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HER ALPHA MALE

Lillith Payne

EROTIC ROMANCE



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DEDICATION

For my husband, my alpha male.

HER ALPHA MALE

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Chapter One

Woodstock, New York, 1962

Standing naked before the full-length mirror in her dressing area, Angela wondered what Royce would see. It had been three years since they'd seen each other, her grandmother's funeral not conducive to allowing them a stolen intimate moment. She'd come to terms with her attraction years ago, deciding on her birthday after he'd kissed her with a raw passion she never knew could exist, she'd accept whatever interest he showed in her and wouldn't push for anything more. The cliché was bad enough. She had the hots for her older brother's best friend. Now, as an adult, she wanted him to see her as she was, not the chubby eight-year-old he had met the first time Tony brought him home on leave and not the gawky sixteen-year-old with braces.

She brushed out her brunette curls to a soft bounce and left them loose as she often did now instead of the tight bun or braid she'd always reverted to. Her makeup was understated at best- a little powder, mascara, and lip gloss. Still more makeup than she'd ever worn while living at home, she was still in her personal comfort zone. Her jeans smoothed up long, toned legs and fit to perfection with the help of a tailor who knew how alter clothing. Her once-baggy dungarees and her brother's cast-off work shirts were things of the past. When she had left the family home in Brooklyn, she had allowed herself to let go of their low expectations and to experiment. Now, she stood proud and tall, content with the woman who blossomed in the tiny house in the woods. She smoothed her hand over the front of her vest and let it drop to her crotch.

Her lips pulsed at the thought of Royce, at the memory of how he'd pulled her inside Nonnie's pantry during the party, of how he kissed her, and of how it had opened a doorway to heaven and hell. She could still remember how his touch warmed her, excited her and made her want more. Even after turning twenty-one, her minimal dating was heavily regulated by her overbearing father, and his choice of suitable companions left a lot to be desired. Not one of her dates had sexually excited her. Not one of them, fearful of the mighty Vito and his wrath, had dared to try to touch her. Royce hadn't cared or hadn't thought about it.

He had been watching her most of the night, making her feel a static in her belly like never before. He had deep brown eyes that drilled through her and brown hair when his military cut let it show. He'd grabbed her wrist, pulled her into the darkened space, and pushed her back against the door to keep it closed. He hadn't spoken. He had simply dropped his mouth over hers and started to explore her.

Angela could remember the exact moment when she had relaxed against his chest, had tentatively moved her hands to his wide shoulders, had tested his firmness with the tips of her fingers. She had opened to his insistent tongue and had groaned deeply when he ignited something inside her she'd only read about. The heat started with his lips, moved through his tongue and shot directly to her crotch. One large hand held her head angled while his other explored her back and buttocks. He'd stroked her with his hand as he stroked her with his kiss, Angela shifted against the rapidly growing hardness pulsing at her belly. His hand found her breast, and he sighed into her mouth while he teased her nipple to fullness. When it budded in his grasp, he moaned a second time.

"Oh, Angela," was the only thing he'd said during their time in the pantry.

The rest of the time, he silently taught her to spar against his tongue, to suck him into her mouth, to taste him, all of which triggered a response pressed against her. Only when she dropped her hand to touch him did he pull back, his one hand still locked around her breast, his other still threaded through her hair. His eyes were wide and he pulled away, turning his back on her momentarily. He'd cleared his throat and turned back, his finger running along her bruised lip. Royce had leaned down and kissed her lightly before taking her shoulders and moving her gently from the door.

His index finger ran along her bottom lip one last time, and Angela remembered the power she felt when sucking it between her lips while her other hand found him throbbing against her palm. The startled look on his face was ingrained in her memory. Noise in the dining room made him pull away quickly, and she silently cursed the intrusion. He slowly opened the door and slid out.

It was two years before she saw him again. Now, he was due for the weekend, her houseguest. Angela had been thinking of delicious ways to make him welcome for the two weeks she'd know he was coming. In a few hours, she'd know what time and distance had done to them both.

She was no longer the shy girl in baggy clothes under her father's thumb. She had blossomed into an independent woman who knew her mind and body. She'd come a long way since that day in the pantry, and she wondered if Royce would appreciate it. Foremost in her mind was being able to share it with Royce. A chill ran through her, budded her nipples, and she didn't resist the instinct to use her own fingers to tug at them several times and reluctantly stopping before she got herself all worked up.

* * * *

Turning into the driveway, he took one last deep breath, a smile forming on his lips as he read her name on the mailbox. It had been a mistake to come. He'd known it all along but hadn't stopped the process. Wanting to see for himself that she was settled and on track was a good excuse. All he had to do was get through the next forty-eight hours, and he'd be on his way, far away. He didn't know where yet, but he knew it wouldn't be here.

The property he'd driven up to see was in worse shape than he'd imagined. While within his power to rejuvenate the old farm, he knew now that it wasn't a place he could settle. This afternoon, after leaving the agent's office, he thought he'd caught a glimpse of her. His stomach had become unsettled, and his hands had gone clammy until the woman across the street turned toward the man she was walking with and he saw it wasn't Angela. That was when he'd made up his mind not to buy the place. He'd always considered himself a strong and competent man, but the idea of seeing her with another man hadn't entered into his mind, ever. He'd been wrong to omit that line of thinking.

He also knew that if she ever found out about Ram McCloud and Agnes White, he'd never be able to face her or Tony again. At the time he was drafting the characters, they seemed safe enough, the distance buying him anonymity. Beyond embarrassed if she realized, he'd have shown his hand and wouldn't be able to handle the consequences. It would be best to just get the visit over with and move to the West Coast where temptation wasn't at his fingertips.

Her house wasn't what he was expecting. The dirt road wound through a wooded tract, and in the distance, he could see a small A-frame home built on pilings. Glancing around, he saw the view of the mountains the height accommodated. He'd had mixed reports of how Angela was actually living and, knowing how her family could arrange perspectives to fit their needs, had tried to give her the benefit of the doubt. Apparently, their needs were to assume that she couldn't take care of herself when he knew she'd been taking care of all of them for years.

It had been automatic, she and her grandmother running the big old house in Brooklyn. He still wasn't sure how she had actually managed to get out, but he'd find out now. This visit, facilitated by his friend Tony, who just happened to be Angela's oldest brother, was supposed to be a quick hello to reinforce to Tony and himself that she was indeed managing on her own. The home looked intact, its cedar siding and roof weathered to a pale grey. It sat across from a newer-looking building, smaller with a second story. A garage, he assumed, from the large sliding door. Following the road to the front of the house, he estimated there had to be two acres of lawn surrounding the structures that faded into wooded land.

In the distance, from the tree line, a figure came toward him, a large brown pony romping beside her. Her! It couldn't be. Not his Angela. The tips of his fingers tingled with anticipation of touching her again, and his mind forced the idea back. Her brown hair was flying loose in the light wind, and dark glasses covered her eyes. She had a bulky jacket over

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extremely tight jeans and boots. He managed to extricate himself from the rented car with several oaths muttered.

As she neared, he saw the brown animal start toward him at a flat-out run. Bracing himself for the animal's impact, it came to an unsteady halt several yards away from him when it heard the ear-piercing whistle. The animal was torn between obeying its master's command and investigating their visitor. The large tail thumped against the dirt, which sent a small cloud of dust into the air.

He didn't attempt to pet the Great Dane. Instead, he tried to steady his nerves as she approached. His erection grew as she neared, and he willed it away and, pulling his jacket close around him, was thankful it was cold enough to still be wearing it. It happened every time he'd seen her in the last years. That was part of the reason he'd stayed away when he'd had opportunities to visit the family with Tony.

A passing image of her reaching hesitantly toward him with her unsteady hands, of her turning his face toward her as she boldly kissed him that New Year's Eve passed through him.

She'd been just eighteen and slightly tipsy on Vito's homemade wine. He'd accepted her untutored kiss and refrained from holding her against him as instinct dictated. Knowing her whole family was in the house, just a room away, had kept him in check. She'd wanted more from him that night, and he'd rejected her. The sad look in her eyes haunted him for years. The next morning, over late coffee with her brothers, he'd waited for one of them to say something, but nobody did. Angela hadn't come down that day until much later, her eyes definitely averted from his for the rest of his visit. That was ten years ago. He'd just turned thirty-eight, and she was now twentyeight. Deep inside, he wondered who had finally taught her to kiss, and the question annoyed him.

"Hi, welcome," she said as she neared, pausing to hook her fingers under the collar of the large dog still beating its tail on the ground.

From several feet away, he saw Angela for the first time in two years. She'd aged he decided but the direction was incredible. As she'd told him once before, she'd decide when her time came to blossom. She had other priorities.

"This is Prima," she continued, struggling to hold back the dog from jumping on him.

Her voice lowered, and he realized she was commanding the dog in a foreign language. The animal, torn between its master's instruction and its need to investigate, pleaded for release with her sad brown eyes. Angela won the battle after several rounds, and she finally looked up.

"I'm so glad you're here. It's been ages since I've seen you."

Their gazes met and held, too many unanswered questions hanging in the air between them, her glasses shielding her secrets. He bent to acknowledge the dog and only after several moments of intense investigation did the animal, obviously bored with him, wander away.

"It is a dog, right?" He tried to gain control of his cock and his emotions. He wanted to swallow her up against him but didn't dare move. Only after the dog deserted them did she approach him and pull him into her warmth without hesitation.

"Royce," she whispered as he lost all restraint and held her tighter.

His name had been whispered in the same tone as the day he'd crossed the line with her. At the moment, he hadn't cared, had only wanted to touch her and now, again, felt the same way. He knew he should release her and didn't. He'd dreamt about her spicy scent and didn't refrain from taking several deep breaths to reinforce the memory.

With her face buried against his chest, he heard her say, "I've missed you."

A small groan worked its way up his throat, and he resisted the urge to pull her lips to his. He waited until she'd released him and tugged off her sunglasses. Her face was bright. Her eyes were still a clear chocolate brown. Her hair was shorter then he remembered, and the severe braid she'd always worn gone. Red and gold highlights bounced around her head as the late-day sun died around them. She didn't turn from his open appraisal. She seemed to be studying him, too.

"Let's get you inside," she finally said, breaking their reunion.

Royce moved to the small trunk and easily lifted out his travel bag, while unable to resist the urge to watch her walk a few steps ahead of him. She'd been talking, but her words weren't registering. All that did was her tightly clad bottom several steps ahead. With each movement, the denim pulled and hugged her long legs. He'd known that she was built, had found out for himself that fateful afternoon, yet he had never seen her display herself when she was around the family. She had always worn boxy sweaters and loose pants or skirts with clunky shoes. He'd never considered her feminine until the layers had been stripped away, and he had no choice but to accept she was female.

The first thing that struck him as he entered her new home were the smells, tomato sauce with basil and oregano simmered on the stove, instantly bringing him back to the Brooklyn house. His stomach rumbled, but she didn't seem to notice. The living room was small but well appointed, a large, river-stone fireplace centered on the side wall with kindling and small logs waiting for a match. Beside it, wood was stacked four foot high on both sides, which would ensure many hours of burning without going outside onto the second-story deck to replenish it.

The space was two stories high, light spilling in through the two-story glass wall he'd seen from the road. Two sofas and a comfortable chair anchored the right side of the room while a large dining table sat across from it. Behind was an open galley kitchen, and a small bar added extra counter space. Gold colored appliances complemented the sun washed walls. He noted the hallway and assumed her bedroom and bath was behind it. In the far corner, a narrow, circular, wrought iron staircase led up to a loft area.

"It's great, Angela," he said and meant it. She'd taken the time to light the fire and was unwinding a long scarf from her throat as he took a second look around. The walls were a subdued orange with bright white trim. Mostly left natural, the outside view was more artwork than anything she could have hung on the walls.

"I'm comfortable here," she started, turned, and laughed. "Did you expect I'd bought a hovel?" Her laugh struck him on too many levels. "Your room's through here," she said as she headed toward the small hallway, while unbuttoning her heavy coat with graceful fingers.

Following, he glanced into the open doorway she told him was his bath and to the rear, into a small but functional bedroom. A double bed with a pale blue down comforter was accented by stacks of pillows. Nightstands stood guard on either side of it, and a lamp was placed on each. Across the room was a small bureau with an oval mirror above it. On that bureau was a dark blue glass vase, with wild flowers overflowing from it. "Let me know if there's anything you need," she began from the doorway and stopped when he looked. Automatically, she bundled the jacket over her arms and blocked his view of her ample chest.

How Royce managed to keep her eye he'd never know, only that this was Angela and she deserved his respect.

"Where do you sleep, isn't this your room?" His look drilled through her and she just smiled, shaking her head. She relaxed as she spoke and went back to folding the bulky wool. His breath caught as she turned and saw her profile. Her outfit was completely respectable, only he wasn't used to seeing Angela dressed this way. A simple man tailored shirt under a downy colored suede vest did nothing to hide her shapely figure. Her waist narrowed and smoothed into wider hips. Her belly was still flat, which added to the illusion of larger breasts swaying above. The denim covering her legs moved with each breath she took.

"No, I use the loft. The view is incredible."

He wondered if she'd invite him up to see it but decided that would be dangerous territory.

"Get settled while I get us a snack. What would you like to drink? I have wine, beer and a few assorted bottles of hard liquor."

"Is it Vito's wine?" he teased, and she smiled.

"I have a bottle of his, if you'd like, but I also have a dry white."

Neither of them acknowledged his crack about Vito's wine. That was the excuse he'd used for taking advantage of her.

"I'll try the white," he said and didn't stop watching her until she disappeared down the hallway.

Shaking his head, Royce knew he was in trouble, big trouble. He unzipped his case and used the bath to freshen up. After splashing cold water on his face, he thought to shave and realized the implications it could bring. When he managed to get his mind and hormones in control, he found her in the kitchen. She'd ditched the suede vest and now wore a full apron to protect her white shirt. Of course, the fact it was tied around her narrow waist only accentuated her hourglass form. She busied herself with taking out a large oval plate from the refrigerator and pulled back the cloth to reveal thin slices of prosciutto ham wrapped around long spears of asparagus and several kinds of melon.

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Instantly, his mouth watered, and he accepted the glass of wine she offered. Small green and white checked cloth napkins were waiting beside a stack of plates. Pulling out one of the bar stools tucked under it, he used the food to move his mind away from Angela.

For the next few hours, they managed to get along as they always had, just two friends who hadn't seen each other in a long time. They talked about the family and her brother George's new baby girl. Apparently, he'd been released from his accounting job, and he and his wife, Gloria, had moved back to Brooklyn to the family home, and Vito. They joked about three generations again living together and while she didn't say anything negative aloud, he knew what he was thinking, better them than her.

She was loading the dishwasher, her prized possession she told him, and he found himself back at the bar talking as she cleared the mess for their supper of chicken cacciatore.

"I can't remember when I enjoyed a meal this much, thank you for cooking for me Angela."

"You're welcome. I still like to cook although I've had to learn portioning. That was another reason to get Prima," she joked.

"Prima, where did that name come from?" He glanced to the large bulk of sleeping dog guarding the doorway.

"She was first born of the litter, and she was my first dog. It just seemed to fit. And I didn't want to end up calling her Spike or Rover." She laughed easily as she wiped the counter. "Coffee and dessert now, or would you rather relax a while?"

"Coffee maybe, but dessert, definitely later. I'm stuffed."

She hesitated only to take one last look around the space before setting up the peculator, moving easily to the cabinet, and taking out two packages of coffee, offering him a choice. He opted for the regular coffee as opposed to the strong Italian coffee usually served at the end of meals in Brooklyn.

Chapter Two

Settled before the fire, she'd dropped into the club chair allowing him to choose between the sofas. They managed to get through the evening, through a rich version of her famous *cassata* cake, and were now snacking on Jordan almonds.

He talked easily about retiring from the Air Force but was hesitant about what he'd do with his future. Angela discussed the research she did for grant applications with little enthusiasm, although apparently it paid enough to afford her this home.

"What are your plans for tomorrow?" she asked, and he automatically told her about a meeting set for eleven. Royce knew he'd take a second look at the old place just to get him away from here. He was supposed to stay two nights with her, and he wondered if he should just up and leave after breakfast. It might be the only way to stay sane. Changing the subject, he asked what he wanted to know.

"How in the world did you get Vito to let you move out, let alone move up here to the mountains?" Reclining on the soft furniture, he pushed back into the cushions, and watched her watch him for a long time before she let a smile tilt her lips and answered.

"Between us?" she smiled at his slight nod. "Well, it was a fait accompli," she said before letting her story unfold. "I gathered everyone at Sunday supper, and when the time was right, I dropped my bomb. Papa had invited Chad to supper, again, and I almost chickened out. But he looked so miserable I decided to let us both off the hook. So after everyone was served, I proposed a toast."

"To your newfound independence," Royce interjected, wondering just how much independence she'd really gotten and in what directions.

"Well, it started out that way, but Papa jumped the gun and assumed I was announcing Chad and I were engaged." She laughed. "Poor Chad, he

was so startled. It took a while, but I settled everyone down and told them Papa was wrong. As you can image, that didn't go over too well on its own. Papa's never wrong, sometimes misinformed, but never wrong! Anyway, I told them Chad and I had decided we weren't right for each other and that I was moving out of Brooklyn."

"Did the ceiling fall from his yelling?"

"Almost. I managed to get across I'd gotten a prime job doing grant research and felt the time was right to be independent."

"Vito didn't agree?"

"No. I never expected him to. He assumed I'd marry Chad because he picked him for me and I was getting kind of long in the tooth, remember, twenty-six and not married." She smiled again. "Anyway, I'd already bought the house here, had it set up and ready to move the last of my clothes into. Vito decided I'd gone crazy, and he'd get his lawyer to get me out of the whole mess. Let's just say he was very angry when he realized I'd owned the place for several months without telling anyone."

"Why?"

"Why didn't I tell them or why wait?"

"Both. I was with Tony when the calls and letters started. They pretty much thought you'd gone around the bend."

"That's why. I wanted to be able to come home here and have it intact. I didn't want them to see the amount of work I'd had done if they followed me up that night. So I'd hired a local contractor to put in a second bath upstairs and to do some general fixing up.

"When I left the supper table that night, I left the family home for good. I got in my car and drove here, home, to my home. And while it may not be what Vito or the boys would choose for me or themselves, it's what I wanted, where I wanted it!" After a pause, she added, "My getting a driver's license, and buying a car only added icing to the cake."

He liked the glint in her eye, the small independence meaning so much, the pride she felt. "I think you made a wise decision. I wondered if you'd ever get out of that house."

"So did I. Nonnie inspired me."

Angela averted her eyes from him and made a process of getting them fresh cups of coffee. Along with it came a cheese assortment with grapes and apples. He was stuffed but managed to pull off a few of the tart green grapes from their vine. By the time she was seated, her eyes were clear again, whatever memory long gone.

Royce used the time to remember Nonnie's funeral. He and Tony had been stationed in different parts of the world when she died, but he had managed to make it back for the service and the wake. Back at the house in her long black dress and boxy black sweater with her hair tightly pulled back into a bun, he'd watched from the outside how Vito treated her. Angela was obviously upset about losing the grandmother who'd raised her after her mother passed. Hearing Vito boast that now his Angela would take over the kitchen made Royce angry. Besides, what else did she have to do with her life since she was apparently unmarriageable.

He'd been hanging back in the doorway to the kitchen, and she'd been clearing debris from the dining room table when the statement was made. Royce had watched her freeze for several seconds before she managed to continue her task and made a quick exit to the kitchen. There were several aunts, cousins, and friends in the space, and he knew they'd take care of the mess. He'd moved behind her as she started to put yet another round of dishes in the sink had taken her by the hand, and guided her out into the small yard, away from the crowd.

