

LADY MIDNIGHT



PUSS IN BOOTS

loveyoudivine

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by Lady Midnight

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Chapter One

The castle was new, a mere hundred years, tucked in the outskirts of the city on three square miles of land. It was the richest by far, because the law firm of Navarre, Navarre and Navarre had been the most successful through the generations. It was occasionally said that the gentlemen had a knack, an almost frightening ability to skirt the law and charm the judges. In reality, intellectual brilliance and devotion to duty as officers of the court was all that was required.

On this day, the sun radiated a pernicious heat over the back lawns of the Gardens of Navarre. No such thing as a gentle breeze could soothe the mourner's discomfort as they drowned in the sentiment of, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust..."

Marquie, as she preferred to be called, broke out with a little sob. Images of her now sainted father collapsed in her mind.

Within the iron lace fencing that surrounded the family plot, she weakened. The sun burnt through her skull further evaporating her senses and broke her knees. She opened her eyes to see that the flag on her father's coffin had been removed and was carefully folded by the color guard of his Marine Corp unit. The plaintive sound of Taps echoed in the empty chambers of her heart like a broken bell. When she reached out to accept the flag from the sergeant, consciousness left her.

Peter Navarre, her brother, sneered. "Wait a minute," he growled at the Reverend, as he reached out for her. But she'd

already melted into the gardener's embrace. "Take her inside," was the quiet command.

Donnell McLaughlin, the estate's gardener, nodded in compliance. Easily, his arm swept under her legs and he raised her against his chest. With a silent, passionless stare of his own, he peered up at Peter. Only then did Peter grab the fallen flag and drop it on her body. Dutifully, Donnell turned toward the home.

She awoke in her private apartment to the soft cooing of a gentle voice and the cool moisture of a glass of water on her cheek. Filled with inconsolable grief, her tears broke free again. "I can't believe my brother is having a party this afternoon."

A single tear dripped from Donnell's lower lid. "I believe they call it a wake, Mistress."

His voice was so gentle, his words never profane. Tenderly, she grasped his hand feeling his own shuddering sentiments. "You loved him, too."

At the mention of the emotion, Donnell's tears flowed uninhibited. Quickly, he rose and turned his back to her, his head drooped with his own grief. But his agony never sounded even as his shoulders heaved.

Quietly, she moved across the thick carpeting and laid her hand on his shoulder. The touch so disrupted his grief that he jerked quickly away. "I really shouldn't be here," he insisted. Refusing to meet her gaze, he asked, "If you're recovered, may I leave now, Mistress?"

"Yes ... yes of course," she said solemnly. "But I need to know that you're okay, too."

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Nodding, he backed further away; his hand held over his mouth as if his grief could shamefully break free. At the door he paused only a moment to peer into her. She was her father's daughter in every way he could imagine. She was his consolation in mourning, and perhaps, his redemption in life.

"Please visit if it suits you," he whispered. Without awaiting her reply, he slipped soundlessly beyond the threshold and pulled the door softly closed.

To open sinus passages closed by sorrow, she sniffled as she moved toward the window. Donnell moved hurriedly away from the advancing crowd toward his own quarters at the rear of the estate. But it was the men dressed in black that interested her now. Those that hovered around her brother smiled. The elder among them hung back with the women.

Was it her grief that restrained her now? Her father's advice rang in her ears. "Sometimes you just have to get mad, Honey." Yes, some things are worth the effort, aren't they? Her love and respect for her father were two of them.

The black, sweat-soaked chiffon stuck to her skin feeling like plastic wrap. Uninterested in its survival she peeled it off and tossed it in the corner along with the lace stockings her brother so abhorred. She sneered at the memory of his recrimination, "You look like a two-dollar whore, but at least you'll have work."

Yes, maybe getting mad was the way to deal with this situation. She slipped on a sheer white negligee and moved toward the window. Far in the distance, she could see the slim, well-maintained figure of Donnell with the black jacket removed and the white shirt sleeves rolled high, his body

bent with impossible weight. Even though the masses of flowers wilted under the tyranny of the summer sun, he moved the arrangements around the grave in a configuration that meant something only to him. What deeper meaning it held was unimportant to her. What mattered is that Donnell loved her father as much as she. And maybe more.

That deeper, though distant, connection between them was broken by the sound of raucous laughter rising from the great room. Her brother and his little kiss-asses from the firm sounded like a frat party erupting with irreverent frivolity. Even as her fists balled, her anger found form in her tears. Anger she could feel swelling inside like a tidal wave.

Only a timid knock on the door could distract her.
"Marquie, Honey, may I come in?"

She relaxed a little to the sound of a soothing voice. The door opened and she whispered, "Aunt Patrice," with relief.
"Please do."

A decidedly handsome woman in her sixties entered with a bitter smile. The silver strands wrapped around her head into a French twist exuded unmistakable grace. "I know how hard this is for you, Baby."

Marquie huffed as she plopped onto the settee. "That asshole is downstairs now counting his fortune before Daddy's body is even cold."

"And I refuse to sanction it," Patrice said angrily. "That's why I'm leaving."

"Please don't," Marquie whispered feeling something akin to desperation bursting within.

Gently, Patrice moved toward the settee and sat close. Her arm enclosed her niece as she wandered around her own rage now. "Peter just informed me that I'm to attend the meeting in the morning. A special meeting he just called to name himself the senior partner."

"Oh, isn't that rich," Marquie snarled. "Damn it, but why you?"

"I have a feeling I'm going to be asked to retire."

Angrily, Marquie launched off the settee and turned to stare. "You've worked there for thirty years as my father's secretary," she offered defiantly.

Sadly, Patrice nodded as she folded her hands in her lap. "Your father hired me before he married my sister. Don't get me wrong, I've been thinking about retiring anyway. I'm sixty six years old. But I would have never left your father. That he passed so suddenly..."

"I know."

"What Peter has in mind for the firm I rather doubt I want to be involved with anyway."

"I think there's something wrong with him," Marquie offered.

"Honey, you know insanity has run through my side of the family for generations. My mother was a raving lunatic which is a lot of the reason I never had children. You know well, that it was passed to your mother. My poor sister," she started shaking her head sadly. "My sister's claim to fame is to be written up in psychiatric journals. It's no wonder she shot herself."

Sadly, Marquie nodded. Her mother was a childhood memory, distant, dim and almost forgotten. But through the years she had heard the stories. She also knew Patrice was special to her father. "But Peter?"

"I see a lot of those same tendencies in him," Patrice admitted. "He has an ability to attract very unscrupulous people. Your father never defended anyone if he wasn't certain of their innocence. Peter doesn't have that same crises of conscience your father had. He put the Alphabet Murderer back on the streets."

"Twenty six exquisitely beautiful women," Marquie said sadly. "And that bastard won't go to prison for any one of them because of a technicality. He won't go to prison until he kills someone else. I don't want him in my house," she declared.

"I'm sorry, Darling, he downstairs now. The ugly truth is that the wealthy can afford a good lawyer. He's wealthy, Peter is good. That they went to college together seals the deal, I suppose. Even though his social standing is destroyed, he's still a friend of Peter's."

A grimace knurled Marquie's face into ugliness. "And now my brother has his own personal hitman on the payroll. Good way to get rid of witnesses."

"Like I said, I don't want to be involved," Patrice reminded. "So rather than wait to be fired, I'll courier my resignation to him in the morning. But my interest is this, Darling. I want you to move in with me ... today. I want you to pack your clothes right now."

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A chill washed up Marquie's spine and settled in her limbs to herald a fever. "No," she said firmly. "That would be the same as handing it to him. I won't do it. That doesn't mean I don't appreciate it. Truly, I do. But I'm not going to let that bastard get rid of me that easily. That is not what Daddy wanted. Even though Peter has informed me that he's moving back in, I'm not alone. We ... I have a lot of servants who don't care for him, either."

Patrice drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I want you always to remember that he's devious. Satan himself couldn't out think your brother. I want you always to remember that the invitation stands. And I want you to be very, very careful."

Feeling a sense of determination fill her powerfully, Marquie nodded. "I have to believe that love conquers all. And I loved my father. I love him still."

Tears sprang into Patrice's eyes. "I do, too, Honey. God, I do, too."

"Peter is going to read the will tomorrow," Marquie said. "I trust you'll be here."

"If you need me, I'll be here, Darling."

The music, the laughter and the drunken frivolity rising from below was more than distracting. "I can't stand this," she screamed. Without awaiting a response, she threw open her door and stormed the staircase. Moments later, Patrice heard Marquie's shattering voice, "OUT. ALL OF YOU. I WANT YOU OUT OF MY HOUSE, NOW!!!"

More laughter washed up the staircase. A chorus of Peter's voice and Marquie's tears stabbed at Patrice's heart. The

argument between brother and sister was bitter ... in front of an audience. That Marquie had her father's tenacity and her mother's ill-timing was almost remarkable now. Her father's sense of duty yet her mother's lack of emotional restraint. But she possessed her father's ability to forgive just as deeply as her mother's sensuality. What Peter could make of this little scene, Patrice dared to guess.

A few minutes later, the footfall on the staircase could be heard. The door flew open and there stood Marquie with armloads of vases filled with flowers exuding both purity and grief. Marquie was every bit as beautiful as the pastels she clung to now. Both in fury and calm, she was as beautiful as her mother.

But the warnings and the war could wait until tomorrow. Calmly, Patrice rose and took the arrangements to place around the room as sentinels to guard against Marquie's grief. "I'll be back about four tomorrow, Baby. Until then, I hope you just rest."

"I will," Marquie assured her. "And thank you for everything."

Tenderly, Patrice held her lips against Marquie's cheek for a moment, and then closed the door behind herself.

Marquie went to the window and there was Donnell still laboring under the searing sun placing arrangements in some kind of order. "You understand," she whispered with defiance. "Patrice understands. How am I going to make my brother understand that I will not allow this?"

Chapter Two

What do you wear to a black mass? Marquie asked herself. "For only Satan himself could find any interest in this." When she was in the mood for nothing more than a t-shirt and jeans, she removed a crisp white blouse from a hangar. Out of respect for her father, she put on a black business suit. Her features were naturally dark so that she needed only a dab of blush to highlight her cheekbones. Without thinking, she slipped on a pair of black pumps sans stockings.

The chime of the clock announced that a mere fifteen minutes separated her from disaster. What she needed was a stiff drink, but that would give her brother another excuse to accuse her of mental lapses. She winked at a member of the kitchen staff who immediately delivered a tall glass of Long Island iced tea. It was noticeably heavy on ice and lacking tea.

"Marquie," Peter said in greeting. Immediately he rose and moved toward her, his arm outstretched. "I know this is a hard day for you."

Her body stiffened to receive his caustic embrace. Defensiveness overtook her at the sight of him since the day he tossed her eight-year old body over the balcony railing and she fell to the soft earth of the garden. "But Dad, she only broke three bones," was her brother's response. "No, you little bastard," her father shot back. "You broke them."

"Peter," she whispered as she backed away and took a sip of bourbon. "I'm sure you've arranged everything the way you want it."

"I'm doing this for us now," he said in his most simpering voice. "There's nothing to argue about any more, Honey. Everything will go down exactly the way Dad wanted it."

She peered into his slate grey eyes a moment and then roved the room. That slimy eel, Keith Landry otherwise known as the Alphabet Murderer, sat in her father's favorite chair. Several of the firm's lawyers were in attendance though she didn't understand why criminal lawyers and international trade negotiators were required. And what did this have to do with family law? But two of the divorce lawyers were on hand while only one estate attorney had been invited.

Nowhere was Aunt Patrice. Donnell McLaughlin moved through the atrium door and glanced at her before bowing his head. Internally, she sighed knowing there was at least one friend in the room. "I want to wait for Patrice," she announced.

Peter's usually haughty expression melted into a scowl. "Perhaps you're unaware, but your Aunt Patrice quit the firm this morning. She did, in fact, say she wasn't interested in this afternoon's proceedings at all." He reached into his jacket and retrieved a letter to give to Marquie.

Suspiciously, Marquie studied her brother and then snatched the letter from his hand. Formally addressed to Mr. Peter Navarre and written on company letterhead, it gave no reason for the resignation. But the addendum, "...though I know you're father has named me in his will, I will not be in attendance this afternoon."

A thousand things ran though Marquie's mind including murder. But she knew Patrice hadn't been feeling well lately.

The sudden death of her father and the strain of the last few days was enough to put Patrice in bed for a week.

She folded the letter and shoved it in her pocket. Without a response, she moved toward the upright chair closest to where Donnell stood. Carefully, she sat down and straightened her spine as one leg crossed the other. Donnell's presence, like a guardian warrior behind her, soothed the tension a little. "You may begin," she declared.

Heavily, Peter exhaled, his attitude huffy over his sister's attempt to command him. As he rolled his eyes, he nodded to the estate attorney who stood with a legal envelope in hand. He passed it to the next man to inspect the seal and signature of Pierre Navarre, Esq. Finally, it came to Marquie and she studied it carefully. It certainly looked like her father's signature. But the date preceded this event by only a month. Her father had changed his will that recently. Boldly, she asked, "Was this document filed with the probate court?"

Respectfully, he answered, "Yes Ma'am. I filed the document myself on that same date."

Marquie nodded and passed it on. If this document differed from what was filed with the probate court she could easily find out. If Peter had forged something ... No, she decided. She knew that couldn't happen.

The attorney took the envelope and broke the seal. As if the contents were gospel, he pulled them out and studied the top page a moment. His voice, flat and dry began, "For the estate of Pierre Navarre..."

Cramps twisted Marquie's intestines into knots. The droning seemed to go on forever. Quietly, she sipped the

bourbon, yet she was lucid enough to hear, "...I hereby name Patrice Evans as the executrix of my will."

Instantly, Marquie looked up at her brother. His grim expression explained he knew nothing of this. Yet for something that should have been a shock, he relaxed back into the chair too quickly, she thought.

"...and to my son, Peter Navarre, I leave my properties in Antigua, Bermuda, California and France. The yacht, Perpetual Motion, is to become his sole property. Peter is to become a senior partner at the law firm of Navarre, Navarre, and Navarre and will retain sixty percent of my share of the profits. An additional five million dollars of my personal accounts will be transferred to him."

Unable to control himself, Peter launched from the chair. His face reddened with anger, he screamed, "Five million. That's all. A paltry five million dollars!"

The suits glanced nervously at each other for this appalling lack of decorum. Marquie understood it well. They now had their hands full; their fate was sealed. It would take three of them to keep the brat prince out of the law firm's affairs. Inwardly, she smiled.

"...to my daughter," the droning again began, the attorney attempting to ignore the outburst of the still-standing heir. "Marquerite Evans de Navarre, I leave le Domaine de Navarre as her sole property."

"That's unconscionable," Peter screamed.

Marquie settled into the straight-backed chair. From beside her, the curling strands of silver smoke entered her vision. Graciously, she took the cigarette from Donnell's hand and hit

it. "What's the matter, Darling?" she said snidely. "All of those other properties are not good enough for you?"

For a moment, he was dumbstruck. "How are you going to finance this place?" he snarled contemptuously.

Her dark brows arched into her forehead. "Let's find out." To the attorney she said, "You may continue."

"Also," being read from the will, "my daughter will receive as her sole property the remainder of my financial holdings in stocks and bonds, valued currently at thirty million dollars. Another ten million in cash will be transferred to her. Forty percent of my share of profits will be placed in trust to finance the expenses of le Domain including but not limited to repairs, taxes and staff salaries. All personal property within and on the estate will remain with the estate."

"This is incredible," Peter snarled in disbelief. "Not even a stick of furniture!"

"I don't understand," Marquie said boldly. "Is your concern that you can't live on sixty percent of ten million dollars per annum say ... in Antigua?"

It was an obvious attempt to get rid of him. To get him out of the firm. He peered around at the stone faces of attorneys surrounding him. "This is over," he decided.

"There is more," the reader said.

"Oh God," Peter swore as he dropped back into the chair.

"Patrice Evans?" the reader said knowing but one woman was present.

"What's she get?" Peter snarled.

"Five million." It was said curtly and with obvious malice. "Donnell McLaughlin."

Donnell's heart leapt at the sound of his name. That his employer would even think of him was an honor. "Yes," he whispered with his head bowed.

"Mr. Navarre has ordered the transfer of five million dollars to your personal account. To be specific, it reads, 'for twelve years of devoted service to me personally and to my daughter as personal assistant, limousine driver and now gardener, five million dollars will be transferred to Mr. Donnell McLaughlin's accounts. Mr. Jerry Davies will personally oversee this transaction and assist Mr. McLaughlin with any concerns or investments he cares to make. Additionally, it is my desire for him to remain a resident of le Domain for the remainder of his life as he so chooses."

Donnell grasped the back of Marquie's chair and held dearly for he felt faint. For twelve years of love and laughter and tears, for a mere twelve years of 'devoted service' that felt more like uninhibited devotion and wanton lust, he was made a king by common standards. For another twelve years he would happily live a pauper wearing only the clothes his Master gave him, eating only the food his Master placed before him. Living for nothing more than his Master's lash. Dying for want of his Master's embrace.

With his chin crushed to his chest, tears dripped passionately from his eyes. A sudden and rash urge to run to the cemetery and fall on the grave, to there weep assuaged his sanity. But his attention was captured by, "Is this over yet?"

He looked up and glared openly at Peter Navarre, unaware of his tear-stained face.

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Peter growled and then rose from the chair. Obviously unbalanced by these revelations, he said, "Thank you for coming, Gentlemen. I will see you all at the firm tomorrow."

The rustle of fine fabrics of grey and black sounded like a stampede. Genuinely amused, Marquie smiled graciously and nodded as they passed in procession. Without the slightest offer of respect toward her brother they made immediately for the door and disappeared. Only she and her brother, the Alphabet Murderer and her knight, Donnell, remained.

"I want you out of my house ... now," she said sternly.

Amused, Peter laughed at her. "First of all, Darling, this is not your house. The deed is a long way off from being transferred to you. Currently, it's a holding of the old man's estate and if I decide to contest what was obviously written by a lunatic suffering from undiagnosed brain tumors, this house may never be yours. Currently, we both have a right to live here. In the event that someday the property is transferred to you, I'll still have sixty days to vacate the premises. State law, Sweetie."

"I'd be happy to make reservations at the whorehouse you frequent," she assured him.

His eyes narrowed as his anger rose. "You might want to settle into this, I'm warning you now. You better get yourself a good fucking lawyer, too. One who isn't afraid to go up against me. Unless you want to settle with me, out of court, something evenly split right down the middle, I'm gonna make sure this costs you a lot of money, Babe. Me, don't worry about me. I work for myself for free."

Slowly, she rose out of the chair, glaring at her brother. Her hand settled before her chest with the index finger and thumb extended in the attitude of a gun pointed at his 'friend.' "I want that cock-sucker out of my house now. He's not permitted to come back, do you understand? If he passes through the front gate, I'm going to call the cops."

Peter's facial muscles quivered with rage. Nothing could ruin his credibility quicker than a visit from the police over a suspected murderer. Quietly, he tossed his head toward the door. Like a slave to Peter's wishes, the Alphabet Murderer stood and left abruptly.

With a heavy sigh, Peter exhaled as he fell into a chair. "You might want to settle down, Sweetie. You'll want to settle in for the long haul," he warned.

Quietly, she turned toward Donnell and saw that his tears were ready to break free again. In her own way, she envied his liberty to grieve as she wanted to. But now was not the time. Peter had declared war. "I'd like you to get the car and take me to Patrice, please."

"Yes, Mistress," he whispered. It was a command he could cling to, something that could be done without thought. Something he wanted to do. Something that would obliterate thought.

Donnell departed and Marquie turned toward Peter feeling nothing but contempt. His words grated like sandpaper. "You might want to remind that old broad that she saved me the trouble of firing her." Unable to withhold her anger, she threw the glass filled with ice at his face. But his arms raised and batted it away. Like a lunatic, he laughed as she stomped

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past him.

Chapter Three

Donnell returned to the two bedroom bungalow he had called home for twelve years. Though every night was spent in his Master's bed, his entrance to the bedroom obtained by the balcony stairs, this was where his clothes were kept.

The events of the last two days were reprehensible. His Master was not insane as his Master's son suggested. The tumors were located around the brain stem that controlled heart and breathing rates, not rationality or logical thought processes. Still, Peter would turn this into a circus and bring shame upon his Master's house.

He went to the kitchen cupboard and reached to the back of a high shelf. Little did his Mistress know that he was licensed to kill. Though his days on the force were long distant and nearly forgotten, the last few days brought them back with vengeance. The days when he had been transferred to homicide. And his first assignment was to assist with the investigation of the Alphabet Murderer.

That the woman Marquie thought of as her mother, Aunt Patrice, hadn't arrived for this most auspicious occasion, gave Donnell reason to worry. It was obvious that Peter hadn't known she was named the executrix. Yet he didn't seem concerned that she had inherited so much money. There was a reason for that and Donnell knew exactly what it was. He knew the Alphabet Murderer, Keith Landry, better than anyone still alive. The others on the investigation had already committed suicide in various ways from gunshot wounds to wild car accidents.

Quietly, he slipped a clip into a Beretta and tightened the shoulder holster around his body. With a click, a round of ammunition moved into the chamber and he secured the safety. As he holstered it, he grabbed his jacket and went to the car.

But his instincts told him they were already too late. He could almost see Patrice's body slashed from her throat to her pubis and her internals sprawled around her. If her heart was missing, he would know the perpetrator.

But it was Marquie on his mind now. Patrice was the one source of emotional support she could depend upon. To lose Patrice would be to lose her sanity. And that Donnell could not allow.

Thirty minutes later, Donnell parked in the driveway. Marquie was so anxious; she let herself out of the limo and dashed toward the door. The key already in hand, she slid it into the deadbolt. But the door was unlocked.

"Oh God," Marquie cried.

"Mistress," Donnell said forcefully as he grabbed her upper arm and restrained her. "Please, allow me."

"Something's wrong," she cried.

Patently, Donnell nodded. "Please, stay right here."

Shaken and shivering, Marquie obeyed. Donnell removed a handkerchief from a pocket and opened the door. He could almost scent the blood, that putrid odor of slowly rotting flesh wafting on air currents. His stomach turned, but he stuck his head inside.

All was well in the reception area. Yet he turned and warned her again. "Don't touch anything." And then he went inside.

It was as if he could sense death hovering around him. He could sense the maniacal energies of Keith Landry still hanging like bats in a cave ready to swamp his reason. He knew exactly where to find the body.

A smear of blood on the hand railing, faint but obvious to him, indicated murder. With the handkerchief, he opened the master bedroom door.

And there she laid. Donnell's organs wretched to see the knife driven at an angle through her heart. It was an attack in her sleep, though she didn't die instantly. Her eyes were open, her mouth agape. The blood on her hands indicated that she'd tried to remove the weapon.

But this wasn't the Alphabet Murderer's MO. The room had been tossed, either in search of valuables or to create the motive of a robbery. A single knife wound had killed her. Not the MO he knew so well.

Immediately he withdrew a cell phone and dialed a number he could never forget. To the man who oversaw the investigation twelve years ago, he said, "Captain, its Donnell McLaughlin."

"Well, Buddy, how the hell are you?" Captain Lucius Sullivant, of the CPD said happily to an ex-officer. And a fine one at that.

"You know that Pierre Navarre was buried yesterday."

"It was all over the news."

"I'm standing in the bedroom of his secretary and sister-in-law. She's got a knife driven through her heart."

"Oh really," the Captain said with obvious shock.

"Address?"

Donnell rattled it off and then said, "You need a full forensics team on this one, Captain."

"Where's the perp?"

Under his breath, Donnell admitted, "I lost sight of him about forty minutes ago."

"You're not saying..." Lucius began.

"I believe so, Captain. I can feel it."

"Secure the site and wait outside. I'll be there in five minutes."

"Yes, Sir." Donnell clicked off and slid the phone into his pocket. He turned to leave. But there stood Marquie in the threshold, frozen in time and place, her mouth agape, her eyes full of shock.

"Mistress," he gasped.

It seemed she couldn't hear him, as if she'd been transported to some realm where everything was a dream, nor could she respond. He knew that her mind couldn't comprehend what she saw. Nothing could she interpret sensibly. He knew that feeling well.

Slowly, he edged toward her. As he reached for her, anxious to get her away from this, she collapsed on the floor.

Quickly, he redialed the phone. "Captain, send an ambulance, too, please."

Already he heard the sirens in the distance. The chop of a helicopter made his blood chill. There was no need for that.

This crime was hours old already. Heavily, he dropped to his knees beside of Marquie and pulled her head into his lap.

"Donnell," rose from the foyer below.

"Up here, Captain." The commotion of officers outside cordoning off the scene caused a rush of memories through Donnell's psyche.

"Who's this?" Lucius asked.

"Marquerite de Navarre," Donnell whispered. "Who thought of the victim as a mother. Patrice Evans is a biological aunt."

Lucius bent to feel the clammy skin on the cheek. "In shock. The EMTs are pulling in now. They'll take her in."

"She'll want to stay. I hope they can hang around."

The Captain nodded as he peeked through the door. He drew in a quick breath through his nose and let it out slowly. "I know you quit the force quite awhile ago. That's the wrong MO for the Alphabet Murderer."

Donnell nodded as the EMTs rushed up the stairs. "Could you just hang around for awhile, give her some fluids? I'll be down in a bit. She's just in shock."

"I'm sorry, Sir, but because she's unconscious we have to take her in."

"Tell her I'll be there in a few minutes."

As the EMT's laid her limp body on a gurney, Donnell kissed her forehead and then stood. "So Captain," Donnell began. He looked at his watch and said, "I arrived at 1738 EDT. The front door was unlocked and I asked the girl to stay outside. As I was finishing up the call with you, I saw her standing in the doorway."

Lucius moved solemnly toward the bed to view the corpse. "I'll bet your ass and mine both that this is about twelve hours old."

"Funny thing though. Peter Navarre has a letter of resignation that was supposedly couriered to his office this morning. Who the fuck would pick up a letter in the middle of the night?"

"They might have picked it up last night to deliver this morning."

"It's a forgery, I'm telling you now. I can feel it. And that asshole, Keith Landry is still hanging around with Peter."

"You don't say."

"I need to get to the hospital now. I'll give you my statement later. There are a lot of reasons Peter Navarre might have to want Patrice Evans out of the way."

"You're still working private duty over there?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I'll call you tomorrow."

Donnell stood in the hallway to allow the forensics team to pass by. And then he hurried down the stairs toward the limo. Certainly Marquie was awake by now. And to find herself alone would be cruel.

Chapter Four

"I'm gonna kill that mother fucker."

Donnell heard the strangled scream as he moved through the emergency room. Because there was a lot business on this hot afternoon, the security guards were outside with yet another stabbing victim. Quietly, he slipped through the doors to the sound of Marquie's screaming.

"Donnell, you have to get me out of here." Her eyes bled with despair, her mascara blackening her cheeks with what looked like lightening burns. Orderlies scrambled toward her to calm her. To his horror, he noted the restraints and then a hypodermic.

"Gentlemen," he rasped, now blaming himself for summoning an ambulance. "She's suffered a terrible shock, that's all. Her father was buried yesterday and today her aunt has become a murder victim."

Still, she fought them, cursing and crying. It seemed hours passed, yet it was only minutes that the drugs took hold and quieted her. Only then could she be restrained to the bed.

"The doctor will be here shortly," was the warning.

"Donnell," she murmured her eyes half-lidded with the narcotic.

"Oh God, Honey, I'm so sorry," he pleaded, knowing he was the singular cause of her confinement. His instinct was to protect her, to cuddle her close to his chest. Decorum demanded that he merely close his hand on hers. "You were unconscious, Mistress."

"Donnell..." Already her tongue was thick yet she tried to fight it. "What happened?"

Full of sadness he shook his head. For this he wanted to be on his knees and explain. It seemed the only proper way to speak to her. Rather, he folded his arms to his lean body and closed his hands in the attitude of prayer. "We don't know yet. The police are investigating now."

With a shallow breath, she murmured, "Peter."

Yes, Peter. Peter was certainly the one who had motive. He also had a very experienced assassin in his service. But since Patrice had lived alone since the death of her husband, who would know if anything had been stolen. On the off chance that this had been a random act, only the use of her credit cards or recognizable items showing up in a pawn shop would indicate a robbery gone bad. Since the murder weapon was a butcher knife, probably matching a set in the victim's kitchen, it would be hard to prove pre-meditated murder.

Restraining a sense of panic, Donnell placed his hand over her forehead. "Listen carefully," he whispered. "You need to relax and gather your wits in order to get out of here. You were hysterical when you came in and you've made overt threats. I'm rather certain they're sending a psychiatrist down here to evaluate you."

"You can't be serious."

"Please, Honey, just work with this for now. When we get home you can say anything to me that you like."

Feeling as if she were floating in an altered dimension, her head rolled on the flat pillow. He stood and backed away a little, only to be greeted by the sight of short, round man with

narrow glasses studying him carefully. I'm Doctor Frank Blaine ... from psychiatry," he said with an accusatory tone.

"And you are ... ?

"Donnell McLaughlin. Her bodyguard. Can we chat?"

The doctor noted the patient's induced serenity and nodded. Dutifully, Donnell followed to a conference room. To do anything to make this better for Marquie, he sat quietly, mindful of his body language and a man who could read it accurately.

Controlling his own emotions, he recounted the recent events.

"But I understand that she's made very overt threats to kill someone. Do you know who?"

Donnell shook his head. "She's not a violent woman. I've been her chauffeur and body guard for several years now. But now with the very sudden death of her father and the murder of her aunt, she is under some stress at the moment."

"Exactly," the doctor replied. "Her next of kin?"

Donnell hesitated. "Everyone who loved her and supported her has died, Doctor."

"No brothers, sisters?"

Donnell looked directly at the doctor now. "She has one very unhappy brother. Unhappy because of the revelation that she was awarded more assets of her father's estate than him. So to add to her stress, Peter Navarre, has threatened to hold this up in litigation for years. My concern is for my client, Doctor. It would save him a lot of time and trouble if my client were to pass as quickly as her aunt has."

"What are you saying, exactly?" The doctor seemed unduly incensed.

"I'm saying that the matter of the murder of Patrice Evans, who was named executrix of her father's estate, is under investigation by the homicide division now. However, if Ms. de Navarre is restricted from doing what she needs to do by giving her aunt a proper burial, it will only add to her stress."

"Is my patient in danger?" the doctor asked.

"Not at the moment," Donnell replied. "It's my job to protect her. If you need proof in the form of an employment contract, I can supply it."

The doctor hesitated, pondering the possibilities. "I have the legal authority and the moral obligation to lock her down for three days of evaluation, you understand."

"I do."

"Given her situation, I'll write a prescription and make an appointment for her. If she misses that appointment next week, I will inform the authorities and she will be brought in for evaluation at that time."

"I understand. I will drive her to that appointment and deliver her to you."

"Alright then. Let me spend a few minutes with her and then you can take her home."

"Thank you," Donnell whispered wholly relieved. But still, this wasn't good. Now there was a legal record indicating the possibility of mental instability.

Because of the years of practice in his Master's presence, Donnell could move soundlessly without notice. He stood beyond the curtain in the emergency room listening to

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Marquie respond through quietly muffled tears. The doctor's voice was calm as he explained what he expected of her and she replied by saying that she needed someone to talk to. She promised to be at the appointment as scheduled. Even Dr. Blaine didn't notice Donnell hovering, as he moved from behind the curtain of the cubicle and disappeared.

Donnell slipped in and whispered, "Let me help you, Mistress."

"That was frightening," she admitted.

"Shhhh." The pale green of his eyes looked directly into her as he shook his head begging her quiet and compliance. "I'm taking you home."

No longer restrained to the bed, she perched on the edge of it, resting a moment to let the dizziness still. "I don't want to be anywhere near Peter right now."

He held a single finger over his lips to quiet her. And then he pulled her into his embrace against his chest. She felt like a rag doll, her arms hanging limp. Finally he was able to place her on her feet. "That's why you're going to stay with me."

Chapter Five

Donnell used the back driveway. By turning off the security system for the moment it took to drive through the gate, he could get on to the estate without notice. Immediately he went to the garage to hide the car. In the back seat of the limo, Marquie was already asleep. As if he handled a piece of priceless art, he picked her up and carried her inside.

The soft hues of twilight melted through the sheers on his bedroom window diffusing the myriad colors on the mottled cream walls. For a long moment, he stared at the languid beauty in her long narrow fingers imagining them wrapped around the grip of a whip. As he removed the sandals, the skin felt as soft as the leather his Master often wrapped him within. He was powerless in the presence of her potential power.

She doesn't need a shrink. All she needs is confidence.

He closed his eyes and opened the snap on her jeans. To the feel of her flutter, he opened them to see the unconscious movement of her arm. The grating of the zipper didn't seem to disturb her. Peeking from behind the open jeans was the most intoxicating sight of petal pink lace he'd ever beheld.

You can do this, he assured himself even as his cock quite shamefully rose. Carefully, he grasped the waist band and tugged it past her shapely hips, the vision of that lace captured in the corner of his eye. Her scent rose around him with inebriating force further rending his sanity. Mindlessly, he folded her jeans and placed them on a chair. With a throw at the end of the bed, he covered her.

