



*Lair of the  
Python*  
Valarie Prince

# LAIR OF THE PYTHON

BY

VALARIE PRINCE

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Lair of the Python

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*For Pasha Oliver-Carter, Lora Walker, Chresse Williams, Judith Gilmore, Dawn Brooks, Darlene Kendall and all the wonderful women of V.I.P. Rebellion-Chicago – Ladies who stand united, stand strong and will never fail to stand and deliver.*

*My sweet sistahs thank you for your support, your encouragement and your formidable strength.*

## CHAPTER 1

Adina was glad to be in Montreal. She'd always thought it was one of the loveliest cities she'd ever visited. Now that her sister, Cookie, had decided to stay in Montreal permanently and start a clothing design business, there would always be a reason to come to the city.

Following the directions to the shop without getting lost once, Adina turned the corner and there, just as Cookie described, was a boutique with a sign hanging above the door that said, *Raven Wing Designs*. She pushed on the doorbell and a moment later a gorgeous brown woman came to the door.

Cookie threw open the door, let out a shriek. She hugged her with great intensity, then took Adina's coat and gloves. "Adina, baby girl, let me look at you. Ah, you are just as fine as you wanna be. Have you been working out?" Cookie asked.

Cookie made hot chocolate and Adina picked out some of her old favorites from Cookie's music collection. She felt like she was in the mood for some Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin and a little Al Green, before he became the Reverend. Adina and Cookie sat on a black leather sofa as they listened to the soulful sounds coming from

the CD player.

“So, tell me,” Cookie asked between her sips of chocolate, “what are you doing here in Montreal? I was so thrilled when I got your message on my answering machine. I’m so glad to see you.”

Adina adjusted the pillows behind her. “I’m going to be in Montreal for a few months. I have a continuing assignment as an interpreter and assistant for a business tycoon who never bothered to learn any foreign languages except Pig Latin.” She smiled, then took a sip of her chocolate and continued. “His name’s Brandon Montgomery. He’s real down to earth to be so filthy rich. But I guess since he’s a self made man, money shouldn’t change him.”

“Well, what kind of business is he in?”

“He’s into a lot of stuff, but he made his money in construction. I feel his real talent lies in his ability to put money people together. In the finance arena, he’s fierce. That’s why we’re here and that’s the real reason why I came by to see you today.” Cookie’s eyebrows arched in an inquiring gaze. “No, Cookie, I’m not here to hit you up for money. To tell you the truth, I came here to offer you a chance to showcase some of your designs.”

Cookie’s eyes expanded their normal parameters. She sat straight up on the sofa and damned near spilled all of her chocolate onto her lovely, winter white sweater.

“Adina, what are you talking about? What exactly do you mean by showcase my designs?”

Adina, realizing this next bit of information may have an even more alarming effect on her sister, stood up from the sofa, took her sister’s cup as well as her own, and set them on the end table.

“Cookie, Mr. Montgomery does a great deal of charity

work. This year his company, along with the Bastille Foundation, is putting together their annual fundraiser,” she said matter-of-factly, as if the words were an afterthought with little importance. “And I need a gown to wear, one of your fabulous creations.”

Cookie leapt from the sofa, grabbed Adina and squeezed the stuffing out of her, then proceeded to scream with joy.

“Adina, you have just made me the happiest woman in the world! This is the gala, avant garde event of the year. Do you know what kinda exposure this could bring to my designs? There aren't any tickets available, unless you donate mega bucks. Oh, Adina, I had only dreamed about being able to get an invite to this shindig just so I could drum up some investors or maybe some business for myself, and here you come in like a Godsend, offering me the opportunity of a lifetime. Yes, yes, yes, you can have a gown to wear! In fact, I have one special. I designed it with you in mind. With your coloring and curvaceous figure, every man in the joint will want to jump your bones,” Cookie said with a smirk and giggle.

“Shit, Cookie, don't have me dressed in some hoochie mama outfit that makes me look like I'm out on skeeze patrol.”

“Come and see for yourself. I just put the final touches on the train and I finished the cape this morning.”

Adina stepped to the other side of the back room and came upon a creation that took her breath away. She was viewing a work of art.

The gown was a captivating shade of red, made more inviting by its thin shoulder straps and floor length. It would hug the figure temptingly but tastefully. While its

sleeveless bodice accented a woman's delicate musculature, it was the back of the gown that really pushed Adina over the edge. The shoulder straps, which held the gown up in front, gently dipped down to the waistline in the back, leaving the area bare and completely alluring. Unlike the front, it didn't hug the body, but instead, flared out behind. Effectively accenting a beautiful hand painted section, which boasted a startlingly recreated tail of a dragon. The cloak, which came with it, was an arresting blood red, its hood trimmed in contrasting raven black fur.

As she had created it, Cookie felt this gown was meant for only one person, her sister, Adina. And now, as they exchanged secret smiles of approval before giving each other high fives, Cookie knew she'd been right. The only task remaining was to select accessories to compliment the gown.

They both agreed that since the front of the gown had an inviting neckline, no necklace should be worn. Rather, they'd accentuate Adina's ears with bold earrings and serpentine arm bracelets rather than wrist bracelets. They also agreed that without a doubt the jewelry would have to be silver; for with Adina's reddish brown skin tones and the red in the dress, the normal gleam of silver, would instead take on a shimmering effect.

"Well," Cookie commented, with a whine in her voice. "I don't think so, Adina. I think you should wear your hair down and wild with just a hint of carelessness to it."

Adina shook her head negatively. "I should wear my hair up and I don't think I should wear a bun or chignon



or anything like that either. They're too damn boring. Besides, I wear those hairstyles for work. I want something different, yet definitely me." A moment of silence passed. "Oh, I know! I can wear my hair in a finger wave pattern with big kiss curls surrounding the frame of my face. If I only wear matte makeup, it will give me a look of just being a little off the beaten path, but always ahead of my time."

As the total picture began to form in her mind's eye, Cookie was forced to agree. Adina's choice of hairstyle would be the perfect compliment to her ensemble.

Cookie had the gown and its accessories delivered to the hotel where Adina was staying. She would come by later to help Adina with her hair and dressing so she would look absolutely stunning. Adina went on to the club to get in a quick workout then she was off to a beauty salon Cookie had recommended. She got a facial and as her tense body was kneaded and squeezed by a heavy handed, but thoroughly effective masseuse, Adina's mind lazily pondered on what her employer, Mr. Brandon Montgomery, was doing at the moment.

Brandon was having a full day. He'd been with the Bastille Foundation representatives all day going over the final details for the evening's events. "Mr. Montgomery, we've decided to seat the Cooper Family at this corner table. They've been a big contributor to tonight's events and I feel we should place a bottle of our best champagne at their table to show our appreciation."

Brandon took a look at the table seating chart then started writing some minor changes to it. He commented to Richard's statement casually, but with authority. "If

you are going to do that, Richard, I feel we should give complementary champagne to all of our big contributors but yes, this table will be fine for the Coopers. According to my lists everyone has accepted the invitation for tonight's charity dinner."

Richard, the Bastille Foundation's representative, said with a proud smile, "Of course, Mr. Montgomery, this is the gala event of the year. It will help to feed many people this cold winter season and this charity ball will help to shelter thousands of people from Montreal's bitter winter. Besides, no one in their right mind would turn down an invitation from you, sir. Your name is synonymous with success. You really have the magic touch."

Brandon's strong, masculine expression barely wavered from the compliment, but internally he was battling the sudden desire to blush. It was true, he confessed privately, these past eight years had been a huge success for him. His name was really becoming a new adjective to describe success. He decided to change the subject before Richard started harrowing his praises again. "Richard, if there aren't any other items that need my attention, I need to get going. It's getting late and I have to get to the hotel and change."

Richard said on a quick exhale of breath, "Just one more thing sir, will you need a limousine to come for you and your date at the hotel?"

"No, my assistant, Ms. Powers, took care of that two weeks ago. And I know she confirmed it again last night when we arrived." As he strolled confidently from the ballroom, his mind churned with thousands of tiny details, which left unchecked, could turn into unstoppable disasters. He glanced at his watch and increased the speed of his stride. It was fashionable to be late at such an

extravagant event as this, but he was after all, the host, and he didn't want to be the last one to arrive. As he slid into the back seat of his chauffeured limousine, he questioned his judgment on whether he should be taking a lady friend to the fundraiser. Ms. Powers might feel uncomfortable around all the elegance. No, he reasoned further, she was the consummate professional and he'd be in need of her services tonight. He only hoped the business attire she chose would be appropriate for the ball.

Back at the hotel, Cookie had arrived to assist Adina with the gown and accessories. "What time is Mr. Montgomery coming for you?" Cookie inquired.

"He's not. I'm to meet him downstairs at the limousine in about an hour."

Cookie's facial expression changed slightly, as if she was asking herself a question. "Didn't the fundraiser start about thirty minutes ago?"

Adina looked up at Cookie through her makeup mirror and said, "Yes, Cookie, it did, but Mr. Montgomery's a strategist and wants to make an entrance. So we will arrive fashionably late. Now help me with my hair and jewelry."

Once Brandon arrived at his hotel, he checked with the hotel manager on whether his assistant, Ms. Powers had returned. After receiving notification that she had, he quit the lobby, took the elevator to his luxury suite and readied himself for a lengthy, eventful night.

He enjoyed a long, hot shower. Brandon truly loved water. It had a rejuvenating effect upon him. He could be dog tired, take a hot shower or soak in a tub and come

out totally refreshed. He gave himself a quick sizing up in the mirror, brushed his hair briskly, dabbed on his favorite clean scented aftershave and finished with a vigorous towel dance.

He dressed quickly and made a call to Adina to meet him downstairs at the limousine. When there was no answer, he noticed by the time on his wristwatch, that he was the one behind schedule. He slipped into his overcoat and ran for the closing elevator.

Mr. Simmons, the hotel manager, apparently spotted Brandon hurrying out of the elevator and immediately cut him off. "Mr. Montgomery, I'm so glad I caught you. Your assistant just asked me to call your room to let you know your car is waiting."

Brandon put on his gloves and scarf and said, "Thank you. Where is Ms. Powers?"

Mr. Simmons' face lit up as if he knew something Brandon didn't. "She's waiting for you just outside. If I might say so, sir, you and your assistant look absolutely smashing this evening. With Ms. Powers on your arm, you'll be the envy of the party."

Brandon observed the odd look upon Mr. Simmons' face but ignored it and walked quickly to his limousine waiting in front of the hotel.

## CHAPTER 2

The minute Brandon's eyes gazed upon Adina, he understood Mr. Simmons' devilish look. Adina looked like a goddess. He gasped before he knew it. She wore his favorite color and she wasn't aware of it.

He watched with naked hunger as she stepped back from him. "Mr. Montgomery, we should go. We should have left twenty minutes ago."

Snapping back to reality, Brandon heard his voice give away his lack of control. "Ah, yeah, let's go."

While sitting in such close proximity to each other in the limousine, Adina turned her head and peered through her window while Brandon gazed with unguarded eyes at his assistant.

This surely couldn't be his Ms. Adina Powers. This wasn't the same woman, it couldn't be. His brain warred with the two images of Adina Powers. The woman sitting inches from him was beautiful.

The kind of woman a man would kill for. He pondered over why he'd never noticed her enticing lips before? Or why he'd never really looked into those eyes cut from black diamonds? How come it never dawned on him how good she smelled! Why was he all of a sudden wanting not to go to this dinner but instead do something

more private and a helluva lot more intimate with this suddenly desirable woman sitting next to him?

He could feel how nervous he was making her. He just didn't care. The way she kept her eyes averted and her head turned away pulsed over his senses how he was making her nervous. Even when she spoke, her words were cautious.

"Mr. Montgomery, I hear almost everyone has accepted your invitation to tonight's event. Except for a few out-of-towners, everyone will be in attendance."

For some dark reason Adina's voice sounded so sexy and alluring. More so than normal. He really had to clamp down on this hunger that was building inside of him. He cloaked his face with a unreadable expression. "Yes, Ms. Powers. It's going to be a good turn out if I do say so myself. Well, here we are."

The limousine pulled in front of the Saleese Auditorium, a magnificent work of refurbished history. Once it had been a grand opera theater during the turn of the century. Possessing an old quality even in its grand days. With so many owners and real estate being so scarce, it became neglected. Until about five years ago. The Brandon Montgomery Group and The Bastille Foundation raised money to refurbish it to its grandeur state. The Saleese Auditorium became a landmark and completely self sufficient from the year round functions it hosted.

Adina and Brandon departed the limousine and walked into the auditorium. Many people had already arrived. They made their way to the coat and hatcheck. Brandon removed his outer wear and handed it to the coat room attendant. He gestured for Adina to remove

her cloak.

She turned her back to him and removed the hood from over her hair. Then she unfastened the ribbons that secured the front of the cloak. When the last ribbon was loosened, Brandon gently placed his hands upon her shoulders and removed the cloak. While she walked away, he gave the cloak to the attendant and got the claim check. With her back still facing him, Brandon turned to look at her once more. "Oh my God!" he gasped.

She turned quickly to see what had upset him but instead looked upon a face showing an expression of total awe.

She moved closer. "Mr. Montgomery, what is it?"

"Nothing," he said with an inhaling breath. "It's just that dress you're wearing. It's breathtaking. I love it. I mean, I really love it. The dragon tattoo on your back is brilliant and the way it connects to your dress is incredible."

She was blushing. He watched as she struggled for composure, assuming compliments were something of a rarity for her to receive.

"Thank you, Mr. Montgomery. I tried to select something that would be appropriate for tonight. If you don't mind my saying...you look quite nice yourself...I really think we should head to our table."

Brandon stepped to the left side of Adina, put her arm through his, looked down at her lovely five-foot-six-inch frame and smiled warmly. He added with a silky purr, "Yes, Ms. Powers, we should."

They walked into the main ballroom and Brandon could feel the temperature rise. The seductive temptress on his arm literally drew the attention of every person in close proximity to them. As they made their way to his

assigned table, many business associates—male associates—saluted him, for his superb taste in escorts. He helped her with her chair and observed how she carried herself with an almost royal, regal stature. He knew if he could sense the glares and stares, then Adina had to be literally feeling the eyes lick over her. But not with so much as a nervous glance did she indicate her acknowledgment of it. Quickly, he took his seat next to her and began holding rudimentary conversations with the other guests at his table. As he listened absently to dry, boring conversations about the finance business, he hoped he didn't look too obvious in his efforts not to stare at his own assistant.

After about fifteen minutes, the official introductions were made and everyone applauded Brandon Montgomery and then settled down to enjoy their extremely high priced dinner.

The meal was served and gobbled up by all who were there. Everything that was supposed to be hot was hot; everything that was supposed to be cold was cold. The desert trays were circling the dining room and both Adina and Brandon selected something fun. Hot fudge sundaes.

While she ate, Brandon stole a quick, unguarded glance at her. He watched how she ate. It was so erotic. The way her tongue darted out to taste the cream, how her lips opened invitingly to take the whole spoonful of dessert into her mouth was turning him on.

Brandon felt a groan creeping through his throat. He caught it, but couldn't catch the involuntary shudder that pricked him when he saw Adina delicately lick her fingers when some of the fudge landed on them by mistake. He turned quickly so she wouldn't catch him staring.

In doing so, he immediately noticed he was not the



only one watching Adina eat her dessert. Since taking their seats, the blatant, but discreetly camouflaged leering had been under control by most of the males at the table, but it was shockingly clear now that discretion wasn't even in the running.

There were at least twelve other men staring at his intoxicating assistant and they were not so reserved in their thoughts. He could read their faces like an open book. They had pure, unadulterated hunger on their faces. And it wasn't for their food, it was for Adina. They were lusting for her.

How dare they look at her like that! Brandon suddenly felt a powerful surge of possession pulsate through him. She was his date not theirs. He actually started contemplating how good it would feel to punch all of them in their noses. But being the shrewd businessman that he was, he decided against it. Instead, he made them all envious when he turned to her and said, "Oh, Ms. Powers, you have a little cream on the side of your lip. Here, let me get that for you."

He raised his napkin and gently removed it. Just touching her made his pulse quicken. He knew the other men had to be feeling it too. She smiled her alluring smile and leaned in towards him.

"Thank you, but maybe I've had enough. I think I'll go and freshen up. I'll meet you in the dance hall." As he rose to help her with her chair, she quickly cut in, "Please don't, stay and finish your dessert."

Her undeniable scent drifted passed his nose. A combination of vanilla and a flowery erotic fragrance. Almost too much. He never thought a woman could leave him feeling so off balance, but Ms. Adina Powers was definitely not one's average woman by any means.

When Brandon was having problems with his interpreters quitting on him in the middle of his key negotiations with top corporate leaders from other countries, he knew he had to nip that in the bud fast.

All the other interpreters had no backbone or self-determination. But when the agency sent Adina Powers, he took one look at this unassuming woman and thought she'd last about a minute. But to his surprise, she had spunk and plenty of it.

He never liked getting too close to his employees, it wasn't good business. But having to keep extremely long hours in important negotiations with foreign corporate leaders, he found himself depending on Adina's sharp wit and her ability to think on her feet when anticipating his needs.

Not once in the past six months had he ever considered her a desirable woman. She never wore any makeup, except for faint, wine colored lipstick. Her hair was always in a tight conservative bun. She was never seen without her reading glasses gently hanging from her nose. Her business attire was just that, business—earth tone colors, long skirts or slacks. There was never even a hint she possessed a drop dead gorgeous body under all those layers of clothing. He wasn't sure she had a steady guy in her life and until tonight, he hadn't cared.

He knew little about her personal life outside of work. And speaking of work, she was exemplary—her mastery of language magnificent. She could easily go from French to Russian to Japanese to Portuguese to Italian to Czech to Spanish to English with grace and flare. Adina was a master at work. She once mentioned, one day when they were on his private jet, that she even spoke a little Klingon.

It had never occurred to him just how she came to master so many languages at such a young age. Did she start as a child or just have a gift for it?

All at once Brandon realized Adina Powers was the biggest enigma he'd ever come across. He was almost obsessed with knowing more about her.

Little did he know, fate was just about to step in and gently push him over the edge.

Brandon finished his dessert and strolled with an assured masculine grace into the adjoining ballroom. It was a huge dance hall. The kind one remembered from those old Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movies on the late show. It had beautiful, teardrop crystal, hanging chandeliers, and a stage for a live orchestra and all the walls were covered in fine tapestries from Asia. The lights were dimmed slightly to give the room an even more opulent aspect.

Brandon was heading toward the orchestra leader to request a song, when one of his business associates cut him off. "Brandon, my man, how are you?"

Brandon looked at the man and smiled warm and appreciatively, realizing it was Keith Fields, C.E.O. of Pantex, one of the world's largest distributors of computer software.

"Oh, hello. I'm fine. Good of you to make it. Are you enjoying our lovely city of Montreal?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact I am. I rarely get to travel anymore since I was transferred to our main office back in the U.S."

Brandon's tie suddenly began to irritate him. "So that's where you've been hiding. No wonder I haven't seen you at the ski lodge in a while."

He watched his friend Keith's eyes widen to the point

of overflowing, as he realized that he kept well informed about his business associates and their habits. "Look, ah...Brandon, my man, this ski lodge business, let's keep that just between us, shall we? I really don't want the wife hearing about it. She's bleeding me dry in the divorce settlement. If she hears I have a private ski lodge my accountant doesn't even know about, I'm dead in the water."

Brandon looked at Keith with eyes as clear as the words from his mouth. "Keith, now really, do you think I'd stoop so low as to air your dirty laundry?" He said his next sentence with lowered lids and a cat-like smile. "Never, never, dear friend."

"Well, Brandon, one can never be too careful. That soon to be ex-wife of mine has spies everywhere."

Brandon decided to change the subject, feeling secure he'd just obtained a new ally to take advantage of at some future date. "If you are lucky, Keith, you may still find that once-in-a-lifetime love. Don't give up hope just yet," he said with a light chuckle.

Keith spotted a friend over Brandon's shoulder and motioned him over. Brandon turned to see George Deveroux coming. "Now that's old money," Keith complimented enviously. "The Deverouxes are one of the oldest families in Montreal and Paris. They have holdings in practically every country in the world. They keep the control in the family so tight, that about fifty years ago it was rumored they were committing incest so no control ever left the hands of the immediate family."

Brandon noticed George coming within hearing distance of the conversation and Keith quickly stretched out his hand. "George, so good of you to make it. I'd like you to meet one of the sponsors of tonight's fundraiser.

"This is Brandon Montgomery."

Brandon extended his hand. "Good evening, sir. I hope you're enjoying yourself."

"I certainly am," George replied. "This is a lovely building. It's a warm and serene location. Seeing it was worth the price of admission."

Brandon continued, "I'm so glad you like the Saleese Auditorium. But be careful, my friend, it just may steal your heart."

George gave a hearty laugh. "God, I hope not. I doubt if there's love at first sight anymore..."

Brandon blinked suddenly as he observed how George's voice abruptly trailed off. Quickly eyeing Keith, they both followed George's eyes until they too witnessed the vision of breathtaking loveliness who had left George momentarily speechless.

"Damn! Who's that and how can I meet her?" George demanded.

Keith quickly agreed with him and admitted, "Yes, she is astonishing, isn't she? If I wasn't going through a messy divorce and feared it would get back to my wife, I'd whisk that little beauty out of here. Brandon, you seem to know or know of everyone here tonight. Who is that woman?"

Brandon slowly unclenched his fists. He couldn't believe how close he was to hitting someone tonight. Keith's sly comments were really getting on his damned nerves.

Just when he thought he'd gotten himself under control, George unknowingly added more fuel to his simmering frustration. He blurted, "I know that woman. I don't have to be introduced. I'd know that sultry, red-brown skin anywhere. And those lips! Lips that can

unleash a smile capable of crippling a man's soul. That's Adina Brianna Powers!"

Brandon stood with his mouth agape; he never even considered Adina had a middle name. But what really rubbed him funky was that this George person knew her better than he and possibly on a more intimate level. Brandon asked on a rushed breath, "So, Ms. Powers, you know her?"

George answered but never once took his eyes off Adina. "Know her....if you mean intimately, no, not exactly." Brandon was relieved some, but curiosity started smacking his brain around and he wanted to know more. George explained, "She used to live in Paris, France a few years back. Her family moved around a lot due to her father being in the United States Military and he was transferred around Europe a great deal. By the way, I know her sister, Cookie Powers. She's older and just as bloody gorgeous."

George began to strain his neck as he lost sight of Adina then he sighed dreamily as he added, "Cookie and myself were in the same fourth year dance and music appreciation class. We were often partnered together due to our height and natural chemistry. Adina caught on quickly in her classes and was moved to the advanced classes with her sister and myself."

George casually slipped his hands into his pockets, turned again to Brandon and finished, "Both she and her sister could set a dance floor on fire. Being the only Negro, eh...black women in the class, they couldn't be missed. Both moved with haunting eroticism. You literally couldn't take your eyes from them. Cookie'd tell me it was the Brazilian blood that coursed through their veins that made them want to move."

Brandon was about to make a comment when Adina finally spotted him and started to make her way towards him.

She hadn't meant to be gone so long but she wanted to freshen up. She noticed the two men standing near Brandon and casually walked over giving them a chance to finish their conversation without feeling rushed to do so. Her gown flowed all around her, giving her the illusion of gliding across the floor. Her step was light and graceful and she had no problem gaining attention as she made her way through the crowd.

Men were looking at her with desire plain on their faces and envy for whomever she was making her way to. Adina smiled her seductive smile at the men who were able to catch her eye. She'd almost forgotten the raw power she naturally possessed over men. She felt a little embarrassed but held her head up and continued through the crowd.

Brandon didn't miss those hungry looks the other men were giving his Adina. *Bloody hell!* What was he thinking? He was acting like she was *his* woman. His blood began to smolder slowly. He needed to keep his emotions in check. The only problem was he wasn't sure his blood was heating up because of the men looking at Adina or the woman herself. He didn't like feeling off-balance.

Adina made her way to the men, stopped directly in front of Brandon and looked up at him. "Mr. Montgomery, let me apologize for taking so long in the powder room."

Brandon looked down at her and smiled, then turned

his attentions to the two men and introduced his assistant to Keith and George. "Ms. Powers, that's perfectly fine. Please, don't concern yourself with thoughts of inconveniencing me. Here, I'd like you to meet two of tonight's contributors, Keith Fields and George Deveroux. Gentlemen, my foreign language interpreter and assistant, Ms. Adina Powers."

Keith took her hand to shake.

Then George took her hand to his lips, kissed it and mischievously replied, "Hello, Little Raven."

Adina tensed immediately at the sound of her nickname and pulled her hand away with great haste. Quickly she sensed that Brandon had caught the abrupt change in her body language. As she watched him lazily drop his lids over his smoky gray eyes, she knew instantly he was very irritated about something.

She stepped back a little to compose herself then asked calmly, "Mr. Deveroux, please forgive my reaction, but it's been a while since anyone has used my nickname. How do you know of it?"

George straightened to his full height of six-feet-two inches then smiled gently. "Excuse me, I didn't mean to embarrass you. Your sister, Cookie, always called you that in our dance class in Paris. You probably don't recognize me without my beard."

Adina studied George's face with great intensity, as though trying to see into his soul. He was an attractive man in his early thirties. His eyes were a deep blue with big black onyx centers. They could easily put a woman in a trance if she stared at them too long. Her own eyes scanned the length of him slowly and her mind instantly thought of a jaguar lean, graceful. The way he smiled



down at her, how classically regal he stood, suddenly reminded her of someone she knew.

Her eyes enlarged immensely as she put his face to a name from her past, but it wasn't the name of George Deveroux, but a nickname she'd called him all those years ago. "Jazzy," she whispered. "Is it really you?"

George stepped closer and answered, "*Oui*, Little Raven, it's me, Jazzy."

Adina screamed with joy and her face lit up like a Christmas tree. She flung her arms around his neck. George lifted her off her feet and swung around and around until she laughed with joy and gasped as she pleaded, "Jazzy, put me down. I'm getting dizzy! Please, please!"

He stopped and set her lightly to the floor. "Oh, Jazzy, how could you," she breathed, "but thank you. It's been a long time since I've laughed like that."

"It's always a pleasure, my love."

Still smiling as she turned her eyes upon the other men, she blushed when Keith replied lightly, "You were right, George. She did remember you."

"Ms. Powers, you never mentioned being so well acquainted with such influential people," Brandon added.

"Jazzy, eh...I mean, Mr. Deveroux and I grew up for a while in Paris. He's a sight for sore eyes."

Swiftly, Adina directed her conversation back to George and informed him that Cookie was in Montreal and would love to see him and that she was waiting for her back at the hotel.

"That's great. I'd adore seeing her again. What's she doing now?"

Adina smiled joyously and said, "What else, Jazzy? You know she's a slave to fashion, especially her own

designs. She has a design boutique. It's been open less than a year, but you and I both know my sister. She will make it a success even if it kills her."

"So Cookie started her own clothing design business. I'm happy for her. She deserves all the success she can hold on to." He paused, grasped Adina by the shoulders and eyed her more closely. "And I can tell just by looking at your gown, she created it. Please, turn around. I want to see the back." Adina modeled graciously and as she turned, caught a raw look of irritability in Brandon's eyes and shuddered. She hoped she hadn't done anything inappropriate. "God, woman, you're hot and your dragon is exquisite,"

"Thank you, Jazzy. Since I have the dragon for life, I like to show it off every once in a while." She paused as her ears tingled. "Oh, listen, they're playing one of my favorite songs. Please, Jazzy, would you honor me with a short dance around the hall?"

Adina couldn't hold back a soft giggle as George pulled her passionately into his arms. She felt herself gliding smoothly to the dance floor and swaying throughout the crowd of other guests like they were the only two people who existed.

Brandon watched this man, this total stranger, get more familiar with his assistant by the second. They moved with great heat and desire. Just then, it dawned on him what he was starting to feel. It wasn't anger, but jealousy. He didn't want to accept it but it was the one name that fit the turmoil of emotions he found himself experiencing.

Adina looked so beautiful and sexy. And the way she looked up at George, with such raw longing and intense

passion. He wanted her to look at him that way. He wanted to make her laugh until she was dizzy. He wanted her to smile her sensuous smile just for him. He wanted her. And that bit of news unnerved him more than anything else had all night.

George and Adina's flawless interpretation of the Tango, eventually summoned the attention of the other guests who had simply stopped dancing in order to watch them.

Feeling uncomfortable for drawing attention to herself, she was after all, suppose to be working, Adina begged pardon to George and asked if he'd escort her from the floor.

Noticing her abrupt change in mood, George relented, but not until he gained her promise to join him for some real dirty dancin' after the fundraiser dinner at some of the night clubs around Montreal. Knowing her old friend would enjoy seeing her sister again. Adina mentioned she'd invite Cookie along as well.

He escorted her back to Brandon who'd never once taken his eyes from his assistant. He had to agree with George about one thing, Adina could move on a dance floor. Her moves lured men's eyes to her. She was graceful and so damn sexy, yet she made it look so natural. As if she had no idea of her affect upon men.

Brandon didn't get a chance to dance with Adina. Once she rejoined him, they worked the room as host and interpreter, moving through the crowd of guests, thanking all for their generous and much appreciated donations to help the homeless. With the steady traffic of people moving through the ballroom, they were kept

overwhelmingly busy. Although, whenever there was a slowing of the 'thank yous and, 'we'll get together soon to discuss the possibility of doing business together', Brandon found himself admitting, more than once that in his short encounter with Mr. George Deveroux, he'd learned more about his assistant, Ms. Adina Powers. And to him, the information was worth every clammy handshake he'd have to endure before the night was over.

With the evening finally winding down, Brandon and Adina decided to return to the hotel. "The line is getting long. I'll start heading over there and you contact the driver," Brandon said.

"By the time you return, he should be outside." Adina reached into her small purse and pulled out her cell phone. "Cookie, it's me."

"How'd it go?" Cookie asked.

"It was incredible. Hey, you'll never guess who I ran into."

"Who?"

"Jazzy. Yep, that's right. I couldn't believe it either. He wants to get together tonight. Go dancing."

"My God, Adina, I haven't seen him in years. Where're you guys meeting up?"

"He's coming by the hotel. Come with us, Cookie. It'll be like old times."

"Hell yeah, I'm coming. I'd love to hang tonight. Say, I hope you don't mind, I invited a few friends over to keep me company while I waited for you at your hotel room. Think it'd be cool if they tagged along?"

"Sure, the more the merrier. Mr. Montgomery is coming back with my wrap. I'll see you back at my room." Just as she returned her phone to her purse,

George Deveroux walked up to her.

“Great news, Jazzy. Just got off the phone with Cookie back at the hotel. Told her you were stopping by and we were going out.”

“Don’t tell me she’s coming, too?” She nodded happily. “This has turned out to be a wonderful evening so far.” He pulled her into a warm embrace and gave her a light kiss on the cheek. “See you tonight.”

Suddenly remembering the driver, Adina reached for her phone again. Brandon was upon her so quickly she jumped a little. “Just got the driver. He’s waiting for us now.” As he assisted her with her wrap, an anxious chill stroked her as Brandon remained stoic and silent and escorted her to the car.

## CHAPTER 3

The tension in the limousine on the way back to the hotel was grueling. Adina couldn't stand it. "Mr. Montgomery, please forgive me for what I'm about to say—but what's wrong with you? Your fundraiser was a perfect success. You made the goal that was set, yet no one would be able to tell just by looking at you. Did something happen at the dinner that I should know about? Maybe I can help you correct it on Monday."

Brandon wanted at that very moment to kiss Adina until her lips fell off. The tension she sensed was not because he had had an awful night but rather, he was using every ounce of restraint he owned to keep from taking her into his arms and ravishing her.

He had to diffuse the situation so with a ragged voice he said, "Tonight was great. And no, nothing happened that I didn't expect." That was a bold faced lie and the understatement of the decade.

Adina breathed deeply and sighed. "Oh, good. I'm so glad. I would've hated for your night to have been ruined after all your hard work." She paused to change the subject. "It was great seeing Jazzy again. Seeing him brought back such nice memories of my time in Europe.

Cookie will be thrilled to see him when he comes for us later on tonight.”

That did it. That was the final straw. Brandon momentarily lost control and overreacted. “What did you say?”

The loud volume of his piercing words startled Adina and she blinked with unexpected nervousness. “Ah...Mr. Montgomery...didn't I mention that Jazzy is coming by the hotel tonight to take my sister and I out on the town for some night life and dancin’?” Adina realized that maybe she shouldn't have accepted Jazzy's invitation so quickly. She didn't bother to check with Mr. Montgomery to see if he still needed her. She continued in a questioning manner, “Mr. Montgomery...I'm sorry, was there anything else you required of me tonight? I really didn't think I needed to check with you since you hadn't mentioned any negotiation meetings scheduled for tomorrow?”

Brandon immediately noticed he'd put Adina on the defensive. To deflate the building tension, he said in a calm, soft voice, “Please, Ms. Powers, let me apologize for snapping at you just now. I didn't mean to make you hesitant and no, I don't want you for anything else this evening.” Another lie. He wanted her so badly he thought he'd go mad. “I just assumed you'd be tired from the dinner and would want to get to bed early.”

Adina blushed softly. “Normally, I would agree with you but when I was dancing, it brought back so many delicious memories that I just gotta get out and move to the music again.

“I love to dance and if Jazzy had suggested anything other than dancing, I would've declined his invitation tonight.” She paused a moment then said, “Do you have

any plans this evening or are you calling it an early night?"

Brandon marveled at how Adina's face just lit up as she spoke of going dancing. At that moment, she was the most captivating woman he'd ever seen.

"Well, no. I don't have any other plans for this evening. Besides, you sound like you'll be having enough fun and excitement for the both of us."

Adina's smile grew wider as if she had come upon a revelation. "Mr. Montgomery, why don't you join us? I'm sure Jazzy won't mind."

In her overzealous excitement, she reached out and squeezed his arm tightly. Her touch rippled shock waves through every nerve in his body. If her hand could do that to him, imagine what making love to her would be like?

Brandon had every intention of declining Adina's invite, but after his explosive reaction to her touching his arm, he wouldn't have said no for anything in the world. He looked deeply into her black diamond eyes and held her gaze, then smiled his crooked smile, nodded his head and said, "I may just do that, Little Raven."

Adina blushed up to the roots of her hair. "Mr. Montgomery, that's not fair. You know of my nickname but I don't know yours."

"I don't have one. So, to make everything even again, why don't we call each other by our first names?"

"That's fair, but is it appropriate? We are still employer and employee," she reasoned.

Brandon wanted to see her smile again more than anything so holding her gaze, he said, "Tonight, we'll just be two friends out having a good time. Since friends definitely call each other by their given names, I think that



will make it appropriate. Besides, it's only for one night."

"All right...Brandon," Adina said, as if trying his name on to see how it fit.

"Okay, Adina." They smiled and started to laugh.

They reached the hotel and quit to their suites. Brandon changed into his favorite pair of tattered jeans and a starched white, linen, short sleeve shirt. He changed into a more comfortable pair of shoes. He pulled out a beat up, weather worn, black leather jacket and put it on. He checked his appearance once more in the mirror, then headed downstairs to the lobby to wait for everyone to come down.

When Adina got into her room Cookie was the only one there. She was dying to hear how her dress went over with the crowd.

While Adina quickly showered, she told her sister how every eye—male eye that is—was admiring her beautiful dress. It went over like a smash. She also mentioned that she'd better get ready to receive a lot of phone calls about her designs, because she gave her name and phone number to everyone who'd asked her about the designer of her dress. Cookie mentioned that Paul and Maxie would wait for them downstairs. Cookie explained to Adina they wanted to give her a little privacy to change her clothes.

Adina was all prepared to wear a simple loose fitting pants outfit, but Cookie took one look at it, and came up with a much better outfit for her kid sister to wear. She ended up wearing an all black creation that Cookie made. The pants had the appearance of being skin tight to the ankle. At the waist was connecting suspenders with silver and gold rhinestones embedded throughout the straps.

Her breasts were covered in a strapless brassiere with matching rhinestones embroidering the entire front. Her shoulders were bare, save the suspenders. She finished the ensemble off with a midriff, black Bolero jacket and mid-thigh, leather boots.

By the time Cookie and Adina descended to the lobby, everyone had arrived and were exchanging pleasantries and names. Brandon took one look at Cookie and Adina and immediately recognized the resemblance. Like George had said earlier at the dinner party, Cookie was just as 'bloody gorgeous'.

He stared at Adina for a long moment, drinking in her crimson brown skin with piercing golden highlights, her full lips that created one helluva kissable mouth. Those eyes that could see right into a man's soul. And that body! *Damn!*

Her legs were long and fluid, thick hips that possessed a curve that was enticing. Her breasts were full and well formed to fit perfectly in a man's hand. She had the neck of a swan. And her hair was as black and shiny as the mane of an Arabian mare. She was magnificent.

Cookie, Paul and Maxie had driven motorcycles to the hotel. They decided who would pair off with whom for the ride to the club.

"Paul," Cookie said, "Let Maxie ride with you. I'll take Jazzy, and Adina and Mr. Montgomery can ride to the club on Maxie's bike."

"Please, Cookie, call me Brandon," he beseeched. "Your idea sounds great, there's just one problem—I can't drive a motorcycle."

All laughed at Brandon for assuming the men would be doing the driving. Adina smiled softly up at him and

explained, "I'll be doing the driving. You'll be safe with me." She turned to Maxie and added, "I hope your bike's a Harley. Ain't nothin' like strapping your thighs around one of those babies. The sensation is better than any vibrator ever invented."

Maxie laughed out loud. "You said it, sister. Come on, people, let's move! I'm ready to shake my ass, yeah!"

Paul howled, and Cookie shouted, "Well, let's do the damn thang!"

They drove around Montreal, taking in all of the sights and night life. The air was electric and alive. Everyone was in a great mood. The stars were out and sparkling giving the sky a brilliant, mystical glow. They paused at a stoplight to decide which club they would go to.

"I say, we go to Hot Chili's," Paul said.

"It's too damn small and the central air is always on the fritz," Cookie said.

"Well, I don't know 'bout you guys, but I'm so feeling The Phantom right now," Maxie suggested.

"Now you're talking, girlfriend," Cookie said. "Last one there buys the first round." The light turned green and Cookie took off like a shot.

The Phantom was the one of the hottest nightclubs in Montreal. The building was made of black bricks. The sign was a fluorescent gray. It had once been a warehouse back in the thirties. The original owner was a bit on the obscure side. His favorite colors were black and gray.

When he sold the building eight years ago, he had only one stipulation upon the sale; never ever change the interior of the building or its color scheme. The new owners thought it a strange demand but were getting the

property at such a steal, they complied.

Later, the new owners were grateful they'd listened to the previous owner. When they opened the Phantom Nightclub, people came in and never wanted to leave. The interior had a creepy feel to it. Dancers got so lost in the music, they would often comment that the gray hues throughout the building helped them enjoy their experience even more. Tonight, The Phantom would claim two more unsuspecting people...Adina and Brandon.

Cookie and Jazzy were leading the riders to The Phantom. Maxie and Paul were behind them and Adina and Brandon were bringing up the rear. The women were doing the actual driving of the bikes.

Brandon was holding onto Adina's waist very tightly. He wasn't sure why he was, she was an excellent driver and very careful. Maybe it was because this had been the first time he'd ever touched her in such an intimate fashion. He liked the feel of her, soft and warm. Her waist was so tiny he had to remind himself to be careful and not hold so tightly, he didn't want to bruise her.

Adina was all aglow. Her face was full of passion and sensuality. With Brandon's arms around her, she began to warm all over. It hadn't occurred to her just how large Brandon's hands were until just at that moment. It gave her a feeling of being so small and fragile. She could feel his chest against her back and liked it.

Her mind began to wonder about what type of man he was when he wasn't working. It was hard to imagine him doing anything else. She wondered if he had a woman somewhere waiting for him. Then she dismissed

that thought. She didn't like it. He never talked much about his family or if he even had any living relatives.

She did know this much about him, he was a hands-on self-made millionaire. He made his money the old-fashioned way, he earned it. Funny, Adina had never given much thought to the people she was assigned to interpret for. But tonight, she was thinking of Brandon in an intimate manner and didn't feel a bit uncomfortable about it.

By the time the gang arrived at The Phantom, it was packed to overflowing. There were people everywhere, the music was loud and rhythmic, and one could literally feel the beat vibrating through the body. They quickly found two abandoned tables and staked their claim. They ordered drinks and watched the dancers for a while.

All that could be seen were bobbing heads and intertwined bodies. There was no color, no gender, no tension, no caution, just music. The kind of music that made one want to scream and move and shake and feel bodies touching bodies. This place was hypnotic!

George and Maxie couldn't wait—they hit the dance floor only after one drink. They let go and moved provocatively to the beat of the music. Paul didn't even ask Cookie, he just pulled her by the arm to the floor. They too became lost and threw caution and restraint to the four winds. It was incredible.

The only ones left at the tables were Adina and Brandon. She was moving in her seat. The beat of the music was too much for her to sit there idle. Brandon watched how her eyes sparkled and took on a sheen of exotic fever. He'd never seen anything like it. Primitive.

Adina caught Brandon looking at her and held his gaze. She noticed for the first time he wasn't wearing a business suit. She scanned his six-foot-four inch frame and liked what she saw. His holey jeans hugged his thighs. His white linen shirt made his bronzed skin glow in the club light. His arms looked strong and inviting.

Oh, and that face, with those hypnotic gray eyes and long thick lashes and his attractive cheek and jaw bones. Ah, must not forget his mouth, she reminded herself. His lips were full and truly kissable. He was, without question, a good looking man. At that moment, she wondered how it would feel to have his lips capture hers.

Brandon wasn't sure if it was the music or Adina, but he knew he couldn't sit there any longer, he had to move. "Adina, this place is great!" he said loudly. "Do ya wanna dance?"

"Brandon, I thought you'd never ask. I was about to ask you. I couldn't wait any longer." They jumped from their seats and made their way to the floor.

The floor was crowded. Everyone was packed like sardines but no one seemed to mind. The song changed and everyone gave a howl. All the people started moving with a seductive zeal. With so many people on the floor, Brandon had to get very close to Adina. She didn't mind nor did she care, suddenly lost in the music. Her eyes darkened with savage heat. She was somewhere beyond the mere confines of her body.

He caught that look and got so aroused, his sex started to harden. His body was betraying him; his hands reached for her hips so he could catch her rhythm.

To his surprise, she put her hands on his and pulled him closer and they moved together. Adina was gyrating and pumping her body up against his. She leaned her upper body away from him and he saw her breasts swell beyond the confines of her embroidered brassiere. Her stomach was pressed against his and her body heat escalated. The tendons in her neck stood out in bold relief as she tilted her head back. She presented a wicked image, an enticing image.

Brandon couldn't take it anymore. He slipped one hand from her hips and placed it around the small of her back. He pulled her up gently, but firmly. She came closer and snaked her arms around his neck.

Her gaze locked with his. She licked her lips and Brandon's reserve crumbled. He couldn't hold back any longer. He picked her up by the waist and instinctively she wrapped her long legs around his back, locking them with her ankles. They caught the other's rhythm and became one on the dance floor.

Brandon was overjoyed. She was in his arms. Her sleek, lithe legs were wrapped around his body and he was making her laugh. His body was betraying him again but this time, he didn't care.

His hands moved all over her, starting with her neck, moving to her shoulders then down to her sides, where they gently grazed her breasts, sending a shudder through both of them. Tonight there were no rules, only music and pleasure.

Adina felt Brandon's head lower to her shoulder, burrowing into the gentle curve of her neck. His nostrils flared as he breathed in the smell of her.

She felt his groan throughout her whole body. She

moaned softly and he pulled away to look into her face. Sparks flew between them.

Before he could think, his body reacted to her. His cock hardened to an almost painful degree. Brandon fused Adina's mouth with his. He couldn't stop himself. He was lost completely in his desire. He was drowning in the softness of her lips, felt tidal wave after tidal wave of warmth surge through his body. He had to have more. His tongue brushed over her lips, silently tempting her to open.

He felt Adina surrender to his gentle invasion. Oh God, her mouth was so sweet and wet. Brandon kissed her until he no longer knew where he ended and she began. His reaction was something he had never experienced. She was a feast that he had fasted for all his life.

Adina wasn't in any better frame of mind or emotional state than Brandon. Her body committed mutiny the second his hands touched her hips. Her breasts swelled, her nipples hardening as she pressed and formed into his powerful body. Knowing she couldn't fight it, she let go and enjoyed it.

Good Lord, did this man know how to kiss. Every turn and twist of his long tongue drugged her. Every time she thought he couldn't take her any higher, he'd deepen the kiss and sent her head spinning. And when he clamped his lips around her tongue and sucked it, she knew she'd simply expire right in his arms.

She felt how her moans affected him. Suddenly his hands were everywhere. When they closed around her ass, her arms tightened around his neck. It was as if they couldn't get enough of each other.



Reality reared its annoying head and Brandon released her mouth slowly, as though it was the hardest thing he ever had to do in his life. Adina strained to focus as she observed the flame of desire she'd ignited in him and wondered if he could he see the volcano of passion he'd erupted in her.

They started to blush profusely. She unwrapped her legs and set them to the floor. Brandon's cock was still hard as Italian marble and Adina felt its head just below her breasts. She wanted to melt right there on the floor.

She noticed that the music changed to a slower rhythm and the dance floor cleared some. *Put a little distance between us.* Her arms slid down from his neck and right away she knew Brandon suspected her intentions. Abruptly she found herself swallowed up in his massive embrace. As her hands became pinned between their bodies, Adina realized that Brandon was not ready for it to be over. His eyes had changed. She was trapped in his dark silver pools as raw hunger pulsed off of him. The rapid beat of his heart under her hands tapped out a rhythm of pure need.

She found she couldn't pull herself away. As they continued to dance, she let the serene joy of feeling so safe in his arms, wash over her.

"So," Cookie shouted, apparently realizing that was the only way they were going to acknowledge her. "You two sure look like you're having a good time. I saw you guys dancing a few minutes ago and you looked great."

Brandon and Adina snapped back to reality and drew their hands away from each other and turned to face the others.

Brandon prayed his voice wouldn't give away the fact that pure savage desire was shooting down his veins for the woman who was just in his arms. "Eh, it was all Adina. I simply followed her lead. She's a fabulous dancer."

He knew his prayers had gone unanswered as he watched Cookie laugh. He sounded like an idiot. As Cookie continued, his face warmed with his embarrassment.

"Uh, huh, right, Brandon. You two were out here setting the dance floor on fire. And believe you me, that takes more than just following someone's lead. You two move with raw heat. It's either there or it's not."

Brandon glanced at Adina and knew her sister would show her little mercy as well. "And you, Little Raven, if you get any hotter than you are already are, I may have to break out a water hose to cool you off."

Adina's mouth opened in shock. *Was she that obvious?* "Hey, let's get some drinks. I'm thirsty," she said awkwardly.

Maxie joined the conversation. "Why don't you fellas order another round for us and we'll be right back."

"And where are you three going?" George inquired.

"To the Ladies Room," the ladies said in unison.

"I should've known," grumbled Paul. "Ladies, don't dally in there all night. It's getting late and I'm getting hungry."

Brandon finally got a grip on his senses and commented to the men as the ladies walked away, "Is it a genetic trait? Why do women always go to the bathroom

together?” The men stood looking at each other for a moment then shrugged their shoulders and headed back to their tables.

In the Ladies Room....

“So Adina, how do you like The Phantom?” asked Maxie.

“It's a wonderful club. The atmosphere is really hypnotic. I love it. You can really let go and turn your inhibitions lose,” said Adina, with a wicked smile.

Cookie replied to Adina while they checked their makeup and hair in the mirror, “I hope I didn't embarrass you too much out there but I just couldn't resist. You and Brandon looked so engrossed in each other, and that kiss! Girl, it's a wonder you have any lips left after he finished with you.”

“Cookie, you saw the kiss too? Damn, I was hoping you didn't.”

“Why, Adina? Anyone with eyes saw that kiss. It was volcanic.”

Adina groaned. “We shouldn't've let it happen but we couldn't control ourselves. Our bodies just got lost in the music.”

Cookie smiled. “If you don't mind me asking...did you like it?”

As Adina met her sister's eyes in the mirror, she could almost feel her lips vibrate from the memory. Suddenly she busied herself with washing her hands as Cookie said, “Don't bother answering. Your face said it all!”

The women joined the men again at their tables. They devoured three more rounds of drinks then hit the dance floor again. It was getting pretty late and everyone was

getting very hungry.

“No wonder I’m hungry.” Maxie said. “It’s four o’clock in the morning.”

Paul glanced over at Maxie’s watch. “Well, there won’t be too many good food joints open this time of the night.”

“Hell, I’d settle for drive through at this point,” Cookie offered.

“I refuse to end our perfect night, ordering some re-cooked burgers. Besides, I could really go for breakfast,” Jazzy said.

“Well, think of something, Mr. Man,” Cookie countered.

“I know of a place,” Brandon piped in. All hungry parties fixed their attention on him. “There’s this restaurant not far from here that’s still open and serves good food.”

“Well, what are we waiting for? You and Adina lead the way,” Paul said.

By the time they’d reached the motorcycles, Brandon had quickly dialed the restaurant and alerted them of his party’s late arrival.

As he hopped on the bike behind Adina, she asked, “Where are we going, Brandon?”

“Stray Cats,” he answered.

Adina started the engine. “I’ve never heard of it.”

“I have. It’s one of the most exclusive food joints around,” Jazzy said. Brandon observed how he was more than a little impressed. “Brandon, how’d you get us in there?”

He wrapped his arms around Adina’s waist and smiled smugly as she pulled out of the parking lot. “I own it.”

Stray Cats was the premier and exclusive eatery for the world's elite night owls. On any given night, one could find some of the world's wealthiest, influential or famous people sitting at the tables. No one got in without an *invitation*. The restaurant opened every night at eight o'clock and closed promptly at noon the next day.

The entire space was a buffet with chefs on standby at every station waiting to prepare any special orders.

When Brandon, Adina and the others walked in they were seated immediately. Brandon noticed everyone was impressed and even more amazed by who was in the restaurant eating right along with them.

"Is that Jack Nicholson over at the corner table?" Cookie asked, as she returned from the salad bar with her plate.

Brandon smiled at her. "I'd heard he was filming a new movie." He glanced around his own table. "Paul, Maxie, you two weren't kidding when you said you were hungry."

Paul was happily cutting into his lamb chop when he said, "I came here to eat. I can sight see later."

Thinking that was a good idea, Brandon and the others focused on the delicious food and their grumbling bellies.

Three hours had gone by when finally someone thought that getting home might be a good idea.

"I only mention it because Cookie is falling asleep on my shoulder," Paul said.

"I'm having such a damn good time. I just don't want it to end," she said.

“I know what you mean, Cookie,” Adina said. “I haven’t had a night out like this in years.” She turned to Brandon. “On behalf of myself, Cookie and the rest of the gang, I want to truly thank you for a wonderful night.”

“Well said, baby,” Maxie added. “Let’s get the bikes and get our gracious host and hostess back to their hotel.”

As they exited the restaurant, Brandon gently took Adina by the arm. With smoldering gray eyes he crooned. “The pleasure was indeed mine.”

## CHAPTER 4

Both Adina and Brandon were exhausted. They made their way through the lobby to the front desk to check for any messages. Then they quietly got on the elevator and went to their individual suites.

They had both been up literally twenty four hours without any sleep. Neither one wanted to comment on the kiss. It was too intimate, too overpowering to discuss on the elevator. Besides, each wanted to keep private the pleasure they felt from it.

Brandon didn't rise until well past two thirty. Adina didn't surface until almost four. Brandon called her room and asked her to meet him downstairs. He wanted to go over the details of tomorrow's meeting. He didn't want any unforeseen snags popping up that he wouldn't be prepared for.

They talked for several hours, making sure everything was ironed out for the meeting. Brandon glanced at his watch and it read eight forty-five.

"Wow, it's later than I thought," Brandon said. "As much as we ate this morning, I have the nerve to be a little hungry. Want to share a light dinner?"

"Now that you mention it, I could eat."

Brandon watched her adjust her reading glasses on her face. As she reached for her menu, he became aware of a tightening in his chest. His mind was going places it had no business going. He shook it off and focused on ordering his dinner.

As Brandon sprinkled pepper and dressing onto his chef salad, he asked, "Adina, are you sure I haven't forgotten anything? I feel like I have."

She looked up from her plate of pasta and answered, "No, Mr. Montgomery, you've not forgotten anything. We've covered all details of tomorrow's meeting."

It hit him like a brick in the head. His damned guidelines. He'd forgotten all about them. When he heard Adina use his surname, he knew what was shared between them last night and this morning was a fantasy and it was over. Reality was back and he needed to remember that.

Slowly he lifted a fork full of salad to his mouth. He felt uncomfortable and oddly sensed a twin sensation was coming from Adina. It was obvious by the way they had started to exchange basic dialogue. Not joyful, rambunctious banter like this morning. Why wouldn't she look at him? He wanted the relaxed, easy feeling they had this morning. Not this self imposed misery, they were inflicting and enduring from each other now. He tried to make it look as natural as possible and he had to give her credit for doing the same.

Before he knew it, Brandon was exhausted. He couldn't believe how much effort it took to pretend not to be attracted to her. Grasping at anything to take his mind off of wanting her, he glanced in her direction as she delicately concealed a yawn.



“I thought it was just me. I’m beat. I’m heading up.”  
“Me too,” she replied. “My suite is calling.”

Brandon was pacing in his room like a caged cat. He couldn't get Adina out of his head. She had even invaded his dreams this morning when he fell asleep. All he kept seeing was her. Every smell he smelled reminded him of her vanilla scented perfume with the hint of exotic flowers. Everything tasted bitter to him after dining on Adina's sweet, dewy mouth.

He could still feel the warmth of her body pulsating with his on the dance floor. He was working himself up into a heated frenzy. If he kept this up, he'd be too wired to conduct business tomorrow. He tried to think of something to take his mind off of her but nothing worked. His body wouldn't let him.

His arms ached to hold her. His lips needed to ravish her mouth once more. His dick throbbed against his belly, demanding to be satisfied. Brandon had to get a grip and fast. He wouldn't make it at the rate he was going.

He commanded all the discipline he possessed and took control of his runaway emotions and his traitorous body. He threw himself into a freezing cold shower then went into his bedroom and opened a window. He turned off the lights and stood naked at the window until he could think clearly again. He jumped into his bed and slept on top of the covers; he left the window open. He wasn't taking any chances.

Adina wasn't doing any better in her suite. She was writing some last minute notes for tomorrow's meeting but her mind kept straying off. She was having a difficult

time concentrating. She wanted to remember the details of the meeting, but her body wanted to remember Brandon.

She stood up abruptly from her desk and walked to her closet to check her suit for tomorrow. She accidentally knocked over the outfit she had worn that morning. She picked it up and immediately caught Brandon's scent in it. It was a combination of fresh cut wood, musk and soap. It was too much for her to handle. She put the outfit back in the closet and shut the door. She was fast losing her battle with her emotions and against her body.

She could still feel his large hands all over her and his warm breath on her neck as he inhaled her scent. She was all a tingle with the desire to be embraced in his powerful arms. Her lips had gone dry with the need for Brandon to capture and plunder her mouth and tongue again.

Her flesh was spasming with raw cravings to be filled by him. If she kept this up, she'd be a nervous wreck at the meeting tomorrow. She had to do something, but what? She paced around the room looking for something to do. Nothing was working.

As a desperate, last minute act, she went into the bathroom and started the cold water in the tub. A few moments later she returned with several buckets of ice. She poured the ice into the tub and got in.

She sat in the ice cube bath until every single cube melted. When she got out, she was freezing but at least her mind was clear. She slept naked in the big bed, with only the top sheet covering her wet skin. She wasn't taking any chances.

The meeting was going along without any unforeseen

snags. The ones that did rear their ugly heads were anticipated and diffused by Brandon and Adina. The meeting ended on a high note and another one was scheduled for Wednesday to iron out the final and most important details before the deal would be finally closed.

Brandon felt the walls of the hotel closing in on him and Adina. More than anything he wanted to get out. His back was tight and his knees were cramping. One look at his assistant told him she needed a few hours of escape as well.

As they walked back to the front desk to check for messages, he said. "The meeting was rough. More ways than one. I think I lost feeling in my left foot twice. I need to stretch my legs. Think I'm gonna walk for a bit then grab a bite." He loved how the mention of food always caught her attention.

"Just let me reply to this message I have and I'll walk with you. I could use some air to clear my head."

"I'll let the driver know to wait here and meet you outside."

As they walked from the hotel, a cold breeze brushed past them and caused Adina to shiver. Brandon noticed and had to catch himself from wrapping his arm around her. Redirecting his tension he said briskly, "Ms. Powers, I want to make sure Mr. Ocasí knows and understands that the cost to build this new complex will greatly increase if he uses the materials he demanded in the meeting."

Adina nodded her head in agreement and added, "Oh, sir, I know. If he decides he only wants one type of material, his costs will without a doubt triple. Besides, the blending of different types of materials as you suggested is safer, absolutely more cost efficient and less time

consuming.”

Brandon realized she'd made a very good point. “Ah yeah, let’s not forget about time. If he expects me to stay in budget and also meet his timeframe, he will have to reconsider the types of materials he wants to use. If I am locked into this deal with only one material at my disposal, I will literally have to travel all over the world just to keep well stocked for the construction of the complex. That alone could add an additional year to the timeframe.”

Adina sensed that he was getting agitated and changed the subject to get his mind off his troubles. “Look, over there, Mr. Montgomery, that seems like a good place to eat.”

He followed her hand and saw a little cozy restaurant. Her shivering must have been obvious as he added, “Let’s go before you freeze to death.”

“The temperature dropped so quickly. If you want to keep walking I can tough it out.” As he clasped her arm she realized that he too wanted to get out of the cold.

They crossed the street and walked inside.

The hostess sat them at a table and informed them someone would be by to take their order shortly. As Brandon helped her from her coat, Adina scanned her surroundings. It had low ceilings, bare red brick walls, soft dimmed lights and a big fireplace which gave it a warm, cozy, homey feeling. When Brandon took his seat across from her, Adina observed how he too was admiring the beauty of the space. Knowing how he had sincere commitment to the preservation of old buildings, Adina felt Brandon truly appreciated the classic architecture.

The waiter arrived and in unison they both barked, "Hot chocolate!"

The waiter smiled. "I think I will bring the chocolate to you in big mugs. You both look as though you need the chill knocked off."

Adina fought desperately to hide a blush as flashbacks of last night's desperate measures flipped through her mind. When she glanced at Brandon, she noticed that he too looked uncomfortable. When his eyes met hers, she got the strange feeling he understood her sudden need for hot chocolate.

"What are you having, Ms. Powers?" Brandon asked.

Adina studied her menu then made a few kooky looking faces and said, "Hmmm, I'm sorta leaning towards the roasted chicken with baby peas and a salad. And you?"

Brandon looked at Adina while her eyes were diverted in her menu. She looked so different this morning. Her hair was in its usual bun and her glasses were hanging on her nose. She was wearing her plain diamond stud earrings again. But today, in the bright light of day, he did notice something about her he'd overlooked the other night. She had one of the deepest dimples he'd ever seen. It was in her right cheek and practically hypnotized him. He couldn't stop staring at it.

Finally, the waiter came back with their hot chocolates and Brandon jumped back to his senses. The waiter took Adina's order then turned to Brandon for his. "Sir, our fish is excellent this time of the year. I recommend it if you're having trouble deciding."

Brandon was having trouble all right, but soon he had himself under control. "Ah, no. I think I'll have the

sautéed pork chops with a baked potato, sour cream and some corn on the side.”

“Good choice, sir.” The waiter added, “I will return shortly with your orders.”

They sat quietly, sipping their hot chocolates. Brandon from time to time glanced in Adina’s direction and noticed she was in deep thought. Almost as if she was in a kind of trance. He pondered why he’d never noticed how focused she became at times. And why all of a sudden he was finding it so damn sexy. He lowered his lids over his smoky, gray eyes to conceal the desire that had crept into them as he thought how much he wanted to take her into his arms and carry her to his bed and ravish her.

A crooked smile dawned on his chiseled features as he thought how he’d kiss her lips, caress her breasts, lick her neck and how much he’d adore to be buried deep inside her. Just these mere thoughts of her had him hard and aching.

He adjusted himself in his chair, trying not to be too obvious with his condition. It was getting quite taxing to remain unaffected whenever she was near him. Just last week, he barely noticed she existed. Now, he couldn’t keep from thinking about her.

Adina’s mind was somewhere entirely different than Brandon’s. She was thinking about the last time she had allowed herself to feel passion and how horribly the situation had ended. She told herself to never linger in the past—it can’t be changed, it can only teach one how to avoid the same problems in the future.

But had she learned her lessons well? She couldn’t deny any longer just how good it felt to be kissed by

Brandon. It had been over two and half years since she had allowed anyone to get close to her. The five year long relationship with Victor in Paris had ended terribly....

She had met him while waiting at a cafe for her sister, Cookie and their friend, Jazzy. They were to meet her for lunch, but they were running late. She decided to give them ten more minutes then she was going to find a phone, call and cancel. As she dug in her pocket for change to make the call, she dropped her book. A very handsome older gentleman came to her aid and picked it up. She was startled by him because he came out of nowhere. His features were striking. He looked to be about thirty. He stood just under six-feet. His body frame was medium, his muscles were noticeable, but not bulging. His eyes were an autumn brown with faint specks of violet. His lips were thin, his chin strong and he had a square jaw line and cheekbone.

He introduced himself and asked if he might join her at her table. She really didn't see any harm in it and agreed. They talked for about thirty minutes before she realized that Cookie and Jazzy had not arrived. She explained to the man that she had to leave. He looked so sad when she said she was leaving that they exchanged names and phone numbers. A week later she got a call from him.

They conversed on the phone for two whole weeks, before she gave her consent to go out on a date with him. Their first date was an average one, dinner and a movie. They walked around a lot and took in the Parisian nightlife. When he escorted her home, he insisted on seeing her again. She was a little hesitant, but agreed.

The next four months were wonderful for Adina. She

was seeing Victor almost every other day. He couldn't get enough of her. He mesmerized her. He was older and so wise and always treated her like a lady and never like a child. He took her opinions seriously and respected her wishes whenever possible. Adina thought Victor would be in her life forever and felt that he had given her so much. He gave her strength and courage to try new things and his wisdom. She wanted to give him a gift. Something that was only hers to give. She would give herself. Victor Millard would be her first lover.

Adina Brianna Powers had just turned twenty-one and felt it was time to experience womanhood. She had the body of a woman, now it was time to become one. She was nervous, but so excited. She couldn't think of anyone more deserving of her gift of love and devotion. She expressed her intentions with her sister, Cookie.

"Adina," Cookie asked with concern. "are you sure?"

"Yes. I want to do this. I want Victor to be the first." Adina eyed her sister wearily and immediately knew what she was assuming. "It's not what you're thinking."

"And what am I thinking?" Cookie stated a little annoyed.

"That I'm being pressured, that he wants me and I'm trying to please him." Adina grabbed her sister's arm to console her as she continued, "He really and truly has not pressured me and I'm ready. I love him...I want him," she replied softly.

Cookie looked into Adina's eyes and smiled. "Well, if you are this determined, I think it's time you received a little talk about what to expect from one's first time with a man." It was a rather funny conversation. Adina knew well what a man and a woman did together. She just never let on how much. By the time the conversation



ended, it was Cookie who had received the education.

Adina and Victor went out Friday night. They mixed it up this time though. They went bowling and roller skating, then stopped for a quick bite to eat. As always, he escorted her back to her apartment. She invited him in and he made himself comfortable. She joined him after a moment or two.

They sat quietly in front of the fireplace. When she felt confident enough she said softly, "Victor, we've been seeing each other going on four months now. You have shown me kindness, respect and tenderness.

"You have never pressured me to sleep with you and for that, I'm grateful. I don't know if you were aware or not, but...I've never made love to a man before. I always knew when I gave myself to that special someone, I'd do so with someone I loved and who loved me."

Victor turned to look at Adina. She lowered her lids over her black onyx eyes to shield the vulnerability she experienced at the moment.

She took a few deep breaths and forged on. "Victor, I want for that special someone to be you. I...I love you."

Victor placed a finger over Adina's lips to quiet and calm her. Her eyes greeted his and they were warm, tender and patient as he crooned, "My Little Raven, I love you too. Thank you for this very special gift. I will cherish it always."

No more words were said. Adina rose to her feet, took Victor by the hand and led him into her bedroom. He removed her clothes gently and slowly, savoring every inch of her beautiful, brown body. He took her hair down and ran his fingers through it. He played with her hair until it was a wild, black waterfall cascading to her shoulders. He guided her to the bed and undressed. She

watched him with passion in her eyes and love in her heart.