She had managed to make it outside and down the driveway before leaning on the side of the house and losing control. Royce remembered pulling her against him and holding her while she cried. He knew tears were for Nonnie and for the future Vito projected. Royce had held her for a long time, while he tugged the pins from her hair and pulled it loose around her shoulders. He'd tried to soothe her but ultimately just held her. When Angela managed to get control of her emotions, she ventured a look at him, her eyes still glassy.

"God, Royce, I'll die if that's what my life turns into."

"Angela, you're a grown woman, decide what you want to do." He'd gotten a laugh over that knowing her father felt he owned her until handing her to a man of his choice in marriage.

"If only it were that simple," she whispered and, obviously embarrassed by her emotional outburst, retreated inside.

Royce followed but didn't find her among the dwindling crowd. Instinctively, he'd gone up to the third floor and found her in her room staring out the window to the postage-stamp-size backyard. "Angela."

She'd turned, and not for the first time, he had been struck by how beautiful she truly was. With her hair down and the bulky sweater gone, she was lovely. Why did none of her family see how beautiful she truly was?

"Royce, I'll be all right. I've just got a headache, thanks for caring," she'd said and turned her back on him. Instinct had him crossing the room and pulling her to him a second time. He'd decided this was to comfort her but knew deep inside he did it for himself, his own need to feel her against him one more time. "Angela."

"I'm all right," she murmured against his chest. "Just all these silly emotions."

"Not silly, you loved Nonnie. You're allowed to mourn her."

She'd finally let go and cried openly, while holding her against the body-racking sobs. He felt her pain in too many directions and knew he couldn't change any of it. Composed finally, she'd leaned against him for a long time. Royce had slipped an arm under her legs and moved her to the twin bed across the room.

Still a child's room, he realized. She was a grown woman, and she was still surviving in a room that was determined to keep her from aging. He'd gently laid her on the bed and sat beside her smoothing back the brunette waves from her face. He'd stayed with her until she drifted to sleep, having pulling a knitted blanket from the back of a chair to cover her with. He'd moved the chair closer to the bed and sat heavily as he watched her sleep, studied her and couldn't for the life of him understand how this family, that had welcomed him with open arms, couldn't see the woman she'd turned into.

He'd whispered, "I love you, angel," and had been stunned when she had echoed his words. He'd always called her angel affectionately, only he was wise enough to use it only when they were alone. He always got a smile out of her, and usually she blushed, averting her eyes from his. She was young by years, he knew, but mature in her soul, with Nonnie's wisdom embedded in her.

* * * *

Standing behind the sofa watching him, Angela wondered what he was thinking. She kept reminding herself that he had a whole other life in the Air Force she knew nothing about, which probably included women or a woman, and she didn't want to think about him touching someone else the way he'd touched her so long ago. When he shook himself back to the present, he automatically reached hand to her. She'd leaned over him from behind and encircled him for just a moment.

"Where were your thoughts just now?"

"Back in Brooklyn," he told her without hesitation.

She pulled herself away and moved across the room. Stirring the embers and settling on a few large logs kept her occupied for a bit and gave her time to bite back the question she wanted to ask. Which time, she'd of inquired, but was afraid he'd be honest and tell her. She glanced at the clock on the mantle and saw it was nearing midnight.

"I'm going to take Prima for a last walk," she said, quickly moving across the space and grabbing a jacket as she left him alone in the warm room. With the outside lights on, the perspective of the room changed, and she wondered if he felt like he was ensconced in the treetops, safe and away from the rest of the world and their interfering wants the way she did in the space.

Hesitating to end the night, she bustled around the kitchen for a few minutes. When nothing left to be done, she finally asked if anything else she could get him for the night.

He'd thanked her for her hospitality and moved down the hallway. She took a quick shower and, stretching out in her bed, listened as he moved about below her. She wondered what, if anything, he slept in, and the idea made her groan as several different scenarios played in her mind. All of them ultimately had her naked under him with him deeply embedded inside her.

Chapter Three

Royce lay in her guest room stretched naked under the comforter, with his hands propped behind his head. He could visualize her as if she stood before him now. The christening of Vito's first grandchild was a huge deal in the family. He and Tony both had managed to get home for the occasion. The same general chaos that always went with the household and so many people was comfortable. She'd made a huge breakfast for her father, three brothers, sister-in-law, and him. Watching from her seat as Angela took control of the meal, he'd seen that Nonnie was aging. He'd known she wouldn't be with them much longer and wondered what Angela would do when she finally passed. He never saw Angela stop to eat, only sip from her ever-present coffee cup.

When everyone was served, she'd excused herself to get ready. It still astonished him to this day that every one of the men left the table and walked away, leaving her all the clean up when she returned. The bathrooms on the first and second floors were occupied, so he slipped up to the converted attic that had been her sanctuary. It held Angela's bedroom and a bathroom. Nonnie had moved downstairs to a converted den when age prevented her from using the stairs. Her old room across the hall from Angela's was now empty, he'd slept there last night, so close to Angela yet so far away. He hadn't expected to sleep with her so close yet he'd drifted off easily, soundly for a long uninterrupted span.

Royce wasn't used to sleeping that heavily, yet her fragrance filled the whole third level, as if welcoming him. The first time he had smelled the spicy perfume was on her birthday, and he'd wondered if that was what had pushed him over the line and had him dragging her into the pantry. It was the same the day of the christening, her perfume was like a call slipping from the steamy bathroom and inviting him in. He'd grabbed his shaving kit and heard the radio going even before he approached the closed door. Closing his eyes, Royce remembered the turmoil he'd felt as he pushed open the door in hope of a glimpse of the woman he'd seen maturing over the years.

She didn't scream or try to cover herself. Instead, standing before the sink, a brush in one hand, she simply watched him for long seconds. He'd stopped breathing at the sight of her. Angela's hair, swinging past her waist, was longer than he'd ever imagined. She stood tall and slim in a lacy pink bra and matching panties. A slip of the same material was folded on the sink top. He remembered licking his lips automatically as he saw how firm and high her breasts were, fighting to overflow the lace confinement.

For some reason he'd always pictured her in stodgy white undergarments with no feminine style. This reminded him of his tour in France where women understood undergarments were as important as their outer dress. Her belly was flat, and her hips slightly wider. Angela had amazing legs, long and toned, made for wrapping around a man's waist as she accepted him into her body.

She'd studied him and he always wondered if her open appraisal was a dare or invitation. His erection appeared with the first glimpse of her and pulsed with each breath he took. Turning and putting the brush aside, Angela finally broke the stand-off. She'd picked up the slip, let it fall open under her touch, and, with the silk swaying before her, slowly walked toward him in the doorway. She never said a word. Instead, she stopped several inches from his bare chest. He could feel the heat from her body. His hand automatically came up to her cheek, and he ran a finger along her fine bone structure.

"Damn it, Angela, you're beautiful."

"And that surprises you, Royce?"

Her words had been a definite advance and he pulled a breath as her fingers lifted toward him. She draped the slip around his neck and let both hands run along his shoulders and down his stomach, meeting just above the waistband of his pants. Knowing that he was erect, she didn't acknowledge his hardness, rather she let her fingers dance over his skin several more times, while her eyes never left his. Her soft hands skimmed over his belly and traced the line of curling hairs that disappeared below his pants.

Her Alpha Male

"You're not so bad yourself, Royce." A blusterous spurt of voices bellowed from below them, and she dropped her hands. "Bathroom's all yours," she managed to whisper as she slowly moved past him.

He'd stood stunned as she'd pulled the slip from his neck, the material drifting over his back, leaving a chill through his body that ended in his cock. He'd wanted to catch her off guard, to see for himself what she hid away so effectively. Now that he knew, it was worse.

The rest of the day, she'd been quiet, keeping herself busy and taking care of family and guests, and it bothered him to hear her brothers George and Raymond tease her that one day she might have a child of her own. He'd been proud of her when her automatic response was that she still had Vito and Ray to take care of, they were children enough for now.

"Maybe when you both finally grow up." She defused the situation with a laugh as she exited the room.

Tony had been listening to the exchange, and shook his head. He hadn't said a word to defend her or to discourage his younger brothers. Royce had been an only child, wanted and loved by his military father and his mother who traveled to every corner of the globe with them. He'd never lived in a home like this and had known the attraction of it was the stability. He'd had an amazing childhood, had lived in foreign countries and several areas of the states. But he'd only known rented housed and huts, never a solid brick home waiting for his return.

That afternoon he'd become disgusted with them all, himself included. He remembered a conversation he'd had with Tony years before when he asked him why he didn't stand up for his sister? Tony had only told him it would be worse to interfere. Angela had to learn to stand up for herself. Apparently, she was learning to do just that.

After returning from the church ceremony, Angela had orchestrated a meal for all the family and what seemed like the entire neighborhood. He'd watched her smile and laugh, accept compliments about her cooking and stand tall when someone patted her on the shoulder and told her that one day it would be her child they christened. All through it, she'd held her head high.

He'd wanted to tear out the pins holding all that beautiful sable hair in such a tight bun. He'd wanted to strip away the loose jumper that hid her body from view. He'd wanted to take her away and show her how he'd touch her, how he'd slowly take her pink slip from her body. He did none of these things; instead, he accepted another refill of Vito's homemade wine and sulked.

Royce had watched her cuddle the baby girl while her parents socialized and only surrendered the bundle when more food and drink were expected. Vito held court in the corner of the yard, his voice blusterous as the day progressed and the empty wine bottles appeared. As the afternoon wore on, Royce was exhausted just watching her continuous movement. When only a core group of family and friends was left, she'd slipped away. He found the kitchen empty and he glanced through the rest of the house, noting the debris and mess still needing attention.

He'd found her on the third floor, just about to pull a huge, baggy sweater over her head when he entered her room without knocking. Again, she didn't holler or complain at his intrusion. She simply stared him down.

Royce relived the moment as if it were happening right. With his belly tightening in anticipation, he'd closed her bedroom door behind him and slowly walked toward her. She'd changed from the dark jumper into dark, baggy dungarees. He couldn't stop his hand from rising to her cheek for a second time that day.

"No one would believe you hide this beautiful body under all these layers, angel."

Her tongue had slipped out to moisten her lips, but she didn't say a word. She let him take the sweater from her hands and toss it on the bed. He'd backed her against the wall and let his hands run down her arms, across her back and rest on her waist, before tugging her against him. She'd let out a small gasp but didn't move away, holding his look when his left hand held her hips against his and used his right hand to pull her hair free, which settled around her shoulders.

"You're beautiful, Angela," he'd whispered just before he kissed her. She raised her arms to his shoulders and participated in the kiss. He throbbed and knew she felt it. His hips were making small thrusting motions against her, and she'd taken his rhythm without prompting, had taken control of the kiss the way he'd taught her years earlier.

He pulled his lips from hers, and he trailed his tongue down her throat to the mound of cleavage presenting itself from the pink lace. She'd groaned when he had trailed along the line of the lace, when he found her nipple,

Her Alpha Male

already budded, hardening further at the touch of his fingers. He'd slipped the straps down her arms and sighed when she burst free to his waiting lips.

Her hands had gone to the wall behind her to steady her. Royce glanced up and saw her eyes closed, her head thrown back against the wall. He let one hand drop to tease her crotch. When she moaned again, he used both hands to pull the pants down her legs, found her juncture, and lightly stroked her. He latched onto her breast, and with each pull of his teeth, he slid his finger against the pink triangle of silk that covered her. She was hot to his touch, moist and ready.

If it had been any other woman, he'd have taken her against the wall with no second thoughts. But he hadn't. He'd gone back to the heaven of her firm breasts and stroked her deeper, wanting to give her something rather take. That had been a first for Royce. In the past, women were for entertainment and fun.

Angela had been different. He had wanted to be different. Angela sighed and used her hands to pull his head taking his mouth in a kiss that made his fingers move quicker. She'd taken his free hand and put it breast before closing her fingers over his in a hint of want.

"God, Angela, I shouldn't be here," he'd said when her head fell back as his hand stroked her with a different touch.

"Royce," was all she'd managed to whisper before pulling him back to her mouth. She'd empowered him by saying his name. Her breath came in short pants of need. His fingers brought her to a climax as he suckled her breast. He let his finger slip under the now-wet fabric, and found it impossible not to slip between her lips. She was so tight, even to just his finger. She pulsed around him, and he felt his cock surge at the thought of actually burying himself inside her heat.

She'd groaned louder, and he'd covered her mouth again. Royce gently probed her and kneaded her breast, all the while demanding her surrender. When she came a second time, he felt her contract around his finger and dampened it with her release.

He moved his hand gently from inside her and traced her lips with her own juices just before he licked her lips clean. Satisfied like never before, even though he was still hard and pulsing with the need of his own release, she'd relaxed against him, her head resting on his chest as she clutched his waist. He held her for a long time waiting for his hard-on to subside and for Angela to come back from her abyss.

When her hand dropped to his crotch and brushed against him, he backed away to give her room to explore him. Her small fingers clasped him and felt him pulse in her palm. Royce watched something new cover her face, a look he'd never seen before. She stroked him once, twice, and each time was rewarded with a surge. Her head dropped, and she started running her damp tongue along his chin and down his throat. She'd stopped to tease his earlobe and whispered his name only once before she moved on, still alternating with little kisses and an occasional nip while other hand unbuttoned his shirt.

Royce knew he couldn't make love to her no matter how much he wanted to, and the knowledge was reinforced when a door slammed on the lower level and voices came closer. He moved away from her touch. She had opened her eyes wide, but knowing he had no restraint left and remembering this was Angela whom he was touching, he'd already pushed her away.

Fumbling with the buttons his shirt, he backed away from her and paused only once at the door to take in the sight of her. Her hair was tousled, and her lips just hinted at bruised. Her cheeks were red with embarrassment and the touch of his kiss. The back of her hand rose to her lips and pressed against them. She was still leaning against the wall, her breasts high and full, the damp crotch of her panties pushed between her lips, her pants in a puddle at her ankles. He saw her trimmed triangle of soft sable curls glistening from his attentions.

He meant to leave but found himself covering the space between them once again. Angela watched him intently and accepted his kiss, tender this time, with passion and calm. The intensity of their earlier moment was gone. Now, he gentled against her, tasting her one last time. His hands moved to her breasts and carefully pulled the lace over her engorged nipples, his large fingers managing to pull the straps back up over her shoulder's. He dropped his head and sucked each one through the material one last time before turning and walking straight out the door.

He'd gone downstairs and straight out into the yard. It seemed a long time before he saw her again, this time she was back in the bulky clothes, her hair tightly braided down her back. If anyone noticed the slight reddening of her cheeks, no one called attention to it. He accepted another glass of Vito's wine and knew deep inside that he never should have touched her. Understood she hadn't been touched before and Tony would kill him if he ever found out. But none of it mattered. He could still taste her on his lips mixed with the wine.

He was glad the sun had gone down and the backyard was dark. For the rest of the night, he kept his distance but watched her carefully. He saw her going through the motions expected of her and wondered if she'd ever be free to explore for herself. They never spoke about it that night, even when he helped her dry the copious amounts of dishes.

She'd talked about her work in graduate school in hushed tones, Vito overhearing and adding his opinion it was a waste of time and money to continue with her classes. Nonnie and Vito had several tense words in Italian that Royce couldn't make out. Angela had turned a deaf ear to them, and Royce wanted to slap some sense into the old man. He knew he was overreacting and pulled back his temper. After all, he was a guest, and he'd already crossed an invisible line with the man's only daughter.

* * * *

He was stretched out on the floor in Nonnie's old room, naked except for his boxers, doing sit-ups. Royce figured physical exertion in this direction was his only escape. He'd heard the light tap on the door and watched it slowly open. Angela, a stack of his clean laundry in her hands, reddened as she came into the room.

"Where would you like this?"

"Angela, you didn't have to do my laundry, but thanks." Knowing he couldn't rise at the moment to take it from her, he nodded to the bed. He was surprised when she dropped down onto the mattress, an appraising look in her eye. "Angel?" His mind raced at the possibilities of her visit.

"Relax, Royce. I'm not here for seconds. Although"—she laughed again, and he liked the sound of her voice, a bit husky with a hint of danger—"I would like to talk."

Trapped by his outward indications of how her visit affected him, Royce dropped his arms over his raised knees. He nodded and waited for her to start. "I know you don't understand me, and that's all right, because deep down, I know who I am inside. The Angela that runs this house has many sides, and I choose which ones to flaunt in front of the family."

"But—"

"Look, if I'd gone downstairs this afternoon dressed in high heels and a miniskirt with my hair down and makeup on, what do you think would have happened?"

Royce laughed aloud at the idea and relaxed back, letting his weight fall onto his elbows. "What an image, Angela." They both knew his silence and open appraisal had him picturing just that. "Vito would have a heart attack, Charlie and Ray would swallow their tongues, and Tony would lock you in your room and throw away the key."

"Exactly." She dropped down onto her side, her hand propping her head. "So until I'm ready to fight that battle, it's easier to let everyone think I am what they want me to be. Why make waves now? I've got one more semester of school, and I've got to establish myself professionally."

"So in the meantime, you hide under heavy clothes and antiquated hairstyles?"

"That's one way of looking at it. The other is I choose the times I want to take my hair down and let loose. Whether you believe it or not, Royce, I do have friends and occasionally get out of Brooklyn for a night on the town."

"All right, so you're not held captive here, but..."

"Everything in its own time, Royce. If it were up to Papa, I'd be married to the man of his choice with babies by now, and college and grad school never would have happened. Those were fights I chose to take on. My physical appearance is the least of my worries at this point. If being plain makes Papa and the boys comfortable, so be it."

"Just don't waste your life, angel."

"I'm not, Royce. I may be on a different time schedule from most women my age, but I have a plan."

"God help us when it surfaces!"

She laughed and straightened into a stretch, her arm's wide over her head for several seconds. Angela dropped her arms and he watched the outline of her breasts move under the sweater. "I'm sure you'll hear!" Angela moved gracefully to the door and turned back. "Thank you for today, Royce." She closed the door behind her, and he heard the click of the door across the hall closing.

Chapter Four

Collapsing onto the floor, Royce laughed at himself. Angela had a plan, and it seemed she wasn't as rough a stone as he'd assumed. When she was done with her polishing, Royce knew she'd sparkle. He slept that night with her spicy scent on his pillow. He awoke the next morning with Angela standing beside his bed, her plaid flannel robe belted tightly around her waist.

"Morning," she started and smiled. "I've brought coffee."

"Thanks," he said, quickly pulling the sheet up over his naked form trying to hide his morning erection that popped to life the instant he recognized her. He raked his hand through his short hair and scrubbed at his face trying to wake himself. She looked different to his sleepy gaze.

"I brought you a going away present," Angela said with an odd smile.

"A present?" he managed to say and only got a nod. Angela backed away from the bed and turned her back to him. Her sable hair was gloriously loose in a cascade of soft curls down her back. He drew a breath when she dropped the robe to the ground. All Royce could see was brown hair and an extremely short patch of black leather. A long length of thigh exposed under the hem led down strong legs to spiked heels.

Slowly she turned toward him and Royce forgot to breath. Angela wore a tight white shirt that clung to every curve. The neckline scooped much too low and allowed him to peruse the tops of her breasts. The material stretched to its limits over her nipples and displayed her hardened buds proudly. She'd decided to go sans bra for full effect. The material hugged her rib cage and disappeared into the waist of the skirt. Long, straight sleeves hugged her slim arms ending at her wrists, which was exactly where the skirt ended. He realized her makeup was very different than he'd ever seen before. The woman standing before him was stunning.

Her Alpha Male

"Son of a bitch, Angela." His voice was almost breathless and his tone turned caustic. "You can't go out on the street dressed like that." His tirade started and ended with him uttering curse words mixed in with phrases like throw away the key himself and not for anyone else's eyes.

