

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

In the Arms of Danger Copyright© 2006 Madison Hayes

Edited by Pamela Campbell.

Cover art by Willo .

Electronic book Publication: July 2006

This book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the authors' imagination and used fictitiously.

Warning:

The following material contains graphic sexual content meant for mature readers. This story has been rated E-rotic by a minimum of three independent reviewers.

Ellora's Cave Publishing offers three levels of Romantica™ reading entertainment: S (S-ensuous), E (E-rotic), and X (X-treme).

S-ensuous love scenes are explicit and leave nothing to the imagination.

E-rotic love scenes are explicit, leave nothing to the imagination, and are high in volume per the overall word count. In addition, some E-rated titles might contain fantasy material that some readers find objectionable, such as bondage, submission, same sex encounters, forced seductions, and so forth. E-rated titles are the most graphic titles we carry; it is common, for instance, for an author to use words such as "fucking", "cock", "pussy", and such within their work of literature.

X-treme titles differ from E-rated titles only in plot premise and storyline execution. Unlike E-rated titles, stories designated with the letter X tend to contain controversial subject matter not for the faint of heart.

In the Arms of Danger

Madison Hayes

Dedication

...again, for Rhyannon.

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Prince Valiant: King Features Syndicate, Inc.

## Chapter One

“Get your hands off her fucking tits.” The harsh words echoed on the pub’s paneled walls.

At the sound of that cold command, the young man crowding Julie froze. Trapped in the leather-lined booth, she’d found herself the unwilling recipient of his unwelcome attention. Now, a look of pure panic fell over his face as his thick, meaty mitt stiffened on her chest. Julie watched as perspiration bled from his pores to shine on his upper lip. With a sick feeling of revulsion, she leaned away from the mouth which hovered uncomfortably close to her face. His damp, sweating breath was an insult to her senses.

“Hey,Dicky ,” her assailant answered warily, without turning. “I didn’t see you come in.”

Julie jumped when a dart slammed into the wall between the booth’s benches. The hand came off her chest as though her nipples were red-hot burners. The dart’s red tail shivered as she stared at the bronze point buried in the oak wall.

“Christ,Dicky ,” the man beside her hurried to protest, his voice strangling in his throat. “Take it easy! I didn’t know she was your girlfriend.”

Julie leaned forward, craning her neck, eager to get a glimpse of her new boyfriend, but a set of beefy shoulders stood between her and her profane Prince Valiant. Although she couldn’t see the owner of the voice, she could tell the young man beside her was scared shitless of thisDicky .

“How could you have known?” The smooth voice was forgiving without surrendering an ounce of menace.

“She just walked in. Inever seen her before. When did she become your girlfriend?” her assailant challenged in a defensive mutter.

“When she ordered supper.”

The short, clipped words sent chills down Julie’s spine, chills unlike the cold revulsion that had settled around her when the beefy lug had slid into her booth and—after a few words of introduction—had leaned over and slid a sweaty paw over her breast. This was a different sensation entirely, and one that Julie was unfamiliar with. A sensation filled with anticipation and apprehension, mixed with the melting gratitude of a woman extricated from an awkward situation.

With a scrape of heavy boots on old wood floors, a young man sauntered into view. He dismissed her unwelcome companion with a flick of his head. “Piss off, Jimmy.”

As Jimmy slid out from beside her, the newcomer slid into the maroon leather seat facing her. Julie watched him as he placed two red-tailed darts at the table’s edge.

He was a bit of a shock. Because Jimmy was obviously afraid of him—yet Jimmy could have just about made two of him. At maybe five-nine, that madeDicky a good deal taller than she was, but he was neither tall nor broad. His frame was slim, his hips narrow. His shoulders were hidden beneath the long

coat he wore but appeared wide enough for a man his size. Smooth hair, the color of vivid rust, tucked into the collar of his black coat and slashed over his forehead to almost hide his eyes. Every feature on his face had a hard edge, from his straight, narrow nose to his sulking, down-turned mouth. As his lips parted, she caught a glimpse of ragged white. One of his front teeth was chipped along its bottom edge. The effect on his face was harsh and unmannered.

And his eyes. His eyelashes formed a fence of dark spikes around irises the color of smoldering wood. Those eyes fixed on her with a hungry intensity, making her draw farther into her seat.

He might have been good looking, if he hadn't looked so threatening. Dicky. Only a Brit could wear a name like that and carry it off like a threat, rather than a joke. He didn't say a word. He just sat across from her with his eyes cutting through the dark ribbons of his hair.

"That's one pound fifty." A girl slid a plate of golden, thick-cut chips onto the table and Julie dug in her backpack to hand the girl a five-pound note.

When the waitress made change and put it on the table, Prince Valiant picked it up, handed the waitress a pound coin and pocketed the remaining money. "Two plates, Mary."

"Right, Dicky. I forgot. I'll be right back."

The young man grabbed up a handful of hot chips as though he was starving and Julie watched his hand travel to his curved lips. "Eat up," he commanded.

"I'm not hungry," she murmured, pushing the plate toward him. "Help yourself."

The waitress set an empty plate in front of Dicky and he pulled most of the chips onto it. "Why'd you order this, then, if you're not hungry?"

"I just wanted to get in out of the rain. A place to sit down."

His eyes flicked at her and she felt it like a knife's caress. "You're American."

"Yeah," she admitted, unconsciously licking her lips, unable to pull her eyes away from his hands. His fingers were long and slender, like an artist's. But his hands were hard, rough, capable, like an artist who's fought for each day's survival.

"My parents are... were British. My mother died when I was young."

He took this information without comment, chewing on a mouthful of chips, staring at her lips as though ravenous. A deep ridge formed between his auburn brows as his gaze flicked around the dark little pub. "You here alone?"

She shook her head. "I'm with—*was* with—a tour group. I missed the ferry this afternoon. I was in the public restroom when the boat pulled out." She made a face. "I ordered seafood last night, for dinner. I haven't been the same since."

Cocking his head to one side, he swallowed what was in his mouth. "You look a little pale."

Watching his Adam's apple ride the column of his throat, Julie wondered why the act should appear so sexy. She nodded and raised her eyebrows. "I feel that and more."

“Mary. Bring us some tea, will you?”

“Two cups?”

“Two cups.” He returned his attention to Julie. “English cure-all,” he offered briefly.

She nodded, caught in the intensity of his stare, completely helpless to look away. The color of his eyes almost matched his dark hair. Just this side of red, his brown eyes burned like hot slag. The flame in his eyes spread over her skin, heating her more quickly than the enclosing warmth of the booth could ever hope to. Her heart did a savage little leap, body set to a fine tremble that accompanied a rush of heat suddenly pulsing through her wan, shadowy system.

“Hey Irish.” A menacing snarl intruded into the booth, while scuffing footsteps brought the dangerous voice closer.

Dicky stopped chewing and, for a moment, regarded Julie with complete regret. Slowly, he raised his eyes to the man with the voice. Men, actually. Two tall, ugly, hard-looking men stood beside the booth. A large hand settled on the table and cut sideways, slicing the darts off the table to skid across the pub’s wooden floor. With seeming disinterest, Dicky picked up a fork, stabbed up a dozen chips and stuffed them into his mouth.

“Where you been, Dicky?” the first demanded in a voice like ground glass.

He was a lean, wiry man with a mean lift to his lip and Julie disliked him instantly. His heavy companion ran a big, battered hand over his bald skull. Like a cold knife, the skinhead’s gaze slid into the booth where Julie sat. She shivered as it reached her.

“Bertie. Skin.” Dicky acknowledged the men’s presence with two words just before his fork flashed down in an arc and pinned Bertie’s hand to the table, while the ceramic plate—gripped in Dicky’s fingers—slashed at the ugly man’s nose. Chips flew at Bertie’s face and shot over his shoulders as the plate’s edge hit him hard beneath the nose, snapped back when Dicky flexed his elbow, then smacked in under his nose again. There was a horrible cracking crunch as the plate broke beneath a fountain of bright scarlet.

The skinhead gaped at Bertie in surprise, which lost him two seconds and earned him the idiot’s prize as Dicky reached for Julie’s plate and caught the man full in the Adam’s apple. Skin doubled over, clutching at his neck. The red-tined fork clattered on the wooden floor as Bertie reached to staunch the blood rushing from his nose.

In a long swish of black coat, Dicky went over the back of the booth and disappeared through the rear exit. Choking and tripping, the two thugs followed him across the pub and out the back door.

The restaurant was silent.

“Shit.” Jimmy slammed his beer mug onto the bar, a look of pure worship on his face, while Mary, standing behind the bar with her elbows propped on the counter, watched the exit door with a dreamy smirk of admiration.

Julie reeled in the suddenly empty booth, trying to catch a breath and trying to catch up. As though ejected from a bizarre fast-forward dream, she reacted slowly to collect her wits and her backpack. As

she blinked around the silent pub, trying to regroup, Julie felt as though more things had happened to her in the last few minutes than had ever happened before, during her entire existence. She felt like something important had happened—and she had somehow missed it.

Moving in slow motion, she slid to the edge of the booth, feeling faint, her weakened body weighted by shock and the quickly unfurling realization that she'd just lost her somewhat questionable prince. It made no sense, but she felt his sudden absence like an uncomfortable, gnawing ache in her very empty stomach.

She felt bereft.

The front door opened, revealing a strip of gleaming black night. Then Dicky was beside her, levering her out of the booth. "Come on," he said with a hand on her elbow. "Time to go."

She leaned away from him, uncertainty on her face, the ache in her stomach replaced with a sudden surge of unsettling anticipation as his rough hands pulled her closer.

"You don't want to be here when those fuckers come back," he pointed out. "They don't like me and they'll like my girlfriend even less. Come on," he repeated and dragged her through the pub's front door.

## Chapter Two

Out on the narrow wet pavement, Dicky turned his collar up to fence off the rich color of his hair. "Where are you staying?" he asked.

Uninvited, his arm went around Julie's waist as naturally as breathing. She slumped into his hold, still feeling pale and watery, as his arm tightened to support her and he pushed her up the street. "Where are you staying?" he repeated.

She shook her head. "I don't know. I'm supposed to be in Dublin tonight with the rest of my group. It was all paid for in advance."

"You don't have a room? Where were you last night?"

"The Admiral... Ansted?"

"Anston. I'll take you there. You have money?"

"A little," she answered, remembering how he had appropriated her change in the pub. "My wallet and passport were in my bags on the ferry. My credit card, too. But I had some money in my backpack."

"How much?"

She swallowed hard. "Eighty pounds," she told him reluctantly.

"I'll take you to the Anston. They'll ask for fifty pounds but they'll take forty. They'll have a phone. You can contact your tour group when they get to the hotel in Ireland. You have an itinerary," he asked, "phone numbers?"

She nodded as he pushed her along the pavement that widened to become a sidewalk. She gave him a nervous glance. "What did those men want with you?"

"Bertie and Skin? I owe them money," he grunted as he threw a glance over his shoulder. "Or some reasonable facsimile."

"Reasonable facs —"

"Money. Cameras. Automobiles. Drugs. They're not picky." Ducking his head toward her, he gave her a hard smile. His teeth flashed in the darkness, the chipped incisor putting a wild edge on his unmannered smile. "They're not picky, they're just a bit brutal."

"They called you Irish."

Dicky shrugged one shoulder in response.

"Are you from Ireland?"

"I'm Liverpool. Been here all my life."

With a tug, he pulled her into his side as he hurried her up the road. His hand on her waist was firm and commanding, his arm a tight band of support wrapped around her. Walking Liverpool's dark streets with a man who had the potential for more trouble than she'd ever encountered in her life, Julie felt unreasonably safe as well as breathlessly excited. She welcomed the presence of his arm and the thrill of warmth she experienced as he wrapped her body to his in a strong grip that was almost possessive.

It was a good ten blocks to The Anston.

Two blocks into the trip, Dicky suspected he was being followed. Five blocks and he was sure of it. Brown hair, short black jacket, dark trousers. He smoked.

Dicky shrugged. He'd deal with the "tail" after he took care of the girl.

His arm tightened around her as his gaze stole sideways and slid across her elegant features. As they walked together, her straight hair swung to hide her face behind a glossy curtain of dark gold. Without thinking, he reached out with his left hand and tucked the sheet of hair behind her ear. She answered this action with a startled look of surprise. Internally, he shrugged. He was used to helping himself when he wanted something. And he wanted to see her face.

She looked like something you'd find on the cover of a magazine, only better, because she was here and now—small and warm—her slim frame tucked into his arm and fitting him perfectly.

The girl was a far cry from the sort of Liverpool slag he was accustomed to. Measuring her against the women who were his normal fare, he could only express the idea in terms he was familiar with. If he were to take all the women he'd ever fucked, they probably amounted to no more than pocket change when compared to this one. This one was more in the league of everything-inside-a-bank-vault, including the entire contents of the bank's safety deposit boxes—jewelry crusted with diamonds, ownership deeds, bearer bonds, you name it.

Those reflections led him to think of the last woman he'd fucked.

He'd been playing darts at the Swan with a couple of tossers from the south when she'd wandered in with two of her friends. The three women were older, in their mid-thirties—married women, most likely—bored with their husbands and looking for sex. Dirty sex. They had trawled the pub with their dark avaricious eyes, lingering where they found unattached males, proclaiming their interest with sultry glances and evocative body language. When Dicky had caught one of them stroking him with her gaze, he'd smiled back at her.

He'd chosen the one in the skirt. She wasn't the prettiest of the three, and he hated red lipstick, but her companions wore trousers and it was easier to seduce a woman in a pub booth when she was wearing a skirt. Easier to fuck her up against a wall, as well.

With his hands under the table and his fingers inside her panties, he'd pulled her legs open and played with her sex while pretending to hold a conversation with her. Dicky grinned. She'd almost come in the booth. The sounds she had made in the middle of their "conversation" had been so awkward, he'd thought he'd have to cover her mouth—and he hadn't fancied that red lipstick. The woman had smelled of stick deodorant and heavy makeup.

When she was slippery and his fingers were sliding easily inside her pussy, he'd taken her outside and found a dark corner a few blocks away. She'd put her teeth in his earlobe as she came, causing him to surge violently as he'd hammered her into the stone wall at her back. She came again about two minutes later, but he'd had a hard time getting off himself. At that point, he'd wondered if he shouldn't have gone for the trousers, after all. Eventually, he'd turned her and pulled her away from the wall. The woman was accommodating. She'd leaned forward and braced her forearms against the wall while he shoved her skirt up over her ass and fucked her from behind.

Dicky blew out a frustrated snort.

But the woman he'd fucked outside the pub had been slag. Not like the woman he shielded inside his arm. This one was sophisticated, American—with money, no doubt. Lived in a house, not a flat. A big home with acres of groomed lawns and a stable full of horses in the back garden. Not the sort of woman you fucked up against a damp wall in a back alley.

If he could get to America he'd have it made, he reflected. *If* he could get to America. But it would be hard for Dicky Evans to get to America, or anywhere else for that matter—when Dicky Evans didn't exist.

Cutting a glance behind him, he tightened his hold on the little American as he steered her around a corner.

A few blocks later Dicky stood on The Anston's stone steps, lighting a cigarette, waiting to be sure the girl got a room. The inn's porch was unlighted. The tall narrow building rose four floors above him, casting him in dark shadow. Dragging on his cigarette, Dicky scanned the neighborhood without moving his head, trying to locate his "tail". When the inn's door opened, he dropped the butt and stepped on it.

For a long moment, he just stared at the female form framed in the doorway. The gold light of the inn glowed behind her, the warm color unwilling to venture out onto the cold stone porch. The yellow radiance backlighting her head haloed around hair one shade too gold to be considered brown. As she stepped outside, she pulled her thin blue anorak tightly around her chest. "I got a room," she stated. "You were right. They took forty pounds for it."



It was cold and damp, and he was in a hurry to be gone, in a hurry to shake whoever was following him. He put an arm around her and pulled her tight against his lean frame as he planted a kiss at the corner of her lips. Pulling away, he watched the small bow of her mouth in her pale, heart-shaped face. Her thickly lashed eyes remained closed as she optimistically held out for more. Smiling, he waited for her eyes to open so he could have a last look at them. Her eyes were that unusual shade of turquoise you normally only ever find on postcards from Canada.

Canadian lakes.

*Cool*, he thought, *and quenching*. He'd like to stub himself out on her, he decided. Briefly, he wondered how she'd fit on his cock—then brushed the idea aside impatiently.

