

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



COMMANDING *Kat*
REESE GABRIEL

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Commanding Kat

ISBN 9781419915871

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Edited by Pamela Campbell.

Electronic book Publication May 2008

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COMMANDING KAT

Reese Gabriel

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Chapter One

Kat squirmed in her seat as the smartly dressed woman in the blue suit perused her application to the Society for Sexual Freedom. Why was this taking so long? It wasn't as if Kat wanted to be here in the first place. With any luck she would be rejected and sent home to her life of microwave dinners, sappy movies and occasional flings with Mr. Bill, her favorite personal pleasure aid.

"I notice you have left the section on sexual fantasies blank," the Society's director, Elaine Van Voorst, said at last from behind her antique mahogany desk, a perfect match to Kat's Louis the Fourteenth armchair.

Kat bit her lower lip. Here it was. The moment she had been dreading. Her only hope was to keep things general and vague.

"I-I don't really have any fantasies," she stuttered, sounding nothing like the polished trial lawyer she was. "Really, I'm pretty average. I do watch that sex therapist on cable. She's pretty interesting, don't you think?"

The elegant Elaine laced her fingers on the blood-red blotter, drawing attention to her manicured French nails. Lips pursed, she gave Kat an even, measured stare. "I don't actually watch television. May I be frank with you, Miss Wayans?"

"Please do." Kat's voice cracked. She was lying and Elaine knew it. What was it that made it so hard for Kat to share her sex fantasies?

As if she didn't know.

There were some desires a woman wasn't supposed to feel, let alone share with a stranger.

Elaine did not mince words. "The Society for Sexual Freedom is more than a mere club. It is a philosophy of life that makes a good many demands on our members. We have standards higher than most can bear. All our clients must be single and unattached and they must maintain the utmost discretion. Their identities must never be disclosed, not even to one another. Furthermore, they come to us only by invitation. You have been very highly recommended by Ms. Victoria Brinson, a longstanding member. Personally, I have my doubts as to your readiness to join our ranks but Ms. Brinson feels you would be particularly suited for the Red Room. Do you agree?"

Kat felt the floor drop from beneath her.

Talk about letting the Kat out of the bag.

"Vicky exaggerates sometimes," Kat said, recalling the supposedly confidential discussion she had had with her best friend and partner at their start-up law firm.

Vicky had begun by telling her a little of what went on in this place, each room with a designated color catering to a particular fantasy or consenting sexual practice. When

Vicky had gotten to the description of the Red Room, it had resonated deeply, to say the least.

Elaine's eyes twinkled, her perfectly oval face framed by upswept gray hair. "So you have no interest in sexual submission?"

"BDSM? Don't be ridiculous."

Vicky was so dead when Kat got hold of her.

Elaine frowned, taking the part of the disappointed schoolmarm cum X-rated fairy godmother. "Are you ashamed of your desires, Miss Wayans? Wanting to be sexually dominated in no way diminishes you as a woman nor does it compromise your independence and power, you know. We are speaking of role-playing, consensual surrender. The men who dominate are also playing roles. They would never force a woman in real life or denigrate her self-worth."

"I would rather not have this conversation, Ms. Van Voorst."

"Because it hits too close to home?"

Kat was losing her cool. "So I have read a couple of books on BDSM. I also happen to think Johnny Depp is hot as hell in a pirate costume. You gonna conjure him up for me too?"

"Someone who looks like him, if you wish," said Elaine, missing the sarcasm.

"BDSM is a joke," Kat declared flatly.

"If you went into the Red Room you would enter another world," Elaine said, refusing to let the matter drop. "The male or males you found there would become your Masters. You would surrender to them. They would take possession of your body and turn it into an instrument of pleasure. You would serve at their whim, doing whatever aroused them. Can you honestly say that holds no appeal?"

Elaine would make a good cross-examiner, Kat thought. "A lot of things hold appeal," she said vaguely.

"What about being bound in leather, Miss Wayans, kneeling to the whip of a man, knowing he will use you as he wishes, delivering pleasure and pain, breaking you in to obedience until you beg and plead to be taken? Have you dreamed of such things in secret, wondering if they could ever be real, hoping against hope?"

Elaine's words were supercharged sexual bullets that cut through her defenses. Of course she had dreamed of it, over and over. Alone in her bed at night, bathed in sweat, sometimes crying, she would moan into her pillows, her limbs twisted in the sheets as she imagined that someone had tied her that way to tease and torment and love her.

Oh god, she needed a man.

A certain kind of man—one not found in bars or politically correct conference rooms or courtrooms. A strong man not afraid to take his pleasure from a woman, a man able to compel her to enjoy the things she craved deep in her soul. Things like discipline and submission.

He would take the reins and lead them both to ecstasy.

Kat felt the raw heat between her thighs. Her nipples had heated to raw points of desire. Every breath made them rub against the silk of her bra.

"I should go," Kat decided. "I don't fit in here."

"But you do fit. You are among friends," said Elaine. "Here we understand the needs of the human soul. We don't judge, we celebrate. It isn't all about sex, you know. Oftentimes people sit in the rooms and talk, getting to know one another."

"I won't be with freaks," she said flatly. "I won't be a freak myself."

Elaine offered no reaction. If she was offended, she did not let it show. "No one is forcing you, dear. You may leave as you wish. If you want to come back, we will be here."

Kat was on her feet, shaky and weak-kneed. "Don't count on it, seriously."

Elaine's smile was serene and knowing. "As you say, dear."

I mean it, Kat wanted to scream out. I won't be back, not in a million years.

"If you wouldn't mind showing yourself out," said Elaine. "I have some work to do."

"Not at all."

Back in the hallway, Kat tried to gather her wits.

It wasn't easy. The whole place looked like some exotic Victorian pleasure salon, elegant and decadent with its sumptuous dark woods, crushed velvet upholstery and heavy curtains.

From what Vicky had told her, the Society for Sexual Freedom was as old as the city itself, which would date it back to the seventeen hundreds. According to legend the group had originally held its wicked meetings underground in cellars and caves. Their current property, a nineteenth-century mansion built by a Wall Street financier, had been acquired after World War I.

Right now all she cared about was finding the front door.

She was halfway there when she saw the other one. It was just off to her left, closed but not locked.

Elaine had shown it to her earlier. *Behind this entrance lies the Hall of Pleasures, she had said. The door is always open as are the doors inside, each leading to its own special room. Only members may enter. They must don a mask, protecting their identity. All clothing may be removed in time but their faces must never be revealed.*

Mutually assured anonymity. That was the Society's credo.

What if Kat were to take a peek? Just for posterity. She wouldn't actually go inside any of the rooms.

What harm could it do?

It wasn't like there was anyone about. She hadn't seen a soul since her arrival, other than Elaine. She was beginning to wonder if anyone else was here at all.

The masks were hanging on the wall, well within reach.

They did not appear to be reserved in any manner.

Kat marveled at the variety. Some were leather, striped with animal patterns. Others were covered in satin, decorated with all manner of jewels and feathers. Every color was represented, though red and black were the most common.

Licking her lips, she ran her fingers over one of them.

The smooth, glossy black leather made her think of bondage with all its sleek and sexy constriction.

The silk masks made her think of her undergarments—the drenched panties and the soft bra that molded her aching breasts.

What a mistake she had made. What had she thought would happen here tonight? She had come straight from work for this interview, her stomach full of butterflies as if it were a first date.

Dating. She had almost forgotten what that was like.

Quickly, before she lost her nerve, Kat selected one of the masks—a red leather one, plain and unadorned. She liked the delicate, feminine shape, the way it curved delicately, ending just below the cheek line.

The mask fit snugly against her cheeks, the catlike eye holes giving her a slightly narrower view of the world.

It was appropriate, she supposed. A cat's mask for a Kat. There was a strap in back to affix it behind her head. She lifted her arms, pushing her bosom outward, to accomplish the task.

The momentary vulnerability of the position made her pulse quicken. What if a man were to tie her this way and do as he wished to her breasts, not to mention the rest of her? Such things were possible in the Hall of Pleasures, in the Red Room specifically.

Kat extended her hand. Her palm was sweaty on the brass doorknob. The metal was cool against her warm skin. She could barely turn it, given the moisture and the sudden weakness of her muscles.

The knob gave way at last.

She pushed the door forward. The creaking was like an alarm bell, a metallic rippling down her spine.

The noise was slight but in her imagination it was magnified. Surely everyone was going to hear. She half expected every door to open on the other side, all the people rushing out in their various states of undress to point in her direction, shouting and denouncing her illicit entry.

She was not a member. She had no right.

The hall was just as quiet on this side as the other, anticlimactic almost.

It all seemed so innocent, like a nineteenth-century hotel with chandeliers, powder-blue walls and white wainscoting interrupted at regular intervals by smartly painted and varnished doors.

Each door was a different color. Each was closed.

Kat felt a dark thrill. So it was real, the special code of sexual delights, the utter and complete secrecy...the freedom.

Her heart skipped a beat as she saw the red one.

Wouldn't it be something just to touch it? Not to go in, of course, but just to run her fingers over the shiny surface.

What better way to firm up what it was she didn't want than to stand in the face of it and say no?

This was a demon and she would stare it down.

She had to.

The alternative was unthinkable.

The price would simply be too high.

Sure, the Society might a safe place, physically, but you couldn't protect the emotions, could you? People were bound to get hurt in these sorts of games. It wasn't healthy to turn some humans into slaves and others into Masters.

Who knew where it could lead. Better to tend to her pleasures in private—stick to erotic books and keep her secret.

Assuming Vicky didn't blab it to anyone else.

Kat moved down the hall, feeling almost giddy. She brushed errant strands of dark hair from her face. Her mouth was dry, her knees quaked.

There were wonders behind each door, mysteries of pleasure.

Vicky was a dabbler. She liked to go to all of them, depending on her mood. Kat thought only of red. Nothing else made sense, nothing else aroused her—not the idea of sex with other women, not two men at once, not even fetishes like whipped cream, high heels or schoolgirl uniforms.

Not that these things were not fine for others.

Kat was not close-minded.

Except when it came to herself.

Hearing a woman's laugh, she froze for a moment. It was coming from behind the blue door. What went on in the Blue Room? Orgies, food play, naughty nun fantasies? She couldn't remember all that Vicky had told her.

Her heart thundered in her chest as she reached her destination.

El Cuarto Rojo.

Le Chambre Rouge.

Pick your language—it amounted to the same thing.

Behind this door women became slaves, ruled by men. Consensually, of course.

She strained to hear any sounds from behind the door.

Nothing.

Was it soundproofed to shield the sound of moans, whimpers, even cries? Pain was allowed if the pleasure was mutual. So was bondage.

From this side it looked so innocuous. A door, painted wood, gold hinges, a doorknob – just like any other.

BDSM is bullshit, she told herself. *A silly game, an illusion.*

As if on cue the red door opened.

Kat gasped, leaping back in surprise.

A man stood in the doorway.

He saw Kat and frowned.

She tried to compose herself. She had nearly been knocked over. What had come over her? She hadn't realized she had been standing so close.

She felt a wave of embarrassment. Did the man think she was eavesdropping?

"You should watch where you're standing," he said.

"I-I'm sorry," Kat replied, hoarse.

The man sized her up. He wore a black leather mask, plain like hers. From behind it she could see the blue depths of his eyes – cerulean, complex, studying.

Her body went weak.

Was this man a Master, a sexual dominant?

Of course he was. He had just come from the Red Room, had he not?

"I was just...passing through," she said.

The man was obviously attractive. He wore a white shirt with large, billowing sleeves like a pirate's shirt. Several of the buttons were undone, revealing a sculpted, hairless chest. His jawline was firm, masculine but not brutish. He had short black hair, cut neatly around his ears. His waist was narrow. He worked out. He had to.

The pants were black leather and tight, tapering to a pair of black leather riding boots. She tried to keep her eyes off the swell of his crotch. Had he just been pleased by a slave?

"Passing through?" He spoke the words with irony bordering on contempt.

Kat blushed behind the mask. She had already apologized once to this man, an apparent Dom. Did he expect more? Did he think she was submissive?

"I didn't mean any offense," she said.

"Yes, and that makes it all better," he replied. He shook his head and walked away.

"You don't have to be rude," she called out.

He slammed the main door behind him. Her last look at him was of his tight, muscular buttocks.

Talk about a pure alpha male.

The smell of him hung in the air – musk mixed with testosterone.

Her pulse raced. Who, if anyone, had been left inside the Red Room? Another Master...or a slave?

She touched the knob. She had to know. She had to hurry, though, because the man might come back. He might catch her and then what would he think?

The door was not locked.

Why would it be?

She opened it a few inches.

Her nerves were coiled like a jack-in-the-box. The slightest force would release them.

Now what?

Should she call out something stupid like "hello"?

The carpet on the floor was blood red. The wall behind it was red too. She saw a rack mounted on it with whips and paddles and a long bamboo cane.

Her knees nearly buckled.

She opened the door wider. The room was bigger than she had expected. More like a hotel suite with a couple of throne-like armchairs and a minibar off to the left. The bed was a four-poster and quite ordinary-looking except for the attached chains and straps.

No doubt they would be used to hold a woman down for sex or else for punishment.

Everything was red, she noted, down to the padding on the ornate sawhorse in the corner. She could only imagine what that was for.

Kat heard a sighing from over her right shoulder.

Oh god.

There was someone in the room with her.

Kat turned very, very slowly.

The sight of the woman took her breath away.

She was standing nude. Someone—the Master—had chained her hands over her head, attaching the gleaming steel to leather cuffs on her wrists. Her lithe, slim body was completely exposed. He had left her on tiptoe, awaiting his pleasure.

In her mouth, between clenched teeth was a leather riding crop.

Kat's pussy flooded.

The woman wore a gray mask. Over the eye holes a blindfold had been attached.

She had short brown hair that was cut in a cute, trendy bob.

Her nipples were pierced.

Pink streaks covered her belly and breasts.

Her flesh quivered.

The man had whipped her.

There was no mistaking her arousal. Her thighs were slick with her juices and her nipples were tight little buttons.

The woman was actually enjoying what was happening to her.

She was being dominated.

Whipped and tortured, left to think about it, holding the instrument of her punishment in her mouth while the Master went off.

Kat felt a brief flash of anger. He had no right. She was so helpless. She was in his power, here to share pleasure with him. What if she was scared, what if she wanted to be released?

It was irresponsible to leave a person like that.

"What the hell do you think you are doing?"

Kat nearly jumped into the air. She whirled about, confronting the Master. "I...was...just..."

"I know what you were doing," he said.

So why did you ask? she was tempted to say.

"You're a voyeur. I don't like voyeurs."

"I don't like men who whip women. How old is she? Twenty-one? Twenty-two?"

The Master could easily pass for thirty-five or younger.

"She is old enough to know what she wants from a man and mature enough to get it," he told her. "Which is more than I can say for you."

"Fuck you," said Kat. "I don't need to be analyzed by a sexual bully. This is all about your insecurity, you know."

"Now who's analyzing?" he said.

Kat glared.

There was a smile behind the mask, not quite smug but definitely self-satisfied. Kat could feel herself getting drawn in and she hated herself for it.

"If you ask nicely, maybe you can watch after all," he said.

The man was hard. There was no mistaking the erection outlined by his leather trousers. This was his world. He controlled everything. Women did what they were told, playing whatever part he gave them. And the more they enjoyed it, the more aroused they became, the more power he had.

Kat had to get out. Now.

"Forget it." She was all set to make a beeline for the door when the Master spoke harshly to the other woman.

"Brandy, beg our guest to stay."

The young woman instantly dropped the whip from her mouth. "Please, Mistress, watch Master use me?"

Kat swallowed. What would this man do to the woman? Would he whip her some more? Would he tease her chained body? Would he release her and put her to her knees so she could lick and suck his cock, showing him just what a good and obedient slave girl she was? Or would he cut to the chase and bring her straight to the bed—the one with the velvet ropes and chains to hold a woman down?

“Don’t you have a boyfriend?” Kat blurted to the hanging slave. “Someone your own age to be with?”

Great, now she was sounding like her own mother. At thirty-three she might qualify as this young woman’s big sister but that was as far as it went.

“Yes, Mistress,” she said with surprising frankness. “My boyfriend doesn’t understand my needs, though. I don’t want to hurt his feelings, so I come here.”

“That doesn’t make for a very healthy relationship, does it?”

“Don’t answer that, Brandy,” said the swaggering Master.

Not exactly Johnny Depp but still pretty damn hot.

And a whole lot more real.

“You’re just a male chauvinist,” Kat accused.

“I only rule Brandy in here. She has her own life that has nothing to do with me. Hell, Brandy isn’t even her real name. All I care about is what happens within these walls and when she is in here she is my pet, possession and sex toy. Aren’t you, girl?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Beg me to take you,” the man said casually.

“Please,” Brandy repeated, heartfelt. “Please use your little slave girl.”

“And if I want you in the ass?”

“My ass is yours,” she said. “Use my body as you please. Fuck me, Sir.”

“You’ve proved your point,” Kat said, doing her best not to imagine herself in Brandy’s place, willfully, wantonly offering her body for exploitation.

“What point is that?”

“That you’re a Neanderthal.”

“And what about you?” he asked.

“What about me?”

“Don’t you have a boyfriend? A nice Mr. White Picket Fence?”

“I’m unattached to any man,” she said icily. “And that is a fact for which I am every day more grateful.”

“What about the nights?”

Kat’s heart clenched, not to mention her belly.

His smile broadened under the mask. He must have read something in her expression. He was like some kind of jungle animal—stalking, toying. What the hell was his problem?

"Ah," he said, his voice smooth as coffee and deceptively gentle. "Therein lies the rub, doesn't it? You don't want to be a lady in bed but you chase away any man who would treat you otherwise."

"I'm surprised you have room for anyone in your bed," she shot back. "What with the size of your ego."

"I have plenty of room," he said, unperturbed. "For good girls who do what they are told."

Her mouth dropped. He was so...coarse. "Do you ever listen to yourself talk?"

"Nope. Do you?"

"First of all, females are women, not girls," Kat lectured.

The man laughed, making Kat instantly furious. "Do you hear that, Brandy? I shouldn't call you my girl."

"Yes, Master," she replied.

"You like being my girl, though, don't you?"

"Yes, Master, Brandy wants to be good...for you."

"And if you aren't?"

"Master punishes," she said huskily, her body beginning to sway, ever-so slightly.

"See how easy it is to heat her up," he gloated. "Wait until I've peppered her backside with the riding crop. By the way, Brandy, you are going to pay for dropping it on the floor."

She dropped her head, shivering. "Yes, Master."

"But it wasn't even her fault," Kat protested.

"Doesn't matter." His shrug was light, utterly unapologetic. The way he moved in here, it was as if they were under a different gravity, one where a dominant man could be himself without fear of repercussion. "I'm the law here. If I want to punish Brandy for no good reason, then I will."

Kat served a different law—one with judges, precedents. "Your way is wrong. I can't approve of it."

"Did someone force you in here?" he asked. "I don't see a gun to your head. As a matter of fact, aren't you trespassing, Little Miss Morality?"

"You're a real smart-ass, you know that? Maybe I was looking for the lesbian room and I got lost."

"You're no lesbian," he said.

"How could you possibly know that about me?"

"You like men far too much. You like to make them happy."

She thought of her father, who was never pleased, and of all those boyfriends, one more impossible than the next. She had given up altogether after law school.

The only time she cared about pleasing men now was when she represented them in a courtroom.

"Men are a means to an end," she dismissed.

"Your current life leads you to act that way," he said, sounding like a fortune teller. "Though it leaves no room for happiness. When and if you can center yourself on a man's pleasure, you'll find peace."

"That sounds like male propaganda."

"Just don't be ashamed of what you are," he said with unexpected passion.

"I really do need to leave," she replied, caught off guard.

He surprised her again, this time with a crisp bow. "It's been a pleasure, Miss—"

"K," she said, knowing better than to use her real name.

"K." He nodded. "It's been interesting, K."

Kat tensed, seeing his outstretched hand—the same one he had used to whip Brandy. How many others had there been, naked and at his disposal, taking their pleasure in obedience and submission?

"I don't know your name," she said as his fingers grasped hers.

His hand was warm and almost comforting, though there was nothing weak about him at all. "You can call me Master J."

"Master...J."

The word Master had rolled off her lips. How many times had she used it in her life in so many contexts? Never like this, though, never as a title.

Kat stepped back. Master he might be but not her master.

"Say goodnight to our guest, Brandy. Thank her for deigning to spend time with you."

Master J kept his eyes trained on Kat, gauging her. She flushed behind the mask, happy for the concealment it offered.

"Thank you, Mistress," said Brandy. "This slave is grateful."

"I'm going to use that larger whip on her," said Master J, indicating a long black leather snakelike whip coiled on the carpeted floor near the barefoot slave. "Would you like to get it for me?"

Kat could barely speak. "No," she managed.

"Not much of a comeback," he said. "For a lawyer."

Her body tensed. "How did you know I was a lawyer?"

"I didn't," he rasped. "Until just now."

Her eyes narrowed into slits.

Master J laughed as she left.

Was it Kat's imagination or could she hear the sound of whistling leather all the way down the hall—the sounds of Brandy moaning as she writhed, her delicate, smooth and perfect skin kissed by the searing whip?

Chapter Two

"Where the hell is Elaine?" demanded Chase Neill, better known to the Society membership as Master J.

Granville Hughes, wearing a tuxedo and silver mask, looked up from his newspaper. "I haven't a clue, my dear boy."

Chase scowled. "Curse your bald head," he told his old friend and fellow financier. "You are lying to me."

"I'm only looking out for Elaine," he said. "From the sound of your voice, I am sparing her a thorough tongue-lashing."

"A lashing? I thought he had his little slave girl for that." The comment came from Elaine herself, who had just now come up behind them in the Society's parlor, where members could share in social time.

They kept their masks on, though in the case of Chase and Granville and Elaine and the other members of the board, it was a moot point.

"Leave Brandy out of this," said Chase.

Only moments ago he had sent the young lady home, having finished their session off with a loving and delicate application of cream to her sore flesh. For a good Dominant it was crucial to leave his submissive feeling peaceful, happy and whole.

"What I want to know is, who was the obnoxious little neophyte you sent snooping around?" Chase said. "She nearly ruined my evening."

That was not exactly true. In reality Chase had been blown away by the fiery, dark-haired woman with the quick tongue and the even quicker mind. She was as lovely as she was smart. And she was ripe for submission.

Granville released a chuckle. "The day a woman is capable of ruining your evening I will turn in my membership card."

Chase snorted. "If you left, the place would fall apart. You are older than the bricks...and twice as thick."

"The woman in question was a prospective member," Elaine supplied. "And I can assure you I had no idea she was going to go exploring."

Chase frowned. He had been unable to put the woman out of his mind. The whole time he was with Brandy he could only think of the stranger—secured by the wrists, naked, trembling at the caress of the whip, moaning at the power of its lash, begging for release...release from her bonds and from her pent-up sexual tensions.

Brandy was eager and vital and obedient but she was so very inexperienced, uncomplicated by life, so easy to decipher. K, by contrast, would be a treasure trove, a woman, indeed.

She would be a girl with him, though.

A slave girl – naked, obedient and hot.

His sleek pet within the walls of the Red Room.

What is she like in the outside world? he wondered.

She was an attorney – he had tricked her into admitting that much. He wasn't sure how he had guessed. Maybe it was the way she had irritated him.

Attorneys had a way of doing that.

Susan's attorneys had dragged him through the mud, using their BDSM relationship against him, painting him as an ogre.

Relationships. What a crock. That's what was good about women like Brandy. You could interact with them, fair and on the level, no drama, no danger of betrayal.

This K, whoever she was had that happily-ever-after look in her eye. She was the type who fell deep and hard. She would end up married, with two point five children and a house in the suburbs. Her love of bondage and submission likely terrified her as much as it fascinated her. She was a moth to flame and for the moment that law career kept her a safe distance from her own desires.

How did he know that?

Experience – a lot more than he had wanted.

He knew the fire because it had burned him so many times.

At this point he would rather be back in the jungle reliving his days as a mercenary under enemy fire than back in the throes of an honest-to-goodness relationship.

"You agree we have to be more careful in the future," Chase said to Elaine.

"Obviously," she replied.

He hardly needed to lecture her. Elaine had been running this place for over twenty years. She was also its main benefactor, a shining light in the liberal community fighting for sexual rights. Setting priggish souls free was practically an obsession for her.

K was one of those souls.

"So, is she going to join?" Chase asked.

"Your mystery woman? No, I'm afraid she's too inhibited."

Chase nodded. "She's definitely submissive, though. Some of the strongest vibes I have seen in years. Talk about denial."

"You sure that's not wishful thinking?" Granville teased. "I got a look at her on the way out. She's quite a beauty. I'm sure she would star nicely in one of your little scenarios."

"I've seen better," he said, though truly he could not recall being quite so affected by a woman before. He had been irritated by her and yet it was all he could do to let her

go. He had been seriously disappointed when the banter ended. Brandy offered nothing close. Nor had Susan – not even in her prime.

Maybe it was the obvious confidence and power of the lovely Ms. K. She knew who she was and wasn't afraid of any man. She was a fighter and she was as happy to fight herself as anyone else.

What would it be like to kiss those impetuous lips that had called him names? How would her skin feel to the touch? Where would her arguments go with her nipple captured between thumb and forefinger?

What could she say with his hand between her legs, feeling how wet she was? And she had been wet. He was sure of it. He had sensed it, like electricity in the air – tingling female submission. She had a streak of wildcat in her too, though.

She was the kind of woman a man needed to take his time with. There was nothing casual or easy about K. He would let their passion run the gamut – manipulating her body underneath him, teasing, letting her fight only so much, denying her release, denying her escape until finally he would push them both over the edge, his white-hot semen pumping into her as she screamed his name – Master, Master, Master.

Damn it, he was rock-hard again after climaxing in Brandy's sweet ass less than an hour ago.

"I'm heading home," he said, devoid of his characteristic wit. "I might take some time off."

"Was it something I said?" asked Granville. "If so, I would like to note it for future use against you."

"Sorry, you're not that good. It's the divorce," he said. "It's all catching up to me."

Was that the truth? Chase didn't know.

K had gotten him thinking about things. She wasn't just a woman with a beautiful body and a quick tongue. There was something about her that made him look inside himself. Did he like what he saw? Domination and submission was his bag, a game he played to perfection.

It was a game, all in good fun.

His marriage had failed for other reasons.

Hadn't it?

Susan was an uncaring bitch.

Okay, so he knew how to be a bastard.

Not when he was being her Master but at other times, occasions that called for sensitivity.

What did this K woman know, anyway, questioning his activities?

He was doing Brandy a favor, helping her out, teaching her to explore her submissive self. He was her mentor. One day when she was ready, he would help her find a true Master, someone closer to her age with whom she could share a lifetime

relationship. In the meantime, she didn't need to go into a bad marriage with this boyfriend of hers and she sure didn't need to have some man other than him messing her up with his improper ideas of domination.

This wasn't kid stuff.

A public service, that's what he was doing.

He could picture K's response to his rationale.

Say goodnight, Master J, before you open your mouth and choke on your own bullshit.

"I'll see you guys around," Chase said.

Elaine would settle for nothing less than a hug.

"Call me if you need anything, dear."

"I'll be fine."

Chase was going to do something he hadn't done in a very long time.

Masturbate.

Maybe even twice.

He had a star in mind for his fantasy, a certain opinionated green-eyed lady whom he needed to get out of his system once and for all.

* * * * *

Kat had fifteen missed calls on her cell phone, all of them from Vicky.

"Vick, I *so* don't want to have this conversation," she announced at last, picking up call number sixteen. At that point she was in the elevator, halfway up to her tenth-floor apartment.

As usual, Vicky made it about herself. "No fair leaving me in suspense, Kat. It's not like I don't have a lot invested in this, you know."

"You're in suspense?" Kat declared. "What about me? I was dropped off in some other galaxy and you were nowhere to be seen."

"It's against the rules for sponsoring members to go to interviews with Society initiates, I explained all that to you," said Vicky. "So what happened to you there? You sound pretty worked up."

Kat's mind raced with the scenes of the tormented, ecstatic slave girl and the controlling, arrogant Master—the one who had dared to make Kat feel like the freak.

As though there was something wrong with wanting a romance based on white picket fences and not whips and chains.

Kat did want a white picket fence, didn't she?

"Nothing happened to me. I didn't meet any men," Kat insisted.

"I didn't ask if you met any men. Although you were sure there a long while. And don't tell me you're home, because you aren't picking up your apartment phone."

"Maybe I was ignoring it."

"Kat, come on."

"Okay, I stopped for coffee on the way back," she said. "Alone."

That was the partial truth, though it didn't begin to explain her time in the Red Room.

"Never mind that," Vicky dismissed. "So are you in the Society or not?"

"Of course I'm not in. Did you really think I was that big of a sex pervert? I was just humoring you so you'd stop harassing me," Kat dismissed.

She regretted the remark at once.

"It didn't seem like harassment, Kat, though you are the legal expert. I'll make sure not to cross the line and try to be a friend anymore."

Kat sighed. "I didn't mean that. I'm sorry. Don't be mad with me, Vick. I'm just kind of stressed from all the new cases, you know? I need a good night's sleep."

"Have some tea," Vicky said, perking right up. "That always helps. You sure you don't want me to come by?"

"Yes, I'm sure." The last thing Kat needed now was company, least of all the prodding Victoria. "Thanks for offering, though."

"Sure," said Vick. "What are friends for?"

Kat rolled her eyes. "I haven't the foggiest idea, Vick, honestly."

* * * * *

Chase leaned over the half wall surrounding the terrace of his penthouse, looking out on the city. His eyes glazed, looking out at the lights, a stream of colors from the streets below.

It was a ritual with him, watching and thinking of all the people, all the human lives, most of which would remain unknown to him.

Tonight he thought of one life in particular.

Where did K live? Which direction? What was her life like day to day? Was she as alone at night as he had accused her of being? The thought was disconcerting, unacceptable somehow. He might not be the sort of man she needed but a woman like that should have someone.

She would make a good partner. He felt it in his gut. He couldn't imagine her ever betraying a man, though he had nothing to go on. She seemed loyal, a fierce firebrand who wanted truth above all else.

What the hell did he know, though? He was a terrible judge of character where women were concerned. He went for superficial women with fit bodies like Susan's—women who said all the right things, played all the right games.

For a sexual Master, an orchestrator of role-play he was pretty inept at controlling life. Business, yes, but anything personal was a disaster. He ought to recuse himself

permanently, irrevocably from relationships. Let some matchmaker pick for him. Better still, let him grow old alone.

If K were up here with him he would show her this view, wake her up to the reality of just how alone everyone was and just how little it mattered how moral people tried to be.

Games behind closed doors, that was all there was.

Some liked to be whipped, others liked gentle kisses.

Chase would kiss her, pull her close in that black dress of hers, his hand on the small of her back. She was a phenomenal woman—shapely, perfectly curved, green eyes set just right in her face.

What did she look like behind that mask?

Whatever the details of her face, she was beautiful, gorgeous and she was interested in BDSM. Why else would she wander of her own accord into The Red Room?

Chase stepped inside from the balcony, closing the glass doors behind him.

Best view in the world.

He lowered the white automatic blinds.

Already bare-chested, he pulled down his pajama bottoms. He was alone in his abode, the way he liked it.

His cock was thick and ready in his hand.

It had felt fine in Brandy's ass, though he had been thinking of K.

Damn it, what was the woman's real name?

Was she mocking him, giving him only a single letter?

Not that he had a right to complain. He went by the letter J.

For his middle name—Julius.

His mother had likened him to Caesar from birth. He been a small, sickly child from a poor family, regularly beaten up by the other boys. Quietly, he had strengthened himself, determined never to be weak again, neither physically nor economically.

By the time they were in high school those same bullies were borrowing money from him, dollars he had earned from paper routes, lemonade sales and anything else he could come up with. Three hours a night was all he had ever slept.

By twenty-four he bought his first small telecommunications company with money scrounged from friends. Their investment had been returned a dozen times over and he had gone on buying and selling, selling and buying.

Caesar, indeed.

Though not yet a billionaire, he had long since passed the point of being excited over every million earned.

Lucky in business, unlucky in love—wasn't that the saying?

Chase closed his eyes. He imagined himself whispering in K's ear as he held her tight, telling her what was to come. The fantasy easily matched the strokes of his hand along his cock, his fingers pressing down on the veins, creating the throbbing pressure he needed.

He imagined them together outside, under the city sky, lost in each other's embrace...

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

"That's it, surrender, girl, give it to me," he said, bestowing hot kisses on her lips.

"What is it you want?" she asked, breathless.

His hands played down her back. "Everything."

She shivered against him. His cock was rock-hard against her pelvis. Decisively reaching behind her, he unzipped her dress.

"Please," she murmured. "People will see."

"You won't hide your submission from the world. You will open yourself."

"No!"

"Yes," he said. "You must tell me yes."

"I...I can't." She shook her head.

He looked into her eyes, just as he had remembered them—hot, expressive and emotive.