Unable to stand himself, he went directly to the shower. With the least amount of warmth, he soothed himself into his proper position. Until chill blains raised on his skin he stood under the cold water. He forced himself to think of the Alphabet Murderer, for whom Marquie was the next target, he was certain.

How many times had he told his fellow investigators that the killer worked on a strictly emotionally level? Every woman they found, from eight years of age, asleep in her parent's home, to seventy, he had wanted only one thing. It wasn't money; it wasn't sex. The killer wanted only to feel, to feel pain perhaps, to feel alive. In every instance he had slashed their bodies open and made away with their hearts. In the case of Patrice Evans, he wanted to still her heart. Or maybe there was no time to slip the still beating heart from under the bone and ... and do what with it? They were never found.

That it was his fate to be tortured by these memories into eternity, Donnell had accepted some time ago. Every detail of the investigation was burned into his psyche as if by firebrand. Pierre Navarre had accepted the role of special prosecutor and in his own words he had said repeatedly, "I'll pull the switch on that son of a bitch, myself." For Pierre Navarre, it was personal. The youngest of the victims was the daughter of a senior partner. When Peter accepted the job of defense attorney in the case, the rift between father and son widened into a chasm ... and was permanent.

Tirelessly, Donnell had worked with Pierre Navarre on the minutiae of the case. Hair samples, blood, DNA, MO's. Eighteen victims into the case, they finally found a strand of

hair that wasn't the victim's. It turned out to be a lover's. Angry and frustrated, Pierre Navarre slammed a shot glass on his desk. "I've never believed in ghosts, but I'm beginning to."

Sergeant Donnell McLaughlin shook his head. "He goes in nude, swaddled in plastic wrap. He slashes the victim, puts her heart in a plastic bag. Unwraps himself, puts all of that in plastic and then walks out the front door with clean plastic shoe covers. Goes to his vehicle, puts his clothes on and probably stops for a burger and fries on the way home. I'm telling you now ... it's either a cop ... or a doctor."

"Our very own Jack the Ripper," Pierre had said.

By that time, two of the eight investigators had mysteriously died. Donnell took a break only to attend funerals, but at the mention of Jack the Ripper, a case that remained unsolved a hundred years later, he broke down. In Pierre's office, he burst with the emotional toll it had taken on him. Pierre rushed around the desk and lifted Donnell into his arms. How long he sobbed on the man's shoulder, he couldn't have known. It was in that moment the connection was made.

The investigation had ended too easily. When fantasies of finding the fiend in the act and committing cold-blooded murder had plagued Donnell incessantly, it was the notes the perp had written to the press that defined Donnell's defeat. Through those carefully crafted lines, Donnell knew exactly where to find him. At lunch in a neighborhood diner, in full view of the public. Shooting him was out of the question. It would have been murder. Keith Landry held out his hands as

if to welcome the handcuffs. And then he said to the waitress with his usual smirk, "Don't worry about the bill, Honey. I will make it up to you."

The trial lasted eight months. No less than fifty two times, Donnell was called to the stand to explain this detail or that oversight in the investigation. Every time Peter Navarre made him look the fool. Incredulously, Donnell listened to the verdict, the droning of, "Not guilty," twenty six times until his intestines twisted into Gordian knots. Without thinking or will, he drove back to the precinct. In the Captain's office, he laid his badge and his weapon on the desk. Still defeated, still numb, he removed his uniform and left it in a puddle. He turned and walked out of the office wearing only his boxer shorts. And he went straight to Pierre Navarre.

Because of the events of the last few days, these tortures returned with vengeance. Only the sound of a cough could turn his attention. He peeked around the bathroom door to see Marquie staring up at the ceiling, herself looking a little like a corpse. Hurriedly, he pulled on a pair of sweatpants and stood beside the bed.

"I can't believe what is happening," she whispered.

Slowly, he nodded. "Feels like an eruption. Let me get you some tea."

Moments later he sat beside of her, tea in hand. "I need to explain something to you," he started.

Laboriously, she pulled herself up to sit against the upholstered headboard and then took the mug from him. Quietly, she sipped it as her bleary eyes bored into him. "I'm listening."

"I met your father a long time ago and I've worked for him ever since. We worked on the Landry case together. I was a cop then."

"Seriously," she said with a strange grin.

"Since then I've been in your father's employ as a body guard."

"I thought you were the gardener," she said quickly. "I see you in the gardens constantly."

"I like to garden," he said softly. "But when you came home from college, what ... four years ago, your father made some changes. You see, your father hasn't trusted your brother, maybe, ever. But when you came back, he became very worried about your safety."

She interrupted with, "So he put you in the gardens to watch over me."

"Yes," he murmured. "I rarely take my eyes off of you. I know what you're doing just about every moment. I take you every where you go." He closed his eyes remembering some of the more intimate moments she thought she was alone—like in the bathroom.

"That's kind of ... creepy." Thoughts of what he might have seen caused her skin to crawl. "Yet my father loved me that much."

"He did," Donnell said quickly. "My orders were to kill anyone who might have threatened your well-being. Even your brother."

"Wow." She nestled into the bedding and held the steaming liquid under her nose to open clogged sinus passages. "I knew you and my father were close."

Donnell gasped as the tears once again blurred his vision. He dropped his face into his hands.

"How close?" she asked.

Donnell shook his head for he couldn't respond.

"I know you were lovers. I could often hear your hushed voice through his bedroom door."

"Oh God," he cried out. Helplessly, he slid off the bed and landed on the floor. With his arms folded over his knees, he wept shamelessly.

She returned the tea to the nightstand and rolled to her side. Tenderly, her nails raked through his hair to soothe him a little. His voice broke every string of her battered heart, and together they wept past nightfall.

* * * *

Stray shafts of moonlight filtered through the softly shimmering sheers when finally she felt like herself again. "C'mere, baby," she whispered as her hand wrapped around his face to urge him onto the bed. "Be with me now."

Though he knew he shouldn't, though he knew this was wrong, he slid beside of her half-clad body. Just as her father often did, her arms wrapped around his head and cradled it to her chest. "It's alright, baby, we're gonna find out who did this. And this time we're not going put ourselves through a trial. We're just gonna kill the bastard."

To the feel of her strength, to the feel of her commitment, he shook his head adamantly. Certainly, she had her father's intelligence and strangely, his wisdom. She had learned well. At the tender age of twenty six, all she lacked was her

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father's emotional maturity. Easily, her outbursts had been interpreted as lunacy given her maternity.

As he nuzzled between her generous breasts, the vision of Keith Landry rose before him. His last thought of the day was simple enough. This time, you mother fucker, I am going to kill you. If I have to go to death row for you, I will."

Chapter Six

Marquie awoke to a sun-splashed morning hearing the twittering of birds beyond the window. That le Jardin de Navarre was the most hopelessly romantic place she'd ever seen in person or print was unquestionable. Even as a landscape architect, these gardens in which the gingerbread bungalow of her body guard was located, she had seen nothing more awe-inspiring.

But romance was the furthest thing from her mind. Feeling alone, suddenly a shiver of panic washed through her and she cried out, "Donnell." Immediately, his face appeared over the edge of the bed. "What are you doing?"

"I sleep on the floor, Mistress."

For a long moment, she stared conspicuously. "Why?"

"Your father allowed it," he whispered in defense.

"Allowed it?" Her mind raced through possibilities but only one settled. "You were much, much more to my father than just a lover."

He bowed his head and buried his nose to the edge of the mattress. "Yes, Mistress. And I tend to thrash at night."

"Flashbacks?"

"Yes."

Her brows arched into her forehead with this latest revelation. Yet a rush of emotion turned her attention. "What do we have to do today?" she asked.

Inside, he smiled at the concept of 'we.' Gently, he took her hand and held his lips against the back of it. "I'm going to take a shower and get dressed. Then we'll go to the main

house, I'll sit in your room while you shower and dress. I need to make a few phone calls and find out the disposition of the..." He hesitated. He was much too direct.

"The body," she choked.

Gratefully, he nodded. "We'll get some food, we both need that. And then we'll go on to the funeral home."

"Alright," she replied. This was something she needed to do for her 'mother.'

"And we'll get your prescription filled."

"Fuck that. They're not taking me down again." She lurched out of the bed and went to the bathroom. That she didn't close the door seemed a welcome to him. The sound of tinkling liquid distracted him wholly. That somehow, they could lean on each other through this suddenly seemed possible.

* * * *

Peter Navarre parked at the end of a tree-lined cul-de-sac and cautiously exited his car. A quick glance told him he arrived unnoticed on this steamy July morning. He walked through the front door, and hollered, "Keith."

"Yeah."

"What do you want?"

Keith Landry stepped out of the kitchen with a cup of coffee glaring boldly. "That fucking Donnell McLaughlin. You lying mother fucker, you never told me he worked for your father."

"What's the problem, buddy? Too close for comfort?"

"That is a man who would be happy to see me dead."

"Bullshit. He can hardly figure out which way up is, much less pull the trigger on a gun anymore. He can't even take a piss if someone doesn't tell him to."

Landry glared boldly. "He's gonna figure out a way to nail me for this one. I can feel that little fuck thinking about me. And you ... the only reason I got off last time wasn't so much because you're brilliant but because you got lucky."

Out loud Peter huffed as if that were the most ridiculous thing he'd ever heard. "Why don't you take it easy, you ungrateful little brat. You walked on twenty six murder charges. And this last one isn't adding up to the police at all. McLaughlin might be trying to convince them it's you, but they're not buying it at all downtown. So take a vacation. I know a little spot in Antigua that might work out."

Leland snapped his fingers and held his hand out. "And I'll take twenty grand to go with it."

"Stop by the office this afternoon and I'll have it ready for you. I'll even make the plane reservations."

* * * *

The day's chores completed, Donnell returned his Mistress to his bungalow. "What can I do for you?" he asked quietly.

"Long Island iced tea, darling," she said softly. "Long on ice and short on tea."

He smiled, grateful that a few things in her life were stable. Even at the parlor, she held it together with only a modicum of quiet sobbing. And because she refused the prescription the psychiatrist ordered, he poured an extra shot

of bourbon in the glass. Dutifully, he placed it on a tray and knelt before her.

As if her vision caught on a sight too lovely for words, she stared openly. "You're a beautiful man," she whispered. Tenderly, her nails raked through the soft strands of his slowly graying hair. As if she thought out loud, she murmured, "There's so much in this life that we could do together. Me a landscape architect, you who loves to garden."

"That's very flattering, Mistress. I would enjoy that very much."

"I remember an afternoon when Daddy and I stood on the porch watching you work. You were so intent with what you were doing. He made the comment that it looked as if you were searching for buried treasure."

Donnell smiled and bowed his head. He remembered well the contentment he felt as his Master watched over him.

"So..." she began. Tenderly, her fingers slipped under his chin to raise him and look into his eyes. "...because my father loved you, and because I do too, your name is now treasure."

Donnell gasped. This was an honor that he had never imagined. "Mistress," he breathed staring unabashedly into her. "You can't know what this means. I would do anything for you," he swore.

Her fingers swept over his cheek as she smiled. "I believe that. Right now, I need to move around a little."

"I must advise that you don't go to the main house just now."

"No. Just the gardens."

"May i join you?"

"Why don't you take a shower and rest a little bit. I'll be fine."

Obviously disappointed, he nodded and then rose, watching as she left him. Rather than do as she asked, because a moral imperative issued by his Master took precedence, he went to the kitchen and turned on the television. The split screen appeared. Unable to take his eyes from her, he watched as she meandered along the stone pathway. Seemingly absent-minded, she reached down to stroke the resilient flesh of a lily.

Buried treasure. It wasn't so much that he was looking for buried treasure, but laying the wiring of these ninety three cameras that had become his treasure. Not a square inch of the entire estate was beyond his sight. Never was she beyond him. At any moment, from anywhere in the world, he could look in on her through a television, a computer monitor or a satellite phone. Those moments he cherished most took place in the dark with only the soft glow of candlelight to illuminate that intimacy. As one hand fondled a nipple and the other her clit. How she would spill with the softest moan and then roll over hugged to a pillow.

In desperation, he envied the maid who changed her sheets in the morning. The maid who placed her lingerie in satin-lined drawers. The maid who rolled her lace stockings and then went to her closet to rearrange the rows of boots and shoes with stiletto heels. The maid who was permitted entrance into the Lady's sanctum to place corsets made of damask with satin garters in their proper place.

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Now the thing to think of was Her pleasure ... "for I am Her treasure," he breathed. He called the main house for two chicken breasts, rice and assorted vegetables. "And please don't forget the white tapers," he added.

* * * *

She dabbed her lips with the napkin and laid it beside the empty plate. How curious that she was able to eat an actual meal while this last week she had been sustained on stolen bites and bourbon. Maybe it was this fairy tale type cottage tucked in the hinterlands of Navarre. Maybe it was the company. "That was wonderful," she said softly, attempting to hold his gaze.

But he was unable to be inspected, his eyes constantly darting from her. Quietly, he rose to clear the table. When he desired only to lie on the floor in front of her chair that she might prop her feet on his hip as her father did, she merely wobbled her fingers to command him to advance. Easily, he fell to his knees beside of her. Tenderly, she scooped him into her arms to hold his face against her neck.

Donnell smiled. In moments like these she was overflowing with confidence. Confidence not only in herself, but the world around her, minute as it was. He remembered well the moment he lost confidence in the world, the moment his reality became a dreamscape and everything in it surreal. When was that moment for her? he wondered. Dom Pierre had an uncanny ability to divide the world into Dominants and submissives and to assign their duties according to their gifts. Surely, she did, too, if only she were permitted to blossom.

But Dom Pierre's philosophy was simple. "Training, practice and then mastery, Donnell," he often said. His philosophy applied to everything from feats of logic, through flawless defense cases to changing the tires on the car. Everything required training and practice, then came mastery of the task. The only variable was attitude and will. His new Mistress certainly had attitude and will. Perhaps all she lacked was training.

Stepping onto a ledge, uncertain of the outcome, he whispered, "Mistress, may i show you something?"

"Yes, baby," she mewed.

That simple word she used so often made him feel protected and cared for. Lacking confidence in the outcome of the course he'd embarked upon, he grasped her hand. Timidly, he began, "You already know that your father and I had a rather unusual relationship."

A broad smile lit her face. "Not so unusual, really. It's just that a daughter doesn't dwell on her parent's sexuality, if you know what I mean. Now that you mention it, for my father, being so in charge of everything around him, being Dominant with his lovers doesn't surprise me."

A little relieved, he turned toward the garage and moved through the service door. From his pocket he removed a key and opened the dead bolt on a steel door. "I hope this doesn't frighten you."

She peered past the door down an unadorned stairwell leading to a basement lit with the softest hues of amber. "Unless you have bodies stacked up down here, I can't imagine what it would be."

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Still holding her hand, he nodded and descended. At the bottom, she stood on the bare concrete floor and froze. Her eyes roved around the massive room as she clung a little tighter. At times like these she was as expressionless as her father. Whether that was an inherited or learned trait, he couldn't know.

"Mistress," he murmured as his heart sank. Wondering if this would end by carrying her unconscious body to the bed again, he trembled internally. Finally, she let go and moved deeper into the room.

She lingered near the bright chain from which the Dom's various whips hung in erotic display of the color black. The net of logging chain refracting the low light seemed to catch her attention as it would a baby's. To St. Andrew's Cross fashioned from ancient barn beams of rough-hewn oak, she turned only a moment. An exam table, a whipping horse, a bondage rack, a steel cage. "This is Daddy's Dungeon," she cried.

"Yes, Mistress," Donnell replied, grateful that she hadn't run screaming from him. Grateful that she was, at least, superficially familiar with these things.

Heavily, she sighed. As if she approached a shrine, her bare feet scuffed the cold concrete toward the whips. As if she invaded a reliquary, she opened a clasp to remove a flogger. Of the ornately braided handle with the long falls, she asked, "What is this?"

"A warm-up flogger, Mistress."

"Warm-up?"

"To beat someone merely to create pain was not what your father was interested in. To warm up a nervous system and empower it to accept continually deeper sensations, to shut down the mind and reunite body and soul ... that's what he demanded."

"You make it sound as if it doesn't hurt."

With a crooked smile, he shrugged. "Really, it's not as painful as you would think of it. It's rather kind of an escape to a safe place."

Her eyes narrowed wondering how being restrained to any of these devices and beaten with a whip would feel safe.

"Show me," she challenged.

"Yes, Ma'am," he said wholly relieved.

Carefully, he took the oft-used flogger from her hand. She noted his clench on the handle. "Because this one is so long, twenty four inches, it requires a particular motion. Pull the falls through your left hand to keep them together and then..." The whip came to life with its voice echoing in the chamber. It was a rather dull sound, not the crack she wanted to hear. With a little smile, he turned and aimed at her calves.

She responded with a tremulous giggle and set his heart on fire.

"And you enjoy this?" she asked.

He closed his eyes and let his breath escape. "Like you can't imagine. With this one you couldn't hurt a puppy. Too gangly ... a warm-up flogger. Some of these others could flay skin."

Feeling energized, she snatched the whip from his hand. "Over here," she commanded.

He closed his eyes and ripped off his shirt with a single fluid movement. The belt opened; the trousers fell to the floor. "Truly, I appreciate this," he whispered adamantly. "I need this terribly."

He reached up to the cuffs on the cross and grasped the soft leather understanding that she didn't yet have the confidence or skills to affix his limbs to it. "Pick a spot and take aim," he instructed. "Just don't let the falls wrap. When they wrap, the ends are moving at a much greater speed and tend to cut."

She nodded, every bit of her concentration directed at a very muscular thigh. She couldn't help but notice that he was painfully erect behind the silk boxers. Reveling in the feel of the leather, the feel of her father's over-powering energy emanating from it, she pulled it through her left hand and made contact with him. To contact another human being in this way sent a jolt of electricity through her own nervous system. It was the most intimate thing she had ever experienced.

His head dropped to allow her energy to swell into him and obliterate his senses. Each soft stroke of the flogger felt like another passionate kiss on his neglected skin. Her technique was almost perfect, but why shouldn't it be? She was the great Dom's daughter and had only to practice, for it was his blood that was also hers.

The gentle caressing ceased for a moment and he opened his eyes. She was going for another flogger which drew a smile to his lips.

"What do I need to know about this one?" she asked softly.

He shook his head. With the falls at only eight inches and the leather much stiffer, he replied, "Same technique, but stay away from soft tissues. The effect is much more concentrated and can damage internal organs ... kidneys and such."

Again, she took aim at the thigh. The soft swoosh of the warm-up flogger gave way to the intensity of a gentle crack. But it was the escape of his breath that drove her on.

* * * *

By the clock on the wall, she noted that two hours had passed already. Two hours that had seemed no more than two minutes. Strangely, she felt full and sated, not by alcohol or food but by something indefinable.

"You're tired?" he asked.

She peered into his eyes, this the first time he would allow her to look into him. "A little. But not really. I don't know what it is."

"It's the..." He was going to use the word erotic. Rather he offered, "Power exchange. I take it and give it back. You take it and give it back..."

"And it keeps growing until it..."

"Overwhelms U/us both."

"Yes," she said quietly, peering deeply into him. His energy bubbled like lava.

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"For my Master and me both, it was the ultimate in Zen meditation. No thoughts, no words, just two people so totally connected into a whole entity."

Now it was Marquie who broke the connection between them by dropping her head. "The human voice is profane at times," she admitted.

He let go of the leather cuffs knowing that this had been powerful for her. While he felt merely caressed, his nervous system able to withstand and require so much more, it was a beginning. Rather than pressure her by begging, he said, "Let me put you in bed."

* * * *

A wash of candlelight danced on the air currents as she lay curled on her side. Her thoughts had returned to break the spell. Thoughts of Patrice, of Peter, but mostly of her father swept through her head to muddle in confusion.

Donnell came out of the bathroom and noted that she lay curled like a baby. "Would you like some tea?" he asked.

"No, sweetheart," she whispered. "Just come here."

Her arms opened to welcome him against her body still clothed in a t-shirt and panties. Because he had warned her that he sometimes thrashed at night, he reminded her gently, now.

"It's alright," she assured him. "Just lie down."

Carefully, he laid his body against hers, his back to her front. Her long lean arm wrapped around his rib cage and her hand splayed over his chest to maintain that connection. "Go

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to sleep, baby," she commanded softly. "We have to be at the funeral home by ten."

Gently, his fingers divided hers and closed on her hand. This was exactly the way he slept with his Master, often his Master's powerful organ having taken its pleasure in his body. He closed his eyes listening to the mirthful chirping of crickets beyond the window. Could this be possible? he wondered. Could she possibly want me as much as He did? Or has she simply lost her mind?

Chapter Seven

For the showing, the casket was closed. Marquie made the decision because the expression on her beloved aunt's face, frozen in the muscles at the moment of her passing, relayed a maligned horror. Patrice knew exactly who had murdered her. But did she know why?

Now sitting in the chapel, listening to the strains of Beethoven's Ode to Joy, her fists balled ready to pound the first intrusion into her anger. What is there to be joyful in this? she snarled inside of herself. Donnell, who sat against her, slipped his hand over hers and squeezed a little. His vision rose just enough to see her shivering with rage.

"Mistress," he whispered, as if to plead for serenity.

She shook her head, yet she opened her hand and turned it so that his fingers could slip between hers. She felt his desperation, as if he could desire her to remain on the surface and not slip below it in a display of hysteria or some drug-induced coma. The ceremony ended and she hadn't heard a word of it. At Donnell's urging, she rose and dutifully followed the casket on its progression toward the hearse. Yet she refused to sit in the back of her own limo, and be alone.

Donnell slipped into the driver's seat and turned the key. Staring straight ahead at the taillights of the hearse, he whispered, "Are you okay?"

The dry tissue in her grip crumbled into her lap. The exquisitely painted nails drove through it like rapiers hell bent on its destruction. It might be days, months, or even years

before she would need such a thing again. "The term, 'pissed off' just doesn't seem to fit today," she snarled.

He swallowed hard as he dropped the gearshift in to Drive. Would there be another scene today like the one after her father's funeral? The one in which she stormed Peter's party nearly naked and they had merely laughed at her? Donnell shuddered for he knew what to expect, mostly because she had refused a tranquilizer this morning.

At her insistence, the ceremony at the gravesite was brief. The priest no sooner said, "Amen," than she turned and stomped toward the main house. Donnell hurried to maintain the pace, yet she arrived before him. As she had directed, a buffet was spread in the dining room, yet she snapped her fingers and moments later, her Long Island iced tea was delivered.

"Thank you," she said curtly. She positioned herself in her father's favorite chair. One by one the members of the firm passed in procession before her, taking only a moment to express their condolences. Friends and family lingered long enough to eat a sandwich or smoke a cigarette. By two o'clock, the house was empty again save for herself, Donnell and Peter.

Peter's eyes burned with some unknowable emotion as she glared into him. "Where's your buddy, the Alphabet Murderer?" she scraped.

Peter shrugged. "Haven't seen him for awhile."

"I'll bet your ass I know where to look," she said angrily. Her voice constricted to the point of strangulation, she

continued, "What I don't understand is why, Peter. Why did you order a hit on our aunt?"

Peter's eyes flared yet his face drained of color. They darted to Donnell whose head was eternally bowed, yet at this moment his eyes were open and rolled toward Peter awaiting the answer. "Marquie," he gasped as if he could no longer draw air. "I didn't ... do this. How could you even think...?"

Defiantly, he stood. Yet he noted the slow upswing of Donnell's arm toward his chest. As if in slow motion, Donnell's hand slipped under the lapel of his jacket.

Peter screamed, "I know you carry a weapon, you asshole. I know you've been ordered to shoot me for the slightest infraction. Yeah, that's right. I overheard the old man talking to you one day not so long ago. In all things, protect the little princess here, even if you have to murder me. Even though you walk around here like a half-wit, you know exactly what you're doing."

Donnell's hand tightened on the grip yet the weapon remained in the holster. His face remained expressionless as he said softly but surely, "Just so you know who we are to each other."

With his usual flair for drama, one never reserved for the courtroom but displayed always, Peter growled, "My executioner."

Peter stood frozen as Donnell's patent stare remained locked on him. He suffered the notion that Donnell would like nothing more than to execute him, to shoot him in cold blood,

perhaps in the back. Grasping at anything, Peter yelled, "There are laws in this state."

For a long moment, Donnell felt the constant trembling he'd endured quiet a little. As if this were the treasure for which he searched, a calmness swept through him. His stern features broke like a mirror under a sledge. A smile ripped open his lips and then his laughter swelled into the room. It was a laughter that sounded much like relief to Marquie, but it was the first she'd ever heard it from him. She peered up to see Donnell laughing, a sound with a twist of evil, perhaps, his vision connected directly to Peter who stared back in horror.

It was Peter who inched backwards as if he meant to escape a trap. Yet it seemed he was caught by invisible bonds. "Get the fuck out of my house," he commanded.

"It's not your house, darling," Marquie reminded. "But if you're uncomfortable here, perhaps you should go."

Donnell quieted yet his smirk remained. At this moment, he understood everything. Every question he ever had about Keith Landry was suddenly answered as if by divine revelation. Landry was, and is, Peter's slave. It was Peter who ordered those women to be murdered and Landry who carried out the orders. The only question which remained was "Why?" His eyes directed at Peter like the laser of a red dot scope.

To this frontal assault, Peter gathered himself quickly. His spine straightened and he looked directly at his sister now. "If anybody is going anywhere, Dear Sister, it's you." He reached into his jacket pocket.

Like the strike of an angry snake, Donnell withdrew the gun and aimed straight at Peter's chest. There was no mistake that Donnell meant to kill him.

Peter snarled and grasped the lapels of his jacket to hold it open. "I could depend on you to murder an unarmed man, you wretch." From the pocket he retrieved an envelope and threw it to the floor near Marquie. To her, he announced, "The old bat left you everything. Her house, her cars, her condo in Hilton Head, and all of that lovely money. So I would suggest that since I have a career here in town and you live on the grace of God, it's you who should leave, baby."

Marquie quivered with anger, and her tongue twisted with the taste of something vile. "You don't intend to contest this one?"

Peter huffed. "I hated that bitch anyway. No, I don't want anything that belonged to her." Without anything further, he turned and stomped away.

Quickly, Donnell advanced, the weapon still in his grip but pointed at the ceiling. He swept the envelope off the floor into his own jacket pocket. Sensing that Peter was on the edge right now, he whispered, "If you please, Mistress, we need to go home."

Marquie nodded as she tipped the glass and drank deep. Slowly, she stood. Yet with the maximum of determination she placed the glass on the counter and exited the kitchen door. She allowed herself to be led through the meandering garden, a seldom seen pathway enclosed by lush evergreens and old, sturdy trees. This, she realized, was a path secluded

from view of the house. If Peter meant to shoot her, he couldn't even see her here.

Easily she swept through Donnell's front door. When he expected her to be exhausted of reason, devoid of stability, she snarled, "Take your clothes off."

He peered into her a moment seeing something totally new. It seemed she had control suddenly. As if she understood something in the exchange between herself and Peter, also. A moment later, he stood before her, completely revealed, his head bowed, wondering what she thought of him. But without contacting him physically, she commanded, "Downstairs."

Overwhelmed by this display, his heart palpitated in his chest.

The thought of turning his back on her was impossible to endure. Rather, he dropped to his hands and knees and moved backwards toward the door. Because she wasn't immediately behind him, he ran down the staircase, positioned himself in front of the piece of furniture he most desired to be bound to. There, he fell to his knees, totally exposed, bowed his head and locked his hands together behind his back.

Even the plod of her footfall on the staircase was eerily reminiscent of Dom Pierre. He felt her advance like a vicious lightening storm ready to break free. But the shoes that filled his vision now were nothing like the Dom's. These had wickedly pointed heels four inches high.

The foot raised off the floor and then turned at the ankle that he could silently measure the heel against his very erect

organ. "Mistress," he breathed of an instrument so exquisite it was beyond his fantasies. And then that daggaresque heel swept under his cock to pin it to his hard abdomen.

The flutter of sensation rapidly swelled into delightful pain and swept down his penis into his balls. It lingered there only a moment before the crescent of his body began to percolate with lust. "Mistress, I swear to You now, anything You desire," he gasped. It was a plea to continue, to divide his senses from his sensibilities. Tears sprang to his eyes as she placed her foot on the floor.

Her melodious voice, well placed in the alto range, commanded, "UP!"

As he would have for his Master, he jumped straight into the air. Because he had done it so often, his hands grasped the net of heavy chain at the precise moment his heels hooked onto it. Curiously, as if she had done this as often as he, she bent just a little to enclose his ankles in the soft leather straps. With just a little stretch, his wrists were bound as well.

Shamefully, his organ stuck out far from his body. The penis spoke for his heart with the first of its tears dripping unabashedly from the orifice. Though it wept soundlessly, begging for her attention, she refused it the soft skin of her lovely hand. Rather, she grabbed a crop and struck hard.

"Do I have your attention?" she snarled.

"Mistress," he cried out, both with the feel of her wrath and her discipline. Not even his beloved Master had been so harsh.

The crop plunged between his legs and thrust upward dividing his balls. For definition, she pinched a nipple between her fingernails. "You will never, ever, not now or in the future kill my brother," she warned. To drive the point a little deeper, she struck with the balls with the crop. Though he moaned, he heard clearly, "He might be an asshole, but other than a few distant cousins, he's all the family I have left. Do you understand?"

Like never before, Donnell peered down directly into her. His disappointment was ready to break free in the form of an explanation, perhaps an excuse. Tears welled in his lids and he batted them away, the pain in this more complete than anything else she could do. But there were things she didn't know, obviously, things Dom never explained to her. To divide himself from this hurt, he closed his eyes and promised, "Yes, Mistress. I will never kill your brother."

With that declaration, she released the torture to his nipple and allowed his balls to hang free. Retreating a few paces, her fingers raised to the collar of her blouse. Methodically, the buttons opened as if there were something esoteric to be understood in the action. Unabashedly, he stared as more and more of her delicate skin was revealed. Hanging naked before her, he was powerless to hide his arousal.

Countless torturous hours of his life had been spent watching her, she believing that she had been alone. She moved now with that same grace, her narrow arm slipping the fabric off her shoulders and tossing it capriciously to the bondage rack. This much of her he had never seen save through the veil of the camera. Her heavy, dense breasts

concealed by black lace created an agony deeper than her warning had been. What he had to give, what he had to offer in return for a few moments locked to a nipple, he couldn't know.

Her heels clicked coldly on the bare concrete and she turned her back moving toward the chain from which her father's whips hung. In this low light, her figure was accentuated by the black leather upholstery of the deprivation box within which he had been seldom locked. Unable to turn away, he noticed how narrow was her waist and the lovely swell of her hips. Surely, there was something unnatural about that. But what would create that exquisite shape other than some very intense corset training?

Inside, he smiled. Those years spent at college were perhaps used to gain another kind of education. Although she was unfamiliar with the technique of discipline, the art of it she fully grasped. Nothing down here had frightened her at all. And that could only be because she did know of these things.

How foolish he had been to think of her as a virgin to all of this. But his thoughts were obliterated by the smack of a slapper.

"You want to be My treasure, don't you?"

The reply was merely the exhalation of breath.

"That means you must obey. you are not going to murder my brother."

Not a virgin yet still so innocent, he thought. His Dom had had a unique style, but the Dom's daughter was pure grace. Her movements were languid as if she listened to a melody in

her head and moved to the rhythm. Each contact of the leather accentuated by the stab of her heels on the floor felt like another kiss on his neglected body. He became so lost in the gentility, so divided from himself, he began to drift.

With the use of the flogger, his muscles contracted to the sensation. Soon the net was flowing like a smooth ocean wave rolling over the open sea. In his head he could almost hear the melody which floated in hers. It was a temptation, a seduction so overpowering, the song of a most exquisite siren that beckoned him into her.

When he awoke from his reverie, he noted that the tight skirt had at some time been removed. All she wore was a garter belt with her signature lace stockings, stockings that her brother always chided her about, but Donnell adored. The dark down between her legs seemed to glisten as if the moisture between her lips spilled beyond their container. Drawing in a deep breath, he could scent her easily.

Holding her legs closed tightly, she bent at the hips to release his ankles. Refusing him the slightest generosity, she held her breasts away from his body as she released his wrists. "Gather my clothes, make Me a bath and bring a Long Island iced tea," were her final words. Spellbound, he hung by his own volition and watched the gentle sway of her hips as she moved away from him. When he wanted only to fall to the floor and lick the leather of her shoes, to leave a trail of kisses up her shins, over her thighs and drink ravenously from her, that too, was denied.

With a smile, he stepped onto the floor. His cock, swelled with her favors, lurched upward into his hand. It burnt

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brightly through shades of red and the hint of blue just beginning. His hands slid over his thighs and up his body to feel the blood red rasures of welts she so patiently inflicted.

He paused a moment, the swell of delight leaving his body with soft laughter. He had most definitely mistaken her for the virgin princess her father often claimed her to be. But his cock ached for more and it dreamt of melting within the fire glowing between her legs.

Hurriedly, he gathered her clothing and took the stairs two at a time. In the bathroom, she was found perched on the edge of the tub, one leg thrown over the other and swinging haughtily. Quickly, he turned on the water and dumped in a bottle of lavender scented bubble bath. Wishing upon hope, he asked, "May I assist, Mistress?"