It would be nice to spend the night in a warm, dry room, and he'd do her if he got the chance—if it weren't for the man following him. He couldn't imagine she'd put up much resistance. She was tiny. One way or another, he'd convince her to open her legs for him. Most women only wanted convincing. He *could* imagine her finally succumbing to lust, her slender body arching inside his arms, her mound pressed tightly against his damp groin as she whimpered on the end of his cock.

It would be nice to fuck a woman properly, to have the time as well as a warm bed to do it in. Doubtless, that was what she was used to. Warm beds, crisp sheets and slow, thorough, clean sex. Slowly, he blinked this thought aside as he started to turn. Her uncertain voice turned him around again.

"Thank you," she stuttered. "For your help." She took a deep breath. "Do you have an address? Phone number?"

He felt sorry for her as his eyes burned at her through several moments of silence. With her faltering question, she'd revealed her interest in him and opened herself to rejection. He regretted what his next words must be.

He felt sorry for the poor little rich girl.

He felt sorrier for himself.

Slowly moving the few steps toward her, he backed her up against the inn's stone wall. With a hand on the wall beside her head and his body touching hers just enough to tease, he smiled down into her upraised eyes. "Let me go, girl. You're better off that way. I'd only bring you trouble."

"Cell phone number?" she persisted in a brave, unwavering voice.

"I don't have a mobile," he told her. "I don't have anything. I don't have a home or a flat or an address. I don't have a place to sleep tonight." His voice was a quiet rasp as he moved his lips to her ear. "And, if you don't stop tempting me, I'll take you upstairs to your room, despite the trouble that follows me. Leave it," he told her. Pulling away from her, he turned and took the steps quickly then crossed the street. He didn't look back.

On the other side of the street, Dicky strode out the length of a tiny, fenced courtyard park, turned to walk along the back of it, turned again at the corner then slipped into the park through a tall wrought iron gate. Leaning against a tree, he lit a cigarette and waited.

When the cigarette had finally burned down to sting his fingers, he flicked the butt away and shrugged, deciding that he'd shaken the "tail", or that his stalker had lost interest. With that thought, he let himself

back out the gate and shot a final look at TheAnston . A small pinpoint of light glowed in the dark shadows beside the steps rising to the inn.

Dicky's eyes narrowed on the spark of orange. Swiftly, he strode away from TheAnston , turned the corner, then jumped several walls, fences, and a final hedge to arrive in TheAnston's backgarden . Flattening himself against the inn's gray stone wall, he edged down a narrow alley toward the front of the building.

A man stood finishing a cigarette. A man in a black jacket and dark trousers, his eyes turned upward to rest on one of the building's lighted windows.

And Dicky realized. The stalker hadn't been tailing him.

He'd been following the girl.

The man disappeared from Dicky's view, but his steps echoed in the alley as he climbed the stairs toward the front door of TheAnston . Dicky stood in the narrow defile between the wall of the inn and that of the adjacent building, his eyes scaling TheAnston's gray stone to the lighted window.

He reacted without thinking. Up. And quickly. He didn't know why the girl was being followed but he didn't want her to be alone when her stalker caught up with her.

Placing his hands flat on the walls crowding in on either side of him, Dicky flexed his arms, lifted his legs, and went up between the buildings as though climbing a chimney, bracing himself with feet and hands, arms and legs, pushing against the cold, damp stone as he moved upward. Upon reaching the fourth floor, he caught the roof's edge as he hauled himself over the eaves and crouched beside the window set into the steep, slate roof.

Within the small room, the slender bit of a girl sat at the end of a single bed, the light from the room's television splashing on her in varying colors. Dicky reached for the bottom edge of the window and grinned when it slid upward. Swinging his legs inside the attic room, he sat on the window's ledge and paused, holding his breath, as he took a moment to admire the view. The girl was dressed in a tiny top that quit trying to be a T-shirt just below her small breasts. The captivating outline of her nipples was stamped on the thin jersey of her cropped T-shirt. Other than the tiny top, only a small piece of pink silk wrapped her hips.

Tilting his head, Dicky frowned at her, wondering why she hadn't noticed him. Her attention was firmly fixed on the flickering TV screen. Leaving the window open behind him, he stood inside the room. On the television screen, there were boats in the water and floating wreckage. His eyes flitted to the girl then back to the screen.

And all of a sudden, Dicky realized what he was looking at—what *she* was looking at.

Moving toward her smoothly, he got himself beside her. Her lips were white, her skin almost transparent as she turned her shocked face toward him. Her eyes were all the bluer against the stark white backdrop of her bloodless skin. As he slid onto the bed beside her, he collected her onto his lap and turned her head with his hand, cradling it into his neck as the newswoman finished her report.

*"As yet, no terrorist group has claimed responsibility for the attack that sank the Liverpool-Dublin ferry this afternoon. All are feared lost."*

Dicky glanced around, but there was no phone in the small room. The attic bedroom was tiny, with barely enough space for the television cart, single bed, bedside table and a simple wooden chair.

“You need to contact your family,” he told her. When she didn’t answer, he pulled her face out of his neck. “You need to call home. To America.”

Her eyes filled with dread. “My father’s on a dig.”

Dicky shook his head, confused. He didn’t understand her words. He didn’t understand what she was trying to tell him. The pale, soft skin of her neck, only inches from his lips, was incredibly distracting.

When he finally gathered his wits enough to think about it, he realized that the girl’s acceptance of his presence was damn odd. She leaned into him as though she belonged to him, belonged in his arms. She should have been wondering where the hell he’d come from.

But she was in shock, he reminded himself.

Still. It felt so goddamn right. It felt like he should be with her and she should be in his arms.

Pulling her hair clear of her neck was just an excuse for Dicky to run his street-worn hands through the swathe of gold silk that begged to be stroked. Trailing his hand down over her shoulder, he let his palm rest on her shallow breast, the act not sexual so much as assessing, a measuring of how she fit him, taking stock of what he held in his arms—of what he had in her. The small, dainty breast only just filled his cupped palm and yet it was enough. It was more than enough.

Before he knew it, before he could control it, it turned sexual. His body responded to the small, warm bit of woman in his arms with alarming rapidity, striking him hard below the belt as his cock stiffened in a hungry surge of anticipation. Quickly, he pulled his hand from her chest and returned it to stroke through her hair.

“He’s out in the middle of Montana,” she explained. There’s no cell phone service. He’s on a dig for dinosaur eggs. I...don’t know anything about the project.”

Dicky cursed softly. “You’ll have to go to the police.” His eyes cut to the open window—one of the two escape routes from the small room. His gaze swung back to the room’s door as he considered the man with the cigarette, calculating where he might be at that precise moment. In the hall, watching. In the lobby, waiting. “I’ll take you to the police station in the morning,” he finally decided. Sliding the girl out of his lap, he stood to check the lock on the door. On his way there, he hit the power button on the television.

“I was watching—”

“They’re all dead,” he told her.

She shook her head at him. “But...who did it?”

Leaning against the door, he dug in his pocket for his cigarettes as he stared at her. “Did you see anyone? At the docks?”

She shook her head again and shrugged in confusion. “I saw a lot of people.”

“Yes,” he cut into her statement, “but did you see anyone in particular? Anyone who stared at you, got angry with you, cursed at you? Did you see anyone suspicious?”

“Suspicious?”

“Someone who didn’t belong. Someone with a hat or a hood. Someone too young or too old. Someone too nicely dressed. A tramp where a tramp shouldn’t have been?”

She shook her head.

He lit his cigarette and shook the match in his hand. “Yes, you did. Think.”

“Why do you think I saw...?”

Dicky watched her eyes register something new.

“There *was* a man,” she said slowly.

Dicky dragged on the cigarette and waited.

“He bumped into me as I came out of the ladies’ room. He nearly ran over me. He stumbled and almost went to his knees.”

“Did you get a good look at his face?”

“Yes.”

“That’s what I was afraid of,” he muttered.

“What?” she asked. “Do you think he might have had something to do with the accident?”

“It wasn’t an accident,” he informed her. “Tell me what he looked like.”

Dicky nodded as she stumbled through her description. The man she described wasn’t the stalker who had followed her here to the inn, and that was troubling because it meant there was more than one of them out there—and where there were two there might be a whole organization.

According to the girl, the man at the docks wasn’t a featureless, nondescript character. Even if the blond were to dye his hair dark, his prominent nose, scarred temple and narrow, jutting chin would give him away. He had the sort of face that would jump out at you from a database of mug shots, the sort of face that would lend itself to a good composite drawing. Dicky could understand the terrorist’s zeal to eliminate the witness.

And that’s what they planned to do.

They were going to kill the girl.

“But why would the Irish—”

“I doubt it was the Irish,” Dicky cut her off. “Either side.”

“Why would anybody? I mean what’s the point? Why kill innocent civilians?”

“To get someone’s attention.”

“The government?The government won’t deal with terrorists! They know that. Everyone knows that! It hasn’t done the Irish any good in all the years of bloodshed.”

“No?” he argued. “They have representation now.”

“Sinn Fein?They could have gotten that without bloodshed. The UKhas elections!”

Dickynodded. “Our elections are next week.” He waited for her to draw some of her own conclusions. When she offered none, he continued. “This attack is meant to sway the election’s outcome. Like the attack on the commuter train in Spain. Not to influence the government, but to change the government. Get the people’s attention. Change leadership and get England to pull out of the war in Iraq.”

“Sway the outcome! But the man...that man at the ferry, wasn’t Middle Eastern.”

Dickynodded. “That’s what troubles me.” The man she had described sounded more Nordic than either Irish or Middle Eastern.Tall with straight blond hair. But, without any evidence to the contrary, the British public was more likely to suspect the Muslims than the Irish. And in the end, that was the bottom line. That was all that really mattered as far as the perpetrators were concerned.

Dickypushed off from the hotel room door then cut a glance back at it. The lock was flimsy at best but it would stop someone from sneaking in quietly.

And that’s about all it would do.

### Chapter Three

Julie must have fallen asleep as they talked. She didn’t remember pulling the sheets and blanket up over herself. But when she woke, she found herself snugly tucked up into bed and the bedside clock reading three-thirty.Dicky was where she’d left him, seated on the window’s ledge, with one leg out the window. A heavy, unlaced boot was flat against the vertical window jamb. The room was dark and cold. Rolling to the edge of the bed, she stood and crept toward the door. There was a rustle of movement—then Dicky was beside her.

Julie regarded him with a wry smile. “I’m going to the bathroom.”

He shrugged his coat down his arms and wrapped it around her shoulders.“Right. Is it down the hall, then?”

She nodded a curious frown at him.

“I just want to see where it is,” he told her.

With a hand on her elbow,Dicky pushed her down the hall and stepped into the bathroom with her. Stopping just inside the door, his eyes flicked around the tiny room and settled on the cracked mirror over the ancient porcelain sink. As though he cared about his appearance, he pulled a hand through his

dark hair just before he backed out through the door, closing her inside the small bathroom.

When Julie stepped out of the bathroom a few minutes later, Dicky was lounging against the stretch of wall between the bathroom and the door to her room. Caught in the dark shadows between two pools of light that dropped from overhead, her dark prince waited for her. His loose jeans slouched arrogantly on his hips while his thin T-shirt hugged his upper body in a carnal embrace. As he pushed himself away from the wall, the jeans and T-shirt parted ways for a bare instant and Julie blinked at the rapid exposure.

A glimpse of smooth, hard flank.

Tight skin stretched over a lean male abdomen.

Although Julie was intelligent enough to know that the dark-haired upstart was nothing but trouble, she was nonetheless female enough to feel an overpowering tug of attraction to the young man. He had to be the most dynamic male force she'd ever stumbled across in her lifetime. The bad boy Brit was the sort of guy no woman could ignore and few women could resist. Julie was smart enough to accept that fact. And she wasn't about to argue with her senses, which were pushing her toward the enigmatic stranger. Somehow, Dicky made her feel like the sexiest thing alive, small breasts and past history notwithstanding. Having barely uttered a word of interest, he had drawn her in with nothing more than his hot, assessing gaze, and a streetwise touch that was both protective and possessive.

With an arm around her, Dicky herded her back into the room.

"Aren't you tired?" she asked as he closed the door behind him.

He rolled his shoulders. "No," he told her, though the shadows beneath his eyes suggested otherwise.

"The bed's big enough...for—"

"No," he answered quickly. "No. It's not nearly big enough. It would take a lot more than that to keep me out of your—"

Dicky broke the words off, realizing he was leaning toward her, head tilted forward, lips bent on taking her mouth as she tipped her chin up as though to receive his kiss.

If he got in that bed with the girl, he'd fuck her and that was all there was to it. And he didn't dare allow himself to be distracted as long as her stalker was still out there somewhere, waiting to make his move. Pulling back, Dicky unwound his coat from her shoulders. Slowly, as though it was Christmas, he unwrapped her and stared at the gift that was her slender body.

He would have groaned if his throat weren't so fucking dry. Jesus, she was a hot little package. His chin lifted a fraction. "Hop back into bed," he told her. "I'll tuck you in."

Tossing the sheet and blanket up to cover her, he returned to his perch on the windowsill. With a glance at the girl's closed eyes, he scraped a hand over the fly of his denims as he shifted his hips. He shut the window, figuring the room was cool enough that he wasn't going to nod off. With a sigh, he jammed one booted foot inside the window embrasure, halfway up the jamb, letting his other foot hang inside the room. His cock was a nasty hard line of need and he rearranged his shaft then rubbed it a few times while he watched the girl on the bed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dicky started awake with the gray sun in his eyes, his forehead pressed against the cold glass of the window. Alarmed, his eyes shot around the room. The bedside clock indicated he'd slept all of ten minutes. Stretching, he twisted to take a good, long look at the bed, and the young woman sleeping on it. As he fished numbly for his cigarettes, he slipped off the windowsill and scuffed his way to the end of the bed, tipping his head so he could better focus on the slender form stretched out on the white sheets.

She'd kicked her bedding off in the night. Small, dainty feet tipped the end of pale, slender legs. The thin wisp of pink she wore as underpants barely covered her mound. A pretty puff of gold curls spilled provocatively from the top edge of her panties. Her hips and waist made a shallow S-curve that wound its way toward her T-shirt. And her T-shirt! There wasn't much of it to begin with! In her sleep, it had retreated high into the hills. Her small breasts were half-moons displayed below the white edge of her shirt. When she breathed, every time she pulled in a breath, he caught a stunning glimpse of fresh, pink areole.

Dicky's throat dried as he quit fumbling in his pocket and reached for the top of his denims. He knew what he was going to do when he plucked open the top button. He knew what he was going to do when he pulled down the zipper. His trousers slid down his legs as he shrugged his coat off his shoulders. His T-shirt came over his head as he took a step toward her. He knew what he was going to do. He knew it wasn't right. But he knew he was going to do it. And he was going to do it to her.

With his breath on hold, he put a knee on the bed and stretched out beside her as he reached for the half-exposed swell of her breasts. She woke as his thumbs were brushing across the tiny imperfections on her perfect areolas. As she opened her eyes, he saw his own scorching hunger reflected in her turquoise gaze. Scorching hunger and warm longing.

The door smashed open and Dicky rolled. Clutching the girl's arms he took her with him. They hit the floor together as a thumping sound came from the bed—the dull thud of bullets plowing through the mattress and drilling into the floor beneath.

Silencer, Dicky recognized immediately.

Thrusting the girl to the floor, he jumped into a squat and shoved at the bed as he ducked. The bed crashed into the intruder's shins and the next shot went wild. In the next instant, Dicky had the small wooden chair in his hand and was swinging it as he leapt onto the bed. The chair thudded and crunched several times and finally splintered before the intruder slumped backward on the wall now flecked with stringers of shining, wet scarlet.

There were two more thunks and two small, neat, dark spots appeared in the ceiling. The gun clattered and scraped across the wooden floor as the girl scrambled for it, got her hands around it, and jumped to stand with both hands wrapped around the gun's butt, her finger on the trigger.

At the same time, Dicky tossed aside the fragment of chair remaining in his fist and reached for the table lamp, smashing away both shade and bulb. As it arced toward the man, the terrorist pushed away from the wall and staggered through the door. The lamp's heavy metal base slammed into the now-empty space on the wall as Dicky cursed.

Turning, panting, he faced the girl.



Arms outstretched, she held the gun in two steady hands, pointed at the door. Her pupils were large and dark, her nostrils flared as her small breasts lifted her T-shirt in short, rapid gasps.

“What were you going to do with that?” he asked her, blinking at the gun.

She shot him a brief, dirty look. “I’m an American,” she stated. “I know how to use a gun.” Her eyes slid down to his cock, stretched out—long but not quite stiff. “What were you going to do with that?”