He joined her and enfolded her in his arms. His kissed her all over; capturing her mouth so many times her lips had become slightly bruised. He took her breasts into his hands and played with her nipples one by one until they were swollen and fat with desire for him. He kissed them, sucked them and licked them until she cried out from her arousal.

He took his hands lower, past her belly to the black curls between her soft thighs. He found her clit and touched it lightly with his finger. Adina's body convulsed uncontrollably at his tender touch. She began to moan louder and her breasts rose and fell with her labored breathing. Then she gasped at the intrusion of his finger into the warm inner folds of her body. He glided his finger in and out slowly so she wouldn't tense up. She could feel how wet he made her.

When she became ultra sensitive to his touch, he placed his thumb on her moist clit and rotated it while he coaxed two more fingers inside her. The virginal tightness eased as her arousal climbed. Adina arched her wet core into Victor's hand. She was silently begging him to relieve this hunger only he could feed.

Victor slid his hand from her and positioned his body above hers. He took her mouth once more with savage need in every stroke of his tongue. He plundered her mouth as he would soon plunder her below. Victor positioned his erect sex at the opening buried within her tiny black curls.

Adina's eyes shot open and saw Victor's glaring back. He had passion, desire and hunger written on his face. She smiled. Victor drew back, then plunged in deeply. She

felt searing heat ricochet through the walls of her vagina. Victor was in to the hilt.

He lay there, not moving so much as an eyelash. Adina's mind was swimming in a dark cavern of sensations. The pain was almost too much. Soon her flesh expanded and moistened Victor's hard, warm dick. She was conquering the pain—embracing the pleasure, the ecstasy.

She felt him throbbing inside her and thought it the most intimate sensation she would ever know. Victor took her mouth again, wedging his tongue deeply, just as his love organ was rooted deeply inside her hot canal. Victor moved slowly. Her walls were slick as he glided in and out smoothly.

Suddenly, Adina came alive with passion and buried her face in his sweaty neck. She wrapped her legs around his waist and locked them at the ankles.

With each stroke Victor went deeper and still deeper and with each plunge Adina felt unbelievable heights of erotic pleasure. It was almost violent in its intensity. She clung to him with all her strength as her first orgasm began to slither through her body. They cried out in unison as her climax triggered his.

Adina floated in space, her body alive for the first time. Victor kissed her once more. His kiss was tender, loving. Adina loved this man and knew she would be with him forever.

Over the course of the next five years however, Victor Millard would destroy any semblance of the love and passion Adina had for him. Once they became lovers, Victor began seeking to take total possession of her entire life.

They moved in together. Then he started to find fault

in everything she did. His words were cruel, nasty, vulgar. He never raised a hand to her but she always felt he never hit her because he didn't to want to damage his playground.

Whenever they argued, which often escalated into full blown shouting matches, Victor would storm out, leaving Adina in a pool of tears. He always returned with some gift for her. Often something she could wear to bed. It seemed he picked fights with her just so they could make up but more importantly, make love. Adina's sexual prowess had improved considerably since that first night. She knew how to please her man.

He liked to make love with her clothed in purple. She owned so many purple peek-a-boo lace nightgowns that she wanted to scream. Not because they were purple but because each one represented a fight they had had. She was so tired of fighting.

Adina played this mental tug-of-war with Victor for almost five years. She came to her senses shortly after she gave him the only gift she had left to give...The Lair of the Python.

Victor became obsessed.

Adina couldn't understand why she was tired all the time. She went to her doctor to get a checkup. She wasn't tired; she was pregnant, about six weeks. Adina was overjoyed—a baby!

Victor hated the idea of her having a child. He didn't want to share her with anyone, not even his own baby. He ordered her to terminate the pregnancy. She was mortified that he would even suggest such a thing and left him and moved in with her sister. She told Cookie she was with child and what Victor commanded she do about it. Cookie sat in silence as Adina painted out the ugly

picture of the past five years of living with Victor.

Cookie hugged Adina and told her everything would work itself out. But Cookie was wrong. By the time the madness had ended, Victor Millard was dead. Adina had lost their baby and escaped death only by divine intervention.

Two and half years had passed since that awful ordeal. Adina had worked hard and created a good life for herself and a wonderful and challenging career. So why was she sitting here reliving lousy memories from the past? Because Victor Millard had left his mark on her and while she knew she'd never trust another man or allow herself to love again, fate had other ideas.

## CHAPTER 5

Brandon Montgomery was a man to be reckoned with. Not the kind of man one could easily intimidate. He had a sharp mind and a gift for being at the right place at the right time. He was honorable, hardworking and self-made. And on top of all of that, he was gorgeous.

But was she doing the right thing, allowing herself to feel something for this man? For God's sakes, he was her boss. He was also one of the most eligible bachelors in the country. And probably had hundreds of women at his disposal. Even so, that didn't dim the flame of desire that she held for him.

The waiter returned with their meals and Brandon began to cut into his chops then looked up at Adina and said, "It has come to my attention that you and I have been working together for almost six months now. How long are your assignments usually?"

Adina took a sip of water, licked her lips and answered, "Actually, it depends on the client and his or her needs. Some can last a week or two. Others, up to three or four months. To be quite honest, you are the longest assignment I've had so far."

Brandon then asked, "How did you get into this line

of work?

Adina finished chewing her chicken, wiped her lips and replied, "I guess you can say I have a gifted memory for sounds." Brandon looked at her with a puzzled expression. She explained, "You see, sir, persons who speak more than one language, think and see in all the languages they can speak simultaneously. You are speaking to me now in English but my brain is translating every single word you say to me into every language I know and speak. It's quite simple really.

"So, when someone is saying something in French, I also hear it being said to me in Russian, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Swahili and a host of other languages I have mastery of. My brain picks out the vocal patterns I hear and I translate those patterns back to the person."

"So, you're saying that every interpreter can do this?" Brandon questioned.

"Well, yeah. Except in my case, I had a little help from Mother Nature. Languages always came easy to me. I just knew what people were saying. Some say it's spooky, but my Mom would say, I have an 'old soul'. I like her explanation best. You have to also know people especially, body language."

"How do you mean?" asked Brandon.

"Take for example yourself and Mr. Ocasi. When I translated to you what Mr. Ocasi wanted for his materials specifications, the vein in your neck began to twitch. Even though you'd not said a word, I knew your tone was about to change to indicate your disapproval. I couldn't translate that harsh tone back to the client. So I had to balance it out with a softer, but firm tone in my voice. Mr. Ocasi received your objections without feeling he'd been put on the defensive."

Brandon stared at Adina in total awe. "I'd no idea it took such concentration to do what you do. I guess it can get pretty intense."

"I really don't mind except when I get headaches. I've had quite a few working on assignment with you, sir."

Brandon finished off his last fork filled with potato, then added, "I'm sorry if I've caused you any pain. I never knew what interpreters had to go through to get the job done. Maybe that's why I've gone through so many in such a short time. I can keep a grueling schedule sometimes."

Adina pushed her plate away and looked out of the window. "I don't mind, Mr. Montgomery. I like what I do. It's rewarding and a little hard work never hurt anyone." She paused a long moment then turned and looked at Brandon and said, "I'm stuffed. I can't eat another bite. I will require a wheel barrel to be carried out of here. I'm going to enjoy walking back to the hotel."

Brandon added, "I know what you mean. The walk will do us both some good. If you are ready, we can get going." Adina nodded her agreement and they paid their bill then headed back to the hotel.

As they strolled quietly down the street, Adina and Brandon did a little window shopping. Without any effort, they were getting to know each other. They walked past a gourmet coffee shop and decided to venture inside. Brandon commented on which coffees he liked. Adina insisted that Brazilian blends were the best. They each bought a bag of the other's coffee to try but argued all the way out of the shop that their personal favorites were really the best.

After the coffee shop, they came upon a little specialty shop. Brandon didn't want to go in but Adina



insisted and he gave in with a mocking growl. "Ms. Powers, I'll only go in here under one condition."

"What's that, Mr. Montgomery?" Adina asked, with a raised eyebrow and a grin.

"I will go into this shop if you and I can drop the formalities and address each other on a first name basis."

So that was why he'd been in such a funk, she reasoned. He wanted to relax around her, be a little less formal. Recapture a little of the magic they'd shared at Stray Cats. Knowing that she would oblige him, Adina still wanted to torture him a little. "But, Mr. Montgomery, I thought you wanted to keep a respectful distance between yourself and your employees. It was one of the first guidelines you set up for me when I took the assignment. You said surnames only."

"I've decided to amend the damn guidelines. Besides, I prefer you better as a friend rather than just an employee. So do you want to go in or not?"

Adina said with a warm smile, "Yes, Brandon, I do."

Brandon smiled his crooked smile and lowered his lids over his eyes then said, "I was afraid you'd say that. Okay, Adina, you win, let's go. Gee, the things I do for my friends."

Upon entering the tiny shop, Adina felt as if she stepped back in time. The lights were low and there were lit candles everywhere. The walls were covered with shelves full of crystal figurines. The statues were all different sizes, shapes and colors.

The tiny shop was filled with the smell of burning incense. There were little knickknacks everywhere. The kind of things one buys because one just can't resist; because one feels a connection to them.

Adina looked at Brandon. "This place is great. I could

stay in here forever.”

Brandon looked down into her glowing face and thought how beautiful she looked. He felt a flame of desire ignite within him. He clamped down on it

“Adina, this place is definitely different but I liked the coffee shop better.”

Adina turned and walked away then said over her shoulder, “Don't be so narrow minded, give it a chance. Hey, come take a look at this.”

Brandon filled the distance between them in two long strides. Adina was holding a crystal unicorn. “This is so beautiful. I have to have it. I love unicorns and all kinds of mythological creatures. I wonder how much it costs?”

A voice came from over their shoulders and said, “For you, beautiful lady, I will give it to you free, if you purchase something else in my store.” They both turned and gazed upon a little old man with gentle eyes and an inviting smile.

“Sir, thank you. But please, I want to pay for it and buy something else as well. Your shop is great.” Adina's eyes scanned the store.

The old man moved closer to Adina and stared long into her eyes. “Beautiful lady, your warm smile and kind heart are payment enough.” He looked up at Brandon then again at Adina and then said to Brandon while keeping his gaze locked on Adina. “Mister, your woman is a rare jewel. I pray you treasure her as such.”

Brandon wanted to correct the old man in his assumption about his and Adina's relationship but decided against it. He felt the man wouldn't believe him, so he remained silent.

Adina held the man's gaze with compassion in her eyes. He reached for the unicorn and walked towards the register saying, "I will hold it for you and when you've picked something else, you can get the unicorn at the register."

Adina looked at the old man then looked up at Brandon and inquired, "He's certainly eccentric isn't he? He even thought I was your woman. I'm glad you didn't correct him. He looked so content in his belief."

Brandon wanted to feel content with it too.

They looked through the store for another fifteen minutes and found all kinds of little treasures. Brandon was beginning to enjoy himself. They bought the unicorn and two matching crystal spheres. They decided to each take one so they would have something to remind them of their little treasure hunt in the knickknack shop. It was getting late so they decided to head back to the hotel.

Brandon got back to his suite and immediately checked his notes of the day's meeting. He scheduled a preliminary meeting with Adina for tomorrow and went over some last minute details with Mr. Simmons, the hotel manager, for Wednesday's meeting.

When he allowed himself to take a break his mind quickly wandered back to the little old man in the specialty shop. Brandon couldn't get his words out of his head. He took off his clothes and showered.

The hot shower knocked the chill off his cold flesh and the cobwebs out of his brain. He slipped on his robe but didn't really feel much like putting on any clothes. He sat on the sofa and tried to relax.

He turned on the television and flipped through the channels four times before he gave up and turned the

machine off. He stood up and walked over to the bar and poured himself a stiff drink. It succeeded in taking the edge off. He poured himself another then went and sat in a big chair which faced the window.

He looked out the window and watched how the day surrendered. He sat quietly and viewed the night coming upon the city. He witnessed how the city became cloaked in mystery. While he sat, he let his mind wander over the day's events and the rather enjoyable afternoon he had spent with Adina. He admitted to himself Adina was complicated. Not ordinary at all. Maybe that's why he found himself more attracted to her than even he cared to admit.

Brandon longed to find someone to share his life with but most women wanted him for his material value and power. All he wanted was a woman to want and love him. He wanted someone who looked passed his material possessions, one that knew who he really was, a successful working class stiff.

Brandon Alexander Montgomery knew hard work and heartache most of his life. He came from a poor family. He was an only child who always knew love, even if he never knew what it was like to own a new pair of shoes or buy nice clothes from a department store.

When Brandon was about eleven his mother took ill. She tried to pretend like it was just a bad bout with the flu, but one night at the dinner table, she started to cough up blood. His father rushed her to the hospital and she never came back.

Jacob Montgomery, Brandon's father, tried to explain that his mother was in a better place and she wasn't in any more pain. Brandon was devastated. His mind couldn't

register the fact his mother was gone forever and their tiny, dilapidated old house would never seem like a home again.

With one less income in the house, their meager expenses became too much for Brandon's father to handle alone. When he turned thirteen, Brandon got a job on the docks, loading crates onto ships from all over the world.

The work was hard for a grown man, even more so for a young boy of thirteen. Brandon managed to keep steady work on the docks for four years. During those years, his body grew strong and hard. His mind became focused and determined. He wanted more out of life. He hungered for the finer things and was going to have them.

When he turned eighteen, his father, Jacob, passed. That day Brandon vowed to become a success in life. Nothing would hold him back. He charged headfirst into the world. He quit his job and bartered passage on freight ships going all over the world. It didn't matter where the ships were going just as long as he kept moving.

After seeing the world twice, at twenty-two, he found himself in Montreal, Canada. He liked the city and decided to plant some temporary roots. He wanted work that paid more money and had heard Montreal was going through a booming phase. Buildings were going up all over the place. Not wanting to miss an opportunity for a new adventure, he got himself a job working at a small, struggling construction company.

He learned fast and was soon offered a full time position. He hadn't planned on staying in Montreal permanently but he knew this was the opportunity he'd been planning for since he was eighteen.

The next eight years were an uphill battle for Brandon

but he proved to the world and his parents, who would never see it, that he was a success. He turned that construction company around. He persuaded the owner to give him options on the company's shares whenever he brought in new business.

His pursuit for new contracts was relentless. He expanded their operations and branched out into other types of construction services. Before long, Brandon Alexander Montgomery owned over seventy percent of the company's shares and, he didn't stop there.

With controlling interest in the construction company, he bought other businesses. Like the Acco Corporation. The largest leaser of construction equipment. If his construction company didn't get the contract to build a building, they would still bring in business through their leasing of equipment to other construction companies.

Having a sharp mind for business, Brandon soon realized there was a part missing from his puzzle...Real Estate. He systematically secured land deeds all over Montreal. He targeted areas that were prime for new construction sights. He would offer potential developers unbelievable deals on the land if they gave his construction company the building contract. If the developer said no to the deal, he could charge them a higher cost for the land and still make money from the leasing of the construction equipment.

With the death of his partner and a minority shareholder, Brandon received total ownership of the construction company and its holdings by decree of his partner's will. Brandon was only thirty years old and worth around a half of a billion dollars.

Now it was time to find that special woman to share

his life with. Brandon found out fast that finding a good woman while being millionaire was the hardest job he ever tackled. He dated many women. Some longer than others but the feeling of love never came upon him...until he met Sylvia Reynolds.

She was beautiful, educated and came from a good family. They met while he was in Quebec on business. He'd been invited to a small dinner party by one of his business associates. He didn't want to seem rude and accepted the invitation but had every intention of only staying a short time.

The party was a total bore. Everyone wanted to talk business or ask his advice on one topic or another. He felt the walls suffocating him and stepped out onto the balcony to get some fresh air. When he saw Sylvia, his heart skipped a beat.

She was enchanting.

She stood about five-feet-eight inches tall; her figure was long and sleek. She had auburn colored hair with deep blue eyes. Her lips were full and made the prettiest heart-shaped mouth. She was wearing a lovely white strapless gown, which accentuated her small, but tempting breasts. Brandon did a double take. He couldn't believe his eyes. She was so alluring.

Brandon closed the space between them in no time flat. He introduced himself and she did the same. They sat out on the balcony for the next hour just talking. She had a cool demeanor about herself that enticed Brandon beyond reason. He had to see her again. He explained that he would be in Quebec for the next couple of months and he would enjoy very much if he could see her again. Sylvia smiled coolly then agreed to see him again.

For the next year and a half Brandon courted Sylvia.

He showered her with gifts and precious jewels. Sylvia wanted for nothing. He loved her madly. He knew he'd found the woman he'd spend the rest of his life with. Feeling sure this woman was the mother of his future children and the one and only true love of his life.

Brandon was ready to ask Sylvia to be his wife. He called her up and asked if he could stop by. She was hesitant then finally agreed. When he got to her apartment he was so nervous he broke out in a cold sweat.

Slowly Brandon got his composure together. "Sylvia, I wanted to see you because there is something that's been on my mind and it's time I shared with you." He was struggling, he knew. He sounded so nervous and he could sense that Sylvia wanted him to get to the point. As he centered himself to speak again, he noticed how she was looking at him. Like she wanted to keep him off balance. He was grateful for the distraction as she placed his hand on her hip and leaned in towards him.

As her soft lips met his, Brandon's common sense went right out the window. She was so good at this, he thought. He knew she knew how much he wanted her, wanted to make love to her. When he suddenly found his hand being lead to her small breast, Brandon knew he was lost.

He pulled her onto his lap and kissed her with wanton desire. His hands were all over her body. They grabbed the front of her blouse and ripped it open sending buttons flying everywhere. She wasn't wearing a brassiere!

His hands came down on her naked breasts gently. Her smooth skin felt like liquid flames under his hands. His cock bulged in his pants with need for her. He couldn't wait any longer; he had to have her. He tore his



lips away from hers and gasped, "Sylvia, I want you so much."

"Brandon, I can't wait either. I always want you. Why don't you dim the lights and make some drinks? I'll go and slip into something more comfortable." Brandon released Sylvia from his iron grip. She rose from his lap and walked into the bedroom and closed the door.

Brandon started to make the drinks then realized he'd forgotten to call one of his associates about the change in the time of the meeting tomorrow. He picked up the phone and heard Sylvia talking to a man on the other end.

"That's right, lover," she whispered. "It should be a breeze to get into his hotel room. I guarantee he'll be occupied for the rest of the night."

"Where is the proposal?" asked the deep voice on the other end.

"It can only be in one or two places; his briefcase or his desk drawer. Besides, if you don't find it there, you'll have the whole night to look around," Sylvia whispered seductively, then added, "I gotta go. Brandon wants me so much he'll pop if I don't give him a little to calm him down."

Then the deep voice said, very annoyed, "If I didn't know you any better, I'd say you actually enjoy fucking him."

"Not nearly as much as I enjoy it with you," she assured him.

Brandon felt like someone had ripped his heart out and poured acid on it. Sylvia, the woman he loved, the woman who he was about to ask to marry, was a corporate spy. She didn't love him. For over a year she'd been using him for information about his company. Brandon felt a murderous need move through him. He

knew that if he didn't get out of there he'd kill Sylvia.

He heard her hang up the phone. He then put his receiver down as well.

Sylvia came out dressed in sexy bed attire but there was no Brandon. She walked over to the bar and noticed that drinks had been prepared, but no Brandon. She searched the entire apartment frantically. No Brandon. She went back into the living room and found a note on the table. She read it and knew immediately she'd been discovered. The note read, "There is a thin line between love and hate!"

Brandon took himself out of the dating arena completely. He buried himself in his work. He deliberately kept a grueling schedule so he wouldn't allow himself to feel.

Soon, Sylvia became just another painful memory. Brandon felt sure he would never open himself up to that kind of vulnerability or let another woman get that close to him again. However, Adina Brianna Powers was no ordinary woman.

Brandon couldn't fight the feelings he was starting to develop for his assistant. He wondered why out of all of the women he'd known over the years, Adina moved him to such distraction? Not even Sylvia had had this effect upon him.

The two women were so different. Sylvia was a spoiled, treacherous, backstabbing bitch. None of those negative adjectives came to mind when he thought of Adina. On the contrary, she was patient, kindhearted and had a generous nature.

Brandon wasn't taking any chances with his heart

again. He was determined to find out everything he could about Adina. And when he found out all her flaws and all the things he hated about her, he'd be able to protect his heart against the alluring power she was gaining over him.

Tuesday came and went in a heartbeat. Wednesday's finalization meeting was fast, heated and exhausting. Brandon and Mr. Ocasí were battling with great passion to have their way on the materials specifications dilemma. Adina spoke at such a rapid pace from one language to another her head began pounding to the point where her concentration was suffering.

After eight straight hours of deliberation, Brandon and Mr. Ocasí came to an agreement. Brandon would receive the building contract for the new complex with the specifications that forty percent of the complex would consist of the materials Mr. Ocasí wanted. They would be distributed throughout the sixty percent blended materials Brandon wanted to work with.

If Brandon's construction company brought the complex in on time, his company would be guaranteed one more contract from Mr. Ocasí's company and have full jurisdiction on the materials specifications.

If Brandon didn't have the complex built on time, his construction company would lose twenty percent of their fee. To compensate for the loss, Mr. Ocasí would guarantee them one more contract but he would have full jurisdiction over the materials specifications.

All the papers were duly noted and signed. Mr. Ocasí and Brandon had their copies hand delivered to their headquarters so construction could begin immediately. The meeting was officially ended and everyone left on a high note, except Adina.

On the elevator Brandon noticed she didn't look so good. Her face was pale and she seemed to be in deep thought. He called her name four times before she finally acknowledged him.

Her voice was soft and groggy. "I'm sorry, sir, did you say something?"

Brandon looked at Adina as though she had two heads and thundered, "Did I say something? Adina, I've been talking to you ever since we entered this elevator. I had to say your name four times to get you to answer me just now."

Adina's lids dropped over her eyes slowly as she turned and looked up at him. "Sir...I mean, Brandon, I'm not ignoring you, really I'm not. It's just hard to make out what you are saying to me while my head is pounding so. I feel as if it will split open any second now."

Brandon flinched as he scanned her exquisite features. Dear God, every soft line of her face showed unbearable pain to him. He felt waves of guilt for causing her such noticeable discomfort. He said low, trying not to cause her any more pain, "Adina, did you eat today?"

"No."

The elevator opened to their floor and Adina moved slowly as though each step was torture. Brandon's heart constricted. He slowed down and walked with her then said softly, "Adina, you need to eat. Let me call room service and have them send something up for you."

Adina breathed a sigh of grateful relief as they reached her door. She pulled out her passkey. "That won't be necessary. I can't eat when I'm like this. Food makes me queasy. All I need is a half a bottle of aspirin

and a place to lie down.”

She tried to put her key in the door but was so unsteady it dropped to the floor. Brandon picked it up and unlocked the door. He took her gently by the arm and helped her inside. He sat her on the bed, then got aspirin from the bathroom. She took them without questioning.

She looked up and smiled. “Thank you, Brandon.”

“Are you sure you don't want anything?”

She shook her head, then bent forward to remove her shoes and started to wince as her head began to spin again. Brandon reacted immediately to her distress. He took the glass and set it on the night stand. He removed her shoes.

She was in such agony she didn't have the strength to object. He helped her out of her suit jacket and placed her eyeglasses on the night stand. She slid back against the headboard, lifted her hands into her hair and removed the pins. After a few moments, her hair fell in wild disarray all around her shoulders.

Brandon put her shoes and jacket away. He turned around and gasped. She looked so angelic with her hair down. It looked like strands of black velvet around her face. The creamed colored blouse she wore simply enhanced the image more. This was the first time he had seen her with her hair down. She looked so vulnerable, delicate.

She was fast asleep and Brandon studied her features for a long time. Her skin was flawless and reminded him of shimmering silk. Her eyebrows were perfectly arched and black as a raven's wing.

With gentle lids covering her black onyx eyes, she

looked alluring and sensuous. Her nose, keen with a little flare at the end, crowned a mouth that was full and made for kissing. She had the kind of lips that would make a lollipop smile.

Brandon sat down on the side of her bed and leaned in towards her face. He was going to place a gentle kiss upon her forehead but just then, Adina licked her lips and moaned softly. The last time Adina did that he had lost all his control over himself and kissed her passionately. Brandon wasn't sure he'd be able to stop himself this time. He drew back and took another look at her then came down gently on her lips. His kiss was short, warm and tender. His body cried for more but that was absolutely out of the question. His hunger would have to be satisfied with this tiny taste of her.

He didn't want to leave her alone. He knew deep down she'd be just fine but he didn't want her to wake up alone and still feel sick. Besides, he reasoned, he was partly responsible for her discomfort.

He turned off all her bedroom lights and closed her bedroom curtains. Then he went into the living room and sat on the sofa. He left her bedroom door ajar in case she awoke and needed something. He would hear her and be able to help her if necessary.

So concerned about Adina that he didn't realize how much the day's events had sapped him of his own strength. As soon as he got comfortable on the sofa, he was out like a light.

## CHAPTER 6

It was well past eleven o'clock when Adina awoke from her drugged sleep. She sat up and stretched like a little kitten. She looked at the clock near her bed and noticed the time. She couldn't believe she'd slept over seven and half hours. She felt better. Her headache was gone and she was rejuvenated from her nap. She put her feet over the bed and stood up slowly. She noticed that she had slept in her clothes and hoped they weren't ruined.

She reached for her night stand to turn on the light then decided against it. Bright lights right away would only bring her headache back. Instead, she reached into her nightstand and pulled out six vanilla scented candles. She lit them then placed them around her bedroom and in the bath. She didn't bother with the other room.

Adina padded into the bathroom and ran herself a hot bath. She filled it with her favorite bath oils then walked back into her bedroom and proceeded to undress. She got her portable CD player and a few CD's. She popped Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* into the player and got into the tub.

She felt like she was floating. She closed her eyes and let the water ease all the tension of the day from her body. She played in the water and splashed it all over

herself. She tingled with satisfaction. She began to sigh with pleasure, feeling better all the time.

Brandon hadn't planned on falling asleep. His only intentions were to keep a watchful eye on Adina before retreating to his room. Brandon opened his eyes slowly. He remembered where he was and sat straight up like a shot.

His shirt was half unbuttoned and his shoes were off. He stood up and started buttoning his shirt while he searched for his shoes. In his haste he barely noticed the faint light coming from Adina's room.

He stopped in mid motion when he realized Adina was awake. He wasn't sure how to handle this. All the living room lights were still out, which told him that maybe she didn't know he was out there. Brandon was as quiet as a dead mouse. He sat silent and still on the sofa, trying to figure out what to do. At that very moment Adina came from the bathroom. From her appearance Brandon knew instantly she wasn't aware he was out there.

She was wearing the skimpiest towel. It barely covered her body. With every step the towel came open to reveal her long, brown, glistening wet legs. The tiny cloth wasn't much wider either. Her creamy, deep brown breasts were overflowing the rim of it. Brandon wanted to say something. He thought he should acknowledge himself so Adina could take appropriate measures. There was just one problem, his damn mouth wouldn't cooperate. It wouldn't utter one sound.

Brandon sat on the sofa mesmerized. Adina finally let the towel drop to the floor and he shuddered. His cock saluted with the utmost respect. He lowered his eyes as if



it would help. It didn't. She left his parameter of vision for a moment and Brandon thought he'd died a slow death until she returned. Her body was still wet from her bath.

She sat on the bed and leaned back then lifted her legs high into the air. She rubbed her hands all over herself. Then it occurred to Brandon that Adina was dancing in the bed to the music she was listening to. She moved so erotically her body took on its own vitality.

She turned over and came up on her hands and knees. She started arching her back and rotating her head until her jet black hair was a wild mess all over her face. Her eyes darkened with savage desire and hunger as she lost herself to the music. She began to growl and purr like a wild, jungle cat. She came up on her knees and rubbed her belly.

She took her hands slowly down her thighs, around her buttocks and over the small of her back until she reached her full, tempting breasts. Adina licked her fingers then placed their wet tips on her nipples and sighed softly as they grew hard with her playfulness. She slid down to the bed and began to laugh.

Brandon couldn't believe what he was witnessing! Never had he considered himself a voyeur, but he was tonight. He expected to see Adina naked for a few moments then she would put on her nightgown and the peep show would be over. He would wait until she was asleep again and sneak out quietly.

He didn't expect her to turn into this wild, savage, lusty, sex starved jungle cat. Nothing he knew about her had prepared him for what he was watching. Adina had more layers than an onion. Each layer made him want her more and more. Damn her!

His body was on fire. His cock pulsed, throbbed and bucked in his pants. He couldn't think. He had trouble just breathing as she played in the bed and enjoyed her own body. His senses were on pure overload.

Suddenly, Adina hopped out of the bed, strolled seductively to her closet and pulled out a little red lounging robe. She put it on and it stopped just short of her full, round hips. Brandon lost what little control he had left. He stood up before he knew what he was doing. Then reality flooded in like a broken dam when he heard Adina swear to herself and say, "That room service menu must be in the other room because I certainly don't see it in here."

Brandon was petrified. If she caught him watching her, she'd probably scratch his eyes out and have him arrested for being a peeping Tom. Think fast. She would be coming into the room any second now. Brandon sat back on the sofa, kicked off his shoes, unbuttoned his shirt again and lay down. He turned his back toward her bedroom door then closed his eyes and tried to breathe normally.

Adina realized the menu must be in the living room. She didn't want to put on any really bright lights unless it was absolutely necessary. She went into the bathroom and grabbed a candle then went into the living room.

She knew the menu was in one of two places. She started to head for the desk and in the corner of her eye she saw something white on the sofa. She stopped dead in her tracks and turned. Totally forgetting how she was dressed, she walked over to the sofa and looked down. Brandon.

She went down on her knees, set the candle on the

end table and touched him lightly on his shoulder. He didn't stir. She concluded that he was exhausted from the day's negotiations and passed out after he'd put her to bed. She pondered over whether or not to wake him. He looked so peaceful and content. Then she decided that maybe he'd be more comfortable in his own bed in his own suite.

Brandon wasn't sure how much longer he could hold out. She was so close to him and she smelled fabulous! His body went rigid with need to be with her. It was too much. He heard Adina's voice though his fog of passion.

"Brandon, you look so peaceful. I almost hate to wake you." Then she placed her hand on his shoulder and gave him a firm shake. "Brandon, wake up."

He simulated waking up as if he had been asleep for many hours. Stretched and turned over so he was on his back then looked up and said, "Adina." He did a fake yawn. "What time is it?"

"It's almost midnight," she said. "I wasn't sure if I should wake you. You looked so peaceful but I'm sure you would prefer to sleep in your own bed."

Brandon stared at Adina, hoping she didn't notice anything out of the ordinary about him. "Well, how are you feeling? You looked so pale when I brought you to your room. I had only intended to stay an hour or so. I guess my body had other plans."

Adina lowered her lids and said softly, "Brandon, I'm fine. It's like I told you, I get these headaches sometimes. They are nothing to worry about."

Brandon's voice came out ragged as he gazed upon Adina and saw she was practically naked and she hadn't even noticed it yet. "Are your headaches always this bad

or was today a rare case?"

Adina placed a warm hand on his shoulder and said, "Brandon, please don't worry. I will admit today was a rare case but that's simply because I forgot to eat." She smiled shyly. "So you see, it was a combination of working and not eating. I promise not to suffer any lingering side effects."

His willpower was going up in smoke. He sat up and peered down at her. He knew if he didn't get up and walk out of the room, she would be in more jeopardy than any headache imaginable.

Adina stood and reached for the candle on the side table. Brandon peered down the length of her body and reacted before either one of them knew what was happening. His strong, husky arms snaked around her waist and pulled her towards him.

Startled by the intrusion, Adina stumbled and fell on top of him full length. Immediately, she felt his marble hard erection. At that second, she realized how scantily dressed she appeared and tried to pull away.

She pushed her body up and away from his by anchoring hands on his wide, hard chest. Electricity shot through her. His body was hot.

Adina realized she fought a losing battle, and said menacingly, "What are you doing? Have you lost your mind? Let go of me."

Brandon held Adina firmly around her tiny waist and with one quick turn pinned her under his long muscular body and said on a jagged breath, "I promise not to do anything you don't want me to."

"Brandon, let me up!"

His mouth moved within an inch of hers. He wanted her to feel his hot breath on her when he said, "I'm sorry I had to resort to such aggressive tactics but you left me no choice. You are a very desirable woman." His eyes licked over her breasts hotly. "I tried to harness the desire you ignited in me but when you come to me dressed so revealingly what am I to do? I'll make you a deal. If you don't feel anything after I try this experiment, I'll release you, apologize for my actions and go back to my room and we will forget any of this ever happened."

Before Adina could give any protest, Brandon kissed her. It was a kiss of possession and longing. He kissed with all the desire pent up in him since that night at The Phantom. He would let all of his barriers and walls down in this one kiss. If it worked then he'd know the kiss they'd shared at The Phantom was not a fantasy but a prelude of what was to come.

Adina was terrified. Her body stiffened with fear. She wasn't afraid Brandon would rape her but that his experiment wouldn't fail. He'd know she was attracted to him.

Oh God, his hands were everywhere. Igniting tiny fires just below the surface of her skin, that Adina was helpless to put out. She felt her trembling frame being crushed to his demanding body. His lips were so hot and moist. His tongue moved with precise tenderness over her mouth. Taking her will, taking her control.

Adina didn't want to surrender. It was wrong she kept telling herself. Funny, her brain was listening but her body was a whole other matter. Before she knew it, her body fired her brain and took over. Her long, silky legs opened to cradle his massive body.

She took her foot up the length of Brandon's calf slowly. When she felt his unexpected shudder, her arms locked around his shoulders. She gasped feeling his bold sex against her thigh.

Brandon dove into her mouth, anchoring his tongue deep, beckoning Adina to taste him. Their mouths fused together becoming one. When he ended the kiss, he looked down into her face. "Adina, am I wrong?"

She was in a tailspin. She looked up with passion on her face and pure raw need in her eyes. Her hands reached for his face and pulled him closer. Her voice was husky as she whispered, "No." Brandon ravaged her mouth and she surrendered completely.

They kissed for half an hour. Adina kissed him slowly wanting to savor every second with him. His body scent made her drunk with desire. That hypnotic smell of wood and a hint of masculine musk. Her senses were drinking in all his essence. His tongue reminded her of delicious licks of forbidden fruit. She liked it, liked it a lot.

Adina took her hands down Brandon's back and pulled his shirt from his pants. She had to touch his flesh, had to feel his warm muscles under her hands. He groaned deeply and helped her take off his shirt as she seared his flesh with her light caresses.

Brandon shuddered as she moved beneath him with slow eroticism. He would go mad if he couldn't give her the same pleasure. He pulled himself away and stood up. The sofa was too restricting for the pleasure he wanted her to experience. The bed would suit his needs perfectly.

With a ragged breath, he pulled Adina off the sofa and lifted her into his arms. His lips were kiss swollen but

he didn't care. He took her mouth savagely as he carried her into the bedroom. He placed her on her feet and stepped away.

He looked at her and motioned for her to remove the robe. She shook her head and closed the distance between them again. Her hands reached out to touch and tease. His eyes closed on a moan as he enjoyed the feel of her hands on him. When she got to his belt buckle, Brandon's eyes shot open. He watched her undo his belt and zipper. She was bold with her caresses as she reached in and grabbed his nature. It grew more in her hand.

Brandon took her by the shoulders and pushed her back onto the bed. His look told her to stay there. He pulled his pants off quickly.

Brandon stood above Adina, gazing at her. He reached for her ankles and pulled her slowly towards him. She purred softly and his blood shot up another degree. He grabbed the belt of the robe and unfastened it. With patient hands he removed it so he could see her sensuous body.

He looked into her exotic face and flames of desire engulfed him. Her neck was long and would be sensitive to his touch. Her shoulders were gently sloped and her arms were silky smooth and soft. She possessed full breasts he judged were shaped just right for his hands. Her waist, so tiny it made her long legs and delicious hips seem even fuller in his eyes. Her sweet nest was hooded with tight, curly, black hair and looked so inviting.

Brandon got into bed. His moves were fluid and focused. He engulfed her in his strong arms and drew her to his massive chest.

She smelled so good. The aroma of mysterious

flowers and subtle vanilla was all around him, attacking his senses from every angle. He wanted to drown in it—no, he wanted to drown in her. He couldn't think of any other place he wanted to be than in her arms.

Brandon's lips moved down her neck and kissed, licked and sucked her tender, soft flesh. One of his hands moved to her breast and the other down to her soft round bottom and squeezed. As his mouth closed hungrily over her other breast, she moaned softly and arched into him.

He gorged himself. His groans of pleasure rose rapidly. His tongue danced wildly over her nipple as he sucked more...harder. He was so aroused he opened his mouth wider and breathed hotly and felt Adina shudder all the way down to her ankles.

His head moved lower to kiss her belly button and Adina became completely unhinged. She was over the edge of her tolerance. She pulled him by his wavy, dark hair back up to her face.

He mounted her slowly not wanting her to tense up. Adina felt his shaft brushing against her inner thigh. It was long and big. He placed the head of his shaft at the opening of her tight core and eased into her slowly, almost teasing her with his cock. She plowed her nails into his arms as she felt herself being invaded by him. She was dizzy with pure need to have him buried inside her.

His body was so strong and powerful over hers. She wallowed in his masculine scent and the sultry feel of his delicious sex. It felt so demanding within her. She liked the feel of it. Liked how it touched with warm, gliding gentleness.

His shuddering breaths told Adina how surprised



Brandon was by the tightness of her walls. She knew he was battling for control. She could feel how his body trembled around her, inside her with his will to keep from hurting her. She could feel him pushing deeper but knew he was genuinely concerned that she couldn't accept full penetration. She wanted to give him all the pleasure she possessed. Her hands drew his face to hers.

"Brandon, I'll be all right."

Her mouth captured his as she felt his arms lock around her. As she gorged herself on his mouth, his hips pushed with one, violent thrust as he rammed into her swollen flesh with the full length of his cock.

Adina gasped and tore her mouth from his then buried her face in his neck. She stiffened for a second then bit him in the collarbone. The pain was so hypnotic it made her weak. She had known nothing like it and desperately wanted him to give her more and more and more.

It had been so long since she'd felt so aroused. She throbbed all around him as he pulsed throughout all of her. Adina wanted it all and raised up slightly to suck and lick on his nipples. His deep groan of surprise speared her on and she sucked harder.

She was overwhelmed by his sudden hunger for her. Her hips pushed up as his final restraints abandoned him and he thrust savagely. His strokes were fluid but intense. He plunged deeply, completely.

Don't let him be disappointed, she prayed silently. She desperately wanted to match his sexual prowess. She caught his rhythm and arched up each time he drove into her gripping flesh with his hard sex. She was meeting him thrust for thrust, plunge for plunge, and stroke for stroke.

She clung to him as their wild dance had them dripping in sweat. She felt his mouth devouring hers. Felt his teeth gently scoring her wet neck. Heard her own cries of ecstasy as his hands pulled her hips harder into his driving thrusts.

Then suddenly she heard his deep groan as his climax joined with hers.

Brandon collapsed slowly over her and buried his head in the hollow of her neck. No part of him wanted to release her. The need to stay inside her consumed him. He listened as she sighed dreamily as he continued to pulsate tiny explosions of pleasure through her silky, slick walls. No words were needed. Their bodies had said it all.

Once they could breathe normally, Brandon embraced her fiercely. He couldn't let her go. Her body was made for him. As he smothered her mouth in soul stealing kissing, he gradually began to feel a rhythmic pattern. Each time he prepared to pull out, Adina would slowly, sensuously flex and relax her vaginal muscles around his cock. The first time he thought he was just imagining it, but by the third time, her pleading groans confirmed his suspicions. She didn't want him to pull out any more than he did.

Her subtle gesture said to him what her lips could not whisper....*stay with me.*

## CHAPTER 7

The sun crept into their bedroom on the paws of silence. Brandon turned his head slightly and came face to face with the glare of the sun. He squinted at the discomfort and opened his eyes slowly. When he did, his mind galloped back to the unbelievable passion he had shared with Adina. He turned his head and gazed upon her. She was still asleep.

Adina was half-sprawled on the bed and half-lying on him. His arms held her possessively. Her hair was a wild mess, some covering her lovely face and some cascading onto his chest. Her hand rested on his heart and her head was nestled in the hollow of his arm. She looked so content and peaceful then a part of him thought it wonderful to wake up with her in his arms every morning.

After the first time, he was surprised at how quickly his cock had awakened and stiffened inside her deep warm depths. Adina had been so open and wanton in his arms. Slowly he had taken her again and it was like his whole body had been waiting for her. By the fifth time they'd made love, Brandon knew he'd forever be addicted to the sensual spell she'd cast over him. Even holding her now in the aftermath of what they'd shared during the night his mind was wondering how he'd ever recover

from what they'd shared and given to each other.

Brandon suddenly remembered what the old man had said to him. *Mister, your woman's a rare jewel. I pray you treasure her as such.* Did the old man know something he didn't? Or was he just making a calculated assumption? Anyway, he couldn't kid himself anymore. Adina had a hold on him. The kind of hold that would drive a man to insanity if he didn't surrender to it. But how did it happen and how did it happen so fast? Well, was it really that fast? They had been working together for months.

Maybe the charity ball and their time at the Phantom was just the catalyst needed to bring his attraction for her front and center. He wasn't really sure how to proceed. This was new to him. He didn't like feeling off balanced. He simply wasn't used to it. Brandon had to be in control.

Not even with what's-her-name did he feel this way. The sexual intimacies he enjoyed with Sylvia and all the women that came before and after her were good, even great, in fact. But nothing, absolutely nothing came anywhere near the splendor he experienced with Adina.

Maybe he didn't love Sylvia. No, he admitted. He had or it wouldn't have hurt so much when she betrayed him. If that was love he had felt for Sylvia then what was this feeling that crept into his veins whenever he thought of Adina? He was about to analyze further when the Little Raven stirred in his arms.

Adina tossed and turned for a moment as she awoke. Not taking into account she rested upon Brandon's body, she absently straddled him, then stretched and opened her eyes leisurely.

She could feel a surge of warmth move through her but knew it wasn't from the blankets. She focused, then

tensed slightly, feeling his large arms tighten upon her. God, what had they done? What had she done?

Her head lifted slowly then she peered into Brandon's clear, smoky eyes. Her voice cracked, "Brandon...I...we shouldn't have. I mean...uh."

His eyes smiled so warmly she couldn't even speak intelligently. He slid her body up so that their faces almost touched then he pulled her head to his light kiss. It was tender but Adina felt it down to her toes.

"Good morning, Adina," she heard him say through a fog of bliss.

She replied feeling slightly lightheaded, "Good morning, Brandon." Her mind cleared quickly. She stared at Brandon, blushing all over as she realized his sex had grown hard and was nestled between the warm outer lips of her throbbing flesh.

"Brandon," she said shyly. "I don't know what to say. I've never done this before. I don't usually..." Her voice trailed off a little as her lids lowered over her sparkling, deep onyx eyes to hide her embarrassment, "...go around making love with my employers. I want to apologize if I have led you on somehow. It wasn't my intention at all." She searched his face pleadingly.

"Say you believe me. I would understand completely if you decided you wanted another interpreter for the last three months of your contract with my agency. I know my behavior was highly inappropriate and I wouldn't feel offended."

The man was laughing. A full blown hysterical laugh. It certainly wasn't what she expected him to do. Were those tears gathering in the corner of his eyes? Adina daintily covered her breasts with the bed covers and wondered what could be so amusing. She poked him in

the ribs. "Would you mind telling me what's so funny?"

Just the sight of her made him rock hard and all she could think of was how to apologize for her behavior. Brandon came back to his senses gradually and noticed she had covered herself and he suddenly felt robbed. The darkness in him wanted to snatch the covers away and bury himself inside her again.

That delectable pleasure he had enjoyed last night was straddled intimately over him. He could feel her little clit throbbing against the crown of his shaft. His piercing eyes locked with hers as he answered, "You, Little Raven. Your dry sense of humor can come out at the strangest times. I'd never dismiss you in such a cold-hearted manner. Besides," he continued with a devilish smile as his hands slowly crept up to reveal her delicious breasts to his hungry eyes, "You are the best interpreter I've ever had. I have no desire to replace you."

Adina felt a little relieved but not much. There was still last night. And what a night it was. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt so loose and relaxed and full bodied. Her flesh felt deliciously used and heavy with relief. Brandon had taken her numerous times. Each time leaving her dizzy and aching for more. The images of him sliding deep and hard inside her filled her mind suddenly and she shuddered with pleasure. Looking down at him now it would be so easy to let him thrust inside her and ride his powerful body. Her eyes closed dreamily and stark reality showed itself behind her lids.

He was still her boss! Her eyes popped opened and the ravenous look in his eyes blatantly said he desired much more than just her linguistic skills now. How would

they continue the working relationship without other emotions getting in the way?

She felt his giant hands moving lazily up her body and she fought desperately to keep her mind clear. "I'm relieved you believe me and you won't be replacing me but there's still a small problem." She stopped his powerful hands from reaching their intended goal. His eyes locked again with hers and he must have seen their seriousness. "I get the impression you want the intimacy we shared last night to continue." Brandon stopped smiling and a blank stare crept into his chiseled features. "Last night will never happen again. It would be detrimental to our working relationship and would cause undue stress in our newly found friendship, which I have come to value greatly. If that isn't bad enough, it's not proper professional conduct at all. No. What we shared must never be repeated."

Adina watched Brandon's facial expressions change with lightning speed. He looked like he was about to protest fiercely when she continued.

"I think maybe you should go back to your own suite. I see from the time it's just after nine o'clock. The Pantex representative will be here at eleven and I'm sure you want to get showered and changed and have something to eat before he arrives."

Adina saw his extreme agitation. She slid from his body and his cock sprang straight up into the air. She quickly glanced at it then rushed into the bathroom and closed the door. She leaned against it, practically holding her breath, waiting for him to leave.

When she heard the suite door close hard she exhaled a slow breath and realized she was shaking. If he'd protested at all she would've lost all her courage and

given in immediately.

Adina had no willpower when it came to Brandon Alexander Montgomery. He could send her head a-spinning. She couldn't focus or concentrate for long periods of time whenever he was near her. Now, that they had had sex, it would be harder than ever.

She told herself over and over that she must remain centered and fixated on the job she came to do. But she knew if they were intimate again all reason would be lost to her and he would possess her forever.

Adina began to run her bath. She walked to the sink to splash her face with water and caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. She looked absolutely radiant. Except for a few passion marks on the hollow of her neck and breasts her skin glistened from their night of love play.

Adina thought about how safe she felt in his arms. How nothing could harm her there. She felt as long as she was in his arms everything would be okay. She stepped into the hot, soapy water and let her mind wander back to the night before. Brandon was an incredible lover. His hunger was as strong as hers. Perhaps that's why it was so good. It's always pleasant to have a lover who can match one's level of sensuality, she admitted quietly.

Brandon was without a doubt her equal in bed. She enjoyed the thrill of knowing he had earned that compliment. Adina sank into the tub and let the hot water draw the soreness from her body. Their sex play would have her moving cautiously for a few days. She told herself she didn't mind at all. It would be worth it for the night of sheer ecstasy she had spent with him



By the time Brandon got to his own suite he was numb. His mouth dropped. What had just happened? One minute he was in the throes of passion and the next, he was standing in his room alone. Suddenly acknowledging he would never have Adina again. How could she just tidy up their passionate night of the best damned sex he'd ever had in his life like it was just another day on the job? *What the hell was wrong with this picture!*

Brandon had to get some perspective. He went to his bedroom and removed his clothes, then sat on the bed trying to analyze this logically.

*Her argument was valid. All the points she made he couldn't disagree with. She systematically laid out why they couldn't continue as lovers. The strongest point being, she didn't want to jeopardize their new friendship. Brandon grunted internally and finally accepted that she was right. He'd simply have to adhere to her wishes. It would to be impossible.*

At that moment he lay on his bed and thought back to last night. The sizzling sex, the raw passion. The hot woman. She was his equal in every way. She gave as good as she got. Not passive or reserved. But free and wild just as he was. And the way her succulent body opened to all of him was divinely pleasurable.

They were a perfect match. Just the thought of her had him stiff and ready. Brandon winced slightly as his hand grazed his collarbone. He looked at his fingertips and saw tiny specks of torn flesh.

He jumped off the bed and walked to the mirror. He thought so she had bit him. He could see and feel her teeth marks in his collarbone. Ah, but what he didn't expect to see were the purple bruises on his penis.

His eyes grew big as he smiled thinking how good it felt to finally experience full penetration inside a woman. The discomfort he would have for the next few days would be a fair price to pay for the steamy, erotic night he had shared with Adina.

The next five weeks were a whirlwind. Adina and Brandon were so consumed and so busy with negotiation meetings for the Brandon Montgomery Group neither one had time to think about anything but business. Adina was grateful for the grueling schedule. The meetings were so taxing there was simply no time for her think about anything but performing her job.

Brandon pushed himself past the points of his normal tolerance. He had to remain focused. These next three contracts would bring millions of dollars in revenue for his company. He wanted them.

They would allow him to increase his charity donations from the company for next year. That would give him a higher tax deduction for next year. But more than anything, he needed not to think about Adina.

Brandon and Adina were dog tired when they finally made it back to their hotel rooms. Adina was sleepy and drained. She didn't even want to eat. She went to her room, stripped off her clothes, collapsed into bed and slipped into a fatigued sleep.

Once asleep, her mind drifted to the night she had made love with Brandon. She could see it as if it was yesterday. *His arms holding her tightly, his kisses searing her flesh, the taste of his tongue in her mouth, the way he buried himself in her over and over. The way he bit her...wait...that wasn't...he*

never hit her.

Adina started tossing in bed, her body tensing up as she went deeper into her dream that was fast becoming a nightmare. A fog came over her then cleared.

*Adina felt strong hands touching her breasts and smiled in her sleep thinking it was Brandon. Then the hands began to hurt her. They were squeezing her breasts painfully. She looked up and it wasn't Brandon over her, it was Victor!*

*He took her hands into one of his and placed them high above her head. She was struggling, trying to fight back but he was too strong. She looked into his eyes and saw sickening disgust. He hated her and he would teach her a lesson for running away from him. He slid his hand down and placed it on her belly. All of a sudden it swelled with their unborn baby. Adina eyes grew in horror and she pleaded with him to not hurt her. Victor balled up his fist and hit her hard in her stomach. She screamed and spasmed.*

*When she looked up again Victor was gone and she was standing on a dark road wearing only a purple peek-a-boo lace nightgown. She felt cold and scared and she started to run. Suddenly, a car pulled up and Victor jumped out. In her fear, she froze. He snatched her by her arms and dragged her into the car.*

*He laughed with a demented cackle as he told her she'd never be free of him. There would be no place she could hide that he wouldn't find her. If he could not have her then no one would have her. Adina tried to turn her face from his but he grabbed her face with his hands and let go of the steering wheel.*

*She looked at him and his face was all burned with his flesh peeling from the bone. She began to scream and cry as she fought with Victor in the car. The car went off a cliff and slid down into darkness.*

*Victor's arms tightened around her. His burned, bloody face moved closer forcing her to turn away. When she did she saw the*

*flames of hell reach for the car like hands. And in her ear Victor whispered, "I told you we'd be together forever." Adina screamed hysterically...*

Brandon was just as drained as Adina but he was also very hungry. He went into his room and changed his clothes. At first, he thought he wanted some room service then opted to go down to the restaurant and have a quick sandwich.

While going back to his room he saw Mr. Simmons. He mentioned he needed to check the heating unit in one of the suites on Brandon's floor. They got on the elevator and exchanged pleasantries about the hotel and construction business. Then they exited on Brandon's floor. As they walked down the hall they heard a woman scream. The screams got louder and louder as they neared Adina's room.

The screams were blood curdling. Brandon ran to her door with Mr. Simmons right on his heels. They banged on it and called out her name. When she didn't respond and the screaming continued, Mr. Simmons opened the door immediately.

Brandon shot into the suite and went straight into her bedroom. Mr. Simmons turned on the lights and waited in the living room. Brandon turned on the lights. Adina was sitting up in bed, her eyes closed and she was screaming and crying. He sat down and grabbed her shoulders. She drew away from him and started to fight.

He called her name and gave her a hard shake. Her eyes opened, raven lashes spiked with tears. She trembled uncontrollably. Her eyes were glassed. Adina looked at him but didn't see him.

He shook her again, "Adina, wake up! Wake up!

You're having a bad dream! Baby, wake up!"

The black fog lifted its veil from her eyes. She gazed up at him. Between gasps for breath and teary sobs, she cried, "Brandon, is it really you?" She reached out a trembling hand and touched his face softly, then fell back on the bed and cried more.

Brandon went into the living room where Mr. Simmons still waited. "Mr. Montgomery, is she alright? Do you need a doctor for her?"

He shook his head. "No. That won't be necessary. She just had a bad dream."

"Sounded more like a soul wrenching nightmare to me."

Brandon nodded in agreement. "Yeah. What I'd like for you to do is have room service bring up a tray of food. I know she didn't eat."

Mr. Simmons was more than happy to be of any help and replied, "Right away, Mr. Montgomery."

Brandon closed and locked the door after Mr. Simmons departed. He could hear Adina crying softly in her bedroom. When he heard her screams in the hall he literally felt himself age ten years. He had never known such helplessness.

*Get a grip man, it was only a dream.*

Then why couldn't he get his heart out of his throat?

Brandon walked in and closed the door.

Adina was shaking. He sat on the bed. Before he could say one word, Brandon found himself tangled up in Adina's embrace. Her naked arms and legs wrapped around him like a vice. Every part of her was trembling and cold.

He felt her small head burrow into his neck. Felt her quiet tears run down his throat. Carefully he gathered the

bed covers around them and slowly rocked back and forth with her. His arms held on tightly as he sensed what she needed. He replied softly, "It's all right. I'm here now. No one will hurt you."

He could tell she was fighting for composure. "Oh, Brandon, please hold me. Don't ask me any questions. I just can't talk about it. Hold me. Hold me. Give me the safety of your arms. Please just—" Her voice stopped abruptly as she cried her eyes out. Brandon remained silent. Rocking back and forth, literally trying to fuse his strength and courage into her. He held her for over an hour.

Whatever had upset her, terrified her down to her soul. Brandon wondered what could have happened to her that it would frighten her to hysterics? Mr. Simmons sent up a food tray but Adina was too upset to eat. She finally went limp in his arms and he knew she had drifted into an exhausted, dreamless sleep.

There was nothing he could do for her except hold her and let her fight her demons by herself. He gently unraveled himself from her embrace and stretched her out on the bed. She looked so drained. He didn't want to leave but knew it was best. She needed to rest.

When Adina awoke the next morning everything was a gray haze. She remembered Brandon being there but she had a hard time remembering the nightmare. In a way, she was grateful she couldn't recall the details of it. She showered quickly, got dressed and went down to meet him for breakfast. When she saw him, he looked terrible.

Brandon may have left Adina alone in her room but

that didn't mean she wasn't on his mind. He was so worried she'd have another nightmare that he paced in his suite all night, ready to run to her aid if she woke up screaming again.

When he got a call from her asking him to join her for breakfast he wanted to see for himself that she was all right. Then he'd go back to his room and sleep for a month.

She joined him at his table and said cautiously, "Brandon, are you feeling alright? You look a little green around the gills."

Brandon knew she was fine if she was able to crack a joke at his expense. "I will be alright, now that I have seen your lovely face. You gave Mr. Simmons and myself quite a scare last night. You bade me not to ask any questions and I will respect your wishes but, if ever you want to talk, I will be ready to listen."

He watched carefully as she attempted to conceal the pain in her eyes. When her gentle lids slowly fell over her black diamond eyes, Brandon had a sense of helplessness that almost hurt. Her private demons were winning.

"Brandon, thank you for understanding. When I find the courage to speak of it, I will share it with you. I promise." She brought her eyes up to meet his, then she reached out and squeezed his hand as though he was the one who needed to be comforted. "Now, are we gonna eat or not? I'm famished. Having hysterical nightmares can give a person one helluva appetite."

Brandon smiled and Adina started to laugh...a little. She wiped her unshed tears away and glanced at her menu. Brandon sat watching her through lowered lids. He thought how he had missed her laughter. After last night he was sure of one thing, he never wanted to see that

look of fear and terror in her eyes again. If he lived to be two hundred years old she would never cry in his arms like that again. He would make his embrace a safe haven for whenever she wanted it.

Adina was surprised when Brandon canceled their preliminary meeting. She didn't argue. She was thrilled to have a day off after almost eight weeks of nonstop negotiations. Plus, this gave her an opportunity to go see her sister, Cookie. When she got to Cookie's shop she could barely get in the place. It was packed with wall to wall people. Adina couldn't believe it.

Cookie spotted her from across the room and yelled, "Meet me in the back of the shop. Push your way through. I will meet you there!"

Adina finally made it to the back room. Cookie joined her wearing one of her new creations and a smile as big as the sun. "What's goin' on? What's with all the people?"

Cookie closed the distance between them and pinched her sister's cheek and said, "My God, girl, I've been this busy ever since the charity ball. I don't know what you said, but I have been working like a dog and making a small fortune in the process."

"I'm so happy for you. Business is definitely good, I take it?"

"Hell yeah, I have orders coming in all the way from Quebec and orders for a few functions that aren't even scheduled until next year. If you ever need another gown on short notice just let me know. I'd be happy to let you increase my business."

Adina smiled and sat down on the sofa. After a few moments, she sensed Cookie watching her. She couldn't believe she was still surprised by the sensation. Her sister,



Cookie, knew her better than anyone.

“Adina, are you alright, honey? Your eyes look sad.”

“I’m just tired.” Cookie’s eyebrow arched up as if to say, *you can tell the truth whenever you’re ready*. Adina giggled a little then said, “I can’t hide shit from you, can I? I had another bad dream. It shook me up something awful. I was so out of it, Brandon had to calm me down. He stayed until I fell asleep again.”

“So, you and Brandon are like that now. I knew he wouldn’t be able to keep away from you after that kiss you two shared at The Phantom.”

Adina blushed. She couldn’t admit they had shared an intimate night together. “Cookie, it’s not like that at all. We’re just friends.”

“Okay, Adina, if you say so.” She really had to work on her poker face, Adina thought. They way Cookie was looking at her, her sister knew she was flat out lying. “Well, I am sorry about your dreams. Why do you think you are having them again?”

She shrugged a slender shoulder and answered, “I really don’t know, but I do know I hate feeling afraid. I can’t stand feeling so lost and vulnerable. I thought I’d gotten past all the horror of Victor Millard. I guess there were a few demons I missed.”

“Well, I’m sure you will get past this. You have a strong constitution and with Brandon clinging so close I’m sure no harm will ever come to you again.”

Adina’s shocked voice cried, “Charlotte Louise Powers, I told you it’s not like that with Brandon and me. I wish you’d stop insinuating otherwise!”

“Yeah right, Little Raven. I’ll believe that when cockroaches start using birth control.” Adina watched Cookie quit the back room. She knew her sister knew full

well she had hit Adina's hot button.

Adina had a great afternoon with her sister. She helped in the shop and sold three gowns. She had no idea how much Cookie charged for her designs. Her sister didn't exaggerate. She was making a small fortune. Cookie gave Adina two new creations to take back with her.

"But Cookie, I don't see the need for them."

"Brandon will."

Adina glared a warning to Cookie. "That's not funny."

With a sly chuckle, Cookie said, "Then do it for me. I love free advertisement."

When Adina returned to the hotel she had a brief meeting with Brandon about their two week agenda in Quebec. She was all set to retire when Brandon struck up a casual conversation and she proceeded to tell him all about Cookie's good fortune since the charity ball.

"Brandon, it was great. I had a lot of fun. The gown she loaned me for the charity ball was a smashing success for her. She told me she's been swamped with orders since that weekend."

Brandon watched as Adina's eyes sparkled with excitement when she told of her sister's good fortune. "I guess the Brandon Montgomery magic touch for success even extends to distant relatives."

"I guess it does, sir. By the way, did I tell you she gave me two more outfits to wear while we are in Quebec? I'm not sure if I should bring them. I didn't see any engagements on our agenda which required after five attire. Do you think I should bring them along?"

Brandon sat up in his chair and grabbed the list of

their agenda from the table. "Well, I don't know. Let's take another look and see what we find." There was a pause in his voice. "On the fifteenth, we have The Art Galleries of Quebec annual cocktail and dinner party. That would be something worth getting all dolled up for."

"But Brandon, I thought you decided to decline the invitation. You had a horrible time last year and vowed you'd never go back.

Brandon scrunched his face together as though he was thinking real hard about his decision. "I've changed my mind, we're going."

"Okay, but that will make our schedule tight. You know we have to meet with the representatives for the Dolby Corporation. I hear their negotiation team is fierce. We'll have to be well rested so we're sharp and alert to tackle them."

Brandon pondered her reasoning, then said, "You're right, we do need to be on our toes to handle the Dolby Corp. Reps. so to ease your objections, we will make it an early evening. Besides, I need a break. You can't tell me you wouldn't like one as well?"

Adina made a goofy face then gave a half smile and said, "Get out of my head, Brandon. I was just thinking that when my contract expires in another four weeks, I'd put myself on inactive status for a month or so and get some much needed rest."

Brandon lowered his lids over his sexy bedroom eyes and grinned like he knew something she didn't. "Oh, Adina, I just remembered what I wanted to tell you... I renewed my contract with your agency. I requested you. The contract is indefinite."

"You did what! Why didn't you consult me first? How

dare you make such an important decision about me? Brandon, I thought we were becoming friends. Friends talk to each other. They don't go off half-cocked planning their friend's lives for them. No! Never! I will not be renewing my contract with you when this one expires."

Brandon gaped in unexpected shock. He couldn't believe her reaction. She was really angry. "Adina...I had no idea this would upset you. I thought it would be a pleasant surprise. I see I've miscalculated."

Adina's eyes were blazing. "You're damn right you did."

Brandon looked on in shock as she pivoted on her heels and stormed out.

## CHAPTER 8

A dina was seeing red. She didn't want to go to her room. So she decided to go for a walk outside. The cold air would cool her temper. She hadn't been this angry in years.

Why was it that the people in her life always wanted to rule her life? Why did they want to make her decisions for her? This was getting ridiculous. First, it was her parents then Cookie and Victor. Now Brandon Montgomery. She wondered if she didn't have a 'Please rule my life' sign on her back.

As she walked down the street it began to rain. She turned her head up into it and let it drop onto her face. It had a calming effect on her. She started to think more clearly. How come everyone wanted to control her in some form or fashion? Brandon came to mind and she had to admit that the real reason she didn't want to renew her contract was not because he had overstepped himself when he decided to renew her contract without telling her first, but rather, she was hanging on by a thread as it was. She was doing everything she could to hang on these last four weeks. She would never be able to work with him indefinitely without eventually giving in to her desire and hunger for him. He was under her skin. He was in her

head. She was using every ounce of willpower she had just so she wouldn't go to his room every night and jump his bones. No. An indefinite contract would destroy any willpower she had.

It started to rain harder so she decided to head back to the hotel. She was soaked to the bone but at least she was thinking clearly again. She thought back to how she snapped at Brandon. He probably thought she had a screw loose. She'd go and apologize to him.

Brandon was so confused by Adina's reaction he couldn't even eat dinner. He went back to his suite. This woman shook him up to no end. He needed a stiff drink. He poured himself a shot of whiskey and threw it back fast. When the warm tingle hit his spine, he sat on the sofa and tried to look at this from a different angle.

He might have overstepped the parameters of their friendship. He just assumed she'd want to be with him. It never occurred to him that she might not want to renew the contract. When he got the certified letter advising him that the contract would be expiring, he didn't think twice and he renewed without hesitation.

Brandon knew now he'd used the contract situation to keep Adina close to him. He couldn't stomach another interpreter. No one knew him like she did. He wanted her and only her. He was being selfish and he fucking knew it.

He couldn't give her up. But, she was angry and his selfish act may have cost him more than he was willing to lose. He had to apologize and tell her the real reason and maybe she'd still remain his friend. He was about to fix another drink to give himself courage for when he faced her and someone knocked at his door.

Adina stood soaking wet in his door. "Brandon, I need to talk to you."

"Adina, get in here before you catch your death of cold."

Brandon took her coat and got her a towel for her hair. He felt a sting of annoyance prick him as he said, "I thought you stormed to your room. I had no idea you'd gone out in this weather."

"I didn't go out in it," Adina said slowly, so her shuddering wouldn't impair her speech. "I was already out when it started to come down. I was so angry I didn't notice the rain until I was thoroughly drenched. Besides, that's not what I'm here to talk to you about. I want to apologize for my outburst in the restaurant earlier. I know you thought I was crazy." She walked over to the sofa and continued, "Brandon, I have to tell you something about me." She took a few quick breaths. "I hate dishonesty and lies. In all good conscience, I would not be able to respect myself if I was dishonest or lied to you."

