



Meghan's Submission

By

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Dedication

To my husband, for unswerving support and excellent cooking.

Chapter One

He brushed tender fingertips over the smooth skin of her cheek, and she gave the softest of sighs. Unable to help herself, she leaned forward and pressed her lips against his with unrestrained passion. Several breathless seconds passed before they pulled apart. Their eyes met in a jolt of raw chemistry, and with care, he reached forward to tuck a stray strand of hair behind her ear. She caught his hand and pressed it to her face, maintaining that charged eye contact as she savored his touch and warmth.

Meghan wanted to throw her shoe at them.

The fluted pop-up paper hearts and cutesy cupids hiding among the pink and red streamers would burn well, she thought with asperity, although she usually didn't have arsonous tendencies.

Efficiently, if with some distraction, she ran the man's information through her terminal to process his withdrawal. Across the counter, the couple continued their shameless public display of romantic intentions.

Never a fan of Valentine's Day, Meghan found her grouchiness exacerbated by both her lack of date and the constant stream of customers in natty clothes. A few had shared their plans without solicitation, often asking after Meghan's own plans for the night. Her truthful answer, "My date couldn't make it, so we'll go out tomorrow night instead," elicited sympathetic replies that made her grind her teeth. She saw no reason to tell them that her date was just a friend who'd offered to take her out because he had no plans, either. All in all, she wondered if she ought to

just wear a sticky note that read, *The one woman in the world with no plans on Valentine's Day*, and get on with it.

First Security Bank stayed open late, and she'd volunteered for the night shift. Most of the other tellers had plans, so why make them work? It meant, unfortunately, that she saw more of the amorous revelers like the lip-locked pair across the counter from her.

"Excuse me, sir. Sir, here's your—sir?" Meghan waited for a long moment while the pair disengaged.

"Hmm? Oh, yes. Thank you." He managed to find his wits again and collected his money.

"Happy Valentine's Day," the woman called over her shoulder as she linked her arm with her man's.

Meghan forced a grimace she hoped passed for a smile. "You, too."

Across the broad foyer, the security guards had closed the bars over the glass doors and switched the signs to read *Closed*. Dusk had crawled over the city, deepening in the canyons between the skyscrapers. Cars choked the streets in thick knots here, on the city's pulse, so near the hotels that must have booked all their rooms to romantic revelers.

She pulled her cash drawer out and, with a sigh, walked it into the vault.

"No date, eh? Me, either," volunteered Byron, the security guard.

"I was supposed to go out with Mark, but he had a last minute issue crop up," she told him, hoping to forestall more conversation.

No such luck.

"With Mark?" He jerked his chin toward a desk in the side area. "The loan guy?" Byron sounded both dubious and critical. "The one with the purple tie?"

"He's a friend," Meghan said defensively. "And he was sweet to offer to take me out."

Byron shrugged. "Come out with me tonight, huh? We can go somewhere nice, maybe drive around a little. I washed my truck yesterday, vacuumed and all."

Meghan tried not to shudder. Byron drove a truck with wheels so large one needed the steps on the running boards to get into the cab. He'd

had to get a special permit for it. "Thanks, Byron, but I think I'm just going to head home." She gave another grimace and didn't care if he took it for a smile.

"You sure? I got a six pack back at the house, too."

The implication sounded obvious to her. Go to dinner, drive around and make out in the monstrosity, then go back to his place for some pity sex and cheap beer. "Positive," she said firmly. "Goodnight."

He snorted and shrugged, and she took that as his sour grapes commentary. The other tellers had lined up at the back door by then, and she fell in at the end of the queue, coat over her arm. The security guard at the door gave her a glance over as she filed through, and then she left the stuffy establishment to step into the cold, night air.

Darkness had claimed the small side streets heading toward the main drag, where she would catch her bus home. The shadows all but obscured the lone rose on the sidewalk, the rich yellow petals standing out against the twilit gloom. She paused, crouching down to examine the errant flower. Someone must have dropped it out of a bouquet, she decided.

The stem was cool when she wrapped her fingers around it, and she guessed it must have waited there for a good while. As she lifted it from the ground, a tag fluttered from a gold filament someone had tied just above one of the leaf nodes. She expected to see a love note or a card from a florist. Instead, she read the words, written in a masculine hand.

I will wait for you in the penthouse suite at the Solstice. Be there promptly at seven o'clock. Show this flower to the doorman, and he will allow you inside.

A shiver charged down her spine as she read the words, and she swallowed hard. Her vision contracted, and the words filled her narrow field of view. *I will wait for you.* For a moment, her skin tingled from her scalp to her toes, and she nearly dropped the flower as her grip turned slack.

On her mind's silken screen, her imagination played images of a

doorman in a smart uniform as he took the flower from her unsteady hand and read the note. A small smile would play on his face as he looked her over, perhaps thinking how lucky the man upstairs was. No matter his thoughts, he would open the door to the private elevator that rose to the very tip of the Solstice's glass and steel spire.

When the doors slid open, she would see the man who had written the letter. In one hand he would hold the twin to this yellow rose; the other he would hold out to welcome her....

The sudden blare of a car's horn startled her back into the present, and she sighed. In reality, he—whoever *he* might be—would spend his night waiting for a woman who would not come. After all, she'd found the rose on an empty side street, so somehow, the invitation had gone astray. Maybe a woman sat at home right now, unhappy as she waited for her date to give her some clue of what they'd do tonight. Maybe the mysterious man would fall asleep, alone in an expensive hotel room, unsure of what had gone wrong in his plans. Both sounded unpleasant and unfortunate.

As reality continued to encroach, her unbidden excitement waned. This, she told herself, was none of her business. She should leave the rose where she found it, or even take it with her and enjoy it at home. If the guilt gnawed at her, she could call the Solstice and have them get a message to the room. That would be the safest and most practical course of action.

And yet, the images would not entirely fade. The doorman, the elevator, the knowledge that someone waited just on the other side... She held the flower up to her nose and inhaled the sweet, musky fragrance, letting it linger in her head.

Her watch read six-thirty, which would give her just enough time to get on a bus and make it to the Solstice.

* * * * *

The rich aromas of melted parmesan cheese and baking bread filled the penthouse. It smelled, Spencer thought as he removed the sauce from

the heat, like a little bit of Italian heaven, brought over the ocean just for the occasion. He pulled two perfectly browned loaves from the oven, ignoring the sweat that beaded on his bare skin.

He rolled his head and stretched his back as he checked off items on a mental list. The spinach tortellini he'd made earlier. He'd rolled the dough by hand and stuffed it with greens and delicate cheese. The alfredo sauce would match it well, and together they met all his client's requirements. It had a sensual taste, a good texture, and one could easily feed the pasta to their lover.

Flames glittered from every available surface; the windows and tables, as well as the candelabras he'd had brought in. His client had specified that he wanted as few harsh, unnatural smells as possible, so Spencer had used natural beeswax candles. Between the tiny fires and the city view, the room had become a feast of light.

Radiant heat from the candles, the stove, and the room's temperature control warmed the air to a degree just shy of uncomfortable. Spencer had long since removed his shirt, not wanting to sweat through it. His client had asked that the room stay quite warm, to keep someone without clothes comfortable.

In truth, he had learned a good deal from the man who'd commissioned this setup. He'd come to Spencer's young catering business full of ideas, with all the elements in mind but glad to listen to any suggestions that would improve his plans. No sense had gone without a good deal of thought, from the sights of the room to the smells in it. He had pondered every detail.

"I want her lost in sensation," he had explained. "Tonight, I direct every moment, so every moment must go beyond her expectations. She has trusted me with this."

Spencer had been unable to hold back his question. "Most women I know would throw that rose in your face for talking to them like that. Do you think she'll come?"

The client had given him an enigmatic smile. "Of course, she will. She wants to submit to me." He had canted his head to the side and considered Spencer for a moment, then continued. "A Dominant is not

unlike a chef. You try to make certain that the person in your care gets all that they want. Even if they haven't a clue what it is, you trust yourself to satisfy that need. It is a sacred kind of trust. They give you themselves. Your job is not to take what you want from them, but to guide them to the unknown things that they desire."

Spencer had suppressed an electric thrill at the concepts presented. He'd never thought of it that way, but perhaps this man had guided him to an unrealized want within himself. Now, he wished he could stay and watch.

Still pondering, Spencer stepped into the bathroom to wash up. The cool water made a pleasant antidote to the heat of the kitchen, so he dampened a washcloth to run over his torso. He'd told Gina, his best friend and a waitress at the restaurant where he worked, about his conversation with his client. "I'd give him a piece of my mind," she'd confirmed. "No one controls me."

"You don't have to tell me," he'd replied, hands held up against her vehemence. "I know. I don't think there's any controlling involved, though. The person who submits does it because they *want* to."

"How profound." Her dry tone recalled the Sahara. "Don't try your new philosophical bent out on me, Socrates."

With his two careers and long hours taking up all his time, he didn't have a chance to try it out on anyone. A job on Valentine's Day, at least, kept him from brooding over his nonexistent love life. He might have liked to have someone to cook for after this job, though.

Were he honest with himself, he would admit to a deep jealousy about the fantasy he'd created for someone else tonight. He might also admit that the loneliness grew with every day that passed, and that an intimate companion might make him very happy. Friendly romps with Gina satisfied a physical need, but they did little for his spirit, for all that he wished they did.

A wish, however fervent, would neither find him a girlfriend nor finish this job. Instead, he moved to stand near the doors that opened into the private elevator. He looked over the room with an eye for how he would want it if he were to do this for a woman. The panoramic city view

created by three glass walls gave such a sublime impression, as if the city sat at his command.

Blue satin sheets on the bed defied the conventions of the holiday, as did the yellow rose petals spread across the pillows, but he liked the contrast. He'd grown tired of the kitschy, naked angels and gaudy reds. These sheets looked like a piece of the night, and he could imagine how a woman would look against them, smooth skin made all the paler by the darkened hue.

The thought made his pants fit much more snugly than they should. A good look at the night table didn't help, either. He'd laid out the blue, satin blindfold, had filled the shallow bowl with sweet, almond massage oil, and had lit the tea light beneath it. And he'd arranged the erotic toys, all new for the occasion, on the lower table beside the bed.

With regret, he told himself that he'd done all he could. He wanted, very badly, to do more. As much as he hated the dating scene, he'd have to wade in if he wanted to do more than brood about his nonexistent love life. Women didn't just wander in and offer themselves to random men, after all.

As he pulled on his best dress shirt, which he'd draped over a chair at the exquisite table for two, he caught a glimpse of his watch. Six forty-five. His client should have arrived by now. He'd taken the rose with the invitation on it late this afternoon, after he'd inspected the room, but Spencer hadn't heard from him since.

His cell phone rang just as he tucked in the last corner of his shirt. "Expressions Catering. Oh, yes, I was just about to call you and — Oh, no. I'm sorry to hear that. I hope she feels better. What would you like to — Oh, yes, we can do that, of course. I left the invoice in my van, though. Can I call you back from there? Great. I'll talk to you in just a couple minutes."

He flipped the phone closed and glanced around the room. All this work, and the client wouldn't get to enjoy it. He'd be too busy with his very sick date. The wracking cough in the background had made Spencer wince.

It would only take ten or fifteen minutes to get this settled. The

candles were all in very safe holders. They wouldn't burn the room down in the time it would take to handle his client's payment for tonight and reschedule for next month, and then he could come back and clean this up. He could take the food to Gina. She'd love it.

He grabbed his keys and headed to the elevator.

* * * * *

Meghan only had to walk a block from the bus stop to the entrance to the Solstice, but even that short interval gave her stomach plenty of time to raise butterflies. Her common sense told her that she'd lost her mind, and that she ought to turn right back around, get on a bus, and go home. But she kept walking, and a tiny, persuasive voice said that she would just give the rose to the doorman.

She would go as far as the lobby and be out of the bitter February cold for a few minutes. Wouldn't the doorman pass a message upstairs for her? She'd never had an excuse to go into the renowned hotel before, and this gave her the perfect chance to see it.

The rationalization kept her in motion, down the sidewalk and into the small throng of people that moved through the gilded revolving doors. Manolo Blahnik shoes and Armani suits surrounded her and imbued her with both an extreme humility and an odd confidence. The small card, hanging from a yellow rose, made its owner a kind of princess with a reason to walk in there. For now, that rose belonged to her. It didn't matter that she wore scuffed pumps and a faded skirt that had seen too many trips to the dry cleaners.

And a name tag. She pulled it off and stuffed it into her purse. Even the rose couldn't cure some fashion mistakes.

Tasteful tapestries decorated the tranquil green walls, woven with scenes of both summer and winter. They also absorbed some of the sound made by the hotel's patrons, leaving behind a repressed murmur. Carved mahogany furniture gave the impression of subtle opulence, as did the long, polished counter that served as the concierge's desk. Thick carpet cushioned her tired feet. The lobby was larger, and nicer, than her entire

apartment.