He followed her eyes to his cock and smiled slowly. “Don’t worry,” he said, “it’s not loaded.” He pointed at the gun. “What about that?”

She flicked the safety on and handed him the weapon.

Dropping to sit on the bed, he pulled out the clip then returned it. “Three rounds left.”

“He tried to kill you,” she said slowly, as though the idea had just caught up to her. “Is...everyone in this city out to get you?”

His mouth straightened into a tight line before he grunted. “Everyone but him. *He* was after *you*.”

“*Me*?”

“He followed us from The Swan. I assumed he was after me, at first. But, after I left you at the front door, he was still here, watching the inn. At that point, I realized it was you he was after.”

“*You knew he was*—but why didn’t you tell me?”

He glanced up at her. “You wouldn’t have slept.”

“I wouldn’t have—”

“And you looked like you needed it.”

“But—”

He silenced her question with a cutting glance.

“But...*why me*? Why is someone following me?”

“Don’t you know?” When he took in her stunned expression, he pushed out an impatient sigh. “That man at the docks you saw?”

She nodded her head.

“Apparently, he saw you.”

Her eyes widened as she stared at him, disbelief on her face. “But that wasn’t the man from the docks.”

“And that makes you feel better?” he asked cynically. “There’s more than one of them. And they’re after you.” When she continued to stare, he sighed. “You don’t believe me,” he stated, his voice critical.



“No. No,” she said uncertainly, carefully. “I believe you. But...”

“You’d rather not,” he finished for her.

She nodded. “I’d definitely rather not,” she murmured.

He smiled at her, dropped his eyes to her toes before lifting them slowly to her face. “You look like you’re feeling better.”

She gave him a tiny grin. “I won’t tell you what you look like.”

“I know what I look like,” he answered her gruffly. “I look horny. But that’s only because I am.” He blew out a sigh as he reached for his denims on the floor. “Let’s get out of here before the...before they make us pay for the damage.”

“Shouldn’t we contact the police?”

“We will,” he told her shortly. “But first things first.” He tucked the gun into the front of his trousers. “We’ve got to get out of here.”

“I’m American,” she ventured slowly, when he threw her denims at her. “But what’s your excuse?”

“What do you mean?” he asked as he stretched his T-shirt over his head.

“I didn’t think there were many guns in the UK.” She hesitated. “But you seem pretty comfortable with that thing.”

He nodded as he mulled her question. Finally he shrugged. “We watch a lot of American television,” he finally offered.

She opened her mouth.

“C’mon,” he pressed her impatiently as he pulled on his coat, “get those trousers on. Let’s get out of here.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Guiding Julie through Liverpool’s busy streets, Dicky pulled her up short next to a red, cylindrical mailbox. Across the road stood the gray brick police station. Turning, he grabbed a napkin from a pastry stall. “Do you have a pen?”

Automatically, she fished in her backpack, relieved that he was apparently going to leave her with some sort of contact information.

He stepped away to use the top of the mailbox. “Listen. There’s a man in there.” He flicked his head in the direction of the police station across the road. “His name is McCready. Ask for Ian McCready. Tell him everything that happened up until you met me. Tell him about the man who’s been following you. Give him this.” He pushed the napkin into her hand.

She regarded it with disappointment at first, then wonder. It was a sketch. Of the man who’d broken into her room. Dicky had drawn it in a few seconds with a cheap ballpoint on a rough napkin. It was a

perfect likeness. Raising her eyes to his, her eyebrows moved together. "Aren't you coming with me?"

His eyes flickered a wince of regret. "I can't, love. I've a bit of an aversion... to police stations. But you'll be all right. They'll take care of you."

Julie hesitated. "The man who broke into my room, you knew he was following me?" she asked awkwardly.

"Yes." Dicky frowned at her. "I told you that earlier."

"Is that why you came to my room?"

Dicky opened his mouth to answer her, caught her expression, and caught back the words. "That's one of the reasons," he said kindly as she searched his eyes for more. Dicky sighed. To give her anything more would be stupid. She needed to understand that. "The other reason was a dry bed."

Ah, fuck. He couldn't help himself.

"And a wet fuck." Arching one auburn eyebrow, he gave her an evil smile.

She took it well, smiling back at him, not intimidated in the least, as far as he could tell. She took it too well.

Well, if that didn't discourage her, maybe this would. "Give us half your money," he demanded.

She gave her head a small, uncomprehending shake.

"They'll take care of you," he told her, flicking his head at the police station. "You won't need it."

As he waited with his hand out, she dug in her backpack.

"You'll be all right," he muttered. Out on the street, the traffic rushed back and forth. There were a few seconds of silence while he folded the pound notes she'd given him, followed by his rush of words. "If anything goes wrong, get a taxi to The Swan. I'll find you."

Ducking his head toward her, he hesitated an instant before he touched her cheek with his lips. Hungrily, he watched her eyes as he drew his face from hers. "I'll watch you across the road," he told her.

As he'd promised, he watched her cross the road and climb the steps, watched the door close on her blue anorak and dark backpack. He stared at the door a few moments before he followed her across the street, sauntered past a few buildings and turned into an alley. Leaning against the wall, he lit a cigarette and took a drag, exhaling a plume of pale smoke into the city's gray atmosphere. Surreptitiously, he checked every car leaving the alley, knowing it was the access alley to the police station.

Though he couldn't have explained the reason for his lingering interest, he *did* want to know the girl had been escorted to safety before he put her from his mind for good. And when he'd finished the first cigarette, he lit another one almost immediately.

Several cigarettes later he saw her light blue anorak on the front steps again. With a vicious curse on his

lips, he dropped his butt and ground it under his heel, staring angrily at the girl in front of the police station. She should have come down the alley in a panda car with an officer.

He cursed again when he realized what was happening. A female police officer guided her down the steps toward a taxi and installed her inside the vehicle then closed the car door on her.

Dicky came out of the alley and strode toward the corner, knowing the taxi would have to brake before making the turn. Casually, he stepped from the curb as the car approached, forcing the driver to stop. Glancing at the driver, he grinned as he slid alongside the taxi, yanked the door open, and threw himself inside. "Keep going, Robbie," he told the driver.

With his head ducked below the level of the windows, he settled onto the taxi's floor. For several seconds he watched her. "What happened?"

"I thought we said goodbye," she challenged him with a tiny smile.

He could tell she was pleased to see him, but he was too tense to respond. Still, he put a hand on her knee, just because he wanted to touch her. "What happened?" he asked again.

She shrugged as she stared at his thumb, tracing an oval on her knee. "I told them everything. They had me go through their database of...mug shots...I guess you would call them."

"Did you tell McCready about the man who followed you?"

"Inspector McCready was in London. He's expected back tomorrow."

"Did you tell them about the man who's following you?"

"I'm not sure they believed me."

His hand tightened on her knee. "*Fucking idiots!*" Dicky exploded. "They should have escorted you, sent someone with you—someone to protect you. Where are you going?"

"They got me a room," she explained swiftly. "They said they'd send a car around in the morning to collect me."

"Anyone following us, Robbie?"

"Christ!" the cabbie answered. "How would I know, Dicky?"

"Start a circle, a big one, and see if anyone's still with you when you come out of it."

"You paying for this, Dicky?"

"Fuck you, Robbie. Charge it to the station." His eyes burned on the girl. "Did you find anything in the database?"

She shook her head.

"Neither of them?"

“No. What do you think that means, Dicky?”

Dicky was thoughtful. “Fucking I don’t know.” He scraped a hand through his hair. “Did they give you any money?”

She shook her head. “They have an agreement with the hotel.”

“What hotel?”

She didn’t answer immediately.

“What hotel, Robbie?”

“The George,” Robbie called out.

“Robbie. Come around the side of Marks and Sparks and let me out behind the hotel. By the time you get around the front, I’ll be watching.

“Go in the front door,” he told her. “I’ll follow you in. After you get your room, I’ll hang about in the lobby and watch for a while. Go up to your room and lock your door. Don’t let anyone in.” He glanced at his watch. “I’ll come up to your room at four o’clock. I’ll knock four times. Make sure the room is en suite. You don’t want to be going down the hall to the bathroom.”

She nodded at his unlaced boots.

“Get a double bed.”

Julie looked up quickly, but his eyes had already left hers.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dicky knocked on Julie’s hotel room door at four o’clock.

Inside the very basic room, she closed the door behind him and turned to face him.

He fished a handful of color out of his pocket and threw it on the navy blue bedspread. Underwear, she realized.

“I was in Marks and Sparks,” he explained briefly.

“Thank you,” she told him as she sat on the bed’s edge and sorted through the bits of silk. Dangling a bit of hot pink from one finger, she gave him a slanting smile. “I’ve never worn a thong.”

He reached for his cigarettes. “Try it on. I want to see it on you.”

The clipped words were a command on his hard lips, spoken as though he expected them to be followed without hesitation. The demand was a jolt to her senses. An empty spot beneath her belly came to life with swooning interest and dark hunger. She wanted him. Wanted to stand close to him. Wanted his hands pulling her against his hard, lean length. Wanted his rough fingers snagging on the smooth silk of her naked skin, skimming her body. She wanted him touching her everywhere she felt unsettled and needy. She wanted him to settle her need once and for all.

She smiled up at him but his eyes were serious. Although he appeared tired and frayed and raw, the fire within his gaze looked as though it would melt steel.

Standing, she moved to slip past him on her way to the bathroom. The room wasn't large and, awkwardly, her body brushed the edge of his coat. And that was all it took. That was all the provocation Dicky needed. His cigarette packet hit the floor as two hard hands grasped her hips, turned her and pushed her into the wall.

Dicky's mouth was all over hers, his hands rough, demanding, as he dragged them up her body to crush her small breasts beneath her T-shirt. Then his hands were in her hair, holding her head as his hard mouth smeared over her lips. "Oh, Jesus," he kept saying. "Oh, Jesus." Dragging in a long breath that appeared to sear his lungs, he grated his tough body against her slender frame. As he pushed into her, one of the buttons on his coat dug into her skin.

A small sob escaped Julie's lips as Dicky's knee pushed between her legs, his rough coat and rough jeans scraping at her as he flexed his knees and pulled his groin upward, rubbing the long line of his denim-clad cock into her rise. His erection, a thick ridge beneath the coarse fabric of his heavy jeans, rasped at her harshly. And, for a moment, it occurred to Julie that he might actually take her, with most of her clothes on, up against the wall. The idea only worked to increase her breathless anticipation.

Dicky's breath was moist against her ear. "Tell me to stop. Tell me to stop, girl. Now, while you've still the chance. Because in two more minutes you won't have any choice. Tell me to stop if you don't want to get fucked."

Julie's head went back to hit the wall as she moaned, "I love you, Dicky."

Dicky pushed himself away from her. Putting a few inches between them, his face twisted in frustration. "You... *don't even know me.*"

"You saved my life."

"*When that man broke in on us? I was only saving myself.*"

Julie met the scythe of his gaze for a moment before she realized she'd made a mistake. Her eyes moved to the floor then back up to face him. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to throw myself at you," she mumbled. "I've never had a boyfriend before."

His eyes cut into hers. "You *don't* have one now."

Her chin came up. "You said I was your girlfriend. In The Swan."

"*What?*"

"You said I was your girlfriend after I'd ordered supper... at the pub."

Slowly, he relented. A miserly smile edged the mean line of his mouth. "I did, didn't I?"

She gave him a determined nod.

"Well, then," he sighed, scraping a hand back through his hair, "seeing as you're my girlfriend, and since

I owe you a meal, how about I take you to dinner. Do you like Indian?"

"I don't know." She balled the bit of pink thong in one hand as she gave him a careful smile. "I'd like to shower first."

Dicky crouched to pick up his cigarettes. "You first, then. I'll go in after you." Finally lighting a cigarette, he followed her backside with his eyes as she moved toward the bathroom.

He wanted to feel that trim little ass tucked into his groin. He wanted to fuck her brutally, and make love to her gently, all at the same time. He nodded to himself as he blew out a long thread of smoke. That first impulse didn't surprise him in the least. The second one was a bit of a stunner.

*After dinner*, he promised himself.

Dicky rolled his fatigued shoulders. Not having slept the night before, he was tired. Dead tired. He considered the warm, dry double bed with longing anticipation.

\* \* \* \* \*

When they returned to the room after eating, Julie slipped into the bathroom to brush her teeth. She left the door slightly ajar. From the corner of her eye, she watched Dicky. He kicked off his unlaced boots and let his coat slide off his shoulders to the floor. His jeans followed. Grabbing the bottom of his T-shirt, he stretched and dragged it over his head. As the crumpled fabric dropped from his fingers, he threw himself on the bed.

When Julie stepped out of the bathroom, he was asleep.

Slowly, she circled the bed.

Dicky's slim, lean body, knotted with hard stretches of muscle, was sprawled against white sheets.

He was a work of art, like some sensual painting cut with a painter's knife on a warm canvas. All burnt sienna and raw umber tempered with flesh tones. Hard-edged and sensual—a contradictory composition of light and dark. Straight strips of rich, dark auburn hair were flung across the pillow on which his head rested. His spiky lashes fenced his eyelids like dark, sharp tears.

One of his knees was bent and raised, and she had to go to his side of the bed to view what lay beyond his thigh. Creeping in that direction, she tipped her head as her eyes sucked up to the tangle of rusty curls between his legs and the length of flesh languishing in the rust. Frowning slightly, she skimmed his body with her eyes then returned them to gaze at his slack penis. She hadn't seen a man naked before this morning but, from the bits she'd picked up in her observations of Greek art, she wouldn't have guessed there'd be so much.

As she watched him, her hands smoothed down over her buttocks, naked and divided by the string of thong between her cheeks. Leaning over him to turn off the light on the wall, Julie pulled off her T-shirt, her thong, and got into bed with Dicky Evans.

Chapter Four

Morning woke Dicky to find the small slip of a woman naked beside him. The fact that she had stripped for him told him a lot about what she wanted, what she expected and what she obviously hoped for. He'd just been given a free ticket with full admission to all rides.

She was a determined little thing. Didn't know what was good for her, but he had to admire her spunk.

Raising himself on one elbow, Dicky gazed down on her small angelic face. Her brown eyelashes rested on pale cheeks, her small lips were full, fresh, pale pink and pouty. Those lips were just asking for it. He put a hand on the other side of her body and lowered his lips to the swell of her mouth. Opening his mouth, he scraped his bottom lip over hers, hovered an instant near her lips and repeated the action, slowly at first. Then at an increasing tempo as his bottom lip moved over hers with steady, accelerating insistence to match the flogging of his heart, of his breath. By the time she opened her eyes, his body was moving lightly against her side, his heart was surging painfully in his chest, his cock pulsing against the smooth, warm skin of her thigh. As he slid a thumb over the bottom, curving moon of her small breast, his voice was a rush of breath.

"When I'm touching you, I feel like... I'm whispering in church or performing some other sort of irreverence. In my school, when I went to school, there stood a small Mary on a pedestal just inside the main doors. She must have been fairly old because she was carved out of ivory, warm to the touch and smooth as pudding. I loved that Mary, worshiped that Mary. When I was skiving off, which was most of the time, I'd stop on my way out the school doors. I had to stop, couldn't help myself.

"I'd run my hands up the sleek, ruttled folds of her robe and over the small round nubs that were her breasts. She had a face like an angel." Dicky watched the girl's face, his eyes moving from her mouth, to her eyes, then to the golden hair that haloed her head on the white pillow. "Sister Catherine caught me at it one day. Mind you, it wasn't the first time I'd been caught. I was expelled." Dicky brushed his lips across her mouth. "I don't know if it was because I was truant or because I was... worshiping Mary. Either way, I was told to pack up and leave. I went straight to the library and nicked all my favorite books—as many as would fit in my schoolbag."

"How old were you?"

"Twelve." He ignored the flicker of pity in her eyes. "I didn't mind. It was fucking rubbish—school."

"What books did you take?" was her next question.

He shrugged one shoulder. "I don't remember," he lied.

"You never went back? To see the statue?"

"No." Baring the rough edge of his improper teeth, he grinned down at her. "The sum of my education was—I learned young that women are nothing but trouble."

A streak of light slashed through the curtains and fell in a stripe above the girl's small nipples. "But soft," he murmured. His eyes lowered, watching the strip of light curve to caress her sweet little tits. "What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east." He nudged a pink nub with his full bottom lip. "And Juliet is the fucking sun."

Slipping his arm beneath her, he pulled her to him, pulled her chest to curve into his mouth as he made



love to her nipple with lips and tongue. When the pebbled surface was wet and glistening and a raw rose color, he moved to her other breast.

