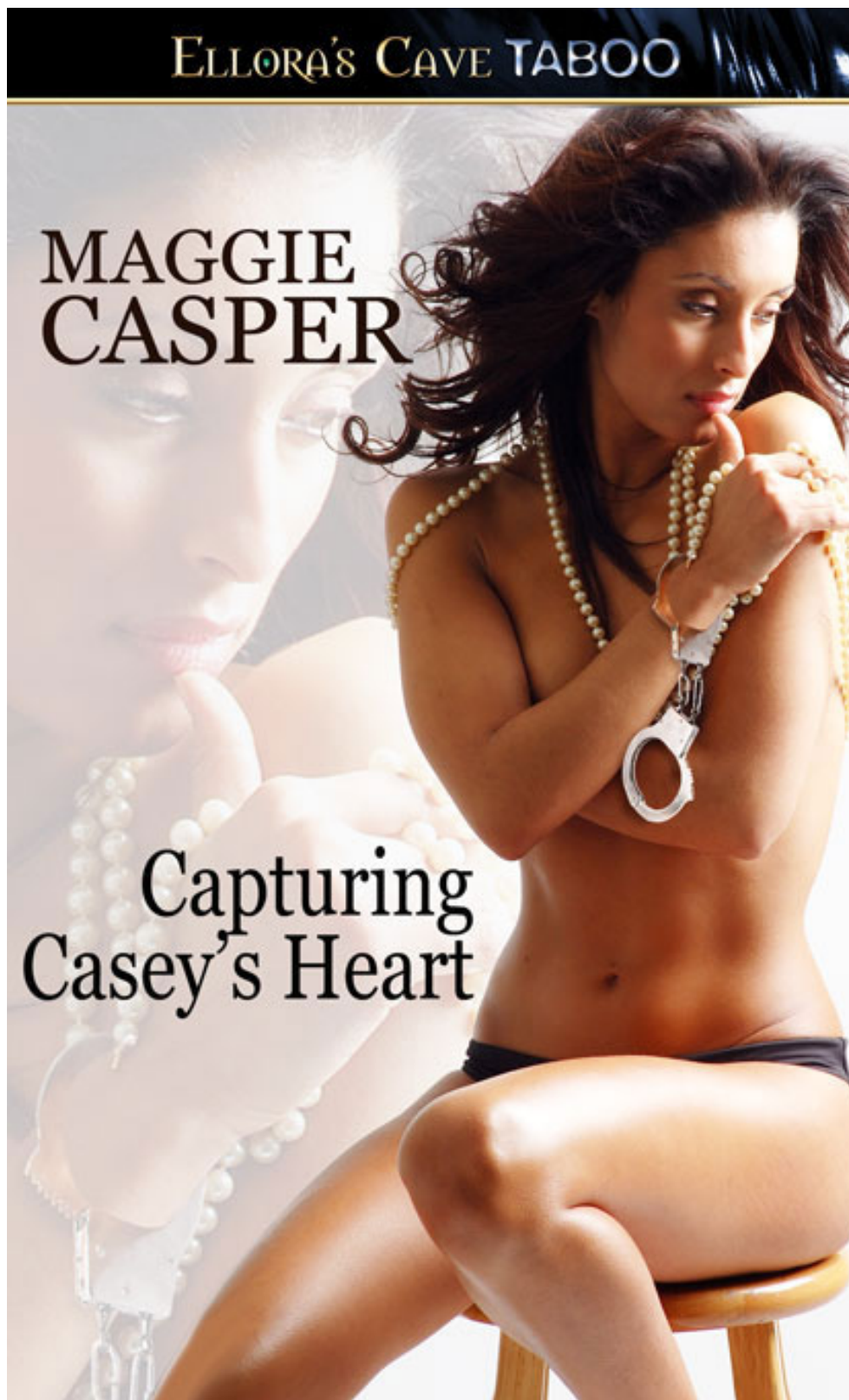


ELLORA'S CAVE TABOO

MAGGIE
CASPER

Capturing
Casey's Heart



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Capturing Casey's Heart

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CAPTURING CASEY'S HEART

Maggie Casper

Dedication

To Kellie, my partner in crime. Thank you for being your nonjudgmental, pervy self.

Chapter One

She was the biggest idiot on earth. Casey McCain thought the words for the umpteenth time as she moped around her house. It had been three weeks, three atrociously long weeks since she had run from Jared Calabrese with her tail between her legs like the coward she was.

Her house no longer felt like a home. It was cold and empty and absolutely spotless. Her daughter Autumn was gone for the summer, off visiting the grandparents with her father Mike.

For a moment Casey thought about her ex-husband Mike. He was a good man and a great father, but he made a better friend than he did a husband, at least for her. They'd really had no business marrying, but it was what young, stupid people did so there was no sense in rehashing the what-ifs. At least they had managed to stay friends. It was something most didn't understand, but Casey had long ago given up caring what others, with the exception of her family, thought.

Of course she cared what Jared thought as well, and from the fact he hadn't called or come over and tried to talk her into her senses must mean he didn't think much. It hurt.

"It's your own damn fault." Casey grumbled the words as she stalked through the living room and into the kitchen hell-bent on baking herself into oblivion.

Not that a person would know it since her brothers very seldom ever let her work a shift, but she was part-owner of the family's pub Raising Cain. However, that wasn't what she liked to do. Casey's true love was baking. Owning a bakery and catering business had been a lifelong dream. Being the impatient woman she was, Casey decided instead of waiting for Autumn to grow up before going out in search of her

dream, she would bring her dream home. It was the reason she'd had her kitchen rebuilt and now ran a small but booming business out of her house.

She uncovered the commercial-sized mixer sitting on the floor and began adding the ingredients needed into its large stainless steel bowl. Once finished, she moved on to another task, but not even the whirling of the machine could drown out her thoughts.

Casey couldn't help but wonder when she'd turned into a commitment phobe? Normally she went into things with her eyes wide open and for the long haul. So why had Jared's desire to place simple silver anklets around her ankles scared her like a child afraid of the dark?

We've already been through this, because you're an idiot.

Kicking the leg of the table as she walked by wasn't such a good idea, she thought, wincing at the pain. Too bad she couldn't kick herself instead. With the way Jared had tied her up like a pretzel on occasion, she should be limber enough to do just that.

The thought stopped Casey dead in her tracks. It didn't seem to matter what she did or where she went, she just couldn't get him out of her head. It should be easy. They had only been dating a few months. Of course, even in that small amount of time she had managed to fall madly and deeply head over heels in love with the big oaf. Hell, she had even stood up to her brothers about him. He was in her blood as surely as he had been buried to the hilt in the depths of her pussy too many times to count over the last several weeks.

She'd accepted his first date invitation on a whim. After all, he was a handsome man. Casey still couldn't explain the instant pull she'd felt from Jared or the surprise when she'd first learned he thought completely out of her box when it came to relationships and sex.

Seeing him again after their first date wasn't a whim. Liking the sadistic things he did to her body wasn't either, as she'd first thought. Loving the way they connected and interacted definitely was in no way, shape or form a whim.

So why then did you tell him you couldn't be his?

The voice in her head asked the same question it had at least a hundred times over the last three weeks and Casey, being the dumbass she was, still didn't have the answer. Or did she? Something deep inside warned she already knew the answer, had merely not wanted to see what it was.

She had a lot to learn, but if there was one thing she knew about Jared it was that he would not come running or begging, thank god. The idea of him doing so made her shudder. He would suffer whatever emotions he felt in silence. She'd been the one to leave even knowing he loved her, so she would need to be the one to go back, and in doing so she would surely pay with her ass to make up for the mistake.

For some odd reason the thought did not turn her on one bit. How she could love an erotic spanking and completely dread even the thought of one used as a corrective measure she would never know. They were both a spanking, right? Casey shook her head in the negative. The two were not even close.

He was a big man, bigger than her brothers even. Casey had never realized that was possible. They had always seemed larger-than-life to her. The first time she had danced with Jared, the top of her head barely reaching his shoulder, she'd asked him then how tall he was.

"Six six." He'd rumbled the two words and, saying no more, pulled her closer into the curve of his body.

His voice was as deep as he was tall and had the ability to melt her insides until she was a molting puddle of goo, or to make her jump and wonder what the hell she'd done wrong. Being a troublemaker or, in her case, a troublemaker as well as a relentless talker and impatient to boot, didn't seem to sit too well. During their time together, it had been as if he were on a mission. Not to change her but to help her be better. In some ways it was a very nice thing. In others it tried her patience and made her spitting mad.

The problem was, Jared saw things in black and white, right or wrong, not very often was there an in-between. It was something Casey should be used to, growing up with four brothers, all overprotective and dominant in their own ways, but she wasn't.

With them she could bat her eyelashes or ask nice and often they would relent. That wasn't the case with Jared. What he said went and if it didn't, shit hit the fan. Not necessarily in a bad way, but when it involved Casey and her stubbornness, there tended to often be what she referred to as "the look" and "the voice". The man had a knack about him. He could use both to titillate her senses or have them on high alert for displeasure that no doubt would arrow straight to her core and make her feel like a little girl caught with her hand in the cookie jar.

He was imbedded deep inside her, part of her very being, and yet she had decided there was no future with him. It was a preposterous thought really. Her every need, and then some, was being met. She was well loved and knew it. It wasn't as if he were out playing the field while she sat home waiting. No, he doted on her. Sure it might be in a way completely different than what she had always considered normal, but dote he did.

Casey could clearly remember their first date. He not only expected to take care of her, he insisted. Small things such as opening doors were no longer for her to do. The first time he'd given her the evil eye for opening her own car door and climbing out she'd dismissed it. The next time they'd stopped Jared had reached a hand across the center console to grasp her arm. "Don't touch the door." He'd smiled, his tone light, but Casey knew an order when she heard one.

If she'd had any doubts about his dominant personality in that moment, it hadn't lasted long. Before the night was over he'd taken to calling her "girl" and she'd not only grown accustomed to it, she'd begun to really enjoy the term. For some reason it felt like a caress.

His parting kiss had been a completely new experience. Used to men who kissed tentatively, as if waiting for her cue, Casey found herself unable to do anything but experience the sensations when Jared pulled her into his arms and made love to her mouth, his way, and with a fervor completely new to her.

In the last few months since they had been dating, Casey felt more alive than ever before and far more secure. She had gotten to a point where she no longer wondered

what the day would bring. The guessing games had been taken out of life and it felt absolutely marvelous. It was nice to always know right where she stood, to know what was expected and what the repercussions were if those expectations were not met. It continued to amaze her how having that security had removed so much stress from her life, leaving time for the important stuff like her family and business.

"And yet you slept alone last night. Dumbshit."

"All grown up and still talking to yourself."

Casey whirled toward the unexpected voice of Cooper, the baby of the family. "You scared the crap out of me! What are you doing here?"

Cooper smiled as he made his way to refrigerator. "I came for a visit."

She arched a brow and tried hard to give him a scathing look. "You know what I mean, Coop. What are you doing here in my kitchen?"

He held up one hand, the other held a glass of iced tea. "I knocked but no one answered so I came in. I can see you were busy." He looked off into the distance before once again settling his gaze on her. "I didn't mean to scare you."

Casey hated the change in her brother. Since coming back from business school, he had been not only distant and quiet but angry as well. With the exception of Casey he acted as if he wouldn't give the time of day to anything in a skirt. It hurt to see him so different than the way he had been before. Not to mention the fact Casey would love nothing more than to get her hands on whoever had hurt him.

"Sit down." She motioned to the table. After taking a seat of her own, she asked, "Everything okay?"

Cooper stared at her for a minute. His mouth opened then closed. It was the same as it had been for the last few years. Casey was sure he wanted to say something, possibly confide in her, but he never did. And she never pushed.

"I came to ask you the same thing."

Casey knew then it was going to be a long day. If Cooper thought it important enough to drop by and check on things the rest of the family wouldn't be far behind.

* * * * *

Jared stripped the filthy clothes from his body and dropped them on the worn kitchen floor of his shoebox-sized apartment. It had been a hard day at work and he was exhausted. Or at least his body was. His mind, on the other hand, didn't want to quit. For the last few weeks he'd been going over and over in his head how to get Casey back.

Leaving the pile of dirty clothes on the floor, he headed toward the bathroom. He pulled the elastic band from his hair, allowing it to feather across his shoulders. It felt heavy with gunk and mud just the same as the rest of him did. It was a good thing he'd never been afraid of hard work because if there was any one constant in his life, that was it. Growing up oil field trash had been good. Back then there was big money in the industry but not so much anymore. Now most of it was bought from somewhere far away, but he'd still managed to work his way up the ladder and now as a tool pusher, he made a nice living. One he wanted to share with another.

As Jared climbed into the shower, his thoughts once again settled on Casey. He missed her and wanted nothing more than to love every inch of her body. He had to shake his head at that one. Okay, so maybe there was something he wanted more. He wanted to grab her and shake her until she returned to her senses, until she accepted him, all of him, and until she accepted who and what she was.

Jared knew it wasn't going to be easy but it didn't matter. Casey belonged to him and she knew it just as well as he did. The sooner she stopped running and admitted the truth to herself the easier things would be because Jared had finally made up his mind. He was not going to sit back and wait anymore, he was going to fight for what he wanted and if that fight needed to be a bit dirty, then so be it.

Knowing she was in just as much pain as he was only made it worse. She wasn't just being stubborn—she was making herself miserable and all because she was too scared to talk things through. To Jared that was inexcusable. As his property, she didn't only have a duty to him but also to take care of herself, which she clearly wasn't. Casey had asked for it the minute she'd run and he aimed to see she got exactly what it was she deserved.

A feral smile curved his lips. Things were about to get interesting, Jared thought as he fisted the length of his cock, visions of Casey spread and tied flashing through his mind. Closing his eyes, he could picture her bent at the waist in front of him, his cock buried deep in her mouth, her ass pushed out, waiting for whatever it was he wanted to do. The swish of his wide leather belt as it arced through the air would cause her to tense, its stinging impact on her ass making her surge forward into him. The way his cock butted at the back of her throat would make her gag and her eyes water. Those luminescent tears only brought out the depth of her green eyes even more. It was a look Jared loved dearly. One he wasn't willing to wait much longer to see again.

After finishing himself off in the shower, which was not nearly as fun as the images of Casey he'd had in his mind, Jared dressed and headed out the front door to where his truck sat parked. He was a man on a mission, one he was damn sure going to see through.

Jared walked to the front door of Raising Cain, reminding himself all the way to remain patient no matter what the McCain brothers said or did. He knew better than anyone how protective they were of Casey, but he also knew they wanted her happy. He just had to convince them her happiness was in direct correlation to their relationship. If they didn't agree or at least understand, there was a good possibility things were going to get much worse before they got better.

It took a minute for his eyes to adjust to the pub's dark interior. It was a comfortable place, one patrons tended to return to time and time again. Every time Jared walked

through the front door he understood why. Too bad the four strikingly similar sets of green eyes watching him didn't seem nearly as inviting.

"What is this all about?" Connor was the first to speak. He was the hotheaded twin, and yet from what Jared knew of the man, fair.

Carson spoke next, but not to Jared, his words were directed to Connor. "Don't go hurting his feelings. Tara will have our hides the minute Casey tells her about it."

Jared had trouble smothering a chuckle. How Tara took on the wild McCain twins and kept them on their toes, he would never know.

"I haven't seen Casey in three weeks so there are no worries about her ratting you two out to Tara. Consider yourself safe."

Silence stretched across the room. The only sound to break it was that of a barstool being pulled out and then creaking as Jared settled his substantial weight on it.

"So that's what has her so down." There was no accusation in the words Cooper spoke but his look was speculative.

Jared nodded. He hated knowing she was feeling down but the stubborn-ass woman had not only sentenced herself to the emotional prison but him as well. He planned on having a bit of retribution for the misdeed.

"That's why I'm here."

This time it was Cash who spoke. As the oldest of the McCain siblings, his word always held a lot of weight. "Then explain it to us."

The next several minutes were spent with Jared filling the brothers in on what he thought went wrong. The truth was glossed over just a bit to keep their personal lives private, but that was all he held back. He needed for them to know he was serious in his intent toward Casey. It was the only way they might agree to help him.

"So let me get this straight," Cash said after a minute of dead silence. "You want to work nights for the next week and you want us to figure out a way to get Casey to help you?"

"That about sums it up."

Connor was all but bristling, although Jared wasn't exactly sure why. Carson and Cooper on the other hand seemed to be mulling the idea over. Cash was the only one he couldn't gage to any extent. The man was like granite, he never let a person see what he was thinking. A smart man, Jared thought.

"I think we should let him try it."

Connor looked over at Cooper as if he'd spouted wings and had taken to wearing a tutu. "And why the hell would you think that!"

"Because she loves him and its tearing her up that they aren't together."

Jared's gaze locked on his. "Did she say so?"

Cooper shook his head. "She didn't have to. She's running scared and miserable because of it." He then looked at his siblings as if waiting, for what Jared had no idea.

As the silence ensued, he felt a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. They weren't going to help him. Not that it really mattered. He was used to doing for himself. Had been doing so his whole life. No reason why getting Casey back had to be any different.

Jared had just pivoted on his stool when Cash's voice broke the silence. "I agree with Cooper. Case is a stubborn one. If given half the chance she'll bury her hands in cookie dough and hide in that damn kitchen of hers. I say it is at least worth a try." Cash then looked toward Jared, his gaze intent. "Harm her though and you'll deal with us."

"No worries there. No harm will ever come to your sister as long as she belongs to me." A little hurt maybe, but no harm, Jared thought silently.

"One more question," Cash added almost as an afterthought.

"Shoot."

"What about your regular job?"

A feeling of relief washed over him. This was an easy question, one that wouldn't invade his personal life in the least. "I work seven on, seven off. Today is the start of my off days."

Cash stood and headed around the bar. "All set then. You've got the next week to try to win our sister back. We'll come up with something to get her here tomorrow night. After that it's up to you to keep her here. Either way, you're on your own. It's going to be nice spending my evenings at home for a change."

Connor, still not looking too pleased, nudged Carson. "I think we'll take care of a few things out at the ranch since we won't be needed here."

Jared did chuckle then. He could just imagine what some of those things were. He turned his head to eye Cooper, who actually had a smile on his face. "I might stick around to watch the fireworks."

That declaration gave Jared pause. "My way, Cooper. No interference no matter what. Does that work for you?" The two men studied each other briefly before Cooper nodded.

"Then it's settled. I'll be here tomorrow evening." Jared shook their hands before leaving. He had a sneaking suspicion it was going to be a hellaciously long week.

Chapter Two

Casey hastily wiped her hands on a towel before reaching for the phone. "Hello?"

"How's it going, sis?"

She smiled at the sound of her brother's voice. "Oh hi, Cash. It's going good. I was just putting up a batch of cookies to cool."

"Are you going to be busy in the evenings this week?"

Casey wasn't at all sure she wanted to know why Cash would ask such a question. There was something different, something just a bit off about his tone that made her nervous for reasons unknown. "No. I don't have any plans."

"Good. We need your help at Raising Cain. Connor and Carson have some things to do out at the ranch and I would like to spend some extra time at home, so we were wondering if you would cover the night shift for the next few days?"

Casey stared at the phone she still held in her hand. Cash had long since ended the conversation so now only the light lull of the dial tone sounded. Had he really told her she was required to work a few shifts at Raising Cain? Casey couldn't remember the last time that happened. What was even more strange was that her oldest brother hadn't gone over a long list of dos and don'ts. Hell, he hadn't cautioned her in any way, which only proved something was going on, but for the life of her, Casey couldn't think what it could be.

Cash had mentioned Cooper being there, even if only holding down the small desk in the office where he kept up with the bar's books as well as other personal side business he attended to. What that was she had no idea. She'd never thought to ask and didn't plan on doing so now, not when thinking about it would only sidetrack her.

Excitement coursed through her veins. Maybe a few nights out at a bar, even if it was to work, was just the thing she needed to get Jared off her mind. Surely there

would be some good-looking men there she could flirt with, ones who weren't so intense in their expectations.

You need a boring vanilla metrosexual man like you need a hole in your head!

The small voice of her conscience taunted once again. She'd spent the last few weeks telling herself that was exactly what she desired, a boring, steady, laid-back man who liked doing it beneath the covers in the missionary position with the lights out. Maybe one who would consider doggie style and anything more than a well-placed pat here or there as going to extremes. The thought made her giggle.

While she might very well have been trying to talk herself into such idiotic thoughts, Casey knew better than anyone she would not be happy in that type of relationship. She knew first-hand since she had already been in one with her ex.

Deciding enough was enough, she finished cleaning the kitchen. With a spring to her step she then went to her bedroom so she could start rummaging through the closet in order to find something cute and a bit sexy to wear. She hardly ever got the chance to work at the bar so she was going to take full advantage of the opportunity by showing her brothers exactly how valuable she could be.

After showering and donning clothes, Casey viewed herself in the full-length mirror hanging on the back of the bathroom door. The snug jeans she'd picked cupped her hips and ass perfectly. She might be going a little over the top with her blouse, or lack thereof, but that was just too bad. Cooper might shake his head disapprovingly but he wouldn't send her back home to change the way Cash might if he were there.