She smiled at his obvious confusion. Royce realized the exact effect she'd been going for. When he stopped talking he just shook his head and acknowledged her point. "You win, angel. I never imagined. And if you go out dressed like that, men will be falling to the sidewalk at your feet and crashing cars as they pass."

"Thank you, Royce." She stood tall and proud, full of attitude and Royce was slightly intimidated. "I just wanted you to understand I realize my potential, and I'll know when the time to assert myself is right."

"Yes, you will, Angela. I underestimated you. It won't happen again."

"I have class this morning,"

Moving quicker than Angela could, he grabbed her wrist and tugged it behind her. She was struggling to get out of his grasp when he pulled her down, over his legs, the thin sheet little coverage for his bulging hard-on. He managed to get her arm behind her, and she stopped struggling. Her skirt had ridden up her thighs, exposing her heart shaped buttocks. He didn't resist stroking her cheeks with his free hand, didn't resist pulling the silk of her panties between them, turning the material into a strip now pressed between her cheeks. With her exposed over him, he ached to touch her and ultimately did. He pinched her skin, and his cock bounced against her belly.

Without thought, he simply raised his hand a foot from her skin and let it come down, alternating sides. She let loose with a tirade of curses in English and Italian, choking back a sob that turned into a husky sigh. His erection started to pulse when his palm print appeared on her porcelain skin and he repeated the spanks several more times.

Royce didn't know how long he would have continued if she hadn't reached under her body with her free hand and grabbed his cock with her hand, fisting him tightly only several times before he lost control and shot against her belly, the sheet absorbing his fluid. Neither moved for many moments until their breathing normalized. The frenzy of lust that had started the process was banked.

Angela slowly pulled her wrist from his grip, struggled to crawl off him, coming to kneel beside him, taking his mouth under hers in a kiss that drained him and re-hardened his cock. Her mouth drew his tongue with the same rhythm her hand had fisted him. Noise below made them realize their time was up. They both stilled until Angela took the initiative.

"As I was saying, I have class this morning," Her tone was normal, but her cheeks were a bright red, the same color as her rear cheeks, thanks to his hand.

He sat forward and gave her an exasperated look. She laughed. "And I still have to change." She'd dipped gracefully, grabbed the edge of the robe, and dragged it behind her to the door.

"Angela, how am I supposed to get the image of you in a mini skirt out of my mind?" He didn't add that he had the image of her palm-stained cheeks now embedded in his mind forever.

She'd hesitated and watched him openly before letting a sly grin tip the corners of her mouth upwards. "Maybe you're not supposed to."

She'd closed the door quietly after her, and Royce had dropped back onto the bed with a loud groan. The image of her that morning had been burned into his brain; recalled often, usually at the most inappropriate times; and each time brought his cock to life.

* * * *

She lay awake in her large bed and thought about Royce being so close. She relived the way he'd kissed her in the pantry and sighed as she remembered the way he'd loved her after the christening. He'd freed Angela that day, although he probably never realized it. She wasn't about to tell him, just yet. What he had done was make her realize that she was a normal woman who needed to get away from her meddling family before she wound up married to the man her father chose.

After he left, she finally made up her mind to change her life. No matter how it turned out, she knew she had to try for her own sanity. Her telling him she had a plan was true, only she needed time to put it into action before she chickened out and wound up the girl her family always assumed she was. Times were changing in the world around her, and Angela wanted the freedom to make her choices for herself as an independent woman of the sixties.

Her Alpha Male

Luckily for Angela, she'd taken positive steps and had wound up here, three years later in her own home. Now if she could just get up the courage to head downstairs and tell him she wanted him. She knew it wouldn't happen, knew he'd have to make the first move, and she knew she had to keep her private life private. Royce might understand the woman she'd turned into, but if the rest of the family ever found out, they'd have her committed.

So again, she tossed in her bed and used her own hand to find a release that was elusive. She'd learned how her body worked and what she liked, but she'd never managed to capture the same heightened level he'd worked her into that afternoon. She'd only seen him once after that, at Nonnie's funeral. Royce had understood that wasn't the time to touch her, he held her as she slobbered and cried, and stroked her hair and back, while reinforcing to her it would be all right in time.

Well, she decided, time was here and now. And tomorrow, if she could work up the courage, she might just surprise Royce with a few tricks of her own. It would be interesting to see if he accepted her advances or if he'd be turned off by her forwardness.

She groaned remembering how she'd tried on the leather skirt earlier in the day and had wondered what he'd do if she came down to supper wearing it. Her body heated at the memory of being stretched around him, being bared and vulnerable while his cock pushed against her belly. Angela pulled a pillow to her chest, closed her eyes, and willed it to be Royce that she held when she woke.

Chapter Five

Royce managed to stay where he was and knew that if he climbed that rickety staircase he'd never leave her alone again. Sleep overtook him, with her perfume around the room, on the linens, a surprise when the smell of fresh coffee woke him the next morning. He never thought to sleep, instead figured he'd toss and turn once again, another night lost to dreams of how he'd touch her if ever given the chance.

He roused himself and jumped in yet another cold shower, dressed quickly only to find the house empty of Angela and Prima. The coffee pot was full and on the counter sat two mugs with a spoon dropped in each with the sugar bowl beside them. The small television in the far corner of the room was on to morning news, but the volume was low. After pouring a cup of the heavy brew, he moved to the glass wall to take in the morning view of her haven. That was how he was beginning to see her home, as her retreat from the real world.

Prima came into his line of vision first, her powerful legs covering large portions of ground with ease, Angela jogging several yards behind. Her hair swung back and forth from the high tail she'd pulled it back into. She wore an oversized shirt and tight running pants. She stopped dead about a hundred yards from the house and looked up, a large smile crossing her lips.

Royce didn't know if she was smiling at the sight of her home or if he could be seen watching her. Long seconds passed, and he didn't move from the window, nor did Angela take her eyes away. Only when the dog came running toward her did the moment break. Watching as the dog playfully jumped around her slim body, he tightened his hands around the mug he held. He'd touched her only once, and it wasn't enough. By the time she reached the inner door, Prima was running through the space, her speed enhanced by the polished hardwood floors. When the dog came to a

skidding halt at the kitchen entrance, her movement was more of a collapse than a sit.

"Morning," Angela said as she entered, pulling off the outer shirt as she moved. She was flushed, her cheeks and nose red, her eyes clear as she watched him. She pulled the elastic band from her hair and let it settle around her shoulders. He knew she was talking and tried to nod or grunt when appropriate as she moved about the small space getting the dog's food ready. She poured a cup of coffee before moving to stand beside him. "Royce?"

"What? Sorry, I was lost there for a minute." He didn't tell her it was because the top she was wearing left her midriff exposed and he'd almost swallowed his tongue when he saw the small gold ring protruding from her navel.

He'd seen women with things pierced other their ears, only always in Europe. Never would he have imagined she'd pierced her navel. A chill ran through him, and he wondered if she had anymore. Through her tight top, he could see her nipples protruding.

"I'm going to jump in a shower. I'll start breakfast after, all right?"

"Yeah, fine. I'm just not awake yet." His eyes betrayed him and wandered to her waist. Her skin flushed under his ogling, and when he finally moved his look upward, the swell of her breasts spilling from the center of her top was almost too much to deal with. "Angela..." He watched her swallow hard, watched her eyes drop to his crotch, the worn denim covering him stretched to the seams limits.

"Shower," she said and walked away.

He heard the water running and forced himself not to stare at the loft balcony to catch a glimpse of her. Going back to the spare room to finish dressing, he hoped the more clothes he wore, the easier it would be to leave her alone or at least hide his physical longings.

* * * *

Standing under the hot spray, Angela berated herself for not inviting him to join her. The look on his face alone would have made it worthwhile. While she held on to the hope he still might join her, she knew it wouldn't be reality. She pinched her nipples as she closed her eyes and wished they were Royce's hands, imagined him holding the wash cloth and moving it in deliberate patterns until she found the release she longed for. Even as she dressed, her lips were still heavy with need and her breasts ached for his lips.

Angela cooked breakfast with practiced ease as they discussed their plans for the day. She had a few errands to run and would probably be in her office over the garage most of the afternoon. She didn't offer of a tour of the space when he inquired what it looked like. She told him an organized chaos while she was working on a project and liked being able to close the door on the mess and walk away.

He offered to take her out to supper but she insisted she prefer to cook. It wasn't lost on either of them he avoided answering her questions about his plans. All he offered was he'd know more later in the day.

Angela had smiled and said, "You'll tell me when you're ready," and dropped the subject.

They left at the same time, only after Angela showed him where the spare key was hidden if he returned before her. That was unlikely to happen as he knew any more time spent in her home was the weakening of his will. He was waiting for the heater in the rental to come to temperature in the cold March air when she backed a large white Buick from the garage. He smiled openly at the sight of her behind the wheel of the huge vehicle. At least, it was a heavy vehicle as the forecaster on the radio warned of snow.

* * * *

Royce was in a quandary. He truly liked the property, the feel of it, and the idea of it. A home for himself, a place where he could make his mark and not leave unless he chose, a place that maybe someday he'd share with a woman and maybe a few kids. He'd sat at the end of the driveway for a few hours after the realtor left and visualized what he'd do to make it his own. If only he could stop injecting Angela's presence into each idea.

Late in the afternoon, he finally turned off the snowy back road and into her driveway. He let out a sigh of relief for arriving safely. Since he'd ventured off this morning, several inches of heavy snow had fallen and more was predicted. The rental car was not meant for driving in storms.

Her Alpha Male

Her home was empty, the side door unlocked. Prima was gone too. Royce started a fire in the hearth and grew frustrated when his mind kept wandering back to the land. He remembered Angela telling him she liked to close the door on her office mess but he was too antsy to just sit before the fire. Grabbing his jacket, Royce walked the distance to the second building, knowing he was just curious about her space, using the single door beside the garage entrance.

As he let himself into the small space, he went up the flight of stairs. He took them two at a time and came to a skidding halt, similar to Prima's entrance earlier in the morning, at the top. He opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. Angela was propped in the window seat to the rear, her head leaning against the glass. The view was of tree tops and sky. A large sheaf of pages was on her lap with a pair of reading glasses balanced on top.

The braid she'd worked her hair into after showering was now dry, and tendrils of loose ends framed her face. In worn jeans, the light pink sweater she'd worn through breakfast had ridden up, exposing just her middle and the damn belly ring. He hardened at the thought of using his tongue to twist the metal until she squirmed beneath him and let out a groan. That was a twist he'd learned in Italy a few years back.

Prima lifted her head from her paws but decided he wasn't worth getting up for. Using the time to take in her space, he realized she'd been right. There was an orderly chaos of papers and reference materials. Shelves on two walls were stuffed with books and he pulled back a startled cry as he read some of the titles. He'd been expecting to find classics or poetry, or even textbooks and reference books, and he found some. The sex manuals and torrid novels had his heart pounding faster.

"What the hell," he said aloud, taking a second look at more of the titles. There were only two framed pieces of art on the wall, and those confused him even more. They were both black backgrounds, framed in thin gold metal. The center of the first one was emblazoned with the name, *Evangeline*, in gold. The second poster was similar, only under the name, *Volume II*, followed in smaller script. Royce was stunned.

He'd seen a copy of the first novel when he'd been stationed in Colorado a few years back. Some of the guys had taken to reading favored passages of the erotic journey of the naive Evangeline. A heroine who lives nine hundred years in the future within a society that denounces physical contact, she discovers a treasure of books centuries old and understands earlier societies were different in a way she couldn't relate to.

Through the first novel, Evangeline comes to terms with her own body, learning the art of self-satisfaction and ultimately sharing her cache with the one man she truly loves and trusts. While his initial response to the volumes and Evangeline's wants are typical to the men of his time, he overcomes what his society has taught him and decides to wander the path of physical enjoyment with her, only to find he's addicted body and soul.

Toward the end of the book, all the guys were panting and rereading the passages, and all were speculating about the author. He'd remembered how the story ended, with Evangeline in control of her lover for the first time and heady with the power it brought and ultimately with the pleasure they both experienced. He remembered wondering at the time what had happened to the alpha male concept.

Royce glanced around the room and moved to the back wall while taking in all the photos that were tacked to the corkboard. There were baby pictures and family shots, weddings and christenings, all candid except for a copy of Tony in full military dress and one of him in uniform. He saw himself staring back from several of the others, his age progressing.

He moved to the window seat and kneeled beside her. He reached to touch the gold ring, and she woke with a start.

"Royce," she'd whispered, and guided his head, kissing him deeply. She snuggled farther into the pillows, pulled him over her, and kissed him a second time before fully coming awake.

He felt her freeze under him and watched through lowered lashes as she slowly woke and realized what they were doing. He was surprised at the strength she'd used to push him away from her, almost losing his balance.

"What are you doing here?" she asked with fragmented breaths. She left no time to answer. Instead, he watched several emotions wash over her, and her eyes scan the space. "Get out!" she told him, not caring that as she stood the pages from her lap cascaded to the floor. "Get out of here, Royce, now." Her hands fisted near her sides and her eyes went wild. "*Now! Out!*"

Royce watched the change overtake her and backed away slowly, mindful that Prima was now sitting near the door whining at the confrontation. He paused in the doorway and opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out. She watched him intently through narrowed eyes before letting out a stream of curse words in several languages directed toward him. When the tirade continued in mostly Italian, he picked up phrases like, "No privacy anywhere," "All men typical," and "Spying for Tony."

Royce turned and moved down the stairs and back to the house with amazing calm. He wasn't sure exactly what had happened but he knew he'd been wrong to go into her office uninvited. He decided that he'd be better off in one of the motels along the interstate. While tossing clothes into his bag, he heard the door open and close in the main room.

Prima nosed her way into his room and nudged his thigh for attention. He absently petted the dog to buy time before turning and confirming she was standing in the doorway. Her face was flushed, and her eyes still a little wild while snowflakes melting on her hair.

"Could we talk, please. It's important."

Her words were clipped, and he saw the amount of control it took to say them. She was pulling a bottle of anisette from a cabinet while the heavy demitasse coffee brewed. The cups and saucers waited beside the pot and he saw a lemon on the counter beside them.

Royce moved to the windowed wall and watched the snow falling. He thought about apologizing but figured it would be better to wait until she initiated the conversation. Carrying two cups to the coffee table, she set them both down and tended the fire that didn't need tending.

Prima was settled in her place near the side door, and the house was finally quiet. Angela's hair had pulled loose from the braid, and she tugged at it to free it.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scream at you."

"I was wrong. I was in your private space."

She glanced and nodded. "Yes. I specifically told you I liked to keep the chaos to myself."

"Yes, you did. I was curious."

Her eyes narrowed as she watched him. "Why are you here, Royce? You've been very careful to avoid telling me what brought you to Woodstock. I can only assume you've been sent to check on me, that the family pressured you into this visit. Did I pass your inspection? Will I get a glowing report, or should I just start packing and move back to Brooklyn? Am I supposed to abandon this life if you agree with my brothers?"

The resentment had crept back into her voice and she tried to pull it back. Her stare made him uneasy, and the truth spilled out. "I mentioned to Tony I was going to be in the area and he asked me to check on you. But I didn't see it as an inspection, Angela. Just a visit...and I was curious for myself." There, he'd told her part of the truth.

"I'm not going back, Royce. I'm not the same Angela that moved away two years ago, and I wasn't the Angela they all thought I was either, but nobody took the time to notice." She bravely looked to him before adding, "Except you."

"I'm not asking you to move home, angel." His affectionate turn made her eyes close tightly. "But I would like a few answers just for myself."

She nodded to the coffee and sipped from the cup before her. Angela sat on the floor next to the table, her back to the fire drying her hair.

"What do you want to know?" she asked with a bit too much attitude.

Royce moved to the sofa and sat heavily before taking the cup to his lips. The familiar licorice scent of the anisette mixed with the coffee brought back memories of warmth and laughter.

"Everything, Angela. Like why you went ballistic when I was in your office? Why you have snapshots of me on your wall? Why you have the largest collection of sex manuals and erotica I've ever seen, and most of all, I want to know who you let touch you in my absence."

He stopped, realizing what he'd said in hostility and frustration. He let his head drop into his hands and braced his elbows on his thighs, not believing she'd goaded him. When he lifted his head, she was watching him intently and struggling to hold back the corner's of her lip that wanted to perk up into a smile.

"Royce, we need to get a few things straight. I'm twenty-eight, and I'm not moving, no matter what you report back to the family." She waited until he nodded. "As to going ballistic, as you so eloquently put it, I'm sorry. I woke and you were there, and I wanted..."

"What did you want?"

"I wanted to kiss you." They stared at each other for a protracted time before she blew out a breath and laughed ruefully, her challenge defeated. "And your choice of reference material," he prompted.

"Back to basics, Royce. We agree I'm an adult and have a right to a private life?"

"Yes, of course."

"What we discuss here has to stay here. Can you promise me you won't cave into pressure and tell Tony or Papa?"

"Tony is my friend, and believe it or not, I have kept a few things from him. Purely for self-preservation, mind you!" He watched her blush and loved her more. Her eyes shuddered closed and he wondered where her mind went. He whispered her name to get her attention. "Whatever you tell me, Angela stays between us."

Studying him intently, she bought more time by making a production of refilling their cups. He was thankful for the diversion and the second shot of alcohol. After handing him his cup, she moved to the glass wall and leaned against the frame, with her back to the room.

"You know I've been doing research for grant applications?"

"Yeah, that's what Tony said, although I didn't know it paid well enough for you to afford this home. Did Vito help out?"

She laughed aloud at the question. "No, I didn't go to Papa for help. As a matter of fact, he was quite annoyed when he realized I had the money to buy this place. Nonnie had started a savings account for me when I was a kid. She knew Vito would never think his daughter would want to be educated. She apparently made Papa put in funds that matched the boys accounts. I never touched my college fund. I went through on scholarships. That annoyed him more.

"When I turned twenty-one, Nonnie made Papa sign over the account to me. He said I should keep it for a wedding fund, and I didn't commit. I invested it, and he forgot about it. I think he figured I used it for grad school. I had my money from working at the bakery after school for all those years and banked most of that, too."

"I remember Tony on the telephone trying to talk your father into letting you go to college. It was a hard sell."

"Yes, it was, and I'll quote Papa, 'I was a pretty girl who was meant to marry and raise a family.' Why did I want to waste all that time and money? I should work in his deli or the bakery, or, if I had to, get a secretarial job and marry the man he chose for me." She laughed and relaxed.

"I remember hearing that a few times, too," Royce told her.

"Anyway, I didn't, obviously. Instead, I...I wrote a book, Royce."

He glanced back and watched her move back before the fire, while wondering if she realized how it framed her in the evening light.

"Nonnie read it and told me good, but it needed something. She decided it needed sex to be sellable!"

Visualizing the older woman who had become a surrogate mother, Royce sat back and laughed at the idea.

"She would. In the twenty years I've known this family, she never held her tongue."

"She was right. I rewrote it several times and ultimately wound up with something publishable." Angela studied his face to see if he made the connection. He leaned forward, took the thin slice of lemon peel from his cup, and chewed on it. "You still don't get it, Royce."

He only shook his head in confusion. "Tell me, angel. None of this makes sense."

"All right, I was embarrassed when I realized I was kissing you and more importantly that you were in my private space. You saw the photos, didn't you?"

"Yes, and I saw myself in a few."

"Yes. I'm not sorry I kept them, Royce."

The tilt of her chin dared him to confront her about them. He didn't. And he didn't tell her that he still carried an old snapshot of her from the christening. He'd taken it from a stack sent to Tony a few weeks after the party. Tony had never noticed it missing or, at least, had never questioned him about it.

"I'm not either, but what do they have to do with you writing a book?"