With his mouth loving her breasts, he slid his free hand down over her belly and fingered his way into her cleft where he found the tight slit of her entrance. As he rimmed the delicate entrance, he wondered how many others had worshiped at her temple. His chest tightened a little as he probed her opening with one finger.

As many women as he'd fingered in his lifetime, he couldn't figure out why this girl felt so different. There was a strange first-time expectancy in her stillness. Her secret folds were rose-petal velvet, delicate to the touch of his hard fingers. Her demure little opening was barely damp with her sweet dewy essence. The fragile nub of her clitoris was tender and pure, as though made for this—his raw touch. The long precious line of her sex felt fresh and new, unexplored and waiting for his intrusion, waiting for him to claim the territory he fingered between her legs.

He wanted to taste her, to take his mouth to her sex, but he was eager to get on her and he preferred she wasn't too wet. He was looking for a perfect fuck this morning and he liked a bit of drag on his cock when he got between a woman's legs. "Are you ready for this, angel? Because you feel a bit small for me."

Writhing beneath the intimate touch of his exploring finger, her words were breathless. "I'm ready."

He couldn't help but smile. The classy little American wanted it hard and fast in England. And he was hard. As hard and thick as he could ever remember being.

Pushing her legs apart, Dicky hoped she was small inside, and tight. Expertly, he slid her feet up on the sheets and bent her knees outward to admit him. Although she seemed stiff, a fine tremble shimmered through her body, a tremble he took for excitement. The idea that she shivered with anticipation for him caused his erection to tighten into a harder knot. With a hand beneath her, just above her buttocks at the small of her back, he spread his fingers so he could command her body and keep her firmly in position as he thrust against her, so he could bear down on her and bring her everything as he delivered his cock to the back of her cunt. Closing his eyes for the moment, he rasped out a hungry breath as he pushed into her. She was hot and damp and sweet and tight and—

*Jesus Fucking Christ.* Dicky's withdrawal was quick and complete. Cock glistening, erect and primed, he stood to reach for her backpack. Dumping it on the bed, he slammed through the contents, searching for her identification.

Brushes, combs, small flat glossy boxes. Makeup. Toothbrush. A few pound notes. Papers.

*Fuck.*

She'd told him her ID had been lost on the ferry.

Dicky collapsed to sit on the bed. "How old are you?" He turned to glare at her.

"I'm not *that* young," she explained swiftly, stumbling in her defensive search for words. "I'm twenty-one," she added quickly.

Dicky's eyes narrowed as he searched her face, trying to decide if she was telling the truth. She looked twenty-one. When her chin trembled, he realized her earlier shiver had probably been one of fear rather



than anticipation.

“Jesus. You *look* twenty-one.” He shook his head. “So why are you still a virgin?” He’d heard of virgins, before. But he didn’t actually believe in them. Especially not American virgins.

She pulled her legs together as she nodded. “I told you. I’ve never had a boyfriend before.”

“Yeah? What’s wrong with you, then?”

“If I knew, I’d change it.”

He gave her a look of patent disbelief. “You could be... a fucking model.”

Her smile was small but genuine. “Thanks. But I’m not tall enough.”

“You know what I mean.”

She shook her head. “I’m not really pretty.”

He stared at her. “No, you’re not pretty,” he finally agreed. “You’re beautiful. You’re... like art,” he struggled with the idea. “You’re like a painting,” he finished. “A museum painting. In a gold frame.”

“Like a painting you’ve seen?”

“Maybe.”

He continued to stare at her a few seconds before shaking his head. “A lot of the old art—the museum art—is religious. Angels and Marys and such. You look like that,” he told her. “Beautiful. So, what’s wrong with you?” he repeated.

She sighed. “The guys I know—the guys who know me—aren’t interested. I don’t fit in. I’ve never fit in. The smart guys think I’m too outspoken. The rebels think I’m too smart. I’m sorry, Dicky. Are you... so much older than me? You don’t look that old.”

“I’m old enough. And I don’t *know* how old you are.”

“I told you. I’m twenty-one, Dicky. I just... got a late start. But a girl’s gotta start someplace,” she ventured shyly. “Do you have something against virgins?”

“I wouldn’t know,” he growled. “I’ve never had one.”

“Well, then,” she said softly. “It will be a first for both of us, won’t it?”

He scowled down at his penis. It had drooped a little, but not enough. With a groan of frustration, he stood suddenly. “No it won’t,” he gritted through his teeth as he paced into the tiny bathroom and slammed the door behind him.

Julie watched the closed door long enough to decide she didn’t want to be on this side of it. She didn’t want to be closed out. She wanted to be part of something. To take part in life. A life that had, so far,

evaded her. And she didn't want to be a virgin anymore.

She was aware that she made most of her peers uneasy, especially the guys. The cute math major she had crushed on last year was uncomfortable with her outspoken views. The Gothico-dopehead who'd flirted with her had drifted away after he'd understood her command of current events.

The nerd had been nervous about what *she'd* say to *him*.

The Goth had worried about what *he'd* say to *her*.

She made men nervous. She tried to keep her mouth shut, but something always gave her away.

Her grades, maybe. She was at the top of her class.

Dicky didn't give a damn either way. Every word he directed at her was spoken with a cool, indifferent confidence. Every gaze he sent her way was weighted with a hot, hard promise that just about consumed her in its outspoken hunger. She could have been a Nobel Laureate and he'd still make her feel both precious and desirable. Fragile beneath the shelter of his arm. Sexy under the heat of his gaze. She knew she was smart. She knew she was capable. She didn't need Dicky for that. She needed him for everything else. She needed him to make her feel like a woman.

She wanted to belong—to him. To Dicky Evans. Even if it was only once. Even if it was just this time and never happened again. She let herself into the bathroom after she heard him draw the shower curtain. He started the water as she closed the door.

From behind the blue plastic curtain she could hear a rhythmic slap—of soap and water and naked skin. Steeling herself, she pulled the shower curtain open and stepped into the back of the enamel tub.

He turned to face her, his hand wrapped around his flushed and angry cock. His eyes were raw, contained elemental fury as he faced her.

"No," he whispered in warning, just before his hands came up and pinned her shoulders against the cold tile wall. "No," he repeated, as his head angled and wet spiky eyelashes brushed her cheek.

She lowered her eyes and watched his tongue come out of his mouth, opening her lips for his invasion.

His next "No" was a strangled cry in her mouth.

His tongue entered her mouth in a rough, heated thrust as his right hand whipped down behind her damp bottom and pulled the length of her thigh up beside his hip. Immediately, his knees bent and his left hand fed his cock between her legs, probing for her tender notch. Struggling to keep her balance, Julie found the tub edge and rested her foot on it. With a moan of gratitude, Dicky reached for her other leg and hiked it to the opposite side of the tub. Straightening his legs, he thrust between her legs several times, missing the mark in his eagerness to get inside her.

His lips broke from hers. His eyes burned into hers with demanding desperation. "Help me. Jesus, lass. Help me."

His hand rushed to meet hers and steer her fingers to his cock. With his shaft wrapped in her small grip, she guided him through her slot to her opening. He thrust hard at the notch and she gasped as he entered her in a thick, spearing rush of pain.

He thrust again, coming up against her barrier. With his hands on the top of her thighs, he pushed her down on his shaft while he forced his way inside her. His rush of breath was harsh in her ears as he crushed into her. Apparently lost in need, he didn't hear her muffled cry of pain as he flexed his knees and drove against her in a fury nothing short of helpless.

Clutching his slippery wet arms, Julie bit her bottom lip and held tight through the storm of his passion. Water beaded on his high cheekbones and gleamed like small diamonds scattered across his lashes. She followed his gaze down to where their bodies met, where his hips slashed up into the space between her spread legs. She felt him fill her more strongly than before, felt his thick shaft stretch tightly inside her.

Abruptly, he stilled as his cock started spilling into her. Alarmed, she returned her gaze to his.

His eyes held hers as though he'd never seen her before, with an expression of breath-holding wonder mixed with fearful awe. Closing his eyes, he put his lips gently against hers.

She figured it was over then. For him anyhow. But he stood, pressed up against her for a long moment, his lips just touching hers. "You shouldn't have come in here," he moaned against her lips, then drew back enough for her to see the reproach in his eyes. "You shouldn't have come in here," he repeated, as he started kissing her. "I didn't want to do it like this. I didn't want to do it...up against a wall. You deserve better than this. Than me. Your first man. Your first time." Both his forearms rested on the tile wall as he held the back of her head in an attitude of prayer. Tenderly, he pressed his lips in an irregular pattern over her face. Finally returning to her lips, he kissed her lightly then pulled her from the wall and turned her to stand beneath the shower's spray of water.

"Are you all right?" he asked. Together, they watched a thin streak of red make a line down the inside of her leg. The water rushed down on them and Dicky angled his head over hers to deflect the spray. "I'm sorry," he said, "I should have used a rubber. I'm clean but I should have used one. Are you going to be all right?" His dark eyes searched hers seriously.

She nodded, feeling a little proud and somehow warmed by the fact that she was his first virgin. "I'm all right. Only," she returned his gaze, "I still want you, Dicky."

A warm light leapt into his eyes. A look something like hope.

As before, Dicky's hand slipped behind her and lifted her right leg to the tub's edge. Unlike before, he went down on his knees before her.

With a thin bar of soap in his hand, he dragged his palms over her wet skin, worshiping the pillar of her straightened leg from thigh to ankle. He soaped up his hands and ran his slippery fingers between her legs, gliding through her pussy, one finger nudging through her folds all the way back to the swell of her cheeks, where he dragged his fingertip over the tight crimp of her ass. Gently, he shouldered her bent leg out of his way to press a kiss into the tender flesh of her inner thigh. Sliding both hands inside her thighs, he eased his thumbs either side of her sex to tug her pussy open. His bottom lip dropped as he canted his head back and opened his mouth over the glistening rose revealed wet between his thumbs. His tongue came out to slide between her puffy labia and his mouth moved up against her pussy as if drinking her in. Opening his mouth wide, he brought his lips closed as he dragged his tongue through her thickened folds.

Eventually finding a thick little point of hardness, he concentrated his lips at that location, softly moving

his wet lips against her clitoris. Coaxing, prodding, brushing against it until he heard the girl's muffled cry of anguish, until he felt her muscles tighten in her thighs and her legs spread a little more to allow him greater access. Her hands clutched at his hair and he pulled away to watch her. Her eyes were closed, her body straining. Reaching out his tongue to her, he slid it into the swollen pink lips and stroked.

And stroked.

And stroked her into a long, shuddering orgasm as, racked with pleasure, she came under his mouth and her slippery female essence slid onto his tongue. He continued stroking until she relaxed her grip on his hair.

Sitting back on his heels, Dicky wrapped his arms around the back of her legs as he held the soft, shallow curve of her stomach against his cheek. He was grateful for the thundering rush of water, hoping its drumming sound would cover the overwhelming pounding of his heart. The light movement of Julie's small fingers stroking through his slick, wet hair was a balm to his beleaguered soul.

"What was that?" he asked in response to her soft words. Levering himself up onto his feet, he twisted the shower's faucet to the off position.

"I'm sorry I was so much work," she answered.

With one hand on the shower curtain, he stopped. "Work!" The word jumped from his lips before he could choke it back. Quickly, he turned back to her, cupping her face in his hand as he put a small kiss at the corner of her lips. "Watching your little body shiver into orgasm while I held your pussy in my mouth and forced you with my tongue? That wasn't work. That was never work.

"I like using my mouth on a woman," he continued. "Did you feel my teeth scrape across your clit?" he murmured as his lips brushed into the hair at her temple. "*I wanted* to kiss your clit and feel it catch on the edge of my teeth. I wanted to fuck you with my tongue." A light laugh rasped on his lips. "But you started coming before I got to that."

"But," she persisted uncertainly, "isn't that supposed to happen while...you're inside me?"

"Ideally," he admitted. "If I'd done it properly. But I didn't give you much of a chance." His voice was critical, the words spoken for himself more than for her. "You weren't ready. When you stepped into the tub, *I was*. I was so fucking hot, all I could think about was getting inside you." He trailed a finger down the side of her face. "Did I hurt you?"

"No," she answered quickly then followed those words with a shrug. "Not much." She smiled suddenly. "It was worth it."

Reaching for a towel, he wrapped her up in it. "When are you expecting your ride?" he asked, returning to business.

"Before eleven," she said.

The look of apprehension on her face was for him, he realized, and his aversion to the police. Despite himself, he couldn't help but feel warmed by her concern. "I'd better go," Dicky told her as he toweled off and headed back into the bedroom.

Following him, Julie glanced at the clock and nodded. She headed for the bedside table where a small

notepad sat alongside a cheap pen.

As soon as his clothes were on, he had his hand on the doorknob.

"Dicky," she said quickly, as the door opened. She scribbled a few symbols on a piece of paper. "This is my email address. So you can find me...if you ever want to."

If he'd had any heartstrings, those words would have just about snapped them. Closing the door on that shy note of hope, he stopped, shaking his head at the floor before he strode back across the room. His arm went around her back and he pressed a long kiss into her lips.

He had to get out of her room before the police arrived. He wished he could leave her with some encouraging words but he couldn't think of a damn thing to say that wouldn't make her cry. And he didn't want to make her cry. "I'd best be off, love," he said. "Before the police come for you."

"My name is—"

"Julie," he whispered, stopping her with another kiss. He took the slip of paper from her hand and slid it into his pocket. "I know. Julie Sheridan," he recited in a soft voice, "thirty-six-eighteen Casalina Drive in PalosVerdes, California. I saw it on your itinerary," he explained. Maybe one day I'll come visit you," he lied with a warm smile. "And then..." He paused long enough to tease her. "Then I'll give you a proper fuck."

## Chapter Five

With one elbow on The Swan's battered wooden bar, Dicky wrapped his fingers around the handle of the heavy glass pint before raising it to his lips. Returning the beer to the counter, his other hand stole into his pocket to rub a slip of paper between his fingers.

The closest internet café was several blocks south of The Swan.

A door opened behind him, but Dicky didn't turn.

"Did you hear about the Juliet got shot?"

Julie-et. Dicky almost choked on the mouthful of beer he forced down his constricted throat. He turned to stare at Jimmy. Several other patrons turned to regard the young man standing just inside the pub door.

"It was only a few blocks from here," Jimmy continued, his expression animated. "In an alley off Highfield. Found her dead in her panda car. Dom and I ran over to see. They were pulling the car out. Shit. Blood all over the inside." At this Jimmy stopped. "You okay, Dicky? *Christ!* You okay, Dicky?"

A second later, Dicky had him up against the door, his hand fisted in the front of Jimmy's T-shirt. "Found her dead? Found *who* dead?"

"The police officer. The *Juliet Bravo*. They found her dead."

"Any...anyone else?" Dicky croaked out an angry rasp.

“What?”

Like a rag doll, Jimmy jerked as Dicky smashed him into the thick, yellowed glass of the pub’s door. “*Anyone else?* In the car. Anyone else killed?”

“Christ, no. No one else. We watched the news report before we went over. *What’s wrong with you ?*”

Dicky’s fist shook as it tightened in Jimmy’s T-shirt. “The American. *Julie* .” He choked out her name.

“There wasn’t anyone else, Dicky . It would have been in the news report. What makes you think—”

“She was in the car,” Dicky stated. His arms fell away and he reeled a few steps backward as he shook his head, his gaze sweeping the pub’s floor, looking for some sort of answer in the worn oak planking.

“Why? Why would they take her? Why wouldn’t they just—”

Blank terror was replaced with slightly mad, faintly cautious hope. “She got away,” he whispered. “They don’t have her.” He stared unseeing, into Jimmy’s eyes. “They don’t have her.” One of his hands crept into his pocket to pull out his cigarettes. He banged a cigarette out into his hand, held onto it a few seconds then buried it back in the pack again. “Give me your mobile, Jimmy,” he ordered. Then again, “*Give me your mobile!*”

Quickly, Jimmy fished his mobile out of his pocket and put it in Dicky’s outstretched palm. “If the little American shows up here, call me. Don’t let her leave. You got that, Jimmy?”

“Right, Dicky . Don’t let the girl get away,” Jimmy recited, as though it was catechism. “Or Dicky will kill me.”

“Good lad,” Dicky said as he pushed through the door and into the wet, cold night.

Hunching along roads that glistened like black onyx under the feeble glow of hovering streetlights, Dicky made his way from the pub east toward Highfield Road. Giving the police tape a wide berth, he searched outward from the alley in an ever-widening grid as he went up and down the roads, in and out of every alley. His eyes were everywhere as he sorted all visual input for any trace of light blue anorak, gold hair. At every turn, his eyes stabbed impatiently at the mobile clutched in his fist. When it started to sound, he almost dropped it. Grappling with the sleek, silvery phone, he only just stopped its leap from his nervous fingers. “*Yeah!*”

“She’s here, Dicky .”