Casey figured it was a good thing he wasn't going to be as she viewed the plunging neckline of the sexy black halter-style blouse she'd chosen. The only thing saving her modesty was the matching barely there bikini top she wore beneath it. The view from behind was only marginally more modest. It bared her all the way to the middle of her back.

Just wearing the blouse had the ability to make her feel sexy. She'd spent the last few weeks working herself to death and in the process being covered in flour and icing and looking frumpy as hell.

Tonight she was in the mood to flirt and tease and smile. She was going to have a good time without Jared even if it killed her. Ruthlessly she pushed her idiotic behavior and the fact she missed him with a passion to the back of her mind.

"I'm going to have a good time tonight and that's that!" Casey grumbled.

All that was left to do was put on her makeup, which didn't take long, considering she didn't wear much. Of course a night like this called for a bit more. It wasn't every day she was asked to work the bar. With that thought firmly in mind, she added a bit of eye shadow where she normally wore none and traded her almost-bare lip-gloss for a burnished orange lipstick that made her full mouth look very sultry and kissable. She looked good and she knew it. That knowledge alone had her smiling all the way to Raising Cain.

Her smile however didn't last long once she entered the bar. Before her eyes even had time to adjust to the dimly lit interior she recognized Jared. There was no way to miss him. He was larger-than-life, both in his actual size and the way he carried himself. Just seeing him made her want to cry. His ability to bring out such emotion in her without even trying made her tense with anger.

Jared openly studied her as she approached. For a second, Casey wondered if he could tell how mad she was, how every nerve ending throbbed to life with his nearness, how scared all those feelings made her? Then she laughed to herself. Of course he could. He had the uncanny ability to know more about her than she did. In the past he had seemed to know how far to push and when to leave well enough alone. She couldn't help but wonder what had happened and why he was here, and in order to find out the answers to her questions she was going to have to ask.

Once again she took the cowardly way out, which pissed her off even more since before Jared she'd never considered herself a coward. Bypassing him and the bar

completely, she headed for the small office Cooper usually occupied only to find it empty. Her stomach fluttered. Whether it was nerves, anticipation or a combination of both, Casey had no idea. All she knew for sure was she was not going to allow the men in her life, including her damn brothers, to run the show by playing matchmaker. If they thought they could still treat her like a child, they had another think coming.

"He decided to leave early."

Jared's deep voice rumbled from behind her. She felt it reverberate through her very core. His voice, no matter the tone, made her breath catch. It attracted her in an elemental way there would never be a cure or escape for.

His voice had affected her that way since the very beginning. She could still clearly hear it, deep and rough in her ear the first time they'd made love.

"If we do this, you're mine."

His words had made her shiver in anticipation. She'd been surprised they had been able to hold out as long as they had before jumping into bed.

"I know."

"And you know our relationship won't be like everyone else's?"

"Yes, sir." It had been the first time she'd used an honorific in reference to him. It had come naturally and felt right.

"Good girl." Two other words she'd come to love.

He'd removed her clothes slowly then, not allowing her to help in the least, commanding her to keep her hands at her sides unless told otherwise. It had been one of the hardest things Casey had ever done. After he'd finished undressing her, he had given her orders on how to undress him, revealing his entire body to her for the first time. He'd been as magnificent then as he was now.

Casey sucked in a deep breath, held it in for a second to try to clear her mind then exhaled before turning around. "Somehow I'm not surprised." She hoped like hell the statement came out as snarly as she'd meant it.

"Hey, Jared! Bring another round," a patron called from the bar.

With her purse still over her shoulder and her coat still on, Casey walked past him. "You're being paged, better get to work."

"And where might you be going?"

Casey gave him a scathing look. She felt cornered and afraid of everything he made her feel, not only about him but the things she had learned about herself. "Any place but here works for me."

She worked hard not to look back when what she really wanted to do was throw herself in his arms and tell him every fear she had. Explain why she couldn't be with him the way he expected, to be owned fully in a way that was deeper than the physical relationship they had first shared. She wanted so badly to ask him for his help in understanding every emotion rushing through her but she couldn't quite bring herself to do so. It would make her even more vulnerable than she already was. Just the thought of it made her feel raw.

"I don't think so." His grip on her arm, although not painful, was definitely nonsense. He meant business.

She turned on him then. It was just too much. He was just too much—too large, too manly and too damn dominant for her peace of mind. He had the ability to swallow her whole and leave nothing behind. To a woman who had just found herself, started a business and was finally pulling her own weight, even if only for herself and her child, that was not something she could allow.

Casey was going to blast him with enough attitude to set him back a few steps but never got the chance. He grasped her chin like that of a child about to be scolded. "You told your brothers you would cover for them and so you will whether you like it or not."

It took everything in her not to react instinctively to his tone and disapproving words. She wanted to apologize and do whatever necessary to see his eyes light up and hear the smile in his voice when he said *good girl*.

Something was wrong with her, she was sure of it. No one in their right mind would wish for such a thing under the same circumstances. No, they would do exactly what she was going to do, argue.

“You know goddamn well I was asked to come here under false pretense so don’t even give me that shit!” She was on a roll. Jared was sure most men would retreat in the face of her fury but he wasn’t most men and he wasn’t going to budge, not even an inch. “I don’t know how you got my brothers to agree to whatever scheme you’ve cooked up but it isn’t going to work, you know.”

Her hair was a wild array of corkscrew curls framing her face. He missed twining them around his fingers as they lay spooning in bed, her ass cuddled close to his cock, exactly where she belonged. Her lips were drawn in a tight line, showing her displeasure completely, but it was her eyes that caught his attention and held it.

Their green depths had the ability to hold him transfixed with the stories they told. They gave an uncompromised view into her soul for anyone who cared to look deep enough. And right now they warned him that she was scared as well as angry.

Jared didn’t enjoy seeing fear there. He much preferred seeing her happy and content, but sometimes the fear and anxiety had to be worked through in order to get to the other good stuff. That was why he wasn’t going to back down. Casey would bury her cravings as unusual and never again test the waters of her true self if he didn’t push, so push he would. Besides, she belonged to him and he wasn’t one to let go of what was his. It was that simple.

“I don’t care under what pretense you’re here. All that matters is you agreed to work.” He released her chin reluctantly. It had been far too long since he’d touched her in any manner. He missed the feel of her warm and soft flesh against his.

“And if I don’t?” The way her chin came up a notch made her words more challenging.

“Do you really want to go there, girl?” Jared almost hoped she did.

She stared at him for a long while before evidently coming to some sort of decision. He wasn't exactly sure what that decision was but it evidently had nothing to do with her submissiveness or their relationship. She continued on with her belligerent stance, attitude oozing out every pore.

"Fine then. Let's get this over with."

Jared watched as she put her purse on Cooper's desk then proceeded to stalk her way past him and into the main bar area. It wasn't until she reached the bar that she removed her coat and flung it with a bit too much force beneath the bar, irritation evident in every move she made.

Although he noticed her stiff movements, it was her clothing that damn near had him swallowing his tongue. She looked sexy as fuck, and from the looks of it, every other man in the place as well as a few of the women agreed. He'd never seen her wear that particular blouse before, but he sure planned on seeing her wear it again at some point in time. It appeared to be made just for the luscious curves of her breasts. She'd not been shortchanged in the ass department either. The way her jeans rode the crease of her cheeks made sweat pop out on his upper lip. She was a gorgeous package, that was for sure.

He was sure she'd gone out of her way to dress sexy on purpose and that was completely fine with him. He liked his women to show off what he considered his. As long as she didn't offer herself up to someone else and no one decided to touch her without his permission, everything would be just fine. If either of those happened there would be hell to pay.

The next two hours were a lesson in patience for Jared. Well beyond what he would ever consider putting up with from a complete stranger much less a woman half his size, a submissive woman who, for all intents and purposes, was his whether she liked it or not.

Casey glared at him from behind the bar before plastering a smile on her face for the patron she was serving. Jared waited until the man left with his drinks before placing his order.

“Get your own damn drinks. I’m taking a break.”

That was it! He’d had all he could take and then some. Uncaring of who saw, he leaned over the bar until they were nearly nose to nose. “If you need a break that’s fine, go to the office and take it. I suggest you use the time to think because if you sass me one more time there’s a very good chance things are going to get embarrassing.”

The narrowing of her eyes, combined with the mutinous expression to cross her lovely features, were nearly enough for him to warm her ass right there in front of everyone.

She came around the end of the bar at a fast clip. She was so angry the air all but sizzled around her. “I don’t want time to think,” she said in a hushed voice from between pursed lips when she reached him. “I’ve done nothing but think since walking into this place, and the only constant thought I’ve had is that I want to go home. Call Cash if you want. Hell, call the whole damn family, I don’t really care but I’m leaving.” Without a backward glance, she strode toward the office.

Jared wanted to laugh but knew it would only make matters worse, and since they were already going to be about as bad as they could get, he didn’t relish the thought. He moved behind the bar and, without hesitation, unzipped the small duffle he’d brought along with him. He removed a set of handcuffs and pocketed the key. He was sure the McCain brothers weren’t going to like it when they heard he’d cuffed their sister in order to keep her put, but there wasn’t much they could do about it after the fact.

Casey still hadn’t reappeared by the time he’d finished and for a brief moment Jared worried she might have snuck out the back door. If that was the case he was going to have to close the bar early and go after her. He had an overwhelming sense that she wanted him and cared for him as much as he did her. She had actually said as much on several occasions, so why she changed her mind when he’d presented her with the

anklets, a symbol of their power dynamic relationship, he couldn't understand. He did plan to get to the bottom of things though, and the only way to accomplish the task was to keep her close and get her to talk.

She came out of the office and his heart sped up. Things were about to get very interesting. He knew well how this could be one of those make-it-or-break-it moments, but he wasn't willing to back down. So when she came around the end of the bar and tried to reach around him in order to get her coat, he easily snapped the cuff around her wrist.

The look on her face was comical. Slack-jawed and wide-eyed, she stared first from the cuff, back to him and then to the cuff again.

"Sit." With a not-so-subtle tug on the cuff he led her to the stool at the end of the bar usually reserved for the bartender. Once she was seated, he fastened the second cuff to the long metal leg of the stool. He wasn't about to wait until she started wailing and screaming like a banshee before getting her completely secured.

Once finished, he used the key to secure the locking feature of the cuffs so they couldn't be inadvertently tightened before finally looking at her. "I said you were going to stay and see your shift through and I meant every word of it. You should know better than to test me, girl. Now sit there and be good while I work."

It was interesting to see the emotions she fought so hard. As he knew they would, his dominance, combined with the cuffs, had her confused and more than likely very wet. Her nipples were pebbled and pressing against the thin fabric of her blouse. She was still angry, that much was clear, but there were a lot of other things going on in her mind as well. She was not very good at hiding what she felt, and from the look on her face, she was feeling a whole hell of a lot.

No one said a word to him, which was probably for the best, considering he no longer felt very cordial. More than anything he wanted to run everyone off and close the bar, but since that wasn't going to happen, he'd just have to make do.

Casey opened her mouth but Jared didn't give her the time to say anything. Leaning in, he kissed her lips, taking what he wanted, plundering the depths of her mouth until she softened and opened for him.

"Good girl. I'll be back in a few."

In a flash her demeanor once again changed. She looked around the room, her cheeks stained pink with what he assumed was embarrassment at being placed in such a predicament.

Jared stood behind the bar, filling orders. He was glad the kitchen was already closed. It would have been hard as hell trying to keep up with everyone's drink refills as well as food orders. He'd just finished pouring a glass of draft beer when one of the patrons yelled from across the room.

"Hey, cowboy! Looks like your filly's gettin' away."

Jared turned just in time to see Casey heading for the door, carrying the barstool he'd cuffed her to. "Son of a bitch," was all he could think to say as he hurried to catch up with her.

Chapter Three

Casey knew she was being childish when she stuck her tongue out at the customer who ratted her out to Jared but she couldn't seem to help herself. She'd almost made it to the door. Of course she didn't have a clue what she would have done had she actually escaped. Without her purse she had no car or house keys, not that she would have been able to wedge the barstool in the passenger seat next to her anyway.

Jared crossed the room toward her. The look on his face was not one Casey remembered ever seeing before and god only knew she had tested his patience on more than one occasion.

When Jared finally reached her, it took everything for Casey not to back up. He looked fierce. His growl was even worse.

"Take your ass back over to the bar before I spank you in front of everyone."

Oh how she would love to challenge him on that one, but there was no doubt in her mind he would do exactly as he had threatened. The man couldn't care less what others thought of him, her or their relationship when they had been together. He was as free a spirit as Casey had ever met. He didn't care about societal bullshit in the least, so Casey decided to do as he'd said instead of telling him to go fuck himself the way she wanted. It would save her the humiliation of a spanking in front of the customers but nothing would save her from whatever he did decide on as punishment.

Grumbling the whole way, Casey slowly carried the stool to which she was still cuffed back to the bar. Muffled laughter met her ears, making the trip seem much longer than it actually was.

Once there, she settled herself back onto the stool and waited, for what she had no clue. By the time Jared finally finished what he was doing and came over to her, Casey

was a nervous wreck. The jingle of keys drew her attention from his face to where he was uncuffing her.

His hands were so much larger than hers. The pads of his fingers were rough from years of hard work, his nails short and clean. Besides the size, it was the color that always awed her. His skin was so dark compared to hers.

"Go use the bathroom and come right back."

Jared's words pulled her out of the clouds. He was all business and it was obvious he had no intention of telling her what he had planned. Casey hopped off the stool and started toward the restroom with the words *yes sir* on the tip of her tongue. Oh how she missed him, his direction, his strength and even more important, the strength she felt when they were together as one.

A thought struck just as Casey grasped the doorknob. What if he didn't have anything planned? What if he was going to just give up and let her go home because she was too much trouble? She turned back to look at him but he was focused on something else and not even looking her way.

"It doesn't really matter. Probably better anyway." She mumbled the words as she walked through the doorway and into the ladies' restroom. Why did the blasted man have to confuse her so thoroughly? Why couldn't she just look him in the eye and tell him to hit the road?

Casey knew the reason why without even thinking about it. It was because she loved him. It didn't seem to matter that she didn't want to be in love. Evidently being afraid of his expectations concerning their relationship didn't stop the feelings she had tried so hard over the last few weeks to forget.

"I'll just have to make it through today and then not show up tomorrow," she told herself as she flushed the toilet and left the stall to wash her hands. It shouldn't be too hard to finish out the evening with him. After all, he was a devilishly handsome man who could work her body better than anyone ever had, and she did like being close to

him. So she would suck it up for the evening and then go back to trying to forget tomorrow.

She should be able to enjoy the rest of the day and then get back to her normal miserable, lonesome self. As she left the room, Casey frowned, thinking to herself how utterly stupid that sounded. It didn't matter though. There was no time to worry about it anymore. Right now she had bigger things to deal with and he was standing by the stool at the end of the bar with an expectant look on his face.

So he did have something planned. Casey wasn't sure how she felt. She was a nervous wreck and yet she felt a smile tug her lips. It amazed her how much he could screw with her mind. How his mere presence could make her wet, slick and ready. The whys and hows of her body's response to Jared still eluded her, but one thing was certain, he had the power to arouse her with nothing more than a look.

"Just in time. I was fixing to come track you down." His voice was a deep rumble, and for a second all Casey could think about was how it felt when he talked dirty while his mouth was pressed tight against her pussy.

In an effort to shake such thoughts from her mind, Casey decided to rely on sarcasm. "What, did you think I would try to inch my way out the window?"

His only reaction was the lift of a brow. "There's no telling with you." He stared pointedly at the stool she had just recently carried across the bar in an attempt to leave, cuff still attached.

She decided it was time to shut the hell up. He argued way too logically. If there was anything Casey knew, it was that her emotions were in a cluster of confusion, making her not only hot-headed and short-tempered but entirely too close to hysterics for her own good. She didn't want to give either him or the bar's patrons anything else to stare at and chuckle about.

"Have a seat."

She looked up at him, trying to gauge what he was thinking. As always, it was impossible. Casey stood on the lower rung of the stool then plopped herself into a

sitting position. When he unhooked the cuff from its previous mooring, she breathed deeply, unsure of whether she was upset or happy he was not going to bind her again.

That double-edged sword of relief and disappointment were soon put to rest because Jared's next movement was to fasten one cuff to the ornate metal pole running the length of the bar. When he held his hand out, Casey knew exactly what he expected.

"I don't think so."

"Don't think, girl. Just do what you know you're supposed to do." He always made it sound so simple.

"I'll stay and even behave." Casey lowered her voice to a mere whisper before continuing. "Everyone is watching."

He didn't appear at all disturbed by the fact. "That's something you should have thought of before acting like a brat."

Without another word, Jared held out his hand. This time Casey held hers out, palm up, meeting him halfway. Her breath quickened. The change was instantly noticed by Jared, causing Casey to curse her wayward body. She should be angry. She was angry. But if so, why was she also horny as hell? It made no sense.

He leaned in close, so close their lips almost touched and Casey could feel the warmth of his breath. "Now sit here and behave yourself."

She couldn't help but laugh. "I've heard that before."

Jared laughed as well and then he did kiss her. It wasn't more than a hard press of his lips against hers but it promised more. Before moving away, Jared slowly brushed the back of his hand across her chest, barely grazing her peaked nipples, never taking his gaze from her face. His eyes seemed fathomless, deep in a way she had never before noticed. Casey shivered in response.

"Hey, boy! If you're done tying her down and playing kissy-face we'd like another round." Raucous laughter followed. It was the same man who had tattled on her before.

It took every ounce of Casey's willpower not to tell the old coot to mind his own damn business.

"Don't worry about them, Case. Just stay here and do as you were told, behave."

He didn't wait for an answer before he slipped behind the bar and started pouring draft beer into clean glasses. How he could always be so damn calm, she had no idea. It seemed that since meeting him she was nothing but a jumble of emotions and arousal. Casey watched Jared, her mind whirling with the potential of what might happen after the bar closed and how she felt about those possibilities.

Her pulse quickened, Jared could see it against the tender flesh of her neck and more than anything he wanted to sink his teeth in right at that exact spot. He kept her on edge all night, making her worry and wonder what he had planned. He was playing her body against her mind and knew it, but wasn't going to let the issue bother him. At this point, he was willing to do whatever it took to get her to realize she belonged with him as well as to him.

The night seemed to drag on. Jared wasn't sure it was ever going to end. When he finally locked the door after the last customer and turned the sign to *Closed*, he breathed deep. Technically the job for the day was over, but he had a sneaking suspicion his work was just about to begin.

Glasses and bottles cluttered tabletops throughout the room. The floor was littered with dirt and papers, and that was just this side of the bar. He was sure behind the scenes things looked just as bad, if not worse. It was going to be a lot of work in order to get things cleaned and ready for tomorrow, but that was the least of his worries.

Right now he had a minx to tame and planned to do it as slowly and thoroughly as possible. Jared felt his cock begin to stir at the thought of baring her completely and using her for his pleasure. Feral is what he felt. He wanted to devour every inch of her body. The fact he did not have to hunt down his prey didn't deter him at all. Having her

cuffed to the bar only heightened his expectation and added fuel to the fire burning deep inside him.

Her big green eyes were fixed on him, watching his every move. He enjoyed knowing he had her complete attention. It was the way things should be concerning his property whether she was ready to believe herself so or not.

Metal clanked against metal as she lifted her wrist slightly. “Are you going to turn me loose now?”

Jared stalked closer. He was close enough to hear her ragged breathing but not quite close enough to touch—yet.

“Not just yet.”

She licked her lips then. Jared knew it for the nervous gesture it was. She had a tendency to do so when unsure. He also knew she did not mean for the gesture to be arousing but it was. The sight of her pink tongue peeking out to moisten her full lips had the ability to give him a raging-hard erection.

“Then what do you have planned?”

He had a lot planned. Some she would like, even beg for before all was said and done. On the other hand, some of it was sure to piss her off. Jared couldn’t quite bring himself to care. This was going to go his way, and in the end all he could hope for was she agreed that at his feet, in his bed, his life, his heart and his soul was right where she belonged.

It was time to delve into her mind. He knew she was riding wave after wave of uncertainty and turmoil. He could see it in the depths of her gaze every time she looked at him. She was torn and fighting herself as well as him. Jared needed to find out why and to help her over whatever hurdle was holding her back.

“Turn around and close your eyes.”

It took a moment before Casey did as asked. She swiveled on the stool until her back was to him. Jared could only assume she had followed his directions and her eyes were closed.

He moved impossibly closer until every inch of his front covered her much smaller back. She shivered. Jared wrapped one arm around her so he could touch her pretty much anywhere he chose. He buried his other hand in her hair, tilting her head to the side.

"Perfect girl. Absolutely perfect. This is just the way I like you."

He spoke the words low so she would have to really listen in order to hear. Jared wanted her complete attention. He wanted her focus to be on one thing and one thing only. Him.

"You belong to me, Casey. You said the words yourself." He lightly stroked a hand over her abdomen, letting her get used to his touch. "There is no escape and you know it."