"Papa must never find out, Royce, or any of the boys. Do you understand? They wouldn't let me live it down, and it would make my life hell with them. Papa already thinks I'm a deviant for leaving his home without a ring on my finger."

"Oh, screw Vito, Angela. You're a grown woman. You have a right to a private life."

"I agree, so between us. Are you familiar with a book titled *Evangeline*?"

Chapter Six

His head turned toward her so quickly they both heard the light snap his neck made with the movement. He stood quickly and walked the length of the room several times while threading his fingers through his still-short military cut and, remembering the two framed posters in her office, used the time to recall the books. "Angela?"

"When I sold the first novel, I bought the house. And only a few people know who I am, Royce, a few lawyers and accounts, my editor, and my publisher. I would prefer it to stay that way."

Her look made him recognize how important this was, that she truly trusted him to keep her secret. "But..."

She laughed and finally relaxed. For the first time since she'd known him, he was completely speechless and shaken by her confession. "I'll start supper." She rose and moved around the familiar space, the move shielding the growing grin on her face.

Royce let her go, his mind reeling from the information she'd given him. Sometime later, she passed in front of him and exchanged the coffee cup for a half-full wine glass. He smelled sausage and peppers cooking and forced himself back to reality. She set the table and continued her prep work as if she'd hadn't just told him she was the author of an erotic novel, apparently a very profitable one.

"The second poster," he said aloud, and she turned with a smile. "Yes."

"I never read the book, Angela. Only saw a few pages."

Suddenly, his control snapped, and he moved into the kitchen doorway, his hands braced on either side of the frame. She paused and shut the flame from under the frying pan on the stove top.

"Royce?"

His fingers tightened against the wood, and his eyes drilled through her. "Who, Angela? Who taught you?"

"What? To cook, Nonnie, of course."

"Don't play with me now, Angela. I'm on a short rope, who taught you, Chad? Or was it Marco? I seem to remember hearing his name tossed around often enough."

Realizing his reference, she turned away. His hands bit into her shoulders from behind, slowly pulling her against his chest. Her eyes closed automatically at the contact with him, and she drew a deep breath.

"Who?" he whispered, his lips so close ear, her hair moved with his breath.

"No."

"No, it wasn't Chad or Marco, or no, you won't tell me the truth?"

"You won't like the truth, Royce. Are you sure you really want to know?"

"God, help me, Angela, I have to know. It will drive me crazy not to know." He didn't add he wanted a face to put to his menacing thoughts.

"You did." Angela turned around, slid her hands around his back, and explored him as she buried her face against his chest.

"Angela?"

"Only you, Royce. After that afternoon on my birthday, I didn't want another man to touch me. The day of the christening only reinforced that. I understood any other man would be futile, no other man was you."

Her sentence finished with the tone of defeat and she pulled from him, her hands' sliding over her upper arms to compensate for the lack of his body heat. "Angel, we didn't..."

"I have a vivid imagination."

She tried to laugh, but it came out more as a strangled cry. Angela pushed past him and, with forced calm, walked through the living room and slowly up the stairs. Royce stayed where he was, unable to get his mind and body to work together. He thought to go up and didn't.

Ultimately, she came back down, composed with her hair brushed out, and slipped past him into the kitchen as if their conversation hadn't happened. Only she handed him a copy of her book before turning her attention back to their meal.

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Royce took the novel and moved back to the living room by remote control. He settled in her club chair after turning on the pole lamp behind it, studying the black cover with just one word printed across it, *Evangeline*. Reading the erotic science fiction intently, he didn't know how long she stood beside his chair before he acknowledged her.

"Supper's ready."

"Yeah," he said, not wanting to stop reading.

Their meal started and stayed tense until Angela stood abruptly. She moved around the table and, without a second thought, used both of her hands to pull his face toward her and kissed him long and hard.

Royce seemed startled at first then dropped his guard, slid his hand behind her, and tugged her onto his lap for better positioning. He wound his left hand through her hair and directed her head to his waiting kiss while his right hand skimmed along her thigh and belly, his finger gently tapping at the gold. She drew a breath when it did and he knew she felt him swell under her.

Angela ended the kiss and pulled away from him. Her lips were swollen from his touch, his body heated and wanting more. Neither said a word or acknowledged the act. She grabbed her dinner plate and went about setting out Prima's supper. He helped clear the table went back to the book. The next time he looked up, Angela was pulling on a huge down coat, fumbling with the front zipper.

"I'm going to walk Prima. I'll be back in a bit."

He nodded but didn't move to go with her. He went back to his reading. Several times, he'd felt his cock twitch at a passage and swell at others. His own body was betraying him, and he didn't care. He knew she had returned from the change in temperature but kept reading. Royce knew she was doing dishes and didn't offer to help. Instead, he let himself get lost in Evangeline's world of self-exploration. He was halfway through the novel when she started turning on lights in the living room and then disappeared from the room.

Angela returned fresh from the shower, her hair still damp and her body still flushed from the hot water. She was standing at the glass wall when he realized she was there. Glancing at the mantle clock, he saw that it was after ten. The snow outside was getting deep, deeper than they'd predicted. She'd pulled on a long flannel robe, the plaid familiar. He'd seen her in it a few times, saw it hanging on the back of her bathroom door in Brooklyn and knew the fabric was soft against her skin. What he didn't know was what she wore under it. "Angela?"

"Royce?"

"Go to bed, angel, please?"

She turned and watched him, the look of defeat crossing her eyes before she nodded and made her way back up to the loft.

Royce shut off all the lights and, heading to his room, knew he'd lock the door to keep himself away from her. A little after midnight, he gave up and pulled on a pair of jeans. His goal was to get something to drink, something to take his mind off her sleeping upstairs. The house was dark, only the exterior floodlights lit up the outdoors.

The snow was falling heavier, and it all looked so pristine around him. With her back to the room, she leaned against the window frame. Her robe was belted tightly around her middle, thick cotton socks on her feet. Prima was sound asleep near the hearth. Royce stood in the hallway several minutes wondering what to do, what to say and was about to back track to his room when she spoke.

"I'm sorry if I've made you uncomfortable, Royce. It wasn't my intention."

His body reacted before his mind could stop him and he moved behind her, his hands directing her back against his body. "What do we do angel?" His fingers slipped up and down along her arms.

"I'd say that was up to you."

"What I want to do and what's right are two completely different things. Tell me, how you could write like that if you haven't been...intimate with men?"

"I have been intimate, with one man."

"Angel, we never finished that day, barely touched the surface of possibilities."

"I know. I told you I have a vivid imagination. You still never told me why you're here, besides checking on me."

His fingers tightened on her shoulders as his cock swelled. He'd never planned on telling her his secret. If she did find out, if she recognized the bits of herself he'd infused in Agnes, she'd know he'd loved her all these years. He wasn't willing to tell her the truth, even after she'd been open and honest with him. He felt like a heel and hated himself for his own cowardice. "You won't like the answer." He didn't add that it was only part of his private world.

"Try me. What do you have to lose at this point?"

"I came here to look at a piece of property on the other side of town. It's an old farm with some land." He told her the location, and she said she was familiar with it, questioned the depth of destruction since it had been abandoned. "Ten years, apparently. It needs a lot of work just to make it habitable, let alone livable."

"Why here, Royce? You could settle anywhere in the world, why look here in upstate New York?"

"Because it was near you, and I can't buy the place, can't live this close to you and not want to be with you." He didn't add that it was a short trip to Manhattan where his publisher was located.

"Would that be so bad, being with me?"

"No, but I'm sure your brothers might think differently." He realized the error of his teasing. "If I thought I was right for you, I'd..."

"You'd what?"

"Angela, I'm not marriage material. Never was. I don't know if I can settle down and live in one place for the rest of my life, I've never tried. What if I hate it?"

"You mean what if you end up hating me?"

"*No*!" He moved away, and he felt cold. "I'm ten years older you, you deserve a man who's young and not jaded, someone to spend your life with who isn't cynical."

"Well, I'm glad you made up my mind for me. You should feel relived. Vito would be proud of you."

He frowned at her sarcasm. "Relieved? I don't think so. Thursday, I thought I saw you in town walking with a man, and I felt a rage of jealousy I never knew existed inside me."

"I don't want another man, Royce. I've only wanted you since my twenty-first birthday when you touched me. No man has ever stood a chance after that."

"What if I don't live up to your fantasy, Angela? That's a lot of pressure to put on any man." His voice faded away at the idea, performance anxiety prevalent in his mind. What he didn't expect was for Angela to laugh out right. "Yeah, and I have so much to compare you against!"

"Evangeline does!" he shouted before he could rein back his temper.

"Evangeline is a fictional character." She moved closer toward him, hesitant. "You and I are flesh and blood. Here and now, in this moment. That's all I'm asking you for, this one time to hold on to."

"Damn it, Angela. You're my best friend's baby sister. There's a code about this. I'm supposed to protect you from men like me."

"Really, where was that code on my birthday, or at the christening when you..."

He moved quickly for a large man and pulled her up in front of him. Her toes barely touched the floor as his eyes bored through her.

"If I touch you, angel, you'll never be free, ever. And I'm not the man you've fantasized me into."

"I'm not free now, Royce."

She stood her ground, and only when he let out a groan did she dare to breathe. His mouth crushed her under him, his kiss punishing, his tongue fighting to intimidate her. Only the more he fought her, the more she came alive under him and let go of all the smoldering wants she'd apparently held inside for so long. She became hot to his touch, and the idea he could garner this reaction from her only fueled his urges to take more.

Angela surprised them both when she pulled from his grasp and shoved him against the window. The moment his bare shoulders touched the cold glass, she dropped to her knees, her hands fighting with the denim her fingers pulling down his pants to finally free his straining cock. Time stopped, and the scene to surreal.

Royce closed his eyes when he felt her fingers drawing the material down his legs and pulled a ragged breath when her warm hands slowly moved back up his thighs, her nails drawing a path to his aching center.

Angela didn't touch him immediately. Rather, she seemed to be studying him, appraising him before slowly taking him in her palm. Royce looked down just as Angela's lips met the glistening drop on his head, just the tip of her tongue straining to taste him. The sight overwhelmed him, and he groaned with a want that had built inside him for years.

Her unsure movements became emboldened when he throbbed at her caress. Angela's warm breath covered his moist tip in an amazing

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dichotomy of hot and cold, which sent a shiver through him. She tested his size with her lips, tasted him for the first time, and he knew he'd come home to a place he never thought to be, in Angela's life.

He dropped his hands to her shoulders to steady him against the onslaught of tongue and teeth that followed. Royce felt his control slip and groaned her name before dragging her away from his engorged cock, up across his bare chest, and to his lips.

His kiss was different. The trace of himself on her lips emboldened him and made him twitch against her. Angela groaned into his mouth as her hands sought him and stroked the length of his cock against her center. Royce wound a hand through her hair and held her against the onslaught of his mouth while his other hand fought with her robe and pulled it from her shoulder where his teeth found the soft skin behind her ear and the cleft of her throat. He knew he was leaving a mark and swelled again at the idea.

Any hint of composure was long gone, and Royce's body overrode his good intentions. He thrust her away from him with a cruelty he didn't know he could possess.

"Protection?" he managed to ask and watched her turn red as she struggled to find the pocket of her now twisted robe before finally pulling out several packaged condoms.

"Good girl, angel," he whispered, just before he tugged the robe down her arms and off her.

"Good God," he said aloud, not realizing the words left his mind. She stood before him in the darkened room, her little, sleeveless, white silky slip covering heaving breasts, her nipples harder than he'd ever imagined. The long length of toned leg drew his gaze down to her cotton socks. With her hair mussed, her lips full and her eyes wide, she was the sexiest sight he'd ever seen.

"Angel..."

"Royce, please?"

He knew his choice had been made long before his arrival. In his fantasy, he'd make her mindless before he'd let her come. He wanted to see how she would react to his touch, how her voice would sound with his name on her lips. She'd always been an erotic woman. He wanted her writhing under him, her using his fingers, his mouth, his cock as tools to find her climax. Just the idea let him abandon his restraint, the ideas of teasing her for hours long gone. He'd drop his mouth over her clit and slip two fingers inside her, watching her expressions as she settled over this new invasion to her body. He'd fuck her until she found her own primal rhythm, than he'd fuck her with his cock.

* * * *

Two simple words had empowered him, had given him permission to take what he wanted. Angela wondered if he'd understand. It didn't matter. She'd touched him, finally, after all these years, and she knew what it was like to taste him.

"Please what?" he asked in a harsh tone while his fingers found her prominent nipples and tugged at them through the thin cloth. "What do you want, Angela? Tell me."

She wondered if he'd tried to call her bluff, so she'd back off. "I want to feel you inside me," she managed to get out while refusing to open her eyes, afraid it would end the dream.

He dropped his hand to her crotch, felt the heat pouring from her body, and he let his palm rest against her and slipped his fingers between her legs to stroke her through the damp material.

Royce lifted her up into his arms, moved her back against the cold window, and pressed her against it while he sucked her nipples through the silk. She let out a gasp at the temperature difference intruding and forgot about it when he dropped in front of her. Her pubic hair was trimmed to a small bed of dark, moist curls. Royce alternated between smooth, soft strokes to circular motions and occasionally rose to play with her ring, prominent against the thin silk, while his fingers grazed against her. Angela didn't know how long they stayed that way, only that her legs were refusing to hold her weight when his tongue finally touched her core, triggering a shocking wave of lust and need inside her. She groaned when Royce moved away, thankful to feel him pull her to his chest.

"Angela, last warning," he managed as he bit her earlobe.

"No warnings, Royce. I want you, more anything I've ever wanted. I want to feel you inside me."

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He groaned and slipped an arm under her legs and lifted her easily only to turn and drop her onto the sofa, following down over her, his lips to her mouth as his hands found her breasts.

She wasn't capable of coherent speech, only small groans and sighs to direct him. When his lips surrounded her engorged nipple, she felt a surge go through her body. Her fingers fought to pull the material aside, wanting nothing between them. He pulled away long enough to dispose of the slip and latched on her other side, his fingers pulling her other breast. Angela felt extremely satisfied in a different direction acknowledging she was open and bold enough to ask for what she needed.

"Royce, please come inside me," she managed, struggling to reach him. "Forget it, angel. Just relax. We'll get there, eventually," he told her. His laughter was different from any she'd heard. It held a hint of excitement she wasn't familiar with. "I'm gonna love you, Angela, so you'll never forget."

"Royce!" His name died on her lips as his mouth went back to her breast and his finger slipped inside her. She was beyond ready to take what he offered.

She knew Royce had had his share of women in the past twenty years and wondered if she'd disappoint him. She released the thought and tried to live in the moment. She knew no shame about her actions, rather used his hands and lips to seek her fulfillment. Tightening around his fingers, she savored her release before he moved back up her body, teasing her lips with his until she opened and shared her essence. With his fingers still embedded deep within her pussy, Angela knew he felt her clutch around them a second time. She was breathless when he finally slipped from her body.

"Don't go," she said quickly, her hands reaching.

"Relax, angel. Catch your breath, I'm right here," he promised, latching onto her nipple once again for reassurance.

"I want to taste you, Royce," she told him when her breathing settled.

Her hands stroked his back and sides, her reach just short of getting a hold on him. He moved farther away and slipped down her body again. When she went slick a second time, he pulled away, reached to the table behind him, and fumbled for one of the packages. Angela took the package from him with steady hands and tore it open before reaching to his cock.

Royce groaned and let her push him back onto the sofa, take control. She covered him with her mouth, let out a sigh when his erection surged between her lips. She brought him to the brink of losing control several times and instinctively backed off just before it was too late. When he was beyond what she thought him capable of, she quickly covered him with the condom before straddling him.

Angela knew Royce was overly endowed from their previous meetings. She tried to push back the sudden panic that rose in her as she slowly lowered herself over him. For years, she'd thought only of having him stretch her like never before. Now that the moment was here, she refused to panic. She wanted this, and if he were willing, she'd take a whole lot more from him before he left.

Royce slowed her descent, forced her to accustom herself to his intrusion. It was an agonizing time, both realizing and accepting their acts. He gritted his teeth, his muscles tensing. She could feel her body stretch around him to accommodate his erection. When she was only halfway over him, he left her own desire and pulled her breasts to his lips, his hands pushing them together so he could suckle both nipples at the same time.

It pushed her over the imaginary edge, and letting her weight drop, she embedded him deep inside her. She came with a fierce shudder, his lips still attached to her breast. Angela dropped her arms around his shoulders and struggled for breath.

"Still with me, Angela?" He teased her only to be reminded that she was as her inner muscles flexed against him. He swore in Italian and managed to lift her with him, turning her under him on the cushion. When he didn't move over her she finally opened her eyes, watching him, not caring her hair was disheveled, her lips bruised, her body spread wide waiting to accept him any way he chose.

"Royce?" He thrust inside her only a few times before gathering her against him a second time and pulling her down to the floor under him on a hard surface to absorb the thrust of each stroke.

She opened, swallowing his length and groaned when he withdrew. Angela wrapped her legs around his waist and held him inside her, using her inner muscle tone to taunt him. He swore a second time and gave up the idea of a slow, mellow joining, and gave what his body demanded. He thrust with complete abandon and she met each penetration.

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His resolve snapped when she groaned, reached to tug on her own nipple, and offered it to his mouth. His lips attached to her breast and he pushed again, taking her over the cliff in a different way.

Angela felt the difference in her climax from his tongue to his penis. Completely different, yet each amazing in its own right. She decided they needed to practice each position before she could decide which was better. And that didn't include how he'd made her feel when he sucked her or when his fingers invaded her. He didn't collapse on top of her; instead, he pulled from inside her and rolled onto his back, his body in a complete sweat.

"Damn it, Angela, are you trying to kill me?"

"Not after that performance. But I'll give you a minute to catch your breath before I expect an encore." She laughed as she rose and dropped a light kiss on his lips. "Something cold to drink?" she asked but didn't wait for an answer.

Using the few moments alone to pull herself together, she forced back any long-term visions and reminded herself she'd have to let him go. She did, however, let herself remember the feeling of him pushing inside her, stretching her like never before. When she returned, he was still lying where she had left him. Angela drank from the glass of water before pressing it into this hand. When he did a half crunch to drink, she dropped beside him, tugged off the used protection, and covered him with her cold mouth. Royce reared, pushing his cock farther down her throat with the involuntary movement.

She laughed despite her full mouth and continued to explore him. The water was long forgotten as she perfected her technique of loving him. With her hands and mouth, alternately, she manipulated him to a second climax, while understanding the short leash of control she was testing. He was amazing in his own right, his body firm and large, hard with want. Angela dropped over his body when he shuddered under her, the last of his release still on her lips.

"Thank you," she whispered, unsure if he could hear her.

He laughed, and she reached for his flat nipple to pinch away his laughter. When she touched his skin his cock jumped beside her face. She swallowed his semi hard cock, starting the process over again.

Chapter Seven

Royce wasn't sure when they fell asleep, only that they were still stretched out on the floor beside her fireplace with a blanket draped over them. Angela was tight against his chest, her legs intertwined with his. He knew it was early morning, but the dull grey day made him snuggle closer to her. She snuggled closer to him when he moved and his hand came up to cover hers. "Go back to sleep. It's raining," he told her just before he dozed off.

He awoke to a strange wetness against his face and, dragging Angela with him, immediately sat up. She was still half asleep and protesting at the intrusion when he realized the dog's face was too close to his, was staring at him.

"Go away, you stupid horse," he said, trying to get the animal to move.

Angela stirred beside him and stretched after pushing the hair from her face. "She wants to go out."

As soon as the words left her lips, the dog started to whine. Angela sat up and glanced around at the evidence of their loving all around them. She struggled to stand and searched for her robe before looking outside. That was when it struck her and she gasped aloud. Glancing at the clock, he saw it was just past seven in the morning but the outdoor wonderland garnered his attention. He remembered saying it was raining out but it didn't register. Now he forced the sleep from his eyes and took in the icy world outside their door.