She stood quickly and turned her back. The tips of his fingers reached out to touch her skin, a fabric as soft and alluring as velvet. Slowly, he opened her bra and the pads of his fingers slid over her shoulder blades knowing now that they had found their salvation. The lace straps fell down her arms.

Dare he peek over her shoulder for the view in the mirror? He merely descended to his knees, the firm flesh of her bottom demanding his tongue. Lightly, no more than a whisper of touch, his lips kissed it as his fingers fumbled with the garter snap. As slowly as he could he rolled the stocking the length of her leg. Carefully, he grasped her ankle and removed the shoe and stocking simultaneously.

"Quickly," she snarled as if she'd had enough of this worship. She shoved the garter belt down to be removed.

Quite gracefully, she settled into the water without splashing it. "My tea."

Speechless, he turned toward the kitchen.

Marquie flipped the switch on the jets to drown in the sound. She closed her eyes but the vision of her brother and her treasure locked in a duel to the death swelled within her. In her heart, she knew that Peter had put a hit on Patrice. Why ... why ... why? It made no sense. But Peter was mad, certifiable probably. In his own twisted way he was quite simply insane. In her heart she knew that of the two men remaining in her life, one of them was going to die.

"Mistress?"

Shocked back to reality, her eyes shot open to see treasure standing before her, his cock still erect like a battering ram. She'd never had a man before. Women yes, women one after the other but never a man. Her eyes swept up his exquisite body, the body of a man half his age, seeing the delicious welts on fire for her. What would it feel like, a real cock stroking her interior intimacies with the desire that was evident?

"Are you okay?" he asked.

As if she owned him, her arm rose out of the water and neared his penis. Before she even touched it, it deflated as if in fear of her. Quickly, she peered up to see his eyes locked closed with an expression of disappointment. Utter shame permeated his corporeal structure. If she wanted it, he desired only to give it to her, yet something inside of him refused, obviously. He placed the tea on the edge of the tub and turned away.

She cleared her throat and said, "you may join Me."

Unable to face her, he crumbled at the command. When his cock should be his most useful asset to her, it was useless. "But..."

"Get your ass in the tub, now."

Quietly, he turned, the shame flaming in his cheek to match the welts. Yet, he slipped into the tub opposite her and stared down at his own hapless embarrassment. As if she understood something he didn't, she placed her foot on his thigh. "A massage, if you please."

Grateful for the distraction, his thumbs pressed into the soft flesh of her instep.

"How long has it been since you experienced an orgasm?"

Shamed by the concept of his own pleasure, he shook his head. His vision locked to the flaming red lacquer on her toenails, he whispered, "I wouldn't know."

"Years?" she asked.

"More like a decade, I would guess."

"Because your Master refused you that?"

He hesitated because the answer wasn't readily clear. Forgetting himself, he peered into her dark, shimmering eyes. "I can't say. Whether He..." Was there a time his Master refused him that kind of pleasure? "Or if i..." Had he refused himself? Perhaps it was simply easier to focus all of his interest, his energy and his love on Dom. And Dom was kind enough to not force him to perform. "I don't know."

Clutching to her foot, he raised it out of the water and held it against his cheek. Why, even in a private moment, had he not luxuriated in that kind of pleasure? A sense of inadequacy

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flooded through his heart and spilled into his body. His balls slipped into their sockets and his cock shriveled. In so many ways, he'd been castrated.

The image of the Alphabet Murderer wearing a smirk swelled in his head. I'm gonna kill you, you mother fucker. If for no other reason than I need to live again.

Chapter Eight

Refusing to be alone, to be divided even by a partition in a car, Marquie took the front seat of the limo. "I'm not insane," she said surely. She hesitated a moment wondering if the insane actually understand that there's something wrong with them. "Am I insane?" she asked.

Donnell grasped her hand and shook his head. "I understand you," he whispered. "So if you are that means I am, too. And I'm not placing any bets on that one."

Tightly, she grasped his hand as if it were a life-line. "And this damned shrink already thinks I am."

Donnell shrugged. The idea that he created this misery for her by calling an ambulance made his intestines twist. "But you have to conform to the system now. You gotta work with it to get out of it. I'm sorry, sweetheart, I never meant for this to happen. Just don't threaten to kill anybody. And he told me he's going to keep you for two hours today. Don't let him wear you out to the point that you start talking too much. In the meantime, I have to make some stops."

"If I call you will you come?" she asked innocently.

He glanced at her seeing her other side, the virgin princess the Dom knew so well. The little girl, so innocent, so pure. If only she could maintain this side of her personality with the doctor. But in so many ways she was utterly unaware of herself. Unaware of her beauty, unaware of her gifts. She lived so deep inside of herself and from there she greeted the world.

"I'll be with you for as long as you want me," he swore.

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* * * *

"Ms. de Navarre, please, have a seat," Doctor Franklin Blaine said warmly.

Nervously, she dropped her bag into an overstuffed leather chair and sat in the one opposite as he settled behind his desk. Probably a button under there that he can summon security, she thought.

"Have you ever been to a psychiatrist before?"

"No," she said quickly.

"It's very simple. We're just going to talk about some things today."

Plastering a pleasant smile on her lips, she shrugged.

"So how have you been?" the doctor asked.

What an open ended question! Her response would reveal everything. But her rage swelled within her, an uncontrollable urge and she said defiantly, "I buried my father last week, my aunt yesterday, my brother moved back into the house now that he doesn't have to put up with Daddy, he's just a pain in everyone's ass, so I've moved in with the gardener."

Slowly, the doctor nodded as he attempted to hold her gaze. "It sounds like you have some issues with your brother."

"That would be a reasonable assessment, yes."

"How old is he?"

What an insipid question. What matters? "He's thirty eight, Doctor."

"And you're twenty six?"

"Yes."

"What don't you like about him?"

Out loud, Marquie huffed. "Where would I start, Doctor? He's arrogant, irreverent, loud, and shamelessly brilliant. Even Patrice said he could out think Satan. He can talk his way out of anything."

"Like what?"

"He was only two years out of law school and got the Alphabet Murderer off on a technicality." Sadly, she shook her head thinking of those twenty six women. "He didn't care about them. He didn't care about those women at all. And that bastard, Keith Landry, is still hanging around our house."

"Keith Landry?"

"The Alphabet Murderer. Surely, you remember, Doctor. They all had their bellies slashed and their hearts were missing."

The doctor threw back in the chair a little. "That was huge case." A case he would never forget considering he testified as a psychiatric expert for the defense.

"Very huge. Investigators died. Countless lives were ruined. People are still suffering," she said adamantly thinking of her precious treasure. "And that bastard has the audacity to walk through my front door and sit his ass in my father's chair and smirk at me."

"Keith Landry is in your house?" he asked suspiciously.

"He's a friend of my brother's. Can't be tried for the same crime twice. Double jeopardy," she snarled. "While a friend of mine is absolutely certain he killed Patrice, I don't think so. I think Peter did."

"Your brother, Peter, killed your aunt?"

"I'm rather certain of it, Doctor."

The doctor hesitated a moment to determine her thought processes and balance his own with what he knew of Peter Navarre. "Why would he do such a thing?"

She pointed a finger directly at him, her patent stare directed at his eyes. "That's exactly what I don't understand. Why would he kill her other than the fact that she adored me and hated him? He had the audacity to open her will before she was even buried. Just yesterday afternoon, he threw it at me. She left me everything and specifically excluded him and her other nieces and nephews. But it's so easy to hate him ... the arrogant mother fucker. Why would she leave anything to him?"

"Sounds like you were special to her?"

Tears sprouted in Marquie's eyes and rolled heavily down her cheeks. "She was my favorite. My mom died, I was only three. Patrice was my mother in so many ways I can't even explain." Through choked sobs, she added, "Patrice wanted me to get away from Peter and come live with her. If I had I would have been murdered, too."

Her condition deteriorated rapidly. Of course, the doctor understood the concept of survivor's guilt. But she was obviously certain that her brother was the perpetrator, her brother who took away her 'mother.' His responsibility was to know if she would retaliate on what could quite possibly be a fantasy—her own hatred projected onto an already loathed brother.

"Tell me about your most vivid memory of your brother."

The question distracted her wholly as she tumbled back through the years. Almost immediately she quieted and her shoulders curled as she crossed her arms over her chest. Like a snail, her knees pulled toward her chest. Her emotional response flat now, she looked directly at him and whispered, "He raped me."

The doctor's head bowed a little, yet his vision remained with her. Very quietly, he said, "Let's talk about that."

Her eyes darted from him and tripped over the very monotone décor meant to soothe rather than excite. "I was sleeping ... in my bed. Some nights, Daddy would sleep with me because..." She began to rock a little, the pain most evident to the doctor. "After my mom died I kept hearing things, you know. I would hear her voice and her screaming. She was insane, you know. At least they tell me she was. You've probably read about her ... written up in psychiatric journals."

The doctor merely nodded, intent on finding these supposed journals to study them and help his patient.

"Some nights, when I would see her in my room and I would scream, Daddy would come sleep with me. But he had to go to some kind of conference. There were plenty of servant's around. I had a nanny," she whispered solemnly. Smiling bitterly, she offered, "And I had a brother. A brother I adored. He was so much older than me, almost like a father. But that night..."

Her voice trailed off. Her eyes fixated on the smooth contours of his desk.

"Take it slow," the doctor said reassuringly.

"I saw Mother again and she was so angry. She was wearing a shroud with blood all over it holding a gun. That's how she died. She shot herself. But she kept coming back to me for some reason."

"Did you see your mother ... in that state before she was taken to the hospital?"

With a snarl, she said, "I was only three, Doctor. How would I remember?"

The doctor nodded yet remained silent. This was something he could also check for the veracity of the statement. His guess was that she had seen her mother in a pool of blood and blocked the memory of it. Yet that unconscious recognition haunted her. "Go on."

"I screamed again. Daddy wasn't home but I felt that warm body behind me, enclose me in his arms. It always settled me to not be alone. And I loved to have my belly rubbed. For some reason that was soothing, too. Daddy would rub my belly for hours and tell me stories ... of Princesses." The muscles of her face contorted to think of it. Copious tears flowed down her cheeks.

"But that night was different," the doctor urged.

"It wasn't Daddy. It was my brother. He ... uhh ... Daddy just rubbed my belly and my chest ... I was only eight. Just a little girl. Peter was rubbing my thighs, my butt. I felt something behind me, something that Daddy never had." She hesitated to smile at the innocence in that statement. "Of course ... my father ... had a ... penis," she added with embarrassment. "Hell if I knew it at that age. I had never seen one. I was only eight. He kept telling me how much he

loved me, how much he adored me, he kept kissing me. And then he forced me onto my back and he..."

She launched out of the chair and stormed around the room. Bits of tissue flew through the air like dandelion fluff on a breezy spring day. But then she noted a painting on the wall, the soft cool colors of a garden in spring. The green grass meandering through the painting accentuated the pastel hues of pink and lavender with splashes of yellow daffodils.

"I don't know why, though. For some reason, he heaved me over the balcony of my bedroom ... into the garden."

The doctor leaned forward, uncertain that he had heard correctly. "Excuse me?"

She turned and stared. "He just tossed me over the balcony. Collar bone, a rib ... and this." She walked toward him and raised her skirt over her thigh. Above the lace stocking near the hip, the doctor could see the faint scars of the compound fracture and the surgical scars required to repair it.

"That was devastating," he whispered.

"Yeah." She dropped the hem of her skirt and then moved away. "And I still don't know why."

"Did you tell anyone about this?"

"You mean after surgery, after I healed?" Angrily, she shook her head. "How am I supposed to heal, Doctor? That mother fucker moved out of the estate years ago, but Daddy had only to die and now he's back. He's murdered my aunt. How am I supposed to heal?"

The doctor drew in a deep breath. "Tell me about your boyfriend."

An explosion of breath ruptured out of her chest as if that question were an offense. "I've yet to find the need, the desire, or the value in such a thing."

"Then you've never been in a relationship?"

"I didn't say that at all, Doctor. I've been in several relationships, as much as three years."

"But they weren't with men."

Her eyes narrowed on him as if to warn him. "And there's a problem with that?"

"Not at all if you're a lesbian."

For a long moment, she glared at him, and then she turned away. Her attraction to her treasure was unmistakable. But was that only because he was submissive, because it seemed she had control of him due to his heartbreakingly beautiful surrender to her needs? How would she respond if he took the lead and made love to her?

What was the point in labels anyway? Gay, straight, bi, queer? They only furthered an illusion of predetermined concepts that on an individual basis meant nothing. As if to clear his confusion, she straightened her spine and settled her shoulders into the chair. Her right leg slipped easily over the left. "I am a Dominatrix, Doctor."

The hint of a smile softened the angular lines of his face. "Indeed."

* * * *

Though his heart pounded to be back in this building again, Donnell slipped through the hallways of the courthouse virtually unnoticed. Timidly, he knocked on the door of Judge Matthew Hines. It had been years since he'd spoken to this man, a man he harbored great resentments for. Yet he opened the door and asked the secretary for the judge.

"Your name?"

"Donnell McLaughlin. He'll remember me."

The door behind her opened wide as if the judge heard the name. Their eyes met with a bit of shock to see each other after so many years. Respectfully, Donnell whispered, "Your Honor."

"Come in, please," Matthew offered.

Donnell settled into the chair and accepted the proffered cigarette the judge always welcomed him with.

"It's been a long time."

"It has," Donnell said softly. "I didn't get to speak to you at Dom's funeral."

"Things were kind of a mess that day."

"They still are," Donnell warned.

Matthew sat back in the chair and folded his hands over his belly. "I'm going to miss Pierre more than I miss my wife."

"You loved him more than you loved your wife."

Matthew's eyebrows raised into his forehead a moment. "I won't deny that," he whispered solemnly. "And I suspect your concern is about Peter."

"It most definitely is. I've come to understand that Keith Landry is to Peter what you and I were to Dom Pierre."

The judge froze at the very idea. As if the word refused to form on his tongue, his lips merely remained parted for a moment. And then he whispered, "Slaves."

Donnell nodded.

"Are you saying that Landry killed all of those women because Peter ordered it?"

"I believe so."

As if he could no longer carry his own weight, Matthew slumped in the chair. His mind blurred like the incomprehensible images of an impressionist's painting, the edges of figures indistinct, and the hues melting into globes of confusion. The concept of justice misplaced visited a certain illness upon him now. That trial had been the most expensive, the most personally devastating, and the most publicly humiliating thing he had ever experienced, before or since. To think they had tried the wrong man caused his stomach to churn.

He wobbled to the liquor cabinet and poured an inch of bourbon into two glasses. Without thinking, he placed one before Donnell and then fell heavily into his chair. "That was the most fucked-up thing I've ever been through. And to think Landry walked on twenty six counts. Incomprehensible."

"And then only because you were a bit lenient toward the defense."

Matthew's eyes burned into Donnell for a moment. Sadly, he nodded as he gulped the bourbon. "Pierre understood, Donnell. We both knew it was his most glaring defeat ... and that I had a hand in it. We talked about it often. But our relationship meant more to us than some trial. Unfortunately,

it damaged our relationship in ways neither of us could have foretold."

The Judge pressed back into the chair feeling the waves of misery he was destined to live with unto death defeat his sanity again. "This has hounded me like a harpy for years," he snarled as he closed his eyes. "I wanted to blame ... you ... for the devastation of our relationship. Young, beautiful, obedient. You who doesn't suffer a hint of hypocrisy. You ... who doesn't have to wallow in some façade to maintain respectability. You can be what you are without recrimination, without gossip, without question. If there had been any hint that I had favored the prosecution, there might have been questions. Pierre understood. I wish you could, too."

Donnell hit the cigarette and stubbed it in the ashtray. "What's done is done now. Right now, it's Marquie who needs you."

"Anything," Matthew replied. "Anything for Pierre's daughter."

"Do you have any sway in Probate court? Peter is going to contest this."

"I'll talk around a little bit. It is gonna be a tough one being as he died of undiagnosed brain tumors. She'll need some serious medical back-up."

"She needs a lawyer, too."

"I've got a few names. What else?"

"She umm..." Donnell smiled. "She's got some latent talent, Matt. She's got her father's skills and all she needs is a little practice and a lot of confidence."

"Interesting. And I can imagine that you've availed yourself of those skills as often as possible."

With that same sweet smile, Donnell shrugged. "And she needs money. I checked her trust fund the other day and it's not enough to keep the house going while Peter is fucking off trying to put her to ruin. Peter wouldn't give a shit if it's sold for back taxes as long as Marquie doesn't end up with it. Patrice's estate won't be settled for months, maybe a year, I'm certain. There's enough there that her other nieces and nephews may contest it."

The judge's hand swept over his cheek as he studied Donnell. "So you're pimping your Mistress, eh?"

Donnell held Matt's gaze. "If you want to call it that."

"How much?"

"Five hundred."

"For that she ought to be outstanding."

Donnell reminded sternly, "I'm not begging for alms, Matt. You will be satisfied. In some ways, you can make it up to Dom by helping his daughter, even if it's only to let her practice a little."

Tears rushed into Matt's eyes at the thought of absolution for his sins against his Master. "Same place?"

"My place. I'll call you in a few days. And I want you to know something now, Matt." Slowly Donnell stood, holding Matt's vision. "As soon as I have the proof I'm looking for, I'm gonna kill Keith Landry and Peter Navarre. I won't care if you send me to death row."

For a long moment, the judge peered into those crystal eyes. "After what you've been through I think we can get you

off on an insanity plea. A couple years locked down in a cushy psyche ward and you're done." Sadly, Matt shook his head.

"To think that Pierre's son ordered these hits..."

Angrily, Donnell shook to hear those words. "He's not Pierre's son. He's Pierre's wife's son, Annetta Navarre's son, but not Pierre's. Pierre adopted him years ago and often told me he wished he could undo that."

"I'll be go to hell, I never knew that," Matthew admitted. "That explains a whole lot. Why he blatantly favored Marquie. How he hated Peter."

"But I'm certain Marquie doesn't know this. And now is definitely not the time to tell her. She hates him, too, but there's some kind of attachment there that I don't understand."

The judge pulled three business cards out of a desk drawer and handed them to Donnell. "Any one of those of guys could help her with the estate."

"I'll call you," Donnell offered.

"Please do. It's been awhile."

Knowingly, Donnell smiled. In parting, he raised a hand to wave good-bye and moved hurriedly through the door. Though he had arrived uncertain of how Matt was going to react to his visit, he was sure now that Marquie had the judge's support. A very powerful, important man was on her side. As he slipped into the limo to go pick her up, a shallow sigh of relief calmed him a little.

* * * *

Puss In Boots
by Lady Midnight

Gracefully, he opened the front door of the car to let her in. She had been crying, her eyes swollen, her cheeks puffy. As he slipped behind the wheel, he asked, "How'd it go?"

"What is it with shrinks?" she asked rhetorically. "They think everything depends on sex."

His features broke into amused laughter. "That's probably true."

"So what now?"

"Shopping, Mistress. I say we do a little shopping."

"That sounds wonderful."

Chapter Nine

She seemed quite comfortable as he lowered the zipper of her dress and lifted it away from her body. The bra swirled lazily to the chair leaving her with only garter belt and stockings. She stood before the mirror studying every nuance of her body as if in the delicate curves something mysterious was revealed.

His heart on fire, Donnell dug through the bags for the purchases he had made while she was trying on other things. From the box he removed the boots of his dreams. Quietly, he opened the zipper on the flaming red leather and knelt before her.

She slipped her delicate foot in and planted her weight firmly. It was a bit of a stretch, five inches when she was comfortable with four. The color alone was enough to churn a conflagration. That he had purchased this when she wasn't looking brought a smile to her face.

Carefully, he raised the zipper slide with his finger tucked inside ensuring that it didn't pinch her. She had to admit that the red patent leather accentuated by the black lace of her stocking made for an interesting focal point. The black chains draped around the ankle added another point of contrast both visually and audibly. Like a child listening to a music box, she moved around the tub, her head cocked. The staccato rhythm of her heels on marble and the splash of chain sounding much like the refrain drew a broad smile to her face.

Boldly she stopped before him, her breasts thrust far in front of her chest. He couldn't help but stiffen at the sight of

her gorgeous dark nipples, swelled with her delight. "What else do you have for me?"

Hurriedly, Donnell dove into another bag. He rose holding a matching corset.

"Lovely," she said admiringly.

She folded the tendrils of dark silk cascading from the crown of her head into a twist. Lovingly, he slipped the shiny red leather around her already tight waist. But because he'd only done this in his dreams, those torturous dreams ignited by the sight of her through camera lenses, he fumbled impossibly with the strings. Finally ... finally it was laced and he pulled them tight. Hesitating to consider the flourish of these strings, the thought of an alpine butterfly came to mind. A knot she couldn't undo without his assistance. Rather, he finished with a decorative little bow.

Peering over her shoulder into the mirror, his cock flooded to its fullest. The once delicate curves undulated with a harshness he could fall in love with. Reluctant to touch her without permission, he asked, "May i?"

She merely nodded a little, her vision keenly attached to her reflection. Yet he felt a shiver pour through her as his hand lifted her generous breast, situating it high above the underwire. With the strength of his conviction, he tugged on the corset to hold the exposed breasts high.

Her spine stiffened like a sword; she stood at a height even with his now. Peering directly into him through the mirror, the hint of a smile twisted her lips. "What else?"

Glad you asked. From the pile of bags, he removed a velvet box and handed it to her.

The creak of the hinged lid stilled his breath in anticipation of her approval. But it was her gasp that stole his sanity. "treasure," she breathed as if she hadn't desired anything more.

Filled with hope, he removed the red leather collar from the velvet card. Carefully, he placed it around her throat and clasped it. Three black iron chains he attached to hook inside the corset, one between her breasts and two on each side. Other more delicate chains he positioned over her breasts. Those chains left free to dangle and move with her were the ones that interested him. They would tickle, caress and perhaps, ignite a riot within her.

Certain that she hadn't paid for any of these things, her breath escaped her chest as she whispered, "This is very generous."

"There is a bit more."

Gloves, perhaps, she thought. Yet she wasn't prepared for the next item.

"I was hoping we could try something new."

Embarrassment flamed in her cheeks to match the red swaddling her body. Never having done this before, her eyes slid shut a moment, yet she nodded, always knowing that she eventually would.

Carefully, he swept the matching harness between her legs and buckled it over her hips. A little patch of glaring red swelled over her mound.

"How does that feel?" he asked.

With a pinched smile, she whispered, "Not so bad. But there's something to finish this off, yes?"

"Indeed." No further than the end of his arm, he snatched the phallus and drew it toward her. Its sheer size was enough to shock her. Carefully, he unsnapped the black iron ring attached to the harness and positioned the phallus against her mound. With a quick little click, it was firmly attached to the harness. "Try it out."

The pads of her fingers swept over the nine inch length of black latex feeling every swell of the veins. Except for the storm cloud color, it was realistic in every detail including the deep corona around the glans. Feeling empowered by it, her fingers wrapped around the two inch girth to fill her hand. "Interesting," she whispered.

He leaned forward to kiss it affectionately and then rose. Grasping her hand, he led her around the tub. With every step, the weight rolled against her body like a wave. Every stroke flattened against her clit to swell it with desire.

"Very interesting," she said sounding sure of herself.

A broad smile lit his features with delight. "If you're asking my opinion, I am compelled to whole-heartedly agree."

* * * *

As best he could, he watched her throughout the afternoon. Like her father, she didn't speak much, but she didn't have to. She had only to stroke a thigh with the crop, twist a pinch of skin between her nails. But Dom's was the gait of an elephant. She moved like a gazelle with horns.

When she released him from the cross, he was led to the horse by the chain around his neck, staggering with the inebriation she had inflicted. Easily, he planted his knees on

the softly upholstered pads and dropped his chest to rest. It was to his most cherished part that she focused her attention now.

The long nails swept over his ass drawing delicate lines and circles. Though his cock had been drained by the intensity of her love, a trickle of blood moved steadily into it as she dallied between his thighs. The soft skin of her hand brushed his balls.

She stood back a little to study this most captivating sight. The gaping orifice between the tight muscles of his ass seemed an escape route out of her miserable life. The balls hung like ripe fruit ready to be plucked and devoured to cure starvation. Even as she watched, the penis swelled.

What would it feel like? she wondered. That softly crinkled hairless skin the color of roses drew her near. The flat of her hand swept over his ass and down his thighs to settle between them. Drawing in a deep breath, she enclosed the balls in her hand.

A soft moan conveying his pleasure echoed in the chamber. So vulnerable, she thought, yet he surrendered so fully. Her grip tightened a little more to feel the organs inside sliding on what felt like a sea of moisture.

She drew in a deep breath and closed her eyes. Waves of delirium spilled through her body to be contacted to a man like this, but this man in particular. His ass wiggled as if to plead for more, to command her undivided attention. Only then did she feel his cock like the trunk of a tree.

Boldly, her hand swept further to feel the rock hardness. The heat within it burned with an intensity she hadn't known

even in herself. As if her fingers were desperate, they wrapped tightly around it.

His chest rose off the pad and he cried out, a garbled emanation she was unable to understand. But the sentiment was keenly conveyed as he backed toward her. Feeling a rupture of something indefinable within, her nails drove into the rigidity.

Little pinches of skin the length of the shaft were delightful to her. To feel the convulsions in his stomach as he drank down the sensations enlivened her. The glans swelled into the palm of her hand.

Yet something inside of her drew her attention away. She felt the musculature of her eyes quiver, her eyelids bat furiously for a moment. But it was in her stomach, encased in leather which demanded a satisfaction she knew nothing of. Her fingernails gathered the tip of the glans. And then slowly squeezed.

His voice, no more human than a beast, reverberated from deep in his body. As she continued to squeeze, the sound of his distress rose to urge her to continue. The louder he wailed, the deeper she dug, reveling in his pain.

She had to force herself to release him. The gasping he was left with was no less charming than his panicked screams. The convulsions of his anus captured her attention wholly. What more could she could create in that lovely thing?

Her hand drew through her slit to moisten it; and then she dragged her fingers over her phallus. Quickly, she positioned it at the orifice and then grabbed his hips. With a bit of a push, she entered him.

Puss In Boots
by Lady Midnight

His breath stilled and for a moment she thought he'd lost consciousness. But she noticed his hands, his fingernails driven into his palms to do something, anything with the pain. She stopped for a moment to see the black phallus forced into his body like a battering ram. Rather than withdraw, she merely held it there as her hand swept tenderly over his back.

"You want me," she told him, her touch as soothing as a silk scarf. But her tenderness elicited nothing more than a shudder. "You want me, I said." Her voice was firmer now, each word defined by her determination. Yet he held still as if his throat had collapsed. "Let me show you," she rasped.

But because she loved him already, she pushed slowly, her own accoutrement feeling as if it were being devoured by quicksand, pulling her into him.

To the feel of her desire for him, he cried out. His strangled voice begged, "Mistress," though his breathing was labored.

"This wouldn't hurt so badly if you would relax. Because this is happening whether you want it to or not."

Quickly, she withdrew and rammed him again.

The jolt sent a surge of electricity to her clit with the most delightful sensation. The chains swept over her breast to kindle a fire. She closed her eyes; her fingers dug into his hips and thrust hard. As she gyrated within him, her pleasure mounted.

Completely lost in this connection with him, his groaning like a chorus of angels, sweat broke out on her body. Her eyes opened to see that he had gone limp, his arms sprawled over the edge of the horse. "No, baby, c'mon," she

whispered, as her arm wrapped around his body. Firmly, she took control of his cock and stroked.

"Mistress," he pleaded. His body tightened to her stimulation creating another misery he could revel in. Her other hand took his balls and squeezed. Completely trapped by her embrace, her desire, her spell, he felt the first few drops of moisture drip from his cock.

"NO," he pleaded. So long ... too long since he had been forced to come. He had more control, he knew. He had no desire to soil her hand. "No, Mistress, please, I'm begging you, no." But his voice only enlivened her movement.

How to escape this torture to his psyche he didn't know. Dizziness permeated his skull. His heart skipped in this chest and his organs contracted. And then he heard the most exquisite sound. A few more quick thrusts and she drove deep and stilled, her voice perfectly tuned to his tears. Exhausted, as if she couldn't take another step, she fell over him.

Shimmering, her body trembled with an orgasm, the quality of which she'd never experienced. Under her, he shook uncontrollably, his tears flowing as freely as her cunt dripping down her thighs. Only in time, could she release her clutch on him. Gently, because she was certain she was in love, she pulled out of him.

* * * *

Candle flames tumbled on air currents to cast waves of shadows over the mottled walls of his bedroom. In the bed he lay on his side, his body still throbbing with her love.

Puss In Boots
by Lady Midnight

Curiously, she had placed locking cuffs around his wrists and attached them to chains. But the vision of her before him, in naked splendor, was his deliverance.

As if she thumbed through a catalogue, she took stock of his wounds. Her fingers traveled over welts and drew a smile to her face. Her eyes narrowed to study the bruises. Without inhibition, she raised his cock to see the specks of blue and black.

Satisfied with herself, she slipped into the bed behind him. Carefully, she folded him into her arms. "Go to sleep, baby," she whispered softly.

He melted in her embrace soaking up her tender kisses like a parched sponge. Feeling an uncommon contentment, he turned his head a little to accept her lips on his. He smiled with the understanding that the more certain she became of her herself, the more she restrained him. The tighter her grip, the deeper her commitment.

"Mistress," he whispered.

Her tongue swept into his ear. "What, baby?"

"You're very, very good at what you do," he began. "To that end, I think You should get all the experience you need. I'd so appreciate Your permission to talk around a little bit, to see if there's anyone else who would happily to surrender to Your whip."

She drew away yet hovered over him. "What are you talking about?"

"There are people in this world who need You as desperately as I do. There is, however, no one that could love You more than me." He hesitated a moment awaiting a

response from her lips in the form of a word or a kiss. When nothing came, he finished softly, "And they pay big money for it."

"You're kidding!" she replied sounding suspicious, though it was only to tease.

"No Mistress. As much as five hundred an hour."

"You mean ... they come here, I whip their asses, and they pay money for that?"

He turned toward her to see an expression of surprise etched in her features. "I could line You up with as many as ten clients by the end of the week who would gladly pay You cash for nothing more than to kiss your boots. For a serious ass-whipping they would be back next week. If You fuck them, You'll own them."

Feigning curiosity, she jumped up to rest on her knees and drape over his hip.

"Who are W/we talking about?"

He shook his head a little. "Names aren't really important though I'm certain you'll recognize a few of them. Everybody's money is green. The point is it would get you the cash you need to maintain the Estate de Navarre while your brother is screwing around."

"Yes, it would," she said quickly, appreciating the collateral benefit in this idea. "Five thousand a week anyway. More than enough to keep this place going."

He scoffed a little. "Ten if you've got the stamina."

"For that I could put a lawyer on retainer."

"If you let me ask around a little, I think we could find one who will take it out in trade."

Chapter Ten

As Marquie lounged in the bathtub with her morning tea, Donnell slipped into the kitchen to make a phone call. "Captain," he whispered. To mask the sound of his voice, he turned up the volume of the whole-house sound system playing her favorite CD.

"Donnell, yeah ... you might be right, Man. The forensics report is back and there is not a scintilla of evidence in that fucking house. The smear of blood on the banister was the victim's ... no prints. Except that this one still had her heart, this is freakishly like the Alphabet Murderer. I'm beginning to believe that after twelve years, he's struck again."

Donnell nodded. This was the validation of his suspicions he had waited for. "And the perp?"

"We found Keith Landry in Antigua ... in Pierre's vacation house."

"Perfect," Donnell whispered. "What's he living on?"

"Cash ... and a credit card ... in his name. But check this out. The balance was recently paid in full."

"So."

"The check for \$31,872.89 was sent from the accounting department of Navarre, Navarre and Navarre. I'm thinking it was Peter Navarre who authorized that payment."

This was news to brighten Donnell's ever somber mood. "I'd say Peter has some explaining to do."

"There's a lot of ways he could explain it, Donnell. Just a little tidbit we're gonna hold in the file for awhile. We know where Landry is. He's under surveillance. I made the

authorities in Antigua aware of it. Right now he's laying drunk on a beach fucking every woman he can get his hands on."

"No reason he should get tired of that any time soon."

"Exactly. So how's Marquie?"

Donnell hesitated to say simply that she was perfect in every regard. Truthfully, she was still in trouble. "I'll call you later, Captain." Quickly, he clicked off the phone and slid it into his pocket.

"Who was that?"

He spun to see her standing nude, the moisture from the bath appearing like dew on the flesh of flowers. Even though her hair was wrapped in a towel she looked like Venus risen from the sea. Feeling hopeless, he reran the conversation in his head wondering what she might have heard. To her quiet stare, he answered, "Captain ... of police ... downtown."

Inside, she braced herself for the response. "What did he tell you?"

Donnell shrugged. "Not much. But they have found Landry ... in Antigua."

She let out a tortured huff and ripped the towel from her head. Pounding, she crossed the room and threw herself into a chair. "I can't believe this," she screamed. "How can that mother fucker...?" A wildness he was all too familiar with crept into her expression.