Dicky’s head went back and his shoulders slumped as he sagged against the nearest wall. With the phone against his ear, he nodded for several seconds.

“You there, Dicky ?”

“Yeah. Thanks, Jimmy. Thanks. Is she okay?”

“Yeah. Mary’s getting her some tea.”

“I’ll be there in ten minutes. Jimmy—”

“I won’t let her get away, Dicky .”

“Tell Mary to take her into the kitchen. Don’t let anyone see her.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Less than an hour later, Dicky fished a key out of his pocket and unlocked a door in a dark hallway. Anxiously, he regarded the pale, white face tucked into his shoulder. He’d all but carried Julie the several blocks from The Swan to the ugly row of flats. Once inside the building, he’d taken her weight as he coaxed her up the stairs. A thick skin of green paint peeled away from the door’s surface, revealing several generations of old color beneath the military green.

Pushing the door open, he pulled Julie into a small sitting room as an old woman struggled to get out of her chair. “No,” he said softly, “don’t get up, Nan.”

“Dicky? Who’s that with you?”

“Just a girl, Nan. She’s cold.”

“Yes. It’s miserable cold. Well, get her wrapped up then.”

He nodded. “I’m going to put her in the tub first. Is that all right?”

“Yes. Yes. And then we’ll have tea?” The old woman shuffled toward a small kitchen that was part of the room.

“If you’re not short.”

“I haven’t yet opened the box you brought last time.”

“Thanks, Nan. If you’ll put the kettle on, I’ll make the tea.” Dicky hurried Julie across the room and into the bathroom, where he sat her on the edge of the turquoise tub. When the water was running, he pulled her clothes off, bit by soggy, red bit and lifted her into the bath. The stream from the faucet took its own sweet time. Impatient with its dawdling pace, he grumbled silently as he scooped the warm water onto her chest.

Words spilled, trembling, from her blue-tinged lips.

“The d-door...the d-door...wouldn’t open.”

Dicky nodded as he pulled the water up over her chest. “That’s it. Get it out, love.”

“The c-car was too close to the wall and the d-door wouldn’t open.” Her eyes were squeezed shut. “The window exploded and there were little bits of glass everywhere. The glass was red. It was red everywhere.

“I was screaming. I wanted to get out of the car, but the door wouldn’t open. I just wanted to get out of the car.

“I tried the other door. There was something in the way. It wasn’t a wall. It was...in the way. But I had to get out, I just keep pushing and kicking and slamming the door against him until I could squeeze out. The whole time there was this terrific noise—explosions—more glass. I got out and fell. There was



another explosion and I got up and ran.

"I ran. I ran until I couldn't anymore." She started to cry. "I didn't know where I was. I didn't know where you were."

Dicky sucked in a breath and scooped her up into his arms. "I'm here now," he soothed.

"I was so afraid. I was afraid I wouldn't find you. That they'd find me before I could get back to you." She shook inside his arms as her voice got smaller, higher, the words caught in her constricted throat. "Dicky. I don't want to... I don't want to..."

He knew what she was trying to say. "How about we stick together from here on out?" he murmured against her ear. Silently, he cursed himself as she shuddered in his arms. When she finally stopped shaking, he pulled away from her. "Let me go make the tea and we'll get you warmed up on the inside. You sit here and soak for a minute."

She clung to him and he held her a bit longer, running his lips over her forehead. "I'm here," he told her in a whisper. "Julie... I'm here."

\* \* \* \* \*

Warm and dry and bundled into the old lady's housecoat after her soak, Julie stood just outside the bathroom door as she sipped her tea. Hot and sweet, just the way she'd come to like it. Just the way she'd come to like Dicky.

He'd towed her dry then continued to rub the thick, rough fabric into her skin, coaxing the shivers out of her body, the tremble of out her spine. Pressing her lips together to still the lingering tremor in her chin, she'd watched his frowning face as his eyes had scanned her limbs for injury. He'd reached for her hand and opened her clenching fingers, searching inside her palm before curling her fingers back into a fist—evidently satisfied she wasn't hurt.

The tea slid down her throat and warmed her heart, her soul, and then invaded new territory, a little farther south. She gave a final shiver and smiled across the room at him. Her eyes snagged his as her dark prince carefully lowered a teacup into the old woman's hands.

"Ah thanks, love." The old lady smiled at Dicky and poked a biscuit in Julie's direction. "That'll warm your bones." Nan smiled encouragingly from her chair positioned in front of a small television. "Sit down. Sit down," the old woman insisted.

Julie nodded as she padded toward a kitchen chair across the room where several bits of paper, differing in size and color, were tacked to the wall above a tiny aluminum table. As she reached the side of the table, Julie stooped to peer at the collection of sketches. It was Dicky's work.

She recognized Jimmy and the waitress at The Swan. There were several drawings of Nan.

"Those are Dicky's friends," Nan announced from the middle of the room. Julie nodded with a smile, finding Bertie and Skin among the sketches, the tack stabbed deep through the center of Bertie's scowling forehead.

Nan chuckled. "Dicky drew them. He's a good lad, Dicky. He brought me the television. The other was broken and I missed my programs. Dicky brought me this one."



Dicky's black boots were under the chair he pulled out for Julie. He kicked them aside before he put his own cup on the table. When Julie smiled at him, he looked away.

"Benny Hill," Nan murmured as she returned her attention to the television. "It must be late," she announced. "You'll spend the night, won't you?"

"If you don't mind," Dicky answered.

"I always feel safer when you're here," the old woman told him. "And it's nice to have a bit of company in the morning."

## Chapter Six

Closing the bedroom door behind him sometime after midnight, Dicky turned and put his back against it.

Julie watched him as she lowered herself to sit on the lavender bedspread covering the old lady's bed. "You live with your grandmother?"

His angry eyes flicked to a small, mirrored vanity against the wall. "She's not my grandmother. She's just a mad old lady. I helped her in with her bags one day." He caught Julie's look—her eyes. "Don't make a fucking saint of me," he said shortly. "I was hungry. I helped her in with her bags and we had tea together. I check in on her every now and then. Sometimes I sleep here when it's cold, when there's nowhere else to go. She never uses the bed. She sleeps in her chair. A lot of old people do." His eyes burned with a banked fire as his gaze flicked again to his own image caught in the mirror above the vintage dresser's low table.

Julie nodded, waiting for him to go on.

"I didn't buy that television."

"I didn't think you had."

"I stole it." He looked apologetic and defiant at the same time. "It was the smallest of four in the house."

"It doesn't matter, Dicky."

"It does to me."

"No, you wouldn't want me to think well of you, would you?" Julie shook her head. "It doesn't matter to me," she said softly. "I would love you, anyway. I'd love you if you'd killed the pope. And I'd know it had been an accident or a mistake."

For several long moments, he stared at her. His hand moved up to rub the space between his eyes and he turned from her. Then turned back.

"I'm sorry," he told her as he took the steps between them and fell to his knees in front of her. With his hands on her ankles, he coaxed her legs apart and moved between her knees, claiming that space for his own.

His hands moved either side of her thighs to curl behind her, clasping her bottom, pulling her closer as he nuzzled his face into the gaping opening of the pink housecoat. Brushing his lips and nose into the hollow between her dainty breasts, he sucked up a deep breath as though drinking in her scent. Nudging the housecoat open with his face, he tilted his head as he considered the delicate pink of her areolas. An expression of pure devotion fell over his face as he wet his lips with the sweep of his tongue. With the rough silk of his lips shining and parted, he opened his mouth to drag his bottom lip over the pink center mounted on her small breast. His hands left her bottom, sneaking into the housecoat as his fingers spread to lock around her ribcage and he mouthed her nipple into erection.

"I'm sorry," he said. Warm, wet lips breathed the words against her breast as his tight kiss twisted on her nipple and his tongue licked out to scrape the pink, pebbled surface.

"I'm sorry," he said again just before the wet silk of his lips dragged across her chest and sucked up her second nipple. The hands clutching her rib cage pushed her back on the bed and he rose to lean over her.

One of his hands left her and she heard his zipper scrape open then felt the soft, moist skin of his erection on her thigh as he leaned over her. The velvet caress of his warm sex dragged over her mound as he held her ribs and put his damp lips beneath her ear. "Oh God, I'm sorry," he said all the way down her jaw line.

"I want to fuck you, Julie. Nicely. But the fact is, there's nothing nice about me.

"I didn't know it would feel this way. I'm sorry for everything I've done to you. I'm sorry for everything I'm going to do to you." He kneed her legs apart and entered her in one hard thrust.

Her small gasp acknowledged his rough entry.

"I'm sorry, Julie. I don't have a rubber. I shouldn't be doing this without a rubber," he whispered. "I've always used one before. I didn't know it would be like this, to feel this way about a girl."

Taking her hands one at a time, he stretched them out over her head, then rose over her on rigid arms and thrust into her deeply. His hips jacked hard between her legs as he came at her with feral urgency and harsh violence.

Clutching the knot of sheets above her head, Julie pulled herself across the bed away from him. While she wanted the young man who'd offered that aching confession, she needed to escape the brutal aggressor who pounded into her. Wriggling, she struggled away from the rough spike of his shaft, stabbing insistently, relentlessly into the delicate pink between her legs.

Apparently desperate with a need he couldn't control, Dicky followed her retreat, falling onto the bed, dropping onto his forearms to contain her escape.

"Dicky!"

He stopped, panting, blinking down at her. His eyes filled with understanding then apology. "I'm sorry," he groaned and she felt his shaft emit a thick pulse, an insistent demand for action.

With his hands underneath her shoulders, he lowered his mouth to touch hers and started a sweet, soft, kind kiss that prodded her senses gently. The love smoldering on his lips kindled a small fire of longing

between her legs and, in an instant, took hold. In the next, it was out of control as her heart and soul went down in rampant flames and all that remained was a smoldering need for completion that only Dicky could address.

Dragging out of her unready hold, Dicky rolled away from her. Sitting on the bed's edge, he yanked his T-shirt over his head, balled it in his fingers, and tossed it to hit the wall then got rid of his loose jeans.

"Let's start again," he told her as he pulled her back to the bed's edge and knelt between her legs. With his eyes on her chest, he reached for her hands. "Feed them to me," he told her, bringing her hands around to cup the bottom sides of her breasts. "Feed your tits into my mouth." With his hands over hers, he pushed the tiny, shy mounds into his mouth a few times, then let his hands fall away. With a mouthful of nipple under the command of his tongue, his half-closed eyes were on her narrow fingers as she lifted and caressed her other breast.

With sudden interest, which could only be described as curious, he stopped and rearranged her fingers to partially cover her dusky pink nipples. For an instant he considered the result of his work, eyes warm with appreciation, apparently enjoying the image of pink nipples peeking shyly from behind the sheltering fence of her fingers. With a sigh of satisfaction, he took his tongue to one set of fingers, pushing them apart and forging between them with a long, wet serpentine caress. As his tongue laved at one nipple, his hand tangled with her other fingers as he used his thumb and forefinger to find the small bud of rose exposed between her spread digits.

A catching sigh of pure pleasure snagged in Julie's throat, escaping her lips as her back arched and Dicky tugged on her nipples. In reward for this pleasure, she fed more of her breasts into the hands and mouth of the man kneeling between her legs.

With this encouragement to spur him, Dicky sucked the whole of her breast into his open mouth then let her go to coax each of her fingers into his mouth where he lavished the same extravagant attention on her fingertips. A warm glowing pulse settled between Julie's legs, a slow burn that begged for attention.

Maddeningly, the scrape of his uneven teeth dragged along her fingers then dipped to pull at the nipples hiding behind them. The result was breathtaking, but by now, Julie was ready for him to direct his attention elsewhere. Still his stubborn, thorough tongue fenced with her fingers and his teeth closed on her flesh, caught at her nipples, ripping a line of fire between her tingling breast tips and the aching pulse between her legs.

Finally she felt his hands moving down her hips, stealing between her legs and she almost moaned in breathless, rampant anticipation. Gently, he tugged her legs apart, pressing them open with his palms flat on the insides of her thighs. Eager for his touch on her sex, she almost jumped when his thumbs tugged apart the needy lips of her pussy and held them parted and wide as his open mouth continued its attack on her breasts—sucking up first one nipple, lingering to abuse the tip with the rough scrape of his tongue, then moving to the other. As she fed her breasts into his mouth, he tugged and worried and nibbled, then scraped with his bottom teeth, constantly moving his head in an effort to zero in on the tender flesh he could reach between her fingers.

Then his lips brushed her cheek as he straightened and took her hands again, helping her to lift and push her sensitized nipples against the smooth skin of his naked chest. She watched his lowered eyes as he gazed at their hands together, just before he dove in to take her mouth, his tongue exploding through her lips with an uncontrolled, urgent edge of male desire in a raw, rough taking. His shoulders lifted as his fingers slid between her legs once more and he tucked his fingers beneath the curves of her bottom while his thumbs returned to open her sex. The cool wash of air on her hot sex caused her anticipation to spiral

into a sharp edge of need. She wanted more. More than his thumbs spreading her pussy wide.

“Open your legs,” he breathed against her lips. “Wider, angel. Open them wide.” Drawing away from her, his eyes burned into her pussy as she shifted her legs apart. Then his light touch was in her open sex as he dragged his fingers from beneath her bottom, playing and fingering her damp folds with a feathering touch that was stunningly arousing but fell exasperatingly short of what she craved. He returned his mouth to hers, the press of his lips broken by rough gasping bursts—scorching intakes of ragged breath—the violent, restless aggression of his mouth directly at war with the soft touch that caressed and teased inside the lips of her sex. A sharp, unappeased longing built between her legs as Dicky doled out the small, miserly caresses with a skill that was consummately wicked.

Her torn breathing matched his as she tried to catch and hold to one of the volleying kisses that exploded against her lips then smeared a path of passionate destruction as it moved across her jaw. Following his lips with hers, she was just about to reach her target and latch onto his mouth, when his face turned heartlessly away and his burning mouth seared a path beneath her jawline to stop below her ear, denying her the long, quenching kiss she thirsted for.

Scooting her bottom to the bed’s edge, Julie attempted to get closer to him, greedily spreading her legs wider for his fingers’ wicked work. With sluttish eagerness, she pressed her knees outward, so he could get more, could give more.

So she could have more.

As she squirmed with a desperate yearning for more contact, she heard his rough breath of cruel, tormenting laughter just before he turned his lips to hers and raped her mouth with a hard, probing kiss, his mouth devastating hers, his teeth bruising her lips. Still his fingers barely touched and stroked inside the burning lips of her pussy while her sex whimpered for more.

Abruptly, his kisses turned featherlight, soft and teasing, his lips just barely within touching distance. At the same time, his finger slashed upward through the line of her sex in a bold stroke that tore a keening cry from her lips. Then his fingers were everywhere in her pussy as he groped at her possessively, cavorting roughly in a playground that he clearly considered his own. Again, he scored a line the length of her slot, pushing through her rutted pink with a pitiless disregard for the specific places she longed for his strong touch to loiter and prod.

“That’s it,” he murmured, his lips brushing the corner of her mouth. “That’s it. Cream for me, angel.” With his words, she realized his fingers slid easily inside the slick lips of her pussy, her cunt crying tears of sex, tears of frustration. “I want you hot and wet before I put my cock to you.”

Moaning at the sound of these hard-spoken words, Julie shifted her lower body against the uncooperative hand inside the lips of her sex as she attempted to guide her needy places to his inconsiderate, unhelpful touch. Her legs spread indecently wide as she pushed her hips forward, trying to feed her pussy to the fingers that stroked and tormented with an ability nothing short of sinful.

His harsh, moist breath was in her ear, roughened with a deep male hunger, murmuring sweet obscenities, promising a deep, dark taking. He was saying something about her tight, hot cunt when his fingers finally settled in the right place. She held her breath then stifled a cry of pleasure as his fingers bracketed the needy flange of her clitoris then deftly closed to squeeze it. Pleasure pumped through her entire system as he pulled on her clit then repeated the action, then repeated it again. Repeated it until she thought she would scream from the full, insane pleasure dominating her lower body and concentrated in her cunt, her wet channel head-over-heels in love and spilling for the man who manipulated her clit with a

searingly abrasive touch—where hot, thick lust pooled beneath Dicky's wicked hand.

"How does that feel?" he asked, his voice heavy with lust. "Is that what you needed? Is that what you wanted?"

She moaned and writhed for him. "Dicky," she panted. "Don't make me...don't make me..."