Moving quietly to the side door, he watched Angela try to hold the dog back while she opened it. Prima had other ideas and hit the exterior platform full-out, her legs slipping on the icy wood. She managed to make it down the stairs, each of her paws slipping and thumping against the wood. Angela watched from the doorway and let out a breath when the dog made it safely to the bottom. She told him that she knew from experience, Prima didn't like to get her feet wet, and the dog returned quickly and settled back in her spot before the door.

"Good girl, Prima." Angela gave the dog one of her beloved bones. "Take a nap," she said with a pat to Prima's head.

Royce was staring out the window when she returned to the living room, naked and stretching wondering what her morning reactions would be. His arm dropped over her shoulder when she approached and he sighed.

"Guess we're snowed in. Now you're stuck with me for another day."

"Well, I'll just have to figure out how to abuse your body to keep you occupied."

It wasn't the words she used so much as the way she said them that made him still. The smile that formed on her lips was inviting and intimidating at the same time.

"Fine with me, only do I get to sleep for a while first?"

"How about in a real bed this time?"

"The woman knows the way to my heart." She took his hand and led him toward the stairs. He pulled away to stir the embers and drop a few logs onto the fire before following her to the loft and getting his first look at bedroom.

Intimidated didn't begin to describe how Royce felt as he hit the top of the circular staircase. The walls and ceilings were a soft white. Centered on a large rear wall covered with padded suede was her king-size platform bed, several steps up from floor level and covered in brown silk only a few shades lighter the suede walls. There were five layers of pillows in various sizes. Angela was tossing some of them onto the floor in a corner while pulling back the comforter to reveal crisp tan sheets with a darker stripe pattern.

Across the room was a small hallway and he assumed it led to her bathroom and closet. The other side of the room was anchored by a large soaking tub, built up with several steps of terra cotta tiles. He didn't need to turn around. He pictured the view easily. On a clear night, one might imagine being outside. There were no bureaus or mirrors. Dark wood nightstands stood on either side of the bed, the only other furniture in the room was a chaise lounge tucked away in the corner. Deep-pile carpet covered the floor including the platform steps, until it met at the bath tub tile. He immediately saw no lights on the tables and looked up to see the several rows of recessed lights over the bed. He'd seen it in magazines but never in a home, let alone did not expect to find them in Angela's bedroom. "Quite a space, Angela."

"Thanks. It's comfortable without being frilly."

Suddenly, she seemed nervous. Royce moved toward her, and she backed up the three steps before slipping onto the side of the bed. As she did, her robe caught under her, which exposed her shoulder and neck.

He didn't stop his pursuit until his lips found bare skin and his fingers found her belly ring. Her breath faltered when the rhythmic pattern of his lips and fingers synchronized. Angela clung to his shoulders to hold herself up against his onslaught, wanting more. She writhed under him feeling him harden with her movement.

"Royce—"

He silenced her with his lips. When he pulled back he waited for her to focus on him. "Angel, where's the protection?"

How he remembered to ask was a miracle, but he still remembered this was Angela. She reached to the nightstand, and he slid over her and traced her arm. Pulling open the drawer, he caught a glimpse of something and froze over her.

Angela pulled a condom out and dropped it on the tabletop, but he held her wrist when she went to push the drawer closed. With his hand clasped over hers, he put it back into the drawer a second time and closed their fingers over the clear plastic phallus.

"Oh."

Royce wondered what she'd say and laughed when she didn't defend the contents.

"All right, so I have some...aids. Do you have a problem with that?"

"No problem, angel." He smiled at his good fortune. "Let's see what we have to work with." He still had her pinned on the side of the bed with her robe half on and half off. He pulled out the clear dildo and took a second pink rubber vibrator that lay next to it. Taking his time to decide between the two small bottles of lubricant, he finally closed the drawer.

That he knew her secrets was intimidating and empowering. The idea that she actually owned the items was stunning. He'd seen them before, had used them with women before but always when overseas. He had never imagined that Angela would have a sex aid in her bedroom, let alone two. The small bottles of lubricant were imported also, and he wondered where she was shopping to have access to this type of item. He remembered the pink lace under ware she'd worn years earlier and the silk slip she'd had on last night. Where didn't matter, only that she'd found them.

It answered another of his questions from last night. He knew he hadn't broken a virginal barrier, but she'd said no other men. While her movements were tentative at first, she'd fallen into his rhythm easily. Now, he knew why. He was both proud and a bit speculative at the same time. Her book came to mind, and it all fell into place. Her voice pulled him back from his thoughts.

"I have live flesh and blood, Royce. I don't need rubber today."

"Oh, but, Angela, think of the possibilities."

She blushed at his reference and tried to move away. Royce kept her pinned where she was and liked when her eyes went wide with anticipation as he ran his hand along the clear dildo and her tongue slipped out to moisten her lips. "Royce?"

"Angela? Want to stop?" His question dared her to say yes.

"No, but I'd rather have you right now instead of those."

Royce dropped it. Who in his right mind would pass up that invitation? He pushed her back on the bed and slid over her, his knee pushing her legs apart. He reached down and teased her, felt her open while she stroked his length in unison.

"Royce, come inside me." She twisted under him and reached to fondle his hard cock.

"Why?"

She startled under him and gave him a look that asked if he was insane. He stared her down, and she let her lips curl into a smile. Her hands left his cock and stroked his sides and back, her short nails making continuous patterns while her eyes never leaving his.

When she spoke, her cheeks heated. "Why?" She mimicked him, her voice husky. "Because I want to feel you fill me, stretch me, make me accommodate your pulsing cock. Do you know I can feel you when you pulse, Royce, inside me, I can feel when you throb."

She continued the patterns her hands drew along his skin, and she continued to tell him all the things she'd wanted him to do. "I want you to fuck me until you explode inside me, and I want you to finish me off with

your lips and tongue. I want your fingers inside me, slick from your come, mixing with mine. I want to taste you from your lips..." She'd sent him over the unseen boundary, and he almost forgot to protect her before plunging inside her.

Their coupling was intense and hard, unforgiving and sumptuous. Angela gave herself, body and mind. Nothing he did or said made her retreat. She slipped a hand between their bodies and stroked their joining. Royce let out a low howl as he came, seeing only pinpoint lights flashing for several seconds on his closed eyelids. Angela stayed with him and stroked him until he calmed. Her cry was anguished when he pulled himself from her. She let out a disappointed groan until he pulled her to the edge of the bed, dropped down, and finished her with his hands and mouth.

She lay exhausted under him, half off, half on the bed. It seemed to take all her strength to raise her hand to the back of his head and run it through short dark brown hair.

"Damn, Angela," Royce whispered into her belly as he took one last twist of her ring with his teeth before pulling her back up on the bed and dropping beside her.

He knew he slept but didn't know how long. If Prima hadn't wanted food, he might still be. Angela tended to the dog after a quick shower and the coffee she made forced him to relent to his empty stomach. He'd jumped in her shower and headed downstairs. They'd managed to make toast and ate standing at the counter. With a light breakfast and an appeased dog, they decided it was too cold and icy to go outdoors and quickly headed back warm bed.

* * * *

"Anything we do stays between us, always? No matter what happens, this will never go beyond these walls?"

Angela was serious, too serious and Royce wondered what she had on her mind. "My word, angel. I'd never share you with anyone for any reason. You have to trust me." He hardened instantly, the possibilities endless.

"I do. But how much do you trust me?" This time she let out a cryptic laugh and he didn't like the smile that formed on her lips. She pushed him back and draped herself over him. Squirming against him, she teased his lips

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with hers, tested his nipple with her fingers. The silky robe she'd pulled on earlier rode up between them in spots. In others, skin met skin.

Angela pushed the dildo into his hand. Royce rolled her onto her back and watched her intently. He traced the phallus against her skin, her chest, her neck before dragging it across her lips. She lay placid under him, her eyes showing her uncertainty.

"Do you want me to stop Angela?" he asked, just before he latched onto her nipple and swirled his tongue around the hardening nub.

He'd bet she wasn't going to stop anything he did with her. He decided to push for everything he'd ever dreamt about, conventional or not.

"No, we don't stop."

He groaned with his mouth full, reluctant to pull away. When he did, he moved the dildo over her breast and throat before passing it over her mouth. The second time he stopped, her mouth fell open, allowing the head between her lips. She paused only a second before sucking it further inside, her eyes lowering. His erection climbed steadily to a solid mass and he twitched against her leg when she moaned around the intruder.

Royce pulled it away and quickly pushed it between her legs. She was moist and accepted the intrusion with only a slight jolt. The whole time, she held his look, daring him to continue. He moved it slowly and gently inside her while he kissed her deeply and matched his hand motion to the thrusting of his tongue into her mouth. Angela was struggling under him, unable to reach him with her hands. "Relax, I won't hurt you." He all but taunted her.

"I want to touch you."

"I know I want that too, but later. For now, let's just explore a bit." He punctuated his words by twisting the phallus inside her, nudging it deeper. Angela sucked his tongue deep into her mouth with his motions. Royce sat up but didn't pull the toy from inside her. "Take this off," he commanded, his fingers pushing at her robe. She managed to squirm out from it without help or change of position. In an instant, she understood.

"Are you in charge, Major?" she asked, her hint the permission he hadn't realized he was seeking.

"Absolutely, Angela, I'm glad you realize it." His eyes swept over her naked body, and only then did he rise off her. "Push back onto the bed," he told her and half lifted her toward the center, settling her on a stack of pillows. She relaxed back, her legs tight together until his strong fingers bit into her knee and pulled it aside, exposing her in full view with the toy still embedded in her pussy. He watched her body heat but she didn't move, she stared him down and he suddenly wondered if this was a good idea.

"What do you want, Angela?" he asked just before his mouth closed over her navel and flicked her ring with his tongue. He moved the toy gently in the same motion, and she didn't answer, only let her body move over the toy. "Oh, Angela, that's it. Come for me angel." He continued the simultaneous movements, and she reached to guide his hand.

She took him on a sensual tour of how her body worked, gave him a glimpse of how to please her all the while watching her fuck the dildo. He felt her convulse and almost came himself. Royce pulled the toy from inside her and put it to her lips to lick it clean before tossing it aside and taking her mouth under his. Her hand found him, hard and heavy with want. Her fingers closed over him, her fist tightening.

Groaning against her lips, he pulled back and let her shift to suck him. He came quickly with her swallowing and licking motions, one hand pumping him toward her lips, and the other fondling his sac.

"Damn it, Angela."

"Oh, Royce, we're in trouble, aren't we?"

For the first time, he heard fear in her voice, heard that she knew how rare their relationship truly was. He didn't let himself think about the future or the lack of it for them. Royce closed his eyes for one long second before leaning back and taking in the view of her naked body, deliciously sweaty and sated.

"Angel, you have no idea." He pulled her to him and held her against him for a long time. Both of them were quiet in the aftermath of the intense experience they'd shared. He pulled the comforter up over them and let himself drift off to sleep refusing to allow his brain to comprehend how accurate her words truly were. He had no way of knowing what she was thinking and, knowing she'd tell him the truth, didn't ask. Royce wasn't sure he was ready to handle the truth.

Chapter Eight

Royce woke alone in Angela's large bed and didn't like it. His first thought was that she'd gone, but the smell of bacon frying drifted up toward him, making him realize that was what woke him. His stomach rumbled, and he forced himself to throw back the cover and leave the warm cocoon to use the bathroom before heading downstairs.

Prima lay in front of the roaring fire, and Angela was in the kitchen. When she turned and saw him, she blushed. Not just heating of her cheeks, this crimson red crept across her almost bare chest, up her throat, and onto her face. She was wearing a silky slip again similar to the one he'd taken off her the night before. Only this one was a pale blue. He hardened immediately and grabbed his jeans from the back of the sofa.

"Want coffee?"

"Desperately," he said as he moved toward her and accepted the mug she held out for him. He took it and drained the contents in two long pulls before slipping behind her to refill it. He didn't leave her space. Instead, he stood in the doorway watching her flip thick slices of French toast that were browning on the griddle. When she removed the last slices, he put the mug aside and backed her against the sink.

Angela watched him move toward her and for only a second held back the smile forming on her lips. She lifted onto her toes and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Morning," he managed.

"Morning," she whispered back, just before her lips found his with a kiss to reinforce that both the night before and their early morning really happened. "Hungry?"

"Food first, then you, Angela," he teased, finally moving back.

Glancing out the glass wall, he saw that the sun had come out and was melting the last of the ice from the previous evening. He realized it was after two. In all of his adult life, he'd never slept in, his military training embedded in his internal body clock. Hell, he thought, in the past, staying in bed until seven seemed sacrilegious, but two in the afternoon.

Breakfast was devoured rather eaten. They decided to dress and walk Prima. Royce was impressed with Angela's small tract of land. They continued on the half mile to her mailbox to retrieve the newspaper. While cold with the ground still slippery in spots, the fresh air did them both some good. It felt natural for him to drop his arm over her shoulder as they walked. Prima bounded up the road ahead of them and circled back often to make sure they were still with her.

"She's no guard dog," Royce teased Angela. "She's afraid of her own shadow and can't get out of the way of it."

"I know. When I saw her at the pound with those sad eyes staring at me through the cage, something just snapped inside me. All thoughts of a German shepherd or retriever for protection evaporated."

"You're an old softie. Just like Nonnie was if you caught her at the right moment."

"Thank you, Royce. That's one of the nicest things you've ever said to me."

He arched his eyebrows and stopped walking, keeping her under his arm. "How about you're beautiful or that you have dynamite legs?" He found the shape of her breast through her coat and squeezed it with his gloved hand. "How about you have a rack not to be compared to any other woman? How about your undies make me hot?"

"All nice, but putting me in the same category as Nonnie was better." "Because?"

"Because"—she shrugged her shoulders forced her chest deeper into his hand—"I always admired her. Not just because she was my grandmother and raised me, but because she stayed true to herself. Grandfather passed before I was born, but in all that time, she never thought about another man. She told me once that she'd found her true love and he'd be waiting. She truly believed they'd have another life together."

Angela's eyes filled with tears and she pulled away, whistling for the dog.

After taking a moment to compose herself, she added, "She could cook and run a house, she was kind and loving, and she never lost her sense of humor. That was her major accomplishment, especially with Papa and the boys."

"I think in a previous life she had some military training," he teased, pulling her back against him. "She could intimidate me with a look!" She laughed and agreed. "So can you, Angela. Do you realize that yet?"

She didn't answer, she just stared.

"Tell me the truth, who was your model for Heath? I know Evangeline is a part of you, fighting to assert your own personality, but..."

"You, Royce, I always visualized you when I was drafting him. I figured that was the only way I'd ever have you, get to experience you." She didn't turn away but her cheeks heated. "It's the only place I could control you."

"Is that what you want, to control me?"

She thought carefully before answering. "I pretty much like who you are in this reality. But on occasion, it might get interesting to have complete control of you, body and mind, or at least be able to tame you on occasion."

This time his face heated, and Angela allowed herself to enjoy the laughter. "Does the idea scare you, Royce, or is your cock getting hard thinking about the possibilities?" She left him, walked the last yards to the mailbox, and retrieved the contents along with the newspaper.

She let out the same ear piercing whistle and waited for Prima to come running back. She did, paused only for a second beside her and loped toward Royce, dropping at his feet. He bent and reached to scratch the dog's belly but did not look up when Angela joined them.

"Is this how you want me, Angela, flat out and docile?"

She seemed to consider his question with a lot more seriousness he'd meant. "It's a start," she said finally before giving him a look that made his cock twitch.

"I'm the man. I'm always dominant." He stood and brushed his hands on his jeans before starting the walk back to her home.

"In general, I agree. I'm not trying to switch roles in reality, but..." "But?"

"But for a few hours, on occasion, you might be surprised how freeing it could be to let go and..."

"And? I want clarification of that *and*," he told her too seriously.

"And submit, I guess, for lack of a better word right now. I don't want you spineless, Royce. I enjoy your strength and maleness, and I suppose it's a trust issue in the end."

"Angela, at times, you scare the hell out of me." He shook his head and let out a strangled laugh.

"That's how Heath feels on occasion," she said, referring to his fictional counterpart.

"I didn't get that from the book. He's hesitant at the beginning because it's the unknown to them both."

"You didn't read volume two!" Angela laughed and Royce groaned. "I'd never willingly hurt you, just like I trust that you'd never hurt me physically with your strength."

"Mind control can be a lot more dangerous."

"Yes, at times, I agree."

"Angela, I think I'd better read volume two, quickly."

They made it back to the house just before the cold started to get uncomfortable. Inside the warm enclave, he settled back in the large chair, her second book open in front of him. He knew she was around the space but didn't bother or interrupt him.

He'd read for over an hour and closed the book when he found himself squirming in his seat to adjust his erection after reading how Evangeline and Heath had finally consummated their physical relationship with total abandon. Closing the book, he dropped it on the table before going in search of her. The kitchen was the first place he looked, and he wasn't surprised to find her whipping something in a heavy pot.

"What would you like a snack or something to drink?"

"What are you making?"

"Custard for the éclairs later. They're already in the oven."

"Damn it, Angela. It's a good thing we were together last night or I'd never have the balls to touch you after reading how Heath awakens Evangeline."

She smiled and winked. "If you wouldn't mind, I'd love a glass of wine but can't walk away from this until it's finished," she said, smoothly changing the subject. Knowing it was organized similarly to the kitchen in Brooklyn, Royce moved easily in the space. He poured for them both and held the glass lips to sip.

"Thanks."

"You're welcome. What happens next?"

"This has to be refrigerated for a few hours."

"Not the custard, the story."

"Oh. Well..."

"Never mind, I'll read it myself," he told her, shaking his head as he left.

* * * *

While the custard was chilling, she refilled their glasses and settled on the sofa with the newspaper. Watching him from under her lashes, Angela still couldn't believe he was here, in her living room, reading her novel. She would never forget how he had touched her and had loved her, how her body responded. She shifted on the sofa when heat flashed through her, budded her nipples, and landed in her lower lips, which left them engorged. Staring at the newspaper in front of her, all she could see was the expression on his face when handing him the dildo.

She wondered what she looked like lying spread naked, heated, and wanting before him with the sexual aid sticking out of her vagina. Her lips pulsed as she remembered using her inner control to tug it deeper inside herself, how his eyes had widened, and how his lips had felt against her while mixing with the fake cock. That was one fantasy she was glad she was bold enough to verbalize with him and even happier he seemed to enjoy it too.

Royce glanced up several times and finally put the book aside. "Angela."

She looked up and smiled.

"Come here, please." He watched as she put the paper aside, moved toward him, and dropped lightly on his lap.

"What would you like, Royce?" Her voice and look asked more questions.

"I want you back upstairs and naked on the bed, waiting for me." "Really?" she asked, nuzzling against his neck. "Completely nude?" She drew patterns across his throat with her tongue, which peaked his hardness under her to a new level. "Or would you rather just a hint of something?"

"Such as?"

"I'll think of something," she told him before sucking his earlobe between her teeth.

"Is there anything that would interrupt us for a few hours?" He was making lazy circles against her back, just missing the curve of her breast. Angela twisted into his palm.

"Dog's fed and walked, supper's on low. Phone's turned off."

"Upstairs, now." Pushing forward in the seat, he forced her to relinquish her position on his lap. "I'll give you five minutes," he told her before heading down the hallway toward his room.

* * * *

Royce's breath caught in his throat. Angela was stretched naked on the center of the bed when he finally came upstairs. He took in the sight of her in one long look before seeing the rest of the space. She'd turned down the bed and rested against several pillows. All she wore was her belly ring, earrings, and a sheer white scarf tied around her throat, its tails sweeping over her shoulder. Her hair was brushed out into soft waves and covered the pillow behind her.