Quickly, he moved around the bar to throw himself at her feet and soothe her a little. But the doorbell rang, certainly an unusual occurrence. Feeling panicked, he grabbed the holster and strapped it over his shoulder. With his hand on the grip of the gun, he opened the door.

He glanced at a man he'd never seen. But his stare settled on Peter Navarre. "What do you want?"

The man asked, "Miss Marquerite de Navarre? Process server."

Marquie jumped at the sound of her name. So utterly unaware of herself, she stood at the door with only a crumpled towel covering the torso of her body. The sight of her brother instantly filled with rage. And she screamed, "How dare you let that son of a bitch stay in my father's home!!!"

Donnell recoiled. This just blew the entire investigation. Soundlessly, he watched Peter step back a bit. Peter's expression dwindled to fear as he glanced at Donnell, yet he recovered quickly enough to say, "Honey, look at you." His eyes roved her narrow thighs and perhaps caught a glimpse of her fur. Enraged, he looked at Donnell. "What the hell are you doing to my sister?"

"GET OUT!" she screamed. "Get out of my house!!! And get that fucking freak out of my father's house." The towel fell away from her body as she opened the screen door. Instantly, Donnell pulled his weapon.

Peter fell back a few more paces. Tears welled in his eyes as her fists beat his chest. As if he were wounded somehow, he grabbed her wrists and held her fast. "Honey, look at you. You've got to come home."

Her rage took hold and her knee raised with a thrust to his groin. Yowling, he doubled over in pain and moved away. "GET OUT OF MY HOUSE!!!" she screamed so that even the

servants in le Domaine might hear. And then she turned to go back inside.

"Marquerite Navarre?" the process server asked.

"What!?" she snarled.

With a bit of decorum, he looked away and handed her the papers.

"You get out, too," she demanded. With the papers clutched in her fist, she moved through the door Donnell held open for her.

Quickly, he closed it and bolted it. He punched the numbers on the keypad to turn on the security system and then turned to her.

Her eyes were open but it seemed she could see nothing. Already, the papers had succumbed to her grip. "Marquie," he said softly to gain her attention.

From her, there was no response. She merely directed her rage to some invisible object unable to attend to any other stimulation.

"Mistress," he said, his voice louder and more stern.

Slowly, her head swiveled in his direction. He peered at her glazed eyes uncertain of what she could understand right now. "I love you more than life itself," he swore. "But are you aware that you just met your brother ... and a stranger ... completely naked?"

The rage in her face slowly melted as she looked down on herself. She was indeed naked, not even a tattoo to cover her innocence. Quietly, she placed her face in her hand and began to weep.

The memory of her beloved Mistress swelled in the blackness of her brain. The hours upon hours of service she performed pouring tea or changing the sheets. Of cleaning the bathroom, of preparing Mistress' other trainees to meet Her. She could see herself perched on the floor between her Mistress' legs, her head laid in Mistress' lap feeling the gentle fingers pet through her hair. The decadently erotic nights passed through her inner-vision like a kaleidoscope of infinite beauty. When one of Mistress' other girls performed admirably, she was permitted to spend the night with T/them.

But never were they allowed clothing. Nothing should come between their Goddess and Her property. Not even a blouse. At first Marquie had found nothing but humiliation in that exposure. But just as Mistress promised, that humiliation faded with her sense of self. For all that mattered was Mistress. Mistress was what she lived and breathed for until the day She borrowed Marquie's car and the brakes failed. Mistress was killed instantly.

Through her clouded vision, she peered up at Donnell. "I'm sorry," she whispered both for these flooding memories and the years of training she enjoyed. What she wasn't sorry for was the adoration she directed at her Mistress. It was only in her Mistress' love, her Mistress' embrace, her Mistress' voice that she could forget herself and her past. "I'm sorry," she said again.

Sadly, Donnell shook his head. Dom had often said that in the Evan's family only one member of any given generation was visited with madness and he was so grateful that it hadn't been Marquie. But now Donnell wasn't so sure.

He parted the sheers at the window to peer out and note that Peter, too, had departed. Quietly, he unwound the papers from her grip. "You need a lawyer, Mistress. Let me find you one."

She nodded, yet her concentration returned to that invisible object which held sway in her mind. He sat at the bar and dialed the phone.

"But do you understand that this is Marquerite de Navarre?" Donnell insisted.

"I understand exactly who we're talking about," the first lawyer responded. "And I'm not interested in this case."

Donnell dialed the number on the next card Matthew had given him. The response was, "I'm sorry, Sir. Mr. Nightwine suffered a heart attack yesterday and we don't know if he'll be returning to work or not."

"I see. I'm sorry to hear that." He clicked off and said a silent prayer over the third. Jeffery Jenkins. Jeffery Jenkins ... where had he heard that name? It sounded so terribly familiar. The call was answered on the third ring.

"This is Donnell McLaughlin and I'm calling for Marquerite de Navarre."

A short silence was followed by, "I'm listening."

Donnell heaved a sigh of relief. Ten minutes later, he closed the conversation and turned to his Mistress. "There's a lawyer going to stop by in about forty five minutes. We have to get you dressed."

Her eyes bled with despair as she peered into him. With her arms wrapped around her body, she shivered uncontrollably. "Am I losing my mind?"

Donnell tossed his head and shrugged. "I can't say," he whispered solemnly. "But like I said ... I understand you perfectly. Wherever you go, I'll be happy to follow."

With his tender devotion directed at her most undeserving nature, she burst into tears.

"C'mon, Sweetheart," he whispered. "Let me help you."

* * * *

Jeffery Jenkins no sooner walked through the door than Donnell recognized him. The man was still in law school when he worked as an intern at Navarre, Navarre and Navarre. With a sense of surprise, Jeff studied Donnell a moment. "You're..."

Graciously, Donnell smiled. "Pierre Navarre's personal assistant."

"Right." A small smile formed remembering a few evenings spent with the senior partner and his assistant. Slowly, Jeff turned away to tend Marquie. Quite obviously, she had been crying. "I was so sorry to hear about your father. Unfortunately, I was out of town at the time. And all of this is making it infinitely worse."

"Thank you ... and it is," she said surely. "I think my brother has lost..."

Quickly, Jeff reached out and hugged her arm. "I know your brother, Ma'am. You might as well know now that he's not one of my favorite people."

Sadly, Marquie nodded. "I hate what he's doing to us ... making a mockery of my father's wishes. But since he started this, I feel I need to rise to the occasion."

Soberly, Jeff peered into her. "That's what I'm here for."

A brief consultation ended with an emotional outburst from Marquie. Donnell carried her to the bedroom, returned briefly for her tea and then closed the door on her. "She's a fucking wreck," he whispered to Jeff.

"No shit. I would be, too."

"What did you mean about being not so very fond of Peter Navarre?"

Jeff glanced at the bourbon bottle and Donnell took the hint. He poured it into a rock glass and Jeff drank deep to steady himself for this. "This is very personal," he said under his breath as he stretched long to look down the hallway and ensure they were alone. "But since I know that you were Pierre's very personal assistant..."

"I was," Donnell replied quickly. "And now I work for the Lady."

Jeff nodded as he swilled the bourbon. "I had believed that Pierre was grooming me for a junior position at the firm. And I was working my ass off. I wanted it. I had visions of seeing Navarre, Navarre, Navarre and Jenkins embossed on paper, you know. Vivid visions until Peter started romancing me, so to speak. Dinners, golf outings, a very wild weekend in Antigua with all the feminine flesh he could stir up. It wasn't long after that he demanded I submit to him. I realize that you and I don't know each other well, but I can tell you now, that was not going to happen. Then or ever."

"I see. And then when you didn't submit, he blackmailed you right out of a job."

"That son of a bitch went to the bar association as soon as I passed it. Every fucking inch of my life was investigated ... including the IRS," Jeff snarled. "So yeah, I owe him one. You know every dog gets his day."

"I do," Donnell agreed quickly understanding that this was about more than just an estate matter. For Mr. Jeffery Jenkins, this was personal.

"And I had a lot of respect for Pierre Navarre. Infinitely more than his son did. So where did you get my name?" Jeff asked.

"I spoke to Matthew Hines and he recommended you."

Jeff laughed out loud and then finished the bourbon. "I spoke to Matt just yesterday. He didn't mention it. But he knew what went down between Peter and me so I'll have to thank him for this. He also said something else curious."

"What's that?"

Again, Jeff looked down the hallway to ensure their privacy. "Said there's a new Domme in town. Supposed to be very good."

With a curious smile, Donnell asked, "Is that a fact?"

"You wouldn't know anything about her, would you?"

"I might."

"Do I have to beat it out of you?" Jeff teased.

To sweeten the deal, Donnell said, "Let's just say that to avoid the hint of impropriety, you may have to wait until this case is over."

"Damn," Jeff whispered. "Beautiful woman. And Pierre's daughter through and through, eh?"

Donnell straightened and then leant from the hips over the bar. "All the way down to those sadistic little toes that drive me wild."

"A real sadist?"

"Not sure yet," Donnell whispered. "But it wouldn't surprise either of us now, would it? And you would like nothing more than a room full of masochists that you and she could use together."

"Fuck," Jeff muttered. He raised his arm to glance at his watch. "I've got about an hour to stop by the offices of some doctors I know. We'll get this wrapped up real quick," he said reassuringly.

A deep sigh of relief swept through Donnell as he pulled out his wallet. He laid a twenty dollar bill in front of Jeff.

"Retainer," Donnell whispered.

"Right." Jeff scooped up the money with a sly smile understanding now that he wasn't going to get paid if he didn't win this one. In this one, his fee didn't matter. Casually, he stuffed it in his pocket. "I'll have my secretary send you a receipt."

Chapter Eleven

"Please remember to stay calm," Donnell said softly. "And for this appointment I'm going to be in his waiting room."

"Thank you," she whispered. That Donnell was taking care of so many things she knew nothing about was such a relief. What did she have to be worried about anyway? She had done nothing wrong.

"Ms. de Navarre," Dr. Blaine said quietly.

"Good morning," she said with a painted smile.

As prescribed, she had taken her medication the last few days in case the doctor decided on a blood test. The low light, the monotone scheme and the trickle of water from the aquarium conspired against her. Easily, she nestled into the cool leather and relaxed.

"I think we dropped off last week with your declaration of being a dominatrix."

The word dominatrix rang in her head. Her mind filled with the image of her goddess stretched long on a bed of satin. Quietly, she whispered, "I was in love with Her."

Without revealing his curiosity over her confusion, he said softly, "Tell me about her."

There was something about this man she didn't like. Perhaps his eyes were too close together. Maybe he had too much forehead and his face was too narrow. It was nothing she could actually identify really, just a feeling. "What do you want to know?" she asked with a shrug. "She died in a car accident."

"When was this?"

"June eighth, exactly four years and nine weeks ago, at 7:38 AM on I-70 outside of Baltimore, six miles east of the Westminster exit."

The doctor noted the details so easily remembered. "Must have been hard for you."

"Especially since it was my car," she whispered. "There was another instance it should have been me."

"I don't understand."

"When I graduated from high school, Daddy bought me a car ... to take to college. A rather nice car at that, a Lexus. When my Mistress died in it, the car was only four years old, had thirty thousand miles on it and was meticulously maintained. There's no reason in the world that the brake lines should have failed."

"Brake failure, you say?"

"A semi pulled in front of her and she couldn't stop. She was traveling at 70 miles per hour and the truck, just getting onto the freeway barely at 20. Rush hour, you know. Couldn't swerve. She drove straight under the trailer. It uhhh ... decapitated her."

"God, I'm so sorry," he said gently.

"It should have been me," she said flatly, the medication having had time to work.

The doctor hesitated a moment to consider the possibilities. This case was one of the most fascinating of his career. His research conducted through newspaper articles, police and medical reports, and psychiatric journals revealed that the three year old, Marquerite de Navarre, had found her mother dead in the alcove of their home. The police report

indicated suicide but the wounded woman had fallen over the balcony of the upper storey ... and curiously landed with the gun still in her hand. She actually died from a fractured skull. Probably because she was diagnosed with multiple personality disorder with seven documented personalities, most of them male juveniles of varying ages, the police didn't investigate too carefully. But the reports concerning the investigation of the Alphabet Murderer were interesting, also. Two of the investigators had died due to malfunctioning brakes. Another shot himself.

The doctor sat back in the chair pondering the possibilities. His current patient didn't seem as if she suffered from paranoia. "What did you and this dominatrix do together?"

Marquie's eyes upturned and she glared at him. "That's very personal, Doctor. And nothing I intend to talk about."

He retreated a little to allow her defiance to moderate. Obviously, this was a very deep topic for her. "You said that you're a dominatrix. What do dominatrices do?"

Her smile broadened as she thought of the woman in red patent leather. "They fall in love, I think."

"With who?"

"Their submissives. Their beautiful submissives who would do anything to ensure their comfort, their pleasure, their happiness."

"Tell me. What would make a ... submissive so desirous of pleasing a dominatrix?"

She thought of herself now, prostrate at her Mistress' feet. "They worship," she whispered solemnly. "In their Mistresses

they see strength of mythological proportions. Perhaps better said, their other half."

"Their better half?" Blaine asked.

Marquie cocked her head to let that concept trickle into her psyche. Finally, she whispered, "Yes, yes of course. It's not that submissives are incapable of making decisions. It's just that they don't need the responsibility. The fear of making the wrong decision. They escape into a world where their influence is limited, where they have not the power to disrupt or destroy anything."

She hesitated a moment to ponder that idea. At least during her own years of servitude, that's what she believed. That submissives were powerless, that the singular power they enjoyed, the ability to obey, came from the creators. But if that were true, Donnell wouldn't be able to affect her the way he did. That he could command her attention with the smallest of smiles, the wiggle of his ass, or the bow of his head frightened her a little now. Suddenly, her awareness of his control was plainly visible. "What they don't know and could never understand is that they are Our better halves."

"Tell me about your submissives," the doctor ordered.

Her long, perfectly manicured nails raked through her hair to drive it from her face. Her vision fixated on the geometric pattern of the carpet with the blankness of a heroine addict. "He's quite honestly the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

"In what way?" the doctor asked.

"Beyond the obvious?" she whispered. "He's never once expected anything from me. He's never once expected

anything for himself. It's simply enough for him to be with me." It's enough for me to be with him.

"What's the sex like?" the doctor prodded.

Marquie's eyes rolled up to glare at him. Quite obviously, her sexual liaisons were none of his business. As her Mistress explained over and over, only an outsider, one who has never experienced the beauty of sadomasochism, nor the love in bondage and discipline would ask an idiotic question like that.

"What makes you think it's about sex, Doctor?"

"Isn't this something that the submissive does nude?"

A sly grin stretched her lips. "So you think that just because somebody is unclothed it's because they're wanton wretches. That they're ready for sex, begging for sex. That it couldn't be merely about submission, about being exposed, about offering themselves, everything that they are to someone else!"

"In our culture, nudity generally precedes sexual encounters," Blaine shot back.

"It also precedes a bath, Doctor. We live in a very shallow society. Your statement implies that nudity is required to copulate and we both know it's not. If you pick out a marriage in our culture, say any union of the traditional sort, you'll find it fraught with inconsistencies, won't you? This one doesn't get enough attention, or that one wants more time to himself. They got married because she's pretty or he's got money, on and on. Unions within the sub-culture can be very much the same if the chemistry isn't right. But when two people are suited for each other, it's absolutely magic, Doctor.

Everybody knows what they're doing and how to approach each other. It's a relationship of mutual respect."

"Are you saying that the dominant respects a human being that bends to every desire that flits through his or her mind?"

This was exactly the attitude her Mistress warned her about. That no matter how much she tried, she would never be able to explain it to people who refused to understand. "That's exactly what I'm saying," she said boldly. "If you think you could ignore someone who takes care of your every need, you are mistaken. But if the balance is askew, as it is in many modern day marriages, if one partner is putting out more than the other, then somebody becomes resentful, don't they? That other person begins to feel inferior because he doesn't have as much to offer as she does and his inferiority is in his face every day."

The doctor shrugged at a valid point.

"But if both people are concerned about what the other feels, about the other's needs, about the other's safety, satisfaction, and general well-being, then we have something more comfortable than the modern-day marriage, Doctor. We have something that marriage was perhaps intended to be, but has failed us as human beings and as a society. Because gender seems to be the defining statement of a marriage and because women aren't always submissive and men aren't always dominant, many marriages fail. But when everybody knows who the hell they are and what they're doing, relationships are much more successful and by that, I mean satisfying."

"That still doesn't explain the sexual aspects."

Marquie huffed audibly. "Just as in any other relationship, sex may be a component. But it's certainly not the entire scope."

"Do you engage in sexual activity with your submissives?"

Angrily, she unwound out of her shell. "No, I don't, Doctor. Discipline is not foreplay, some prelude to ... kink." She turned up her nose at that word, a word in the lexicon she hated more than any other because it implied a malfunction or deviation of some kind. "Discipline is what reminds a sub that somebody loves him, that somebody is taking care of him, someone's full attention is his even if for that moment. It reminds him that he's worth the effort, the skill, the emotional investment. That he's loved and adored and cherished in ways that nobody else would care to offer."

Quietly, he challenged her by saying, "Then sexual contact is never part of the program."

"I didn't say that, either," she said, retreating into the chair. She closed her eyes and allowed her vision to fill with the image of Donnell. A virgin to men, other than her brother, and perhaps afraid of them, she couldn't deny her attraction to her slave. Now feeling the same sense of calm and serenity as when he was near, she whispered, "He's exquisite."

Blaine remained quiet a moment rather than infuriate her into defensiveness. But what he needed was a view of her deepest, most personal fantasies. Something that would reveal her inner soul and introduce him to her motivations. That she was in danger was obvious, but whether that danger was inside of her or exerted from an external source, he

wasn't certain. "If you had the license to do whatever you cared to, what would it be?"

With her eyes closed, her mind returned to the vision which was so often revisited lately. Her hand turned up, and with her fingers splayed, she cupped the empty air. "He has balls like a mule," she whispered. "Balls that are begging me to tend to them."

"Are they beautiful?" he asked, though it sounded like a voice in her head.

She huffed a little for that was a stupid question. "One of these days..." her voice trailed off. "With a nylon rope ... those exquisite things are going to find themselves restrained so tightly they can't breathe. Mistress did it many times ... the balls forced into the sac by the coiled rope. The balls divided looking like sweet, ripened plums."

Blaine shivered a little with the vivid memories of seeing such things in print. "How did Mistress feel about men?"

Instantly, Marquie's expression brightened though her eyes remained closed. A playful smile spread on her lips as she pulled her legs into her lap, unconsciously exposing herself. "Mistress loved men," she said with happiness.

Blaine threw back in the chair a little, surprised by the answer. He expected to hear a torrent of vague accusations and received just the opposite. "What do you mean she loved them?"

"She loved to watch them think. She'd set them up in impossible situations with two possible choices, one of which led to the ultimate reward, and the other to ruin. Of course, they didn't know which was which ... and had no rational way

to make a choice. It forced them to feel their way through it. To get in touch with their intuition."

"So these contests always had a defined outcome?"

"Absolutely. If an hour of Her acquiescence to their deepest desires was the reward for choosing the Royal Petal, the choice/prize structure was never changed mid-stream. In four years, She never went back on Her word. But if they chose a ball-beating, and the prize for that choice was a month's banishment from Her House, so be it."

"And that would be a difficult choice for a man?"

Silently, Marquie huffed as her eyes opened. "By what criteria would you make that choice, Doctor?"

"Of course, I would not choose the ball-beating."

"Obviously," Marquie sneered. "But if the choice of the Royal Petal led to month's banishment rather than untold pleasure, by what criteria, as a man given to logic, would you make your decision? Would you make that decision based on the pursuit of pleasure or the avoidance of pain?"

He hesitated peering into her dark eyes. "I don't know."

"More to the point, Doctor, would the underlying motivation be in the pleasure of your Mistress or in your own selfish pleasure?"

"I don't know."

"How you respond to these queries answers these and many more questions, Doctor."

Blaine sat sickeningly still, feeling as if he had suddenly become her prey. The crispness of her words, the focus of her vision, the command with which she held her body conspired

against him. It felt like the stab of an icepick in his groin and his eyes slid shut to hide his shame.

Marquie smirked a little and sat back in the chair. She'd just found one of Blaine's limits. And the soft spot to rub into abrasion.

"Would you like to take a break, Ms. de Navarre?"

Pushing ahead, she said quickly, "Not at all, Doctor. We'll give you your twenty minutes of my two hours at the end."

"Alright then," he whispered.

"You wanted to know about my submissive."

Blaine steadied himself by leaning over the desk and planting his weight on his elbows. "I'm listening."

Determined to get ahead in this situation, Marquie curled into the chair again, her arms looped lazily around her legs, her chin propped on her knee. Knowing that Blaine was totally turned on by all of this, her eyes lids slid closed as if they were doors sealing her off from the material world. Somehow she could force this to a conclusion either in her dungeon or in court.

"I think ... yes..." she whispered. The hint of a grin stretched her lips. "Daddy has a ball vice down there. Daddy has some fascinating things," she murmured reverently.

"A ball vice?"

She ignored the tremor in his voice and he said, "Oh yeah. Mistress had Her various means of restraint, but my father had the imagination and resources to do anything he liked. He apparently liked balls."

She hesitated a moment to throw her head back and peek through slits at his reactions. Amused that he sat frozen, she continued:

"Daddy has this incredible little collar for the scrotum of an exquisite cast aluminum, that can be worn 24/7. But it has all kinds of attachments for it ... chain, rope, steel plates for crushing, rabbit fur liner, weights for stretching. Some lovely things for the cock. I found some notes in his office, all about treasure. He didn't like the boy moving around a lot. Although there were days he'd spend four or five hours in the gym, when they were together, Daddy insisted on calm."

"Because ... the man ... could get so worked up?"

"Exactly," she whispered. "He had suffered some serious trauma. But with Daddy he was safe and protected."

"How would you make him feel safe and protected?"

"It's all in those balls," she whispered. The key to his total surrender. "I've got to get them tied up right away," as if she were making a note to herself. "That hair should be singed off of there weekly."

"Did you say singed?"

Her eyes shot open at his very obvious disdain. "Of course, singed. How would you do it?"

"I think I'd leave it alone."

She shook a little with an amused grin. Restraining laughter, she said, "Of course, you would, Doctor. But we're talking about me."

Slowly, his expression moderated a little. And then a tiny in light in his eyes created a crease. "How would you do that ... exactly?"

With a wrinkle of her nose, she twisted in the chair and planted herself firmly with one leg tossed over the other. "Daddy's notes explained everything," she whispered. "While, of course, some use rubbing alcohol, Daddy insisted on Rothschilds for His treasure. The flame is much less toxic, of course, and there's always a little something left when the hair situation is resolved. Now, the Rothschilds '68, Daddy preferred because its flame had a particular brilliance."

"That's a very expensive bottle of champagne," Blaine commented.

Marquie's features contorted as if she didn't understand. "Are you attempting to tell me that there is something on earth that could possibly be too good for Our treasure? It's a ritual, Doctor. It's what reminds him that we love him. One Saturday night a month, Daddy would take him to the dungeon and singe his hair. I think that is a very good idea. It gives him something to look forward to."

"Look forward to? That must be incredibly painful."

Marquie laughed a little. "My father was a genius at the care of slaves, I'm proud to say, Doctor. I've found extensive case files of those he kept, both for his own pleasure and their comfort. But what you don't understand is when they're in the throes of sexual abandon, the so-called pain becomes merely stimulation. Daddy wasn't certain as to whether this particular slave we speak of is aware that he experiences orgasms in the throes of this pleasure and pain. That will be interesting to find out."

"Oh no. Hold up on that," Blaine ordered.

Rather than surrender to his directive, she said simply, "Rest room?"

The doctor pointed to a door and watched as she disappeared behind it. Chilled, he sat in his chair unable to move. That was the most grotesque thing he'd ever heard spoken of. That she had the heart of a sadist was more than obvious to him.

Marquie returned and tossed her bag over her shoulder. "Next week?" she said nonchalantly.

Stunned, Blaine nodded. "Sit down, please."

"I don't have anything more to say," she said surely.

"But I do. Sit down, please."

Knowing he had the power to lock her down in a mental ward, she grudgingly complied. Calmly, she crossed her legs and then stared into him. "Yes?"

"What you've described here today is assault," he started. "Something that could get you put in jail for a very long time. It seems to me that you've never actually done the things you've described, but that you've been witness to them. It also occurs to me that you're aching to do these things with one particular man."

"It's called Cock and Ball Torture, Doctor," she said defensively.

"Exactly," he said sternly. "That definitely would be torture, and not only illegal but morally reprehensible and very, very dangerous."

To defend the practice and explain the benefits to the masochist would be folly now. His decision was made, a

decision based his own love of the family jewels. Marquie remained quiet.

"We need to get to the underlying pathogenic beliefs that you developed about men as a child. Obviously, you have a need to hurt them," Blaine said adamantly. "A pathogenic belief is not necessarily based on reality, but it seems as if it's true. It's not even a conscious belief. But it's something that fills the believer with anxiety and guilt. Until we get to these pathogenic beliefs of yours, I want you to promise me that you won't do any of the things you've described."

Marquie hesitated a moment staring into him, reviling him for his lack of understanding. Rather than try to explain again, she whispered, "Of course."

Blaine noted her non-compliance in her response. "Miss de Navarre, I'm serious about this. These are things that require intensive treatment. To indulge in them would only hamper that treatment and create more problems in the future, both for your health and your liberty."

Marquie drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. The threat in his statement was obvious. Less antagonistically, she whispered, "You're right," with a little bow of her head. "We'll talk next week then."

Blaine softened a little as he nodded. "I'm serious about this," he reminded sternly.

I am too, she thought. Quickly, she stood and faced him. "Next week then?"

"Definitely," he responded with an arch of his brow. "And get this prescription filled on the way home."

Chapter Twelve

For the thirty minute ride home, she sat frighteningly quiet, staring at nothing in the car. Once in his house, she moved to a leather chair and fell into it. "I feel about half loopy," she said surely. Quietly, she shook her head as to clear the dust settled on her brain. "And here, start a fire with this," she commanded as she handed him the new prescription.

Donnell glanced at it to see that the dosage had been doubled. Fearing badly, he began, "Uhh ... what did he have you talking about today?"

"I don't even remember ... oh ... yeah ... my Mistress."

In mid-step, Donnell stopped dead. Only slowly, a corner of his mouth dug into his cheek. "Your Mistress?" he said incredulously.

She grinned broadly at his curious smile. "Why is that so hard to believe?"

It wasn't hard to believe at all. For the length of her service a corset was never removed to achieve that waist line. Quietly, he settled at her feet and perched his chin on her knee. "Are you a masochist?"

She grimaced a little and shook her head. "Moi?" she said playfully. "Nonono. In fact, it was often my duty to administer punishments. Which is not to say that I've never been the receiver, but no."

He wiggled a little and peered deeply into her. "Tell me."

"You know more about it than I do."

"If you know so much about it, why did you let me make an ass out of myself and try to teach you what to do with me?"

Her tongue swept over her lips to reignite the shock of red there. "It cut down a little on the trial and error portion of the program, didn't it? It might have taken months to find out what really turns you on ... if you hadn't so readily told me about it. Besides ... it gives me some insight into how my father did it."

Self-consciously, he laughed a little. He hadn't realized that he was being had.

"Don't get me wrong, baby," she mewed. "I've never used a strap-on before. That was Mistress' obligation. There's a lot of things I've never done ... only watched."

Filled powerfully full with curiosity, his head shoved between her thighs to part them. The scent rising between them stirred his cock uncomfortably. "Have you done men before?"

Teasing, her face knurled as if the concentration of her thoughts caused pain. "I ... maybe, probably. There may have been one or two."

His heart fluttered uncontrollably as he buried his nose to the crescent of her body and breathed deeply, filled with affection. This explained why she rarely wore panties. "Do you like to do men?"

Almost laughing now, she drove her fingers through his hair and pulled him closer. "I haven't decided. I need a little more practice, I think. Don't you?"

"Yes, Mistress," he said hurriedly, hoping that he would be the etude, her personal practice piece.

"So we have a couple of hours before our guest arrives. I'm going to need a handful of rubber bands tonight, darling."

"Ooo, Mistress," he whispered as he backed away. Thinking of his cock he added, "Rubber bands are not a good idea."

Her eyebrows dug into her forehead with dismay. Completely ignoring his admonition, she added, "And candles, darling. White kosher candles, if you please."

"Yes, Mistress. Of course."

* * * *

Completely transported out of himself, Donnell hung against the cold concrete wall watching in awe. Foolishly, he had mistaken her for a virgin in the dungeon. Never again would he assume anything where his exquisite Mistress was concerned. The judge's tears, the garbled voice, the pleading all conspired to set him on fire.

Now that a very thorough flogging was completed, the judge laid exhausted on his back on an exam table. Quite deftly, she secured his ankles to the stirrups, her skill with rope unmistakably accomplished. Hobbles on his knees attached securely to the table, held his legs painfully open. But his voice refused to still even as she tied his hands together. Because she was a gracious woman, she wrapped the rope securing his hands around Donnell's waist that he might enjoy a little vicarious pleasure.

"SHUT UP!!!"

Whether the judge was frightened or impossibly captivated, Donnell couldn't know. In awe, he watched, his cock lengthening painfully, as she pressed her naked breast to the judge's mouth. The moaning and pleading instantly gave way to the subtle sounds of slurping. So very full of compassion for those who live beyond redemption, she flattened her breast over his face. Minutes passed as he suckled furiously. And then he stilled.

Quickly, she rose and slapped his face hard. He awoke with a start, his eyes glazed.

"Do I have your attention?" she yelled.

"Mistress ... my God," he begged.

"That's better," she said haughtily. The rubber bands loosely looped around Donnell's balls were yanked away. Quite calmly, she took the judge's penis and wrapped one securely at the base, another about half way up the shaft and the last around the corona. The judge's head rolled on the table, the pleasure in this the most intense he had ever experienced.

She glanced at Donnell to see his mouth agape, his awareness of himself so depleted that a stream of drool trickled from his lip. The rope around his waist tugged at intermittent intervals to keep him involved. Smiling inside, she wrapped a leather thong tightly around the neck of the judge's scrotum, then attached that to a rope hanging over head. To the other end of the rope she secured a five pound weight to stretch him into inexperienced ecstasy.

The judge's voice rose again and echoed through the sparse expanse as if it were an alpine cavern. Calmly, she

moved away, dallied for a moment at the bank of drawers where Dom kept His smaller equipment. It was with a cigarette she returned, and of course, the lighter. The three candles treasure had provided for her were lit.

Quite calmly, as if she meant to perform an exam, she pulled a bench to the end of the table. With one leg placed carefully over the other, she hit the cigarette filling her lungs. In amazement, Donnell watched as she leaned forward, the candle flames only an inch from the judge's tortured balls. As if she were blowing out birthday candles, the hot wax splattered capriciously in searing pin points on the cold flesh.

The judge cried out in ecstasy. It was almost too much, it seemed. The candles were relit time and again and only when his balls were completely covered in wax, did she stub out the cigarette on the floor. She rose to unhitch the rope around Donnell's waist and remove his wrists from the steel restraints on the wall.

"Straddle him."

Without a thought, Donnell leapt to the table and planted his knees beside the judge's head. Completely awed by her skill, his vision fixated on her every movement. Gently, she removed the weight stretching the judge's balls to let them rest for awhile. As if she handled a piece of meat, she held up the penis and said softly, "Just the tip."

Ravenous, he fell to his hands and took the cold flesh between his teeth. Her nails dallied at the rubber band closest to the base. A pair of surgical scissors cut through it like a flash. The judge screamed with the horror of sensation returning like a convoluted lightening strike. Uncontrollably,

he thrashed attempting to throw Donnell off, this ecstasy, this pain too much to bear. Rather than be removed from a feast, Donnell sat back on the judge's face and opened his mouth to devour it all.

How cold the last two thirds of it were! The flesh swelled between his tongue and the roof of his mouth was a morsel of impeccable preparation. Sucking furiously, he wanted only a taste of the judge's essence. Only to the tap of his shoulder did he retreat a little, yet he held the glans in an embrace of wanton suction.

Unhesitant, she cut through the next rubber band. A scream declaring horror filled the room with a shock wave. The sound waves from the judge's mouth rattled his balls with exquisite vibrations. Donnell was helpless, this an experience he never dreamt of. The organ in his mouth filled as if flooded by a tidal wave. Until now, he hadn't realized how starved he was.

With a smack to his ass, he lurched forward. But his mouth refused to part from the feast. He felt her hand grab the judge's face and shake it a little. Her voice low and threatening, she said, "Can you imagine what it's going to feel like when the last one is cut?"

Through a throat nearly closed by pain, he rasped, "Oh Mistress, no, please, I can't take anymore."

"Oh darling, don't be silly. After all, you are still conscious," she whispered. "In just a few minutes..."

The judge cried out again, the tears flowing from his eyes a river of woe. Another smack on Donnell's ass positioned his balls over the judge's mouth again.

Without compassion for their pain, Marquie ripped the half-ripe penis from Donnell's hold. The moment stretched long as Donnell watched, a hint of foam frothing at his lips. The rounded tip of the scissors etched trails of white over the blood-engorged glans. The judged writhed with the pain and then ... the scissors cut the band.