"May I help you, ma'am?" asked a friendly voice.

Meghan started and turned to face a man in doorman's livery. Her confidence evaporated, as did all the moisture in her mouth. The butterflies resumed their dance in her gut.

She'd planned it all out in her head. "I found this rose on the sidewalk," she would say, "and it has a note about a date in the penthouse suite. Could you give this to the person there, and let him know it was lost?" It sounded very polite and concerned to her.

However, the words jumbled up in her throat, and she mutely held out the rose.

With a knowing nod and a pleasant smile, the doorman took the rose and looked at the tag. "Right this way, ma'am," he told her as he handed back the flower then guided her toward a recess in the wall.

You can just tell whoever's there what happened yourself, said the tiny voice in her head. *When will you have a chance to see the penthouse suite again? You might as well have a look.* Her common sense howled in protest, but her feet carried her across the foyer. She wasn't ready to give up the fantasy just yet.

From the sidewalk, she'd seen the glass elevator at the base of the hotel. Now, the doorman helped her up the few small steps that lead into it. "You have a good night, ma'am," he said, and his lips lifted in a smile that said he knew she would. A jolt of excitement bolted through her, and then the doors slid closed, leaving her with that final impression.

Meghan had seen pictures of the elevator in a magazine in the bank's vestibule, accompanied by pictures of the room. There'd also been a well-written article in the local newspaper. In peak seasons, the penthouse suite often booked for months at a time, which meant the very rare reservations came at a high price. The private elevator served the top floor exclusively, and it presented a beautiful view of the city as it rose up the Solstice's edifice.

She enjoyed every second, soaking up the beautiful sights as the elevator began its deliberate ascent. People still walked along the busy street, but they looked smaller and smaller as the ground fell away.

Headlights stretched along the road, punctuated by the reds and greens of traffic signals. Then, as she crested the high rise that faced the hotel, she could see the city's lights, the bright windows and street lamps that made up the skyline.

Gently, the car began to slow, and her heart picked up a frantic tempo. She tried to tell herself that inside she would find a very rich and very disappointed man who might not appreciate her presence. At best, he would thank her and send her away. He would not invite her to have a look around, or to stay for dinner and a more exciting dessert. As the upward movement stopped, she decided that she'd conditioned herself for the reality of the situation.

The doors opened into paradise.

From here, the city stretched out like a sea of grounded stars, awash with reflected radiance and pulsing with rivers of light. Candles flickered from all around the luminous panorama, nearer stars that warmed the air and added golden lights to the reflections in the glass. Dazzled, she stepped from the elevator into the room as if she'd entered a magical space that floated cloud-like over a very harsh world.

The smell of fresh bread pulled her attention from the resplendence of the metropolitan tableau. It mingled with the succulent aroma of parmesan cheese and the faintest hint of honey. Her stomach gave an indelicate rumble, a reminder that it had been hours since lunch.

Someone had set a table for two with fine china and crystal wine glasses. That same someone had chosen a nice bottle of wine and had set out small dishes of whipped, herbed butter. A small sheet of paper rested on one of the plates, but she couldn't see the person who had left it there.

"Hello?" she called. No one answered, so she walked farther into the room for a look. The bathroom door opened on the same wall as the elevator, but the door stood ajar, and she saw no one beyond it. The penthouse's open floor plan didn't leave anywhere else to hide. She wondered where he'd gone.

Set against the far wall was the bed, midnight blue sheets shimmering in the candlelight. It had no blankets, but in a room this warm it hardly needed them. The rose petals scattered across the pillows

matched the shade of the rose she still held in her hand. The bowl of warmed massage oil drew her attention, and she wanted to moan just at the thought of it. After a long day on her feet, a good rub down sounded like heaven.

She tried not to stare at the objects on the low table beside the bed but found it very difficult to avert her eyes. Her skin flushed with warmth. She'd never been brave enough to buy anything like that, let alone try it, but in this room, the thought rather appealed to her. Maybe, after she left here, she would go to that store and...

Maybe not.

It took effort to tear her attention away from the array of toys, so to distract herself, she walked to the dinner table. Someone had written on the paper with graceful script; masculine but artistic. Electricity jolted through her. It arced across her nerves to prickle in her fingertips and thrill up her spine, shorting the synapses in her head so that the words filled her empty mind.

I have given you a rose, and you have come to me. If you place the rose into the vase, I will know that you wish to be mine for the evening, completely and without reservation. You need do nothing more, my love. I will take care of the rest.

A crystal vase waited in the center of the table, almost hidden among the glasses and bottles. Her hand shook as she held the flower to her nose again, inhaling its beautiful perfume as she stared at the small, crystalline vessel. What would it feel like to sit at this table, knowing that the man you loved wanted you to give yourself to him? That once you'd made that decision, he would take the night into his confident hands, and you could only enjoy the ride? Knowing that a man existed who could, and would, do this?

The chair made no sound as she drew it out and settled on its padded seat. She gave the rose a final look, and then reached forward to slide it into the vase.

"Are you sure?"

Meghan gasped, startled by the voice. She flew to her feet as her attention snapped toward the doors where a blond-haired man leaned against the jamb. Although his posture remained casual, his muscular arms crossed in front of his broad chest, and his green eyes watched her intently.

"I— I'm sorry, I didn't—"

"Shh." He pushed off the doorframe and moved several steps into the room. The white shirt accented his muscled frame without binding, and he'd left it unbuttoned enough to show the dip at the base of his throat. "You don't have to explain. You just have to tell me if you're sure."

She tried to speak again, but the words died on her lips. The lone survivor was a very quiet, "Yes."

He smiled, and his face transformed into an easy, friendly look that made his eyes sparkle. He crossed the space between them until he stood just inches from her. He smelled good, like basil and the indefinable scent of a man. With a gentle touch, he cupped her chin, tilting her face up so she was forced to look into his eyes. Her body trembled, overcome with a fever that scorched her nerves and overwhelmed the last hint of fear in her heart.

He loomed large in her vision as he leaned down and caressed her lips with his. One strong arm wrapped around her, firm and possessive, while he trailed soft fingertips across her cheek to wind his hand into her hair. The heat in her center suffused her and melted her against his powerful frame.

He held her up with one hand flat at the small of her back, while his other hand cradled her head. His tongue flickered like a tiny fire over her lips as the kiss deepened. As she relaxed, it dipped in to stroke hers with a lazy hunger, and the tips met with a flare of passion.

When he pulled away, he left her breathless and once again looking into his eyes.

"Thank you," he said, his voice quiet and sincere. "Please, sit down and let me finish preparing our dinner."

She found she had no choice. Her legs had gone weak. Like a gentleman, he settled her into her seat, and she found herself staring at the

yellow rose in its crystal vase.

Chapter Two

The phone call with his client had taken longer than he'd anticipated, in part because he'd given the man a recipe for chicken soup guaranteed to help fix a cold. Spencer had wondered why the doorman wore a significant smirk, but he'd not asked, since he'd left lit candles in an empty hotel room. Doormen deserved to be happy, too, after all.

When the doors opened, he saw the reason for the doorman's look of sly humor.

She hovered at the table, staring at the note with wide, dark eyes. Her hair flowed over her shoulders in gentle waves, a rich mahogany shining in the candlelight. Beneath her plain, white blouse, her breasts rose and fell with a rapidity that betrayed her excitement, as did the tremors that shook her hand as she raised a yellow rose to her face and inhaled.

A yellow rose with a tag. He knew that rose. He'd prepared it earlier and given it to his client.

He had no idea how she'd come by it and had started to ask, but then thought better of it before he made a sound. Instead, he leaned against the door and watched as she stared at the vase, the set of her lips and rapid breaths an indication of the depth of her inner conflict. His heartbeat sped, and time seemed to dilate as he studied her every winsome line and quiver, an erection swelling against the front of his pants.

He'd never seen a woman more beautiful than this one, and her

torment only magnified her appeal. In an instant, he knew what he would do if she made her choice. He had taken the occasional casual lover in the past, but tonight was different. A one-night stand would disrespect the trust she put in him.

Silently, he urged her to surrender to what he could see she wanted. *I'll take care of you, I promise*, he told her in his mind. *I won't hurt you. I'll give you what you need. What we both need.*

She pulled the chair out from the table and sat down with exaggerated care. Long seconds went by as she stared at the flower with all its significance. Then she slid it into the crystal vessel.

He exhaled, surprised that he'd been holding his breath, and exalted in the rush of triumph and excitement. "Are you sure?" he asked her. *I'm here. I know what you've done.*

Surprise flashed over her features as she hastened to her feet and faced him. Those dark eyes had grown wide. "I— I'm sorry, I didn't—"

"Shh," he interrupted. She had fought so hard for the choice. He didn't want her to talk herself out of it. He moved closer, out of the doorway and into the room. "You don't have to explain. You only have to tell me if you're sure."

Tell me you're still sure now that someone is here. Let me hear you say it.

Her lips parted as she hesitated. She looked ready to rationalize it all away, but those words never came. Instead, she spoke a quiet, "Yes."

The smile curved on his lips, and now he couldn't wait any longer. He closed the gap between their bodies, desperate to touch her skin and smooth away the distressed crease on her forehead. When he cupped her chin, she shivered against him but didn't draw back. She looked into his eyes, as he looked into hers, and in that gaze he found the answer he wanted.

Reckless energy surged through him as he kissed her. He wanted to touch every inch of her, but he knew that the time for that hadn't yet come. Instead, he wrapped his free arm around her, loving the curves of her body as they molded to his, and he moved his other hand from her chin to the softness of her hair. Her mouth was warm and sweet, and it opened to him. The tentative flickers of her tongue enflamed him. Never

before had he worked so hard to contain his desires.

He pulled back before he became too drunk on those gentle kisses. It was as if he held a sparrow in his hands, a tiny, trembling creature that could only trust he would give her what she needed. She made him want to stroke her feathers and show her how wonderful submission could be.

"Thank you," he told her, expressing his respect and appreciation for her. "Please, sit down, and let me finish preparing our dinner."

With a firm hand, he guided her to her chair and tucked her in at the table. She murmured her thanks and again gazed upon the rose in the vase.

"You must be thirsty." He stroked his hand down her hair before turning to fetch the carafe of ice water he'd set out earlier. The ice rang musically as he poured it for her.

"Thank you." Her hands still shook, but they steadied around the cool glass.

Awkward silence descended as he returned to the small kitchen area. "What's your name?" he asked as he turned on the burner beneath a pot of salted water.

"Meghan," she said, her voice less tremulous than before. "What's yours?"

"Spencer." While the water heated, he sliced the fresh bread and put it into a basket. "I've made spinach tortellini with alfredo sauce, fresh bread and herbed butter, and mascarpone cream with strawberries for dessert."

"That sounds wonderful," she said, and for emphasis, her stomach rumbled loud enough for him to hear.

She looked embarrassed, but he laughed and gave her a grin. "And you're starving. It'll be just a couple minutes, I promise. In the mean time..." With a flourish, he picked up the basket of bread and sat down across from her. A knife sat next to the dish of herbed butter, and he picked it up, smearing a healthy dollop of the fragrant yellow spread across a piece of bread with a practiced motion.

Her head canted adorably as he held it out with the clear intent of feeding her. With a dubious look, she leaned forward and opened her

mouth. After her first taste of the bread and butter, however, she made an enthusiastic, "Mmm," and leaned forward for another bite like a hungry baby bird, her eyes alight with anticipation.

He could feel the ground crumbling from beneath his heart.

The butter melted over her tongue, and her mouth filled with the most wonderful flavor. Nothing, she decided, tasted better than fresh bread and butter, especially this whipped concoction with its garlic and herbs. The handsome man seated across from her while she ate it helped, too.

Spencer. He made her breath catch when he looked at her with those quick green eyes and ready smile. Her body still thrilled where she'd pressed against him. For perhaps the first time in her adult life, she found herself truly desiring someone's touch instead of considering it the pleasant afterthought of a date.

She gave him a little pout when she'd eaten the last bite of that first piece of bread, and his laugh rang through the room. "As much as I would like to feed you another piece," he said, as he picked up the knife to butter a second slice, "I have to cook the pasta. I have a hunch you'll manage without me, though."

"I think I will," she teased then took the piece from him when he held it out to her.

Meghan watched him as he added the pasta to the water and began to warm the sauce. He cut a handsome figure, muscles rippling beneath the material of his shirt. How would he look with just an apron to cover him? *Kiss the Cook* would have a whole new meaning. More to the point, how would he look in nothing at all?