She'd turned on a few of the overhead lights, which had pink bulbs in them that bathed the loft with an ethereal glow in the late afternoon. On the bedside table laid a bath towel and both of her toys displayed beside the bottle of lubricant. Two condoms waited beside them. Royce dropped the similar packages he'd retrieved from his bag beside them before lifting the fine silk scarf.

"Major, have I followed your orders correctly?" she asked, and he knew she didn't care that her whole body blushed with her words.

"So far," he said as he moved toward the side of the bed. "this is effective." He used the edge to tease her nipple.

She sighed and closed her eyes. When the movement stopped, she slowly opened them. Leaning over, she tugged his shirt from his jeans and

enclosed her fingers around his bare waist before she turned over, put her face to his crotch, and sighed. Seconds later, the denim was pushed down his thighs as she enveloped his erection with her mouth.

Royce was straining to hold back, but Angela's mouth was too much to bear. The sight of her stretched naked across her bed with her butt in the air and only the wisp of white cloth covering her while she swallowed him became etched in his brain. He pulled away, and she seemed to accept his movement, dropping back to the center of the bed.

She watched every move he made while stripping off his jeans and shirt. He watched her intently for a long minute before sliding beside her, finding her mouth under his, and renewing their connection. Her sigh signaled her submission and she went soft under his weight, molding around him, and her leg thrown over his in an attempt to bring him closer to her entrance.

"You're in such a hurry, angel." Royce leaned back and watched her openly. "You trust me, don't you, Angela?"

"Yes." Her answer was immediate. She waited only a beat before adding, "Only you, Royce."

He groaned and felt his erection twitch. She smiled when it did and, palming him, stroked his fullness to the brink of bursting. "God, Royce, you're so hard, so big, last night I almost didn't think you'd fit inside me."

"Do you have any idea how tight you really are, how warm and sweet it is to be buried inside you, to feel your heat." His head dropped to her breast, and the discussion ended.

They went back to communicating with sighs and moans. Royce moved her hand over her heat and pressed her fingers tight to it.

"Angela, come for me, make yourself come, I want to watch." He leaned back and saw the indecision on her face, imagined the things going through her mind, and held back a smile when her eyes slipped closed and her fingers started to move over her slick lower lips.

His finger tugging her belly ring, his motions got more intense as hers did, and all the while he watched her movements, small, tight circles against her clit alternating with slipping her finger inside and out and wiping the moisture over herself.

On the next pass, he grabbed her hand and sucked her fingers before replacing her hand back to her pussy. He selected the clear dildo and gently slipped it between her legs, letting her decide. Angela groaned and turned to Royce.

"I'd rather have the real thing."

"Later, let me watch you." She leaned forward and kissed him, then let herself drop back and take the plastic intruder into her body under her own hand. It amazed him when she switched hands, her right moving the dildo while her left grazed against her clit.

"That's it, just between you and me, Angela."

Somehow, his words registered with her, and she started moving both hands with purpose, shyness and embarrassment gone and abandoning herself to the act.

He watched with fascination as her hands brought herself toward release, a gasp catching in her throat the moment she climaxed. Her body tensed around the clear invader, and she let it slip out as she relaxed back on the mattress. Royce didn't waste time shifting his body onto his side, his head coming to rest between her thighs to lave her clean while giving her access to his full erection. Angela's warm hand encompassed him and, stroked him, mimicking the movement of his tongue. He pulsed in her palm, and she sighed, her free hand moving to hold his head against her in a motion that pushed them both over the edge into mindless abandon.

Royce dropped beside her, his head still resting on her thigh as her fingers used his ejaculate to lubricate his shaft and keep it erect even after his orgasm. He felt her twisting from their position and realized she was sheathing him. Angela moved to spoon against him, slipping him inside her. He let her adjust their position for her enjoyment and reveled as she rode back against him with enthusiasm and took what she needed to peak while she stroked their joining.

He was exhausted yet elated as she rode him. His hands grasped her shoulders to reposition her angled slightly forward deepening his penetrations. He let his hands roam along her naked back and sides, occasionally pausing to grasp her breast. He knew his resolve to hold back was waning, his need to climax too much. Royce moistened his fingers with her earlier release and teased her rear entrance. Angela groaned and pushed back against him without conversation. He let his finger slip inside her, felt her clench around him, and gasp at the new sensation. He stilled behind her and let her move over him and again set the pace she wanted. He was close

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to losing control a second time, the idea of how she let him invade her too much to accept. He felt his cock sliding against his finger, the thin membrane all that separated them and whispered her name.

"Make me come, Royce, please."

"Oh, Angela," he managed just before moving his finger in a different rhythm, sending them both into the darkness of liberation. She slumped beside him and he slowly pulled his spent cock from inside her before carefully moving his hand. He fell back, sated like never before.

"Thank you," he managed and wasn't surprised when she laughed and repeated his words. Neither moved from the place they'd collapsed.

Royce lay back with his head propped on a folded towel while the warm water swirled around him and Angela sitting in front of him with her head resting against his chest. They'd been quiet after their afternoon adventure, not uncomfortable, just quiet, and easy in each other's company.

"Do you have plans for tomorrow?"

"Nothing important, some work if I can get my mind to think clearly. What about you?" His original plan would have had him long gone from her home and her bed by now. Fate and a snowstorm intervened.

"Come for a ride with me, Angela, I want to show you the farm I found."

"All right. I'd like to see it."

"What would you like right now?" He lifted the weight of her breasts already suspended in the water, pushed them together, and molded them with his touch. Her nipples hardened on contact, and he felt her squirm, sending a pulse through him.

They didn't waste time with words. She moved from his grasp and stepped out of the tub, pausing only to pull a towel around herself before shaking open a second one. Royce briefly dried the bulk of water from his body before sweeping her into his arms and walking the few paces to the bed.

After their nap earlier, she'd finished their supper preparation while he continued reading volume two of *Evangeline*. During that time, she'd

headed back up stairs and changed the linens. The crisp cotton was cool against his damp body.

"Royce?"

He hovered over her for a second too long before his face turned intense.

"Royce, you're making me...uncomfortable."

"Am I?" His tone left no doubt that had been his goal.

"Major?" she whispered and watched him take the white scarf from the side table and pull the silky material through his hands and thread it through his fingers while he studied her body.

"You're getting wet, aren't you? Just me holding this damn piece of silk is getting you all hot and bothered, isn't it?"

"Damn you, Royce."

"Is that a yes, Angela?"

"Yes."

He didn't ask again. Instead, he dropped over her and straddled her waist. His hands drew hers together in front of him and he tied them securely with the material, testing its strength before looking at her.

"Angela, is that too tight?" She didn't answer. She stared. He lifted the knotted silk, and her arms rose with his movement. When he'd pulled them up over her head, he released her against the pillows, her bound wrists high above her head and waited, watching. She moved under him, settling onto the pillows, her hips starting to writhe under him.

"Angela?"

"Major, please..."

His head dropped and he kissed her in a way they hadn't shared before. It was all about attitude and possession. And Royce possessed her, body and mind, by the time he pulled away. He traced her body with his fingers, which sent small shivers of anticipation through her as he watched her nipples bud harder. He surrendered to the want and took first one, then other, between his lips, adding a hint of teeth when she seemed ready.

Angela shifted under him. He was intense with his movements. His penis continued to enlarge against her belly. He ran the clear dildo over her mouth and gently pushed it between her lips, watching her moisten it. Her tongue swirled over the duplicate cock and he removed it from her mouth.

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With a half turn he slipped inside her pussy with ease, his hand already learning her tunnel. When deeply embedded, he gently moved it, while holding her in place by straddling her. As she moved with his thrusts, he moved forward, sliding his erection between her breasts, just missing her open mouth. As his hand moved the dildo he moved over her, finally feeding her the length of his shaft. She groaned around him accepting his hardened length.

Royce had though to tease her a bit, but he knew neither of them would last if he kept this pace. He reluctantly moved from her lips and settled back.

She watched him and knew before he moved where his mind went. The small pink phallus replaced the clear dong inside her, and Royce was careful to turn it on to the lowest setting. He left it inside her while he alternated between tugging her nipples and feeding her his erection. He wasn't sure how he managed to keep himself from exploding, only that with her his body overruled what his mind would ordinarily stop.

She was disappointed when he pulled it from her, and, she sighed when he held it against her breast and added his teeth to the mix. She squirmed under him, trying to reach that elusive moment when he started moving it up and down her body. First down one side of her waist and hip, across her wet junction of curls to the other side and up. Over and over he repeated the action until she became secure and let her eyes drift closed. When she did, he changed the pattern, forcing her back from the respite she'd slipped into.

He held it against her navel and covered it with his mouth, his teeth tugging on the metal. Angela groaned when he moved away, a loud gasp coming from inside her when he finally slipped it back in her. She was wet and accepted it openly.

"More, Royce," she managed to say but didn't look directly at him. She focused on his erection, just inches from her lips and licked them with anticipation.

He obliged and let her suck him again before taking the clear stick and running it along her lips. Her tongue swept out to moisten it, and he moved it lower, using her moisture to ease the path into her rear entrance. He dropped his mouth over hers as he gently inserted it inside her.

Angela's hands came forward automatically, but Royce stopped her and pushed them back over her head. "Want me to stop?"

"No."

He saw the determined look in her eye and swelled further. "Good, because I've just gotten started. I warned you, Angela, once you were mine, you'd stay mine."

"Yes."

He let out a short laugh moved off her, stretched out to lie beside her, his face nuzzling her pussy, with his erection just inches from her mouth.

"Royce, I can't reach you," she said while she tried to shift closer.

"I know," he said before mixing his tongue with the two intruders in her body. One hand grazed over her breasts, and he pinched the nipple while he mimicked the motion against her clit. Groaning and moving under him, she took the invasions and asked for more. Her hands started to reach to him and she paused when he stopped, resting them back over her head while she gave him a nod of acceptance.

Finally, he pulled her closer and turned her onto her side so she could swallow him. It didn't last long, Angela came quickly once she started sucking his cock, her vaginal walls grasping the rubber deeper inside for his view while his lips and teeth assaulted her externally. She came with a shudder and a sigh seconds after he emptied onto her tongue.

He dropped back but kept the toys in place, gently moving the one in her pussy only slightly to start her in a new pattern of delight. Her body knew what it needed, and she writhed against the dual intrusion.

"Royce," she whispered, "make me come again. I don't care how." Royce smiled at her abandon and trust.

* * * *

Angela seized the moment and made herself come one last time while he watched. She knew no shame as she allowed him to penetrate her this way. He rolled her back and moved between her legs, finally removing the vaginal toy. His cock came to attention when he rubbed the head against her damp pussy and slipped inside her only after he'd remembered to grab a condom.. The difference was overwhelming, the small toy still in her anus rubbing in unison and she lasted only a few strokes before constricting around his cock and forcing him to a second, smaller ejaculation. She collapsed under him, exhausted and spent, not caring how she looked or what he thought.

Her Alpha Male

He brushed the hair from her face before leaving her body, pulling out the second toy before he moved off her. He fumbled with the knot on the silk before it slipped free, and he rubbed her wrists while the circulation came back, all the while whispering she was his now, only his.

Royce pulled her up against his chest and held her tight. "We're in deep trouble, Angela," he whispered, and she only nodded into his chest before allowing herself to drift off to sleep in his arms.

Angela let her mind go blank. Her body was exhausted like never before, and she knew her legs wouldn't hold her weight if she tried to stand. Royce had given her the best gift ever, himself. In all way's as she'd given herself. When she tried to feel embarrassed, all she could do was smile. If what they had done together was wrong, so be it. She'd accept all the guilt, willingly.

Chapter Nine

Sunday morning, Royce was awake early and shook Angela from a deep sleep. He'd made coffee, and two mugs were on the bedside table when she roused.

"Morning," she managed, dragging her fingers through her hair.

"Morning." He handed her a mug and moved away. "Prima's walked and fed. Shower and I'm going to take you out to breakfast, well lunch really."

"Yes, to the shower. How about brunch here?" She lifted an eyebrow, and she laughed when he left her sight quickly. "Chicken," she said, taunting him, but ultimately joined him under the hot spray.

Her body pressed to his back, she let her soapy hands roam all over him. When he tried to move she held him in place, her lips to his neck, her hand sliding along his arm's directing them with hers onto the wall before him. One hand stroked his cock while the other moved over his belly and chest. His morning erection was heavy in her hand, and she used the lather to aid her movements.

"Royce, what will make you come?" Her other hand never stopped moving over him, around him. She'd taken a step away but only to skim her fingers over his shoulders down his back and across his tight buttocks. She found the sensitive spot behind his ear and teased it with the tip of her tongue before latching her lips to his skin and sucking deeply while her tongue continued to torment him with light flicks.

Royce let her have him, relaxed back against her and closed his eyes, bracing himself with his hands on the wall. He was close to coming and tried to tell her but she shushed him, to wanting to finish him as her hand moved over him with quicker motions.

"Angela," he managed to utter just as she bit his neck harder and her hand moved faster and harder against his skin while her other hand slipped between his cheeks, just skimming over him lightly. He groaned at her touch and came with an intensity that was new when she penetrated him with her soapy finger. Royce wound up pressed against the shower wall with Angela's lip's still attached to his neck and her hands gently stroking his cock, from the inside and outside. She'd let her hand slip away and stepped closer against his body.

"Morning, Royce," she whispered, just before she bit his earlobe. He started to push away from the wall and turn but she was already prepared, her body centered and her weight distributed evenly. Her hands smoothed up and down his body several times before she let him relax.

"You promised me food," she told him as she rinsed the suds and exited quickly, leaving him alone under the hot spray.

* * * *

What she didn't let him see was the very self-satisfied smile her lips lifted into. She might be inexperienced in reality, but her mind had imagined many different ways to surprise him.

Breakfast turned into a late lunch by the time they managed to leave the house. Neither of them mentioned their shower experience. Royce was behind the wheel of Angela's Buick, and Prima was settled in the back. He drove from the diner to the farm, the distance silent between them. By rote, he pulled off the main road and stopped to take down the cable blocking the private road. On the drive up, he told her about the farm, forty acres that had been left to seed, an old farmhouse with five bedrooms and only one antiquated bath on the lower level.

There were several barns and outer building all in need of major repair and a small pond at the southern point. Royce stopped the Buick about a hundred yards from the house.

Angela was quiet while she studied the structure. It had good, basic lines. It had just been neglected, probably beyond repair. The slate roof was in desperate need of restoration, and pieces of the clapboard siding was missing in places. Wind and time had taken their toll on the structure, weathering it beyond quaint. A large porch ran around the house, but the railing was missing in places and broken in others, and the flooring missing on one side. The lower level had planks nailed over the larger windows, but the upstairs windows had been left uncovered, most of them broken, which let in more destruction from the outside. Angela turned to Royce and chose her words before speaking.

"All right, I see what you see, a falling-down hovel. I also see what it could be with some time and energy. What do you see, Royce? Why did you want to see this property? What would you do here and why?" All valid questions from her perspective.

He shifted under the steering wheel, obviously uncomfortable and she leaned over and kissed his cheek lightly before pulling quickly back. She waited quietly until he spoke.

"I always promised myself if I survived long enough to put in my twenty years, I'd retire to an old house, someplace off the beaten path. A place where I was in charge and made all the decisions."

"What would you do here?"

"There are options." He still couldn't bring himself to share Ram McCloud with her, even after everything they'd shared in the last forty-eight hours.

"Such as?" She finally tried to pin him down. He squirmed, and she knew she'd made him uncomfortable. "Can we get out and take a closer look?"

Royce nodded, and she didn't wait for him to come around and open her door. Instead, she met him at the back to let Prima out for a run. Angela slowly wandered around the outside of the house and wondered what it had once looked like and what it might be again one day if somebody put some time and effort into it. Angela didn't allow herself the luxury of picturing herself as that person. As she rounded the back, ignoring all the shrubbery that hadn't been trimmed in years she let out a gasp.

The front elevation was deceptive to the rear, the mountains in the far horizon, and the town below them in the distance. "Royce, it's a beautiful view. I couldn't imagine from the front the house was set on a cliff."

She took only two steps farther before her world flashed in front of her eyes, and she didn't like what she saw. He was beside her without warning, pulling her back roughly. His breathing was fragmented, and he'd used more force was necessary. But in that flash of time, she saw her future with him and knew, then and there, she was meant for him alone.

Her Alpha Male

"The retaining wall is rotted, Angela, be careful." His voice was tense, his body rigid. The way he was staring down made her antsy in his arms.

A peculiar heat worked its way through her body, from the strange static in her belly to her heated lips, now engorged and wanting attention and in the back of her brain where it all jelled into the same realization. This was the man she loved and wanted to spend her life with. His same intense look reinforced that it wasn't going to happen. She drew a deep breath and, pushing the idea aside, reminded herself that she'd promised to take what he gave her and let him go without a fuss. He turned her back against him, showing her the view.

"All right," she said as her heart finally steadied, but she didn't move from his warmth. "What would you do here, Royce? How would you spend your time? What would you do for a living?" She felt him tense more behind her and quickly added, "Never mind, it's none of my business." While she didn't pull away, she held herself taut.

"Angela, the house would have to be rebuilt. I'd like to save some of the woodwork and molding details and incorporate them into the new building, but it's not structurally sound. None of the building on the site are. It would take a lot of work and time to turn it into something livable."

"Do you have the time and more importantly do you have the want?"

"I have both."

"But yesterday you said you couldn't buy it, that it's too close to me. I'm not moving again, Royce. I just got my house finished."

"I know, Angela. I'm not asking you to move."

She could take his statement several ways and she didn't like any of the directions. "You're being very evasive. I'm not sure why, but I won't pressure you. Somehow, I get the feeling that's what you want, for me to pressure you so you can retreat and tell yourself you were right about what ever excuses you summon."

Angela stood tall and waited for an answer. When none came, she moved away from his warmth and wandered across a barren field toward an old barn, the attached silo now missing its metal roof. Her emotions were on full tilt, and she was hurt by his words. The dog was still running in haphazard patterns around the acreage.

Royce waited a long time before finally following her. She'd stopped in the doorway and let her eyes adjust to the darkness before entering. There were bales of stale hay and dust motes circulating through the space in the daylight coming through several openings, the largest one where a roof should rest.

"I never had a real home, Angela. We were always living on a base someplace or were moving to another. I want something substantial in my life, a place I can unpack my life and never move from again."

"So it's a matter of finding the right place for you and making a commitment to it."

"Yes."

"I can understand that perspective, Royce. I searched for over a year before I found Woodstock. And months longer before I found my little house. But I was doing it on the sly, and it was difficult to get away to explore." She smiled but didn't share the reason with him. He already knew why.

"Why here? Why this town?"

"Several reasons. I liked the quaintness about it, but it's a thriving place. I see the potential for its future. It has all the amenities within a reasonable driving distance and I can still get back to Brooklyn if I want to. But it's not like I'm living on Queens or Long Island where Vito would expect me to attend every Sunday supper. And I can drive into Manhattan when I need to for work. I like the feel of a tourist town because it stays current with the rest of the world and I can still drive a few miles and be locked away on my four acres where nobody calls the shots but me."

"You're an amazingly strong woman, Angela."

"No more than you, you survived twenty years in the Air Force."

"And I'm regimented and hardheaded and stubborn at times, basically jaded."

"Yeah, tell me something I don't know." She laughed, and they both relaxed.

"The sun's going down, and it's getting colder. We should head back."

"You mean you're not going to make love to me in the barn?"

"Not in the middle of March. Ask me again in June or July."

Neither addressed their last comments and let it drop.

"All right," Angela whistled for Prima who took a long time to find her way back, looking pathetic and relieved when she spotted Angela in the distance. "If I didn't know better, I'd say that dog got lost."