As if it were struck by lightening, the blood rushed into the oxygen-starved flesh. With a broad smile, she listened to the judge's wailing for only a moment before it gave way to grunting gasps of exhilaration. Wiggling it, she offered it again to Donnell.

He lips swept down the organ until his mouth was full with the most exquisite cock he'd ever had the pleasure of. Never had he enjoyed one as hard or as available to be fed from. The throbbing in it sated a desire he never knew existed.

He didn't notice but she released the judge's knees. Instinctively, the legs closed and crushed in on his head. The plaintive moaning was muffled by the soft inner-thighs. Only a moment more and it burst into his mouth.

The creaminess tasted like bitter butter. Wantonly, he drank it down, his heart throbbing for her, his most exquisite and loving Mistress.

* * * *

Completely used and utterly pleased, every inch of his body still throbbed. The judge's dilated eyes rolled to see her moving toward him.

"That will be all this evening," she announced. "treasure will see to your care. Good night, gentlemen." Brusquely, she

turned and left them together. Together they listened as Her footfall faded away.

"Good God," Matt whispered.

Looking into the judge, Donnell nodded quietly. "Not even Dom had that level of intensity."

"No shit," Matt whispered. "That is one wicked woman."

Donnell's hands slipped over the judge's sweat-soaked skin toward the balls to remove the wax.

"No," Matt whispered. "I'd like to keep that for awhile."

Donnell laughed at him. "That's gonna hurt getting it off as much as putting it on was. All that hair."

"That wasn't pain, my brother," the judge whispered. "That was fucking incredible. Unable to move just yet, he continued, "My wallet. Take all of it. And make me an appointment for next week, if you would."

* * * *

Marquie lounged in the bed, naked from the waist up, a sheet pulled to her stomach sipping her tea. Her own buzz had yet to wear off when she heard, "Mistress, may we disturb you?"

"Yes, darling," she said softly.

A little stunned, she watched as the judge, one of the most powerful in the criminal court system, crawled toward her on his hands and knees. Beside of the bed, he sat back on his legs and folded his hands in his lap. "Mistress, may i thank You?"

"Of course, you may, My darling."

The judge stretched forward and planted his lips against her outstretched hand. Unsatisfied with that, he grasped it tenderly and moved up her arm, his kisses of adoration expressing his gratitude. That breast, still simmering with an inner fire, filled his vision. Because she hadn't refused him so far, he pressed his lips against its softness.

Tenderly, her fingers parted his sweat soaked hair. "That's fine, precious," she whispered.

Slowly, he withdrew. The three thousand dollars Donnell had taken from his wallet seemed a small cost compared to the shimmering electrical currents still flowing through his body. "May i ask, Mistress?"

"Yes."

"Do You do women also?"

With a tender smile, she whispered, "I do, love. Do you have a little girl for Mistress?"

"I might," he said softly.

"Mistress would be very pleased with that. She might even allow you to watch, if you're a good boy. No using the cock without Mistress' permission," she reminded.

"Yes, Ma'am," he said quickly. "I don't know how to thank You."

With a little wrinkle of her nose, she kissed the tips of her fingers. Tenderly, she planted it on his lips. "Go on now. Mistress must rest."

Judge Matthew Hines retreated and dropped his weight to his hands. Slowly, he crawled away from her. In the living room, Matt rose and took his shirt from Donnell.

"Are you okay or do you need me to drive you home?"
Donnell asked.

"I'm okay, thanks," Matt whispered. Fully clothed, he headed for the door. "I really appreciate you turning me on to her. Can I give your number to a friend of mine?"

"Absolutely. I'll check her out."

The judge grasped the doorknob and let himself out. Staggering a little, he moved toward his car. In this darkness, he wouldn't have noticed the man hidden in the bushes.

The car moved slowly through the iron-gate and Peter Navarre finally stood. Isn't this interesting, he muttered inside of himself. He noticed the lights in the living room of the bungalow go out and then a moment later the lights in the bedroom dimmed. "What the hell are you doing with my sister?" he said angrily, but then he knew. He knew exactly where Marquie had been and what she was doing now.

He stood in the garden a moment longer pondering Donnell's fate. Everything would be so much easier without him around. As if the solution to his problem arrived by revelation, his cell phone vibrated against his hip. He flipped it open to see that Keith was awaiting him.

Should be in France by now, the stupid son of a bitch. Without taking the call, he closed the phone and slipped it into his pocket. Maybe I don't need him after all.

Chapter Thirteen

"Doctor Blaine, this is Peter Navarre. I need to speak to you about my sister."

Blaine hesitated a moment pondering this most unusual case. "As long as you understand that I can't speak to you about your sister, I'll listen to whatever you have to say."

At the appointed hour, Peter Navarre walked through the doctor's door and positioned himself carefully. "How is Marquie?" he asked quite concerned.

"As I told you earlier, I'm not at liberty to discuss her case with anyone."

"I don't care for what I've seen going on lately. She's vacated the main house and has moved in with the gardener."

"The gardener?"

"The gardener, Doctor. I know he goes around telling everyone he's her body guard, but I can assure you. He is the gardener. Beyond that, I went out to speak to her the other day. She came to the door totally nude."

"I see. So you suspect that the relationship between her and the gardener is..."

"Utterly unethical, of course. Obviously, he's using her weakened emotional state to his advantage."

"What advantage could he gain in this?"

"Marquie stands to inherit a great deal, Doctor. Millions and millions of dollars, you see. And because her sexual proclivities are ... a bit odd, I'm certain that bastard has her

doing things she wouldn't dream of doing without his encouragement."

"Are you saying you think she's in danger?"

"I'm saying that if she were thinking clearly just now, she wouldn't have moved out of the main house at all. It's hers. When the estate is settled it will be hers."

As much as Blaine wanted to know more about Marquie's sexual proclivities he wasn't at liberty to be enlightened at just this moment. He looked into Peter's dark eyes studying the concern etched at the edges. "I don't have enough to take to the courts and ensure guardianship," he said under his breath.

A slow smile stretched long on Peter's lips. As if he were buoyed by a revelation of Biblical proportion, he stood easily. Almost laughing now, he said surely, "Thank you, Doctor." And then he turned and moved quickly through the door.

* * * *

Peter Navarre sat at his desk pondering his sister's fate. What did he really want out of this thing anyway? The old man's money was just an excuse anyway, wasn't it? And Patrice's estate. He allowed that to Marquie without contesting it when it should have had a share in it also.

The lever of his door turned at the same moment his secretary's voice screamed through the intercom. Quickly, he rose for he understood that an intruder had forced past her. Security was on its way, he was certain. Yet the door opened and Jeffery Jenkins advanced with his usual arrogance.

Heavily, Peter fell back to his chair. "I thought this was a problem," he said with a smirk.

"Figure one of your less-than-satisfied clients is after you? How ya been?" Jeff asked snidely.

Peter leaned forward and planted his elbows on his desk, his hands folded in front of him. "I suspect you've got about ninety seconds before security arrives."

Jeff tossed his briefcase on Peter's desk and flung it open. Carefully, he removed a two inch stack of papers and laid them on Peter's desk. "If by Friday at noon, you haven't dropped your suit against Pierre Navarre's estate, I will file every one of those," Jeff said assuredly. "And just for a little light reading, I added a few medical journal articles and depositions from neurologists, including those who treated Pierre Navarre, and other assorted medical experts. Enjoy your evening." Just as quickly as he had arrived, he was gone.

Peter swept his arm across the desk and gathered the file. "In the State of Ohio, the County of Franklin..." No less than eleven civil suits, the plaintiff, Marquerite de Navarre, greeted him. Every form of litigation imaginable from punitive damages of rape to attempted murder drove past the threshold of his anger. He thought back through the years and tried to remember everything he might have said to Jeff, even in inebriated ecstasy. The bastard certainly had done his homework well. What more might Marquie have told him?

"Fuckwad," Peter snarled. Included was a court order for a DNA sample from Pierre Navarre. And if one wasn't extant, an order of exhumation would be granted. That would prove

nothing more than the fact he wasn't related to Pierre by blood.

Angrily, Peter shook his head. In a single fluid movement, his credibility and career would be washed away. How in the hell did Marquie have the sense to hire that bastard? But then it wasn't Marquie, was it? It was Matthew Hines. And Donnell McLaughlin.

Like a saber, his finger stabbed at the intercom. "Get in here," he ordered. "I need to file some shit."

A moment later, his secretary sat before him. "Just the standard," he said rudely. "I'll drop the suit against my sister. Network it to my computer and I'll fill in the details."

"Yes, Sir," she said softly.

Peter lulled at his desk a moment consoling himself. Though he had stood to gain several million dollars worth of assets if his sister had merely complied with his wishes, there were other ways to achieve his ends. Now that the entire security system at le Domaine had been reprogrammed, including the audio/visual in the gardener's quarters, not even a sneeze would escape his scrutiny. Whatever Matthew Hines was up to would soon be public knowledge. And of course there was Jeffery Jenkins.

"You boys just hold tight to your undies," he said with a tone of self-righteous indignation. "You are about to be exposed."

Chapter Fourteen

Donnell crawled across the floor, most comfortable in his nudity. He curled at his Mistress' feet, one perfectly formed buttock perched on Her foot. As usual, he planted his chin on Her lovely knee, his pleasure in this unmistakable in his shining countenance.

"What can I do for you?" she asked with a smile.

"Ahhh, yes," was merely an exhalation of breath. "treasure would merely like to remind Mistress of Her appointment this evening. And he would also like to remind Mistress that Her precious treasure is deathly curious about the goings-on in the dungeon this week, what with all of the delivery and set-up people, the banging and clanging ... the activity directly overseen by Mistress."

A delighted little laugh swept out of her chest. "Her precious treasure?"

Properly, he averted his eyes from hers, her naked breasts equal in pleasure to them. "Yes, Mistress."

With a broad grin, she nodded and pulled him into her lap. "I didn't notice anything in your Master's dungeon that had anything directly related to females. So yes, I made a few purchases."

"May I assume Mistress enjoys her females?"

Still, her expression exuded her amusement as she swept through his hair. "You may, My darling, but don't make a habit of assumptions."

"Yes, Mistress, of course. What would Mistress like to wear this evening?"

"Mistress isn't too terribly interested in that. Treasure may decide."

His eyebrows arched into his forehead, this an unexpected little treat. "Is there anything Mistress requires Her precious treasure to prepare for her?"

Her laughter was jovial as he constantly reminded her that he was precious to her. Happily, she pulled his face between her breasts for a little hug. "A cigarette and some tea ... with just a hint of bourbon," she replied.

His mouth opened on the narrow bit of skin between her breasts and pulled it between his teeth for an adamant kiss. Slowly, he moved away from her as if doing so was equal to plunging a knife through his heart. He dropped his weight to his hands and turned his exquisite ass to her that she might note his most valuable assets and keep them in mind. As he breached the cold tile of the kitchen floor, the doorbell rang.

"Fuck me," he muttered. He stood to flip through the camera views on the monitor. "It's your lawyer."

"Let him in," she commanded as she loosely draped the satin of her robe over her body.

A flush of self-consciousness rose into Donnell's cheeks. But it wasn't so bad being as Jeff was a player. And a damned accomplished disciplinarian, if he remembered correctly. He opened the door to see a hint of a smile form on the visitor's face.

"Is your Mistress available?"

"Come in."

"Miss de Navarre," Jeff said respectfully.

"Have a seat," she offered. Immediately, she snapped her fingers at Donnell to remind him of his interrupted errand. To Jeff, she said, "Since this is a good day, I assume you're here to add to it," indicating she wasn't in the mood for bad news.

"Yes, Ma'am. I most certainly am." From his jacket pocket he retrieved folded papers and handed them to her. "This was filed by Peter Navarre just a little while ago."

She opened the papers and seemed unimpressed. From the silver tray held before her, she casually took the glass of tea. Donnell placed the ashtray with the lit cigarette on the arm of her chair and then turned to serve her visitor his usual bourbon. Dutifully, he moved away yet stood erect, his feet apart, hands held behind his back clutched to the tray.

Jeff began, "You do understand that your brother has dropped the suit contesting your father's will?"

"Oh yes," she whispered. Her dark eyes bored into his studying him intently. "And I appreciate this very much. Truly, I do. What you might have threatened him with I dare guess. Whatever it was cut very deep, obviously." She nestled into the chair and took a sip of tea. "But it's three weeks past the death of two people I love dearly. I've had some time to put this into perspective. That was merely the opening volley in this escalation of the war between us, don't you see? That he relented so easily on this tells me he has something else in mind."

"That would not surprise me, Marquie."

"I've done a little investigation myself, Jeff. I understand why there's no love lost between you and my brother."

"That was a long time ago, but yes," Jeff replied. "I would be lying to you if I said this wasn't an opportunity I've been waiting for."

"I don't have a problem with that," she said surely. "Everybody needs a reason to do what they do. But surely you understand now that you're on his hit list."

"Hit list?"

"He'll do everything he can to make you miserable in more ways than you can imagine. And merely for the entertainment value in it."

With a little relief, he sipped the bourbon. "I'm not concerned about that, Marquie. I can handle myself."

"Then I give you more credit than you deserve," she said rapaciously. "My brother is a dangerous man."

"Dangerous?" he shot back with mild alarm. "Surely, you don't mean..."

"You don't know my brother as well as you think you do," she explained. "I want you to move in here for awhile. Since the matter I hired you for is concluded, you're no longer my attorney, merely my friend. I know you and your wife are separated so I don't believe that she's in danger. I know you're living in a hotel downtown. I also know that every one that has ever loved me and protected me is dead, Jeff."

"Marquie," Jeff insisted. "I really think this is a bit overboard."

"My brother has his own personal hit man. While that asshole has taken up residence in France, I understand, it would take only twelve hours to get here. I have to assume that the fact that you're still alive is indicative only of the fact

that if you were meet an untimely death, you could be replaced, at least for my purposes, quite easily. And yes, my motives are selfish in this. I couldn't handle it if one more person died because of their support for me."

"You're frightened," he whispered.

"You're fucking right I'm frightened," she said adamantly. "I feel like he's watching me constantly, I don't know why. I just feel..." Her fingers arced into claws and she shook her hands. "He's constantly watching me. And I'm telling you now. Everyone who has ever supported me in anything is dead." Holding up the papers she finished by saying, "And this heaped humiliation upon defeat. Don't fool yourself into thinking that he's going to forgive that because you're even with him."

His face blanched, yet he shook his head as he sat back in the chair. It wasn't like he was doing anything with his life anyway, other than working fifteen hours a day. "Alright then," he said solemnly. "For the respect I had for your father, I can sleep here." From his vantage, it seemed as though the more attention he lavished on this exquisite woman was the measure of danger which threatened him. But he could think of more difficult ways to get over his wife and get back into the scene than joining her staff.

"You may not know that I'm a pro-Domme," she said.

"Good news travels very quickly, Mistress."

"I have an appointment this evening," she said calmly. "You're welcomed to attend as a spectator ... or perhaps a participant."

Forgetting himself, he smiled broadly as his weight shifted in the chair. "Are You doing a male or female this evening?" he asked.

"A female. This is her first visit. Of course, My treasure will be on board and I have another spectator, but he will be chained to the wall."

"It will be my pleasure to assist You, Marquie."

* * * *

At the ring of the bell, Donnell moved up the staircase, Mistress' heavy chains attached at his throat, his wrists, his balls and his ankles. There was no mistaking that she had control of him or that she desired that control. At the sound of the bell, he opened the door to see a middle-aged woman in a business suit. At the very sight of him, she averted her eyes.

Without speaking, he held the door and ushered her in. Quickly, he nodded at the guard and then punched the numbers on the keypad to reset the security system. Quite calmly, he took her bag and placed it on a chair. As she shivered, he removed her suit jacket and then opened the zipper of her skirt.

"I don't think I've ever been so scared," she whispered.

Refusing to violate his Mistress' wishes, he remained silent as he opened the buttons of her blouse. The bra was removed to allow her small but dense breasts to be viewed. As instructed, she wore no panties, but Mistress desired that she wear nothing at all. The garter belt and stockings were removed at once.

Cowering, she stood before a man she had never seen. Though he was wrapped in heavy chains, obviously a slave to Mistress, he was a man. A very intense man with a very erect penis. Donnell's fingers swept up her chest and over her throat to push her chin up a little. He moistened his lips and then placed them against hers feeling her tremble.

He knew those feelings well. The fear, the trepidation, the desire, the need. With the clank of chains leading from his collar to his wrists, his hands slid down her arms. Tenderly, he clutched her hands and placed them at her breasts.

Remembering Mistress' instructions via email, she drew in a deep breath and released it to force calm upon herself. She needed only to concentrate on one little thing at a time rather than allow herself to be overwhelmed. She dropped her hands to her side and nodded.

Donnell led the way, she dutifully following. When they reached the Dungeon, he moved quickly toward his Mistress but she froze at the bottom of the staircase. Awash in a soft pink glow from an overhead spotlight, Mistress was seated in an ornately carved chair of dark mahogany upholstered in black leather. He took his place to Mistress' right and watched carefully.

She couldn't help but notice one of her dearest friends chained to the wall, a judge, his penis bound tightly by a leather thong. Or the gorgeous man, one she had seen around the courthouse, wearing only leather pants so that his very muscular and well formed torso was plainly visible.

Her mind went blank, or perhaps there were so many thoughts swirling like the winds of a cyclone, she was unable

grasp one of them and find her sanity. Like an endangered gazelle she was ready to bolt and escape the scrutiny of three very fine men. Like a wanton wretch, she could see nothing before her but Mistress' voluptuous breasts beckoning her.

Simply frozen, she stood beyond the light staring into it. It was as if she stared at a screen, the film perpetually locked on this single frame where no one moved and no sound could be heard. She had but to close her eyes, drop to her hands and knees and follow her heart to the Mistress, but she was as frozen as the figures both within the light and the shadows.

Mistress responded to her desperation by raising Her hand. "Come, child," was merely a subtle breath loosed on her ravaged psyche attempting to reorder it, or perhaps eradicate it. It was all she needed to find her mind and fall to the floor, her tears leaving a trail of unrestrained desire in her wake. Near Mistress, the soft glow of light felt electric and alive illuminating her body with the warmth of luxurious waves. Somehow, the commands Mistress issued via email returned to her. Still on her knees, she rose. Over and over again she had envisioned this scene in her mind. She had taken it to bed with her; she had awakened with it. But now it was impossible to raise her hands and grasp her own nipples.

Internally, Marquie smiled, her suspicions of this one affirmed by this contact. This was a woman, who at the age of forty five, had done it all, except with another woman. She was extremely intelligent, very educated and had a very stressful job like the men around her. Not unlike them, an occasional scene was an escape from the burdens of life. But

this was something she had never done. The fear etched in her face, the trepidation of her movements explained that this was a moment this woman had fantasized about and lived for because this surrender to another woman was what was in her heart. To awaken her from her coma, Marquie snapped her fingers.

With a jerk, as if her nervous system had been shocked by electricity, the penitent raised her hands. Her nails enclosed her already swollen nipples and pulled the breasts high. In her dreams, Mistress had reached out with desire toward them, but this was reality. Mistress merely sat there, unaffected, Her eyes boring like lasers. The moment stretched long to devour what little self-confidence she had. Tears sprouted and rolled down her cheeks to drip onto her breasts.

Finally, Marquie had the response she wanted. Slowly, she leant forward from the hips, her spine still straight and reached out to touch the soft skin encasing the rib cage. Gently she swept up, her hands turning to take the gift of Her submissive. The flesh was released to her care and the hands that delivered it returned behind the back and clasped together. Tenderly, Marquie kneaded the flesh and pinched the nipples.

The penitent closed her eyes feeling her Mistress' caressing love. Her mind void of any thoughts, she felt a needy desire to crumble into her Mistress' lap and be petted. Her tongue swept her lips and then parted. Her breath came heavily to indicate her pleasure in this acceptance. In gratitude, she whispered, "Mistress."

The word no sooner passed her lips than her nipples recoiled with incredible pain. Suddenly off balance her head spun as she was pulled forward into Mistress' lap. Out of the corner of her eye, she noted the living statue of a Dom suddenly animate. By the hair, her head was jerked painfully back. Before she could cry out, a ball gag slipped between her teeth and held her mouth shamefully open. The buckle snapped and then a lock closed to keep it in place as long as Mistress desired.

The rush of adrenalin through her body caused her heart to palpitate. She began to squirm, but her movements were merely the impetus to aid the Dom's as he lifted her off the floor and spun her toward him. His heavy arms locked around her body forcing her hands behind her back. She felt the cuffs quickly locked at her wrists and ankles. A heavy collar swept around her throat. Before she could grasp the magnitude of her error, her hands were hitched together and then pulled to the center of her back, held in place by a chain from the collar.

Again, she was turned to face Mistress, but The Attitude was infinitely less angelic and decidedly demonic. She barely recognized the Woman, Her face knurled with disgust, it seemed. Forced again to her knees, Jeff's fingers splayed over her eyes so that she was helpless to move, her head pressed against his very rigid penis. Yet she was able to see plainly the fate awaiting her.

Until this moment, she was unaware that the ball gag had a hole in it to aid her breathing. But the hole obviously served another purpose. In horror, she watched through the splayed

fingers as Mistress received a bowl of liquid from the slave. A long cotton swab soaked heavily in a thick liquid was held high to allow the excess to drip away. Suddenly transported to another dimension where nothing made sense any longer, the swab aimed directly at the hole. Her head shook violently as a grunting in her throat spoke for her fear. But her head was held firmly; she could do nothing but place her tongue against the hole in defense.

The swab touched her tongue and drove the most vile taste into her psyche. Something in her mind said castor oil though she had no recollection of ever having it. Once again, the swab was dipped and forced through the hole tickling the back of her throat. Instantly, she began to gag.

Marquie handed the bowl to treasure and smiled at Jeff, pleasantly infatuated with this one. That she had so easily and quickly deconstructed a well-built self-image and strong personality pleased her intensely.

With an approving smile, Jeff peered down at her, wholly smitten with the newest Domme in town. Though she wasn't the first he'd had the pleasure of, she could hopefully be the last. Certainly, the most memorable.

Calmly, Marquie stood as the submissive doubled-over. The gagging hadn't yet ceased and saliva flowed through the hole. A couple drops of castor oil would get nothing more than a turned up nose from someone with experience. She almost laughed out loud at this histrionic display. To end it finally, she raised her leg and dug her heel into the open palm at mid-back.

A bit of defiant choking ended it finally. By the hair, the penitent was yanked to her feet and dragged across the room, her mind unable to get ahead of the proceedings. Dizzy and nearly blinded by tears, her back was pressed against the man splayed on the wall, a dear friend, a lover, a man she almost married once. The first sensation to register was his very erect cock stabbing between the cheeks of her bottom. But her hands were raised high and she could feel nothing more than the soft skin of his sixty year old abdomen.

She opened her eyes to see that her collar had been attached to his wrists, high over his head. Before she could get her bearings, the first lash struck a breast. Somewhere in her psyche, she saw the vision of a line in an email. "...since breasts are Mistress' most favored toys, they will receive unlimited attention." Little could she have known this was the attention they were to receive.

Unable to do otherwise, she pressed back against Matt's body feeling the first drops of his semen wet her flesh. The sound of the strikes deafened her ears. Her own muffled sobs whistled through the hole in the gag as her tears flowed freely onto her breasts intensifying each crack of the whip.

Spellbound, Donnell fell to his knees never having seen anything more beautiful. A soft amber light swelled around them, the exotic atmosphere decidedly erotic. Two exquisite submissives so hopelessly in love with each other, so alike spiritually and sexually chained together making love to each other. her tears ruptured with the feel of the energy flowing through them. his head was dropped to nuzzle her ear and

give her strength. Never had he seen anything so compelling, so artistic, so heart-breakingly beautiful.

He glanced at Mistress and Dom to see them working together as if they'd partnered in this performance so often it was natural. Of the Doms, it was the fluid movements, the concentration, the perfection of balance and aim. Of the subs, it was the tears, the soft whispers, he grinding into her, she dancing with him.

The energy flowing between them held him in limbo, a state of erotic suspension that somehow transcended the flesh and drove him inward, upward and completely beyond himself. At the very height of his inner ecstasy, a voice rose from the depths of mortality to shake his senses and command his attention. The judge roared with an orgasm so permeating and complete he seemed to lose consciousness and merely hung.

Donnell's mouth agape, trembling with otherworldly vibrations, his attention moved to Marquie. Quietly, she pushed Jeff away and took a warm-up flogger in hand. The long falls swished gently over the swollen breasts, the nipples enflamed like ripened cherries.

Somewhere inside of himself he understood that this was merely the first plateau for the female. Perhaps, it was Jeff's turn next.

With a wink at Jeff, Marquie handed him the flogger. Quickly, she released the female and threw her over a bench where she happily fell to a state of rest. With a pinch to the judge's scrotum, she awoke him from his reverie. Easily, his

hands were loosed. So as not to disturb the flowing energy, she whispered, "Clean up your mess."

With the deepest of gratitude, he fell behind the female with his tongue extended.

Jeff stepped back a few paces. His heart thudded listening to the subtle sounds of licking, those imperceptible emanations of uncontrollable breath escaping a constricted throat like whispers to a lover. His vision locked on the back of Marquie's body as she held the female down to be cleaned. The wide shoulders, the tight waist, the exquisitely feminine swell of the hips and the taut ass. With a glance at Donnell, he thrust his hand between his legs to soothe the ache.

Because the judge would have happily remained on his knees and licked the female's ass through the night, Marquie shoved him away. For such a lean body, Marquie possessed the strength of a Titan and hoisted the limp woman onto the bench, face up. She snapped her fingers for her treasure and the Dom.

To each of them, she gave control of a knee and the female's legs were spread wide. The moisture of her cunt flowed so freely, Marquie had to wipe it away. She then produced a bottle of Super Glue and laid a thin line of it along each side of the external labia. With her fingernails, she took a pinch of skin and doubled it back on the glue. In awe, Jeff stared at the swollen flesh that had yet to be touched.

The female's head rolled on the bench as if to protest. Even as she was stood up, dizzy from these ministrations, she could feel her cunt held shamefully open, the moisture flowing freely down her inner-thighs. The device to which she was

being led she had never seen before, but it sent a thrill of terror through her heart. Still shaking her head, she felt the heat in her breasts like a firebomb already lit and ready to burst. The sound of a ratchet device exploded in her head and a moment later, she felt a sharpness drive into her cunt. Deeply, she was penetrated to hold her in place.

Once again, she cried out to the feel of being invaded. Completely lost in a place she had never visited before, confusion swept through her like a tidal wave. She opened her eyes to see Mistress before her, Mistress' face looking like the angel of her dreams. Tenderly, Mistress reached out and grasped her face in Her hands. For the first time since this began she heard Mistress' voice. "you need to surrender."

Yes, yes, she thought. All of her life was instantly distilled and purified in those four simple words. The need that had mocked her, that had tortured her and divided her from reason, the unrelenting desire that had strangled her daily life loomed before her like a grotesque dragon raining annihilation upon her seemed to evaporate now. With the help of her Mistress she leant forward a little and placed her chin on a platform. A board swung around the back of her neck to hold her loosely in place.

Her breasts swelled to the bursting point were handled with sharp fingernails, yet a sense of serenity and calm swept through her. Ropes were wrapped tightly around her breasts to extend them far from her body. But it was as if she no longer inhabited it, as if she was merely a witness rather than a participant. Clamps were attached to her nipples and from

those, heavy weights. The weights were dropped over a board to pull her breasts to further remove them from her.

She closed her eyes feeling these various pressures at so many points in her body, unable to attend one of them singly. Her entire frame filled with a fever, never before having been so utterly stimulated. The sound of the ratchet raising her higher, forcing her to stand on her toes barely registered. The coldness of a liquid applied to her anus caused a moan.

In the blackness of her mind, she saw the words of Mistress' email shimmering in the hue of refined gold. "...to sacrifice, to be used for other's pleasure, to know finally that you are what your are. A slut, who only in bondage, can live free." Her tears coursed freely to the feel of this bondage, for the first time feeling congruent inside and out.

A small tremulous vibration began deep in her body, the phallus driven into her coming to life. Her anus still shivered from the cold, and she felt trails of another icy liquid on her back. Over the flesh of her bottom, it felt as if ice cubes danced over her. And then she heard a whoosh and felt the flames.

A moan of utter pleasure swept from deep inside. The fire evaporated with the alcohol but the heat remained. The smallest shift of her body tugged at her breasts and caused the weights to sway. Floating in a haze of delirium, she felt the hot knob of a penis breach her orifice. Taking command of her, it plowed deep into her body.

For a few moments, Marquie watched as Jeff's very exquisite organ flowed into the female's body with the gentle rocking of a wave. The judge had situated himself on the

penitent's chair, the phallus driven deep into his rectum with a strange little smile on his face. She turned her attention to treasure, utterly enraptured by the evening's proceedings. With a soft smile and motion of her fingers, she bid him to come to her.

Slowly, he rose, almost unable to command his own body. Quite curiously, she laid a bead of Super Glue along the length of his very erect penis and pressed it against his body. With a bit of relief, he sighed, knowing he wasn't going to be forced to perform, something he hadn't done in years. Yet from the drawer, she removed a strap-on and positioned it around his hips.

"Mistress." The oblation rested on his lips yet the sound was swallowed. This was the ultimate in humiliation, yet, the ultimate in exaltation. Deeply, she peered into him, holding his gaze like a cobra. As if to say she understood his defeat, his demoralization, his utter contempt of himself, she grasped his hand tenderly and wrapped his fingers around the latex cock. Like a shotgun blast, he understood now. She loved him just as he was and wanted nothing more than he had to offer.

Overwhelmed, he dropped his face to her shoulder. His tears washed over her flesh as she wrapped her arms around him. Too quickly, she released him and took his hand. She led him to the female and tapped Jeff on the back.

So close but not close enough, Jeff removed himself from the female. Marquie pulled treasure to take his place and positioned the phallus to the orifice. "It's okay," she whispered, and then she leant forward and kissed his moist cheek. "For Me."

Filled with anxiety, he grasped the hips and closed his eyes seeing nothing but Marquie fill his inner-vision. Gently, he moved forward feeling a strange resistance, feeling so divided from himself. He looked down to see his own neglected cock glued to his body yet his hips were thrusting forward with another. In a moment of helpless confusion, he cried out.

"Easy." It was spoken with such command, he had not the strength to disobey. Jeff stood behind him with his arms wrapped tightly around treasure's body. He felt Jeff's heated cock rub against his balls cooled by his Mistress' restraints. Even as he thrust deeper into the female's shuddering body with the latex substitute, his Mistress' moistened fingertips rubbed over his glans.

It was the most extraordinary thing he'd ever experienced. He was held in place and supported by the flowing strength of a Dom while he thrust with his hips feeling a friction completely incongruous. His own sensibilities departed just as the female's had and he laughed a little as he fell back into Jeff's embrace. He was no longer a man, a man damaged by defeat, nor was he an animal. He just simply was. Propelled by an energy he'd never experienced, he was open, feeling it flowing through him like the rising of a tide. His head rolled on Jeff's shoulder as the chains clanked to a more animated rhythm. Whatever self control he once commanded, whatever shame and humiliation he once endured departed him. With a shudder of unimpeachable delight, he felt the semen propelled through his penis like a burst dam.

Marquie's hand flattened against his cock and swept softly down the length to soothe it. The experience was so utterly

intense his gratitude took form in helpless sobbing. Tightly, Jeff embraced him and pulled him away from the female. Because he wasn't able to stand, Jeff lifted him onto the table to rest.

Moments later, Jeff drove into the female again. The vibration in her cunt caused by the phallus swept into his cock to set it on fire. But it was Marquie he stared into, her eyes deep and dark as she held his gaze. The tender things she whispered to the female were of no account to him. But he could imagine Marquie's outstretched hand was rubbing the female's clit.

The female moaned to her Mistress, a gentle pleading, a gracious appreciation. Yet she shook her head, an indication that she was about to lose control and sully her Mistress' Chamber with her pleasure.

"If this is what I want, this is what I get," Mistress whispered in her ear. "you have no control. you have no resistance. you are Mine and I command it."

Still looking at Jeff, Marquie nodded with a smile. Jeff could feel it in the female's body, the orgasm that had been brewing to a fever pitch. Marquie had but to wet her ripened lips with her tongue and Jeff thrust deep feeling his cock like a stick of TNT. The female wretched in his arms, her ass in motion and she exploded and tightened nearly crushing him.

Quite expertly, Marquie opened the lock on the gag and removed it quickly allowing her to breathe better. She turned off the vibrator so they both could relish the natural contractions of orgasm still connected to each other. Very gently, she lifted the weights attached to the breasts and

removed them. Leaving them in a lingering embrace, she moved toward treasure.

Though he was still in a haze, his eyes focused a little on her. He was lucid enough to know she was removing the strap-on from his hips and the chains from his body. When she removed the leather thong from around the neck of the scrotum, he seemed to find himself. Feeling it rise within, he reached out for her. Generously, she bent over him to take him into her arms. From his lips, the words, "I'm in love with you," swelled in her heart and caused a rupture of pleasure.