Her breath caught. He wasn't sure whether it was his words or his touch, maybe it was a combination of both. She was trembling now. Not the shakiness she would get when they played but more of a fine tremor. He held her tighter.

"Somewhere deep down you know it's okay to trust me, to let go." Jared breathed against the flesh of her neck, nibbling and licking until she arched into his hand. "Tell me."

Casey tried to turn her head away, fighting the truth of his words. Jared held tight. The hand fisting her hair allowed her no more movement than what he saw fit to give her. A strangled moan left her lips as she sagged against him. "Tell me."

"I...I don't know."

Her voice was husky, her tone unsure. "You do know. You remember how the last few months have been. I know you remember the freedom in my ownership. I can feel it in your body even now. You remember how it felt to finally realize you could do anything I asked of you."

Jared jerked Casey's hair tight, eliciting a sharp gasp to escape from her lips, pulling her head back against his shoulder so he could see her profile as he spoke. His hand wandered to her throat where it lay still. He had the power to cut off her oxygen and blood supply, to harm and even kill her and yet she didn't move a muscle. She did trust him, she just didn't yet realize how deeply. "Everything I demand is in your power, Casey. All you have to do is trust yourself to want it and trust me to guide you to it."

He kissed her then, deeply plundering every inch of her mouth. He guided his hand from her neck to her jaw where he held her still for his tongue, his teeth. With his other hand he plucked at her nipples through the thin fabric of her shirt. When he applied firm and increasing pressure, she stiffened against him, whimpering as pain and pleasure mingled. Her scream filled his mouth, overloading his senses.

Pulling away from her lips, Jared turned her toward him, looking deep into her eyes, and commanded once again, "Tell me."

"I want to but I don't know if I can be what you want." Her eyes were glazed. She had a dazed and confused look on her face, one that tore at his heart. He ruthlessly pushed the emotion away. He was inside her head right where he wanted to be, needed to be in order to get her to once again open up to him, and he planned to stay there.

Jared drew circles on Casey's inner thighs until she writhed against him, begging with her body, her pussy doing her thinking for her.

"It's up to me to decide what I want and to help you achieve that goal." He rubbed against the seam of her jeans with just enough pressure make her quiver in response. He continued to toy with her nipples while playing with her denim-covered pussy and delving deeper into her mind. "It's up to you to trust and to do as I say. Nothing more, nothing less."

He released her and backed up a couple of steps. "Strip out of your pants."

Her gaze flew to his even as she scooted off the barstool, her free hand straying to the snap of her jeans. Jared made no move to help as she fumbled one-handed to unsnap and unzip them. "Look at me." There was no way in hell he was going to allow

her time to rebuild her shields. This was all about getting into her head and staying there. About using her body any way he desired so she understood once again what it was she craved. That she belonged to him completely and in any capacity he saw fit.

It had nothing at all to do with sex yet here she was stripping for him. And oh yes, they would fuck, but to him it was not about placing his cock inside the tight confines of her pussy and pounding away until his balls drew up tight and he got his rocks off. That he could get anywhere.

It was about her need to be controlled and his desire to control. It was about the willing exchange of power and the trust required for it to happen. It was about their future, a future he planned to make damn sure existed outside the sex and lust.

Her gaze stayed glued to his. Her pupils were dilated until the green of her irises were barely visible. When Casey was finally done wrestling the snug garment over her hips, she kicked it to the side. She wore no panties, which pleased him immensely.

"Good girl." Jared collected a chair from the nearest table and pulled it close enough to the bar so Casey could reach him although not without a bit of stretching involved.

The position put him at eye level with her pussy. Her bare nether lips were slick with her cream, swollen and inviting. He roughly nudged a hand between her thighs then slapped back and forth, letting her know he wanted her legs open. Once she was in position he, without preamble, wedged three fingers into her. Casey gasped then groaned, pulling on her cuffed wrist to get closer to him.

"It seems as though your pussy knows exactly where you belong."

Chapter Four

Casey couldn't think clearly. Her emotions were spiraling out of control. Everything he said was true. Her pussy was doing all her thinking for her. Even after all these weeks he still owned her body and could evidently very easily slip into her mind. The knowledge made her angry as hell. Why did it have to be that way and why had it never before been like this with any of her other partners?

Her brain felt like mush and her body was on fire. He was fucking with her mind, making her see things she didn't want to see, feel things she wasn't ready to feel. It was an overload of sensation that left her wanting to scream and cry while she begged for more.

A little voice in the back of her mind told her she had a choice, she could tell him to stop. End the game. The problem was, it was no game and she knew it just as she knew she couldn't stop. She wanted to feel him in her, on her, surrounding her with his warmth and control just as bad as she needed her next breath. It made her feel weak, so weak. She shouldn't want it. She shouldn't crave it. That was one of the things that scared her most. If she kept going in their relationship the way she had been, eventually she would have no voice. She would become a mere shadow of herself, a hull of a woman who was weak and walked all over.

Casey opened her mouth to protest, to cry out her need to be released, to run and hide because what she was feeling was too much, but she never got the chance. As it always did, the feel of Jared's hand in her hair stole the words right from her mouth. His kiss was even worse, rendering her clueless as to the thoughts that had just moments before run through her mind.

The feel of his hands on her, in her, plundering her while lifting her higher and higher, brought only one thing to mind. She would do anything he asked in order to feel the length of his cock inside her, wherever he chose, however he chose.

"Please..."

"Please what, girl?"

She had no idea when he stood but he was now going through his wallet. When Jared found what he was looking for, he removed the foil pack. After placing his wallet back in his pocket, he began unfastening his jeans. When he was finished, he pushed the denim as well as the thin cotton of his boxer briefs over his hips until they pooled around his ankles. Then he sat.

Finally. The corners of her mouth lifted. She could play this part of the game and even had a chance of coming out on top. She knew his preferences, what he liked and could use the knowledge to her advantage. Maybe if they fucked he would be too busy to mess with her head anymore.

"Please let me show you how much I want you." The word *sir* almost slipped past her lips again, but he was no longer her sir. Casey had to remember that if she was going to remain strong. This was going to be a fun romp, nothing else. Once they were done, she would go home and put everything he had said tonight from her mind. It was the only way. Besides, she wanted to feel him deep inside her pussy very badly. It would have to be enough to last her a lifetime. She decided in that second she would try her hardest to be everything she imagined he wanted but she could never be in order to leave him with memories as wonderful as those with which he had left her.

"Show me."

Casey watched him, waiting for him to scoot closer so she could better reach. It took only a second for her to realize he had no intention of doing so. Why did everything have to be so difficult? Why did he always feel the need to push and, for fuck's sake, why did it make her crazy with desire when he did so?

Because it proves just how much control he has over you. It proves just how much of you he truly owns.

She shook her head, trying to cast aside such thoughts. She didn't need any such reminders. Casey had spent weeks trying to forget, all to no avail. Hell, the throbbing of her clit and achy slickness of her pussy were enough proof.

"Always playing games." She couldn't seem to keep the sneer out of her voice.

Jared cocked his head to the side as he idly stroked the magnificent length of his now-sheathed shaft. "No games, Case, just you and me. Now come here."

There was no denying the commanding tone of his voice. Casey looked from where he sat seated, to the bar where her hand remained cuffed, trying to figure out how to go about things. It seemed backing up to sit on him, taking him deep inside her while her back was to him, was the only way.

She turned then, stretching her arm as far as she could, Casey backed up. It still wasn't enough. Sticking her ass out as if in search for her seat helped and soon she felt the warmth of his hair-roughened legs beneath her. Casey was sure she looked silly as hell. She was bent far forward, the only part of her body touching his was her ass and pussy as a hand at her waist guided her onto his cock.

As usual, Jared didn't allow her to set the pace. Before she could think to sink heavily down onto his length, he grasped her waist with both hands and yanked her onto him while surging up at the same time. Her pussy spasmed at the intensity in which it was filled, struggling to accommodate his size.

"Don't you dare come, girl. You know the rules."

Casey whimpered, unsure if she could hold it back. He had been screwing with her all night long. Emotions whirled and her anger mounted. She shouldn't have to wait, there were no rules between them anymore. He did not own her!

It had taken her a couple of weeks to retrain her body to come without permission after leaving him. Those had been a couple of the most frustrating weeks of her life and Casey had no intention of going back.

She lifted then lowered herself, shuddering at the feel of his latex-clad length stretching her sheath then refilling her. She was going to get hers whether he liked it or not.

Jared grasped her waist with bruising force. "Don't test me, Casey. You know the consequences of coming without permission, nothing has changed."

The tone of his voice dug deep inside her head until it felt as though his words massaged her brain. He still had the same power over her. He still owned her body as well as her mind—that much was obvious. The realization was like a blow to the solar plexus, it stole her breath. Casey whimpered, on the verge of tears.

Jared buried his hand in her hair, tugging just enough to cause a sting and force her to arch her neck. In her precarious position she couldn't go far, so she sat there on his cock, her feet planted on the floor, and knew she was never going to win this battle the way she had thought.

She might be able to captivate him with her body, but he owned it and knew extremely well how to use it for whatever purpose he deemed necessary.

"You know how much I want you, girl, how much I love you. I know you know." He kept a hand in her hair while guiding her with a hand at her waist. With every thrust, he surged up to meet her, burying himself so deep it was somewhat painful. The sensations were wonderful. They took over and soon Casey was lost.

"Please, please may I come?" In her head she was chanting the words over and over but had no clue if in reality she did the same.

"No, you'll come when I tell you you can come and not before." He smacked her ass hard. "No more asking."

His tone brooked no argument, but oh how Casey wanted to argue. Her pussy clenched down on his cock, the aching need so deep she thought she might die from it.

Once again he spoke. This time his voice was very low and gravelly deep. "You have the power to please me greatly, Casey. With nothing more than your obedience

and service you have the power to make me the happiest man on earth.” His hand snaked around her waist to fondle her swinging breasts.

He sat up straighter, taking her with him. Leaning forward allowed his chest to come into contact with her back. Casey continued to move up and down over his shaft. Her legs trembled with the effort but the last thing she wanted to do was stop. When he pinched and plucked her nipples, she cried out and stilled in an effort not to orgasm. She was so close.

Jared stroked her hair with his hand, a gesture that felt nurturing to her. “You’re doing a wonderful job.” He murmured the words against her back, his warm breath feathering over her heated flesh. He was so big, so strong. “You belong to me, girl. Utterly and completely. Denying it will do you no good.”

With those words spoken, he once again reminded her she didn’t have permission to come then took his pleasure with her body, pistoning up into her in hard strokes until his muscles clenched and he cried out her name. She could feel his cock twitch inside her but could do nothing to take advantage of the last of his arousal. He held her still, causing her to become frantic with need and pent-up desire. Oh god, no! He was going to leave her like this! *Why*, her mind screamed. Casey wasn’t sure if she’d voiced the question out loud but regardless, he answered.

“You’ll come for my pleasure as well as your own, but only when I tell you to, not a second before.”

Jared could tell Casey was losing the battle. He could imagine her anger and confusion at his treatment, and yet if she took the time required to process she would completely understand his actions and very possibly be turned-on by them all over again. Of course getting to that point might be painful for the both of them if her ragged breathing and poker-stiff body were any indication.

“Up, girl.” He smacked her ass to punctuate the command.

"I don't want to. I'm not done." Her tone was not at all defiant, more of a cross between a groan and a whimper. Jared took her resistance as an invitation to delve deeper into her mind as well as play her body in a lesson she would not soon forget.

He stood, dislodging Casey from his cock. Jared removed and discarded the used condom in the nearest trashcan. When he was finished, he uncuffed her from the bar but did not free her other hand. She watched him, her gaze still heated with passion and anger. It was intriguing how one emotion could add to the other. They were so similar.

She looked stunning with her hair in a wild array of curls around her shoulders. Tiny wisps stuck to her cheek, damp from perspiration. Her breathing was still shallow, her nipples proud and erect, begging for more attention. The only articles of clothing she wore were a low-cut blouse with a tiny bikini top beneath, and they weren't covering much after the way they had just fucked.

Jared could tell by the way she watched him she thought they were done. She must figure he had gotten his and so it was over. Soon she would realize that wasn't the case at all. Before the night was over she would come to understand how his touch could control her on every level. She would also realize to obey him in everything he asked. Casey trusted him with her physical well-being and on some levels her mental and emotional well-being as well, but she needed to give in more. He wanted it all.

While ruffling through his wallet for another condom, he watched Casey closely. Frown lines appeared between her brows. She was probably wondering what he was doing. When she saw the condom in his hand, she smiled so triumphantly he had trouble holding back his mirth.

Reaching around her, he cuffed her hands behind her back. The position put her in the perfect spot to nuzzle his chest, licking his nipple. She had him so hot he was hard and ready in a matter of seconds. Casey's mouth was sheer bliss. He wanted nothing more than to have her suck him off, watching her eyes as he pressed her head down on his shaft until every inch of him disappeared into the dark warmth of her mouth. That

wasn't to be the case though, at least not just yet. Right now Jared had other plans for the little minx.

This time when Jared sat on the chair Casey was right there, interested in his every move. He opened the condom then rolled it over his already-erect cock before beckoning her to climb onto his lap. They were face-to-face this time, Casey with her knees dangling over the arms of the chair.

Jared smoothed a hand over her cheek before grasping her jaw and positioning her head just where he wanted it for a deep and lingering kiss. "You said you weren't done."

Casey nodded then leaned in for another kiss, one he didn't allow. She was arching against him, probably trying to get him to move. Jared ignored her movements and continued speaking instead. "You know things don't work that way. You're done when I say you're done just like you come when I say you come." Her green eyes were now narrowed on him. He wasn't sure if she was getting the picture, but he was sure she would before the night was over.

It was then Jared moved. He surged his hips forward, shafting deep within her fist-tight cunt. She was so damn hot and wet he had to grit his teeth to keep from repeating the motion.

Now that they were face-to-face he could pay more attention to her breasts and their coral-tipped nipples. He maneuvered her shirt so they were bare to his view then leaned in and took one deep into his mouth, laving it with his tongue and nipping it with his teeth.

She was frantic now. Her hips rocked against him desperately. Jared could feel tiny spasms ripple through her internal muscles as she came closer to the orgasm she so badly needed.

"Oh yessss," she exhaled against his neck.

With both hands on her hips, Jared stopped her. When she cried out, he wrapped his arms around her back and pulled her even closer into his hold, offering comfort even while he disallowed her orgasm.

"Not until I say."

It took several minutes for her breathing to slow and for her to finally sit up and look at him. Jared kept her gaze locked to his as he started again. This time he did so with a hand tugging her back by the cuffs just enough to move her away from his body. He used his other hand to stroke her overly sensitive clit.

She bucked against him, cursing and begging. "Oh fuck. Please!"

Jared remained quiet. He'd told her once not to ask again and had no plans to repeat himself. He kept up, torturing her clit until she was once again on the brink then reminded her, "Don't you dare come, girl." Although he kept his voice low, he knew she would understand by his tone that he meant business.

"Oh god. I can't stop it."

Her internal muscles contracted tightly against his cock, pulling at him, squeezing, promising how very good it would feel for him to finally let her come. The problem was, Jared had no intention of doing so and once again he stopped. She gave a little bounce as if trying to stomp her foot. "No! No, no, nonononono..."

Her reactions were primal. She wanted to come badly and, at the moment, would pretty much do anything he told her in order to do so. It was right where he wanted her, dependent on him for that completion. It was the perfect way for him to stay imbedded deep in her mind when she went home alone tonight.

"Again."

The green of her eyes turned dark, gold flecks shimmering in their depths as she stared at him in disbelief. "Why?" She asked the one-worded sentence, her voice a mere whisper.

Jared wasn't used to explaining himself but for Casey he would do anything. "The next time I tell you no asking to come, you'll pay more attention. Next time I tell you to get up, you'll get up. Next time you will serve me the way you have in the past. Do you understand?"

When her eyes welled with tears, darkening her lashes but not quite spilling over, he had trouble not giving in. Her capitulation in the way of a softly voiced, "Yes, sir," nearly had him whooping with joy. It was a small victory but victory nonetheless and he would take it as a good sign they were moving in the right direction.

He moved in her then, slow and precise, making sure to rub against her clit each time he penetrated the depths of her pussy. She whimpered and moved against him in return. This time there was a slow buildup. He could imagine she wanted to move frantically against him, seeking out the climax he had been keeping from her, but instead she relaxed against his chest, making wonderful little noises. She had let go, given the power to him, allowed him without protest to set the pace.

When her body tightened against him, Jared was tempted to finally let her get off. He was sure it would be a powerful experience for her, but it would negate the point he was trying to make, the lesson he was teaching her, and there was no way in hell he was willing to go that far because he wanted to feel her come on his cock or hear her scream her release. Not even to see the completely sated look in her eyes or the devastating lopsided grin she wore afterward. In order to win the war he had to take every little battle seriously. He planned to do just that.

It took every ounce of his willpower to stop her the last time. She made little sobbing sounds against his chest but otherwise gave no protest. Jared leaned forward, taking her with him. He then tilted her head so he could kiss her softly on the lips before wiping her sweat-soaked hair from her face.

"I love you."

Chapter Five

Casey felt as though she had been ridden hard and put away wet. Very wet. Her legs wobbled when she tried to stand and her clit throbbed as if it might explode if a stiff breeze passed her by.

He was going to leave her like this, wanting, desire flooding through her veins in river-like torrents. She wanted to be angry, to rant and rave at him, to rail about the unfairness of it all but knew it was not the right thing to do because orgasm or not, she'd had a wonderful time. She could be mad later if that was what she needed. Right now what she wanted was not to think about everything that had taken place. She wanted to run, to bury her head in the sand and forget how intense his gaze was, how her body overruled her mind with each command he spoke.

Instead, she collected her clothes. After wiggling back into them, Casey went to the bathroom where she emptied her bladder then splashed cold water on her face after washing her hands. It didn't help. More than likely nothing was going to help, at least until she got off, and that she could do later when she was alone and safely in her own bed. Right now though, she just needed to concentrate on not jumping Jared and getting herself home so she could play alone, getting off until her clit no longer throbbed in arousal.

However, when she emerged from the bathroom, things did not go as planned. She'd thought he would be done with her and let her go so he had time to plan what to do to torture her tomorrow. Instead, Jared watched her carefully, studying her as if she were a specimen beneath a microscope.

Casey had just about as much as she could take of his scrutiny. Her body ached in ways she didn't want to consider enjoyable. Her nerves were rattled beyond belief and she was wound so tight she feared she might snap at the least bit of provocation.

Following the instincts that told her to run, she headed toward Cooper's office so she could gather her purse.

"We're not done." Jared's voice rumbled from across the room. In that instance everything in her swelled until Casey thought she would burst from it.

She whirled around to face him. "Not done? Not done!" She knew that at any moment she was going to start sounding like a stark raving mad lunatic but couldn't seem to find the energy to care. "What are you not finished with? Fucking with my mind? Fucking with my body!" At the last her voice raised another notch. "I say we are, Jared. I said we were done three weeks ago and I say we're done now."

Mortification overwhelmed her when Casey realized there were tears streaming down her face. She wanted to turn and run for the door, to get away from everything he made her feel but there was going to be no escape. If there was one thing about Jared Casey knew well it was that he was not the running type and had the same expectation of others. There was no way in hell he would allow her to leave now so she might as well finish.

"I can't be what you want. I've told you that. Why can't you understand?"

He stood in front of her, towering over her much shorter height. His scent invaded her senses. He was everywhere all at once. Casey wanted to lash out. She wanted to hit him, to make him leave, to make him understand she was not what he was looking for. She also wanted to hold him and feel his body buried deep inside her. She wanted to be able to trust him completely and to love him without reservation but she couldn't. It was too hard and so damn scary. Just the thought of failing, the what ifs, made her feel a little sick to her stomach.

"I've heard you say it all already, girl. I listened and I heard, but that does *not* mean I have to agree."

"Bu...but you should respect my feelings." Casey tried not to sniffle and failed. This was going to go down as one of the most embarrassing days of her life.

This time he grabbed her wrist when she tried to wipe away her tears. He gathered her face in his hands and forced her gaze to his. While his expression might have been considered tender, his tone was very stern. "Respect has nothing to do with it. Your feelings have been noted and will be worked through. It's natural to be afraid and have doubts. The emotions are not a bad thing. It's what you're doing with them I don't agree with."

He was making no sense. At least none she could figure out. Right now she wanted to go home, to put distance between them so she couldn't think about what he did to her with his closeness.

When he released her, Casey once again turned toward Cooper's office. Jared's hand on her arm stopped her short. "When I said we weren't done, I meant with work."

Casey couldn't help it, she started laughing, and once she started, she couldn't seem to stop. There was no mirth to the sound. It was more an emotionally hysterical laugh. Even to her own ears it sounded as if she had gone mad. "You expect me to stay and...work?"

"I do." He had obviously lost his mind as well. It was the only thing Casey could think of. He had cuffed her first to a stool and then to the bar before fucking her silly and all without letting her come. Casey shook her head. Jared had either gone insane or he was more demented than even she could have imagined.