So, I've come to tell you the real reason why I can't renew my contract." She came off the sofa and walked up close so he'd know she meant her words. "I don't trust myself around you." She stepped back slowly as she saw his eyes darken. "I could never do an indefinite contract wanting you the way I do. My hunger for you is absolutely insatiable. You don't know how many times I've wanted to come to you and drown in your kisses and surrender to your embrace. You can't imagine how I've ached to have your hands all over my body."

The night of my nightmare, I prayed you wouldn't leave me. I wanted to wake up in your arms desperately. These last few weeks have been torture. The only thing

that has gotten me through them—and what will get me through the next four—will be away from you and I'll go on with my life and still have you as a friend.”

Now, Brandon was angry. Here he was, ready to admit his true reasons for not consulting her about the renewal of the contract and she beat him to the punch and confessed first. Another layer on the onion.

Brandon closed the distance between them in one step. He looked down and said, “Look, if anyone is going to do any true confessions around here, it's gonna be me. I was all set to beg your pardon and explain why I didn't consult you about the renewal, and you come in here making it worse by being honest.” Brandon took a few deep breaths and plunged in. “I didn't consult you because I was being selfish. I didn't want you to be able to say no. I didn't want to let you go. You have no idea how many times I've come so close to bribing Mr. Simmons to give me his master pass key to your room so I could come and be with you. When you had your horrible dream, I thought I had died a thousand times when I couldn't hold you all night and take away your pain. You can't fathom all the nights I lay in my big, empty bed aching to taste you again. My only comfort was at least I'd always be near you as you were bound by your contract to interpret for me.”

Adina stepped from Brandon and let his words penetrate her brain before she said, “From the sound of both our confessions, we're having the same problem. What do you suggest we do about it?”

He stepped so close his warm breath fanned her face. “Have sex. A lot of it.”

That wasn't the answer she needed or wanted to hear.



She was barely holding on now. "We can't. That's too easy and would only satisfy our bodies. We need a solution that will bring a permanent end to our problem."

As Brandon gently lifted her fingers to his lips and began to suck them one by one, Adina groggily acknowledged that he didn't want any other solution. As she became hypnotized by the pull of his hungry gray eyes, too late she realized he was looking for the tiniest crack in her will. Before she could focus, a whimper of pleasure slipped out and Brandon pounced.

He moved with lightening speed, moving his hands to cup her face then kissing her deeply, forcing her mouth open with his tongue and tasting her hungrily.

Adina felt herself become liquid fire in his hands. She was dazed and felt her arms snake around his neck, pulling him closer into her hot mouth. Soon she came up on her toes to compensate for their height difference. She was drowning in a sea of pleasure.

She felt his large greedy hands settle on her ass and press her hard into aroused body. She had to fight the sinking feeling she was experiencing. She couldn't lose herself. Gathering her last bit of restraint, Adina pulled from Brandon and said breathlessly, "You don't understand how insatiable you make me. I won't stop. Please listen—"

Brandon claimed her lips again, only this time, he'd never let go. Silently, he demanded her total surrender. He lifted her into his arms and held tightly. She stopped struggling and became suddenly relaxed.

Brandon walked into his room and laid her down on the bed and pulled his mouth away slowly. He looked into her eyes and he did a double take. They had changed. Not

the color per se, but they were deeper, darker. "Remember, I warned you." Brandon swallowed hard, she had actually intimidated him.

Abruptly he was snatched forward by his shirt collar as Adina swallowed his mouth with hers. Her hot tongue sank deep into his mouth and he realized that she was seducing him. He actually heard himself gasping as she pushed him off of her.

He stood over her consumed with a raw hunger. When she slid from the bed and placed her hand on his dick and squeezed he thought he'd come right in his pants. Her type of seduction was addictive. He couldn't focus on anything but her.

Every stroke of her hands across his body ignited pure lust in him. When her tiny growls vibrated across his skin he had to remember to breathe.

When her fingers and mouth started ripping off his clothes, Brandon thought it was his turn to undress her. *Not.* Adina pushed him onto the bed. He watched as her eyes sparkled with raw heat as she stripped out of her clothes slowly teasing him, taunting him, and torturing him. When her hair fell and she licked her full lips, Brandon nearly jumped off the bed. He wanted her. Every fiber in his body screamed to have her.

As she climbed into the bed and straddled him, he felt his cock buck in anticipation. She kissed him fully. Every tongue thrust, a thunderbolt of wild passion. She tore her mouth away and sat up. "I want a good hard fuck, Brandon. Do you think you could help me with that?"

He couldn't fathom intelligent thoughts. All he could do was nod his head.

Adina's kisses were drugged with hunger, desire and lust. He tried to roll so he was above Adina. She had him

straddled firmly between her silky thighs and held on to him with vice grip pressure around his rib cage. She started to move to a primal beat only she heard. She slid her body up and down his, sending all the nerve endings into overdrive.

He couldn't take his eyes off of her. She licked her lips and growled as she moved slowly down his body, tasting him with her wet mouth. When her tongue touched tender spots he didn't even know he had, Brandon felt his breath catch in his chest.

Her hands were doing incredible things to him. As her warm little fingers spread his thighs to reveal the sensitive skin inside, he couldn't hold back a pitiful whimper.

She wanted to eat him alive, he thought. As her lips closed around his cock Brandon could see the passion devils dancing in her eyes. Then he saw nothing but sparks as her mouth swallowed and pistoned down his shaft.

Damn, she was good at it. Every stroke of her tongue tortured and soothed. Every slurp and groan of her lips pushed for his surrender. Brandon's whole body became one gigantic nerve. Even his eyelashes tingled with the indescribable sensations.

Just as his own gurgling cries echoed hers, Brandon flinched as her masterful mouth abandoned his cock.

There was a primal sense of urgency in the way she straddled him. He groaned as she pulled his cock from his belly and centered it between her thighs. Brandon grasped her hips and impaled her forward. He couldn't wait a moment longer.

They gasped at the soul wrenching pleasure of his penetration. He could feel her womb. Feel how it

throbbed against the head of his cock. A sensation that aroused the hell out of him. He felt her limbs straining around him. She wanted to set the pace and he was more than happy to let her.

The pleasure on her face was staggering. Nothing was more beautiful to him than watching her move wildly over him, thrusting herself upon his dick until she cried out.

He reached with shaky hands for her waist then thrust up as she came down. The harder he surged up the tighter her singeing muscles gripped his shaft. He knew they would ravage each other before this ride was over.

He couldn't hold in his groans and moans. The sight of her, the feel of her around his dick, was more passion than he wanted to hold inside. He felt Adina take his hands from her waist and place them high above his head. He was shaking violently as she quickened the pace of her thrusts to an almost reckless speed.

Then he heard it. Her sultry voice in his ear. "You know what I want, Brandon. I want to hear you come." And he could do nothing but oblige her.

A harsh cry tore from his full lips as they catapulted in their climax. He shivered with total abandonment. His mind launched into infinity. He felt himself somewhere between life and death.

Adina collapsed on top of Brandon, her sprawled body dripping wet, her hair matted to her face and neck. She could feel him shaking beneath her and breathing deeply as if he'd just run a marathon.

She felt his hard arms slide down her body and capture her in a possessive embrace. Dear Lord, he felt good under her, around her, inside her. She buried her

face in his neck and wrapped soft arms around his shoulders tightly. When his rough hands began making little circles down her spine, she actually purred. She lifted her head and observed his closed eyes and a delicious smile working its way across his chiseled features. She ran her tongue over his mouth and asked, "Wanna do it again?"

Brandon's eyes popped open. *Was she serious?* Still holding her in his arms, he took in a jagged breath and turned to his side. He gave a light chuckle, "That was incredible. You were incredible." Adina blushed then ran her tongue over his swollen lips. He shivered all around her.

She replied soft and sensuously, "I wanted you to know how you made me feel that first time. It was my way of saying thank you. The first time we had sex was...wonderful. I wanted you to have something to remind you of our time together after we go our separate ways."

Brandon rolled until Adina was pinned beneath his massive body. "Please tell me you're not saying what I think you're saying? You still can't be planning to leave when your contract expires?"

Adina tried to rise but Brandon wouldn't move. He wanted an answer and wanted it right now. "Brandon, let me up."

"No," he said sharply.

"Brandon, this can't work and you know it."

"Don't put your words in my mouth. I don't know any such thing."

He felt her warm breath blow across his wet chest, just before she lifted her beautiful eyes to his. "Look at

the situation sensibly. You are my boss. Because of what you do for a living we've had to work closely together. We've had to spend a lot of time in each other's faces. That had to create a type of temporary bond as well as a mutual attraction towards each other. But that's all it is, temporary. When my contract expires, you'll see I'm right."

Brandon wanted to shake some sense into Adina. She wasn't cooperating at all. He knew he was stubborn and determined, but he didn't have anything on this woman. "This is the second time you've neatly explained why you and I can't be together. The first time I went along and respected your decision. Not this time. There's absolutely no way I will let you talk me into letting you go."

Adina couldn't believe her ears. She felt an unnatural twinge of *deja vu*. She said firmly, "Brandon, I'm not trying to talk you into anything. I'm simply stating the obvious. Besides, there isn't much you can do to alter the situation. My mind is made up." Her hand caressed his annoyed, strained face.

"When my contract expires in four weeks, I'm taking a leave of absence. If you still require an interpreter next year, I'm sure my agency will supply you with an adequate replacement for me."

Adina was amazed at how adapt she had become at reading his moods. He was ready to explode. She could see it clearly in his eyes. With all his success, wealth and influence, he knew he couldn't win this fight. She wasn't afraid to walk away from all he was and all he could offer.

"You and I have just had the kind of sex few people will ever experience. And you're telling me you can give it up," he snapped his fingers into the air, "just like that?"

Adina lowered her lids over obsidian eyes as her fingers made little circles on Brandon's shoulder. She lay quiet for a moment, apparently thinking hard as to what to say. "I can never deny the way you make me feel when you are inside me. It's pure ecstasy but therein lies one of our problems.

"All we have and share in common is our savage desire for each other. There must be much more between a man and a woman than just sex. I'm not sure any of this makes sense to you but I know from experience that what I say is true." Adina brought her eyes up to Brandon's and flinched. He was angry. It was written all over his face. Her reaction was second nature. "You're getting heavy. Please, let me up... you're scaring me."

He rolled off of her and onto his back. She slid from the bed and started to dress. She knelt to pick up her shoes when Brandon walked over and said, "You said earlier, that what we feel...what I feel towards you is temporary. How can you be so sure? Where does your reasoning come from?"

Adina started to put on her shoes. At first she thought it best not to answer then decided it would do no harm to let him know what she thought. "Many people, including myself, have made the mistake of jumping into relationships without fully understanding what it takes to have a real connection with someone.

"It's the little things that eat away at relationships. If you don't have a strong, solid foundation any relationship you build is destined to collapse." Adina started to leave when Brandon pulled her into his embrace. The heat of his naked body made her shudder.

"What connection would that be, Adina? What little things? Tell me, please, I want to know." His voice was so

silky and alluring. Adina could hardly look at him without going weak in the knees. He was so powerful, so big, so sensuous.

She took a deep breath and blew it out slowly then backed out of his arms and said, "There are many things. The one that comes to my mind is knowing the person you are with. Brandon, how well do you really know me? How well do I know you?

"Trust. I trusted someone once and I don't think I could do it again. Can you trust someone who could possibly never trust you?

"Friendship. Could you be a friend even if you didn't like what your friend was doing or acting?

"And then of course, there's love. Could you love unconditionally? Could you love a woman with every fiber of your being? Could you love a woman enough to let her go? Can you honestly say we have that between us? I can't." Adina turned to walk away. She said her next words tenderly, "I'm sorry if anything I've said has annoyed you further, but it's how I feel, what I believe."

Brandon watched Adina quit his suite. He padded straight to the bar and grabbed the bottle of whiskey. To hell with a glass! She had him so left from his right, so backward from his forward only big gulps would soothe his runaway emotions.

He walked into the bathroom and ran water in the tub. It filled quickly and he got in. He took a wash cloth and emerged it then propped it on his head. He couldn't believe it. She had done it to him again. She managed somehow to convince him that she was right and they could not be together. Damn her! Her words were ringing in his ears.



Brandon finally admitted he really didn't know Adina. He only knew what she presented to him. He really didn't know anything about her. For instance, what was her favorite color? Did she like children? Did she want children? Did she have children? Did she have allergies? Why did she have a tattoo of a dragon on her back? Did she like making love in the rain? Brandon's mind filled with hundreds of questions about Adina that he had to confess he didn't have any answers for.

Trust came hard for him as it was. It had become more difficult after Sylvia betrayed him. He had problems trusting people just as much as Adina did. He pondered over the person in Adina's past who had hurt her so deeply she wouldn't allow herself to trust anyone again.

He groaned as if in pain then sank in the tub as he thought how his earlier actions proved her right again about his capabilities to be a good friend under the gun. Overstepping his bounds as a friend and deciding for her that she would renew her contract all but sealed his coffin on his credibility as a good friend.

Love... the big money question. He loved Sylvia Reynolds and she'd ripped his heart out. Love was something that demanded too much of him. It meant giving up control. Brandon ached with the thought that love was a leap of faith he wasn't willing to take. Damn, Adina was right. Brandon hated the idea. He honestly couldn't admit he loved her or loved her enough to let her go. He wanted her too much and he knew that that wasn't love. Love wasn't selfish and that's exactly how he felt...selfish.

Brandon argued long and hard with himself in the tub. When it came to Adina he was greedy. All he wanted was her. As soon as she left, his body started to crave her

again. If his penis wasn't so sore from their hot sex and if he wasn't totally exhausted from it as well, he would've taken her again for the utter pleasure it would bring him.

No, it was not love he felt for her. She was right again. The only thing they shared was their hunger. Brandon eased from the tub slowly. All his soul searching and a half a bottle of whiskey had him wobbly. He dried himself and retreated to his bed. He lay awake for hours. His mind raced. He felt as restless as a cat.

He sat up abruptly and knew why he couldn't sleep. Adina was in the room. Not her exactly but her essence. Her perspiration had washed his sheets. Her unmistakable scent engulfed him from every angle. He grabbed his pillow and put it over his head. That only made matters worse. It was the one she'd rested her head upon. He came from the bed and sluggishly trotted into the living room. He propped himself on the sofa and finished off the whiskey.

## CHAPTER 2

The next week and a half went by like the previous weeks; fast, heated and productive. They were the consummate professionals while they worked together. Neither revealed any outward signs of cracks in their armor. They pushed themselves as always, hard and grueling.

Brandon and Adina fought so hard to steer clear of each other they decided to eat alone in their suites until they left for Quebec.

Adina had just finished dinner when she decided to listen to Stevie Ray Vaughn's *Riviera Paradise*. She turned off the living room lights and sat quietly on the sofa.

She thought of Brandon and how they'd gotten so out of control. She couldn't deny she wanted him. In all honesty, she craved him. But that was just his body. Who was the man? What was in his heart? She hardly knew him.

The last person she'd trusted tried to kill her when she didn't want to be with him anymore. She knew to be strong and stand her ground when it came to Brandon. She would never repeat the same mistake she had with Victor Millard. He enticed her with promises he never kept, love veiled in deceit and desire laced with

destruction.

Adina smiled to herself thinking how some women would kill to be in her position. Brandon Alexander Montgomery was one of the richest men in the country and he wanted her.

Working so closely with him for so many months, she observed how women literally threw themselves at him. Most times, they practically prostituted themselves just to get his attention and here she was, telling him they couldn't be together. Other women would gladly contend with the persona and image he presented. So why didn't he have the same effect upon her?

She thought about it long and hard and concluded most women only saw the nice, pretty package Brandon represented; money, power, position and security. None of them really looked at the man himself.

If she didn't know in her heart and soul that Brandon or any man for that matter wasn't a good man, she just couldn't be with him. She had found out the hard way that looks could be deceiving. She would never allow herself to be blinded by a pretty package again. She would never settle for a shell of a man.

Adina and Brandon were grateful to be leaving Montreal for a while. Brandon felt some new scenery was necessary. Quebec would be a nice distraction. Being cooped up in the hotel for months had taken its toll on his nerves. Not to mention he was literally burned out from weeks of nonstop negotiations.

As Brandon checked to make sure everything was in the limousine he slyly watched as Adina checked them out of the hotel. How the fuck was he supposed to keep his hands off of her once he had her alone in the

limousine?

As Mr. Simmons escorted her to the car, Brandon bristled with pure frustration.

“Ms. Powers, it's been a pleasure to serve you. Mr. Montgomery and you have been absolutely fabulous guests at my hotel. I only wish more of my guests were like you.”

Adina smiled sweetly and said, “I've enjoyed your hotel and its warm hospitality. I will be back. I never got a chance to go swimming. Maybe we can make a date of it.” He caught the innocent wink she gave Mr. Simmons as she slid into the back seat.

Brandon needed to hit something. He was so jealous he could spit. He got into the limousine and smoldered internally.

The flight to Quebec was stressful but not nearly as tense as the ride to the airport. They had more room to move around and could avoid each other if they really had to. They got to the hotel and checked in. Adina called her sister to let her know that she'd made it in one piece and left the name of the hotel and phone number in case of any emergencies.

Brandon went downstairs to check the hotel's conference room's facilities.

While waiting on the hotel manager, he ran into George Deveroux.

“Mr. Deveroux, God, man, how are you?”

George smiled and replied, “Mr. Montgomery, so good to see you. What are you doing here in Quebec?”

“Brandon, please, call me Brandon.”

George nodded, “If you call me George or better yet,

Jazzy.”

They stepped into the lobby and began to chat about all the events that had transpired since the night of the charity ball.

“So Brandon, you got the Ocasí contract. I bet he was a tough nut to crack. I hear he's a shrewd negotiator.”

Brandon's eyes rolled before he replied, “God, yes. If Adina hadn't been in the room I probably would've leapt over the table and ripped his fuckin' throat out. He was so unreasonable about the material specifications for the complex we're building for him in Montreal. I thought I'd kill the guy.”

George's eyes grew wide when he heard mention of Adina's name. “Ah yes, I know what you mean but you had Adina on your team. The lady knows how to get the job done. She reads a situation well.

“I hope she came with you to Quebec. I'd love to see her again. I had so much fun the night of the charity ball. I have to ask her how Cookie is doing and maybe she can tell me why Cookie won't give me the time of day?”

Brandon did a double take. “I had no idea you were interested in Cookie. The two of you seemed so casual. I never suspected a thing.”

George looked at his watch then leaned into Brandon and said his next words with a slight smirk. “Brandon, if I had the time I would go into more details but I will give you the edited version. As you know we all grew up in Paris. When I met Charlotte, I was immediately attracted to her. She was beautiful, smart, confident and determined.

“I didn't care what color she was but my family did. I was a jerk and didn't handle the pressure my family applied on me about our friendship. They felt she was

after my family's money.

"I tried to tell them it wasn't like that, we were just good friends. They pressured me to distance myself or they'd make my life miserable.

"I was furious. I stormed out and told Cookie what was happening. I could see she was hurt but she said she understood. I became so moved by her inner strength and pride I kissed her. She yielded to me with such abandonment that I just had to have her. That night we made love. It was...explosive! She told me afterwards, the gift I received would never be repeated and no other woman could duplicate it. She was right. It's been fifteen years and I've not found one woman who could do to me what Cookie did."

Brandon looked at him with a curious stare. "George, lots of women give their virginity to men—that's nothing new. You can't tell me you haven't had another virgin in your life."

George burst into a full belly laugh. "Oh, Brandon, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to laugh but it was so funny I couldn't resist. You thought I referred to taking Cookie's virginity? No, Brandon, no." He chuckled again then said, "Charlotte gave me something much more satisfying. She gave a gift so rare I've literally searched the world trying to experience it again. I have come to the conclusion the only one who can give it to me is Cookie. She has ruined me for every other woman that has come into my life since her. I must have her and it again."

Brandon's curiosity smacked his brain around and he had to know. "Jesus Christ, George, what's the gift?"

George stopped smiling and said with a straight face. "Brandon, I can't tell you. I will never tell. It's the sort of thing you don't tell. What Charlotte did the night we

made love I will carry to my grave.”

Brandon was really annoyed and knew George would never tell what the gift was. “Since I’ll never know, we might as well change the subject. Are you going to the Art Galleries of Quebec cocktail and dinner party tomorrow?”

George eyed Brandon solemnly. “I never said you’d never know, I just said, I’ll never tell. I really thought you and Adina were getting to know each other a little better since going to The Phantom. I thought she might have told you. But to answer your question, yes, I’ll be at the party tomorrow. I hope I see you and Adina there. Look, I gotta get going. Tell my Little Raven I said hello.”

Brandon went over the conference room facilities with the hotel concierge. He tried to concentrate on the pros and cons of the conference room but he kept thinking about what George had said. He finally got to his room and stripped out of his clothes and took a hot shower. The water washed away some of his tension.

He slipped on his robe and padded barefoot into the living room. The hotel had supplied his room with a complimentary fruit basket. He picked through it and settled on a Granny Smith apple. He walked into his bedroom and sat on the edge of his bed and thought about what George had said.

Whatever Cookie gave George fifteen years ago stayed with him until no other woman could ever satisfy him. And whatever this something was, Adina knew about it. Brandon wondered if she could give this gift. And if she could, would it have the same effect on him as it had had on George? Brandon finished his apple and finally drifted to sleep.

Even in sleep, he was not free of her. She invaded his



dreams more and more as their time together grew to a close. Tonight, he dreamt they sat under a tree. *She lay cradled in his arms. They were kissing and talking about their day then his dream grew dark. He looked around and she was gone. He called to her. She didn't answer. He had this feeling of such loss.*

*Suddenly, he heard her scream his name. He started to run toward the sound of her voice, calling to her, telling her to hold on, that he was coming. Her screams pierced his very soul as his heart constricted with panic that he wouldn't be able to save her.*

His dream changed again. *He stood in a shallow stream in a dense forest. He looked across the water and saw a woman's body sprawled on the ground. He ran across the stream calling Adina's name. He knelt down and lifted her into his arms. Someone had hurt her and he'd been unable to stop it. Death had a firm hold.*

*She looked up and said, "Hold me, give me the safety of your arms." He embraced her tightly as tears rained from his eyes as she slipped away...*

"No!" he cried and sat up like a shot. Cold sweat was dripping from his clammy flesh. He grabbed his robe and rushed into the other room. He called Adina's room. She picked up on the fourth ring. She was groggy, but alive. He apologized for disturbing her and hung up. Then something seized Brandon and hearing her voice wasn't enough. He had to see her. He had to feel that she was all right. He ran quickly to her suite and banged on the door.

She answered right away. "Brandon, what is it? Has something happened?"

He breathed deeply and said, "I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. Are you sure you're okay?"

She studied his face and must have recognized the look in his eyes. "Did you have a nightmare? Is there anything I can do to help?"

Brandon stepped closer, his whole body rigid. Adina knew what he wanted. "May I hold you for a moment, please?" He didn't let her answer. He pulled her to him slowly then wrapped his arms around her and squeezed fiercely.

Adina kept her composure and molded into him as her soft, sensuous mouth brushed his ear and whispered, "Brandon, I'm fine."

Her voice soothed him so deeply, the muscles in his back, shoulders and neck relaxed. She knew what he needed. He pulled his head from her neck and looked down. He couldn't help wanting to kiss her but he kept his composure and pulled away slowly. "Thank you," he whispered. Adina gave a half smile then he walked away.

Brandon and Adina were busy with their individual tasks for the remainder of their day. Adina confirmed schedules and times for the conference room and checked on the hotel's other business facilities. Brandon decided he would secure the limousine for their traveling this evening to the dinner party. He also wanted to get an opportunity to look at some of the historical landmarks around Quebec. He thought some of them could be refurbished by his construction company and the Bastille Foundation. When he finished with his impromptu sightseeing, it was late so he headed back to the hotel.

Adina called Brandon and informed him she was running late. So was he. They both agreed to meet downstairs in fifteen minutes. Brandon came down but there was no Adina. He went back up to her room and knocked on the door.

"Brandon, please come in. I tried calling your room but you'd already left. I need your help." She took off her

robe and turned her back to him. "My zipper's caught. I can't get at it and it's tangled in my hair. Would you mind fixing it for me?" Brandon was already to protest how much he hated to be late. But when he gazed upon Adina in her gown, he forgot how to speak. She was breathtaking.

Cookie had selected a gown that was stunning. It was made of tiny rhinestones and crystals. The gown completely covered and hugged Adina's body from her neck to her ankles. The shimmering stones were attached to a sheer flesh toned fabric, which gave the effect that Adina was totally nude, save the stones and crystals. She wore her hair down and it surrounded her face and cascaded to her shoulders.

Brandon was afraid to touch her. He wasn't sure he'd stop himself. He eventually came back to his senses when he heard Adina speaking to him. "Brandon, I really appreciate this. You better believe this will be the last time I listen to Cookie about wearing my hair down. It can really get in the way sometimes."

Brandon worked Adina's hair out of the zipper then moved it over to her shoulder and finished zipping up her dress. Her body was so warm, her skin so soft. He wanted her desperately.

Adina turned, looked at him and caught the flame of desire she'd ignited. She stepped back promptly and reached for her coat and felt his hands go around and reach for it too

"Let me help you with that." Passion plundered through her veins. His hands were so large and strong. She had to beat down the urge to fall into his arms and stay there forever.

They arrived at the Art Galleries of Quebec cocktail and dinner party in time for a tour of the new wing that had been built in the spring. They wandered around the entire wing enjoying all the wonderful pieces of art.

Some of it was traditional works that one could figure out and some of it was far out. It really made one think. They both realized they preferred the realistic motifs but admitted that some of the more exotic, funky stuff did leave an impression with them.

After the tour, the crowd disbanded and everyone strolled throughout the gallery. Brandon saw a business associate so he excused himself and walked over to talk to him.

Adina continued through the gallery. She came upon a small room with wall paintings. The room was dim and had a creepy feel to it. She couldn't resist and glided inside. She looked around and noticed she was the only one in the room. She glanced at the paintings and they made her shudder.

They told the story of man obsessed with a forbidden love. It was so sad. The colors were dark. The strokes used to create the images were etched in pain and betrayal. She looked around the room again and understood why the room's lights had been dimmed. That effect intensified the feeling of being helpless and trapped. Adina didn't like the feeling and was about to leave when a low, hoarse voice spoke from the darkness. Adina turned to look at where the voice came from. She wasn't aware she'd begun to shake. "Who's there?"

A figure of a man emerged from the shadows. He was dressed in all black. That's why Adina didn't notice him. He was about six feet tall with a medium athletic build.

His eyes were concealed behind dark glasses which made him look even more menacing.

Adina was scared. She had no idea why this man frightened her. She stepped away from him frantically, trying to put distance between them. The man stopped in mid-motion and said calmly, "Please excuse me. I didn't mean to frighten you. You looked so engrossed in my work. I just wanted to get your reaction."

Adina put her hand to her throat and breathed in deeply. "You scared me to death. I thought I was alone. With all the black you are wearing, I didn't notice you in the shadows at all. Please, give me a second to compose myself then I would be happy to give you my reaction to your work."

Adina forced herself to get a grip on her runaway imagination. The way he came from the shadows struck pure terror in her. She thought he was Satan coming to claim her. She turned away from the man and looked at the paintings again and said, "Your work is most moving. I like the dim light effect. It enhances the mood and intensifies the feeling of great loss."

The man smiled at Adina and said, "I wasn't sure about the lights at first. I thought it was a bit over the top."

Adina turned to face him again and noticed he had moved closer. She smiled faintly then continued, "I disagree, the lights are really the finishing touch. I wouldn't get the sensation of being trapped and helpless without them." Adina paused. "I'm sorry, I'm just going on about your work like I'm some kinda expert."

"Please, Ms.—"

She smiled and filled in the blank. "Powers, Adina Powers."

"The name is the destiny. There's no need to apologize. I respect the opinion of regular people too," crooned the mysterious stranger.

Adina started to laugh softly at the sarcastic remark. "I'm sorry, sir, but that was a little funny... 'regular people too'."

The man smiled wider. "Please, call me Edward. Edward Fenton."

Adina stopped laughing as he moved closer. She couldn't shake the feeling of anxiety that came over her whenever he moved nearer to her. She shook it off and continued, "Mr. Fenton, I really must get back to the party. There are more rooms I want to see before dinner is served. So if you will excuse me, I'll take my leave of you now."

Adina walked out the little room and started back to the rest of the crowd when she felt someone take her gently by the arm. She turned and looked up. It was Mr. Fenton.

"Ms. Powers, I was just wondering by any chance if I could see you again? This evening would have been a total bore if you hadn't stumbled into my room."

Adina was stunned and at a loss for words. She looked at him hard then smiled and said, "Mr. Fenton, I'm not from around here. I'm only in Quebec on business which will conclude in two weeks. All my time until then will be consumed with work... I'm sorry, but my answer is no."

"I do appreciate your honesty. Well, if you don't mind, can I escort you back to the party? I don't think that would interrupt your schedule."

Something told Adina that this man was unaccustomed to being refused. "I'd like that very much,

Mr. Fenton, thank you.” Edward extended his arm and she slipped hers through. His body was warm but this overwhelming feeling of being cold came over her. She shook it off and let him escort her back to the crowd.

Brandon had been walking around trying to find Adina. He was a little agitated. His dream from the other night had turned into a reality—one minute she was there and the next, she was gone. He was about to go into the new wing when he spotted her coming towards him on the arm of another man.

Brandon was immediately relieved to see her but as quickly as he became relieved, he became annoyed. Who was this guy and why was he so cozy with Adina? His eyes grew darker then he got a grip on his emotions and lowered his lids. “Adina, where have you been? I've been looking for you.”

Adina removed her arm from Edward's and paused before speaking. “Brandon, I'm sorry. It wasn't my intention to worry you. I was in the other wing looking at some paintings. I wasn't aware you were looking for me.” She smiled softly and looked at Edward then back to Brandon and said, “I'd like for you to meet one of the artists on display, Mr. Edward Fenton.”

Adina's expression was alerting Brandon to fact that his irritation was showing. He calmed some and extended his hand. “Hello, Mr. Fenton. I must take a look at your work. It must be interesting to see.”

Edward took Brandon's extended hand, smiled coolly and answered, “I don't know about all that but Ms. Powers found it moving and I get the impression she understood the feeling I wanted to relay.” Brandon didn't miss how Edward suddenly looked at Adina with

predatory adoration. "She has a natural talent for reading a situation well."

There was an eerie bond between them. Brandon couldn't quite put his finger on it but he knew he didn't like it. He moved behind Adina, so they were both facing Edward. Then with a warm, intimidating grin, he said, "Yes, I'd have to say you're right. She does have a way of seeing things most people don't."

Adina became incensed by the way they spoke of her as though she wasn't even in the room, or as if, some kind of inanimate object being displayed in the art gallery. She said calmly, but coldly, "If you two are finished dissecting my attributes, I think I'll go and look at some other rooms before dinner is served." She walked away and didn't look back.

If she had, she might have witnessed that Brandon and Edward never took their eyes off each other.

They were like two killer bees swarming around the same exotic flower. Each trying to extract the nectar before the other had a chance to. Brandon wanted to hit Edward Fenton. He really wanted to hurt him. His emotions were raw enough where Adina was concerned but this guy rubbed him the wrong way. He knew for sure it wasn't jealousy like it was with George or Mr. Simmons. But for some dark reason, Edward grated along his nerve endings like fingernails scraped against a blackboard.

Brandon decided to put some distance between him and Edward and try to find Adina again. When he excused himself, Edward crooned, "Mr. Montgomery, I'm sorry, but did I say something to annoy you? You seemed a little tense just now."



“No, Mr. Fenton, you didn't but my assistant, Ms. Powers, may be upset with me. I don't think she appreciated being talked about as though she wasn't here. I could tell by her tone she was pissed.”

Edward nodded in agreement. “Ah yes, I caught that breeze also. I do hope she isn't too upset with us. I would hate to be an ill thought in the head of such a devastatingly beautiful woman. Maybe when she simmers down, I'll go and apologize.”

Brandon chuckled a little then smiled. “I'll do it for the both of us as soon as I locate her again. She has a way of slipping away from me when I'm not looking.”

Mr. Fenton stopped smiling and removed his dark glasses. His eyes had an eerie layer to them. “I wouldn't make that a habit, Mr. Montgomery. Adina is the kind of woman you never let slip away. She's so rare that if she only comes once in a man's lifetime, he's lucky.”

Brandon felt a chill grip him. Edward sounded as if he was speaking from experience but what made Brandon's blood run cold was that he got the impression Edward was speaking specifically about himself and Adina.

Brandon stepped from Edward and said with a formidable stare, “Yes, Mr. Fenton, I know.” He walked away assured his statement delivered the effect he wanted. Edward wasn't the only one who knew how special Adina was.

When he located her again that cold feeling had left him. He noticed George Deveroux talking to her and they looked to be having an enjoyable time together.

“Little Raven, tell me, why is Cookie giving me the brush off? I have missed her greatly. I thought she would

let me get closer this time but she's keeping me at arms' length and I am getting desperate. I'm crazy about her but she doesn't believe me, ever since our time in Paris. I don't think she trusts me."

Adina took a sip of her sparkling water, looked up at George and said honestly, "Jazzy, I didn't know you had it this bad for Charlotte. I knew the two of you were close in Paris and kept in touch for many years afterwards, but I always thought you two mutually decided to go your separate ways. Has something happened recently that leads you to believe she may want to get involved with you again?"

"The Phantom was the most recent. It was just like we had never been apart. When we all drove off after dropping you and Brandon at the hotel, Cookie invited me back to her apartment she has over her design shop.

"We talked for an hour about how our lives had turned out and how much fun we'd had in Paris. Then all of a sudden, it dawned on me that Cookie was the only woman I ever let get to know me. She knows me better than I know myself. I knew then I'd never stopped loving her.

"She has been the only woman I knew without a shadow of doubt who wanted me just for me and not my name or my money. When I chose to distance myself from her all those years ago, I never dreamed I'd throw away the best thing that ever happened to me. She never says anything but I know that's the reason why she won't trust me. I hurt her and she doesn't want it to happen again."

Adina placed a comforting hand on George's shoulder and said softly. "Well, Jazzy, I will admit trust comes hard for both Cookie and me. The only advice I can give to

you about Cookie is to show her.

"If you show her you're going to be there no matter what, then maybe she'll open her heart to you again." Adina took a deep breath and forged on. "Now, about this brush off business. Believe me, Jazzy, it's not like that at all. I went to see her last month. She's been swamped with orders for her designs ever since the weekend of the charity ball.

"She's been so busy that I stayed with her the whole afternoon and helped her in her shop. I plan to help her again when I get back to Montreal. My contract expires with Brandon at the end of this month. I'm taking a leave of absence so I can get some rest.

"While I'm off, I'd planned to help Cookie with her orders and find a place to live. If you find yourself in Montreal, why don't you stop by the shop and lend a hand? I can't think of better way to show her you can be dependable."

George smiled down at Adina, thinking she had given him the solution to his problem. "That's a great idea. You definitely have more than a pretty face. You actually have a brain in that lovely head of yours...Where are you thinking about looking for a place to live?"

"I will stay in Montreal for a while. I really like the city and I'd be close to Cookie. The only thing is, I don't want a house. I want something that's really me. Something I can fix up and make my own. I'm kinda leaning towards a loft."

"Really?" he interjected. "I know of a few nice ones in Montreal. Just let me know and I'll have a word with the building super and he'll let you take a look."

Adina threw her arms around George just as Brandon came upon them. "Oh, thank you. I wasn't looking

forward to searching all over town to find a place to live. I really appreciate the gesture.”

George spotted Brandon over Adina's shoulder and caught the jealous look on his face. With a devilish smile he said, “It's the least I could do, considering how much you've helped me.” He dipped his head towards Adina's and kissed her lightly on the lips. The kind of kiss a brother gives his little sister.

Unfortunately, Brandon didn't see it that way. His blood began to boil. George brought his head up and teased, “Brandon, I didn't see you standing there.”

Adina turned to face him. “Are you and Edward done talking about me as if I'm not in the room?”

Brandon nodded his head then moved closer to Adina. He wanted her to feel his presence all around her. “I'd come to apologize for mine and Mr. Fenton's behavior but I see you've sought comfort in the arms of another.”

Adina caught his meaning and was about to unleash her temper when George cut in sharply, “Brandon, did you say Mr. Fenton? Edward Fenton?”

Brandon looked up at him and said, “Yes.”

He turned pale. “How long ago did you see him? Tell me, please, I have to know.”

Brandon heard the concern that bordered on fear in his voice and answered, “Why, I just left him in the north wing about ten minutes ago. What's this about?”

George took Adina gently by the arm and turned her to face him. “Adina, be a dear and get me a fresh glass of champagne.” She must have seen the stoic look on his face and left them alone.

Brandon knew George wanted her out the room

before he explained any further. "Jazzy, would you tell me what this is about?"

"Where was Edward when you saw him? And who was he with?"

"I first saw him standing at the intersection of the north and east wings of the gallery. He was escorting Adina back to the party."

George's facial expressions changed so fast Brandon couldn't keep up with all of them but the ones he caught were fear and shock.

"Brandon, show me exactly."

Brandon showed George where he saw Adina and Edward. They walked through both wings until they ventured upon the little room with the Fenton paintings. They went in and George got so nervous his body went rigid. Brandon couldn't understand why. "Jazzy, why are you concerned about this Fenton fellow?"

He walked over to the name plate next to the paintings. "Brandon, this is why... look at this." Brandon walked over and read the information on the plate. According to it, Edward Fenton died over two years ago.

Brandon felt that cold grip again. "Then who the hell was the man with Adina?" he said sharply.

"I'm not sure...but I'm going to find out. They'll be serving dinner soon so we'd better get back. Besides, Adina is probably wondering where we wandered off to."

Brandon said quickly, "Yeah, let's get out of here. This place is eerie. All these shadows and dark images give me the creeps." The two men exited the room with the feeling Adina had departed with...trapped and helpless.

As they walked back to the party they decided to keep Adina in their sights at all times until the gala was over.

Brandon informed George he and Adina would make an early night of it. He agreed with Brandon that that was the best idea.

When they caught up with Adina, she questioned them about their whereabouts. George said, he was a huge fan of Edward Fenton's work and wanted to see it. He asked Brandon to show him where his art was displayed. Brandon remained silent as George told her the truth, but managed to tell her nothing.

Adina raised one of her perfectly arched eyebrows. She didn't believe them. "Okay, you two, I'll accept this explanation for now, but I have a feeling there's something else going on. I know how men get when they're up to mischief." She took a deep breath and put her little hands on her hips using her body language to tell them to relax. She'd not pursue the subject any further. "Well, if you two are done running around, I'd like to be seated for dinner. I'm getting tired and I want to leave early if at all possible."

Brandon joined in. "Adina is ready to eat and so am I. So if you will excuse us, we will head in now."

George caught and understood the look Brandon gave him and responded accordingly. "I understand completely. I'm getting rather famished myself. I do need to make a detour first. I'll see you later."

After dinner was served they stayed another thirty minutes then readied to leave. On their way out, they saw George again and informed him they were retiring. A look of relief came over his face; he hid it well behind a wide smile. He didn't want to upset Adina or agitate Brandon for he could tell that Brandon suspected that he

had no luck at all finding out who the stranger was.

In the limousine, Brandon and Adina sat quietly. "I want to apologize for my behavior this evening."

Adina turned to face him. "There's no need. I know you didn't mean it. If I've learned anything about you these last nine months, it's that you have to be in control. You can't help yourself. The way you acted is part of who you are. I don't have to like it, nor will I tolerate it, but at least I do understand it."

Brandon sat in silent awe. She was priceless, she understood him. He knew then he would miss her greatly when she left in two weeks. He turned to ask if she had enjoyed herself at the party and noticed she had fallen asleep.

It occurred to him that he'd never see her sleep again. A need to hold her once more consumed him. As if he was compelled to do so, Brandon lifted his arm up and around Adina's frame. She naturally leaned her head into his shoulder and chest. She sensuously molded her body into him never once opening her eyes. He held her tenderly all the way back to the hotel.

Adina's contract was officially complete. Brandon wanted to thank her for an excellent job as his interpreter. He suggested they go to a private party he had been invited to. They could bring in the New Year with a bang.

Adina said, "That sounds like fun. Lord knows we've earned it. These past nine months have been hard work and I think maybe we should celebrate with a little fun and cheer... Might I make a suggestion? Let's not take the limousine there. Let's drive ourselves or maybe rent a

carriage or slay.”

Brandon couldn't believe how Adina just lit up. She practically glowed. “That's a great idea. You check the sled and carriage rentals and I'll check on luxury car rentals. Let's meet again in say, two hours, so we can discuss our findings.” They were very lucky. There were still some car rentals available and carriages. Brandon could tell Adina really wanted the carriage. It was her night so he gave in and decided to go with the carriage even though he really wanted to rent the Rolls Royce.

They spent the day relaxing around the hotel. Adina enjoyed the spa and health club facilities. Brandon decided to get in a game of racquetball and a quick swim. Adina spotted him in the pool as she left her yoga class. She looked at him with admiration in her eyes. She thought he was a gorgeous, specimen of masculinity. He'd given her back her passion and made her feel safe again. She liked that they'd become friends.

A tiny twinge of sorrow pricked her when she thought of how she would miss him. At least, she reasoned further, her hunger for him wouldn't cloud her judgment.

Adina wore Cookie's other creation. It was a little fire engine red dress. It wrapped to the figure seductively and stopped just at the hip

It was sleeveless with a shamelessly, revealing neckline. Adina felt naked. She didn't normally wear short dresses, but tonight was special.

She would let herself go for a change and throw caution to the wind. She wore her hair down again but instead of having it in an elegant adult hairstyle, it was wild and messy, giving her a different look—intimidating,



mischievous, dangerous.

The hotel concierge called their rooms to advise them the carriage was waiting for them. They quit their suites at the same time. When they caught a glimpse of each other they knew they would have fun.

“God, Brandon, you look great.”

“Adina, you look wicked. Let’s get into some trouble.”

They smiled at each other and ran towards the elevator.

By the time Brandon and Adina arrived at the party, it was in full swing. Everyone gawked at them as they entered the room. They made a striking couple, both with their contrasting yet complimenting skin coloring, their sensual and exotic facial features and their differences in sizes. Brandon, the masculine giant and Adina, the feminine temptress. No wonder they were noticed. They were the perfect couple, each different, yet together, appeared made only for the other.

They mingled and laughed and enjoyed the other guests and each other. They danced and vanished into music, drank champagne and ate rich food till they thought they'd bust. The New Year was fast approaching and neither one wanted the night to end.

Adina excused herself to go to the ladies room. While Brandon awaited her return, he encountered someone he thought he'd never want to see again... Sylvia Reynolds. He gasped before he could catch himself. She still quickened his pulse. Even after her betrayal, she could still unnerve him.

Sylvia moved over coolly as if she wanted to approach him cautiously. She wasn't sure how he'd react to seeing her after all these years.

"Hello, Brandon." Sylvia said with some tension in her voice.

Brandon couldn't believe it. She was hesitant toward him. He felt sorry for her. "Sylvia, you're looking well."

She exhaled slowly. "Thank you. So are you, but then, you were always easy on the eyes. Are you here with someone?"

Brandon looked at Sylvia and wondered what he had ever seen in her. She was so two-dimensional and shallow. There was no depth or complexity to her at all. Maybe that's all there ever was to her, he reasoned. Maybe that flawless beauty and cool demeanor was what he had mistaken for love.

Brandon smiled brightly as he came upon a revelation about Sylvia. Yes, he did love her once. Actually, he had loved her deeply but he knew now with great clarity that he was never in love with her.

Brandon stepped closer to Sylvia and said, "I'm here with my assistant. We're celebrating a hard earned successful year. This is my way of expressing my appreciation for all that hard work she performed for me. She hasn't had a relaxing night out in months. As you know, I can keep a hectic schedule sometimes."

The way her devious little eyes were sparkling told him she had just realized he was still a bachelor. Reading her was just too damned easy, he thought. "So you took pity on the old woman and treated her to some glitter and glitz. You were always so gallant, a true gentleman."

Brandon began to chuckle lightly as he tried to imagine Ms. Powers as a passive, timid, old woman. He

couldn't wait until Adina returned so she could put a severe crack in Sylvia's icy cool demeanor.

He pulled himself together and said, "It was the least I could do. Ms. Powers worked hard. She knew just how to please me." His little joke went right over Sylvia's head, just as he hoped it would.

Brandon made sure to keep Sylvia distracted with dry conversation as he kept a look out for Adina. As she came into his view he could feel his body hum with anticipation. He saw her make her way to him after requesting a song from the orchestra leader. If there was anything he was sure of, he knew the fireworks would kick off early this year.

Sylvia took one look at Adina and knew Brandon had made a fool of her. Ms. Powers wasn't old at all! In fact, she was young and extremely beautiful.

Brandon loved every minute of it. He watched her cool demeanor dissolve into a sweltering pool of dirty looks and irritated glares. He wanted to laugh so badly, but instead said, "Sylvia, I'd like you to meet my interpreter and assistant, Adina Powers. Adina, this is Sylvia Reynolds. The bitch I almost married."

Adina's mouth opened in shock. Suddenly speechless. Before she could give any kind of a response, Sylvia turned and walked away in a huff. Brandon burst into a full, blown laugh. His face was red and he couldn't breathe.

"Brandon, what's going on? Why did she storm off like that? What did you do?"

He gathered his senses slowly. His sides ached from his hysterical chuckling. It was difficult to answer her coherently. "

Adina, I'm sorry but she had it coming. I just couldn't resist."

Adina started to laugh though she didn't know why. "Okay, now you have me doing it. Would you please tell me what that was about? But tell me on the dance floor. I requested this song and I came over here to ask you to dance, so let's dance."

They made their way to the dance floor and set it on fire with their rendition of the Tango. They cut loose and showed off some sizzling moves and steamy steps. They were having fun. The music slowed to a rhythmic waltz and Brandon proceeded to tell Adina all about Ms. Sylvia Reynolds. But what had them laughing again, was when he told her Sylvia thought she was an old woman he was taking pity on and showing a little night life.

Adina came back to her senses and said, "Oooh, that's funny. She's definitely a conceited one isn't she? I guess she thought she could still wrap you around her finger. God, what an ego."

Brandon defended, "She never had me wrapped around her finger!"

Adina countered, "Oh yes, she did. How else could you have loved her? If you'd taken the time to look into those lovely blue eyes of hers instead of the pretty little package she presented, you'd've seen there was nothing behind those eyes. She's empty, hollow like a shell."

Brandon stopped laughing and looked into Adina's eyes. "I will miss you." She held his stare and watched his eyes darken with his desire but this time she witnessed something else...sadness.

She smiled trying to give him comfort. "The feeling is mutual."

They heard the crowd count down to the New Year

and joined in. "Five, four, three, two, one.... HAPPY NEW YEAR!"

Adina reached up and hugged Brandon and he lifted her into the air and spun around and around. They laughed like children. He set her to the floor and looked deeply into her midnight, black eyes.

Adina stopped laughing as she saw desire come over him like a wave. Before she could regroup, he pulled her into his embrace and brought his head to hers. His lips were just over hers but he didn't claim them. He waited until her eyes changed with the same passion and desire. Adina whispered, "Yes."

She formed her body to his as her arms glided effortlessly around his neck and pulled his head closer to hers. As she felt herself being lifted off the ground, she knew the kiss she offered had spiked his arousal like a drug.

She was desperately addicted to him; his lips, hands, arms. And like him, she was feeling the symptoms of withdrawal. So when he slowly ended the kiss, she understood the beseeching longing in his eyes.

"Brandon, please. I don't want to argue tonight."

"Won't you reconsider renewing your contract?"

Her eyes said one thing but her mouth said, "I can't. Please understand."

She felt suddenly cold and alone as his hands released her and he turned and walked off the floor. She watched him disappear into the celebrating crowd and felt tears fill her eyes. She knew this would be hard on him, but she hadn't fathomed how deeply her choice would hurt her.

Brandon didn't want to understand, only wanted to feel. He wanted Adina and didn't care who knew it. As

his determined stride cut a wide path through the crowd the only thing on his mind was punishing her. Punishing her in a way that she'd remember for the rest of her life.

Once off the dance floor he quickly contacted the carriage to come around. He snatched off his bow tie and requested his and Adina's wraps. When the carriage arrived he threw their coats on the floor and headed back into the party.

When he saw her accepting a glass of champagne from another man, every possessive, jealous bone in his body vibrated with controlled fury. As she caught his eye he could almost feel her tremble from across the room. As he made his way to her, whatever she was feeling, the other guests were sensing it too and got the hell out his way.

By the time he stood in front of her, Brandon was ready to commit murder. Slowly he reached for her champagne and drank it in one swallow. He surrendered the empty glass to the man standing beside her who in turn made an instant exit. Deliberately he kept his eyes glued to her as he said, "It's time we were leaving."

"I'm not going anywhere with you while you're in this nasty mood."

He ravaged her with his eyes and pulled off his tuxedo jacket. "Yes, you are." He placed it around her shoulders and simply picked her up and threw her over his. As her screams of protests trailed behind them, Brandon couldn't resist giving her wiggling little ass a smart smack as he growled, "Be quiet."

Once he'd dumped her in the carriage, he gave the driver specific instructions. He wanted a long ride all over the city. And no matter what he heard he was not to stop

this carriage until he got a phone call stating it was time to return to the hotel.

When he got inside, Brandon was greeted with a brutal slap across the face. He savored the sting of it, the passion behind it and the fire within it. Slowly he turned to Adina. "I can't make you change your mind. But I can make you wish you had. For the remainder of this carriage ride, we are no longer employer and employee or friends who've decided to go their separate ways. For the remainder of this ride, you are the woman I desire and I am the man you want."

Oh, she was pissed. He could feel the raging fury pump off of her. His nostrils flared as she hissed, "Now wait just one damn minute, Brandon! Who the—" and never finished.

Brandon came down hard. His mouth ravished hers. His tongue drove into her soft mouth and with virile assurance willed her into obedience.

He kissed with such fevered desire she began to shiver. He took her in his arms and crushed her to his body. He was going to consume her; she'd succumb to him. He pulled his mouth away abruptly and buried his face in the swan curve of her neck.

There he licked, sucked and bit until Adina gasped, "Please. Brandon, don't..."

He knew she was wearing down. He felt her little fingers playing in his hair. His lips moved down to her tender, swollen breasts. He was on fire! And clamped his wet mouth down right through the fabric of her dress. He sucked and nibbled and bit until Adina cried out as she quivered in his arms.

Brandon knelt before her, took her silky legs and opened them wide. Then he slid big, rough hands

between her smooth thighs and heard her gasp with hot joy.

He would give no gentle ride. Tonight he would plunder her. Ravage her with a lust she herself had ignited in him. His hands clamped onto her thong panties and ripped and clawed until she was exposed and open for his torture, his special kind of punishment.

He dragged her to the edge of the carriage seat and threw her legs over his shoulders, his tongue gorged on her clit.

The taste of her was more delicious than any gourmet meal he'd ever sampled. Her trembling fingers digging into his damp scalp fueled him to a reckless pace. His tongue thrust inside her and rotated over and over until her cries of ecstasy pumped into him like an invisible lover.

But he wanted more than just to punish her. He wanted to infect her with an unforgettable passion that would haunt her in the coming weeks, months and years with out him.

He slipped his tongue out and moved again to her swollen clit. With three fingers he set a rhythm inside her vagina that made her buck and shake beneath him. No mercy, he thought. None for her, none for him.

He felt her hips arch into his hungry, ravishing mouth. She was so wet for him. So open for him, so ready for him. Her muscles were clinging to his fingers, her hands were pushing his head harder into her throbbing clit. All her frantic movements told him she was not just close she was there.

Unable to resist her pleas a moment longer, Brandon said, "You know what I want, Adina. I wanna hear you come," and sent her to heaven.



She braced her small hands on his huge shoulders and convulsed intensely. A heart stopping climax tore right through her body. A whimpering cry escaped her dewy lips and unshed tears filled her Alaskan oil eyes. She felt wave after wave of tormenting rapture.

Suddenly, she fell into a deep void of sinful fulfillment. Her legs were being lifted from his shoulders. Absently she felt Brandon drowning her face in sticky kisses. His hands were spreading her thighs wide. She was so dazed she couldn't think. Then he was tearing the dress from her body. He was between her thighs, wrapping her legs around him. His hands were everywhere; he was rough and violent and she was too weak to resist, too aroused to care. She wanted to be devoured, taken, ravished. Yes, oh, yes.

She wanted him, her fevered hands clawed at his trousers, trying to free his hard sex. She wanted it, wanted it deep inside her. He had awakened her beast and now it was challenging his. His pants were down, his shirt opened. The carriage was jerking back and forth, sending their emotions into a frenzy. He pulled her off the seat and turned her around, making her vulnerable to his advances. She didn't care. She was ready for anything he wanted to bestow upon her.

He spread her thighs and nuzzled in between, when she felt his hands upon her waist, she readied for his entry.

No, he surprised her. He snatched her back so quickly she cried out as she felt herself being thrust upon his long sex.

He was inside her, so hard, so hot. One of his hands wrapping completely around her waist as the other

tangled and disappeared in her hair. His mouth was on her neck—sucking, biting, licking.

She couldn't help herself, she was burning and started to rotate and gyrate with him inside her. Soon she was thrusting herself upon him like an animal driven by forces she didn't understand, but compelled to surrender to.

Her hands disappeared in the thick waves of his hair. Her mouth, opening and closing upon his fingers, made Brandon plunge into her even harder. Suddenly and without warning, he withdrew from her and eased back onto the carriage seat behind her. Adina was panting and shivering from his abandonment. She turned around with eyes blazing with dark, dangerous passion. "What...are you doing?"

"I want you to feel how much you will miss me...need me...want me," he breathed hotly.

Adina's whole body was going through withdrawal. She leapt on top of him and straddled him. Brandon let her, but didn't penetrate her. Every single ounce of restraint he had was in full control. "Do you want me, Adina?" He glided slowly between her thighs.

Agitation and frustration settled in her hands and they came up to claw at his face.

He grabbed them fiercely, pinning them behind her back, forcing her heavy breasts to arch into his sweaty chest. "Come now, Little Raven, set us both free..." His tongue slid slowly over her moist collarbone and up the side of her neck. "Say you want it—me." Then his mouth closed around one hard nipple.

Adina couldn't breathe; every nerve in her body was flinching from his torture. *Give him what he wants.* She couldn't fight the hunger in her body. "Brandon, please, I can't—ah!" He thrust powerfully upward.

He released her hands and embraced her silky, smooth back and pumped up into her so hard her cries were barely smothered by his hot mouth. He slid to the carriage floor with Adina beneath him, setting a rhythm in her soft depths that was maddening. Each stroke whipped her into a wild frenzy.

His seed started and he crushed Adina in his arms. As she felt his hot cream fire into her body, Adina returned his demanding kisses with raw emotion. This one time she would cast out all the rules and give in to the blatant need for this man who had awakened her unstoppable passion. He was every single element of pleasure she could ever imagine. This moment would last her a lifetime.

Brandon was barely able to swallow her scream of pleasure as she tightened around him and exploded. He felt her warm climax moistening his long shaft and shuddered. He couldn't stop kissing her, touching her, holding her—he couldn't get enough of her. She would be the one hunger that would never be quenched.

## CHAPTER 10

When they arrived in Montreal, Brandon and Adina decided to make their goodbye short and professional. He drove off in his limousine, and Adina waited patiently for her sister to come for her. Cookie was always running late. She'd never been on time for anything.

Adina was digging in her bag for her cell phone so she could call Cookie and give her a piece of her mind about having her wait at the airport for over an hour, when she bumped into someone unexpected...Edward Fenton.

"Excuse me, but have we met before?"

Adina paused in dialing her sister and smiled. "Edward Fenton, hello." She extended her hand to him. "What are you doing in Montreal?"

Edward smiled coolly. "I'm here researching for my next project and you?"

"I'm waiting for my sister to come and take me home. She's running late. I was just about to call her."

"Well, I'm waiting on a connecting flight but it has been delayed. It will most likely be canceled by the way my day is going."

Adina glanced at her phone and noticed that she had

no signal. "I'm sorry to hear that. Being stuck some place you don't want to be can be frustrating. Well, if you'll excuse me I need to find a phone. It has been nice seeing you again."

He started to follow her. "Do you mind if I walk with you?"

Adina looked up at him and thought he doesn't give up easily. "No, not at all."

"In Quebec you said you were there on business. I gather since you're back in Montreal, your business is concluded and you have a little free time on your hands?"

"Free time, no. Unfortunately, even when I'm not on assignment, I'm just as busy. Oh, thank God, there's a phone."

Adina tried to call Cookie but there was no answer. She was hoping that Cookie was on her way and hadn't forgotten her.

"Don't look so worried, Adina. Your ride will be here soon."

Adina noticed that Edward was dressed almost the same as he was at the art gallery dinner party. This time he was wearing a dark hunter green suit and dark glasses.

She really didn't want to seem rude but every time he got close to her this feeling of being trapped and helpless engulfed her. She had to fight the urge to keep a significant distance between them. Maybe it was because of the images in his paintings. Something told her it was something more.

She took in a deep breath and collected herself. "I'm sure you're right, Edward, but I'm tired of waiting. I'm heading back to baggage claim. Maybe she's arrived." Adina hoped Edward wouldn't follow her.

She wasn't that lucky. "I just noticed that my flight

was canceled,” Edward said. “So I will have to head back to the baggage claim to get my luggage and find a hotel for tonight. If you are not too busy, can I offer to buy you a drink until your sister arrives?”

Adina could feel her pulse quicken as Edward walked closely next to her. She tried to concentrate but his cologne invaded her senses and caused her head to spin. “That’s nice of you, Edward, but I’ll take a pass. I see my sister.”

Adina lit into Cookie for having her wait over an hour for her. Cookie snapped back and said she was on time. She told Adina she had gotten a message on her answering machine that Brandon’s plane was due to arrive an hour later and to be there at the new scheduled time.

Adina said in a huff, “You’ve got to be kidding. Who left this damned message?”

“Little Raven, I have no idea. Since you didn’t leave me the phone number on the plane to call in case plans changed, I had no way of not knowing it wasn’t a legitimate schedule change. I even tried calling your cell. By the way, who was the man I saw you with and where is Brandon?”

Adina gave a quick shake of *deja vu* and answered, “I don’t have a signal for some reason. I know I charged the damned thing last night. Oh, that man, his name is Edward Fenton. He’s an artist I met at a party in Quebec and Brandon left an hour ago. He knew you where coming and saw no need to wait.”

Cookie helped Adina get her luggage into the car and they went back to Cookie’s apartment. Adina listened to the message and concluded there was no way for Cookie to know it wasn’t a legitimate call. Adina shook the strange feeling that came over her and finished

unpacking.

Brandon decided to go into the office before heading home. When he arrived it was a madhouse. Everyone wanted his time and attention. There were problems with the Ocasí complex. The Acco Corporation, a subsidiary of the company, was having problems keeping equipment available for its large leasing contracts.

A land deal he'd finalized over a year ago was being held up in court. The wetlands surrounding the area were being considered for preservation protection. On this deal alone, Brandon could lose millions of dollars because the project wouldn't be finished according to the contract his construction company signed with the developers.

Brandon decided to hold a series of meetings over the next six weeks with his directors and managers to get everything back under control. The first thing he would tackle was the land deal.

"Albert, why wasn't I informed that this land deal had this kind of snag in it?"

Albert Paulsen was the director and foreman for the land deal in question. "Mr. Montgomery, no one knew the preservationists would try this maneuver this late in the game. Besides, that last assistant of yours, before Ms. Powers, was horrible. She was so busy trying to snag a rich husband, namely you, sir, that she didn't follow through on anything. She didn't even file the proper papers in court to get an injunction to stop the preservationists from trying this anytime they felt like it."

Brandon was red he was so angry. "You mean these damn people can haul our asses into court and hold up production for weeks every time we hint at breaking ground on the wet lands?"

Albert took in a ragged breath. "In a nutshell, yes. If we don't work something out with these people we'll be looking at over thirteen million dollars in violation and penalty fees."

Brandon exploded! "Damn, damn, damn! Fuck-a-duck!"

"Thank you, Mr. Montgomery, for finally demonstrating that you're a real flesh and blood human being. I was starting to wonder if you knew how to curse. I know this sounds bad but there is a silver lining in this cloud. The courts could rule not to honor the preservation protection to the wetlands if we can prove the wildlife that is sustained by the wetlands can be sustained somewhere else just as efficiently. If we can find another place to house the wildlife, the preservationists could drop their suit and let us get on with our jobs."

Brandon groaned. "Albert, it could take months to find enough land to house the wildlife. We don't have that kind of time. The preservationists are dragging us back into court in two weeks. We wouldn't have enough ammunition to diffuse them in court or work out some kind of deal that would get them off our butts for good."

Albert smiled at Brandon like he knew something he didn't. "I know that, sir, and, so did Ms. Powers." Brandon looked at Albert in shock and gestured for him to tell what he knew. "Ms. Powers was concerned that this might happen and knew no one would be prepared.

"Since you were so consumed with landing the Ocasí Complex contract, she decided to take the bull by the horns and play a hunch. Back in September of last year, she gave me a call and told me of her suspicions. That the preservationists might try this maneuver because she noticed we hadn't filed our court papers in time and this



would leave us wide open for a catastrophe later on down the road.

"She suggested, since we couldn't file for an injunction because we missed our deadline, that we search out adequate housing for the wildlife and be prepared to take the information to court to prove the wildlife could be sustained elsewhere sufficiently."

Brandon was in awe. Adina was still anticipating his needs and she was gone. God, he missed her so much. He hadn't realized how deeply until just then. "So you're telling me that Adina...eh, I mean, Ms. Powers, knew this could happen and took care of it last year just on the pretense the preservationists might try this little stunt?"

Albert's chest expanded with pride. "Yes, Mr. Montgomery, if you want to look at it like that. She solved our problem for us months ago. All we need to do is to pick some appropriate vacant lands from this list she supplied me with and we stand a good chance of winning our case." Albert paused when he noticed Brandon's face light up with a smile. He was lost in private thoughts

"Mr. Montgomery, if you don't mind me saying so, Ms. Powers was great. I kinda hoped she'd come on board permanently. She kept everything under control and running smoothly."

Brandon came back from his private thoughts and noticed everyone staring at him. "What?"

"Mr. Montgomery, we've been trying to get your attention for over five minutes. Are you all right?"

Brandon blushed then lowered his lids over his eyes. "I was just thinking about Ms. Powers. You're right, Albert, she's great." He felt Albert dissecting him. He wasn't himself and knew Albert had noticed. He cleared his throat and said, "So Albert, what do you want to do

about the wildlife and the lands?”

Albert passed Brandon a folder with his proposal. “Mr. Montgomery, Ms. Powers and I felt the best approach to this situation was to present the preservationists a package deal. If we find adequate housing for the wildlife and also donate a percentage of our profits from our wetland contracts to the organization, we can use them as consultants for future projects that involve wetlands and we can opt not to use or purchase the land based on their findings.”

Brandon sat back in his chair and pondered on it for a moment. “Damn, Albert, that's really good. I like it a lot. You said you and Ms. Powers put this proposal together?”

Albert was blushing now. “Well, sir, to be quite honest, I only came up with the relocation of the wildlife. It was Ms. Powers who came up with the package concept. She emphasized it would be better to have the preservationists as our allies and not our adversaries.

“She also wanted me to take the credit for the whole idea since she'd be leaving when her contract expired but I just couldn't do it. She has such a sharp mind; no one at this table would believe I came up with the whole idea all by myself.”

Brandon laughed. *Another layer on the onion.* “Okay, Albert, how soon can we implement this package and how much is this going to eat on the timeframe?”

“If the preservationists go with the land choices Ms. Powers suggested, we could lose as little as six weeks of production time. That's if we work around the clock, offer triple time and a half and a non-monetary incentive to the crew if they get it done in under six weeks.”

Brandon raised his brow. “What do you mean by

non-monetary incentives?”

Albert took in a deep breath and continued. “Well, Mr. Montgomery, according to Ms. Powers, money isn't always the best motivator. It's a good one but it isn't always the most effective. Some of the ideas she came up with were outstanding.

“For example, find out what the crews like to do more than anything and give it to them free for a month. Like, if the majority of the crew likes to go bowling, rent out a bowling alley every weekend for a month and let the crews bowl to their hearts' content. If the crews enjoy skiing, take the whole crew skiing every weekend for a month at a different resort each time.

“She also added that this shows your employees that you trust they will give you their best performance and their loyalty and this shows you that they trust that you do care about them just as much as you do about your profit margin.”

Brandon was astonished at how this woman thought. She really could read a situation well. “I have to admit the ideas are excellent. I wouldn't amend a thing. You and Ms. Powers covered every angle. Good job, Mr. Paulsen. Well done indeed. I don't know about you guys but I'm hungry. We will end this meeting and schedule a follow up for after the court date.”