"You will not have to hide your face with me," he declared. "There will be no masks."

Her full lips trembled. He seized them, the kiss almost brutal in its hot need. She moaned, opening her mouth to his plundering tongue. He pressed his crotch into her. He flattened her breasts against him, showing no mercy. He could almost feel the tight points of her nipples.

It was all he could do to keep from ripping the clothes from her body. He would have this woman. He would own her. And he would do it his way.

Complete and thorough conquest.

He released her mouth. She moaned softly, looking at him differently now, with slight trepidation but also with awe.

Chase lifted his hands, undoing the tresses of her hair. She sucked in her lower lip as he arranged the dark curls about her shoulders as he wished them to be.

Never had a woman looked so beautiful, standing, hands at her side, so totally trusting, even as she tried to anticipate experiences she could not imagine.

"The whip." He caressed her cheek. "I will use it on you."

K exhaled, shuddering.

The response was excellent, exquisite and feminine.

"First I will caress you with it. I will run it over your flesh, every inch of you. Your pretty breasts, your rosebud nipples...between your legs."

She moaned softly again, bordering on a whimper.

"And then I will punish your flesh, teasingly and sweetly."

"Oh god, Chase..."

"You will be bound in my bed. You will be taught to obey."

Gasping, she tried to stammer another no.

Chase took her earlobe between his teeth, clamping on the superheated, tender flesh. K groaned softly, unable to help herself as she pushed her body against him, offering, wanting.

He grasped the cheek of her fine ass with his left hand, molding the firm flesh of the globe against his palm and fingertips. "Say yes," he pressed.

She was on the verge of succumbing. He let the moment hang deliciously. "You will come on command, girl, you'll beg...you'll be my slave."

"Oh god," she cried softly, trying not to move against him. He pulled her against his pelvis, letting her know how aroused he was, how completely in control.

She had no hope.

"You'll be my slave," he repeated.

"I c-can't."

"You can and you will."

"This isn't right," she protested, though her body felt incredibly right, a perfect fit against him.

"You need discipline, K. You need domination. It's what you dream of. It's what makes you hot and you don't have to be ashamed ever again."

She was on the verge of orgasm and he had not yet touched her.

"Say yes, K."

"P-please..."

He lifted his hand from her ass only to return it at lightning speed.

She shrieked. "Wh-what was that?"

"That was a spank, girl." He rubbed his hand over her hot bottom. "It is part of your submission. There will be plenty more if you do not cooperate."

She shook her head no.

"I will spank you at will. Your ass is mine."

"Please," she croaked, sounding none too certain of what she was asking for.

He gave her another, relishing the raw, physical contact.

"Do you like that?"

She shuddered, clearly afraid to acknowledge her pleasure in punishment. Her loins were superheated, burning against him. It was all he could do not to fuck her right here under the stars.

Chase slid K's dress up, exposing her panties. He cupped her silk-clad ass. "The next time will be on your bare bottom," he warned. "Answer my question. Do you like it when I spank you?"

His touch was insolent, deliberately groping. He found her dripping crack. She gave a small squeal. "I like it," she confessed.

"Look at me, girl." His gaze fixed on her, pinning her soul. Could she see the depths of what he intended for her, all the wonder and pleasure and delicious torture?

"Say it, K."

Her lips formed the word, the one he had been waiting for. "Yes."

"You surrender?"

"I...I do."

Chase's smile was slanted, that of a sexual Dominant at play. "We'll see."

His hand slid up her thigh under the hem of her dress. Her eyes widened as he reached the waistband of her panties. She whispered his name.

It was music to his ears.

He found her wet, responsive, more than ready.

His finger slipped inside her, parting the lips of her swollen pussy. Her sex juices dripped pleasingly.

Very, very slowly he stroked her, enough to drive her out of her mind but not enough to bring relief.

She was begging in no time. "Please, no more."

"I've only just begun."

She moaned as he inserted a second finger and then a third, simulating penetration.

Her head fell against his shoulder as he played with her at will, fingers moving in and out of her pussy.

"Would you like to come?"

She groaned softly, eagerly.

"You can't," he said.

"Puh-please..." She sounded so sweet and submissive, which only urged him on in his domination.

"Tell me you are my slave."

"I am...your slave."

He granted her release, compelling her to climax against his hand. She writhed helplessly, her breath coming in short stabs.

Chase held her close, allowing her to ride out her orgasm, a seemingly endless wave of female sighing and gentle shuddering. He kissed her neck, nuzzling, soothing.

Then he fed her, inserting his cum-soaked fingers into her mouth. She licked them obediently, sucking them clean.

“Good girl.”

She looked at him with moist, lost eyes.

“Kneel,” he ordered.

He helped her down, she was so weak.

His hand caressed the top of her head. She did not need to be told what to do. Almost frantic, she unzipped his pants and pulled out his stiff, aching shaft.

Chase could barely hold back. “Yes,” he encouraged as she wrapped her fingers around the base. “Show me how you worship my cock.”

Parting her lips, she wrapped them around the tip of his cock. She suckled softly then slid him farther inside the soft, hot pocket of her mouth. There was no way he would be able to hold out. Placing his hand on top of her head, he moved decisively to the back of her throat.

Groaning, he released himself, gloriously flooding her mouth. She swallowed with consummate, submissive obedience.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Chase responded to the fantasy, climaxing in reality. His semen blasted as he stroked himself, firmly gripping his hot, thick, vein-covered shaft.

He longed for it to be real. Chase needed to be with K, to touch her, to pleasure her...to control her.

He would bring forth her true submissive nature. He would allow her to feel the pleasure she was meant to and which he was sure she was missing now.

Such a beautiful repressed creature.

He would fuck her pussy – fuck her hard until she screamed and came and came and screamed, hours of lovemaking, a full night of pleasure until the coming of dawn.

And then the real fun would start.

He would pull out the chains, affixing them to her lovely wrists and ankles.

Before he was done, she would call him Master...and he would call her slave.

* * * * *

Kat collapsed into her bed sometime after two. She had finally convinced Vicky not to come over, though only after a knock-down, drag-out about her night at the Society. In the end it was easier to admit she was repressed and that she had made a mistake not fighting harder to be a member.

Fortunately, she had been able to keep the details of her time in the Red Room to herself. It wasn't anything lurid, anyhow. She could take her experiences there or leave them.

Couldn't she?

She had verbally sparred with Master J, whoever he was, and talked briefly to his pretty young slave. In the end Kat had left the two of them to their own devices, lost in the world they had created between them behind closed doors, a world of obedience and discipline, pleasure and pain...and intimacy.

That last part had surprised her. There was definite chemistry between the Master and his slave. They seemed to read one another, complementing each other's needs.

Brandy had not come across as a victim and she hadn't seemed like a phony or a bimbo, either. She had seemed levelheaded and sincere. She cared for this Master J and he seemed to have some care for her. They were truly sharing a bond, pardon the pun.

How ironic that BDSM role-play should lead to something real like that—to trust, honesty between partners.

Or was she reading too much into it?

Wishful thinking?

Kat felt vaguely guilty because she had not belonged in that room. She had been a voyeur and in a way she had stolen something from it. Even now the apprehended images flooded her mind.

She could not help but toss and turn, her body superheated and supersensitive.

So many questions unanswered.

How could a man speak so commandingly to a woman and have her respond so softly? How could he tell her he was going to whip her, take her for his own pleasure and make it seem so delicious...wondrous?

What if Master J were in this room with her now? What would he make of her movements, the sweat on her flesh, the blatant female need between her thighs?

Would he command her to stillness, making her await his orders or would he compel her to move for him?

Letting her fingers stray to that place of deep, hot need, flat on her back, legs wide, Kat let herself drift, making the fantasy real...

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Master J loomed over the bed. He was naked, the moonlight reflecting off his solid flesh, revealing toned muscle, a flat, ripped abdomen, muscular thighs and sculpted biceps, all in all the perfect specimen of masculinity.

He was hard, his cock pointing straight toward her. She could imagine it touching her, penetrating and filling her, so thick and large...and those balls so full and heavy.

She let her hand stray to her dripping-wet pussy, stroking herself in anticipation.

His voice was stern, bringing her to heel. "Did I say you could touch yourself?"

She froze mid-stroke. No man had ever spoken to her like that. She shook her head no.

His eyes shone in the moonlight—steady, burning holes through her soul. "You are going to have to learn, Kat, you don't have control, I do."

She swallowed. She wanted to learn. She needed to learn. But was she ready?

"Hands above your head, palms up," he commanded. "Legs apart—wide."

She obeyed, rendering herself helpless.

He made her wait. Her mouth went dry, the seconds passing like centuries. She was on the verge of begging him to do something to her, to make her do something to herself...anything.

Her pussy burned and her nipples were hot buttons. She could not touch herself.

Her heart raced.

Did he intend to fuck her just like this or would he put her in bondage?

What if he punished her first, subjecting her to his spanking hand or the sting of a whip?

Kat squirmed under his gaze.

"You have an incredible body," he said. "But you've no idea how to use it."

"Your body is incredible too," she rasped.

"Silence, slave girl." His voice lashed at her, like the snap of a whip. "You speak when spoken to, is that clear?"

"Yes."

"Yes, Sir," he corrected.

"Yes, Sir," she replied hoarsely.

"I rule you in bed now," he said. "It's that simple."

"Yes, Sir."

"Lick your fingers clean," he ordered.

Kat put her cum-soaked hand to her mouth.

"That's the first taste of your submission," he informed her. "You will find it has varying flavors. Now I will show you how a Master gives himself pleasure."

Deliberately, slowly, he began to stroke himself, squeezing the base of his hard, thick shaft and moving his hand forward and back.

She imagined herself sucking him and making him come. She would swallow thick, warm spurts of his semen, milking him dry like the good pleasure slave he wanted her to be.

Continuing to suckle her fingers, she pretended they were his cock. A tiny moan escaped her throat.

"You're a hot, saucy wench," he said. "Your body was born to be taken in hand by a strong man, caressing, squeezing and pinching you, driving you wild. How you must suffer, living in a world without pirates or warriors to capture you."

"Yes, Sir." She sighed. There was no denying it.

"I am going to kiss you," he said. "Because it is what I want."

She did not expect him to be gentle. In fact she did not want him to be. The very force and arrogant confidence of his words melted her to a pool of utter female need. She burned and craved. Nothing mattered but his touch, his will, his pleasure igniting hers.

Master J descended upon her, pressing his chest to hers, taking her lips with his own, his mouth searing her like a brand, hot and dry.

Kat arched her back though she continued to lie as he had commanded her – open, her hands over her head. He plundered her, his teeth bruising her lips. His tongue moved in hard and fast with all the purpose and energy of a miniature cock, thrusting, penetrating and conquering.

He explored her mouth at will, owning every corner and taking the very breath from her body. There was nothing she could do to resist, nothing she wanted to do.

Whatever happened next, whatever he inflicted, whatever he wanted, the choice was his.

It was slavery of the consensual sexual kind.

When he was done with her mouth he took each of her nipples, biting them in succession. The pressure made her tremor against him in response, her pussy clenching and unclenching.

If only he was inside her, making her come for him. She would do anything.

Master J had no intention of giving her quick release, however. Kissing her breasts, teasing her with pleasure, he made her whimper.

"You are mine," he said simply.

"Yours, Sir." She shivered, molten hot.

"Mine," he repeated.

She cried out as his hand moved between her legs, possessive, decisive. He found her clitoris, immediately plunging her into mindless ecstasy.

"You may not come without permission."

She bit down on her lip, whimpering, fighting to hold back.

He slid his fingers between her pussy lips. "Beg for it," he said.

"Please, please take me, Sir."

"You may call me Master."

"Master..." Kat exhaled, her belly pierced by a hot blade of desire. "Take me...Master."

Master J rose above her, his majestic body assuming the position of absolute domination.

The head of his cock pressed at the entrance to her pussy – teasing, torturing. “You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen,” he said. “I have never wanted to enslave anyone so much.”

She moaned.

Master J sheathed his cock inside her, penetrating to the hilt. She felt as if she had been waiting a lifetime, maybe several lifetimes.

He made a deep, satisfied groaning sound as he began his motions of pushing and thrusting.

“I know how you want it,” he said. “I know what you need. You need the control taken away.”

“Y-yes, Sir.”

No sex had ever been like this, no fantasy.

“Would you like to come?” he asked.

He had pulled out until his cock was barely inside her.

Oh god, he was going to drive her insane.

“May I come, Master? May I come in submission to your cock?”

He took her wrists, gathering them in one hand. “Yes,” he said, pinning her in a viselike grip. “You may come but you will do so as my slave, you will feel it deep in your soul.”

“M-Master,” she cried, the words instantly triggering her body’s response. Her own obedience magnified the pleasure, doubling, tripling the release. Her toes curled, her back arched, her entire body clenched and then released. She was gone from herself, gone from her own soul.

The orgasm went on and on. The whole time he remained rigid inside her, scarcely moving, making her do all the work, shamelessly lifting her body, writhing, pleading for more.

She soared to the top of the universe and then began the inevitable slide down.

The small kisses he gave her on the way were almost cruel. They were punishing reminders of how quickly he could restoke the fires.

“Lie still,” he commanded when it was his turn to come inside her.

Kat could only whimper, her belly burning as his measured strokes brought her once again to the precipice.

“You may not come again,” he said.

Unyielding, he seized his pleasure, making of her his vessel, shattered and broken beneath him.

Master J let loose a roar as he came, the sound of his supreme male power filling the air with electricity.

She took his cum inside her, hot and thick, spurt after spurt, forbidden to move, denied the right to share.

Her one thought was as overwhelming as it was scandalous.

Finally a man who understood.

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Sometime later, when she had come as many times as she could endure, Kat fell asleep.

She was so exhausted she forgot to set her alarm.

Chapter Three

Marsha had that look on her face.

The “Which do you want first—the bad news or the worst news?” look.

“Coffee,” Chase grumbled, walking past his trusted assistant of ten years.

Marsha brought it promptly, fixed exactly as he liked.

Another bad sign. When things were going well she frequently told him, *Get it yourself—what do you take me for, an unpaid intern?*

“Don’t tell me,” he quipped after a couple of sips. “The market collapsed on my way up in the elevator, leaving me nothing to my name but this mug.”

Marsha smiled wryly. “That would be too simple. Life never destroys you outright when it can torment you instead.”

“Fair enough. So what is it—animal, vegetable or mineral?”

“None of the above. You remember Pamela Coil?”

Chase frowned. “The name is vaguely familiar.”

Marsha folded her arms, hip cocked slightly. “Well, she certainly remembers you.”

Chase drank some more coffee. It was starting to come back to him. “She was in accounting, wasn’t she? She did a piss-poor job as I recall. No clue how she ever got her CPA.”

“She probably wasn’t applying herself on purpose,” Marsha said. “It looks like she wanted to be fired so she could file suit.”

“On what grounds? She faked her incompetency a little too well if that’s what she was up to.”

“Fake or not, she’s got a real enough case going,” announced Allan Silverman, Chase’s chief legal counsel. “I’m afraid we’re looking at sexual harassment.”

“You’re kidding me,” said Chase.

“I never kid,” said Allan, who stood a full six inches shorter than the statuesque brunette, Marsha.

Chase exhaled. “Sit, give me the grisly details. Marsha, you stay, I am going to need all the moral support I can get.”

Allan laid it out straight as soon as he and Marsha were seated in the two wingbacks in front of Chase’s desk. “Pamela Coil is claiming you attempted to coerce her into sexual acts.”

Damn. Was the woman on drugs?

Chase snorted. “I wish I could have coerced her into keeping the books straight.”

"I know the timing is bad," said Allan. "What with you just getting past all that stuff with Susan."

"I'm sorry," said Marsha. "I know these charges are rubbish."

"And we will prove it in court," said Chase. "Followed by a countersuit for defamation of character."

Allan cleared his throat. "I knew you would feel that way but I want you to consider the publicity. We just went through the divorce and the press is still chomping at the bit. You think this is worth it?"

"Think how much energy it would take," said Marsha. "I would hate to see you go through any more than you already have."

"Are you two saying we should settle?" The very idea made Chase sick. "Just give in to virtual extortion?"

"In today's world this is part of the cost of doing business," Allan pointed out. "It's nothing we should take personally."

Chase did take it personally. He had been pushed around a little too much lately. "I'm going to fight it, Allan. I want outside counsel. Nothing personal but this isn't your area of expertise. I want the best. And make it a woman. Let people see women aren't afraid to stick up for me."

"Any good counsel will probably recommend you do the same thing I'm telling you to do," said Allan.

"Fine, let it come from a woman's lips. I'll take it better."

"What am I?" asked Marsha. "Chopped liver?"

"You're not a woman. You're my right-hand man. Plus you're no lawyer. Hell, if you were, I wouldn't be able to trust you."

"My turn to be chopped liver," said Allan.

"Just get me that lawyer," said Chase. "Please and thank you."

Allan was on his feet. "I'm going. Hell, you never know when I'll get another thank you out of the likes of you."

Chase grinned. "Not in this lifetime."

Marsha waited until after Allan was gone. "So what's the deal with you?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about, Marsha."

She arched a meticulously groomed brow. After all this time, he had never seen her with a hair out of place. She was unmarried, totally dedicated and a complete enigma.

"I know you better than I know myself. You're thinking about something and it's personal," she said.

"In that case, shouldn't that be a clue to leave it alone?"

She shook her head. "Sorry, Chief, I'm the number one meddler around here, remember?"

Chase sighed, leaning back in his leather seat. "I ran into a woman last night. I can't stop thinking about her."

"At your S and M club?"

"It's not an S and M Club and yes, I saw her there. What the hell she was doing, I haven't a clue. She wandered straight into a scene I was doing, never even apologized. Went on to accuse me of being a sexist, exploiting pig who preys on younger women. And all the while she was practically melting in her panties watching my play partner."

"So, why didn't you play with her too, if that's what she wanted?"

"I told you, she wasn't invited."

"So invite her."

"Absolutely not," he growled.

Marsha arched a brow. "Touched a nerve, did I?"

"It's just that she's not a member," Chase said, attempting to cover for his unusually strong reaction. "She just wandered in. It irritated me."

"I can tell," said Marsha, not bothering to hide her amusement.

"Don't go reading too much into it," he insisted. "I'm probably just tired, worn out still, over the divorce."

"You brought it up," Marsha reminded.

"And now I'm un-bringing it up," he said. *Was that even a word?*

"Mm," said Marsha, oblivious. "So what's her name?"

"Who? The one at the Society? She called herself K."

Marsha shook her head. "I will never understand BDSM. A woman wants you to whip her ass but she won't trust you with more than the first letter of her name."

Chase fought the image of K bound, twitching under the punishing lash, her buttocks red, enticing, begging his carnal attention, moans escaping her throat. "She doesn't want me to whip her ass."

"Then why did she go in the room?" Marsha asked reasonably.

"She was bored? How the hell should I know?"

Again this morning—shortly before dawn—Chase had pleased himself while thinking of the mystery woman.

What was she like under those clothes, behind that mask? What promises did she hold behind those expressive, penetrating green eyes?

She was extremely intelligent and strong willed. That fact loomed more and more in his mind. She had been able to hold her own with him verbally and she hadn't backed down.

Was she thinking of him the way he was thinking of her? Did she think he was a callous brute? Did she really grasp what Mastery was about? Controlling a woman's mind as well as her body, awakening it to its fullest possibilities?

"Chief." It was Allan, on the intercom.

"Yeah?"

"I got us a lawyer."

"That was fast. And she's a female?"

"Kathryn Wayans. Is that female enough for you?"

"How quickly can you get her over here?"

There was a slight pause. "We are going to have to go to her, actually."

Chase frowned.

He never went to lawyer's offices.

Ever.

"Tell me you're joking, Allan."

"She said either we come to her office or forget it. I told her your position and that was her answer."

"Fine, then we forget it," he said stubbornly.

"Don't be hasty, Chase. She doesn't knuckle under to power," Marsha reasoned. "She might be exactly what you need."

"No woman is worth kowtowing to," he said bluntly.

"What should I tell her?" Allan asked.

Chase felt the blood vessels throbbing in his temples. "Tell her —"

"Tell her pride goeth before a fall," Marsha interrupted, looking pointedly at Chase.

Chase rubbed his temples. She was right. He hated it when she was right. "Tell her to expect us in a half-hour," he said. "And god help them if they don't have a helipad."

He would fly the copter himself, keeping control...as always.

This Kathryn Wayans would learn that.

The hard way, if necessary.

Chapter Four

Vicky's eyes bugged as she looked at her partner, best friend and virtual sister. "You really told Chase Neill you wouldn't go to his office to see him?"

Kat didn't bother to look up from her paper-laden desk. This had been such a bad morning already, what with oversleeping and a continuously burning pussy, thanks to her memory of Master J and the Red Room.

"I talked to someone on his staff, Vick. He already has his own lawyers and he wants me to drop everything and run over there to help him? I don't think so."

"But Kat, he's *Chase Neill*, as in Chase-A-Billion-Neill, head of the fastest-growing consortium in the country. Do you have any idea what his business could do for the firm?"

"We have more than enough clients already – deserving, decent, honest ones. This guy is a fat cat sexual harasser. Big difference."

"I wonder why he even called you?" Vicky speculated, disappearing as she often did into her own thoughts. "There are so many bigger firms. He's taking an awful risk."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Vick."

"I'm just saying..." Vicky trailed off, shrugging.

"What are you saying?" Kat felt her blood pressure rising. "That I'm not worth my salt? Because I sure don't feel that way about you. I actually back you up and give encouragement. As an ex-cheerleader, you should know the part."

Vicky gave it right back, as she had since the two first met and became best friends back in college. "You could have been a cheerleader too, if you weren't so busy studying."

"We can't all get straight As without cracking a book," Kat snapped.

Vicky furrowed her brows, a perfect match to her straight, golden yellow hair. "What if Chase Neill is involved in some kind of government spy work?"

Kat was unable to keep the aggravation out of her voice. Of all times for Vick to start acting blonde. "What the hell are you talking about, Victoria?"

"Never mind. You are obviously busy."

"How perceptive."

"But you are meeting with him? He actually agreed to come here?"

"Unfortunately," Kat grouched. "Now if you don't mind, I have a ton of work to do before he gets here and quite probably ruins the rest of my day."

"Suit yourself." Vicky turned to leave, causing Kat to feel a sudden jolt of nerves. She was not as bold as she sometimes appeared, not like Vicky.

“Wait, Vick. You’ll sit in with me when he comes, right?”

Vicky offered a sudden grin and a wink. “Where else would I be?”

Kat heaved a small sigh of relief. Truth be told she had hoped Chase Neill’s lawyer would tell her thanks but no thanks when she refused to go to his office to see him.

She wasn’t ready to meet that kind of power player right now. Kat had had enough of dominant men for quite some time, particularly the one known as Master J who had so effectively invaded and taken over her fantasies.

What a night she had endured.

Would she ever be able to masturbate again without thinking of Master J’s hard body, his hard commands and his sexy, potent ways?

This morning she had woken up disjointed and out of sorts. She had actually reached across the bed to feel if he was there.

It had felt that real.

“Kat?” Their assistant, Kevin, was standing in the doorway. “Your new client is here.”

Already? What had he done? Come by rocket ship?

“Thanks,” she told the second-year law student whose boyish good looks made him the center of attention for every female visitor. “Tell him I’ll be right there.”

“He says he won’t wait.” Kevin declared a bit sheepishly.

Kat reacted. “He damn well *will* wait if he wants my attention. Who does he think he is, anyway?”

“Nice fiery delivery,” announced a second man—taller and much more formidable—behind Kevin. “You do the same in court and we won’t have any problems.”

Kat’s mouth dropped open. That was Chase Neill? She had expected some gray-haired old curmudgeon, not a man in his prime, fit, with the body of a warrior and the fashion sense of a Parisian executive.

Chase wore charcoal gray silk trousers and a blue dress shirt, the collar unbuttoned. He had a gold-buckled belt and tasseled loafers. His hair was short, neat and dark as a raven’s wing. His eyes were sapphire blue, the sort a woman might die for.

She must have seen a picture of him somewhere because he seemed vaguely familiar. Or had she seen someone like him?

No, this man was one of a kind, of that there was no doubt.

“I’m Chase Neill.” He presented himself in front of her desk, his carriage straight and proud, as if he was taking command of an aircraft carrier. “I assume you’re Kathryn Wayans.”

Kat tried unsuccessfully to reply. Her mouth was dry as cotton. The man had her completely off balance.

"Yes," said Vicky, filling in for her momentarily dumbstruck partner. "She is and she's very pleased to meet you."

Chase arched a brow, his laser blue eyes focused straight on Kat. "She has a funny way of showing it."

Kat clenched her fist, fighting the effect of the man's stare.

What was it about him that was so disconcerting?

"Vicky," said Kat, "you may inform Mr. Neill that I show things in my own way. And while you are at it, please tell him I despise being talked of in the third person."

Chase pursed his lips, evaluating. She felt like it was a chess game and she was his opponent.

Or was she one of the pieces?

Chase's reply was directed to Kat. "And I despise having my time wasted...Miss Wayans."

Vicky promptly ushered him toward the chair in front of the desk. "Kat feels the same way. Why don't you have a seat and you two can get started."

"Not here," said Chase. "Do you have a conference room?"

"Certainly," said Vicky smoothly. "That would be fine, wouldn't it, Kat?"

Kat glared. "Absolutely."

Vicky led the way, with Chase following and Kat bringing up the rear. She was even more aware of his height and strength up close. He moved with the confidence of a predatory cat.

His cologne was vaguely familiar.

It reminded her of last night.

So did his voice, come to think of it.

Just went to show how overwhelmed she still was from her experience in the Red Room. No matter what, she must never, ever go back.

"Want some coffee?" Vicky asked as she closed the conference room door behind them.

The room was moderately sized, with walnut paneling and oil paintings of nondescript English landscapes. The square footage upped their rent considerably but Vicky had insisted, claiming all real law firms had conference rooms.

"No thank you," said Chase, seating himself at the head of the table.

Figured.

He regarded Vicky disapprovingly. "I prefer to speak with Miss Wayans alone."

Vicky reopened the door with utter grace. "Absolutely, Mr. Neill. Ta-ta, Kat."

Kat's eyes pleaded with Vicky to stay.

Vicky offered another wink and closed the door behind her.

"Not on the left," grumbled Chase as Kat moved to sit down. "Sit on the right."

Kat glowered. What was this man's problem? He was obviously some kind of control freak.

No doubt he was guilty as hell in this harassment case, whatever it was.

In a huff, Kat sat down with her legal pad. "Seeing as how we are both busy, let's get down to business, shall we?"

He was looking at her, doing that chess thing again.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"I know you from somewhere," he said.

Her heart quickened a little.

So she wasn't the only one who had sensed a familiarity. She had chalked it up to the leftover power of last night's fantasies.

"I am sure you meet a lot of people, Mr. Neill."

"I do," he agreed. "And I make it a point never to forget a face. Tell me, Miss Wayans, why do you practice this particular type of law?"

Kat set her pen down. "I deal with harassment because I'm good at it. Mr. Neill, may I be honest with you?"

His smile was lightning quick and sexy as hell. "I thought lawyers were always honest."

"We present the truth as it is presented to us." She opted to ignore the sarcasm. "In a few moments I will ask you if you are guilty or not. This will be for purposes of preparing the correct defense, not out of any need to make a moral judgment. Before I ask, however, I must disclose a piece of information that might affect your decision to hire me. I'm not overly fond of you so far, Mr. Neill, and it's only fair you should know that."

"I see." With an air of drama, he leaned back in his seat.

This is the sort of man who likes to make a show of everything, she thought.

"And would you like to know my opinion of you? Strictly in the interest of fairness?" He drawled the words, mocking her.

Kat's teeth set on edge. "That isn't necessary."

"Why not?"

"Because," she said, deciding that subtlety would get her nowhere. "Your opinion of me does not matter in the least, by which I mean, it will not affect my ability to defend you in court."

"I see," he said evenly. "And what if I told you I wanted to sleep with you?"

Her mouth went dry. "Excuse me?"

"Would you defend me any differently if I told you I was sexually attracted to you?"

Her heart was pounding wildly. She was furious. She was outraged. This man was coming across as strident, dictatorial, obnoxious and totally sexist.

She was tempted to sue him herself.

And yet, at the same time, she found herself strangely drawn to him, like a moth to fire. He was handsome as hell – dark, domineering, completely indifferent to the careful lines of political correctness. Strictly as fantasies went, this guy would make one hell of a Master – masked, bare-chested, putting a helpless woman through her paces, making her surrender her deepest self.

“I’m a professional,” she dismissed. “No, I would not defend you any differently if you told me you were attracted to me.” There, let him put that in his dominant pipe and smoke it.

Chase nodded, satisfied. “All right, we can proceed. You’re what I’m looking for.”

Unbelievable.

Her gaze narrowed. “Are you trying to tell me that was some kind of test to see if I would take your case no matter how much of a disgusting pig you revealed yourself to be?”

“Can you blame me?” he said, unabashed. “I expect to pay you a good deal of money. I want to know what I’m getting.”

She felt a wicked chill down her spine at his choice of language. This was a very bad time for her to be battling erect nipples and dampness between her thighs.

“What you will be *getting* is competent legal counsel, if that’s what you are really here for.”

His face held absolutely no expression. “What else would I be here for, Miss Wayans?”

Her cheeks reddened instantly. He was trying to make it seem as if she was the one with impure thoughts on her mind. “Not a damn thing...if you know what’s good for you.”

His brow shot up almost imperceptibly. “I believe this is the part where you’re supposed to tell me I’m your not type.”

“I can’t imagine you’re anyone’s type,” she said, all pretense of politeness gone. “Although I imagine you love yourself a good deal.”

“I’m aware of my strengths and weaknesses,” he said, nonplused. “There is no point in confusing the two.”

“What are your weaknesses, Mr. Neill?” she asked with as much contempt as she could manage. “I can’t imagine a man as perfect as you having any.”

“I’m too trusting, apparently. I should never have hired Pamela Coil.”

“She is the employee who is suing you?”

“Yes. She was an accountant for my firm.”

“Were you involved with her?” The question had shot from Kat’s lips, unplanned and with a lot more emotion than was called for.

"She wasn't my type," Chase said, his lips angling slightly to one side. Was he playing with her?

Kat's loins heated another notch in reply. Damn it, the man was arousing her. It was all the result of that stupid Society for Sexual Freedom, the wickedness of the Red Room. It was as though her libido had been opened wide and she couldn't shut it down.

"Is that the only reason?"

"I don't sleep with my employees."

"If you met her on the street today, what then?"

His brow lifted much more noticeably this time. "You seem awfully curious, Miss Wayans."

Kat stiffened. "It's my job."

It was her job, though she was worried it might be more.

"If I met Pamela on the street now, I don't think sex would be uppermost on my mind," Chase said dryly.

"What about before she sued you?" she pressed. "If you saw her in a bar —"

"I wouldn't go to the same kind of bar."

He was good, she gave him that. Any potential cross-examining attorney would be better, though.

"And why is that, Mr. Neill? Do you find all the action you need at work? Does it turn you on, having women underneath you, obeying you?"

His answer caught her off guard. "I like obedient women, yes, but I keep sex and work separate."

Kat swallowed. What was she dealing with here? He talked like...a Master.

She was afraid to find out more but she had to ask. It *was* her job. "Mr. Neill, this is not some cocktail lounge situation where we can afford to be coy. If there is something in your sexual background or habits that will come into play, I had better hear it from you now and not in the courtroom from the lips of opposing counsel."

"I am a practitioner of BDSM," he said.

Kat felt as if she had been shot point blank. "A practitioner of...what?"

He frowned, on the verge of scowling. "This not playing coy needs to work both ways. You're a twenty-first-century woman, a lawyer specializing in sexual harassment. I think you know what BDSM is."

"I'm perfectly aware of sadomasochism," she said, recovering.

He shook his head. "BDSM is more. It's bondage, domination and submission too. Pain is a very small part of it for most and for some, it figures not at all."

She tossed her dark hair over her shoulder. "And this justifies the behavior to you? It's okay to humiliate women as long as you don't hurt them...too much?"

He didn't crack. "Are you asking as my attorney?"

“What else do we have between us?” she replied, returning his volley from before.

“So this is a test.” He nodded. “Good. You can see I’m not defensive. I’m aroused by women who submit to me, Miss Wayans. I use their bodies for mutual pleasure. I put them through paces.”

“Paces...” She whispered the word, imagining what it would be like to follow the sexual commands of Chase Neill.

What would he have her do? Strip off her clothes, fall to her knees and take his cock meekly, hungrily into her mouth? Or would he bind her so she could surrender her ass to the whip?

Kat was dripping wet.

She pressed her thighs together.

This man could be a friend of Master J for all she knew.

A twin more like.

Kat felt a chill down her spine.

Was that what seemed so familiar about him?

It couldn’t be.

What were the odds of the masked Master J being the arrogant Mr. Neill? A million to one?

Still...

Stranger things could and did happen in the world every day.