Her nipples perked up, chafing against the seams of her bra, and warmth spread between her legs. Their kiss had promised so much, and she hoped he would keep those promises. Even after that brief, fiery contact, she still expected to wake up and find she'd dozed off on the bus home. Or that he would realize she shouldn't be here and send her away. She knew she should confront that now, before they got any further, although it hurt to think about this ending as soon as it had begun.

"You know, I just found the rose on the way home from work, and

I—"

"Does it matter?" he asked, cutting her off as he heaped the cooked tortellini into a bowl. Although gentle, his voice remained firm. "We're together, here and now. How we got here shouldn't change where we're going." He gave her a look that banished the last of the thought. "No more of that, Meghan. You're mine tonight."

Between her legs the wetness grew, and wildfires spread over her skin. "Yes, I am," she said quietly, and she knew it for the truth.

He served supper at the table, drizzling the velvety white sauce over a generous portion of pasta. "I ought to feed that to you," Spencer pointed out, "but you might faint away from hunger if I did." After he saw that she had all she needed, he sat down himself.

"I might," she admitted, taking a bite from her plate. It tasted even better than it smelled, which Meghan had thought impossible. "Spencer, this is extraordinary."

"Do you like it?" he asked, obviously pleased with her praise. "My own recipe. It always gets good reviews at the restaurant."

She could see why. "You're a cook?"

"A *chef*," he corrected, scolding her in a playful tone. "I am. I cater, too. My own company. It's still small, but I've gotten some recent notice. What about you?"

"I work at a bank." She sopped up some sauce with a piece of bread. "It isn't quite as exciting as what you do."

He shook his head. "I think you're very exciting, Meghan. And beautiful."

She ducked her head, eyes unfocused as she chased a tortellini around the plate with her fork. "I don't know if I'd say that."

Gentle fingers lifted her chin and brought her gaze up to meet his. "I do. You are beautiful and sexy. I won't hear otherwise." He wouldn't let her look away until she nodded. "Good. Tell me, does your job make your feet sore? Your legs and back?"

"Everyday." With her last bit of bread, she wiped the plate clean. As sorry as it made her to see dinner gone, it had left her pleasantly sated.

"Then that will be our second order of business." He pushed his

chair out and walked around the table to pull out her seat. She took his offered hand and found herself in his arms.

"Tell me again," he said in a low, husky voice. "Whose are you tonight?"

His heart beat a palpable rhythm against her chest, just as rapid as the tattoo hers pattered against his. His gaze burned with a scorching intensity, and clearly, it burned for her. He wanted her, and she wanted him just as much. "Yours," she answered. "I'm yours tonight, Spencer."

"Then we're going to go take a shower. I'll wash you, and in return, you can wash me. After that, we'll go to the bed, and I'll give you a massage with that warm oil." He leaned down and kissed her, a long and slow interplay of lips and tongue that stole her breath. His hand slid down her back to caress her behind, palming the curves possessively. "Are you ready?"

"I'll do whatever you ask," she told him. It excited her to feel him shiver when she said it.

He left her no choice. When he let her go, it was to lift her into his arms and cradle her against the firm muscles of his chest. Tightening his arms around her, he dipped his head down to steal another kiss from her then, effortlessly, he carried her to the bathroom.

On the outside, the glass had a reflective surface that made it impossible to see in. On the inside, however, the glass remained clear, so the entire room had a view even better than that from the elevator. Two sides of the shower displayed the metropolitan spectacle, and a simple bath became an exhibitionist's delight.

Spencer set Meghan on the bath mat. He opted against the claw-footed tub and instead chose to set the pair of showerheads to a steamy heat. As the heavy vapor billowed, it curled against the glass of the shower but refused to stick.

"It's not fogging up," Meghan said with fascination.

"They treat the glass in here with a special chemical," he said with a grin. "No matter how hot a shower you take, you won't fog over the view." His fingers found the buttons of her blouse and began to undo them, revealing more of her skin with each opened catch.

Soon, he had it undone, and he laid it over a rack near the shower. Seconds ticked by as he looked her over, and then he reached for the fasteners on her skirt. It dropped to the floor, and he dropped with it, onto one knee as he pulled her pantyhose from her legs.

A sudden blush of modesty stole over her with a flash of a desire to cover herself and not be naked to his inspection, but he gently took the choice from her hands. His fingers hooked into the waistband of her panties, and he tugged them downward, baring her most private of areas.

He tossed her other clothes over the rack as he stood. The smile on his lips said he liked what he saw, and his tense motions spoke volumes about the eagerness he repressed as he reached around her to unfasten her bra. When the hooks opened, the material fell away. She had nowhere left to hide.

He slid his hands around her sides to cup her breasts. She shivered under his touch, and when he brushed the pads of his thumbs over her nipples, she couldn't help but gasp.

"These are perfect," he murmured, rolling her nipples between his fingers. Her nerves came alive, surging in trails from her breasts to the back of her neck, down her spine, into her belly.

"Undress me," he told her, and she couldn't obey fast enough. Haste made her fingers fumble over the buttons of his shirt, but finally, she coaxed them all open. Her palms flattened on his chest, and she shoved the shirt back. Over his shoulders and down his arms, she pushed it, with a pause to undo his cuffs so the constriction would fit over his large hands.

She'd never seen a man so flawlessly built, and she wanted to know how he would fit against her. Without further delay, she unfastened his pants and knelt, as he had, to pull them down his legs. His erection strained against the fabric of his black underwear, begging for her to set it free. It sprang up as she pulled the waistband down, long and thick as it jutted from its nest of soft, golden curls. Impressive balls hung beneath it, low in the warm air.

He reached a hand down to help her to her feet then guided her into the spray of the shower. The hot water relaxed her after her long day

at work, the heat coaxing her muscles to unwind. Spencer moved behind her and snuggled her to his solid frame as warm as the water and twice as delicious against her skin. She heard the click of a bottle's top, and he poured some shampoo into his hand. After a moment to allow the liquid to warm, he massaged it into her hair.

Meghan moaned. He had strong fingers and used them to good advantage, scrubbing her scalp and kneading away the tension at the base of her skull. This was a luxury that she could quickly get used to, and he seemed in no hurry to stop. Her eyelids slid to half mast as she leaned against him, and she watched the city in a drowse while he pampered her. She reveled in the attention he lavished on her. Every woman should feel like this once in her life—indulged and pleased by an attentive man.

When he rinsed her hair, he leaned her back, carefully cradling her head while the soap washed away. Then he repeated the process, working the conditioner through her hair while she all but purred. He cared for her with tenderness, and she found herself more relaxed in the presence of this stranger than she was with people she'd known for far longer.

He soaped his hands and smoothed them over her body, and she leaned into him. As his palms glided down her arms then up her sides to massage her breasts, she sensed the shower turn from epicurean to erotic. She was more than ready. His gentleman's ways and gentle dominance had won her, and now she wanted to give him whatever he desired.

To show him how much she wanted to please him, she shifted her hips against his erect cock and arched her back. The shaft stroked along the cleft of her backside until his balls brushed her folds. His moan, a deep rumble that vibrated through his chest, brought a smile to her face. He kneaded her breasts harder, and she could feel the simmering passion in every movement. It percolated close to the surface now, and it gave her the courage to slide her backside against his shaft again so that it slipped between her cheeks.

His gasp echoed from the shower walls, and he tugged her nipples between his fingers hard enough to make her moan. She ground against him, and he slipped more deeply into the tight confines of her backside. The head of his cock rubbed against her anus, stroking the sensitive skin

alive in a way she'd never before experienced. No one had ever touched her in that secret place, and while she wasn't ready to explore that yet, this intense rubbing told her that someday she would want it.

For now, the audacity of this small, hedonistic foray into her sacred space delighted her as much as her own boldness surprised her. She squirmed against him, and one of his hands slipped from her breast to the curls between her legs. He pressed his hand first against one thigh, then the other, and she spread her legs further apart for him.

She had no choice but to lean forward and brace herself against the wall as his hand slid through her curls to find her swollen lips. When he ran them between his fingers, she moaned his name and couldn't stay still as he tested their plumpness with a gentle tug. He stretched each nerve until it hummed through her body. The strength in her knees almost failed when he scooped his finger into the slit. He collected the dew that had gathered there and slicked it over her clitoris.

Sparks danced through her body, centered in the depths of her belly. She spread her legs wider, and he rewarded her with hot, demanding strokes along the length of her pussy. Beneath his hand, her flesh engorged, and he took full advantage of it. He pinched and squeezed, rubbed and teased, and she gave moan after tortured groan as he ground her clitoris beneath his thumb. But he never dipped inside, and that emptiness tormented her. Each touch was beautiful, but shallow, and they couldn't give her the satisfaction she craved.

"Please," she whimpered as he drew out her labia again and chafed them between his fingers.

"Please what?" he asked, his voice deep and husky.

He caught her clitoris between his fingers again and gave it the softest of squeezes. She mewled desperately and pressed her butt back to him. "Please... I need you inside me."

"Do you?" he asked, deliberately brushing over the mouth of her pussy.

"Yes," she pleaded. "Please."

He allowed his cock to slide along the length of her wet slit as he pressed in behind her. The pads of his fingers circled over her clitoris, and

she writhed against him, desperate to coax him into her and press harder against his touch. She'd never burned with this much desire, or felt so very empty.

"Who decides what you need tonight, Meghan?" he asked, his shaft pressed along her lips.

"*You*," she gasped, the slow build of the fiery wave within her more acute than ever. His shaft stroked over her pussy, the head teasing against her opening before it brushed past and left her in pleasant agony.

"Will I give you what you need?" His fingers and cock both stopped and rested against her.

She writhed, unable to keep her body still as it begged for the sensations to continue. All her contortions came to no end but frustration, however, as he held still and awaited her answer. "You will, if it...if it pleases you..."

"It does." His cock moved away, but his hand took its place. It forced her aching pussy wide as his other hand continued its relentless circles on her sensitive nub. When he plunged a finger inside, she arched back and thrust her hips with a grateful cry.

His finger explored her, pressed against the bundle of nerves within her as it drove back and forth. It made her knees weak, and she leaned against him for support. The pressure inside her whet her need, and he seemed to sense this, for a second finger joined the first, spreading her wider than before.

She pushed back into each of his thrusts, grinding her clitoris against his fingers, surrounded by his arms and suffused with flames. As she rode the fires, they crested with a sudden brightness, and she wailed his name, body wracked with the intensity of her climax. He didn't stop, but instead demanded wave after wave of explosive quivers and breathy cries. Finally, she drooped against him, and he gave her pussy lips an affectionate pat.

"That was beautiful," he said, the words whispered into her ear as he gave her a tender kiss on the earlobe. "Thank you."

She steadied herself with a hand on the wall, her legs still rubbery. He turned the sprays of water off and guided her from the shower stall.

The hotel had provided fluffy towels, and he patted her dry, taking the opportunity to stroke her again. A quiet whimper escaped her lips.

The bed loomed large in her vision as they emerged into the candlelit main room. She expected Spencer to carry her, but he didn't stop to pick her up. Instead, he touched her skin and watched her. She knew that her eyes grew wider with every step toward the satin-shrouded mattress, and the smirk on his lips told her he enjoyed every moment.

Nervous excitement filled her. The shower was only the beginning of his plans for her, a very tame prelude to an entire night of unknown pleasure. Here, spread before him, she would place herself at his mercy, and he would show her things she'd never seen. He would demand her submission, and she would give it without hesitation. Wetness melted from her sex, ready for what would come. The thought of him looming over her, pushing his cock into her inch by inch, made her heart beat faster.

"Lay on your back," he told her as they reached the midnight sheets and the surface they covered. She centered herself on the pillows, delighted by the scent of rose petals and the glide of satin against her sensitized skin.

He moved over her, held aloft by his hands and knees. He leaned in and kissed her, his lips languid as they caressed hers. "I want to taste you before I coat you in oil," he murmured against her. "Open for me, lover."

He positioned himself between her legs as she opened them. His gaze burned with desire as he looked down at her, then he lowered himself to place a light kiss on her curls. The tip of his tongue flickered out to brush over her clitoris. She sucked in a sharp breath and let it out in a long, slow exhalation as he lapped at her again, this time in a long, broad stroke from the base of her slit to the tip of her clit.

Like a wanton, she opened her legs further, wordlessly begging for more. He suckled one of her engorged folds into his mouth and played his tongue over it as he held it. When he released, it was only to take the other between his lips.

She sighed out with a long, "Oooh," and the sound seemed to spur his tongue into broad strokes. It swept over her pussy, then dipped inside

over and over again, as far as it could reach. His lips closed over her clitoris, sucking at it, licking it like a cat with quick, intense strokes.