Lost for words, she heard his next question.

"What, Julie? Don't make me stop? Or don't make me come?" She tossed her head as his lips fed the warm, breathy question into her ear. "Do you want me to stop, girl?"

"Nooooo," she keened, almost mad as the biting thread of desire tightened to wrap her hips and sting her lower quarters. "No, don't stop. Don't stop. Don't make me wait."

"Tell me how it feels," he whispered. "How does it feel to have a man's hands in your cunt. My hands." With her clit between his fingers, he pulled and teased and twisted all at the same time and she gasped again, threw back her head, on the verge of something...incredible—and wanting it like an addiction. "How does it feel to have a man's fingers all over your clit?"

"Oh, Dicky," she sobbed. "Oh, God," she said, as though they were one and the same.

"Tell me how it feels, angel."

"Like a burn," she squirmed against him. "A terrible, wonderful burning path that's leading...God...that's leading to somewhere I want to go." With these moaning words, she pushed her lower body at him again, smearing her open, wet sex against the fingers that slid down through her folds to settle just above her vagina. His unkind fingers played with the sensitized flesh at her point of entry, the rosy pink surrounding her opening even more sensitive than the ripe, fleshy bud of her clitoris. Here, his touch tortured her on a deeper level, with a greater promise of satisfaction where he stroked the wet opening at a steady, heady pace and pushed her body closer to open orgasm. A hot line of sweat broke out on either side of her sex, in the creases of her thighs and she felt her own damp moisture trickle downward into the crease of her ass.

Suddenly, those God-given fingers were gone—his lips were gone—and her body was jolted by their absence. As she drew in a shuddering sob, his thumbs moved to spread her labia again. Wrenching her eyes downward, she stared at his darkly red head, now between her legs, and she choked back a scream as he blew on her burning sex. As he watched her open sex with avaricious interest, she felt the length of her open vagina pluck at the empty air. Again, he blew and, again, her vagina grasped at the orgasm just out of reach. Again, he pursed his lips to blow and her cunt leapt and clenched in anticipation before he could even get the breath out of his chest. Her cunt felt like a tightly strung guitar string poised on the point of failure, one tug away from snapping and unraveling with a single, deep note of release.

"Steady, girl," he told her in a low, warm voice of pleasure, clearly delighted with her body's reaction to his heartless manipulation. "Not yet. Not quite yet." Carefully he pulled her legs wider and again that edge of orgasm grasped at her body like a heavy lust drug. "Steady, love." Slowly, carefully, he lowered his head and reached out his tongue to her vulva to lap at the female moisture running from her vagina. "You're so pink," he muttered. "Hot pink and rosy." His eyes lifted to burn into hers. "You've got to see this," he told her softly. A fire of lust and anticipation flamed in his eyes as his gaze moved across the room to settle on the vanity's mirror. "You've got to see all of this, as I fuck you."

Julie clung to Dicky as he lifted her out of the housecoat and carried her across the room to the vintage dressing table. Mindless with need, she smudged her body against his in a vain quest for release. Upon reaching the dresser, he untangled her grasping arms and turned her to face the mirror. She ended up with her knees spread wide to reach the vanity's narrow stack of drawers. The tiny table between the drawers was inset by several inches, giving Dicky perfect access to the hot running sex between her legs.

Deftly, he arranged her on her knees, pushing her legs wide on the dresser as he moved her hands to the tops of her thighs. With his chest warm against her back, he flexed his knees, skidding his cock head through the sodden, needy folds that screamed for more than the sweet sliding contact of his plum-shaped tip. In the mirror, Julie watched the dark, lush head of his sex push between her thighs as he made several, long, tormenting, maddening thrusts before receding again. In answer, her cunt grasped at him.

Her vagina was quaking again, on the edge of closing, when he finally seated the wide, blunt head of his cock against her weeping slit. Immediately, she writhed at the touch and all it promised, trying to lower herself onto his shaft. But her legs were stretched to their maximum and there was no room to move downward.

"Dicky," she cried, begged, sobbed as, gripping her hips tightly, he penetrated her in long, slow, thick inches that promised deliverance. Promised, but delayed in that aching promise. Forging into her in a lingeringly brutal stretch, he finally came to a pulsing rest fully seated inside the tight walls of her vagina. Julie almost wept in relief. His thick, savage flesh filled her like a promise and a threat as his lips hovered just above her ear.

"Just how close are you?" he murmured with a savage upward thrust of his hips. She watched his face in the mirror—wild, aggressive, elemental and overpoweringly male—then watched their two bodies together as she knelt inches from the mirror, impaled on the thick shaft of Dicky's erection.

Her head fell back on his shoulder and she watched her own body arch to push her small tits closer to the mirror. Firmly, he reached for both her hands and guided them toward the dewy thatch just above her cleft.

"I want to watch you come," he whispered against her ear. "I want to watch as I shaft you, but if I start to move now, I'll spill and I'll miss it. I want to see your clit," he said, encouraging her fingers over the thick, swollen cushion of her pussy. "I want to see the long precious line of your sex, open as you take yourself to orgasm, as you take *us* to orgasm." Pulling his hands up to her wrists, he pushed her fingertips at her clit then slipped his hands beneath hers, and pulled her labia wide.

Despite his words of self-restraint, his hips began to move in an automatic male reflex as he used his thumbs to inch her fingers toward the glistening ruffle of flesh near the top of her cleft. "Do it, Julie," he breathed. Open all your precious pink so I can see it as I fuck you."

"Oh, God, Dicky," she moaned, her head tilted backward and eyes half-closed as she gazed at the mirror where she was displayed on his body, her sex spread in his hands, the thick root of his cock buried in her vagina, his balls swaying between her legs.

"Wait a minute," he said, lifting her right hand to his lips as he sucked her fingers up into his mouth. Returning her wet digits to her pussy, he pulled her open again, exposing the ruffle of her clit, rare and forbidden, to be consumed by his heated gaze.

Her hand slipped into her slot as she used her wet fingers to touch herself everywhere before settling the



length of her pussy. As she watched her fingers move inside her folded pink, the edges of her vision started to darken and she thought she would black out as she approached shatter point. A few more flicks of her fingers and she surged into orgasm, her cunt clasp on the impossible length and width filling her, her body convulsing on the stake that stretched hard and deep inside.

Within her body, something incredible was taking place. Something she was helpless to stop or slow, though she'd have liked to slow it—just long enough for it to last forever. Something that felt like detonation—fireworks—burst and splashed at the back of her vagina where Dicky ripped forward to drive against her limit at the best possible instant of perfection. Like a fish on a line, she danced and shimmered on the hook that sprang from Dicky's groin.

"Fuck me," he whispered in awe at her temple. Then he was moving inside her, his arms clamping her racking body against his as he shoved into her—pulled—then ripped into her again, his cock battling her spasming cunt with savage energy. Dicky reacted in an explosion of male need held in rein far too long. As Julie came out of orgasm, she watched his face in the mirror, the uneven edge of his rough tooth creasing his bottom lip as he pounded into her at the same time he drove her body down on his shaft. His eyes snagged hers, his expression fierce and feral, and within her a sudden new spark built at the erotic sight of that face, so primitive in its need, so male in its execution.

"What..." she whispered, "What does it feel like to you, Dicky?"

His eyes were glazed with a hard shining light. "Like the edge of pleasure. The edge of a promise," he grunted as he continued to slash between her legs. "Like the only thing you can believe in. The only promise you can count on. Like a fucking wish about to come true."

Without warning, she jerked into a second, sudden orgasm as his teeth closed on the shell of her ear, clamping the frail ridge of flesh between his teeth and lower lip. Again her body leapt within his arms as he strangled a roar in his throat and his hips rocketed upward to blast her with a searing flash of intense pleasure as his release washed into her womb.

Seconds later, they stared at each other, stunned—sex-slicked bodies sealed together in a warm bond, sweat-dampened ropes of deep gold and dark blood twisting together where their faces touched.

"Jesus," Dicky breathed, his expression nothing short of staggered as he stared at the two lovers entwined on the mirror's face. "That was beautiful. You were beautiful," he whispered hoarsely, as he nuzzled his face into her neck. "Watching you on my cock, your tight little cunt stretched wide to take me. Seeing you orgasm on my fuck." A heartfelt shudder of emotion ripped through the lean, corded muscles of his hard body and he held her tightly. "If I live to be a hundred, I'll not forget this moment. I'll carry that sight to my grave...and people will wonder to see such a withered old corpse with such a shit-eating grin on its face."

Replete and content, Julie graced him with a sleepy smile.

"And you," he informed her with quiet, teasing pride, "can leave this life knowing you've been thoroughly fucked."

## Chapter Seven

In the morning, Dicky drew the bedroom door closed behind him and padded barefoot across the sitting

room. With one hand, he tugged at the loose denims riding low on his hips as he shivered in the chill room. He wore no clothing other than his trousers.

Trying to decide if Nan could afford a little more heat, he considered the old woman, tucked up in blankets on the chair while the television flickered its gray light at her closed eyes. Eventually deciding that she probably couldn't, he rubbed his arms and lit a cigarette, drawing the smoke deeply into his lungs as though it might warm him. With the cigarette dangling in his mouth, he filled the kettle and plugged it in then pulled out several kitchen drawers, rummaging through their contents. Impatiently, he flicked his head to shift the hair that hung in his eyes.

"Can't find your pencil, Dicky? Here, let me have a look for you."

"That's all right, Nan," he answered quickly. "Julie's a pen in her backpack."

"Is the loo free?"

"It is," he answered. "Do you want a hand getting there?"

"If it's not too much trouble. I'm a bit stiff in the mornings."

After he walked the old lady to the bathroom door, Dicky swung Julie's backpack off the floor and dug through it until he came up with a pen. He watched the closed bathroom door as he crept to a small cabinet in the sitting room.

On the bottom shelf was a neat, sharp-edged, lavender box. Sliding the lid off, Dicky moistened a finger to pull out a sheet of faintly colored stationary. Carefully angling his smoking cigarette out of the way, he balanced the sheet on his hands as he crossed the room back to the table.

Nan came out of the bathroom and stood at his shoulder to watch. "I'll just make the tea," she said when the kettle boiled.

The pen moved on the paper, slowly at first then with more confidence. When Nan placed a cup at his elbow, Dicky continued without looking up, stubbing out a cigarette and lighting another as Nan shuffled across the room to her chair.

The television was on but Nan watched the young man as she sipped her tea. Dicky expelled a long wisp of smoke as his eyes closed and his head went back, the pen gripped tightly in his fingers. When his eyes opened, his attention as well as the pen returned to stroke the paper on the table before him.

Abruptly, he dropped the pen as his head tilted. With a warm glow, his eyes assessed the paper in front of him. In that instant, Nan heard the bedroom door crack open behind her and she watched Dicky's head come up. The glow in his eyes sprang to flames as the girl stepped into the room. Nan watched that intense gaze smoldering behind the ribbons of his slashing dark hair.

The old woman nodded to herself. It had been a long while since she'd seen a look like that, but not so long that she didn't remember what love looked like.



Dickyswung out of the chair, sliding the paper under his hand as he turned into the kitchen. “Tea, Julie?”

“Yes, please.”

Looking about the kitchen, he finally slipped the paper onto the top of the small refrigerator before reaching for the ancient, chipped teapot. On his right, Dicky heard the chair being pulled out. After pouring the tea and putting a teaspoon of sugar into the cup, he joined Julie at the table.

Dicky’s eyes rested on Julie’s face while she stirred her tea, her gaze directed to the small television across the room.

“What is it?” he asked, when her gaze flickered. His eyes cut to the television.

Julie peered at the TV a moment longer, cut a glance at Dicky, then returned her gaze to the screen. “I thought... that man...”

“What man?”

“He was standing behind the guy being interviewed. But it couldn’t be. Isn’t that the...”

“Leader of the opposition party. Yeah.” The television screen changed as the news coverage moved to a protest in America.

“Well, the man standing behind him looked like the man at the ferry. Did you see him?”

Dicky shook his head. “The bodyguard? I didn’t notice him.” Dicky took a few moments to think. “The man at the ferry, the man you described, wasn’t in the police database, yet he’s concerned—very concerned—that he might be recognized. Concerned enough to kill a police officer in order to get to you.”

“If he’s that worried,” Julie argued, “wouldn’t he have enough sense to avoid a television camera?”

Dicky nodded at her. “That’s an old clip.”

“What?”

“It’s not a recent interview. I saw it a few months back.” Dicky rubbed a hand over his smooth, bare chest. “I wonder,” he said slowly. “If we were to go back through the old newspapers... I wonder if we might catch another glimpse of him.” He stared at Julie thoughtfully. “It might be worth a try.” Pushing to his feet, he swung into the kitchen with his empty teacup. “There’s a huge pile of old papers in the Swan’s kitchen. We’ll start there.” Leaning against the kitchen wall, he frowned at the housecoat she wore. “You need some clothes. Your others are a mess.”

Julie’s eyes widened. “I lost my backpack. In the... police car.” Her eyes flickered with a bit of hope. “But you took half of my English money.”

Dicky nodded. “We’ll need that later,” he said shortly as he dropped back into the kitchen chair and reached for his boots tucked beneath Julie’s seat. “Damn. I wish McCready —”

“I talked to McCready.”

Dicky frowned up at her as he tugged on his bootlaces.

"I talked to McCready . When the...that police officer picked me up, she took me straight to Inspector McCready . Afterward, they sent us out to shop for some clothes. That's when we were—"

"Did they have time to do a composite drawing of the man at the docks?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Did McCready see it?"

"Yes."

Dicky glanced up at her as he knotted his laces. "How'd it turn out?"

"The artist wasn't as good as you."

He smiled and nodded, stood and reached for his coat hanging on the chair. "I'll bring you back something to wear."

"Dicky, you aren't going to..." Julie shot a wary look at Nan, clearly unwilling to use the word "steal" in front of the old lady.

"Yeah, I am." He grinned at her.

\* \* \* \* \*

"They're a bit tight," Julie suggested a few hours later as she turned her toe and frowned down at the new flare-leg jeans hugging her thighs. She zipped up the dark green anorak Dicky had brought her as she questioned him with a frown.

"No," he answered. "They're just right. Come on, then. You ready, Nan?"

The old woman scuttled toward the bedroom door. "Just let me fetch me cardigan and I'll be right with you."

Dicky corralled his two females through the flat's door, down the stairs and out of the building. Eyes sweeping the street, he trailed a few paces behind the women as he followed them to the pub. After installing Julie behind a tower of newspapers in one of the Swan's booths, Dicky guided Nan back toward the door again. "The church is just in the next block," he told Julie. "I'll be back in an instant."

He shot a look around the pub and spared a smile for Mary before he left with the old lady.

Back less than five minutes later, Dicky froze inside the door as it shushed closed behind him.

Skin stood in the middle of the pub with his booted foot in the center of Julie's back. Scattered chairs and dislodged tables indicated there'd been some sort of struggle before Julie had been pinned, facedown, on the pub's oak floor. "Where's the little bastard?" Skin demanded.

Mary's angry gaze swung to meet Dicky's . "Dicky!" she shouted, relief sharpening her voice. "I've called the police."

The skinhead's eyes came up and registered an instant's uncertainty before the big man swept caution aside and ground his heel into Julie's anorak. "Hey,arsehole . Hope you don't mind. The bottom of me boot needed cleaning."

Forcing his expression to remain neutral,Dicky curbed his rage as his gaze narrowed on the foot planted in the middle of Julie's back.His fists clenched and unclenched, blood pounding fiercely in his temples, misting his vision with a thin wash of red fury.

"Why should I care?"Dicky's voice was a soft whisper, raw, like the sound of tearing paper. A few steps took him into the pub. Squatting on the other side of Julie, he cocked his head to look at her face then, as if to get a better look, leaned his weight on one hand.

His foot slashed over Julie's back and hit the leg Skin was standing on. With most of his weight on that foot, Skin went down asDicky leapt to his feet, standing above Skin as he put his heel in the bald man's face.

And again.

Then once more with pure, unmanaged violence.

Reaching behind him,Dicky swung a chair over the man on the floor and pinned the thug's upper body inside the chair's legs.Dicky gave the girl a dangerous look as he slammed one booted foot on the chair.

"I'm all right,Dicky ," she told him, scrabbling to her knees.

"Of course you are," he told her soothingly, in a voice that didn't match his eyes,then returned his gaze to the man trapped beneath the chair. "That's the only reason he's still alive," he said, with a voice like torn silk. "You got any money, Skin?"

A slurred obscenity was his captive's only answer.

"Check his pockets, Julie. Take half of what he's got."