Jared watched her, one corner of his mouth tilted in a semblance of a smile. It was as if he could read her mind and knew exactly what she was thinking. "You agreed to work, but as of yet you haven't managed much of it, so I think it's only fair you get clean-up duty while I do the heavy stuff."

"You think it's only fair, do you? Well, I don't. If you remember it was you who cuffed me so I couldn't work."

This time Jared's smile spread across his face. "Believe me, girl. I remember."

It was obvious arguing was going to get her nowhere. So if Casey planned on getting home and away from Jared any time in this decade, she might as well get the

work over with. With her nerves raw, it took everything in Casey not to growl and stomp her foot as she began gathering glasses and bottles off the tabletops.

By the time she was done cleaning, Casey felt torn up. Normally she would have used the physical labor as a way to help her ease past the sexual longing she'd been feeling. The problem was, it didn't help when at every turn Jared made sure to brush against her or swat her ass to hurry her along.

His presence was hard enough to deal with, but his touch and his voice made things even more unbearable. Due to the combination of his assault on her senses, Casey's clit still throbbed while her nipples remained peaked and begging for his attention.

It seemed as if days had passed by the time she finally made it home. Her shower was hot and short, allowing just enough time for her to wash her body and hair without even considering extras such as shaving. Casey had things to do, things such as plugging in her favorite wand-style vibrator and getting off until she slipped into a coma where she could forget about today.

Settling on her bed, Casey tried not to think of all that had taken place. She wanted other hot and dirty thoughts to take over while she played with herself. In her mind she conjured such things while first circling her clit with two fingers. She didn't really need to arouse herself since she was still wet and ready but she enjoyed making it last.

She was sensitive to the touch and her pussy spasmed slightly around her fingers as she delved into her moist heat. She enjoyed the full feeling but was more than ready to feel the vibrations of her toy. Casey spread herself, exposing her clit, and with her free hand she placed the wand right where she knew it would work its magic the fastest. She had several orgasms to make up for and no time to spare since Jared had made her stay and help clean up, which meant she had not gotten home until late.

Jared.

His name whirled around in her head. Before his face appeared in her mind, Casey heard his voice. He had such a wonderful voice, so deep and gravelly he could

probably arouse her by reading the back of a cereal box. He could use his voice to attain his goals. Where other men had to yell or puff up and act all macho to be seen, all Jared had to do was change his tone and anyone within hearing range would know he meant business.

She pictured him in her mind, his face a stark mask of pleasure as he fucked her. His arms were big and powerful as they held her down to the bed, his weight pinning her beneath him until she felt powerless in a way that was arousing beyond belief.

Casey was close, very, very close. Her body shook with the need to climax, growing taut with each vibration. She continued to picture them in her mind. It was so real she could hear his voice in her head, feel his breath against her neck as he whispered to her.

“Not until I say.”

And just like that her peak ebbed into the abyss, leaving her gasping for air, near tears and cursing in a way that would have gotten her mouth washed out with lye soap as a child.

* * * * *

Casey was going to fight him every step of the way and in the process drive him to distraction. Jared was sure of it. She was such a damn spitfire. Why she felt the need to make everything so monumental, he had no idea. Instead of dealing with things and talking them through, she kept them inside where her mind had the power to turn them into dark and scary insecurities. It was a habit he planned to break her of.

Before that could happen he needed to keep her in his presence long enough to have a few deep and meaningful conversations, preferably of her own choice versus being cuffed. The type she was obviously hoping to avoid.

Jared couldn't help but chuckle. Had he not been so surprised and angry, the sight of her trying to flee, carrying the stool she'd been cuffed to like the proverbial ball and chain, would have been funny as hell. It evidently had been to the patrons of Raising Cain since their laughter lingered on for quite some time.

Casey's brothers were going to hear about their first evening together, Jared was sure of it. He was very curious as to what their reactions might be. He couldn't even imagine what his might be if it were his sister Charlotte who had been in the same predicament he'd placed Casey in. All he knew was that it more than likely wouldn't be good.

Jared shook his head to get rid of any thoughts of his sister in such a manner. It was just too much to consider. Instead he undressed and climbed into the shower. It was late but the day had been an easy one compared to the type of manual labor he normally did on a workday so he was not physically tired.

He knew he would need his rest because tomorrow would more than likely be much of the same if Casey decided to show at all.

The single thought stopped Jared's hand in mid-stroke, washcloth dropping to the shower floor. What would he do if she didn't show up for work? He hadn't yet given the thought much consideration. Jared would like to think Casey would come in because she'd told her brothers she would but Jared knew better.

She was a stubborn handful, and if she felt she'd been slighted, then she would have no qualms about not sticking to her part of the deal. She'd said as much tonight during one of their heated conversations.

"Shit," Jared muttered beneath his breath. He finished rinsing, giving his cock a couple of long, hard strokes before stepping from the shower. The bathroom was steamy and warm so Jared opened the door. What he needed was cool air to calm his body.

Even after screwing like rabbits in the bar he was still raring and ready to go. It had always been that way with Casey. There was just something about her, everything about her. From her wild curly hair to the crooked pinky toe on her right foot, he loved everything in between.

And in that instant he made a decision. Tomorrow he would show up at Casey's place early, making sure she didn't try to sidestep her commitment of working at the bar and in the process, seeing him.

With the decision made, Jared climbed into bed in hopes of getting a good night's rest. Instead he got one erotic dream after another. In each Casey danced just out of his reach and as he had been for the last few weeks, he was frustrated beyond belief.

Back in the day he wouldn't have pursued her, or any woman for that matter. However, as the years flew by and he matured, Jared began to think more and more about finding the right woman, the right submissive woman to settle down with. Casey's stubborn ass might not think she was what he needed or wanted, but Jared knew better. He wasn't about to let her get away without a fight.

The only problem was, he didn't have anyone or anything to fight other than Casey herself. There was no other man, no one trying to keep them apart. Jared cursed, punched his pillow and settled into a more comfortable position, hoping for another hour or two of sleep.

Morning rolled around too soon. Instead of bemoaning the fact, Jared looked at it as another opportunity to make things right. They had a bright future together, Jared had no doubt. Now he just had to make Casey realize the same.

As he dressed, Jared pondered how to go about things. He could show up at Raising Cain and hope she decided to do the same, giving her the benefit of the doubt. Shaking his head, he quickly decided it would be a waste of time. Casey was not going to show up on her own. He knew it as well as he knew his pipe wrench would be sitting right where he left it at work out on the rig.

He had a tendency toward being more straightforward and she knew it, so there was a good chance she wasn't going to answer the door when he knocked. Not that it mattered, Jared thought with a tinge of amusement as he palmed the key to her house. She was going to work her shift at the bar with him one way or another, of that she could be sure.

A knock sounded at the door as Jared poured his second cup of coffee of the morning. He rose to answer it, wondering which of the McCain brothers would be standing on the other side. Or would it be all of them? It was proving to be an interesting day already. Jared couldn't help but wonder how the rest of it would turn out.

Jared opened the door to find Noelle McCain and Tara Sanders standing on the other side. His lips quirked in amusement as well as a bit of shock. He opened the door wider, allowing them entrance into his tiny apartment before peering out into the hallway.

"They're at the ranch." It was Noelle, Cash's wife, who spoke first.

"How did you manage that?"

Tara, who was in a triad relationship with Connor and Carson, chuckled before answering, "Believe me, it hasn't been easy. The phone has been ringing off the hook since last night."

There was something about the way she spoke and the mischievous gleam in her eyes that warned him. "They don't know yet, do they?"

Oh damn. This was not going to be good. Jared wasn't worried about himself but from the stories he'd heard, he could bet that Tara and Noelle would be sitting lightly once the cat was out of the bag.

This time it was Noelle who spoke. She waved off his question with a roll of her eyes. "Cooper knows. He was just pulling up when we left so I'm sure the rest of them know by now as well." She lowered her voice just a little. "Did you really cuff Casey to the bar?"

"I did." He saw no reason to lie about his actions. He'd warned the McCain brothers things would be done his way and he'd meant it.

Tara snorted. "I bet she was thrilled about that." Tara and Casey had been friends since school and knew each other well. "You don't sound too worried."

Jared walked back to the kitchen under the assumption they would follow, which they did. "Coffee's getting cold. Would you like some?"

Noelle looked as if she might jump him for a cup of the black gold. "It's decaf, right?" When he opened his mouth she cut him off, "Work with me here and say yes." Without waiting for an answer she poured herself a cup and sat with him at the table.

Tara was laughing outright. Jared wasn't sure whether it was over his cuffing Casey or due to the confused look he surely wore.

"Breastfeeding. Cash won't allow caffeine in the house," Tara mumbled as she poured enough sugar into her own cup that Jared wondered if it would crunch when she took a drink.

That was all he needed, to send Noelle home on a caffeine high on top of having all that was going on with him and Casey. He should take her coffee away and offer her a glass of milk or water instead.

"Touch my cup and you die." Noelle took another sip of the steaming-hot liquid, a look of sheer bliss crossing her face. Jared couldn't help it, for the first time in weeks he actually laughed. These two were going to be in such deep shit he could only be happy he wasn't in their shoes.

"So what brings you here?"

Tara stared at him, her head cocked slightly to the side. "She's not going to show up at Raising Cain today."

It was as he figured but still kind of hurt to have the words spoken from an outside source. "I know and am not overly worried about it. Did she tell you as much?"

"No. I just know Casey and she's running scared and she'll keep doing so until she's ready to face the music. We're a lot alike in that way."

Jared knew about Tara's story with Carson and Connor. Tara had fled town years before, scared about the type of relationship she was getting into. He didn't plan on him

and Casey repeating it. "No offense meant, but I'm not willing to wait years for her to figure things out."

Tara nodded, a slight blush staining her cheeks. "No offense taken. How do you plan to head her off?" She looked uneasy then. "I don't want her hurt."

Reaching across the table, Jared squeezed her hand. "I have no intention of hurting Casey. I love her. I'll be heading her off on her own turf. She refuses to come to me and talk so I'll go to her...and bring her to Raising Cain. Pretty simple, really."

Jared could tell Tara and Noelle both had severe doubts about the simplicity of his plan but neither of them voiced their thoughts on the matter.

Noelle, who had been protectively holding her coffee cup in both hands while steadily sipping its content, finally spoke again. "I like you, Jared." She pushed her chair back and stood while he and Tara did the same. "And I think Casey loves you. If I didn't I wouldn't have intercepted all those phone calls. Please don't make me regret it any more than I'm sure Cash will. And be ready for them because, unless Cooper can work miracles, they'll come. Probably all four of them."

He stood there speechless. These women cared for Casey like a sister, were in relationships with her brothers, and yet here they were in his dingy kitchen, warning him. Much to his chagrin they both kissed him on the cheek. Noelle gave him a big grin and thanked him for the coffee before waving and ducking out the door after Tara.

Jared poured himself another cup and waited.

Chapter Six

Casey frowned at the slight bruise marring her wrist. It was more than likely caused by the cuffs from the night before. She couldn't help but wonder when her sexual tastes had changed so much. Now just the sight of such a mark had her panties wet and her pussy aching.

A knock at the back door pulled her from the current path her thoughts were taking her. She got up to answer it, reveling in the slight achy protests made by her body.

Oh yeah! Something had definitely changed, she told herself, a smile on her face even though she was still annoyed about the night before. All annoyance fled when Casey realized it was Tara and Noelle at her door.

"Morning, sunshines." Casey smiled brightly as she swung the door open. There was nothing better she could think of to brighten her morning than a visit from her friends. "Tara, coffee's in the pot. Noelle, you get juice."

Noelle flipped her the bird then sat at the kitchen table without getting something to drink. Casey just laughed.

"We just left Jared's. He let her have coffee."

Casey looked from one woman to the other at hearing Jared's name. Patience was not a virtue she could remember ever claiming. "Why were you at Jared's?"

"For the coffee." Noelle smirked.

"Yeah right. My ass." Casey couldn't help but fidget a bit. Her skin felt so tight it might split. Her nerves were on edge and here her friends were joking with her.

Tara took her seat beside them at the table, a steaming mug of coffee in hand. "Well, after the phones at our houses continued to ring off the hook nearly all night with the

main topic being you cuffed to the bar, we thought it best to head into town and give the man a head's up."

"And the stool." This time Noelle laughed out loud.

"Noelle, be nice," Tara scolded Noelle even though she seemed highly amused herself. Casey, however, was not so amused. She just wanted to go back to bed and hide beneath the covers until it all went away.

Casey could tell by the look in Noelle's eye that her friend wasn't done yet, so when she spoke again, it didn't surprise Casey at all. "Did you really try to leave with the stool?"

Tara failed miserably at her attempt to stifle a chuckle, causing Casey to surge to her feet. "Yes, dammit! I did."

"What did Jared do?" Tara's voice sounded a bit hesitant.

Casey turned to look at her friend, then. Just remembering brought heat to her cheeks and a smile to her lips. "He told me to go back and behave myself or he'd spank my ass."

It was like a domino effect. First Noelle started giggling and then Tara, and before she knew it, Casey had joined them. They laughed until they were in tears. It felt so good to just have a bit of fun.

When they regained their composure, it was Tara who spoke first. "I would imagine a man the size of Jared could accomplish quite a spank if he put his mind to it." Her voice was a soft purr.

Casey shivered at the thought. "Mmm-hmmm, he sure can." God what she wouldn't give for the feel of his large hands on her right this very second. Why she was fighting what was between them was hard even for her to understand, which made trying to explain it to anyone else impossible. She just knew he needed more than what she could offer.

"My brothers already know, then?"

Noelle and Tara looked at each other before Tara answered. "They didn't when we left this morning but I'm sure they do by now."

"I wouldn't be surprised if they're not already over at Jared's place," Noelle added.

A thought sprang to Casey's mind. "So you two took it upon yourselves to intercept any phone calls until you left this morning?" It was Casey's turn to smirk.

Tara sighed. "Sure did and, yes, I already know we're more than likely in trouble."

"And not the hot and sexy kind either." Noelle didn't look overly worried.

"Maybe not, but you know once they've done their worst they're going to want to have some rough-and-tumble make-up sex." Casey couldn't help but throw that little tidbit out there.

Her friends looked at each other, wide mischievous grins spread across their faces. "What do you say we head home?" Tara asked, already rising from her chair.

Noelle did the same. "Sounds good to me. I'm about ready for some make-up sex."

"Make-up sex, hell, I want the spanking."

Casey couldn't help but laugh at Tara's exuberance. She was so glad these women were now her family and told them as much.

"Oh my gosh! I almost forgot to ask, how is Autumn?"

Casey smiled brightly, then. "She's doing great, having a blast visiting with Mike's parents."

"Oh good. She's such a wonderful little girl. Okay, we're off. Wish us luck." Tara giggled like a schoolgirl

A round of hugs followed then Noelle and Tara were gone. Once again her kitchen was quiet, leaving Casey way too much time to think and wait because she knew she was going to have company. What she didn't know was whether her company would be in the form of Jared coming to make sure she went to work or her brothers making sure she didn't.

A couple of hours later Casey had the answer. Without knocking, Cash, Connor, Carson and Cooper all filed through the back door and into her kitchen. They were all large men. Bigger than most yet not quite as large as Jared.

"Hey, Case," Cooper mumbled before taking a chair and straddling it backward. She smiled. Some things never changed. Only now Cooper was old enough that Cash wouldn't scold him for not sitting properly at the kitchen table.

Deciding to head things off before the impromptu family meeting ended up being more like an interrogation, Casey spoke first. "I have no plans on hiding behind the four of you. You know as well as I do Jared won't harm me in any way so it would be better to just leave this between him and me."

She took a deep breath, surprised she'd managed to get all of it out without being interrupted. Cash, Connor and Carson had stopped milling around her kitchen and were now just staring at her. Cooper, who was still seated, had a small smile curving his usual unsmiling lips.

"Well, hell. That was easy. Jared said the exact same thing." Cash leaned a lean hip against the counter as he took a swallow of the coffee he'd poured himself.

"Yeah. Well, I don't like it." Connor's reaction was no surprise to Casey. He'd always been even more protective of her than the rest of them.

"Doesn't really matter if you like it or not," Carson spoke for the first time. "It sounds to me like they want to work it out themselves. Besides, we've got some business of our own to take care of at home."

"That we do." Cash gulped the last of his coffee then set the cup in the sink. When he turned to hug Casey, his brows were furrowed. She smoothed the flesh with her thumb and kissed his cheek. "Don't worry about me. I'm a big girl now and can take care of myself."

He smiled then. "Doesn't matter how old you are, Case. You'll always be my baby sister." His words and the reverence in which he spoke them nearly brought tears to her eyes. "Just promise me you'll call if you need us."

She looked from Cash to the other three then back again. "I promise."

One by one they engulfed her in big bear hugs as they left. Cooper was the last to go. "You gonna be at work tonight?" Casey wasn't sure why she asked the question.

"I'm going in now. Thought I might get my work done so I'm out of your way."

She wasn't sure whether she was relieved or not. "I thought you wanted to hang around and watch the show? Didn't you say something like that the other day?" She couldn't help but tease him.

Cooper shuddered. "No way do I want to watch while your man cuffs you to the bar."

"Jared's not my man."

"I noticed you didn't argue about the cuffing you to the bar part." Cooper chuckled. Casey felt herself blush. He kissed her lightly on the forehead then moved around her and out the door. Casey was a little sad to see him go. She'd give just about anything to see Cooper smile all the time again, like he used to.

* * * * *

Jared was surprised when he knocked on Casey's door and she answered with purse in hand. He half expected he'd have to carry her to his truck kicking and screaming. Instead, there she stood with a slight smirk on her full, berry lips.

"Don't look so stunned." Her tone was mocking, instantly alerting him that just because she was going with him of her own free will didn't mean she was enthused about it.

He decided to keep his mouth closed. Responding would only start an argument. And Jared had no plans on arguing. He planned on them doing everything but arguing.

This evening she was dressed a little more modestly than she had been last night. Her jeans were still as snug and the sandals she wore showed off her cute little toes topped off with what she referred to as hooker-red polish. Her blouse, however, was not nearly as revealing. She was going for the layered tank top look, which she pulled

off perfectly. The wide belt circling her waist accentuated her curves to their fullest. Of course, she could have been wearing a potato sack and she still would have been the sexiest woman in the universe.

Jared opened the passenger door and waited for Casey to climb in. Once she was settled, he pulled the seat belt out and handed it to her to fasten. He took a deep breath, inhaling her scent. "You smell like sex and the beach, Case. I swear, girl, you're going to be the death of me with your sexy-ass body and fighting spirit."

She just stared at him from wary, wide green eyes. "I'm not what you need, Jared." Her voice was a whisper, a hint of hurt and achiness evident in every word.

He smiled the best he could when what he really wanted to do was fuck some sense into her. "I beg to differ."

He closed the door with a snap then took his time walking around the back of it to the driver's side. He needed the few seconds it took to regain his composure. Casey had the ability to test every emotion he had and a few he'd never before claimed.

She was reckless in her love, giving completely one day and running scared the next. Jared understood because he'd been on the verge of doing the same thing himself a time or two. He needed to make her realize what she was doing, to see how damn silly it was to deny them, to be a goddamned martyr.

"Everything okay?" she asked hesitantly when he finally climbed into the cab.

Jared gripped the wheel with a little more fervor than needed. "Yep, just fine." He started the truck and slowly pulled away from the curb.

Her actions had thrown him and now he was fumbling for how things should go. Last night he'd gotten into her head by keeping her on edge and controlling her orgasms. She'd been so damn beautiful, her need evident in every muscle of her body as well as scented in the air around them. He could still feel the warmth of her breath against his chest as she'd tried to calm her trembling body. He'd have to do something different tonight, but he wasn't quite sure what just yet. Thoughts and ideas were already taking shape, but he'd have to play it by ear.

It shouldn't have been a surprise to Jared they managed to reach their destination without saying a word to each other but it was. He'd been so lost in his thoughts he'd been driving on something akin to autopilot, and from the way Casey sat there watching him, she knew it.

"Don't touch the door," Jared grumbled the warning as he stepped down from the cab. He was feeling out of sorts and irritated instead of laid-back as he usually did.

He opened her door then waited as she hopped down. Jared wanted to help her, to span her waist with his hands and lift her down the way he used to. Not because she needed the help, but because he liked the feel of her in his hands. He didn't because doing so would push him even further.

She eyed him warily and mumbled her thanks then headed toward the bar as if she wasn't sure what was wrong with him, which made absolutely no sense. She'd told him she loved him, gave her body freely, took everything he had to offer and then tried to throw it all away. How the hell could she even wonder what was wrong with him?

Jared stalked after her. The interior was dim and, as always, welcoming. It seemed there was more of a crowd tonight than there had been last night. From the way they all quieted and swung their gazes toward the door when he and Casey came through it, he had no doubts it was because news of their fiasco from last night had made the rounds. Everyone was more than likely anticipating round two. It was all the more reason why Jared had already decided not to do anything other than work side by side with Casey tonight.

It would give them both some much-needed time to think. Not that his mind or heart would change at all. He loved her and needed her and had no intention of giving up until she realized it. He knew she loved him, knew she cared so much that leaving him had hurt unbearably, but she'd done so without thought for herself because she wanted him happy.