Wild energy radiated up her body, the heart of it deep inside her. She thrashed her head against the pillows, tangling rose petals into her hair as she moaned, unashamed to display her pleasure. She clutched the sheets into tight bunches, and her hips lifted to meet his movements. When he slipped two fingers inside her and pressed them upwards to rub the bundle of nerves there, she thought she couldn't bear it. Her skin came alive with the untamed sensations.

He made a come-hither motion inside of her to beckon the fires that raged at the heart of her. His fingers teased in and out, in tandem with his tongue's motions against her clitoris. With each stroke, the electricity that coursed through her nerves grew, surged faster, took her higher.

When she came, she screamed his name, her climax breaking through her like the waves of a storm. His tongue continued to demand her response, and his fingers still plunged inside her. She arched upwards, pressing her pussy harder to him, and a second climax shook her, smaller but deeper, her words long since dissolved into unintelligible wails.

He let her down and removed his fingers as he drew back. She lay against the sheets, panting, eyes closed. The tingles that lingered slowed their dance through her body, giving way to a languorous state. Opening her eyes, she found him watching. He sat with one leg crossed loosely toward the other, his hands resting in his lap, and a small, possessive smile curved his lips. She wanted him to always look at her that way. It made her feel safe, kept, *loved*.

"Now, I think you're relaxed enough to continue," he said, sounding playful.

"Don't you want me to do the same for you?" she asked, her gaze on the erection that stood up from between his legs. She had a sudden desire to taste it, to give him the unfettered pleasure he'd just brought her.

But he shook his head. "Later, you will," he promised in a tone that brooked no contrary opinions. "For now, I want you to turn over."

It would mean she couldn't look at him any longer, but the promised massage sounded divine, so she rolled onto her stomach. He

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knelt over her, legs on either side of hers, and his cock rested along the cleft of her backside again. She hadn't expected such arousal so soon after her last climax, yet the firm warmth of his manhood against her roused it. He knew, she trusted, exactly what she needed.

Chapter Three

Meghan looked so beautiful beneath him on the bed, eyes closed, lips still slightly parted from her ardent cries. With her orgasm, he had come close to his own. He'd never seen a vision so sensual, so seductive, as her climax at his hand, or the way she gave herself over to what he wanted.

As he nudged her to over, he knew that he wanted to push her further. She complied, her touchable back and plush, curved ass now before him, and he realized that he wanted more than her compliance. He wanted her surrender.

He scooped a small puddle of the warmed oil into the palm of his hand, releasing a breath of sweet, almond aroma into the air. The long, breathless heartbeats while he had secretly watched her struggle with herself over the rose had loosed that long-hidden desire within him. He rubbed the oil between his palms and put his hands against the skin of her shoulders. The knots in her muscles didn't take long to find, and her tiny moans of contentment only inflamed his desire.

He wanted her. More than any other woman he'd ever slept with, he wanted Meghan. He needed to sheath himself inside her, her body rocked by his thrusts, and his name on her lips again while he emptied into her. But he had to wait. The time was not quite right yet. He had more to do.

Working with his thumbs, he forced the knots to untie, first in her shoulders where her bra straps would pull, then in toward the base of her

neck. The look in her eyes as she'd parted her legs for him had taught him so much about her. Earlier, she had acted timid, but as he'd hoped, she'd warmed to him. When he took the choice out of her hands, it freed her to let go.

He wanted her in freefall, with nothing left to hold onto. He wanted to feel the tremors pass through her skin, see her eyes widen when he shouldered through the walls of her comfort zone and took her beyond them. More, he knew that she wanted that, too. She wanted someone to guide her, explore with her. She wanted someone to love her and take care of her needs.

He knew he could do that. He just had to convince her.

After scooping more warm oil onto his hands, he rubbed the muscles along her shoulder blades. She mumbled happily, the visible half of her face suffused with her contentment. The skin he'd already rubbed glistened with a beautiful, golden sheen. He ran his hands down her sides, over the slow taper to her waist, the flare of her hips, the curved mounds of her buttocks.

Many men, he supposed, might consider her looks quite plain. Any man who thought that way hadn't watched her or seen her with more than the most cursory of glances. Anyone who gave a closer look would see a spirit that transformed her from plain to stunning. As he circled his thumbs against her spine, he thanked those poor men. Their blindness had brought her here, to him.

He slid his oiled hand between her buttocks, and she quickened as he did so. Unable to help himself, he slid his shaft in that now-slick valley, the tight fit stretching the skin of his cock across the head. A groan escaped him as he pulled back and then pushed through again.

He had more to do. But it would torture him as much as it did her.

The smooth, slow thrusts along her backside brought Meghan out of her muzzy daze. He made his need apparent in each long stroke, and she wished he wouldn't hold back. She wanted him to plunge deep inside her with that unhurried rhythm.

A large hand at the small of her back prevented her from guiding him inside. He held her down so he could slide himself first in that warm

niche, then between her legs, along the outside of her sex again. The need he created in her almost ached, and she whimpered.

Gently, he rolled her over again and spread her legs far apart to expose her pussy. With oily fingers, he began to massage her folds, the sweet smell of the oil mingling with her own musky wetness. He stretched her sensitive skin as she writhed under his touch. When he put both thumbs inside to caress her inner walls and pry them apart, she moaned with ardent abandon.

Her hips undulated as he continued this intimate stretch, the deliberate thrusts of this thumbs a counterpoint to the upward slide of his fingers against her clitoris. She cried out as he opened her with his hands. No one had ever spread her this way, but with anyone else, embarrassment might have overcome her. He could see the most private parts of her, and he used them as he chose.

But not with Spencer. He'd taken away her choices, her chances for distress. She was grateful, especially when he reached down beside the bed, one thumb still buried within her, and came up with a blue, silicon phallus.

Her heart hammered, and her chest constricted. Although she'd always wanted to try this kind of toy, the thought of it still intimidated her. But he stroked her pussy to comfort her as he removed his thumb and, seeing her eyes so wide, he smiled.

"I'm going to put this inside you," he said, voice quiet as he lubricated it with liquid from a bottle beside the bed. "You're going to take it for me so I can see it spreading you."

She nodded, intoxicated with mixture of excitement and apprehension as she watched him fondle it.

It disappeared between her legs. The tip of it was cool and hard as it nudged between her folds, and the head rested just outside her slit. "Watch me," he told her, and his eyes met hers. "Don't close your eyes, and don't look away. Watch me."

Intense green eyes held her gaze, and she found she couldn't look away, even as the flared head began to move inside her. It held her open, more rigid than the hardest cock, leaving a wake of intense pleasure that

made her arch and writhe. He took his time, unhurried as he pushed it in a fraction of an inch at a time, and drove her crazy with a kind of need she'd never before experienced.

Before, the sizeable phallus had filled her with trepidation. Now, she wanted it seated inside in one decisive stroke. She tried to thrust her hips forward, up, any way she could to pull the object further in, but his large hand held her down. His gaze pinned her, and he continued that excruciating, slow slide.

When his fingertips brushed her distended folds, she knew he'd embedded it in her to the base. Every inch of her pussy's depth had come alive, stretched and filled by the object Spencer had put inside. She quivered as he slipped his fingertips inside to test the tautness of her sensitive flesh.

"How does it feel?" he asked, his voice thick and deep with his desire.

"Huge," she said, but the word became a groan as he slid his fingertip inside and widened her further. It rubbed her inner walls, circled over her already alert nerves. "Ooohh, Spencer, I'm so full. It's so hard."

"Does it hurt?" he asked as he stroked her puffy sex once more.

"No." She moaned as his fingers stroked her very sensitive hood and brushed over her clitoris.

"Do you like it?" He pinched the little nub, and then settled the pad of his thumb over it.

"Yes...oh, yes, yes, yes..." Her words dissolved into incoherent, plaintive noises as Spencer withdrew the phallus far enough that he could drive it in again while his thumb stayed on her clit.

It rode into her, spreading her channel with each thrust. "It will take you," he told her, and punctuated his words with a sharp lunge of the phallus, "until you climax, because I want to watch you come with that inside you. You will come for me, won't you, Meghan?"

She would have no choice. It would pull the orgasm from her, and already, the waves in her core lapped higher and higher with each pleasant invasion of the rod.

"Yes," she answered between the moans she couldn't stop.

"And then," he said as he leaned down, close enough that his warm breath brushed her ear, "I will take you. And you will come for me."

"Please, Spencer, yes," she gasped out, his promise igniting her passion in a bright flare. She burned to have him inside her. This silicon shaft felt wickedly good, so foreign and forbidden, but it only made her crave his real, warm cock.

"Not yet," he said then shifted himself around on the bed. The phallus remained deep within her where he left it. She expected to see that green-eyed gaze. Instead, she found herself confronted with the engorged length of his erection as he knelt beside her. "But I'll give you a taste."

It loomed in front of her as it jutted from a nest of blond curls, looking larger than she'd expected it would when she'd felt its length against her. The deep plum-colored head pressed against her lips when he leaned over, and it burned with his body heat. Tentatively, she opened her mouth, and he slipped himself inside. As his shaft pushed between her lips, the rod between her legs resumed its thrusts into her simmering pussy.

Penetrated both above and below, Meghan was claimed. Spencer took her mouth with easy thrusts, and the phallus forced her passage wide. His flesh tasted good as it rode over her tongue, and she lapped at it, tracing the seam and the sharp ridge that defined its head. It would fill her sex more completely than the rod that spread her now, and the thought inflamed her with an unbridled ardor.

"When I come, it will be in your mouth," he said in a husky voice, his cock as deep into her mouth as she could take. "You'll swallow every drop, lover." He retreated until the ridge brushed her lips, and then advanced again. "Won't you?"

Her moans sounded desperate, even in her own ears, but she *was* desperate, filled with a fiery need for him. When she'd offered to service him earlier, she'd wanted to please him, but she hadn't expected this final signal of capitulation. With his cock in her mouth, his hand driving a heavy phallus into her naked sex, she found that all paths in her heart led to surrender.

Free of the last of her fetters, she gave herself over. She suckled him with deep pulls, and his hips snapped forward, driven by an evident urgency. Their groans mingled in harmonized need. Roughly, his thumb ground over her clitoris, even as the silicon rod kept up a rhythm that didn't falter. She lost herself in the sensations, the wash of energy as it rose higher and higher.

He groaned louder with each thrust, and he held her head to steady her. The energy swelled until it blinded her, and she wailed around his shaft as the climax crashed in, hips thrust upwards to meet the phallus at each pass. He shouted her name, his cock buried for a final time, and his seed spilled into her mouth. His cock throbbed as it emptied into her throat, and the very thought of it intensified the ripples that coursed through her. With relish, she swallowed every drop he would give her, still hungry for more.

He pulled his cock from her mouth, and she flicked her tongue over her lips to capture the last taste of him. For the moment, he left the phallus in place, stroking her moist, plump folds with affection. Her pussy throbbed around the hard object within her, contracting around its impliable resistance, as Spencer positioned himself along her side.

When their lips met, she sensed the difference in his touch. Before, the anticipation had dominated, a kind of reckless hunger that brought with it an amorous bravado. This time, as their mouths touched and their tongues twined, a new depth and intimacy took over, filled with an unspoken trust that stoked the fires within her higher, hotter.

Now was the time to tangle their bodies together and move as one in a slow, sinuous dance. His hand cupped her breast even as her fingers sought his nipple and traced around the sensitive skin. A moan escaped him, eliciting a surge of moisture between her legs that coated the shaft still within her. More. She wanted more, and she wanted to slick him with her wetness as he drove himself deep.

She broke their kiss to flick her tongue over his jaw. He shifted upward, guiding her seeking mouth with a gentle hand in her hair. "Yes, Meghan," he moaned as her mouth moved down the side of his neck and over his collarbone. "Suck on me."

Eagerly, she found his taut nipple, and she lapped it with one long, slow swipe. His skin tasted good, clean and slightly salty, and she loved the way the little nub stood up from the wrinkled flesh that surrounded it. Playfully, she batted it from side to side then gently nipped at it. In response, his hand relinquished her breast and slid down her stomach to the curls between her legs. His fingers came to rest on her clitoris once more.

They moaned together. She took the fleshy nub into her mouth, and he pressed himself to her with a moan. Within her, the phallus shifted as he took hold of it and pulled it out. Its sudden departure made her gasp, but he didn't leave her empty. His fingers replaced it the moment it passed through her outermost lips, and he pressed the heel of his hand to her clitoris with each stroke.

"You're so wet," he whispered, fingertips pressed against the bundle of nerves inside her pussy. He groaned as she rasped her tongue against his nipple. "So hot. So...yes..." A third finger pushed inside her, and she gyrated her hips to rub herself against his hand. His erection rode against her leg, hard and demanding.

Every nerve blazed as if he'd lit it aflame. She could hardly believe that he stroked her again toward climax, her sensitive flesh responsive to every touch. The wild, uncontrollable climb overcame her, and each upward surge stole her breath until she had to release his nipple and ride the vortex of energy.