She simply didn’t have the evidence to draw a clear conclusion. They were of similar builds, hair color, eyes, yes. Their voices had similar effects on her and they were both Dominants.

Kat had to consider her fatigue, though, her state of mind, which was less than objective. She had dominant on the brain at the moment.

Damn Vicky for stirring all this up in her. She was seeing things, projecting mysterious Master images onto her new client.

“Are you with me, Miss Wayans?” He spoke the words sharply, snapping her from her reverie.

Like the snap of a whip.

“Yes. I was thinking, that’s all. Mr. Neill, you know this could be a problem?”

“Tell me something I don’t know,” he replied, a slight tone of bitterness coming through, the sort of tone one often heard in divorced men.

“Your sexual tastes have come up before?” she guessed. “In litigation?”

“My ex-wife Susan. She and I enjoyed a BDSM relationship in our marriage. We had a contract, even. When things turned sour, by which I mean she fell in love with a hockey star, she decided to drag it all into court, so she could have her attorneys paint me as some kind of abusive monster.”

“What do you mean, you had a contract?”

He furrowed his brow. “You really want to know this?”

“I have to.”

For more reasons than one.

“Susan was a submissive. She needed the control and sexual power of a Dominant. I was granted rights over her body—certain powers of punishment to keep her within the bounds she craved.”

Kat reacted. “That kind of thing is unenforceable. You can’t expect someone to be your...your slave.”

He eyed her for a moment. She squirmed, not liking the feeling of being appraised.

Whatever he thought he saw in her, he was wrong.

“I am not a foolish man, nor am I a megalomaniac,” he said evenly. “There was no intent to hold Susan against her will or cause her any harm. It turned us on to have her sign such a document, that’s all.”

“That’s disgusting,” Kat dismissed.

“Some women want to be owned.”

“Sure, just like minorities like being second-class citizens,” she shot back.

He shrugged. “If you’re looking to punish me with your rhetoric, don’t bother. Susan cleaned my clock and her lawyers did a nice job of raking me over the coals to boot.”

She seized on his verbiage. “Maybe you have been seeking out punishment all along. Maybe you envy the women you enslave.”

His candor was disarming. “That’s an interesting theory but it’s not in my nature to submit any more than it is to be female. Some people have to lead. It’s a curse as much as anything.”

“Dictators are full of such self-serving statements,” she dismissed.

“I’m not a dictator, Counselor. I’m a man who binds his women to him willingly. I free them to be the women they want to be. I’m a beast, though rather a benevolent one.”

Kat licked her lips. She wished she was the kind of woman bold enough to slip from her seat and go to this man on her hands and knees, beautiful and powerful and challenging, intensely sexual and vital in her feminine need.

Ninety-nine percent of the men on the planet would cringe and run from the room in fear. This man would not. He would remain in place for one simple reason.

He was stronger.

Kat held her breath. She needed to end this little session fast. “I am going to need a lot more information,” she said smoothly. “I will have to have access to your personnel records. I will need to interview all involved staff as well.”

“We haven’t negotiated your fees,” he pointed out.

For some reason the word negotiate rankled her.

"I don't negotiate," she said. "You will meet my standard fees. No more, no less."

"You seem rather confident. How do you think rich men get that way if not by driving hard bargains?"

She rose to her feet. "I'm not a bargain, I'm an investment."

Chase frowned slightly. "I assume the meeting is over."

"Our meetings start and end when I say," she declared. "That is one of my rules."

"One of them?"

"You'll discover others as we go along." She opened the conference room door and stood pointedly beside it. "If you would kindly leave your contact information with my assistant on your way out, I will be in touch."

"For what it's worth," he said, pausing beside her in the doorway, "I am innocent."

Kat's pulse raced. He was too damn close. He smelled of musk and fresh soap—subtle, quintessentially masculine. She felt way too feminine in his presence.

It occurred to her that it would never be enough to simply offer oneself to a man like this. He would not merely take a woman. He would make her beg first.

And then he would play until she was owned to the depths of her orgasmic, writhing soul.

Unbidden, her nipples rubbed against her bra, wanting to be kissed, licked, pinched.

These breasts are yours, do with them what you will...

Something flashed across his eyes. He looked as though he might speak but he did not. He walked away, leaving her flushed, barely able to stand.

"How did it go with Dream Boat?" Vicky asked a few moments later.

Kat had not moved in the intervening time. She had her back braced against the doorjamb. "It went...fine."

Hands on her hips, Vicky eyed her. "I'm sure it did. Although, I think you would have been a lot happier if you'd gotten into his briefs instead of working on filing one."

"I don't want in his briefs," Kat said, snapping back to reality. "Honestly, you have sex on the brain sometimes."

"At least I get around to having it in real life every now and again. Seriously, when was the last time you got laid?"

"A month ago, maybe two," she dismissed. "I don't want to talk about this. We need to review precedents on this case. We have to start doing research."

"It's been more like six months," Vicky persisted. "If you count that CPA, though he didn't even give you an orgasm."

"We are not talking about orgasms," Kat fumed. "Honestly, Victoria, let it go."

Unfortunately, Vicky did not have that ability. "What exactly happened in there?" she asked. "And don't you dare say 'nothing'."

Kat gestured Victoria into her office for privacy.

Naturally Kevin took this as an invitation to join them. "What's up?" he asked conspiratorially.

"'What's up' is this is for girls only," said Kat.

Kevin offered one of his charming, Justin Timberlake grins. "I know what girls want, if that counts."

"No, it doesn't," said Vicky. "Go and make yourself useful."

"Doing what?"

"I don't know, make coffee."

He rolled his eyes. "That is all you think I'm good for around here, you female chauvinists."

"Sue us if you like, it's not like we have any money," Vicky quipped.

Kat spilled the beans as soon as he was gone. "Chase Neill is into BDSM."

"Really?" Vicky was in heaven. "Well, that gives new meaning to performing for your client, doesn't it? One wrong move and he'll haul your little fanny over his lap for a spanking."

Kat felt a tingle down her spine as she imagined Chase's hand on her ass. Would he spank her through her clothes or strip her down first so he could make contact skin to skin?

Either way she would be subject to him, forced to be hot, pleasing...obedient.

"He could be into leather too," Vicky speculated. "He could put you in a little collar and leash."

Kat's jaw clenched. "You make me sorry every time I share anything with you."

"I'm only trying to help you. You have to get out of your shell. I'm doing what a sister would."

"Which is why I don't talk to my real sisters anymore," Kat countered. "Can we get to work now?"

Vicky sighed. "If you say so." Almost as an afterthought she said, "Oh, by the way, that Master you ran into last night?"

Kat froze. How did she know about Master J?

"What about him?"

"Apparently you made an impression."

"H-how?" There it was again, the stutter.

"Elaine called while you were in your meeting and told me all about it. She says he went off on her about how you snuck into the Red Room. I can't believe you did that, by the way. There might be hope for you yet. Anyway, Elaine says it's been a long, long

time since he reacted like that about anyone. He was furious with you. Don't tell anyone I told you, it's confidential."

"Oh." She pretended not to care. "Well, I can't say he had any effect on me. What a joke, swinging his little submissive around on a rope. You would think, if he was a real man, he would dominate someone his own age."

Vicky's expression was a borderline smirk.

"What's that for?"

"You're jealous."

"Me? That's ridiculous. Jealous of whom?"

"The sub-on-a-rope, as you call her. Brandy is her code name, by the way, and she's not Master J's girlfriend or anything. He is mentoring her."

Kat snorted. "Is that what they call it nowadays?"

"He'll probably be back there tonight," Vicky said.

"He could be in Timbuktu for all I care," said Kat, replying with a little more emotion than necessary.

"Right. Because you are not at all interested in Master J or in Chase Neill or any other red-blooded, well-hung male."

"Don't be sarcastic, Victoria."

"All I'm saying, Kathryn, is you are building up like a volcano and you had better do something about it. If you don't want to go for this Master J, then recuse yourself from Neill's case and go for him instead."

"We need Neill's business, remember? And Master J hates me."

"So go online or look for someone else at the Society."

"I'm not a member," she said stubbornly.

"Because you choose not to be."

"Correct." Kat was determined to end the discussion once and for all. "And I am choosing now to remain single, dedicated to my job and..."

"And boring," Vicky quickly filled in the blank spot.

Kat frowned. "I was going to say I am open to possibilities."

"So long as they aren't sexual or romantic."

"Some people are meant to excel at their careers."

"Some people can have both. The ball is in your court at this point."

"Good. You may declare the game to be over." She spoke with a note of triumph, though inside she felt a strange emptiness.

The vacuum was immediately filled with a crazy idea.

What if she went back to the Society tonight? Not to participate but just to learn a little more for her case, so she could better represent Chase Neill should his BDSM history become an issue.

Yes, that was it.

She would go back to the Red Room, strictly for business.

It sounded rational. Justifiable.

Then again, maybe that's how moths thought just before plunging themselves yet again into the fire. The moth could survive a certain number of times but sooner or later would be the last.

The Red Room, come hell or high water...tonight.

Master J could be there or not, it was of no matter.

For all she cared, Chase Neill could come there too.

They were two different people, they had to be.

If for no other reason than the fact that J was not Chase's initial, first or last. It was flimsy reasoning, though it was something to go on at least.

A moment later the doubts returned.

Men had middle names too. And a lot of them began with the letter J.

* * * * *

Kathryn Wayans was an insolent woman with a smart mouth and an even smarter brain.

Chase could not stop thinking about her all the way back to his office, which was saying something because up to now all he had been able to think about was K, the wandering would-be sub who had so innocently waltzed into his tightly controlled little world.

The fact that two similar women—strikingly similar, actually—were affecting him like this in such a short period of time was a sign that he was not doing as well with the divorce as he had thought.

It wasn't like him to fall for women left and right. Even when he'd made bad choices, his intentions had been good. Susan had been the best he could find, the most beautiful, passionate of women, an absolute asset on every front.

Who was he kidding? She was goddamn eye candy, a gold digger, a pretend submissive who had gotten on her knees and into his bed to take him down.

And taken him she had.

In many ways he had deserved it. More than once he had spurned the possibility of real love in favor of getting ahead. Instead of intimacy, he had settled on sex. Pleasure was a definite necessity but you couldn't take it at the cost of everything else.

Were there no true submissives in the world—tender, innocent hearts full of courage and not afraid to hope?

Chase loved and adored women and he yearned to unlock a truly fiery female heart, to find a beauty who could kneel for him and him alone, who could be his slave

in bed, wild and sweet all at once. Not a cynical bitch in disguise and not a doormat, either.

Was there no one who could go toe-to-toe with him, whom he could enjoy conquering again and again?

He was running out of time, or so it felt. All the more reason to keep control of his emotions, to keep from making any more mistakes.

This was hardly the time to act like a schoolboy, falling for every pretty face, or in K's case, a pretty, masked face.

Wouldn't it be something to put the two women together, combining the lawyer's saucy mouth and K's saucy curves?

They could be sisters.

The thought brought him up short.

Such a strange idea. Though it was understandable that his mind could work that way. The dark hair, the vibrant green eyes. They were the same height too.

He laughed out loud.

There was one problem with his little fantasy.

A woman like Kathryn Wayans wouldn't be caught dead within the Society's walls, let alone inside the Red Room.

No, they were two different people.

They shared a place in his fantasy and nothing more.

That and the first letter of their names.

K for Kathryn.

He had made a point of double-checking the spelling of her name on the law office door on the way out.

Life had its ironies, didn't it?

He was due to go back tonight.

It was his intention to end things with Brandy. He no longer felt he could serve as her mentor. His objectivity was gone, if he ever had it. He was supposed to be putting himself in the role of her Master, allowing her to feel the thrill of submission without putting himself in a place of romantic attachment.

Brandy wanted to have sex with him, she had made that clear. She adored him. That was not unusual in such relationships. It was his job not to take advantage.

He would continue as her platonic guide, helping her to negotiate what she needed with her current boyfriend or else to find another man, a real partner. She was ready. More ready than him, apparently.

She wouldn't make the kind of choice he had. She would not pick the male equivalent of a Susan.

One last night with Brandy and then...what?

Aloneness.

There was a concept new to Chase Neill.

Chase a billion, chase a skirt – he had always been after something. Always making the rules and making others follow them.

Kathryn Wayans told him she would make the rules and he would follow. She was cool, fierce under pressure, a tigress. She had a heat all her own but she had also buttons he could push.

A woman with buttons was dangerous for a man like Chase. It meant she was potentially malleable, conquerable.

It was well known that the strongest personality types were the most submissive in bed. Many business men in Chase's position preferred the woman to be in charge. Like he had told Kathryn, that wasn't an option for him.

Chase landed the helicopter safely on the pad, in control.

Always.

He would go back to the Red Room tonight.

Would K show up?

Not likely.

He would be as amazed to see the other one...Kathryn...with a K.

Chapter Five

Kat was having a major wardrobe crisis.

What on earth was she going to wear to the Society tonight?

Standing nude in front of her closet, Kat eyed the usual suspects. Her skin was still tingling from her shower, not to mention the fantasies raging in her mind.

She fingered her favorite black dress, the two red ones and her turquoise one with the lettuce hem.

What message would these particular garments send? she wondered. Would she appear to be a woman too anxious to be feminine to play the games of men?

Kat thought about wearing jeans, simply to make a point. She could be casual if she wished, no matter what the setting appeared to dictate.

Goodness, the decor was so formal. She had half expected to see women in long gowns and men in old-style evening coats.

Funny, she hadn't seen anyone at all, though. Were they steering clear of her? She wasn't a member yet, after all and they had their identities to protect.

Kat scratched the jeans idea. She didn't really feel comfortable in denim. She liked to dress well when she went out and that was her right. So what if people thought she was conforming too much. Let them think what they liked. They had no influence over her. Master J, least of all.

So what if he had taken up residence in her fantasies with his swaggering ways and hard muscles. She was no Brandy. She would never surrender to him.

She would never let Chase get the better of her either.

To hell with them both.

Kat despaired of finding a dress. Sighing, she skipped down to the skirts. She would make a compromise, a nice skirt and blouse combination, not too pretty, not too prim.

For heaven's sake, at this rate it is going to be midnight before I get dressed.

Grabbing a pleated black skirt and red silk blouse, she laid them out then went to work making herself look nice, just not too nice.

Nicely made-up, feminine, just not femme fatale.

She opted for a frosted lipstick, a subtle shade of pink and her simple, elegant pearls.

Black shoes, naturally.

And stockings. Definitely stockings.

Deciding on underwear made her nervous. She really didn't want to go there. No one would see her bra and panties, right, so what difference would it make?

She shivered a little, fingering the material of her various undergarments in the drawer. She had a habit of buying pretty panties and bras. No reason, really – it wasn't as though anyone special ever saw them. It was a hobby, like macramé. Kat chose a pair of black lace panties and a matching bra. Would Master J approve?

He would never see them, of course.

The idea was for her to maintain decorum, to act normally enough so he had no excuse to try his tricks on her.

Kat frowned. There was nothing normal about going to a club to watch men whip women. Never mind picking out clothes, she should be wearing a suit of armor and a giant "keep off" sign to the Society. Better still she should not be going at all.

What about her hair, should she put it up or leave it down? Which way would be more powerful and dominant-looking? The last thing she wanted to do was look vulnerable.

She considered the matter as she pulled on the panties, sliding them up her legs and thighs. They felt so soft and feminine against her skin. This was not the sort of thing a woman in control should have bought, was it?

Her sex was a little moist. She was afraid the panties might end up damp. Her breasts ached as she put the bra on, the material constricting the wanton flesh, pressing the taut nipples. Her belly did hot flips as she thought of how Master J would treat them.

He would touch, taunt, punish her at will. And she would react, she would be unable to help herself, just like Brandy, Master J's slave. Was that her real name or had Master J given it to her?

She had felt a little embarrassed, granting only a letter to herself when he had allowed so much more to his slave.

Tonight she would give nothing to Master J, if he was even there.

This was a research trip, she reminded herself, to help Chase Neill.

Kat chose stockings in a sort of trance, her mind barely focusing on what she was doing. As she put them on she marveled at the slow, sensual transformation that came with encasing her long legs in such obviously feminine accoutrements.

Stockings were not practical, they were meant to be attractive to men, the sort of men who would put a woman to their pleasure.

Was Kat that sort of woman? Would a man want her enough to chain her to the ceiling and strip her, keeping him for herself?

Her fingers trembled as she buttoned the blouse. Red was not a very neutral color, was it? She put on the skirt and finally her heels.

She decided to leave her hair down, casual. As a finishing touch she put on the pearl earrings her grandmother had given her. One day she would like to wear the pearls at her wedding.

Fat chance, she couldn't even keep her mind off sexual slavery long enough to look for a decent male companion, someone she could marry.

Chase Neill had gotten married. Ironically, it was his wife who had ruined things when she stopped playing by their kinky rules. Was there another side to the story?

There usually was.

Kat took a deep breath. "Last chance to talk yourself out of this," she told her silent reflection. "Big help you are," she muttered.

Kat made her way to the door. She hailed a taxi to take her to the Society. The driver, a friendly bald man, tried to strike up a conversation. Kat was too nervous.

Her heart was thumping wildly by the time they reached the historic mansion known from the outside simply as The City Social Club. Did the driver have any idea of what went on inside? Cabdrivers usually knew everything. Kat had had no idea of the place's true function until Vicky had told her about it a few months back.

Vicky was pretty eclectic in her tastes. She had been to a lot of the rooms. One of her favorite things was exhibitionism. She liked people to watch her making love, the more the better. There was a room for that at the Society. Kat forgot the color. Gold maybe, like Vicky's hair?

Just about every fetish had a home in the Society according to Vicky. It was a public service as far as she was concerned. Kat wasn't sure, though she probably should not have been so harsh on Elaine last night.

She considered apologizing to the woman. Assuming she would even agree to speak to Kat. Kat wasn't so sure she would be allowed in at all but Vicky had seemed confident.

Leaving the driver a twenty to cover a generous tip, Kat hustled from the cab. She didn't want him to get a good look at her in the rearview mirror. Could he read her anticipation, her sexual anxiety?

Kat climbed the magnificent marble steps, ready for anything. She was all set to knock when she heard a voice coming through a speaker next to the large carved wooden door.

"My dear," called a cheerful, elderly male voice. "Please put on the mask that is in the basket beside the door."

Kat looked down. There was a three-legged table with a wicker basket on top. Inside the basket was a ruby red mask. It was truly a work of art, set with dark jewels and painted with delicate blue lines around the eyes. Feathers decorated the sides.

Kat pulled the strap over her head, putting the mask to her face. She secured it just in time as a man opened the door.

"I am the Colonel," he said, bowing his bald head. "It's an honor to make your acquaintance."

"Likewise. I am...K," she said, deciding to stick to her alias from last night. "I am not sure I am really welcome here, though."

"Of course you are welcome," he said, waving her through. "We were expecting you, actually. Please, come in."

That would be Vicky's doing, thought Kat. Oh well, if her best friend weren't meddling, Kat would be worried there was something seriously wrong with her.

"Would you like a drink?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, thank you." She wondered why he was called the Colonel. He didn't go by Master anything so maybe he wasn't into BDSM. "I'll have a scotch."

She followed him into a study, a couple of doors down from Elaine's office. "May I ask a question," she said as the Colonel handed her a clear glass, clinking with ice.

"Anything."

"What is a mentor, in BDSM circles, I mean?"

He pursed his lips. "I wouldn't claim to be the expert on all such matters, but my understanding is that it is a nurturing role, a kind of hands-on therapy, if you will."

"Surely it's just an excuse for sex play, though?"

"It can be," he acknowledged. "And sometimes it's a part of a relationship. If you are speaking of exploitation, that all depends on the integrity of the mentor."

She was dying to ask about Master J.

"Would you like to sit down?" He gestured to a royal blue, crushed velvet love seat.

"Thanks." She sat down hard and drained her glass.

He chuckled. "Would you like another?"

"No," she said nervously. "I mean...yes."

The Colonel smiled and took her glass. "No need to be anxious. Tell me," he said, striding confidently to the bar, "what did you think of our Master J?"

Kat swallowed. "What did I...think of him?"

"Yes." He handed her back the glass, refilled. She promptly drained half of it as if it were water.

What could she possibly say in response? Before she could think much more she blurted the truth.

"I think he's arrogant."

She watched the dancing light in the Colonel's brown eyes. "Did I say something wrong? Are you two friends?"

"Indeed we are, and yes, he is—arrogant, that is."

She nodded, drinking some more. She would not have a third.

"He has integrity, though," said the Colonel. "More than any man I know."

“Oh?”

“I know that means nothing to you,” the Colonel acknowledged. “Because you have no reason to take my word on anything. I won’t speak for J but I can tell you he’s been hurt recently by a woman. Look deep enough into his eyes and you’ll see it.”

Her ears perked up. “Did you say a woman? You mean that slave he was with?”

“Brandy? No, she is an angel. I was referring to his ex-wife.” The Colonel downed a brandy. “I shouldn’t be telling you this. Forgive me.”

“It’s all right.”

“No, it isn’t. May I show you to the room now?” he said.

Her chest tightened. “You mean...the Red one?”

“That’s why you’re here.” It was a statement, not a question.

“Yes...”

“There isn’t a reason to be afraid. Be yourself, he likes you.”

“Hard to tell,” she muttered. *As if she cared what he thought in the first place.*

“He is a bit brittle, yes.” The Colonel’s voice was filled with affection. “But the best men often are.”

Interesting.

Should this make Kat feel closer to Master J...or Chase Neill?

Both were brittle men – deep, with painful backgrounds.

Both recently hurt by ex-wives.

One thing was for sure, Kat had had enough of these fucking coincidences.

“Thank you for the drinks,” she said, back on her feet. She held out her hand, expecting him to shake it.

He kissed it instead.

The contact of flesh on flesh, lips on skin, warmed her, along with the liquor. She was feeling loose, a little daring.

Not at all the state of mind she should be in on her way to the Red Room.

“Am I making a mistake?” she wondered aloud.

“Everything is a risk,” said the Colonel. “It’s a matter of weighing them. The bigger mistake might be to leave. It often is.”

He had a point. Or was the scotch messing with her logic?

In any event, she nodded. “I’m ready.”

“Indeed you are,” he said, a huge smile breaking out on his face. “I only wonder if he is!”

* * * * *

Chase sat alone in the Red Room in one of the antique armchairs. He had sent poor Brandy home, crying.

That was far from his intention but he could have handled it better. He could have handled a lot of things better in his life when it came right down to it.

If he didn't have to get up early for a conference call with overseas investors he would start drinking right now, heavily.

What was it with women? Honest to god, all he had wanted to do was cut Brandy loose. It would have happened sooner or later, anyway.

The tapping on the door jarred him from his self-pity.

Who the hell would be knocking so timidly, almost apologetically?

One person came immediately to mind. His pulse quickened.

K was back.

Chase fought to keep a cynical veneer over his racing emotions. So many questions where this K was concerned, so many possibilities.

"Come in," he called out. "There's no butler to open it for you."

At the last second he remembered to put on his mask, a layer of smooth black leather to obscure his troubled features. What was it about a mask that made a man change, bringing out his hidden nature? Like an outward deception to reveal inner truth.

Irony – life was one big fucking joke.

"I...I didn't want to disturb you," she said, poking her head through the doorway.

She was wearing a red mask tonight with rubies and blue feathers. It was the perfect complement to her raven's wing hair and her fiery green eyes.

"How could you not be disturbing me?" he said, summoning all the irritation he could find. "It's not like I invited you."

"Do you want me to go?" she asked.

K was even more beautiful than the night before. She was wearing a red blouse and black skirt, stockings and heels. The outfit emphasized her flaring hips and narrow waist. She was extremely feminine but she radiated strength too.

Did she want to be initiated? What kind of underwear did she have on?

"It makes no difference to me," he said.

She surveyed the room. He realized she was dressed almost exactly as he would have her. Uncanny.

"You're alone," she said.

"You came an awful long way to state the obvious," he challenged.

She pursed her lips. "I should leave."

"You should," he replied. "But you won't."

She met his gaze again, this time there was anger. "You don't have to be rude. I might be new here but I know I have rights. Your friend the Colonel was a perfect gentleman."

"So go and spend your evening with him and see if I care."

She tossed her hair over her shoulder.

Familiar.

"I can see why you're alone. Brandy probably couldn't put up with you either."

Chase's blood ran hot. He was hunting but this was a new kind of prey. It was time to test. "Brandy is gone because I commanded her to go. Women do what I tell them in here. That scares you, doesn't it?"

"Do I look scared?"

"You look like a woman who's been in a state of perpetual denial."

"About what?" she demanded.

"Where do I start? How about that outfit you're wearing?"

"What about it?"

"I'll bet you tried on a hundred other things first, right? Didn't want to look too easy, too eager, too frigid, didn't want me to guess you were trying to look a certain way at all. Bet you got a pile of rejected clothes home on the bed right now. Or did you throw it all on the floor so you could get on the bed and pleasure yourself about seeing me again?"

Her body language indicated he had it at least partially right. That was the advantage of a scattergun approach.

"You don't know me at all. You're the predictable one," she countered. "You're a walking advertisement for swaggering machismo with your pirate shirt and those boots. You think that impresses women?"

"You tell me," he said sardonically. "You're the expert."

"Is that sarcasm I detect? A sure sign of a defeated man," she declared.

"You argue well." *Almost too well, just like a certain lawyer I met today.* "There's one thing you haven't explained, though. If you are so indifferent to BDSM, why are you here? Correct me if I'm wrong but there are other rooms here – quite a few."

"Are you trying to get rid of me?"

"Yes," he replied.

She folded her arms. "Well, it's not working."

He rose to his feet. Going to the rack on the wall, he took down a riding crop.

"What are you doing with that?" Her voice was wary, tremulous.

Excited.

"Here." He held it out for her to take. "Use it."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"It's your only option," he said, reaching for her wrist and putting it in her palm. "In the Red Room you dominate...or you are dominated."

Kat regarded him, the whip in her hand. "So you would let me...whip you?"

Chase tore open his shirt, baring his chest. "Does this answer your question?"

"I won't do it," she said stubbornly.

He took a step forward. He was inches from her face. "There are no options here, woman. Take charge of me, if you can...or submit."

Seconds ticked by.

Everything hinged on what she did next.

The course of the night...and maybe of both their lives.

Now what?

Kat had bluffed herself into a corner. She was standing there, holding a riding crop, confronting a gorgeous, masked, bare-chested man who wanted her to whip him or else submit.

Submission...what would that even look like, what would it cost?

A man like Master J would not settle for half measures, that much was certain.

Give an inch and he will take it all.

She could always take the third option and just walk out.

That was the safe thing to do.

The Colonel's words echoed in her brain.

Everything was a risk. Leaving might seem easy but that was often the wrong choice.

Certainly it was the boring choice.

"I'm not dominant or submissive," she told him after what felt like an hour.

There, that should put the ball back in his court.

He accepted the whip as soon as she offered it back.

Relief coursed through her veins. Or was her victory a little premature?

Master J was close enough to touch. She need only reach out her fingers to feel the muscles of his hairless chest. Her breasts strained for contact, her body silently begged for nudity so they could be skin to skin.

"Found yourself a loophole," he said. "Let's see if it holds up."

She didn't like the sound of that.

"You're not dominant," he agreed. "We know that much."

She held her breath as he moved the whip toward her.

"Please..." she whispered.

He touched the tip of the slim black leather crop to the mask over her cheek. She tensed as he moved the tip back and forth, giving her the illusion that he was touching her flesh.

“Please what?”

She didn’t know how to finish the sentence.

“You’re not dominant...” he repeated, grazing the leather tip across the mask, heading for her lips.

Or submissive, she wanted to reiterate, though nothing came from her mouth.

Oh god. He was touching her lips. She tasted the leather – wicked and sensuous.

He rubbed the tip of the whip back and forth over her lips. She shuddered – immobilized, helpless. So this was the feel of leather on skin, the feel of a Dominant’s whip, having its way with her.

Did he expect her to kiss it?

Master J took the whip away abruptly, sparing her for the moment. Her trial was far from over, however.

“Shouldn’t you be going?” he said, mocking her. “You don’t belong here, remember?”

“No...I don’t.”

He played the whip along her arm, touching her this time through silk. She had to suppress a soft moan. How could he act as though he had the right to do that? More to the point, how could she be feeling such a dark thrill?

Reaching her wrist, he shifted and tapped the whip on her belly.

She nearly jumped from her skin.

“Interesting,” he said, his voice husky.

“What do you mean, interesting? It was a normal response, nothing sexual.”

“Did I say it was sexual?”

“No.” She frowned. “And don’t tell me the sexual part is in my own mind, you’re just trying to trick me.”

“Am I?”

She took a step back as he moved the whip again, extending it this time toward her breast. “What do you think you are doing?” she demanded.

“What does it look like I’m doing?”

“It looks like you’re about to...to molest me.”

“You don’t want your nipple touched?” His voice was soft, deceptively soothing.

“Not like that. Not by you.”

“Someone else then? In some other fashion?”

She hadn’t been expecting his finger, swiftly applied to her lips. She sucked in her breath.

"Yes," he whispered, his voice heavy, encouraging, rolling over her like a like a hot, enveloping fog.

Kat opened, allowing him access, and his finger moved past her lips, just inside her mouth.

What had she said yes to?

"Look at me," he said.

She dared not, not like this.

"Look at me," he repeated and suddenly she understood a Dominant's power – all in the voice, all in the mind.

All in the submissive's consent.

She met his gaze, moist-eyed as she suckled his finger. He smiled – measured, confident, as if he was wholly enjoying the moment but still keeping ten steps ahead.

Her knees buckled.

This man had a plan. For her.

Kat whimpered, trying in vain to shake her head no. She didn't want him knowing things about her from her eyes and her body language.

She wasn't ready.

"That's a good girl," he said.

It was a Master's praise, tender and intimate for his slave.

Her cheeks suffused with heat behind the mask. She was grateful for the modesty it offered. Kat shouldn't have been thrilled to hear those words. She should not have been aroused.

Master J removed his finger. She was reluctant to let him go but tried not to show it.

Her heart slammed in her chest. Her very being screamed out, waiting for his next move. What would he want from her, what would he do?

"Relax," he whispered. "You're beautiful, K, and you're perfect for me, for this."

She took solace though there was no way that could be true. He didn't even know her.

"You doubt me," he said.

She could not answer.

"Turn around." Kat cried out as he smacked her ass. Hard. "Face me again."

She couldn't do it.

"Face me," he repeated.

She turned around, her ass in flames and her loins too.

"If I say you are perfect, girl, you are," he said sternly. "In this room there is no lying. If you please me, you do so absolutely and I have no wish for anything else or anyone else. If you do not please me...you are punished."

K could hardly breathe. Her body was in a kind of stasis, midway between here and the real world, wherever that was.

Somewhere outside the door, beyond the realm of the Red Room.

"Do you understand me, girl?"

She nodded, amazed at her shyness.

This wasn't her, it was a role.

Wasn't it?

"Then tell me so."

"I understand you."

He lifted her chin, cupping it with his thumb and forefinger. She burned to see his face, those chiseled masculine features she knew lay behind that mask.

He was handsome, he must be.

Without taking his eyes from hers, he moved his hands beneath her skirt. She shuddered as his fingers traveled up her thighs to the edge of her panties.

"Lace." He identified the material. "Did you wear them for me? Did you want to be attractive for me?"

He could not demand this of her. It would be ever-so much easier if he threw her down onto the bed ripped off her clothes and penetrated her poor, overwrought body. Let that be her answer. Let him take what he wanted and be done with it.

She looked away.

"K!" He said her name sharply.

She jolted slightly, her body feeling the echoes of his hard spank. This man was like no other she had ever met. Then again she had never known a place like the Red Room.

In here everything was possible.

Be careful what you wish for, right?

"I don't know," she said timidly, her voice a fierce whisper.

"You do know, K. You're aroused."

"Puh-please..."

How many times was she going to say that word tonight? This wasn't her, so weak and out of control.

"You will come for me," he said.

It was a statement, not a question.

Her pussy clenched in anticipation. She sucked in her taut belly as she felt his fingertips. Kat could only whimper as he grazed the waistband of the panties.

"Have you been fantasizing about this? About me?"

She did not want to give him that information. There would be no limit to his power over her.

"It's only been...one night," she evaded, trying to control her breath.

“And did you toss and turn naked in the sheets, craving a Dominant’s hands on your body, demanding your absolute obedience, taking from you, putting you in bondage...punishing you?”

Oh, hell, it was like the fucker had been there with a hidden camera. Or was he just in her head?

“It’s...not...your...business,” she stammered.

He grazed a finger over her clitoris, uncontested. “Oh?”

He was mocking her.

What case could she make for privacy when she was letting him have free rein over her body, granting him access to her most intimate self?

“You have no idea, do you?” he rasped. “What a Dominant can do to a sub. I can hold you here like this on the edge as long as I want. I can make you beg. I can turn your pleasure into hell and you’ll beg for that too. For the last time, girl, have you fantasized?”