"Probably just turned around a bit," Angela defended.

"Yeah, just turned around. She's a dog. She's supposed to have an innate sense of direction." He was laughing as the dog slinked back beside Angela. "Give her time. She's never been here before."

"All right, I won't pick on her. Come on, it's getting late." He reached for her hand and she automatically took his. Their walk back to the vehicle was quiet.

* * * *

Royce insisted on stopping in town and having an early supper at the burger place and on bringing back ice cream for later. Prima was fed and walked in the fading daylight, and finally, they were settled in for the night, a glass of wine near each of them. Royce was finishing volume two of *Evangeline* while Angela scanned the newspaper.

Chapter Ten

Angela had gone upstairs ahead of him, just after she'd walked Prima one last time. He told her he'd be up in a few minutes. He only had a chapter left in volume two. Closing the novel, he held it in his hands for a long time before placing it on the table. He walked to the glass wall and shook his head. He'd never given her credit for the depth of her creative side. He'd never allowed himself to really see her as a woman other than Tony's little sister.

It had worked for twenty years, despite the few instances when his dick overruled his brain. But he'd known for years she was different, and the way she wrote was overpowering, especially now that he knew he'd been a model for Heath. A deer wandered from the woods and halted in the corner of the yard. It reminded him of Prima, skittish and on guard.

The sight brought tears to his eyes, and he laughed at himself. His emotions were on overload. When he'd thought to make this quick stop to check on her, he hadn't been prepared to come to terms with his feelings, to accept that he'd been in love with her for years. And he never gave her credit for the passion she kept locked away.

Volume two had Evangeline and Heath finally joining in the physical sense. She'd managed to turn the two inexperienced lovers into a finely tuned unit, each learning to play the other like a fine instrument. Angela ended the novel with Evangeline presenting Heath with a present. The silver and blue wrapping was described with great detail as was the look on his face when he open's the box to find an antique wooden paddle.

Royce had read the pages and found it hard to breath, found himself shifting his instant erection for comfort. He almost choked when in the last passage of the novel, Heath was on his knees before Evangeline, with his hands raised and the paddle waiting her touch. This was a twist he hadn't seen coming, but he remembered her feelings about trust and control.

Her Alpha Male

The instance reinforced his feelings. He did trust her to control him. While he'd thought about giving a woman a light spanking in the moment, and had enjoyed the experience with one long-ago partner, he had never given thought to being on the receiving end. His alpha personality shone through with an amazing chauvinistic flair.

He didn't want to think about how Angela might hold that paddle against him. The idea terrified and embarrassed him, yet in the back of his mind, he knew that if he wanted to spank Angela, and the want was overwhelming for too many reasons, sexual excitement only one of them, he'd ultimately have to trust her if she decided to turn the paddle on him.

Royce didn't like the way his erection was throbbing and decided this was the end. He'd leave her tomorrow and never look back. It was rude but necessary for survival, and he'd become a survivalist over the last twenty years. The deer was gone when he looked up. Only a few tiny hoof prints in the fresh snow left evidence it had been there.

He wondered what Tony would think and say if he ever found out about Royce's time with his baby sister. He knew instantly the friendship wouldn't survive his defiling of Angela and tossing her aside. What would Vito do? Visions of a shotgun being held to his head and Angela walking down the aisle toward him in her mother's wedding gown materialized, and he broke out in a cold sweat.

The photograph of her parents' wedding had stood on the sideboard, with one of Nonnie and her husband beside it, for as long as he could remember. He easily pictured Angela in Nonnie's simple gown as opposed mother's frilly one, filling it out better than her grandmother had, but definitely something similar. She'd make a beautiful bride, he mused, and realized the direction his mind had taken. No, he wasn't getting married. He was going to settle down and find himself. Maybe someday, when he was older and tired, he'd find a woman and make her his wife. But that was a long time away. Now he just had to remember it.

He took some time to control his feeling before heading up for one last night. One last span, during which he could touch her and love her, could make her his own before he walked out of her life for good. Angela was lying on the bed, naked except for a black silky slip. As he approached, she moved to the foot and reached toward him while lying on her belly. "Royce," she whispered as he neared. When he was close enough, she pulled him to her, her fingers using his belt loops to pull him closer. There was no conversation or playful banter. Angela took what she wanted from him. She pushed the denim from him with ease, and she swallowed his rising erection with an enthusiasm that only made him want her more.

"Angela, we need to talk."

He'd pulled from her mouth and tugged his jeans back up his hips. When she finally pulled back from him, she rolled onto her back, and stared up at him as he knelt beside the bed.

"You have the worst timing for conversation, Royce, unless it's to tell me what you want on your last night here."

Her gaze held his, and he smiled, shaking his head. Angela rolled back onto her stomach and propped her head on her hands.

"Well?"

Suddenly he was tongue tied, his entire well thought out words gone from his mind with the simple touch of her lips. Her slip had gotten tangled when she moved and had ridden up her back. Her tight butt glowed in the soft pink light. She watched him intently before speaking, and he knew she could read him like no other woman ever had.

"If you're looking for absolution, you have it. I know you're leaving, and in all likelihood, I'll probably never see you again, or at least not for a long time. I knew that going into this and I accept responsibility for any guilt or hurt either of us feels. But damn it, just once in my life I wanted what I wanted, just for me. Can you understand? That for just this weekend, I wanted to know what it would feel like to be loved by you."

"Angela, I can't."

"You can't what? I haven't asked you for anything, have I?" He gave her a strained frown, and she laughed. "All right, aside from sex and silence, I've not asked you for anything. No commitment, no false promises. I simply asked for your attention."

"You deserve more," he said, his words a mere whisper.

"Yes, but it's not going to happen, and we both know it." Angela held his look and refused to blink first. "Royce, I've always loved you to some degree, first a childhood crush then more. But I've always accepted you didn't see me in a sexual way. This weekend, I still didn't think you did, but somehow, we managed to get this far. Let's not spoil it. Can't we just have this time to ourselves without regret?"

"I never meant to hurt you."

"I know, and you haven't. I'm a big girl now, and I knew what I was getting into. If anything, I pushed you further than you were willing to go. So, just between us, Royce, let's just let loose for the next few hours and enjoy each other. Reality will intrude on us soon enough."

"Is that all I am, a way to let loose for a few hours?"

Something had shifted, and Angela wasn't sure what happened. She pulled herself up, sat back on her heels, and stared.

"What would you prefer? I've already professed my undying love to a man who won't accept it. Should I make a scene when you leave tomorrow? Will that make leaving easier?"

"No!"

"Well, tell me, Royce, what do you want?"

"Damn it, Angela. I can't give you a future."

"I know that, and I'm building one for myself. But it doesn't mean I shouldn't take advantage of you when I have you here, does it? Should you have not kissed me on my birthday? Was it wrong for you to touch me the day of the christening? Was it wrong that I let you? None of it matters, Royce. Tomorrow you'll pack up your rental car and drive away. And wherever you decide to settle, I know it wouldn't be here. And most of all, it won't be with me. So, give me what you can for a few more hours and a few more memories to keep me warm on a cold winter night."

"You deserve more."

"Yes, but you're not prepared to give it and I'm not prepared to turn into a *puttana* and force you into something you obviously don't want."

"If I could, angel." His eyes closed in defeat, and they both recognized the beginning of the end. She reached out to his chin and pulled his head closer.

"You can't, I accept that. What I won't accept is wasting what little time we have left together. You promised me this time together would never leave this space and I'm holding you to that promise. So let's just see where the night and our imaginations take us, and in the morning, I promise not to make a scene." Angela closed her eyes and tried to take a deep breath while holding back the tears that threatened to spill down her cheeks. For long seconds, she stilled, and Royce watched her intently. When her lips twisted into a strange smile, she finally opened her eyes and openly surveyed him. "I could always call Tony and tell him how you took advantage of his poor, innocent little sister, unsuspecting in her invitation to an old family friend."

Royce stared for three heartbeats before laughing wildly at the notion of her being unsuspecting or innocent. "That's what you'd tell him, huh?"

"It's one possibility, but I like my way better."

He stripped off his shirt and backed her toward the pillows as he advanced. The heavy air around them dissipated.

"Be careful, Angela. I'd have to tell him about Evangeline." His gaze held hers, and again, her laughter startled him.

"I'd be forced to explain the dedication."

Royce stopped dead and stared. She was laughing as he twisted around the circular staircase. He made it to the table in record time, grabbed the book, and took it toward the fireplace for light. He fumbled to find the page. Royce stared at the simple words and finally laughed, at himself and at Angela. Her dedication was brief and to the point.

For R. M., my inspiration.

"Son of a bitch." He hissed through his teeth and shook his head. Royce dropped the book on the sofa and headed back upstairs. Angela was sitting cross-legged in the center of the bed with an impish grin on her lips. "Next threat?" she asked, knowing she'd managed to throw him.

He moved quickly, quicker she was prepared for. Before realizing how, he was sitting on the edge of her bed, with her spread across his lap, her slip bunched up around her waist. Heat from his hand reached her before the actual touch of his hand, soft at first and on the second pass, the third pass impacted with her skin a bit harder as did the one that followed. His cock jutted against her belly, and she jolted away without thought. Her cheeks were red, and he saw his imprint was be visible. Royce spanked her twice more, and she came, writhing over his legs while his cock nuzzled against her.

Angela slipped off his lap and down between his thighs and freed his cock for her waiting lips. She licked his moist tip and savored his taste, no longer surprised when he pulled her up to kiss her. "No more threats, angel." He moved her beside him on the bed and slipped the strap of her gown off her shoulder, exposing the rounded top of her breast.

"I have a much better idea."

His fingers tugged her already hardened nipple and he felt it swell further. His cock twitched to life, and he moved to her other side.

"And that would be," he asked just before he latched onto her.

"That you fuck me until the sun comes up."

Her request didn't faze him. "How?"

"Every way you can think of and a few I've thought about..."

The look on Angela's face made Royce straighten and back away. He saw the intensity in her expression and knew she meant what she said.

"Royce, I want anything you can give me, and I'm going to take all I can."

Excitement between them all but sizzled in the air around them. He stripped off his jeans and tossed them aside before sliding beside her.

"Never disappoint a lady," he said as he pulled her against him and crushed her breasts against his chest as he lowered a finger to twist her belly ring.

"Major?" she whispered, and he swallowed the rest of her words with a kiss.

* * * *

He was exhausted, physically and emotionally, after their night together. Sometime in the early morning, Angela had become insatiable. She took what he offered and pushed for more. Royce knew he couldn't hold out much longer. She'd worked them both into a frenzy right from the start, and he'd come quickly. Angela had teased that she'd have some time to work on him and remained true to her word.

In the last moments before he lost control a second time, he moved from inside her and flipped her over. Angela kneeled on the bed waiting for him to enter her, pushing back to take him deeper in her pussy when he did. He didn't stop his hands from running along the red prints on her cheeks, impacting the marks again to darken them.

Lillith Payne

"Royce, make me come, one last time," she told him, as she moved her hips against him.

He'd grabbed her sable curls and wrapped them around his hand, her head, and upper body pulled back by his motion. "Are you sure, Angela?"

"Yes...Major." Her groan of disapproval was short lived when he pulled away, replaced with a sigh when his tongue replaced his cock, licking her pussy and anus. Royce felt the throb of orgasm starting to overtake him. He moved away and grabbed her hair a second time.

He groaned aloud and tightened his grip on her hair. His cock fucked her pussy several strokes more before he pulled his glistening slick erection from inside her and, without warning, plunged back just an inch higher, filling her like never before. No toy or even his large finger could have prepared her for the invasion his cock made in her body. She let out several ragged breaths before catching his rhythm and, slowly moved against him, allowed him to invade her body and mind one last time.

When he came, he did so with a cry of his own, her name dying on his lips. He'd slipped his thumb in her vagina after she'd adjusted to his invasion and that was what pushed them both over the edge into the abyss of pinpoint lights and patterns on closed eye lids. She crumpled under him, and Royce dropped with her. He dislodged himself from her with minimal movement and stayed on top of her.

Neither said a word nor dared break the intensity of their act of total abandon. Royce shifted slightly beside her and pulled her, his arms banded around her holding her to his chest. Her hands slipped up to hold his hands in place. They lay quietly with their own thoughts until each of them drifted off to sleep.

She let out a small giggle and he smoothed his hand along her arm.

"Sleep, Angela."

Closing her eyes, she snuggled closer to his body, the imprint of her locked in his memory.

Royce was exhausted in too many ways to count. He was physically weak and his mind was exhausted. His leg muscles were aching and his arms felt like dead weight. Yet his cock was stirring again, lying with her reddened buttocks against him. He willed it to stop, yet it stayed semierect, as if to remind him that his cock really was in charge.

Chapter Eleven

Royce woke alone in Angela's bed and didn't like it. He could smell the coffee brewing and gave himself a minute to regroup before leaving her bed. She'd come up the stairs quietly and placed the mugs on the side table before slipping back under the comforter while he'd been in her bathroom, almost hesitant to wash away her scent from his skin..

"I come bearing gifts, coffee."

"You are my queen," he teased and pulled her close. Angela automatically wrapped her arms and legs around him. He dropped a quick kiss on her nose, rolled her onto her back, reached for a mug, and drained it in two gulps. He rolled back and took her with him.

She simply shifted to capture him and slid over his length. She hadn't sheathed him with a condom, and the difference was intense.

"Angel?"

"Quiet, Royce. It's all right, I promise. I'm on the pill."

He pulled back, studied her face, and spoke before thinking. "Why?"

"Because I wanted to be protected. I like the idea of being able to choose when I start a family instead of leaving it to chance."

"But if there's nobody else?"

"Besides just birth control, it makes my cycle much more predictable." Watching him closely, she added, "Just once I wanted to feel you inside me, just you against me. I'm due soon, that's probably why I'm so horny."

"That's why?" he teased as his lips ran along her forehead.

"Of course, it has nothing to do with you or your equipment."

"I see, it wouldn't matter if I pulled out and used your dildo?"

"Why use rubber when I have the real thing?" Her words were punctuated with her inner muscles tightening around him, pulsing while she made no external movement.

"Why did we use condoms all weekend?"

"I wanted to be sure there were no accidents." Angela reached up and pulled his mouth to hers ending their discussion.

They moved slowly with each other, both knowing this was one last time. He let her ride him, watched as she threw her head back, felt her hair tickle the tops of his thighs. She moved with grace and her movements intensified. Royce rolled her under him and took what she offered. He grazed their joining with a finger, which pushed them both into one last mindless moment of lust and abandon. His body was in a complete sweat by the time his breathing returned to anything resuming a pattern.

"Thank you, Royce," she whispered, holding him tight when he went to pull away. She reluctantly loosened her arms from around him and let her legs slip open. Royce stayed locked with her only a moment before dropping beside her. He knew in that instant if he didn't leave now, he never would.

* * * *

Their shower wasn't sexual. It was sensual, last touches and strokes to memorize. They moved together in a sort of automatic wave of dressing and long, soul-wrenching kisses that left Angela drained and Royce mindboggled. Angela braided her hair and applied minimal makeup while Royce shaved. She went to start breakfast but didn't fuss when he turned her down flat. Something in his tone made her relent. Standing beside his rented car in the early morning while Prima chased leaves and retrieved sticks, Angela let out an anguished groan and hugged him tight.

"Angela," he started only to have her look up, her eyes glassy.

She raised her fingers to his lips to stop his words. She cupped his face and directed it toward her. Standing on her toes to reach him, Angela kissed Royce good-bye. When she finally pulled away, she didn't care that he saw a tear escape her eye and roll down her cheek. Turning, she headed toward the garage and did not look back, only whistled for the dog to join her.

* * * *

Royce watched her wait by the door for the dog and slowly go through it, all without looking back. He slipped behind the wheel of the rental and left her. Only he couldn't help himself from slowing just as her house went from sight. His head pounded with an ache that matched the one in his heart. Royce never loved before, and he never lost before. In a few days, he'd experienced both. He wanted to hate Angela for both experiences but had to shoulder half the responsibility.

* * * *

Four days later, Angela automatically shut off the electric typewriter before answering the phone. She took a deep breath and pressed the receiver to her ear.

"Hi Angie," the deep voice said.

"Hi, Tony, how are you? Where are you?" She hoped her voice sounded light and breezy. Anything else would be a disaster.

"Hi, baby girl."

She smiled at the affectionate term even though at times it annoyed her.

"How goes life in the academic world? Any new funds dispersed because of your research and carefully worded applications?"

She laughed and told him she was on track while not giving him any real information. There was an obvious pause and she decided to cut through the chitchat and get to the point. "So, I assume you heard from Royce. Did I pass his inspection?" She heard Tony draw a breath and knew she'd put him on the defensive.

"Hey, kid, come on. It wasn't like that," he said quietly.

"Yes, it was. So, did I pass?" She pictured her older brother and the grimacing face he'd be making attitude.

"Yeah, of course, it's not like I sent him to check on you. He was going to be in the area and..."

"And you sent him to check on me. So?"

Finally, he laughed, knowing he'd been caught and owned up to it. "All right, so I worry about you out there in the woods all alone."

"As my older brother, I can't stop you from worrying, but I think it's about time you gave me credit for being able to take care of myself."

"Chill, Angie. It wasn't like that. If I could have gotten away, I would have come myself."

"To inspect my home and my lifestyle. Damn it Tony, sometimes you're worse than Papa!"

"Hey, settled down, kid. There's no need to start calling me names."

"Back off, Tony, and tell the rest of the family the same thing. I'm sick of getting summoned back to Brooklyn and being told my life choices don't count because they're not yours or Ray's or Charlie's or even Vito's." Angela took two cleansing breaths and tried to adjust her tone and her attitude.

She'd been on a hormonal rush the last two days, her period starting on schedule leaving her no doubt as to her status. And while she wouldn't have wanted to trap Royce into a relationship because of a baby, the idea of having his child was always appealing. Her flow was a reminder that it would never be.

"Pop call again?" he asked, not letting her bait him.

"Yeah, at seven this morning."

He laughed knowing never to approach her until she'd had coffee.

"Angela, you need to come home, now. This silliness is over," she said mimicking Vito's tone.

"And you told him?"

"The same thing I'm telling you, to back off or you'll lose contact with me completely." She allowed herself to laugh remembering her father's stunned reaction. "I told him if he bothered me anymore, I'd turn my house into a commune and let all the hippie friends he thinks I have live here too!"

"That must have made his day."

"He made mine. I figured it only fair to reciprocate. And since you're on the phone now, I'll warn you, you're probably one of his calls for tonight."

"Living in the woods has toughened you up, kid."

"No, living in the real world has made me responsible for myself."

"Yeah, why are you raising horses?"

She laughed and realized Royce had used the dog to escape Tony's questions and concerns. "Yeah well, she eats like a horse, but as Royce probably told you she's still afraid of her own shadow. But she'll come into her own, just like I did."

"Royce said you cut your hair."

"And? What's the matter with that? Every woman changes her hairstyle occasionally."

"Yeah, I just can't picture you with short hair."

Her Alpha Male

"It's shoulder length, Tony, not chopped to shreds! And if you'd get your ass back here for a few days, you'd see for yourself."

"It's not that easy to manage right now, kid."

"Yeah, I know, it's always complicated with you. You want to know every detail of what's going on, but you don't want the responsibility of the day-to-day annoyances that goes along with the family."

"Yes." He answered. "Angie, I didn't call to annoy you, just to say hi."

"And that means you won't accept any lectures on family responsibility. So, I'll make you a deal. Come to visit me and I won't tell anyone in Brooklyn that you're in the state...unless you piss me off!"