His fingers withdrew as he rolled on top of her. Now, she could see, he couldn't wait to put himself inside her. The head of his cock was hot as it teased her wet opening. When he stared down at her, she no longer wanted to flinch away from his gaze. His body excited her, his cock tantalized her, but the smolder in his eyes made her want him more than any touch could.

A loud, lustful groan spilled from her as he filled her until his balls pressed against her moist folds, spreading her wide with his firm length. For a long moment they held together, and then he withdrew and plunged again, buried to the hilt with a soft grunt.

"Yes. Spencer, please, yes. Oh, please, yes..." The sounds tumbled

from her, more moans than words, as he drove into her with his prolonged, even thrusts. He neither sped nor slowed, and she could barely withstand the savage need within her forced higher with each lunge into her sex.

His hand snaked behind her to hold the small of her back and pull her into each snap of his hips. "Do you want it?" he groaned into her ear, grinding his hips against hers.

"Yes!" She met each thrust with one of her own.

"Whose are you?" His rhythm grew faster, and he drew his breath in ragged gasps.

"*Yours.*" The blood roared in her ears, and fires raged through her.

His cock plunged into her in a series of hard thrusts, and his loud moans echoed off the glass walls. She screamed his name and threw her legs wide, braced open to accept him. Her muscles tensed, and the explosion lurked, it gathered, and then no force on earth could stop it.

Her climax shattered through her, breaking in tempestuous, bright waves that claimed her body from her scalp to her toes. From somewhere far away, she could hear the shouts of Spencer's climax, but then he throbbed as his seed filled her, and she no longer cared about his voice. He thrust into her one final time and spilled the last of himself deep within her.

Their breaths sounded loud against the sudden silence. He cradled her against him, telling her without words how he cherished what they'd just done, and cherished *her* more than that. As she basked in the final echoes of her passion, he brushed the top of her head with his lips.

He gave her a little squeeze then slipped out of the bed. Meghan opened her eyes to watch him as he walked to the bathroom and flipped on the light. A smile lifted the corners of her lips. She could watch him for a very long time.

When he returned, he held a small, white square of cloth in his hands. "Spread your legs," he told her. When she did so, he put the cloth against her swollen folds. It was cool, but not cold, and it soothed her hard-worked flesh. He cleaned her with gentle strokes then held the towel to her with a soothing pressure.

Tears kissed her eyelashes, but she refused to let them go. A profound sense of release filled her. It went beyond satiation, straight into her heart. No one had ever laid her soul bare then held it in his strong, sheltering hands. No one until Spencer.

He tossed the towel onto the table and climbed back into bed with her. She nestled into his encircling arms, happy in his warmth and strength. No, she'd never experienced anything like this before, and she hoped she would never have to go without it again. Lulled by his protective embrace, she closed her eyes, vowing not to fall asleep and miss a moment of her time with him. But then, with his cheek against hers, she drifted into an exhausted slumber.

* * * * *

The clink of a metal spoon against glass woke her some time later. When she opened her eyes, the room looked darker than she remembered it. Some of the lights had winked out, but the city never went dark. The candles, too, had burned down, some to dead stumps while others burned brighter on unevenly melted wicks.

Though she'd lost track of the time, she found it meant very little to her tonight.

Spencer stood naked in the kitchen. She could see his handsome lines and toned muscles from where she lay on the bed. The unreliable light of the candles loved his form. It deepened the shadows in the dimples of his buttocks and chiseled the marbled lines in his back as he leaned against the counter and looked over the city. She loved the thoughtful, adorable look on his face

"What are you thinking about?" she asked, shifting around so that he could better see her face.

He looked over to her as she spoke, and a smile lit his features as he saw her. "It isn't very interesting, I'm afraid."

"Tell me?"

"I was thinking about raspberries." He held up his cup. "Mascarpone cream with strawberries. I was wondering if I'd like it with

raspberries. Some chefs use them quite a bit, and I get requests to use them all the time at the restaurant, but I really like strawberries."

She grinned. "So you got out of a comfy bed to think about raspberries."

He looked a little sheepish. "Not exactly. I got up because I was kind of hungry, and I remembered that there was dessert here."

"Snack attack, then. That's a good excuse." She put her chin on her hand. "It looks tasty."

"And, lucky for you, I have another cup of it." He spooned the last of his into his mouth, put the dish into a plastic box, then pulled another full cup out of the little refrigerator. On the way to the bed, he grabbed a spoon and a glass of ice water, arriving with the makings of a fine midnight treat.

She sat up as he settled on the bed beside her. Spencer held a spoonful of the fluffy confection out to her, a strawberry nearly hidden by the cloud-like dollop. The cream melted on her tongue, sweet and light, and the deep-red berry provided just the right amount of tartness. "Mmm," she enthused. "Ooh, good."

He gave her a grin that could have melted sterner hearts than hers. She loved that look. "I'm glad you like it. I like to see people enjoy what I cook."

"Even grilled cheese?" she teased, accepting another bite.

"Especially grilled cheese. With four kinds of cheese and fresh tomato basil soup," he said, and stole a tiny bite of her dessert. "Sometimes, I put sun-dried tomatoes in the sandwich."

"That sounds wonderful," she admitted. "Do you cook for yourself?"

He nodded and gave her another spoonful. "When I'm home, although most of the time it's not too elaborate. The fun of cooking is cooking *for* someone, at least, to me. My best friend eats like a queen on my nights off." He licked a smudge of cream from one of his fingers. "This turned out really well."

Meghan, who had made herself boxed macaroni and cheese the night before, stomped on the jealousy before it had a chance to do more

than tickle her. "I can't imagine anything you cook turning out badly."

He laughed and scraped the last of the cream from her bowl and let her lick the spoon. She saw his cock twitch as her tongue hugged the metal utensil, looking for the last trace of the delicious dessert. "Oh, it happens. Just last week I destroyed some vitello marsala. It's not good when you want to apologize to the pan you cooked in."

She laughed, too. "That *is* bad."

With a clatter, he set the cup on the table and passed over the ice water. "I think my late-night hungries are done for. How about you?"

Meghan realized as the cold liquid hit her tongue how thirsty she'd become. "Mmm. Me, too."

The water glass went next to the empty desert cup. He settled himself on his side, and she snuggled in next to him, spooned against his broad chest and long body. Between the sugar and the conversation, however, she wondered if she could fall asleep again so soon.

His hand came up to cup her breast and squeeze her nipple with gentle pressure. She gasped, amazed at the quick wetness between her legs. "Maybe," he whispered, as he nibbled at her earlobe, "you'd like me to put you back to sleep."

In answer, she swiveled her hips against his and rubbed her backside against his already attentive cock. He used his free hand to pull her leg back over his and, with her pussy bare, slipped his fingers over her damp folds to open them.

His cock pushed inside her, and she rocked her hips backwards with a moan, taking all of him into her once more. Slick fingertips circled over her clitoris and pulled mewling moan after shameless groan from her with each movement.

The pleasure took little time to build and burst from its hidden place within her and engulfed her as he moaned into her ear. His hand still clutching her breast, he drove his shaft forward in hard, swift thrusts. As the climax broke over her, he flooded her with his seed, his body wracked with the hard pulses that milked him dry.

Now, she knew that she could sleep. With him still inside, she rested her head on his bicep. Against her ear, his heartbeat slowed.

Meghan's Submission by Cassandra Moore

Another several candles guttered and went dark, and Spencer reached down to pull the sheet up over them both. Meghan barely noticed as she drifted into a pleasant doze that stole over her and weighed her down into slumber.

Chapter Four

Megan opened her eyes, the harsh morning glare that poured through the windows far brighter than she liked. Even with the tinted exterior of the glass, the penthouse suite glowed. She could draw the shades and crawl back into bed to sleep off more of the morning.

The thought sounded wonderful. Darken the room then crawl back between those heavy, satin sheets. Curl up against Spencer and doze back off for another four hours or so. Wake back up, and...

And what? The thought pulled her out of her cozy notions of sleep, tickling at her mind until she came too far awake to return to dozing. Carefully, so as not to disturb her unconscious partner, she dragged herself out of the bed and went into the bathroom. Their clothes still sat in a small disarray, puddled on the floor, draped over the towel rack.

And what?

By day, things looked very different than they had by the magical light of candles.

Doubt refused to leave her alone as she took care of her business and put on her things. She couldn't bear to hear how he'd taken advantage of a foolhardy woman who'd come to return a lost rose. How he'd enjoyed a night of casual sex with a naïve person, and now, could she please leave?

Spencer wouldn't do that. The thought sounded as firm as a spoken word. *Spencer would never do that. Spencer respects you. He takes care of you.*

In all honesty, the notion that he would dismiss her seemed a bit

histrionic. She had no idea what Spencer would and wouldn't do. After all, she'd met him just last night and knew next to nothing about him. He didn't seem like the type who would wave off their time together so lightly.

He cares about you. She found her purse on the table, pulled her brush from it, then returned to the bathroom to try to repair the mess she'd made of her hair. How could he care? They didn't know each other.

You care about him, and you hardly know him. Why couldn't he feel the same? That thought stopped her cold, and she stared at her reflection in the mirror. She did care about him, and she couldn't deny that even to herself. Care that teetered on the dangerous precipice that dropped into love. Perhaps it was the same for him. It would be so easy to find out if he did.

But the timidity and doubt rushed in like water from a burst dam, drowning her new boldness and replacing it with the reflexive defenses she'd always known. It would be so easy to find out how he felt. But it would hurt too much if he said the wrong thing—if he didn't care and had taken advantage of her lapses in judgement. If he considered her naïve for her submission, or less of a woman.

And why wouldn't he? she thought, weighed down by sadness. *You aren't even woman enough to stay until he wakes up to find out for yourself.*

It was so much safer to allow last night to stand on its own, as an enchanted, memorable night when two strangers met and, for a while, bound themselves together. No discussions about future assignations, no assumptions or hurt feelings, no chance to allow daylight to wither away the happy, fragile ghosts raised the night before.

Before she could talk herself out of the idea, she decided to leave. He might wake up at any moment, and she would have to face his rejection. Or face her own actions and his expectations.

She would have to stay instead of running away like she'd always done.

She took a business card from his box of pans and ingredients and strode to the elevator. There she stopped for one last look over the room so she could remember how it had looked when the doors had opened.

Unable to help herself, she looked at the bed and the man within it. He slept on, still exhausted, arm extended as if it looked for her but was too tired to find what it sought.

Meghan burned the image of him into her mind. She memorized each line of his body, the soft furrow of his forehead. Then she turned and stepped into the waiting elevator, eyes full of tears, and wondered, as the car rapidly descended, if she'd left her heart behind.

* * * * *

When he opened his eyes and saw the empty pillow, he knew she had gone.

Propping himself on his elbow, he looked around the room. Her purse no longer sat on the table, and her shoes, once by the elevator doors, hadn't walked off on their own. Spencer sighed heavily and threw the sheet back, reluctant to climb out of the bed that still smelled of her sweet essence.

She might have needed to go to work that day or had some other morning engagement, but she would have left him a note or her phone number. As he searched first the table then the counter, he came to an unhappy conclusion. *Not even a glass slipper.*

Had he upset her? He wracked his brain as he went into the bathroom to wash his face and dress, but he didn't think he had. She'd responded well to him. Better than well, she had glowed, she had put herself wholly in his hands. When they'd fallen asleep, she'd pressed to him, and he remembered the happy smile on her lips. No, she'd enjoyed last night.

And there lie his answer. He remembered her skittishness as she'd put the rose into the vase, the trembling hands and wide eyes, the uneven, shallow breaths that she'd taken. She *had* enjoyed last night, and it'd scared her. Before she could face it, she'd run away.

He didn't know her last name or at what bank she worked. How could he find her and tell her she had no reason to worry? Didn't she know he wanted to see her again? She could come to his house and meet

his cat. Stanley would love her. The cat would drape himself over her shoulder while she stood in the kitchen and watched him cook the grilled cheese and tomato basil soup she'd wanted to try.

"Damn it." He sighed, wiping his hand over his face. By the position of the sun, he figured it was almost ten. He had a couple hours to clean out the room, as the Solstice had a check-out time of noon. The kitchens at work would expect him at three to begin preparations for the dinner rush, and on Valentine's Day weekend, he'd need all the prep time he could get.

As he loaded the last box into the back of the van, his pocket began to vibrate. Without any dexterity, he pulled the phone out of his pocket and glanced at the caller identification, then flipped it open. "Hey, Gina. No, I'm still at the hotel. It went...look, I need to go turn in the room key. I'll be home in twenty minutes. Just meet me there, and I'll tell you what happened. Right. See you then."

He flipped the phone closed and stared at it a moment, shaking his head. Gina would never believe this story.