“Yes.”

He slid his fingers into her pussy, making her moan. “That’s better.”

No, it wasn’t. She was in this agonizing holding pattern. Why didn’t he just get on with it? Surely he could see she had no way to resist?

“And when you saw what I did to Brandy, that turned you on too, didn’t it?”

“Yes,” she hissed, restraining herself from adding, *you cocksucker*.

He chortled. “But you’re not submissive.”

Kat closed her eyes. He had thrown her own words back in her face.

“Dominance is a tricky thing,” he said. “Most people think it’s about overwhelming a submissive. Really you just awaken the fantasies, anticipate them. Most women feel tremendous guilt. They aren’t supposed to want to submit and men aren’t supposed to want to dominate.”

Kat just wanted to climax and she was pretty close to that begging he had alluded to.

He must have sensed she was reaching her limit. “Move against my hand,” he ordered.

K gasped. He was going to make her reveal the deepest movements of her desire. How could she refuse, though?

Pressing her pelvis forward, she obtained the contact she needed, her pussy taking his fingers deeper, his thumb over her clitoris.

“Oh god.” She gritted her teeth. The room began to spin and she was spinning with it. She was vaguely aware of her motions—writhing, undulating—but mostly she was focused on the cascading roar in her brain, the raw heat pouring through her flesh, opening her. She wanted everything this room could offer. She wanted him to have his way with her absolutely.

Kat came hard. She surrendered completely, trusting in his ability to keep her together. If this was submission, it wasn't the worst thing in the world.

Wave after wave washed over her, cleansing her of all the tensions. She had let this build for so long.

It felt like forever until she came down. When she did his fingers were at her lips.

Kat accepted them, licking clean her pungent, musky juices. It was the scent and flavor of submission.

"You will go home now, K."

Her breath caught in her throat. "B-but..."

She wanted to object further but she lacked the strength, the will. She was in his orbit, spellbound.

"You will think about all of this, you will sleep on it," he said imperiously. "If you are ready to proceed you will return tomorrow night and we will begin."

Kat felt anger well up. Was she a faucet to turn on and off? There were things to talk about, her feelings to consider.

He had just made her climax, for heaven's sake.

"I-I thought we had begun."

"No. We haven't."

Her head swam at the possibilities. If this wasn't already domination, what was it?

"If you do not return I will bear no ill will. This isn't for everyone. Make no mistake how it will be, though, if you come back. That door behind you is never locked. You will have a safe word to instantly stop any activity and you may leave at any time. Beyond that, you will have no power—none. You will call me Master and you will obey. Displease me and I will spank your insolent ass. Push me too hard and you'll be whipped or maybe I will do that just for fun. You never know. It's all in the charge, the control. I have it. You don't. That's the Red Room, girl."

Her pussy continued to drip. She was on the verge of another orgasm already. She could make love to him right now. She could also get on her knees and service him, taking his hard shaft into her mouth, suckling, pleasuring.

"Take your eyes off my cock. You don't look without permission."

An answer should be coming to mind, a quick comeback to divert attention. Or else she should slap him.

She was up to neither.

They had crossed some threshold in their relationship.

"K" had been born, well and true, this night.

"Touch me," he ordered.

Kat's world swung on its axis, a hundred and eighty degrees to nowhere.

He had just told her not to look at his cock and now he wanted her to touch it?

“Do I have to repeat myself, *girl*?”

K extended her hand to his swollen crotch. She touched the smooth leather. She could feel the erection underneath straining to escape.

“That is just for you,” he said frankly. “My hardness and my desire both. You should never be ashamed of desire, mine or yours. When I speak harshly, when I control you and thwart you, it’s for our mutual pleasure.”

Kat swooned. Just for her? If she were a man like Master J she would be hard for someone younger, more like Brandy.

“Do you believe me?”

“Yes,” she said quickly, not wanting to be spanked again.

On the other hand, maybe she did want to be spanked. She could still feel the twitching, the lingering heat of his palm.

Not that she would ever ask.

Master J smiled knowingly. “Good girl.”

She shivered as he stroked her hair. She couldn’t help but angle her head toward him, wanting the contact.

“Go home now,” he said softly.

“Yes,” she replied, almost adding *Master*.

That would be for tomorrow night.

Assuming she decided to come back.

Chapter Six

Kat had been on the warpath all day.

She had not slept a wink last night. Somewhere in the dim hours between three and four the tide had turned, from hot, almost dreamlike recollection of her time with Master J to a frenzied, sudden awakening of indignation.

He had touched her without permission. He had said things to her he had no right to say. He had...used her, making her move her body against him, seizing a cheap and tawdry orgasm as if she were some kind of hussy.

And she had let him.

Talk about grounds for a lawsuit. If they were in any kind of work environment she would have enough against him to clean his clock. It hadn't been work, though. It had been a private social club, one whose sexual mores, as consensual as they were vague, could put a woman on some pretty shaky ground when it came to alleging much of anything in the way of harassment.

It wasn't as if he had violated her. He hadn't held her or forced her in any way, just used his hand in an intimate way, inviting her to take pleasure for herself.

It was the same hand he had smacked her ass with.

Kat burned with the memory, her imagination heaping heat on her backside. Every time she sat in her desk chair, every time she got up, every time she moved, he was there with her.

And it wasn't over, either. He actually wanted her back again tonight. His words burned far deeper than the memory of the spank or the orgasm. It was like a brand that had gone straight to her soul.

If you do not return I will bear no ill will. This isn't for everyone. Make no mistake how it will be, though, if you come back. That door behind you is never locked. You will have a safe word to instantly stop any activity and you may leave at any time. Beyond that, you will have no power – none. You will call me Master and you will obey. Displease me and I will spank your insolent ass. Push me too hard and you'll be whipped or maybe I will do that just for fun. You never know. It's all in the charge, the control. I have it. You don't. That's the Red Room, girl.

What she ought to do was to go back and give him a piece of her mind. She would show him what it meant to talk like that to a woman, a real woman. She would let him know he had picked on the wrong female.

Wouldn't it just give him more power, though, if she went back?

Far better not to go at all, to snub him completely.

The nerve of the man.

Oh, how she wished she could punish him this time!

It didn't help that she had to review all Chase's company personnel records, which had been faxed over this morning. On the surface, Pamela Coil didn't have too much to go on.

It was going to come down to a he-said/she-said, though and in this case the "he" doing the saying was a notorious whip waver who had already been branded a deviant by his ex-wife.

It was no surprise the man made her bitter. He had sure irritated her. Or was that Master J's fault? Either way, Kat was a bear all the way around.

At noon, Vicky called her in for an intervention, two against one.

"Why is Kevin here?" she demanded.

"Because," Vicky said, arms folded over her chest in her most intractable stance. "He's a victim here like me, along with everyone else who has had the misfortune of walking into this office today. I don't like to be blunt, Kat, but you are acting like a real—"

"Don't say it." Kat cut her off, glumly. "I know how I've been and I am sorry."

Snapping at people left and right, arguing about nonsense, Vicky was right.

Kat sighed.

"It's okay," said Kevin, once again proving his mettle as the most forgiving person in the world. "You're probably right. The way I hum in the hall can be a little annoying sometimes."

"No, it's fine, honestly." Kat collapsed onto the leather sofa in Vicky's office. "I was totally out of line to yell at you for that. I don't know what's come over me."

What was coming over her was a fresh wave of heat as the leather pressed against her butt cheeks, initiating another wave of memories and fantasies.

She had to decide by tonight. What was she going to do?

Was this a one-time offer to return to the Red Room to Master J? Probably so.

One of the things that annoyed her was how he wasn't giving her any time. It was all well and good that he was ready for this deadline but she was brand-new to BDSM.

"We all have our moments," said Vicky. "But I do think you need to do something with this anger."

"I agree," said Kat, grateful that Kevin's presence would prevent Vicky from taking the conversation in a sexual direction. "And I know exactly what will help."

"You do?" Vicky seemed skeptical.

"I'm going to meet with Chase Neill," she announced, finalizing the idea in her head. "Strictly to discuss his case, of course."

"Oh?" Vicky raised a brow.

"Uh-huh. I've been thinking about this all morning."

Actually she was making it up as she went along.

"I have some...peripheral concerns."

Read BDSM.

"What kind of concerns?"

"Just...concerns," said Kat.

Vicky rolled her eyes. "Whatever. Just take the rest of the afternoon off and try to be with us tomorrow, *really* with us."

Kat felt herself getting irritable all over again. "If you're saying I'm distracted—"

"I don't know what you are, other than touchy as hell."

"Well, I'm not distracted." *I'm in control*, she wanted to add, *of my life, my job, my sexuality*.

"Fine, Kathryn, you're not distracted."

"Don't take that tone with me, Victoria."

"Hey," said Kevin, sensing the fireworks about to start. "You guys want pizza for lunch? That always lightens things up."

"Just don't expect the firm to pay for it," Kat said, feeling and sounding like Scrooge.

Vicky took his arm. "Come on, Kevin, I will take you for Chinese."

"Okay. You want to come, Kat?"

Kat wanted to come, all right, but not for Chinese.

"I'm good." She forced a smile.

Okay, maybe not so good, though she would be better once she got a few things off her chest with Chase Neill.

Make that Chase Julius Neill.

The bastard used his middle initial at the club.

She had looked it up on the Internet this morning.

Not that that meant anything.

Master J could stand for a million other things.

Master Julius, Master Jason, Master Joshua...

Kat sighed. The odds were still a thousand to one against it.

Even if by some remote chance they were the same man, she could rest assured Master J/Chase had no idea who she was.

She could count on that, couldn't she?

Oh god, she thought, he knows me as K, how much more obvious could I have been?

Maybe he thinks my name starts with a "C".

Picking up her purse, she headed for the door as determined as she had ever been in her life.

Never mind asking about his case, she was going to dump Chase Neill as a client and she was going to burn her membership card to the Society for Sexual Freedom.

Wait, she didn't even have a membership card. Fine, she would join just so she had a card to burn.

Like that made any sense.

But why start making sense now. She was on such a roll of nonsense.

The hot-and-bothered-can't-sleep-at-night-can't-concentrate type of nonsense, to be specific.

Two men at one time invading her peace of mind.

Two different men. At least they had better be different.

God help them if they weren't.

* * * * *

Marsha found Chase in the hallway, on the way to a meeting. "Chase, Miss Wayans, your attorney, is here."

Looking at Marsha, he waited for a punch line.

"I told her you had a meeting—she said she would wait," Marsha told him.

Chase was in no mood. Kathryn was aggravating, gorgeous and she had kept him up last night—yet again—with red-hot fantasies.

Or was it K?

He was getting confused.

"Tell her she can go back and wait in her own damn office until I call her," he snapped. "Does she think I have no other responsibilities?"

Marsha sought to temper him. "She's enthusiastic," she pointed out gently enough. "That's not a bad thing."

Chase sighed. He did not need this right now.

"It's not like I don't appreciate an attorney who's eager," he said. "But she needs to know her place."

Marsha's brow shot up. "And what *place* would that be?"

Chase ran his fingers through his hair. "Never mind. Send her to my office. I'll talk to her there."

She nodded. "In the meantime, I can start the marketing meeting for you if you like."

He nodded absently. Kathryn's words were playing loud and clear in his head.

I make the rules, you'll discover as we go along.

Like hell she did.

It was time to put a stop to this nonsense once and for all. Marching to his office, Chase put on his game face.

Let her see who really called the shots around here.

His intention had been to get there first, staking out a place of intimidation behind his mahogany desk.

He was shocked to find her already waiting in his office.

How had she gotten there so fast?

"Mr. Neill."

"Miss Wayans."

Damn, he had forgotten just how good she looked. She had her hair tied back today. It was held in place by a small brooch. She wore a burgundy skirt suit, the hem just above the knee, stylish and professional without compromising her lush, inherent femininity.

Kat Wayans had curves, make no mistake. A man might do almost anything to get hold of a body like that.

She wasn't the type to flaunt her looks, though. If anything, she hid her sexuality. And that was what made her really and truly irresistible.

Was she a wild "Kat" underneath? Or a kitten?

"May I sit?" she asked.

Chase snapped back to reality. He had been stripping her in his mind, measuring imagined responses to his commands, to his touch.

How would she react to the feel of steel cuffs on her wrists, confining and holding her? "Yes," he said, noting the fact that she had asked his permission. "You may."

Something flashed in her eyes. She pursed her full lips. Did she resent him turning her politeness into submission...or did it excite her?

Chase kept his eyes on her as she sat—the way she bent her body, the way she smoothed her skirt over her thighs, the way she crossed her killer legs.

He longed to own those legs, to own her responses, her motions. If only he possessed her now. At a word she would lean forward for him, unbutton her jacket and blouse. Why stop there? A snap of his fingers and she would slip to the floor on hands and knees, crawl to him, panting, looking up into his eyes...begging for the privilege of his cock slipped into her mouth for her to lick and suck deeply.

Like a good girl, his good girl.

"I am not used to seeing people without appointments," he said, taking up his position behind his desk.

"You've been accused of a crime," she reminded him, dismissing her intrusion. "Things are not going to go according to your every whim."

He smiled thinly. "Is this another one of your rules? Unannounced visits?"

"If I have a good reason."

He leaned back in his chair. "Do you?"

"I'm thinking of dropping your case."

He frowned. The woman was teasing him whether she knew it or not. "Do it, then or don't. But stop thinking."

"I might have expected you to talk me into keeping you."

"I don't play games."

"What about sex games?"

"Are you asking as my attorney?"

"For the time being."

"I don't like games with or without sex. How about you get to your questions?"

She kept her cool in the face of his sharpness. "This BDSM business...did you discuss it at all with the plaintiff?"

"With Pamela? No, of course not."

It was Kat's turn to frown. "Never answer a question like that too quickly. She was in your employ, what, seven months? You saw her on average how often?"

"Once a week, I would say."

"And were you ever alone? Answer carefully."

"On one, maybe two occasions," he said after a moment's thought.

"Uh-huh. And according to the personnel records she was a poor employee, yes?"

"She was counseled. We were very careful—we followed the HR book." Chase considered that one of the strongest points he had in his favor.

Kat nodded her head in acknowledgement, all business, though he could think of nothing but having those lips on his shaft—hot and sweet.

"Following the book isn't always enough. Not when there are extenuating circumstances. Like it or not, your involvement in sexual activities considered by the majority to be deviant can make you seem capable of almost anything. We have to consider if there is anything—anything at all—that the plaintiff's attorney can seize on."

"I told you, I never crossed the line with Pamela."

"And you're sure you know where the line is?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"If I may elaborate..." She crossed her hands on her lap. He would dearly love to be standing over her with a crop, bidding her to part those thighs, opening her legs for inspection.

What kind of underwear did she have on? Why wasn't she married? Did she have a boyfriend? His instinct told him she was alone.

Where did that confidence come from?

Did she shave her pussy?

She would if he had any say in the matter.

"You have a tendency in your mannerisms, Mr. Neill, a certain overbearing nature."

"That's absurd," he dismissed.

"There, you see, you are doing it again."

"I'm doing nothing."

"You are minimizing my point of view," she insisted. "Is it because I'm a female?"

"If you're trying to provoke me —"

"And what if I am? Will you put me in my place?"

His pulse raced. "What place would you like...Miss Wayans?"

"How about on my knees," she said.

He clenched his fists. "Don't play with me."

"That's what lawyers do. I'm a friendly one. Imagine what an unfriendly one will be like."

"I don't have time for this. I have a meeting."

"Were you ever tempted to spank Pamela Coil?"

His heart slammed in his chest. "No."

Although I am damn well ready to spank you.

"Come on, Mr. Neill, you are a self-professed Master. Wasn't she asking for it, a pretty little female like that, so cute and naughty? She was begging for it, wasn't she?"

"You can save yourself quitting, you are fired as my attorney," he announced.

"It must be hard to listen to a woman talking when you can't control her. What is it they do in BDSM, gag the victim?"

"There are no victims in BDSM."

"That's right, I forgot. They enjoy it. Like the way Pamela must have enjoyed you browbeating her. You did browbeat her, I imagine, or did you take a gentle approach, babying her every time she made some slip-up. What does it cost a man like you — even a small mistake by an accountant — would it be a cool million maybe or just a few hundred thousand?"

"Why are you still talking to me? What part of fired don't you understand?"

"You won't fire me. You're too smart for that."

"I don't trust you. That's reason enough."

"I've done nothing to engender suspicion," she protested.

"You are a man hater, that's cause enough."

"I do *not* hate men."

Interesting. Was that a small crack in the emotionless armor?

"You resent when men assume the superior position, a position which is entirely natural," he said testing her.

"In your dreams," she retorted.

"I think history bears me out. This world has been run by men — lock, stock and barrel."

"Which goes a long way to explaining why it's in such a sorry state."

Chase frowned. Leave it to a lawyer to keep running him in circles. "Regardless, you have to admit you have a thing for BDSM."

"It leaves me cold...I admit that."

"No, you're not cold in the least. You're hotter about it than any woman I've known. You're damn near obsessed."

"Oh...now we're getting somewhere."

He didn't like that new look on her face, not one little bit.

"Was that the rationalization you used on Pamela Coil? You told her she secretly wanted to be dominated and when she resisted you created conditions that made it impossible for her to do her job and then you fired her."

"You're wrong," he said flatly. "And not just about Pamela."

"What else?"

"You said I was too smart to fire you. Kindly leave now on your own or I will have security escort you out."

"As you wish." Kat rose to her feet, a picture of grace under pressure. He only wanted her more. He needed to feel her body crushed in his embrace, her lips sweet as wine, her body squirming, writhing...and ultimately surrendering.

"You will receive a bill for services rendered."

"You'll be paid double," he assured her.

Rendered...services...did every word have to remind him of sex? He didn't dare stand as she departed. Not with his cock rock-hard in his pants.

Sweat collected on his brow.

Was K coming back to the Red Room tonight? Would he be ready for her? What had possessed him to speak to her like that, to offer her, in effect, his pledge of domination?

Curse the Red Room and all it represented.

Marsha found him a half-hour later, still behind his desk.

"How did it go with Kat Wayans?"

Chase glared.

"That well, huh?"

"Tell Allan I need another attorney and make it a man this time."

Marsha gave him a moment to come to his senses. "You sure about that?"

"Why is everyone questioning me?" he snapped.

Kat was right there in his brain with an answer, the one he didn't want to hear.

Because you've crossed the line and someone has to bring you back.

"Maybe you should take the rest of the day off," Marsha suggested gently.

So he could go home and think about dealing with K tonight in the Red Room? Not bloody likely.

"I'm fine. I just need some aspirin."

She furrowed her brow, lips curling downward. Once or twice over the years Chase had wondered if Marsha had feelings for him. It was nothing they would ever discuss. Chase saw her as an older sister, sometimes a mother, always a friend but that's where it ended.

"I'll get it for you. Though I would rather you get some rest. You realize you've been going full tilt since the divorce? You are going to have to deal with your emotions sooner or later."

He managed a smile. "I'm like that alien with no emotions, from TV, remember?"

"What you are is stubborn, the most stubborn human I have ever met."

"You haven't spent enough time with Kat Wayans," he grumbled. "She takes the cake."

"That's another thing," Marsha said. "Why exactly does she upset you so much?"

"She is an upsetting woman, end of story. Don't even try to tell me there's some love-hate thing I have with her."

"I didn't say it...you did."

Chase snorted. "You two should partner up. You'd have made a great lawyer, Marsha, always putting words in people's mouths."

"I'll get your aspirin," she said, a twinkle in her eye.

Chase checked the clock.

Three o'clock in the afternoon.

Tonight was coming. Too damn fast.

* * * * *

Vicky let Kat finish her rant. From experience, they both knew it was best for Kat to wind down completely before attempting to solve the problem at hand.

"And another thing," Kat said, momentarily stopping her pacing in front of Vicky's desk. "That man has no self-control. He practically flew off the handle at me and all I was trying to do was help him."

Vicky, who was perched on the edge of her desk applying a fresh layer of lipstick to her full cherry lips, offered a perfunctory confirmation, her hundredth or so of the conversation. "Really? That's crazy."

Kat scowled. "Vicky, are you even listening to me?"

"Uh-huh."

"What did I just say, then?"

"You said Chase Neill sacrifices goats to Satan."

"Vicky, this is serious."

Vicky put away her lipstick. "I know it's serious, Kat, I'm just not seeing the issue, other than you two fighting like a couple of kids in a schoolyard."

"He's the one fighting," she exclaimed. "He's a male chauvinist, he's unreasonable and he's going down in a ball of flames on this harassment suit except he's too stubborn to see it."

Vicky looked at her, sighing. Never a good sign. "Kat, I have never lied to you, right? I tell it like it is. And right now when I look at you I do not see an objective, clear-thinking litigator. You know what I see instead?"

Kat covered her ears, not the most mature reaction. "I know what you're going to say. You're going to tell me I have a thing for him, right?"

"You have to admit, the signs are there. I can't blame you. He's hot as hell and totally available from what I read in the tabloids."

"So you go for him. You could have him in a heartbeat, with your looks."

"He wouldn't go for me, Kat, I'm not his type."

"You're not submissive, you mean? I knew you'd throw that in my face. For your information, he hates me because I'm too domineering. You're the one who knows how to lay on the charm and defer to men."

"I know how to seduce them. It's a control thing for me. And trust me, I keep that control in bed. You, on the other hand..."

"I have a few fantasies," she dismissed. "That's it."

"And I'll bet anything they center hopelessly around Chase Neill. Or is this about that Dominant you've been seeing at the Society?"

Kat let her have it. "I don't know who is telling you this stuff but it is wrong and it's also not your business. Anyway, you're wrong, nothing is happening with me and Master J. We ran into each other by accident, that's all."

"Twice, you mean."

"How do you know this stuff?" Kat demanded. "The Society is supposed to be secret."

"Things get around. Like the fact that Master J has reserved the Red Room tonight for his exclusive use. Rumor is, he ditched Brandy, so that leaves you."

"I am not going back," Kat insisted.

Vicky shook her head. "Master J is not the kind of man to be stood up."

"Well, he will be tonight."

"You should get something new to wear," Vicky said, oblivious. "We'll go and pick it out together."

"You're ignoring me again, Vick."

“Maybe you should go without panties. That would definitely get his attention. Then again Dominants like to make a big deal about undressing. He will want to make you take your panties off for him and tell him how wet they are – that sort of thing.”

Kat’s pulse raced. “I will not do that for any man. I will never surrender my equality.”

“Out here you won’t but in the Red Room you aren’t Kat Wayans, you are a masked submissive girl who doesn’t want to be equal, does she?”

Kat was silent.

Vicky smiled, satisfied. “It’s settled, then, we are off to go shopping.”

The next thing she knew, Kat was being led by her best friend to buy clothes she didn’t want for a man she didn’t want to impress at a rendezvous she didn’t want to go to.

Talk about being a masochist.

Chapter Seven

Chase sat glumly, listening to Elaine. They were in the library, overlooking the gardens behind the mansion. Floor-to-ceiling windows revealed the moonlit labyrinth of hedges and the seemingly endless beds of roses.

The conversation had been going on quite some time and it was decidedly one-sided.

Was every woman in his life determined to second-guess him today?

Sensing his impatience, Elaine sought to sum up her main arguments.

“Chase, I have known you forever,” she said from her place on the divan across from him. “You are the noblest of souls. Granted, I personally would not last five minutes with you as anything other than a friend but I know you would never bring a woman to harm. This K is brand-new, though, she hasn’t even officially joined, she has no background and you...you are not in a place to be taking on a new slave. Susan’s memory is too fresh.”

“Elaine, I respect you, you know that. You know more about life and love than I ever will,” he said. “But you can’t know what’s in my soul, not when I don’t know it myself.”

Elaine sighed. “Answer me this. Does K represent for you a new adventure? Do you yearn to enslave her person, body and soul...or do you thirst to make her into someone else? When you look at her, do you see her...or a ghost?”

Chase frowned, thinking of Kat.

“I’m on to something, aren’t I?” said Elaine, sensing his hesitation.

“It’s not Susan, really, it’s not. There is this attorney, though, she was representing me...”

“Yes?”

He shook his head. “It’s the strangest thing. I almost feel like—”

Elaine held up her hand, cutting him short. “You of all people should know not to let your thoughts travel in that direction. What we have here in the Society, especially in the Red Room, are our fantasies, our images. Trying to connect them to reality will ruin everything.”

He tensed. “Are you saying they could be the same person?”

Elaine laughed lightly. “My dear, what a question. Of course they could be. We guarantee that no one here is related nor do they match the lists of excluded persons submitted by each member. No ex-wives, girlfriends, etcetera. Beyond that, this K of

yours could be your neighbor, your doctor...or your lawyer. That is part of the thrill, is it not?"

He nodded, though he was not feeling very thrilled. Just tired...and empty. "I'm not sure everyone is cut out for this kind of experience."

"You least of all," she replied, surprising him with her bluntness. "You are a serial monogamist. Unfortunately you lack the patience to wait for a proper mate. You try to force things."

"You blame me for Susan?"

"Of course not. Susan did what she did. Should it really have surprised you, though? Was she not being true to herself, hurtful as she was?"

"She was true to her devil's nature. Evil with an angel's face."

No faces here at the Society, only bodies. That increased the hunger, the animal lust in the midst of so much luxury and civilization.

"I will see K," he decided. "I will do with her as I will."

"That is your right. And hers."

"If she comes back, it will tell me all I need to know."

"Will it?"

He stood. "No more questions."

"Good luck."

"Thank you."

He was going to add that he needed no luck but he wasn't so sure anymore. Was his confidence a good thing...or a sign of impending disaster?

The answer lay behind the door. In a room he had entered hundreds of times before.

This time would be different.

K was different.

He...was different.

And he was about to find out just what that meant.

* * * * *

Kat was not herself. This was not how she usually dressed, not how she moved and certainly not the kind of place she should be going.

Down the familiar hall, in her silver heels that matched the skintight sequined silver dress – halter top, backless, low-cut with built-in bra.

Her hair was piled high with teasing curls down either cheek. She wore diamond earrings that she had bought some years ago on a trip to Switzerland.

Her legs were freshly shaved and she wore no stockings.

She wore pearl-white panties and a push-up bra.

Perfume – subtle as a spring rain – teased her tingling skin.

A million times she had told Vicky she would not be able to go through with this but here she was.

Tonight was different, not like the last two nights. The first night she hadn't expected to even see the Red Room and the second night she had given herself that nice ulterior motive for coming, calling it business.

This...this was about answering a man's call to come to him prepared to submit.

A wicked idea crossed her mind. Vicky was the one who had gotten her all dolled up. Wasn't Vicky the expert on seduction, on keeping men right where she wanted them, close or far?

What if she borrowed a page from Vicky and turned the tables? Yes, this situation was far from hopeless. Why not look at it as she did her work? How many courtrooms had Kat walked into, indifferent, even hostile, only to take command with her words, her presence?

Law was about seduction. That was a sad truth.

She would use that truth.

And she would use Master J.

Personal goal – beat him at his own game before the night was through. Smiling, she put her hand on the knob.

Static electricity zapped from the metal to her fingertips. He was there, Master J was inside.

Too bad for him.

She had already taken down one man today and she was about to chalk up number two.

* * * * *

If Chase had any doubts about taking possession of K they evaporated as soon as he she walked through the door.

She was stunning. Ravishing. Far and away the most beautiful and sensuous creature he had ever laid eyes on. He had to have her. Nothing else mattered, no woman before or after.

Susan had never affected him so, nor Veronica before her, nor any of the other women he had known over the years.

Where had this woman been all his life?

He rose to his feet as she entered the room.

From behind her mask he saw a quick flash in her eyes, hopeful, tense, eager. She intended to challenge him.

Excellent.

He expected no less.

This would be delicious sport indeed.

"You came back."

"Yes. Though it won't be like last night," she added quickly.

"No?"

"I don't want to be touched again. I'm here for...closure."

He smiled. He would do a hell of a lot more than touch the feisty K. "You are here for our mutual fantasy, K. You are here to fully submit. Last night was nothing but the appetizer."

She was looking around the room, trying bravely to take in all the details, as if for the first time. "You really don't think I'm going to be taken in by these theatrics, do you?"

"All in good time. Would you like a proper tour?"

"Why not?"

Her mask was perfect, fitting smoothly over her cheeks, all the better to reveal those eyes – darting, alive, speaking volumes.

He moved to the leather padded sawhorse. "This is called a Sybian."

She nodded, reserved.

"You have to come closer."

She approached, wary.

"There are several ways to make use of a slave on this device."

"I don't need the details," she said hastily.

"The woman can bend over," he said, ignoring her. "Her ankles and wrists can be fixed to the legs. Her belly touches the leather. She might or might not be naked. The ass is exposed for whipping, the pussy for insertion of any kind."

"You needn't be so graphic."

"If the slave is limber, you could fix her belly up. Pretty sensitive position, no?"

Her head cocked slightly to the side in clear confrontational mode. "You seem to have a lot to prove."

"How so?"

"Have you stopped to consider what you are compensating for with all this paraphernalia?"

"You mean like these whips and paddles?" He strolled to the rack. "Personally I discipline my girls naked, though it can be done through clothing."

"Girls? How many exactly do you have?"

"I don't know if a man can ever have enough, do you?"

"I couldn't say."

Her haughtiness was giving him an explosive hard-on, as if her splendid appearance had not been enough.

"Those clothes look new. Did you buy them for me?" He changed the subject.

She stiffened. Body language was everything. "I don't buy clothes for men, though you can try them on if you like."

He laughed. "Very good. I like when my girls have a sense of humor."

"I'm not your girl," she said hotly.

"Of course you are. That's why you're here."

"I came for reasons you wouldn't understand."

"Oh, I understand you better than you think. Regardless, by entering this room tonight you agreed to my terms. You surrendered your rights."

"What about your big speech on consensual sex?" she demanded. "And safety words and stopping things whenever I want?"

"Your safety word will be 'compensation'," he declared ironically. "Think you can remember that one?"

"I can think of lots of other words where you are concerned. Insecurity, arrogance—"

"This is the bed, K." He stood in front of the four-poster. "Its function is obvious enough."

"Quite obvious." She practically spat the words.

"Restraint isn't necessary with a slave." He alluded to the various straps and chains. "But it is fun."

"For who?"

He smiled. She had left him a perfect opening to defend his lifestyle. But, doing that, he would only open himself to a barrage of criticism, point for point.

Time to see what this feisty beauty was really made of.

"Is your pussy wet, K?"

Her eyes flashed hot. "None of your goddamn business."

"I can find out for myself. I am hardly a stranger to your intimate responses."

She backed up a step. Her chest was rising and falling a little quicker. "I told you. You're not touching me. Last night was a fluke."

"And I told you it was the appetizer. I used scarcely a fraction of my power of seduction last night, K. How much of your own power of resistance did you employ against me?"

She took a step back. Her chest was rising and falling rapidly now. From the look in her eyes he would wager it had been one hundred percent.

"You're a smug bastard," she charged. "And trust me, that is no turn-on."

“One touch.” He held up a finger. “Give me one touch and if you still have this much venom you can leave here, your dominant ego intact.”

“I thought you already had control?” she gloated.

Oh, how I will enjoy taming her.

“You can even name the place on your body I touch. If it has no effect, I will admit that BDSM is a fraud.”

She pursed her full lips. He could sense her caution. “Is this a trick?”

“Find out, K.”

“You may touch the tip of my little finger,” she said. “If that makes me swoon at your feet, have at it.”

“Very well.”

It was her turn to laugh. “I was kidding.”

“I was not.”

“Suit yourself.”

Chase pointed to the center of the room. “Stand there, close your eyes.”

She did so—proud, tremulous, absolutely magnificent in her newness to domination and submission.

She had no idea what was coming. Making her come last night had been largely a physical act. The vast majority of submission was in the mind.

“Only one touch,” she reminded.

As if he needed more.

“Keep your eyes closed. Do not move.”

Chase left her like that for a few agonizing minutes.

The waiting was half the fun...and half the torture.

She sucked at her lower lip.

At one point she shifted her weight slightly.

“Be still,” he ordered, making her jump slightly.

Her breathing was shallow. She was primed, ripe for takeover. Just a little longer.

When he could stand no more, he moved to approach his sweet, consensual victim.

He did so slowly, very slowly, giving her time to fully absorb the sound of his breathing.

Kat’s heart skipped a beat as she heard him approach. What did he have in mind? He had access to just one finger, her tiniest one. What damage could he do to her defenses?

The man had sounded far too confident, damn him. There had to be a trick. Master J must have left himself some loophole.

J. The first letter of Chase's middle name.

She pushed the thought from her mind.

The world was not that crazy. She would have to be living in some kind of perverted sex novel for that kind of coincidence.

She tensed.

His breathing was so very steady, measured. He must be very close, studying her...looking for weaknesses. Kat tried not to squirm. He had already rebuked her once, making her feel like a naughty girl, a bad slave. Her nipples were so tight and hard under the dress. She should never have let Vicky talk her into buying this particular one. She looked like a courtesan, a passion dream for some self-indulgent billionaire.