What he needed to do was make Casey understand that being with her was what made him happy. He didn't need anything but her heart, body, soul and of course

submissive obedience, which was the gist of the problem. As far as he was concerned though, it was a problem they could and would work through.

His decision to do nothing other than work was going to leave her wondering. As far as Jared was concerned that was as good a way as any to stay in her head. By the time they were done for the night she would also be in need, due to not being allowed to come the night before. He wasn't a complete bastard so before the night was over and he took her home, he would make sure she got off. Actually, he would make her beg for it and then work her until she begged him to stop.

It was one of the scenes she had always loved. She'd once told him, her voice not much more than a breathy whisper, how his controlling her release not only made her hot but it also made her feel submissive toward him in a way that went soul deep. He'd never forgotten those words or the erotic mewling sounds she made when she'd come so many times she was damp with sweat, her tremulous voice begging, but for what she had no idea.

Casey headed toward the back office, more than likely to stow her purse. Jared hadn't bothered to bring a bag of tricks with him tonight. He was traveling light. She watched him like a hawk as she wandered back into the main room. She went behind the bar to retrieve an apron then once again followed him with her eyes as she tied it around her waist. All of a sudden he felt lighter, no longer annoyed as he had been just mere minutes before.

"Do you want to take the bar or the tables?" He asked the question as if nothing had happened the night before, as cordially as if they always worked together.

She opened her mouth then snapped it shut. He wouldn't doubt it if she'd had a sassy retort then abruptly changed her mind when the filter between brain and mouth kicked in. It was something that didn't always work in her case. Jared just smiled.

"Tables." She still stood there, rooted to the spot.

Jared nodded then lightly swatted her ass. "Best get moving then, girl."

The confused shake of her head was small but not imperceptible. Tonight was going to be a whole lot different than last night, Jared thought as he served a bottle of beer to one of the patrons. Probably going to seem dull compared to last night, and he couldn't help but chuckle a little when he thought of how disappointed the customers were going to be. He also couldn't help but wonder if Casey would be just as dissatisfied.

The night went fast but probably not quick enough for his little spitfire. Every chance he had Jared rubbed against her or patted the swell of her ass. When she came up to order drinks, he made sure their fingers touched briefly, and if for some reason she came behind the bar, he crowded in close to tell her what a good job she was doing and how much he appreciated her willingness to work with and be close to him.

By the time Raising Cain closed for the night he figured she would be about ready to explode. She was running high from the looks of it. Twitchy and jumpy, she couldn't seem to stay still and yet she continued to watch him. It was something that until tonight Jared hadn't realized. He very much enjoyed knowing her big green McCain eyes were pinned on him and no one else.

Chapter Seven

Jared was the meanest man alive, as well as the most handsome. He was warm and cuddly and smelled very good and he came in a double XL, and as far as Casey was concerned, that was the perfect size.

It pissed her off something fierce that he had gone from seducer to friend in the span of twenty-four hours. He was either playing head games with her or had decided she was right. She didn't have what it took to be his, his girlfriend, his submissive, his property.

The thought hurt more than it should, but she had known it would happen. He should have listened. Had Jared listened, last night wouldn't have happened. Casey would not be sore from the width of his cock stretching her or bruised from his cuffs. Most of all she wouldn't be so damn angry she wanted to kick him in the balls until his high-pitched voice caused local dogs to howl.

She needed calm. This one extreme to the other shit wasn't working and it was exhausting to boot. Casey wasn't sure she could take much more of watching, wondering and waiting. She also didn't see how she had much of a choice, which was another ounce of anger added to that already heaped upon her shoulders.

Something was going to happen. She knew it just as she knew whatever it was had the ability to lay her low. He was either going to change tactics again, getting inside her head, burrowing into her heart until she had no choice but to shout to the world how much she loved him and damn the consequences, or he was going to tell her he agreed and let her go. Which was exactly what she wanted.

Wasn't it?

Casey pinched the bridge of her nose. All this shit whirling through her mind was making her head hurt. She felt powerless over her own emotions, unable to control and

fix things. It was something she hated with a passion. Sitting around and doing nothing was not her way, but that was exactly what she had spent the last three weeks doing, hiding out and licking her wounds.

Wounds I caused.

A low growl of pure frustration escaped her throat. Casey caught Jared's attention then motioned toward the back while mouthing the word *bathroom*. She didn't wait for an affirmation before she started moving through the tables toward her destination.

Jared was watching her. She knew without a doubt. It was a feeling that made the flesh on the back of her neck tingle. Casey wondered what he was thinking. He'd looked a bit worried or something similar. The furrow between his brows was accompanied by a frown and the narrowing of his eyes as he scrutinized her.

A few minutes would have to be enough time to gather her wits about her. Casey wasn't so sure it was something she could accomplish, but she was sure going to give it a try. If she didn't, things were going to get embarrassing and not the cuffed-to-the-bar kind of embarrassing. This had the probability of being a hundred times worse.

Casey splashed her face with water then looked into the mirror. She wanted to cry, felt tight with the need to do so. She also wanted to rant and rave and throw things. It was as though her world were going to come crashing down around her.

She'd fallen hard and fast in love with a man who said he loved her back. Why then could they not be together? It was a question that had taunted Casey for the past three weeks. And each and every time she answered it with painful honesty. She wasn't what Jared needed to be happy.

Sure, they could fuck like rabbits for now, use all that wonderful new relationship energy to the fullest, but then what? Casey knew exactly what. Then he would see just exactly how not submissive she was. He would realize she was used to not only taking care of herself but others as well, and she was used to doing so on her own terms.

She was just saving them from heartache later, when it really mattered. Casey lowered her head to the counter. She should have never researched BDSM and anything

to do with D/s relationships and submission on the internet. At least then she could have gone on, blissfully happy, not knowing she had merely been playing a game, one she wasn't even all that good at.

A soft knock on the door brought Casey's head up. She'd been in here feeling sorry for herself for far too long. One of the customers had probably been standing out there doing the pee-pee dance, as Autumn called it.

"Just a sec."

"Case? You okay in there, girl?"

Her heart thundered against her chest. His voice had a way of pulling her in and comforting her even when his touch was missing.

Casey forced a smile to her face then answered the door, but no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't look him in the eye. "Yeah. I just have a bit of a headache and needed a minute away from all the noise." She knew better than to pull the "I'm fine" routine. It didn't fly with Jared. It was one of the first lessons she'd learned. When he asked a question about her well-being, he expected a thorough answer.

His fingers beneath her chin were warm and gentle. She almost wished he'd be rough with her. She needed rough. Right now gentle was not good, it only added to the vulnerability she was feeling.

Jared tipped her chin and kissed the tip of her nose. "Don't think so hard, girl. It's all going to work out in the end."

With her voice stuck behind a sob in her throat, Casey could only nod. He lingered there with her, and for a moment she was terrified he was going to insist on talking. "We need to get back out there, Jared."

He turned his head, probably deciding how best to handle an emotional woman. When it seemed as if he'd come to a decision, Jared released her chin and stepped back. "We'll talk later but you remember what I said. Things will work out."

Casey believed him, every word he spoke. In the end, it would all be fine. They could be friends or at least part on good terms. Of that she had no doubt. Neither one of them were vindictive or bitter. It was going to be hard as hell and probably hurt for a long while, but it would work out.

For the first time since arriving at Raising Cain, Casey didn't feel as though she wanted to run and hide. She might still feel like crying buckets, but some sort of ease had washed over her at Jared's words.

The rest of the night passed without a hitch. Case and Jared worked in companionable silence. There were times when she caught him watching her and her heart leapt to life but no longer did she feel like gelding him, so things were definitely looking up.

After the way the night had gone, she expected they would leave as soon as Raising Cain had been cleaned and things stocked for the following day. Jared would give her a ride home and probably tell her he now understood where she was coming from and wish her well.

What she didn't expect was for him to follow her into the office, his face tight, his hands balled into fists at his side. "I want to touch you."

The words themselves might have been forceful, but the tone in which they were delivered was questioning. "You're asking?"

"I'm asking."

Casey could only imagine how different that must feel for him. When it came to her, he was used to taking what he wanted. She'd once given him that right and had reveled in every second of it.

Casey took a deep breath. Was this going to be along the lines of a goodbye fuck, she wondered? Could she do this and then go back to life as she'd known it? She wasn't going to have a choice. They didn't belong together. Clamping her hands to still the trembling, she looked him over.

He was so damn perfect. His body was large, his shoulders wide, his upper arms the size of her thighs. She knew that for a fact, she'd measured them before out of sheer curiosity, Jared laughing the entire time. The memory made her smile. Beneath his shirt she knew his abdomen was flat, brought on by hard work, not six-pack pretty like the guys who worked out with weights seven days a week.

Her gaze lingered over the button fly of his jeans where his cock already strained the fabric. The first time she'd seen him in the buff had been intimidating. It was a day Casey would likely never forget.

"Casey."

She was going to kill him, Jared was positive. Her gaze devoured every inch of him just the same as his often ate her up. At his voice, her gaze snapped up to his face. She wore a look more vulnerable than he had ever seen. She felt so deeply and yet tried hard to hide it. It angered him and made him sad. She was too beautiful, too wonderfully perfect to be hiding anything from him.

Her breasts swelled as she inhaled deeply. "Yes please. Touch me, Jared. Touch me all over."

"You're sure?" He couldn't remember ever asking her that question. She was nodding before he'd even finished.

"I'm sure. Your way. Please, Jared."

He missed her calling him "sir". The fact she no longer did told him exactly how hard she was still working to separate herself from him. It made him want to bellow and rage. Instead, he calmed his nerves by taking her face gently in his hands and kissing her lips lightly.

Casey leaned into him and tried to deepen the kiss. He could imagine she was feeling raw and possibly even as rough as he felt. Those emotions made a person want to claw and scrape, to devour anything within their path. Jared wasn't going to allow it. She needed gentle. She needed to realize there was more to their relationship than

rough-and-tumble sex, than S&M, than anything to do with being dominant or submissive. Until then she was going to keep distancing herself and there would be nothing Jared could do about it.

When she lifted a leg over his thigh, rubbing herself against him, Jared whispered, "Easy."

She growled in response. It was not a seductive purr. The sound was not the lost-in-pleasure whimpers he loved so much. It was a straight-out harsh sound that screamed frustration.

"You must have had a very hard night, girl."

Her hands that had once been resting on his waist tightened. She looked up at him then, her gaze pleading. "Bastard." She whispered the single word against his mouth.

"I'll make up for it now. How would you like that, Case?"

A crooked little smile curved her pouty lips. "I think I would love it."

"Good girl. Now let's get you out of these clothes."

A responsive shiver coursed through her body as he reached for the fastening of her jeans. Within minutes she stood before him without a stitch of clothing. Her body was all soft swells and sweet valleys.

Jared gathered her against him. He needed to feel her giving flesh mold to his much-harder body even if he was completely clothed and she was not. For several minutes they just stood there. He held her tight, sighing at the feel of her arms wrapped tight around him. Her hair smelled of flowers and tickled his nose, but he didn't move. At that very moment he was exactly where he belonged. She had a way of making him feel at home no matter where they were. It was one of the things that made him realize just how important she was to him, how big a part she played in his life. And come hell or high water, he had absolutely no intention of letting her slip away from him, no matter how noble she was trying to be.

When he could no longer wait to taste her, Jared lifted Casey to the flat surface of Cooper's desk. She looked around the room, taking in the desk then back to him. A soft chuckle escaped her lips. "Coop's gonna hate this."

Jared agreed. "Good reason not to tell him."

Dropping to his knees brought Jared to the perfect height. He was almost right where he had wanted to be all night long. "Spread your legs and touch yourself for me."

Color washed over her cheeks and upper chest. When she hesitated, her embarrassment evident, he helped. Using both hands he wedged her knees apart then sat back.

"Come on, Case. I want to see you play for me. I want to see how your fingers make all that slick cream I'm going to lick from you."

She closed her eyes then. He could only imagine how hard it was to be in her position, open and vulnerable to his gaze. Seconds passed before her hand uncurled from around the edge of the desk. Slowly she moved it to her cunt, her fingers sweeping up the glistening folds. Jared couldn't wait. He needed to taste her and yet he wasn't done watching so he decided to compromise.

"Look at me."

When she did as told, he opened his mouth. For a second she just stared at him as if she were unsure what to do. Jared knew the second she realized what he wanted. She sucked in a quick breath, the color of her cheeks deepened even more.

The fingers she brought to his mouth shook slightly. Jared moaned loudly as he curled his tongue around first one finger and then the next, her taste blooming across his taste buds. By the time he was done, she was trembling.

"You're the best thing I've ever tasted, girl. Indescribable."

This time she smiled. "I'm glad you like."

"Like, hell! Let me just show you how much I like."

Jared wanted to bury his face in her cream-slicked pussy but held himself back, barely. He wanted her first release to build high, so high she was crazy with it. And then when she tumbled over, he was going to keep going until her climaxes rolled in on waves and she begged him to stop.

He was also very curious as to whether she would remember his rule and ask permission or if the amount she had distanced herself no longer made that a consideration. Just as no longer referring to him as sir. He'd never felt a title to be important, but for some reason Casey using his given name felt wrong.

The first lap of his tongue to her pussy was long and slow, starting down low then circling her clit. She sighed deeply and tried to wiggle closer. Jared held her still, his arms banded around her thighs.

Continuing on the current path, he worked her slowly, sometimes going as deep as he possibly could inside her. It wasn't until she was gripping his hair in her hands and begging that he paid any attention to her clit.

The heat of his mouth against the tiny bundle of nerves caused her entire body to tighten. Within seconds her legs were shaking and her breathing had increased until she was nearly panting.

Her taste was sweet. She was so wet he could easily penetrate her with his cock, slipping in and slamming home until they both shouted their release. It was a tempting thought, but not one he planned on carrying through.

"Oh! Oh yesss, right there." She moaned then and went back to grasping the desk with one white-knuckled hand. The other had such a tight hold in his hair Jared felt the sting clear to his cock. He worked her with his tongue and his fingers as well, sliding in three as far as they could possibly go. She was hot and wild. Her orgasm was building. Jared could feel the minute ripples as the muscles tightened around his digits.

"Please!"

High-pitched and ragged, the single word meant the world. "Not yet. Let it build, Case. When it comes, I want you to let go completely. Let it carry you away." *Back to me*, he added silently.

"I can't..."

"You can. Just a second longer, baby."

He thrust in and out while lightly biting the tender flesh on her inner thigh before moving back to her clit. It was time. Jared wanted to feel her come, he wanted to hear her scream his name, but most of all he wanted to taste her release.

Jared concentrated all his efforts on her clit. He flicked it and swirled it with his tongue until she released his hair with her hand and lay back on the desk gasping for air. "Please. Oh god! Please, please, please may I come?"

Ah, she was relenting, giving in to his wants and desires in exchange for her own needs. Jared smiled against the flesh of her inner thigh. She was so fucking beautiful.

"Yes. Come for me. Come now!"

A few more flicks of his tongue had Casey bucking against him, calling his name until she was out of breath. Her release was like water to a thirsty man, he couldn't get enough.

Jared was far from done. He licked and laved her folds lightly until her breathing slowed and then he started over. She was his, all he'd ever wanted and more than he could have ever hoped for. He didn't plan to stop until she realized it and once again used the title that bound them together in a way more than just mere sex could.

Chapter Eight

Jared was out of his ever-loving mind if he thought she could possibly come again. Slick with sweat and damp with her juices, Casey's body trembled. Her clit was so sensitive the slightest touch was nearly painful and that wasn't even accounting for the fingers he had buried deep inside her.

There was a definite burn and throb going on between her thighs. He was stretching her, and for a brief minute Casey wondered if he was planning to fist her. It was something they had tried a time or two, something she'd been very interested in after hearing stories of wonderful G-spot orgasms brought on by the extreme fullness, but at the moment she couldn't quite grasp the words to ask or even care. Whatever he was doing felt too good to worry about specifics.

Her body was a writhing mass of sensation, moving against his fingers, fucking against them hard and deep without conscious thought. It seemed as if the orgasms never quite stopped. Instead, she was rolling from one to the next with no down-time in-between. They just got more intense as they peaked and she flew higher and higher.

If he didn't stop she was going to faint, that was how overwhelmed her senses were. "No more."

His throaty chuckle sounded rough to her ears. "I thought you said my way."

She had, hadn't she? Casey couldn't think of a good reason to stop. She wasn't even one-hundred-percent sure she wanted to stop. Her brain warred with her body and this time her body was winning. Her head lolled to the side and Casey forced her eyes open to see Jared, to get his attention.

His chin rested on her thigh, his gaze pinned on her face. A tremor ran through her body, shocking pleasure as her hips bucked against his fingers once again. "I ca...can't. No more."

He nibbled on her thigh, still watching her close. Casey couldn't think, couldn't string enough words together to beg for mercy. Her body was set upon its course for satisfaction at any and all cost and Jared seemed determined to see to it she got exactly that, extreme gratification.

Another orgasm hit, tearing a keening cry from her parched lips. She was past the point of exhaustion and now the only thing her body could do in response to the stimuli was tense. Jared's face swam into focus for a brief second before her head thudded to the desk's surface. She was starting to tremble from the inside out. It was an out-of-control shivering that had absolutely nothing to do with being cold yet made Casey want to be held and petted.

"Please..." she gasped when he scissored his fingers inside her aching pussy. "Please, sir, no more."

And he stopped.

Casey didn't have time to wonder why before he gathered her in his arms and sat on the chair behind Cooper's desk. The feel of his hands on her, his arms solid bands of muscle holding her tight, keeping her safe stole all thought from her mind.

The only thing she could think to do was to hold on tight and burrow in until the shaking stopped, her body calmed and her mind once again worked as it should.

When things settled, she started to feel a bit silly. Every time the shaking happened and she had to be taken care of she felt a bit shy. It was a vulnerability she didn't think she would ever get used to.

"Hi." It was a stupid thing to say but nothing else came to mind.

Jared chuckled. "Hi." His face then took on a very serious look. "Thank you."

She wasn't sure what he could possibly be thanking her for. Wasn't it the other way around? Shouldn't she be thanking him for all the mind-blowing orgasms? "For what?"

The silence that greeted her question made her squirm a bit. It felt as though she were missing something, something important, but for the life of her she couldn't figure out what.

"For letting me touch you."

Letting? Did he just thank her for letting him touch her? Casey's first thought was, *Who is this man and what has he done with my Jared?*

My Jared?

God, she was royally fucked in the head. One minute they were happy as hell with him owning her. The next she'd booted him to the curb, not knowing if she could be the submissive he needed even though she still cared deeply for him. Now not only were they going back and forth, but he had reverted to asking permission and her *letting* him do things. The thought made her shudder.

"Since when did you start asking permission?" Casey knew her tone was confrontational, sarcastic even. There was just something about his demeanor that rubbed her wrong.

"Since you started acting like a skittish filly bolting from your own shadow."

Jared was right. She had been running, knowing it didn't make his words any less irritating.

"Well, don't." She levered herself from his lap. On legs so wobbly she wasn't sure they would hold her, Casey turned her back on him and went for her clothes. The action would have meant an end to the conversation for most people. However, Jared wasn't most people.

He stood and moved toward her. "Don't what, Casey? Don't ask to touch you or don't just touch you of my own free will? You're giving off mixed signals here, girl. Best make up your mind."

She whirled on him then. Why couldn't he get it through his thick skull that she'd been fairly resolute in her decision before he'd forced himself back into her life? Why did he have to continue to confuse both her mind and her body? Why in the holy hell

did he think he needed to change who he was for her, to *ask* for the love of fuck! She needed for him to know, to understand.

Casey poked a finger into his chest then looked way up and into his eyes. "Don't ask for what you normally wouldn't," she sneered.

Jared opened his mouth to speak but she cut him off. Respectfulness and submissiveness be damned. He was not going to do this. She wouldn't *allow* it. Now that one ought to go over well, she thought just before laying into him.

"Don't you dare try to change who you are to suit what you think I want or need. I can't do it for you and I won't allow you to do it for me." She felt ten feet tall. "I know I'm not what you need." Just saying it hurt through and through. "I wanted to try. I really did, but every time I saw disappointment in your eyes over something I did or didn't do, it made me realize I'm not a real submissive."

"Now wait a damn minute!" Jared's voice thundered through the room, but Casey was not going to be dissuaded.

"No, you wait just a damn minute because I'm not done. I have tried time and again to explain this to you, Jared, but you never listen. You only hear what you want to hear."

She sounded pitiful even to her own ears. As the moments ticked by it became harder and harder not to cry. Casey was sure her nose was red and her eyes were probably not much better. Her voice had probably risen a notch or two, something it always did when she cried.

Jared stood there. His arms were crossed over his chest, the muscles bunched tight. Other than the muscle ticking in his jaw, he could have been carved from stone, he was so still. All Casey knew was she had to make him understand. She had to get him to listen. She was beginning to doubt herself, and in doing so, there was a good chance she would give in. The only way to make sure that didn't happen was to get him to agree with her, to see her side of things. She was frantic with the need to see he did.