Her wetted lips washed treasure's face with tender kisses. Rather than reply as she might have desired, she said merely, "Wash the female and bring her to Me." She turned toward the judge and moved in his direction. Another soft kiss was planted on Matt's head. Full of overflowing gratitude, he grasped her hand and held his lips to the back of it.

* * * *

With her iced tea, Marquie lounged in the whirlpool. Through the mirror she saw Jeff standing at the threshold with a glass of bourbon. "Care to join me?" she asked.

"As a matter of fact..." he started. A moment later, he was naked and lounging at the other end. "I can honestly say I've never seen anything like that."

She smiled broadly as her foot swept up his body and came to rest on his chest. "I hope you're gonna hang around for awhile. I truly am concerned about your safety. For this alone, Peter would put me down ... and you, too. Yet his motivations are quite varied."

He grasped her ankle and raised her foot out of the water to hold the sole against his lips. "You really are afraid of him, aren't you?"

"I've never felt any shame in fear, Jeff. It keeps me alert. I don't particularly like living on the edge, but it's just a feeling I have. If I could prove anything I would take it to the police, of course."

"Let me ask you something." Without awaiting her permission he continued, "Donnell told me that you forbid him to shoot your brother. If you're so frightened of him, wouldn't that be the perfect solution?"

She hesitated forming a rebuttal to an obvious argument. "Truly, it would," she agreed. "But I'd rather live in fear with Donnell, than free without him, knowing his freedoms were sacrificed as he sits on death row."

Jeff clutched her foot a little tighter as he stared into her. Realizing now how desperately in love with Donnell she was, he said adamantly, "Damn." He closed his eyes and pressed his lips tightly against the sole of her foot. In his heart, he felt her declaration like a gunshot. "I do appreciate you letting me hang around though."

"That's my pleasure, My Friend," she said softly. Driving her foot deep against his chest she added, "But that's not to say there isn't plenty of room in my home and my heart for anyone who wants to be involved."

With a deep appreciation, he nodded as he smiled at her. "I'm grateful for that."

"But if you mention this to him, I'm gonna fuck you up. Until this thing with the estate, my freedom, and the Alphabet

Murderer is resolved peacefully, he's a man sitting on the edge of sanity."

"Yes, he is ... and with good reason. I suspect the very last reason he needs is to protect you and your love for him. I know how he feels."

* * * *

Nestled deeply in the pillows, Marquie's eyes fluttered with contentment when her female was delivered. Following her silent instructions, she laid down against her Mistress, her head nestled on Mistress' shoulder. Her moist lips swept adamantly over a naked breast.

Yet treasure hadn't removed himself from the bedroom as Marquie had planned. Rather, he was erect again, watching this beautiful female make love to his Mistress. Full of shame, he looked away.

Marquie reached out and grasped his hand pulling him into bed. Lying opposite the female on Marquie's other shoulder, he delighted in the feel of Marquie's arm wrap around his waist. She seemed to pull him closer, to push him down a little yet he rose merely to take one of her generous breasts in hand and suckle it. With his fingers threaded through the female's hair, he positioned her at the other.

Marquie stretched out a little and began to squirm. Her breathing quickly increased and treasure could see the throb of her heart in the artery of her throat. She let out with a little sigh and then instantly went limp. Carefully, she pulled them away from her breasts.

In the near darkness, Donnell rested on his arm peering into her. Was it even possible? Did she or didn't she orgasm with that stimulation only to her breasts? He had heard of such things but considered them fantasies. Quite boldly, he swept down her body and buried his nose to the crescent of her body. As he drank down the heated scent, her legs parted.

Quickly, he moved between them and nestled deeply. The rich, thick moisture melted on his lips like sugar. With his tongue thrust into her body, he could easily feel the contractions of orgasm. Stunned, he peered up at her half-lidded eyes, she nearly asleep.

The word trained shot through his mind like a revelation. She had been trained as she was training him and everyone around her, including a Dom, a very high-profile lawyer, to love her and protect her. She had been trained by her Mistress, her body but the instrument her Mistress played. And her Mistress had seized her sexuality to be enjoyed by nobody but Her. Marquie could cum on demand.

Donnell laid his head on the flat of her abdomen riding the inhalation of breath into her body. Broadly, he smiled, the shimmering of his first orgasm in years still floating through his body. Would she train him to come on demand as she was training this female already? With the idea that he would be forced to fuck anyone she put in front him, it was blatantly clear that she would reserve his penis for Herself. Yet, it was also blatantly clear that she didn't require it for Her pleasure.

A sigh of relief quieted him a little. Yet, his last thought of the day was Damn.

Chapter Fifteen

Frank Blaine slipped the tape into the VCR and switched the TV on. Adjusting the sound, he listened carefully to the moaning of the woman in chains. His vision narrowed on her hair. With a little thrill, he recognized her immediately. And there was his patient, Marguerite de Navarre, whipping those generous breasts.

Like the sound of a piercing siren, his cell rang shaking him badly. He reached into his pocket, reticent to answer for it could be only one human being on earth. His wife. He didn't bother to respond verbally.

"You are supposed to be here now, Frank. And you're not. That means the children and I are on our way to the airport without you. If you aren't at the airport when the plane takes off, there won't be any reason for me to come home."

Aggravated, he snarled, "Of course, Dear. I'm leaving now."

"I want you to understand something, Frank. This means we'll be leaving two cars at the airport instead of one. This means that you'll be doing extra chores around the house to pay for this fuck-up."

"I understand," he murmured.

"When you only make fifty cents doing the dishes, it could take you the rest of the year. Don't forget those filthy photos of you I have ready to send to your mother."

Blaine clicked off feeling his liver wretch. If only you would both die, you and the old bat. Unable to do otherwise, he removed the tape from the VCR and placed it is his desk

Puss In Boots
by Lady Midnight

drawer. Quickly, he locked it. There was enough on that tape to bring down the world on Marquie Navarre. Damn. Fearing badly, he rushed to the airport.

Chapter Sixteen

Marquie stirred to the sound of mourning doves perched on branches, warning of the approaching storm. Wrapped around her precious treasure who was in his utmost pleasure chained to the bed every night, she had to smile. How she would get along without him, she couldn't know. Even he was beginning to loosen up a little, to trust, to enjoy, to live. By the time they settled in bed last night, they were both dizzy with drunkenness.

Her head throbbed as she rolled away from him, yet curiously, her hand stuck to him. With a little jerk she pulled it away. Maybe he had come in his sleep. This thing called orgasm he was beginning to enjoy again. With a smile, she rolled onto her back and shielded her eyes with her arm.

"Mistress," Donnell whispered. He was groggy; his head throbbed as if a freight train careened through it, yet he opened his eyes. Surely, he was still dreaming. Forcing consciousness upon himself he saw the puddle, glowing red, yet the blood had dried into a crimson orb on the pure white sheet. "Mistress," he screamed.

"What?" she rasped, yet to open her eyes.

"Are you okay?"

"Headache," she said with a sigh.

Horried, he laid still a moment. Menstrual blood was all he could hope for, the only thing that made sense. "Mistress, I have to pee," he stated as if it was already too late.

Quietly, she rolled over and threw her arm over his to open the steel snaps holding him in place. Through the gray

light of a gloomy morning, he saw the blood caked on her wrist. His heart tore into his chest and seized his lungs to think what she might have done. A panic so permeating cleaved at his sanity and he screamed out, "Jeff."

"Would you stop already!!!" she demanded. Her eyes squinting, her stomach nauseous, she forced herself to sit feeling as though she might vomit.

"Oh God," she heard, Jeff's voice full of the same panic as Donnell's.

Separating her eyelids with her fingers, she saw through blurry eyes a mass of blood coating her arm. "Fuck," she cried out. Scrambling to the end of the bed, she tumbled to splatter on the floor. On her hands and knees, she crawled around the bed. Her voice constricted with fear, she screamed, "Honey, what happened?" She rolled Donnell to his back to see the globs of blood dried to his belly.

Stunned, she peered up at Jeff and heard, "What the hell happened in here?"

Unable to comprehend, she shook her head. Had she disciplined him last night? Had she gotten too rough? Her mind ran through a series of scenes, but they were dull and unimaginative. With the sheet, she clawed at the dried blood on his stomach to find his wound. A glass of water by the nightstand she poured over his body, scared to death to lose him. Unable to understand, tears flushed to her eyes.

Like a madman, Donnell grabbed her arm to hold it still. With her frantic movements, it had already begun to bleed again. At the sight of X's slashed into her wrists, the wounds oozing blood, he moaned urging Jeff to advance quickly and

look closer. And then he grabbed the phone to call an ambulance.

Finally, Marquie saw what they saw. And she screamed.

* * * *

As lightening crashed beyond Dr. Blaine's window, he sat down at his desk, aggravated by this intrusion into his vacation. Watching the first of the tapes sent by Peter Navarre, he snarled contemptuously. That his patient, Marquerite, had ignored all of his advice in the matter of human sexuality wasn't surprising, really. But this ... to see men in chains, and a woman repeatedly raped while she encouraged the behavior, was intolerable. Obviously symptomatic of narcissistic personality problems in the extreme. And a complete lack of compassion. Someone who enjoyed sadism as others enjoyed ice cream.

He sat back in the chair, his hand over his eyes to shield the bright flashes of lightening spilling around the edges of the draperies. But what does Peter Navarre have to gain by this? His concern for his sister seemed genuine. Their father's estate would be divided according to the terms of the will, now that Peter had dropped the suit. The gardener, on the other hand, seemed to be living the high life, having seduced her into his home, his bed, and perhaps the final destination, her bank account. A man fifty three years old was helping himself to a twenty six year old woman whose sources of emotional support had been buried, whose mental stability was questionable and whose bank account about to swell to Olympian proportions.

Dr. Blaine could certainly understand Peter Navarre's concerns.

This decision should be easier, he thought. Just then, his secretary opened the door. "Bad news," she said solemnly. "Miss de Navarre is in the ER. She slashed her wrists last night."

"Ohhh..." the doctor moaned. Hurriedly, he brushed past his secretary and rushed to the elevator.

* * * *

"I didn't do this," Marquie said defiantly. "Doctor, you have to believe me, I did not do this."

Sadly, he shook his head. "You're going upstairs for a week."

Though a few cc's of morphine had been delivered in the IV, she was still lucid enough to know what that meant. She launched out of the bed ripping the IV from her hand. "You can't do this," she said passionately. The fear of being locked away was one of her greatest. Having read her mother's lunatic ramblings of what it's like to be insane, knowing she was to be locked down, away from society, away from life, panic washed through her body. Almost instantly, men in white coats encircled her and she felt the stab of a needle on her hip. Her eyes slid closed as she crumpled toward the floor.

* * * *

In an overcrowded emergency room, his own health suffering badly, Donnell took a seat with Jeff. Carefully, he

scanned all entrances awaiting the doctor. As soon as Blaine appeared, Donnell launched from the chair.

Jeff stood quickly to steady Donnell's shivering body. Doctor Blaine studied Jeff a moment and recognized him plainly as the man in Peter Navarre's videos who committed rape on a bound woman.

"Miss de Navarre has been sedated and she's being admitted."

Donnell jerked away from Jeff's grip. "I need to see her," he insisted.

"That's not possible."

"Certainly you have visiting hours," Donnell protested.

Through stern, uncompromising eyes, Doctor Blaine stared into Donnell.

In a flash, Donnell accused, "You locked her down. You can't do that."

"That's all I can tell you. Good day, Gentlemen." He turned quickly and moved through the crush of waiting patients through a side door. In a moment, he disappeared.

Stunned, Donnell turned to Jeff, his tears of fear and loathing ready to break free. Jeff's only response was, "Let's go." Though Donnell's feet refused to move. Jeff grabbed him and pulled him away.

"I can't leave her," Donnell insisted as Jeff threw him in the passenger seat of his own car.

Jeff slipped into the driver's seat and slammed the door. "There's something going on here. I smell Peter Navarre all over this."

"What the hell are you saying?"

"Obviously, you didn't slit her wrists. You were chained to the bed. I didn't cut her. She was much too horrified, truly traumatized to see her own blood. Settle down and think about this for a minute."

Donnell sat back in the seat, his mind blank. Too much was happening too fast to make any sense of it. "Are you saying Peter broke into the house last night and slashed that poor woman's wrists?"

"Think about it, Man," Jeff commanded. "It looks exactly like a suicide attempt, does it not? But women rarely slit their wrists, do they? And she certainly had enough pills in the house to OD on."

"Oh fuck," Donnell said feeling as if he might vomit. "You know I feel like screaming hell."

"We need to look at the security tapes."

* * * *

Together, they studied the tapes. Full of loathing and about to rupture with rage, Donnell asked, "How long do suppose it takes to walk through this house, slash her wrists and then turn the security system back on as the perp is leaving the premises?"

Slowly, Jeff shook his head. "The system wasn't on when I came in around three this morning. I hadn't thought about it then, but the alarm would have gone off, wouldn't it?"

Donnell slumped against the wall and slid down it. When he reached the floor he pulled his cell phone from his belt and hit one on the speed dial. "Captain," he whispered, shaking beyond his control, "I need to talk to you."

* * * *

A half hour later, Captain Lucius Sullivant walked through the door. "What the hell happened to you?" seeing something much different in Donnell.

The story was told quickly and the captain made a quick call.

"What's the hurry?" Donnell asked. "This wasn't secured like a crime scene should be."

The captain looked away and shook his head. "Keith Landry is back in town. Flew in yesterday."

Donnell froze. The thought that that bastard had broken in ... and while he slept, made him wretch. But Jeff stepped in. "She was very concerned that Peter dropped that estate suit because he had something else in mind."

"Like murder?" the captain said off-handedly. "No reason to sue a dead woman, is there? And might as well make it easy on himself by trying to make it look as if Donnell did it."

The forensics team moved through the door, three of them going down the hallway toward the bedroom. "Get me a sweeper, too," the captain ordered of the remaining man.

A sweeper? Donnell wondered. Something that would seek out cameras and listening devices. "Captain, we already know this place is wired. There are cameras over every inch of it. But it's all hooked up to one computer system. I've already been through the security tapes and there's an eleven minute and thirty eight second gap at 2:38 this morning."

"Then that still leaves everybody under suspicion, doesn't it? And if you were as drunk last night as look right now, you

don't remember if you turned the security system on last night, do you?"

The throbbing in Donnell's head refused to subside. Yet he leafed through the images held on the security computer. At exactly 7:14 PM, it was shown that he turned the system on for the night.

"Interesting," the Captain offered. "But if she was as drunk as you were, she still might have done this herself."

Donnell shot back, "And had the presence of mind to turn the cameras off before she did it!? She doesn't even know this place is wired."

Aggravated, the captain tossed his head. "Can this system be turned off and on from a remote?"

Sadly, Donnell shook his head. "I have one in the car so that I can come through the gates. Pierre had one, Marquie has one. It's feasible that Peter is using Pierre's but he'd still have to have the password."

"Alright," Lucius said with a smile. "That definitely puts Peter in this then. Still, I think we'll put a little pressure on this doctor who has locked her up. Oh ... and little more interesting news. Keith Landry and Dr. Frank Blaine went to elementary school together."

"You aren't serious," Donnell said excitedly. Here was another little ribbon that wrapped this package a little tighter. "Then Blaine was either being blackmailed to testify for the defense, or he did it out of a sense of loyalty."

"Could be argued either way," Lucius said softly. "What's your gut telling you?"

Donnell hesitated as he drew out a cigarette. Quickly, he glanced at Jeff. "I'm thinking that in this and in all else, Landry and Blaine are Peter's creatures."

Slyly, the Captain glanced around. Seeing that they were alone now, he asked, "Is it about sex?"

Quickly, Jeff spoke up. "Most definitely that ... and much more, I assure you."

"How would you know?"

A grin spread on Jeff's features. "I'll be happy to tell you," he said surely. Easily, he led the way to the garage to explain Peter's more salacious interests.

Yet the words, "...about sex..." rang in Donnell's ears. If it's not about the money, then what? Could that sick mother fucker actually be interested in his sister sexually? Does he intend to make her a slave ... and thereby control her money as a little perk in the deal?

Something ... something nagged at him. The fact that they had categorized the case under the heading of the Alphabet Murders only applied on a superficial level. It seemed the alphabetical order of the names was just convenient. What was it about Landry ... but then what did Landry matter if he was only Peter's slave? What about Peter?

The forensics team departed with plastic bags full of sheets, pillows, even towels and shampoo bottles. As an afterthought, Donnell dug the bourbon and vermouth bottles out of the trash and gave it to them. When Lucius reappeared with Jeff, he said, "Man, I'm sorry to get you involved in this thing."

"Not at all," Jeff said reassuringly. "So, Captain, I'm available if ever you need me."

Lucius nodded. "Take care of him," he commanded as he pointed at Donnell. "He looks like death warmed over." With a wave, Lucius departed.

Quickly, Jeff turned to Donnell. "Unless you can turn off part of that security system so that we can talk alone, we'd better split."

Donnell reached over the bar and punched in the code to turn off just the bungalow. Yet he left the screen on so that he could watch it; that he could know if it were turned on again from a remote location. "So what are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking that if Peter has this kind of control over the security system and he can come in here and slit his sister's wrists, quite stealthily without waking either of you, making it look like a suicide attempt, he knows exactly what we we're doing downstairs the other night."

"Oh fuck," Donnell screamed causing an impossible pain in his head. His first vision was of the Alphabet Murderer, creeping through private homes in the dead of night, to abscond with a heart. And with that mother-fucker Landry back in town ... Peter could have been manipulating the security system while Landry was slashing his Mistress wrists! All the while he slept.

Donnell's intestines twisted pulling his organs into a whirlpool of painful churning. About to vomit, his mind filled with self-recrimination wondering how he could have let this happen. Was it simple complacency? Or fear?

And to think his nemesis had stood that close and done his deed—while he slept!

* * * *

"Judge Hines ... Donnell McLaughlin and Jeff Jenkins are here to see you."

The door opened and the judge, looking pale and exhausted, stood as if he were about to fall. "We need to talk ... somewhere else."

Donnell glanced at Jeff suspiciously. Was the judge's office wired, too? A short walk north on High Street delivered them to The Court of Small Clams, a decadently decorated bar for lawyers. They took the booth to the rear, the judge perched in the very corner able to see everyone and everything. His fingers wrapped around the hi-ball glass as if it were a life raft, he whispered, "Mistress is locked down in the psyche ward?"

Donnell leaned over the table and rasped, "How the hell did you know about this already?"

"A friend in processing called me this afternoon. It seems a Petition for Guardianship for Marquerite de Navarre has been filed."

Donnell reared back, his weakened body filling with rage. "By Peter Navarre."

"That makes all the sense in the world now," Jeff said quietly. "That's why he dropped the suit contesting the will without any hassle. Just like she said, he had other plans. And I'll bet my ass that those papers were filed just minutes after she was admitted."

The judge grabbed Donnell's cigarettes and lit one. "He had to have them written up already. All he needed was that one last authentication that she's a danger to herself. And if he really did sneak into the house last night and slit her wrists, Marquie is in more trouble than we can even imagine."

"Who the fuck is this doctor?" Jeff asked under his breath.

"You never heard of him?" Matt asked rhetorically. "He's one of Peter's most famous and flamboyant defense witnesses."

The cramps in Donnell's stomach tightened and made him wretch. "And just happens to be an old buddy of Keith Landry's."

"You are kidding," Matthew screamed under his breath.

"Information we could have used twelve years ago. As well you know I wasn't allowed in the courtroom when I wasn't testifying so I couldn't put it together," Donnell said sadly feeling that defeat rupture deep inside again.

Patiently, Matthew reached out and grasped Donnell tightly. "Justice delayed, maybe, but never denied," he whispered to give him some strength.

Quickly, Donnell removed his wallet and laid another twenty dollar bill in front of Jeff. "Retainer," he said. "I suggest you file something with the courts that the good Doctor Blaine and Peter Navarre are at least, figuratively in bed together, and that makes the doctor declaring Marquie incompetent too easy for Peter."

"This is so blatantly obvious that Peter is just after her money. If he can't get it through the courts, he'll get it

through the mental health system. But we need another well known psychiatrist ready to step in and handle the case."

"But what if he's after more than her money?" Donnell asked.

Intently, Jeff stared into Donnell studying the small creases intensifying the gaze. "A slave," he said under his breath.

Matt nodded sadly. "It wouldn't surprise me." The judge balled his fist and softly pounded the table in front of Jeff. "Call Melissa Alvarez at 614-555-8967. I'm certain you'll recognize her. She's one of the best in the biz. But I get the sneakin' suspicion that Peter is going for the kill on this one. If I understand correctly, what went on when they read Pierre's will was positively revolting."

With consternation, Donnell agreed whole-heartedly. "Melissa Alvarez? Could she possibly be Mistress' newest client?"

Silently, the judge nodded. "And a damn good psychiatrist, one who understands the lifestyle and not only lives it, but advocates it."

"Obviously," Donnell whispered. "The question now is simple. Will Peter Navarre publicize those tapes of the scene the other night? And put us all to ruin?"

Chapter Seventeen

At the appointed hour, Jeff Jenkins signed in at Dr. Melissa Alvarez's office. Just as he took a seat, the door to the inner office opened and she stood erect, her features filled with a warm effusion and perhaps, her cheeks were just a little flushed. Never had he seen a more beautiful woman exuding compassion for those who live beyond redemption.

"Mr. Jenkins, please, come in," she said softly.

He stood and closed the button on his jacket to hide his interest displayed in the nether regions. "Thank you, Doctor," he said gently. He placed himself in a chair before her desk as she filled two glasses with ice and water. Graciously, she placed one before him.

With her head tipped slightly forward, her eyes directed at his chest. "I understand that Marquerite de Navarre is in trouble."

"If I thought she was off her rocker, I wouldn't be here," he admitted. "But uhh..." He hesitated because this was not only a professional matter, it had become personal. "Between you, me, and the fence post, if I may, my experience tells me that people feel much freer to express themselves in a dungeon setting than perhaps anywhere else in their lives. In the four hours I spent with Marquerite de Navarre the other night, I didn't see anything but compassion. I don't happen to believe that she's a true sadist because I have myself to compare her to."

"But she certainly is a fine facilitator," Melissa offered agreeably. "I've studied sadomasochism all of my life, Jeff.

People who start from the bottom up, who start as subs and then play the other side, rarely have any innate sadistic tendencies. That doesn't mean they don't enjoy discipline, obviously they do. But the pleasure they receive is of a more vicarious nature. Those Dom/mes are doing exactly what they would want done to them, if they were on the bottom at the moment."

"That certainly makes sense," he said. "She's certainly not the bitch-with-a-whip kind."

With a broad smile, Melissa said, "I've catalogued the personality types of Dom/mes and then wrote a paper about it. Of course, it was a hit with the sub-culture, but I damn near got laughed out of the profession." With a toss of her head, she added, "All that tells us is that BDSM has attracted a great many adherents, so many in fact, that it represents a threat to the establishment. I'd say that in the next fifty years, it will be taken off the list of paraphelias."

"But I'll be dead by then, Honey," he laughed.

"So will I," she said with a smile. "But the point is we're laying the ground work. Nothing changes without a good foundation to rest upon. And this case, obviously, is not only of a professional interest to me, but I certainly would like to see Mistress Marquie back on Her Throne."

"You understand there are tapes of that scene?"

She sat back in her chair and looked directly into him now. "This is where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. Everybody, at some point in their lives, is tested. If those tapes are made public, then yes, I will be thrown out of the profession like last week's garbage. But this is who I am and

this is what I do. I'll still have a PhD, I just won't have a license," she said with a shrug. "But you have to ask yourself the same question. Is this case that important to you? Because you and Matt both, could find yourself sitting in the alley along with me."

"By virtue of those tapes, I'm already committed, aren't I?"

Her voice, naturally soft and alluring, she asked, "If it weren't for those tapes, would you still be involved?"

"I got involved before the tapes were made," he admitted. "To avenge myself on Peter Navarre. In a twist of irony, if those tapes are released and I'm disbarred, he still wins, doesn't he?"

"That's one way to look at it," she said softly. "The other way is to view it as an opportunity for change and growth. It just depends on where your heart is. Are you in love with law or could you love something else?"

He stared deeply into her for a moment. "That does put it into perspective. And justice is whimsical, isn't it?" He hesitated a moment to feel the strength of his conviction swell up within him. "So where do we start, Doctor?"

The carefully controlled hold on her body relaxed instantly. "Frank Blaine," she began. "He's a Freudian anyway. Women are always submissive, men are naturally dominant and any other configuration upsets the balance of nature. He refuses to acknowledge dominance and submission beyond the context of gender. What's hilarious about that is his wife has him literally by the balls."

"How so?"

Melissa shrugged. "She is a bitch. She's got humiliation down to a science. I watch him respond to the phone ringing and laugh my ass off. He's been conditioned so carefully he jumps out of his skin."

"Oh ... so in this he's avenging himself on dominant women?"

She shrugged a little. "A lot of reasons. One is merely the names involved. He loves press. But he's not doing this for Peter Navarre as much as we would like to find a hint of hypocrisy in his tortured little soul. He does believe in what he's doing. But if he can't make her obey of her own free will, he's got an entire pharmacy at his disposal."

"I imagine she's floating in a purple haze as we speak."

"I checked in on her a little while ago. She didn't recognize me."

"Interesting. And if she should show up at a guardianship hearing in that state, it's almost assured that Peter will be granted guardianship."

"The law end of it is your gig," she reminded. "But if she can't even spell her name, I would assume so."

"He's got her that drugged up?"

"He does. So what we need is a statement from the police that this was an assault rather than self-inflicted. We already know that Blaine works closely with Peter Navarre. What you don't know is this, Jeff. Doctor Blaine was not scheduled to be working that day because he was on vacation out of the country. He flew home from a vacation and left his family in St. Thomas ... for some unexplained reason, which is something he'll pay heavily for with his wife. That leaves me

to believe that Peter is much more important to him, for some reason.

"Oh wow! So all I need is a phone call between him and Peter then."

"If you could come up with some evidence ... of that nature ... I think he would probably recuse himself from the case. He would protect his career, I believe."

"Melissa," he said with a snap of fingers, "thank you. I'm certain I'll be seeing a lot more of you."

"If I thought she was having problems, I'd still help," Melissa said with definition. "I can understand how stressed out she is. But the fact that she can conduct herself the way she did the other night tells me she's not insane. Far from it. But you know Peter will use the angle that since their mother was a confirmed schizophrenic with multiple personality disorder then Marquie has a genetic predisposition to it."

"Then he's just as susceptible."

Melissa shook her head. "Statistically, seventeen out of a hundred males may end up with it, so it's not impossible. Just a much higher percentage for females."

"Figures. I'll talk to you soon. That hearing is scheduled for next Thursday."

"Then you better get on it. She'll need at least a week to dry out."

Chapter Eighteen

"Thank you," Donnell whispered. "Thanks for the call. I pray he survives."

Donnell clicked off and slid the phone in his pocket. Tears flushed through his eyes as his hands covered his face. A memory so vivid as to make him weak dropped him to his knees. "It's not over, Donnell," Dom Pierre had said. "It won't be over until that bastard is dead. And somehow, someday, you're going to have to end it. I can't do any more."

Barely able to rise, Donnell stumbled through the door into the evening's last rays of shimmering daylight. Over the carpet of emerald grass, he moved unsteadily, the shimmering light pulling him into itself. When next he could see, he lie curled on Dom's grave.

"I can't do anymore," Dom said.

Of his Master, he asked, Why do You think i can?

The words, "How bad do you want it?" popped into his head.

With a little smile, he curled closer to the marble headstone, its base nearly two tons, and atop the scrolls of justice in place. Dom Pierre never asked for more than he had coming to him, the concept of justice being precious to him. But Peter always considered receiving what he deserved to be the least anyone could do.

"I have to kill your son," Donnell whispered. As if it were ordained twelve years ago, he knew now, it would have to be. "Not for myself, nor for You any longer, my Lord. But for Her."

"Hey. Don't mean to interrupt," Jeff said quietly, reticent to disturb Donnell's meditation and worship.

Donnell turned toward the gentle voice and saw Jeff standing with two bottles of beer. Silently, he invited Jeff to join him. "How'd it go?"

"I think we've got it, buddy. Not only did Peter Navarre make a phone call to the good doctor's cell, Dr. Blaine didn't even make reservations for the flight back. He just showed up at the airport and waited for the next plane out of there. Apparently, he knew his services were going to be needed. Beyond that, Dr. Blaine has been seen at the offices of Navarre, Navarre and Navarre after hours. Way after hours."

Donnell nodded yet his expression remained dour.

"That's good news, Donnell. If I can find just a little bit, somewhere, even a rumor, that Peter is doing Blaine as a slave, we'll have all we need to get rid of him and pave the way for Melissa. It might even get rid of Peter. I'll write this up this evening and take it to the doctor in the morning. If he has any sense, he'll take himself off the case. So what's the matter?"

"You haven't heard the news, then, have you?"

"What now?" Jeff rasped.

"Matthew Hines. He was in a car accident a little while ago."

Jeff blanched and his stance weakened. Easily, he fell to the soft earth onto the grave. "Is he alive?"

Soberly, Donnell nodded. "Barely. I talked to the station a little while ago. At six thirty, he was still in surgery. Punctured

lung, his back is definitely broken. Even if he survives, he'll be paralyzed."

"Oh fuck," Jeff roared. His first thought was that this incident was one of Peter's hits on the opposition. "But it was only a car accident," he protested.

"No, it wasn't, my Brother," Donnell whispered. "The judge has a Mercedes ... three years old. The brakes went out. That's definitely one of Keith Landry's MO's. Three investigators in the Alphabet Murder case lost their lives in car accidents very similar to this one. What Keith and Peter weren't counting on in this one is that a trucker would be involved. There happened to be a camera in the truck that ran over Matt and it showed the whole thing.

"A little white Chevy pick-up swerved in front of a semi. Matt was behind that semi, with no brakes. So when that trucker slammed the brakes, Matt was helpless to do anything. Without brakes, he slammed into the back of the truck. But the truck swerved and threw him into on-coming traffic. Another semi going southbound, with a camera in the cab, nailed him. That's when the serious damage was done."

"Good God," Jeff cried out. "I heard the freeway was shut down on the radio. Couldn't have known it was Matt. But how do you know that Landry was involved?"

"The license plate on the white Chevy showed up in a police cruiser's tape. A rental, leased to one Michael Grogan and it was returned, in tact, minutes after the accident. Michael Grogan is one of Keith Landry's aliases. There's a warrant out for Landry now. But then Michael Grogan just got on a plane headed to France about a half hour ago."

"I'll be go to hell," Jeff said nervously. "So is this a warning?"

"Matt Hines and Melissa Alvarez are very good friends ... lovers even. It wouldn't surprise me if Peter found out that you've been to see her. Whether he knows that is inconsequential, actually. Matt has enough friends at the courthouse to sway the opinions of the people who grant guardianships in cases like this. So to Peter, Matt would have been the biggest threat ... if we're following this correctly."

"So this wasn't just a car accident, was it?"

"Doesn't look like it," Donnell admitted.

"Is this going down like the Alphabet Murder investigation?"

Instinctively, Donnell's arms wrapped around his body as his head sank. "It truly is," he said exuding sadness. "But this time it seems to center on Marquie."

"Did anybody ever ask themselves if it was about Marquie last time, too?"

Donnell's head shot up and his eyes widened as he stared incredulously. "Why would we have even investigated the defense attorney's little sister?" he rasped. "But it all makes sense now. That little eight year old girl. A few named Margret ... or one named Maragret. One Peggy. Oh my God," he screamed as some invisible force launched him to his feet. "Peter is the Alphabet Murderer. He just put Landry in place to go to prison in his stead."

Jeff stood quickly and grasped Donnell's forearms to keep him still. With the hues of twilight melting around them, they

stood rapt in each other's vision, silhouetted by the advancing night.

Unable to restrain his excitement, knowing the last piece fit as precisely as if he'd cut it himself, he had the answers he'd searched for these last twelve years. "Peter killed every one of those children and women because each of them reminded him of Marquie somehow. The Alphabet scam was just a little game. Good God, how long must he have been planning those murders?"

"You aren't serious, are you?" Jeff asked incredulously.

"This is the motive we've been looking for all along," he cried out, hopeful that his Master could hear. "We blew it off then to some psychopath, a fucking head case, no rhyme or reason. But there was a motive. A man who wanted to possess a little girl and keep her eight years old forever."

"That's fucking sick," Jeff groaned.

Adamantly, Donnell nodded. "That's the nature of the disease. They always have a motive, but it makes sense only to them. Talk to Melissa. See if I'm right."

"I believe you, man. I've seen some stuff from Peter that is actually pretty scary. He's one twisted sister."

"And don't forget brilliant. Don't ever cheat the devil out of his do."

"I remember Pierre saying that all the time." Jeff squeezed tightly on Donnell's forearms a moment, and then let go. The words hung on his tongue, almost loathe to find voice. "How could he ever justify this?"

As the rising moon reflected in his tears, Donnell whispered, "Psycho," with near reverence. "I feel it in me at

times. I fell in love with that girl the moment I laid eyes on her. She was fourteen years old. And Dom knew it, too, though we never talked about it. But it wasn't until she came back from college He made me her bodyguard. Until she graduated from high school, she had round-the-clock nannies ... and I'll bet my ass and yours they were armed. They weren't friendly women. They weren't nanny type, you know."