Julie found a wallet in the skinhead's coat pocket and started pulling out notes.

"That's enough, Julie. I don't want to take more than I can pay back." He took his boot off the chair and addressed the skinhead. "I'm leaving now. I'm going to turn my back and walk out that door," he said, flicking his head toward the exit. "If you move, and I am close enough to know of it, I'll kill you." Taking Julie's hand he moved her across the room, opened the door and pushed her through, then followed.

Towing Julie a step behind him,Dicky headed down the street at a brutal pace. They hadn't gone two blocks when he ducked into an alley. Three steps into the darkened interior, he pinned her against a wall as he held her jaw tightly between thumb and fingers he couldn't stop from shaking. Then his hard lips were against hers. Opening his mouth on her closed lips, he caught them between his teeth and hers, bruising them roughly before he pushed her lips out of his tongue's path. His tongue stabbed into hers as he crushed her body with his. His hand left her jaw to tighten in the hair behind her ear while his other hand caged her breast and his knee fought for a place between her legs.

Suddenly he stopped and glowered at her lips, dark and swollen as a result of his passionate onslaught.

Still watching her lips, he lowered his mouth slowly and caught her bottom lip, dragged it through his teeth and released it. His eyes lifted to hers, his dark irises fire-heated coals with blackened rims. "I can't wait," he said without apology. "I'm going to have you now."

Julie realized he meant to take her there and then, up against a wall in broad, gray Liverpool daylight, only a few steps away from a road filled with pedestrians. The prospect was both frightening and thrilling. The idea that Dicky wanted her badly enough—needed her badly enough—to risk discovery as they rutted together against a wall in a narrow alley, loosed a wash of blood-red, liquid lust that weakened her limbs.

With his chest still hard against hers, Dicky leaned his lower body away enough to unzip her jeans and shove them past her knees. More than that, he didn't bother with. Pressed tight against her, his long dark coat concealed their bodies as he pulled his own fly and, leaving his jeans buttoned at the top, dragged his cock through the placket. "Reach into my right pocket," he instructed her harshly. "I picked up some rubbers when I was out this morning."

She found the small plastic package and brought it to chest height where she struggled to open it. Clearly impatient with her efforts, Dicky sank his teeth into the package. The thin plastic ripped as Julie pulled it apart. She caught the condom before it could fall. "Put it on me," he told her.

He made enough room for her to get to him. Hesitantly, she reached for him.

Dicky's breathing stopped and his eyes closed when she took him in hand. Opening his eyes again, his chin on his chest, he watched her fingers as she rolled the condom down the straining length of his cock. His hand slid to meet hers and he clamped her fingers around his cock as he lifted his eyes to hers. His hungry gaze was hot enough to scorch steel as he pulled her hand away with his and he forced his cock down between her legs. The wide head rode through the folds of her pussy once before he bent his knees and thrust upward, repositioned his cock head, and shoved into her.

With the wet heat of Julie's cunt sucking him in, Dicky drove against her, hip pistoning. His hands on her waist gradually raised her against the wall until he'd put her just within hard reach of his cock head—positioned her so he could hit her core every time his knees straightened. Her denims were scraped down past her knees and he fought for her left leg—fought to pull her knee up against his hip, then higher, past his waist. Her left foot came free from her denims and, with a hand behind her knee, Dicky pulled it up and pushed it back, never ceasing his brutal action between her legs. He watched her face as her eyebrows pinched together and her teeth cut into her bottom lip.

Slowly, his body ground to a halt as he snagged her eyes and held them with an accusing question.

"I'm not going to make it," she admitted with reluctance.

"Yes, you are," he told her in a rough lilt.

Stroking the length of her naked leg from thigh to ankle, he pulled her foot behind him. He smiled as she locked him into her leg's embrace.

"Remember how I fucked you last night?" he growled softly. "Remember how you spread your legs for

me while I opened your sex. I had your pretty lips spread wide so I could see all of your hidden pink, so I could watch you while you played with your clit.”

Pulling his upper body away from hers, Dicky worked his groin against the mounded cushion of her pussy, grinding the rust curls in his groin against the clit cloistered inside her pouting lips. With his hands either side of her face, he lowered his lips to hers in a long, gentle, lingering kiss. Kissed her until she whimpered into his mouth and pushed her pelvis forward, straining for his action. Watched her feeble attempts to thrust herself on him, helpless without leverage. Let her struggle for him as her cunt rippled and tugged at his erection.

With her shoulder blades hard against the stone wall, Julie arched her back as she tried to capture more of him.

As she twisted on his shaft, Dicky sighed with pleasure at the havoc her struggles created in his cock. Finally unable to hold back a second longer, he put his lips against her ear. “I hope you’re ready,” he said. And that was all the warning she got as he resumed his thrusting action with renewed violence.

“Dicky,” she cried. Grappling at his hips, Julie strained to force him hard inside her. With his blunt cock head shoved tight against her core, he gave her an instant of still, hard pleasure to orgasm on, then banged his way forward to his own release.

Afterward, he stood for several moments, his forehead damp against hers.

“What are you humming?” she asked with a laugh in her voice.

His shoulders tightened in a shrug. “I don’t know. I’m thinking it must be a love song, though.” He took a long breath and sighed. “I don’t want to move. Ever. I want to stay right here, inside you. Forever.”

“Think we could sleep standing up?”

“I’m sure it’s been done before.”

When she smiled into his eyes, he felt himself stiffen inside her.

“Is that you?” she asked shyly.

“Oh, shit. I’d better get that rubber out of you.” He pulled out carefully, shielding her with his coat while she found the leg of her denims and got them pulled up again. Throwing the condom aside, he tucked his cock inside his trousers then remained standing in front of her, his palms flat against the wall. “Julie,” he started.

She lifted her lips and nudged at his mouth with hers.

“Ah, fuck, Julie. I don’t know what to do.” For several moments he stood there, his forehead resting against hers.

“Maybe we should go to the police,” she suggested.

He thought about this for a while. “No,” he eventually answered. “I’m not giving them another chance to fuck up. Not with your life. I want those bastards behind bars before you go to the police again.

“We’ll go to London,” he said finally.

## Chapter Eight

Dicky was smiling when he stepped into their room at The Regent Hotel in London. He gave Julie a sly look.

The dull, dingy room was decorated in flat brown and ugly mustard, though decorated might be a generous word to describe what those colors did to the small room. Still, it had to be assumed the colors hid a multitude of sins—other people’s sins—which were better left unexplored. The room smelled of years and years of fun moneyed guests, plowing through glum weather in cheap raincoats, coming and going in a long damp procession.

They’d been in the city three days. On the train south, they’d put together a composite drawing of the man at the docks. Every morning Dicky left early to trudge the streets between the parliament buildings and the opposition’s offices. Up until today, he’d returned late every evening.

“You found them?”

“The one from the docks.” Dicky smiled. “He stepped out for lunch.”

Reaching for the hotel phone, he just grinned at Julie as he punched the keypad. Holding the receiver against his ear, he took a few impatient steps to stop in front of the room’s only window. His fingers slid through his hair as he tucked a few dark strands behind his ear.

“Hey, asshole. I’m the man who returned your mobile today in the pub.

“No, I don’t expect a reward. Not inasmuch as I lifted it from your pocket in the first place. I left you a picture if you want to go find it.

“It’s about the girl.” Dicky winked at Julie.

“The girl you’re looking for. I’ve got her.

“Yeah. Yeah,” he said with a snort. “You don’t know what I’m talking about. Take a look at the picture.

“I want a passport with that picture on it along with ten thousand pounds in return for the girl.”

Dicky shook his head. “Just shut up and listen. Here’s how you know I’m real, that I’m not working with the police.” He turned his back on her. “Run the picture past the Yard. It will be ID’d as Michael O’Rourke. Michael O’Rourke. Wanted for terrorism resulting in murder.”

He shifted his shoulders impatiently. “I know you have that kind of access. Don’t waste my time.

“What’s she to me?” His shoulders twitched. “I picked her up on the street just after your ferryboat ‘accident’. I’m fucking her.

“Yeah. Every chance I get.

“What do you think? Yeah, she’s good.”

Dicky laughed into the phone. “She thinks I’m helping her.

“Yeah.

“Bring the passport and money to the Victoria Embankment tomorrow, three o’clock. Across from the Eye. *You* bring it. I don’t trust your friend. I beat the shit out of him. He might be the grudging sort.

“Yeah. He broke in on me while I was doing the girl. I thought he was looking for me. It took me a while to figure out what was going on.

“Fuck! Everyone’s after me! That’s why I need the money and the passport.

“Dicky Evans. Twenty-three, five-ten, brown hair, brown eyes. Nineteen-eighty-three.

“Apartment two-twenty, twenty-four-eighty Merseyside, Liverpool,” he said, reciting Nan’s address.

“How should I know? Make it up.

“Yeah, well, just to remind you, I still have your friend’s gun.

“*Fuck you!* How many bullets do I need to kill you?

“Across from the Eye, tomorrow, then. I’ll give you the girl.”

Returning the receiver to the cradle, Dicky let out a pent-up breath. With his right forearm horizontal on the wall, he leaned next to the window. The light was harsh on his stark features. “I’m sorry to be the one to tell you...” He laughed without turning. It was a hard laugh. “But you’ve been sleeping with a murdering, fucking terrorist.”

When Julie made no response, he didn’t turn to look at her. Dicky pushed out a breath and gave his head a half-shake. “I should have told you... before now. I’m sorry for all the things I’ve done to you. I couldn’t help myself. I wanted to fuck you and love you and lose myself inside you. I wanted to... *be* Dicky Evans.

“If it helps to know, I feel... bad about it.” His voice dropped. “I feel sick about it.” His lips turned down and he shook his head as he faced her. He winced when he saw her face.

Julie felt a tear start down her cheek. “I didn’t realize,” she told him as she shook her head. “I should have told you. I’ve known. I’ve known all along.”

His eyes narrowed a warning as he shook his head.

“I saw your picture in the Liverpool Police Station, in their terrorist database. The first time I was there. Before we... did anything. You were younger in the picture, but—”

Looking like he was trying to comprehend some problem just beyond his grasp, Dicky continued to shake his head as he took the two steps to the bed. Then his knee was on the bed between her legs as he pushed her back and laid her out beneath him.



He captured her head in his hands and held her face as though he'd just found the answer to all life's troubles and he'd not risk losing it. For a few moments, he did nothing more than gaze into her eyes as though that blue was the one thing in the world that could save him.

"You..." he told her in a voice that shook. "You are so fucking precious."

The bedside radio was on and music surged into the room, a faint regular pulse, as Dicky's lips brushed against hers in rhythm to some obscure British band. Inevitably, his hard lips pressed formore, restlessly demanded more, as he positioned and repositioned his open mouth on hers, lips dragging, tongue dredging, heart reaching for all of her he could get into his mouth.

Dicky felt her palms low on his flanks and gave her enough room to reach his zipper. There was a faint rasp of steel unlocking followed by the touch of her small hand wrapped around his cock. He gasped into her mouth, his tongue distracted as she racked his shaft downward.

Yanking at the top edge of her denims, Dicky worked one side of her trousers down her hips while she managed the other. Then one of his hands met hers to pull the crotch of her thong aside and guide his cock head into her pussy. With the pink thong only just out of the way, he entered her slowly. The edge of her thong rasped at his length and he reached behind her, digging his fingers into her crease to dislodge the thin strip of thong that clung between the cheeks of her ass. Sliding his arms under her shoulders, he seared her lips with his while his hips took possession of the space between her legs.

Probing gently, he felt her new release seep around his shaft, hot and slick, surrounding his cock in an erotic damp kiss as she sobbed into his mouth and her body curved up in a gentle arch to meet the lean, smooth muscles of his abdomen. He squeezed his eyes shut as her slim, lithe body began to move on him, a captured wave beneath his own. Moving slowly, he took her to the threshold. Knew she was there when her body rocked up to meet him, knew by the soft sounds originating in her throat. Gently, he nudged her toward orgasm.

"Rubber," he finally grunted.

Ignoring her small sounds of protest, he pulled out of her and dug a small package from his pocket. With shaking hands, he tipped the latex into his hand and rolled it over his glistening erection then eased between her legs again.

Slowly, too slowly, she worked herself against him, drawing him in deeply and pushing herself onto his cock head all the way to her limit. Each time he brought it to her, she whimpered. Slowly, he delivered. Patiently, he waited for her.

Then he threw her right over the edge.

When her head tossed, he shoved in as hard as he could and watched her face as her eyes opened, unseeing. Inside her cunt, pink muscles locked on his cock, released, and locked again. He pulled his hips and crammed back into her a few times then shot into orgasm so intense it felt as though his soul had been ripped from his body.

She screamed at the edge. Screamed words beyond reason, beyond understanding. Words of love and promise. Words he could never accept nor return. He covered her mouth with his hand, tightening his palm over her lips. "No. Don't say that. Don't say that," he rasped, as he jettisoned inside her.

Afterward, he tied himself in a knot around her and slept like a wrecked man. A man who's fought the crushing waves of despair and is finally washed ashore to rest in the kind hand of fate.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Let me tell you about Michael O'Rourke," Dicky said when he woke beside Julie later in the day. Their bodies were still sex-damp and sealed together. "You deserve to know." Breaking away from her, he rolled to the bed's edge and sat with his back to her. "Michael O'Rourke was a fourteen-year-old who carried a package into a church for his older cousins. It was supposed to be a lark. A package of stink bombs that would go off in the middle of a Sunday morning service." He nodded to himself. "It was supposed to be a lark."

"My cousins were—four, five years older than me. Looking back, I would have to say they had no sense of humor. I don't think they were terribly bright."

"But because of Michael O'Rourke and his cousins, Dicky Evans can't get a job, can't get a driver's license, passport—can't even feed himself! Dicky Evans has to steal from hard-working shop owners, steal from his friends, just to eat! I hate Michael O'Rourke," he said, his words succinct, without sympathy. "Michael O'Rourke killed three people and ruined my life." His head dropped into his hands. "One of them was a young father with two children."

He turned his face to her, eyes shining. "D'you know what that man's wife would do to Michael O'Rourke? Should she get her hands on him? She'd kill him. Kill him with my blessing. But Dicky," he muttered a laugh. "Everyone loves Dicky. Even though he's a fucking violent bastard who steals from them every opportunity he gets. Everyone loves Dicky."

"I left Ireland. Came to Liverpool." He pushed out a heavy sigh. "It was supposed to be a lark, Julie." With his eyes, he begged her to believe him.

Julie could have cried for the man who'd lived with this terrible truth for so many years. But this wasn't the time for crying. This was a time for strength. "You were fourteen, Dicky. You didn't know it was a bomb. Can't you go to the authorities?"

He shook his head at the floor. "The only two who could clear me—my cousins—died in a protestant plot three years ago. The authorities—"

"Oh fuck, Julie. I have another phone call to make."

"Then I have to go out. I need a new T-shirt," he said, "and a few other things. I wish I could find another clip for this gun." Tugging at his jeans as he stood, he picked up the gun on the bedside table. "If this were Liverpool, I'd have no trouble finding a replacement clip." He shook his head thoughtfully, hitching his butt up onto the windowsill. "We'll just have to make a strong defense," he muttered.

"I'd never let anyone hurt you," he said to himself softly. "*Anyone*," he repeated in a forceful whisper. His eyes were distant and resolved as he rubbed the gun barrel against his temple, absently scratching his head with the nose of the deadly weapon.

A cold shiver of dread spiked up Julie's backbone at the image of the young man with the gun barrel against his temple. She moved toward him quickly, smoothly, lifting her hand to caress his forearm, sliding her palm up to capture his hand and guide it downward. The gun's rough grip grazed her nipples as she

coaxed the handgun downward then pulled it behind her where the cold metal chilled the base of her spine.

As he pulled her slim body into his, Dicky transferred the gun to his other hand and laid the weapon aside on the windowsill. "Don't tempt me," he growled at her, "when I've so much to do." His erection pressed a line into her belly, a heated declaration of his interest, as well as a pleasantly scorching offer.

"Is it never quiet?" she asked him as her fingers brushed over the long cock inside his jeans.

He made a small groan. "Not when you're around."

## Chapter Nine

Detective Chief Inspector Ian McCready glanced at his watch and leaned on the long windowsill as his eyes focused on the London Eye, the Ferris Wheel on the far side of the River Thames.

"Think he'll show?"

"Who knows?" McCready answered the young detective. "Most tips don't pan out. Although... the man who called in didn't sound like a crank. He seemed to know what he was talking about. The description as well as everything else seemed right."

"Why do you think he contacted you, instead of someone at Met?"