Brandon was beat when he finally made it home. He took a hot bath and let his mind wander over the day's events. It was interesting how every thought eventually came back to Adina. She was with him every moment of everyday. He wanted to see her, touch her, have her. He even dreamt of her, how she smelled, tasted, everything was Adina.

After the wetlands deal was successfully won in court, Brandon began the preliminary meetings for the leasing problems the Acco Corporation was having with its large order contracts. He brought in Marvin Smothers, the leasing operations manager at Acco.

“Albert, how soon can the crews start relocating the wildlife and what is your honest opinion of how long it’s going to take?”

“Mr. Montgomery, the crews started two days ago. They were so excited about the triple time and the incentive package we offered them, some guys came off of vacation to get in on this fabulous opportunity. Everyone is thrilled about the incentive. We’ve had full double crews working nonstop for the past forty eight hours.”

“I will have to admit that Ms. Powers was right. She said money isn’t always the best motivator. I just knew the triple time would pull the men in but it didn’t, it was the incentive. When they found out they could have the one thing they love to do most for a whole month, I was bombarded with guys wanting to sign up. In all honestly, the relocation of the wildlife could be completed in as early as twenty one days.”

“That’s excellent. This relocation won’t hinder our original timeframe at all. Tell me, what did the guys choose for their incentive?”

Albert smiled wide. “The crews decided on a double treat. Two weekends of white water rafting and two weekends of hiking and camping. Since the incentive was just for the men who worked the relocation and no women would be coming along, they decided on the ultimate man’s fantasy.

“Eight days and nights of total freedom to have fun

without any guilt. They won't have to be polite, considerate or watch what they say. They won't have to go with the wife to the grocery store or visit the inlaws. They can be total barbarians and no one will care or chastise them later for it. Mr. Montgomery, I almost wish I was going."

Brandon started to laugh and had to admit the crews had picked themselves one great incentive.

"Albert, I don't blame you. I kinda wish I were going too. Now that we've hurdled over that little mole hill, it's time to get down to the business of this leasing equipment conflict Acco is having.

"Mr. Smothers, would you enlighten me on why we are suddenly short on equipment for leasing to large contracts?"

Mr. Smothers was nervous. Brandon had that effect on people.

"Mr. Montgomery, the main reason is because one third of our equipment is down for repairs. I'm afraid some of it will have to be replaced. They just can't take the workload our large contracts are inflicting upon them. And therein lies the second part of our problem.

"Our customers are saying we're not honoring our part of our lease agreement with them because we don't supply adequate equipment to them on a regular basis. They claim it's not their fault if the equipment can't handle the workload. If it was designed to do the job, it should get the job done. If they cancel their contracts we stand to lose over two million dollars in revenue this year."

Brandon breathed in smoothly and asked, "Mr. Smothers, why wasn't the new equipment ordered as soon as the old equipment went down?"

Mr. Smothers swallowed his sip of water and answered, "Mr. Montgomery, it was but since our order was so big, we couldn't do a partial shipment and all of the equipment is needed now. The manufacturer has put us on back order for thirty to ninety days."

Brandon's vein was twitching again. "Mr. Smothers, the manufacturer can't get the new equipment here any sooner than that? How long has it been since you put the order in?"

Mr. Smothers tried to stay calm but Brandon really had him stirred up. "Well, sir, the order was placed right before the new year. If I might make a suggestion, your former assistant, Ms. Powers, came up with a plan I believe could really save the day."

Brandon was struck dumb. He had this stupid look on his face. Ms. Adina Powers had handled his company like it was hers. "Please, Mr. Smothers, let's hear this plan."

Mr. Smothers explained, "Ms. Powers suggested we implement a barter system immediately. The Brandon Montgomery Group has several other assets and holdings that could easily be bartered to get the equipment we need until our order arrives from the manufacturer."

"We may be the largest supplier of leasing equipment but we are not the only one. She suggested we barter with smaller leasing companies for what we need until our order arrived."

"We could barter equipment we have or manpower for repairs of their equipment at our expense when they get swamped with down equipment. We should also place orders for the new equipment with other manufacturers and offer a bonus to the manufacturer that can get the equipment to us first."

“The manufacturer who delivers the equipment first would receive their payment for the order the day it arrived instead of the traditional net thirty days. I liked Ms. Powers’ idea so much, that I started checking into the barter system and found almost half the equipment we needed was available at smaller leasing companies. And all they wanted was to barter the manpower for repairs at our expense and a ten percent markup on their lease to us.

“The main reason why I didn’t implement the plan was because Ms. Powers bade me to speak with you first because she knew she wouldn’t have the time once you two left for Quebec.

“So, Mr. Montgomery, is it a workable plan? Can I go ahead with it?”

Brandon burst into a full belly laugh. He struggled for composure as he realized that everyone in the room was completely blown away by his reaction. He could sense that they weren’t quite sure how to respond. He flashed a wide smile and said, “Yes! Mr. Smothers, implement the plan. It’s a wonderful idea. I only wish I’d thought of it.” Brandon turned to Albert. “You were right. Ms. Powers is brilliant.” He turned again to Mr. Smothers. “How soon can we barter for the equipment? When did Adina speak with you about this?”

Mr. Smothers exhaled a huge sigh of relief and jotted down some quick notes. “According to my calculations, we can get half the barter equipment as soon as tomorrow and the rest by Friday.

“To answer your second question, I was in constant communication with her since last October. She wanted to be kept abreast of the situation in case our down machines escalated beyond twenty percent. When they

reached thirty percent, she informed me of this plan she'd been thinking about and suggested it might come in handy if we ever needed to use it.

"Mr. Montgomery, I agree with Mr. Paulsen. Ms. Powers kept everything under control and running smoothly. Are you sure there's no way to get her to come on board permanently?"

Brandon's smile dimmed some as he said, "Believe me, Marvin, I tried. That woman is stubborn. Once her mind's set, forget it. She's as tenacious of a tigress."

Brandon started to drift in his private thoughts about Adina again. She had a hold on him. One he wasn't sure he wanted to shake. Not to mention his directors and managers had started to notice a drastic change in him. Even he had to accept that he laughed more. That he was calmer in the eye of the storm. As he glanced over at Albert and Marvin he suspected they knew these changes in him were because of Adina Powers.

Albert said casually, "Mr. Montgomery, do you wanna set up a preliminary meeting for the Ocasí Complex? We need to get that ironed out a.s.a.p."

Brandon slipped back into reality as if it was a shirt that was too tight and with an irritated sigh said, "Yes, this would be as good a time as any for the Ocasí headache. I knew the materials specifications for that complex would come back to haunt me. How about a preliminary in one week and a follow up in three weeks? Well, if that's all, people, this meeting is officially over."

Brandon got home and couldn't stand it. He looked around his huge mansion and thought something was missing. He never felt so alone. He started to prance around like a caged animal. The house was huge, yet, he



felt as if trapped or as if the walls were closing in on him.

He had to get out. He walked to his bedroom and changed into some casual clothes. As he changed his shoes, he looked around his room and thought how empty it was. There was no one in it except him. He looked over at his bed and knew he couldn't sleep in it without someone to share it with him.

He decided to go for a walk on the property grounds. The night sky and cool air calmed him some. He thought about his life and how full it was yet, how empty he felt. He thought of the last three months with Adina. He felt so alive. They worked perfectly together, like a well tuned machine.

She knew his moods, anticipated his needs and she understood him. He actually felt still and relaxed with her. What was happening to him? Why did Adina have such a hold on his heart? Why couldn't he shake her? What was it about her that drove his mind to always come back to her?

Brandon reached the end of his property and turned to look at it. He viewed the beautiful landscape and gardens, the Olympic sized pool, the tennis courts and the stables and the huge mansion that sat in the center of everything.

This wasn't his home. Then, a revelation smacked Brandon in face like a cold arctic wind. The Montgomery Estate was never his home. He hadn't felt a sense of home since the death of his mother when he was eleven. No, he thought, that wasn't quite true. He did have that feeling one other time. He'd had it...with Adina

Brandon smiled wide and felt his whole body tingle with the revelation of what he'd just discovered and accepted to be the real reason for why he couldn't shake

Adina out of his heart. She was his home.

The feeling of home he'd been trying to rediscover ever since his mother's death. Adina was his serenity, his peace, his quiet, his calm, his still and his anchor.

Brandon was in a tailspin of emotions. It was the kind of feeling one gets when winning the lottery. An explosion of joy, then a desire to tell the world of your good fortune.

That's how Brandon felt. Except—he had no one to share his news with. But he wasn't going to let that stop him. He knew he'd be with Adina. He didn't know how or when but their paths would cross again and he would convince her they were meant to be together.

He knew this wasn't going to be easy but he already knew what it would take. She'd told him once after they'd made love. He had to get to know her, trust her, befriend her, and most importantly, love her.

Brandon was so thrilled that he ran all the way back to the house at full speed. When he got there, he was out of breath and happier than he'd been in weeks. He shot up to his bedroom, stripped out his clothes, showered and went into one of his guest bedrooms. He got into bed and turned off the lights then thought to himself, he would not sleep in his bed again until Adina agreed to share it with him.

The meeting for the Ocasí Complex was falling apart at the seams. The material specifications which Brandon knew were ironed out were fast becoming a reoccurring nightmare.

The material that Mr. Ocasí wanted to use was hard to keep in supply and since it had to be interwoven into the blended materials Brandon wanted to use, the

construction on the complex was almost at a dead stop. Brandon called in Albert Paulsen and Richard Bourdaeux, the director and foreman on the site. Mr. Ocasí was unable to attend but he sent his assistant, Mr. Walter Ito.

Mr. Ito was a small man with keen, dark, strikingly attractive Asian features. His eyes were deep set and menacing. One look from him and you were shaking before you knew it.

If he hadn't been the adversary, one would consider him rather handsome in a devious sort of way. The larger sizes of the other men didn't intimidate Mr. Ito one iota. He read people well and knew the strongest asset any man had...was his brain. Yes, Mr. Ocasí had trained his assistant well!

Mr. Ito consistently debated that the Brandon Montgomery Construction Company was not obligating their contract with the Ocasí Corporation. He argued that the materials being used were not the materials agreed upon and that the construction company was taking unfair advantage by using a higher percentage of blended materials to compensate for the shortage of material Mr. Ocasí insisted upon using.

Brandon remained collected during Mr. Ito's accusations and waited to have his turn. "Mr. Ito, I'm afraid you're wrong in your accusations. This company hasn't gotten to where it is by breaching its contracts with its customers.

"We have not exceeded the materials percentage specifications mapped out in the contract with your corporation. We've built what we can with the material you wanted and the rest is the material we specified we'd use to build this complex. The percentages are as they should be; sixty-forty."

Mr. Ito's report said something else entirely. "Mr. Montgomery, I beg to differ. According to my calculations, it's not sixty-fourty at all. It appears to be more like ninety-ten, your favor. If these statistics keep going in the way they are once the complex is completed, it'll be comprised of eighty percent blended materials and twenty percent of our materials."

Brandon was getting very warm. Where did Mr. Ito think he was going with this? His numbers had to be a figment of his imagination.

"Mr. Ito, that's impossible. Your numbers are wrong. I went over the material supplies myself. We're using the right amount of each material. The complex will be built according the specifications of the contract."

Mr. Ito dropped his lids over his sharp, menacing eyes and pushed his report down the conference table to Brandon before he said, "Mr. Montgomery, if you take a look at my report you'll see I'm not wrong. If you want to stay on the time schedule you indicated in the contract you will need to have the east side of the complex finished before the spring.

"I know for a fact your supply of our material needed for the east side is almost depleted. Are you telling me you'll have the materials restocked in time to finish the east side of the complex?"

Brandon looked again at the timeframe and the material supplies according to Mr. Ito's report. Damn, he was right. If they ran out of the blasted material, they'd have to replace it with the blended material in order to meet the spring deadline.

That alone would put them in breach of contract with the Ocasí Corporation. Brandon was not happy at all. He hated being unprepared for snags that could have been

avoided. He turned to Mr. Bourdaeux and showed him the report. "Mr. Bourdaeux, I'm afraid Mr. Ito may have me and this company at a disadvantage. Is there any possibility he could be wrong or have miscalculated his findings?"

Mr. Bourdaeux read the report then looked at his own. He took in a jagged breath and came to the same conclusion that Mr. Ito had—they'd run out of the material before finishing the east side of the complex.

"Mr. Montgomery, I'm afraid Mr. Ito is right. There is no way we can finish the east side of the complex with the limited supply we have and still make the spring deadline. If we try we would have to use a higher percentage of blended materials to get the side completed on time."

Brandon's vein was twitching again. This was no longer a little inconvenience. It had escalated into full blown fucking catastrophe. "Mr. Bourdaeux, how could you have miscalculated like this! This could cost millions and very well put us in breach of contract with the Ocas Corporation."

Mr. Bourdaeux swallowed hard and said, "Mr. Montgomery, I'm sorry. I had no idea it would be this difficult to replenish our supply. The way the Ocas Corporation wants the materials distributed is so unorthodox it has been an uphill battle just to keep the meager supply we have in stock. Sir, I know this doesn't look good, but I do have a suggestion, if you will allow me to elaborate further." Brandon gave him a look of pure irritability but nodded for him to continue. "I've heard over the past few weeks Mr. Paulsen and Mr. Smothers singing the praises of your former assistant, Ms. Powers. I'm glad to say, I'll be joining the bandwagon

where that little lady is concerned.

"I spoke with her not too long after the Ocasí contract was hand delivered to me. She indicated the Ocasí Corporation was very adamant about having this specific type of material used in its complex.

"She told me it had certain properties in its chemical makeup which enabled it to handle the type wear and tear the complex would be bombarded with once it was in operation.

"She mentioned, that if I ever got so low on the material they wanted to use and couldn't exceed the percentage amount of the blended material, I could use this other kind of material that is exactly the same in every way as the Ocasí material except, it was missing one property...the color was different.

"If I added the missing property to the material, as it is being interwoven into the blended material, it would eventually change color and be a perfect match. It's kinda like the difference between lead and gold. The properties of each metal are exact except, gold has an extra one which makes it the more valued metal.

"Same difference here. The Ocasí material has an extra property but unlike the lead/gold metaphor, we can inject the extra property into this other material and get a material that is as good as the Ocasí material."

Brandon eyes expanded. If the Ocasí Corporation would be willing to accept this substitution of their material until they could restock, they wouldn't be in breach of their contract.

Brandon said to Mr. Ito with renewed vigor, "It has come to my attention that there is another material that will work just as well in the place of your material until we get restocked and it will not exceed the blended material

specs as outlined in our contract.”

Mr. Ito’s eyes met Brandon’s and they were cool and piercing. “Mr. Montgomery, I think we’re talking apples and oranges here. I’m here to make sure you use the materials you agreed upon when we signed our contract.

“I don’t see anywhere in the contract for substitutions. I’m sorry, Mr. Montgomery, but I can’t accept this alternative. It would be like saying it’s okay for your company to take advantage of us.”

Brandon was boiling. He thought he wanted to hurt Mr. Ocasí last year but he knew he wanted to kill Mr. Ito. What was this little bastard up to? Everything about this situation told Brandon that Ito wanted his back against the wall, wanted him to squirm. But he couldn’t figure out why. Yes, the Oscasi project was his baby, there was no denying it. He’d negotiated it personally because it was a jewel of a deal. But Mr. Ito’s lack of cooperation strongly suggested that the little prick was not about to let him or his company off easily. He was sure of one thing, Ito had a much bigger itinerary on his mind.

Brandon said coldly, “Sir, you’re not being reasonable at all. The materials Mr. Ocasí wants are not reasonable. It will be practically impossible to get restocked in time to complete the east side of the complex by spring. Isn’t there any kind of a way you can accept the substitution until we can restock the material?”

“Mr. Montgomery, I really sympathize with you, but I’m sorry. At this point in the negotiations, I don’t have the authority to approve a substitution change so late in the construction of the complex.

“I’ll have to speak with Mr. Ocasí and inform him of my findings. After, we may be in a better position to work something out with you. The best I can do is give you a

few more weeks to come up with other alternatives to your problem. By then, Mr. Ocasí will be in Montreal. I'll speak with him and then come back and negotiate with you further."

Brandon hated loose ends. He knew damn well Mr. Ito could authorize the substitution but he was baiting him and he knew it. He played the game. "Mr. Ito, I understand perfectly. I appreciate your generous gesture to offer me more time. Why don't we schedule another meeting in say, two weeks so we can get all of this behind us and get back to work?"

Mr. Ito smiled then stood up. The other men did the same. They ended the meeting and Mr. Ito left. As soon as they saw him being driven off in his limousine, Brandon exploded. "That son-of-a-bitch! He could've authorized the substitution. He's definitely up to something."

Mr. Bourdaeux couldn't wait to jump in. "Yeah, I know. There's no way a powerful man like Mr. Ocasí would send someone to negotiate for him who couldn't make a decision in his place. I also agree, he, or rather, Mr. Ocasí, is up to something."

Brandon got hotter and hotter as he realized there was something more going on here than just the building of this complex. His blood started to cool as he thought about his Adina. She was still helping him and he was going to find a way to thank her. "Richard, you said that Adina...Eh, Ms. Powers, told you about this material, what else can you tell me about it?"

"Well, sir, I don't know what else I can tell you. You should speak with Ms. Powers. She has a lot more information on the material than I do."

"Mr. Montgomery, if I can speak frankly, I think you



should try to get Ms. Powers in on the next meeting with Mr. Ito. I think she knows something. The way she was so vague about the material and how she insisted I use it if I ever got real low. Are you certain there's no way to secure her for the next meeting with Mr. Ito? I'd feel a lot better knowing she was on board and on our team."

Brandon looked at his two directors, his friends, and smiled. "Fellas, you have no idea how hard I tried to get Adina to come on board permanently. She's stubborn." He paused then added, "This is important though. Maybe we can't get her permanently, but she might consider this one assignment if I can stress how desperately I need her."

Albert breathed deeply then said, "Mr. Montgomery, you said when you returned from Quebec that Ms. Powers was off the assignment. How are you going to get her to help us? We don't know where she is."

Richard added, "She could be anywhere."

Brandon remained quiet for moment then a light bulb went on in his head. "If I know my Little Raven, she didn't go far from the nest. She has an older sister who lives here in Montreal. I met her the night of the Saleese Auditorium Charity Ball. She's just started her own clothing design business. If we can find Cookie, she's bound to know where we can find Adina."

"Mr. Montgomery, please don't think I'm being nosy, but when did you start addressing your employees by their first names? And who is this Little Raven?"

Brandon could hardly contain himself. He looked at Albert and Richard and summarized they had noticed a change in him. He just wasn't the same.

"Albert, I know you and everyone else around here thinks I've been out of it since my return from Quebec. I

don't know quite where to start so I'll just say what I am feeling. Yes, you're right. I didn't address employees by their first names. I felt it wasn't good business. Well, I don't feel that way anymore. In fact, I've decided to amend that lousy guideline. For now on, you and all my directors may address me as Brandon.

"To answer your second question, the Little Raven is Adina Brianna Powers. I don't know how to explain it, but she has me completely and totally distracted. I see her everywhere I look. She's always in my head and I've just discovered she's in my heart and I've not been happier in all my life."

Well that wasn't the reaction he expected his friends to have. Richard and Albert were just sitting there staring at him in awe. Then it dawned on him that the woman he was crazy about was not the woman they remembered.

Richard said, "Mr. Mon...Brandon, are you sure this is the same woman? The person you're describing sounds unbelievable. I mean, Ms. Powers was so quiet, reserved and barely noticeable. How did this happen?"

Brandon laughed aloud then realized he was starting to do that a lot more too. He looked at his two friends and thought how they had never seen Adina off duty or knew how really seductive, hot and sexy she could be. His laugh roared down to a light chuckle when Albert and Richard's eyes began to bulge.

"Guys, I'm sorry. But it occurred to me that you've only seen Adina at work. If I can get her to come back and help us with this Ocasí mess, I'll see if I can get her to tell you about the motorcycle ride she took me on the night of the charity ball."

"Motorcycle ride! What motorcycle ride?" both men said in unison.

Brandon walked away and began to laugh all over again. Over his shoulder he said, “You better start looking for Adina’s sister.”

Albert and Richard agreed they had to find Adina Powers so they too could see the woman who had cracked Brandon’s impenetrable armor.

## CHAPTER 11

Brandon was correct in his assumption about his Little Raven. She hadn't gone far from the nest. She had every intention of staying with Cookie for only a couple of weeks then she was going to search out a decent place to live. But Cookie was so swamped with orders she was beginning to get backlogged.

Adina decided to stay with Cookie and get her back on schedule. Then she would put her energies into looking for a place to live.

"Cookie, this gown isn't laying the way you want. If you ask me, we should use the weight of a heavier material to make it hang better on the body."

Cookie's mouth was full with a tape measure as she worked on a mannequin across the room. She brought her head up to see what Adina was talking about. "Little Raven, you may have a point. Let me see what you mean and I'll be over there in a minute to adjust it. I think we're going to have to really think about getting a bigger work space. We're all over each other. You've been a Godsend helping like this but I know you will be going back to work in a few weeks. I'm going to need full-time help now."

Adina brought the design she was working on over to

Cookie to inspect. She made a few changes and marked where Adina had to stitch the material.

Adina began to walk back and said, "I've really enjoyed being with you. Your work is stressful but nothing like interpreting. I just have to get the stitch right. I don't have to second guess what people are saying to me. This has been a pleasant and challenging change for me. You are right though, I will need to get back to work soon. I also need to start looking for a place to live. We are all over each other upstairs too."

Cookie grabbed the sketches on the table and made some minor changes. "I know you said you wanted to stay in Montreal. Are you getting a house?"

Adina brought her head up from her stitching, "God, no. I want something that's really me. I want something I can make how I want, something that has a lot of space, open space, where I can spread out and feel uninhibited.

"I want an unfinished loft. When in Quebec last year, I ran into Jazzy. He said if I wanted, he'd help."

Cookie brought her head out of her sketches. "You didn't tell me you'd met Jazzy again in Quebec. How is he?"

Adina responded with lightness in her voice. "Oh, I didn't? I was so mad at being kept waiting at the airport for over an hour, it must've slipped my mind. But yeah, I met him again and he said he'd be happy to help me.

"He also wondered why you're giving him the cold shoulder? I tried to explain but to be quite honest, I really didn't know what to say. You know he's still crazy about you. He admitted it to me in Quebec."

Cookie stuck herself with a stick pen. "He told you that? Damn, I'm surprised he did. He knew you'd tell me. I wonder what game he's playing? He knows I care for

him. I just can't commit to a relationship right now. Not with the business just getting off the ground. Besides, I'm not sure I can open my heart to him again. It was just too painful the last time."

Adina looked up and saw that Cookie did have a vulnerable side. It could be bruised just like anyone else's. She was always so strong and determined but Cookie had known heartache and wasn't immune to its side effects of caution and mistrust.

"Cookie, I know you and Jazzy had something in Paris and it affected you deeply. I believe Jazzy wants to make a new start with you. He claims you know him like no one else and knowing you like I do, I know he's right. Why are you hiding behind the excuse of your business to avoid the feelings you have for him?"

Adina felt a rare flare of anger shoot across the room from her sister. She couldn't ever remember Cookie getting mad with her. But Cookie's cold eyes gave all indications that she was at the end of a very short fuse. As she stopped what she was doing and walked towards her, Adina found herself actually holding her breath.

"People who live in glass houses or lofts shouldn't throw stones."

"What do you mean by that? I was talking about you, not me."

"Adina, give me a break. Do you think I was born yesterday? You think I don't know why you really took a leave from work? Brandon Montgomery was breaking you down. He would've succeeded too, if you hadn't run away."

Adina was hot now! Here she was trying to help her sister face her problems with Jazzy and Cookie was throwing her problems with Brandon right back at her. "I

told you I needed rest. I needed a change and a break.”

“Adina, you’re running away from what you feel for your boss. You’ve been working yourself into an exhausted frenzy every night for weeks just so you wouldn’t have the strength to think about Brandon. He’s the kind of man you need and his magnetism was pulling you in and you knew you couldn’t fight him so you ran away.”

“That’s a lie!” Adina shouted, then stood up abruptly. “Cookie, if we’re gonna go there, then let’s go there. If you ain’t the pot calling the kettle black. What about you and Jazzy?”

“You can’t tell me you never loved him or that he never loved you. Otherwise, you would have never given him the gift.” The shock on Cookie’s face rattled Adina but she was not backing down. “Don’t look at me like that. And no, Jazzy didn’t tell me. I figured it out from the way he talked about you and your time together. If you could give him the gift, then you know he loved you. Why are you hiding behind all these excuses now?”

Cookie’s eyes were blazing. “Adina, what business is it of yours? I told you I can’t open my heart to Jazzy again! Why can’t you just leave it alone?”

Adina came back just as strong. “Why? I’ll tell you why. Because there’s more to this than you are letting on. You have always hounded me to tell the whole truth all my life. I told you about Victor when that was a nightmare I would’ve preferred to keep to myself.

“I also told you I finally perfected the gift and gave it to him and that’s why he wanted to kill me. I’ve always needed someone to lean on and give me strength but I’m all grown up now. It’s time you started to treat me that way! Open up and tell me why you can’t be with Jazzy.”

Cookie's voice was soft, almost a whisper. "For years I've only seen you as my baby sister. My Little Raven. Somewhere along the way, you grew up, became a woman. Now as I look at you, you may be the one woman I can talk to about this. I've carried this secret for so many years I guess I convinced myself I couldn't trust anyone with it. Not even you. Only, I don't know how to lean on you, let you anchor me."

Adina watched Cookie turn from her and her heart trembled. Slowly she stepped behind her sister and held her in her arms. As tears landed on her hands, Adina remained quiet and waited patiently until Cookie was ready.

They moved to the sofa and Adina gave her a box of tissue just in case she needed them. Cookie started her story.

"Adina, you're right. I've been keeping something from you about me and Jazzy." She lowered her lids over pretty brown eyes and said softly, "Like Mama, I was able to perfect the gift early. I had it under control when I turned seventeen. I had just met Jazzy.

"We became good friends and I never planned for our friendship to go beyond platonic. We never thought we'd have to give up our friendship. But one spring day he came to me and said he couldn't see me again because his family was giving him grief.

"I believed his family would really make his life miserable. I told him I understood and would respect his decision. I knew I could never decide between my family and him, so I knew the choice he'd make before he did.

"Jazzy was so touched by my inner strength that he kissed me. I tell ya, Adina, I've been kissed before, but not like that. It was electrical, almost spiritual. I yielded to



him and we made love and I gave him my gift of the Lair of the Python.

“He handled it well. As you know, it can leave a man disoriented the first time. It was my way of saying goodbye and I’ll love you always.” She wiped her crystal tears away and continued.

“After going our separate ways, I met a man named Andrew. We met at a party and started to date. We were coming from a country drive when he asked if we could stop by his house so he could change his clothes. I wanted to wait in the car but he insisted that I come inside. Explaining, it wasn’t safe for a young lady to wait alone. I went in and he...”

Cookie turned away as she tried to fight back the tears which rolled down her face. She took a deep breath and found inner strength. Adina took her hand and squeezed it, assuring her she was there.

“I went in...and he raped me. All while it was happening he told me I had asked for it, that I deserved it, that I wanted it. When he finished, he dressed me, put me back into the car and took me home.

“I felt so sick and dirty. I couldn’t stop bathing. I wanted to tell someone, but back in those days, there was no such thing as date rape. I didn’t think anyone would believe me. He never came by again.

“My nerves were raw. It became hard to keep food down. Then when I thought it couldn’t get any worse, I missed my period. My cycle was never regular but I was later than normal. I went to the doctor and she confirmed my suspicions. I was just about eight weeks pregnant. I wanted to die. My emotions were all over the place. I was in a tailspin. I would sit and cry and cry then become so angry at what Andrew had done to me that I wanted to

kill him.” Cookie began to flinch on the sofa and couldn’t sit any longer.

She stood up to finish her story. “I received therapy and learned to heal myself. I got focused and I started to give you my attention.” She turned slightly to glance at her sister over her shoulder. “By then, I’d aborted the baby. I couldn’t bring the child of a rapist into this world. I had to be sure you never experienced the kind of pain I’d suffered.” Cookie’s hands balled into tiny fists and she strained to finish.

“About a year later, I was at a café reading the paper and noticed a story about a rape trial. The details the six women described were so similar to mine, that at that moment, I knew it was Andrew who was on trial.” Cookie turned swiftly with deranged tears in her deep eyes. “I thought, dear God, he’d been stopped. Someone was braver than I and he was going to pay for what he’d done to me and to those other women.” Suddenly, Cookie dropped to her knees and Adina rushed to her side and tried to embrace her, but Cookie flinched at her attempt. She stared blankly over Adina’s head as she whispered, “They found Andrew guilty on all counts...but it was me...and Jazzy, who paid.” Cookie clutched her belly and rocked slowly and said, “Andrew...he was sterile.”

Adina had figured out Cookie’s secret. She collected her gently in her arms and rocked with her. Cookie lost all her reserve and broke down and curled into a small ball on the floor with her slender arms crossed over her belly. As Adina placed Cookie’s head in her lap and stroked her brow lovingly, she listened through her sister’s sobs. “Now you know why I can’t open my heart to Jazzy again. I aborted his baby. What Andrew did to me left me

so distraught and numb I just assumed it was his.

“It never occurred to me the baby might be Jazzy’s. After the rape, I floated in and out of a catatonic limbo. Days seemed like weeks, weeks seemed like months. I just wanted to forget. I didn’t realize until Andrew’s trial that my one night with Jazzy and the day of the rape were only four weeks apart and my baby was gone. Jazzy’s baby was gone.

“If he ever found out he’d hate me forever. I couldn’t bear to lose him twice.” Cookie stared blankly with raining eyes. “I’d rather he just thought I was hurt from when he left me in Paris. I’d die if he ever knew the real reason was because I felt such shame for aborting our baby. I couldn’t handle the guilt and his hatred for me. Please, Adina, keep my secret,” Cookie cried.

She held Cookie and let her cry until her eyes emptied. They decided to close up the shop early and give themselves a break. Adina sat with Cookie until she fell asleep. She looked so calm and peaceful. Free.

Adina wondered if Jazzy would be able to forgive Cookie if he ever found out. Would Cookie be able to get through it? Adina went to her room and analyzed what Cookie had said about her and Brandon. Was she running away? She knew on New Year’s he had consumed her. He was overpowering. She still couldn’t look at the color red without blushing.

She missed him so much. She craved him desperately. Why was that? She felt for sure that once they were apart she’d get focused and be able to turn him off in her head. It wasn’t working out that way.

The longer they were apart the more she wanted to be with him. Cookie was right, Adina finally admitted. She was working herself to the point of sheer exhaustion just

to keep from thinking of Brandon and his magnetism.

She couldn't fight it any longer. Despite all she had said to him she was breaking her own rules and allowing herself to feel something for Brandon. And it wasn't just friendship. It went deeper. It was a combination of many things and the feelings got stronger and stronger the longer she was away from him.

She began to shudder at the thought that maybe it was love she felt for Brandon Montgomery. She had closed herself off from that emotion for so long she had almost forgotten what it could feel like to be loved by someone and love them in return.

Adina took a long, hot bath. Tomorrow would be a long day because she and Cookie had decided to stop early. She hopped into the bed, turned off the lights and thought of Brandon. This was the first night that she didn't try to fight her thoughts of him. She let them come in whatever form they wanted.

The next week was a mad dash against the clock. Cookie and Adina worked non-stop to get Cookie back on schedule. Every since their long talk, they were a lot closer. They were practically finishing each other's sentences.

Cookie knew it was time Adina started looking for a place to live. If they could get her back on schedule, they'd take a day off and go shopping for a bigger work space and look at lofts for Adina.

Cookie thought it would be great for Maxie to join them on their shopping spree. She called her up and they all decided to make a date of it on Friday. This would give Adina a chance to pick up her baby.

Maxie decided to stop by a day early just to see if she

could help out. Cookie and Adina put her to work right away delivering the gowns to their new owners. On her last trip she wasn't alone when she returned. A familiar face escorted her into the shop...Brandon.

When he came into the shop, Adina's heart skipped a beat. She hadn't expected him. She was totally unprepared. She began to blush like a girl on her first date. "Mr. Montgomery ... eh ... I mean, Brandon, what are you doing here?"

"I need you. . .eh...I mean, I need your help. Is there some place where we talk?"

She moved closer, looking deeply into his eyes. Something was wrong. "Yeah, sure. The back room. I'm sure Cookie won't mind." When they walked away, Adina knew Cookie and Maxie would have their ears plastered to the door trying to listen.

"Brandon, let me take your coat and have a seat on the sofa." She hung up his coat then joined him. "Now, what's the problem and how can I help?"

When he suddenly stood from the sofa, Adina knew the problem was big. She couldn't remember him ever being so jittery. "Adina, it's the Ocasí contract. It's unraveling at the seams. Apparently we stand to lose millions on the deal. We can't keep within the guidelines of the material specs.

"Mr. Bourdaeux is having a terrible time keeping the Ocasí material in stock for the damn building. If we can't get the east side of building built by spring, we may be forced to breach our contract by having to use a higher percentage of blended materials to meet the deadline."

"That motherfucker! Oh, Mr. Ocasí, you are a slick bastard. I was waiting for the other shoe to drop and it has!" Adina was so outraged she forgot Brandon was

even in the room. She shot off the sofa and approached him. By his lost expression, she knew he had no idea what was going on. She regrouped quickly. "Brandon, when do you meet again with Mr. Ocasi?"

"Tomorrow morning and Mr. Ocasi won't be there. It will be his assistant, Mr. Ito. Why are you so upset? And why do I get the feeling you knew this was going to happen?"

Adina had no time to for the details. There was too much to do and she had to do it all by tomorrow morning.

"Brandon, remember, once I said, that to be a good friend you had to accept a friend as they were and also be able to trust them? Well, I need you to be a friend and trust me. I can't talk about it right now but I promise, if everything works out, all your problems will be solved."

"I trust you. Believe me, I do. But can you give me a hint as to what's going on?"

Adina's mind was racing; she had to move fast. "I can't just yet. What time is the meeting tomorrow?"

"It will start at nine o'clock."

"Brandon, I'll be at the meeting but due to other obligations I agreed to before you told me of this little crisis, I won't be in business attire. I just won't have the time. You have to go. I've a lot of work to do." As she headed for the door and began to open it, she heard Cookie and Maxie scurrying away. She could do nothing but give the two of them a smirk.

Cookie came over and said, "Adina, you look like you are ready to kill someone. What's going on?"

Adina's eyes met Cookie's. "You know how I hate dishonesty and lies. Brandon just informed me that one of his contracts is going sour and I know why."

"I had a feeling the other party was up to something and Brandon, unknowingly, has just confirmed it for me. I need to ask a favor of you. I must get to the courthouse before it closes. Will you be okay here with the remainder of the orders without me? What I have to do to help Brandon can't wait."

"Sure, honey, go ahead I'll be fine. Maxie took the last of the orders to their new owners. So I'm officially back on schedule. Don't forget we're getting your baby tomorrow so make sure you are ready."

Adina had forgotten about her baby. "Thanks for reminding me. I have to be at Brandon's corporate headquarters tomorrow at nine. Can I get a ride from you before you pick up Maxie? By the time you pick her up and come back for me, I should be done."

Cookie smiled brightly at Adina. "I don't see a problem with that. Just make sure you're ready when we come for you. We have to pick up your baby and head across town by eleven thirty to look at those lofts."

Adina gave her sister a hug, turned, grabbed her coat and shot out of the shop. "Thanks, Cookie, you're the best! I'll see you tomorrow!"

Adina stayed up all night going over the documents she'd gotten from the courthouse and deeds office. When she finally found what she was looking for, she gave a yelp and jumped up and down on her bed. She had Mr. Ocasí now. All she had to do was reel the slippery little sucker in.

Brandon was having trouble getting to sleep. He wasn't sure if it was the meeting or Adina. God, she

looked gorgeous. She seemed to glow, he thought.

Her dimple had him in a trance again. She smelled delicious. He wanted her so much. But he'd not surrender to his hunger. Tomorrow was an important day and he needed to be sharp and alert for whatever his Little Raven had planned. He closed his eyes and hoped when he fell asleep, Adina would be in his dreams.

Everyone was at the meeting. Brandon, Richard Bourdaeux, Albert Paulsen, Marvin Smothers and Walter Ito. Adina got to the headquarters on time but was purposely late in entering the meeting. She made sure no one saw her before then.

Adina checked with Angela, Brandon's secretary, to make sure everyone was in the meeting and that she was the only one missing. She told Angela to intercom Brandon in the conference room to let him know she was there.

"Thank you. Have Ms. Powers come in." When Albert, Marvin and Richard heard what Brandon said, their eyes shot to the door. Adina opened it slowly and walked in smoothly. As she came closer to the table every man including Brandon was mesmerized by her beauty. Adina had told Brandon in advance she wouldn't be in business attire but he gasped just like everyone else.

She was wearing a pair of hunter green, suede, high waist pants with suede, fire engine red chaps over them. They were tight and accentuated every curve and sway of her sexy body.

Her top half was covered with a matching red cotton turtleneck sweater. She had on a suede hunter green jacket that stopped at her waist and matched her pants. Adina's hair was down and styled with big messy curls.

She wore minimum makeup but her lips were painted



with deep, red lip rouge. She came before the table and all the men were still standing. She gave them a glance and proceeded to speak. "Gentlemen, please excuse my attire, but I have some place to be immediately after this and I won't have time to change. If all of you are ready, then take your seats and let's get this started."

Brandon could tell Adina had woven her spell on his directors. With a quick glance in their direction he knew they couldn't believe this was Adina Powers. He also knew the exact moment by their expressions when it finally clicked in all their brains why he was moved to utter distraction whenever his thoughts were of her. They knew what he knew, she was absolutely beautiful. He started—in order to give his associates a chance to compose themselves. "Ms. Powers, you look fine. Please, let's get started, shall we?"

Brandon knew Adina was on the prowl. Slowly she walked towards him and turned her eyes on her prey. "I'm sorry, Mr. Montgomery, I don't think I've met Mr. Ocasí's assistant, would you do me the honors?"

Brandon turned away from her and said, "Ms. Powers, I'd like for you to meet Mr. Walter Ito."

Adina smiled warmly. "Mr. Ito, it's a pleasure to meet you. I hope this will be the last time we have to come together like this."

Brandon saw it. A quick flash of uncertainty in Mr. Ito's eyes. But it was enough to confirm that Mr. Ito knew he had a fight on his hands this morning. As Mr. Ito fixed Adina with a cold gaze, Brandon felt like he was witnessing two gladiators enter the arena. "The pleasure is all mine, Ms. Powers. And yes, I'm sure this will be the last time we come together like this."

Brandon almost wished he had a bag of popcorn. He

glanced at his directors and knew they felt it too. There was something going on between these two people. They had the same look in their eyes.

Mr. Ito started the conversation. "Mr. Montgomery, as I mentioned in our last meeting, Mr. Ocasí is back in town. I've spoken with him about your idea to use a substitution for our material until you could restock.

"I'm afraid he didn't like your suggestion. He felt your suggestion was just another way for you to use the materials you want, instead of the materials he agreed to. Since there are no provisions in the contract for substitutions, I can't in all good conscience give authorization for the substitution.

"If you've any other ideas you wish to discuss, Mr. Ocasí gave me authorization to decide if any of them would be more appropriate for our needs."

Brandon's vein was twitching again. Mr. Ito knew damn well there weren't any other ideas that could be decided upon. He was just taunting him. He felt Adina tap his hand with her pencil. He turned to her and knew by her expression that he needed to regroup. Slowly he watched her eyes divert to the note pad by her hand. He read the message. *Stay calm and go along with him. Let him gain false security.*

Brandon begrudgingly forged on. Arguing point after point for almost forty five minutes when suddenly, Adina cut in. "Excuse me gentlemen, but I think we need to regroup. We are getting away from the real problem. Why don't we take a break so we can get refocused on the real issue at hand?"

Everyone stood up then stretched and walked around the room. The men were scattered but Adina knew they

all were watching her. She walked back to the conference table and removed her jacket.

All the men had to fight back the need to gasp at her beauty

The red sweater was snug and emphasized her full breasts and the color made Adina's face glow. With her hair down and slightly frayed she looked ferocious. She walked to Mr. Ito with cat like grace in every step. She began her assault with the deadliest of weapons. . . a smile.

"So, Walter, may I call you Walter? I see Mr. Ocasí has trained his assistant well. You have all your bases covered. It looks like you'll be forcing Brandon's company to breach their contract. Tell me, how does it feel to have that kind of power?"

"I don't know what you mean. But If I did, I'm sure the feeling would be all consuming. If I might ask, why do you care?"

Adina had him now. "I just wanted to know what kind of feeling the power I'm about to take away from you has. Walter, I'm going to stop playing games with you. My patience isn't as good as those in my stables." Adina referred to Brandon and the other men in the meeting. "I know exactly what you and Mr. Ocasí are up to. I had my suspicions when he made such a stupid request for the materials specifications, but when this unexpected shortage of the raw materials arose, I knew you'd set a trap. And, I might add, it was the one I hoped you'd lay."

Adina let her body language and her ferocious stare tell Walter everything he suspected. No, she was not bluffing and she knew exactly what his underlying agenda was for not accepting the substitution. When his muscles

tensed Adina pounced. She got right in his face and watched his midnight eyes flare as she blatantly intimidated him.

With a quick scan of the others, Adina knew they were fighting desperately to remain casual. As she turned her attention again to Walter, she bared strong white teeth to give lethal emphasis to her blood chilling words. "I've remained silent until now, but if you force my hand, and I really hope you do, I'll tell the others what Mr. Ocasi is doing."

Walter came back just as menacing. "You don't have any proof and even if you did, none of it would hold up in court. We'd still get what we want, it would just take longer."

Adina was going to break Mr. Walter Ito with his own treachery. "Not if I make them initiate the Agachi Proxy." She paused, watching his face change from confidence to shock. "Do you think I got where I am by being stupid? Remember, the name is the destiny. Mine is Powers and I have a lot of it. When I yield it, I never miss my mark.

"If you want to play hard ball then so be it. But I hope Mr. Ocasi is in the mood to explain to his conglomerate back in Japan why The Brandon Montgomery Group initiated Agachi procedures against him and his company."

As beads of sweat surfaced across Walter's forehead, Adina took that as a clear sign that he was well aware of the ramifications of her very real threat. That if the Agachi Proxy was initiated, Mr. Ocasi could lose face back home and in the international market. She had all the cards and she was not backing down.

But this was a battle of the minds and Adina could appreciate a worthy opponent. As she watched him

struggle to regroup, she tilted her head and listened as he coldly replied, “Ms. Powers, it seems you have me at a disadvantage. Maybe we could come to an agreement. I’m sure we can reach a mutual understanding.”

Adina liked what she was hearing but she didn’t appreciate being taken for a ride. She made her demands and would accept nothing less than them.

“Walter, I want you to agree to the material substitution until you can put the raw materials back on the market so the construction company can purchase and restock their supply.

“Then, I want you to assure my stable there won’t be any more problems with you or Mr. Ocasí in the future. I’m going to walk over to my men and inform them you are ready to talk to them again.

“I will also tell them if they don’t hear what they want to hear in fifteen minutes or less, they are to initiate the Agachi Proxy immediately.” Adina stepped from Walter, licked her lips slowly, intentionally, then bowed from the waist to him then turned sharply on her heels and headed towards the others.

She went straight to Brandon. The other men moved over to her as well. She turned her back to Brandon so she faced the other men. Her voice was whispered. “Gentlemen, please come close to me. I want you to completely shield me from Mr. Ito’s view.” The men did as she asked. When she felt Walter’s eyes still upon her, Adina reached behind and pulled Brandon closer while she pulled Albert forward. She purposely sandwiched herself between her men. Their breaths mingled seductively as she continued, “Now listen carefully. This roller coaster ride will be over in a few minutes. I’ve set everything up for Mr. Ito. All I need for you to do is play

out the role I've designed for you."

She peered hotly at the three men before her. "Albert, Richard, Marvin, when I give you the signal, I want all of you to turn at the same time and look directly into Mr. Ito's face, then take your seats. Don't say anything, just keep your eyes on him at all times until he begins to speak." Adina leaned into the man behind her, igniting his attention and his passion.

"Brandon, I want you to remain behind me. Keep your eyes on me. When I give you your signal bring your head up, look directly at Walter and give a warm smile. Then step away and take your seat. If my plan works, you'll get everything you want."

Adina gave her first signal and the directors did as they were told. Her gaze cut to Walter as he shuddered before he could stop himself. Her stance, her eyes, her silence expressed one undeniable fact: her power was real and she had won.

Adina gave her signal to Brandon and he did as she asked. She remained standing purposely behind Brandon. When she felt the gesture had served its intent, she adjusted her jacket on her chair and walked out.

She went to Brandon's secretary and told her to turn on the intercom. She wanted to hear the meeting. Walter caved in like a house of cards.

She heard them finish and officially close the meeting. She rushed back to the conference room to put a final nail into Walter.

She walked in and the men were all standing. They stopped speaking and locked their eyes on her as she walked towards them. She stopped directly in front of Brandon as the other directors fanned out on either side of her. She turned and faced Walter while her stable

stood behind looking at her.

“Mr. Ito, I’m so glad we were able to get everything settled. I do hope we can do business again...By the way, there’s something I want to give you.”

Adina placed her index finger into her mouth and licked and sucked it sensuously then removed it and slid it across Walter’s lips. As shock rippled across his features after recognizing the old Japanese tradition, he staggered back, turned on his heels and walked briskly from the conference room. Suddenly a delightful slogan popped into her head:

*Catching a ride with her sister to Brandon’s office, twenty dollars.*

*Arriving just in time to prevent a corporate takeover, millions of dollars.*

*Seeing her adversary scurry away in humiliated defeat...priceless.*

Adina burst out laughing. As she doubled over from lack of air, Brandon and the others had to help her sit down. They looked at her in total confusion.

She pulled herself together and said, “Gentlemen, please sit down and I’ll explain what just happened in here.” She waited for them and took a sip of her water and gave a cheerful sigh and said, “Guys, look, I know you’re probably wondering what just took place here and you’re no doubt wondering why Mr. Ito caved in so easily after I had my little chat with him?”

The men nodded their heads in unison. “Well, I’m going to make this brief because my sister is waiting downstairs for me. In a nutshell, The Ocasí Corporation was setting The Brandon Montgomery Group up for a takeover.” She paused, watching their faces light up with the revelation. “You see, the Ocasí Complex was just the bait to lure the construction company into a well laid out

trap.

“Brandon, Mr. Ocase knew you wanted his contract. What you didn’t know was he’d been watching your company expand into the international market. You were providing a good and stable product.

“Eventually, you’d become a formidable competitor in the overseas market. Mr. Ocase didn’t like that at all and decided that if he was going to have competition, it would be the kind he could control. And the only way to do that was to own you.

“When he gave the material specs back in September, my antenna went up then but I had to keep my suspicions to myself until he played his hand. When you informed me Mr. Ito was bitching about the substitution of the material until you could restock, I knew then that the Ocase Corporation had purchased all the raw materials and were keeping them off the market.

“Thus forcing you either to break your deadline or breach your contract. There had been no provisions made in the original contract for substitutions. Either way you went, they had you on all sides.” Adina suddenly hopped on the table and sprawled across it leisurely, enticing her captive audience to no end. She turned on her side, resting her head on her propped up hand and continued.

“Ah, but what they didn’t know was, I had them. I went to the courthouse and found the legal records about mass purchases of raw materials, followed the paper trail back to the Agachi Proxy. It’s an ancient Japanese custom that allows one company to take over another if they felt the company could be handled better under their control. I informed Walter I knew what he and Mr. Ocase were up to.

“Now, here’s where you four come in.” Adina slowly



moved intimately close to her men and explained, "I made Walter believe I was the one who really had the power in this room," she pouted slowly. "I had him thinking all of you were in my stable, that I could make you do whatever I wanted you to do." Adina straightened out the men's ties one by one, watching their eyes ravish her with their private thoughts. She knew this had been the look Walter witnessed when they all stared at him.

She moved back but remained on the table with her legs crossed underneath her and finished, "So when we separated and I was left standing, you showed him I really was able to back up what I'd said."

She turned and smiled sweetly. "Richard, I'm sure you won't have any more problems keeping the raw materials in stock. Mr. Ito will probably put it on the market before the end of the business day."

All the men sat there with their mouths agape. Their faces suddenly started smiling at Adina and she began to blush all over the place. She had once again helped them out and they were showing their appreciation.

"Woman, you are a rare and precious jewel," Brandon said.

All the other men nodded their heads in total agreement then Albert asked, "Adina, why did you do that thing with your finger?"

She slid daintily from the table and slipped on her jacket. She gave Albert a devilish smile and answered, "Oh, that. I was giving Mr. Ito a taste of the victory I took from him. It's another Japanese custom. I hate to run off like this, but my sister is waiting. I have to pick up my baby. If you will excuse me, I need to leave."

Brandon shot out of his chair and started walking along side Adina. The other men didn't want to be left

behind and followed Brandon. As they walked down the hall to the elevator, they made quite an alluring picture. Men surrounded Adina on all sides. They were wrapped around her little finger and she knew it.

They came to the elevator and Richard said to Adina with a wide smile, "I didn't know you had children? Why don't you bring your baby up for a visit when you have a free moment?"

Adina blushed softly then placed a warm hand to his face. "I don't have any children. When I said baby, I was referring to my..." She turned her head as the elevator opened and saw Cookie and Maxie about to exit.

Cookie had on the same outfit as Adina's except the colors were camel and black. Maxie was wearing all white leather with deep blue fringes hanging from the arms of the jacket. Adina walked over to the ladies and the men followed her like obedient puppies.

Everyone exchanged pleasantries then Cookie said, "Little Raven, we need to get going. We have to get across town and we haven't picked up your baby."

"I'm coming, Cookie. I was just saying goodbye."

Adina shook everyone's hand then she reached for Brandon's. He shook his head then stepped up close and gave her a big bear hug.

"Thanks for all your help," Brandon said lovingly.

Adina caught her breath and started to walk away. The elevators opened and she, Maxie and Cookie got on. Just as the doors closed she shouted, "No need to thank me, Brandon. That's what friends are for!"

The men stood at the elevator for a long time thinking about the cinnamon brown woman with golden highlights who'd come into their lives like a lamb and

departed like a lioness.

“Brandon,” Albert said. “You were right. She’s unbelievable. Her sister’s gorgeous too! Any more at home?”

Richard jumped in. “Their friend, Maxie, wasn’t anything to laugh at either. She was just as beautiful.”

Marvin added, “Richard, Adina never said what her baby was.”

Brandon chuckled. “I think we better get back to work. I know it’ll be hard ‘cuz I’m using all the restraint I have not to jump on the next elevator and go after them.”

## CHAPTER 12

During the next two weeks all that Adina had said came to pass. Richard had no problem keeping his stock of raw materials available to build the Ocasí Complex. Neither Mr. Ocasí nor Mr. Ito gave another objection about anything. They literally did a disappearing act.

Once Brandon had found Adina again he made sure he kept in touch. He went over to Cookie's clothing design shop almost every other day. He stayed in Cookie's and Adina's faces trying to find any way to be of help. If that wasn't enough George eventually found his way to the shop. The place was getting way too small. One good thing with him there though, Adina could speed up the process of finding a loft.

"Well," Adina said to George as she cut some material for Cookie's latest creation, "I'm glad you're here. I'm going to really need your help. A couple weeks ago, I looked at some lofts but I really didn't like them.

"We did find some great space for Cookie to relocate her shop. I need to find a place and get moved before I go back on assignment at the end of March."

George stood next to Cookie making funny faces at her as he handed her pins to hem a piece of material to a

dress she was working on.

“Little Raven, it’s going to be tough to find you a loft in less than four weeks. Why have you waited so long? I would’ve thought you’d at least have a targeted area by now.”

Adina brought her head up from her cutting and looked at him like he was crazy then said, “Christ, Jazzy, if you haven’t noticed I’ve been a little busy helping a mutual friend of ours get back on schedule with her clothing design business and to answer your other question, I haven’t waited so long and I do have a targeted area. I just don’t have the time to get out there.”

Brandon was standing in the kitchen making hot apple cider for everyone when he said, “Adina, it seems to me that you have too much on your plate. If it’s time you need, then we’ll have to find a way to make you some.”

He came out of the kitchen wearing an apron and holding a tray in his hand. He passed out the cider then walked over to Adina and said, “I’m sure I speak for everyone in this room when I say that you’ve come through for all of us in these past weeks and I propose that we all juggle our schedules a little and help you find your precious loft.

“I have a plan. I’ll come by the shop everyday and help Cookie while you and Jazzy look at all the lofts you’ve targeted. When you find the loft you want most, I’ll help you move in or you can have it arranged, if you want to continue helping Cookie in the shop.”

Everyone’s mouths gaped at his plan, then Cookie began to laugh softly. “I’m sorry, Brandon. I didn’t mean to giggle at your idea. It’s just hard to imagine you here

with me all day cutting patterns and stitching and pinning materials together. You're a captain of industry, a multimillionaire. I just can't see you as a...seamstress."

Adina giggled herself then quickly interjected, "Oh Brandon, she's right. It's a great idea but it's hard to visualize. Besides, I could never ask it of you. You'd have to take too much time off from your work."

Brandon took a sip of his cider and smiled warmly at Cookie and Adina. "Ladies, it may be hard to see but it's not impossible. I know how to do basic sewing. I did a lot of it as a kid. I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth. I had to keep my tattered clothes in one piece when I outgrew them faster than my father could replace them." Brandon directed his next statement to Adina.

"Anyway, if it hadn't been for you, I might not have a company to take time away from. So, if hanging out with Cookie for a few days will help in the payment of the enormous debt I owe you, I'll gladly do it."

Adina touched Brandon's arm tenderly. That flame was still there. "Brandon, thank you. I really appreciate this."

He wanted to make her happy in all ways. He placed his hand over hers, squeezed gently and waited for her eyes to raise to his. "If I might quote a very dear friend...'no need to thank me. That's what friends are for'."

Cookie caught the passionate look between them and smiled softly to herself. She liked Brandon and knew he'd be a good match for Adina if she'd ever stopped running away from how she really felt for him.

As Cookie thought about Adina and Brandon, she

looked up and found George watching her. She blushed shyly but held his stare. It was all there, just as Adina had told her. He still loved her with all his heart. It was written all over his face.

She watched as her own hand caressed the side of his face tenderly. He leaned into it then turned his head to kiss her palm sensuously. She didn't pull away but watched his eyes change as they witnessed the same love for him come over her face.

She started to blush really hard and George's smile grew by leaps and bounds. She turned away quickly and said with a voice an octave higher than normal, "So, it's settled then. Brandon, you'll stay with me while Jazzy and Adina go loft hunting. If you think you can do the work, I can definitely use you."

Brandon brought his eyes up to meet Cookie's and said with a proud smile, "I'll give it my best effort for I know I'm replacing a rare commodity."

George and Adina spent the next week viewing lofts all over Montreal. Adina was particular about what she wanted. She wouldn't accept anything less than exactly what she desired. It had to be spacious with lots of windows and good hardwood floors.

She didn't want a kitchen or a bathroom, just the pipes and hard wiring. She'd design her kitchen and bathrooms herself and have them built to her exact specifications. Her dream loft had to have high ceilings and bare brick walls.

She wanted it to be old with capabilities of being transformed into a modern living space. And of course it must be well ventilated because she'd be storing her baby in the space. She didn't want any accidents.

After a full week of intensive searching, they found the loft of her dreams. It had everything she wanted and an added bonus...a panoramic view of the city. She fell in love immediately and signed a one year lease on the spot.

She walked around the space and knew it was perfect. She took measurements of where she'd put her bedroom, bathroom, kitchen and her storage room for her baby. The rest of the space would be open and inviting until her needs changed.

Adina was so excited George had to drag her out bodily. He only convinced her to leave when he suggested that if she wanted to be moved in by the end of the month, she'd better make arrangements for a contractor to come and give estimates for the work.

Adina couldn't wait to get back to the shop so she could tell Cookie and Brandon that her search was over. She and George may have been busy traipsing all over Montreal, but Brandon and Cookie were just as busy keeping her ahead of schedule so when Adina returned to work, she'd remain on schedule with her orders.

During this time, Brandon and Cookie got to know each other a little better. They talked about Adina a lot. He admitted to Cookie he was attracted to Adina and wanted to take their friendship to the next level but she fought him every step of the way.

"Cookie, I sorta wish I had an older brother to talk to when confused about life. I don't know if you knew or not, but I'm an only child."

Cookie strolled over to Brandon and checked his stitching and commented, "You're quite good. I'm not so sure you've not missed your calling as a designer. I guess you have a point about being an only child; it can have its



disadvantages.

“But I’m not the oldest. Adina and I have an older brother named David. He’s in the military with our father. He’s following in the footsteps of our dad and is pursuing a career in the military. Adina and I hardly ever see him. He’s married and has two beautiful children, a two year old boy and a two month old girl.

“He promised when I started my business, he’d take leave to come visit Adina and me. I hope he keeps his promise. I’d love to see him again.” Cookie changed the topic. “Brandon, do you want any children?”

He brought his head up, looked right into Cookie’s face and with a wide smile said, “I want many children. I love them. I plan to fill my house with babies.”

Cookie raised a perfectly arched eyebrow. “Well, I hope the woman you’ve chosen to be the mother of all these babies loves them too.”

Brandon chuckled and lowered his head to finish his stitching. “I’m sure the woman I’ve chosen will love them as I love her, with every fiber of my being.”

At that moment, it occurred to Brandon that the woman was Adina. He knew right at that instant he was in love with her. She was his woman. Just as the old man had said that day so many months ago. He knew contentment with the belief. He blushed at his new discovery for he held a feeling Cookie knew it before him and was just seeing if he was aware of it yet.

“Cookie, Adina told me you knew people. She was right and so was Jazzy. You’re amazing. I can’t believe you just got me to make that private confession to myself. How’d you know I’m in love with Adina?”

Cookie grabbed a spool of material and spread it out on her worktable and began to take a measurement to

cut. “Brandon, I don’t know if you realized it or not, but no matter what subject we happen to be talking about, you manage to say Adina’s name in almost every sentence. If that’s not love, then you have a very limited vocabulary. Anyway, I’ve seen all the signs before.

“Adina may be fighting you but I’m being truthful when I say you’re getting to her. She has some bad and ugly scars from her last relationship. It will take all the love you have to help her conquer the fear she has of opening her heart to anyone again. She mentioned that you stayed with her when she had that bad nightmare last year. Sorry I can’t tell you more about it, but if you keep at her, Adina will trust you and tell you herself. Just hang in there, Brandon.”

So it was more than friendship she felt. A warm sensation moved through him as he realized that he was on the right track. He was wearing her down. She would soon be his. He was just about to ask Cookie a question, when George and Adina burst into the back room.

“Cookie, Brandon, I found it! It’s great, it’s perfect, exactly what I’ve been looking for! I signed a one year lease.” Adina was pacing back and forth as she described her dream loft to Cookie and Brandon. “Oh guys, wait ‘til you see it. It has a panoramic view of the city. It has huge windows and high ceilings with bare red brick walls. The floors are good. I did see a little water damage but I can have that fixed. Now, all I have to do is contact a few contractors about some estimates.”

Brandon’s ears started to tingle when he heard ‘contractor’. “Adina, why do you need a contractor? I thought the space was perfect?”

Adina turned to face him. “The space is completely empty. It’s been gutted so I can have my bathroom,

bedroom, kitchen and storage rooms built to spec. I need a contractor to build them before I can move in.”

Brandon had a breakthrough. He finally thought how he could repay her for all she has done for him. “Adina, do you have the measurements and materials you want to use with you?” She nodded and handed them to him then turned to give Cookie more details.

Brandon walked over to George and shared his idea. He knew he had an ally in him when he said, “Brandon, do it. If you leave now, you can start tomorrow. I’ll explain the bare minimum to Adina and take over with Cookie so she doesn’t fall behind.”

The next three weeks went by like molasses for Adina. She couldn’t wait to see the loft. George convinced her to stay clear of the construction until it was finished because she’d only get in the way. He promised he’d go by every few days so he could get updated reports.

The weeks may have been creeping by slowly for Adina, but Brandon was in rush to beat the clock. He was determined to have Adina’s loft ready in four weeks so she could move in. He even did some of the work himself. Especially, in her more intimate rooms like her bath and bedroom. He wanted them absolutely perfect for her.

He finally finished and contacted George to bring Adina to her new home. She was shocked at the workmanship and the detailing of each room, tears welled in her eyes she was so happy. She did notice Brandon was there and realized how much she’d missed him.

She walked slowly through every room inspecting and

testing the faucets and doors. When she got to her bedroom, she almost fainted. It was elevated off the floor. One had to climb up a few stairs to reach it.

Once there, she walked into a room from heaven. The walls were created from glass brick so no matter where the sun was during the day, it would always shine into her room and create beautiful rainbows all around her.

It had interior lights as well. There was a switch for almost everything. The floor was covered with a thick, plush, cream colored carpet which would match any decor she chose to put in the room.

Since everything was still open space, there were thick drapes that encircled the entire parameter of the glass walls so when she retired she could close the world out.

The bathroom was immensely large. Broken into three distinct areas. There was the toilet area that actually had a door to it so one could have extra privacy if the need every came and the bathroom had to be occupied by more than one person at the same time.

The shower area was massive as well. It occupied an entire corner of the bathroom. The shower door came out of the wall and made a half circle against the corner. It was tiled with beautiful seashells. Her bath linen was stored in the wall on either side of the vanity mirror and the double sink.

The kitchen was just fabulous. It had all the latest appliances, cooking and eating utensils. The rough red brick was kept but the decor was all modern European. The color scheme was cream and hunter green. It looked like a combination between old country charm and futuristic chic. She loved it.

Her storage room was in fact a mini garage and

mechanic shop for her baby. It was also slightly elevated but instead of stairs to get to the room there was a ramp. That way she could ride her bike right off the elevator and into her mini garage.

It was well ventilated just as she requested and it had a concrete floor so clean-ups would be easier.

Adina turned and ran to George. "Oh, thank you. You've made me so happy. My new home is perfect. Please, tell me, who did you get to do all of this? I want to thank the company personally for an excellent job."

George took Adina's hand, smiled warmly and walked her over to Brandon, who'd all but disappeared into the woodwork while watching Adina inspect his handiwork.

"Adina, I'd love to take the credit and the gratitude for bringing your dream home to life, but unfortunately, I had nothing to do with it. The person you owe all of this to is Brandon."

She reached up and gave him a big hug. "I don't know what to say. How can I ever thank you? You've given me my dream. I'll be forever grateful. Tell me, how'd you pull this off so fast?"

Brandon didn't miss anything. He had watched how her face lit up with sweet joy from seeing her dream become a reality. When she went into her bathroom and hopped into the huge, whirlpool tub and played in it as if taking a bath he almost died a slow death from wanting her so much. He vowed they'd share many baths. As her warm body pressed into his he was hard pressed to remember the question. "Remember Albert, from work? Well, I told him I had found a way to repay you the enormous debt we owed you for helping us with the wetland deal. He contacted some of the men who had

qualified for the incentive package you and he put together. He explained that you were the one who had actually came up with the incentive program and that you needed help getting your new loft in living condition. The men thought back to all the guilt-free fun they had, thanks to you and signed up to complete your loft at no cost to you.”

“Brandon, your men did all this just to thank me for helping them have fun?”

He thought about it for a second then nodded his head. “Yep, this beautiful new home of yours is compliments of some good men who just wanted to say thanks for eight days and nights of guilt-free fun.” He watched her closely. He wanted to see every emotion unfold on her face. This had been one of her most cherished hopes. A place of her own. As her head dipped slowly to his chest, he knew he’d made it a cherished reality. Gently he placed a finger under her chin and lifted her face to his. “Sweetheart, why are you crying?”

“I’m just happy. I’ll never be able to repay you for all of this.”

“I can think of one thing that would put a dent in your bill.”

He felt her trembling hands touch his face. As he gazed deeply into her hypnotic eyes her warm mouth moved over his. He sank into the kiss and savored it slowly. He had waited so long for a sign she had deeper feelings. When her tongue tangled sensuously with his he felt the spark that was always between them grow into a gentle rising flame.

When they finished the kiss, Brandon immediately cleared his throat and saw that Adina was blushing. Then it hit him. They were not alone. He looked up and saw

that Cookie and George were still in the room.

George couldn't wait to tease them. "Oh, you two, don't mind us. We were just leaving to get something to eat. We didn't think you two'd be hungry for food."

Cookie poked him in the ribs playfully and added, "He's right, we were thinking of getting something to eat. Would you care to join us?"

George stood behind Cookie signaling them to say, no. Brandon was sure he was up to something and started to laugh.

Adina said, "Thanks for the offer, but I think we'll take a pass."