The rest of their conversation went smoothly and ended quickly. Angela knew that if he agreed to visit her, he'd have to accept she was capable. And while she was thankful Royce had kept her secrets, she'd been slightly depressed that he'd gone and hadn't contacted her since. She'd known from the start that this was how it would be and went into the situation with her eyes open. Knowing only time would ease the feeling of loss, she'd buckle down and get back to work. At least in her novels she could control Heath and his actions.

* * * *

Volume three had been finished before his visit, and now, she wished she could add to it. Instead, she decided it might be better to start fresh with a new and completely educated perspective. For the past few days, she'd been jotting notes and reminders for a new story.

Angela didn't recognize the return address on the manila envelope that had been stuffed into her mailbox. She'd taken the whole stack of mail upstairs and tossed in on the dining table while she heated tea water. Absentmindedly, she warmed her hands on the mug.

Ridiculous as it was, her hands were cold, and she shook by the time she lifted the envelope. Her stomach somersaulted as she sensed trouble inside it. Sliding her finger under the flap, she turned it upside down, shook out the contents and was immediately puzzled when she saw the comic book, *Ram McCloud*. She'd never been into comics and had no idea what this one was about. Peeking out from the front cover was a sheet of white paper.

Angela, it's taken me a long time to come to terms with sharing this with you. I knew the moment you saw this you'd realize you were the inspiration for Agnes. I trust you to keep my secret, Angel. Like you, nobody knows who writes Ram McCloud, and I'd like to keep it that way, (even from Tony). I think of you often, Royce

The tea was long forgotten as she sat snuggled up in her reading chair, the comic book now closed on her lap. She was stunned to say the least. Royce Merrill had developed a new comic strip super hero. Ram McCloud worked for the White Agency, the last of the defenders of peace and freedom in a world where many would rather chaos reigned. His navy training and years of ultra secret work have left him the one man whom the Agency could count on in dire times. His nontraditional ways and gruff exterior clashed with his Agency contact, Agnes.

When he was approached, he was never specifically informed who his ultimate boss was. He'd been in too deep when he found out the plain, nondescript Agnes turned out to be the brains behind the whole operation. Their clashes were both verbal and bordering on physical, and Angela realized the sexual tension he was creating between them. Agnes was tall and well endowed, with dark hair and dark brown eyes that drilled through Ram's defenses.

Her hard edge annoyed him, and he vowed to never take another assignment, yet with each crisis, he found himself across the desk from Agnes, each jockeying for position, both professionally and sexually. The story ended with Ram saving the world from evil, but only with Agnes's help, a fact that annoyed him to no end and pleased her.

Angela stared at the cover and laughed as she glimpsed the dark-haired, pointy-breasted Agnes in the background, with dark glasses shielding her expression.

In the foreground was an over-muscled version of a brown-haired, black-eyed Ram McCloud, his expression a grimace while he glances over his shoulder at the folder Agnes is holding. Not a single word in all this time, and now she knew why. Knew why he was so dead set against telling her where his future lay. Angela was both proud of and angry with Royce.

She'd trusted him with her creation of Evangeline and Heath. Why couldn't he trust her with his? Yet, he had, but only in his own time frame.

She thought to write back, but she realized the address was a business and didn't want any personal correspondence to cross that line. Instead, she'd jotted down a simple note and mailed it to the last address she had. Whether he still got mail there remained to be seen. Remembering her promise to let him go, she knew that if there was ever to be contact between them, Royce had to initiate it. She had to assume now was the time.

In her sprawling handwriting she wrote,

I'm impressed! Thank you for trusting me.

Under it, she only added her initials.

The following day she was at the newsstand finding out where she could buy the comic book. After being sent to another store, she managed to get a copy of the three following chapters. She hurried home and read each with delight and awe. Royce's imagination was much more vivid than she'd imagined. While his plots were superhuman, she saw the relationship between Ram and Agnes deepening and let out an automatic sigh when she read the last one.

Carefully, she went to the office and put the rest of them in the clear plastic holder she'd stored the first volume in. It sat on the credenza behind her desk, always within sight.

Chapter Twelve

The call annoyed her, so Angela didn't answer. She looked away from her typewriter and waited for the answering machine to pick up, thankful she had indulged in the expensive machine. It was her house line, but an extension ran to the office. It would probably turn out to be a sales pitch about dirt! At least that was the way her day had been going, and her week, and summer, and the past months.

Since spring, she hadn't been able to get back into her normal routine. Her work was suffering. She had no imagination left. Thank God, she was still getting grant work to keep her busy. Prima had grown another six inches in height and about thirty pounds in weight. She was still afraid of her own shadow. Sleeping in the center of the office, her breathing was heavy in the humid room around them. The earlier breeze had died down and the air was now hot and sticky. After the fifth ring, the machine turned on, Angela listening with half an ear.

"Angela?"

She dropped her feet from the desk beside her and leaned forward, not sure who she heard.

"Angela, if you're there angel, pick up. It's Royce."

Her heart lodged in her throat, and her hands started to shake as she reached for the receiver. Again, she heard him say, "Angel, pick up. I need to talk to you."

She grabbed at the receiver and knocked over her half-empty coffee cup in the process. "Royce, I'm here, hang on." Angela grabbed at tissues to mop up the coffee and forced herself to take a deep, steadying breath before trying to talk. "Royce, I'm here. How are you, where are you? Is something wrong?"

"Calm down, Angel, something's up, but nothing's wrong. How are you, Angela?"

"I'm fine, really. What about you?"

"I'm all right now."

"Now, does that mean you weren't, did something happen?"

"Yes, and don't panic. I need to see you."

"When?"

"As soon as possible." Static and background noise interfered on their line making it hard to hear.

"Of course, when and where?"

"Your place in about an hour. Does that work for you?"

"Yes, it's okay." She breathed. "I'll put up some fresh coffee and—"

More noise, and she finally heard him say, "Angela, I want to take you someplace, so dress in jeans and bring a jacket in case it turns cold later."

"All right, I'll see you soon." Angela disconnected the call. She made herself turn off the lights and sprinted across to the house, Prima at her heels.

Angela fed the dog even though it was early and dashed upstairs to turn on the shower while she stripped. Half an hour later, she was standing before her closet wondering what to wear. She pulled out a comfortable pair of jeans that she knew enhanced her long legs and decided on a white, shortsleeve cotton T-shirt. Pairing it with light sneakers, she grabbed a cotton sweater as an extra layer and managed to get some mascara on her lashes along with the rest on her cheek. She was just taking a last look in the mirror when she heard a vehicle turn into her driveway.

A large black Ford station wagon pulled in, and Angela knew it would was Royce. Opening the door, Prima ran ahead and greeted him first, her paws to his shoulders as she licked his face. By the time Angela got close enough to pull her back, she heard Royce say, "Enough, dog. I missed you, too, but I missed your mommy more."

She glanced up at Royce who was using the sleeve of his shirt to wipe Prima's kiss away.

"Royce." She let out a breath before moving into his open arms. "I've missed you," she said into his chest, unsure if he heard her.

"I missed you too, angel." He held her crushed to his chest, his fingers tangling in her hair and using it to pull her head back. "God, I've missed you."

His kiss told her he had. It was fierce and demanding, wanting her to surrender. Angela didn't let herself think, only feel.

She spread her hands over his chest, pinched his shoulders to make sure he was real before using his dark brown hair to pull him closer and to hold him. She let her fingers comb thought his first nonmilitary hairstyle since she'd known him. Even with her breasts crushed against him, she felt her nipples bud to fullness and the heat from his tongue speed directly to her belly, which started that same static feeling she'd missed for so long. He grew against her, and she dropped her hand to stroke him automatically.

He broke their kiss and smiled down at her. "Oh no, Angela. First, we talk." His lips dropped to her forehead, and neither of them pulled away.

"Royce, what's going on, why are you here and why now?" Her voice was low, her face turned into his chest. She didn't know if he heard her, but she had to ask.

"All valid questions. Are you ready to leave?" He pulled back from her and steadied her with his hands on her waist. "I've just got to put her in the house."

"No, put her in the back of the car. She can come with us."

"All right," Angela said, confused but agreeable. "I'll go lock up."

* * * *

Angela answered Royce's questions about the family while they drove, all the while wondering where they were going. Half an hour later, after a second turn, she knew. He was bringing her back to the farm, the one he said he wouldn't buy because it was too near to where she lived. He pulled off the road and stopped the vehicle to drop the old cable before entering. His fingers pulled her chin toward him, and he dropped a kiss on her lips.

"Just a few minutes and I'll explain everything."

She nodded and stared straight ahead until he pulled a few yards from the location of the old house. It was gone, and the view from where they sat was extraordinary. Royce let Prima out and met Angela on her side of the car.

"The view, it's incredible," she told him and meant it.

"Yeah, the old place just blocked it out."

"There are trees down too, that's opened it up a lot."

"You remember?" The look that crossed between them said it all. Of course she remembered, in vivid detail. "Yes, of course you would. That's part of why I love you so much." Royce was obviously testing her reactions and smiled when she slowly turned to look.

"Excuse me?"

"I love you, Angela. Don't you believe me?"

His brown eyes twinkled, and she relaxed instantly. "Yes, I do, or you never would have said it."

"You're right, and I should have said it a long time ago, to myself and to you. But I wasn't ready." He looked and laughed, taking her hand. "Come, let's walk." He took her toward the far end where the barn had once stood. It too was gone along with the silo. A makeshift lean-to had been put up, and boards and lumber were stacked under it. "Obviously, there have been some changes." He stilled. "Angela, would you consider moving one last time, here with me, after the new place is finished?"

"Royce..." His name came from her lips with her breath. She simply stared wide eyed at him.

"I bought the old place a few months ago, Angela. I wanted to get everything straight before I came back and asked you to marry me."

"Marry you?"

"Yes, but isn't that your line?"

"Yes."

Royce dipped his head and kissed her properly and fully on the lips before he pulled back.

"That was a whole lot easier I'd imagined," he told her and laughed. "Angela, I love you and spent four months trying to make myself believe it wasn't real, no way you'd actually fall in love with me and want to spend the rest of your life with me."

"How would you know if you didn't ask?" Her eyes were watching him closely and he laughed again.

"Oh, Angela, I've missed you. And I'll love you until the day I die. Say you'll marry me and make our home here."

"Yes, because I've loved you all my life and always wanted exactly that."

"You won't be upset that it's not Brooklyn?"

"Brooklyn was where I was born and raised. I'll always have strong ties to it, but I chose Woodstock to start my life. And now you've chosen it, too. This is where we'll raise our family and start our own traditions. This land, Royce, it's what you always wanted, isn't it? A place to call your own, to never have to leave it unless you decide to?"

"Yes, Angela. It just took me a while to get all the pieces together."

* * * *

He kissed her like never before, with love and tenderness and a kind of passion they'd only briefly shared. They wandered around the rest of the acreage while he told her of some of the improvements he had in mind, including reusing the salvaged lumber on the project. Angela asked questions and seemed stunned when she realized his major plan.

"There's a rough draft of what I have in mind in the car. We can look at it later. It's just a starting point. I wanted you to have a say in the house you're going to live in, too. And I was thinking a separate wing for our offices but wasn't sure if you'd rather a detached building, what?"

"Speaking of offices, would you like to tell me about Ram McCloud and Agnes?"

He laughed and felt his cheeks heat. "Not really, but I will. Between us, Angel?" She nodded, and he continued. "I'd been shopping the book and thought I had a deal but didn't want to take the chance something would go wrong. So until the deal was signed, I didn't tell a soul. I started looking for a place to settle just after. And a few months later, March found me in Woodstock, New York, with my angel waiting for me."

"When I got it that day, I wanted to talk to you so badly, tell you how proud I was of you and your creative side. I was truly impressed, Royce Merrill. I went out and bought the other three the next day." She said it with a self-conscious laugh but held his eye. His fingers tilted her chin toward him and he kissed her full out, releasing her only when his hands started to wander her frame.

At the car, Royce sat on the back tailgate, Angela tucked against him. Prima was wandering in the distance and Angela whistled. The dog came running stopped abruptly and started to chase a leaf.

"She's still going to get lost, isn't she?"

"Probably, but she'll get it right one day. I have faith in her."

"Like you had faith in yourself to leave Brooklyn and the family behind when the time was right?"

"Something like that," she admitted to him.

"And you had faith in me, too, didn't you?"

"There were no other real option. There never has been for me."

"Following in Nonnie's footsteps," he said, "One man for all your life?" "Yes."

"Good. That's what I've been hoping for."

He reached further into the back of the vehicle and pulled out a bag she hadn't seen hidden behind her seat. Tugging the outside bag off, Royce handed her the large, beautifully wrapped package.

Angela gasped when she saw the box wrapped in silver and blue paper and ribbons, just as she had described in Evangeline's story. The box was long and slim in her hands, and they shook slightly.

"Go ahead, open it, angel."

Angela slowly pulled the ribbons off and tore back the paper to reveal a plain white box. She drew a breath before pulling back the cover and letting it fall on her lap. Peeling back several layers of tissue revealed a slim, finely finished paddle. It was exactly as she'd described in volume two, except this one had their initials carved into the handle. A large M in the center of the handle, a smaller R on the left side, and an A on the other. Angela looked at the initials and the drawing of Ram McCloud materialized before her eyes.

Royce slipped the wood from its bed and placed it in her hands, his eyes watching hers. "I trust you not to abuse this, Angela. Do I make myself clear?"

Angela nodded automatically while she studied the object, felt the weight in her hands, how the handle conformed to her palm. She traced the initials that had been elaborately carved with her finger. Royce watched her moisten her lips and a wide-eyed stare over take her face. She swallowed heavily several times before looking.

"Royce?"

"I said I trust you. Isn't that what everything boils down to, trusting and loving one person for the rest of your life?"

"Yes, I truly believe that."

"We'll learn our boundaries together, Angela." He held her eye and wasn't so sure that this was a good idea anymore when he saw the smile that crossed her lips. "I'm still the alpha male. Don't let your imagination get too carried away. I'm a good sport, to a point!" She laughed with him before throwing her arms around his neck. "Consider the paddle a metaphor for our understanding."

"Thank you, Royce, for loving me and for trusting me."

"Angela, there are some things that stay between a husband and wife."

"I don't want to share you with anyone, Royce. I've waited too long to have you as my own." She stared back at the paddle and bit her bottom lip.

Royce gently took the object from her hands and gave her back the bottom of the empty box, or what she assumed was an empty box. In the bottom corner was a small, white velvet jewelry box. She took it out but didn't open it. Instead, she studied the container. Royce watched her, slipped it from her fingers, opened it, and took out the object. He took her left hand and slipped it on her finger. "My wife, Angela, forever and just between us."

"Yes, Royce, my husband forever, and just between us." She nodded to the paddle on her lap before looking at the one-carat, square-cut diamond that sat on a platinum band. It was a stunning ring, catching rainbows in the fading day light. "It's beautiful, thank you." She drew him closer for a kiss that melted away the months he'd been gone before pulling from him abruptly. She looked at the ring on her finger and recognized it. "How?"

"I talked to Tony, told him I was coming here to marry you. We clarified a few things between us. He said he wondered if I'd ever have the balls to ask you."

She drew back and studied his face. "Tony knew I was in love with you? He never said a word."

"He told me he knew the day of Nonnie's funeral when he found me watching you sleep."

He remembered how he'd followed her upstairs and held her until she'd cried out all her anger and frustration. How he'd lifted her, had placed her gently on her bed, and had sat beside her until she drifted off to sleep. Her eyes were glassy when she ventured to look at him.

Royce used the pad of this thumb to wipe away the stray tear she couldn't hold back. "He suggested you might like to use Nonnie's engagement ring. Vito gave it to me this morning." "Papa gave you Nonnie's ring this morning? He knows?"

"Yes, we had a long talk and straightened a few things out between us. The whole family will be here tomorrow for breakfast to celebrate, if Tony can hold them back that long." She stared with complete disbelief. "Angel, if you want your own stone, I'll buy you anything that will make you happy."

"You make me happy, Royce. Being your wife will make me happy. Not jewelry or stones." She used her fingers to pull his chin closer so she could kiss him. "And if it doesn't bother you, I'd love to wear Nonnie's ring."

"Fine, if you change your mind, tell me. In the meantime, I still wanted you to have an engagement gift from your fiancé." He pulled a braided chain from his pocket and put it in her palm. Angela used her finger to twist the chain until the three perfect square stones faced her. Each of the three matched diamonds was nestled beside the next, all anchoring the center. Her breath caught in her throat.

"Royce, it's magnificent,' she whispered, still almost afraid to touch it.

"Instead of a ring, you have a necklace. A diamond for our past, present, and future. For the rest of my days and beyond if possible."

"For the rest of my day's and definitely beyond."

"Whatever will keep you happy." He hesitated than gave her his "Major" smile. "The necklace is for public eyes. This is for mine only," he said as he pulled a smaller object from his pocket and held it in the palm of his hand to take.

Again, a single square stone in a platinum setting only set similar to an earring. He waited until she took it from him, then used both his hands to pull her T-shirt from her jeans and tapped her belly ring.

Angela's cheeks heated as she lay back and replaced the plain gold ring with the diamond Royce bought her. She reached to him and he let himself drop over her, renewing the contact he'd missed so much. He didn't resist the urge to palm her buttocks with his hands.

Prima had come back and was asleep beside the car when Royce finally let Angela go. He held her and promised never to let her go again. When she finally broke down and started to cry, he laughed only a bit before handing her a clean handkerchief. When she composed herself slightly, she picked up the paddle once again. "Oh, Royce, we're going to have such a good time!"

"Angela, maybe this wasn't such a good idea. Just holding that damn thing in your hands is getting you all hot and bothered."

"Yes, and it made your cock surge. I can see you're about ready to burst the seams."

He took it from her hands and placed it aside. "Don't go getting over confident on me."

"Royce, what Evangeline and Heath experience together isn't necessarily what I want from you...at least to that degree." He gave her a questioning look, and she took a cleansing breath. "Whatever our limits turn out to be, we'll find them together. You of all people know fiction isn't reality. Besides, I like you as an alpha male. It seems right for us."

"And what is our reality?"

"It's what we find we're both comfortable with."

"And finding those limits?"

"Is going to be a lot of fun!" She laughed again, pulled his face close to hers and dropped a quick kiss on his cheek. "We have to trust each other, and we'll find our way."

"I trust you, angel, I wouldn't be here if I didn't. Just remember some things are better in moderation."

"Except how we love each other."

"Except that. Besides, I have a feeling we're going to stay pretty busy with your aids and a few I've picked up along the way."

"Really? Show me," she whispered and felt his cock twitch under her hand.

"Later, after we're married," he said with a wink.

"All right, until we can practice with my collection."

"Angel, two is the start of a collection."

"Yes, two is, as in the two in that particular drawer. You never asked to open the other one or to look in the closet." Angela watched his jaw drop and loved him even more. "All right, I don't have that many, but a few you haven't seen yet."

"Did you use them and think of me, angel?" His hand dropped to her crotch, stroking her through the seam of her jeans, pushed the moist material against her lips. "Yes, I did," she told him boldly. "But the real thing is much better. I'll take your flesh over rubber any day. Your cock, your fingers, and especially your mouth." He groaned and leaned forward to kiss her. When she pulled back, she waited to get his eye before adding, "Royce, I think you better read volume three."

They both turned and looked at the paddle. Angela gave him the same smile as she had the morning she'd given him his private fashion show. It said, "I'm confident, horny, and know exactly what I want." He knew exactly what he wanted—Angela as his own, forever.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Having been born and raised on Long Island, New York, my husband and l were both eager to leave the urban lifestyle behind and explore our futures. With his encouragement, I'm living my dream of writing romance novels full time.

Our new rural setting allows us to enjoy time together and gives me guiltless hours in my imagination indulging my other passion. When I realized my works consistently tended towards the erotic, I gave myself permission to explore places I might not venture in real life.



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