Vicky wouldn't let her go for something more conservative, though. The whole day had been a whirlwind, up to the time she had arrived at the Society's door.

Elaine had greeted her personally this time.

"You look gorgeous, my dear," she had praised. "You are an absolute doll."

Kat was feeling like a doll, all right—a toy even—trapped here for this man's amusement.

He would do what he wanted with her. He would enslave her by the rules of the Red Room...unless she stood up to him.

She must resist this touch.

How bad could it be? A brush of his fingertip against hers? Or what if he took her finger and placed it to his lips or took it into his mouth and nibbled? What would that feel like?

Kat clenched her fist. Why didn't he get it over with?

All of a sudden she felt a powerful hand grasping her wrist, wrapping it in a firm grip. Before she could react he lowered her hand, touching her extended little finger to...his crotch.

She melted, feeling the hardness of him under the leather of his pants. His throbbing cock felt like it was going to tear open the material. She longed to see it, to feel it in her hand—pulsing and thick, his balls full and ready to shoot his semen at will.

"That is for you, K. From the first moment I laid eyes on you I wanted you. Tonight it happens, girl. Tonight you submit."

"Not...not like this," she protested.

"Why not?" he pressed. "Because we're strangers? You think I don't know the fantasies that keep you awake? How you want a man's hands on you, incisive enough to guess your needs, bold enough not to ask permission to fulfill them? A man who will take and take and drive you out of your mind with his mastery? I know all too well, K. I am the male in those dreams, the one who has to have you on his terms, who isn't afraid of ropes and leather."

“There’s great freedom in this, no? Knowing you are that badly wanted. You think I would have you here now if I did not desire you utterly? You think I would stand on ceremony for you...*slave?*”

The way he said the word seared her soul.

She was not to be a work slave, not some kind of drudge forced to toil for another, but an object of kinky, total passion. Talk about an inviting scenario.

Still, how clearly was she thinking right at this moment? Things were all mixed up in her mind between this man and Chase, between her fantasies and her fears.

“Let me go.”

“If it’s what you want,” he said, releasing her wrist. “All day you stand equal to men, if not superior. You have your way and you no doubt accomplish your goals. What about your fantasies? Must they go un-lived?”

She covered her ears. “I shouldn’t listen.”

“You’re fighting it, K. You came back here, you took that step, yet you won’t go all the way.”

Kat wanted to run. The walls were closing in. This man sounded just like Chase Neill, right down to the inflections in his voice, though the things he said made no sense in the outside world. No twenty-first-century man would say them.

And no twenty-first-century woman should be even considering responding.

How much had she already surrendered, though?

Master J gathered her wrists easily in one hand and held them overhead. “You are a woman,” he said. “Healthy and vital with desires—there is nothing wrong with you. Nothing wrong with this.”

“This” was his hand, under the hem of her dress, moving up her inner thigh to the edge of her panties. She quickly closed her legs tight, in anticipation of further invasion.

“Open,” he rasped, his voice commanding, seductive.

She shook her head no, as much a plea as a denial.

“Open,” he repeated, lightly pinching the skin of her inner thigh.

Kat moaned and spread her legs. Master J took his opportunity, moving under her panties to touch her throbbing sex, quickly reclaiming the territory.

“You are even wetter than last night.”

“Yes.”

“Keep your hands in the air. Wrists crossed.” Releasing her, he now had full use of his hands.

She trembled in anticipation, knowing it was her own will that bound her now.

His hand found her breast, possessing and molding the firm, round globe.

“Is this what you imagined me doing to you when you bought this outfit? Did you think of me putting my hands on you at will? Kind of takes the pressure off, doesn’t it, not having to choose?”

Master J gave her buttock the same treatment, sliding his hand over her clothing—clenching, lurid, graphic, squeezing obscenely.

“That’s what clothes like this are for. To entice a man to take you...own you.”

Her breath came in short bursts.

“There’s freedom in this, you know,” he continued, this time lifting the hem of her dress to her waist. “You don’t have to hold back and you have no danger of rejection. You think you would be here if I didn’t absolutely want you? You think I couldn’t have any woman I want?”

She shuddered with her need, her body screaming to surrender, to give this man absolutely everything. He certainly knew how to talk, didn’t he...and how to touch?

“Let’s get this dress off, shall we, K?”

She offered a whimper, mildly affirmative.

Why the hell couldn’t she talk? Where was her silver tongue that had earned her top place in her law school?

With her hands still over her head, he pulled the garment upward very, very slowly. His fingers grazed along her ribs, her belly. Her teeth chattered. She was so damn vulnerable. If he would only push her down, invade her, fuck her amongst a heap of clothes, pumping in and out, steaming like animals, over in a few seconds.

Reason returned.

Master J didn’t seem like the wham-bam-thank-you-ma’am type, though.

He was careful not to disturb the mask or her hair. Expertly working the dress free, he separated her wrists for the moment it took to tug it completely from her.

“Much better.” He tossed it onto a nearby chair. The material floated, wicked thin, landing on the lush red material.

Kat did not think it was better at all. She was standing in bra and panties, at his mercy.

He stepped back, appraising.

“No,” he said sharply as she tried to cover her bosom. “Those breasts are for my viewing pleasure.”

She glared in sudden fury. Before she could open her mouth to object, he issued a command.

“Hands behind your head, girl, now.”

The Red Room was swirling around her, its dark and magical implications almost palpable now.

“You can look all you like,” she defied, interlacing her fingers behind her neck. “For all the good it will do you.”

It did him plenty of good, apparently.

Tucking a crop under his arm, he ordered her to stay still with her back well arched. The position only emphasized the swell of her breasts, the exposure and vulnerability.

She drew a ragged breath as he moved toward her – casual, intent, insolent.

Oh god, he was taking her left breast out of the bra, pulling the cup beneath the full swell of pale flesh.

“Much better. Don’t you think?”

Kay shuddered. The cool air of the room was wreaking havoc on her already hyper-sensitive skin.

“You seem to be with me so far,” he mused.

Kay moaned softly as he touched her nipple, flicking it back and forth.

“Let’s see if the other one is as responsive.”

“Please,” she croaked.

“Please what? Keep going? Stop? Which is it?” He mocked her slightly as he repeated the treatment, exposing the right breast.

This time he added a new twist, a tiny pinch to her nipple.

“I think I would like a drink, K. Go and fetch me one. Scotch on the rocks.”

He had to be kidding.

K wasn’t sure she could walk straight, much less make the man a drink.

“Run along,” he rasped. “Like a good girl.”

Turning her gently toward the bar, he palmed her ass, patting it.

She offered an inarticulate protest. Still, she couldn’t stop herself, moving sensually toward the bar as she did his will. It was as though she floated, a warm, pervasive glow filling her.

A most naughty glow at that.

How could she feel so good being controlled by a man?

Her hand shook as she poured the scotch. The ice was in a bucket. Cold mist poured out when she opened it. Master J had said nothing about a drink for herself. Presumably such rights were not extended to slave girls in the Red Room.

Being careful not to spill the drink, due to her shaky state, she made her way back to Master J. Her every movement, her every breath seemed to scream out her femininity. In her mind she could not stop her breasts bouncing, thrusting. Though medium-sized, they felt like huge balloons – tender, throbbing balloons. Did he intend to touch her more, to make love to her?

Or was she to face the darker side of pleasure?

Master J had gone to sit in one of the armchairs. He occupied it like a throne, a delicious combination of regal composure and indifference.

“Stop right there,” he commanded.

Kat froze some ten feet away.

“What do you think you are doing, girl?”

“S-serving you?”

“You aren’t a waitress, K, you’re a slave. You serve your Master on your knees.”

The drink felt heavy as a rock.

“Is there some part of my speech that confuses you?” he asked, his voice suddenly as cold as the ice.

“N-no,” she replied.

“No what?”

“No...Master,” she said, her mouth dry as cotton.

He jolted her as he snapped his fingers, pointing to a spot on the floor in front of him. Taking his meaning, she went to him, almost running.

She knelt.

“Is the cup cold?”

The question seemed foolish, though she answered nonetheless. “Yes, Master.”

“You may warm it for me.”

She stared at him blankly.

“Use your body,” he said. “Your belly and your breasts.”

Kat pressed the beveled glass to her stomach, the flesh tingling against the cold. She sucked at her lower lip. Her pussy ached—empty, desperate. She could feel the dripping juices oozing from her sex, soaking her panties.

“Turn it all the way around,” he encouraged.

She rolled the glass from side to side, her belly undulating.

“Now put it between your breasts,” he ordered.

Kat was thankful for the mask that hid her eagerness, commingled with shame.

She pushed with both hands, separating her breasts.

“Good girl. Roll it over your nipples for me.”

The glass was warm. As one of the beveled edges rode over her left nipple she groaned, ever-so slightly.

She barely made it through the ordeal.

“Present the glass,” he commanded. “Head down.”

Kat scooted forward a little on her knees and offered the scotch, as though to a god.

His fingers brushed hers. The contact felt like electricity shooting down her spine.

Taking a sip, he said, “Not bad, now put your hand in your pussy and play with yourself.”

The way he said it—so coarse and matter-of-fact—was a complete violation of her dignity. Despite that fact, or maybe because of it, Kat had never been so anxious to masturbate.

She spread her knees, still a bit shy as she slid her fingers under the waistband of her panties.

“Open wide, girl. You left your modesty at the door,” he chided.

Kat spread for him. Pulling the panties away from the side now, she went to work. She shuddered, lightly stroking at first, then a little faster.

“Give yourself as much pleasure as you can. Go on. Just don’t come.”

She responded instantly to his domination over her orgasm. Not only had he claimed her body, he was possessing her very pleasure. She would feel it under his command or not at all.

More than anything, she wanted and needed to climax. Shameless, she began to writhe, pressing her clit, practically dripping. Her sex lips were puffy and her canal was yearning to be filled.

Greedily she stuffed several fingers deep.

Too late, she realized the effect of so much stimulation so fast.

Groaning, she clamped her thighs together.

She was coming and she couldn’t help it. It was like oceans of warm, sweet water washing over her and dissolving her flesh in currents of ecstasy.

I am climaxing in front of my Master, she thought. I am disobedient, wanton.

“Oh...” Kat tried to contain the reaction or at least conceal it. She was so helpless, overpowered and yet her own desires were working hand in glove with his.

Wave after wave washed over her, sizzling over her nerve endings—a quiet fire, burning. It was over in a few moments, though it felt like hours.

He watched the whole time—placid, aloof, completely in control. She was his—owned.

Finally the last wave passed.

Exhausted, she hugged her breasts—weak, hot, still feeling the aftereffects, the tiny tingles along her nerve endings.

Then she remembered the command about concealing her body. Head down, she put her arms at her sides.

The glass tinkled as Master J took another drink. “Have a good time, did we?”

She could not make eye contact, though what had she done except follow her natural instincts, ones he had encouraged?

“Give me your panties,” he ordered.

He made it sound like a punishment.

Quickly she stripped down, presenting them with a shaking hand, head lowered.

“Kneel back,” he ordered. “On your heels. Split those thighs wide.”

Kat obeyed with maddening speed and precision.

She wanted him to fuck her, throw her to the floor and be done with it, coming inside her while holding her down, immobile on her back. Or on all fours, her ass

pushed up and out while he ravished it, alternating rutting thrusts with heavy-handed spansks.

Kat was less than a foot away from him, all too aware of the proximity.

He was weighing the evidence of her guilt in his hand,—the panties, light, frilly, soppy, irredeemably feminine. “You think I will go easy on you for this act of disobedience, girl?”

His stare pinned her in place.

“No, Master, I don’t.”

Kat had never felt more uncertain, more off balance. There was no telling what would happen next.

It was intoxicating, thrilling and maddening all at once.

Oh well, she thought, at least I seem to have stopped stuttering.

“Crawl to me,” he commanded. “Like the sleek little sex animal you obviously are.”

“Yes, Master.”

Chase was ready to burst. The beautiful K was kneeling before him, her body lithe as a cat.

Was that Cat with a C...or a K?

Her true identity was hidden behind the mask. Only her eyes were exposed and her soft, sensuous lips—made to be kissed hard and uncompromising.

Her only garment was the bra, her breasts exposed from where he had pulled them from the cups. She could do with a pair of nipple clamps. *All in good time*, he told himself.

There was so much he wanted to do with K.

“What is a slave’s purpose?” he asked.

She looked up at him. “To obey,” she answered, trancelike.

Chase’s heart swelled—such a combination of innocence and wonder and underlying lust. How could a man not be thrilled?

“And did you obey?”

“No, Master, I took pleasure without permission.”

“Do you deserve punishment?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Smart girl.”

Smart like a lawyer?

“Your punishment shall fit your crime.” Reaching out he flicked the tip of the crop he had brought with him over each of her nipples. She writhed in response.

“Unzip my pants.”

Her fingers trembled. She breathed heavily as she removed his cock. It sprang forth, hot and eager. "Straighten your back. Eyes forward."

She continued to steal glances at his shaft—quick, furtive and hungry.

"In your fantasies you are made to suck men's cocks?"

"Yes, Master."

"You masturbate to such images in your mind?"

She nodded.

He slapped the whip down on her thigh. She moaned in reply.

"I asked you a question, slave."

"Yes, Master, I masturbate to images," she said hastily.

"Your pussy will burn," he pronounced. "Untouched while you pleasure me. That's your punishment."

She sucked on her lower lip.

"Kiss my cock. Kiss the tip of it and thank me for your punishment."

She lowered her beautiful head. With trembling lips, she pressed her mouth to his cock...in slavery.

"Thank you, Master, for my punishment."

"Lick it up and down," he commanded. "Nice and slow."

She would do it to his specifications. That was part of a submissive's fantasy, just as his was to direct this gorgeous female in her pretend subjugation.

"Do a good job," he said, running the whip down her back, "and I might go easier on you later."

She applied herself, running her tongue along the underside. She found the protruding vein of his shaft, causing him to exhale in raw pleasure.

His fingers naturally found their way into her hair—winding, twisting. "K, have you ever swallowed a man's cum?"

"No, Master," she said, adding quickly, "I've never been told to."

"You would like that, wouldn't you?" he rasped. "To be ordered to swallow your Master's cum?"

She nodded with surprising shyness.

He pushed her head gently back to work. "Earn it, girl."

She went at him—zealous, eager, kissing, nibbling, consuming. At last he pushed his cock head fully between her lips, entering her tight, hot mouth. She applied suction with enthusiasm.

"I'm going to fuck your mouth," he growled, feeling his passion building. "You'll take it, girl. You'll submit, obey...swallow."

She moaned, receiving his thick cock all the way to the back of her throat. He was not going to be able to hold out. Muttering an epithet, he came, giving one final pump into her willing mouth. She drank him down, passionate as any experienced slave.

“Yes, girl, take it like I own you. Your body, your lovely mouth.”

She drained him dry, continuing to work her lips and tongue even after he had stopped coming. He pulled her from him.

She looked up, smiling, licking a drop of cum from her lips.

“Tomorrow. You will return...and I will penetrate you.”

“Yes, Master.”

“Go and stand in the corner. Press your breasts and belly to the wall, hands behind your head. Count to a thousand and then you may leave.”

He was on his feet.

“Master?”

He snapped his fingers, pointing. “Go.”

“Yes, Master.”

Her obedience in rising made him feel the stirrings of a second erection. Why not take her tonight? She was ready, clearly. Was he just being cautious for her sake...or was he afraid of a commitment?

K was already in the corner, having assumed the position he had imposed. What was she feeling, thinking? He didn't want to know, really. He couldn't afford it. Without another word he gathered his things and left the room.

Kat could not have counted to ten much less a thousand. Her nipples chafed the cool surface of the wall. She tried unsuccessfully to keep her pussy from rubbing. All in all, she felt hot, bothered, obscene and needy.

She shouldn't want more but she did. The more this man did to her, the more he reduced her to an object, thwarting her will, the more she wanted him.

Three hundred, four hundred...where was she?

She tried to listen for some sign of him. The door had opened and closed already. Was he really gone? Surely he would come back.

A thousand? Might as well be a million, a billion.

She would never make it.

She wanted to run. She wanted to scream. She wanted to come.

Scratch that. She needed to come.

Master J hadn't given permission, though.

God, listen to her worrying about the orders of a man who wasn't even there. How would he ever know?

He wanted her back tomorrow night...for penetration.

Sex.

With a Master.

Her Master for all intents and purposes.

Clearly that would be going too far.

She would have to draw the line tonight.

This whole experience would need to be put in the "fun while it lasted" category.

Time to get back to real life.

Whatever that looked like anymore.

At least Chase was out of her life. He had done her a huge favor by firing her.

She couldn't stand the man.

No matter what Vicky said.

"Kat, dear..."

Kat was jostled back to reality by the gentle voice of Elaine Van Voorst.

"You can go," she said softly. "Master J has left already."

"He...he said to count to a thousand," she said hoarsely.

"Oh. Well...you will have to do it then, won't you?"

Kat looked at her. "I...I suppose."

"We'll do it together."

And so they began, the two voices together, experience and youth, the present and the future.

It felt strangely calming and somehow...right.

I will be back, she thought. Tomorrow. Though it won't be to see Master J. Anyone but him.

Chapter Eight

Chase was in a worse mood than usual, which was saying something, considering his state of mind lately. Marsha took one look at him on the way in and gave the “keep clear” signal to the rest of the staff.

“Coffee,” he barked to no one in particular.

He had not slept a wink. This was getting to be a lovely little pattern.

Allan was waiting for him in his office.

Oh yeah, this day was shaping up to be a gem.

“It’s obviously bad news,” said Chase. “I can see it on your face. Just give it to me, no sugarcoating.”

He steeled himself, waiting for back up from Marsha. She handed Chase his coffee and told him to sit down.

“It’s about the Coil case,” Allan said when they were all settled.

“Why am I not surprised?” Chase grouched. “Don’t tell me—our plaintiff has shown up with a twin sister?”

“No,” said Allan without a trace of humor. “I have to tell you, though, I think you made a mistake letting Kat Wayans go.”

Chase grimaced internally. If only he could let her go. She inhabited the landscape of his dreams—what should have been his dreams—not to mention his every waking thought. And then there was K. The whole thing was killing him. Which one did he want? Which one could he afford to do without?

“Come on, Allan, there must be a million other attorneys just like her.”

“Not as many as you think. And most of the better ones are pointing me right back to Kat. Apparently she has a reputation.”

“That goes without saying. The woman is a witch, Allan. Just pick anyone, will you? This case is killing me,” Chase complained.

Allan gave Marsha a look, like maybe he had drawn the short straw to tell him something.

“Out with it,” said Chase.

“Pamela has upgraded on her attorney,” said Allan. “Apparently your deep pockets attracted a much bigger fish.”

“How big?”

“Think Johnny Cochran big,” said Allan.

"There's more," said Marsha before Chase's heart could even think of starting to beat again. "The attorney is Lawrence Freeman, who happens to be very close with Susan's lawyers. There's a chance she's behind this, Chase."

Allan cleared his throat in the glaring silence. "Boss, if they try to link up this harassment thing with your BDSM history —"

"I know," Chase interrupted. "I'll end up flipping burgers at the nearest fast-food joint. So what do we do now — as if I didn't know?"

"We get Kat back," Allan stated the obvious.

"Meaning you get Kat back," Marsha said pointedly.

Chase drew a breath. He was going to have to go, hat in hand, to the wicked witch of the city bar association.

"Let it never be said that I will not go to any lengths to save this company," he announced, rising to his feet.

"Not to mention your cute tushie," said Marsha. "So you want me to call her office and tell them you're coming?"

"And give her a chance to escape or barricade the doors? Not on your life. It's a sneak attack, or nothing."

Unfortunately, at this point, it was feeling a whole lot more like nothing.

* * * * *

Kevin was literally waving a white flag in the doorway.

Kat looked up and saw the handkerchief and part of his arm.

She was not amused. So they thought she was on the warpath again, eh? She would show them angry in a hurry.

"You had better be here to tell me the copier man is here," she declared, referring to her complaint of the hour. "Because until he is, I have nothing to say to anyone in this office."

"He's on the way," Kevin called out.

"Shouldn't have to come at all. How many times do I have to tell you guys, don't jam the machine. Am I the only one who takes responsibility for anything?"

"Chase is here," Kevin said, completely ruining the cadence of her complaint.

"What do you mean he's here?"

"He's in the next office, Kat. He wants to see you."

She snorted. "It will be a cold day in July before that happens."

"He said *please*."

Kat's jaw dropped. "He said...what?"

"He would like to see you...please."

Kat frowned. It had to be an imposter. "Ask him what it's about."

Vicky's lithe frame appeared in the doorway. "You know what it's about, you stubborn little thing. It's his case and he needs help so give it to him."

"He knows it all, so why doesn't he represent himself."

"Enough, Kat," said Vicky brusquely. "Either take the man's case or ask him out on a date and fuck his brains out because clearly there is unfinished business between you."

She wanted to chew Vicky's head off but what was the point?

Kat sighed. "Send him in. I know I will be sorry."

"You already are sorry," said Vicky, walking away, Kevin in tow.

Chase appeared a few moments later. "Knock, knock," he said.

"Come in. Sit down."

"I appreciate you seeing me."

"I assume you are trying to rehire me?"

His lips curled downward. This was not a man accustomed to admitting mistakes. "Circumstances changed. Frankly you're the best. I was hasty to think I could do without you."

"I appreciate the confidence. So what's changed?"

She was watching his lips move. She was losing too much of herself in those eyes. She needed to touch him and feel if he was real. So much of her life felt like illusion, what with all the time spent with Master J and her continuous fighting with Chase.

"Pamela Coil has secured a more prominent attorney. It appears my ex-wife might have involved herself. Your concerns about the BDSM being used against me are turning out to be well-founded."

Kat licked her lips, avoiding the temptation to hit him with a big fat "I told you so".

"There's a question you must be prepared to answer," she said. "No matter what else you prepare in your defense, this is what will make or break the case."

He shifted slightly in his seat, resolved. "Go on," he rasped. "Let me have it."

She responded instantly to his boldness, her panties moistening and her nipples hardening. "Did you at any time, before during or after employing Pamela Coil, imagine dominating her sexually?"

He didn't bat an eyelash. "Why include after? What difference would that make?"

"Because if you can be made to admit to some revenge fantasy—say making her crawl to you on her hands and knees in nothing but a bra to be punished for her disobedience—that would go to show a certain state of mind."

Chase narrowed his gaze, as if trying to figure something out. It was Kat's turn to shift in her seat.

She had just given the exact scenario last night with Master J.

"That's a pretty specific fantasy."

She cleared her throat. "A good attorney would do that, to push your buttons."

"And would that attorney also want to know what I would do to the girl next?"

"No. I mean yes....maybe."

"I would have her service me, Kat. She would give me pleasure on her knees without being allowed to come."

He had her fixed in his sights, as though he was the attorney and she was the witness – worse still, – the defendant.

"So you would have Pamela do that?" Kat deflected.

"Were we still talking about her?"

"Yes," Kat said, firmly this time. "And I have to tell you, this doesn't look good for you."

"I never imagined revenge on Pamela. Revenge and sex don't mix for me. Domination can't be done out of negative emotion."

"I don't think I can take your case," she said flatly.

"Why not?" he shot back. "I'm bloody well on my knees here."

She tried to imagine Chase kneeling. The image didn't fit at all. "I have my reasons – personal reasons."

Chase's features tightened. "I don't accept that, Miss Wayans."

She felt a shiver down her spine. His words had the power of a whip. She nearly said yes.

As in *Yes, Master?*

"It's not yours to accept or deny. It is what it is."

"You will explain yourself, Kat – now."

Her voice trembled ever-so slightly. "I would like you to leave, Mr. Neill."

"I respectfully decline."

She stood unsteadily. "Then I will leave."

He caught her arm as she reached the door.

"Let go of me," she demanded.

"Not until we have this out like civilized adults. You have something against me. What is it?"

"I don't like you," she said. "And after this little stunt you're pulling, I'm pretty much convinced of your guilt."

His grip was firm as steel. His kiss came hard and fast, urgent, communicating of a million things unsaid in previous meetings.

One of which was the fact that he wanted her...bad.

She wanted him too.

Kat couldn't help it. She pressed her breasts tightly against his chest. She wanted to feel every part of him at once. Her hands groped and explored.

They were going to fuck. On her desk, the floor, the couch, wherever they landed first.

It had the air of a skirmish, a lightning battle. Oh god, he was opening her blouse, undoing the buttons and parting the halves. His teeth sank into her breast through the cotton of her bra. So much pent-up energy. What was he working out? Who did he imagine her to be?

He scooped her up, lifting her by her bottom.

They made it as far as the desk. Chase set her down on the edge, pushing up her skirt. She worked frantically at his zipper. She thought of Master J's very different pants – leather instead of silk trousers. Another kind of power uniform.

Chase didn't bother with the panties. Pushing the panel aside, he thrust his hard, hot cock into her without preamble. She took him, wet and ready. He sank to the hilt in one glorifying push. Oh god, yes. She locked her heels behind him. She had lost one shoe, the other remained.

"Fuck me," she gasped. "Chase...you motherfucker."

He growled low in his throat, obliging. He was at her like a piston, slamming in and out. This was not for the timid, this was not Sex 101. They had skipped right to the advanced level. It was uncanny. How could their bodies know each other this well?

Chase continued his ravishment, unabashed, biting at her neck, chewing her earlobe, consuming her inside and out. She scratched at his back, wanting through his clothes. This was going to be over too fast...and then what?

"I'm going...to...come," she said, the words coming in stabs of breath.

"Do it. Explode for me. I can take it."

She bit hard into his shoulder, stifling the cry. Her pussy muscles contracted, holding him fast. He growled low and she began her meltdown.

Oh god, this was what she had wanted last night, to feel possessed, had...taken.

"I'm...I'm yours," she hissed. "Master..."

The words slipped from her lips before she could stop them. Chase exclaimed in surprise. Reaching behind her, as if in response, he swept his hand across the desk, clearing it. She understood his purpose a moment later as he pushed her back, laying her head on the mahogany surface.

"Hands over your head," he commanded. "Wrists crossed."

She opened her mouth to object. One look in his eyes told her "no" was not an option.

Chase took immediate advantage, tearing open her bra. He paused a moment, enjoying the sight of her bare breasts rising and falling.

Kat was utterly captured, his cock in her to the hilt, his eyes devouring her torso. She felt like a slave, as much or more, than last night.

Chase was definitely a Master, just like Master J.

There were so many similarities. She couldn't ignore it, in the sound of their voices and in the touch of their hands.

Chase molded her breasts – imperious, possessive.

Oh yes, this was how Master J would do it. This was what it was like to be used by a Dominant.

He moved within her with measured strokes, gauging her. “Hold still,” he ordered. She squirmed.

He pinched her nipples.

“Hold still,” he said again.

She closed her eyes, submitting, relaxing her body, letting the sensations overwhelm her, the pleasure at his whim, under his control.

“Look at me,” he said, merciless.

She beheld his face and for a moment she saw something else – the mask, the eyes like lasers underneath. She opened her mouth to respond but he was already there, at the brink.

He released a low, grunting sound, his hands clamping her waist.

He was climaxing inside her.

“Yes,” she moaned. “Oh yes.”

Chase filled her, his semen spurting deep, thrust after thrust. She had never felt so full of a man, so complete. She wished it would go on and on.

At last he exhausted himself. She saw sweat on his forehead. She wanted to lick it off. She wanted to kiss him, starting there and working all the way down his body.

Chase was the first to recover his senses. “That shouldn't have happened,” he said quickly, withdrawing his glistening cock.

Kat groaned inwardly at the sudden emptiness. At times like this she wished she could be a man, able to move so quickly from the throes of passion into the next activity.

“Well, it did,” she said sharply.

He offered his hand to help her from the desk. She declined.

He busied himself straightening his clothes. She pretended not to notice as he put his cock away.

She wanted more of it. She wanted to be on her knees, kissing it, begging to suck him.

“Did you do that to Pamela?” she wanted to know. “Did you ravish her on her desk too?”

Something burned in his expression. “Are you asking as my lawyer...or as a spurned lover?”

She slapped him hard.

His lips angled sharply. He rubbed his hand over his cheek. "At least we finally know what this has really been about."

Chase's semen was deep inside her. She could still feel his cock throbbing, the way his hands had taken her breasts.

She had called him *Master*.

"What are you talking about, Chase?"

"All those questions about my dominating Pamela. You've been asking them for yourself. You have submissive tendencies."

"That's a lie."

His features hardened. Her knees went weak. "You can lie to me but not to yourself. We both know what happened just now. You surrendered to me. You wanted to be controlled."

"I called you Master," she dismissed. "A slip of the tongue. I was thinking about the case."

Chase seized her, pulling her close, his thumbs and forefingers on her cheeks. He connected their lips, though this time, instead of kissing, her he took her bottom lip between his teeth, biting.

She gasped, a hot knife twisting in her belly. His breath was on her, his body hard against her. She felt herself melting, needing, wanting.

Whimpering she reached for him.

He pushed her away. "Were you thinking of the case just then?" he mocked.

Her lower lip trembled. "You're a hateful man. I hope...I hope..."

"You hope I lose my case?" he finished for her. "Don't worry, it looks like I will...now that I've lost you for good."

She wanted to say something back about how he had never had her.

Was it her imagination or had there been emotion in his voice – a sense of loss?

Does he mean anything to me? What did it matter?

Tonight Master J was going to take her.

By morning Chase would be a distant memory.

The doorknob turned. They hurried to look presentable just in the nick of time.

Vicky entered. "Am I interrupting?"

"Like that would stop you," Kat said.

"We would appreciate our privacy," Chase told her.

Vicky shook her head. "Not a good idea for you two. What you need is a referee."

"Vick, please." Kat was practically begging.

"For starters, you're off the case, Kat," Vicky announced.

"I wasn't on it. He fired me."

"Whatever," said Vicky. "Mr. Neill, I am going to take Kat's place, professionally that is."

"Come again?" said Chase.

"I will deal with Pamela Coil," she said. "And I promise you by the time I am finished with her she will never bother you again."

"Vicky, what are you going to do?" Kat asked.

"That's not your concern. What you two need to do is to go out somewhere, sit down over coffee and sort through your personal feelings."

"I have no personal feelings," dismissed Chase. Both women looked at him. "I don't," he insisted.

"You do," said Vicky. "And you will talk with Kat or I won't help you."

"What makes you think you can do anything with Pamela?" Chase asked.

"Trust me," said Kat, speaking from experience. "She will find a way. Just leave her in one piece, will you?"

"Sure thing. I suggest the coffeehouse down the street," said Vicky.

"Vick, I'm not sure now is the best time," said Kat meekly.

"Why?" Vicky looked at her pointedly. "Because you two just had sex? Don't try to deny it, it's oh-so obvious. Look, Kat, you're driving me crazy, you have feelings for this man and you need to tell him."

Chase looked at Vicky and then at Kat.

Kat tried not to smile. Dominant as he was, he had likely never run across anyone quite like Vicky.

Kat loved her, really she did.

Vicky followed her instincts and she had never been wrong – up to now at least.

"Don't just stand here," Vicky said to both of them, "you have work to do and so do I."

Chapter Nine

Chase sipped his double latte trying to figure out what the hell had just happened. Less than an hour ago he had come to Kat Wayans and asked for her legal help and now he was sitting across from her at a café.

In that space of time he had acquired a new attorney...and a new lover – this very same Kat who was trying so hard not to make eye contact.

He cleared his throat in the silence. “Is your partner always so...”

“Yes,” Kat said, both hands on her mug. “She is.”

Chase laughed. “You don’t even know what I was going to say.”

“Whatever it was, I’m sure it applies.”

“She seems to care about you, I’ll say that much,” Chase observed.

“She’s the sister I never wanted,” Kat said dryly, though Chase could tell the affection was very much mutual.

“You really think she can do something about Pamela Coil?”

“Time will tell. When Vick puts her mind to something, though, it’s never a good idea to stand in her way.”

“What about you? Are you willing to do what it takes to get what you want?”

“I stand up for myself.”

He studied her. Her sudden shyness was quite charming, not to mention arousing. The lovemaking had left her subdued, another sign of her submissive nature. Would her fighting side come back out if he pushed her?

“You would rather not take the lead in bed, though.”

She eyed him, frowning. “I would prefer not to discuss my sex life with you, if you don’t mind.”

He smiled. “That’s a little silly, don’t you think, seeing as how you and I just had sex.”

“You asked me about bed,” she said curtly. “We weren’t in bed.”

“Let’s not mince words, Kat. I was inside you. I climaxed and so did you.”

She looked about for witnesses. “For heaven’s sake, keep your voice down.”

“No one’s listening. And so what if they are? You think it’s not obvious, anyway?”

“What’s not obvious?”

“That we’re lovers.”

Kat stiffened. “Certainly not.”

He brushed his finger over her lips.

She recoiled. "Don't...don't do that."

"You don't like it?"

Her cheeks turned a healthy pink. "It's not about liking or not liking."