Brandon stood next to Adina as she watched them leave her building from her window. When they got in the car and pulled from the curb, she turned and wrapped her arms around him. This was what he'd missed, so many lonely nights without her. Intimacy, serenity, connection. As he returned her gesture, he knew she'd missed something too. The comfort and safety she could only feel embraced in his arms.

After walking through the loft several more times, Adina realized it was getting late and decided to head back to Cookie's shop. While on the way, Brandon asked her about her first assignment.

"It's a standard translation assignment. It will only be for about a week or two at the most. There won't be any traveling and I won't be required to stay overnight at hotels. I'm grateful for that because I was beginning to hate restaurant food. I like to cook my own food whenever possible."

"I didn't know you liked to cook. Are you any good?"

Adina smiled proudly. "Yes, I am. If the truth be

known, Cookie's real reason for hating to see me get my own place isn't because she won't have any help in the shop but because she can kiss all those home cooked meals I used to make goodbye. My big sister is the queen of takeout. She can find any fine restaurant anywhere in Montreal but she can't find the oven door on the stove."

Brandon began to laugh and said, "You may be exaggerating just a little. I'm pretty sure she can find the door. It's rather hard to miss. If you're that good, I'll have to try some of your dishes next time you cook for Charlotte."

Adina turned to Brandon with her mouth agape. Cookie must really like him to tell him her real name. "I see you and Cookie did get along okay. She hates being called Charlotte, but why wait, I can cook you something. When I'm done with this assignment, I'll have a few days off before the next one begins. Why don't I stop by your house and cook you one of my favorite dishes? As a matter of fact, it'll give me the chance to see your home. I hear it's a real show piece."

Brandon escorted Adina to the door. She reached up and hugged him again. As he held her, he thought how the next two weeks would be slow torture until he could see her again, but it'd be worth it.



## CHAPTER 13

Brandon kept himself busy until Adina arrived that evening. He had his home cleaned from top to bottom. There really wasn't that much to do. Rarely was he there and he wasn't messy. He made sure the kitchen was especially clean. Then it dawned on him that he hardly ever went through his own house. He almost didn't want to. Suddenly he wanted to experience it like Adina would tonight, like the first time. He double checked with the groundskeeper to make sure they were exceptionally beautiful. Brandon was all ready to receive Adina into his home.

When Adina pulled up to the gate of Brandon's estate she was blown away. It was gigantic, just like him. Suited him completely. Guarded well but once inside, became warm and inviting. Like Brandon. When she rang the doorbell, Adina was surprised when he answered the door himself.

"Your estate and home are lovely. I hope you will allow me a tour and since you came to the door, I guess your butler is sick?"

"I'd be honored to show you my humble dwelling and no, Harry isn't sick. I gave everyone the night off. I

didn't see any reason for them to stay when they'd have nothing to do."

They went throughout the entire house. They started upstairs in the bedrooms. They each had a name and a color scheme. They were inviting and cozy.

When they got to his master bedroom she knew instantly that it was his room. It had the same smell as him, fresh cut wood, musk and soap. The color scheme was neutral, tones of creams, browns and grays. The furniture was constructed of different types of fine woods like, mahogany, oak and cedar. This was definitely a man's room.

They continued their tour downstairs and viewed his extensive library, his home office and his leisure room. Adina could tell he spent a great deal of time in this room. It had everything, an enormous music collection, a pool table, board games, and a huge flat plasma screen television mounted on the back wall. They finally made it to the kitchen and Adina fell in love at first sight. It was a kitchen for a chef.

She came upon a revelation and turned to Brandon. "Why don't you help me cook our meal? It will be fun. When we were kids, whenever mama needed a break, my dad would cook. We would make a big deal out of it. We'd all go to the grocery store and buy everything fresh and come back and cook it together.

"I'd love to do that with you. What would you say, if we hop on my bike and go to the store, buy what we need then came back here cook it and really became decadent and ate it in the leisure room? We could play games and listen to music."

"You know, that's not a bad idea. Have to admit, I've never ate anywhere except in the formal dinning room. I

could go for being a little bad.”

It was a cool early spring night. They came out to Adina’s bike and she watched as his eyes viewed it. Her baby was big. It looked like it was made more for him.

“Adina, this is your baby? This bike is almost as big as I am.”

She smiled at him. “Would you like to learn how to drive it?”

“I couldn’t. I might drive it into a ditch.”

“I’ll be with you. Besides, you know how much this bike means to me. I trust you will be careful.”

“Little Raven, when you put it like that, how can I refuse? I want you to know this bike intimidates the hell out of me.”

She laughed. “Hop on. I’ll show you how it starts.”

Adina spent the next forty-five minutes tutoring Brandon on how to handle her Harley Hog. When he felt confident, they decided to leave the estate and go out into the nightlife. His braking was a little shaky but he could accelerate smoothly.

Brandon could make good right turns, but his left turns, left much to be desired. Adina kept her hands on his just as a precautionary measure, but he was really doing the driving.

Adina felt so proud at how well Brandon was catching on. She snuggled up to his body to keep her hands on his. She expected her usual reaction to come over her being so close to him but it didn’t come. Instead, a warm serene feeling washed over her and she never felt so content.

They made it to the produce store in one piece. They went inside and shopped till they dropped. They packed

the food in the storage bins on the back of the bike and headed back home.

As Adina slipped on an apron and handed one to Brandon, she threw out a few suggestions for dinner.

“Now I know why my mom always told me to never go grocery shopping on an empty stomach.” She glanced at the mountain of bags on the table. “I think we over did it.” She stepped over to the table as Brandon followed and tied her apron securely behind her. She reached into the first bag. “Well let’s see what we have. What about lasagna?”

He pulled another bag in front of him and said, “Sounds good. But let’s see what else tempts our taste buds.” After unloading a few more bags he suggested, “Fried catfish might be nice.”

“Eww, I don’t eat seafood.”

The dumbfounded look on his face was simply adorable.

“Then why did we buy the fish?”

With an apologetic look she said, “Because you wanted it. I never had any intention of cooking it or even touching it for that matter.”

Brandon put the smelly item in question in the freezer. “Okay, the table is overflowing with enough food to feed ten people. There has got to be something here that we can both agree on.”

Adina looked over the contents. “Oh, I got it. We are having Chinese.”

“Mm, now you’re talking. And tonight’s special will be?”

“How about homemade egg rolls and bite size pieces of sweet and sour pork for the appetizers with chicken

breast cubes deep fried in tempura batter served on a bed of rice and broccoli rounding out the main course?”

“My mouth is watering. Take what we need and move it to the counter and I’ll clear table so we can get started.”

As Adina mixed and blended and fried, absently she thought a little music might be nice. Just then the soulful sounds of one of her all time favorites piped into the kitchen’s speakers. She turned around and Brandon was holding a tall glass of lemonade out to her. How did he know that she was thirsty? The way he could sense her moods was spooky. She took the glass.

“Brandon, how’d you know I liked Al Green? I really have to take a closer look at your music collection to see what other hidden treasures you have.”

“I love all kinds of music. I just may shock you. I have some Steely Dan, Santana, Doobie Brothers, Marvin Gaye, B.B. King and some Teddy Pendergrass set to start after the Reverend is done.”

He was shocking alright.

Shockingly irresistible.

“I’m impressed. Hey, the food’s almost ready. Let’s clean the kitchen so we won’t have to bother with it later.”

“No. If we are going to be decadent then let’s go all the way. I want to leave the kitchen in as much of a mess as possible. My house keeping staff complains they have nothing to do. So, if you don’t want them to quit on me, leave this place as messy as you can.”

“You want messy, you got it!”

Without saying another word she turned and picked up an egg and handed it to him. When she saw how carefully he held it, she smacked his hands together.

Brandon shot her a wicked look and she knew he

wasn't taking that lying down.

He grabbed a hand full of flour and scrunched it around in his hand then smeared it all over her face.

She gasped and quickly reached for the remainder of the liquid tempura batter. Brandon let out a yelp and started to back away. She chased him around the kitchen spilling the batter on the floor until she caught him and dumped it on his chest. She couldn't reach his head. They spent the next ten minutes sword fighting with large wooden spoons, pots on their heads and pot tops as their shields. The timer went off and the food was ready.

"Brandon, I can officially say the kitchen is messy. Let's eat."

He looked around his huge kitchen and chuckled. The place was practically demolished but it was the most fun he'd had in years. He heard a familiar sound coming from outside and looked out the window and saw it was raining. "Will your baby be okay in the rain?"

Adina shot to the window to see how hard it was coming down. "Brandon, I need to move my bike. It's coming down too hard for me to leave it out there for much longer. Is there some place I can store it until the rain stops?"

"Bring it inside. We'll leave it in the kitchen."

"I can't do that. My bike doesn't belong in your beautiful kitchen."

"The garages are some distance from here and they're full. If you don't want to bring it in the kitchen you're have to bring it all the way around to the front of the house and park it in the foyer."

"I just feel funny parking a Harley Davidson motorcycle in someone's kitchen."

Brandon looked down at Adina and gave a warm smile. "Don't worry, I know the owner, he won't mind."

By the time she got the bike into the kitchen, Brandon had changed his shirt and set the food up in the leisure room and had a warm towel waiting for her. She was soaked

"Little Raven, you have to come out of those clothes."

"Yes, I know, it's just, I don't have anything else to wear."

"I had a feeling you'd say something like that so I brought you some old clothes of mine. They'll be too big, but at least, they're dry."

Adina gave Brandon a sideways glance and took the clothes.

"Where can I change my clothes?"

Brandon started to walk away and was headed towards the leisure room. Over his shoulder he said, "Any of the bedrooms upstairs. Don't forget to bring the wet clothes down with you. I'll meet you in the leisure room when you're done."

Adina trotted up the stairs and tried to decide which room she wanted to change her clothes in. She didn't know why, but she wanted to be in Brandon's room.

She walked in and stripped out of her clothes. She dried her body and hair and walked around the room again taking in his powerful essence. She crawled into his big bed and rested her head on his pillow.

A feeling of pleasure crept over her and she sighed. She didn't want to keep him waiting much longer and hurriedly got dressed. She took one look at herself in the mirror and fell out laughing. She was lost in his clothes.

She couldn't go to dinner dressed like this. She walked to his closet and found something that fit a little better. She let her hair down so it could dry faster and rushed down stairs.

Brandon was famished. He'd started eating the egg rolls when he saw Adina come into the room. He did a double take; she wasn't wearing what he'd given her.

She must've changed her clothes in his master bedroom. She was wearing a tank top T-shirt and his old, torn up pair of overalls. They were too big but she'd rolled the cuffs up at the ankles and she didn't have on any shoes.

"I hope you don't mind, but I couldn't wear what you gave me, it was just too big. Once I got the shirt buttoned up, it still fell off of me and the pants tripped me twice before I could get out of the bedroom. I went into your closet and found something I didn't think you'd mind me wearing and I put it on and came right down."

She looked radiant. He took her wet clothes. "I don't mind at all. Please, sit down and eat. I'll put your clothes in the dryer."

Enjoying the delicious food and delightful company of Adina put Brandon in a wonderful mood. When she suggested they play a game of dominoes, he found out quickly that he didn't stand a chance of winning. He was too distracted.

"Brandon, I've never met such a happy loser. I guess the stakes aren't high enough for you. Do you want to play something else?"

His eyes darkened to a hypnotic, deep gray. "How about a few games of pool? If I win, then you give me something you value deeply. If you win, I give you



something I value dearly.”

Adina liked a challenge just as much as Brandon. This game of pool would be interesting indeed. “I see that you do have wicked streak in you after all. If we go best three out of five, then I’ll accept your bet and don’t think just because I’m a woman I won’t be up to the challenge.”

“I will never underestimate you again, Little Raven.”

The first game was a filler. They each wanted to see how the other played. They adjusted their game strategies for the next four. They were concentrating so hard Adina was sweating. They were so into their own performance that they each forgot the other one was in the room when it came time for their turn.

Adina won the first two games but Brandon won the next two. It had come down to the final shot for Adina. If she made it, the game would be over and she’d win. If she missed, Brandon could take the shot and win the game. She missed but Brandon sank the eight ball in the corner pocket with no effort at all.

She winced at losing the game. She put her stick away and walked over slowly with her head down.

“Well, you won fair and square. But I almost had you in the fourth game.”

Brandon set his stick on the table and lifted Adina’s face up to his.

“Close only works in horseshoes. I guess you want to know what it is I want for my prize?”

“You want my bike, don’t you? I accepted your bet and you won so I’ll give it to you.”

“No, sweetheart. I’d never take your baby from you. What I want is even more valuable to you than your bike...I want your heart. Adina Brianna Powers, I love

you.”

Adina stepped from Brandon but found she could go no further. She was pinned between him and the pool table. His eyes peered right into her soul. She could hardly breathe. “Brandon...we...I...oh, God. You’re asking for the one thing I’m terrified to give. I was so sure you wanted my bike. That’s why I accepted your bet.”

Brandon braced his arms on the pool table and leaned down to her face. He wanted to surround her completely before he said, “Adina, I love you. I think about you every moment of every day. I dream about you. I hear your voice in all the sounds around me. Are you telling me you don’t feel the same way? Please, don’t lie. I’ll know if you do.”

Adina could barely comprehend intelligent thoughts. “I’ll admit that my feelings for you are very strong but what you’re asking of me is harder than you know. I would love to give my heart to you but I’m afraid. Something inside won’t let me.”

He took her hands and pulled her from the pool table. “Let me show you that there’s nothing to fear. Dance with me.” The music they moved to was David Sanborn’s *The Dream*.

They danced slowly, moving to a primal rhythm as old as time and love itself. Adina felt herself relaxing in his arms and a feeling of safety and serenity came to her and she wasn’t afraid anymore. She put her arms around his waist and nuzzled his neck. Before she could stop, her mouth confessed what her heart had wanted to say for a long time. “Brandon, I love you. I yield my heart, my body, my soul. All that I am is yours.”

He placed his hands on her face and lightly kissed her forehead. She trembled from the sensation and sank into

his next kiss as her heart beat in tempo with his.

They went and sat on the sofa and talked for another hour. As the hour grew late, Brandon sensed that Adina was worried about getting caught in another storm.

“I think the rain has let up enough for you to ride your bike.”

He helped her off the sofa and escorted her back to the kitchen. “You have really got to stop reading my mind. I was about to check the weather.” She reached for her jacket and remembered her clothes. “My clothes should be dry enough to wear out.”

He helped her into her jacket. “Keep mine. No sense in changing again. Besides, I kind of like the way you look in my tank T-shirts.”

She granted him a tender kiss goodbye and he watched her back her bike out of the kitchen and drive away. He stood in the kitchen watching her tail lights get smaller and smaller. When they disappeared, he turned off the lights.

Slowly he made his way to his office and sat down. He didn’t want to be there. He didn’t want to be in the house alone. He missed her already. He sighed in frustration and decided to call it a night.

He was halfway up the stairs when he remembered he’d left the lights on and the music playing in the leisure room. He trotted back down killed the lights and music and was about to head back up when someone rang his doorbell...Adina.

She walked in without saying one word. He watched her ascend the stairs and walk right into his bedroom.

It took him a few moments to react. Suddenly he shot up the stairs and rushed into his bed room and closed the

door.

“What are you doing back here?”

She turned to him then took off her jacket and moved closer. She looked up and whispered, “I don’t want to be alone tonight.”

Brandon’s whole body went into full alert as he realized what she meant. She wanted him, she wanted to wake up in his arms. He couldn’t wait to accommodate her. He took her into his arms and drove down on her mouth passionately.

This was the first time he hadn’t had to persuade or seduce Adina to yield to him. She was so willing and giving his heart constricted with all the joy he felt.

Maybe she wasn’t really here. Maybe he was imagining her as he did every night. Giant fingers tangled in her jet black hair as his tongue danced in her mouth tasting the ecstasy only she could give. He didn’t imagine that.

Brandon pulled his mouth away. “Adina, please, say it again.”

“I love you.”

He wanted to drown inside of her. She tried to bend down to remove her shoes but he wouldn’t let her. “Let me do that.”

He knelt at her feet and removed her shoes and socks. His eyes remained locked to hers the entire time. He took his hands up her soft sensuous body as he rose back to his full height of six-feet-four inches.

He looked down with love in his eyes. “I want you.”

She leaned seductively into his body. “Show me.”

He kissed her with such frenzy he found it harder and harder to remain standing. When did she take off his shirt? Her warm hands moved along his smooth, hot skin

and it drove him crazy. He reached up with precise accuracy and undid the snaps on her overalls. The pants fell to the floor and he heard her moan softly. All she wore was his tank top T-shirt, nothing underneath. He had to get to the bed before they ravished each other right there on the floor.

Brandon lifted Adina as she wrapped silky legs around him and walked over to the bed and got in. He removed the rest of his clothes and groaned as her warm lips greeted exposed flesh with hot, wet kisses. He captured her hands as they joined in the fun and pinned her to the bed. His mouth rolled over hers, his tongue sank deep and lulled her into submission. Gently he pulled away and looked shyly into her eyes.

"I didn't think I'd be this nervous." Surprise surfaced on her face and he continued, "I've thought about this moment for so long that now that it's arrived, I'm a little unsure."

That brought a slow smile to her face. "There's nothing to be unsure about. You're an amazing lover." He felt her thigh glide up his leg and groaned.

He strained to keep his focus. "No. Don't you see? That's what I mean." He kissed her palm and placed it over his heart. He wanted her to feel how it raced. "You were right, Adina. It was sex. All the other times, it was just sex. It has to be more this time. I want it to be more this time." He rolled over her and pulled her arms around his neck and whispered, "I said I love you, but I've never given you flowers. I said I love you, but I've never taken you out on a date. I said I love you, but I've never looked into your eyes and told you you're beautiful." He gathered her face in his hands and finished, "I said it, but I've never truly expressed it. Let me do so now and make love

to you.” He felt her arms tighten around his neck as he took her mouth with his own.

This time he listened. Not to her words, but rather her body. He heard it whisper the little secrets to pleasing her. When her head fell back in ecstasy, her neck called to his lips and he answered with wet nips and licks until her trembling fingers dug into his scalp.

As her heavy breasts rose with labored sighs, his big hands captured them with teasing caresses.

When her groans of surrender chanted her need, he dragged his mouth from her neck, between her breasts and let his tongue dip into her navel. Yes, her body was sharing all its secrets.

He could feel her stomach muscles contract beneath his ministrations and moved his mouth over her swollen clit and darted his tongue out with just enough pressure to make her whimper. When her limbs and back bowed up in desperate invitation, Brandon devoured her. Her cries, pants and gasps told him when to lick, when to bite, when to suck. He could feel her thighs closing around his head and knew by her choppy, unsteady breaths that all her secrets were revealed to him and he rewarded her for it.

Adina felt her orgasm roll over her like a stampede. His tongue had stripped her of all her barriers and walls. When his mouth released her clit, nothing remained but ravenous need and it stunned her. Never had she felt so dazed and fog headed. As his slow, wet kisses journeyed over her breasts and settled over her mouth, she panted frantically as his enormous cock moved closer to her waiting wet core.

Brandon relished how sinful she tasted in their mouths. He tangled his tongue with hers letting her savor all the pleasure he had given her. He felt her hips rising up in a blatant offering and when her sharp nails dug fiercely into his hard ass, he gave her what she wanted. With a swift, hard, thrust he drove into her with the entire throbbing length of his dick.

Her rapid panting and short gasps signaled what he already knew. Although it had only been for a moment, he knew he had hurt her. Every rigid, blood pounding inch of him was anchored deep within her sheath.

He waited for her eyes to focus and said, "I know, baby. I can make it better."

He started slow letting her deep sheath rediscover him. He watched as wonder, acceptance and finally hunger painted her flushed face. She was so wet, so deliciously tight around him that he struggled with his own demands.

When her knees drew up and her teeth scored his shoulder, he hissed from the pleasure pain and rewarded her with a rapid series of piercing thrusts. Her moaning cries of pleasure vibrated along his skin like a turning fork.

Adina was memorized by the smell of their mingling sweat. She couldn't stop her hips from surging up to his driving thrusts. Her ears tingled with the sounds of her own abandoned screams. She couldn't hold on.

Her orgasm felt so good around his dick. The way her hot little pussy cinched around him almost crumbled his control. His will was being tested and strained with every stroke. He felt her arms and thighs like a vice around him

and lifted her legs to his left shoulder and crossed them at the ankles.

Her cry of surprise fueled his determination. He slowed his strokes to let her catch her breath and when her mewling whimpers escalated, he drove his long, thick shaft into her breathtakingly tight sheath with all his passion and hunger.

The image of her thrashing and panting as he drove her over the edge was the ultimate high for him. Suddenly he unlocked her ankles and lowered her legs and swooped down on her mouth feverishly. With his shaft still buried deep inside her, he gently lifted her left leg and came under it so they lay spoon fashion.

Adina felt like a limp doll. She was breathless, weak and overwhelmed with the sensations coursing through her body. As she felt him readjusting their positions again, her arm hooked around his neck and pulled his mouth to hers.

The urgent thrust of her tongue hinted to Brandon that Adina couldn't take much more. Carefully he grabbed her hip and pressed it firmly against his groin. When her whimpering pleas rose, he lifted her leg over his hip. He lifted his head and breathed, "Come for me, again."

"I can't."

"Yes, you can." He slid slowly into her from behind and watched her eyes glass over with pleasure. "I'll help you." He captured her mouth with a deep kiss distracting her from his sneaky fingers as they eased between her spread thighs and played with her clit. Her body jerked against his hand, but he didn't stop. Each time he pushed



into her, his talented fingers pressed firmly. When she cried out, he rammed forward with a hard thrust that reached her womb.

Now he was the one crying out. His climax poured into Adina as her strong walls locked down on him as she came. He winced in shocked pain but also an unexpected sensation....dark pleasure.

After several moments, he found the strength to move. He rolled onto his back and pulled Adina into his arms. Their skin was slick with sweat and he felt her shiver. He pulled the covers over them and said, "I think that went quite well, don't you?"

He couldn't believe his ears. He turned off the light knowing no other answer could have been more perfect than the sound of Adina's peaceful snoring. He chuckled softly and soon joined her.

## CHAPTER 14

Sleep stayed with them until late in the morning. It was almost eleven when Adina awoke. She looked down at Brandon and thought how beautiful he'd made her feel. How much she loved him and loved waking up in his arms.

She felt a little afraid it was too perfect. Something would ruin what they had together. She pushed those negative thoughts away and tried gently to pull from his embrace but Brandon awoke immediately. "Please, go back to sleep."

Brandon lowered his lips to her forehead and kissed it lightly. "I could never sleep without you in my arms."

She blushed and leaned back into his embrace. "I only wanted to make breakfast. I don't know about you, but I'm starving."

He turned and pinned her. "I'm starving, but not for food. I want something more satisfying."

Adina slipped her arms around his neck and adjusted under him. "Last night was incredible. You were wonderful." She stopped his kiss before it stole all her rational thoughts. "But if we start a repeat of last night, I won't be able to walk. So before I change my mind, let's get dressed and eat."

Brandon let her rise.

He growled playfully as he watched her walk into the bathroom. As he heard the water, he thought about their night of lovemaking...fabulous.

He rubbed his belly and listened to his stomach growl. She was right, they really needed to eat. They couldn't survive on sex alone.

He hopped out of bed and walked to his closet for a robe. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. His eyes immediately saw the condition of his manly loin. It had the light purple bruises again...a lot more than last time.

Adina could hold him like no other woman he'd ever known. Just thinking about what her body could do to him made his penis swell more. He knew they couldn't go at it again...yes, they could!

He walked into the bath as Adina was getting into the shower. "Wait, I want to bathe with you."

She turned quickly to see Brandon and his noticeable arousal. This was the first time she had actually seen what her body did to him. She closed the space between them, keeping her eyes locked down.

"Brandon, does it hurt? You make my body crave you so much. I sometimes forget the power I have over you."

He looked at Adina strangely. He didn't quite understand and was so aroused by her naked body, he didn't care. "Yes, it's a little tender but I'll be fine. I'm starting to get used to it."

"This has happened before? I'm so sorry. Please, forgive me."

He wanted to laugh again as he thought how she had begged his pardon the first time they had had sex. “Adina, it’s okay. I’m fine really, now get in this tub with me. I want to wash your body.”

She brought her eyes up to his and followed him to the oversized soaker tub. He needed the depths of her hot body. His hunger grew at the exact rate as his dick.

He waited for her to step in. But before she could get settled next to him, his strong arms pulled her down where he wanted her to be. When she crashed into him, he simply smiled as she struggled to find her balance. Pretending to help her get adjusted in the tub, he quickly seized on the opportunity to guide her heavenly thighs apart. Before she could protest, he thrust up. His mouth swallowed hers.

He felt her muscles relaxing around him, opening to him. Oh shit, she was hot. He dragged his mouth over her salty wet skin and growled, “I couldn’t help myself.” He felt her purr softly and knew she understood.

He loved how she responded to him. How she nestled into his chest and relished his strength and the safety of his arms. But it was more than that and he was pleasantly surprised by a new discovery, he liked Adina. And the way her wet little pussy was squeezing his engorged cock, he knew she felt the same.

He smiled slowly as her eyes connected with his and she said, “You started it.”

His hands grabbed her ass and yanked her into his powerful thrust. He watched her melt into the pleasure of it and said, “Then let me finish it.”

Ah, that’s what he wanted to see, her feed off their combined passion. He watched her build until her strangled cry pulled him into their crippling climax.

Adina's belly was protesting its emptiness. She raised her head from his chest and said, "Now I'm really hungry."

She felt his hands leave her and grab for a sponge and soap. As he began to wash her and himself, he said, "Yeah, I guess it's time we ended our wonderful bath."

As he helped her out of the tub and dried her off, she let herself wallow in the sensation. God, how long had it been since she'd felt so pampered? When she felt her skin being covered in silk, she opened her eyes. The look on Brandon's face was too cute. She glanced at herself and fell out laughing. "I look ridiculous in this robe."

She reached for his outstretched hand. "Not at all. It's a perfect fit."

As they came down the stairs, Adina heard voices. Her grip tightened around his hand. She knew he'd sensed her apprehension when he stopped and said, "Adina, don't look so nervous. It's just Harry, my butler and Lucy, my head of housekeeping."

"They're probably fussing about the mess we left in the kitchen."

Adina blushed up to her hair roots when she remembered how messy they'd left the kitchen. "Brandon, we shouldn't have left the kitchen like that. I feel so guilty. Maybe we should go and help."

How he looked at her with such love just melted her heart. She also knew by that look, that he would not let her lift one finger. "I promise, sweetheart, this is the most work and fun they've had in months. I wouldn't dare spoil this for them by offering to help and neither shall you. Now come on, I thought you said you were hungry?"

Adina smiled her secret smile just for him and raised his hand to her mouth and kissed the back of it gently. The heat of her lips sent shock waves through him and she knew it. He had to wait for the main course.

Maybe teasing him might not have been a good idea, she thought. She felt his muscles bunch in readiness to pounce when abruptly he turned his attention to the bottom of the stairs.

Harry was an older, gray haired gentleman with a wide smile, and the deepest pair of hazel eyes Adina had ever seen. He was small framed, well under six-feet tall but his demeanor and stature made him seem much taller. When he spoke, his voice was clear, sharp, and crisp. He was the kind of man who literally pronounced every single syllable. "Mr. Brandon, you and your guest have risen from your slumber. Will it be breakfast or lunch? And am I serving it in the dining room or your bedroom?"

Could this day get any more embarrassing? Suddenly feeling very awkward, she crept behind Brandon's massive frame. Her actions drew his eyes straight to hers and they told him, he was on his own. She watched his gaze return to the butler.

"Good morning to you too, Harry, and breakfast would be fine and we'll take it in the dining room."

She felt Harry's smile immediately soothe her. "Very well, sir, but if I might be so bold, it's almost one o'clock. The proper salutation during this time is good afternoon. Will you be having your usual breakfast of toast and coffee or would you like Cook to prepare you something special?"

She wanted to burst out laughing. Brandon turned to her, smiling like a little boy. "What's so funny?"

“Honey, I love your butler. He’s so precious, he doesn’t miss a thing. Would you please introduce us?”

Brandon and Adina descended the rest of the stairs quickly.

“Harry, I’d like for you to meet Adina Powers. Adina, this is my right arm around here, Mr. Harry Gillis.”

She extended her hand. “Mr. Gillis, it’s a pleasure to meet you. You keep the Montgomery Estate in excellent condition.”

“Ms. Adina, call me Harry. Do you require something special for breakfast? Cook would be happy to prepare anything you desire.”

“I know we left the kitchen in a mess last night. I’m sure the staff has been cleaning for hours. I don’t wish to be a burden.”

“It’s no trouble at all. They were grateful for something to do.”

Adina looked up at Brandon and watched this *I told you so* look come across his face. She diverted her eyes back to Harry and stepped closer to him. “Well, if you’re sure.” She paused to nibble her lower lip then said, “I’d love some waffles with lots of butter and syrup and fresh fruit and a tall cold glass of milk.”

“I’ll have Cook get on it right away.”

He was a delightful man. As Brandon lead her to the dining room she turned and

ran after Harry. When he turned, his eyes had changed color. She noticed his cool composure was a little frayed. She allowed him his dignity and said as if she didn’t notice any change in him at all, “I’m sorry, Harry, but you didn’t get Brandon’s breakfast request.”

From over her head, Brandon said, “I’ll have the same as Adina.”

She stepped from Harry, turned and walked back to Brandon.

As they walked into the dining room, Harry watched Adina and recalled how his body ignited with a volcanic flame when she touched him so tenderly. All he could say was, “Brandon, you’re one lucky man.”

Harry couldn’t wait to get back to the kitchen to tell the cook, Mrs. Peters and Lucy about Adina. “Lucy, you’ve got to see her. She’s astonishing. Even her name is exotic...Adina. Her hair is the color of a moonless night, eyes are as black as Alaskan oil, and her skin is a perfect cinnamon brown with golden highlights. When she speaks, it’s like hearing angels sing to your heart.”

Lucy was preparing a fresh plate of fruit to take to the dining room. “Well, if you’re having this kind of reaction, then no wonder Mr. Brandon has been acting so strange lately. He’s never had a woman over to the house before. It’s always business. He didn’t trust no bitches around him ever since that Sylvia witch hurt him so badly.”

Mrs. Peters nodded her head. “Yeah, and when he gave us all the night off because he said his guest would be preparing their dinner meal, I knew then, Mr. Bran was starting to open up to someone.” Mrs. Peters turned to Harry and asked, “Where do you think he met this Adina person? And if you can stop thinking with the head between your legs, what kind of feeling do you get about her? Is Mr. Brandon setting himself up for another Sylvia Reynolds?”

Harry made a disapproving face to Mrs. Peters but she was right, he was having a lusty reaction to the master’s guest. He shook it off, cleared his throat and answered, “Madam, I will have you know, I’m far too



much of a gentlemen to go around lusting after my employer's woman. But to answer your questions, I think Ms. Adina was his last interpreter and assistant from last year.

"I remember him mentioning her name a lot when he first came home in January. My first impression of her is...how can I say it...alluring. I don't mean like that viper, Sylvia Reynolds," Harry explained as he scratched his head. "Ms. Adina has a warm and charming quality which I really believe to be genuine. I don't think Brandon has fallen into the same trap as he did with Sylvia. To be honest, I think he's the one baiting traps. Just looking at her tells me that he had every intention of securing her for himself when he invited her over last night."

Lucy finished the plate of fruit and headed out of the kitchen as she said, "Until I see for myself that she ain't gonna cause Mr. Bran no harm, I can't take your lusting word for it."

Harry gave a fowl and funky look to Lucy but it had no affect because her back was towards him.

Adina and Brandon made it to the dining room and sat quietly for a moment. Then he noticed papers at the end of the table and got them.

"I think you've made an everlasting impression on Harry. He doesn't normally warm up to people as fast as he did you," Brandon said.

"I like Harry. He's very paternal. He's quite protective of you." Brandon turned and looked at her with total amazement. "Why would you say something like that?"

Adina stood gracefully and walked over to the window then turned to face him. "Brandon, everyone in this house loves you and cares for you like you were their

child. I think it may have something to do with Sylvia.

"They won't let anyone get too close to hurt you like that again. I'm pretty sure you've had other women in your life, before me, but after Sylvia, who didn't pass your family's...the house staff's approval and you strategically got rid of them somehow."

Now that was just plain scary. Her mind was a constant wonder to him. Some unknown force moved through him and suddenly he wanted to share everything with her. He set the papers down and sealed the space between them in two broad strides. He gathered her face in his giant hands and kissed deeply. He hugged her fiercely. When she caught her breath and got focused again she asked, "Why did you do that?"

"Adina, please, come sit down. I want to tell you something." She followed him to a chair at the table. When she tried to sit, he blocked her and sat first, then bade her to sit on his lap.

"You're right, well, almost right about my staff, Sylvia and this house. As I told you in Quebec, Sylvia was someone I loved deeply but what I didn't tell you was I had this house built for her.

"It was to be my engagement present if she agreed to be my wife. I informed my staff I was bringing home their new lady of the house. They were so excited. Harry and Lucy were elated that I was finally settling down and starting that family I kept telling them about." He nuzzled her nose with his own then continued. "After everything was ruined between me and Sylvia, I began to hate this house and everything in it. Harry and Lucy completely remodeled it just so I could tolerate it. They noticed I was withdrawn and even a little depressed.

“One day while coming from the stables where I sometimes kept horses of business associates, I overheard them talking about me. I don’t think Mrs. Peters, Harry and Lucy heard me enter the house.” He sighed as he collected his thoughts about that ugly time in his life.

“Pain was etched in every sentence that had my name attached to it. They said how they’d like to kill Sylvia for hurting me. Then I heard them swear they’d never allow anyone to hurt me again. Lucy even went on to say, I was the child she never had and would die before she’d let anyone hurt her baby again.” Brandon looked up and said sadly, “Adina, my heart constricted with such love for them that on that day, I made a promise to myself to never give them any unnecessary heartache again. I threw myself into my work and made more money but my love life was a dead end. I didn’t want to even date.”

Then he remembered, “Harry noticed and called me on it. He said, I was a still man and should at least get physical relief every once in while. So yes, there were other women, but never anyone serious. You are the first woman who I’ve ever brought to my house and I promised myself I’d not sleep in my bed again until you shared it with me. Because of you, I can finally call this house...a home.”

Would he always have this sense of vulnerability whenever he opened himself to such painful memories? Suddenly he felt slender arms wrap around him. Gentle hands lifted his face. His composure was not where he wanted it be. Slowly he lifted his eyes to hers as she said, “Brandon, as long as my heart beats life into my body, you’ll always have a place to come home to. I promise I’ll love you for as long as you want me to. My love is forever and unconditional and like Mrs. Peters, Harry and Lucy, I

too would die before I'd ever let anyone hurt you again."

Cocooned in her embrace, Brandon buried his head into her pillow soft breasts.

His first tears in almost twenty-five years welled in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. He hadn't allowed himself to weep over anything since his mother's death. These were tears of unbelievable relief. Relief in knowing as her soft mouth brushed against his ear, he had waited his whole life for someone to say, "Shhhhhh, Brandon. It's all right. You're home now." He let the emotion roll over him as she rocked him in her arms.

Lucy witnessed the whole confession from the shadows in the hallway. This was the first time she'd ever seen him weep.

Adina was very special indeed. She stepped back and decided to return to the kitchen and give them a few moments alone.

"Lucy," Mrs. Peters said, "Why'd you bring...hey, what is it?"

Lucy looked at Harry and Mrs. Peters then pulled out a hanky and dried her eyes. "It's Brandon...he's crying."

"What?" the others said in shocked unison.

"I was bringing them their fruit plate when I overheard him tell Adina about a conversation he overheard us have many years ago. You know the one where we all agreed to always protect Brandon.

"After he heard us, he vowed to never hurt us again. That's why there have been no more women since Sylvia. The little lady with him now made the same pact we did. She even said as long as her heart beat life into her body he'd always have a home. Isn't that the most beautiful thing you've ever heard?" Lucy sniffled.

Harry and Mrs. Peters looked at Lucy with their mouths agape.

Mrs. Peters questioned, "You mean he's known all these years that we've been worried sick about him and he's kept it to himself? Lucy, what should we do?"

"Act like we always have. It's the only way to avoid raising suspicion. Besides, I'm glad he knew we didn't like Sylvia. It probably gave him solace to know we didn't approve of her."

Harry asked, "So, Lucy, do you approve of Ms. Adina? Any woman who could crack Brandon's armor must be special."

"Harry, I couldn't agree more. Just the little I've seen of them together proves to me she sees the man and not the just the pretty package he comes in." Lucy dried her eyes and tucked her hanky into her apron pocket and explained, "Well, I can't keep them waiting any longer, they've got to be wondering where the hell their breakfast is. Be sure to have the waffles ready when I return."

Lucy made it into the dining room just as Brandon was finishing up a phone call to the office. Adina was sitting at the table. "Thank God, Lucy. I was about to send out a search party. I'm famished."

"Sorry about the wait." She set the plate on the table and turned to Adina. "Mr. Brandon, who's this pretty little girl you're eating with?"

He walked over and stood behind her chair. "Lucy, I'd like for you to meet Ms. Adina Powers. Adina, this is Lucy Monaco, my head of housekeeping."

Adina stood and extended her hand. "Hello, Lucy. I'm glad to make your acquaintance. Brandon was just speaking of you. He appreciates you greatly."

Lucy took Adina's extended hand, then suddenly,

feeling overjoyed for her lit'l Bam Bam's happiness, pulled her into a warm embrace. "Miss. Adina, the pleasure is all mine. Please, sit down and eat. The waffles are on the way."

Adina had some of the most delightful expressions he'd ever seen. He almost wanted to give her a bear hug just to see them again. He couldn't stop smiling as she said, "Brandon, she's wonderful, don't ever part with her."

"Little Raven, she's never acted like that before. I don't know quite what to say, except, she likes you."

How did she do that, he thought. How could she make something as average as eating pieces fruit seem so sensuous, erotic and sexy? He had trouble eating his own food for watching her eat hers.

"Brandon, is there a problem? Why are you watching me eat?"

"Don't you know? I want to be that fruit you're eating."

"If you come over here, I'll feed you."

He leaped across the table and grabbed her. He knew he had surprised her when she dropped her grapes. He picked one off her plate, popped it into her mouth and kissed her hungrily. "Mmmmm...I think I'd like it very much if you fed me."

Brandon sat in her chair and she straddled him. She fed him from her plate of fruit. She started with plump strawberries, then cut pieces of pear, next came grapes. By the time they got to the chunks of pineapples, Brandon was taking the fruit right out of Adina's soft, warm mouth. Each piece was paid for with a kiss more passionate than the one before it. So absorbed in Adina's

kisses, Brandon never heard Lucy enter the room. One look at Adina and he knew she hadn't heard her either.

He had to give her credit. Lucy's professionalism never wavered. She set the dishes before them and said, "I hope you two enjoy your breakfast."

He felt his cheeks turn hot. He released Adina and watched her take her seat. He ate slowly, eyeing her with sweet, sinful promises of later pleasures.

They went back up to Brandon's bedroom immediately after they finished eating. Adina started to dress so she could leave. Brandon loved looking at her body. He loved how her skin glowed with a natural sheen. It amazed him how her one dimple could hypnotize him with just a glance.

He loved her curves and swells, the beautiful lines in her back, the alluring pull of her dragon tattoo. His body parts wanted to play with hers. He came behind her and naturally she leaned into him and he captured her mouth hotly.

Then she pulled away abruptly. "Brandon, please. I need to go. I have to return to work day after tomorrow and I have research to do."

"Little Raven, you're driving me crazy. You can't leave me. I want you now." His voice was hot and heavy with desire.

"If we start, I'll never stop. You know how wicked you make me."

Brandon groaned as if he'd been hit in the stomach then fell on the bed. He propped the pillows behind his head and watched her. "How long is this assignment, Adina?"

"Eight weeks."

“What,” he thundered. “You’re joking? I can’t go that long without you in my arms or in my bed.”

“Brandon, it’s not a joke. I’ll be working straight through until the second week of June.” She walked over and crawled into the bed with him. “It’ll be hard for me too.”

He groaned, “You won’t be the one walking around with a hard on the size of a sledge hammer for the next eight weeks.”

When her bottom lip quivered at the graphic image he painted, he knew she was going to miss him a lot. “My agency has me committed to assignments until the end of the year. When I’m between them, I promise, I’ll spend every spare moment with you.”

Brandon pouted. “You promise?”

She replied warmly, “Yes, I promise.”

She brushed her lips across his and he rolled over and pinned her beneath him. He kissed with such heated passion and desire, the poor girl was dizzy when she sat up. He escorted her to her baby. He didn’t bother to change from his robe. He helped her onto her bike and took a steamy kiss goodbye. As his grounds keeper walked over and they watched Adina drive through the gates, Brandon absently took the rose offered him and said, “I’m in love with that woman, Avery.”

As he started back into the mansion, he took a sniff of the flagrant flower and thought he heard Avery grumble, “Finally. It’s about damn time.”



## CHAPTER 15

April came and went in a blink. Adina was on assignment and working hard. The time was going fast for her but at night she missed Brandon terribly. She talked with him on the phone every night. She wanted to see him, hold him and make love with him.

It was harder than she realized to be away from him but she would to get through these next six weeks if it killed her. During May, she got an unexpected surprise. She had to attend a cocktail/business party, which meant she needed another gown.

She called Cookie and asked if she could help her out. When she got there, Cookie came into the back room from upstairs. She looked a little flushed and her beautiful, jet black hair was messy.

“Cookie, I’m sorry...were you asleep? I thought I’d come right over after work so I could be fitted.”

Why was her sister blushing? “Eh...um, well, no. I wasn’t asleep. Just working on another...project.”

Adina tossed her coat and bag on the sofa and waited for Cookie to focus. This wasn’t like her. Something had changed since the last time she’d seen her big sister.

“Adina, please, sit down. If I do say so myself, you look radiant. What have you been up to? And how’s

Brandon?"

Now Adina was the one who blushed. "Thank you. I'm back on assignment again and that's why I need a gown. The cocktail party is tomorrow night and I don't have a thing. Mr. Fukami just sprang this little inconvenience on me this morning. I couldn't think of anyone other than you to get me out of this jam."

"Well, that's just great to hear. I do have a little black number that will be perfect for a cocktail party. I was trying to figure if you wanted silver or gold accessories. You didn't answer my other question, how's Brandon?"

Adina couldn't contain herself a moment longer and jumped off the sofa and started pacing back and forth. "Cookie, he's wonderful! I haven't seen him in over a month but the last time I did...it was heaven!"

"Adina, are you two...lovers?"

Her sister could always pull the truth out of her. She joined Cookie again on the sofa. "I tried to fight it. I really did. I didn't want to make the same mistake I'd made with Victor. Brandon told me his true feelings for me and made me admit mine for him. Oh, Cookie, I'm so happy. I love him and the sex!" She said with a wicked sheen in her eyes. "Girlfriend, if I had the time, I'd definitely have some tea to pour. His sexual prowess matches my own in every way. He's uninhibited. He takes me to heights of ecstasy I've never known before. I don't have to guide him to the methods that please me, he just knows." Adina was afraid too. "Sometimes I feel as if tragedy is waiting somewhere around a corner to strike and take my happiness away."

Cookie embraced her tightly. "Little Raven, I knew if you just accepted what was happening between you and Brandon, you'd know love and joy again. Try not to linger

on those ugly thoughts. You two are in love; wallow in that feeling for awhile. You haven't allowed yourself to feel it in so long. Don't spoil it with thoughts of the past."

"I know you're right, it's just second nature I guess. So, is Jazzy upstairs and are you going to tell me about that?"

She had made her sister blush! Adina couldn't believe it. Cookie wouldn't meet her eyes. Would miracles never cease? Finally her sister knew what it felt like to be caught off guard.

"How did you know?"

Adina placed her hand under Cookie's chin and lifted her face to hers. "I'm not the only one in this room glowing with radiance."

"Yes, he's upstairs. He and Brandon must be studying the same game plan. I haven't been able to shake him. He's everywhere. He's always coming over. He helps me with the orders. When I forget to eat, he cooks and feeds me. When I'm dead on my feet, he carries me to bed. And when I want to scream when one of my designs won't cooperate, he takes me into his arms and calms my nerves. He's pulling out all the stops and I don't know how much longer I can hold out and I'm not sure I want to anymore."

Cookie began pinning her hair up and said, "He arrived just a few moments before you. I was buttoning up my shirt when he came upstairs. He saw me before I did him. By the time I noticed him, he was standing over me and that old feeling emerged in me and I couldn't fight it.

"He reached for me and I didn't pull away and he kissed me. I'm still a little lightheaded from it. God, I

want him so much. My body is aching for him and he knows it.”

“Cookie, that’s beautiful. But I don’t understand; why are you fighting your reaction to him? Let go and let him love you again. Maybe if you can get the sexual tension under control, you can find the strength to open your heart to him?”

Cookie looked up towards the stairs leading to her bedroom. She turned to Adina again and said with some sadness, “I’m not sure I can. That would mean telling him about the baby. It happened over fifteen years ago and I just told you about it. I don’t think I’m capable of that kind of leap of faith.”

“Charlotte,” Adina said softly, “being with Brandon I’ve learned that sometimes all you have to choose from is fear or a leap of faith. Trust your love for Jazzy and his for you and I’m sure everything will work out.”

Cookie looked at Adina with total amazement. “Damn, girl, you have definitely grown up. Mama was right; you do have an old soul. Enough about me. Let’s get you into this gown. You’re gonna look fabulous!”

Adina was on time when Mr. Fukami came for her at the hotel. She was wearing a lovely, jet black, full length, form fitting cocktail dress. It was sleeveless with a modest neckline. The collar was beaded in sequined rhinestones and her accessories were silver. Her earrings matched the rhinestones in the dress and she had a matching bracelet as well. Her hair was worn straight back in an elegant French braid. Her makeup as always was modest but alluring.

The back of the gown was the kicker. It had a split that stopped just short of the middle of her thigh. They

arrived at the cocktail party and Mr. Fukami immediately put her to work as his translator with the other guests. The men and women were pleasant and charming and everyone commented on her beautiful gown and its accessories.

She was free advertisement for Cookie and was happy to sing her praises.

As the dinner party entered into the final stretch, Mr. Fukami granted Adina a moment's reprieve. She went out onto the terrace for a breath of fresh air. A warm breeze rippled across her skin and her thoughts ran to Brandon.

She whispered on the wind, "Brandon, I love and miss you so much. I wish you were here with me so you could hold me close."

Just at that moment a figure emerged from the shadows and stood behind her. Adina felt that warm ripple abruptly turn into a cold chill. When she turned around her heart thudded against her ribcage. She stepped back quickly as she recognized the figure was Edward Fenton.

He frightened her and she didn't understand why. Why did his smile always remind her of something menacing and sadistic? He wasn't wearing dark glasses but wore dark clothes again. His eyes were strange, almost dead. All she wanted to do was to get away from him. And she sensed he knew it for he was blocking the way to the door.

"Mr. Fenton, you seem to have a way to scaring the life out of me. I didn't hear you walk onto the terrace."

"Adina, I thought you and I had come to know each other better, it's Edward. The reason you didn't hear me was because I was out here first. When you came onto the terrace you were so wrapped up in your own private

thoughts, I didn't have the heart to disturb you."

With Edward so close she was having trouble focusing. Soon she began to shiver. "Please, Mr. Fen...Edward, I'd like to go back inside now, you're blocking the door. Will you step aside?"

Edward stepped back but not aside. "Adina, are you cold? You're shaking. Would you like my coat? I'm sure it will keep you warm."

Adina tried to move away from Edward but as he matched her step for step, she realized he wasn't going to let her get away from him.

"No, Edward. I don't want your coat, I'm not cold. I'd just like to go back inside now. Will you move away from the door please?"

Edward shook his head. "Adina, there's no need to be afraid. I'd never hurt you."

Adina didn't like being toyed with. Suddenly, her voice revealed her anger as she said, "Edward, I don't appreciate this cat and mouse game you are playing. I don't want there to be any misunderstandings between us so I'm going to be very straightforward with you.

"I'm not attracted to you in the way you want me to be. I think you are an interesting person, but I'm involved with someone and we are very happy. So if you think keeping me out here against my will is going to kindle a spark of attraction between you and I, it won't. Now, get out of my way!"

Edward's whole demeanor changed when her venomous words reached his ears. He felt this need to dominate her, control her. Adina caught that look and it brought back a sickening feeling of *deja'vu*.

She acted out of sheer instinct and stepped away. Edward imprisoned her arms in a fierce grip and brought

her into his embrace. She was shocked that he had touched her. She felt like she was being held by pure evil.

Edward's voice radiated with hunger, "I like you and I'm sure if you give me a chance, you could feel the same way about me again."

Adina's voice and her drive came back in waves as she struggled in his arms. "Edward, let me go! You're hurting me! I'm involved with someone and we are very much in love! Take your hands off of me!"

"It's Brandon Montgomery, isn't it?" Edward hissed.

Adina stopped struggling as a look of shock came over her. How did he know to whom she was referring? "What difference does it make who it is, it's not you!"

Edward crushed her small form in a menacing bear hug and brought his head to hers and said with absolute certainty, "I promise you, I'm not now, but I will be."

Then, before she could stop him, he trapped her mouth in a passionate kiss. She was so afraid she went limp in his arms. A feeling of being caged in and helpless washed over her like a waterfall.

His kissing technique seemed wildly familiar, but Adina was so disoriented and scared, her brain wasn't functioning properly. He abruptly pulled his mouth away, leaving her weak and gasping. He released her then turned quickly on his heels and walked off the terrace back into the party.

Adina braced herself with her hand on a chair while she tried to compose herself. She couldn't believe he affected her the way he had. Edward frightened the hell out of her, but what had scared her shitless was the kiss! Sweet Heavens it was so hauntingly familiar yet darkly arousing.

She walked back into the party and found Mr.

Fukami. He noticed the strange look on her face and asked if she was up to finishing her duties. She nodded her head and they continued with their work.

Adina wasn't fine at all. When she got back to the hotel, she was all fried nerves. She went into her bedroom, stripped out of her clothes and tried to get some sleep but that even came hard. She finally vomited in the bathroom.

When finished, she took a long shower and tried to do some work. She was just about to call it a night when she got a call...it was Brandon. She was so happy to hear his voice. As the sound of his deep, sexy, baritone voice soothed her raw nerves, all the tension and fear just leaked out of her. They talked for almost two hours before her eyelids became so heavy she couldn't stay awake another minute. They finally hung up and Adina drifted into a content sleep.

Brandon knew his woman well and knew something was wrong. He wanted to go to her as soon as he got off the phone but decided against it. He chalked it up to her having a hard assignment.

She sounded fine by the time they had finished their call but still he couldn't shake the feeling there was something not right. He decided if this feeling hadn't left him by the end of the week, he'd go to her.

Adina was grateful to be busy with Mr. Fukami. It kept her mind off of missing Brandon and more importantly, off of her frightening encounter with Edward Fenton.

She couldn't shake the cold grip that came over her whenever Edward traipsed through her mind. Sleeping



was hard enough without Brandon but now she had to contend with haunting visions of Edward.

She only had two more weeks and she'd be off assignment for three days. During those three days, she was determined to spend as much of it as possible with Brandon.

The past six weeks had been slow torture for Brandon. He wasn't sure how he would make it without Adina. Each day crept by. He tried everything to keep himself busy. For the average person some of it would've worked, but for Brandon, it only had a temporary affect. He spoke to Harry, his butler, to see if he could come up with a suggestion to help him keep busy until Adina came home...he liked the sound of that, home.

But it was Lucy who came up with the perfect solution.

"Mr. Brandon, you're a powerful man and you own a construction company. Why don't you go back to on site work? I doubt if anyone at the office would object. Besides, Albert, Richard and Marvin have everything under control there. If any problems arise, they can find you on the sites."

Brandon liked the idea a lot. "Lucy, you're a genius. I never thought about going back to work. The intense manual labor would keep me occupied. I'd really enjoy working on the Ocasí complex. I'll do it! It will be good to work sun up to sun down again. Construction is hard work. It's the distraction I need to keep me from climbing the walls. I'll leave tomorrow."

He arrived on the construction site before sun up. The crews were surprised to see him. He talked with

them for several minutes but when they realized he'd come there to work just like them, they almost didn't believe it.

Here, the owner of the company side-by-side with them laying concrete, nailing two-by-fours, walking the gang planks, measuring spaces for proper window installation and when he pulled out his lunch box and propped down with them to eat lunch, some of them did a double take.

One of the guys had to comment. "Uh...Mr. Montgomery, you feeling okay? I mean, what you doing out here with the working stiff?"

Brandon took a bite of his steak sandwich, chewed a few times then said, "I feel fine. In fact, I've not felt this good in weeks. It's good to go back to your roots every once in a while. I may own the company, but not too long ago, I was just a poor kid from the wrong side of the tracks with a lot of determination and a strong back. Besides, my woman is out of town and if I didn't find something to do to keep me totally focused, I was gonna go mad. Anyway, I wanted to work on this complex to see for myself that everything was running smoothly."

"Mr. Montgomery, I know whatcha mean. When we had that raw materials shortage earlier this year, I jus' knew there were more problems in store for us. But to everyone's surprise, it's been smooth sailin'." He paused to sip of his apple juice. "So, your woman is out of town? It must be hard at night? When my wife's gone, I get no sleep. Guess after fifteen years together you kinda get used to each other."

Brandon breathed out a slow breath. "I know whatcha mean. We've only recently come together and she had to leave on assignment and I haven't slept

straight through the night in weeks. If it hadn't been for my housekeeper suggesting I go back to construction, I don't know what I would've done to get through the next two weeks."

"Well, she must be real special. What's her name?"

Brandon picked up his orange and peeled it, popped a few pieces into his mouth, swallowed hard then said with great pride and joy, "She was my foreign language interpreter and assistant from last year. Ms. Powers, Adina Powers."

"Ms. Powers? You mean the little lady whose house we fixed up in March? Jeeze, Mr. Montgomery, I would've never known. She seemed so quiet. I didn't think she was your type? I mean, you always seem to be with the glamorous types. She must be different around you, huh?"

Brandon drifted in his sultry thoughts of his woman then replied, "You can say that again. She's absolutely stunning. And has a quirky sense of humor that matches my own. Yep, she's special all right. Well, I better get back to work, wouldn't want the boss to dock me for loafing on the job." Brandon stood to stretch his muscular six-foot-four inch frame then walked back to the east wing of the construction site.

The men watched him with their mouths agape. They couldn't believe this was Brandon Montgomery.

They began talking amongst themselves. "Albert said this Ms. Powers woman was the one who got us our eight days of fun," said one worker.

"Yeah, and Marvin said, she's a real looker," admitted another.

"I overheard Richard say she could steal a man's soul

if she put her mind to it,” replied the first worker.

“Well, maybe if we’re lucky, we’ll get to see this Ms. Powers everybody’s been talking about. ‘Cause I just don’t see what all the fuss could be ‘bout. She can’t look that different,” answered another worker, dipping into the conversation of the first two.

Brandon worked harder and longer than anyone else did on the crews. He was committed to wearing himself out. He wanted to be so numb when he came home, that the only strength he had was used to collapse into bed and sink into an exhausted sleep. It worked.

He gained a rhythm about his work again and boy was he getting a deep, dark tan. His skin resembled bronzed copper. His muscles shimmered in the hot sun, his chest expanded with the heavy labor and his fluid legs began to ripple more with his solid, hard virilities, hell even his hair had changed color. He hoped Adina recognized him when she saw him again.

He made it through the first week with few problems or catastrophes. He was deeply proud of himself. He hadn’t felt this accomplished in years and again he owed it to Adina. He had always loved working with his hands. Now, he could do it for the enjoyment it brought him and not to put food on his table.

He was going strong during the second week then he hit a snag. Some of his measurements weren’t panning out right according to the architectural blueprints. His step back to get a better look was a step back too many. The plank under him gave way and he went down.

Adina finished up with Mr. Fukami a day early. She was so glad to be going home. She got back to her loft

around nine-thirty. She had really missed her home but she was missing Brandon more. She couldn't wait to see him. She was going to surprise him at work. She unpacked her business clothes then called up her sister, Cookie.

"Hey, sis, I'm back."

"Glad to hear it."

"Your gowns were a hit. You'll probably be getting a few calls soon."

"Too late with the heads up, baby. I started getting calls the next day after the party. I'm bustin' my ass over here."

"Well, glad to hear it. I'll get the gowns back to you before I head out of town again. Also before I leave I want to cook you dinner. Least I could do. You've been a real life saver."

"Girl, you know I don't turn nothing down but my collar. Just tell me when and where. Little Raven, hate to cut this short, but your sister has got to get back to work."

"All right, Cookie. Call you later."

Adina checked out her baby to make sure everything was working properly. She hadn't put it in storage again so she did some quick maintenance on it then pulled it out of its storage and started to dress.

She decided on something fun and wicked that would make her look fantastic and really sexy. It was another one of Cookie's creations but one she bought for herself. A bike riding outfit.

It was a cream, camel colored, native Indian style midriff jacket, with long fringes on the arms and pockets with form fitting, hip hugging, low waist pants with fringes going down the sides.

Her entire mid section was exposed. Her bared reddish brown skin shimmered against the butter soft, leather outfit. Her breasts were covered with the same material except it wasn't exactly a brassiere.

From the front, it looked like a brassiere but instead of connecting together across her back, it connected under her arms so it gave the illusion she was topless if you saw her from behind. Her boots were moccasin style riding boots of the same material with fringes on the side. The boots came up past her knees.

She wore her hair down with big messy curls. Her makeup, as always, modest but her lips were painted a sensuous, deep red. She backed her bike onto the freight elevator and headed over to The Brandon Montgomery Group headquarters.

When she arrived, she turned the head of every man in the place. They were gasping on their coffee and choking on their donuts. She knew if they were reacting this way, Brandon would flip out of his skin.

She went to his office and was surprised to see Angie not at her desk. She waited a few moments for Angie's return but when she heard commotion in Brandon's conference room, she walked over there.

The door was open and everyone paced back and forth and had concern all over their faces. She also noticed no Brandon. She waited for the commotion to simmer down then knocked lightly on the door.

Albert grumbled, "Whoever you are, come in, damn it!"

Adina walked in slowly, cautiously. Everyone in the room gasped at seeing her. Albert regrouped fast. "God, Adina, I didn't know it was you."

She smiled softly. "That's okay, Albert, you weren't

expecting me. I'm off assignment early and I wanted to surprise Brandon. Will you tell him I'm here?"

Adina could read people. Her antenna went up instantly. Everyone's face was filled with hesitation and leeriness. She walked to Brandon's office.

She went right up to Albert and asked, "Where's Brandon?"

"Adina, maybe you'd better sit down."

Her heart constricted painfully. Her deep eyes swelled with tears. Something had happened to him. "I don't want to sit down. Where's Brandon? What's happened?"

Albert looked torn. "Adina, I just got a call from the construction site of the Ocasí complex. There's been an accident. Brandon...was hurt. He wanted to keep busy while you were on assignment so he went to help out at the construction site two weeks ago. Everything was fine until this morning. I don't know anymore than that, I swear."

Adina couldn't contain herself. Her tears were flowing. She felt a soft cloth being offered to her. She looked up and Albert was handing her a napkin. Distraught in her panic, she placed her head upon his chest and he embraced her gently. When she lifted her tear stained face to his, he said, "We're waiting for the site to call with more news."

Adina recaptured her composure and inner strength with new vigor. "I'm not waiting for any more news. I'm going there right now."

"I was thinking of going to the site too. Can I give you a lift?"

"No. I have my baby. You're going with me. We'll get there faster." Adina turned quickly and wiped silver tears from her eyes and walked out.

Albert didn't dare keep her waiting. He followed straight away. Richard and Marvin couldn't believe the pull she had over them because they felt themselves following her too. They'd take Albert's car. When they got downstairs they finally saw Adina's baby.

"Adina," Richard said, "this is your baby? Wow, it's magnificent!"

Adina gave Albert her helmet and got on the bike. "Thanks, Richard. Albert, get on. You'll have to hold me tightly. I'll be driving fast. I have to know what's happened to Brandon and speed is what I need to get to the site."

Albert took off his suit jacket, tie, and rolled up his sleeves and got on with Adina. Richard and Marvin watched Albert and Adina exist the parking garage. They envied him so much they wanted to kill him. They got in the car and followed immediately.

When Adina and Albert arrived at the sight, there was a huge crowd over near the east wall but they didn't see an ambulance. Adina thought maybe they'd missed him. She brought her bike right up to the crowd and let Albert off then turned off the bike, and jumped off herself.

She was shaking from her inner tension. She didn't know what she'd find beyond this crowd. The men noticed her instantly. Their eyes were practically popping out of their heads as they watched her make her way through the crowd. Albert was making way for her.

"Albert, can you see him? Is he...alright?"

"No, I can't, but that doesn't mean it's bad."

All of a sudden they heard his voice. Adina's heart



skipped a beat, he was alive. They made it through the crowd and when Adina saw Brandon, she looked at him hard.

He was sitting up as one of the workers bandaged up his cuts. He was holding a conversation with another worker. Suddenly Brandon stopped when he noticed the crowd had gone completely silent and was looking at something.

He followed their stares to Adina. She came from behind Albert with eyes filled with tears. Brandon stood immediately at the sight of her. His heart pounded wildly. His legs buckled.

Adina gasped and ran to him. "Brandon!" She helped him to sit.

He looked at her like he hadn't seen her in years. "What are you doing here?"

She wanted to be strong but her reserve was crumbling. "I was at your headquarters right after the others got the call that there had been in an accident. I'd come home to surprise you. Mr. Fukami let me off assignment a day early. I came straight here when they said you'd been hurt. Are you all right?"

Brandon's heart was breaking seeing how he had caused her to worry. "I'm fine. Have a couple of bad cuts and bruises and a nice little bump on the back of my head, but besides that, I'm great. I told the guys not to call but they insisted 'cause I lost consciousness for a moment. I had no idea they'd made it sound so cryptic."

Adina sat down beside him. She took his head into her lap. "Is that better? You should've gone to the hospital. You could have a mild concussion."

“I don’t like hospitals and I’ll be fine now that you’re here.”

Adina caressed his face gently then removed her jacket and placed it carefully under his head.

Her attention was pulled from Brandon briefly as she heard the crowd of workers conceal their gasps of adoration. She felt their hungry looks lick over her like they wanted to worship her. She brought her head up, smiled sweetly at the men then directed her attention again to Brandon. “We need to get you out of this sun and into a place that’s cool and comfortable. My loft is closer than your office or home. Can you handle a short ride there?”

“Call my doctor and tell him to meet us at your place. Pretty sure I can make it that far.”

Adina helped him up then hopped off the two-by-fours where they sat and walked to Albert. “I’m gonna take him with me. I’ll have the doctor meet us there. I want to thank you for your help. When Richard and Marvin arrive, please inform them Brandon is fine and I have him.”

She reached Brandon and helped him up. He was so much larger than she, so some of his men came to her aid. The other men held him while she slipped on her jacket and walked to her bike. They helped Brandon get on, then Adina. Brandon wrapped his arms around his woman and rested his head on her shoulder. She turned and whispered a private message to her man then kissed him softly on the nose.

As they drove off, the crowd buzzed like bees in a nest.

“Did you see that tattoo? She’s incredible,” said one

man.

"That can't be Ms. Powers," voiced another.

"Richard was right; she could steal a man's soul if she put her mind to it." Another worker admitted, secretly thinking she could have his soul anytime she wanted it. "Oh God, that body! Wonder if it's as soft and supple as it looks?"

Albert overheard the last comment and had to answer the question, "Fellas, there goes one helluva woman. And yes, she's as soft and tender and gentle as any woman has a right to be. Brandon Montgomery is one lucky man."

The whole crowd was in total agreement.

Adina got Brandon to the loft and took him to her bedroom and helped him to bed then called the doctor immediately. When he arrived, he confirmed Adina's suspicions. Brandon had a mild concussion. Then he explained that Brandon was to be kept quiet. If he fell asleep, awake him every two hours for the next six. If he awoke without any pain or light headedness, then she was to let him sleep for as long as he needed.

Adina did as the doctor ordered. She checked his more severe cuts and scrapes and helped him undress and gave him a sponge bath and fed him. When she saw his head dip twice, she knew he was trying to stay awake. "Brandon, please, try to rest. I'll be with you for as long as you need me."

"Baby, I've missed you desperately. My body is on fire for you and here I don't even have the strength to kiss you."

"My love, we'll have time for that later. Now, close your eyes."

"I will if you give me one kiss...just one."

Adina moved closer, looked deeply into his smoky gray eyes then brought her mouth on his softly, not wanting to cause him any pain.

He reached for her face and drove his tongue into her warm mouth and groaned deeply. He released her slowly then sank into the pillows and drifted into a deep sleep.