"Don't you see? I'm not ever going to automatically do what you say without at least wondering why, but more than likely asking why as well. I'm not the blindly follow orders type. I can't even imagine asking to eat and go to the bathroom much less give it a try." She beseeched him with her eyes to understand what she was trying to get at. "We would constantly go round and round and you would always be disappointed. Soon enough that would turn to anger and resentment and end ugly with both of us hurt."

When she stopped to take a breath, he asked, "Are you done?" His tone was deceptively calm, one Casey had never heard before and hoped she never did again. It made her want to hide. He was either very hurt or very angry, but she couldn't back down now because it was obvious he was planning to argue.

She shook her head. "I'm not going to argue with you about this, Jared. Hell, just take this conversation for instance if you don't yet believe me. *This*," she stressed, waving her hands around her, "is not submissive. The first time you told me to do something I wasn't at least interested in there's a good chance I would tell you to go fuck yourself. That is not submissive, Jared. You would eventually be miserable with me and you know it!"

The only thing Jared knew for fact was Casey was a bigger pain in the ass than he ever could have imagined. He couldn't believe she might actually believe all the bullshit she was spouting. Where in the hell had all these dumbass ideas come from anyway? Hell, he didn't even want to know just yet. Right now he was pissed. Royally and thoroughly pissed and wanted nothing more than to beat her ass into next week, making her so sore she wouldn't be able to sit for days without remembering why.

One side of him was relieved. Although they were insecurities on her part, they were so outlandish Jared no longer worried he wouldn't be able to show her the light. The other part of him was angry because she'd made them suffer when there had been no need.

The woman evidently needed lessons in communicating. She'd gotten her head full of harebrained ideas and run with them, never once asking his opinion. That was something he would make sure didn't happen again. Ever!

"Done yet?" He asked the question with much more calm than he actually felt.

She nodded and continued to stare up at him, not moving even when he bent low so they were nearly nose to nose. "I would like to tell you your worries are stupid but that wouldn't be right because they're your worries and evidently mean enough that you would break off our relationship without talking to me about them beforehand." She blushed. Whether in embarrassment or anger, Jared didn't know and didn't care.

Damn but he was going back and forth between wanting to spank her ass or hug her close and tell her everything was going to be fine. He rammed a hand through his hair and backed away from her, knowing now was not the time for either.

"I need a few minutes. Finish dressing and meet me up front." Jared didn't wait for an answer before leaving the office that was still filled with Casey's scent.

She'd spent so much time getting herself to believe the drivel she'd just finished spouting to him, Jared knew she wouldn't be willing to listen if he told her differently. When he'd offered his collar, in the way of matching anklets, she'd gotten scared. Was it due to the insecurities she just mentioned, the level of commitment, the intensity, whether conjured in her head or real? Jared had no clue.

It very well could be a mixture of all the above. It didn't really matter either way. In order for him to get her to see she was exactly what he wanted and needed, he was going to have to show her. It was that simple.

A couple of deep breaths calmed his nerves and he no longer felt like throttling the little idiot. It was just in time because in the next second she came warily into the room. She stopped when she reached him. He was now perched on the edge of a barstool, his booted feet rooted to the floor.

"I'm not sure where you got your information from, girl, but someone has done us a major disservice by telling you what their idea of a *real* and *true* submissive is." He

held up a hand when she opened her mouth to talk. "My turn. You just listen." Casey nodded, but it was obvious as hell she wasn't happy about it.

She looked so damn cute. Her hair was a mess of curls around her pink face. Her lips were pinched and flat with some emotion, irritation or anger, Jared assumed. Her eyes held the weight of the world as well as uncertainty. A man could see clear to her soul through her wide green eyes if he only took the time to look. Jared planned to take as much time as needed to see her every fear, her every worry, her every deep, dark, naughty secret. He only prayed she stayed open to him for the opportunity.

"I could tell you wherever you got your information was dead wrong, but I doubt you would believe me, so instead I am going to show you. When is Autumn due back home?"

She cocked her head to the side as if trying to figure out what he was getting at. "Not for a couple more weeks."

"Okay. Good. I want you to take a trip with me this weekend."

Jared could tell she wanted to balk at the idea. He needed to get her there and at this point would do just about anything to make sure it happened. "No questions, Case. Just give me this, please. Do this for me, for us. Let me prove you wrong..." he let his words trail off before finishing, "unless you're afraid."

A challenging glint flashed across her eyes, making Jared smile inwardly. He'd scored.

"Fine then, but I need to know where we're going so I know what to pack."

There was no way in hell Jared planned to tell her he was taking her to a BDSM conference. Not yet. It would give her too much time to worry and fret, and that was the last thing either of them needed.

"Pack casually, except that little black dress of yours I like so well. Bring something sexy as well. I'll take care of the rest." He started toward the door, his hand at Casey's elbow, steering her along the way to his truck.

"The rest of what?"

Jared locked the door to Raising Cain and loaded Casey into his truck before answering her question. "Anything and everything." She didn't seem too pleased by his answer, but other than a small huff, she remained quiet.

"One more thing, Case." This was where she was going to try to backpedal. If his expectations were right it might be best if he pulled onto the shoulder of the road in case she opened the door and tried to make a jump for it.

Her face was stark against the dark interior. It had been a long two days and an even longer three weeks but it was part of the deal, part of the plan he'd worked out in his head so he needed her agreement. The questioning look she gave Jared prompted him to continue.

"While we're gone this weekend, things will be just as they were before. My way, same rules. And as always, I am ready to listen anytime you have a question or just feel the need to talk." Jared stressed the last because it was evidently something she hadn't felt comfortable with before.

She nibbled at her bottom lip for a second. "That's not a good idea. I'm not very good at this game." Even in the dark interior he could see the telltale blush climb up her cheeks. "Except in the bedroom."

Good was not the adjective he would use to describe how she was in the bedroom. If she were any better at pleasing his cock they might very well kill each other. Just the thought of her bound to the bed, spread-eagle and ready for not only his cock but his lash, had Jared steel-hard in no time.

Her taste still lingered on his tongue and probably his fingers as well. She was sweet and spicy and always ready for him. It was hard to decide whether he enjoyed the fist-tight grasp of her ass or the moist, hot depth of her cunt better.

"I'm not playing a game with you, Casey. Far from it." Jared reached over and tilted her chin until she was looking at him. "Now tell me you agree. It's only a weekend. What have you got to lose?"

Casey nodded. "Okay, I'll go."

Jared could tell she was already worrying over where they were going to go and what was going to be expected of her. He hoped like hell he was making the right decision. Taking her to a BDSM conference and showing her there was no one right way was the only thing he could think to do other than kidnapping her difficult ass and hiding her away until she relented to be his for all time.

Hiding a chuckle behind a cough, he pulled back onto the road. She had evidently done something to him during the short time they had been dating. He was head over heels in love with her. Just the idea of losing her made him want to take very drastic measures to the point he was sounding like one of the heroes in those romance novels his sister was always reading.

Chapter Nine

Her mind. That was the answer to Jared's question of what did she have to lose by agreeing to go away with him for the weekend. She must be certifiable. Of course she was! She'd gone from being a level-headed divorced mother with her own business to some crazy woman who had no idea what in the hell it was she wanted.

One minute she was sure she couldn't live without Jared and was willing to do whatever necessary to make sure he knew it. It was at those times over the last several days of them working together that she had given in. Those were the times when she reverted to calling him "sir" and loved the way the word felt rolling off her tongue as well as the look to cross his face upon hearing it.

But then there were the times when she annoyed and irritated him with questions. If she were really his property she wouldn't feel the need. Being completely owned would mean she not only trusted but submitted to a point where she always followed, never feeling the need to question or balk. Right? It was during the times she did just those things that she was reminded why she had called it off. It was for the best.

And if I keep telling myself that, then I might actually believe it at some point.

Yeah right! She was a fucking moron and she knew it. Why couldn't she just be super-selfish and go for what she wanted instead of what was right? Damn her conscience anyway.

Casey was pulled from her maudlin thoughts by the shrill ringing of the phone. She answered then cursed herself for not having checked the caller ID. She wasn't in the mood to talk to Jared, or pretty much anyone else for that matter. Nervous didn't even broach how she felt. Needing the next few hours to gather herself, Casey had planned to sort of hide out.

"Hello."

It was Cash. Casey recognized her oldest brother's voice immediately. "Hey."

"You sure about this trip? If you don't want to go you don't have to." It was just like her brother to skip any niceties and get right to the point. It was also like him not to hesitate in protecting her just as he wouldn't hesitate to boss her around. For some reason his words got her back up and made her want to growl in irritation. Not only at him but at Jared as well. Casey had planned to let her brothers know about her leaving town for the weekend but Jared had evidently beaten her to it.

"I *know* I don't have to go, Cash. I'm a grown-ass woman and if I didn't want to go I wouldn't, but I gave Jared my word and plan to stick by it." She was silent for a moment before saying out loud what she had been afraid to admit before. "I owe it to him, to us, to see if there is something there."

"Good girl. I hope it all works out the way you want, Case. If you need us for anything we're just a call away."

Casey hung up the phone with a smile on her face. If there was one thing she'd never had to worry about over the years it was that she always had the support of her brothers. The McCain clan was very serious about family. The way they had always been there to support her proved things were not going to change anytime soon. For that Casey felt very blessed.

And now to get back to packing. The thought grumbled through her mind as she once again gazed into her closet. She'd already pulled out her best jeans and a pair of black slacks as well as the black cocktail dress Jared liked. Blouses were harder to decide on. She knew Jared wouldn't want her to wear a bra and that always left her feeling angsty. The gals weren't as perky as they used to be, so finding a top where she didn't feel the need to tuck her nipples into the waistband of her pants was always difficult.

Casey chuckled at the thought. Okay, she wasn't so large she would actually need to do something so silly, but how she looked braless and dressed still caused her issues.

Since it was summer, it made things a bit easier. She had a couple of tank tops with built-in bras so those were an automatic pack but they weren't dressy enough to wear out so she continued to paw through the clothes in her closet and drawers. Finally settling on a few more blouses, she tossed them toward the suitcase lying open on her bed.

Now on to the something sexy Jared had requested.

Pulling out a corset and a couple of nighties, Casey eyed them dubiously. It would have been much easier if he had told her exactly what it was he wanted to see her in. It wasn't as if he didn't know what was in her lingerie drawer. He'd bought most of it for her. Of course she hardly ever wore any of it. Casey had long ago come to the conclusion he bought her things because he enjoyed taking her to the stores and having her try things on for him.

The phone rang again. This time Casey did check the caller ID. It was Jared. Instead of irritating her, the fact he was calling exhilarated her and caused her pulse to leap.

"Hi, Jared."

"Just making sure you haven't run off, girl."

A smile curved her lips. "I said I would go. You wouldn't by any chance tell me where we're going now so I can finish packing?"

"Nope."

A man of many words he was not. "Okay then. At least tell me what kind of something sexy I should bring."

A low, growling sound emitted through the phone line, making Casey's smile widen. "Something on the modest side of sexy."

Now that was an oxymoron if she'd ever heard one. "Jared, there is nothing modest about any of the outfits you've bought me and you know it."

His breathing sounded a bit louder. Casey could almost imagine them talking dirty, having a hot little phone sex episode. They had done it before, once when he'd had to

travel out of town for work. It was something she would never forget. Not nearly as good as the real deal but still very hot in its own way.

When he answered, his voice was a low, rumbling purr. "That's because you've got one hot body, girl. One that should be flaunted not covered up."

Heat radiated up her chest and over her cheeks. "Well, thank you, but that still doesn't help me figure out what to take."

"Stubborn as ever, I see." His chuckle softened the blow but his words dampened her mood. They only added to the proof she'd been trying to give him as to why she was about as far from submissive as a person could be.

"Yep, and not likely to change."

He swore. The word was so low she barely heard it across the line. Several tense seconds passed before he finally answered her question, his tone clipped. "Pick one of your corsets with all the trimmings and don't forget shoes to go with it. Something high."

"Thank you." Casey hated it when she disappointed him. It made her want to cry. She'd tried for a while but it was useless. The only thing she'd accomplished was to make herself miserable. She wasn't the quiet, docile type. She was loud and opinionated and liked to have fun. Pretending to be anything other just didn't seem to work.

"Damn it, Casey! Don't. Don't go all quiet on me, girl. You did nothing wrong. Nothing, do you hear me?"

"I hear you." And she did, she just didn't believe him.

"Yeah. You hear me, you're just not listening and you're not talking. I want you to promise me that this weekend you'll work hard to do both."

He'd lost her. She heard everything he'd said, always had. "I don't know what you mean." She'd never considered it beneath her to fess up that she was completely clueless about something, so why start now?

"You hear every word I say and evidently the bullshit others spout too, but you don't actually listen to the message. That needs to change, and instead of assuming things, you need to ask questions, ask for clarification if you aren't sure. It's called communicating, Casey, and it's something we need to work on. Both of us."

It sounded as if he were doing a very good job of it to her. Of course that was the most she could remember him saying all at one time. The whole idea of asking questions went against everything she'd read on the internet about D/s relationships and being a sub. Wasn't she supposed to just do everything without question?

Damn, this was all so confusing. Casey felt a headache coming on. Between stressing, over-packing and wondering where they were going and his phone call, she didn't really know which end was up at the moment. The line was quiet. Jared was waiting and Casey knew what it was he was waiting for. She had already agreed on the trip so she might as well go the whole way and see where it left them.

"I promise."

She could hear the smile in his voice when he spoke. "Thank you. Now finish packing and get some sleep. I'll pick you up at seven in the morning."

* * * * *

Jared rose well before dawn. He'd packed a bag with clothes and another with toys and other pervertibles. If Casey would let it happen, their weekend could be a lot of fun. The flight was short and landed with no problems. A shuttle took them to the conference hotel. Upon entering through the front doors it became evident something was taking place and that something was not just the average series of business meetings.

People stood in small groups talking. Old friends hugged and smiled, becoming reacquainted with each other. The atmosphere felt very positive and welcoming.

Casey followed him to the front desk where he checked them in. Then the two of them made their way to a row of tables where they filled out waiver forms, showed

identification and collected name badges. He was somewhat surprised Casey had not yet commented on their location.

Jared turned toward her only to notice her gaze was trained on a cluster of people. In the group stood a tall blonde woman, who wore as little as possible while still being considered legal in the hotel's public lobby. A wide collar hugged her throat and from it hung a shiny silver leash. What stood out most to Jared was the look of pure joy on the woman's face as she laughed and joked with those around her.

The man holding the other end of the woman's leash smiled at something she said then proceeded to swat her ass sharply. The sound reverberated around the room, causing a few heads to turn and the woman to blush. Otherwise, it didn't garner too much attention.

Casey turned in his direction. "Where are we? What is this place?" She whispered the words for his ears only.

Jared nodded to a bellhop who had been waiting with their luggage on a cart before answering. "I'll tell you all about it when we get to our room."

She studied him for a brief second before agreeing. "Okay." Jared could tell she had questions, a lot of them. He only hoped his answers were good enough.

Her gaze wandered around the lobby and the people there. When they reached a set of doors leading to the indoor pool area and atrium, she did the same. She continued her perusal of the areas surrounding them until their ride in the glass-sided elevator came to an end and they were at the door to their room. Jared tipped the bellhop and carried their bags into the room. It was spacious, fairly typical as hotels go. They had a decent view of the atrium so he had no complaints.

He'd been to the conference once before and had thoroughly enjoyed the presentations as well as the onsite play party. There was nothing quite like the energy felt when a few hundred kinky people congregated together. Jared hoped Casey felt the same by the end of the weekend.

"Is now good?" She seemed uncertain. "There was a woman being led by a leash out there, Jared." Her eyes were wide and super curious. It was a look he'd grown to love and didn't believe he would ever tire of.

"Yes, girl. Now's good." He sat on one of the two straight-backed chairs tucked neatly beneath the small round table nestled into the corner of the room.

Casey was flitting around the room, more than likely getting rid of some of the nervous energy coursing through her body. Jared could think of better ways to rid a body of nervous energy but decided against it. Now was not the right time for stroking and licking every inch of her bound body, no matter how much his cock thought otherwise.

Jared watched her. He seriously doubted she realized how well she served him when it came to the simple things, such as unpacking his bags. She looked around briefly as if searching for something before going back to the task at hand. He had carried the toy bag in and instead of dropping it at the door as he had the others, it lay at his feet beneath the table. That was a conversation he was not yet ready to have. They had never played in a public setting and he didn't want to make Casey any more nervous than she apparently already was. At least not until the time was right. Instead, he decided to sidetrack her by answering her questions and in the process begin what he hoped to be a good conversation.

"We're at the Southern States Leather Conference. It's the largest BDSM conference in Texas."

Her eyes widened. She stopped unpacking to stare at him while worrying her bottom lip. "You've been here before?"

Jared nodded. "I came last year and had a lot of fun. Finish unpacking then we'll go get something to eat and go over tomorrow's schedule to see which presentations look good."

Instead of doing as she'd been told, she asked, "Why did you bring me here?"

Not listening was a habit she would lose soon enough, Jared knew. Her need to question boiled down to a need to trust and that was something that came with time. He lifted a brow at her and decided to let it go. There were things much more important than having every command blindly followed. There was a desire to obey that had to be cultivated and based on respect and a willingness to serve. It was a lifetime commitment he was looking for, a partner, and in order for that to happen they had to work through the rough spots, together.

"You don't believe me when I say you are exactly what I need, that not all submissives are created equal just the same as not all dominants are in their wants and needs. So I decided to show you the diversity firsthand."

Her brow furrowed. She was thinking too hard again. "It's not that I don't believe you. It's that I know me."

Jared was not going to even get started in the same argument again. It took everything in him not to roll his eyes. "Casey, you don't know yourself half as well as you think you do."

His words acted like a stake, making her back ramrod straight. Her hands were now on her hips while she glared at him. "And you think you do?"

"Actually, yes. I do. Now finish unpacking so we can go eat. I'm hungry."

She didn't argue his point but her body language made it clear she wanted to. Within minutes she'd finished, stowing their suitcases inside the closet so they would be out of the way.

After a trip into the bathroom, she washed her face and brushed her hair then eyed what she was wearing before looking his way. "I have no clue what people wear to these things."

Jared decided it was time for a little reminder. He made sure his tone brooked no argument. "It doesn't really matter what people wear to these things, girl. It only matters what I want you to wear."

Her face took on a completely different look. It was almost as if he'd buried his hand in her hair and tugged. She just let go. She didn't quite smile, but a peaceful look replaced the nervous scowl furrowing her brows.

"Yes, sir."

Jared did smile then, wide. He strode across the room and collected her into his arms. "Good girl. Now why don't you exchange those jeans for a casual skirt? Keep the tank top, I like it, but lose the panties. You won't need them this weekend."

Casey blushed then extended up onto her tiptoes for a kiss. In a matter of minutes they were back in the elevator and off to the hotel restaurant. When they got there, they found it full of chattering conference goers. After only a short wait they were seated at a table close to an open walkway, making it easy to watch people as they walked back and forth.

Voyeurism was something the two of them had in common, so no matter what, she would at least get some pleasure out of the experience. Even if it was just from watching all the different styles of people over the course of the weekend.

A waiter appeared almost out of nowhere to take their order. When he left, Jared pulled out the schedule so they could go over the presenters list as well as class topics and descriptions. There were several that caught his eye. Casey seemed to be excited one second and unsure the next. He chalked it up to fear of the unknown. She'd never experienced a conference and until she got out there and talked to and watched people, she wouldn't be too comfortable in the unfamiliar setting.

Jared gave her hand a comforting squeeze before resting it on her upper thigh. She immediately opened her legs for him, just as she'd been instructed to early on in their relationship.

When their food was served, he had the waiter deliver both plates to the spot in front of him. He had to give Casey credit at remaining quiet when he was sure she wondered what the hell he was up to.

"You'll eat lunch by my hand today." The look on her face was utterly priceless as Jared forked the first bite into her mouth. It was going to be one interesting weekend for sure.

Chapter Ten

It was going to be the longest meal in history. Of that, Casey was sure. She could feel her cheeks flame as she parted her lips for the first forkful. Jared watched her intently, a look on his face that warned her not to argue. It took everything in her not to do so. They were in a public place for goodness sake. She was sure everyone would be watching them so she kept her eyes lowered. If she saw people were indeed watching and even worse, snickering, she had no clue what she would do. It would probably not be good though. That much Casey did know.

“Look up here, girl. I want to see those pretty green eyes of yours.”

Casey looked up as asked but she was far from happy about it. The thought crossed her mind of telling him she wasn’t hungry, but knew it wouldn’t matter. Jared would see right through her ploy and very possibly do something else to embarrass her.

He laid her fork down long enough to take a few bites of his own food. She watched while he slowly chewed. What she really wanted to do was melt into the floor. What in the hell could he possibly get out of feeding her? It wasn’t as if stuffing forks full of food into her mouth was sexy in any way, shape or form.

Unable to get the question out of her mind, Casey decided just to come out and ask him. “Why feed me?”

“Because I want to.”

She should have known he would play obtuse. She could be just as persistent as Jared was being evasive. “But why do you want to? What could you possibly get out of feeding me?” She waved a hand around them. “It isn’t like this is sexual.”