He laughed. "What else is it about? When I had you on your desk you seemed quite blissful and –"

"I said keep it down, Chase," she cut him off. "And I meant it."

Things were getting interesting now.

"You expect me to take orders from you, is that it?"

"No. I expect courtesy."

"In my world, courtesy is very much tied to hierarchy. I like to know my place in the order of things, don't you?"

"Your world and mine are nothing alike," she dismissed.

"You gave your body to me, Kat. You called me Master."

She set her fist down on the table hard. "I'm here out of respect for Vicky but I swear if you keep pushing it –"

"What, Kat, what will you do? Get up and walk out. That would be running away. Your kind doesn't run."

Her eyes were wild. Her lips were full, primed for passion. "What do you want from me, Chase? What am I supposed to be doing here?"

He arched a brow. "Are you asking for orders, Kat?"

She narrowed her gaze. "You are trying to trick me," she accused.

"I'm not doing anything you don't want me to."

"You're talking to me and I don't want that," she quipped.

He sipped his coffee. "You've not had good luck with men, have you?"

"I've done just fine."

"You haven't found anyone to give you what you need. You have your own independent life, you don't want a man to be domineering but behind closed doors you don't want a gentleman, either."

"Obviously you're the perfect candidate," she said acidly. "At least for the second part."

"I'm the one to dominate you in bed, you mean?"

"I meant that you weren't a gentleman," she fumed.

"So your friend Vicky was wrong when she said you had feelings for me?"

"Anything I feel for you is highly negative."

"I feel things for you, Kat. In fact, at this moment, I can almost read your mind."

She snorted.

"Shall we try an experiment?"

"No thank you."

"Come on, be a sport. I'll tell you what I think is going on with you and you can confirm or deny. To begin with, you're still quite aroused from our encounter in the office. This of course was my deliberate doing and you know it. I am getting you worked up for my own pleasure and that is making you very, very hot."

"Way off the mark." Her cheeks went from pink to red.

Chase continued. "Just hearing me talk about domination gets to you. I'm not safe, not like other lovers you've known. Oh, I would never hurt you but you have no idea what I might do next, what I might demand of you."

"You're in no position to make demands."

He smiled. "Call them requests, then."

She pursed her lips.

"You're curious, my little Kat."

"Don't call me that."

"Your panties must be very wet," he observed in a seeming non sequitur.

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"Why don't you take them off for me?"

She glared in disbelief. "What...here?"

"At the table, yes."

"People would see."

"They might."

"You're crazy."

He shrugged. "It's what I want, Kat. Take it or leave it."

"I'll leave it."

"Suit yourself."

A few moments passed in silence. "You have no right."

"No right to what?"

"You know perfectly well what."

Excellent, he thought. *She could not let go of the idea. His will, working in her mind.*
"Why don't you tell me."

"You have no right to make me do such a perverted thing. It's not even legal."

"I'm sure you would be discreet. Only you and I would have to know you were sitting for me, bare under your skirt, your sex juices dripping, your pussy throbbing, needing my cock."

"You're such an egomaniac. You think you're so special."

"You're the one who is special. And I'm the first person to shower you with the attention you need and to lust after you as you should be lusted after."

“You fucked me on my desk. That is hardly treating me like a princess.”

“You don’t want to be treated like a princess, though, do you? Your dream is to be a slave.”

Her mouth opened but nothing came out.

“Take your panties off...slave.”

Her breathing quickened. She licked her lips.

“I hope you’re not going to be a bad girl. Bad girls get punished.”

She shook her head no, still dazed.

“Slaves don’t get to keep panties on. Their pussies are property. They are kept naked, available to be fucked at will by the Master. You did call me Master, didn’t you?”

He could sense her heat, her raw need. She was in a kind of trance, the ecstasy that came with letting go and doing another’s will.

One more command to push her over the edge. “If I need to, I will spank you at this table. I’m quite rich, I’m sure I can get away with it if anyone asks. Besides you would hardly object, would you?”

Kat bit her lip.

“I’m waiting.”

Her will crumbled. She was practically panting as she shifted in her seat. Her hands disappeared under the table. The café was relatively empty and they were in the corner. The chances of anyone noticing were small. Still, they were in public.

“That’s a good girl,” he coached. “You’ll feel ever-so much better when you’re nice and exposed and helpless.”

Kat sighed. Her eyes fluttered closed. Her motions were awkward, halting. An experienced slave could strip like this in a matter of seconds. Chase didn’t want that, though, he wanted to experience it for the first time all over again—the world of BDSM through Kat’s beautiful, intelligent eyes.

She lifted her bottom. He wished he could see the details, the way her thumbs must look hooking under the waistband, the way the material was sliding over her engorged sex lips and down her thighs.

He saw the panties fall down her legs.

“Step from them,” he ordered. “Hand them over.”

She did so. He held her hand a moment, making her blush all over again.

Very slowly, never taking his eyes from her, he put the panties to his nose. That scent, it was familiar...not just any woman.

“I was right about your being aroused.”

She nodded, looking down.

“I’d like you to open your legs.”

Kat whimpered.

He could see her nipples tenting the blouse. Her bra was back in the office, stuffed in a drawer, ripped beyond repair.

"Undo the top button."

"Chase, please..."

"Do it, Kat."

She complied, allowing a much better view of her cleavage.

"Where will I have you next?" he wondered aloud.

Her eyes were hot, her features locked in frozen desire.

"Shall I take you in my car or in the alley, perhaps? Or should we get a hotel room?"

"I...I have work to do."

"I'm sure Vicky will cover for you...under the circumstances."

"Y-you don't know me."

That stutter, so sudden and out of character. He had heard it before and he knew exactly where and when.

Son of a bitch.

The images flooded his mind—those hot, burning eyes, those beautiful lips, that hair. She had worn a mask, she had fought with him and surrendered to him...in the Red Room.

Why had he doubted so long? It was as obvious as the nose on his face. Maybe too obvious.

K was Kat.

Clearly he had known all along at some level, just hadn't wanted to believe it. What to do now? The right thing was to cut her loose. Any further contact in the outside world threatened his position in the Society and with it, potentially, the identity of other members.

On the other hand, how could he say goodbye to this woman and miss this opportunity today?

He could have Kat right now. On the other hand, he could have her tonight as K.

That was a long time to wait. He had waited too long already. Perhaps it was time to leave the Society and make sure, in the process, that Kat never joined up herself.

Whether or not the two of them could ever form a relationship, Kat did not need to be involved with men like... Men like what? He struggled to finish the thought. Men like me, who belong to the Society and use it as a sexual outlet?

"I know you better than you think...Kat," he said. He had nearly slipped and called her K. "And I'll know you better still after I've had the full use of your body for the afternoon."

Her legs clamped shut by sheer reflex. "This has to stop, Chase."

"No, it doesn't. Open your thighs. You weren't given permission to close them."

"I'm not a slave. You have no power over me."

"When we're alone I'll have all the power I need. You will crawl, you will beg and you'll obey. I also have a long memory, so you would do to well not to irritate me now."

Kat parted her thighs, grudgingly at best. "I've not agreed to go anywhere with you."

"Wider," he commanded.

Her knees opened a little farther.

His nostrils flared. With every submissive act, she was making him want to dominate her all the more. "You will pleasure yourself for me. Right now."

Her eyes were hot as fire. The hidden lust belied her objections. "I will not, Chase."

"You haven't a choice, girl. You've already submitted. In your heart you know you have."

"This is going too far," she declared.

He promptly gave her a good idea just how far this was really going. "In my car, I keep a small whip, Kat, a riding crop. In your fantasies I know you are subject to a man who wields one. I am that man and I am telling you in a short while you will kneel before me utterly naked, subject to the lash. Your lovely ass, your thighs, Kat, even your breasts and that lovely pussy you are so modest about. I have no qualms. I will treat you as you've dreamed, as you've imagined. Now...must I repeat my orders?"

Kat's fingers trailed her thighs. Eyes furtive, darting back and forth, she sneaked her hand beneath the hem of the skirt.

"Oh god," she rasped. "You're really going to make me do this?"

"More than that. I expect you to come."

"I c-can't," she said, slipping perfectly into her K role.

"You can and you will. Your orgasms belong to me, and I will have them where and when I want."

She moaned, shuddering against her hand. The way she was clenching her teeth, fighting the movements, Chase knew she had found her clitoris.

"Good girl. Show your Master what a sweet little wench you are."

He could almost feel the shivers going up and down her spine. She was so responsive, so alive, so completely accepting of his ability to guide and protect her.

"Master," she groaned, trying to keep as quiet as she could. "It's...I'm going to..."

"Yes, let it go."

Kat writhed softly. Damn, she was so beautiful. Mesmerizing. He had to have her again. ASAP.

Mustn't rush the experience, though.

He waited until the last of the waves had passed through her. When she was settled, breathing more easily, he ordered her to taste herself.

"Suck your fingers. Suck them clean."

Resistance clouded her features and then abruptly she gave in. Wantonly, she extended her tongue, tasting the glistening juices, oblivious now of possible witnesses.

Never had he seen a woman so passionate, so completely absorbed...so totally trusting of his mastery.

"Let's get out of here," he said.

"Where are we going?"

He took her hand. "First hotel room I can find for us."

* * * * *

Kat's libido was on overdrive. She just knew everyone could tell she was naked under her skirt. Never had she dared to go around in public so scandalously attired.

By the time they reached the elevator of the National Arms Hotel she was ready for a meltdown.

"Forty floors to go," Chase muttered in frustration at the long ride. "How's a man supposed to wait that long?"

Encouraged by his raw expression of desire she made her move, turning to grab the brass rail. "Fuck me here. Take me...now."

Chase laughed. "Anxious, aren't we, pet?"

She bent forward, unabashed. "Tell me you aren't."

"Thought you were worried about getting caught?"

"You can hit the emergency button."

He delivered a decisive smack to her skirt-clad bottom. "Let's not forget who's in charge."

Kat squealed, put in her place. Her body ached and burned from head to toe. She tried to get him to kiss her.

He held her at bay. "I want you simmering hot."

"I'm well past simmering," she complained.

"Too bad." He grinned. "I'm just getting warmed up."

Chase held her hand chastely, during the rest of the way up.

She tried again to throw herself into his arms as soon as they were behind the closed doors of the presidential suite.

"Down, girl," he said with mock harshness.

She shivered as he pulled the whip from its hiding place under his jacket.

"Take off your clothes."

Kat stripped naked, discarding the blouse, skirt and shoes.

She stood in front of him, back arched, breasts heaving.

"Kneel," he ordered.

Kat sank obediently to her knees.

With the whip, he brushed back strands of damp black hair from her face. "You're a fast learner."

"Let me please you," she said, reaching with her hands.

"No." He lightly slapped her hip with the whip.

She looked up, scandalized, excited by his rough treatment.

"Back straight," he ordered. "Put your hands behind your neck."

Kat assumed the delicate, helpless position.

"Knees apart."

She spread them, inner thighs glistening with her own juices.

"My cock is something you earn, girl." The words were familiar. Master J had said them.

"Yes, Master."

"Have you ever swallowed a man's cum before?" he asked, his hands working his zipper.

Kat was overwhelmed with déjà vu. This was too much like last night. Was she dreaming?

"I...no," she lied. "I haven't."

Chase frowned. "That's not the truth."

She cocked her head. He was saying it like he knew, which he couldn't, unless...

"I-I'm sorry," she stammered.

He pulled his cock out, rock-hard, thick, the veins pulsing before her eyes.

It was him.

There was no way she could forget a magnificent shaft like that. Back in her office, when he had taken her so fast and with such ferocity, she had had no time to look closely at it.

"What's wrong, Kat?"

The blood had drained from her face. "I should go."

She was on her feet. He held her fast. "Kat, talk to me."

"Please, Master...Chase."

J, she had almost called him J.

Oh, for heaven's sake, she was going weak in the knees. The way he was looking at her, all strong and concerned and manly.

Chase scooped her off her feet. Her protests fell on deaf ears as he took her to the bed, depositing her on top of the white comforter.

"I have wanted to have my absolute way with you since I saw you, Kat, and I'm not putting it off any longer."

She watched spellbound as he removed his jacket and unbuttoned his shirt.

"You don't have to get nervous about BDSM," he told her, baring his splendidly smooth, muscular chest. "It's all in play, you know that."

How could she tell him it wasn't the BDSM that bothered her, it was the fact that she already knew him, that she had already submitted to him in a different world, the world behind the Red Door.

"I know."

Chase smiled as he undid his belt. She gasped at the sight of his thighs, his legs. He was strong and chiseled, just as she had imagined, a nearly flawless specimen of manhood.

He came to her naked, his eyes alive, attentive and wicked. "I haven't any rope to tie you properly, so I'll have to do it with my voice."

"Your voice?"

"Yes. For example, when I tell you now to lay your arms over your head, wrists crossed..."

"Then I will do it." She completed his sentence. "And I will keep them that way as long as you tell me, as though I have been bound that way."

He nodded. "Exactly."

Kat felt it, the invisible bonds bringing with them the illusion of delicious constriction.

He was free to touch her as he wished. She was his, enslaved by her own will.

"Arch your back. Show me just how incredible you are."

"Yes...Master." Kat proffered her breasts, the flesh searing hot, burned by his gaze.

He released a deep, guttural sound of appreciation, soft but deeply masculine. "Part your legs," he commanded.

It was much easier this time than in the café.

Chase licked his lips. "Close your eyes. Keep them closed."

Kat tried to relax, letting darkness slip over her world.

It was impossible.

She was on the edge of a sweet, slicing blade of desire.

The room grew quiet.

Where was Chase?

She jolted, hearing a sound across the room. Ice clinking? Was he at the minibar? She remembered fetching Chase a drink when he had played the part of Master J. Should she tell him that she knew? What if she was wrong?

Presently, she heard him approach, the steady sound of his breathing so familiar.

The mattress dipped as he sat beside her. The urge to shield her body from his gaze was overwhelming.

His finger brushed her lips. She released a moan.

He let it linger and she drew it softly into her mouth, suckling.

After just a few seconds he denied her. The wet finger moved to her nipple.

Kat whimpered.

A moment later she felt something cold and smooth on her belly.

An ice cube.

She moved to rise.

The whip tapped her inner thigh. "Hold," he ordered.

Her pussy throbbed and ached.

Kat opened her mouth only to have it sealed by a kiss—quick, dry and teasing.

Panting, she resumed her position of submission.

"Good girl," he said, touching the ice to her nipple.

The sensations poured over her—cold, wet, hot—all at once, a zing of pleasurable pain to the brain.

He left it there, a second, an hour, who could tell?

Then he moved to the other nipple. The cube was wet now, dripping.

He slid it very, very slowly down her belly.

Kat moaned and shivered.

He moved a finger between her legs.

He set the whip next to her, perpendicular to her thigh.

Chase played with her clitoris.

Expertly, he took her to the brink and left her there.

Her breathing was quick and shallow. She craved bodily contact, frantic hands—hers and his—limbs intertwining, their sexes fusing. Oh god, their sexes pushing together, a perfect fit.

"Chase..." she groaned. "Master..."

Several fingers penetrated her pussy. "Move," he commanded. "Move against my hand."

Lifting herself, she pressed her pelvis to his hand, trying to get the contact she needed. He continued tormenting, never quite giving her what she needed.

She was out of her fucking mind.

He was in total control.

She hated it.

She loved it.

He made her lick her own juices from his hand. Her mouth was greedy, beyond desperate.

The mattress rocked slightly again. More displacement. He was getting completely on the bed. Oh, why couldn't she open her eyes and see?

Something was against her thigh, the pressure of burning hot skin.

His thigh and his cock...his hard, hot shaft!

"We don't know if a chance like this will come again between us," he murmured, his breath hot in her ear. "We have to take advantage."

It could come tonight, she thought, if I keep my appointment in the Red Room.

"Look at me," he said.

Kat opened her eyes, letting the light flood in. She saw him looming above her. His face was a study in male want. Smoothly, as if he had been doing it forever, he positioned himself. Kat opened her legs wider to accommodate him. Her eyes moistened.

"I'm yours..."

For how long, though and which one of her did he have? The woman he knew as Kat or the alter ego K? Or did he have them both?

Good grief, it was laughable. She hadn't chosen a slave name very well, had she?

Kat, K, not exactly hard to figure out.

His mounting of her was slow, perfect.

He poised at her labia, the tip of his cock barely pressing on the flesh it was about to pierce.

She ached to lift her behind, to make it go faster, though she knew her place. "Please," she begged. "Master."

He smiled approvingly as he sank his cock an inch, no more.

The world stopped there.

Between heartbeats they gazed into each other's eyes.

It was the very opposite of what had happened in her office in terms of speed and yet the intensity was no less.

Chase descended, all the way to the hilt.

She clenched with eager muscles. At last, a way she could move freely.

He exhaled, indicating his pleasure.

She could feel him throbbing, expanding.

Would he hold out long?

Lowering his head, he placed his mouth on her breast. A fresh charge passed through her, a cord pulled tight inside her, connected to her pussy.

Chase suckled both breasts, both nipples and then he lifted himself, nearly withdrawing but not quite.

"D-don't stop..."

He seemed to revel in her erotic discomfort. "You could have obeyed quicker in the café," he observed.

"I will next time." Would there be a next time?

"You know what it does to me, having such a beautiful woman in my control?"

"I have a pretty good idea," she rasped.

He laughed, lowering himself once more. "Do you now?"

"Yes..."

Chase pressed his body to hers, chest to chest, flattening her breasts. She gasped from the sheer animal sensation, her soft curves against hard muscle, hot, sweating bodies connected the way they were meant to in nature.

He took her arms, separating them. Using his hands, he pinned her wrists on either side of her head. "Now you're bound for real...Kat."

He had delayed a second in saying her name. Why?

"Finish it, then," she taunted. "Conquer me completely."

"Already have."

She gritted her teeth.

He laughed again and reared back.

A split second passed and then he withdrew and slammed himself home. The bedsprings creaked in reply.

"Again," she demanded, caught in the twilight world between submission and control.

He obliged, delivering another deep, hard thrust.

More followed, one after another until she lost count, her body shaken apart, nerve by nerve, every part of her open, craving.

How could a woman be so empty and so full at the same time? How could she feel both sated and starved?

"Come," he growled. "Come for me, Kat, baby."

Kat clenched her captive fists, digging her nails into her own flesh. She needed to feel it, all of it, everything that was possible at this moment.

She might have screamed or maybe it was just in her mind. They were together, imploding, the two of them wrapped in a world none could touch.

The outside world could go fuck itself.

His semen thundered into her.

His semen blasted apart her body.

She took it, the offering of a god.

The climax of a very bad boy, a Master.

She came...a slave.

The spasms overwhelmed her. It was a perfect letting go, true submission.

One orgasm, two, how many?

At a certain point he flipped them over, lifting her into place, captured, riding his cock.

He was past his climax, though he was still thrusting from underneath, rock-hard. His hands clamped her breasts, he growled, looking at her with wild eyes.

At last he settled down.

Slapping her hip, he ordered her to keep moving.

Heavens, the man had needed no refraction time.

"Entertain me," he said, putting his hands behind his head.

He had a leer on his face, giving her a pretty good idea of the show he was looking for.

A lap dance, full contact.

Kat shook out her hair, writhing for him, feeling so completely female, sensuous, desired.

Chase grunted in approval. *He was about as happy as a man could be*, she thought.

"Touch your breasts," he ordered. "Show me how men play with them in your dreams."

Kat closed her eyes, recapturing all the fantasies, back to when she was a teenager being fondled by shaking, clammy hands in the front seats of borrowed cars. She had pushed the boys away, only to become confused and frustrated when they had given in so easily.

A part of her had wanted them to persist, to push them both past the point of no return.

She slid her hands up her rib cage and around to her breasts, showing him now, moaning as she squeezed – insolent, taking – as a man would take.

Leaning forward, she let his still-hard cock stimulate her clit.

"How long have you had the fantasies?" he asked. "How long have you known you were submissive?"

"Always," she whispered, eyes half closed. "Ever since I thought about sex at all."

"You never enacted them?"

"In real life, no."

The Red Room didn't count. That was not real, at least not technically.

"Why not?"

"They aren't...productive." The word sounded hollow, meaningless to her.

He clamped her hips, stopping her motion. "Productive of what?"

"They can't be lived out," she said. "Real relationships can't be like that. Your marriage surely proved that."

His brow furrowed. Had she touched a nerve?

"I didn't mean anything, Chase."

"No, you're right. I tried to turn BDSM into something contractual, to be lived out around the clock. I was a fool, obviously."

"It's not your fault, Chase."

"I want you to climax," he said, all business.

"Yes, Master." She hissed the words.

Another whirlwind followed almost immediately, her fingernails raking down his strong chest, his hands digging into her breasts. Her toes curled and uncurled and curled again, the last bits of tension wrung out of her until she simply collapsed on top of him, her cheek on his chest. Safe. Secure.

He stroked her hair and told her she was a good girl...and one hell of a fine woman. She drifted, more peaceful than she had felt in years.

Chapter Ten

Kat had fallen asleep on his chest. He was touched by the trust she must have felt to have done such a thing. He wanted more than anything to stay with her but he had a situation he must address as soon as possible.

He had knowingly breached the regulations of the Society, placing its principles in danger.

By all rights he should not see Kat again. Quite possibly he should resign from the Society as well.

His lack of judgment boggled his mind. What had led him to have sex just now with a woman he was quite certain was mixed up with the Society? The fact that he was a Master, responsible for protecting the female submissives he engaged with only made it worse.

Kat was experiencing his dominance in two guises. She was sure to become confused.

Not to mention the fact that she was his lawyer as well, or had been until a short while ago.

Chase was able to gently roll Kat to her back. She made a few sweet murmuring sounds, though she did not waken. She was so adorable in sleep. He could kiss all over her beautiful face...and the rest of her too.

Gathering his clothes, he went to the bathroom for a quick shower. He mulled over what, if anything, to leave behind in a note.

He opted for something simple, unemotional.

"Thanks for everything, Kat. Best for all if I'm gone when you wake. Chase."

Placing the note on the pillow beside her head, he slipped quietly out the door and headed for the elevator.

Putting in a call for Elaine on his cell phone, he waited for her clipped, efficient voice on the other end.

"Van Voorst, here."

"Elaine, we need to talk."

"You sound terrible. It can't be as bad as all that."

"Worse. When can I come and talk?"

"When do you want to come?"

"Now – sooner if possible."

"I'll clear my calendar, darling."

"Thanks." Chase missed Kat already.

He had a feeling it was going to get worse before it got better.

* * * * *

Kat stirred restlessly in her sleep. She was reaching out, aware of missing something, but what? In her dream she was searching, wandering across a gloomy countryside in the fog. An early morning chill hung in the air. She was wearing a long white gown, very damp.

She was barefoot. Her feet sank into soft, moist earth...

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

"You are searching for him," said a voice.

The Voice was in her own heart.

"Searching for who?" she asked aloud.

"Your animus. He who is the male part of you."

Kat ran farther into the black woods. Twigs cracked here and there around her. She could hear the sound of birds, lonely, faraway calls. She despaired of ever getting out. The woods were darkening. Was it night already?

Ahead she saw a light between the trees, a golden glow.

There was a clearing. She reached the edge of it. It was a perfect circle.

"Don't stop now," said the Voice, urging her to set foot across the boundary.

She did so and at once, in the center of the grass circle, she saw a man seated on a log. He was very tall and strong. He was dressed in black, wearing a mask.

Was this her animus?

"Chase," she whispered.

The man in black began to laugh. "No," he said. "I'm the Master."

He took the mask off and underneath was her own face.

"Are you surprised?" the creature said. "You know you weren't ever going to let go. You will steer your own ship always, even if it means never venturing into deep water."

She opened her mouth to argue when suddenly the fog descended, obscuring the creature from her vision.

She heard hoofbeats behind her.

"Run," said the creature. "Before it's too late."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Kat awoke grasping the pillow, crying out.

A piece of paper slid down her nose.

She sat up, looking about. "Chase?"

Kat called his name at the same time she read the note.

A chill went down her spine. For a moment she thought she was still dreaming. She looked around the room. His clothes were gone and so was he.

Kat held herself together through a shower. It was hard because she had seen the wet towel and she knew he had been there before her. All she could think of was his hand caressing the soap. She wanted him touching her again, taking her.

It didn't make any sense. Whatever was going to happen between the two of them, he didn't need to just run off and hide.

The move seemed out of character, cowardly, almost. From another sort of man, she might have expected it. Chase was supposed to be a Dominant, though, the Master of the Red Room.

Did he intend to show up tonight at the Society?

What if she were there to meet him, to shame him.

Kat choked back tears. It was silly to be so sad. She hardly knew Chase or Master J.

He had hurt her, Chase had. She would not let Master J do the same. In fact she would turn the tables. Let him feel rejection at her hands instead.

That would serve him right.

And maybe after that she would find herself a new Master, one she could control.

* * * * *

"I'll admit," said Elaine, seated across from Chase in the parlor, "we've never had such a thing happen before. It's a terrible coincidence, isn't it?"

"If I had met her in just one context or the other," he said. "We could have made a go of it, had some fun at least."

She arched a brow. "Is that what you're after? Fun?"

"Absolutely. I'm just following your advice, right? Don't go chasing after ghosts, don't do anything too soon."

"Do you think she knows your identity?" Elaine asked.

"No. At a couple of points I thought she might be suspicious but I think she's too caught up in the mystique of BDSM right now."

"In that case you can still have what you want."

"How?" he asked.

"Why it's quite simple," said Elaine. "As Chase Neill you are out of her life. As Master J you are still very much a part of it."

He eyed her suspiciously. "You realize what you are saying? You want me to continue on with a woman whose identity is compromised here? For you of all people

to let that happen is incredible. And what if she figures out who I am? I'll be in for another damn lawsuit, with my luck."

Elaine sighed. "Chase, you know I would never say or do anything to hurt you but I cannot lie to you either. I believe that you attract much of your own misery with women."

"Sure, I'm a magnet for the nut cases."

"Kat is not a nut case and she would never sue you. I think that's what is throwing you. She is not going to make you unhappy and that fact is killing you."

"Kat is different, I agree. She should find another nice young lawyer, settle down."

"Is that what she wants?"

"How in blazes should I know what she wants?"

"You're getting upset, Chase. Why?"

"I'm not upset," he insisted. "I just can't believe you're suggesting I see her again."

"I'm not suggesting anything. The choice is yours."

"You know it would be wrong to see her."

"Life is not always black and white." She shrugged. "So you broke one rule already. It's unlikely you will be able to conclude the matter one way or the other without breaking at least one more."

"I just won't show up tonight. How is that breaking any rules?"

"It's not," she acknowledged. "But what about Kat's heart?"

"What about it? It's not like she's in love with me."

"And what about you?"

"I don't love her either. She's very attractive and I enjoyed bedding her. That's as far as it goes."

"If that's all it was," she countered. "You wouldn't even be talking to me. You would have skipped your appointment tonight and never given the matter another thought."

"That's where you're wrong," he insisted. "I was just being thorough. For your information, I am skipping tonight and I won't look back. I'll sleep like a baby."

"I see. What shall I tell her, then, Chase?"

"I don't give a damn. Tell her anything."

Elaine pursed her lips.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he demanded.

"Like what?"

"Like you feel sorry for me. Like you're disappointed—hell, I don't know. It's your look, you know what it means."

"You are projecting, my dear boy."

"I will tell Kat myself," he decided. "I won't let another do my dirty work."

"Suit yourself."

He shook his head. "Don't even pretend this was my idea. You manipulated me into it and you damn well know it."

Her smile bordered on a smirk. "I scarcely see how that is possible, given that you are a Dominant."

"Now I know you're teasing me."

She laughed. "You really are precious. Someday you will find a woman to appreciate you."

"It's not Kat."

The haste with which he had spoken the words made him wonder who he was trying to convince, her or himself.

* * * * *

"Miss Wayans." Elaine was there to greet Kat at the door, just as she had been on Kat's last visit.

Kat noted that she was not being offered a mask...yet.

"Miss Van Voorst," she said, trying to keep her emotions in check. "It's nice to see you."

Coming here had been harder than Kat had imagined and it was not getting any easier. She wondered if she would really be able to go through with it.

"Are you all right?" Elaine asked, ushering her into the foyer. "You don't look well."

"I'm fine, yes."

"You're a very poor liar," Elaine said. "Why don't we go in my office and talk about it."

Five minutes later they were sitting in comfortable armchairs sipping tea. "Miss Wayans, I know we haven't had much chance to get to know each other..."

"Call me Kat."

"Very well, Kat. I must tell you, I am impressed that you continue to return here. I have never before allowed a nonmember such access. I wonder about your permanent place here, though. Frankly, you strike me as quite old-fashioned, even though you are kinky. You need one man. You need a permanent love affair."

"I'm afraid I've never had much luck in that arena. I think I am ready now to settle on having a little...fun."

She laughed lightly. "There is only one other person in the world I know who can make the word *fun* sound so positively dreary. Amazingly enough, I spoke with him just a little while ago."

"Who is he?" she asked.

She smiled. "I think you know."

"Master J," Kat whispered. "He's here then?"

"Indeed, he's waiting for you in the Red Room."

Her stomach did a hot flip. "I can't go. I can't see him."

"Is that not the reason you came?"

"Only...only to tell him off but I've changed my mind."

Elaine studied her.

"I've already said too much," Kat exclaimed. "I shouldn't say anything else."

"You didn't need to say a word. It is written on your face. You came to submit...to your Master."

"He's not my Master."

"He has dominated you, though."

"A little bit," she conceded. "That's all."

"There is no 'little bit', Kat. One is dominated...or not."

Kat examined the woman's features. She was lovely for her age—porcelain skin, deep eyes and wrinkles that only spoke of wisdom, love, adventure. "Have you ever..."

"Submitted to a man?" she supplied. "Happily so."

"So you're a...submissive."

"I was once, for one particular man." Her face took on a glow, as if lit up from a light, long ago. "He was French, the best lovers are...kinky or not. He controlled me solely with the power of his voice. He teased, denied, pained me and even trained me to come with the whispers from his throat. I would do anything for him, anything at all. Alas, he was married—the French ones always are. The wife was understanding enough, knowing I would never be more than a hobby for him. He used that fact. It was part of his power. My desperation was the hallmark of my slavery. He reduced me and I went along in wonder, following the plan completely."

"How old were you?"

"Barely nineteen. He was forty. He was easily the Master of me, the very seat of authority. I bowed to him. I longed for him. My existence was waiting, pining between visits while he continued to enjoy the rest of life with cold precision. I told myself that he thought of me every minute but the truth was, he cared not at all."

"How sad."

"Everything is sad when you are nineteen," she dismissed. "It is the age of drama."

"I'm not nineteen, though, Elaine."

"You are much more grown up, it is true. You know what you want and tonight you want to surrender to a man you know nothing about, not even his real name?"

"That's just it, I do know him." Kat had blurted the words before she had intended.

Oh well, no time to backpedal now.

"And what makes you think you know him?" Elaine asked.

She did not seem as surprised as Kat had expected.

"He, that is to say, I..."

Elaine held up her hand. "I have no wish to torture you. I was waiting to see if you would show an intention to reveal the truth and you have. Let us cut to the Chase...literally."

Kat felt the blood drain from her face.

"Yes." Elaine read her mind. "I know that you have guessed the identity of the man to whom you submitted in the Red Room."

Kat swallowed. "There's more to it. I have been with him in real life too."

"I know this also, my child. Chase is your lover on the outside and your Master here. Or do you think of him as Master there too?"

Kat thought about it. "In some ways. Though it is different outside the Red Room."

"That is how it's meant to be. Within the Red Room you release your fantasies. You surrender to the roles you wish to play. Truly, Chase is as much captivated as you are. He came to me just before you did to tell me he knows who you are."

"I wasn't sure if he knew or not. Though it should not surprise me he figured it out, as I did."

"He is quite distraught as to what to do, actually. He is a man of honor, a man who likes his world black and white and in this case there is no clear course of action."

"He seems to have made his mind up already. He left me a note telling me we wouldn't see each other again."

"Apparently he feels it is different for Master J and K."

Kat shook her head. "I can't split my identity or cut off part of myself."

"You won't have to past tonight."

"Why not?"

"Both of you will have to leave the Society. Chase has guessed as much, though we didn't discuss it. Our rules require that anonymity never be breached. It would be quite improper to allow you to continue, even if it is only each other that you know."

"So why did you let him go to the Red Room to wait for me?"

Elaine's smile was sad, almost mystical. "I'm a sentimentalist, I suppose. I thought perhaps the two of you should have one more chance to connect your lives. It is not here that you would have a future, though. You are destined for greater things."

Kat bit her lower lip. "He's been hurt pretty badly by Susan. He doesn't seem ready for a relationship."

"Chase knew what Susan was about," Elaine said. "Subconsciously he has sought women who won't challenge him, who will provide spectacular fireworks and then depart."

Kat laughed nervously. "Is that what you think I am?"