"Wow," Jeff muttered under his breath. "Then Pierre suspected."

"Obviously. That's why He needed me to finish this. No matter how much He hated Peter He didn't have the heart to kill him. All He could do was protect Marquie." Donnell's fists clenched as he turned toward the tombstone. "You know what we need, My Lord? We need Your diaries. Where are they?"

Excitedly, Jeff approached. "He kept diaries?"

Staring up at the scrolls, Donnell nodded as if he listened for some silent voice to offer revelation. "We need those diaries, My Lord," he insisted respectfully.

But no response was forthcoming. Agitated, he spun toward Jeff. "They would be in the safe in Dom's room, where Peter lives now," he spat. "But it's computerized. Surely, whoever fucked with the security system has opened the safe."

"That's probably true," Jeff offered. "Would Marquie have known how to get into the safe?"

"Absolutely. I taught her myself. Dom wanted her to know so that if He and I were killed at the same time, she could get everything out. He was always concerned the Alphabet Murderer would come after us."

Full of sadness, but not shocked by that statement, Jeff shook his head. "Then she's got them," Jeff insisted. "Call it intuition, I don't care. She's got them, then. That was probably the first thing she did when she heard of His death. We need to go to the hospital and find out where she put them."

Donnell glanced at his watch and shook his head. "Melissa checked on her a little while ago for me. Mistress doesn't even know her own name."

"Blaine," Jeff scowled accusingly.

"Yep. So I suggest you go write up whatever was on your mind a little while ago, and I will go tell Melissa about Matt."

"Oh shit. No, it will take me fifteen minutes to put a little something for Blaine together. Melissa needs us now."

"And then I suggest we stop by Navarre, Navarre and Navarre to install a few cameras in Peter's office. And before you protest, I programmed that security system myself, also. I know that master password for the office, just as I know the one here," he said surely.

Chapter Nineteen

Dr. Blaine studied the brief personally delivered by Jeff Jenkins. His blood pressure rose with his fear. What had he done that he needed to suffer this? Of every case he had worked on with Peter Navarre, he was certain of his diagnosis. Serial murders, rapists and child killers are definitely insane, and therefore, no longer responsible for their actions. He threw up his hands and dropped the brief in the drawer. Peter would simply have to understand.

He walked down the corridor a few paces and entered Melissa Alvarez's office. "Is she available?" he asked.

"On rounds right now."

The doctor nodded and went to the eighth floor of the hospital. The doors of the elevator slid open and there stood Melissa awaiting it. "Got a minute?" he asked. "I need you to take over the de Navarre case if you have time," he added with unusual haughtiness.

Her eyes narrowed to slits as she silently threatened him. In the midst of the night, exhaustion had crept over her as she held vigil at Matt's bed, praying only for his survival now. All night long, she had asked only one question. Why?

"What's the problem?" she asked angrily of Blaine knowing he protected the perpetrator of these crimes.

He stepped out of the line of traffic into a dark corner. "You may not know it yet, but the legal system is going to ask you to take over from me."

"I don't understand why," she said quickly to bait him.

He studied her dark eyes a moment, she looking as innocent as a new born. Yet he had tapes that clearly showed her involved in activities which would get her license revoked. "Now is not the time to play games, Melissa. But it's obvious that someone in the court system is more interested in this situation than others. Being that she's the daughter and heir to a very high-profile lawyer this doesn't surprise me. But I don't want you to forget the tapes that were made of her escapades," he warned.

Melissa straightened and licked her lips, her thoughts having been formed through the long night, but not voiced. "You and I have been colleagues for a very long time," she started. "We agree on very little, but that's not the point, is it, Doctor? Just as you don't want me to forget these supposed tapes..."

"They're not supposed," he shot back. "I have placed them in a safety deposit box."

She tightened allowing her anger with this inquisition to rise to the surface. "Just as you don't want me to forget the tapes, I don't want you to forget the phone call Peter Navarre made to your cell, and the fact that you flew home from vacation ... for what purpose?"

Blood rushed out of the doctor's head and dizziness swept through him. "I don't know what you're talking about," he protested.

"No, of course you don't, Frank. But on those tapes I'm certain you noticed not only a very successful lawyer, but also a judge and an ex-cop who still has a lot of sway with the police department. It would be very interesting to find out

that someone else slashed Miss de Navarre's wrists, wouldn't it?"

Dumbfounded, he stared at Melissa. "How can you say that? That's ludicrous."

"Is it?" she whispered. "Marquie and Donnell were both unconscious, damn near dead, which had they died, the police would have wrote it off as some suicide pact. Jeff Jenkins was partying, with me, at The Court of Small Clams, that night. The security system was shut off sometime in the night before he got home. Somebody with access to the security system shut it off and then went in there and slit her wrists, Frank. Who else would have access but Peter Navarre?"

His lips parted as he stared incredulously, this the most contrived story he'd ever heard.

Unhesitant, she forged ahead. "Perhaps you haven't seen the toxicology report from the police department yet. In that bottle of bourbon they drank that night, there was enough hydrocodone in it to put them both to sleep for a week, which pretty much takes Donnell McLaughlin off the list of suspects since he was partying, too. If she had drank the whole damned thing by herself, she would have died. That's being investigated now as attempted murder.

"But when she was brought to the hospital, you didn't order any toxicology tests, did you? The argument that both Miss de Navarre and Donnell McLaughlin were trying to kill each other, that they had some suicide pact, doesn't make sense, does it? But the idea that somebody wanted them to be unconscious so that he could go in there without waking them and slash her wrists, makes a great deal of sense."

"You aren't serious," he whispered.

Melissa leant forward a little that she could remain quiet.

"Think, Frank. Think of someone who has a vested interest in controlling Marquerite de Navarre and the wealth she's about to inherit. I know you've worked with Peter Navarre a very long time. I'm just wondering how well you know him. For reasons that remain unknown to us, he wants her ... and us, to think that she's insane."

"She is insane," the doctor snarled contemptuously.

"Anybody who wallows in that kind of sexual depravity needs to be locked up."

Melissa sneered as her eyes narrowed. Be very careful here, Frank. I know your precious career, and Peter Navarre, are about all you truly care about in this world."

Blaine stood back a little glaring boldly. "Exactly what does that mean?"

"It means, sweetie, that you're playing with fire. What you don't know is that all of those late night trips you make downtown to Navarre, Navarre, and Navarre, when you're supposed to be at the hospital, on call, are also caught on tape."

Blaine choked as he backed into the corner, his complexion drained of color. Internally, he shook until those tremors crested the surface of his body.

"Now that they know that you and Landry went to elementary school together, now that they know you bend over for Landry every time Peter tells you to, they've got the three of you pretty well connected in a tight little fuckwad, so to speak," she added for effect.

Quickly, he gathered himself, a protest on his lips.

"Nonono," she said quickly. "If I'm looking at this correctly, that bitchy vixen you call a wife, is the least of your problems. What are you going to do if they decide to reopen the Alphabet Murder case because they have new evidence? Is your ass as clean as it ought to be, Doctor?"

Almost instantly, he seemed to collapse. "Oh God," he growled.

Melissa hesitated a moment allowing all that she'd said to sink in a little. "If I were you I'd sever ties with Peter Navarre and Keith Landry real quick. That is, unless you'd like me to step up to the position of Head of the Psychiatric department around here, because you'll be doing time ... real hard time. And you heard that Matt Hines is down in ICU right now. That also is being investigated as attempted murder."

"The judge in the Landry case!" he gasped.

"Exactly," she said smugly. "Now that the cops are certain it was the Alphabet Murderer who killed Patrice Evans, you got a lot of thinking to do, Frank. It looks like all of those debts that are yet to be paid in that case are coming due. You might want to decide which team you're playing for. Let's go see my new patient, shall we?"

Leaving Blaine behind, Melissa hied through the corridor to Marquie's room. Marquie lay in bed, her eyes glazed at the ceiling, her wrists bound to the bedrails. She had been drugged and restrained in ways only animals are.

"Marquie," Melissa said quietly with a gentle touch to her patient's hand. "I'm Dr. Alvarez and I'm taking over your case, Honey."

Marquie's dry tongue protruded through her parched lips in an attempt to respond to a stimulus. But that was all there was.

The figure of Frank Blaine filled the threshold, his eyes burning as he stared at Marquie. Melissa glared at him as she moved away from the bed. "You know as well as I do that you've got a perfectly functioning woman who has suffered unusual stress and she can't even get up to take a piss. What's equally interesting is that you consider what she's doing an act of depravity, but what you're doing is ... what Frank, entertainment? I think this is a real good time for you to get out of this one."

Melissa went straight to the nurse's station and asked for Marquie's chart. Since this heavy sedation had only gone on for a few days there was no need to worry about withdrawal. "No more meds," she ordered, "and call me as soon as she comes around a little."

She turned again to see Blaine still in the doorway of Marquie's room staring blankly. So very concerned about her new patient, she ordered of the nurse, "I want a twenty four guard on Marquerite de Navarre."

The nurse looked queerly at her. "This is the psyche ward. Nobody can get in here."

Whispering, she explained, "But Frank Blaine can. Just do it."

Chapter Twenty

"Marquie, Marquie, wake up, honey." Melissa had spent the night at her bedside checking her vitals every half hour. She raised the bed to place a few ice chips in Marquie's mouth. This time Marquie responded by closing her lips on them.

"That's better."

"Who are you?" Marquie asked.

"I'm Doctor Melissa Alvarez. Are you feeling well enough to talk?"

"Where am I?" Marquie asked.

"This is Riverside Hospital. You're in the psyche ward."

Mumbling, Marquie asked, "What the hell did I do to end up here?"

Gently, Melissa grasped her free arm and unwrapped the bandage around her wrist. "The other one is identical."

Through blurry eyes, Marquie stared, her face first a mask of confusion and then calm. "I remember now. I remember the wounds at least. I don't remember doing it. And I can't think of a reason why anyone else would."

"X's on wrists don't happen by themselves, Honey. Somehow they got there. And I know you've been depressed lately."

"But depression is the road to suicide, isn't it? I know I have a lot to be bummed out about ... but it also seems like I've got a lot to look forward to."

"Like what, honey?" Melissa asked.

Marquie laid back and closed her eyes. "treasure," she whispered. "I want my treasure ... where is he?"

"I can call him for you. But why don't you tell me about him."

Her lips turned up at the corners. "He's an incredible man," Marquie said softly. Tears sprouted into her eyes to think of Donnell. "He worked for my father for a lot of years. I used to watch him in the garden," she whispered with obvious affection. "A good man. He has accepted things in me that so many others wouldn't, you know."

"Like what?"

Marquie drew in the first deep breath in two days feeling pain in her lungs. "Sexually," she admitted openly. "He doesn't think I'm some kind of freak. We're very compatible."

"Can you think of any reason he would want to kill you?"

"My treasure?" she asked incredulously. Her mind was still a blur yet she could think of nothing he would gain from that.

"Anyone else?"

Still lightheaded, she forced her eyes wider, yet saw only the shimmering glow of multi-hued lights cloud her vision. Quietly, she murmured, "My brother has been trying to kill me all of my life. Since the day he dropped me over the banister. I think since the day he killed my mother."

The words rang in her ears. Quickly, she shot up, her inner-vision ravaged by a horror she had blocked out. "Good God," she screamed as she pulled at her hair with the hand that had been loosed from the bedrail. "Oh God, I remember."

Melissa launched from the chair and threw her arms around Marquie to quiet her a little. "What ... what do you remember?"

"My mother," she screamed. "He shot her ... and then pushed her over the upper floor railing. Oh God."

Her entire body cramped as she saw her three-year-old self in the kitchen doorway peering at her mother's body sprawled on the foyer floor. Her eyes raised upward to see Peter holding a gun. His strangled voice, "Go away," throbbed in her head like the clapper of a broken bell. Frightened beyond reason, she ran outside to escape and find her father. And then she ran back into the house to her dead mother. "He killed her," she declared.

With Melissa's help, she laid back, her tears streaming, her sobs ready to break free. Her mother's case had been studied by every post-graduate student for ten years and Melissa was very familiar with it. The cause of death was officially written up as suicide. But then the police had never investigated it as a homicide.

As Marquie lay in the bed sobbing, Melissa picked up the phone to call Donnell. There was no longer any doubt in her mind that Marquie was in danger. The only question was how to get her out of it. So the first call should be to the police.

Chapter Twenty One

Shaking uncontrollably, Donnell allowed Jeff to usher him through the twisted corridors of the hospital. Only now that his precious Mistress had been moved to the general population of the hospital, could he see her. "We have to move her," Melissa had said adamantly. "If we leave her in the psyche ward, that's more evidence she's insane."

"But she's safe in the psyche ward," Donnell had insisted.

To the private guard at her door, Jeff announced, "Donnell McLaughlin."

Quickly, the off-duty officer checked the list and stepped aside.

But to see her so pale, so weak, so helpless, Donnell crumbled into Jeff's embrace. "treasure." Her smile was as broken as her voice.

"Mistress," he pleaded. Without reservation, he lay in the bed beside her. "This can't be happening." So angry with himself because he alone caused this by calling an ambulance that day, he wrapped tightly around her desiring only to protect her. Yet, he understood how impossible that was for him. He had slept through an attempted murder.

Her arm looped around him but didn't have the strength to pull him close. Yet she held out her other arm inviting Jeff to come closer. With a smile, he perched on the edge.

"You look like shit, Lady," he said attempting to be playful. Her eyes slid closed yet her hand strolled up his chest. Tenderly, he grasped it and held her fingers to his lips. To get

her attention, he said firmly, "Mistress, we need to know where your father's diaries are."

As if her meager strength finally failed her, her arm went limp. Yet, Jeff held firmly to her hand. It seemed her head shook a little and then she lost consciousness.

"Shit," Jeff whispered. "We have to have those diaries."

"What diaries?" they heard from behind.

Quickly, Jeff turned as Donnell slid off the bed to greet Melissa. Jeff explained, "Apparently, Pierre de Navarre left behind diaries that may explain his trepidation over Peter."

"And that would be helpful now?"

"In court, at least. If nothing else, I might be able to get Peter put out of le Domaine. But the real danger for Marquie is Peter being her guardian. If Pierre had suspicions about him being the Alphabet Murderer, that would be a huge help. If we could somehow connect those murders to Peter's depraved desire for his sister that would cinch it. No court in the world would make him her guardian."

"And you think she knows where they're at?"

"We do, Melissa," Donnell said quickly. "I called the station last night and they're working on a warrant to search le Domaine as we speak. Unfortunately, the Captain and I disagree on how useful the diaries would be."

Her eyes darted between Jeff and Donnell a moment. "I do, too," she whispered. "I assume that if you make the diaries available for inspection, then all of them are open to scrutiny and not just the parts that plead your case."

Donnell's features twisted as he peered up at Jeff. "There would be a lot about Patrice Evans in there. And it probably wouldn't do the murder investigation any good."

"Fuck," Jeff muttered in a low growl. "If Peter doesn't go down for that murder, he might not go down for anything. Shit."

"You need to find another way," Melissa insisted.

His vision locked to hers, Jeff unwound and lengthened his spine, now looking down on her. "You know where they are."

Her eyes averted from his. Yet she reached out and pulled him into the hallway, Donnell on their heels. "She knows where the diaries are, Jeff. I merely know they exist by virtue of her talking about them and a few lines in Frank Blaine's medical file on her, that's all."

Jeff's arms folded over his chest as he leaned toward her. "What do you know that can help me, Melissa? Our collective goal here is to serve not only justice but get that woman out of the biggest mess of her life."

"It's hearsay," she snarled. Rather than stand in the hallway and prove her personal involvement in this to anyone who might be watching, she turned and headed for the elevator, they following closely. Moments later, they were in the garage which doubled as the employee's smoking lounge.

"Marquie has hidden the diaries so that they'll never be found. Electrical voltage wouldn't drag it out of her, I believe. But in those diaries, it's written in Pierre Navarre's hand ... Pierre believed that Peter was indeed, the Alphabet Murderer. He wrote how astounded he was that a man, any man much

less one he raised, could place another man on trial and defend him for something he himself did."

Wholly relieved, Donnell drew in the first deep breath of a decade. "I knew it," he whispered. "He was protecting Marquie all along. And by making me her body guard, he was training me to protect her, too."

"That makes sense," Melissa said quietly though the cameras in the garage were merely video with no audio feed. "He also believed he had Peter locked out of her life for good. He never foresaw this. But Marquie understands that her father didn't think like the devil. He couldn't have second-guessed Peter."

"Sounds like Pierre," Jeff said.

Melissa glanced behind to see a couple moving toward the elevators. She grasped their hands and pushed them toward a corner, the walls covered in soot. "The only other thing I can tell you is this—Patrice Evans and Pierre Navarre were lovers."

Donnell deflated a little having expected something new. He had known that for years. Often he was banished to the bungalow for hours or days at a time. Almost immediately, Jeff declared, "That's interesting. For how long?"

"All of their lives," Donnell said. "Since they were kids. Dom was in Viet Nam, was wounded. And eventually reported killed in action. About six months later, he showed up in a hospital in the Philippines. Patrice had married Dom's brother."

"Good Lord," Melissa gasped.

"When he got back, Dom married Patrice's sister so that they could be close. She started working as his secretary immediately."

Instantly, Jeff and Melissa turned to each other, a smile growing on their lips as they studied each other intently. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking, Doctor?" he asked almost relieved.

"We need DNA samples," she insisted. "Both from Pierre Navarre and Annetta Navarre."

"Why?" Donnell asked rather confused.

"Because we need to do a maternity test," Melissa declared.

"A maternity test?"

"If Annetta is not her biological mother then the chances of her being physiologically ill dwindle considerably," Melissa offered.

"And," Jeff began, "legally, it would be reason enough for Patrice to leave her entire estate to Marquie. Peter knows this, he knows that Patrice is Marquie's mother, and that's why he didn't contest Patrice's will, also."

"I bet you're right," Donnell said excitedly. "Peter sees himself getting pushed out of her life for the last time. He's going for the kill." The very words split his heart open yet filled him with rage. "This would mean that Peter is only a cousin to Marquie, by virtue of the fact that their mothers were sisters."

"Exactly," Melissa offered. "But let me say this. If you execute that search warrant on le Domaine, you're going to push Peter closer to the edge. If he feels a little pressure, if

he feels you're closing in on him, he's going to respond. How, is anybody's guess. But I'm thinking that if the person petitioning for guardianship is in prison, that makes the point moot."

Jeff laughed a little. "Can't guard somebody from prison."

"It would be merely fascinating to see how he responds to a very thorough search of the place. Guilty men always give themselves away."

Donnell shook his head. "No we don't, baby. And don't forget that he's psychotic. He believes he has everything under control."

Curiously, Melissa peered into him. "We?" she asked.

As if the bond was unbreakable between them, he stared back. "I'm gonna put a bullet through that mother fucker's brain. And I'm not gonna lose a minute's sleep over it. In fact, it may be the first good night's sleep I get in years."

Deep inside, she felt the pain pouring through his statement drive into her like a blade. Quickly, she wrapped him in her arms. So very concerned, yet so patiently understanding, she said, "Be careful, my friend," as she held to him a moment. "I'm here if you need me."

Tenderly, Donnell kissed her cheek and backed away. "Right now, we need to go execute a warrant. We'll call you later."

She stood still a moment watching them jog off into the twilight of exhaust fumes, dart between cars and then disappear. If only they could get Peter on a criminal rap before Thursday. But that was a long shot. The reality was, she had only three days to prepare Marquie to defend her

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sanity.

Chapter Twenty Two

The courtroom was stifling as Peter finished his closing arguments. In a flurry of quietly controlled rage, he took his seat. An intern from the firm passed a note to him.

The cops are searching the mansion ... right now.

He froze to think of it, feeling his heart stop in his chest. If they should find ... A wash of panic split his sanity for a moment. And then he breathed deeply. As the judge dismissed the court for the day, he stood slowly and confidently. They would never find what they were looking for. Never. This was just a ploy of Donnell's, he knew.

Chapter Twenty Three

"C'mon, let's go," Jeff commanded. "Guardianship hearing."

"Is Mistress going to be there?"

"Yes," Jeff said surely. "Melissa has her at least half dried out. Hopefully, she can sound lucid enough in her own defense."

"I suppose its better that they've kept her in the hospital for her own protection."

"C'mon, buddy, it's alright. If this goes south, I'm gonna file a motion that a third party guardian is appointed. Try to get Peter out of her life somehow."

"That would definitely be my pleasure," Donnell whispered.

* * * *

With Jeff ready to defend Marquie from every angle, Donnell rode the elevator with him to the 39th floor. "What surprises should we expect?" he asked anxiously.

"Just about anything," Jeff responded. "The important part is that Marquie holds it together. But something tells me the decision is already made."

"Why do you say that?"

Pensively, Jeff glanced at Donnell as the door slid open. Hurriedly, they moved to the Chamber doors to see Marquie and Melissa on one side of the table sitting opposite Peter and Blaine. Why Blaine? Jeff wondered. As soon as they were seated the judge began.

"Miss de Navarre, do you understand what is taking place today?"

Marquie huffed as she sat back in the chair, a ruffled blouse around her wrists to hide the bandages. "I believe that my brother is trying to convince you that I'm not mentally stable enough to not only handle my own affairs as an adult would, but also to declare me incompetent to place a bite of food in my mouth, Your Honor."

Donnell cringed because this was exactly the attitude that could ruin this for her. The haughtiness he adored was lost on the public at large.

"And do I understand, Mr. McLaughlin, that Miss de Navarre was residing with you at the time of this suicide attempt?"

He hesitated a moment, wary of answering the wrong question. "Whether it was attempted suicide or attempted murder is still being investigated, Your Honor. And yes, she was residing with me. I'm her bodyguard."

"But it says here that you sleep in the same bed with her. Is it common practice for bodyguards to sleep in the same bed with their clients?" the judge asked snottily.

"When clients are as concerned for their safety as Miss de Navarre is, I'll make the exception, Your Honor."

"Have you engaged in any kinds of sexual relations in said bed?"

Knowing well that Peter couldn't produce a tape of it because nothing even remotely sexual had taken place in that bed, Donnell responded, "Not whatsoever, Your Honor."

The judge peered down at Peter's petition reading further. "We have an attempted suicide, threats of committing murder, evidence of aberrant sexual behavior. We have statements that the patient has refused to take her medication as prescribed. Testimony that she parades around in front of strangers nude, both at a gathering after her father's funeral and when a process server arrived at the door. For reasons the petitioner doesn't understand, she's moved out of her own home to live with the man who is paid as a gardener rather than a bodyguard. Is there anything else, Mr. Navarre?"

Peter's eyes locked to Marquie's and held her furious gaze. "Honey, these are things that wouldn't be happening if Dad was still alive. I can see how you've deteriorated and so quickly. Living out back with the gardener..."

"If you move out of the house, I would happily move back into it," she snarled.

Dramatically, Peter raised his hand to his eye as if to brush away a tear. "Honey, somebody needs to watch over you right now. And nobody loves you more than I do."

For a moment she stared at him, this performance most touching. And then she burst into laughter. A raucous laughter that she couldn't control.

Melissa grabbed her hand to steady her and interrupted. "Your Honor, the only reason Miss de Navarre moved out of the main house is that she's afraid of her brother."

"Why should she be afraid of her brother?"

Melissa glanced at Marquie and Marquie nodded. Their previous conversation to give Melissa permission to suspend

doctor/patient confidentiality in this matter was reaffirmed. "Because, Your Honor, he tried to kill her when she was only eight years old. That's after he raped her."

"Marquie," Peter gasped. "How could you say that? Raped?" His features contorted into a mask of pain.

"What happened when she was eight?" the judge asked.

Peter interjected: "Dad was away one night and she was having terrible nightmares over our mother. She'd wake up screaming, wake the entire household. As Dad would often do, I went into her bedroom to calm her down. We got to playing and tussling. She got too close to the balcony and tumbled over it. Broke several bones."

"And somewhere in that you feel that your brother raped you?"

"I was there, Your Honor," Marquie said defiantly. "I was also there when he murdered my mother."

The judge rolled his eyes a little. "Your mother's death was a suicide. I have the police report."

"They didn't investigate it as a homicide, did they?" Melissa asked.

Just then the door opened and Captain Lucius Sullivant entered the room. "Your Honor, I have something here that may put an entirely new light on this proceeding. I have a court order to exhume the body of Annetta de Navarre for forensic evidence."

Aggravated, the judge looked up at the Captain of the Columbus Police Department and snarled. "What does that bring to bear in this case?"

"Only that we've found further evidence that Miss de Navarre's memories of her mother's death may reveal facts that were dismissed twenty three years ago. We have not only Miss de Navarre's statement, but with a warrant we searched Pierre Navarre's library. Our handwriting analysts have just authenticated that Pierre wrote these diaries. Pages from his personal journals were found that reveal a good deal of information about his adopted son, Peter. He felt that his wife didn't have enough sense about her to find a gun and shoot herself. He is adamant that Peter killed her."

A gasp from Peter interrupted the captain. "I'd like to see these journals," he said, appearing visibly shocked that his father would write such things.

"You will," Lucius said surely. "Your mother's body will be exhumed next Tuesday. We'll know everything we want to know then." Lucius turned to the judge and continued: "On that basis, Judge Martin, has ordered us to investigate this matter."

Angrily, the judge continued, "Still, what does that matter have to do with this one?"

"Your Honor, this is a Guardianship hearing," the captain reminded. "A man who is under suspicion for murdering his mother is seeking guardianship of his sister and a vast amount of wealth. As an officer of the law, I'm rather concerned about that."

Quickly, the judge said, "That matter is mine to decide. You may leave."

Angrily, Lucius glanced at Donnell. In that one moment, everything between them was understood. It was obvious

now that Peter had a good percentage of the court system in his back pocket, especially with Matthew Hines still in the hospital fighting for his life.

As they previously discussed, there would be twenty four hour guards placed at Marquie's side. Donnell nodded with a little relief. Tenderly, he slid his hand onto Marquie's thigh to capture her hand. Exasperated, the captain turned and left.

The judge sat back in the chair and placed his chin in his palm to consider this new evidence. What if the police were on the right track? What if Peter Navarre is a brilliant psychopath and not just some hot shot lawyer that works at something until he succeeds? He does work within the system, at least. He does it legally. Drawing in a deep breath, he said, "I'm going to grant guardianship on a temporary basis. Thirty days and we'll return here to find out how it's going."

Melissa Alvarez launched out of the chair, her anger stifling her sense. "You don't understand what you're doing," she accused. "My client has moved out of her own home to escape her brother."

"Sit down," he snarled.

"Your Honor," Jeff said quickly. "I will file an appeal before I leave the courthouse that a third party be appointed as Miss de Navarre's guardian."

The judge waved it away. "Do as you like, Mr. Jenkins. But until that appeal goes through, Peter Navarre is granted temporary guardianship of his sister. That's all. In the meantime, I'd like to know where Miss de Navarre is going to live."

Everyone's undivided attention turned to Marquie as she captured her brother's stare, his eyes burning with some unnatural light. Slowly, she rose, letting go of Donnell's hand. Planting the flat of her hands on the table, she leaned forward and announced, "I'm going to live in the bungalow at the back of my estate until I can get an eviction notice and have my brother thrown out of my house."

"With Mr. McLaughlin?" the judge asked.

"My bodyguard," she said defiantly.

"NO," the judge said. "You are not living with the gardener. You will move back into the main house."

"You're wrong about that, Your Honor," Marquie said defiantly.

"Then she'll stay at the hospital," Melissa decided.

"If she doesn't require hospitalization, she will be released."

Melissa hesitated. She glanced at Dr. Frank Blaine knowing it would be impossible to keep Marquie locked down for any good medical reason other than her 'aberrant sexuality and danger to others,' to which Melissa refused to concur. For as happy as she would be to have Marquie live with her, that would be a certain violation of ethics.

"I'll move out," Donnell said softly.

"NO," Marquie roared. "You're the only reason I'm still alive."

Donnell grasped her hand firmly and held dearly. So much he wanted to reassure her of now, so much he wanted to say. That it would only be a week before her mother was exhumed

and all of this would be over. Peter would go to prison and the order would be void. All he could say was, "It will be okay."

"NO," she screamed. Knowing these very special people who loved her truly could no longer help her, she filled with rage, the muscles of her body clenched. She growled at Peter, "You and I are going to finish this very soon. One of us is going to die, do you understand? If your intention is to keep me a prisoner in my own home to be your sex slave, to rape me as often as you wish, you're going to have to kill me, Peter." Her entire body quivered uncontrollably as she held him a moment longer. Slowly and deliberately, each syllable pronounced clearly, she declared, "If I have to die to get away from you, it won't be a problem for me."

And then she commanded, "treasure, take me home." Without awaiting any other instructions from the judge, she moved hurriedly through the door. Though chills washed through his flesh to have heard her pronouncement, Donnell leapt to his feet to follow.

Stunned, the judge closed the folder and stood. His vision fixed on Peter Navarre a moment. Wondering, apprehensive about the decision he made, he turned and left the room.

* * * *

Peter stood in the living room of the bungalow listening to Marquie sob as Donnell packed his clothes. The hushed whispers, the soft stroking of flesh he could barely withstand. Though Marquie remained in the bedroom, her heart obviously broken to see Donnell leave, Donnell moved

through the corridor with his suitcase, and headed for the door.

"You don't have any property that belongs to Navarre's, do you?" Peter asked suspiciously.

Reaching deep inside of himself to summon a kind patience and will he had never before been forced to exercise, Donnell rasped, "No Sir, I don't."

"Do you need a lift to somewhere, pal?" Peter asked condescendingly.

To hear the arrogance in the tone, Donnell stiffened. There was something familiar about it. Something horrifying. Something of a memory long past, yet one that could never be forgotten. He felt a chill wash up his spine and spread through his limbs. A single sound reverberated in his head with the words, the Alphabet Murderer.

He stared into Peter's dark eyes seeing something so obvious finally. But it was ludicrous, wasn't it? To think that Peter committed those murders, that he got Keith Leland to take the rap and then essentially defended himself in court. Utterly ludicrous. Yet he could feel those small tremors, he could almost scent the Alphabet Murderer. Was it perhaps the scent of hormones released by adrenalin? The scent of sweat? There was no accounting for it, yet every cop instinct he ever enjoyed filled him powerfully full of awareness now.

Donnell dropped the suitcase to hit with a thud at his feet. Holding Peter's gaze like a laser, he said, "I'll tell you what, buddy," full of obvious snideness. "You and I have a date with destiny. And this time, all of your judges, all of your lackeys,

all of those brain cells in that brilliant head of yours aren't going to be of any use to you. Just you and me."

"Oh hold up, sweetie," Peter interrupted.

Donnell continued undeterred. "If you have any questions about the ownership of that Mercedes in the garage, I'm sure you're connected at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles as well as you are everywhere else. And don't forget that the side street next to the bungalow where I'm taking up residence is public access. It won't do you any good to call the cops on me. I am a fucking cop. I am licensed to kill you."

Amused by this show of defensiveness, Peter snarled, "And I supposed someone in an official capacity signed that license?"

"That's right, my brother," Donnell said. "The day Margie Hatteras died, a little girl eight years old had her belly slashed from her throat to her mons. The daughter of a friend of your father's. Satan himself signed your warrant."

Peter's eyes flared as he stepped back a little. Donnell stared a moment longer seeing the truth revealed as only a guilty man could offer his own recrimination. A mocking breath swept out of his chest feeling free now, feeling powerful in a way he hadn't in years. Quickly, he grabbed the suitcase and flew out the door.

Peter's heart pounded in his chest as he fell into a chair. The garage door went up and then he heard the sound of the motor. Aggravated, he went to the window and pulled back the sheers. Just as he promised, Donnell McLaughlin parked on the side street to watch everything.

"Mother fucker," Peter rasped.

Marquie's sobs had dwindled to a plaintive choking echoing through his soul. How many nights had he listened to that sound, a sound that nearly drove him out of his mind. Sounds that accused, sounds that conveyed heart break. Sounds he wasn't able to soothe in any mortal way.

Silently, he moved down the hallway and stood at the door. Her face was buried to the pillow leaving her tight bottom swaddled in denim, her feet bare. She wore only a bra. Anguished, he laid down on the bed beside of her and scooped her into his arms.

Instantly, she tightened and then pulled away. His arms locked around her as his hand cupped a breast and crushed it to her chest. His lips met her neck and she screamed out. Defiantly, she kicked at him, and then finally wiggled away.

The brass lamp on the nightstand was the closest thing she could grasp. Rumpling the shade as she held it high over her head, she screamed, "I'm not gonna take this from you anymore."

"Marquie!"

Peter rolled off the bed a split second before the lamp came crashing to the mattress. He peered up over the edge in time to see the lamp careening in his direction. The bulb shattered against the wall with an explosion of sparks. Angry now, Peter leapt off the floor and bounded the bed, an irresistible force and grabbed her arms. Enraged, he shook her.

"You will submit to me," he growled. "You will be mine finally. If you won't do it voluntarily, you will do it under duress. I don't give a fuck any more. You can consider

yourself locked down in this little dump, little girl. You'll eat what I have the servants bring you, you'll drink what they leave behind. There is no television, radio, or phone any longer. I think at the end of thirty days, Daddy's little precious will be much more agreeable, don't you?"