Jared looked around the room then leaned over the table, holding her hand snugly to the polished wood surface. “It isn’t always about sex, Case, although I could make

our lunch here very sexual. What this is about for me is control. When I feed you, I control another aspect of your day, even if a small one.”

A shiver ran the length of her spine. Although the actions of him feeding her were embarrassing, his words made her react in a completely different way. Not for the first time Casey's mind warred with the realities of a D/s relationship.

In her mind it was everything she'd ever hoped for. Someone whose strength and leadership abilities she could trust and feed off. Someone who could help her to be the best possible person she could be, who would lend their strength to her when needed. The knowledge of what was expected by having clearly defined rules and protocols. It was all she had ever wanted and much more if she considered the S&M and sexual aspects.

What muddled the waters were times like right now, times where she found herself doing something she really did not want to do. Pushing limits and releasing control were a couple of the things, even if from opposite sides, that seemed to be a staple in any lifestyle relationship. So why was it Casey couldn't seem to do either right? She sucked at having her limits pushed, her lunch with Jared feeding her just another reminder, and giving up control always seemed to be an uphill battle. It wasn't a matter of always being on. It was more of a matter of ever being on for her. Once again though, Jared didn't see it. If he did, he wouldn't be nudging her lips open for another bite.

Casey took the food into her mouth then proceeded to look around while she chewed. She was half afraid everyone in the room would be staring. She was thoroughly surprised to find only a couple of people watching her and neither, it seemed, were doing so in a negative way. Both smiled widely at her, seemingly more curious or happy even about Jared's idea of lunch.

Otherwise it seemed as if no one were watching them. Most were talking in boisterous groups and having a wonderful time. It was then Casey realized how much negative energy she'd put into what could have been a fun experience. The realization sucked the breath from her lungs. They were at a BDSM conference and Jared was

feeding her. Big fucking deal! She was making way too much of what they were doing, closing herself off to any and all possibilities because she cared way too much about what others thought.

She'd told Jared she would give the weekend a try and yet she had nearly made a mockery of her first test. It seemed there wasn't much she could get right when it came to the type of relationship Jared was in search of, so the least she could do was finish off the meal with much more dignity than she had started it with.

When Jared offered another forkful, Casey opened her mouth wide and made sure to lick the fork clean before letting it slip from her lips. She couldn't help but to smile at him. It might take her a bit longer to figure things out but eventually she would.

When the waiter came around and refilled Jared's coffee cup, Casey prepared it the way she knew he liked it. She'd not really ever seen doing so as being submissive. She enjoyed taking care of people, especially her family and Jared. What made something so small an act of submission was the expectation on his part as well as the consequences if she did not submit.

Jared preferred his coffee a certain way and had explained to her early on in their relationship exactly how that was. He expected it to be prepared for him in that manner whether at home or out in public. There was no skipping the task because she was in a bad mood or just not in the mood. It was expected of her and had consequences if not completed as expected. That right there was the gist of the problem. As soon as things switched from being done because she enjoyed and wanted to do them to being done because it was expected she do them, she started to flounder.

She couldn't be the only one flailing about like a fish out of water, making mistakes right and left, but it sure seemed that way. The websites she'd read said she should always be on her best behavior and making mistakes was not allowed. They said if she was a real submissive she should always enjoy serving her owner and never have an off day. She should never question his authority and always be agreeable. That was something Casey was sure she'd never be able to accomplish. She thought it was

impossible, at least for her, and wondered how those around her could seem so happy when held up against such stringent expectations.

Sometimes rules and protocols were forgotten in the hours of a busy day. What then? It was then that she disappointed and, man, did she ever hate those days!

There was something Casey could do about lunch though. She could make the rest of it a pleasant experience for the both of them. She had just learned that even though she might be somewhat embarrassed by Jared feeding her, it was not hurting anyone, including her, so what did it matter? He was happy, and if Casey looked deep enough and cared to admit the truth, his crooked smile as well as the attention she was receiving was making her happy as well.

Jared picked up a piece of garlic bread from his plate. He took a bite then offered her one. Casey grasped his hand to steady it to her mouth then bit into the crusted bread. He brushed her lips with a finger. His eyes smoldered at the touch. An unseen spark arced between them, pulling them together, holding them locked to each other.

"Thank you, sir." She licked her lips of the crumbs she felt there.

The rest of the meal was spent with great conversation interspersed with a nibble here and there of the remaining finger food from both of their plates. By the time they finished, Casey was hot and wet and ready for a trip to their room. From the look of Jared's cock, hard behind the confines of his jeans, he felt the same.

"Can we go back to the room for a while?"

He smiled in a way that made her heart flutter. "Why would you want to do that, girl?"

"Please, sir. You know." Casey was sure her blush had turned a very ugly shade of crimson.

Jared put enough money on the table to cover the bill and a tip. Pulling her from her seat, he led her at a slow pace up the wide-open walkway. They were heading away from the part of the hotel where their room was. "I think so, but I still want to hear it from your own lips."

Before she could try to drag him the other way he had led them through a curtained partition and seated himself on a couch. There were several couches and chairs lining the walls of the long hallway. People were seated, some on the furniture, some kneeling on the floor. More than anything Casey wanted to be one of the ones kneeling, but couldn't quite bring herself to do it.

As if he'd read her mind, Jared tugged her hand, drawing her attention to him then motioned to the floor at his feet, leaving her no decision in the matter except to ignore him completely and do as she liked. That just wasn't something she could do, so Casey knelt, facing him.

Moving closer to the edge of the couch, he opened his thighs and pulled her close for a kiss. Even sitting, he was very tall. Casey had to arch her neck in order to reach his mouth.

Jared broke the kiss then rubbing a hand through the length of her hair, said, "Now tell me why you want to go back to the room."

Something had changed during their lunch. He'd seen it in her eyes as she gazed around the room as well as in her demeanor. She'd gone from having a very stubborn tilt to her chin to smiling and licking his fingers every chance she got. Jared wasn't sure what brought on the change, but he liked it and planned to talk to her about it. Doing so might give him a bit of insight as to what was going on in her mind and why she thought she was not what he needed.

Her blush was so damn cute he planned to keep her cheeks pink by one mean or another this weekend. Both sets as a matter of fact. That thought nearly had him groaning. Tomorrow night's play party was going to be one heck of an experience for the both of them, Jared was sure.

Casey spoke in a near whisper. Her lips were close to his, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "I wanted to go play."

"Mmm, that does sound like fun. What did you have in mind?"

She shifted her weight from one knee to the other and back before settling into a more comfortable position. "Nothing really. It's just lunch did end up being, ummm, hot, and by the time you were done feeding me, I couldn't think of anything else besides having sex with you."

Jared laughed then. She was so refreshing and outspoken. Even while unsure and embarrassed she just wasn't willing to back down.

"So it wasn't all just me being the bad guy and making you do something you didn't want to do?"

This time she looked away from him. It was obvious to Jared his question made her uncomfortable. Poor thing. He hoped she realized she had a lot more similar conversations in her future. When she looked back to him, he witnessed guilt in her eyes. Jared didn't like it. She had nothing to be guilty of.

"At first, yes, that was how I felt. But then I realized people weren't looking at us in a bad way and you were smiling."

Jared watched her closely as he spoke. "And you're partial to my smile?"

"Making you smile makes me happy."

"Sounds like a win-win to me." He leaned in close and kissed her soundly on the mouth. "But you still haven't told me exactly what it was you wanted to do back in the room. I want details, girl." The growling sound she made had Jared chuckling.

"You are a stubborn man."

"Yep, and not going to change either, although from what I have seen, you give me plenty of competition on the department. So you might as well get on with it."

"Yes, sir." Casey laid her hands on his thighs. She ever-so slowly moved one up until it lay across his stone-hard erection. "I wanted to get just like this, on my knees, while you held my hair in your hands and fucked my face."

Her words made his pulse leap. Fucking her face was something he loved to do. She had a great throat and although she had not perfected her deep-throat techniques, the

sounds she made while she struggled to take him deeper and deeper only added to the eroticism of it all for Jared.

"I know you enjoy it when my lips get all red and puffy and my eyes water until my makeup runs. Why you like the look I'll never know or understand." She shook her head a little.

Jared was just about undone. "It's not just the look or even the sounds, girl, although they add to it. It's about the feel of your hair in my hand as I guide you. It's about the moist heat of your mouth and knowing you're struggling to keep your lips open and wide for my taking. As you know, it's about being in control."

And Jared did see in her face she understood. For him it was about control in every aspect. He was a dominant man by nature. Not because he could bully someone into it or because he expected it as his due. It wasn't a game or something he turned off. It was simply who he was.

"What else?"

She buried her face in his neck. "Then I wanted you to take my ass."

His cute little Casey. He had fucked her in the ass too many times to count. It was one of the things he loved most. There was nothing quite like taking her ass, deciding whether to do so nicely or merely because she was his property and that was what he wanted. From the beginning of their relationship Jared had considered himself quite lucky she enjoyed anal sex in all its forms, just as much as he did.

"I think fucking your ass is a great idea." And he did. Jared's cock was nearly bursting he was so fucking ready. Between watching her struggle through lunch, her voice, touch and taste, he was teetering on edge.

Her green eyes were bright when she lifted her face from the crook of his neck to stand. "We can go back to the room, then?" She asked the question as if it were rhetorical and she expected to do so.

Jared stood as well. Gathering her hand into his, he took a deep breath to calm his overeager cock. "Not just yet, girl. I want to have a look around first."

Casey's mouth hung open. It was a rather comical sight. She looked at him as if he'd just sprouted a set of horns. Her cheeks were once again pink, but not in the cute, slightly embarrassed way he enjoyed. If the mulish jut of her chin were any indication, Jared would bet he'd just pissed her off once again.

As always, he planned to keep her on her toes and guessing. She had promised to give the weekend a try and he intended to see that she got out of it everything possible. That would involve mingling and seeing people interact as well as doing the same themselves, not hiding out in the room, fucking like mad, no matter how bad he wanted to do so.

They walked the long hall, looking at different booths promoting alternative lifestyles and the silent auction offerings. There were a lot of leather goods, both clothing and implements as well as books and erotic art. Once done, they looked into the different conference rooms in order to get a feel for what type of setting the presentations would be held in. Jared thought doing so might put Casey at ease.

He was pleasantly surprised to find he was correct. The more they wandered and looked, the more she relaxed and smiled. In no time at all she was back to her inquisitive self.

Jared had done everything possible to keep her on edge sexually as well, enjoying every minute they found themselves alone and even a few in which there were others around. She gave no argument at his closeness or his obvious desire to keep her libido at peak levels.

Even when he kissed her deeply while fondling her bare pussy beneath her skirt she didn't say anything or stiffen against him as she normally would have. Instead, she moaned against his lips and struggled to get closer, to ride his thigh. A few times she'd been so hot there had obviously been no thought to where they were or who might be watching. She had merely given in to his lead. It was just the way Jared wanted her, ready and available for whatever his whim might be. In order for such a thing to happen she needed to trust in him that his whims would not be detrimental to her in

any way. That type of trust took time. Time was something Jared had plenty of, but only if the stubborn woman beside him was willing to take it as well. Otherwise it would be like braving white-water rapids with nothing more than a teaspoon.

Jared loved how Casey had started opening up. Before he knew what happened they'd met up with a female-led triad. The five of them seemed to hit it off right away. It was obvious Casey was enthralled by their interaction with each other. Finding out the friendly trio were fairly local to Chaos only seemed to fuel her eagerness. He saw a future for them in the local BDSM community now that they had met some people who were active, and hoped Casey did as well.

Several hours passed before any of them realized just how late it was. Their new friend Colin was the one who broke into the ensuing conversation. "Mistress, it's getting late."

She glanced at her watch, a bemused expression crossing her face before looking up at them. "It has been fabulous meeting you both. I hope we can do it again."

They all stood then. Before giving Casey hugs, the trio asked Jared's permission, which was immediately granted. He'd enjoyed every minute of their time together and from the smile on Casey's face, knew she had too. Now though, he was ready to take her back to their room and take her body in every way he could think of. Then, once they had both been sated and were relaxed, they would talk.

Jared smiled in anticipation of the talk almost as much as the sex. He enjoyed every minute he had in which he could learn more about Casey and what made her tick.

Chapter Eleven

Casey woke the following morning sore and seriously sated. She was sure there was a mile-wide smile on her face. She'd always loved spending time with Jared, whether in bed or out. He was just the type of person people gravitated toward and she had been no exception from the very beginning.

Turning over, she reached for Jared only to find his side of the bed cold and empty. She frowned. He must have gone out for something. Casey hoped like hell it was coffee. She decided to go ahead and shower since it would take her longer to get dressed than him and she knew they had a busy day of watching presentations planned.

While rinsing her hair in the shower, she started to think about the different people she had met so far. She very much enjoyed the trio they'd met last night. Their personalities were all so different and yet they seemed to mesh well together.

Although it was obvious Colin was owned by his Mistress and very much enjoyed his position as her submissive, it was also clear he was very independent and would not submit to just anyone. He even seemed to switch when it came to seeing to their other partner Tim. The whole thing made Casey's mind whirl. From some of the things she'd read online, Casey thought if a person was submissive they were pretty much submissive all the time and gave the same deference to everyone. It was obvious Colin didn't follow those rules.

"You almost done, girl?"

Jared's voice made her jump. "Yes, sir, just finishing up now."

The shower curtain was pulled aside, allowing cold air to invade her steamy-hot cocoon. "Good. Hurry it up so we're not late to the first class."

Instead of closing the curtain, he continued to stand there, watching. "Ummm, sir?"

She still needed to shave her girly bits and was a bit embarrassed by the thought of him standing there watching. It was one thing when he was in the shower with her, shaving her even, but to have him just stand there and watch left her feeling even more vulnerable.

“Yes, girl?”

The glint in his eyes told her he knew exactly what he was doing and how it made her feel. She blushed and smiled. “Never mind.”

Jared returned her smile, his gaze now resting on the juncture of her thighs. Casey decided to make it worth his while to watch. She lifted one leg onto the edge of the tub. She then lathered shaving gel over her pussy and ever-so slowly scraped the razor across her flesh.

She was no longer cold. His perusal made her hot and wet in a way completely different than the water coursing over her body did. It only took a minute or two before her task was completed and she turned off the water.

Jared lifted a towel from the sink and motioned her out of the tub. Casey did as instructed and stood silently on the mat while he dried her from the top of her head to the tips of her toes. He made sure to touch everything in between as well, and by the time he was done, she was as good as gone.

“Have to make sure you cleaned everything, inside and out.” With those words he sauntered off.

Casey just started at him. He was forever leaving her hanging, right on the precipice of tumbling over into a mind-blowing orgasm. He sure did have a way about him.

She sipped coffee and munched on a bagel while dressing. In no time they were back in the elevator and headed downstairs for the morning presentations. Most of the ones they had chosen were service-oriented instead of the more physical how-to classes. Casey assumed it was for her benefit. She was both excited and nervous to see what types of people would attend such classes. Would it be a bunch of wannabes like her?

Upon entering the first room, they were both given slips of paper and small stubby pencils. After inspecting the paper, she realized it was a questionnaire about the class, asking for opinions on the topic as well as the presenters.

Jared found them seats. Once seated, Casey looked around the room. There was quite a combination of people. She couldn't help but smile. It was absolutely wonderful to see so many people of different ages, color, sizes and shapes all together in the same room. It made her smile and fidget in her seat. She wanted to meet everyone and talk to them. She wanted to hear their stories and share some of her own. Even as she sat there, looking way more than normal in her jean skirt and tank top covered loosely by a button-up blouse, as far from fetish wear as she could possibly get, she felt somehow as if she belonged.

The presenters were an older Master and slave couple who talked openly about making such a relationship work. She spoke of submitting to her Master's will even when she wanted to wring his neck. She admitted it didn't always come easy, but as their relationship had progressed and trust was firmly in place how it did get simpler.

And he spoke about learning to listen instead of only dictating. It was very shocking to hear someone who saw himself as a Master say that not only did they make mistakes, but they learned from them just as anyone else. He said he had made plenty as had she, but as a couple who communicated openly and honestly, they had worked through them. One of the final ta-da moments of the class was when the woman's Master said he loved her spunkiness and the fact she was not afraid to speak her mind. He chuckled and admitted that although he listened it didn't mean he always agreed or would change a decision based on her thoughts and ideas, but he was willing to pay attention.

Casey listened as others in the group asked questions and shared stories. It seemed there were as many different ideas on how it was done as there were people in the class. She clapped loudly when it was over and filled out her slip of paper in a very positive way. The rest of the day proved to be much of the same. The classes were very eye-

opening for her. The whole time they wandered from room to room, with small breaks of talking and mingling in between, Jared hardly said a word.

She kept watching him. By now he should be telling her “I told you so” but he didn’t. He held her hand, smiled when she settled at his feet during one of the breaks and just watched her in general, but he said very little and it made Casey nervous.

By the time presentations for the day were over, she was exhausted, both physically as well as emotionally. It had been a very revealing day for her.

“What are we going to do now?”

Jared looked down at her. “Are you hungry? I think we’ll get something to eat then go up to our room and rest for a while before the party tonight.”

Casey didn’t say a word until they had been seated at the same table where they’d eaten supper the night before. She had seen a time blocked out for a play party on the schedule, but hadn’t asked what it was. At the time she wasn’t quite sure she’d wanted to know. Since Jared hadn’t said anything either way, she had no clue whether he would want to go or not.

“What kind of party is it, sir?”

His hand tangled in her hair. With only a slight twist of his wrist he was able to tilt her head to just the angle he wanted it. His kiss was deep yet gentle. It commanded and demanded, pulling from her everything and then some. Their tongues tangled then retreated. His teeth nipped her bottom lip, pulling on it until he could suck it into his mouth. By the time he was finished Casey was sure she would have a hickey there.

“The kind where I can get you naked and beat on you in front of people. And you’ll get to watch the same happen to others.” His words were whispered against her mouth.

Casey felt her eyes go wide. “Like a dungeon party, then?”

“One and the same, girl.”

“Will other people be naked there too?” Casey couldn’t imagine parading around in the buff with people watching them do dirty stuff if she was the only one.

Jared must have recognized her unease. He kissed her again, this time hard and fast, then untangled his hand from her hair. "Probably. Don't look like that, Case. You'll be fabulous and you'll have fun. Now look over your menu because here comes the waiter."

Their meal was eaten in relative quiet. Casey was excited as hell and scared to death. She'd heard about dungeon parties and had always secretly wanted to try out the place closest to Chaos she'd heard about, but had never quite worked up the nerve to go alone. Once she'd met Jared, it just never seemed to come up. Now she was finally going to have her chance. She just hoped she didn't do something stupid to embarrass him.

* * * * *

Casey looked drop-dead gorgeous in her corset. The short black skirt she wore with it barely covered the curve of her ass. It was going to be all he could do not to fuck her silly before they left the room. With no panties on beneath, it would be easy enough.

She'd left the curly length of her hair down around her shoulders. Jared counted his blessings that she enjoyed hair pulling as much as she did because her hair was one of his favorite things. Her legs were encased in black stockings to mid-thigh. Strappy heels covered her feet. He wasn't sure how she managed to walk in them, but was very happy she did. They accomplished wonderful things for her legs and ass.

They arrived a few minutes early to the party, so mingled in the hallway along with the other conference goers. People were dressed up in every way imaginable. Casey seemed to find the woman prancing around in pony gear enthralling. Her gaze followed the woman around and around until someone opened the doors and announced the start of the party. At that point she grabbed his hand and held on as if her life depended on it.

"We'll walk around and watch a few scenes first."

The look on her face went from wary to curious and intrigued in the blink of an eye. A beautiful smile radiated across her mouth and she lifted up on tiptoes to kiss his cheek. "Thank you, sir."

Jared knew how much she loved to watch. He remembered the first time he'd gone to a party. Even though he didn't play, he'd still had the time of his life just by watching and being surrounded by like-minded people. He wanted the same for Casey.

About halfway around the room they came upon Colin and his Mistress. As they had last night, it appeared they were having fun. Only this time it was a bit different. Colin was blindfolded, gagged and bound over a spanking bench. His Mistress was welting his ass with a bamboo cane, eliciting sounds of both pleasure and pain.

They continued to watch for several minutes before making their way around the rest of the room, stopping to watch the scenes that interested them. When they came to a staged area with seats, Jared climbed up and sat. He knew Casey would be right behind him so there was no need to give her any instruction.

"Right here, girl," he said as he patted his knee. Once she was seated, he asked, "So what did you think?"

She looked out over the room. Her gaze shifting from one scene to the next, looking over everyone. "It's even better than I imagined."

Jared couldn't help but smile at the enthusiastic note in her voice, the way her face brightened. "How so?"

There was a pause as she obviously pondered before answering. "I've read stories, seen pictures and even watched some BDSM porn before, but in that you get very little about how much energy is exchanged and how much feeling is involved in every sound made, every strike of an implement or caress of the hand. It somehow makes it all better. More."

He liked her answer and was glad she considered the experience positive so far. "Let's see if you're as much of an exhibitionist as you are a voyeur."