"Oh, no," said Elaine. "You are quite the opposite. And that is why you frighten him. You see, Kat, it is you who have actually helped me change my mind about Chase. I had thought as you did, that he needed time to heal, that he was a victim. I cautioned him against throwing his heart and soul into another woman. He had always seemed so excessively romantic. Now I see that he has only allowed himself to fall for women like Susan because they won't truly demand anything substantial, other than money and cheap affection. The way he talks about you, the agitation I see in him, the utter exasperation... My dear, it is the very first time I have ever seen Chase in love. He might wield the whip but he is dealing with a quite untamable beast here."

Kat pictured Chase in the Red Room. What was he doing at this exact moment? Was he pacing or sitting in his chair, brooding behind the mask? Was he nervous and excited as he waited for her? Was he truly concealing a sea of deep emotion behind his obvious lust, as Elaine was suggesting?

"I wish I could be so sure he felt anything at all," Kat confessed. "He's rather a closed book."

"You've not discussed how you feel about each other, I gather."

"No. We either argue when we get together or play erotic games."

Elaine laughed. It was a deep, rich sound that warmed Kat enormously. "That is love, trust me."

Kat remained skeptical. "It's all happened so fast. Really, I'm confused more than anything."

"You're here, though and so is he. That speaks volumes. Go to him, my dear."

"And do what?" Kat was becoming agitated. For the life of her she couldn't remember her original plan in dealing with Chase tonight. Had she even had one?

"Whatever comes naturally," said Elaine, as though it were the simplest thing in the world.

"That's easy for you to say," said Kat with a sigh.

Elaine laughed again. "Only because I am not the one in love, my dear. And may the gods preserve you for having fallen in love with a man like Chase Neill."

"Is he that bad?"

"Oh, no, he's as noble a man as you'll find. But he is all male in a way few men are anymore. He's a lion who won't be caged. He's the sort who won't be happy without something to conquer. He's a knight, a swashbuckler."

"I need someone steady, reliable."

"Oh, he's reliable enough. He would raze a continent to protect his woman but he won't abide being five minutes late for an appointment."

"Sounds way too intense."

"I think you're up for it. Seems to me there is an old-world romantic woman inside you waiting to be set free, one who would be rescued from the dragons every now and again."

Kat was on her feet. "We shall see."

It was going to take every bit of her courtroom skill to get through this next encounter with Chase. She must give him nothing, surrender nothing.

Now if only she knew what she wished to gain.

Tonight had to be an ending, not a beginning. That much was sure.

"I trust you know your way to the Red Room," said Elaine with a wistful smile.

It was engrained in Kat actually, a pathway seared through her brain. In that room, behind that door was a world from which she did yet want to fully escape.

"Thank you for all you've done."

"Don't thank me yet," said Elaine, handing her a jeweled mask to match her simple blue dress. "Go and win your man first."

Kat smiled politely, happy to hide her terror behind the lovely blue mask.

Above all things she must not let Chase Neill know how unsure she was.

A man like that would take everything.

And she would probably help him to get it too.

Chapter Eleven

Kat was wearing a blue dress tonight, elegant and classy, with narrow straps over her shoulders. It was cinched nicely at her narrow waist, emphasizing her feminine curves.

One look at her made Chase ache.

She was like one giant sucker punch, knocking out his wind, not to mention his carefully planned speech.

He wanted to tear off her mask and press his lips to hers. He wanted to seal their mouths and then he wanted to seal their bodies. He wanted to hear her sigh against him, letting go. He wanted to tell her everything. He wanted to dare to love a woman beyond BDSM, with no contracts, no hiding behind the whips and the masks, fun as they were.

He wanted a true partner. Someone he could bed and trust and never let go. Such things were illusions, though, far more fantastical than the trappings of the Red Room.

No, he could never truly have Kat as he wanted. The one thing he could do was to warn her away, telling her not to trust him or any other man in Dominant guise.

"K," he said her name.

"Master J," she replied, as tight-lipped as he.

"Turn around," he ordered.

"Do I please you?" she asked, moving in a slow, graceful circle.

His heart clenched. She pleased him more than she could ever imagine and certainly more than he dared admit.

"Slaves shouldn't fish for compliments. If they are displeasing they find out soon enough...with a crop to the backside."

She was facing him again. "Yes," she whispered.

"You are different than last night."

"How so?" She stood before him – poised, confident, with a new kind of beauty.

Chase shifted in his chair, for a split second rendered speechless. If he didn't know better, he would think she had guessed his identity. On the other hand, Chase had the distinct sense that she would have stood this way before any man. It was as if he was dealing with a new Kat, a woman who had learned something about herself – something crucial – in the last twenty-four hours.

It was only partly about BDSM.

He would stripped her all right but it was her soul he wanted to see.

"You tell me, K. What did you do since we saw each other last?"

"Is that allowed?" she asked, casually enough. "Are we able to reveal our outside activities?"

"If you keep to generalities, no names or place locations, nothing that would reveal too much."

"In that case, I had sex with a man," she said, her bold, neutral tone inflaming his blood.

"And?"

She shrugged her bare white shoulders. Her eyes danced behind the mask. She sounded almost teasing. "It was sex. I think you know how that goes."

"No," he said curtly. "I don't. There are a million ways to make love, a million nuances."

"It's all the same in the end, though, isn't it? You're a man, you can understand screwing and moving on."

Chase frowned. "So this man meant nothing to you?"

"You seem awfully interested in him."

"He made love to my slave. I think that is very much my concern."

"You sound jealous."

"Don't play me, K," he warned. "Or that little bottom of yours will end up over my knee."

"Yes, Master," she purred.

She was trying to shift the power dynamic but why?

"Was this man a Dominant?"

"Yes, Master."

"You submitted to him?"

"Yes, Master."

She sounded like a damn witness on the stand.

"Stop answering like a lawyer," he complained.

"How should I sound?" she asked in that same sweet tone.

"I don't know. How about not being insolent, for starters?"

She wasn't being at all insolent. Why was he losing his temper?

"If you are worried about the other man, Master, you needn't be. He turned out to be a loser."

"Oh?"

"Yes, he walked out on me. He didn't even have the guts to say it to my face. Just fucked me and sneaked out."

"Surely he left you...something," he said acidly.

"Oh yes, I almost forgot. He left a note, a really pathetic one."

Pathetic? He had taken fifteen minutes to come up with that. "I'm sure he was handling the matter the best way he was able, slave."

"Probably he was married," she speculated. "I don't want to talk about him, though."

"Well, you keep bringing him up."

"Do I?"

"Yes, you do. So what kind of lover is he?"

She shrugged. "He's all right."

His blood pressure continued to rise. "Just all right?"

"I'm sure you could do better."

"I'm not here as your gigolo," he informed her. "You will serve me...or leave."

"Yes, Master."

"You haven't the first idea how BDSM works," he lectured, trying to keep the displeasure from his voice. "You have to...to enter the thing."

"What am I doing wrong?" she asked, reasonably enough.

"When you were with that other man..." he began.

"The one I am talking too much about, Master?"

"You know perfectly well which one I mean, missy."

"So you think if I had been more submissive, he wouldn't have sneaked out on me like a low-life weasel?"

"He wasn't being a weasel, K."

"You seem awfully sure of that, Master."

"Men do things for a lot of reasons. Has that not occurred to you?"

"What other reason could there be?"

"I don't know, maybe he wanted to protect you. Maybe he had some kind of secret."

"So he *was* married."

"No, damn it, he wasn't!" This was going all wrong. He had completely lost his cool. "Look, K, I'm trying to help you, to educate you."

"So I see."

"There are things you don't understand."

"Like what?"

"Things." His head was pounding. This talking business was driving him crazy.

"You seem upset. Shall I fix you a drink?"

"No, I don't want a damn drink. I want you to listen to me."

"I am, Master."

"Then keep listening. I need to tell you something. I am not who you think I am, K." *And you aren't who you think either. You don't belong here, Kat.*

"What do you mean?"

Chase breathed deeply and removed his mask. She showed no sign of surprise.

Not even a little.

"You knew," he accused.

"I was waiting for you to tell me of your own accord."

"How long have you known?"

"I had suspicions from the beginning, the first time you came to my office, though I didn't take them seriously until today in the hotel. How long did you know?"

"From the moment I saw you, I knew, though I denied it for a while, refusing to trust my own senses."

"It was such a strange coincidence," she said.

"Yes." He couldn't help but smile. "You really had me going just now, telling me what a weasel you thought I was."

"You are. You left me high and dry."

"I did so because of the Society. I knew I would see you here. I didn't want you to get hurt."

"It's a little late for that."

He cocked his head. Did she have feelings for him? And what about him? Did he have any for her or was it simple lust for that fabulous body of hers?

"Nothing is ever too late."

"You wrote your note and I accepted it."

"It wasn't meant to be a binding contract." He rose from his seat and went to her. He touched her arm, preparing her for a kiss.

"Don't do this."

"Don't do what?"

"Start up another game. We're both a little old to be playing dress-up, don't you think?"

"If I want to kiss you, how is that a game?"

"Because it won't mean anything."

"It means what we want it to mean."

"I want it to not happen at all," she defied.

He rubbed her bare arm very lightly. "You know I can take a kiss from you, sweetheart, and a good deal more besides."

"I'm not your sweetheart."

"Tell me I'm wrong. Tell me I can't kiss you if I want."

Kat was unable to answer.

"You are trembling," he said.

"You know what you do to me, damn it." Her voice was tremulous.

"Tell me." His eyes were insistent, irresistible.

"You drag me outside myself," she said in a near whisper. "You...overwhelm me."

"I'm going to make love to you. On that bed, Kat. No bondage, no BDSM...no games."

Her chest was rising and falling in time to the beating of his own heart. "It won't change anything," she said.

"You let me worry about that." His hand went to her hip, cradling the soft curve.

"Oh god." Her eyes slid shut.

"I don't know what I would do if I had to live without your touch," he confessed. "I feel like I've known you forever."

"Which one of me?" she quipped.

He slid his fingers over her belly and up to her breasts very slowly, brushing her left nipple. At last he cupped her chin, lifting it. "There is only one Kat."

"No..." She whimpered as he took her lips – a press of mouths, deceptively light.

Chase didn't need force. He didn't require pressure to brand her.

"Oh, Chase, I want it, I want you, I do but –"

"But what," he interrupted. "You think there's a reason to keep us apart, now...or afterward."

"Your divorce," she said, almost panting. "You aren't ready. And I...I don't know what I'm looking for."

His hands moved down her back and clutched her buttocks. He bent his head and bit her neck lightly but firmly.

Kat moaned.

She melted, as though her soul had been breached. It was a race now to undo each other's clothes. She pulled the dress over her head and helped him unbutton his white silk shirt with the billowy sleeves. His chest was bare underneath. She ran her hands over it, raking her fingernails with a hungry familiarity.

He reached behind her back, unclasping her bra. Pulling the straps forward over her shoulders, he let her breasts spill free, directly into his grasp. She groaned as he kneaded the flesh. Feverishly, her fingers worked at his belt. She nearly tore off his pants to get at his cock.

It throbbed in her grasp, her smooth, soft fingers working the shaft, readying it to be inside her.

There wasn't time to take down her panties. Ripping the material in his hands and baring her hot, dripping sex, he lifted her body and thrust deep into her. It was like the first time all over again. Would it always be this way between them, so hot and urgent?

Kat was more than ready, clinging to his body as Chase carried her to the bed, their bodies connected, her sex skewered deeply by his rock-hard shaft. Chase lowered them, not breaking contact until she was on her back – splayed with him on top of her.

He began to move within her, driving her body down, over and over, into the velvet-covered mattress. In between his deep penetrations he lifted them upward, nearly off the bed. As if in free fall they clung to each other, riding the sensations of mutual ecstasy. He was scarcely aware of where his own flesh ended and hers began.

They were like some machine organically enhanced, throbbing and writhing, cohabitating hearts beating as one. He had never had sex like this – not with Susan, not with anyone. And Kat was not even officially his girlfriend.

He was going to have to marry her at this rate.

Even as he said the words in his head he was filled with dread.

Here I go again, thinking with my cock, getting myself into a domestic nightmare waiting to happen. I should at least get her to sign a pre-nuptial agreement.

Hell, she could draw it up herself.

Who was he kidding? He was in over his head. Wherever this was leading, he was not turning back.

They came together like longtime lovers, their bodies totally in tune. He suckled at her breasts, trying to consume her. She smelled and tasted so incredible. She was raw and dynamic and totally...his.

The orgasm lifted him from the room. He felt as though he soared above the mansion and over the spires of the city. Her sweet surrender underneath him only confirmed the complete fulfillment of his thunderous climax.

Afterward, she held on to him very tightly. The waves had passed like a swirling hurricane. They were sweaty and thick with the scent of animal heat.

They were sated. But for how long?

Was she afraid to fall asleep, afraid she would wake and find him gone again?

He had to admit that the temptation was there – to cut his losses and run. He couldn't do it, though, not to Kat, not twice.

"A penny for your thoughts," she murmured, lying with her head on his chest. "Although I bet that's a loaded question, huh?"

"I'm a man. We try not to think."

They lay in silence a while, Chase studying the design on the ceiling – red and white mosaics in the shape of a heart with crossed arrows through it.

The arrows symbolized the sting and power of BDSM while the heart was there to remind that all activities in this room must never stray from principles of mutual joy, if not actual love.

"Have you always been into whips and chains?" Kat asked at last, turning onto her side to prop her head up with her hand.

"They turned me on from the start. Though it took a long time for me to realize you could play at that sort of thing in real life."

"So you didn't tie your date after the prom?" she teased.

"I wanted to," he admitted. "At the time, I thought the idea was a bit disturbed. Mostly I focused on making money. Women never did me much good, anyway."

"Present company included?"

"That remains to be seen," he teased back. "What about you? You said you've always had submissive fantasies. You never tried anything?"

"I always let the boys tie me up when we played cowboys. But I had no idea how to work that into relationships later on. Until you, I just thought it was all a dream."

"Maybe it is," he said wistfully, reaching across to stroke her hair.

"I think it is what it is," she said, speaking like an old hand. "You were right. We have to define it for ourselves."

"Do you think you would ever want to do this 24/7?"

"You mean fuck? Who wouldn't?"

"No." He laughed. "I mean the dominance and submission. Would you be someone's slave?"

It was her turn to laugh. "Get real. Taking orders in bed is one thing, outside it quite another. I'm afraid if you want some kind of contract like you had with Susan, I'm not your girl."

"I wouldn't want that again," he said, surprised at his own conviction. "It's just an illusion, anyway. If someone acts like a total slave they are either lying or building up resentment."

"Some maybe. Maybe there are people who really like it, though. It's not for me to judge."

She had a point. She was definitely a wise woman.

"What will you do after tonight?" he asked.

"After we're booted out of this place, you mean?"

He pursed his lips.

"I'm sorry, you didn't know that, did you?"

"I knew it, though this is the first time I have heard the words. I go back a long time here. It will seem strange not to have it as a part of my life."

"Are there other places like this?"

"One or two in other cities, though nothing can quite compare to Elaine's little fantasy world."

"I think I might try a dating service," said Kat.

"A BDSM one?"

"No, a regular one. If there's a little kink mixed in, that's fine, but I would like to meet someone for more general company."

"I can give a reference," he said, clearing his throat.

"I'll bet you could."

So it was really over. They were going to go their separate ways, parting as friends, even. No more fireworks, no more fighting, no more passion.

Had it all dissipated so quickly?

"One of us will need to leave here first," Chase said.

"Let's flip a coin."

"You can go. I would like a few moments alone in here."

"I understand," she said. "And I'm sorry you have to lose all this."

"It's okay. Time marches on."

Maybe it was time for Chase to find a dating service too, a regular one.

Chapter Twelve

Vicky had insisted on the meeting in her office. She was on cloud nine, beside herself with the good news she was about to share. Obviously it was with regard to Chase's case since she had invited him to be there, as well.

"I don't see why you need me," Kat had said. "He's your client now."

"I would have thought you'd be concerned."

"You thought wrong."

"So I gather things aren't going well between you two on the dating front," Vicky said now as Kat sat across from her.

They were waiting for Chase, who was late.

The man who couldn't stand being even five minutes tardy according to Elaine.

"There is no front," said Kat. "There never was. Chase and I are friends, nothing more."

Vicky raised an eyebrow. "If you're such good friends, why didn't you want to be here today when I talk to him?"

"I have a lot to do."

"Like what? Some more avoidance? Girl, just face facts, you are in love with Chase Neill. It's not like you have the plague."

It certainly feels like it, she thought. "I'm not in love with anyone, least of all Chase."

"Okay, whatever." Vicky rolled her eyes.

"Don't do that," Kat snapped. "You know it irritates me."

"I'm just agreeing with you."

"No, you're not, you're doing that eye thing and that 'whatever' thing."

"Honestly, Kat, if I have to watch every word around you —"

"Don't act like you're innocent. You know exactly what I mean. And where do you get off talking about love? You're not a psychologist."

"Am I interrupting something?"

Kat nearly swooned at the sound of his voice. She turned and there he was — Chase Neill, his body framing the doorway, filling it, dominating it.

"Not at all, Chase." Vicky brightened. "Do come in and sit down next to Kat on the couch."

Kat flashed an angry glare as Vicky took the plush armchair for herself. She was so going to get it later.

"I'll stand if that's all right," said Chase.

Kat jumped up. "Me too."

"Well, it's not all right," said Vicky. "I like my clients to sit down for good news."

"Did you say good news?" Chase's features lightened.

Kat felt her heart soaring. It had been hard to see Chase looking so somber a moment ago, almost gloomy.

"I did," Vicky confirmed. "Now sit, both of you."

Kat frowned at Vicky and obeyed. Chase followed suit.

He attempted to keep to his side of the couch, though there wasn't nearly enough of a buffer between them. She smelled his cologne—the deep scent of musk and fresh soap.

It was no use. He was too close, too masculine, too overpowering.

She needed him. She needed the warmth of his skin, the heat of his touch, the agony he could inflict with his teasing tongue and the wickedness of his stinging whip...and that way he looked at her, centering her. And the fights that made her feel so purposeful and alive.

She had been so lonely without him—two days and two nights of tossing and turning, tears on the pillow again and again. It made no sense. She had gone her whole life without knowing the man and here she was, feeling utterly dependant on him. It wasn't as though they even got along outside a few spectacular encounters in bed.

Okay, not all of them had been in bed but they were sure spectacular.

It had to be simple lust. Speaking of which, she sure would not mind an opportunity to tear off Chase's clothes in the next few minutes. Anything to get at that cock of his again. She wondered if he had been with anyone else since. Kat would scratch the eyes out of any woman who even looked at him.

God, she wanted to be straddling him, drawing his cock between her thighs and deep inside her, filling the terrible hollowness, exciting and waking the nerve endings of her pussy, moving her toward the inevitability of climax.

"Before I get to the good news," said Vicky, "I want to say something to you about the Society for Sexual Freedom."

Kat tensed. She could feel Chase do the same.

What was Vicky doing? She couldn't possibly know about Chase's membership, could she?

"Elaine told me the whole story," said Vicky. "She felt I ought to know since I was Kat's sponsor. If you ask me, you two had a good thing going there and you should keep it up. Create your own Red Room. You don't need masks to be kinky, you know."

"Get to the point, Vick," said Kat icily. "Tell us about the case. Can Chase win or not?"

"I don't think he can win," she said. "No way, no how."

Kat inadvertently reached for Chase's hand. His fingers squeezed down on hers.

"Why not?" said Chase.

"Because," said Vicky, beaming, "the case will never make it to court. As of five p.m. yesterday, it was dropped."

"I beg your pardon," said Chase.

"Pamela Coil has withdrawn her case," Vicky explained.

"Why would she do that?" asked Kat.

More to the point, what had Vicky done to her to make her do it?

"She was lying," Vicky said. "And now she wants to be truthful."

"That's an amazing turn of events," said Chase.

His fingers were cold to the touch. Was he that worried about the case?

"Sometimes people just need a little nudge in the right direction," said Vicky.

"What kind of nudge?" Kat wanted to know.

"A better word might be leverage," said Vicky. "You see, I hired a private investigator and it turns out our Pamela Coil has other identities. Lucinda Spoils and Melinda DuPree, to name a couple. She has a criminal record, as well. I had a little talk with her and convinced her she didn't need to have perjury added to her collection of offenses."

"I can't believe she thought she would get away with what she was doing," said Chase. "Is she even a real accountant?"

"I think you figured out firsthand the answer is no," Vicky said dryly. "She is quite good at forging resumes and acquiring phony references. Your ex, Susan, went to a lot of trouble to get your company to buy her story. She must have figured that you would fold easily afterward and settle out of court. Susan was in for a cut of the money Pamela was going to win. Turns out your darling former spouse needs more of your money already. She's run through most of what you gave her."

"Unbelievable," Chase muttered.

"Sad but true," said Vicky.

"I don't know how to thank you," said Chase.

"You should thank the PI. He's quite good at what he does."

Kat could see from the look in her friend's eyes that Vicky had an interest in the man beyond the professional sphere.

Heaven help him, she thought. Vick will eat him for breakfast.

"My company will pay his fees," said Chase. "And yours." His hand retracted from Kat's, leaving her instantly empty inside. "I thank you again," he said.

Vicky rose with him, shaking hands.

"It's our pleasure." Vicky looked at Kat expectantly.

Don't let him get away, Vicky's expression said.

"I'll see myself out," he said.

"Let Kat show you."

"It's quite all right," said Chase.

"She doesn't mind," said Vicky.

"He said it's all right," Kat told her, a bit brusquely.

Vicky shrugged. "Suit yourselves."

Kat sighed in exasperation.

Chase, who looked very pale, mumbled a goodbye to both of them and headed down the hall toward the exit.

Kat, not trusting herself to talk to Vicky, promptly returned to her office.

First order of business – no crying.

* * * * *

"Chase, wait," said Vicky.

Chase was at the outer door to the law office. "Yes?"

"You can't leave Kat like this."

"Leave her like what?"

"You could see how upset she was."

"She didn't look upset."

"Well, she is. I know her. She's missing you very much and she wishes you would fix things."

Chase furrowed his brow. Vicky was a high-energy woman, definitely well meaning but extremely hard to read. "I'm not sure what there is to fix."

"You and her. There is something there, obviously and you need to make it right."

He shook his head. "I still don't see exactly what you think I can do at this point. We have gone our separate ways."

"She loves you," Vicky blurted.

Chase's mouth dropped. "She...what?"

"She told me so," Vicky said.

Chase studied her eyes. They were slightly evasive but not dishonest. "When did she say that?"

"That's not important. You know I'm right. She does love you," Vicky insisted. "And you need to be a man and go tell her you love her too."

"I don't love her."

"You do."

"Look, I deeply appreciate all you have done for me and I am sure you have everyone's best interest in mind but you can't simply go around forcing people to be in love."

"Why not? If it's what's in their hearts and they are too stubborn to admit it, then aren't I doing them a favor?"

He ran his hand through his hair. This was not a submissive woman, not at all. "Maybe you should talk to my assistant Marsha. She could probably explain better where I'm coming from and why I'm not in a position to be in love."

"Do you feel the room spin when Kat is there?"

"Do I what?"

"Does your heart soar? Can you imagine not seeing her again? What if I told you another man was going to love her, that he was going to take her in his arms and possess her?"

Chase scowled. "What other man?"

"I have no idea but one will come, sooner or later. And that idea kills you, doesn't it?"

"She can find someone better for her."

"And when she does, he will kiss her, make love to her, and in all likelihood, dominate her."

Chase clenched his fists. "Why are you doing this, Vicky?"

"Because I won't let you make a mistake this big."

"I've made some whoppers already – the chief one being Susan."

"Tell me Kat's another Susan," Vicky defied. "and you'll have a war on your hands, right here, right now."

"Okay, she's not Susan. She's a damn fine lady and I don't think she would ever intentionally hurt me."

"You don't *think* she would hurt you?"

Chase was sweating. He had not eaten and not slept in two days. His whole world had felt like a black hole since leaving Kat the other night. He had sat in the Red Room alone and felt so goddamn miserable.

"I know she wouldn't hurt me," he corrected. "Though I don't know why I know."

"Because you love her."

"It's complicated. She's not straight-up submissive," he said.

"And you're not straight-up dominant. I've been around the Society enough. I know what those Masters are like. They are muscleheads with blimp-sized egos. You like kink but you don't want to squash your woman's will."

"No one would ever squash Kat's will." And if anyone tried, he would have to answer to Chase.

"You love that about her. She's stubborn, she's unpredictable, she's coy, she's a wildcat and she will stay that way until you turn her into your little kitten."

Chase smirked. "Are you saying all this as my attorney?"

"At the moment, yes. Though I would sure as hell prefer saying a thing or two as maid of honor at your wedding."

"Aren't you skipping about a million steps in between?"

"Go and talk to Kat," Vicky challenged. "And then you tell me."

"She will never agree to marry me."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not going to ask."

"Yes," she defied, "you are."

"And what makes you so sure?"

"Kat's a challenge, that's why. And you don't back down from challenges."

"It might be a good day to start. There's no telling the regrets that could come my way."

"You'll regret it a lot more if you don't try." Chase heaved a sigh. He was going to do it. He was actually going to talk to Kat. "I'll agree to talk to her but you have to answer one question first and I want the truth."

"Done."

"When you said that Kat told you she loved me, you were lying, weren't you?"

Vicky grinned. "Like a rug. Now go in there and get her, tiger."

Chase headed back down the hall. Was he about to make the biggest mistake of his life...or redeem himself once and for all?

* * * * *

Chase was at Kat's office door knocking to get in.

"Just a minute," she called out, holding him at bay long enough to put a call through to Vicky.

"What is it?" Vicky asked.

"Chase hasn't left yet," Kat replied.

"No?"

"Don't pull the innocent act. You sent him back to me, why?"

"I can't imagine why I would do something like that."

"I can. What did you tell him? You didn't say I had cancer or something, did you? Oh god, Vick, I swear..."

"It's no big deal. I might have let it slip that you have certain feelings, that's all."

"Feelings? What feelings?"

"Well, you know...feelings."

"No, I don't know. There are lots of feelings. I could feel pity for the man. I could be angry with him."

"You could also be in love with him."

Kat went through the roof. "You told Chase Neill I was in love with him?"

"It's not like he couldn't have figured it out for himself."

"How? I haven't talked to him. I haven't done anything. I'm not even seeing him anymore."

"See? That proves it."

"Proves what?"

"You are not seeing him because you love him. And he isn't seeing you because he loves you. It's pretty simple, you just let him in so he can propose and we'll have a big toast. I'll get champagne."

"Propose? Have you lost your blonde mind?"

"Don't talk so loud or he will hear you through the door."

"I don't care if he hears me or not." Kat pressed her fingertips to her temple. "Vick, I can't even believe you did this. You know what a mess I have to fix? I'm going to let him in. I don't even know what I'll say. This is such a nightmare."

"The word you'll be looking for when he asks you is 'yes', Kat."

"No! No! No!" Kat slammed down the phone. She would never say yes—not to Chase Neill, not to any man. She liked her single life, she liked her career. Mr. Bill was all the action she ever needed.

Kat went to the door. Chase was standing there looking perplexed. "It sounded like you were talking to someone in there."

"There's no one in here. I was alone. Now you're here and I'm not alone."

He cleared his throat. "I think we should talk, Kat."

"About what?"

"I think you know the answer to that."

"Everything Vicky told you is a lie," Kat said, the words spilling from her mouth. "I never said anything about loving you. No offense, you're a good man, I just don't feel that way about you so you can save your breath because there isn't any way I would marry you, not to say you would not be a fine man to marry—"

"Kat, calm down." Chase held her upper arms. "You're going to hyperventilate."

She looked into his eyes, hating herself for the tranquilizing effect he had on her. She couldn't afford to be weak with a man, least of all one as strong as Chase Neill.

She had to preserve her identity.

"I am calm."

"I'm not here to sweep you off your feet. I don't intend to propose marriage."

"You don't?" Kat felt a crashing wave of disappointment. Where was that coming from?

"You said yourself that you don't love me. I knew when Vicky told me you did that she was just trying to get us together."

"And you don't love me, either?"

Chase's eyes were stormy. "Does that really matter, Kat?"

She knew she should leave it alone. Naturally she didn't. "I guess I'm curious."

He smiled wryly. "A little cruel, don't you think, me having to answer that when you've already said you don't love me?"

"I didn't mean it that way."

"I know. There is nothing cruel in you. You're an angel if ever there was one."

"Hardly." She blushed. "Ask Vicky or better still, Kevin. I can be pretty demanding."

"Why do you suppose we didn't fight harder the other night?"

"Fight for what?"

"For each other. We just kind of made this unspoken agreement to walk away."

"It wasn't going to work. We didn't have the Red Room anymore and you already had left me in the real world."

"I felt stuck between worlds."

His words struck a chord. "Me too."

He nodded.

"Chase, I'm not submissive. I won't sign some agreement so I can kneel at the door waiting for you to come home each night like a cocker spaniel would. That's not me."

Chase laughed. "You don't make the idea sound very appealing at that. Truthfully, I'm over the contracts. I want a woman I can be challenged by, one I can play and dream with, but most importantly, a woman I can trust."

"You deserve that," she said softly.

"What I deserve," he said, brushing stray hairs from her face, "is you."

Her toes curled. "Why wish for that? I thought you liked yourself," she quipped.

"I do. I'm quite fond of myself, actually."

Kat swallowed. This was beginning to look like that proposal he had said he wouldn't deliver. "Maybe you should be making this speech to Vicky. She's more than a match for you."

"We would kill each other in a day," Chase said flatly.

"Probably less," she agreed.

"Vicky ever been married?"

"Once, when she was eighteen. He was her high school sweetheart. He died in a skydiving accident. She's played the field ever since. Run roughshod over it, more like."

"Think she will ever settle down?"

"She would have to find some kind of daredevil. That's the only way."

“What about you?”

“I am settled down with my career.”

“You’re lonely, though.”

“Most people are.”

“They don’t have to be.”

“I like my life as it is.”

“So tell me goodbye, Kat. Tell me you don’t love me and I’ll walk out.”

“You already know I don’t.”

“I want to hear it from your lips, straight out.”

She was right there, about to say it. It would be so easy but then he really would walk out and, being the kind of man he was, he would not come back.

“You know how I feel.”

He traced her lips with his finger. “Do I?”

The cold she had felt in him earlier was all gone. Interesting. Was he energized and heated by being here with her?

“Don’t do that, Chase.”

“I’m not going to seduce you again,” he reassured her. “I won’t use your body against you – not for something this important.”

“I...don’t...love you.” The words were like death. Her eyes watered. He looked momentarily stunned – a deep sharp wound.

“So be it.”

He turned to leave.

“Chase, wait.”

“No.”

“Please...”

He pushed her back. “I’m through with you, Kat.”

Chase slammed the door behind him.

She collapsed to the floor, on her knees, sobbing. The tears had come like a storm, raging from a blue sky.

Vicky came to her. She knelt beside her, cradling her racked body.

“I-I...”

Kat couldn’t get out anything meaningful.

Vicky did not say I told you so. She did not say anything, just told her dearest friend it would be all right.

* * * * *

Chase made it as far as the helicopter. He had never been so furious in his life. But why? Kat had had every right to reject him. She had done so before and he had rejected her too. This was a sour deal, a dead horse they kept beating.

Blame Vicky for dredging it up all over again.

No, that wasn't fair. Vicky was forcing them to deal with their feelings, nothing more. In point of fact, this was not over. Not so long as he felt so strongly. He wasn't done with Kat. He still wanted her and there was no mistaking that she wasn't done either. There was too much fight still in her.

And she would go on fighting until he seized the reins.

How could he have been so blind? This was not just a sexual thing—it was emotional.

She needed for him to be the man, to set the course they both wanted. He could never expect her to come on board, to see things his way. He must storm her defenses for her own good.

Kat might not have it in her nature to serve like a pet but she did need to follow a man. There was a place and time for domination and male control and this was it.

He had missed this all along because he had insufficient control over his own desires. He had lacked clarity.

He had failed to trust his male heart.

He was the hunter. In the first seconds of eying sweet prey a man knew. He had wanted Kat Wayans absolutely the moment he saw her. There had been no doubt. To hell with the past and forget the betrayal of Susan. That did not count against his judgment or against his nobility. It spoke only of Susan's character.

Chase's character was about not giving up. Vicky was right. Kat was the challenge he couldn't walk away from. There was no turning back. Everything in his life had led up to now.

Susan had been a lesson along the way. He was glad of her now and of the other women before her, for they had readied him for this—for Kat.

Chase headed back to Kat's office.

It was time to take what was his.

He did not knock this time.

Kat was sitting on the sofa. Vicky was beside her, wiping her eyes with a tissue. Both women looked up, their mouths slightly agape.

He must have been quite a sight.

"Vicky, I'm here for Kat."

"You want me to leave?" asked Vicky.

"No." Kat squeezed her arm. "Stay with me, Vick."

"That won't be necessary, Vicky," he said. "We're the ones leaving—in my helicopter, to be precise."

"I'm not going," said Kat.

"I'm not asking," said Chase.