## CHAPTER 16

Brandon eased himself into a sitting position on the bed. He was a little foggy but the day's events came flooding back and he remembered Adina was home. He stood up and walked to the living room. He looked around and didn't see her but heard music and someone moving in the storage room. He decided to walk over there but first, he'd see what she'd done with the loft.

It was decorated tastefully and beautifully. She had little crystal figurines all over the place. There were pictures of her family. Her parents, Cookie and their older brother, David. Brandon could tell Cookie and Adina took their exotic, alluring beauty from their mother. She was enchanting. Her father was a handsome man and David was the spitting image of him.

On her walls she'd put up oriental rugs. They were large but each one was a different color and shape. One was rectangular, another round, then one was triangular. They appeared to have been handmade and very old but preserved beautifully.

Her furniture was inviting and cozy. He could tell by the way her loft was decorated that Adina liked to be comfortable. Not one single piece of furniture or

accessory seemed closed or restricted, everything had an open feel. Her music collection was as extensive as his; she even had some pieces he'd love to have in his collection. He felt so content in her space. Just then, he heard her singing and had to go to her.

Brandon walked to the entrance of the storage room just as she was turning her back to pick up a tool. He gazed at Adina for a long moment; she was magnificent. His heart and body were longing for her. He had missed her so much that to finally see her wasn't enough, he had to touch her, taste her, have her, love her. "Adina, whatcha doing?"

She turned quickly and saw him standing in the doorway. "Brandon, what are you doing out of bed?"

"I'm not sleepy anymore and you didn't answer my question."

Adina closed the distance between them and looked deeply into his eyes. "I was working on my bike. I heard some unusual rattling when I brought you home. I wanted to check it out before I took the bike out again. I just finished. You should be in bed. You don't want to overdo it. Let me turn off the lights and I'll walk you back."

Brandon's eyes darkened with passion at her mention of bed.

"Overdoing it is exactly what I have in mind." He moved with cheetah-like speed. He pulled her into his arms and came down on her mouth hotly. He had wanted to do that since this morning but his circumstances wouldn't permit it. She seemed softer, warmer than he remembered. She smelled delicious, that sweet whisper of vanilla with a hint of exotic flowers drove him wild.

He pulled away and watched her struggle to focus.

“Brandon, let’s get you back into bed. You shouldn’t be overexcited.”

“Adina, if you’re gonna get me into bed, then I definitely want to be excited.”

“I’ll not be the one to blame if you have a relapse. Now, come on back to bed.”

Brandon let Adina lead him to the bedroom. He watched how her body moved in front of him, how her long, sexy legs glided back and forth, how her full, round hips wiggled and secretly called to him and her curvy ass teased and taunted him.

Adina turned off the lights and returned downstairs to finish cleaning up in the storage room then came back to her bedroom. She called to Brandon, when he didn’t answer, she presumed he’d fallen asleep again. She removed her clothes and padded quietly into the bathroom.

Brandon felt it best to let Adina think he was asleep so she wouldn’t worry. He was all ready to wait for her to come to him when he heard her humming in the bathroom. His curiosity got the best of him and he walked slowly towards the bathroom.

The lights were dim and she was in the shower. The steam from the hot water had the entire bathroom covered with dew. Brandon entered the bathroom. Her back faced the door. He viewed her as she washed her body in the shower.

She was so sensual, so provocative, that he couldn’t wait for her to come to him he had to have her now. He moved to the shower and walked in quickly. Adina turned around when she felt unexpected cool air on her back.

“Brandon, what—”

He was most subtle in his assault of seduction.

“Adina, hand me the soap. I feel dirty as well and since the shower is big enough for two, I didn’t think you’d mind sharing it with me.”

Adina’s mouth opened. Her eyes fired with desire as the water rolled down his body. His sleek, naked physique was so close. She wasn’t sure she could stand looking at the water glisten his muscles with moisture and watch the steam rise from his skin.

Adina knew to turn away, but she couldn’t, she didn’t want to. Before she could regroup, she moved closer to him. Brandon pulled her to him with the sheer magnetism of his presence. She extended her hand with the soap and he took it and placed it back on the tray.

Suddenly, she came to her senses and pulled away. “Brandon, we can’t.”

The look of hunger in his eyes clearly told her being refused was not an option. When she found herself pinned against the cold tiles of the shower wall and his fiery, ironclad body, she knew she was in big trouble.

His wicked question crumbled her defenses more. “Adina, you don’t want me?”

The showerhead was motion sensitive; as they moved, it moved. It bathed their bodies with steamy water.

Brandon, the hot water and the cold tiles on her back, sent her into an erotic tailspin. She looked up at him and watched the blacks of his eyes widen until they covered the gray. “Yes, I want you but—”

Brandon didn’t care to hear anymore. He descended upon her mouth and took what he knew she was



desperate to give. When he lifted his head, he let his warm breath fan over her ear. "Eight weeks," he growled. "Eight weeks thinking about you, wanting you, aching for you."

His body pressed her tighter against the wall. His knee slowly parted her wet thighs. He pulled her hand between them and closed it around his engorged cock. "Every night I went to bed with this staring back at me. Every morning I awoke to the same." He felt her tremble when his dick jerked in her hand. He groaned with the pleasure of it. His tongue swiped down her neck as he continued, "Just let it happen." His strong hands gathered her thighs and lifted her just a little. He captured her mouth in a demanding, will stealing kiss. "You know you want it." Suddenly her hand released his cock and gripped his neck as she literally tried to climb up his body. As her thighs spread to cradle his hard hips, he adjusted his hold. With his cock braced right at her hot opened flesh he said, "The long wait is over."

Adina was drunk. High and giddy as she felt her body yield to the invading drive of his cock. He was everywhere. His mouth was eating at her mouth, his hands squeezing her ass holding her steady as he pushed inch by delicious inch inside her. His skin was hot and scalding her with tingling passion. She could no more resist him any more than she could stop the rising sun. She would devour as she was being devoured.

Brandon loved when she gasped from his deep thrusts. How her eyes would glass over with lust and heat almost did him in. Never was there a more beautiful woman than Adina lost in her passion. As her head fell

back, his hungry mouth was drawn to her neck. He sank tiny bites into her throat and cried out when her pussy viced around him. "Look at me, Adina." His thrusts were tapping her womb. He waited for her intense eyes to focus on his. "Do you like how I feel inside you?"

"Yes. Oh, God, yes."

Her agitated moves were spiking his lust to new heights. "Then prove it." He pulled her down into his upward thrust. "Come for me."

Adina could do nothing else. Her whole body was shaking. Her steamy pants crescendoed with his frantic sighs as he pounded into her with non-stop precision.

He could watch her come every day for the rest of their lives, he thought. She was so abandoned and consumed in the pleasure of her orgasms. As he drove his stiff flesh harder and harder into her, she got wetter and tighter. He pulled them from the wall and sank to the shower floor.

He noticed that the shower head followed him and sprinkled his back with warm, beads of water. The sensation of it and Adina clawing at his flesh, her wet mouth latching onto his nipple surged a sense of excitement through him that was close to perfection.

With every greedy thrust into her throbbing body, he felt water splash all over them. He was lost in the madness of it. Absently, he felt her mouth searching for his and he surrendered to the amazing kiss she offered. Nothing but this exquisite moment mattered.

He was torturing her, she thought. Even as her hips pushed up into his plunges he kept the pace meticulously

steady. He was drawing it out and it was making her crazy. Desperate and needy she snaked strong fingers into his wet hair.

“Brandon, please, come with me.”

Brandon knew his internal control was gone. Every layer of his skin was shaking. She was straining to pull him closer. Her silky legs had locked around his hips and he knew there was nothing left to do but let go. A brutal cry tore from his throat as his body responded to hers and filled her with his thick cream.

The hot water felt good on their bodies but it was becoming obvious they were turning into prunes. Brandon stood up slowly then lifted her into his powerful arms. Adina turned off the water. He stepped from the shower, grabbed a towel and walked back to bed.

“Brandon, are you feeling okay? Your head isn’t hurting?”

He kissed her body with his wet lips and answered, “I’m feeling like a king right now and yes, my head hurts but not the one on my shoulders.”

Before Adina could give any comment, he rolled over her and began sucking her breasts. He felt her curl herself around him and purr. When his mouth found hers, his long tongue was rewarded generously with a deep kiss. Suddenly she pulled away to catch a breath.

“I’m worried about your head. I know you want more, and so do I, but just for tonight, let’s take it easy.”

“Sweet love, I’m fine. I promise. But you’ll worry no matter what I say, so, I’ll curve my appetite just this once but no more after tonight.”

He rolled to his side and pulled her into his embrace. He could hear how exhausted she was as she tried to keep

up with his thread of conversation. He knew the exact moment when she fell asleep. He lay listening to her deep breathing and abruptly decided to gently pull her where he wanted her to be. On top of him. It had been weeks since he had felt so calm. He also knew sleep would never find him without the warmth of her sheath cradling his sex. Slowly, he eased his shaft into her inner folds and heard a soft moan drip from her lips. Then, finally, he too found tranquil repose.

The morning came too soon as the rays of the sun surrounded her bedroom and insisted they acknowledge it. Brandon stirred first. He squinted at the sunlight then smiled softly to himself as he peered down at Adina's lovely face.

He adored looking at her. She captured his every thought. Even in slumber, she could arouse and call to him with only her presence. He watched the rise and fall of her chest and flat stomach as she breathed deeply. His hand moved to her lower abdomen as he tried to imagine what it would look like swollen with his babies.

He wondered what their children would look like. He knew she'd give him strong, handsome sons and he'd give her beautiful little girls. Would they take her coloring or his? Then he thought, maybe their babies would be somewhere in the middle.

How would their eyes be? Perhaps they would be dark and enchanting like hers or gray and catlike, as his own.

He rubbed her belly gently and thought how he wanted children and how deeply he wanted them with Adina. Just then, she stirred. Her hand eased slowly over his.

He stared into her dark, deep eyes and for some reason blushed.

“You caught me watching you sleep. I was just thinking about...the future.”

Adina squeezed his hand and smiled softly. “I sometimes think of it too.”

Brandon felt the need to ask, “Adina, do you want children?”

She blushed gently then caressed his face. “Children? Yes, I want a big family. I don’t see it happening right away, but in the future, I’d like to have many babies.”

Brandon lowered his lids over his purple-speckled gray eyes and smiled coolly. “I know I’ve never brought this up before, but it has been eating at me and I jus’ gotta know...why do you have tattoo of a dragon on your back?”

“As much as you’ve seen me naked and have touched my body, it never dawned on you to take a closer look at my back?” She rolled over on her stomach.

“Brandon, come closer and I will explain. If you look very closely, you can see that it’s not just a tattoo, it’s a birthmark. Both Cookie and myself were born with a birthmark of some kind.

“Cookie’s is located on her inner right thigh. It’s not as big as mine but hers is shaped sorta like a coiled snake. My birthmark resembled the head and mid section of a dragon.

“When we lived in Europe, I was so self-conscious about my birthmark that Jazzy suggested that me and Cookie get tattoos that resembled them. So one summer day, Cookie and I got up our courage and went to a tattoo parlor.

“It had never occurred to either one of us what our

birthmarks really resembled. It was the tattoo artist who pulled the image out. Cookie went first. We were so nervous.

“When the tattoo artist finished, he had made Cookie’s birthmark look exactly like a coiled up king cobra. He was so good no one would ever suspect it was actually a well-camouflaged birthmark. I went next.

“By the time he was done the artist had created the head and mid section of a fire-breathing dragon. The deepest colors of the dragon’s scaly skin are really me and the red, green, black and golden highlights, the tattoo artist added. So, Brandon, now you know why I have a dragon on my back.”

Brandon inspected Adina’s back with razor sharp vision, trying to decipher the birthmark from the artist’s tattoo; it was practically impossible. His warm hands touched her back and she moaned softly.

Suddenly he wasn’t interested in her tattoo but rather her. He kissed her back with his sensuous, full lips. He became aroused by the way she purred and how he felt the moans through her skin.

“It’s a new day. I feel like loving you again.”

Adina giggled then turned. “I thought you wanted to ask me questions?”

He placed his head over hers. “I’ll always have questions, but they can wait. Now, shut up and kiss me.”

Brandon moved his mouth over Adina’s lips and drowned in dewy sweetness. As he kissed deeper he came upon a revelation. She loved to kiss! She was the only woman he’d ever been involved with that liked kissing just as much as she liked making love. His hot body was readying itself for more of their love making when the doorbell rang. “Adina, are you expecting someone?”

“No, not that I know of. I spoke with Cookie on the phone last night. I explained what had happened to you but she didn’t mention she would be coming by today. I better answer it though. It could be important.”

“No. Stay with me. If you weren’t expecting anyone maybe they’ll go away,” he said with a voice husky with wicked intentions.

“They’re ringing like they’re not going to go away. I will be back.” Adina exited the bed and put on a robe. Brandon growled with disapproval in every grunting syllable.

Adina went to the intercom and asked who it was. When they said who they were, she screamed and buzzed them up right away.

She ran back to her bedroom and quickly changed her clothes. “Honey, get up and dress. It’s Cookie and she’s brought my brother, David, his wife and the kids! Oh, I’m so excited! Hurry, my love. I’ll meet you downstairs.” Before Brandon could ask anything, Adina shot down the stairs to let everyone in.

By the time Brandon was fully dressed, everyone was downstairs and their laughter soared up to his ears. He stuck his head out then came down the stairs slowly. He walked over to Adina and took her hand.

She blushed softly then introduced him. “David, Charmaine, I’d like for you to meet the special man in my life, Brandon Montgomery. Brandon, this is my big brother, David and his lovely wife, Charmaine.”

David said, “Brandon, it’s a pleasure. Now I know why my baby sister looks so radiant...she’s in love.”

Charmaine couldn’t wait to speak. “David, baby, don’t embarrass her. Please excuse my husband, it’s nice

to meet you. Please don't take this the wrong way, but your name is very familiar. Are you into international finance or fundraising by any chance?"

Brandon blushed from all the attention then lowered his lids over his striking gray eyes. "I dabble in the international market and do a lot of fund—"

"Brandon Montgomery," Charmaine cut him off as she put the name to the event. "Now I remember. Are you the same Brandon Montgomery who sponsors the annual charity and fundraiser ball for the homeless of Montreal?"

"Yes," he answered softly.

Charmaine squealed with joy then walked over and embraced him warmly. "Please don't think I'm forward. It's just your charity ball helps so many people in the area and I just want to personally thank you for all of your selfless efforts.

"I work with the homeless in every city or country my husband serves in. Your name is well respected in many major cities throughout the world for your efforts in helping the less fortunate."

Charmaine turned to Adina. "Cherish him. He's indeed a good man."

Adina and Brandon started blushing all over the place.

"Little Raven," David said, "I know it's early, but would you by chance have something to eat? I'm starving and you know Charlotte and my wife are lousy cooks."

"Excuse me," Charmaine barked. "You didn't marry me for my cookin'."

"Yes, I know. But that doesn't help my grumbling stomach."

Cookie couldn't wait to jump in. "Yeah, David, we all



know why you married Charmaine. She's the only one who said yes but now I'm starting to wonder if she didn't get the short end of the stick."

Adina started to laugh at their family bickering and decided to diffuse it. "Okay, everybody go to your corners. I'll be happy to cook on one condition. If I can see the babies, where are they?"

Charmaine brought the children to meet their Aunt Adina. Anthony was a handsome little devil and Carmen was so beautiful.

Adina's heart clenched. "Charmaine, may I hold her? I promise to be careful."

"Of course you can."

Adina held little Carmen in her arms and Brandon caught a look of total love in her eyes then he saw something he didn't expect...sadness. Adina covered it quickly but he knew that's what it was. He moved to her and touched her shoulder lightly. She looked up at him with unshed tears. She looked again at the baby.

"She's so beautiful, Brandon. They grow up so fast when they are this young and you have so little time. I better give her back to Charmaine before I get too attached and keep her forever."

Brandon looked at Adina and baby Carmen and thought what a serene picture they made. His voice was emotional with silent tears. "Adina, I'd love to give you babies."

Brandon's hand glided tenderly across her cheek. She leaned into it and one tear rained from her liquid eyes. She looked at him and mouthed the words, "I love you," and Brandon dropped a kiss to her lips.

Adina gave Charmaine the baby then went into the kitchen and cooked a huge breakfast for everyone.

Brandon decided to help out. He was becoming a great second cook, and he washed dishes better than anybody. They served breakfast and everyone sat and ate everything.

They talked for hours about their childhood and growing up all over the world. Brandon finally found out why Adina's nickname was Little Raven. When born, she came out with a full head of hair, her eyebrows and eyelashes. The hair was so black and shiny that the doctor said it resembled the feathers of a little raven.

Adina and her family found out some interesting things about Brandon as well. He had been an only child, his parents were dead and like them, he had traveled all around the world and had seen just about everything. But what they found to be the most enlightening—was his reason for sponsoring the homeless charity ball every year—Brandon felt everyone should have a home to come back to.

The reunion was in full swing when another expected guest arrived...George. Now, it was Cookie's turn to blush. He couldn't wait to put her on the hot seat for some of the stuff they did in Europe.

George went over to Adina's music collection and pull out some old jams and before anyone knew it, they were all dancing and having themselves a party.

Adina and Brandon were dancing and laughing when she decided it was time to tell him about Victor Millard. "Brandon, remember last year when I had that awful nightmare, you said, when I was ready to talk about it, you'd be ready to listen?" Brandon stopped smiling and

looked deeply into her eyes and nodded his head. "I think I've found the courage to talk about it. I won't go into the details right now but rather, I'd like to take you on a picnic tomorrow and tell you what happened."

"Adina, whatever you tell me I will be there for you. I promise."

It was late in the afternoon when the reunion/party died down and everybody went home.

"Adina, Cookie, this is the number to the hotel we will be staying at," David said.

"Oh good. Charmaine, let me know when you will have a moment. I want to stop by with few outfits for you," Cookie said.

"Since having the baby, I can't fit into a thing. Once I get the kids settled down, I'll give you a call."

"I'll walk you guys down. I want to kiss the little ones goodbye one more time," Adina said.

When she returned to her loft, Brandon had an annoyed look on his face. "I just got a call from my driver. He said that he's waiting for me downstairs."

"Yes. I was just about to tell you so."

"How did he know I was here?"

She crossed her arms over her chest and stood her ground. "Simple, dear. I told him. I called Harry and Lucy to let them know you were fine and to send your driver."

Suddenly he plopped down on the sofa looking sullen and moody. "I don't want to leave."

She joined him on the sofa and collected his sad face in her hands. "They've been worried about you. I promised I'd send you home so they could see for themselves that you are well and of course to take care of you."

She felt his head dip to take a kiss. "But I'm fine,

really. Didn't I prove that last night?"

His hands were getting close to crumbling her reserve. "And that's why I must send you home. I'm too much of a distraction for you." He shook his head stubbornly. "Do this for me." When he still looked unmovable, she simply got sneaky. She pulled him down into a soul snatching kiss. When he came up for air, he was too dazed to argue.

Brandon sat quietly on the way back to his home. When the car pulled up to the front door, Harry and Lucy rushed out to greet him. A feeling of guilt pricked him. They were really worried. The look on Lucy's face was staggering.

Patiently he let them fawn all over him. He thought it was the least he could do. When they insisted that he go to bed after they checked his bandages, he gritted his teeth and obliged them.

Once engulfed in the solitude of his own master bedroom, he finally admitted privately that he was tired. As his lids drooped over his eyes, he found himself wondering what Adina could possibly have to tell him.

## CHAPTER 17

They decided to go to a secluded park that circled a small lake. They ate, talked, kissed, played games and danced to music then took a nap. When they awoke, it was cloudy but Adina didn't want to leave. She wanted to tell him and was ready.

"Brandon, what I'm about to tell you is so hard for me. But because of your love and warmth, I've found the courage to share it with you." She collected herself and started slowly.

"When I lived in Europe with my sister, Cookie, I met a man. His name was Victor Millard. I had just turned twenty-one. He was older than me; he was about thirty. We started to date and fell in love.

"I believed I'd be with him forever and decided to make him my first lover. I wanted to be an adult before giving my virginity to someone. These are modern times and people sleep around a lot and have many bed partners and lovers. She blushed, thinking how puritan she must sound.

"I was never able to be that sexually uninhibited with multiple partners. You can blame it on my old soul as my mom puts it. Well, after we became lovers we moved in together.

“In the beginning it was wonderful. My sexual appetite improved tenfold and I made it my mission to be the best lover Victor had ever had. With respect to his age, I knew he’d had other women before me.

“I wanted to please my man and that realization drove me. My quest became knowledge. I learned about all the things he loved, desired, aroused and enticed him to total distraction.” Adina stared off, suddenly thinking how she had mastered all her lessons too well.

“I discovered Victor liked to look at me. He enjoyed watching me, watching my body move. He liked me naked. He especially enjoyed the way my tattoo could snatch his willpower in a blink and make it impossible for him to resist me.” She turned her gaze again to Brandon.

“Victor was a voyeur. Watching as well as participating aroused him. I made sure to always look beautiful, sexy and alluring for him. I found new ways to make our sex life fresh and exciting. I worked hard at keeping Victor satisfied...Hmmm, now as I think of it, I had an insatiable appetite for sex.”

Adina curled her legs up to her chest and admitted, “I loved being uninhibited and thought he enjoyed the fact it was all done to please him. After about a year, Victor changed. He suddenly started accusing me of things I’d never do. Like lying to him about where I had been or who I was really with.” She flinched, thinking how ugly memories could return so effortlessly.

“Victor became extremely jealous and selfish. He started picking fights with me for no reason or some reason I had no clue about. He never hit me, but I had noticed he wanted to control and dominate me more and more.” Adina sighed deeply as she tried to go on.

“He wanted to know where I was going and who I

was going with. He wanted to know why he wasn't enough for me. I pleaded over and over that he was all I wanted. He wasn't satisfied and wanted to be shown." Adina's fists strained her small knuckles as a twinge of twisted anger moved through her.

"He insisted I quit my job." Something she had always regretted. "For he believed I used my career as a front to conceal my hidden agenda of flirting and carrying on with other men. I explained I'd never do anything like that. But he said, if I loved him, I'd quit. I did."

Suddenly Adina's eyes blazed with her self-loathing for being so gullible. She continued in a cold tone. "He systematically started closing me off from everything except him. Two more years passed and it got worse. We were fighting almost every other night. Victor would storm out, leaving me in an ocean of tears. He would always return to apologize and I would forgive him." Like a damn fool, Adina said annoyingly to herself.

"Soon Victor brought me gifts to accompany his apologies. But it was always the same thing. Purple, peek-a-boo lace lingerie. He loved me in purple and loved to make love to me in it. I would often think he picked fights just so we could make up. More importantly, make love."

Adina lowered her lids over her eyes as if the rest was so painful she couldn't look at Brandon. She began to shake then pulled herself together and continued.

"Brandon, this next part is the hardest for me because it all roller coasters downhill after this. My sister and I possess a special talent. Cookie developed hers and had it under control by the time she turned seventeen. I developed and finally got it under control when I'd turned twenty-five. I'd been with Victor for almost five

years.

"I still loved him deeply and thought if I could give him my special gift, we could go back to how it was in the beginning." Adina shuddered. Then a warm breeze brushed her face and she said,

"The day I decided to give Victor my gift was perfect. I lit candles all around the house, cooked his favorite meal and wore his favorite sexy lingerie.

"He came home and tried to pick a fight but I wouldn't let him. He could tell I was really trying and let me have my way. I loved him with every fiber of my being.

Then, I gave him my gift, the Lair of the Python." Her lids dropped over her black eyes as she explained. "It's a sexual technique used to guarantee absolute pleasure in a man. It was developed in South America and practiced by a handful of women in Brazil. One being my mother. "They use the technique to keep their husbands and lovers faithful. Since most women in third world countries have so little power over the destiny of their lives, they are forced to use the only weapons they have at their disposal...their bodies and sexual prowess."

Adina lifted her lids and said, "The technique was taught to me and my sister by our mother. She told us once perfected we were only to give our gift to someone we loved and make the men swear to never tell because if they did, it would put our lives in jeopardy.

"Mama said to choose our men carefully. For if we weren't careful and selective, we'd have problems with them later." Adina turned away from Brandon as she desperately tried to fight back her tears.

"The Lair of the Python often created backlashes in



the relationship. Most men become so addicted to the technique, no other woman can ever satisfy them. But there were some whose addiction became insanity. Mama was so right.” Adina shook her head and forced herself to look at Brandon. She focused on her love for him and continued with much difficulty.

“After I gave Victor my gift, he became obsessed with having it every time we had sex. If I said no, he’d burst into jealous rages and accuse me of wicked, nasty things.

“He’d say I was fuckin’ around with other men and...women. That I was giving my gift to any man with a big enough dick to satisfy my insatiable sexual appetite. He was breaking my heart and destroying anything I’d ever felt for him.”

Adina’s eyes welled with the tears she could no longer hold back. Her composure was crumbling. It was all too much...far too much. She remembered everything as if yesterday. Suddenly, she was drowning in waves of pain. “I didn’t want to believe I’d made such a bad choice in lovers but it was starting to look that way. I wasn’t ready to throw in the towel. Sometimes being stubborn has its drawbacks.”

Brandon reached out and squeezed her hand. She lowered her lids again and went on. “I started losing my appetite and was tired all the time. I went to the doctor for a checkup. I was pregnant. Six weeks.”

Her voice strained, “I was so happy. A baby. I just knew Victor would be thrilled. I rushed home to tell him.” Suddenly she looked at Brandon, her expression showing her deep hatred, anger and...pain.

“He immediately accused me of infidelity and said the baby wasn’t his. Here the man I loved, had given my virginity, devotion and heart to was accusing me of

sleeping around.

"I told him the baby was his and I had never ever been unfaithful to him. He calmed some then immediately asked if the pregnancy would interrupt our sex life." Her hand wiped back the few tears she allowed to spill from eyes and said, "I thought it an odd question but explained there wouldn't be problems with me making love.

"Then I mentioned the Lair of the Python wouldn't work when I'm with child. It automatically shuts down when the woman becomes pregnant so the baby wouldn't be harmed." She released Brandon's hand and scooted away from him as her terrifying memories flooded her.

"Victor went berserk!" she screeched. "He struck me across the face so hard he busted my lip. Then he demanded I terminate the baby because he wasn't taking care of a bastard." Adina began to rock back and forth frantically as the doors to her raging emotions burst open.

"Everything became crystal clear. Victor never wanted me to have anything or anyone but him. Not even our child. I told him I was keeping my baby and this was the last time he would ever treat me as he had."

Still rocking wildly Adina looked right through Brandon and said, "That day I packed a small bag and left him. I moved in with Cookie and told her everything. She tried to comfort me and be the best big sister anyone could ever ask for. But not even Cookie was prepared for the levels to which Victor would go to reclaim me..."

Adina stood abruptly and turned from Brandon. Her whole body ached with her suffering. The tears came faster now. She needed them. They helped wash some of the pain away.

With a ragged voice she said, "One evening while

heading home to Cookie's apartment, I ran into Victor. He cornered me and pleaded to go somewhere to talk. Of course, I said no.

"Victor wasn't giving up that easy. He knew everything about me. Knew just how to get to me. Finally, I agreed to have a cup of coffee at a cafe. When we got there I had a glass of juice. Because of my condition, I needed to be excused. When I returned, Victor wasn't saying anything I hadn't already heard so I left. As I walked back to my apartment, I became dizzy and disoriented. I felt myself falling. Every instinct I owned screamed Victor had put something in my juice. When I awoke it was dark and I was naked and so very afraid."

Adina's entire body went suddenly stiff as her private hell crawled from its dark, musty grave to torture her once again. No longer was there pretense in her voice. Her inner strength and courage had bowed down to their new master...terror.

"Victor heard me fumbling around and came in to check on me. I screamed and tried to get past him. He pulled me out of the bedroom and sat me down at the kitchen table. I sat paralyzed in fear. He had abducted me and no one knew where I was. I was at his mercy. What would he do to me? To my baby?"

*No more. No more.* Adina suddenly heard her conscience begging. *It must be said—all of it*, screamed her brain. *I can't do it again*, cried her heart. *Then Victor wins*, whispered her soul.

Adina swallowed hard then said, "Victor finally let me see who he really was. He proceeded to tell me exactly what he was planning to do and over the next eighteen days and nights he kept his word to the letter.

“He would treat me like the slut that I was. If he wanted to fuck me, he would and there would be nothing I could do stop him.

“Then he admitted the worst part of all. That he’d been watching me for months before he had introduced himself. He knew in advance I was capable of giving a man the gift of the Lair of the Python because someone had told him about me.

“He planned my seduction from the very beginning and had never loved me. He only wanted my gift. The only thing was he hadn’t expected my gift to be so powerful. So when I gave it to him and had decided to take it away, he couldn’t have that.

“And if he couldn’t have my gift or me, no one would. He promised to kill me. I believed him.”

Adina sank to the blanket and curled up into a ball. Her small arms crossed over her chest as she spasmed dangerously. This was killing her. She had lost her hold on reality. She was reliving every single second of horror all over again.

Brandon couldn’t remain reserved anymore. He sensed deeply he that was losing her. Quickly, he reached out his steel arms and pulled her into them. As his arms circled her Brandon could only see rage. As in his dream, someone had hurt her and there had been nothing he could do about it. His lids lowered over his eyes.

Adina slowly floated back and said softly, “After telling me his plans, he did everything he threatened. He raped me so many times that first night, I started to bleed.

“If I cried out or fought him, he hit me. If I didn’t kiss him right or suck his dick just the way he liked, he hit

me. If I begged not to be hit or asked for rest, he hit me. My whole body was covered in bruises, cuts and whelps. He wanted the Python and I couldn't give it to him.

"That only infuriated him more and the last time he beat me, he was so out of control, he even stomped me in my chest." Adina flinched at her own words. "The pain was horrible and I passed out. When I awoke, he pulled me by my hair and said the baby had to go. I was so weak I couldn't stop him."

Adina felt her memories. Suddenly, she quaked wildly from the false pain and doubled over in Brandon's embrace.

His heart jumped into his throat. He held on to her fiercely thinking desperately how to help her. She wouldn't make it alone. He knew that now.

Like a whisper from God, the solution came to him. His arms closed around her painfully and he said, "Safety of my arms."

Adina screamed, then cried uncontrollably.

Brandon repeated the words over and over until finally they lulled her from the spiraling pain and darkness. He rocked with her as she forged on determined to tell him everything.

"After five days, he finally gave me some food. I was so grateful I didn't notice the taste for several minutes. When I did, it was too late. I knew he'd fed me something to hurt my baby.

"About two hours after eating, I started having bone crushing cramps in my belly. I was losing the baby. I begged and pleaded for him to help me and not take the baby. He did absolutely nothing but sit and watch as I

screamed and spasmed uncontrollably as the baby spontaneously aborted.”

Adina focused on Brandon’s arms and not the imaginary pain running through her as she said, “Later when I awoke, I was covered in blood. He threw some towels over me and demanded the mess be cleaned.” Her words dripped from her lips as her tears rolled down her soft cheeks. “While I carefully wrapped what had once been my precious little one into a small towel, I tried to figure out what I had done to make him hate me.

“The only thing coming to me was that Victor was not the man I thought him to be. Underneath all the kind words and gentle times we’d shared, there was a monster, an evil fiend just below the surface. He was a creature carefully camouflaged as the perfect man for me and over time, slowly surfaced to destroy me.” Adina slowed her fierce rocking, suddenly becoming drained.

She continued, “He never knew me because I never really knew him. He never loved me because he knew I’d never love anyone as horrible as he really was. After he took my baby, I knew then, he had never trusted me when I said it was his. Only a sick, demented person would kill their own child.”

Brandon’s strong hand slowly stroked her brow and the gesture felt soothing. She caressed and kissed his hand. “When I got all the blood removed from me and the floor, he made me take the baby and the bloody towels and burn them in the fireplace. After that I didn’t care if I lived or died. The only reason I fought was for the baby but he had even taken that from me. My spirit was broken and my soul was cold. I was numb and dead inside. I was ready for him to keep his final promise and kill me. I wanted safety, serenity, peace.”

Adina pulled from Brandon's sheltering arms and faced him. She was finding her inner strength again. Her lids dropped as her voice strained, "Victor was incensed. He thought for sure once the baby was gone I'd give him the gift. Victor had miscalculated in his plans. He had forgotten the most important and most powerful part of all...love. You see Brandon, I can only give the Lair of the Python to someone I love. I can't fake the feeling. My body would know and nothing would happen."

Adina again brought her legs to her chest as she said, "Since I had no feelings for him at all, Victor knew he'd ruined all his chances of every receiving my gift again. He started to show me kindness and warmth again, as if that could rekindle some spark in me. He fed me regularly and gave me a gown to wear. He let me sleep longer than an hour or two. I came down with a very high fever on the last day with him. I was still weak from his brutal beatings and bleeding from the miscarriage."

Adina's voice suddenly surged again with her anger. "I spitefully told him he would never ever have my gift again. They say, when one is close to death, one sees things a lot clearer. Well, I did. I got my courage back and taunted him." Her unshakable instinct to survive surfaced and Adina spat, "I told him when I died he'd be trapped in a sexual limbo. No other woman would please him."

"Victor dragged me from the bed and pulled me into the kitchen. There he placed me in an old wine barrel and began pouring cold water all over me, trying to break my fever. I laughed and said it was too late. I was leaving him. He said I'd never leave him. We'd be together forever."

Adina sat on her calves as she fiercely explained, "My apathy began to be replaced with anger. I don't know

what came over me, maybe it was self-preservation but I started to fight him.

“I waited for him to lift me out of the barrel. When he tried to take me back to bed, I struck him. I clawed at his eyes, bit his hand and kicked him with all my strength!”

Her eyes blazed with the same fire as her voice. “Victor pulled away as I became more ferocious in my attack. He was shocked at my will to survive and bumped into a kerosene lantern on the table. It fell and splattered everywhere. The room caught fire and the flames were spreading through the cabin. I was so exhausted I stumbled backwards and knocked the barrel over as I fell. The water splashed a path on the floor that ended at the door. With all my strength, I crawled to the door. Victor grabbed my leg. I looked back and screamed. He was horribly burned. All he did was yell I’d never ever be free of him; we would be together forever. I kicked him in what was left of his face but he was beyond pain, beyond reason. His grip was steel. He only laughed and pulled me harder towards him.”

Adina’s shoulders slumped as he confessed, “I resigned myself to the fact that we would be together in death as we never could be in life...Just then, a wooden plank came down from the ceiling and landed on his back.

“The crushing impact caused him to release me. I barely made it to the door as the cabin went up in flames all around me. I managed to drag myself to the car and passed out at the steering wheel.” Adina took in a deep cleansing breath and finished.

“The fire grew until it was noticed by a distant neighbor. Help arrived and I was rushed to the hospital. I



had lost so much blood the doctors feared I'd not make it through the night. One doctor explained that because of the miscarriage combined with the lack of care I'd received afterwards, that only time would predict if I'd ever conceive another child. When I saw Cookie, she told me Victor was dead."

Adina wiped her last tears away and moved closer to Brandon. He had been so quiet. But there was no mistaking the pain he had suffered along with her. Her small fingers interlocked with his as she closed the door to this nightmare. "Eventually, therapy helped me to discover that when it came to Victor, I saw what I wanted to see. I saw the picture he presented and I never tried to see past it. If I had, I would've seen a shell of a man. I gave his life substance. That's why he'd never let me go.

"With much counseling and a lot of family support, I closed that chapter of my life and started over. I went back to work and challenged myself with harder and harder assignments." She looked up at Brandon and smiled, "I took the assignments the agency had given up hope on." She noticed his soft blush. The way his lids suddenly hid his beautiful eyes, she knew what he was thinking. That if he hadn't kept such a grueling schedule, they never would have met. "My work became all consuming to me. It was the medicine I used to dull my pain. All other parts of my life were nonexistent.

"I didn't date or go out socially because I feared if I met someone and opened my heart, I'd be hurt again...Then, I met you." When his eyes connected with hers, her heart skipped a beat as his smoky eyes revealed all the warmth and love he had for her.

"I was content with my life just as it was, uncomplicated and unfulfilling. Then, there was you.

Every since the charity ball, you entered my thoughts more and more. When you kissed me, that had been the first time I'd let anyone get close to me in over three years.

"When you held me in your arms, I felt so safe. That first night we had sex was wonderful. I came alive again. There had been no one since my terrible ordeal with Victor. But you never tried to overpower me or dominate me. You let me enjoy the pleasure of my own passion...Victor was the only man before you and I wasn't sure I could be intimate with a man again." Her full, moist lips brushed across his rough hands. "But you were so patient and so tender. Unknowingly, you helped heal the wounds inside me I couldn't reach by myself."

Adina's hands cradled Brandon's handsome face as she said, "When my assignment ended, I knew something had awakened in me again. I wanted to confess my love for you but I was afraid I'd make another mistake. But when you took that leap of faith, I had to take that leap as well. Brandon, thank you for being the friend I came to know, trust and love."

Brandon pulled her into his embrace. His loving words flowed gently to her ears. "I will treasure and adore you for the rest of our lives. I give my solemn oath; you will never know fear like that again. Upon my life, I promise to do everything within my power to keep you happy and not allow anyone to ever hurt you. These things I pledge with the safety of my arms and all the love in my heart...forever."

As they sat embraced in each other's arms, it began to rain softly. The water soothed the pain in both of them. He pulled away and said smoothly, "We better go. If we stay out here much longer we'll be washed away."

Adina shook her head. “Mmm...not yet. Make love to me.”

Brandon removed Adina’s clothes and she his. Their hands played slowly over each other, as if exploring the other for the first time. He pulled her into his arms and slid to the blanket. The air was humid but the cool rain felt good on their skin.

When she felt him gather her face in his giant hands, her thighs opened and cradled his hips. As his mouth brushed over hers, she vaguely heard him say, “I’ve thought of making love to you in the rain for a long time.”

Her head lifted to his as she threw his own words back at him. “I know. I’ve imagined it too. Now, shut up and kiss me.” His lips rolled over her mouth as he pushed his smooth, rigid body into the soft inner folds of hers.

## CHAPTER 18

Adina had two days left before she went on assignment for three weeks. She spent every moment with Brandon. She hated to be apart from him but she had a job to do and so did he. On her last day with him, she suggested they host a small dinner party for Cookie and George at her place.

"I think it would be nice to see Cookie and Jazzy again. We had such a nice time when they were over and I want to thank her again for all the gowns she has loaned me."

"Do ya wanna have the dinner at your home or mine?"

"At mine. That way it remains casual and easygoing. If I said your place, they may arrive in formal attire."

"Good. What time should I stop by?"

"Six o'clock should be good. That will give us plenty of time, if I tell them to come at eight."

Brandon came by around six and helped Adina cook for Charlotte and George. They worked together smooth and effortlessly. As if they had been together forever. They could practically anticipate the other's needs. The music set the pace in the kitchen. They tasted the cooking, kissed and snuggled. They were having fun. It

was wonderful.

They served dinner and chatted casually through every course. Cookie and George complimented Adina on her dishes so much she could hardly keep from blushing each time they took a bite and moaned with delicious delight.

Once dinner was finished, they moved to the living room and chatted about the possibility of Cookie putting a fashion show together for her fall designs.

"Cookie," Adina said. "I think Jazzy has a wonderful idea. You should do it. Can you imagine what kind of exposure a fall fashion show could bring to your designs?"

Cookie took a sip of her wine. "I want to do it but I'm not sure I have enough pieces to do a complete show. Besides, I'm not sure everyone would like my designs. I mean, I create the unusual and exotic that's not everyone's taste."

"Cookie, who cares? If you can get the right exposure to the right people, you can make the unusual and exotic everyone's taste. All we need is an angle. Something to capture the right people's attention."

George and Adina seemed more excited than Cookie but she was coming around. Then Brandon had an idea. "Adina, you just said that we needed an angle to generate the right people. Well, this year the Saleese Auditorium Charity Ball for the Homeless should do something different." He adjusted himself on the sofa and said, "Why don't we offer the contributors a treat of a show of designs exclusively by Cookie? We can say a portion of any of the designs sold would go towards the funds to help the homeless. "Rich people don't mind spending

money if they feel it will go to good use. Besides, they would get beautiful clothes in the process.”

“Brandon, that’s an excellent idea! That’s just the angle we need to skyrocket Cookie’s designs into the mainstream of the rich and elite!” George paused, then turned to Cookie and smiled as he watched her pretty face glow with designs to use for the show.

Brandon asked with a warm smile, “Cookie, do you think you could have a full fall line of your designs ready in time for the charity ball later this year?”

Now Cookie was standing up and pacing back and forth. “Brandon, this is such an honor. Thank you so much. Are you sure you’re okay with this? I wouldn’t want this to be a flop.”

George came behind Cookie and wrapped his arms around her. “Of course he’s sure and you’ve never done anything that was a flop in your life. Just think of the few pieces the Little Raven has worn and the overwhelming response they brought in.

“That last little cocktail dress you loaned her brought in ten orders alone. Can you fathom how busy you’ll be after an exclusive fashion show at The Saleese Auditorium Charity Ball for the Homeless? I mean, honey, come on—we’re talking about the gala event of the year.”

Cookie took in a deep breath then exhaled slowly. “Jazzy, if you think I can do this, then I will accept Brandon’s offer to host the show for me. It’s gonna be hell trying to get a show together on such short notice but you’re right, this is an opportunity I just can’t pass up.”

Adina said lightly, “So Cookie, how soon can you start on the new designs?”

She came back to reality as she heard her sister. Her

mind galloped with wild ideas and George wasn't helping her concentration any by holding her so intimately. "I'll go home tonight and get started. I was about to ask if we could cut our dinner short. I want to jot these ideas down before I forget them; and one other thing, when is the charity ball?"

Brandon walked to Adina's music collection to change the music and answered, "It's been tentatively scheduled for October."

Cookie gasped, "Oh, Brandon, you're kidding. Now I must leave. I can't do a fall show. I must create designs for a winter/spring show."

"When you do something like this, timing is everything. If I'd done a fall show, it wouldn't have gone over as well because most people already have their fall wardrobe. Thank God I asked when the ball was this year. I could've made a horrendous mistake."

Everyone laughed because Cookie was so serious. "Look you two, I'm gonna take her home before she starts pulling her hair out. It's not a pretty sight." George said.

Adina and Brandon walked them down and watched them drive off. Adina smiled up at Brandon and said, "Well, you've made Cookie the happiest and most crazed woman in the world."

Brandon looked down and smiled his crooked smile. "I really hadn't expected the evening to end this early but I'm glad it has. It gives me the opportunity to make another woman happy and crazed."

Adina caught that wicked sheen in his eyes and backed away slowly then turned and ran back into the loft. Brandon took after her like a shot. He caught her

just as she made it to her bedroom.

He lifted her into his arms and hopped into bed. They turned off the lights and laughed out loud then silence engulfed them as they made love into the wee hours of the night. Brandon and Adina weren't the only ones bringing in the new day making love.

George escorted Cookie home. Her mind churned with all kinds of ideas for the fashion show in October. She was so consumed in thought, she barely noticed he had led her all the way to her bedroom and had begun turning down her bed.

Cookie paced not even aware she was talking to herself.

George sat on the edge of the bed totally enthralled in her beauty. He loved her madly and couldn't imagine his life without her. If she never opened her heart to him she'd never doubt he loved her.

Cookie tripped over the rug and that broke her train of thought. When she snapped back to reality and noticed where she was, for a brief moment, she wondered how she had gotten there.

She saw George sitting on the bed staring at her. "Jazzy, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to ignore you." She walked over and sat next to him. "It's just, I get so caught up in my work I can't see anything but my designs."

"Charlotte, there's no need to be sorry. Your drive and focus are some of the many things I admire about you."

"You have really been a good and dependable friend. I don't think I could've made it through some of my



hairier times without you by my side. Thank you.” She kissed his cheek lightly, then stood to walk away.

Quick as flash, Cookie found herself caught up in a ravishing kiss. George’s mouth imprinted haunting images of their first kiss. A kiss of total abandonment and desire. She wanted to pull away but it felt good to be in his arms again. She couldn’t fight him and herself it was just too much.

He pulled away, his voice filled with passion “Charlotte, I love you. I have never stopped loving you. Let me love you tonight?”

“George, I can’t. So much has happened since our first time. It’s been hard to keep you at arms’ length, but I’ve had my reasons. Please understand.”

He whispered, “Charlotte, you don’t love me or care anything for me?”

She couldn’t think with his warm breath fanning her face. Her restraint was crumbling. “It’s not so simple.”

“It’s just that simple. Do you care for me? Do you love me?” he asked slowly.

“Yes, you know I care but—” He kissed her. Only this time, she felt her will becoming his.

He pulled his warm lips away and caressed his tongue over her bottom lip. “Charlotte, do you love me?”

She opened her eyes and locked them with his. Her hands cradled his face as she whispered, “I never stopped. I loved you from the moment I met you.”

He captured her mouth wantonly. The walls began to tumble down. “Charlotte, I’ve waited fifteen years to hear those words from you. I want you so much.”

Cookie was dizzy. She couldn’t hold back anymore. She wanted to make love just as much as he did. She kissed him and George had his answer.

He lifted her into his arms, never once taking his mouth from hers and walked to the bed. She kissed him with fifteen years of deep passion and desire.

They stripped each other of the rest of their clothes and locked themselves in a ravenous embrace. The needs and desires of their bodies enshrouded them completely.

“George, love me like that first time.”

“Charlotte, I will love you forever.” He covered Cookie’s mouth sensuously and released his hold over hungry emotions. He eased his manly essence to the passage leading to her lair of divine pleasure. Then, he looked deeply into her eyes and thrust fast and hard.

Cookie’s whole body stiffened from the fierce intrusion. George took total possession of her. She watched his lids dip over his loving eyes and knew his body was remembering the unbelievable tightness of her warm flesh.

She craved him; had to have more and more. His massive shaft sparked carnal flames in her deep wetness with every gentle stroke, sensitive plunge and consuming thrust. The beast was calling. She must obey. She had to surrender and make George want to as well. She moved her full, succulent mouth to his lips and whispered passionately, “George, give yourself to it.”

He heard her words through a fog of fever as he dropped his last hold and let go. Her body could bring him to such heights of blazing pleasure. It felt so powerfully right to be buried completely inside her again.

He plunged into her abyss with fierce intensity. Thrusting so hard, so deep, he just knew he was hurting her even as she begged him to give her more.

Cookie caught his piercing, hypnotic rhythm and matched it. She drowned in an ocean of delightful tidal waves. His long, swollen shaft pounded into her with such force, she quivered with tremors of ecstasy. She felt her dark side emerge to take away her control. The beast was alive and would soon engulf them in an erotic storm of indescribable pleasure. She cradled his face and watched his eyes change as he felt the shocking sensation.

“Charlotte, don’t. I only want you,” he gasped.

“I can’t stop it. I don’t want to. I want to give it to you. Please, let me.”

George wanted to say no, but his body screamed for him to say yes. He couldn’t concentrate. Cookie was taking him and he was reaching climax rapidly. He couldn’t stop the Python even if he tried.

He descended upon her mouth hard, and drove deep into the soft inner folds of her body. He felt her hold become all consuming and interfered with his breathing.

Suddenly, his climax streaked through his loins. His body became enslaved by hers. He stiffened with the assault of his release. He pulled his mouth away then buried his head in her neck and groaned painfully, “Chhhharlotte!”

He slid into a dark, dreamy void of rapture. When he emerged, Cookie was above him giving the Lair of the Python. He tingled from a sensation only she could give. His body remembered this special gift and he experienced total elation and ultimate pleasure.

He couldn’t think or even breathe without embracing absolute rhapsody. She had him, she had complete possession of his mind, his body, his soul and yes, even his life. He felt ecstasy and even pain that if he died right

at this moment, he'd have no regrets.

Cookie had to experience the ultimate in arousal with him again. She moved slowly and temptingly. With every gasp and sigh she created in him, she felt her own release build inside her until she was drifting off the edge of sanity.

She wanted to give it to him, needed to give it to him. Her mind shut down and the beast took ownership of her body as well. She began to thrust upon his wet, hard cock with lightening speed, whimpering with unharnessed hunger.

She cried out as her climax clawed through every inch of her sensitive body. She released with such force, she shook involuntarily. Her deliverance saturated his throbbing sex with all her smoldering cream.

George exhaled a sultry, painful cry as he convulsed and shivered wildly while his release crescendoed through every nerve in his body. The fiery sensation took him to heights of arousal and depths of pleasure he had known only once before. Exploding so strongly, he fought to breathe as he filled her with rivers of his hot seed.

Cookie went limp and collapsed into his arms. All the passion was still there. The years hadn't diminished it at all. Tears welled in her eyes when she thought the only way to know for sure if George truly loved her, was to tell him about their baby. It would mean taking a leap of faith that terrified her. She knew her quiet sobs had been noticed when his arms tightened around her. He turned to face her.

"Charlotte, what is it?"

“There's something I must tell you and I'm afraid,” she confessed softly.

“Honey, no matter what you tell me, I'll still love you. Please, believe me. That will never change.”

Cookie turned her back to his chest. He cradled her in his arms and waited for her to begin. “I know you've always thought all these years that the main reason I wouldn't give you and I another chance was because you'd hurt me when you left me. I felt it best you believe that lie because the truth was so much more horrible and I felt so guilty for what I had done.

“After you left me in Paris, I felt a little down and a girlfriend of mine suggested I attend a party to lift my spirits. While there, I met a man named Andrew. We hit it off and dated a few times. On our last date...” She reached for his hands and pulled them over her heart. “Jazzy, he raped me.” She felt him flinch. “It was awful. He was cruel and vicious. I was a bundle of nerves for weeks. I was barely functioning. I didn't report it because I didn't think anyone would believe me. Things only got worse.” She sighed deeply and continued,

“I was experiencing all the normal symptoms and after weeks and weeks of self denial, I finally accepted I was pregnant. I was devastated, scared and lost. I was alone with only myself to depend on.

“A few weeks later I got an abortion. It was the hardest thing I ever had to do. A year or so later, Andrew was on trial for raping another woman.” Cookie cried softly, not wanting to go on for this next part was the turning point for her and George. “In his trial, Andrew confessed to being sterile and raped women because they couldn't give him babies. In my rage to spite a mad man, I aborted your baby, not his. Being so upset and numb it

never even occurred to me that the baby...could be our baby.

"I was four weeks pregnant when Andrew assaulted me. Now you know why I've been so afraid to let you get close again. Afraid you'd never forgive me if you ever learned the truth. Please, George, don't hate me."

Cookie rolled from his embrace and sobbed painfully. She had taken that leap of faith and bared her soul and deepest secret to the one person who could crush her entire world with one wrong word.

George lay quiet for long moments going and came to a conclusion. None of it would've ever happen if he had stayed by her side. Never would he hate her for something that was in part— a large part— his fault for being a coward. When she needed a friend most he had abandoned her. Instantly, he knew he'd never leave her again. He'd never allow anyone to hurt her again.

He turned and watched her beautiful, shimmering body shiver with sadness and guilt. He listened to his heart and found the words to soothe her.

He moved closer and turned her so she faced him. He wiped away her tears and kissed her eyes. She kept her lids over her beguiling, brown eyes as he kissed her so gently and said, "Charlotte, I could never hate you for something you had no control over. If I had fought my family, you never would have been left alone. That horrible animal would have never hurt you. No, my love, I'll never hate you for the mistake I made."

Cookie's lids lifted from enchanting eyes and George saw that they were still filled with unshed tears. "I just kept remembering how upset and angry you were with Gabrielle when she aborted your baby from two summers

before. How you hated her for never telling you she was pregnant. How you swore you'd resent any woman for depriving you of your right to be a father. George, I feared you'd never forgive me."

He remembered that heated Paris summer also. How Gabrielle had toyed with his heart and his love. How he'd poured his feelings out to his best friend, Charlotte, over how devastated he'd been when he'd discovered Gabrielle's deception. No wonder she was afraid, he thought. How could she admit to the one thing— at that time in his life— he could not accept.

George's eyes soon filled with tears as well. She had been afraid, alone and hurt. And he was to blame for all of it. He embraced her with all the love he had and said, "There's nothing to forgive. I love you as much as I ever did and like I said earlier, nothing will ever change that." Cookie melted into him and his warm mouth found hers slowly.

George's hand caressed her soft belly. "Charlotte, I want to give you a baby."

Her eyes filled with liquid stars. Her hand covered his and she nodded. They made love all night long. They traveled slow and smoothly, tenderly soaring into the savored passions of total ecstasy.

When the rays of the sun crept into Cookie's room to inform them a new day had arrived, George began to awake. He opened his eyes and noticed he was cradled in Cookie's heavy breasts.

Her warm, velvety body surrounded him. His heart hit his chest and his soul screamed with joy. He hadn't dreamt their passionate night; it had happened, it was real. He lifted his head and peered down at her, thinking how

he'd always love her.

Finally, he thought, he was at last with the only woman he was ever meant to be with...his best friend. He nuzzled her neck sweetly to bring her from slumber.

"Good morning, sleepy head," George said.

"Good morning."

"I hope our slight detour last night hasn't washed away all your ideas for your fashion show in October."

Cookie sat straight up. "The fashion show! God, I almost forgot all about it. Oh Jazzy, I must get to work right away. I don't have a minute to waste."

He almost wished he had never mentioned it. He pulled her down and kissed her so she couldn't speak. "Cookie, I know you want to get started right away, but might I have a few moments more with you? I've waited so long to have you all to myself."

Cookie cradled his face and smiled warmly. "I'm yours forever. I'll never put anything before us again. I'll not allow a day to go by without saying I love you. Nothing will occur in my life unless you are a part of it. I want you with me always." Cookie kissed him deeply and George literally felt every word.

He cleared his throat, "Well, since you put it like that, I guess I can share you a little. Say, are you hungry? I could really go for some breakfast, maybe French toast?" Cookie giggled and he knew she'd been thinking French toast too.

They showered and dressed then George cooked them breakfast. Cookie got started immediately on her designs for the show after they ate. They talked and laughed and worked hard all day.

George knew Cookie would work nonstop if he wasn't there and insisted she take a break. "Jazzy, I'm on



a roll. I really want to finish this one design,” Cookie groaned.

“You said that three creations ago. Now come sit down and take a five minute break. I promise, I won’t distract you any longer than that.”

“Ooh...okay.”

They drank fresh lemonade and chatted casually about Brandon and Adina.

“Jazzy, I forgot to tell you. Adina will be out of town on this next assignment of hers. She’ll be in Quebec. It’s only for three weeks but I have a feeling Brandon will be climbing the walls.”

“I have the same feeling. Anyone can see they are madly in love. I hope he doesn’t decide to climb any more skyscrapers while she’s gone. He must have given her the scare of her life.”

“Speaking of scary and bizarre, at dinner last night she told me something strange. She said the night of the cocktail party she met this guy named, Edward Fenton again.” George had a total look of shock leap across his face. “Why are you looking like that? Did I say something wrong?”

He composed himself quickly. “Eh...no. You said, this Edward person, Adina saw him again? Go on, I want to hear more.”

“I don’t know if I told you this or not, but back in January, when I went to pick up Adina from the airport, someone left a message on my voice mail stating Brandon’s plane would be arriving one hour later than what Adina had told me.

“Since she hadn’t given me the phone number on the plane, I had no way of knowing it wasn’t a legitimate schedule change. When we finally found each other at the

airport, she was being escorted by this Edward guy. She said he was an artist she'd met in Quebec. We both dismissed the mix-up with the plane and thought no more about it or this Edward guy.

"Anyway, the night of the cocktail party she saw him again. She told me he had really frightened her. While taking a break on the terrace, Edward surfaced from out of nowhere and blocked her from leaving.

"He made a few advances but she explained she was involved with someone. He immediately grabbed her and asked if it was Brandon Montgomery? She tried to pull away but he became even more menacing...then, he kissed her."

George's mind started racing with lightening speed. This nightmare couldn't be starting again. He wouldn't let it this time. If Charlotte ever found out what he suspected, she'd never forgive him and he'd lose her forever.

He turned and smiled casually. "Cookie, did Adina tell Brandon any of this?"

"No, she didn't. We didn't see any reason in worrying him when he'd just had his accident. Besides, she assured me she'd never see Edward again. He was just rambling."

"Good. I'd hate to hear of anything happening to our Little Raven. See, just like I promised, five minutes. Now, back to work."

## CHAPTER 12

George was grateful Cookie would be busy with her work. It gave him a chance to find Brandon and inform him about the resurfacing of Edward Fenton. “Brandon, thanks for seeing me on such short notice.”

“You're lucky you caught me. I just came from dropping Adina at the airport. I came into headquarters to get some work done.” George watched his posture become alert. “I get the feeling this isn't a social call. Please, sit, and tell me why you are here?”

“I have something to tell you and when I'm done, we will be the only ones who know the whole truth and you may want to kill me.”

“If you're going to tell me something, say it, before I start filling in the blanks with something a lot worse. Wait, has something happened to Charlotte?”

George shook his head. “What I've come to tell you has to do with Adina.” He paused, as he watched Brandon's face go from relief for Charlotte to anxiety for Adina. “Remember when you and I had that talk about my relationship with Cookie in Paris? I gave you the edited version and only what pertained to me and Cookie.

“What I didn't tell you was that that one night changed my life forever and it also changed Adina's. I

need to ask, has she told you about Victor Millard and what he did to her?"

George flinched when pure hatred pulsed off of Brandon from across the room. "Yes, she told me. I could kill him for what he put her through. Luckily, he's already dead. How could he do those things to her simply because she didn't want to be with him or give him her gift?"

George's eyes bulged from his head. "Brandon, the gift is what all of this is about. Adina hasn't given it to you yet?" Brandon shook his head cautiously, then George added, "You two are so much in love, I'm sure she'll grant it to you soon.

"As you know, Cookie and I became lovers in Paris when we were nineteen. When she gave me the gift, I was young and not experienced in all the ways of love and sexual pleasures. I had yet to take that journey.

"As I grew into manhood with all the desires of a man, I learned what Charlotte had given me was so rare and unknown to practically every man on the planet, I became crazed. I searched all over the world trying to experience it again. When it looked like I never would, I accepted it, and went on with my life.

"My parents and family were so relieved I was coming to my senses and getting to the business of running the family business, that they threw me a huge coming home party. I had too much to drink and alcohol is a depressant.

"I was so upset that I couldn't be with Charlotte, I stumbled into our library and passed out. When I came to, I was still pretty plastered. Someone was talking to me and asking why I was so sad. In my disoriented and confused state, I told this person what Cookie did to me.

“He was so subtle and smooth. He eventually coaxed every detail of my one night with Charlotte out of me. I was so far gone; I even told him Charlotte had a younger sister, named Adina.”

George knew Brandon had put it together but knew he couldn't stop now. “I can tell by the way you are looking at me, Adina has indeed told you the whole story. But before you leap over your desk and rip my heart out, let me finish.”

George took in a deep breath and blew it out slow and easy. “My head was pounding and I started to drift in and out of consciousness. When I awoke, I remembered what I'd done and said to a total stranger.

“In a brief moment of weakness, I broke a promise to never tell anyone about the Lair of the Python. I was desperate to find out whom I had spoken to. I found my mother and she said she'd asked my cousin, Edward Fenton, to check on me to make sure I was all right.”

George knew he was enraged when he found himself abruptly accosted by the collar as Brandon growled, “Edward Fenton is your fuckin' cousin? You told him?”

George swallowed hard and nodded his head. He knew Brandon had a murderous need coursing through his veins. “Wait, there's more.” He felt the vicious grip around his throat tighten just before he was slammed brutally into his chair.

He stared up at Brandon. “I confronted Edward and asked him about what I had said. He claimed all I did was mumble for hours. Something inside me kept telling me that he had lied to me. But I had no proof. Edward was too clever to let anything slip. Later, he began following me. Eventually, he trailed me to Cookie, then Adina.”

Brandon stepped dangerously closer, clenching his

fists tighter and harder.

George observed him wearily then said, "Edward watched her for months. He stalked her and she never even knew it. He found out where she lived, ate, even where she worked. Then the day came when he made his move." George looked at Brandon and flinched. "He left a message for her at a club where she exercised. He made the message appear to be coming from me and Cookie and told her to meet us for lunch. He knew we weren't coming and introduced himself.

"Edward knew if I ever heard Adina mention the name, Edward Fenton, I'd immediately know he had lied to me. So he told her his name was...Victor Millard."

Nothing could save George now.

Brandon yanked him savagely out of the chair and threw him into the wall and screamed, "You son-of-a-bitch! I'll kill you!"

George gave no resistance. He had done far worse things to himself to atone for his part in Adina's suffering. He knew the wild insane anger Brandon was feeling with every brutal blow to his body.

When he was slammed against the wall and suddenly released, George noticed that they were not alone. Cautiously he held his throbbing ribs and struggled to stand. He watched Brandon quickly dismiss the intruder, and used the sudden reprieve to regain his faculties. When Brandon returned, he was bent over in his chair.

"Because of you, Adina was raped, tortured and almost killed! When I think of how she suffered at the hands of that bastard...if I didn't care for Cookie and love her sister madly...you'd be dead now." He pulled away with great restraint.

George nursed his busted lip then thought, why

bother? *When I tell him the rest, he'll bust the other one.* He sat down eyeing Brandon carefully. When he felt ready, he replied cautiously, "I need to explain something to you about Edward. When I received the gift I was nineteen and just beginning to explore the pleasures of sex. I had no idea Charlotte's gift was so rare but Edward did. He was thirty when he met Adina and thirty-five when he received it. He had known passion and ecstasy but nothing like what Adina was capable of doing to a man.

"Edward was always possessive of the things that belonged to him. Adina never stood a chance once he set his sights on her. He'd never let her go."

George poured a glass of water and drank cautiously for he knew Brandon was again losing his patience and would soon lose his temper. "Edward was a human chameleon, who could blend into any setting anywhere. He was absent whenever I visited Adina with Cookie. There were no pictures of him in their home. Only photos of Adina. The entire house was designed so he could watch her. I didn't think much of it at the time, until she left him. When she told Cookie everything, all the pieces started fitting together.

"But by the time I figured out my cousin Edward, was actually Adina's lover Victor Millard, I freaked. I went to Cookie but it was too late. Adina had already disappeared."

He could literally smell the pungent scent of fury oozing from Brandon's pores. He saw Brandon's eyes darken with hate for him. He readied himself for whatever would come and confessed, "I didn't have the heart...no, that's not true...I know that now. What I didn't have was the courage to tell Cookie what I suspected as well as my part in the whole dreadful ordeal.

"Instead, I kept the real truth from her and diligently helped her search for Adina. Once found, she was so close to death, I became consumed with guilt. I told Cookie I'd handle everything. Even advised her to tell Adina Victor was dead. And up until last year, I thought I had told the truth."

George saw Brandon's fist ready to strike when it stopped. Quickly he searched past the rage in his eyes and saw a glimmer of sanity return.

"What do you mean, up until last year?" Brandon breathed with anger.

"I don't know how to say this so I'll just come right out with it. The police nor the fire department ever found his body in the burned cabin. It was completely destroyed but there should have been some kind of remains but there were none. I think he escaped the fire somehow. And if he did, then Adina is in grave danger and...so are you."

That did it.

Brandon pulled him from the chair and hissed, "I don't believe you. Why didn't Adina recognize him last year?"

"She said he'd been burned in the fire. Edward no doubt had plastic surgery to alter his appearance. And with the kind of money my family has, he could've easily paid off everyone to keep his true identity a secret."

George could hardly breathe Brandon's grip was so intense. "If he's so obsessed, why hasn't he approached her again? Adina hasn't seen him since that night in Quebec."

"That's why I'm here. He has. The last time was too close for comfort. She saw him at a cocktail party on her last assignment. He cornered her and said they'd be



together again. Adina didn't take him seriously because she doesn't know it's Victor. Why should she? She believes he's dead. Adina thinks of Edward as just an overzealous admirer." Brandon's lids lifted from his eyes. George felt a hot twinge of terror race down his spine.

Brandon released George and spat through intimidating, sharp teeth, "I'll kill him with my bare hands! I didn't like Edward Fenton from the moment I met him. I wanted to hit him that first time. Now, I wanna really hurt him." Brandon started to pace slowly. "That's why whenever he spoke of Adina, it was as if he spoke from personal experience. I must warn her. If he gets her alone again, there's no telling what he might do." He turned to quit his office.

George, knowing full well he would pay dearly for his next action, grabbed Brandon's arm hard and stopped him. Both of their emotions were high. Brandon yanked away then pushed George hard to the floor and turned to leave again.

"Brandon, wait!" George shouted, as he struggled to his feet. Brandon turned like a cornered tiger ready to pounce. "We can't tell Adina. It would send her into an emotional tailspin. You didn't see what she was like after Edward had finished with her. She was in a catatonic state for weeks and had nightmares all the time. I can't let you put her through that again. We have to focus on finding Edward and putting him away first. If we tell her now, she could go into shock because we don't know where he is."