Jared rose from his seated position, placing Casey on her feet as he did so. All of a sudden she was back to being unsure and nervous, wringing her hands together while watching him with wide eyes.

He motioned her to the door where they had checked their toy bag. Once they had it in hand again, Jared scanned the room, looking to see which equipment was free. He settled on a four-sided wooden frame so he could bind her arms over her head and still be allowed the room to move all the way around her.

"Strip, girl. I want to see skin."

Her green eyes grew impossibly large. "Everything?"

Stopping what he was doing, Jared put down the cuffs he'd been fiddling with and moved to stand in front of her. "Yes, everything. I could take them off for you so you can tell yourself you had no choice. If that makes it easier."

Jared knew Casey would take his words as a challenge. When her chin shot up, he knew he'd hit his mark. "I'll always have choices. I might not like them and they may very well be few, but there will always be choices."

She was finally getting it, finally getting he did not want someone to blindly follow but to use common sense and to submit because they chose to, no matter how difficult.

Without a word she began removing her clothes. Pink streaked across her cheeks and chest, endearing Jared to her even more. She was such a cacophony of emotions and attitude he was never quite sure what to expect. Jared hoped it was always that way to some extent. It would keep things new and fresh.

"Good girl."

Within minutes he had her cuffed and bound to the silver rings across the top of the frame. "There is only one rule during this scene, Case. You are not to say a word. You may make whatever sounds you want or feel the need to, but you are not allowed to speak. I'm not going to gag you because that would make your job of staying quiet way too easy. I'm also not going to blindfold you because I want to be able to see everything

I do to you reflected in your beautiful green eyes.” He gave her hand a quick squeeze before backing away.

She looked so damn beautiful hanging there. Her breasts bobbed and swayed with each breath she took. Goose bumps rose across the flesh of her arms, probably in anticipation since the room was not anywhere near cold.

For a little while Jared just stood there and watched her. The longer he did nothing, the more she began to fidget. A couple of times her mouth opened as if to speak only to be snapped closed again. When she finally closed her eyes and calmed her breathing, becoming still, he approached her.

“You’re the sexiest woman in the place. Everyone is looking at you, girl. They’re waiting to see what we’re going to do. Waiting to see if I am going to make you scream, or if you’ll be leaving with welts rising on that gorgeous ass of yours.”

Jared plucked and rolled her nipples until she sucked in a breath and leaned into his touch. When he had them standing at attention, he produced a set of clover clamps attached by a silver chain. Dangling them before her eyes, he grasped one nipple then settled the clamp into place. Her breath hissed through pursed lips.

He knew if he touched her pussy he would find her wet already. Instead of doing so, he attached the other clamp to her free nipple. This time she groaned deep in her throat. Leaving her for a few seconds, he gathered some clothespins and stuffed them in his front pocket. Slowly Jared walked around her, stopping at her back. He kept his touch light, but the bite of his teeth on her shoulder was anything but. The give of her flesh beneath his teeth was highly erotic. Casey whimpered at the sensation.

“I bet if I felt that cute little cunt of yours it would be sopping wet.”

She didn’t speak but her breathing deepened, becoming more ragged with each breath. Jared moved around to the front of her then, putting his words into action, he slipped a finger between her thighs and probed. Sure enough, she was slick and coated with cream.

“How did I know? Could it be because you’re a nasty little slut?” He tilted her chin up, forcing her gaze to his, then kissed her lips. “My nasty little slut. Isn’t that right?”

He knew it was unfair to ask a question after instructing her not to speak but, as far as Jared was concerned, that was half the fun. Casey nodded and leaned into his touch, widening her thighs so he could delve deeper. She thrust down on him, her hips undulating as he scissored his fingers deep within the warmth of her body.

When he dropped down to one knee, his face even with the juncture of her thighs, Casey’s gaze shot to his. Her eyes were already wide, but they grew even wider when he removed the clothespins from his pocket. One by one he clamped them onto her labia. Each time he did so, she made low, sensuous sounds but never once spoke.

By the time he was done and was once again back on his feet, she was covered with a fine sheen of perspiration. With her bound and clamped just the way he wanted her, Jared strode back over to the small folding table where he had set out toys he’d brought just for her.

Like the majority of masochists he knew, Casey enjoyed the feeling of thud over sting. He intended to give her a bit of both and in the process push her limits. Before him lay an array of paddles, canes and floggers. Their scene together, with her having been ordered not to speak, was going to test them both. His willpower to hold out when what he really wanted to do was fuck her. Jared was interested to see how things played out.

Chapter Twelve

Her entire body throbbed, ached and burned. From the swollen lips of her mouth where he had kissed her, biting and sucking on her lips, to her feet where he had raised her so high she now stood on tiptoe. Everything in between was a mass of sensation. The clamps had long ago come off her nipples and pussy. He'd chuckled and warned her it was a possibility her scream might very well have cleared the room. Now they were oh-so-very sensitive. So much so Casey was not sure whether to shy away from or lean into the lash of the flogger he was now using on her breasts.

On shaking legs she took everything he had to give then offered him more. Casey wasn't sure when she realized she trusted him completely to do with her as he pleased, but she did. Of that she had no doubt. He watched her like a hawk. She knew so and was aware of his every move even though long ago she'd pretty much lost the ability to open her eyes and focus unless prompted to do so.

All she could do was feel and tremble. Sweat rolled down her body in rivulets, chilling her overheated flesh. The overwhelming urge to cry and beg his forgiveness for leaving him nagged her, tore at her, fought for release and nearly won. As the need welled inside her, tears spilled over but she would not speak, not even to beg, no matter what. She could do this. More than anything she trusted Jared to know when she'd had enough.

The tears burned her cheeks, hot and acrid, reminding Casey of how badly she had messed things up. Reminding her that due to her own stupid stubbornness she had almost lost one of the best things to ever happen to her. All of a sudden the weight was too much to bear and she couldn't hold on. Great racking sobs tore at her chest, making it hard to breathe.

Jared was right there beside her, holding on to her tightly as he wiped the moisture from her face. "Why are you crying, girl?"

Going through Casey's mind over and over was that she couldn't speak. Wouldn't until she was told it was okay to do so. All she could do was shake her head, her downturned face covered by her spill of hair.

Lifting her face in his hands, Jared brushed back her hair. "Open your eyes and talk to me, Casey." Although soothing, his tone brooked no argument. It acted as a catalyst. It was as if the dam broke and before she could stop it, everything spewed forward.

"I..." She hiccoughed. "I'm so sorry. I was so...so stupid." She closed her eyes and shook her head again, couldn't bring herself to look at him, didn't feel as though she deserved to do so.

"Now, girl!"

"I didn't know. I didn't understand." She sounded pitiful even to her own ears. Opening her eyes to him was hard. She was afraid of what she would see.

Jared regarded her for a second. "And now you do?" He sounded almost hopeful. Casey couldn't imagine why he would still want her, much less be hopeful she had finally gotten a clue.

"I think so." She looked up to where her hands were still cuffed to the overhead post. They tingled a bit and now that she was somewhat back in her right mind she felt majorly awkward having such an important discussion in her predicament.

"Go on."

He was as implacable as ever. Stubborn man. Casey smiled through her tears. "Whatever works for us is right. It's what works for us and our relationship, not what others say it is. And serving you doesn't make me weak. My love for you and my willingness to submit to you actually make me stronger."

His kiss was all-consuming. He devoured her with tongue and teeth, inhaling her breath and giving her his own. It was as if he wanted to crawl right inside her or pull her inside him. Either way, they were not close enough.

"You got it, girl. And no matter what, as long as we talk we can work through anything. Anything! You hear me."

Casey nuzzled him as much as she could without the use of her hands. Her eyes were still blurred by tears and more than likely swollen and red, but she didn't care how she looked at the moment. "Yes, sir. I hear you."

Jared uncuffed her. After covering her with a blanket, he settled them in a chair where they snuggled and talked for a few minutes. When her eyes were dry and she no longer shook, Casey gathered their toys and stowed them in their bag before cleaning off the equipment they had used.

Once she was dressed, Jared led her out of the dungeon room and to the elevator. They couldn't get to their room fast enough as far as Casey was concerned. She wanted him so badly she could taste it.

Literally.

Her mouth watered in remembrance of sucking him deep, twirling her tongue around the bulbous head of his shaft until he took control, holding her tight and fucking her face before spilling his come over her chest. In a way, marking her as his as he had done numerous times before.

"I think there's something wrong with the elevator."

Jared didn't crack a smile but his eyes twinkled in the dim light. "Why's that?"

Casey cozied up to his side, placing the muscular length of his thigh between her own. The contact between them sizzled. "Because it's taking too long." Maybe they should have taken the stairs she was going to add just as the bell dinged and the door opened.

Jared laughed.

Bags forgotten, she was on Jared the minute he closed the room door behind them. "I've missed you so much." It was going to be hard forgiving herself for the mistakes she'd made, for nearly costing them their relationship.

As if reading her mind, he answered, "I wouldn't have let you go without a fight." He buried his face in her hair, his hold crushing her to him. "It's all part of the learning process, girl. So don't go beating yourself up over it. That's my job."

They both chuckled.

There was no seduction in the way he single-mindedly removed her clothes. She was his property, owned, his to do with as he wished. And right now it was obvious to Casey he meant for her to be completely naked and in as little time as possible.

"Stay right there."

She did as told, craning her neck this way and that to see where he had gone and what he was doing. When he returned, he was carrying a small black zippered bag. She knew what was inside, had become intimately familiarized with the bag during their time together. One thing Jared was diligent about was taking care of his toys.

He came at her with a spray bottle in one hand and a soft cloth in the other. "Lie across the bed belly down."

"Yes, sir." Casey did so even though she knew there was a possibility what was to come might sting like hell. The first time he'd cleaned her with the combination of alcohol and water she'd yelped as if he'd tried to kill her and called him a sadistic bastard. It was the first time she'd seen him truly smile. She'd known then she was a lost cause.

This time it wasn't so bad. Cold more so than stingy, which meant the cane he'd used on her ass and thighs hadn't abraded the skin as much. Casey only hoped she was left with the pretty welts she was so fond of.

Jared's hand was warm as he rubbed some ointment across her offended flesh. Touches that started out for purely medicinal purposes took on a more sexual slant and soon Casey found herself panting, close to orgasm.

When she tried to turn over so she could touch him, smooth her hands over his taut, tanned flesh, he stopped her. His weight on her back pinned her to the mattress. He was heavy, making it a bit difficult for her to breathe but not so much she would ever wish him to move.

"I've been thinking about how to punish you." She stiffened, his words delving deep, worrying her and yet helping to release the anger she'd been feeling toward herself since figuring things out. He would make it right, whether she enjoyed it or not, whether she wanted him to or not, and then she could move forward. "And I've come up with some things, neither of which you particularly care for, but both of which I do." He nipped the same spot on her shoulder he'd bit earlier, causing her breath to whoosh from her lungs.

Peace mingled with a bit of dread. She'd never really been punished before. Corrected, yes, but to her punishment meant she'd done something severely wrong. Of course, she mused silently, keeping them separated for three weeks would definitely fall into that category.

Jared felt the tension in her body. Knew her mind was whirling faster than the speed of light. She was a pleaser, always had been when it came to him. He also knew that due to the time her little learning curve took and the amount of emotion she'd shown in the dungeon, she would continue to kick herself in the ass forever if he didn't do something to reconcile the situation.

He'd never enjoyed punishing due to the mental and emotional anguish it oftentimes could cause, but this time he was going to enjoy it because on his end it was not actually punishment. In the end it would bond them together stronger than ever before. And he was going to make sure it ended on a very positive note for the both of them.

Removing his weight from Casey's back, he nudged her over. The look in her eyes was different. Although pensive and probably a little worried, she looked happy.

"Don't move an inch." Keeping his voice stern when she looked so soft was difficult. Jared moved to the closet where he dug into one of his many bags of tricks. Leather cuffs dangled from the ends of the spreader bars he removed, their hardware making a clanking sound. He waited a second, listening intently, although not turning to look to see if he could hear any rustling coming from the bed. When Jared heard nothing, he smiled and turned to head back to the bed. Besides the spreader bars, a miniature leather slapper, a couple lengths of rope and the lube and condom already on the bedside table, he didn't need anything else.

Except for the matching chains he'd been waiting weeks to lock around her slender ankles. Before leaving for the party, he had placed them in the drawer of the bedside table so everything was set.

When he climbed back onto the bed, she reached for him. Jared narrowed his gaze on her, causing Casey to wince and drop her arms. She had moved. He shook his head at the plea in her gaze. "Tonight, until I tell you otherwise, you won't touch me."

He knew the question was coming even before she voiced it. "Why?"

She'd always been curious and "Why?" was among her favorite questions. It was something that would abate with time and trust and as she got to know him, his likes and dislikes better, but Jared hoped her curiosity never went away. It was one of her many endearing qualities.

"Besides because I said so?" He raised a brow at her. "For three weeks you called the shots. During that time I wasn't allowed to touch you. I think the punishment should fit the crime."

Understanding shone in her eyes. It was obvious by the way her hands were balled into tight little fists she was not happy with the thought. "Yes, sir."

"Good."

Jared made short work of fixing her wrists into the cuffs on the end of the smaller spreader bar. Once finished, he secured the bar to the legs of the bed with rope. She would be going nowhere until he said she would.

The next bar was fitted with long, wide cuffs. They fit securely around her thighs, the bar keeping her knees wide apart, so wide Jared had a clear view of all her pretty pinkness. It was a very awkward position. He didn't think they had ever used this particular toy before. He was already enjoying himself though, the hard length of his cock a testament to the fact.

Casey watched him, couldn't seem to take her gaze off his every movement. The little leather slapper was burning a hole in his back pocket. "Every bad girl deserves a spanking, don't you think, girl?"

The corner of her full lips twitched up and into a slight smile. "Yes, sir. I do." She enjoyed the spankings he'd given her in the past. Jared knew within seconds she wouldn't like this one at all. She was the type who could take just about anything on her ass, but the minute he came near her pussy for a little erotic torture, she was crying and begging him to stop.

When Jared pulled the small toy from his pocket, her eyes nearly bulged from her head and her smile vanished. Every muscle in her body grew rigid in anticipation but she didn't fight the confines of the cuffs or struggle against the bars. She just lay there, her chest heaving with every breath.

If he were really mean he might have her suggest a number she thought she deserved and count them out for him, but Jared was growing impatient. He wanted to be through with this part of things so they could move on to the good stuff.

"I don't know how many will make things okay in your head so we're going to go based on emotion. I want to hear you beg, girl. I want you to assure me you're going to talk to me about your worries from now on. I want your tears and the negative things you're feeling toward yourself right now. I want any self-doubt and self-blame gone. I want it all and when I think you've given it all to me, we'll stop. Do you understand?"

Tears were already streaking into her hairline. The green of her eyes glittered through them. She was probably afraid and uncomfortable and absolutely, stunningly gorgeous as she lay there before him, bound and at his mercy.

"Yes, I understand, sir."

Jared didn't start slow. There was no warm-up when it came to punishing and although his hands ached to rub and soothe in between each quick set of smacks, he held back. Casey cried out and cussed. Her litany of "fuck" could more than likely be heard in the next county. She screamed and groaned and she sobbed so hard it tore at his soul.

It was when she gasped words between each sob, promises to try hard at communicating her feelings, assurances she would never go off half-cocked because of something she read on the internet, that Jared slowed things down. She apologized, which was not what he wanted to hear. She had already done so.

"Oh god! Please, sir. Please no more." She begged him, her voice shrill, fighting to be heard over the sound of the slapper and her cries. "I want to learn. I...want you to teach me." Words were hard to understand through her tears. Jared continued, the sound of the slapper meeting flesh, making her skin change from pink to flaming red. Each stroke a struggle for her and for him as well. "I want to do this right. Forever, sir."

That was exactly what he'd been waiting for. He needed to hear from her own lips she still wanted the same thing it was he'd been searching for. A long-term relationship. A lifemate. Forever.

Removing the spreader bar holding her knees apart, Jared settled himself into the cradle of her thighs, his shoulders keeping her wide. She sucked in a gasping breath and tensed at the first stroke of his tongue. He chuckled. "Sensitive?"

Casey lifted her head, a "duh" look written plainly across her face. "Very."

"Good, then I did my job right."

She dropped her head back to the bed, sucking in a deep breath. She held it for a second before releasing it, a sob followed. Jared couldn't help it. Such a small sound and it nearly undid him. He lay beside her, snuggling close, giving her his warmth.

"Thank you, sir." Although low, her voice didn't waver. She was a damn special woman.

Jared lightly ran his fingers up her cleft. Although she was wet, more than likely from the afterglow of her punishment and not the actual deed, she still nearly jumped out of her skin at the contact. Once he was done with her he would have to be sure and soothe her with a cold compress.

"I guess it's a good thing I didn't plan to fuck your cute little cunt tonight."

She whimpered. Jared could tell she wanted to argue by the set of her jaw, but she remained quiet.

He leaned up, settling himself on his elbow then reached across her to the nightstand where he grabbed the lube and a condom. "Not to worry. I didn't add your fine ass into the equation." Casey watched him as he rolled the protection on then lubed his rock-hard shaft. The heat of her gaze made him impossibly harder. "I'm going to fuck you hard, girl. My way, to my liking. You'll know your place as not only my partner but my property when I'm done."

Waves of heat radiated off her. Although still red and more than likely sore, her pussy was coated in her slick cream. But it was the way she lifted her hips in invitation to him, the way she begged him, the need in her voice. "Please use me, sir. Please use your property. Make me yours, please, sir."

"My pleasure, girl. Always my pleasure." Jared lubed her rosette, inserting first one finger then two, preparing her for his cock.

Jared was true to his word. After lifting her legs until her knees were nearly pinned to her ears, he drove into her in one thrust. She groaned at the intrusion, her body struggling to accommodate his size. It had been a few weeks since he'd taken her ass and damn had he missed it. Her ass was hot, sucking him in, gripping him tight as her muscles spasmed.

His pleasure in her body was great. She did things for him no other woman had. As far as Jared was concerned, she was perfect. As he pistoned in and out of her body, Jared knew it would not last long. Between the sounds she was making and the way the depths of her tight ass felt around his cock, the end was going to come soon.

As best as he could, Jared held off. He wanted to feel her clench around him as she exploded in orgasm. With one finger he lightly rubbed her clit to gauge whether she could tolerate the pain it might cause. She moaned low in her throat, the fist-tight confines of her ass clamping down on his shaft.

"May I come please, sir? Please, please!"

Jared felt a tingling from the base of his spine. It warned he was too close to stop. His movements became more rushed as he plunged even deeper. "Not until you tell me you love me." He wanted to hear the words, needed to hear her say them to him again.

"More than anything, sir. I love you more than anything!" The last came on a wail as her body struggled not to come without permission.

"Then come for me now."

She did, her ass tightened on him in wave after wave of pleasure. Jared shouted his own release, sinking his cock balls-deep in her ass, in and out, over and over until there was nothing left. They collapsed in a heap on the bed, Casey still bound and at his mercy.

* * * * *

Sometime early the next morning Jared woke Casey up with a gentle kiss. They ate and drank coffee in companionable silence. Afterward they showered in which Casey washed and cared for him as if they had not been separated for the better part of a month. It was nice to be back into the swing of things, to be utilizing some of the rituals they both seemed to enjoy.

Jared dressed and was sitting on the edge of the bed watching Casey primp. "Girl, come here and bring me what you find inside the nightstand drawer."

She put down the brush she'd been using on her hair and came into the room. Looking from him to the drawer he spoke of, which was within arm's reach of him, she merely smiled and did as asked.

Jared smiled too. There was a time when she would have mentioned how he was close enough to get whatever was in the drawer himself.

She grew silent and still as she looked into the open drawer. When she looked back over her shoulder to him, he asked, "Are you ready?"

He could see her fingers tremble as she reached into the drawer to remove the twin anklets. She reverently held them in her hand and closed the drawer. Without a word she moved in front of him where she dropped to her knees. It wasn't until she was kneeling before him and he could see her eyes shining with joy that she answered. "Yes, sir. I'm ready."

About the Author

Maggie Casper's life could be called many things but boring isn't one of them. If asked, Maggie would tell you that blessed would more aptly describe her everyday existence.

Marrying young and being loved by a great husband and four gorgeous daughters should be enough to make anybody feel blessed. Add to that a bit of challenge, a lot of fun and an undeniably close circle of friends and family and you'd be walking in her shoes.

Speaking of challenges and fun, when not writing, Maggie's alter ego spends her time fighting fires and treating patients as a Lieutenant and Advanced Emergency Medical Technician with the local fire department. These awesome people are like her second family, no picking and choosing, they're just stuck with her.

A love of reading was passed on by Maggie's mother at a very early age, and so began her addiction to romance novels. Maggie admits to writing some in high school but when life got in the way, she put her pen and paper up. Seems that things changed over the years because when she finally decided it was time to put her story ideas on paper, the pen was out and the computer was in. Took her a while to catch up but she finally made it.

When not writing, Maggie can usually be found reading, doing genealogy research or watching NASCAR.

Maggie welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and e-mail address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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