Understanding finally what he expected of her, nausea rose from her stomach to her throat. Still unwilling to let it happen like this, her knee swept into the soft flesh between his legs. But he'd lived with her long enough; he knew her ploys. He turned in time that she struck his thigh and only glanced his balls.

Uncontrolled, he swept her into his arms, her back against his body. His fingers threaded through the waistband on her jeans and pulled them apart. With her pants around her knees now, he threw her on the bed face down and straddled her torso. The broad flat surface of his hand met her bottom with a crack.

She writhed uncontrollably, yet he continued. One powerful slap from the left hand was followed immediately by one from the right. The skin began to glow with a soft pinkness that he could sink his teeth into. Yet his rage was uncontrollable.

* * * *

Donnell situated himself on the side street where he could peer through the willowy limbs of weeping cherry at the front door of the bungalow. The navigation system in the dashboard had been replaced with a security computer configured specifically to meet Pierre Navarre's requirements.

Operated by the car's batteries with a back up solar cell, he let the car run a few moments to power it up. Fifteen minutes after he left his home of twelve years, he turned on the monitor of the security system and punched in a password.

89754302-566635

Access denied.

Ihatepasswords

Access denied.

Marquerite

Access denied

"Fuck wad," he rasped. Peter had found virtually every password that opened the security system. "Obviously has a little computer nerd on his payroll, too." He punched in another code, a simple number, a date in fact. The master password his Master insisted upon. 82093. The first day his Master took him in His arms and made love to him.

The screen flashed. Donnell smiled.

Nothing in the living room. He moved the camera angle down the hallway to see Peter stumbling through it like a drunken elephant. The camera followed Peter's movements into the kitchen as he rummaged through the drawers. Knives were thrown to the counter top. Adrenalin pumped through Donnell's limbs as he reached into his jacket to pull the revolver. Ready to leap out of the car and rush to Marquie's defense, he noted Peter gathering the knives into his arms. Peter then moved around the counter toward the television. Without any hesitation, he put his foot through it shattering the screen.

"Fucking freak," Donnell rasped as he tightened his grip on the gun.

Peter opened the door and threw the knives into the lawn. Quickly, he turned and went to the refrigerator. Bottles were uncapped and thrown to the sink to be emptied. Everything else but a jar of pickles was tossed beyond the door, beyond her reach.

Instantly, Donnell understood. This was a siege. An old-fashioned, medieval type siege meant to force her surrender to hunger, thirst, and loneliness and offer it to her captor.

A quietly controlled rage swelled up within him. He watched as Peter tore the phone from the wall and then dumped her bag to take her cell. He walked through the exterior door and slammed it hard enough to rattle the windows. And then he stomped to the main house.

Quickly, Donnell switched the camera view to the bedroom. Furniture was overturned, a lamp was broken. The sheets on the bed were in disarray and a bit of blood was spattered. "Where is she where is she?" He turned the camera angle to see her standing in the corner with her jeans around her feet. Her bra had been torn and her bottom was as red as fire.

"Fucker," he growled.

She was so frightened still that she stood in the corner quietly sobbing even though her attacker had left the premises.

He pulled out his cell and quickly dialed it.

Marquie heard the faint ring of a cell phone, a rather short clipped chirping sound emanating from the bathroom. But all

the phones in the house had been removed, she thought. Reticent, she leant over and grasped her jeans to pull them over her hips. Cautiously, she followed the sound of the phone.

Inside the linen closet, on the floor in the back. She had to get on her hands and knees to crawl into the closet. Fearing badly, she clicked it on.

"Marquie, its Donnell, listen carefully."

"He's gonna kill me," she screamed.

"Quiet," Donnell commanded. "Get in the closet, close the door where he can't hear you through the security system."

She rolled over and pulled the door closed. A sudden fright washed through her remembering her own closet vividly and the hours she passed hidden away in it listening to her mother screech at the top of her lungs about things that didn't exist. "He's going to kill me, I know it."

"Listen, honey, just listen. I'm right out here on the street and I'm not going to leave you. I'm right here, watching you through the security system. The next few days are gonna be kinda rough but we're gonna get through this. Do you understand?"

The strength in his voice soothed her a little. She drew in a deep breath to steady herself. "Alright," she whispered, scared that Peter might hear. "What do I need to do?"

"You need to hang tight, baby. You need to get through every day with only me on the phone intermittently. As hard as this is for you, they're going to exhume your mother's body Tuesday, that's one week from today, and then this will

be over. For me, Mistress, for me if for no other reason, I need you to be strong now."

In the blackness of the linen closet, Marquie closed her eyes to let her vision fill with her precious treasure. "Yes," she breathed. "I'm not going to let him do this to me. I can't," she said to shore her self-confidence. Yet the ravages of doubt shook that foundation. "I want you to know something though. I need you to know how much I appreciate everything you've done for me."

"Marquie, NO!" Donnell screamed. "You are not going to leave me, damnit. I need you to be strong now. You are not going to die."

She swallowed hard to choke back a sob. What she said at the hearing was painfully true. The only thing that was certain was that she would escape, somehow, be it alive, dead or something in between. "I also need you to know that I love you," she whispered. "Thank you for everything."

"MARQUIE!!!" The tone of her voice indicated she was prepared to die if necessary. "I need you to hold tight for a week. I don't believe he's going to let you starve but at the same time I don't want you to eat the food he'll bring you. We got a twenty-four hour guard on the way and they'll always have something with them for you."

"Alright," she whispered. "But I really need a drink."

"I know, baby." Of the bottles he placed in the closet while he was packing, he said, "If you rummage around in there you'll find two bottles of bourbon and I think eight or ten joints. I'm sorry I couldn't get my hands on any food for you. I'll kill the camera in the bathroom and make it look like an

electrical problem so at least you'll have some privacy in there. Just don't be gone out of my sight for too long."

"God, you're so good to me," she whispered.

He hesitated wondering about his true motivations. "The thing I've lived with for so long, the thing that has driven me out of mind ... honey, I understand it finally. I've existed like the living dead for no other purpose than to kill the Alphabet Murderer. I'm gonna do that, Marquie. I'm gonna kill that mother fucker. But I need something to live for beyond that, please understand. Mistress, please, don't leave me."

"I know. I understand," she whispered. "I know if Daddy were here, he would do it for you."

Donnell nodded feeling the veracity in that statement. "Alright, honey. You've got my cell number. You call me when you need me. Otherwise, I'll be watching. Oh and hey ... the guard is rolling up the street now."

"Okay," she said on a heavy breath. "I better get out of the closet where I can be watched."

"Good girl," Donnell whispered. "Please know how desperately I love you."

The phone clicked off and left her with the cold tasteless sound of the dial tone. She laid it on the floor and groped in the darkness for the bottles he claimed to leave. In the far corner, she felt the glass and also the carved wooden box of his reefer stash. Mindlessly, she opened the bottle and tipped it high. Though it burned down her esophagus and splashed into her empty stomach, it soothed her instantly.

Muffled by the door and the linens, she thought she heard the doorbell ring.

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* * * *

Peter sat at the computer monitor in the master suite watching Marquie through the security system's cameras. "How could she have escaped?" he wondered. And then he saw the linen-closet door open at the sound of the doorbell. He peered out the back window to see the cruiser in the street. Certainly they had a warrant to enter the property. Just another ploy to try to unhinge him.

His attention returned to her. Tears sprang to his eyes to see the sweetness and the innocence he so loved about her as she crawled on her hands and knees out of the closet. He saw nothing but that beautiful child he so adored, a child he fell in love with when he was only a baby. Yet, he shook his head as she tripped down the hallway toward the door wearing only a bra and tattered jeans. "Sick, sick, sick."

* * * *

Marquie opened the door to see a uniformed officer. "From Donnell," the cop whispered as he handed her a bag of doughnuts. "We have a warrant to protect the cemetery until the exhumation," he said with a toss of his head toward the family plot. A thin smile stretched his lips. "We'll be right outside."

Relief swept through her and she was able to relax a little finally. "Excellent," she whispered. "I'm in your debt."

The officer's eyes batted a little as if to say, 'We've got it under control now.' She nodded gratefully and then closed the door.

The silence throbbed in her head. Automatically, she went back to the closet and closed herself in.

* * * *

"Hey."

Peter nodded to the sound of Keith Landry's voice. "Did everything go okay?"

"Of course," Landry sneered. "It's not exactly hard to find a guy whose willing to fly to France under an assumed name with the passport of Michael Grogan, especially for ten grand, now is it? And when he arrives back in the States he'll be arrested," Landry finished with a laugh.

Peter laughed a little, too. "That was pretty smooth," he admitted. "So here's the deal. You'll stay right here in this room for the next week because I have to be seen at work. We'll get this exhumation out of the way. The fucking idiots. Obviously they don't know that there's nothing in that coffin but ashes. But the old man didn't make a big deal about having the dizzy bitch cremated before the closed-coffin showing, did he? I can't wait to see the look on their faces. Anyway..." he began laughing again as he raised out of the chair. "Your job is to sit here and make sure she doesn't leave that little dump out back. I don't care what she does, but she's not to leave the house ... right?"

"Right, Boss."

"And you're not to leave this room. The servants will leave your food at the door and once they're gone you can get it."

"I get it already," Landry shouted under his breath.

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"I'm going back to work for awhile. The cameras in this room are blacked out. McLaughlin can't see what's going on in here."

"Alright already. But you think he's watching still? Shit, I changed every password in the system."

"I know you did," Peter replied. "It's just a feeling I've got."

Chapter Twenty Four

Friday arrived. What time it was on this Friday, Marquie couldn't know. Wednesday and Thursday had passed uneventfully, though she remembered pacing the house like a lab rat. Rather than sleep in the bed where her brother had assaulted her, she curled in the closet.

"This is ridiculous," she assured herself. "A prisoner in my own home." She hadn't showered for days. The blood crusted on the bandages pinched a little as she twisted her wrist. The pain in it indicated an infection had taken hold.

Feeling a rush of anger, she threw open the closet door. "This is fucking ridiculous," she snarled. Aggravated, she ripped off the torn and soiled clothing and turned on the water in the tub. Donnell said he'd killed the cameras in the bathroom. She grabbed a joint and nestled into the water.

"Miss Marquerite?"

She hadn't heard the front door open. She didn't really care. "In here," she shouted. A moment later, her maid placed a tray of food on the edge of the tub. The aroma of eggs and bacon made her salivate.

"How are you?" the woman asked.

"I'm just fine," she said trying to control her anger. "I'm just fine." A tear swelled in her eye and she raised her hand out of the water to gather it. "That will be all. Thank you." The maid turned and moved rapidly down the hallway to gather last night's meal, lamb chops in mint sauce that remained untouched, to take away.

That she was hungry was obvious. Carefully, she removed the lid from the tray to see the steam rise off the fluffy eggs and smell the hickory smoked bacon piled next to peeled oranges and buttered muffins. "Damnit," she whispered. And then she remembered. If it's time to die, so be it.

Ravenously, she tore into the bacon. With a fork she scooped the eggs onto a muffin and stuffed it in her mouth. The rush of food into her empty stomach caused it to wretch a little. Rather than gorge herself, she laid back with a slice of orange to suck the sweet juice from it.

If she remembered correctly today was August 21st. Her father's birthday. Today was a day she should be sitting in his den, looking at his pictures, laying flowers on his grave, and grieving for him. In so many ways, her present circumstances were created by her father. But no man of rational thought could predict the actions of a lunatic.

Bite by bite, she finished the meal, her first in days. Feeling a little energized, she shaved her legs. Moving to the shower, she washed her hair and rinsed thoroughly. But Peter hadn't brought her any clothes, had he? "The creep. So he can watch me naked."

From the linen closet she removed a sheet of white satin and tied it around her body under her arms. These were impossible circumstances. Impossible to understand. Impossible to escape. Without thinking, she went to the garage and opened the dungeon door. In the dungeon, she nestled into her chair.

"Princess." She heard her father's voice as clearly as if he stood next to her. Quickly, she peered around the room and

saw nothing but the statuesque outlines of draped chains and iron bars. "Sometimes you just have to get mad," she heard again.

She launched out of the chair and stood to hug her father. It seemed she felt the rush of a breeze flow over her, the touch of a kiss on her cheek. "Daddy," she cried out. "I am mad as hell." Her fists balled and thrust out at the empty air.

Completely animated, she grabbed a crop from the chain. With short bursts of unlimited power, it struck the padded leather surfaces placed around the room.

* * * *

The noonday sun baked on the roof of Donnell's car. Sweating uncontrollably, he closed the windows and turned on the air-conditioning. To see his beloved Mistress in the dungeon reasserting her authority gave him hope. Carefully, she concentrated her energy on the padded surface of the exam table.

He wondered now what she was thinking of. Was it him or was it Peter? Was this a scene of discipline delivered with love or was it the animosity of revenge?

He glanced at the gas gauge knowing he couldn't leave the motor running much longer. Sooner rather than later, he would have to leave to get filled-up. He glanced at the outside cameras seeing the guards lolling under the trees in the cemetery. Perhaps he should wait until their relief came on duty.

"Shit," he whispered.

* * * *

"Sometimes you just have to get mad."

But being angry is a very different thing than madness, isn't it, Daddy? She laid the battered crop on the rack and peered down at her wrist. The perfectly shaped X carved into her skin and dotted with stitches oozed with infection. If it's time to die, what matters how? "And if I have to die, I can't leave this world hating anyone the way I hate Peter."

Feeling exhaustion creep over her, as if the atmosphere upstairs was somehow heavier than below, she settled in the chair a moment. She peered up at the clock to see that nearly an entire day had passed as she raged at the world in her dungeon. "I can't let this go on another day, damnit." Without another thought for her safety, she flung open the door.

Twilight crept along the eastern horizon though the sun hung low in the west. She glanced toward the family plot and noticed it was empty now, a change of guard in progress. The officers chatted with each other for a moment and then she noticed Donnell drive off. Her heart stumbled a little to see him leaving her. Perhaps, it was better this way, she thought. He doesn't have to feel responsible.

The House of Navarre loomed before her like a cursed mausoleum now. The granite stones embedded with quartz crystals caught the evening light and tossed it toward the heavens as if those rays were the pathways she would use to be with her father. Resolved, or perhaps resigned, she moved boldly toward the doors.

Even the interior had the feeling of a crypt. There was no one in the kitchen nor were any sounds of human life evident.

Expecting to find Peter in the Master suite, she moved soundlessly up the stairway, lingering at the top to peer into the foyer. In her blurred vision, she saw her mother's body sprawled on the floor, the skull fractured, the neck in the most grotesque angle. Quickly, she turned away from that sight and hurried down the hallway.

"Peter," she whispered as she turned the lever on the door. Barely opened, she peered through the crack to see a man sprawled on the bed. Investigating further, she saw that it was Keith Landry, stoned and drunk, unconscious and alone.

Disgusting. That son of a bitch lying in my father's bed.

She drew in a deep breath and ran down the staircase. It was no longer rage she felt, but a permeating desire to end this once and for all. Though the outcome was uncertain, she opened the door leading to the lower level where most of Peter's parties had taken place. Yet everything was quiet here, nothing out of place.

In the near darkness, however, she saw a seam of light from under a door. It was the door to the wine cellar. And it should have been locked.

Donnell's words rushed over her like an icy wind. "I can almost scent that bastard," he had said. She, too, noted a perception flush through her body though it didn't seem physical. As if she knew she faced a horror yet couldn't look away, she tiptoed toward it.

The mumbling voice of Peter was more than real to her ears. Her head cocked to better hear the garbled emanations. It seemed as though he was crying, perhaps praying, offering

oblations to whatever god he worshipped. Curious, because she had never heard such reverence in him before, she flung open the door.

* * * *

Donnell paid for the gas, a day old sandwich, chips and a can of Coke. He popped the top on the can and drank deep, unwrapped the sandwich and bit into it. Before he moved away from the pump, he flipped on the screen. Narrowing his vision in the near darkness of the dungeon, he saw no movement. Quickly, he scanned the rest of the house.

"Oh God, Honey, what have you done?"

Neither had she slipped into the gardens for a breath of fresh air.

"Fuck, Marquie," he swore.

Ninety three camera views in the house. "Fuck," he whispered. Her room, the master suite which came up black, bastard, her bedroom, kitchen, salon, living room, den. It was after all, Master's birthday today, but nothing. "Honey, please." Camera number eighty lit on the pool table, eighty one in the mechanical room, eighty three in the media room. Somehow he sensed, somehow he knew it was the wine cellar. Punching the button on 84 he saw Peter standing naked in front of Marquie who still wore her white sheet. "GOD NO," he screamed. Panicked to the depth of his soul, he turned the key and sped out of the station.

A block down the street, a cruiser pulled out behind him in pursuit of a maniac.

* * * *

Stunned silent, Marquie stared at her naked brother, his body completely shaved in some ritualistic manner she couldn't comprehend. But within her peripheral vision, she noted the jars on the shelf before which he had knelt, praying. Had she taken time to count she would have found twenty six of them, she was certain of that. The dulled, grayish masses shaped like human hearts floated in foul-looking liquid.

"Marquie," Peter pleaded.

"Don't come near me," she growled through clenched teeth.

"Honey, you have to understand something. I have never loved anyone the way I love you."

Her face frozen in a mask of horror, her head shook adamantly. Her breath came in shallow gasps. "Peter please, if ever you loved me, don't come near me." She watched, helplessly shivering, as he unwound and stood, his shadow casting a dull light across her body.

His eyes narrowed as he peered into her, as if seeing something long forgotten. His voice sounded innocent, saying, "You've never looked at me the same way again, baby. I didn't kill her, Marquie. I was about to grab the gun out of her hand when she pulled the trigger. But you think I killed my mother, don't you?"

Internally, Marquie shook, the uncontrollable trembling cresting the surface of her body. Those vivid memories flashed through her mind with the rapidity of a jackhammer. "I'm your sister, for God's sake. She was my mother, too."

A smile twisted on his lips and dug into his cheeks. As if everything between them was suddenly made right, his consternation melted into a gentle smile. "You don't know," he offered as if filled with wonder. "No, honey, you're not my sister. I know for a fact that you're not my sister."

Her hand groped at the door jamb and her nails dug into it to keep her upright. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Pierre," he said gently in his attempt to explain this. "Pierre was your father, but he wasn't mine, you see. I was adopted by Pierre when my mother, Annetta, married him. Who my real father is ... who the hell knows who that bitch might have laid down with."

"Annetta was my mother, too," she whispered.

"No, honey, she wasn't. Annetta was not your mother. And Pierre wasn't my father. You and I have no genetic relationship at all."

"Then who is my mother?"

A little laugh washed out of his chest; he was so hopelessly in love with her naiveté. "In all these years you haven't guessed? In twenty six years you haven't figured it out?"

"Peter, I don't feel like playing games right now."

His expression darkened as his vision settled on her perfectly crafted feet. "Patrice, honey," he said full of sadness. "Patrice loved the old man more than life itself."

"You liar," she screamed. Yet in this vignette of psychosis, her feet refused to take her away. "How dare you say that to me?"

"God, you are so stupid sometimes, Marquie." His eyes narrowed as his vision bored into her. "I remember the bitter

arguments Pierre and Annetta suffered over his and Patrice's love child. My mother was wild with rage at times. She beat the pillows, hell, she beat her head against the wall endlessly for hours until that thumping would drive me out of the house. She beat herself into unconsciousness. It's not that Pierre ever cared for Annetta, you see. He only married Annetta so he could remain close to Patrice ... in a socially accepted sort of way. Because Patrice was already married ... and in order for her remain married, in order for her maintain her social position, she had to give the baby up. She gave you away Marquie. She let Pierre raise you."

"Then we're cousins?" she gasped.

Happily, he shook his head. "Patrice was adopted, too."

Dizziness swept through her body and rose in her throat to choke her. Whatever she had stumbled upon, whatever she had crashed into she no longer had interest in. Feeling at the point of collapse, she fell backward a little. Yet Peter grabbed her and pulled her against his naked flesh.

"You're going to kill me," she whispered to his throat. She could feel it within him, the quietude and serenity as if they only had to die together and his life would be complete.

"I have to, honey, don't you understand this yet?" Quickly, he spun her around to face the jars. "See how beautiful they are, baby." Gently, he stroked through her hair. He reached out for a jar and held it against her chest as she shivered uncontrollably. "She's exquisite," he breathed. "Her name is Margret." He replaced that jar and reached for another. "This one," he started with a sigh, "beautiful, only eight years old.

She loves me," he whispered as he pulled the jar against his own chest to cradle the dead heart inside.

Uncontrollably, Marquie shivered, his madness finally illuminated in his 'collection' of women. All twenty six of them had reminded Peter of something in her. Whether it was black hair, the tender age of eight or the name, it didn't matter. In every one of them Peter saw something of her ... and he murdered them.

About to lose consciousness, she drove her fingernails into the palms of her hands. NO, she screamed inside of herself. As much as she wanted to escape the insanity she had endured the length of her life, something forbid her of going this way. Suddenly, she felt Peter tighten as if in defense of something. His hand crushed her arm; he shoved her into the block wall.

"But you, you bitch," he screamed. His hand splayed against her chest pinning her there. His knurled features contorted like burning flesh. "You never looked at me the same way again, did you, little girl? You think you're so damn special, Daddy's little princess." His tongue swept over his lips as if he could already taste blood. "So judgmental. So much like your daddy. Your precious daddy who went to the grave without the first admission of his own guilt. He drove my mother insane. He was in love with your mother."

As his grip loosened on her to replace the jar to the shelf, she jerked from his hold and sent the jar spiraling out his hand. In a single fluid movement she grabbed a wine bottle and squared off with him.

The shattering of the jar seemed to bring him around. His eyes followed the heart as it skidded across the floor and she could almost scent the anger that rose up in him.

"Look what you did, you fucking bitch!" he screamed. His features contorted into a rage so that she no longer recognized him as Peter, rather as some thing possessed by pure evil. In an instant, she broke the bottle over the rack splashing wine on the floor and held the broken, jagged neck in the attitude of weapon.

"Nonono," he snarled. "You see, that has to be replaced. You ... are going to replace it."

* * * *

"Goddamnit," Donnell yelled at the rookie cop who finally caught him the driveway of the Navarre estate. With a .38 aimed at his chest, he held a .45 aimed at the cop. On his cell, he called the guards out back.

"Drop the gun," the rookie yelled.

The sound of sirens in the distance split the quiet of the gardens. "Donnell," Lucius screamed. "Drop the gun. He'll shoot your stupid ass."

Angrily, Donnell laid it on the trunk of the car, this matter now to be resolved, but likely too late for Marquie.

"What's going on?" Lucius asked.

"Downstairs, in the wine cellar," Donnell gasped. With a flash of movement, he grabbed his weapon and ran for the door. Easily, he ignored the warning shot fired into the air.

At the bottom of the basement stairs, he heard Peter's voice above Marquie's moaning. An instant later, he stood at

the door to see her body crumpled on the floor. His entire body swelled with a sense of the fortitude his Master often spoke of. "Right here, you mother fucker," he demanded.

Peter swung around, his eyes burning with some supernatural glow as if in his mind, he felt omniscient. His vicious stare trained on Donnell as his fingers arced into claws. A cackling laughter swelled into the room, a laughter that had rung in Donnell's head for twelve years. It was filled with such mockery, such temptation. It was a plea to kill him.

"You can't do it, can you?" Peter said laughing.

Trembling, Donnell released the safety. The sounds of officers upstairs securing the site swelled in his head and returned him to murder scenes he would never forget. The bodies of beautiful women slashed open like livestock congealed into a force of pure power. His finger curled around the trigger.

"You've been chasing me in your nightmares for twelve years," Peter grinned. "Running, turning over every rock, thinking you were looking for Keith Landry. I would hear you thrashing at night, the old man's voice trying to soothe your wretched agony. Here I am," Peter tempted, as he stretched his arms out to form a cross. "All you need to do is pull the trigger."

The first foot of an officer glanced the basement staircase with the subtlety of a summer cloud. It was an imperceptible sound, yet Donnell heard it clearly. The next tread creaked a little, but his distraction was found in his Mistress. The aching sound of her pain as she awoke, stirred within him.

"Oh she's alive," Peter declared. "But not for long. You see, you will never have her."

The thought of leaving Marquie, of Marquie leaving him obliterated all else. Every muscle in his body tightened and he raised the gun a little further. Aimed at Peter's forehead, the tension released its hold on him. His expression moderated to something mechanical, something that relayed he needed only a command to obey.

Peter's expression turned to horror to see the change in Donnell. Donnell took a step forward, a step filled with determination. Peter grabbed a jar on the shelf and held it overhead, the closest thing to a weapon he could lay his hands on. In the background, a blurry vision of his Mistress darkened the little light in this room. Her hand rose with the broken bottle clutched in her fist.

No, Donnell told himself. This is mine. Rather than allow a wild shot to harm her, he quickly aimed the gun at Peter's genitals. Without a thought, he pulled the trigger.

The blast filled the room with echoing confusion. Another jar fell to the floor releasing a putrid odor, enough to cause convulsions. Peter's voice, tortured with pain, rose above the reverberations. As he crumbled to the floor, his hands cupping his wounds, Donnell peered at Marquie a moment. Her vision locked to him as if to say, 'Finally, I understand.' He could feel a sense of serenity wash through her as if the first twenty six years of her life melted away in his embrace. As Peter roared on the floor, rocking with his unbearable pain, Donnell's arm dropped to his side.

She was the singularly most beautiful woman he had ever seen. After all of these years, he finally understood Peter's motivation. He took only their hearts because he so desperately needed hers. Hers was a heart Peter could never be worthy of. But his was, he could see it in her gaze, in the utter longing as tears dripped through her eyes. He could feel it in the ripple of her muscles as she dropped the bottle to the floor. A tidal wave that swept through her body and swelled every sinew to stab at her heart.

So totally connected to her now, a gentle smile brightened his features. His arm straightened and caught the rhythm of Peter's rocking, a gyrating movement that spoke of nothing but uninhibited pain. Easily, his motions moved back and forth with Peter's. The barrel came to rest on Peter's forehead and together they rocked, entwined in a danse macabre, like lovers who contained nothing but hate.

The moment stretched long as Donnell stared into Marquie. Half of his body swung to Peter's rocking gait, the two of them having been so connected these past twelve years they were hardly discernable. They had become The Twins of Good and Evil, no one able to tell them apart. But the other half of his body was hopelessly connected to her. Her eyes filled with tears reminded him of some baptism long ago, when there was a promise of salvation.

The choice was now his. He could remain locked to the Alphabet Murderer in this eternal torment of defeat and impotency, or...

Slowly his arm raised as if the left half of his body was totally disconnected from the right. His left hand turned up

and held steady, his fingers stretched out to invite her, to accept her, to love her beyond forever. She had only to accept him.

Her dry lips parted as she bored into him feeling every last barrier to his love perched on the precipice. Her skin, paled by fear, rose with a lovely flush. Without another moment's hesitation, she reached out and took his hand.

The touch of her heart fired through Donnell's body feeling like lightening strikes at every muscle. He closed his eyes, the movement in the right half of his body still swaying with Peter's pain. What was there beyond this pain, a pain he had grown accustomed to, a pain he had wallowed in like a depraved maniac?

As Peter's body rolled back, Donnell's wrist cracked to pull the length of the barrel up. The end solidly planted against Peter's forehead, Donnell's inner vision could see exactly as if through a camera, see the infinite angles of a weapon held against his demon's head. He had only to pull the trigger to be free.

Filling the width and breadth of the threshold, preventing any others from entering, Captain Lucius Sullivant watched the body of the Alphabet Murderer tumble backwards and sprawl out. The hand fell on a long-dead heart as if groping for the goddess who lived within. The perpetrator of this murder stood with the woman enveloped in his clutch.

As he watched Donnell and Marquie cling to each other, he ordered, "Get Landry out of the bed and lock him up for the attempted murder of a court official. And call the crime lab."

Slowly, Donnell's right arm stretched long holding the grip by two fingers. Donnell was surrendering.

Quickly, Lucius moved forward and snatched the gun from Donnell's grip. By the collar of Donnell's shirt, he tore Donnell from Marquie's grip and turned him. For a long moment, he peered into Donnell, his other hand clutched to Donnell's shoulder. And then he slipped the weapon into Donnell's holster.

"You'll need to make a statement," the Captain warned.

Donnell stepped back a pace and reached into his pocket for a cigarette. He held the flame to the end and inhaled deeply. His eyes rolled up to lock to his Captain. Exhaling a cloud of smoke, he whispered, "I think I already have."

Chapter Twenty Five

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Once again seated in the front row of the chapel, Marquie held to Donnell's hand. Dutifully, she rose as the casket moved past her vision and followed the processional. Standing erect in the late summer sun, she stood quietly as the coffin slid into the hearse. The door of the vehicle closed and Donnell pulled her away.

Perched in the front seat of the limo, her treasure by her side, she peered playfully at him. "I think the first thing we need to do is get us a smaller car."

He laughed a little as he turned to her shimmering countenance. "A smaller car?"

"Yeah, you know, something like a Corvette."

His laughter ruptured. "A Corvette. Your father would puke."

Quietly she nodded. "How about a Porsche or a Lamborghini?"

"Ooo, Lamborghini," he repeated slowly as he he'd suffered a skull fracture at the thought of it.

"What do you think we ought to do?" she asked with the pout of a Princess.

From her side of the car, she heard, "I'll tell you what I think you ought to do." Quickly, she turned to see Jeff and Melissa happily holding hands.

"Hey, you two," Marquie said grinning broadly.

"Mistress," Melissa said quietly with a flirtatious smile.

Jeff leaned over to grin at Donnell and stroke Marquie's cheek. "I think you ought to come to dinner with us," he announced. "And then, if I understand correctly, the Bureau of Dungeon Inspection wants to make a visit tonight."

"The Bureau of Dungeon Inspection?" Donnell laughed. "And I suppose you're the Director of said Bureau?"

With a wink at Marquie, Jeff said, "Absolutely. Oh and hey, Melissa got a call a few minutes ago. Matt just came out of a coma. And he's not in as bad a shape as they previously thought."

"Oh, that's fabulous," Marquie said wholly relieved. The good judge was one who wouldn't have to die to protect her. "Give him a kiss for me and tell him I'll see him tomorrow."

"Yes, Mistress," Melissa offered as she raised Marquie's hand to her lips.

"Jeff," Donnell interrupted. "Give me a couple of hours, will 'ya?"

Thoroughly amused, Jeff said, "Take three, buddy. We'll see you then. But I've got one quick question, Marquie." He crouched low beside of the car to peer into her. "Something that's been bugging me. Where are the Dom's diaries?"

With a broad smile, Marquie held up her hand to shield her eyes from the sun. "I buried them," she whispered respectfully. "With Daddy."

A shiver washed up Donnell's spine to know that the diaries and their contents were safe now. That they lay at rest with his precious Master. That the only person to have read them was Marquie.

Jeff nodded. "You just tore out the pages we would need to bust Peter. And then you saved us the trouble of doing it ourselves. You took him down for us."

Gently smiling, she kissed the tips of her fingers and tossed it to Jeff. Rather than confirm or deny his suspicions, she said, "Later." To divide herself from this inquisition, she rolled up the window.

Filled with curiosity, Jeff led Melissa away from the car toward his own, wondering if he'd been played all the way through this by an exquisite Dominatrix.

Quietly, Marquie turned to Donnell to see an expression of relief glowing through his features. "I don't want to burst your bubble, but having a party tonight is not a very good idea," she insisted.

He turned the key to start the engine and dropped the lever into Drive. "Why shouldn't we, baby? Peter had a party for your father. I think we ought to have one for him."

Stunned by his response, she laughed a little. He's right, she thought. Hopelessly in love with him, she giggled as the car lurched forward. Daddy, I hope you can join us tonight. How much fun we could have had disciplining our slaves together!

The procession turned into the main driveway, but Donnell continued on to the back of the property. A moment later, he pulled into the garage and leapt out of the car. With a wildness in his expression, he jumped onto the hood and then off the other side. Quickly, he pulled her out of the car and lifted her into his arms. With the conviction of a madman, he kicked the door into the house open.

"But if you're asking what I think we ought to do...?" he growled playfully as he dropped her on the bed. Feeling a freedom he'd never known, he threw off his jacket and tore at his tie. His shirt rumbled to the floor and he kicked his pants away. Before her, he stood naked listening to her laughter.

Her eyes glittered with a soft, delicate light. "Right here, right now," she commanded.

Obeying as only a precious slave would or could, he grasped her ankles and pulled her toward him. But he didn't have to force her legs apart. They were already open to receive him.

His body dropped on top of her and his cheek slid across the soft flesh of her face. "But you're a virgin," he whispered, reticent to take her and hurt her somehow.

Tears sprang into her eyes at the thought of it. An image of the coffin in the cemetery, glowing in the noon day sun and perhaps, purifying the contents, soothed her. The word 'virgin' echoed softly like the melody calling the faithful to vespers. "Virgin," she whispered, her lips curled to his ear. "I am now," she offered with a sigh of relief. For the first time in her life, she could surrender to the passion of a man.

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