She'd let herself in by the time Spencer turned in the key and made it back to his condo. "Stanley's pissed," she said without preamble. "You left him dry last night. He didn't get his can of wet food."

Indeed, the gray tabby turned his back to Spencer and stared at Gina, his eyes full of hopefulness. "Sorry, Stan," Spencer said as he threw his keys on the counter. "It isn't like you starved, buddy."

"That means you didn't come home at all last night." She pulled the tab on a can of cat food and spooned the contents into the cat's bowl.

With a, "Mrرت," the cat attacked its preferred dinner, still ignoring Spencer as only a feline can.

"Nope, I didn't." He kicked off his shoes and went up the stairs to his bedroom, then pitched his clothes into the hamper. He could hear Gina behind him.

She made a harrumphing noise. "I came over to see how your job had gone, and you weren't here."

He laughed. "You came over to steal food."

"That, too." She chuckled. "I had to get takeout. How awful is

that?"

"Depends on where you got it from." He pulled on a pair of sweats and migrated back down the stairs. "Help me load this stuff in the dishwasher, will you?"

"You didn't feed me, and now you want free labor. Figures." But she still took one of the dish boxes from him and went into the kitchen with it. "So? Where were you?"

Spencer put several dirty pans into the sink. "The Solstice. I'd gotten the place ready and was waiting for my client to show back up when my phone went off. His date got sick, and he had to take care of her."

"Wow, that sucks." Gina lined up plates on the bottom rack. "Sick on Valentine's Day when your date rented the penthouse for you."

"Yeah. He wanted to pay and reschedule, so I hit the van. I got back up to the room, but I found a woman in it."

Gina murmured, "Talk about room service."

Spencer snorted. "She had the rose with the invitation on it. I don't know where she got it, but she had it, and she'd read the note about putting the rose in the vase." He'd shown Gina all the plans the night before. "And there she was at the table, all indecisive and gorgeous. Just beautiful." He sighed and ran hot water into the saucepan. "Looked like she'd just gotten off work, but damn, she looked just... She had dark hair, and you could just *see* her shaking, trying to decide what she'd do..."

"Whoa, wait. You walk in and find a strange chick in the room, she's got that rose, and she's actually following the directions on the note?" Gina's jaw dropped. "And you didn't ask who the hell she was or what the hell she was doing there?"

"I didn't care, to be honest," he said sheepishly. "She was so pretty, Geen. So I just watched, and when she put the rose in the vase, I asked her if she was sure."

Gina's jaw dropped further. "You took her up on it?"

"Of course, I did. I had all that food, and the room was decorated already, and you know how I'd wanted to try it, and there she was..." His hands fell still as he remembered. "It was beyond words. Everything I

could have wanted it to be, and even more than that. I spent the night touching her, making her come, and she bloomed under it."

"Bloomed. You just said *bloomed*. Now you've turned into a bad poet." She put her hands on her hips. "So, why are you here doing dishes? Where's the girl?"

Spencer sighed. "I wish I knew. When I got up, she was gone. She didn't leave me her number or address."

"So we look her up in the phone book."

"I don't know her last name. She didn't tell me, and I didn't want to pressure her. We were so caught up in it all." Spencer forced back a wave of despair.

Gina put her hand on his arm. "You're a noble idiot for not asking her, Spence. But that sucks. It really does."

"I know her name is Meghan and that she works at a bank." Defeated by the situation and in no mood for dishes, he left the kitchen and flopped down on the couch. "I thought about calling every bank in town, but there are so many of them, and I don't want to seem like a stalker, you know?"

"Yeah." She sat down next to him. "Look. If it was all as intense as you say and she took off, maybe she's just not ready for it. She needs to regroup. If she can't handle it, that's her choice, and you can't change it."

He looked at her, all the more miserable because he knew she was right. "I want to see her again, Geen. I want...more than last night."

Gina cocked her head, looking at him for several seconds without saying a word. "You've got it bad, don't you?"

He nodded.

"Okay." She ran her fingers through her strawberry blonde hair and sighed. "Here's what we'll do. First, we'll give her some time. Let her get herself straightened out. Right?"

"Right." He didn't want to take the time, but his friend had a point. Meghan might just need a few days to wrap her head around what had happened, and rushing to her could do more harm than good.

"Then we can start looking around for her. There are a lot of banks in town, but if she means this much to you still, after we give it some time,

then it'll be worthwhile." She shrugged. "You can talk to your client. Maybe he knows where he lost that rose, what area of town. We can at least get him to tell you where he went with it and call the banks along the route."

Having a plan lifted his spirits a bit, as Gina must have figured it would. He leaned over and kissed her forehead. "You're a genius."

"No, I'm a Gina." She smiled at their old joke. "I'd offer you a friendly quickie, but I don't think you'd take me up on it."

"I wouldn't." He shook his head. "It wouldn't be right."

Gina looked mournful. "I don't think I like this, Spencer. You're going to fall in with a woman, and my meal ticket and sex life will be flushed down the toilet."

Spencer smirked. "Quit snubbing the male species and get a boyfriend."

"It hurts my hand to hit you, buddy, but I will. Don't think I won't." She stuck out her tongue. "When's your shift tonight?"

"I have to go flog the lackeys at three. You working?"

"I'm on at six. Tips should be good tonight, at least. Come on." She tugged on his arm as she stood up. "Let's get a nap before our shift, at least. You've got to be wiped out, and you know how lazy I am on a Saturday afternoon."

* * * * *

The cell phone vibrated itself off the dresser and onto the floor, waking Meghan out of a sound sleep. She'd managed to bus herself home, climb the two flights of stairs to get to her apartment, and find her keys as a deep weariness weighed her down. Despite her exhaustion, however, she'd been sure she wouldn't manage to fall asleep at all.

Her cotton sheets had chafed, and every spring poked her through the old padding. She'd slept on it for years without noticing, but her night at the Solstice made each fault stand out. The bed's worst shortcoming, of course, was its emptiness, and a new mattress couldn't fix that.

At the thump, she startled, confused by the fact that she'd fallen

asleep, and by the odd buzz that a dresser shouldn't make. When comprehension dawned, the gadget had stopped its dance on the floor, but seconds later, it started up again. She fumbled out of the bed to rescue her phone before it shimmied under the furniture. "Hello?"

Meghan had to hold the phone away from her ear at the sound of her best friend's worried, shouting voice.

"Robin. Robin, I'm fine. I know. Something came up, that's all. I'm sorry I worried you. Come over and I'll tell you. Bring coffee. See you in a few."

She laughed as she ended the call. Leave it to Robin to make the day a little brighter with her incessant worrying. Meghan took few chances, and preferred the worn paths and sure bets to unmarked trails and long shots. Robin, however, made Meghan look like Magellan.

She'd showered and put on comfortable clothes by the time her best friend blew in the door. Had she not known Robin before today, she would have wondered if worry had consumed an averaged sized woman and whittled her away to an elfin reed. "Where were you?" the willowy woman demanded, trying to hug Meghan and juggle a pair of hot lattes and a bag of breakfast pastries.

"It's the strangest story. You'll never believe it." Meghan liberated the bag, as well as one of the lattes, and herded Robin toward the sofa.

The black-haired woman sidled toward the couch, never letting Meghan out of her sight. "I called because I knew you didn't have plans until tonight, and I thought we could watch movies together." In a single, agile motion, she stepped around the coffee table and folded her graceful limbs onto the sofa. "That new Asian food place opened near my place, and I thought I could get some for us. But you didn't answer most of the night, so I came over to make sure you hadn't been hurt, but you didn't answer the door. I came in, and you weren't here, and the bank lines had all closed, so you weren't at work."

Robin had a high, melodic voice, expressive and pleasant to listen to. Her excellent diction and intuitive grasp of tone turned each sentence into a tiny piece of music. Which was good, Meghan thought, because when Robin got concerned, she tended to use it quite a bit, in extended

bursts, to pour out all the many worries of her great heart.

"No, I got off work and was going to the bus stop, but I found a yellow rose on the ground."

Big blue eyes stared at her as her friend began to nibble an apple pastry. "A yellow rose? Were you arrested for theft? Poisoned? Did you have an allergic reaction?"

Meghan laughed. "No, nothing like that. The rose had a note attached that said someone was waiting in the penthouse suite of the Solstice. I thought they might have dropped it, and I didn't want them to wait all night. They might have been disappointed if they didn't know their flower had been lost. So I went to return it."

"To a hotel? With someone you didn't know waiting? You might have been killed, or raped, or been drugged and had a kidney stolen!" Robin looked aghast.

The words died on Meghan's lips, and she stared in astonishment, mouth hanging open. "A kidney stolen? Robin, hello?"

Robin had the grace to blush. "I've heard that it's happened."

"I don't think that happens at the Solstice." Meghan loved Robin dearly. Every now and again, however, she worried about the very strangest of things. "I did think of the others, but..." She sighed. "It was the way the note was written, Robin. It was...do you remember that girl you worked with? The one that gave you the pass to that club, where—"

Nodding so hard she nearly spilled her coffee, Robin interrupted, "Yes! I remember. She said she was going with her master."

Bolstered by a big swallow of her own drink, Meghan forged on, although her cheeks burned. "It... I mean, I was surprised, but that kind of turned me on. I wouldn't want to call a man Master or Sir, but the thought of it, someone taking over... It didn't sound so bad.

"When I went up, no one was there, but the room was all set up so beautifully. Candles, and a dinner table, and this beautiful bed with satin sheets and rose petals and, um, fun...er, items..." Meghan's face heated even more. "It was so romantic. I'd never seen anything like it. And there was a note on the plate that said that the person it was meant for just needed to put the rose in the vase to agree to surrender herself for the

night. And it was just so exciting, and just..."

Robin watched quietly for a moment. "So much like something you wanted to do," she finished.

She nodded. "Yes. And I wanted to know what it felt like. So I put the rose in the vase. And I hadn't heard it, but someone came in, and he asked if I was sure. I should have left but...but I *was* sure, Robin."

"So you stayed."

Nodding again, Meghan put down her food. "It was wonderful. It was more than I'd ever wanted it to be. I did things I never would have done on my own. And Spencer, he was so gorgeous. He's a chef. He fed me terrific food and washed my hair, and he made me feel so *good*." *Good* seemed like an inadequate word, but she couldn't find another.

Slowly, Robin put down her breakfast and her cup. She took Meghan's hands into her warm, soft ones, and Meghan could already hear the admonishments, all the terrible dangers that could have happened.

"Good for you."

With a blink, Meghan blurted, "But I could have been killed, or mutilated, or had my internal organs removed or something. He could have been a stalker or a psycho!"

"Yes. But you knew that when you went to a hotel where someone you didn't know was waiting for you, and you didn't even call me first to tell me so that I could call the police if you didn't call me back." *There* were the paranoid words Meghan had expected. "But you saw him, and your heart knew. You have a trustworthy heart, Meggie. It's why I love you so much."

Meghan's vision blurred with tears.

"Besides, I am not brave. I would have burned the rose in case it had the plague or anthrax." Robin's voice was wry. "You have to be brave for the both of us, sometimes. You took a risk, and it paid off. Even if it makes me frantic to hear you did something so dangerous, I'm kind of, sort of, proud of you." She glared. "But don't do it anymore. Not without some sensible precautions."

With a sniffle, Meghan nodded. "I won't. Promise."

"So where is he? Is he cooking? Is he in the bathroom?" Robin

craned her neck and looked around the apartment. "I didn't bring him coffee. He doesn't want coffee, does he?"

"He's not here." Meghan's voice was small. "I kind of left him sleeping at the hotel when I woke up."

Robin stood up in a surge, flailing her slender limbs as she almost leapt the table. "You left him? After all that you didn't even have a good morning, or tell him he had to make you breakfast, or find out if he was an international terrorist? *Meggie! What were you thinking?*"

"I was afraid." It sounded ridiculous now. Ruefully, she decided she should have called Robin before she'd made the decision to leave him. "He might have broken my heart, or told me to leave, or..."

"Now you sound like me." Robin began to pace. "You can't do this. This can't end like this. It's not right. If you're going to be brave for us, this can't just drop off. I'll never survive it. You did get his number, didn't you? Something? Anything?"

Confused, Meghan wondered if Robin had more invested in this than she did. She'd never seen her friend like this. "You'll never survive it?"

Robin shook her head. "Not ever. It's like driving off a cliff and never hitting the ground. All you could do would be to worry about when the impact came."

Meghan stared. "What?"

Her friend glared. "Never mind. Your heart knew, and then you ran off. You must have gotten his number."

"He runs a catering business. I took a business card." Meghan pointed. "It's in my purse."

Practically airborne, the human shaped bundle of spirit and energy moved to the counter and upended Meghan's purse. "Here. Expressions Catering." A receipt fell out of Robin's pocket before she came up with her phone and dialed. "Hello? Yes, hi, is this the owner? Spencer Webb?"