"Go with him," Vicky said. "You'll be fine."

"We can do it one of two ways," Chase said. "You can walk out of here or I will carry you, bound and gagged."

"Vicky, this is kidnapping," Kat pleaded.

"You're exaggerating. He's just trying to get through to you."

"Victoria, do you have any idea what a terrible friend you are being right now?" Kat asked.

"You'll thank me later," Vicky said.

"If I live that long."

Chase took Kat's hand, pulling her to her feet. "We haven't time to waste. I want to be on the island by dusk."

"Island? What island?"

"Sounds dreamy," said Vicky. "Send a postcard."

"There aren't any post offices," he said, scooping the protesting Kat into his arms. "It's strictly private."

Damn, she felt good like this, squirming, wriggling...his.

Without further ado he headed back to the helicopter.

This time he would do things right.

Chapter Thirteen

Kat was firmly convinced. She was flying with a maniac, albeit a very sexy maniac.

Chase's whole demeanor—completely in control, mysterious and commanding—was turning her on like crazy.

He was treating the whole world like one giant Red Room in which he was Master. Which made her what exactly? His willing slave? Surrendered victim? Hapless hostage?

Somehow—she *would* find out later—Chase had gotten his hands on her passport and, at the moment, they were over the ocean. They had traded the helicopter for a small private plane back at the executive airport in the city. He was flying it, naturally.

Earlier, when she had asked where exactly they were going, he had told her he was taking her where he should have taken her in the first place.

As if that was supposed to explain everything.

“And where *precisely* is that?” she asked stubbornly.

“The island.”

“You already told me that. I want to know which island it is.”

“The one we are going to.”

She glared at his handsome profile. The sun was setting. “I don't have time for riddles. And I don't have time to be kidnapped.”

“Vicky will take care of everything. That's what partners are for.”

“It's not that simple.”

“Sure it is.” He put his hand on her thigh, his touch making her instantly hot and weak.

“You should get some sleep. It will be another hour or so.”

“Don't touch me.” She tried to pry his hand away. His grip was too tight. “You have no right.”

“You are my slave,” he reminded.

“K was your slave.”

“K is you and you are her.” His fingers crept under her skirt to her sopping panties.

“We're in an airplane, for heaven's sake.”

“I know,” he rasped. “If there was a big enough cabin, I would take you and fuck your brains out.”

Kat wanted that—oh god, did she ever.

“You may not do this,” she declared. “You're my kidnapper.”

He leered. "Kind of a sexy game, huh? Being whisked away by a crazy devil who can do anything he wants to you?"

"It's not a game," she insisted. "You are crazy."

Chase's finger had found her button. Pressing on her clitoris, making her squirm, he said, "Kat, I own the island we are going to. We'll be alone. I am going to rip off all your clothes and I'm going to love your body until you submit to me."

"I've already done the submission thing," she protested.

"I want more. I want it all."

His voice chilled her and thrilled her. Hating herself for her own needs she pushed her pelvis, hot as fire, against his invading fingers. "You won't...get away with this."

"I already have, baby." He took his hand away, denying her.

"Chase..."

"I like it simmering, remember?"

"You're a fucking bastard," she spat. "That's all I need to remember about you."

"You should get some sleep."

As if.

"Go to hell."

"It's your call, angel," he drawled. "Just don't let me catch you trying to play with that pretty little pussy of yours. It belongs to me now."

Kat felt a hot flip in her belly. She suppressed a whimper. More than anything, she wanted to beg his permission to come, or better still, to service his thick erection with her willing mouth.

She insulted him instead. "If I did masturbate, I wouldn't be thinking of you."

He laughed. Low and evil, the sound making her nipples tighten as if he were pinching them. "Seems to me you're itching for a spanking, kitten...and I aim to deliver it as soon as we land."

Kat's ass sizzled in anticipation. "Over my dead body."

Chase chuckled some more. Furious, she shut her eyes and pretended to sleep. The whole time she listened to his breathing. He was too goddamn close and this airplane was too goddamn small.

Eventually he leaned over to calm her down. "Sleep, sweetheart," he murmured in her ear.

She was out like a light.

* * * * *

Chase landed the plane on the empty airfield sometime in the middle of the night. Kat was out of it. Her body was completely limp, enjoying the sleep of the dead. He lifted her from the airplane and took her down to the beach.

He had built a more permanent house on the other side of the island but for their purposes the open air would do nicely.

Chase was pretty exhausted by now and much as he hated to postpone his fun with Kat, he would have to allow himself a few hours' sleep. There wasn't much trouble she could get into if she awoke but he didn't feel like taking any chances.

Besides, he thought, attaching the rope from the airplane's emergency locker to her wrists, it will be fun to see her reaction when she wakes.

Chase tied her wrists in front of her and wrapped the free end around his fist. He then laid her down beside him on the white blanket of sand, the stars for a canopy. He fell asleep listening to the sounds of her breathing – soft and true.

It felt as though it was only five minutes later that she woke him, though the position of the sun in the sky indicated he had slept through the night into mid-morning.

"Get this off me," she demanded.

Kat was standing over him, wild-eyed, her hair a mess. She was pulling on the rope, trying to dislodge it from his fist.

"You're wasting your time, angel," he informed her. "I'm much too strong."

"I will not be held like a prisoner," she said, tossing her hair over her shoulder. "And I am not your angel."

He crossed his ankles. His cock was tenting his pants. "Fine, free yourself, then, *slave girl.*"

Kat came at him in a fury. Falling to her knees, she tried to bite his hand. She was certainly desperate.

He turned her over onto her back. "I already told you what would happen to you on this island. Do you think I changed my mind?"

She tried to knee his crotch. He parted her legs easily, pinning her. With one hand he held her roped wrists overhead. "This is not pretend rope this time."

Kat regarded him – proud, contemptuous. "I will never forgive you for this."

His breathing was steady. He felt the testosterone pouring through his body. Where to begin?

The stripping?

The spanking?

"I made two promises to you about the things that I would do to you."

Her eyes lit up. She tried to push him away.

Kat's blouse was the first victim. He tore it open, baring her chest.

"You'll fucking pay for this stuff."

"With pleasure." Turning her over, he went to work.

The blouse shredded in his hands from behind, giving him access to her bra. He ripped the strap. Turning her face-up once more, he finished the job, exposing her torso completely.

With thorough satisfaction, he tore the waistband of her skirt and tore apart her panties.

"You will take your spanking bare-assed." Kat moaned. Grinning he rolled her to her side. "This is how it will be with us. The tension will mount and mount and I will take you—over my knee or whatever is convenient. You'll have no choice. You were born to be my sassy submissive."

Kat cried out, more in surprise than pain as he delivered the first blow. It was a well-placed smack to her left buttock.

"Nice and pink," he said, massaging the affected area. "You mark well."

"Screw you," she hissed, though her voice was husky, expectant.

"You would like that, wouldn't you?" His finger slid between her pussy lips, collecting a line of her musky sex juices.

"N-no."

He smacked her again, harder.

"Don't lie to me, angel."

"All right," she said squirming. "I want it, I want sex."

"You'll take punishment first." He delivered another spank, enjoying the sight of the jiggling, helpless flesh. Kat squirmed, a natural if ever he had seen one.

Chase administered ten spanks in all, a healthy rain that heated her up to a nice glowing red. By the time he was done her ass was twitching of its own accord.

He wanted to drive his cock into her but there was something else he would attend to first.

"Kat, has a man ever loved you with his tongue?"

She hesitated before answering in the negative.

Chase would take care of that oversight right now.

"On your back," he ordered, after first taking time to lay his shirt out to cushion her buttocks from the sand.

"Chase...wait."

He had no intention of waiting. Parting her legs, Chase moved between them, gently kissing his way up her thighs. She made soft mewling sounds, indicating her appreciation. Keeping her tied wrists overhead, she arched her back, inviting his progression.

Chase kissed her labia, feeling the gentle pulsing under his lips. He tasted her—sweet and musky.

Brushing her with his teasing tongue, he made a play for her clitoris.

"Oh, Chase."

Yes, this was what he wanted for her.

A chance to abandon herself fully to the receiving of pleasure. It would be a commanding of her body as surely as if he were inside her, fucking her.

“Your...tongue,” she cried softly. “It’s...amazing.”

Chase pressed his face against her sex, pushing his tongue deeper and using it like a small cock. Her body began to buck underneath him. She would not hold out long.

Good.

Moving his head back and forth and up and down, he focused on her pleasure center. She called out his name.

“Go on, Kat.” He paused to encourage her. “Let it happen.” His words were like a trigger. He felt the rumblings from within her, the pouring out of invisible lava. The orgasm was multiple—three, maybe four times. Chase stuck with her, continuing to pleasure her until the tremors receded and her body returned to a normal state.

She was breathing softly, though he sensed the deep need still within her.

She wanted to be taken.

Chase rose above her, rock-hard.

He buried his cock inside her, finding her opening as if for the millionth time and yet still feeling the thrill of something new.

She arched her neck for a kiss and he let her taste herself. He rocked her slowly, holding himself back long enough for her to learn and explore how his body worked, how he fucked, how he breathed.

He came gently but fiercely, the most intimate orgasm he had ever had in his life.

This one was for Kat. It would not do for anyone else. Indeed he could not imagine coming this way with another.

Afterward they drank from a bottle of rum he had stashed in the plane. They talked a long time and then they made love once more. After that came more sleep.

Kat was unbound this time, her limbs draped over his. Chase was the first to wake up—it seemed to be a pattern with them.

Taking it as further evidence of his need to lead them, he made the decision to take things to the next step.

Kat did not wake up as he took her back to the plane. This ride would be much shorter than the last. The destination was the neighboring island.

It was also owned by Chase, though it was entirely uninhabited. In fact it would be a bit busy when he got done making the phone calls he needed to.

Chapter Fourteen

Kat heard Chase whispering in her ear.

"We're at the airport, darling."

Airport? Hadn't they been on a beach, making love on some kind of deserted island a moment ago?

Kat blinked, looking outside the cockpit window.

It was certainly a small airport, just a couple of lights, a few planes and a pair of rusted hangers made of corrugated, patchwork metal.

"What kind of place is this?" she asked, groggy.

Better yet, what day was it? The sun was rising. How long had it been since he had spirited her from her office? One day or two?

"Welcome to Chase's Island International Airport," he said proudly. "Chase's Island Two, that is. We were on Island One before."

The man owned more than one island?

"I can walk," she said as he walked around to her side to lift her out of her seat.

"Not without clothes."

"If you hadn't ripped them off," she chided.

He wrapped her in a blanket.

Her weight was nothing in his strong arms. She felt a weakness all over her body, the small plane ride having jarred her muscles into submission.

"You smell good, baby," he rasped.

"Chase, no," she murmured as he cradled her against his chest. "No more sex."

"We're not going to have sex right now. Not until after."

"After what?" she asked.

"The marriage ceremony," he said as though he were talking about nothing more remarkable than a walk on the beach.

"Marriage ceremony?"

He clung tightly to her. "You don't think I'm going to let you get away from me again, do you?"

Kat tried to formulate a coherent objection. "But...but..."

"You are marrying me, woman," he said flatly. "And that's final. You can have the day to rest while I get things ready but it will happen tonight."

Kat did not know whether to be horrified or overjoyed.

In truth she felt a good measure of both.

One thing was for sure, she would find a way out of this by hook or crook.

* * * * *

Kat had tricked him. She had gone into the bathroom to take a shower and now she was refusing to come out.

He banged on the door. "It's no use. There is nowhere to run."

"Maybe not. But you will have to drag me out of here kicking and screaming."

Chase frowned. This seemed so cut and dried in his mind. The way she had responded to him, the way they had shared their dreams on the beach, it was as if they had known each other forever.

"I love you, Kat. I'm not afraid to say that now."

"Bully for you. I'm still not marrying you, especially not on some stupid island. It's like a weird reality TV show."

Chase seized on the remark. "We can have a bigger service later. You can invite as many people as you want. I got you a dress for now. It will only be a few people, anyway."

A chaplain friend of his from the nearby island of St. Bartholemew would perform the service. Chase owed him big time for agreeing to do this on such short notice.

"People you picked," she said through the keyhole.

Actually Chase was having Vicky flown in but Kat didn't know that. She would be here at his estate shortly, which was good, because he was going to need help dealing with Kat.

"Kat, be reasonable."

"Hah! What do you know about reasonable?"

"I don't want to have to knock this door down."

"Yes, you do. You're a maniacal bully and you would love to knock the door down."

He drew a deep breath. "Kat, I really do love you and I will take you tonight for my bride."

"You know nothing about marriage. And you don't know me."

"I will get to know you."

"You're supposed to do that first."

"I know what I want," he insisted. "And I will have it."

Kat was silent a moment. "What if it doesn't work out?"

"We'll get divorced like everyone else but that won't happen."

"Why not?"

"I won't let it."

"It would be up to both of us. You can't just force everything into your plans."

"I'll keep you in line. I'll spank you," he said, trying to appeal to her lighter side.

"You can't spank me into a happy marriage. Anyway, I don't even have a dress."

"I'm having clothes flown in for you. Would you stop worrying about every detail?"

"A bride's dress is not a little detail, Chase."

He had had enough.

"Kat, unlock the door. Now."

She went quiet again. The next sound he heard was the door unlocking. His cock went rock-hard at the sight of her towel-wrapped body, her hair dripping wet.

"You look incredible," he whispered.

"Chase, I am not even dressed."

"It doesn't matter what you wear, I would marry you naked."

"I'll bet you would."

He took her hand. "We need to get this service done with. I will die if I'm not inside you again and I want it legal."

"No, Chase."

He put her hand on his crotch. "Are you going to argue with that?"

"You don't get to put me in holy wedlock because I make you horny."

"What about you? Shall we check to see if you're aroused too?"

"I'm always aroused around you. You know that."

"All the more reason to marry me."

"You're impossible."

"Kat, look at me. And listen very closely. There are times for caution. I'm a businessman so I know. There are also times to pounce on a good thing and this is one of them."

"I'm not your mouse to pounce on."

"No, you're my Kat and I will have you for my own for all time."

"I'm a neat freak," she said exasperated. "I roll up my toothpaste tubes with a clothespin and I hog the sheets. Do you really want to live with that?"

"You'll learn to share," he teased. "Or you'll sleep on the floor."

"Like hell I will."

"Look, Kat, we can go 'round and 'round, take a year or two, live together and it will still come to a leap of faith. If I don't trust my instinct now with you then I will never be able to make another decision in my life."

"I don't want to disappoint you."

"You couldn't do that if you tried."

"You were this sure about Susan at one time," she reminded him.

"No. I was fooling myself. I was too scared to be alone. This is different."

She bit at her lower lip. "This is just so...spontaneous."

"That's the general idea, yes."

"I need to talk to Vicky."

"Vicky will be here any minute. You will talk to her and then you will marry me."

Her mouth dropped open. "Vicky's coming here?"

"Yep." Chase smelled victory.

"You're crazier than I thought."

"Or a whole lot more in love."

"You haven't even proposed."

"Fine. Will you marry me, Kat Wayans?"

"I'll think about it."

"You do that," he said, leaving her to her thoughts for a little bit. "I would make it quick, though—the wedding is in less than four hours."

"You're impossible," she called out after him.

"Would you have me any other way?" he called back.

She was silent.

He took that as a yes.

* * * * *

"Vicky, he wants me to marry him!" Kat said, dispensing with the hellos as her best friend walked into the master bedroom of Chase's island estate.

"So I gather." Vicky gave her a hug. She was carrying a garment bag. "I stopped by your apartment on the way. You didn't have a whole lot in the way of white dresses, so I found you something from my wardrobe. Chase said he would be getting you something but we can't trust men with these kinds of things, can we?"

Vicky opened the bag, revealing an off-the-shoulder white dress, cinched at the waist and with a scalloped hem.

"It's a little flirty, probably, but we are doing this on the beach so it should work."

Kat looked at her in disbelief. "You can't be on his side!"

"There aren't sides, sweetie. You both want the same thing. I am thinking we should have your hair up, maybe with some flowers."

"You're as delusional as he is," Kat declared.

"Come on, Kat, what do you have to lose?"

"Oh, I don't know, how about my sanity, for starters? Then there's my freedom, my happiness. Does that about cover it?"

"I think you should go barefoot. That would be so cute."

Kat continued to regard her. "You know that what he did is a crime, right? He grabbed me from my job and brought me here against my will. Oh, did I tell you we stopped off at another island first so he could tie me up and ravish me to his heart's content?"

"I know, isn't it romantic? Take off that towel, let's try the dress."

Kat just stared blankly. What was the use?

"I'll regret this," she said, unwrapping the terrycloth bath towel.

Then again, maybe she and Chase would be happy. Stranger things had happened in the course of history.

She stood before her friend naked.

"Hmm," said Vicky, regarding her. "You look really good that way. Maybe you two should do this in the buff."

"That's what he said."

"Great minds think alike."

"Deranged minds, more like."

"You just relax and leave everything to me. I will give everything that special Vick touch."

"That's what I'm afraid of," muttered Kat.

* * * * *

The Reverend Bennington Seabrook stood on the sand with his old friend. Chase's palms were sweating and he couldn't stop them.

"This is worse than before a mission," Chase complained to his one-time mercenary comrade.

"Are you sure you are ready for this?" Bennington asked.

Chase knew there was no lying to the demolitions expert turned minister and chaplain. "No," he said. "But I'm sure as hell not backing down now."

"Better a safe retreat than a rout," Bennington said, quoting one of their old commanders.

Chase shook his head. "I know. Don't worry, I'm committed."

Bennington pursed his lips. Commitment meant he had deployed fully, passing the point of no return. Either he fought his way forward to the objective from this point or he died on the way.

"She must be very special," said Bennington.

"Never met anyone like her. She drives me crazy. We fight like cats and dogs but the passion is unbelievable."

"If it were anyone else," said Bennington. "I'd have to ask difficult questions. In your case, I owe you my life three times over so I'm no position to question."

"You would question me, though," Chase made sure. "If you felt, you know, that God might have a problem with this, given my marriage track record?"

The dark-skinned, ruggedly handsome Bennington put his hand on Chase's shoulder. "I have prayed, my brother. There is a blessing in this. As for Susan, I never liked her."

Chase smiled thinly. "Now you tell me."

Hopefully Bennington would continue to feel this positive once it came time to drag Kat out here kicking and screaming.

He wouldn't let it come to that, of course.

If she really didn't want this then he would let her go.

Vicky would get her ready, though, mentally and otherwise. He had confidence. She had even brought some of her own clothes for Kat, which would surely make her feel more comfortable.

For his own wedding outfit, he had chosen white slacks and a white silk shirt. He kept his home here fully stocked and equipped, though he seldom visited. The last time had been with Susan. He had nearly sold it after the divorce—the house and the island both.

He was glad he had held on to it now.

"I appreciate you doing this more than you know," said Chase. "You're my closest friend. You would be best man if you didn't have to do the marrying part."

"One job is enough for me." He patted the pocket of his jacket. "The one you should really thank is the magistrate who signed this marriage license for me, at the drop of a hat."

"I'm sure a donation for a new government hall for the island will make it worth his while," said Chase.

Bennington laughed. "No doubt."

"Not that I'm trying to buy this marriage, Bennington, you understand." Chase was deadly serious.

"Relax," Bennington laughed. "I would give you hell, brother, if you were trying to put one over on me or anyone else."

"Of that I have no doubt," said Chase.

* * * * *

"Turn around," said Vicky. "Let me see the finished product."

Kat humored her, feeling well past overwhelmed.

Vicky was speechless, which was not a good sign. Vicky was never speechless.

"Vick, talk to me. Is it that bad?"

"Oh, no," said Vicky, her eyes watering up. "You look...incredible."

Kat clutched the spray of flowers one of Chase's servants had provided. The colors were vibrant red and yellow and orange. "Vicky, there is no way I can go through with this."

"And what if you don't? How will you feel then?"

Kat hadn't thought that far ahead. So far, she had been intent on escape. "I'm not saying I would never marry Chase...if things were to happen at a normal pace."

"You aren't normal people. He's not a normal guy. It's now or never."

"That isn't fair, Vick."

"Life isn't fair, Kat."

"What about my family?" Kat said, running out of excuses.

Vicky arched a brow. "You really want your mom running around? Now that would be crazy."

Kat took a deep breath. "I suppose we could get it annulled or something. Oh, Vick, I just realized, we haven't done a pre-nuptial."

"I already asked and he refused."

Kat shook her head in total disbelief. "This can't even be legal. We're not even in a real country, are we?"

Vicky kissed Kat's cheek. "Just do the service, sweetie. If it feels wrong by morning you will know how to get out of it. Shoot, it's not like you can't find a good lawyer."

Kat laughed. It felt good. "Thanks, I needed that."

"Any time. Not that I expect you to be getting married again any time soon."

"Don't worry. I'll be sure and return the favor one day."

It was Vicky's turn to laugh. "Now that would be something."

Chapter Fifteen

Chase felt as though he had just been sucker punched about a hundred times over.

Kat was walking toward them wearing a white dress, her hair arranged on her head in graceful tresses interlaced with flowers, her feet bare and delicate on the pure, white sand, her eyes lit by the moon, her skin glowing with a kind of lustful shyness.

She was coming toward him, Vicky beside her.

She was going to marry him.

It was actually going to happen.

“Not bad,” murmured Bennington approvingly. “Your tastes seem to be improving.”

“They won’t get any better than this,” said Chase.

Kat sucked in her lower lip as they made eye contact, a million words communicated.

There was no one else on the beach, no one else in the world now—just the two of them. Peace settled over him.

He was doing the right thing.

Kat walked up the invisible aisle of sand, between the swaying palm trees. The waves provided a lulling background melody—soothing, majestic.

Kat continued her graceful motions, the lovely Vicky smiling broadly, holding her arm. Vicky led her straight to him, right to his side.

“Dearly beloved,” said Bennington in his booming voice, once Kat was settled in beside Chase with Vicky on her left. “We are gathered to celebrate the bonds of matrimony and may I say, on a personal note, that while I have seen some dramatic unions in my day, this is one of the most dramatic.” He extended his hand to Kat. “I am Bennington, by the way.”

“I’m Kat and this is Victoria.”

“Pleased to meet you both,” he said.

“Likewise,” said Vicky.

“Kat,” said Bennington, trying on her name for size. “Is that short for Kathryn?”

She nodded. Chase felt her trembling.

“Kathryn, you are sure of what you are doing here?” Bennington asked.

Vicky prodded her.

“I’m here...to get married.”

“Why?” asked Bennington, flooring them all with that straightforward question.

Here goes, thought Chase.

Kat turned slowly and took Chase's hands in hers. "There are a couple of answers to that," she said, looking into his eyes. "Actually, there are probably a lot of answers. I will go with what Vicky, my best friend in the world, said to me earlier. Scary as it is to be doing this, I can't imagine going backward. It would hurt me in ways I can't describe. Chase, when you are with me, you make me so angry sometimes and there are like a billion things I don't know about you but something has changed in me big time because when I'm not with you, I feel really, really terrible. So either I am totally in love with you or seriously disturbed."

"Probably the latter," called a deep voice from the shadows. "So are we going to get to the objection part or what? Boy, have I got things to tell you about this son of a bitch!"

Chase's heart stopped cold.

Shane?

It couldn't be.

Shane was dead.

"You look like you've seen a ghost," said the big blond man, muscles pushing the limit of the sleeveless T-shirt. "Or are you getting cold feet up here?"

Shane pushed him hard on the shoulder, as if to prove he was real. Chase tried to react, tried to process how he could be seeing a man he had left for dead two years earlier on a top secret antiterrorist mission.

"Shane," he croaked. "But...how?"

"Can't keep a good man down or is that 'only the good die young'? Never could keep that straight. So who's the lucky lady?" He beamed at Kat. "Shane's the name, crashing weddings is the game."

Kat was quickly pulled in for a crushing bear hug.

"This is Kat," Chase said. "And her best friend Victoria."

Shane looked her up and down, the way men invariably did when meeting the curvaceous blonde. "*Hel-lo, Victoria.*"

Victoria stepped back deftly. "I think a handshake will do," she said a bit warily.

Shane arched a brow. "I don't bite, baby...unless you ask real nicely."

"And that might well happen," Vicky retorted. "Right after hell hosts the Winter Olympics."

Shane laughed. "This one's feisty, Chase. I like her."

"The feeling is totally not mutual," Vicky said curtly. "If it's not too much trouble, would you mind getting out of the way of the ceremony?"

"Over here," said Chase. "You might as well be best man."

Shane obliged. "I guess she told me off, huh?" he said to Chase.

"Yes, she did," said Chase. "And after this you are going to explain to me what the hell you are still doing alive, not to mention how you found out about this wedding."

"The last part is my fault," said Bennington. "Shane's been staying with me the last few weeks. He was there when you called. He made me promise not to tell you so he could keep it a surprise."

"Blast it," said Chase, suddenly remembering. "I left the rings back at the house. I should have my head examined."

"Got it covered," said Shane. He dug in his pocket and produced a handful of gold rings. "A couple of these ought to do."

"Where did you get them?" Vicky asked with ill-disguised contempt.

"I could lie and say the jewelers," he told her.

"Never mind, I don't want to know," she said.

"There are extra ones," Shane teased. "What do you say you and me tie the knot, give Bennington a two for one?"

Vicky glared. "I would cut you down to the size you deserve to be right now but I think we have already wasted enough of Chase and Kat's time, not to mention the good reverend's."

"Good reverend?" Shane chuckled. "I could tell you some stories from the old days."

"Shane, give it a rest," said Chase, good-naturedly enough. "Before I start wishing you were dead again."

Chase called to one of the servants standing nearby. "I need the rings from my dresser," he said.

The man nodded. He came back a few minutes later with two gold bands.

Shane gripped his shoulder. "Let's do it, old buddy."

"We are gathered here in the sight of God," said Bennington, beginning the service, "to unite these two people in wedded matrimony..."

Everything was a blur after that—until the kiss, that is.

From there it was as natural as breathing, two bodies and two souls connecting as one. The kiss felt so right, confirming his instincts that this was the woman to roll the dice with one last time.

Afterward, Kat and Vicky embraced, both women shedding tears. Chase grabbed hold of Shane, giving him another hug.

"You crazy son of a bitch," was all Chase could think of to say.

After that, holding his bride's hand, Chase invited them for champagne. His servants had already set up a table full of island delicacies, including colorful, succulent fruit, luscious crab and delicious cakes. It was a perfect celebration. Much as Chase wanted to celebrate and talk to his old friends, though, he wanted to be alone with his new wife a whole lot more.

Bennington laughed, slapping Chase on the shoulder. "Go," he said. "Don't waste your time with us."

Chase didn't need to be told twice. He scooped up Kat, dazed in his arms.

"You're getting good at that," she said.

"I have a lifetime to practice," he replied with a wink.

* * * * *

"Hey, wait up!"

Vicky cringed at the sound of Shane's voice behind her. Pretending not to hear him, she quickened her pace. The makeshift reception was over, Kat and Chase were safely tucked away in their honeymoon chamber and she was ready for a good night's sleep in the guestroom Chase was providing her in his island mansion.

She had more than earned her keep for the day and tomorrow she was going to have to head straight back to the mainland to do her real work and Kat's too.

"Vicky!" He was calling her again, his voice much closer. She could almost feel his presence—strong and potent, completely masculine and thoroughly untamable.

The man had curled her toes at first sight.

Talk about a train wreck waiting to happen.

With any luck she would make it back to her room before he caught up.

Vicky knew his type from hard experience—handsome and sexy as hell and wild as a demon. In short, he was the last thing she needed in her life right now.

"You deaf or what, girl?" He had caught up to her, his hand on her arm.

"No, I'm not deaf." She whirled on him. "But you're about to sing like a soprano if you don't take you're frigging hands off me."

"Whoa, there," Shane said, chuckling and backing off. "Didn't mean to start World War III, sugar."

Vicky did her best to resist the slow drawl, the rippling muscles, the easy way he carried his body—confident like a jungle cat. He was the sort who could have any woman he wanted and tonight he had set his sights on her.

She would be flattered but then again she was pretty much the only available female on the island right now.

"I'm not your sugar, *Ace*, so stop sweet-talking me. It's late and I'm going to bed."

He licked his lips, blue eyes flashing. "Is that an invitation, Miss Victoria?"

She felt a hot chill down her spine thinking of Shane in her bed, naked, their hands exploring, bodies sweating, intertwined.

"It most certainly is not. I am going to bed to sleep," she informed him.

"That's a real shame. A body like that shouldn't be wasted on sleep."

"You must get slapped a lot."

"I've had my share of war wounds."

She shook her head. "You're actually proud of yourself, aren't you?"

"Better to have loved and lost," he waxed philosophical.

Vicky rolled her eyes. She really ought to give him the brush-off. Then again, something about him bugged her. He was Chase's good friend. He had been through some incredible war trauma, spared from certain death.

Surely there was something more to him than the superficial, sexual opportunist he appeared to be.

To sum it up, she was curious.

For Kat's sake, if nothing else, she ought to get to know this man who meant so much to Chase.

"I'll talk with you but nothing physical is going to happen. Is that clear?"

"Scout's honor," he assured her, holding up his hand, palm facing out.

She arched a brow. "That is not a Scout salute."

"It's not?" He feigned shock. "I might have to go back to school on that one."

"While you're at it, I would advise you to brush up on your karate. I'm a black belt and if you make one false move on me I will unleash a firestorm on your ass."

He whistled. "Victoria, you might be the woman of my dreams."

"How fitting, because you are the man of my nightmares."

* * * * *

Chase had the ropes fixed to his bed. They were made of fine red velvet, designed to fit over each of Kat's lovely wrists with the other ends attached to the brass headboard.

Kat was on her back at the moment with her arms overhead. He could not see her eyes because of the blindfold, though there was no mistaking the smile on her face, the serene anticipation of his mastery over her body.

"You are the answer to all my prayers," he told her as he sat beside her on the bed.

"And you are the Master of my heart," she said, her nude body trembling ever-so slightly.

"No regrets?"

"You'll be the first to know," she teased. "After my lawyer, of course."

He trailed his fingers down her side. "If you mean Vicky, I think she might have her hands full with Shane."

Kat arched her back reflexively, seductively. "Yes, he seems to have gone to the Chase Neill School of Subtlety."

"He goes for what he wants," said Chase, resting his hand on Kat's belly.

Her breath was quick, hot, needy. "So do you."

"I have been accused of that. You think Vicky might go for Shane?"

"Vicky has never been one to get serious with men, though I have never seen her get so hot under the collar about one the way she has with Shane. There is definite passion there."

"Here too." He moved his hand between her legs. "Open," he told her softly.

She parted her thighs. "Yes, Master."

His cock throbbed. "I love when you call me that, my wicked little slave."

"I will always be your slave in bed."

"You won't regret it," he promised.

She moaned as he grazed her sex lips with his fingertip. Her clitoris was already swollen at the first touch. He had her at the brink of orgasm after just a few strokes.

"You may not come without permission," he told her.

She clenched her fists. "Please," she whimpered. "I'll do anything."

"Of course you will," he rasped, caressing her left breast. "And then some." He pushed his fingers deep inside her. "Move," he ordered. "Move against my hand."

Kat complied—his sweet K—writhing against his fingers, pressing her body upward as though it were his cock inside her. She looked incredible, her wrists tied, her body so vulnerable and yet so charged with heat and passion.

He let the teasing go on as long as he dared, until he was at the bursting point himself and then he mounted her, swiftly pressing his body down to claim her, consummating their whirlwind courtship, his cock sank to the hilt.

"K," he groaned. "My wild little Kat."

"My Master J," she said, her pussy muscles clenching his fully immersed shaft. "Oh, what you do to me."

"It's only the beginning," he said, starting to move within her, up and down, decisive, toward a quick explosion. "There is so much more to come."

"To come...yes," she picked up on the word. "I need to come, please, don't deny me."

"Yes. Now, do it now."

They reached their orgasm together, like age-old lovers, the rhythm and tension of their union melted together in a single volcanic rush, dissolving everything in its wake.

Their bodies bucking—his hands holding her flesh, pushing himself deep as he could get, his semen filling her to overflowing, the waves of her own release urging him on to empty himself fully into her.

"Yes, yes, yes," she cried, trusting him in the blind darkness, his being over her and through her and with her.

He swelled with joy and the absolute thrill of sweet domination, control and adoration of her beauty. He was the luckiest man alive and to think this was only their first night together as man and wife.

Only the beginning.

About the Author

Reese Gabriel is a born romantic with a taste for the edgier side of love. Having traveled the world and sampled many of the finer things, Reese now enjoys the greater simplicities; barefoot walks by the ocean, kisses under moonlight and whispers of passion in the darkness with that one special person.

Preferring to remain behind the scenes, cherished by a precious few, Reese hopes to awaken in the lives of many the possibilities of true love through stories of far off places and enchanted lives.

For the sake of love and hope and imagination, these stories are told. May they be enjoyed as much in the reading of them as in the writing.

Reese welcomes comments from readers. You can find Reese's website and email address on the author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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