"I did see her!" he spat ferociously, "Do you think it was easy for Adina to tell me? I watched her die right before my eyes. Her terrible memories ravaged her. My arms couldn't hold her tight enough as pain ripped her

apart from the horrible flashbacks of miscarrying her baby.

“She fought valiantly through all of it and relived every stinking, miserable detail of being with that bastard. I felt her pain, anguish and terror each time she did...so don’t tell me I didn’t see it...don’t tell me I don’t know.”

George saw the pain in Brandon’s eyes and knew he had relived the horror just as they all had. With a surge of courage, he said, “You know I’m right. Adina couldn’t survive the truth just yet.”

Brandon turned from George, unwilling to accept his words. Then, Adina flashed across his eyes. He saw her smiling and happy...then, he saw her as she was on their picnic...catatonic, terrified— hurting. No, he admitted quietly, that vision of her he never wanted to see again. He slowly turned to George and whispered, “I never want her to go through that again. But I refuse to sit by while a madman stalks the woman I love.”

“No, Bran, of course not. We need to keep Adina safe until we catch Edward. Cookie said Adina would be gone for three weeks. Has that changed?”

Brandon started to calm some, but only to speak without pure rage aiding his efforts. “It’s still three weeks as far as I know. Why?”

“She should be okay as long as Edward doesn’t feel he needs to make a move sooner than he has to. If my suspicions are right, he’s been watching Adina for months. Probably since January and I suspect he also knows you are the other man in her life.”

“What? I’m the only man in her life!” barked Brandon.

“That’s not how Edward views you. To him, you’re a

predator who has for the moment, lured Adina away from him and like I said earlier, you're in danger too. Edward would kill you rather than give Adina up."

Brandon hissed, "Not if I kill the fucker first." He centered his anger. "Victor Millard has been following and watching us for over six months and you're just now saying something. Have you lost your mind? What took you so long?"

George had to get Brandon focused on the real problem at hand so he said, "I only found out today. Cookie mentioned it in passing. I know you're pissed, but we have to move past our tension and work together to keep Adina safe."

Brandon took a sip of water and breathed in deeply then counted to ten, though it did no good. "You're right, it's just, Adina's in danger and she's not even aware of it. Edward could strike at any time and we're powerless to stop it."

"We're not that vulnerable. As long as we know where Adina is, Edward can't be far away. When she comes off assignment, I want you to stay close to her. Make up some excuse she'll believe."

Brandon gave an unexpected smile then lowered his thick lashes over his deep gray eyes and said, "That's easy. We can't keep our hands off each other. I won't have any problem sticking close to Adina."

George felt some of the tension ease up and proceeded with his plan. "Make sure when her assignment ends, there's someone at the airport to collect her promptly. We don't want any more mix-ups."

"I can do one better than that. I can have my jet pick her up in Quebec and have her brought straight to me."

But what if he goes after her while she's on assignment?"

"Mmmm, I don't think so. That would draw too much attention to him. He will try when she's off assignment. I'm going to call in some big markers to see if I can find out where he is staying.

"He doesn't know we're on to him so maybe we can track him down through his expense records or spending habits. If we're lucky, we may find Edward before he makes his move."

"George, you've hit on something. Adina told me Victor had a few vices that may help us trap him. I'm gonna do a little searching of my own. I've an idea of where to start."

Brandon was a nervous wreck when he got home. He didn't want to let on just how upset he really was in front of his family because he was also terrified.

Victor Millard was alive and after Adina. She was in danger. The woman he loved with all his heart and soul could be taken from him by a sadistic lunatic. All his instincts told him to bring her home and never let her out of his sight. But that would frighten her and the last thing he wanted was for her to be afraid.

He began to calm and relax as thoughts of Adina came to him. He had to keep her safe at all costs. He had promised he would and he had never broken a promise in his life.

Brandon went to his bedroom right after dinner and started to think about the horrible story Adina had told him. From what Brandon could figure, Victor had a pattern to the way he did things. He planned everything in advance. If he did manage to abduct Adina, he'd take her some place that had been prepared in advance. It

would be furnished and stocked with food and clothes. Clothes. Adina said Victor liked her in purple. Specifically, purple, peek-a-boo lace lingerie. Edward would need this lingerie before he got Adina, Brandon thought. If he could locate where Edward had purchased the lingerie he might be able to find Edward or where he planned to take Adina. Brandon decided to call it an early night. He would be up early in the morning to meet with his friend and ally, Keith Fields of the Pantex Corporation. Keith could help him find Edward Fenton.

The next three weeks went by like a whirlwind. Keith was able to help some but not much. He did manage to give Brandon a list of all the French lingerie imported to the area within the last six to eight months.

He still had to go to the shops and ask if any large quantities of peek-a-boo-lace had been sold to one buyer or if any of it was purple. He was running out of time so he brought in the help of his family; Mrs. Peters, Lucy and Harry.

They split the list into four equal parts. They scoured the city looking for any leads. They came close but it wasn't sold to just one buyer or it wasn't purple.

He wanted to be at the plane to meet Adina. He also didn't want to neglect his part of the list, so he gave his half to Harry.

He had to make sure Adina didn't suspect anything out of the ordinary so he greeted her as he always did, with all the love he had in his heart. He was determined to stay close to her for the next four days. He would make sure she was never far away.

Adina was surprised and thrilled when she got off the

plane. Her man was waiting for her. She ran over and he lifted her high in the air. "Brandon! Honey, please, put me down!" she cried lightly.

"Only if you say you love me and missed me."

"Yes, yes, to all of the above!" Adina confessed happily.

It felt great to be in his arms. She noticed the hungry twinkle in his eyes and raced him to the limousine. Once inside her happy giggling was swallowed by his ravenous kiss. "Adina, I've missed you."

"I thought my assignment would never end. I wanted to be in your arms more than anything." Adina climbed on top of him and gently kissed his eyes. "You tempt me so. I could eat you up."

He answered her suggestive purr with a sexy, deep growl, "If that makes you happy, devour me."

Adina felt her jacket being pulled off as she lowered her mouth to his. She reached between them and undid his pants and freed his manly essence. He gasped under her hot mouth when her playful hands stroked and aroused his cock. She felt the frantic tugs of his hands on her body and knew he was aching for her. They journeyed underneath her skirt and took hold of her soft ass.

He gasped at his findings. "Adina, you're not wearing any panties!"

She adjusted her body over him. Shaking her head she replied, "Mmmm...I want you inside me." Adina cried out as Brandon immediately fulfilled her request.

As they rode back to the Montgomery estate, Brandon fell asleep. His head rested on her lap. She looked down at his masculine face.

His lashes were long, thick and covered his eyes with

a hint of mystery. His lips were relaxed, full and tempting. Jaw and cheekbones, strong, powerful and so sensuous. His nose was enticing and had a little perk to it. He was gorgeous and Adina thought how she loved him.

He had given her so much. Friendship, strength, serenity and love. She caressed his face not wanting to disturb him. She remembered all that they had shared. He was an intricate part of her life and she trembled thinking she would die if anything ever happened to him. Her mind wondered to his accident at the construction sight. It was like waiting for the other shoe to drop, then it did.

She took a deep breath to shake the terrifying feeling that came over her. She couldn't bear losing anything else she loved. He was deep inside her essence. Brandon Alexander Montgomery was in her soul...was her soul.

She dried her eyes and thought how she could show him the deep, powerful love she had for him. She kissed him lightly on the forehead and he stirred then sank deeper into sleep. Adina smiled her secret smile and knew exactly what to do...The Lair of the Python.

When they reached the Montgomery Estate, Adina noticed the tension between Harry and Brandon and assumed it had something to do with his business. She retreated to his master bedroom and stripped leisurely from her clothes. She thought a long soak would soothe her then decided only Brandon possessed that skill.

When he came to his room and noticed her gone, his imagination ran wild. He walked to his bath and saw her clothes carelessly scattered on the floor. A wicked desire moved through him then. His Little Raven was playing a game.

He too removed his clothes. Where could she be? He

wondered. He crept through his own house butt naked. The thought of getting caught like a thief in the night, thoroughly excited him. How on earth could he explain it to Harry?

When he got downstairs, he darted across the hall to his den. Before he could catch his breath someone turned on the lights.

"It took you long enough," said Adina's alluring voice.

Brandon turned around and lying on her side on his pool table was his Little Raven. Her eyes sparkled with sultry promise and suddenly he didn't care who saw him naked. He strolled to her with catlike grace. "How did you get down here without me seeing you?"

"I waited for you and Harry to retreat into the kitchen then I came down." Her bare foot slid down his chest to torture his groin.

Brandon groaned, "I'll lock the door."

She grabbed his arm. "No, it's more exciting this way," then she pulled him back to the table.

Brandon covered her body and unshackled his hunger upon her. He felt her warm fingers grip his pulsing cock and position it to her wet opening.

Their kisses were as wild and careless as the mood he was in. His arms reached out to the sides of the table and gripped fiercely. He braced himself then surged forward. She cried out but it was never heard, he devoured it with his own mouth instantly.

Her hot wet walls enslaved him. Her mewling cries drove him wild. His frame shuddered from her tiny muscles squeezing around him. His body took hers savagely. Her opening drew him deeper and deeper. Then there was a burst of eternal fire and everything grew



dizzily dark.

Brandon came back to Adina and peered into sexy eyes. His expression must have betrayed his thoughts when she quietly said, "You looked so intense a moment ago with Harry. I felt a lil' envious that something other than me could distract you. So I decided to get your attention." He felt her damp body mold to his. He could hardly hold in a comforting moan, when her hand began to caress the hard slab of wet muscles on his back while the other twined into his hair.

At that moment, he felt the strongest, most fierce ache of possession he had ever known in his life. His body felt enervated and free. The gentle strokes of her warm hands caressing him like a child in the warmth of a mother's bosom gave him deep peace. The warmth of her body beneath his own soothed his nerves like a winter quilt on a mean, cold night. The flexing and relaxing of her inner walls around his shaft made him feel the deepest, purest love he had ever known.

As he lay intertwined inside her sensuous body, all that swirled in his mind was that she really did know him. She had sensed his need to be loved and comforted. He embraced her tightly. No man would take her from him. He'd kill any who dare tried!

"Brandon, what is it? she whispered.

He lifted his head and saw her concern for him in her eyes. He smiled lazily and replied, "Nothing a few more distractions like this can't fix."

Adina giggled. "Whenever you're ready for round two so am I...What are you doing?"

"Since you like parading around the house naked, let's retreat to my bed so I can enjoy you all over again." Brandon carried her boldly out of the den.

When they passed Harry in the hall, Brandon could literally feel Adina blush when Harry said, "I'll have more towels brought up, sir. I see you and the madam have apparently run out."

Once upstairs, he walked to the bath and filled the huge soaker tub with hot water. Adina turned on soothing music then joined him. "Brandon, be careful. I wouldn't want you fall and hurt yourself."

He eased into the water and cuddled next to her and said, "This feels good. Have I ever told you how delicious you smell to me?"

Adina turned then straddled his body and rested her head of his wide, wet chest. She took a bath sponge and dipped it into the water. As she squeezed its liquid contents over their bodies she answered, "You too have a scent I find totally delightful. I love how you smell."

Brandon yawned as the water eased the tension from him. "I'm sorry. Normally water rejuvenates me. I rarely become sleepy afterwards."

"I don't mind. I'm rather tired myself. The flight in from Quebec and our reunion have left me drained."

They sat quietly when he felt Adina lift head from his chest.

"Brandon, I've come to a decision that I want to share with you."

He kept his head tilted and eyes closed. "Go right ahead. I'm listening."

"It's time for you to receive my gift of the Lair of the Python."

Brandon's head sprang up and his eyelids opened. "That's not necessary. I love you without having the gift. You don't have to—" He felt her wet fingers cover his lips.

"I want to give it to you. I know you weren't expecting it from me but I have the capability of giving sublime pleasure and ecstasy to a man and I want for that man to be you." He felt her soft fingers trace the curve of his collarbone.

"At first, I thought I'd just give it to you and tell you afterwards but then I thought it best to advise you first. When it happens to a man for the first time, it can be unsettling. You don't need to be more nervous than necessary."

"I'm not quite sure how to respond. I don't know if I should be thanking you or cursing you."

"Believe me, Brandon, when I've given you my gift there will be no question as to how you should respond."

"Well, when should I expect this gift? Will I have it tonight?"

"No, not tonight. I'm tired. If I'm not careful I could hurt you."

He swallowed hard. "I see. Whatever you feel is best." Adina's head settled again to his chest.

"I have some running around to do tomorrow and the day after. Plus, I want to visit Cookie and see how she's coming along for the fashion show. After, I'll be ready."

Brandon tensed at hearing her say she wouldn't be with him all four days. "Adina, I was hoping we could spend more time together. By any chance can any of your running around be done after your next assignment? Or perhaps, I can tag along?"

"I wasn't sure you'd be interested in going with me. Besides, I didn't want to ask because you do have your own work to attend to."

"My company is running just fine. I made sure all my

work was done before you came home. I have the next four days free and I'm at your service."

Adina squealed with joy and gave Brandon quick kisses all over his chest. It felt so good he started to laugh. "That's fantastic. I hope you don't get bored."

He came back to his senses gradually. "Where are we going and what are we doing?"

"Well, I had planned on spending tomorrow shopping. I need a new wardrobe badly. I need more suits and other accessories for my business attire. Then I was going to do some shopping for my loft. I want to check into getting the back of the loft built out into an exercise room and dance studio. I also need to get more furniture pieces. I saw a few that caught my eye the last time I was here. And lastly, I want to get your birthday present."

Brandon's mouth dropped. "How did you know my birthday was coming?"

Adina blushed then smiled her secret smile. "I asked Harry."

"That old man can't hold water." Brandon took in a quick breath and continued, "Well, you definitely have a full schedule. I don't think I'll be bored at all but I will admit, when it comes to your wardrobe, the only thing I like to see on you is me."

Brandon felt her soft lips cover his and recognized that flame between them grow into a slow burning forest fire. They decided to quit the bath and seek comfort in the confines of his bed.

Once there, they continued their conversation about Adina's agenda. Then suddenly, Brandon didn't want to talk anymore. He wanted to taste her. He buried his head between her thighs and devoured her.

As his tongue ravished and gorged he felt her

orgasmic cries roll over him like rain. When her panting breaths calmed he crawled up her body and sank his tongue into her mouth. When her hand closed around his cock, he lifted his head.

He watched as she slowly eased down his body and replaced her hand with her hot, wet mouth. As her tongue licked his shaft, he groaned from the sensation of the head of his cock gliding along the roof of her mouth. Abruptly he collapsed into a gripping climax. He opened his eyes as she slithered back up his body. As little devils danced in her dark eyes he groaned as she licked his come from her thick lips and thrust her tongue into his mouth.

## CHAPTER 20

They were up early the next day. They dressed casually and had a light breakfast. When they were settled in the back of the limousine, Brandon insisted the shopping spree be on him.

“No, Brandon, I couldn’t,” she said.

“I won’t take no for an answer.”

“This could get really expensive.”

She looked so guilty, he thought. He knew right away her concern was that she would appear greedy. Slowly he captured her chin and lifted it. “You’ve given me so much, Adina.” He brushed his lips across hers. “Companionship, passion, love.” He kissed her deeper. “Great sex.” He watched her blush. “Let me do this for you. Let me spoil you. I want you to have anything and everything you want. And I want to be the one who gives it you.”

His lips pulled into a slow smile as she said, “If I get carried away, you promise to rein me in?”

“I’ll promise no such thing.” He covered her lips again and signaled the driver to go.

They went everywhere. Brandon watched how Adina’s face glowed at all the fine clothes and accessories. He noticed she had a reason for why she dressed the way

she did for work. Adina didn't want her natural exotic beauty to distract her clients and make it hard for them to work together. What Brandon found refreshing was Adina's business attire may have been plain and boring, but her lingerie was pulse racing to say the least. If he had known she wore such sexy, little things under her business attire, he would have ravished her the second after he first saw her.

She liked seductive, raunchy, intimate apparel. There were sheer flesh toned brassieres, silk thigh highs and stockings; she told him she didn't like panty hose because they made her booty inch.

Brandon died and went to heaven when she started to pick out her camisoles. She bought them in every color but the ones that caught and kept his attention...were the red ones. His favorite color and what he discovered was her favorite color too. Next came her jewelry.

Adina liked simple but versatile pieces. Pieces that could go from work to leisure easily. She restocked her earrings and bracelets. She didn't wear rings but she did want to get herself another anklet.

Brandon was totally engrossed in her free spirit and open charm. She was captivating and he was having the time of his life. He had never thought this much fun and enjoyment was possible while simply spending a exhausting day with Adina.

Adina couldn't believe how well Brandon was holding up. Her sprees were hard on the seasoned shopper but Brandon never complained once. He was actually enjoying himself. The next day was much of the same but this time she was hunting for furniture.

When they started to shop for her furniture she

watched as Brandon asked questions about the quality of the wood used in the frame of the furniture. She finally knew why his master bedroom was conceived of mostly wood pieces. He liked durability and quality above everything else. If he didn't like the wood used, he advised her not to buy the piece. Needless to say, the sales associates in the stores wanted to strangle him for talking her out of some the purchases, but she trusted his opinion and acted upon it whenever possible.

While Brandon haggled over the price of a love seat and side table, Adina wandered into a small room which displayed furniture for a nursery. She walked around and fell in love with almost everything.

She turned to leave. Brandon was watching her. "Did you get him to come down on his price?" Adina asked.

"Actually, I did. Is there something in here you want? And, is there something you need to tell me?"

Adina looked at him and knew he was asking if she was pregnant. Well, it was possible. They made love all the time and a baby would be a natural conclusion.

She smiled shyly. "Yes, there are many things here I desire, but they can wait." He smiled and exhaled a low, slow breath. She observed he was more sad than relieved by her answer. "Don't worry, dear, I will have a need for a nursery someday."

He gave a light chuckle and escorted her from the room.

On their way to Cookie's shop, Brandon told Adina he would finish the back of her loft himself. "Bran, that's really not necessary. I can use a contractor."

"I want to do it. I love working with my hands and it will give me something to do while you are gone that won't put my life in danger." After hearing that, she



conceded immediately. The last thing she wanted was to come home and learn he had been hurt.

When they got to Cookie's shop, she was in a whirlwind of creations. Everything she had created thus far was astonishing. There were gowns, suits, cocktail dresses and outerwear. Adina couldn't believe how enthralled Cookie was. She noticed George was there and he and Brandon seemed to be putting their heads together about something. She made Cookie take a break and they sat and talked for a few moments.

"Cookie, you're coming along nicely. I can't believe all the creations you've managed to put together at such a short time."

"Oh, Adina, I have such a long way to go. I might not use all that I've created. I am having a blast. Jazzy is making it good for me."

"Is he now?" Adina said with a sly smirk.

Cookie blushed shyly and lowered her lids over her eyes. "I've something to tell you. George and I...we're together again."

Adina hugged Cookie. "I'm so happy for you. When did this happen?"

"Well, it started the night of your dinner party. I had planned to come here and work on my designs but Jazzy and I got a little sidetracked. Before I knew it, we were making love. It was wonderful, just like our first time, only better...I told him about the baby."

"Cookie, how did he take it?" Adina asked wearily.

"He was supportive and loving. I couldn't believe the warmth and compassion he showed me. I just knew he would never forgive me.

"I'm so happy, I just want to shout it to anyone who asks," she paused then added, "Oh yeah, I almost forgot,

after the charity ball in October, I'll be moving and I wanted to let you know. The shop will be moving to a bigger space and I will be moving into my new home with George."

"Dang, Jazzy didn't waste no time did he?"

"He wanted to get married the day after we made love. But I said if he could wait fifteen years, then he could wait a few more months. He wasn't thrilled at all with the idea but he agreed. I see Brandon is with you this time. Is there something you wish to share with me? I can see you are just itching to tell me something."

Now it was Adina's turn to blush. "Cookie, I've decided to give Brandon the gift. Before I left on my last assignment, I found the courage to tell him about Victor Millard and like Jazzy, Brandon too was supportive and understanding.

"I knew no other way to express to him how much he means to me. I'm a little nervous but I want to share that kind of passion with a man again. And I want for the man to be Brandon."

"Well, Adina, I have to admit I like Brandon. I feel you've made a good choice this time. Once you've given him the gift we'll both see what kind of man he is capable of being." Cookie showed Adina more of her sketches and designs and they became lost in the world of high fashion.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the room, Brandon and George compared notes about the whereabouts of Edward Fenton.

"So Brandon, have you come up with any more leads on Edward? I called in some pretty big markers to help us out. I was right. He's been here since January.

“Actually, he’s been in and out of Montreal twice. He has been hard to keep track of once he comes into Montreal. He pays for everything with cash. Maybe he has a stash, but I’m thinking he’s making large withdrawals under an assumed name from one of the local banks. I’m getting close.”

“Jazzy, that’s great news. I decided to take the other angle. Since he’s paying in cash, he has to be spending it somewhere. I decided to check into some of his vices.

“He likes Adina to wear purple lingerie. Very expensive, French lace, to be exact. Now, what I know about this animal is that he plans everything in advance. If he plans to abduct Adina, he’d take her someplace that’s prepared in advance.

“It would be stocked with everything he needed to keep her comfortable and also keep him satisfied. If I can find where he bought the lingerie, I might find out where he’s staying or where he’s planning to take Adina.” Brandon took in a deep breath to calm his nerves then said low and determined to George, “I know this much, I want this silent nightmare over with and soon. I can’t stand this menacing cloud hanging over her head for much longer. She’ll be leaving in two days and she’ll be on assignment for six weeks and when she returns, I must tell her the truth and assure her this mad man is out of her life for good.”

Brandon knew his tone told George he was dead serious. “I’ll do my very best to insure my cousin is out of all our lives permanently. Just as you want this over with so do I. Cookie and I are together. I don’t want anything coming between us again. Especially, since she’s consented to marry me after the charity ball in October.”

Brandon did a double take. George had just as much

to lose as himself. It was deeply important that he find Edward too. "Jazzy, when did this all come about? It seems so sudden."

"Brandon, I've waited fifteen years to have Charlotte and nothing, I mean nothing, will get in my way this time. I adore her and now we're together as lovers should be. I'll never leave her again. I must stop Edward before making Charlotte my wife. I want no secrets between us that could come and snatch our happiness away."

"Well, congratulations and good luck. We will both need it...Oh, and ah, sorry about the beating."

"I deserved every blow I got," George confessed. "It wasn't easy explaining the bruises to Cookie though." Brandon flinched. He had been completely out of control that day. He thought George had taken his ass kicking quite well.

He looked at him and noticed he was smiling brightly. "I damn near killed you and you can actually smile when you think about it?"

George turned to look at Cookie then turned again to Brandon. "I told Cookie I fell down a flight of stairs. When she saw the rest of my body, she spent the rest of the day and night caring for me," he admitted with a wicked grin on his face.

"Jazzy, you're something else. Only you could turn a major ass kicking into an excuse to make love."

"I do consider myself most fortunate to have a beautiful woman kiss away my bumps and scrapes for hours and hours." George practically purred his response.

Brandon scolded lightly, "You are too lucky for your own good."

George chuckled then answered, "Brandon, my luck's Cookie. And once Edward is out of the way, I'll extend

my luck. . . she wants a baby and I can't wait to be a father. For all I know, she could be with child now. We can't seem to stay away from each other. It's as if we're making up for lost time."

"Boy, do I know that feeling. It's strong. You can't fight it and you don't want to." Brandon sighed happily.

"Are you and Adina thinking of having a family?" George asked.

Brandon blushed. "Yeah, we've talked, but nothing's set in stone."

"Well, if Adina is anything like her sister, you won't wait for long. When they set their minds to something, it's as good as done."

Brandon and George conversed a little longer then joined the ladies on the other side of the room. They all pitched in and helped Cookie then Brandon and Adina headed to her place to drop off a few packages. When they got to Brandon's home, he checked with the others.

They rose early on her third day with him. Adina was all ready to go down and have a hearty breakfast, but Brandon was in a lazy mood and opted to stay in bed. She padded down to see Mrs. Peters and requested a big breakfast for two and carried it back to his bedroom. "I've decided to eat with you instead of downstairs."

Brandon sat up and helped Adina with the breakfast tray. "Mmm, everything smells good. What do you have?"

Adina crawled back into bed and proceeded to remove the covers from the hot plates. "Well, let's see. Some fresh cut fruit slices. Mmm, I love pineapples. I have crispy, bacon strips, juice and coffee. And homemade oatmeal with fresh whipped butter, cinnamon and honey and a side of English muffins."

“Can I have some of your breakfast?”

“I’ll share with you. It’s my job to keep you strong for tonight.” Brandon took a bite of bacon. “By any chance, can I get a sample of what I can expect later this evening?”

Adina ate a piece of fruit then turned to face him. “No, we won’t be coming together again until tonight. As a matter of fact, I need to go. I have to make a few preparations and no, you can’t come.”

Brandon swallowed hard then moaned, “Aw, honey, come on. That’s not fair. I can’t even have a kiss?”

“Nope. No kiss, hug, snuggle or a quick tumble in the shower. When I leave you won’t see me again until it’s time to make love. Also, give everyone the night off. I want to be alone with you. Now, finish up. I need to get going.”

Brandon ate quickly. While he did, Adina knew he would try to crumble her defenses. Slyly she eased out of the bed and retreated into the bathroom. When she came out she was fully dressed and Brandon was completely shocked.

After breakfast Brandon escorted her to his limousine. He bade the driver to take her wherever she wanted to go. He tried to steal a kiss but Adina dodged his lips smoothly. Brandon stood there totally bewildered as he watched her being driven away.

He became focused again when he thought this was the perfect opportunity to track down Edward. He turned quickly and trotted back inside to talk to everyone about their findings and to give them the night off.

Edward Fenton was a clever man. No one would

deny that. Due to his obsession with voyeurism, he had become immensely crafty in the methods of camouflage. Jazzy and Brandon were correct about why he was in Montreal and what he had really come for...his woman.

Adina belonged to him. Edward was a possessive, selfish man. He'd been without the touch of her body for three years. No longer would he be denied of her pleasures.

He had been without the satisfaction of a woman since the accident. He knew after receiving Adina's precious gift, no mere woman would please him. He had disciplined himself to abstain from sex until he had the only woman he would ever want.

Edward's hunger for her overpowered him more and more each day as he grew closer to capturing her again. She would yield every time and surrender her body whenever he desired. She would give him the Lair of the Python.

All the months Edward watched her only made him crave her more. This wasn't like the first time when he studied her. No, this time he did so out of sheer pleasure. Edward almost caved in once when she came off assignment. He wanted to take her right at the airport. But that was too dangerous.

His body ached for her. He would have to move soon. Besides, Brandon Montgomery was getting too close to her for his liking. He vowed when he saw Adina, he'd reprimand her for being unfaithful to him.

Edward was ready to bring Adina back home where she belonged. He found the perfect remote location and had stocked it well with all her favorite foods and a host of clothes and furniture he knew she would like.

The only thing he needed was her lingerie, his

favorite, purple peek-a-boo lace, imported all the way from Paris. The lace would arrive in two weeks. Then he would set his final plans into motion.



## CHAPTER 21

When Adina arrived later that evening, she was surprised to find Brandon not at home. In a way, she was relieved. It gave her a chance to relax and prepare the bedroom.

Tonight would change their lives forever and be a crucial turning point in their relationship. The last man to receive her gift almost destroyed her. Adina prayed for Brandon to truly honor her once this night ended.

She turned down the bed and lowered the lights. She pulled out her lingerie and some body products and pampered herself. Adina took a long, hot, soapy bath, oiled and moisturized her body then slipped on her negligee.

Her hair fell around her shoulders and she brushed it vigorously so it flowed loose with soft curls. Adina wore only a hint of makeup but she made a point to dab on perfume. Vanilla, with the hint of exotic flowers. She pulled out small candles, lighting them strategically around the room. She wanted enough light to see, but not clearly. She played stimulating music to set the right mood. Her lair was now primed and ready to receive Brandon Montgomery.

Brandon noticed the limousine was in the garage and knew Adina had returned. He had been gone all day and couldn't wait to get home. He kept himself busy venturing around the city trying to locate the purple lace. There were a few good leads he would follow up on after Adina left on assignment. He was certain Edward was near and he would find him.

He got in the house and Lucy and Mrs. Peters had already gone and Harry was just leaving.

"Sir, Ms. Adina is waiting for you in the master bedroom. She wants you to freshen up in one of the guests rooms then join her."

Brandon knew he was a lot more nervous than he thought when Harry added, "Good luck to you sir." He watched Harry collect his coat and exit through the front door. When he heard the lock click, he realized he was holding his breath.

Brandon took a long shower then slipped on his robe and walked to his bedroom. He knocked softly and heard a gentle voice beckon his entrance.

He opened the door and his eyes immediately darkened at the hypnotic image that fell before his sight. Adina was lying on the bed. The room was shadowy and empowering. He felt like a moth being pulled to her flame.

Adina sat up and crossed the room to meet him. She closed the door and led him to the center of the room. She snaked silky arms around his neck and said, "My love, tonight I'm going to take you on a journey only a handful of men in this world have traveled. I want you to understand I do this with all the love, desire and passion I have in my heart.

“Once we start, we can’t turn back and we can’t stop. Now and forever you’ll know I love you and I put no one before you.” Adina came up on her toes and kissed Brandon softly.

His emotions were all over the place. Adina was every kind of woman he could ever want and desire. She made his secret journey wonderful and magical.

He pulled his mouth from hers, then buried his head in her neck. He moved wantonly to the music that played in the background. Sade's Cherish The Day.

The song seemed perfect because he knew he would cherish her and this night forever. It was like the old man had said, she was a rare jewel and to be treasured as such.

She had denied him all day of her body and presence. He only wanted to undress and love her completely. He took his hands over her body luxuriously, testing the feel of her pliable flesh.

Adina reached with smooth fingers to untie his robe. She knew just where to touch him to arouse him to total distraction. Soon he moaned softly in her ear. She opened his robe and began to apply hot, moist kisses to his muscular skin. She aroused him slowly, deliberately while loving the feel of him under her hands.

Brandon's hand cleverly glided between them and undid the dainty ribbons on her gown. The flimsy material slid some and revealed her delicate plump breasts. His roughly textured, gentle hands cupped her trembling breasts.

Brandon groaned in sheer ecstasy. He untied the last of her ribbons and watched the beautiful, sheer, red negligee fall smoothly to the floor around her ankles.

Adina gasped cooingly and stood bare before him to admire or devour if he so desired.

His hands disappeared in her dark hair as his head moved from her breasts then up to her inviting mouth. He felt her kiss all the way down to his toes. He was losing his internal battle with his restraint and willpower. He would soon succumb to his hunger for her and they would begin down the road to nirvana.

He pulled away and stared at her silently. As he felt her cool hand fist around his hard cock, her words shattered his resistance. "Come to me."

He lifted her and walked over to the bed, depositing her there then quickly joining. They'd been slow and easy in their arousal of the other's passion. But now the time had come to unleash the beast and launch their bodies and minds into depths of rapture unimaginable.

Brandon plowed his tongue into Adina's mouth. He kissed and touched her with such fever, she cried out from the domination. He was drowning in the warm depths of her body. Her sweet flesh called him and he was dying to answer. He mounted slowly, teasingly.

He placed his rigid, pulsating sex at the entrance to her dark intentions. He pushed just the head of his shaft into her body and groaned deeply. Adina was ready and waiting for him. She was dizzyingly wet.

He came down on her mouth hotly, opening her legs more, then wrapping them high around his back. He embraced her tightly then with one swift, brutal thrust, plunged into her.

"Brandon!" Instinctively, she clenched him with fierce tightness. He grunted with surprise, noticing this time it was tighter than any time before. She held him so snugly, he wasn't sure he could move in such a close fit. He had

to try.

He couldn't believe the wet warmth of her. Adina's mouth touched his ear and whispered, "Come to me."

He could never resist those words. They were like a battle cry to an obedient soldier. He started to move gradually. He didn't want to rush the ecstasy of the experience.

He gasped at the delirious arousal it created in him. He started to moan as he felt this wild need to conquer her. He wasn't sure where it came from. Only knew to bid its command. He thrust deeper, harder into her compact sheath. In the back of his mind, he knew he might be hurting her, but he couldn't stop. He wanted to bring her body to surrender.

Adina was losing a grip over her mind as Brandon drove viciously into her. Anchoring so deep that soon the beast would be upon them. Tears welled in her eyes. She cried out from pleasure so primal, so savage. She would soon lose her glorious battle to her dark side. The Python would come and engulf them in a magnetic state of erotica. So, she panted her last intelligent words, "Let go, Brandon. Give yourself to it."

Adina pushed her tongue into his mouth and crippled his restraint completely. She moved with him in this private dance of heated carnal hunger. As he pushed deeper, her soft hips surged up to meet every hard plunge into her body. She squeezed his upper back with her long legs and he panted from the intense embrace she captured him in.

He yanked his mouth from hers. She tightened more around his immense, stiff shaft. Brandon had trouble

concentrating and buried his head in the warmth of her neck. He was succumbing to the strong pull and steel band hold around his sex. He had known nothing like it before in his life. It was exhilarating and a little frightening but he wanted to experience all of it.

He started to move faster, sink deeper into her hypnotic bliss.

“Oh, God!” gasped Adina.

The Python was here and called to Adina to take Brandon. She obeyed with no hesitation. She unclenched the walls of her sheath from around his shaft on his next thrust. It was so unexpected, that when he plunged down with all his strength, he crashed into her womb.

Adina gasped, growling from the powerful impact of his shaft touching her center. Her climax rose from the silky depths of her feminine core. She drifted off the edge of sanity. Her body reacted to him; famished for more.

Brandon couldn't stop, craving for that feeling of total closeness. Adina clenched the walls of her sheath around his cock harder and tighter.

He grunted with the intense pleasure pain. Then, again she unclenched and he drove ferociously to her. Over and over his male hardness collided with her feminine softness until his skin dripped heavy with sweat. His cock was soaked in her wet thick cream. He shook and quivered uncontrollably. He felt his release scream to be free. He could hold back no longer. On next impact with her womb, he'd launch all his love into her.

She knew he was close to releasing because she was close to hers. She would soon take Brandon on the last

part of this wonderful journey. On the next unclenching, the Python would be released.

Brandon moved his head over hers and looked into her eyes. He didn't see her. He didn't see Adina but someone else. Her eyes had changed. They were deeper, darker.

He was so gone in his own passion; he began to thrust into her with all his might. He didn't care about his own pain or if his brutal thrusts were hurting her. He only wanted to be wherever she was.

Again, he felt her muscles unclench from around his shaft. He drilled into her with such intensity, that for an instant, he thought he had pierced her womb.

This time Brandon knew there was something different about her unclenching. Adina's walls began to pulsate faster and faster. She became extremely wet as though getting ready for something to happen.

His body began to convulse with the savage assault of his forthcoming climax. His breathing, heavy forced. He fought to inhale every life-giving piece of oxygen. His eyes began to strain as he inhaled one, final breath and tried to exhale. Suddenly, he felt Adina embrace him tightly with her arms and legs.

A hauntingly, intense climax surge up from his sack of life, spiraling up his shaft then enter the head of his penis. He stiffened, breathing in order to exhale out but something wasn't right!

He felt his staggering release right at his tip. He shook wildly with the satisfying sensation of being so close to erupting into Adina with his fiery seed. He was dizzy, his arms shivered with need to climax but something was happening.

He tried desperately to exhale his breath and climax. He was in an eternal state of sporadic spasms. He looked at Adina and knew she was doing this to him. He wanted to cry out, but he had trouble just exhaling his breath. Right there. Right at the edge of climatic ecstasy and he couldn't release. He knew he couldn't ejaculate.

He felt his raging seed roar up into his shaft to battle Adina's hold to get out. His lungs thundered trying to exhale his burning breath. The head of his shaft fought to explode into Adina's warm body. He could do neither and sank into a dark void of semi-consciousness.

Adina *was* doing something to Brandon.

She was loving him with the ultimate gift of adoration and pleasure. She had clamped the walls of her pussy around his head and shaft with such force and brutal strength she had literally stopped the release of his orgasm...but, had not suppressed it. It was still there, waiting to come to a full bloom in her body.

She watched and waited. Watched as his lungs fought valiantly to supply his body with air. She watched as his arms strained to keep him from collapsing. But what she really waited to see was the blacks of Brandon's eyes glass over with his pain and unexpected surprise. As his voice abandoned him, Adina knew he was ready.

He buried his head into Adina's shoulder as he slipped from a conscious reality to a shadowy dimension of pleasure, pain and ecstasy. He had never known anything like this before. He was experiencing something that was unbelievable. He was shaking and rigid all at the same time. Weak and potent. He couldn't breathe, couldn't come and couldn't move. He was in shock and



also aroused beyond reason.

His heart raced trying to adjust to Adina's powerful hold. Feeling so startled by what was happening to him only shivering sighs seeped from his lips. His body was at her mercy.

He dropped his lids and relinquished his control to Adina. Muscular arms fought desperately to keep locked above her, but he couldn't hold on and collapsed. Losing his last grip on reality.

He came back to consciousness slowly and felt himself being moved. He was paralyzed. He couldn't move but knew he was being moved. Adina rolled over and leaned her torso away from his chest until she sat in an upright position.

He couldn't believe this little woman had moved his massive body. But she had and what was more amazing, she'd moved him without ever releasing her ironclad grip on his cock. He was club hard inside her and surging with his unleashed seed. It still staggered through every inch of his throbbing genitals.

Brandon looked at Adina and saw the beast in her eyes. It was going to devour his body, his essence, his soul and what was even more frightening, he wanted it to.

His eyes filled with tears as he felt an aching penis flinch to release his seed from his body. Unfortunately, Adina's hold was all consuming. He was going through the motions of release but she held it at bay. The stirring was almost too much.

"Adina!" his mind screamed as she started to do something totally unexpected. . . move.

He felt her smooth cool hands reach around to play with engorged sensitive testes. Gently massaging them,

caressing them, coaxing them. He could feel what she was doing but not able to stop what she was doing. He couldn't beg or detour her in any way.

Brandon knew what was happening was practically impossible since he had yet to ejaculate his first climax. But yes, it was happening. His aching balls were responding to her manipulation. They were filling with his seed again. It was growing heavy with his love for her! Adina was holding his release at bay and building him to climax again.

This couldn't be happening he thought, but he could feel it happening. He could feel his deliverance raging through his loins. Feel his manly pouch growing fat with his seed. Brandon was in an eclectic paradise. He only wanted to experience. Didn't want to think anymore. He even stopped trying to breathe. He yearned for the ultimate sensation in divine pleasure.

Adina wanted to love him with every ounce of passion she had inside herself. She felt his body heat rise inside the moist lair of her feminine core and she knew his sack had filled with his thick cream again. She proceeded with the next phase of her seduction.

She looked into his face and noticed he glowed with raw need to release. Her head hovered above his then she kissed Brandon lightly. He opened, silently pleading for air to breathe. She breathed into his hot mouth and started to slowly glide her vice grip wet walls up and down the full length of his long shaft.

Brandon groaned from the unexpected awareness and shivered from the wicked sensation it created in him. Adina came all the way up, leaving only the tip of his

shaft trapped inside her vault of ecstasy.

Each time she rose, he experienced an electrical feeling of almost releasing. He soared in clouds of hypnotic sinful pleasures. Quivering and shaking so much, he knew he was losing his mind.

He wanted to scream. But that would take too much effort and he just didn't have it. He barely held to sanity as it was. He couldn't fathom the unexpected, thrilling sensations from her walls.

As she came off his shaft but kept his head locked securely in her sheath, the cool air embraced his stiffness, sending all his senses into oblivion. And when she came down again, her hot iron grip encased his flesh forcing him to experience a little death each time. Something was happening. Adina began to purr and growl deep in her throat. Brandon knew it would affect him. He pried his eyes open to watch Adina become... uninhibited.

She was taking him along for the ride and he desperately wanted to go. Suddenly, he felt urgency in every glide of Adina's plunges down his rigid shaft.

She thrust hard, fast. She was out of control and plummeting into a black hole of hungry needs. She experienced higher and higher levels of gratifying stimulation with every hard wicked thrust down Brandon's throbbing hard flesh.

Her release approached infinity. She had to soar until it consumed and captured her very soul. No turning back, she could only follow wherever it took her.

Adina went numb. Savage primal fire mushroomed through her body.

She lost her own breathing when she thrust down using every ounce of her strength then released her

menacing hold over Brandon's head and shaft.

She cried a primitive scream as her climax boomerang through her body. It left her quaking with waves of unbelievable ecstasy and euphoric satisfaction. Her release felt so wonderful, it took her into an elevated eclipse of primal passion and desire. Her overly sensitive body surrendered to the beast within. And it bestowed climax after climax after climax upon her.

Brandon's body went limp then became tense and stiff. His neck arched his head into his pillow. Struggling breaths caught in his throat. Finally, he heard himself roar a blood curdling howl.

He was at last coming...it was going to tear his soul out. It catapulted from the head of his nature like a rocket. Departing his body with such force, he quivered under her uncontrollably.

He bucked and jerked with total elation. For a brief moment, he thought maybe he was dying because his release was so strong. But as his body tried to adjust to the crippling release a tingling pulsating throb overcame his penis...sweet merciful heavens...it was happening again.

He panted and bucked wildly. Electricity, numbness, fire surged up his erection. The stirring ravaged his senses and already shivering frame. He was so unprepared and so bewildered, his words escaped on a quivering gasp, "Oh God, Adina!"

He stiffened as he became ultra sensitive to every breeze in the room, every shiver in Adina's body above him and all the blood circulating in his body.

His massive frame shook and jerked violently! He was drenched in his and Adina's sweat and felt each and every

drop trickle down his highly sensitive skin.

His nostrils flared smelling his and Adina's body scents. It was so arousing he panted and whimpered with delicious delight.

Suddenly that first tiny spark of eruption reached the head of his shaft and found his sanity. His entire body went numb when his blood burned his insides to a scalding mass of flesh. His deep spiraling release roared through his body. He was so far gone he heard his heart pound in his ears. Then the release evolved into a full, soul wrenching explosion and snatched his breath away.

Brandon's seed shot from the head of his shaft like a fiery speeding bullet through an automatic rifle. His back raised from the bed and for the first time he felt his hands move. They reached involuntarily for Adina's hips and squeezed ferociously. She cried out but he was in such an euphoric state he wasn't sure the outcry was from the pressure he applied or her own release.

His debilitating climax whirled boiling lava fire, sun scorched flames and scalding thunder through every nerve in his body. The feeling was so cataclysmic, so severe, Brandon sank sharp teeth into his bottom lip, not stopping even when the lip turned raw and blood trickled from it.

He felt his tantalizing deliverance from the ends of his hair to the tips of his toe nails. It was the most powerful, crippling, orgasm he'd ever experienced in his entire life.

He was panting, growling, moaning and gasping uncontrollably. He slipped off the edge of saneness and landed into a dimension of absolute ecstasy. So far off the deep end he heard someone whimper and realized...it was himself. He sounded hysterical.

His multi-releases filled Adina's sensuous sheath with

so much of his thick fluid he wondered if there could be any left in his own body.

Adina collapsed over his body in total exhaustion. He heard her sighing dreamily as her breathing returned to normal.

His body still reacted to her every move. He was still very hard inside her. The head of his swollen penis was sensitive to every little motion she made.

He began to ascend from that dark world of erotic shadows and with difficulty, emerge back into reality. It happened slowly. He was in shock. He lay quiet trying to conjure together what had just happened.

He had no control over himself at all. His muscles flinched and jerked while he fought to pull every breath into his body.

Adina had conquered him, he thought distressingly. She fed their hunger with sensations he had never known before. In between gasps for air and sighs of soothing relief, he thought how she could hold with such force and intensity. That in itself was extremely rare but there was more. She had the capability of unleashing pleasure in a man so all consuming she literally kept him in a perpetual state of suspended climatic release.

Suddenly, Brandon had a revelation. The foggy haze lifted from his eyes. His breathing slowly returned to normal and as it did, he pondered his thoughts more clearly.

Gradually a few questions found answers in his head. If Adina had given Victor Millard this wondrous and unbelievable feeling letting her go would be impossible. If Charlotte had given George this hypnotic feeling of sublime arousal, it made sense that she'd ruined him for every other woman that came after her and why he would

never leave her again.

Brandon was completely exhausted and thoroughly drained. He felt as if he had just done fifteen rounds with the heavy weight champion of the world and lost.

His mind grappled with fatigue and weariness as he pushed to analyze all that had happened to him. He was so weak but he couldn't get any rest so long as these questions hounded him.

Brandon thought how his body was captured by Adina's. She stripped his will and restraint. She had enslaved his penis then shackled it with her powerful hold and devastating pull.

His heavy lids closed over dazed eyes as his mind raced over what she actually made his body do. His eyes opened leisurely after putting it all together. He knew the secret to the Lair of the Python.

The Python was a sexual holding technique, but the gift of this unusual and special technique was it allowed a man the rare and extraordinary opportunity to have and experience simultaneous multiple orgasms.

Now it made perfect sense why Jazzy said he would never tell and carry he secret to his grave. And like Jazzy, Brandon knew he too must never tell or take this very special gift for granted.

A weary smile casually etched through his chiseled features. Brandon thought about the beautiful, alluring woman sprawled over him.

For men, Brandon thought, suspended states of numerous orgasms were physically impossible. Ah, but he had just experienced it and was still alive. What happened to him was absolutely unheard of in the modern world. Because Adina didn't use any devices or outside stimulating aids to hold his climax at bay. All she used

was her own sensuous body ...*wwwow!*

Though tired and weak, he fought his body to stay conscious. Straining to dissect this magnificent phenomenon. He was losing for his body cried for rest. He tried to move and started to panic. He discovered he couldn't move. He felt every tiny sensation coming in contact with his body, but he couldn't move so much as a finger.

Adina slid from Brandon and studied him silently. She saw his penis was still flinching from being buried within her tight lair. She knew his testes had to be unimaginably sore from her manipulation to fill them quickly with his seed.

Then she looked into his eyes and saw what he was discovering. The love making was over and still he had no control over his limbs. She knew this was a side effect of her technique and began to stroke his body with her warm hands. Slowly, she reactivated his strained nerve endings and relaxed his muscles and tendons again.

She watched as a fluttering sensation moved through him. She focused on his lips as he tried to speak. "Adina, I—"

"Shhh, let sleep have you now," she whispered.

As his heavy lids lowered over his reddened eyes Adina lay next to him and fell into a sound, restful slumber.



## CHAPTER 22

Brandon was positively drained and his body gave every indication of that fact. Even though he had retired early the night before, he didn't try to open his eyes until almost four.

When his lids lifted, he noticed his room had been kept dark and the lights were still dim. He looked for Adina and saw her sitting quietly in his favorite easy chair writing out some notes.

She was dressed in one of his robes with her dark hair combed back and gently resting on her shoulders. She was wearing her reading glasses and appeared to be in deep thought.

He tried to move and gasped. His whole body ached. He had a look of embarrassment on his face and he had no idea why. He pulled himself together and sat up to speak but his voice came out hoarse and incomplete.

"Adi-na, wha' time is it?"

The sound brought Adina's head up immediately. She put her work down and joined him on the bed. She knew his reaction was normal. He felt off balanced and bewildered. She reached for a pitcher and glass and poured him some iced cold water and gave it to him.

“It’s just a little after four o’clock. Drink the water before you ask any more questions. The Lair Of The Python has a tendency to leave one dehydrated. I’ve been up for a little while, but I’ve not eaten. Are you hungry?”

She knew he was extremely thirsty when he gulped down three more glasses of water. She noticed that he drank each glass like man who had been lost in the desert for a week. When he handed her the glass and refused any more, she gently smiled as he said slowly, “I can’t believe I’ve slept this long. What do you want to eat?”

Adina set the glass and pitcher back on the night stand. “I’m famished. I want everything all at once. Mrs. Peters said she’d be happy to prepare anything we wanted, but first, I think maybe we should get you out of this bed and moving again. I know you have to be stiff and sore. If you can get out of bed, I’ll run a hot bath for you.”

Brandon blushed profusely. “I think you may be right. I’m hungry but I’m hurting like crazy. I tell you what, go and put our meal order in to Mrs. Peters. I’ll run my own bath and you can join me.”

Adina headed downstairs and instructed Lucy that they would be dining in his master bedroom and didn’t wish to be disturbed unless for an emergency.

She informed Harry that Brandon would probably sleep on and off for the rest of the day and she’d be leaving later that evening. Harry told her he’d make sure all her luggage was ready to go and loaded in the car for the trip to the airport.

Adina padded quietly back upstairs and discovered Brandon slowly making his way to the bathroom. She watched him quietly while he concentrated on walking without wincing in pain. He made it finally. She disrobed

to join him, when she heard him growl in agony.

She shot into the bathroom and found him leaning over the sink viewing his massive, muscled body in the mirror. She followed his eyes to see what he was staring at. She came upon the same thing he saw, his penis and testes were completely swollen and covered with deep purple bruises.

He hurt all over and it wasn't just his manly private parts. Every inch of his body ached. He turned to see her staring at his groin and said barely above a whisper, "Adina...what did you do to me?"

"Brandon, please sit down. Let me run your bath. I'll answer all your questions once I get you in the tub."

He let her help him into the hot soapy water and waited for her to join him. He groaned deeply as she washed his body and massaged his knotted tight muscles.

When he felt thoroughly relaxed, she said casually, "Brandon, you may be tired and drained for the rest of the day. I promise, you won't have any permanent damage from the Lair of the Python.

"The first time for a man is a bit unsettling. But once you become accustomed to the technique, your body will accept it and anticipate it and your genitals won't react this way."

"Adina, I have never experienced anything like what I did last night. It was wonderful, magical and I want to thank you. I will treasure it and you always.

But I do have to admit my curiosity is getting the best of me. I just want to be sure what happened to me is what I think happened. Did I, or did I not, experience a multiple orgasm?"

She nodded. "I'm surprised you figured it out. Most

men know total and authentic multiple orgasms in a man are nearly impossible and conclude the most pleasure they will ever know is to have one, real, long, deep orgasm.

“But yes, the secret of the Lair of the Python is the capability to hold a man’s first climax right at the point of ejaculation from the head of his penis while simultaneously building another climax in his testes; so when the first climax releases from his shaft, his second and even sometimes his third, fourth and more follow immediately behind without the head and shaft of his penis going limp.”

He felt her light kisses cover his chest as she explained, “It takes intense concentration in order for a woman to even try it on a man. If she’s not careful and totally in tuned with the man’s body as well as her own, she could quite easily kill her lover when he stops breathing in order to ejaculate his sperm.” He could feel her eyes watching him. From her expression it was obvious to her that he was in deep thought. And with good reason. He felt shock ripple across his face as it occurred to him that he always ejaculated on an exhale. And also why he was having so much trouble breathing last night. It was like a revelation when he realized, in the most graphic terms, that if one can’t breathe, one can’t come. And if one can’t come, one can’t breathe. He thought wildly that it’s as if his lungs disconnected from the head on his shoulders and connected to head between his legs. He suddenly shuddered.

He felt Adina caress his face and draw his attention back to her as she finished, “The reason it’s called Python is because that particular snake doesn’t kill its victims before it devours them. The Python embraces its victim so strongly, that the prey passes out from internal

damage.

“But the main reason is the prey’s lungs have been compressed so severely it passes out from lack of oxygen. The Python squeezes its victim so tightly it can’t inhale or exhale air to breathe. By the time the prey comes around, if it comes around, it’s too late. It’s being consumed by the Python.”

Brandon swallowed hard and looked at his penis. He knew exactly what she referred to. Last night he thought he had died and his body just didn’t know it.

He motioned for Adina to come and lay upon him. He gently encased her in his arms and asked tenderly, knowing it would dredge up painful memories. “My love, is this the gift you gave Victor Millard?”

Adina tensed slightly at the mere mention of his name. “Yes, but he became so obsessed with having it all the time that when he couldn’t have it anymore, he tried to kill me.” Adina put her arms around Brandon’s neck and buried her head in his chest and inhaled his masculine, clean body scent then continued,

“I still wonder sometimes how he even found out about the gift. It’s so rare that the men who are lucky enough to be granted the experience don’t tell because they immediately realize they’d put the woman in great jeopardy.

“I mean, if more men knew multiple orgasms were a possible reality and had access to the women who could bestow that kind of pleasure, they’d go a little crazy always wondering if the woman in their arms was capable of such ecstasy.”

Adina sighed as she thought of her own mother and the stories she had told her and Cookie of how she too

had suffered because of their talent. Adina remembered her mother telling of how their father had rescued her from a tyrant who had literally kept her as a sex slave.

"Also, the women would live in constant fear of being discovered then possibly used and abused for their special talent. Luckily, the idea of a man experiencing a multiple orgasm is so farfetched most men simply don't believe it when they hear it." She paused, unable to continue. Honey, if you don't mind, can we change the subject? I don't like to think about Victor. Even though I know he's dead, he still scares the life out of me."

Adina felt his arms tighten around her. He dropped a soft kiss to her head. "I promise to never mention him again."

Grateful for his simple pledge, she granted him a deep kiss and rose from the tub. When her moves were suddenly arrested she turned and looked down at Brandon. "You need to soak in the hot water."

"Don't leave, Adina. Please, stay with me," he said with a husky voice.

"Sweetheart, I'll be right back. "

She stepped out of the tub and slipped on her robe and heard him mumble low under his breath. Something about not being able see her naked figure anymore. After a few moments, she returned with his robe. He stood slowly and they retreated to his bed and ate everything Mrs. Peters sent up.

They remained in bed talking about her next assignment and how she would be in Vancouver, Canada for the next six weeks.

"That's a long time," he said.

She slid out of bed and put their breakfast tray near the door. "Yes and I'll miss you every second I'm away

from you.” She turned around and found him standing right behind her. She wrapped her arms around his neck and added, “Oh don’t look so sad.” She brushed her lips across his. “At least you won’t be walking around with a hard on the size of a sledge hammer this time.”

He laughed out loud. “Good point.” He kissed her head and said, “Come on. I’ll help you pack. But the red negligee stays here with me.”

He escorted her down to the limousine and kissed Adina lovingly then watched her being driven to the airport. His heart soared with joy and he knew at that exact moment he was without a doubt the happiest man alive.

Brandon wasn’t the only one who watched Adina leave. Edward was there. He really didn’t appreciate Brandon touching his woman, let alone getting so intimate and familiar. He knew he had to hurry up and put his final plans into motion so he could get Adina away from this man who sought to keep him from his ultimate reward.

Adina stayed in contact with Brandon and Cookie while she was in Vancouver. Her assignment was going well and she wanted to make sure Cookie was holding up for her fashion show in October.

She was nervous for Cookie because this was very big for her sister and she knew Cookie was probably going mad. But surprisingly, Jazzy was keeping her head cool. The creations were going well and the timeframe wasn’t as much of a hindrance as Cookie had originally predicted.

When Adina spoke with Brandon, her heart soared higher and higher as she heard how much he loved and missed her. She had only been gone two weeks, but already couldn't wait to see him again. When this assignment ended, she'd be off for ten straight days. She would be back in time to celebrate his birthday.

Brandon was down to the last three shops on his list. He knew he had to be close to Edward. Everything in him said he was very close to finding that sick, demented animal.

He pondered over the many ways he'd cause Edward Fenton excruciating pain. He thought how he'd like to inflict the kind pain and suffering to Edward that Edward had inflicted upon Adina.

He felt rage moved through him whenever he thought Edward touching and hurting her. He couldn't wait to get his hands on Mr. Fenton.

Edward wanted Adina back more than anything. He had to have her. He couldn't contemplate life without her. From the few times he'd seen Brandon and Adina together, he knew Brandon had fallen in love with her.

He loathed Brandon Montgomery. If it hadn't been for him, he'd be with his lovely Adina. Hatred surged through him as he thought of how Brandon must be touching, tasting and experiencing all the delicacies of her sensuous and alluring body.

Brandon had no right to her. To Edward, Adina was his and his alone. He had been the first to show her love, passion and erotic desire. She had given him the gift first and no other man had a right to it.

He was determined to strip that condescending smirk



from Brandon's face. The fastest and most effective way to do it...take Adina away from him.

Edward had been waiting for the imported French lace to arrive. It was time to put the final part of his diabolical plan into motion. He made a phone call and a deep voice said, "I've put everything into motion. Now you're sure you want to do this? I want my money before I go ahead with this."

"Yes, I understand you want your money. It will be waiting in the parking garage where you are to leave the car. Now, remember, I don't want you to kill her or cause her any permanent damage.

"I just want her banged up only but enough to keep her in the hospital for observation. I have to get going. I want you on this right away. I've waited long enough to taste my victory. You'll not hear from me again. When I've successfully secured what I want, I'll send word as to where you can pick up the other half of your payment."

Cookie rose early and found that Jazzy was up and out. He had made her a light breakfast and left it on the stove. She dressed quickly, gobbled down her meal and immediately started working in her shop.

Half the day had gone by when she noticed her fabric order from the manufacturer's hadn't arrived. She needed that material to finish this series of designs. She gave the manufacturer a call. They told her the order was ready but their truck was down and if it was an emergency she could come and get it. Cookie was consumed with finishing this block of fashions by the end of the week. She advised them she was on her way then flew out of the shop like a shot.

She never made it to her destination.

Cookie was in such a rush, she didn't notice a pickup truck was trailing her. She was speeding, then suddenly, there were two cars in front of her preventing her from switching lanes so she could move ahead of them.

She was swearing like a drunken sailor as she fought to get pass them. The cars stopped and the pickup truck stopped right on her rear bumper. She was trapped on three sides and couldn't get out of her lane.

The drivers got out of their cars and ran full gallop down the street. Cookie was just about to exit when another car came from out of nowhere and broadsided her on the driver's side of her car.

The impact crushed the door and knocked her clean over to the passenger side of the car. Her shoulder hit the door with such force she released a bloodcurdling scream from the stabbing, blunt pain and passed out.

When she came to, the car had been ransacked and her purse was gone. A stranger passing by came over to the car and saw she was still alive and immediately called an ambulance. The paramedics arrived and rushed her to the hospital.

George was up early to follow a few leads to find his cousin Edward. He wanted to tackle them before he went into a board meeting at the hospital.

The meeting moved along tediously and everyone decided to take a break. He took a walk around the hospital and was about to return to his meeting, when he saw Cookie being rushed into an emergency room.

His heart constricted with terror. He ran into the examining room, his eyes filled with tears as he gazed down at her face. Her nose and lip were bleeding and she was unconscious. Her beautiful, jet black hair was wild

and concealing her face. She looked so vulnerable, fragile.

He turned to the doctor. "What happened? Is she all right? I have to know!"

"Please, you'll have to wait until we finish examining her."

Jazzy's pulse raced thinking of every horrible thing imaginable. He literally walked a hole in the rug underneath him. The doctor came out and he sealed the space between them in an instant.

His voice surged shaky and scared. "How is she? Can I see her?"

"Mr.?" The doctor questioned.

"Deveroux, George Deveroux."

"Mr. Deveroux, Ms. Powers will be fine. She took a bad bump on the shoulder when her car was broadsided."

"She was in a car accident?" George asked anxiously.

"Not exactly. Sir, are you related to her? Maybe her husband?"

"Yes." George knew to lie to the attending physician. Only immediate family was allowed to visit a patient when brought into emergency. He continued with a shaky voice, "Why do you ask?"

"She keeps asking for someone named Jazzy," the doctor replied.

George's heart leaped with joy and anxiety. She wanted him.

"It's her nickname for me. Please, may I see her now?"

"Yes, just a few moments. I still need to check her blood work."

He took a ragged breath. "Thank you, Doctor."

He walked in with his heart in his throat. Cookie was gently propped up in the bed. Awake, but he could tell,

still groggy. Her eyes filled with tears at the sight of him, knowing he would be worried. Her hand reached out and he took it.

“Charlotte, what happened? The doctor said a car broadsided you but you weren’t in an accident.”

“Please sit down. I look worse than I sound, but I’m fine.”

George became deeply emotional. Hearing her gentle, silky voice was more than he could bear. His head buried in her warm breasts and he let his tears flow freely.

Cookie cradled his face with her good arm until he collected himself. She went on to tell him what happened. Both thought it most strange for a thief to go to all that trouble just to carjack her. George thought it was very bizarre indeed. He was just about to excuse himself when the doctor returned.

“Ms. Powers, your body has had a severe jolt. Your shoulder is dislocated and will need to be pulled back into the socket then it will be packed in ice to control the swelling. I’m going to keep you overnight for observation to make sure there aren’t any unforeseen complications due to your condition. I can’t give you anything for your pain.”

George’s heart started to race again. “Doctor, why can’t you give her anything? You can’t let her suffer all night. I won’t stand for it!”

The doctor smiled at him and concluded he didn’t know. The doctor turned to Cookie and her expression explained she would fill in the blanks. The doctor told Cookie he’d have her own doctor check in on her later. George was furious and about to unleash his temper when Cookie squeezed his hand and placed it over her abdomen.

“Jazzy, please, I can endure the discomfort for one night.”

He turned back and peered deep blue eyes into her raven black ones and said with renewed irritability, “Honey, I don’t understand. Why should you? I can’t stand to see you suffering unnecessarily.”

She moved a hand to his face to calm his nerves and answered, “I will endure it because I don’t want to hurt my...*our* baby.”

George’s powerful blue eyes grew big then he realized where she’d rested his hand. He looked into her obsidian deep eyes and kissed her gently on the lips. “Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked, barely above a whisper.

“I was going to when you came by the shop to help me.” She smiled softly.

“Charlotte Louise Powers, I love you so much! When are we due and how long have you known?”

“Well, if I carry to full term, I should deliver sometime in late March and I’ve known for about a month now.”

“A month,” George barked. “Why did you wait so long to tell me? We’ve been making love almost every night. I could’ve hurt the baby. I can’t bel... wait a minute, what do you mean by carry to full term?”

Cookie began to giggle as his face changed from shock to bewilderment. “I was going to tell you straight away, but when I started to swell up so fast, I just knew you would notice and comment on it.

“When you didn’t, I just thought it was in my head that I was rounding so quickly. Then, it dawned on me that maybe it wasn’t so strange after all. I went to my doctor and had an ultrasound.” She placed her hand over his and blushed. “George, we’re having two babies. I’m

carrying twins.”

He rubbed his hand over her swelling belly and finally noticed she was rounding out a lot more. He had been so consumed with finding Edward, he hadn't observed Charlotte's body changing with his child...Oh God, his children!...Twins!

He had to hurry up and find Edward. He couldn't afford any more distractions. He was going to be a father. He was so happy that he started to grin from ear to ear then he removed his hand and replaced it with his head. He kissed her belly all over. She giggled until she lost her breath. He saw her agitation and stopped.

Then he said to her belly like it was a person. “Listen to me, your mama has just made me the happiest man alive. I will treasure her and the both of you for the rest of my life.” George brought his head up and kissed Cookie until she was dizzy. “I want you moved to a private room. I will take care of everything. I want a big bed installed I plan on spending the night and...”

“Hold it, Jazzy,” she cut in between breaths as he kissed all over. “I will only be here for one night. Besides, I need to get home and finish my work. It's going to be hard enough to stay on schedule since I've lost a whole day of work but it will really be hard with only one arm to work with.”

He was in no mood to argue. He would have his way in this.

“Listen to me, woman, not only are you going to stay put for as long as the doctor says, but you will not be lifting one finger to work on any more designs. If the doctors both agree you can be released tomorrow, then I'll take you home and have a full staff waiting for you to order around. You won't be overtaxing yourself anymore.

Have I made myself clear?"

She didn't like being treated like an invalid and he knew it, but he would not waver on this. He drilled determined eyes into hers and watched as her bottom lip poked out and she pouted, "Ooh, alright. I get your point."

He kissed her lightly on the forehead, stood and quit the room. He made arrangements for her to be moved to a private room. George knew instantly by the doctor's nervous reaction that he had discovered who George 'Jazzy' Deveroux was.

"Mr. Deveroux, I hope you understand I meant no disrespect. I was informed a moment ago how important you and your family are to this hospital. I know you oversee the very generous endowment that your family grants to this hospital every year." He pulled George over to a private area and continued cautiously, "I've only been at the hospital for a few weeks. I'm still learning who's who." When George still presented a blank and agitated expression, the doctor swallowed and said, "Let me personally assure you that Ms. Powers will be fine. I will need to contact her legal next of kin."

George slowly relaxed when the emergency doctor introduced another colleague to him. "Mr. Deveroux, this is Dr. Soren. She's Ms. Powers' obstetrician."

He nodded. "How are my babies? Were they harmed in any way?" he asked.

"I just finished examining her and I agree with Dr. Redmond, she will be fine. The fetuses' heartbeats are strong and gave no indication of trauma or stress. But I must make something very clear. Charlotte must take it easy and get plenty of rest if she is to carry to term. Multiple fetuses are considered high risk because of the

toll they take on the mother's body.”