Sudden panic washed over Meghan, and she gave a frantic shake of her head.

"I'm planning a party, and I've started to look at caterers." Robin gave her a wry look. "I've heard some good things about you. Do you

have restaurant references? You're the head chef at Rafael's? Yes, I know it. Are you working there tonight, maybe? You are? Terrific. I might come by and have a taste. Thanks so much. Bye-bye."

Meghan sighed with relief. When her friend got ideas in her head, she often became an unstoppable force. "You really didn't have to do that."

"Yes, I did." Robin pointed her phone in accusation. "You wouldn't have. Now you know where he is, and you can go to him and set this right."

"Robin..."

"Meghan." Her friend leaned over the back of the couch. "It's a public place. It's safe. The waiters won't mug you unless you don't tip enough. And you'll always regret it if you don't do it."

The butterflies in her stomach took flight again. She remembered how she'd felt as she looked at that crystal vase, rose clutched in her hand. Had Spencer not arrived to surprise her, would she have stayed to wait for him? Or would she have spent her entire life hiding in her comfort zone, never stepping outside her protections to chase what she truly wanted?

No rose. No vase. No Spencer. Now, she had only her fears and the specter of future regrets to face.

"Mark from the loan department is still supposed to take me out tonight," she said. "Maybe he'd like to go to Rafael's."

Robin snickered. "You're taking your date to meet your other date. This is not good."

"Oh, honey. Mark's gay." Meghan laughed. "He's taking me out to be nice, and probably to talk about guy problems. I get all his stories at work. He's great, and he's just going to love this. And," she teased, "he'll be good extra protection. He knows how to handle unruly men."

With a squeal, her friend gave her a quick hug from behind. "Now you're thinking!"

With a lighter heart, Meghan retrieved her phone and dialed Mark's number. "Hey, it's Meghan. We're still going out tonight, right? Can we go to Rafael's?"

* * * * *

"I had no idea you were such a wild woman, Meg," Mark said as helped her out of his car and passed off the keys to the waiting valet. "Don't move the seat," he warned the man, then gave Meghan his arm and walked her toward the door. "I felt bad that I had to put off our dinner last night, but it sounds like Jim did us a favor. At least he's good for something," he added in an angry mumble.

Meghan giggled and blushed, her nerves making her giddy. "I'm sorry he's being such a pain."

"Better now than later." He shrugged. "I don't want this to turn into some kind of overwrought drama like my last boyfriend did." Flashing a quick, playful grin, he continued, "But I am not bringing tonight down with my love life. We're on a mission here."

"That sounds a little dramatic, don't you think? Thank you." She walked through the door as he held it open for her. "I don't even know if he'll want to see me again. If not because last night wasn't, well, important to him, then because I ran off this morning."

He shook his head. "He'll want to see you again. I know men, Meg. You just gave him a reason to chase. Men like to chase."

"If you know men so well, why is your love life a shambles?"

He smirked. "I'm just doing the public a service. I'm finding all the bad ones and pointing them out."

She couldn't help but laugh.

Rafael's had a clean, elegant look that Meghan found very appealing. The Tuscan décor, with its brightly colored pottery and curling wrought iron sconces didn't overwhelm the eye. Instead, it provided the right touches to set off the graceful curves of the room's architecture and lent an authentic Italian atmosphere to the restaurant.

"The reservation is under Dunbar," Mark told the hostess.

"Table for two?" she confirmed.

He nodded. "And maybe you can answer me a question. We came here because one of your chefs has great press. Is Spencer Webb in the

kitchen tonight?"

"Oh yes," the woman said with a smile. "He's terrific. You're in for a treat."

"I certainly hope so," Mark muttered to Meghan under his breath. She blushed again.

Patrons had packed the restaurant, but the skillful hostess wove her way through the crowded dining room and seated them at a table near a wall. As they settled in, a pretty woman with strawberry blonde hair approached. "Hello," she said. "My name's Gina. I'll be your server tonight. Can I get you started with something to drink?"

Mark glanced over the wine and beverage list. "You have a sommelier, don't you?"

Gina nodded. "We do, yes. He's won regional awards."

"Well, we'll want wine with dinner, but we'll have him choose a vintage that fits when we order. In the mean time, I'd like an iced tea." He smiled. "Meghan?"

"The same, please," she answered. As the server moved off, Meghan gave Mark a look. "I had no idea you were so sophisticated."

"You wound me. I am far more than I seem." He feigned deep indignation as he glanced over the menu. "Right now, I am absolutely, positively hot and jealous. In that kitchen waits a man who did things to you which would blow my mind and leave me too turned on to speak. Just the *thought* of it turns me on."

Meghan gnawed nervously at her lower lip. "He may not appreciate that I've come to his work. Or that I've tracked him down. Or even that I've shown back up."

"Oh, no." Mark gave her a firm glance over his menu. "If he hasn't carried you off by the end of tonight, I'll give him an earful of how stupid he is, and he doesn't want that."

Smiling, she shook her head. "No, he doesn't. Thanks, Mark."

"And if that doesn't work, then maybe he's better off with me," he teased.

"Mark." Meghan cried in mock horror.

"This veal looks good," he said, his attention back on the menu.

"You haven't looked at what you want."

"I don't need to." She took a deep breath. "I'm not going to pick what I eat."

He folded his menu and stared at her. "You aren't...oh, you are." A pleased smirk spread over his face. "You are such a devil. I had no idea. I always thought you were kind of a sweet little mouse, but you're a tiger, honey. Oh, that is hot."

Gina returned with their glasses of iced tea. "Are you ready to order?" she asked with a smile.

When Meghan's nerve failed her, Mark went first to provide a nudge. "I'll take the ossi buchin in gremolata," he said.

Gina scribbled on her pad. "And you, ma'am?"

Meghan cleared her throat. "Chef's choice. Please tell Chef Webb that I'd like him to choose for me."

* * * * *

Despite the Valentine weekend rush, the kitchen had run without a hitch so far. Cooks and assistants bustled around the kitchen in a kind of unchoreographed dance. One swerved while another ducked to avoid an assistant who carried a plate of chopped ingredients. "Easy on the pepper," Spencer directed, brandishing a sprig of parsley destined for an elegantly prepared plate.

The work helped keep his mind off Meghan's disappearance. With their nap a total failure, Gina had declared that she would either find the vanished woman or throw Spencer a grand funeral, but one or the other would happen. As an apology, Spencer had promised to make her favorite German chocolate cake that week, and Gina had forgiven him right away.

As if summoned by the thought, Gina ducked into the kitchen. "Spence, got a sec?" she asked, standing off to one side so as not to get in the way of the food preparation.

Spencer wiped his hands and joined her. "What's up?"

"A woman at one of my tables said to tell you that she wants you to choose her dinner for her."

"Unusual, but not unheard of," he said, confused by the tone in her voice. "So why do you sound like that?"

Gina hesitated a moment. "I'm not sure if I should tell you this."

"Tell me what?" he demanded.

"Look, I don't know if you should make anything out of this or not, but I heard her date call her Meghan." The words came out in a rush.

His heart skipped two beats, and excitement prickled over his skin. "What does she look like?"

"Dark hair, dark eyes. It's a common name, but... They're at table fifteen. Take a look."

She flattened herself against the wall as he fled the kitchen. "Which one is fifteen?" he asked, scanning over the sea of people.

"You chefs never come out of the kitchen," she groused in amusement and surreptitiously pointed. "Over there. By the wall. She's got a blue dress on. See her?"

Spencer saw her. He saw nothing but her. The electric thrill that jolted through him locked his muscles in place and narrowed his vision so that the world blurred. Only Meghan remained in focus.

Across the room she laughed as she lifted a glass to her lips. She'd put her hair up, and he could see the graceful column of her neck, curving into the soft, sensitive spot between her neck and shoulder. The material of her dress clung to her, and he wanted to charge over and press himself to her, kiss her, ask her why she'd left and if she would please, please stay. But his limbs wouldn't move.

A sharp punch on the arm snapped him back to his spot in the doorway. "Ow! Huh?"

"I said, that has to be her because you've turned stupid." Gina grinned hard enough that her cheeks had to hurt.

He grabbed her arms. "What did she say?"

His question made her grin harder. "She said to please tell Chef Webb that she wanted him to choose for her. She has to know that you're here."

"But she's with another man." Spencer had seen her date. The man took obvious pride in his appearance, and it paid off. His suit fit his trim

body with tailored precision, and he'd gelled his hair into a perfect backwards sweep. Although Spencer told himself that he had no right to jealousy yet, it consumed him all the same. "Go find out what that's about."

Gina gave him an amused stare. "I don't have a reason to go back to their table. Their glasses are still full, they already have bread and butter, and I have nothing to deliver."

"Um. Wait." Spencer ducked into the kitchen and grabbed a finished plate of bruschetta with goat cheese. Someone else had ordered it, but that didn't matter to him. "Make another one of these," he told an assistant, taking off with the platter as the man stared at him in confusion. "Here." He stuck the plate on a decorative platter and thrust it at Gina. "Take this to them."

To his irritation, his best friend looked like she might collapse in laughter. "Spencer, they didn't order appetizers."

"I don't care. It's...chef's choice. Go give it to them." He shooed her away, but as she began to walk away, another thought struck him. "Wait!"

She came back, a tolerant stare fixed on him. "Yes, Spencer?"

"That's not going to cut it. Just knowing if they're together isn't enough." He gazed around the room and spotted a flower arrangement at the front. "Look. By the lobby."

Gina balked. "No way. Unordered appetizers will look suspicious enough. Just go out there if you want your answer."

"Please, Gina. I have to go cook, and you know I have to stay back here." He pleaded with her with his eyes. "I have to know. I won't be able to think straight otherwise."

She sighed. "You are so obnoxious when you're in love."

* * * * *

"And then I told him, 'You told me that you didn't want to celebrate Valentine's Day, and I believed you.'" Mark made a face. "Do you know what he told me? 'Well, you could have ignored me and gotten something anyway.'"

Meghan laughed and took a drink of her tea. Mark's love life was a perennial comedy of errors, but he looked ruefully amused by it. He'd made it clear enough that he wanted her to enjoy his story, even at his expense.

"Can you believe it?" He snorted. "He wasn't even supposed to be in town, but he delayed his business trip by a day, *just in case*. Then he had the nerve to get mad about it."

"Excuse me." Their server appeared at the side of their table with a plate of toasted bread slices smeared with white cheese and garnished with roasted peppers. She set it at the edge of the table. "Chef Webb sent this out to you to start your meal."

Mark smirked. "That was nice of him."

"I hope you don't mind me saying so," Gina began, expression almost sheepish, "but you two look cute together. Is it your first date?"

With a laugh, Mark shook his head. "No, no. Meghan's my friend. I bribe her with food to listen to my man problems."

Their server's eyes went wide, and then she laughed, an easy and oddly relieved sound. "Well, I'm sorry to hear you're having problems, but I'm glad you're here all the same. Enjoy your bruschetta."

"Watch her," Mark murmured. "She was scouting."

Meghan looked at him, confused. "What are you talking about?"

"She's doing reconnaissance for him," he said. "Don't turn your head, but watch her. She showed up to ask about me."

"I thought she was bringing appetizers," Meghan said, bewildered by Mark's waitress paranoia, but she scanned the wall until she found an ornate mirror that reflected the room. After a moment, she found their server's distinct strawberry blonde head.

Gina threaded through the tables toward a niche in the wall, but didn't go into the door hidden there. Instead, she paused just inside the nook to talk to someone. In the shadows, she thought she could see a white jacket and hat.

She wanted to turn around and stare but forced herself to watch in the mirror. As Gina spoke, the man in the chef's attire came more into the light. Now, Meghan could see his face and knew Spencer watched her. He

knew she was here. Under his gaze, her head swam, and the heat began to build at her core.

"Is that him?" Mark asked.

Meghan found she couldn't speak. Instead, she nodded, unable to take her gaze from the reflection.

"If you find men like that at random, Meg, we're going out more often," Mark told her. "Does he have a brother? Meg?" He chuckled. "Oh, this is fun. You look like someone walked up and hit you in the head. Meghan."

"Hmm?" Still a bit dazed, she tore herself away from Spencer's image in the mirror and looked at her date. "What?"

Mark smiled. "Look what else is on that tray."

A yellow rose rested on the platter, soft petals still furled into a bud. The sound of her heart thundering in her ears drowned out the noise of the restaurant as she stared at it, and the significance slowly sank in. No tag dangled from the stem, but then, she didn't need one.

Meghan looked up and stared into the doorway, the mirror no longer necessary. She could see him there, not in the easy, confident stance he'd taken when she'd first met him. Now, he looked tense and nervous, his gaze focused on her alone. Even from where she sat, she could see his emotions in his face; the hope, the dread, the pain of anticipation.