Ian shrugged. "A lot of these blokes only know one name. A lot of them are paranoid—with good reason. I appreciate your working with me on this, Detective. I'd like to take O'Rourke off the street. He's the last of his gang. His cousins died a few years back."

"How'd they die?"

Ian held up a finger for silence then pressed the same finger against the small earphone he was wearing.

A tinny voice crackled in his ear. "Okay, Inspector. I've got him."

Ian nodded. "Can you slide him off the street?"

There was a pause. "I don't think so, sir. He's got a girl with him. She's glued to him."

"Shit. What's the bastard doing?"

You should be seeing him in a few seconds. Long black coat, dark reddish hair. The girl's wearing a dark green anorak.

"Right. I've got them." Ian McCready raised his binoculars and started to focus on the young couple. Their arms were around each other as they came up the Victoria Embankment, the gray stone wall a backdrop behind them. "That's him," Ian announced to the other officers in the room. Then. "What the hell? What's *she* doing with him?"

The speaker in his ear crackled. "Shall we move the mobile units in?"

Ian raised a hand slowly as he peered through the binoculars. "Not yet. He's got a hostage. Keep the target in your sights." InspectorMcCready watched the young man stop and lean against the embankment wall as he pulled the young woman in front of him. "*Bastard*. He's using the girl as a shield."

Apparently stopping for a quick kiss, the couple switched places, putting the girl behind the target. The young man blocked her from Ian's view just before two men sauntered up to join them.

Ian frowned behind the binoculars. "Now what?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"You bring the passport?" Dicky challenged the blond man from the docks.

In response, the terrorist pulled a thick envelope from inside his coat and laid it on the top of the embankment wall. As Dicky reached for it, he saw the blond's companion—Julie's original stalker—discreetly raise a gun to point in his direction. Lowering his hands carefully, Dicky stared at the dark hole of the gun barrel. "I have a gun, as well," Dicky told the men.

Coldly, the blond sneered. "But it's not in your hand."

"No," he said quietly. "It's on the roof of that building across the road."

The blond snorted. "Bollocks."

"The police. SO13. Terrorist Unit."

The blond laughed. "The police would never involve the girl. SO13 doesn't use civilians as bait."

Dicky shook his head. "They're not here for you. They came for me. They came to catch an Irish terrorist." The corner of his mouth twitched. "They came for Michael O'Rourke."

The blond's expression of scorn lasted only seconds—after which his face drained of all color.

"I called Liverpool last night and gave the police... a tip-off," Dicky continued. "Told them where they could find O'Rourke, if they wanted to. But by now, DetectiveMcCready, who's worked with the girl, will have recognized her—and you, from your composite. Maybe even your friend here, from the drawing I made of him." With those words, Dicky raised a hand, not knowing what to expect, but expecting something.

IanMcCready was crossing the street while others of his team closed on the four people.

The blond threw out his arms in anger—there was a gun in one of his hands. "It's a stalemate," he announced, his eyes furious and flicking around him at the several men moving toward him. He leveled his gun at Dicky's chest, making the young man his distant hostage, unwilling to approach him, uncertain where Dicky's handgun was and recognizing the girl might have it.

Dicky backed up into Julie as he shrugged. "SO13 won't lose any sleep over Michael O'Rourke's death."

"Maybe not," the blond snarled, "but this bullet's going right through your chest and into her head."

The two terrorists stood on the sidewalk, guns drawn, their backs to Ian McCready's approach. The empty space around them widened as McCready's men quietly diverted London pedestrians.

"Drop your weapons," the Inspector announced crisply. "There are a dozen guns fixed on your backs as I speak."

Keeping his attention focused on the couple in front of him, the blond terrorist shouted in answer. "Yeah, well you can *back off* your dozen guns or a bullet goes through the girl's head via this bastard's chest."

The Inspector turned his attention to the young man who'd placed himself squarely in front of the girl.

Dicky pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and shook one into his hand. "You can kill Michael O'Rourke with a shot to the head," he told the blond. His voice was soft, his accent dangerously Irish. "But I imagine a sniper will take you down before I've hit the ground. And I'll be there, holding the door open for you, when you arrive in hell." Cupping his hands at his mouth, Dicky lit the cigarette and shook out the match. "Or you can shoot me in the chest." He reached to tug at the top of his T-shirt, revealing the bulletproof vest beneath. "But it will never reach the girl. The bullet stops here, at my heart." With those words, he tapped a spot on his chest.

The blond's companion took a small step backward, his eyes searching everywhere for escape, his elbow moving back uncertainly, as the gun barrel lowered to point at the pavement.

At the same time, the blond's weapon came up to level on Dicky's head. For a long intense moment, the terrorist snarled his hatred, the gun targeting Dicky's insolent gaze.

Dicky pulled on his cigarette and exhaled a cloud of smoke.

"I ought to kill you, you little Irish bastard. It would almost be worth dying to watch your *fucking* head explode."

"You want to kill Michael O'Rourke?" Dicky continued in a threatening lilt, "Go ahead, dickhead. You'd be doing me a favor."

As the blond hesitated, the police team closed on the party. The two men who'd threatened the young couple were slammed into the wall as their weapons were swept away. Dicky was next. A young officer shoved Dicky against the wall and searched his pockets then reached under his coat and started to frisk down his legs. As Dicky braced his hands at the top of the wall, the brown envelope wobbled at the edge of his fingers. When he reached for the packet, the officer gave him a blocking shove. As the envelope started its slide toward the river, Dicky kicked off of the officer and vaulted to the top of the wall—where he teetered.

There was a loud crack as a small explosion tore through Dicky's T-shirt. He flew off the wall, splashed into the Thames, and sank.

Julie screamed as the blond terrorist, hands pinioned behind his back, stared at her and laughed.

Chapter Ten

Seated behind his desk in his office, Inspector McCready motioned the girl and her father to take a seat. He steeled himself and met the young woman's eyes. "We haven't found him. Diving teams have turned up nothing. He hasn't... washed up downstream... yet." The Inspector took a breath. "The sniper who shot him was only doing his job, Miss Sheridan. He saw the target attack an officer in an apparent attempt to escape. His rifle was sighted on the target's chest, so the shot wouldn't have killed him, not with that bulletproof on. But it would have been a bruising impact, enough to take his breath away. And the vest was heavy. He'd have to have gotten it off right away."

McCready tracked a tear down the girl's face and gritted his teeth.

"But you haven't found a body," the girl's father pointed out.

"No." Ian shook his head at the man's stubborn display of hope. "But it's been three days and he hasn't turned up anywhere else, either.

"The only places we know to look for him are the places you've told us. The Swan in Liverpool, the old lady's house. I'm sorry." Ian stood and paced to the window. "I've left messages with his friends asking them to contact us if he turns up."

Julie shook her head. "They won't do that. He won't let them." She slid a cautious glance at her father. "Because of Michael O'Rourke."

Arms folded across his chest, Ian turned to rest against the windowsill. "I left my message for the young man you told me about. The one who saved your life, Dicky Evans. Michael O'Rourke is dead. He was shot by one of my snipers. If the bullet didn't kill him, he drowned in the Thames."

Tears spilled down Julie's face as she nodded. "He'd be glad to know it," she whispered. "It was probably the one thing he wanted more than anything else."

McCready stared at the girl, knowing she was wrong. Knowing that Michael O'Rourke's death could only have been the second thing Dicky Evans would have wanted—at best. The first was sitting in a chair in his office. Despite this knowledge, Ian sighed and nodded his concurrence. "You're heading back to California tomorrow?" he put to the girl's father.

James Sheridan nodded as he stood to shake the inspector's hand. "Thanks for all your help," he told the officer. "Please contact us if you learn anything more."

\* \* \* \* \*

Out on the curb at LAX, James Sheridan gave his daughter a look of concern. She'd lost a lot in the last few weeks. She'd always been small and slender but her experiences in England had reduced his daughter to nothing more than a pale shadow of the girl he'd put on a plane three weeks ago. It looked as though the life had gone out of her, as well as the light. The UK trip, meant to be an adventure, had been one harrowing trial after another. Somehow, she had survived it all. But only through the intercessions of a young man—a man she might not be able to live without.

He shook his head. How had she done it? How could one young woman have survived everything she'd been through?

First, losing the thirty-odd members of her tour group in a terrifying act of violence. Then discovering her own life was threatened by a vicious menace the police couldn't shield her from. He shook his head

again. It was amazing she wasn't a basket case, considering what she'd been through—witnessing the policewoman's shooting death at point blank range, facing the knowledge that she was the murderer's next target, somehow fighting her way out of the car, away from the assassin, and escaping to wander Liverpool's streets alone.

Only to find herself in the hands of some soul-strafed hoodlum dragging a cartload of demons in his wake. Forced to take refuge in the arms of a man who was a dangerous threat unto himself. A man who might easily have proved to be just as vicious and violent as the danger that stalked her.

He wasn't though.

He wasn't just as bad.

Dicky Evans was worse. *And that fact was the only thing that had kept his daughter alive*. Only a man accustomed to brutality would have reacted quickly enough to save her. Only a man comfortable with breaking rules would have been able to protect her.

Except for the grief marring his daughter's lovely face, James might have been glad the guy was out of her life.

Except for the grief...and the drawing.

James sighed as his eyes settled on the large, flat envelope she clutched in her hand. Inside was the drawing they'd found when they'd gone to visit the old lady. Julie had insisted on filling the old woman's cupboards before they left the country. When Julie had reached up to put a large tin of biscuits on top of the small fridge, the portrait had floated to the floor. She'd stood there, rooted in place, her hands upraised as she stared down at her portrait—Dicky's last gift to her.

James nodded. The man who had drawn that portrait was a man in love. In love with his daughter. And a man capable of that kind of love couldn't be all bad, he was certain.

So it wasn't surprising that, despite the nightmare she'd experienced in that country, his daughter hadn't wanted to leave England for home and a return to security. She had begged for another week to wait for news of the troubled young man who had been the only salvation that England's streets could offer her.

She looked so tired. Exhausted. "Will you be all right, here?" he questioned her with a frown of regret, not wanting to leave her but unwilling to subject her to the long walk out to the remote lot where his van was parked.

Without answering, she nodded, sinking to sit on the stacked duffel bags—her luggage.

Glancing around the busy arrival area, he decided she'd be safe enough. "I'll be twenty minutes or so," he told her.

Julie nodded at the ground as he started away. About two minutes afterward, a pair of unlaced sneakers sauntered to fill the sidewalk where her eyes were fixed. A burning cigarette butt dropped to the ground and one shoe moved to cover it.

"Romeo and Juliet," Dicky said. "But only because I liked the illustrations."



“Wh-what?” What was left of Julie’s blood drained to her feet and her body began to slump as she lifted her gaze to Dicky’s face—her vision fading at the edges as she fought to retain consciousness.

His hand was under her elbow, firm and strong, supporting her, pulling her to her feet before she could properly faint. “You asked me what books I nicked from the school library the day I was expelled,” he reminded her. “How Green was My Valley. Tale of Two Cities. Horatio Hornblower. And Romeo and Juliet.” He gave her a small sideways grin. “I always fancied Juliet.”

She stared into his face, stunned.

By now, he was supporting her full weight as she lagged limply in his arms. “Are you all right?” he asked, suddenly alarmed. “Julie! Are you all right?”

She collapsed within his arms, her legs too watery to hold her upright, her arms too weak to grasp and hold the man she longed to cling too if only to assure herself he was hard and real, here and now. “I thought you were dead,” she whispered then started to cry.

Rocking her in his arms, he held her tightly against his lean frame. He laughed but she felt damp tears on her skin as he buried her face in his neck. “I might have told you,” he admitted, “but the topic never came up. I’m a strong swimmer. Most people who live on islands are,” he declared reasonably. “Still, I was flagging when I finally reached that floating restaurant downstream. By then, all I had on was my denims, and they were wet. The passport was wet too but it dried out eventually. I pulled myself onboard and found the waiters’ lockers. The trousers are a bit loose, but the trainers fit perfectly.”

His fist was under her chin, raising her face as he anxiously checked her eyes. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know it was going to happen that way, but when I found myself in the water, it seemed like the best way to put my past behind me... once and for all.”

“But, everyone was looking for you! How did you get out of England without anyone knowing of it?”

“Took the ferry to France and flew from there. I’ve been hanging around here, watching the London flights come in ever since.” Carefully, he set her on her feet, supporting her until he was sure she could carry her own weight. “I figured the English police would be watching the British airports for Dicky Evans.”

Shaking her head, still trying to take it all in, she told him, “They weren’t. Well, they were, but not because they wanted to capture you. Dicky Evans has been given a clean slate. The news about the opposition party plot arrived just in time for the elections. Dicky Evans is even a bit of a... hero.”

At this little irony, Dicky threw back his head and laughed. “Dicky Evans, the hero,” he gave her a smile that was a bit proud. The look in his eyes turned distant before his smile hooked downward at the edges. “And what about Michael O’Rourke?” he said in a very soft, very Irish accent.

“Michael O’Rourke isn’t a problem anymore. To anyone but you. You need to forgive him, Dicky. He was a kid, and as much a victim as the people who died that Sunday. It wasn’t his fault. It was never his fault.”

“Oh, Jesus,” he rasped, dragging her closer and crushing her to the point that she feared her tiny breasts might never inflate. “Jesus, you’re perfect, lass. Absolutely, fucking perfect. You always...” he choked on the words, his voice rough with emotion.

“You’re a good person, Dicky. You were always a good person. What happened at that church, that Sunday, never changed that fact.”

He nodded without speaking, holding her for several more quiet moments. Finally he pulled her face out of his chest so he could hold it in his hands. “What’s next, then, Julie?”

“You still have the ten thousand pounds?”

“Give or take a few hundred.”

“USC has a good art department.”

He shook his head. “USC?”

“College,” she said. “University.”

“They’d...they’d never accept *me* !” he sputtered.

“That’s where *I* go to school,” she teased with a lifting lilt.

“I’ll get in,” he told her quickly. “You think I can get a student visa, then?”

“If there’s any trouble we’ll just have my father adopt you.”

“Adopt me! That’s never going to work,” he argued swiftly.

“Why not,” she laughed.

“You know damn well why not. I refuse to be your brother. The least you could do is offer to marry me,” he grumbled.

“Well if you ask me nicely, I’ll consider making you an offer.”

“Good,” he told her.

“Good,” she sighed. “And after that, we can see about that proper fuck you still owe me,” she suggested.

He pulled away from her, looking down on her face, his expression stunned and more than a little hurt. “You artless little *tart* ! *I gave you that* —and more!”

“You’re right about that,” she relented with a smile full of life. “You gave me that—and I want more.”

About the Author

*I slung the heavy battery pack around my hips and cinched it tight—or tried to.*

*“Damn.” Brian grabbed an awl. Leaning over me, he forged a new hole in the too-big belt.*

*“Any advice?” I asked him as I pulled the belt tight.*

*“Yeah. Don’t reach for the ore cart until it starts moving, then jump on the back and immediately duck your head. The voltage in the overhead cable won’t just kill you. It’ll blow you apart.”*

That was my first day on my first job. Employed as an engineer, I’ve worked in an underground mine that went up—inside a mountain. I’ve swung over the Ohio River in a tiny cage suspended from a crane in the middle of an electrical storm. I’ve hung over the Hudson River at midnight in an aluminum boat—30 foot in the air—suspended from a floating barge at the height of a blizzard, while snowplows on the bridge overhead rained slush and salt down on my shoulders. You can’t do this sort of work without developing a sense of humor, and a sense of adventure.

New to publishing, I read my first romance two years ago and started writing. Both my reading and writing habits are subject to mood and I usually have several stories going at once. When I need a really good idea for a story, I clean toilets. Now there’s an activity that engenders escapism.

I was surveying when I met my husband. He was my ‘rod man’. While I was trying to get my crosshairs on hisstadia rod, he dropped his pants and mooned me. Next thing I know, I’ve got the backside of paradise in my viewfinder. So I grabbed the walkie-talkie. “That’s real nice,” I told him, “but would you please turn around? I’d rather see the other side.”

...it was love at first sight.

Madison welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

Also by Madison Hayes

Alpha Romeos*with Rhyannon Byrd*

Calendar Girls: Miss April

Calendar Girls: Miss December

Calendar Girls: Miss February

Calendar Girls: Miss October

Dye’s Kingdom: Wanting It Forever

Enter the Dragon*anthology*

GryffinStrain: His Female

Kingdom ofKhal : RedeemingDavik

Kingdom of Yute : Tor's Betrayal

Made For Two Men

Zeke's Hands



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com) for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

[www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com)