A shiver of relief raced down his spine. He shook the hands of both doctors and said, “Thank you for putting me at ease. I truly appreciate it. I won’t forget the kindness you have shown me and the care you have provided to Charlotte.”

He left them to their duties and got Charlotte settled into a private room. He held her hand until she fell asleep then quickly contacted Brandon. Everything in him told him that this freak accident-carjacking had more to do with Adina and his cousin, Edward than what met the eye.



## CHAPTER 23

Adina was in Vancouver working hard interpreting on her latest assignment. She was focused and determined. Her client spoke several languages as well but sometimes required an interpreter for languages he didn't speak.

He was a financier from Greece and was in heavy negotiations with two representatives from the now independent states of Russia. He needed an interpreter because his mastery of Slavic languages was pathetic.

The meetings were going well when his personal assistant rushed in with a message for Adina. The message read, her sister, Charlotte had been in a car accident and had been taken to the hospital. She excused herself and confirmed the authenticity of the message.

The hospital wouldn't tell Adina if Cookie was all right or if she was still in the hospital. They kept saying something about hospital policy and security of their patients. Adina tried to call Jazzy, hoping he could inform her of Cookie's condition but there was no answer at his office.

She thought maybe Brandon could help and called his home. Harry explained Brandon had taken the day off from work to work on some important project and would

be out all day. Adina started to get a little frightened. She couldn't find anyone who could tell her about her sister's condition. She thought long and hard and concluded that she would fly home immediately.

She rushed to her client and explained her family emergency. She promised that as soon as she found out the condition of her sister, she'd return straight away. Her client was not a slave driver and understood completely. To soothe her worries, he offered her the use of his private jet.

At first, she refused, but he insisted because it would get her to Montreal all that much faster. She was so concerned for Charlotte, she didn't refuse again and graciously accepted his assistance. He escorted her to the plane and advised her there would be another passenger going to Montreal. He had asked to borrow the plane to go to Montreal on business. Adina didn't care just so long as she got back to Cookie.

She immediately got on the plane and prepared for take off. She peered through the window and waved goodbye to her client. She closed her eyes and gave up a silent prayer that when she got to Montreal Cookie would be all right.

She was in such deep concentration she hadn't realized the plane had been in flight for over twenty minutes before she opened her eyes again. She stood up, stretched her frame then removed her shoes and tried to stay calm and relaxed.

She looked around and didn't see the other passenger who was suppose to be on the flight. She shrugged her shoulders and thought maybe this person was in the bathroom. Her stomach grumbled and she walked to the wet bar for the fruit tray.

She noticed wearily that the tray was filled with all her favorite fruits. There were sliced pears, pineapple chunks, big black grapes, tangerine slices and honeydew melon. She fixed herself a small plate of everything and returned to her seat. She sat quietly, eating her fruit, when out of nowhere the other passenger was upon her.

Adina looked and gasped. It was Edward Fenton. She stood so fast her plate of food fell to the floor. She was shaking with fear.

He was scaring her and he knew it. "Adina, it's good to see you again. You're looking well." Edward smiled.

Adina swallowed hard. "Edward, you're the other passenger?"

"No, Little Raven. I'm the pilot. The other passenger won't be joining us because there is no other passenger. It's just you and me."

Adina moved away from him. He let her; there was no place for her to go. Just like his paintings she'd viewed in Quebec, she was trapped.

"Edward, what's the meaning of this? Mr. Hikos informed me that there would be another passenger aboard this plane." Her voice was sharp and deadly. Scared.

"Please, Adina, calm down. My friend Aaron didn't lie to you. He really did think there'd be someone else on this plane. At least, that's what I lead his assistant to believe and that's what he told Aaron.

"I knew once you found out about Charlotte, you'd want to go home to be with her. So, I asked Aaron if I could fly the plane back to Montreal because I had some urgent business waiting for me there.

"I told him I'd have his pilot bring his plane to him as soon as I got back to Montreal. So you see, my precious

Little Raven, Aaron didn't lie to you. He just didn't know the truth."

Edward moved closer to Adina. She froze with fear, her body quaked violently. She was stuck on this plane and there was nothing she could do to get away from him. Her mind raced over what he said.

"Edward, how'd you know I was coming home to see about my sister, Cookie?"

Edward flashed a menacing smile as if complimenting himself on a well laid out plan gone perfectly. "Because I know what happened."

Adina's eyes enlarged watching his face take on an air of confidence. "What happened to my sister? Is she all right? Please, tell me. I have to know?"

Edward walked over to the wet bar and fixed himself a drink and continued, "Well, let's just say she won't be doing any more fast driving for a while. She'll be laid up in the hospital for a few days but she will be all right. I made sure of that."

"Thank God, she's okay. I was so worried. Was she in an accident?"

"No, not exactly, but I made it look that way." His demented smile grew.

"What do you mean...what did you do to Charlotte?" Adina could hear her voice rise with her fear and anger. "What did my sister ever do to you?"

Edward came from the bar and closed the distance between them in an instant. "She's never done anything to me. Why do you think I didn't have her seriously injured?" He threw back his drink, sighed then added, "Besides, it was the only way to get you to come off assignment so I could be alone with you again. Adina, you really work too hard. When we get home, you have to cut

back, maybe even quit.”

Adina’s anger surged as she hissed, “I’m not going any damn where with you! How dare you hurt my sister, play with her life and my livelihood just to suit your sick and demented fantasies. Who the hell do you think you are? You arrogant, pompous son-of-a-bitch! I demand you land this plane and let me off right this second!”

Edward’s eyes changed from confidence and amusement to deep, sea green coals of death. Adina gasped and moved away from him.

“Listen to me, Adina, I know you’re angry but I will advise you not to raise your voice to me again. I didn’t like it in Paris and I don’t like it now. I’m sure you wouldn’t want me to punish you for being disobedient.”

Edward’s condescending words ignited more rage in Adina and she was determined to stand her ground. “What in sam hell are you talkin’ about? I’ve never been in Paris with you. I don’t even know you. I only met you last year in Quebec. So, if you don’t want me to raise my voice, then you had better land this plane now! I’m through playing this game with you, Edward.”

He moved with intense speed and grabbed Adina by her arms. She winced with pain as her eyes ballooned with surprise, shock. Edward bared sharp, white teeth and brought his head down to hers.

It was only a hair’s breath away when he said with smoldering anger, “I told you not to raise your voice to me again. I see I’ll have to prove to you we did know each other once. I had hoped to have the confines of a romantic setting, but it seems I shall have to reprimand you and take my pleasure of you here and now.”

All of Adina’s instincts told her to fight and she listened. She screamed, kicked, bit and scratched him.

There was no way she'd let him have her without one hell of a fight on his hands.

Edward was surprised and thrilled at Adina's tenacity. She had so much passion it was going to be great to receive his pleasure from her. He held her strongly in his arms and sealed his mouth over hers hotly.

He kissed with such fever and desire that Adina gasped for breath. Her body fought him as her mind raced to analyze why his kisses and style seemed so familiar.

Before she could catch herself, she bit into his bottom lip and drew blood. Edward squealed with pain. Instead of drawing back and releasing her, as she had hoped he'd do, he pulled his head away and peered down into her horrified eyes. "So, you do remember the way I liked to be kissed. I thought you would."

Before Adina could figure out what he said, he covered her mouth again then forced it open invading the moist softness with his tongue. His mouth filled with his blood and she could taste every drop of it.

Suddenly, she recognized what she thought he was doing. He was giving her his bloodlust. Adina knew of only one other man who had liked his kisses in that fashion...Victor Millard! She stiffened, horrified with the revelation that Edward was kissing her the way Victor would have. She had to fight a sinking ache of *deja'vu*.

*Victor is dead. Victor is dead.* Adina kept telling herself. She came back to reality when Edward's head pulled away.

"Take your hands off of me!" she shrieked. "Maybe I didn't make myself clear in Montreal. I don't want you, ever. Now, turn me loose!"

Edward laughed hard and sinisterly. "I will never let you go, my pet. Like I said once before, we will be together forever."

Adina started to shake hard. His words pierced an old scar and tore it open. She was reliving a pain and terror that had been buried deep inside of herself. "No! No!" Adina screamed.

She became hysterical and wild in her fight to be free of him. Becoming so relentless in her pursuit to be away from him, Edward abruptly let her go, causing her to lose her balance and fall backwards on the floor.

She scooted away from him screeching, "Stay away from me! Don't touch me again!" Her words were fired with pure hatred.

In her battle for freedom, her black hair came down and was wild all over her head. The pear green silk blouse she wore was out of her skirt and missing several buttons. She was breathing hard and her ripe, breasts rose and fell with her hard breathing.

Slowly she attempted to stand when abruptly she found herself thrown to the floor again. As she struggled frantically beneath him, she felt her blouse being ripped violently from her body. His expression of lust and hunger caused her to tremble with hatred. He was devouring her breasts with his eyes and she remembered how he always adored sucking them. When his serpent-like tongue slithered from his mouth she attacked him with renewed vigor.

She hit him all over his face. She scratched at his neck and chin with sharp fingernails. The smell of his cologne made her gag. One of her fingers jabbed him in the eye and he growled from the sudden discomfort. When he brought his head up again, his colored contact lens had

shifted and was coming off his pupil.

She looked past the falling lens and saw the real color of his eyes. Autumn brown, with faint specks of violet. She would know those eyes anywhere. Eyes of a madman...the eyes of Victor Millard! She was in such a state of shock, she couldn't scream.

Adina felt his hands reach under her skirt to find her vagina. Her mind jumped back to reality and she began to battle for her life.

Edward was enjoying the fire in Adina, but his long, starved hunger was getting the better of him. His dick throbbed with its need to be buried deep inside of her again.

"My, my, Little Raven, you have made this plane ride more delightful than I ever could have hoped. You have such a beautiful body. It has been my pleasure to warm it with this little game we've played. But I don't think you should forget who the victor is."

He watched her shiver with fear. Oh, how he had missed her. Missed her body, her mouth, her deep juicy pussy. She was so ripe and ready for him.

As he sized up his possession, his property, his woman he noticed how she tried to careen her staggering fear as she said, "Victor, please, don't hurt me. Just let me go. I won't tell anyone. Just leave me alone, let me go."

He leveled his face directly over hers and breathed his hot words over her mouth, "I'll never let you go, my dear. What is mine, I keep. And you belong to me now and for an eternity.

"I've waited a long time to have you all to myself and nothing is going to stop me from savoring the many pleasures you will give to me. I'm tired of talking. It's



time I rediscovered your sweet, tight pussy.”

He sank his tongue deep into her panting mouth and delighted in the surge of panic that coursed through her. Her arms and hands beat at his shoulders and back. Her knees tried in vain to stay closed against his insistent thigh. He laughed at her feeble attempt to push him away. He let her struggle continue a little longer then snatched her hands and pulled them high above her head. When he had secured them in one of his he crooned, “I’ve put up with your teasing but make no mistake I will have you. It can be enjoyable for both us or me only. The choice is yours. Either way, I will fuck you.”

Adina knew he wouldn’t hesitate to strike her or beat her to a pulp if she didn’t stop fighting him. She wept savagely feeling his hot mouth in the hollow of her neck as he tore her remaining clothes from her body. His fingers hooked into her lacy panties and ripped them away with such force she cried out.

She could feel him adjusting his pants and pulling out his penis. As he forced her thighs wider his hand closed over her breast. She looked into his eyes with pleading for him not to do this in her own. She turned her head as he groaned with perverse satisfaction as the head of his cock pushed inside her. His roar of triumph echoed in her ears as she felt his hips draw back and then suddenly he became unsteady and was thrown to the side of her.

In spite of being on autopilot, the plane was teetering up and down violently. It was as if a strong hand grabbed hold of the plane and shook it like a toy.

Mother Nature had stepped in where fate had detoured. The plane had descended too low and the

automatic pilot had shut off.

Adina rolled away from Edward and scurried to the farthest part of the plane. She was sobbing so hard, her body was convulsing. Edward jumped up and went into the cockpit. He stayed there until the plane landed.

When he returned, Adina had managed to cover herself in her trench coat. Victor had torn her underwear and blouse and skirt to shreds. She was still hovered in the corner shivering with shock at the knowledge Victor Millard was alive. He had kidnapped her and no one knew where she was. He walked over and she looked up at him and noticed he peered at her now with his own eyes.

“Stand up, Adina. We have to leave now!” His words barely held back his fury.

“Please, Victor, don’t do this. Let me go.”

Edward reached down and yanked her to her feet then dragged her off the plane. She knew she wasn’t at an airport.

He placed her in his car and tied her hands to the steering wheel so she couldn’t escape when he went back to the plane to remove all her personal affects.

She knew he must to have been in rush because when he returned, he wasn’t angrier and she concluded that he didn’t find the note she had left in the seat on the plane. She could only hope that whoever found it would believe it and send help. She was drained, wanting only to sleep. But she was going to force herself to stay awake even if it meant burning the cigarette lighter in the palm of her hand so the pain would keep alert.

When Brandon got home, Harry had two messages

waiting for him. One from George marked urgent and one from Adina. Brandon called George at the number he left and was informed that Cookie had been in a bizarre accident. He told him he couldn't go into it over the phone and to meet him in the parking lot of the hospital.

Brandon got there and George was waiting for him. "I came as fast as I could, is Cookie okay?"

"Yeah, she is now. The reason I didn't go into it over the phone is because I don't think this was an accident. My sick cousin was behind this. When I get my hands on him, I will kill him."

"Hey, calm down, Jazzy. How can you be sure?"

"Well, for one thing, she wasn't in an accident; she was carjacked. But they didn't take anything from the car until after she was broadsided and knocked unconscious. It seems their primary goal was to hurt her then make it appear like a robbery. I mean, they left their cars. The drivers pinned her in on three sides then got out and ran away before they robbed her."

"Well, if what you say is true, what's the purpose?" Brandon asked.

"I think Cookie was used as bait to snag Adina."

"What!" Brandon did nothing to cover his shock.

"Cookie was banged up so Adina would come off assignment to be with her. According to her medical and insurance information, Adina's the person the hospital must contact in case of an emergency."

"I got a call from Adina at home earlier today. My butler told her I was out all day. Do you think the hospital called her on assignment and she was trying to find out what happened?"

"I'm sure of it." George said.

“We are so close to catching that son-of-a-bitch.”

“I know. I have to devote all my energy to getting this sick bastard and to Cookie, of course. With her condition, I’ll have to keep my eye on her. If I don’t, she will work herself into a nervous wreck.”

“I thought you said Cookie was fine?” Brandon asked.

“Cookie’s fine. With everything else, I forgot to mention she’s pregnant. She’s due in late March of next year.”

“Congratulations, that’s great news.”

“Now you know why I want Edward. He used my woman to snag yours and he could’ve really hurt Cookie and our babies and that’s something I’ll not allow.”

Brandon stared strangely at George and said, “Babies?”

“Yeah, Brandon, Cookie is carrying twins. I told you she was my luck. Now with the babies coming, we’re about to get some more luck. Any with the lace?”

“Actually, yes. There was a large purchase of imported French lace that came in this morning. I traced it to two buyers.”

“Can you call them tonight? I want to get on this now.”

They hurried to George’s office at the hospital and called the shop where the lace was delivered. The owner said, the lace was prepaid in cash and was picked up in person by its new owner that morning.

The shopkeeper told Brandon she didn’t have an address, just a phone number. Brandon called the number and a familiar voice was on the other end...Mr. Simmons.

“Mr. Montgomery, we did have a man here who fits that description. He kept to himself and was barely

noticeable whenever he ventured out of his suite. Only sir, this gentlemen didn't go by the name of Edward Fenton, but Victor Millard."

Brandon felt his heart turn to ice. "Is he still at the hotel, Mr. Simmons?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Montgomery. He checked out this morning. The reason why I remember is because I had to leave the hotel to actually take his method of payment to the bank. It's very rare for any one to settle a forty-seven thousand, eight-hundred and thirty-two dollar hotel stay in cash in this day and age."

"Did he say where he might be going or why he was leaving?"

"He made some idle remark about his business being concluded here and that he and his woman were going away for long relaxing rest."

Brandon hung up the phone and felt his heart clench in sudden terror. An acid grip embraced his soul. He immediately called Adina on her cell phone. She didn't answer. He asked George if he knew Mr. Hikos and to contact him.

"Brandon, I can call Aaron, but I'm sure he can't help us." He made the call and turned white with the information he received from the other end. "Thank you, Aaron. You've been a great help."

George swallowed hard then looked at Brandon with a deadly calm. "Brandon, the hospital did call Adina's agency to inform her of Cookie's accident. When she tried to call and check on Cookie status, the hospital wouldn't release any information. That's when she tried calling you and me.

"Aaron said he was so moved by her concern for her sister, that he loaned her his jet to fly her back here. It

was a standard run and his pilot would bring the plane back straight away. But the pilot called him hours ago and said the plane never arrived at the designated airport. Instead, he reclaimed the plane at a remote landing strip.”

“Well, if he didn’t bring the plane to Montreal, who did?”

“Aaron let one his good friends make a quick run to Montreal. His friend was Victor Millard.”

“Ohmigod, Jazzy, no! He’s got Adina. I can feel it. He has her and she’s afraid, I know she is. I will kill him! I swear it!” Brandon hissed.

“Get in line! Look, we have to think fast. The pilot called in three hours ago, which means Edward’s been back for at least that long.” George pulled out a map and circled where the pilot said he had obtained the plane. “If we mark from the landing point and circle the areas around it and assume he is moving by car, there are only a few places he could be hiding out. Now, behind the strips there is nothing but dense foliage. To the east of them are a few residential communities but to the left of the strips are industrial parks with huge single story buildings. Some are under construction but some are completed and in operation. But get this, these parks are spaced far apart and are literally two to five miles away from each other. If he’s going to take her somewhere, he’d take her there.”

Brandon’s eyes were smoldering. “How soon can we get out there?”

“If we leave now, we could get there in about two hours,” George replied.

“That’s too long. Is there a way to cut the time?”

“If we fly we could be there in under forty-five minutes. But that’s dangerous. If he hears the helicopter coming, he could overreact.”

Brandon turned to George. "Not if we don't take the 'copter all the way to the parks. What if the helicopter dropped us right outside the closest park area?"

"How would we get to the parks? We won't have a car?"

They both sat quiet for a moment then said in proud unison,

"The motorcycles!"

Brandon explained, "We can store the bikes on the helicopter then when we get outside the parks, unload them and ride in under the veil of darkness and coast in so we won't have the engines on."

"Brandon, I can get Cookie's bike. Can you get Adina's and God, I hope you know how to drive one?"

"Yes, my precious Little Raven showed me how a short time ago. I've never been so happy to be a quick study as I am right now."

George added, "I will secure the helicopter, you get Adina's bike and meet me back here in fifteen minutes."

Adina was desperately trying to remain awake. The day's events had depleted every ounce of her strength. She was still worried about Cookie.

Her thoughts were galloping in her head as she tried to stay focused and alert. She thought wearily that no one knew where she was. No one knew she was coming back to Montreal. She hoped that Brandon had called the hotel and learned she was missing. Maybe someone would find the note and send help.

She peered into the darkness then glanced down at her wristwatch. An hour had passed and she noticed they were headed in a westerly direction.

Slightly bruised and aching all over, she tried to shift

her position without calling attention to herself but she knew Edward was aware of her every move.

He couldn't resist unleashing his sarcastic charm. "Adina, if you had surrendered that luscious body of yours to me, you'd be glowing in the after rays of our lovemaking rather than flinching and squirming in your seat trying to conceal your pain."

She never liked his sarcastic, condescending attitude. He was always so sure of himself, so arrogant, so cocky. She didn't appreciate it in Paris and she really didn't like it now.

She felt the need to battle his wits to assure him that she was not going to make this easy for him. "What makes you think I would have enjoyed you making love to me? I can't stand to have you touch me. Everything about you repulses me."

"Adina, you wound me with your stabbing words. I know you don't mean those nasty jabs. You're only saying them to hide your true feelings. I know you love me."

Adina gawked at him hard and knew she was in the presence of a sadistic, stark raving lunatic. "I don't love you, Victor!" she said the sentence fast and heated. Then she thrashed out with the only weapon she had, her sharp tongue. "I guess you really weren't listening to me in Montreal. I know you have a new face but maybe you should have gotten a new brain as well. As I told you then and as I'm telling you now, I'm involved with someone and we are deeply in love. I only desire him in my heart. There's no other man for me but him. Nothing you do to me or say to me will change that. I love him, not you."

"Isn't it funny how you won't mention his name? Let me save you the trouble, my dear. I know you've been fucking Brandon."



"I can't believe you betrayed me with another man when you know how much I care for you. But I forgive you. I know how loose your morals are and how weak you get when your sexual appetite is flaring. You can be such a tramp at times, Adina. Anyway, I'll make sure to keep you satisfied when we get home."

Adina let her anger speak for her before she could stop it. "How dare you insult me that way! I never once betrayed you with another man. I'm not loose and I'm sure as hell not a tramp.

"Listen to me, Victor...Edward, or whoever the hell you are, I will never give myself to you. You may take your pleasure from my body, but I will never give it.

"My heart and love belong to Brandon. I belong to him. Nothing will ever change that. You can ignore it if you want, but know this, each time you fuck me, my love for Brandon will grow stronger. Each time you try to seduce me with your syrupy, pathetic words of love, my heart will soothe my soul with the words of the only man I love.

"No matter what you do to me, all you will succeed in doing is increasing my love, my desire and my passion for Brandon. I hate you and you will know that emotion is all I have for you each and every time you look into my eyes." She paused, thinking how to stab the verbal knife deeper into his inflated arrogance.

"Oh, and another thing, don't ever expect to receive the Lair of the Python. I'll never grant it to you again and we both know it can't be forced from me."

## CHAPTER 24

Victor was content to smolder in his anger and have this battle of wits with Adina but when she threatened not to give the one thing he had contrived to have, he snapped. Before he could stop, his hand reached for her hair, then yanked it hard.

“Look, you little bitch,” Edward growled. “If you think you’ll deny me the one thing I desire most, you’re sadly mistaken. If you don’t give me the gift, I’ll make you wish you had. You thought I was cruel that last time we were together, you haven’t seen anything yet.

“I will fuck you every single minute of every single day. Give you no mercy, no rest. When I’m done you’ll truly know the meaning of bloodlust!”

He rammed her head into the door window and watched with sadistic pleasure as she slumped over and fell unconscious.

When she came around, they were pulling up to a commercial building. He pulled her out and escorted her inside. Once in, she noticed the entire building had been remodeled into a huge, deluxe apartment.

There was a master bedroom, a full kitchen and bath, living and dining rooms, a recreation room and a dance

studio. He hadn't left out one detail. It was stocked with enough food, supplies and clothes to survive on until the next Ice Age. Her head still pounded and she became dizzy. She walked over to the sofa. Victor grabbed her arm.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"I just want sit down. Please, Victor."

"No." He barked then squeezed her arm tighter. "I've waited for what seems like an eternity to finally have you. I won't wait any longer. I'll give you a few moments in the bedroom to freshen up then I'll join you shortly."

Adina eyes grew with total loathing. She snatched her arm from his grasp, stormed into the bedroom and slammed the door. If she hadn't been so distraught, she may have noticed that the room was indeed comfortable. She went to the bed, sat down and began to cry with fear, hatred and sorry.

It was happening again. She was trapped and completely at his mercy. She lay down and began to shake violently with her despair. Her hand brushed a soft material. She turned on the light and looked down.

She gasped at the beautiful, purple peek-a-boo lace negligee. It didn't leave anything to the imagination. Her eyes swelled with tears as she heard him walking towards the bedroom. It was not wise to agitate him further. She stood and rushed into the bathroom.

He marched in and called, "Adina, how much longer? My patience is thinning."

She peered at the image staring back at her through the mirror. She couldn't hold him at bay anymore and said with a collected calm, "I'll be out in a moment."

Adina removed her trench coat and took a quick shower. As the water drenched her with wet tranquility,

her mind grappled with the situation. The strongest emotion coming was survival. She focused on staying alive.

Tears flowed more when she realized exactly what that would take and what would have to be done. She tried to rationalize that it was only her body, he'd never possess her heart; he'd never have her love.

If she could keep him pleased, maybe he wouldn't hurt her and she could escape but Adina knew one thing, she mustn't agitate him.

If she wanted her freedom, she had to keep him satisfied. She came from her bath, dabbed on his favorite perfume and opened the door. He sat in a chair stretched out leisurely. "I've waited a long time for this moment. Turn slowly. I want to see you."

She did as he commanded and when she faced him again, he stood before her. She swallowed hard and tried not to appear afraid but it was impossible. His closeness thoroughly terrified her.

"Victor, don't hurt me. I...promise not to resist you. Just don't hurt me." Then her eyes searched his and she shuddered. There, a look of triumph on his face.

He said calmly, proudly, like he had won the ultimate prize, her unconditional surrender. "Little Raven, I've waited three years to taste the pleasures of your body. I promise I'll only hurt you if you want me to or if I feel causing you pain will intensify my enjoyment. Now, come here and remove my clothes."

Adina reached up with shaky fingers and started to unbutton his shirt. She kept her eyes averted from his, but was painfully aware of his naked glare upon her.

She thought sadly, he knew just how to belittle her. Only he would insist she remove his clothes before he

raped her. How much more depraved could he be?

She got the shirt opened and before she could get it off, she felt his hot breath come closer. Adina wished she hadn't looked up because when she did he came down on her mouth savagely.

His lips were crushing and hurting her soft mouth. He was letting her feel the little power she had. He was in control and letting her know it with his brutal attack upon her mouth.

She forced herself to yield. He embraced her under her arms, leaving them no place to go but around his neck. Slowly her arms moved to where he wanted them. He pried open her mouth and ravaged her moist innocence with his tongue.

She felt his penis rise and poke her in her belly. She grew tense but forced herself to relax. He pulled his head away and bade her to finish undressing him.

"As much as I want you, I'll not rush in the taking of you. I'll have you any and every time I desire.

"When you finish undressing me, I want to see you dance for me. I've missed the way your body moves. I'm sure you remember how I enjoy watching you."

She fought back the tears that swelled in her eyes and answered softly, "Yes, Victor, whatever you want."

Adina slowly and tediously peeled him from his clothes. She desperately tried to stretch it out as long as possible. Unfortunately, all it did was make Edward crave to have her more. He walked over to the bed and pressed a button on a remote control and music started to play loudly.

"Dance for me, Adina!" he shouted over the music.

She closed her eyes moved slowly. The music made her head throb. She fought it, determined to get through

this night alive.

Brandon and George had the helicopter drop them off two miles before the first industrial park. While in the helicopter, they surveyed the entire area and saw that only three parks had been finished and were in operation. The bad news was they were nowhere near each other. It would be daylight soon and they'd lose their advantage of night if they didn't decide which one to go to first.

"Jazzy, from the overview in the helicopter, did you see anything which indicated the one he took her to?" Brandon asked.

"Mmm, no, we couldn't linger too long or we might have caused him to become suspicious. What about you, did you see anything on your side of the helicopter?" George inquired.

"No, all I saw was darkness and more darkness. Do you think we should split up, or go to each park together?"

George admitted, "I want to say split up but that could be way too dangerous. If something happens to one of us, he might move Adina before the other one could get to her. It's best if we stay together. Let's hope we find her at the first park and not the last." They mounted the bikes and drove like bats out of hell.

They went to the first park and searched it thoroughly. When they didn't find any signs of Edward and Adina, they departed quickly. They sped to the second park and they both felt this cold hand touch them.

Brandon turned to George. "I don't know about you, but I'm getting a real eerie feeling about this place. It's not like the other park. It's smaller and the building doesn't have any exterior windows. Don't you think that's

odd?"

George remembered, "According to the blueprints, all the parks were made the exact same way on the outside but made to order on the inside by the new owners. Let's get a closer look at that building."

"Yeah, I think you're right."

They exited their bikes and walked quietly to the building; they were in complete darkness and were moving slowly so as to not arouse anyone who may be watching them.

They didn't know what kind of booby traps Edward might have planted to warn him of incoming intruders.

As they got closer they could smell gasoline from a car even though they didn't see one. Both knew someone was there or had been there with in the last half an hour. They walked around the building twice and concluded there were no unforeseen booby traps waiting. They paced quickly back to their bikes and got flashlights. While returning to the building, they discussed how they'd get in.

"Bran, the police will be here by sun up but we still need to get inside."

"I noticed these windows were sealed recently. So whatever is in here, he doesn't want to get out and he doesn't want the world to see."

"That sounds like Edward's m.o., selfish and possessive. Did you see there's only one entrance into the building? He has to be keeping his car somewhere."

"I think he's keeping it in the building. If you look closely at this entrance, it can be opened wider to accommodate the width of a car and look, the car tracks stop here, then disappear."—George noticed something and said, "There's only one set of tracks and they are

coming into the park and are still fresh. He's still here."

"We need a distraction. Something that will allow us to get this door opened without being detected." Just then, both heard music coming from inside the building. It was so loud they felt it vibrate the door. Brandon's heart leaped in his chest. Adina was on the other side of this wall and so was Edward.

They sized up the door and concluded that it was a pretty thick piece of steel. Without the key, the only option to get it open was to break it down. They knew they had to move quickly because they had no idea how much longer the music would camouflage their efforts to enter the building. They decided to crash their bikes into the door. They'd drive up then jump off and hope the bikes hit their target.

She stopped dancing when he yelled, "Adina, strip for me like you used to do when we lived in Paris. And make me believe you love doing it for me."

She closed her eyes and leisurely untied the ribbons which tied the negligee on her shoulders. She teased him long and slow before she let the first ribbon drop to reveal one tempting, full breast.

She turned quickly and let her exposed back taunt and torture him wickedly. She dropped her head and let her hair fall into her face, giving her a savage, carnal appearance. She turned to him again and let the other ribbon fall from her other breast and the top half of her abdomen.

She began to gyrate her hips in a hypnotic fashion watching Edward become drunk with his desire and lust for her. She knew him well enough to know that the savage gleam in his eyes meant one thing: if she didn't



hurry and come out of her gown, he would throw his restraint to the four winds and attack her mercilessly.

Finally, Adina let the gown fall gently to the floor. She danced a little more then was ordered to stop. He motioned her to come closer and she did so wearily. There was nothing else she could do.

She stood before him glowing with perspiration as her breasts rose and fell with her breathing. He sat up and pulled her into the hollow of his legs. He slowly licked the tangy, salty sweat from her soft, quivering, stomach and Adina closed her eyes.

Adina felt his hands all over her body and wanted to scream. She bit into her lower lip until she felt faint from the pain. Eventually, his lips moved over her tender breasts. His mouth came down viciously and she gasped from the feel of his teeth sinking into her nipples. Suddenly, there was urgency in his suckling. Her breasts no longer satisfied him. He wanted something more stimulating, more gratifying.

Adina was unable to suppress a shriek of fear when he yanked her to the bed. He forced her soft, smooth thighs opened. He positioned his long throbbing sex at the opening of her honey lips and stopped. He said with lust ebbing out of every syllable, "Adina!" She opened her eyes to see him looking at her with total craving and hunger on his face. "I want to enjoy this. If I don't, you'll pay later!"

Her bottom lip quivered with fear as a sinking feeling of helplessness engulfed her. She finally nodded and closed sad eyes again.

Edward came down on her mouth hotly then the music stopped. He heard loud engines come closer and

closer. Before he could think, there was an exploding, crashing sound in the other room. He drew back from Adina, hopped quickly from the bed, got dressed and quit the room.

Adina didn't bother to question what was happening and ran into the bathroom. She put on a robe, came out again and tried to make her way to the door.

She saw a small fire at the entrance to the building. Someone had crashed the door in with two motorcycles. She didn't see Victor and thought this was as good a chance as any to get away.

She ran full gallop toward the opened entrance. She was just a few feet away when someone grabbed the back of her neck and tackled her to the ground. She started screaming with all the energy she had.

Edward pinned her underneath his body and she fought ferociously with him. She was battling with this mad man for her life. Suddenly, and without warning, he drew back and struck her brutally across the face.

Brandon made his way into the building just as Edward lifted his hand. His whole body went into full alert. He didn't know what he would find but he'd be ready for anything. When he saw Edward striking Adina, everything human about Brandon bowed down to his dark side.

He became a crazed beast instinctively designed and skilled to protect his mate. His eyes darkened, his upper lip rose to bare his sharp, white teeth and he struck out.

He leaped on top of Edward with savage intensity. He knocked him off Adina and she didn't move. Edward and Brandon were warring like two jungle cats.

Brandon pulled Edward by his neck and smashed his fists into his face. There was blood everywhere and Brandon cared not if it was from his busted knuckles or Edward's face.

Edward blocked Brandon's last punch and jabbed him brutally in the midsection. He balled up and Edward gave him an uppercut with his knee.

Never one to play fair, Edward kicked Brandon in his chest and solar plexus. Brandon got his second wind and caught Edward's leg and flipped him to his back. Then he pounced him like a mountain lion and started choking him with all his strength. He was going to kill Edward Fenton by tearing his throat out with his bare hands.

George came in right after Brandon and saw Adina on the floor. His heart skipped a beat as he rushed to her side to check for a pulse. She was alive. He lifted her and moved her to the couch. He checked to see if she had any other injuries. He had almost forgotten about the other men when he heard his cousin, Edward, gasping loudly while he fought to breathe under Brandon's powerful grip.

He rushed over trying to prevent another murder. "Christ, Brandon, you're killing him! Let him up! Don't stoop to his level! Let him rot in jail where he belongs!"

"No!" he grunted! "I want to kill him. He must die! You know it! I know it!"

Edward's eyes were glassy with forced tears and he'd turned completely red from lack of oxygen. He could hear his blood pound in his ears and knew he was close to death.

He also knew, the only way to survive this was to beat

Brandon to the punch. So, Edward contorted his body, released a strained sigh and stopped moving.

Brandon stopped choking immediately and turned to George. "I had to do it. He was hurting Adina."

George grabbed Brandon's shoulders and said, "The police will be here soon. We have to get our stories straight."

Brandon's crazed eyes began searching for Adina as he confessed, "I don't care what you tell them, just so long as she's alright. Where is she?" As he rushed to the couch where Adina lay, his heart and soul were on an emotional roller coaster ride to hell. He leaned into her speaking gently, but there was no hiding the pure terror he felt, "Adina, wake up. Open your eyes. Don't leave me! Don't take my home from me. Adina, open your eyes!"

She felt his gentle kisses and breathed that familiar scent of fresh cut wood, musk and soap and a half smile found her face. Her eyes opened slowly. "Brandon, is it really you?" she whispered tenderly.

His eyes filled with tears as she recognized him. He nodded. "Are you okay?"

She cradled Brandon's face with her small hands and said, "I was so scared." She paused to glance at her surroundings and flinched. "Can we leave this place? I want to go home. Will you take me with you?"

Brandon pulled her into his arms and embraced fiercely. It was painful and she didn't care. She needed to feel safe again. She watched George cover Edward's body with a sheet and instinctively burrowed deeper into Brandon's arms

As they headed outside to help George with the flares to signal the police, neither noticed the flatness of the sheet used to cover Edward's body. He wasn't under it anymore.

With the room so dimly lit, Edward knew just how to hide in plain sight. He was the master of camouflage. He stayed low to the floor while he searched for a weapon. His hand came to something long, hard and heavy. Then he waited for Brandon's tall figure to be distracted, then, he charged up from the floor with savage, cheetah-like speed.

Adina screamed when Brandon crumbled and fell hard to the floor. George dropped the flares and rushed back in to find Brandon knocked out cold and Edward still very much alive.

He moved so fast, George never saw the lead pipe until it connected to his head. He fell to the floor but didn't lose consciousness. Edward came at him with absolute insanity on his face.

Adina reacted before thinking and jumped on his back so George could get up. Edward was like a mad beast. He growled ferociously when he felt her intrusion and swung swiftly and she flew off and crashed into her motorcycle, smacking her head against the handlebars. She didn't pass out and saw that George had no time to get on his feet and defend himself. Her blurred vision strained to focus on Brandon and when it did, she saw he was still out. Adina had to think. Had to stop Edward once and for all. She stumbled to her feet and ran.

George was in a painful, stifling fog. He was bleeding

and trying desperately to get to his feet. Before he could, without wobbling, his cousin was upon him, readying to strike again.

He blocked the blow with a wobbling arm, but lost his balance and fell again. Edward pounced, placing the lead cylinder into his windpipe.

George gasped for air, feeling himself going under. He looked into his cousin's eyes and saw his own death in them. He struggled fiercely when suddenly, Edward gagged in horrible pain and collapsed on top of him.

He tore the pipe from his strained neck and inhaled air hard. There was something warm and wet all around him. He forced his eyes to focus and they saw blood. He pushed his cousin off and turned him over. Blood was everywhere. Edward was still alive but not for much longer. George looked up through teary eyes and intense inhales of breath and saw Adina standing above them with crazed shock straining her exquisite features.

Adina was afraid that if Edward killed George, he'd immediately focus his attention on Brandon and kill him too. That would leave her alone with him again. She had to stop him.

She stumbled to her feet and ran into the kitchen for a weapon of some kind. She opened the first draw she came to and grabbed the first thing she could get her hands on to protect herself with, then turned and ran.

She saw Edward choking George to his death. She shook violently. Her mind shut down as she responded to pure, pulsating adrenaline.

Adina ran over and came behind Edward. She grabbed his head and yanked it back swiftly then took the long, razor sharp carving knife she grabbed in the kitchen

and swiped it across his neck deep and fast. She held his head in her hand and watched his eyes dilate with surprise, bewilderment, and then, terror. She released him and stepped back when she heard him gag. Edward's body convulsed suddenly and fell forward.

George noticed Adina was shaking. She looked down at Edward like she expected him to get up. He was gagging and gasping for air as death came closer to him. His body jerked violently as it fought to put air into his lungs but that wouldn't be happening. Adina had slit his throat from ear to ear and he was literally choking on his own blood. It was coming out of all the openings in his face. It cascaded from his neck, nose and mouth.

As she watched him die for the second time, a strange need to taunt him came over her. She leaned into his face glaring long into his eyes as she watched death sink deep talons into him. Her words had a menacing calm tone. "Victor, now you know the true meaning of bloodlust." Adina watched his body shiver and shudder to fight death. She thought calmly to herself, that this time she'd see and know Victor Millard was indeed dead. His body contorted then stopped moving.

She looked at him oddly, turning her head from side to side. She sized up his twisted figure and thought he never looked better. She felt trembling hands slowly take the knife away. She heard George mumbling cautiously as he carefully pulled her from his cousin's dead body.

Brandon came to slowly and gasped, "God, Adina, what happened?" She was splattered in blood.

"Victor 's dead," she breathed softly.

"I know. I killed him," Brandon said, noticing her lost eyes.

"No, Brandon, you didn't. That's why you see all the blood. He was going to kill Jazzy, maybe even you," she said with pure agony.

Brandon noticed Adina was beginning to unravel. He brushed a black strand of hair from her face and said gently, "It's over." His words were as fragile as her spirit.

"Brandon, hold me," she beseeched.

He rocked back and forth, cradling her completely. He gave her just what she needed. "I promised myself my arms would always be a safe haven for you. I'm thrilled you want them to be as well."

The sun crawled into the sky and the police finally arrived. Adina admitted to killing Edward Fenton, alias Victor Millard, in defense of George 'Jazzy' Deveroux.



## CHAPTER 25

The police got the bikes loaded onto the helicopter then they helped Adina, Brandon and George on board. While the helicopter took off, George thought it was good to be the president of the board of a hospital. It allowed him the opportunity to use its facilities and equipment for urgent business such as this.

As he pondered longer, his heart grew heavy with knowing Adina had been hurt, and this time he'd have to tell Cookie everything and he could quite possibly lose the only woman he had ever loved.

He turned to Adina then. She was curled up in Brandon's arms and he was holding her protectively. He could see the bruises on her lovely face and knew his sick cousin Edward had been cruel to her.

There was no doubt in his mind that Edward had raped her. How would she get through this? How would she get through the nightmares and catatonic states this time? He brought his eyes up to Brandon and made a quiet prayer that he was the kind of man who could endure the traumatic effects this ordeal would have on her.

Brandon embraced Adina tightly. He looked down

and noticed she drifted in and out of an exhausted sleep. His eyes caressed the features of her exotic face and he thought how he had failed her.

He hadn't kept his promise that she'd never know fear or pain again—that her days would be filled with happiness and love. But Edward Fenton had made a liar out of him and she had known fear, pain and sorrow and he was unable to prevent any of it.

Brandon's eyes focused on the bruises that were becoming blatantly noticeable on her face and upper neck and he flinched with the thoughts of what she had to endure while with Edward.

His heart swelled painfully when he realized Edward had raped Adina again. He pulled her closer and wondered how would he ever make this up to her? What could he do to make her feel safe, secure, capable of trusting him again? His lids dropped over his grieving eyes.

The hospital helicopter landed on the roof and they were immediately escorted into emergency. George and Brandon were treated for their injuries and warned to take it easy for the next few days.

Adina was seen privately. Brandon couldn't come with and she was bewildered.

He sensed it immediately and said, "I will be here when you come out. I won't leave you." She squeezed his hand and let the nurse take her away.

It was still early in the day but George couldn't hold off on talking to Cookie.

When he reached her room, she was just waking up and trying to get out of bed. He smiled at her and stepped in to prevent her from rising. Cookie looked up at him

and instantly noticed his injuries.

“George, what happened to you? We look like a matched set now.”

He pulled up a chair and took Cookie by the hand and told her everything that had transpired in the last twenty-four hours. “George, you said Victor Millard was dead! Said he had burned in the fire! Why did you lie to me!” Cookie was incensed.

“I didn’t know I was lying to you. I really thought he had died in the fire. It was only when you told me of Edward Fenton making advances towards Adina that I put it all together.” He answered, desperately trying not to upset her more.

“George, what the hell does Edward Fenton have to do with Victor?” Cookie demanded.

He started to squirm in his seat then swallowed hard and began to tell her the entire truth about what he’d done almost ten years ago.

He told her how he had become depressed and crazed and got drunk and told someone every single detail of their one night together. “How could you! You swore you would never tell!” Cookie snatched her hand from his. Her eyes were sharp daggers of pure contempt as she spat, “Do you have any idea what kind of danger you could have put me in? Who was this person and why didn’t you come and tell me? I was your best friend and the topic of conversation!”

George took in a ragged, defeated breath and told Cookie that the person was his cousin, Edward Fenton. And even told him that she had a younger sister, named Adina. He finished his confession when he explained, Edward followed him every time he went to see her and eventually, located Adina. When Edward met Adina he

told her his name was Victor Millard. George went silent as he watched Cookie's mind put the rest of the story together.

She was furious and hopped from the bed and started to limp back and forth across the room. George wanted her to stay in bed and conserve her strength for her sake and the sake of their babies, but he knew she'd react this way and thought, maybe it was better she purged her anger rather than smolder in it.

"George, I don't believe this! My sister, my baby sister, almost died twice because of your loose tongue wagging to a madman about our talent. You told the fuckin' bastard almost ten years ago and that son-of-a-bitch came back from the depths of hell to reclaim her. Well, I'm glad he's dead and I'm very glad Adina was the one who killed him. Does she know you were the one who told Edward about her?"

George stood up and closed the distance between them, then looked into Cookie enchanting, deep brown face. "No, my love. I wanted to come to you and tell you and beg your forgiveness first. Then ask how I should proceed?"

At that very moment, Cookie realized something. George was most upset about this whole ordeal and his part in it. She suddenly noticed the self torture in his eyes at keeping this kind of secret.

She saw for the first time, that he'd carried around guilt so deep it had almost strangled him. Cookie knew she couldn't remain angry with him. If he was as distraught as he said he was, and if Edward was as diabolical as Adina had told her, then George hadn't a chance of remaining loyal to her and their one night they

had shared.

She took his hand and rubbed it across her face and watched his eyes fill with unshed tears. She felt his shame in himself for what he had done and said lovingly, "George, I'll admit I'm not happy about this at all. I really don't like hearing such distressing news, but right now you don't need another cross to bear. What you need is for me to be your friend and not your overreacting, hysterical lover.

"This is what you will do. Look at me...You will tell Adina exactly what happened ten years ago. She's going to be pissed and possibly not want to see you for a while. But if she is anything like me, she will let it go and eventually forgive you just as I have."

Jazzy's heart skipped a beat at Cookie's tender, healing words. She was incredible and she still loved him. Though he had committed a terrible betrayal, she understood it had been an accident of weakness, not a deliberate attempt to cause Adina any harm. Jazzy's head dropped to her good shoulder.

He said with absolute adoration in his voice, "I've been so wracked with guilt all these years by what I had done. I didn't think you'd understand or forgive me. I promise, as soon as Adina is better, I'll tell her everything. I'll never keep anything from you again. Thank you, Charlotte. Thank you, for being my friend, for your forgiveness and for your love."

She turned and kissed him lightly on the cheek then said calmly, even though what she said was of an urgent matter to her. "I know you're upset, but I can't stand here much longer...I gotta pee."

George chuckled softly. Cookie always knew just how

to combat a difficult situation with compassion and humor. He escorted her to the bathroom.

When she came out he had stripped from his clothes, crawled into bed and collapsed into an exhausted sleep.

Cookie looked upon him lovingly and placed her hand over her belly and gave a silent thanks that all of her babies were safe and well. She got into bed and George cradled his head in her soft breasts and she drifted asleep again.

Brandon hated hospitals. He tried to avoid them at all costs. They always reminded him of the hole they created in him when they took his mother away. He started to pace back and forth in the waiting room for what seemed like an eternity for someone to come and tell him the status of Adina. He saw the nurse who had escorted her away and cut her off. "Nurse, is Adina alright? Can I see her?"

"Excuse me, sir, you must wait to speak with her doctor." Brandon's eyes grew big with pain and the nurse caught his look of total panic and said quickly to calm him, "What's your name?"

"Montgomery, Brandon Montgomery."

The nurse immediately recognized the influential name and smiled warmly then took his hand and led him to one of the sofas. Her tone was soothing, comforting. "I'm not supposed to divulge any information about our patients. Family members are supposed to speak with the attending physician.

"But you have such a sad look on your face that I will make an exception in your case. Before I start, I want to thank you for all the selfless work you do in our

community. Like the donations you give to the homeless and the hospital's hospice for the terminally ill.

"You have such a generous heart that I can't bear to see it so heavy with worry for your lady...Adina is fine. She has some ugly bruises on her body and a mild concussion and she'll probably ache all over for a few days, but other than that, she's doing okay.

"She will probably need to speak with a counselor to help her deal with the trauma of tonight's ordeal but she will get through it with you by her side."

Brandon squeezed the nurse's hand and shuddered with relief. "How much longer before I can see her? Will she have to stay overnight?"

"She doesn't want to stay. That's why the doctor hasn't come out yet. He's trying to persuade her to stay at least one day for routine observation."

He chuckled, "If I know my Little Raven, the doctor can forget it. She's as stubborn as they come. I need to use a phone to have a car come take us home."

Brandon was right; the doctor had no luck at all trying to persuade Adina to stay overnight. The doctor would only release her if she had round the clock observation for her concussion.

Brandon promised if she came home with him, there'd be someone with her at all times. Once Adina agreed to that, the doctor released her.

They got home and Mrs. Peters, Harry and Lucy were waiting. Immediately, they were put to bed and watched over with caring, paternal eyes for the whole day.

Adina awoke a little groggy but was relieved Brandon had shared his bed with her. Lucy informed Adina of a visitor. It was George. He thanked her for saving his life

and she did the same. Then he told her everything.

Just like Cookie had predicted, Adina was angry. She couldn't believe he could endanger her life so carelessly.

"I'm responsible for all of this. Please don't hold any of this against Brandon. He wanted to tell you straight away but I knew it was best if we worked together to find Edward before telling you."

Adina stared at George, ready to spit pure venom. Then she observed like Cookie had, that he had carried the guilt of what he'd done for almost ten years.

She harnessed her anger long enough to think about what that must have been like for George. To carry such a dreadful secret and live every day knowing he was to blame for someone else's agonizing suffering.

There would never be any way to atone for his actions or be forgiven for his sins without losing everything and everyone he loved. That, Adina thought, had to be the cruelest torture anyone could endure.

She looked deeper into his eyes and knew he had chastised and persecuted himself severely. His self-imposed torture would always be with him every time he looked into her eyes. She decided that that would be punishment enough.

"Jazzy, we'll never speak of this again. I never want hear the names Victor Millard or Edward Fenton for the rest of my life. I've been through hell over the past two days and I'm not sure I'll ever be able to forget your part in this. But, I do forgive you."

His lids dropped over his powerful eyes and his shame presented itself fully. She turned and headed out the room. Over her shoulder she said, "Tell Cookie to call me when she gets released from the hospital. I will come by and cook one of her favorite dishes. I learned from



Brandon that she is eating for three now.”

When she reached the staircase, Harry gave her an urgent message from a Mr. Aaron Hikos asking her to contact him at her convenience. With everything that had happened in the past two days, she had totally forgotten all about him.

She immediately contacted him and explained her situation. Mr. Hikos was so distraught by his unexpected role in her abduction, he told her she could relinquish her assignment and he would still pay for the remaining four weeks of her contract.

Adina was so surprised by his generous offer, she promised when she was able to return to work, if he still needed an interpreter, she'd be happy to assist him again.

The next four weeks were a little uncomfortable for Adina. She had a few nightmares and for some reason, felt Brandon distancing himself from her. He had convinced her to stay at his home and give her place to Cookie and George while they worked on the charity ball in October.

Adina agreed because with Cookie's condition, it couldn't be good for her to climb up and down stairs all the time and the loft was so much roomier for them. At least until the charity ball was over and they could be married.

She just kept noticing how Brandon was acting towards her. Whenever they were together, he was as he always was, but she sensed something different lately.

He was available for anything that she might want to do. He was perfect. But she got a sensation he held a part of himself back from her. She thought with some ray of hope that his birthday might bring them closer.

“Brandon, do you want to do anything special on

your birthday?"

She caught a look of sadness in his eyes and thought he couldn't even look at her without feeling sorry for her. "I hadn't planned anything. What did you have in mind?"

She said rushed, hurried, "Nothing, I thought you wanted to do something."

"To tell the truth, I had planned to stay home and spend my birthday with you."

Adina could tell he was trying to think of something they could do together because it was obvious he hadn't planned on celebrating his birthday at all. "That's great. It will give us a chance to be with each other," Adina said with a bright smile.

Brandon's birthday finally came. When Adina, Harry, Lucy and Mrs. Peters escorted him to the garage, his face lit up when he saw his present.

"A motorcycle. You got me a Harley Davidson motorcycle."

"We all chipped in," Harry said.

He walked over and pulled off the bright red ribbon. He ran his hand over the handle bars. "It's incredible."

"We thought that you and Adina would enjoy going out for long drives together," Mrs. Peters added.

"Just so long as you two are very careful," Lucy warned.

He chuckled at her maternal tone. "I don't know what to say."

"How about, thank you?" Adina said.

He turned to her then. "This is the best birthday I've ever had." He looked over at his family. "All of you, thank you from the bottom of my heart for such a wonderful and thoughtful gift."

He gave them all a huge hug and told them he and Adina would return to the house in a few moments to cut his cake. As he returned from escorting them out of the garage he caught a weary look on Adina's face. Suddenly he felt so guilty. She was trying so hard to enjoy herself for his sake.

Adina hoped he wouldn't feel sorry for her anymore and know she was all right. Her heart ached with the thought he pitied her and really didn't want her. As he inspected his bike more closely she said, "Lucy did not want you to have this bike. She fought the rest of us tooth and nail before she finally relented."

"I'm not surprised. She's been acting like my mother more and more lately. Or maybe I've just now started to notice."

She slid her hand over the fine leather seat of the bike. "It's a beautiful machine." Her hand covered his. When he jerked from her touch, she quickly finished. "We better get back inside. I'm dying for some of that birthday cake." She didn't wait for him and rushed from the garage before her tears rolled down her face.

After the cutting of the cake and a few more happy birthday phone calls, they decided to call it an early night and retreated to their bedroom.

Once Adina knew Brandon had fallen asleep, she rose from the bed and slipped on her emerald green, sheer lounging robe and sat in his big easy chair and curled herself up in a ball.

She brought her legs to her chest and embraced soft arms around her knees. She thought sadly that Victor had managed to take something else from her...Brandon's love. She buried her head into her knees and quietly wept.

Brandon had felt restless for the last half an hour. When he rolled over and found Adina missing, he sat straight up like a shot. He searched his darkened room and saw her in his chair sobbing quietly.

His heart constricted with such compassion, he came from the bed and knelt at her side. He placed a gentle hand on her arm and said softly, "Adina, why are you crying?"

"Go back to bed. I'm all right. I didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't. What is it? Please, tell me."

With a defeated, hoarse voice she asked, "Brandon, you don't want me?"

"Why would you say that? Of course I want you."

"Please, don't try to hide how you really feel. You can't even look at me without sighing with pity and you haven't come near me since Victor...Edward, whatever the hell his name was, abducted me." She sniffled in sad frustration.

"No, no. That's not it at all. That's what you've been thinking all these weeks?" Adina looked up through teary eyes and nodded. Brandon confessed, "The reason I've been acting different towards you was because I've felt so guilty for not keeping you safe. I didn't keep my promise and you trusted me to keep you from harm's way and I was unable to." His hand caressed her soft face as he said, "I was afraid I'd lose you if you felt you couldn't trust me anymore so I didn't want to pressure you into anything. All those sad looks were of a man in great pain. I felt you pulling away from me." He rubbed his nose against hers and whispered, "I didn't think you'd want to make love because it'd be too much after your ordeal."

Adina wiped her eyes and shook her head. “Oh, Brandon, we have our signals crossed here. I never ever felt you were to blame for not keeping me safe from Victor—Edward—oh, you know who I mean,” she sounded confused. “I was so grateful you loved me enough to find me.” Her warm tongue moistened her lower lip. “I felt you distancing yourself and I believed it was because he had taken me. I felt you didn’t want me for you thought I had been with him.”

Brandon took her hand and kissed it with his warm lips. When she shuddered his smoky gray eyes darkened with hot passion for her. “Oh, Adina, I want you. You have no idea how much I want you. It’s been a living hell lying next to you night after night and not being able to have you. Baby, I want you so much I ache.”

She gave him a gentle smile and squeezed his hand tightly. “I swear to you, I’ve put no one before you. Yes, I was with him but we never...had sex. He tried and I fought with everything I had. That’s why I was bruised and so sore.”

“Are you sure, my love?”

She placed his hands on the belt of her robe. He untied the knot and opened it slowly. He shuddered as she brought his hands to her lips and purred, “I’ve never been more sure of anything in my whole life.”

Brandon captured her lips passionately. She tasted so sweet and delicious. That hypnotic taste of honey and pineapples. He’d missed her so much. He pulled her gently to the floor. Adina moved into him seductively assuring him she wanted no one but him.

Ah! He smelled wonderful. That powerful aroma of fresh cut wood, musk and soap drove her wild. All of her

senses came alive with the unmistakable flavor of his tongue in her mouth.

His hot lips moved to her swollen breasts. His mouth opened to take them in and she gasped and cradled his head in her arms. He sent her emotions and senses in every direction all at once.

He took her to heights of passion and rapture she'd never experienced before. She cried out lightly when she thought she could stand no more.

His head moved even lower. He found her belly button and sank his tongue into it. Her stomach quivered with his sensuous torture and yet he moved still lower.

Oh yes, her mind whispered as his warm mouth slowly surrounded her sensitive clit. Her back came off the floor. Her legs opened willingly to accommodate his massive hard chest.

She fought back a trembling moan as pulsing electricity shot through every nerve. When he increased the pressure and plundered deeper and harder she knew her whole body was at his mercy.

Just when she thought there could feel no more pleasure, he snaked his long, sleek tongue deeply into her wet, warm core. Devouring her wickedly and sinfully. He sent her closer into oblivion with every savage, hungry plunge of his tongue.

Then suddenly, he stopped.

Still panting frantically she watched Brandon move over her and position his body to invade hers. He said with a savage hunger, "Tell me you want me."

She brought her face to his as she grind her luscious, honey up and over the tip of his enormous, steel hard cock. She felt his groan ripple through her whole body as she answered, "Only you. I want you inside me, please."

Brandon thrust his long tongue into her waiting mouth and shivered as her arms tightened around his back. Out of control and starved for the feel of her deep wet pussy, he thrust hard and strong.

She jerked from the impact and he sank deeper. Nothing but pure hunger coerced through him as he felt her piercing nails sink into the flesh of his back. He felt enslaved by the sweet addictive memories his cock was shooting in his brain. Her fisting tight fit around his cock was pure ecstasy. He tore his mouth from hers and gazed hotly into her eyes and saw her blatant invitation for more and he held back no longer, he had to move.

Plunging deeply, completely, he gave her all his love, fire and hunger with each and every bone shattering stroke. He drove harder and harder. He would snatch her breath away with every plunge and rejuvenate her with each thrust.

With locked arms he pulled his entire shaft from her then lunged harder and faster into her tight sheath. On each downward plunge, his dick nipped and clawed her swollen, wet flesh.

The sound of her screaming his name drove him mad. When his cock hit her womb he sank into the glory of watching sublime pleasure etch across her face.

Adina felt her body being conquered by Brandon's. He was inflicting all his love upon her and she was soaring into the outer limits of joy. She wanted him to share in this beautiful passion he gave her. She moved with him, surrendering to his hypnotic rhythm.

Adina arched soft hips up to drink his long, hard nature into her body. Her walls viced around his cock.

When his surprised eyes searched out hers, she let her actions confirm his suspicions. She relaxed her muscles and cried out as his driving thrust tapped her womb.

He didn't think he would want it again but his body was remembering and it was preparing him for the Lair of the Python. When her tiny incredibly strong muscles locked down again he felt shock ripple through him as he realized, *oh yeah, he wanted it.*

Her muscles relaxed abruptly and he sank fast and completely to the heart of her. His head began to spin from lack of oxygen as his seed began to surge up his cock. He shivered with the assault and buried his head in her neck then, everything went dim.

Adina reached around and manipulated his love sac to do her bidding. It swelled quickly and she began to move wildly upon him. This wasn't like the first time. She knew he needed no coaxing; he was primed for her gift.

As she drove her hot, wet, brutally tight pussy down his shaft, her sweat splattered onto his chest and stomach and she panted with pleasure as Brandon quaked from the sensation. She thrust one final time and released her hold from around his shaft and head.

Brandon released a gasping howl as multiple releases scorched through his pulsating, throbbing loins then ballooned into all the parts of his rigid, convulsing body. His fiery elixir exploded into a multitude of electrical sprinkles and cascaded down every nerve ending he had. His deliverance erupted so intensely, he felt his penis drench her sheath with all his essence and love.

His eyes strained to focus as he watched Adina



plummet into the throes of her own climax. It was hauntingly beautiful. Slowly her body collapsed on top of his wet chest. Unlike before, this time, he had more control once the lovemaking was over and wrapped her in his arms.

He lay on his back stroking her damp spine. When she finally lifted her head she whispered, "Happy birthday."

He accepted her soft kiss. "I'll cherish it for the rest of my life." He snaked his hands into her hair and pulled her face closer. "I love you, Adina." He swallowed her mouth with his own and groaned deeply when she ground her hips into his groin.

Just before he slipped into a blissful content sleep, he heard her gently whisper, "I love you more."

October was fast approaching and Cookie was frantic about the Charity ball. With George's help, she'd managed to get her entire line together. She was in her second trimester and boy, was she showing. Her twins were letting everybody know they were there and they wanted to be seen.

Adina had returned to work and she and Brandon were closer and even more in love than ever before. She decided that as much as she loved her loft, she belonged at Brandon's side and in his bed. She didn't have the heart to give it up and gave it to Cookie and George until their house was completed in the spring.

Brandon was working on the final specifications for the Charity Ball and was a nervous wreck. He decided it was time to make Adina an honest woman and make her

his wife. She was so damned headstrong and independent, he thought, she might want to keep the arrangement they had and just live together. He wasn't quite sure what to expect from his Little Raven, but a part of him thought, he wanted her no other way.

The main person going totally bonkers was George. He thought he knew pressure as a wheeler and dealer in the finance arena. He didn't know what pressure was until he tried to help Cookie put a fashion show together, make sure she got plenty of rest because of her condition, plan a wedding, have a house built and work eight to ten hour days at his own job.

Then on top of all that, Cookie informed him that since this was her first major fashion show, she had invited her entire family and they all would be coming. David, her brother, Charmaine, his wife, Adina of course, and their parents.

When Cookie said her parents, George almost fainted. That meant, he'd have to go to her father, reintroduce himself, ask him for Cookie's hand in marriage, after waiting seventeen years, then explain why they're getting married after she was already showing with the proof of their affection for each other. Major Powers would not be amused. Yes indeed, this was going to be one hell of a party.

The charity ball was an absolute smash and Cookie's designs went over superbly. Everybody placed orders for their spring wardrobe which told George he'd need a bigger staff in order to keep his pregnant, soon-to-be wife away from the sewing machine. He knew if Cookie got behind, she wouldn't hesitate to start working on the

pieces herself and by the time these clothes were needed, she'd be ready to have the babies and that would put too much stress on her.

When Brandon and Adina got home, they were exhausted but so happy for Cookie and the success of the ball. They were also thrilled for George 'Jazzy' Deveroux. Major Powers only told him no twice before giving his consent for him to marry Cookie.

The Major did give George one stipulation. He must always keep Cookie happy and never make her question her choice in saying yes to him. Because if she did, then he would have a real problem...her father.

Adina and Brandon raced up stairs to his master bedroom, stripped from their clothes and hopped into a hot soapy bath. They chatted about the night's more memorable events.

"Oh God, Brandon, did you see how hard Jazzy was sweating when he decided to finally ask Daddy for Cookie's hand in marriage? I've never seen anything so funny in my whole life. Here was a leading captain of finance being sized down to mush by that creampuff of a dad of mine."

Brandon kissed Adina lightly. "You're laughing, but I could totally relate to Jazzy's situation. Your *daddy*, as you put it, may be a cream puff to you, but he's a shrewd negotiator when it comes to his daughters. I ought to know, he told me no three times before he would allow me to ask you to marry me. He kept saying something about you being his last pebble on the beach."

Adina stopped laughing. "My daddy said I could marry you?"

"Mmm...hmm. Yep, he sure did. Now, I just have one

question for you.” Adina swallowed hard because it was coming but shook from the thought that he was gonna ask. “Will you marry me, Adina?”

She breathed slowly and watched his eyes grow with anxiety for her answer. “Yes, I’ll marry you.” Then she smiled her devilish smile and added, “Besides, you don’t want to explain to my daddy why we’re getting married after the baby comes.”

Now Brandon was the one with the stupid look on his face and Adina giggled with the news of her surprise. “You’re...you’re gonna have a baby?” Brandon was lying between her legs with his head and chest resting on her breasts and abdomen. He came off her and stood quickly. “When did this happen?”

She tilted her head slowly. Her deep eyes drank in his magnificent frame with its powerful muscles and arousing burnt copper skin. *If this baby is a boy, he’ll be a wondrous specimen of a man, judging from the looks of his father.* Finally, she locked her eyes with his smoky gray ones and said cooingly, “Yes, Brandon, I’m having a baby. It happened the night of your birthday. I see I have surprised you.”

He sank down into the tub and placed his hand on her deceptive belly and kissed it softly. The action was meant to be tender and comforting but all it managed to do was to arouse her appetite for him. Her eyes darkened with passion. She knew he had caught their subtle meaning when he said, “Adina! We can’t. We could hurt the baby.”

She laughed seductively. “Brandon, the baby isn’t due until June. Surely you don’t think we can avoid making love for seven months? I’d think in my condition, you’d want to do everything in your power to make me happy. And sweetheart, not only does making love make me

happy, it makes me ravenous. Now, shut up and kiss me.” Adina moved her steamy hands over his wet, hard body.

Oh God, why was she torturing him like this? He felt her sensuous body pull him like a magnet. His will was evaporating like steam. She snaked her silky arms around his neck and he knew it was hopeless. She knew just how to crack his defenses and turn him into an obedient lustful fool.

“Well, I guess once can’t do any harm,” he said, low and unsteady.

Adina smiled a seductive challenge. Her thighs parted and trapped his raging cock between them. “Ready when you are.”

He clasped his giant hands over her ass and lifted her just enough to slip the head of cock inside her. When she gasped with utter pleasure he covered her mouth and wrapped her legs around his waist and step out of the tub. With each slow step he sank deeper and deeper into her wet flesh. By the time he reached the bed, she was fully impaled on his greedy cock and he worshipped her with his body and his love for the rest of the night.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Valarie Prince is a single career woman currently living in the fabulous city of Chicago, Illinois. She graduated from Northern Illinois University with a bachelor's degree in Communications and script writing. Currently she works as an admissions advisor for a global on-line university in Chicago. She is a part time full-figured run way fashion model and has no children.