Last night, she'd found a rose meant for someone else. Tonight, he'd given her one meant for her, just as she'd wished for. She knew, as he smiled at her with that nervous longing, that this rose carried a question that asked for longer than one night.

She hadn't realized that she'd picked up the rose, but she held it all the same. Its fragrance didn't compare with the one from last night, but somehow, its promise smelled far sweeter. And although this vase was made of painted clay, not imported, cut crystal, she thought it looked even more wonderful when she put the rose into it.

A broad grin spread over Spencer's face. He pressed his fingertips to his lips, and then he disappeared through the door, back into the kitchen. Gina grinned at them as she moved out of the nook to tend another table.

Excited, she looked at Mark. "What do I do now?"

"Eat something," Mark advised her. "I think our dinner's going to be a little late." With a wink, he picked up a piece of bruschetta. "Someone's been distracting our chef."

Meghan reached out and took one of the pieces of bread from the plate. It reminded her vividly of the night before, when he'd held bread out to feed her from his hand. As the tastes of sweet, tangy cheese and peppers filled her mouth, an exuberant joy washed through her heart that had nothing to do with dinner at all.

Chapter Five

"Whatever else he may be, he's a damn fine cook, Meg." Mark wiped his mouth with his napkin. "Between the veal and that tiramisu he sent out, I'm spoiled for any other restaurant in town."

"He's great, isn't he?" Meghan beamed with pride and sipped the last of her coffee. Then she looked around. "But I haven't seen him since earlier, and we're ready to go."

He shrugged. "It's still pretty busy in here. He's probably cooking. You two have your understanding though, don't you? I'll take you home, and you can call here and ask for him. Even better..." He pulled a card from the bank out of his wallet, scribbled a message on it, then flagged their server down.

Gina hurried over. "Need something to go?" she asked.

"To stay, actually." He handed her the card. "My friend's number is on the back. See to it that Chef Webb gets that?"

"With pleasure." Gina smiled at Meghan. "He'll get in touch with you. I guarantee it. You two have a good night, now."

Mark pulled out Meghan's chair, and they walked out of the restaurant. "I hate to leave without seeing him again," she lamented as the door opened and cool air took the place of heated.

"You heard the lady. He'll be in touch." Mark handed the valet his ticket, and the man hurried off.

"He'll definitely be in touch." They both turned around to see Spencer standing at the door. He carried his hat in one hand, and his

white jacket bloused open at the top, revealing the top of a T-shirt.

Mark laughed and put out his hand. "I don't believe we've met. I'm Mark Dunbar, a friend of Meg's from the bank."

Spencer walked forward and shook it. "Spencer Webb. Thank you for taking care of Meghan for me tonight."

"My pleasure, I guarantee, although I require you to introduce me to any brothers you have," Mark told him with a grin.

"No brothers, but our sommelier did ask me to give you this." Spencer passed over a scrap of paper. "Would you mind if I took Meghan home?"

Mark shook his head. "I would only mind if you either didn't take her to your home, or you didn't stay in her home when you got her there."

Meghan swatted his arm. "*Mark.*"

"Sorry, Meg, that's my car." He gave her a quick hug. "I've had an excellent time. Thank you for the dinner and company. Now, go on."

Spencer moved to stand beside her as Mark got into his car and pulled away. "I like your friend," he said, taking her hand in his.

Her skin tingled at his touch. "He's nice. We have lunch together a few times a week."

"I was scheduled till at least eleven tonight, but I convinced one of the other chefs to come in and work the rest of my shift." He pulled her around to face him. "Come home with me. I want to spend time with you."

She took a deep breath and then nodded. "I'd like that."

He led her around the back of the restaurant to a small, grey sedan and opened the passenger's door. Once he'd helped her in, he closed the door and walked around to his own side of the vehicle. Poked by something hard beneath her, Meghan fished around the seat and pulled out a tube of lipstick.

"Yours?" she asked with a grin as Spencer folded his large frame into the car.

With a laugh, he took it and put it into the center console. "Gina's. She's my best friend, and she's always putting makeup on in the car. I like to brake suddenly and see if I can mess up her lipstick."

Meghan giggled as they pulled out of the parking lot and into the flow of traffic. "You're so helpful."

"Very," he said and spared a glance toward her. "I missed you."

Nervously, she looked down at her hands. "I'm...I'm really sorry, Spencer. I was worried about how you'd be this morning, and I just...I stopped thinking and just reacted. I should have stayed."

Soft fingers lifted her chin and tilted her face to look at his. "None of that, love," he told her, stealing looks into her eyes as he watched his driving. "I understand what you were thinking. You don't need to worry, all right? Not about last night, or this morning, or even tomorrow morning." He caressed her cheek. "Right?"

Reassured and happier for her apology, she nodded, content to lean into his touch. It hadn't been twenty-four hours since he'd last touched her, but she felt as if years had gone by. "Right."

With a final brush, he put his hand back on the wheel and gave the road his full attention. "Stanley will be happy to have me home early. He was upset that I didn't come back last night."

"Stanley?"

"My cat." He chuckled. "Stanley is spoiled. He always has dry food out, but I give him a can of wet food at night. I wasn't home to give him his can last night, and he'd only just forgiven me when I went to work today."

Meghan feigned a gasp. "You stayed with me instead of going home to feed your cat? You're awful."

"First Stanley, then you. Everyone turns on me." He smirked. "And I'll bet you both turn around for good food and a good petting."

Warmth spread between Meghan's legs. "I can't speak for Stanley," she said as she shifted in her seat. "But I might."

"I can speak for Stanley. If I let him sit in my lap, and I rub him, first gently, then firmly, he'll put his tail in the air." He turned the car. "If I keep rubbing him, he'll roll over and give me his belly."

Her imagination ran wild as he talked, but she didn't see a cat in her fantasies. She saw his hands on her skin. "He's a smart cat."

"He is. You'll love him." Spencer spared her a furtive glance, as if

against his better judgement.

She knew what the glance meant. For a moment, she wondered if it asked for something she couldn't give, but her heart told her otherwise. A long time had passed since the last time she'd spoken those words, but she found that, after all this time, she was ready to say them again. Leaning over, she placed a soft kiss on his cheek. "I know I will. I already love his owner."

His grin lit the night more brightly than the headlights on his car.

After what felt like an eternity, they pulled into the complex of condominiums where Spencer lived. He helped her from the vehicle then took her through the planted paths to his door. From the window, two golden eyes peered out of a grey, striped face.

She laughed. "You were right. He's waiting."

"I spoil him badly," Spencer said with a chuckle then opened the door and motioned her inside. "Welcome to Stanley's home. I live here, too."

"It's nice of him to let you." Meghan looked around at the comfortable furniture, the neat but not obsessive keep of the room, and the profusion of cooking magazines. The couch looked plush and deep, perfect for watching movies, cuddling, or loving. She liked the place immediately.

Spencer sounded nervous. "It's not the penthouse suite," he said after a moment's hesitation.

"It's better," she told him, and plumped down on the couch to prove her point. "It's yours."

He shed his jacket and tossed it on the coffee table next to her purse before he sat next to her. "That's enough for you, is it?"

"Mmm hmm." She ran her fingers through his hair. His hat had left it in a funny shape that she found adorable.

"There's a lot we have to talk about, I'm sure." He reached around her head to unclip her barrette and, once he had it out, ran his fingers through her hair. She loved the little smile that curved his lips. "But I don't really feel like talking right now, do you?"

She made a happy sigh. "No, not really."

His hand trailed down through her hair to the top of her zipper. "Then I'm going to undress you and put you on my lap," he told her, sliding the tongue of the fastener down her back. "I want to feel you rubbing against me as I slide into you."

"Oh, Spencer, yes. Whatever you want." Her heart sped in her chest.

He pulled her to her feet and let her dress slide down her body. With a quick motion, he pulled his shirt over his head. One shoe got stuck on his foot, but he kicked it across the room, even as she undid his trousers. Their underwear all but evaporated from their bodies.

"You are so beautiful," he whispered as he cupped her breasts in his hands, seemingly entranced by their weight and texture. His erection stood out from his body and brushed against her midsection as he stepped in to give her a fierce kiss.

They sank onto the couch together. She straddled him, rubbing his cock along the hot, wet length of her sex. A shiver coursed through his body as she coated his shaft in her moisture. The tables had turned, and she gloried in this new found power. When had she gotten so brave? His large hands moved to clasp her buttocks and, as she pushed forward, he thrust his hips up.

His cock slid home in one smooth motion. She groaned into his mouth. This was what she wanted, and now she had no idea why she'd almost let it go. She needed him to take her, but he let his cock rest there, buried inside her, warm and hard and thick.

The lack of motion tormented her, made her simmer when she wanted to boil over. She tried to shift herself on him, but he held her still. He sucked her lower lip into his mouth, flicking his tongue over it before letting it go, and then deliberately he moved her back along his cock so he could plunge it into her again.

She threw her head back, eyes closed, hips tilted to take as much of him as she could. As his hands pushed her backwards, she rode him up then plunged downward again. He allowed a slow, torturous pace, and the energy within her built with excruciating slowness and intensity. Her clitoris rubbed the base of his cock with each stroke, and the slow

stimulation drove her out of her mind.

"Spencer...please..." she begged, squirming against his shaft. She wanted to ride him hard, to build the fires inside to a feverish blaze.

"In a hurry, love?" He groaned as he sheathed his full length within her.

She whimpered as she ground herself against him. "Yes... I need you."

"You have me." He thrust harder into her, faster and more desperate, each lunge a jolt to her body.

"I need you to come inside me," she moaned.

In a flurry of fierce thrusts, he complied. The explosion tore through her as she wailed his name and milked him with ardent, shaking thrusts along his length. Hot moisture flooded her as he shouted his own climax.

They collapsed back on the couch. Her heartbeat slowed as his cock gave its final spasms within her.

"I can't get enough of you," he said and wrapped his arms around her. He held her tightly against him, until she pulled back to enjoy the sloppy, possessive smile on his lips. "You're staying the night, aren't you?" He sounded hopeful. "I'll make waffles for breakfast."

"For waffles, I'll stay," she said. She might have said more, but her purse began to ring.

"Let it go to voice mail." He circled his hips, and his cock stirred inside her.

"I don't want to talk to anyone anyway— Wait! Robin!" She twisted, trying to keep him within her while she contorted, and grabbed her purse to fish out her phone. "Hello? Robin. I'm sorry, I wasn't paying attention a couple minutes ago. No, nothing like that. I'm at Spencer's."

She watched the slow smirk spread over his face, and she knew she was in a very pleasant kind of trouble. He began to move within her. "Hi, Robin," he mouthed, while he rocked himself against her.

It took great effort to keep her voice even. "Yes, *that* Spencer. It's all fine, yes. Yes, Mark...um. No, I'm fine. Mark met him. No, I didn't...ah, abandon Mark. He got the sommelier's number...mmm. No, Robin, I'm

fine. I'm just *really* busy right now. Exactly. That'd be nice. Yes, I'll call you tomorrow morning and tell you that I'm still alive. I'm going to hang up now, Robin. Goodnight."

With a savage stab to the power button, she turned the phone off and threw it onto the table.

"How's Robin?" he asked while he reached his hand between them to pinch her clitoris.

Meghan moaned. "Robin was...oohh. Robin's fine. She worries."

"Does she?" He massaged the sensitive nub with his fingers and tugged on it as he pushed himself further into her. "I suppose this didn't help at all."

"Not a lot," she gasped, rubbing her clit against his hand as she rode his cock in and out. "I think you made her worry more."

"I'll bake her a cake," he said on a moan. "For now, though, I want to watch you come again like this. Then I want to take you up to my bed, where I intend to spend the night finding new ways to make you writhe."

The words excited her as much as his fingers and cock did, and her second climax broke over her in a sudden, acute wave. With a grunt, he stood up. She wrapped her legs around his waist, and his cock shifted inside her with each step as he made his careful way toward, then up, the stairs.

On a small table, just inside the bedroom door, she saw a crystal vase with a yellow rose inside it. The flower had begun to open, unfurling its petals as it stretched toward a full, beautiful bloom.

The End

Author Bio

Cassandra Moore is an eccentric, thirty-something insomniac with an overactive imagination and a deep lust for words. Writing is her preferred vice, and has proved more addicting than even chocolate. Usually, she is found at the computer, headphones on, interrogating her muse until the poor thing sings.

If she is not absorbed in her word processor, you might also find her reading, working with her aquarium, or playing with yarn and pointed sticks. She lives in Arizona with her husband, two children, two cats, and herd of Siberian dwarf hamsters. You can visit her website at <http://www.cassandra-moore.com>