

EXOTIKA

ELLORA'S CAVE

SHILOH
WALKER

Drastic
MEASURES

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Drastic Measures

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DRASTIC MEASURES

Shiloh Walker

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Chapter One

“Ever heard of asking for help?”

Arms loaded with supplies, Pam jumped at the deep voice—the deep *familiar* voice. *Damn it. What the hell is he doing here?* Distracted and thinking about Ethan, she had missed the last step and if he hadn’t been standing there, she would have landed on her ass in front of him.

Instead, she just dropped a huge box loaded with office supplies, the olives that she favored from the party store across town and bulk-size boxes of tampons that she kept on hand for the ladies’ room.

Grimacing up at him, she said, “You need to wear a bell or something, Ethan.”

Ethan Parker always managed to show up, seemingly out of thin air and almost always when she didn’t expect to see him. Crouching down, she shoved stuff back in the box and flicked him a dismissive glance. “Shawn’s not here, Ethan.”

“Yeah, I know.” He knelt beside her and helped gather up the dropped items, storing them neatly inside the box. His hand brushed against hers when he added a box of pens and Pam stiffened, instantly drawing back and then feeling like an idiot.

He always affected her like that, made her so self-conscious and clumsy to boot.

“If you’re not looking for Shawn, why are you here? The club doesn’t open for a few hours.”

He shrugged. “Wanted to go grab a bite from Fontana’s and wondered if you’d join me.” A grin tugged up the corners of his mouth and he said, “I don’t like eating alone.”

That boyish charm probably worked wonders on the women who didn’t know the man under the charm. Pam did, though. She’d seen Ethan in action and the guy was a shark. Boyish charm or not, the man made her nervous.

Besides, why the hell was he asking her? If Ethan didn't want to eat alone, she'd imagine he could easily find five different women who'd love to join him. But he'd asked her?

Frowning, she glanced at him and shook her head. "Sorry, I've got a ton of work to do. The new manager is starting tonight and I've got to get my work done so I can get her trained."

An odd look—a dark scowl—there and then gone, tightened his features. "Yeah, that wedding isn't too far away, is it?"

"Just a few weeks," she replied, pulling her attention away from her fiancé's sexy partner and focusing on straightening up the supplies in the box. Organized by nature, she stacked things neatly, giving everything an attention that would have done Adrian Monk proud.

Except it was more an attempt to keep from looking at Ethan than anything else. Yeah, she was neat, but she wasn't fanatically so.

He sighed and there was something almost forlorn about the sound, something that made her look up at his face. "You okay?" she asked.

A faint smile, mocking and typically Ethan, curved his lips and he reached up, brushing her hair back from her face. "No reason I shouldn't be, is there?" His gaze dropped to her mouth and despite herself, Pam felt a shiver race down her spine. Then he blinked, the moment disappeared and he stood.

Without saying anything else to her, he turned and walked away.

* * * * *

Sometimes a man had to take drastic measures. Ethan knew that. He'd never been opposed to taking risks—hell, he liked taking risks. Loved it when they paid off, learned from his mistakes when they didn't.

But there was a lot riding on this risk. It wasn't ever a smart move to take on a risk when the personal stakes were this high. Ethan knew that as well. He'd always taken

care to make sure he looked at things objectively and weighed all the options before he made a big decision. Some people called him a gambler and he was—in some ways. He took risks but he didn't take them blindly.

This one though...

Blowing out a breath, he shoved a hand through his hair. It was thick and black and almost to his shoulders. It was more from laziness than anything else. He hated taking the time to keep it cut short and it grew so fast that he either had to mess with a haircut every month or just grow it long. Long was easier. Most of the time he kept it tied back but this early in the morning, he hadn't bothered yet.

Last night he'd gone to bed convinced he was making the right decision. But now, he had to wonder if his obsession was getting the better of him. He'd risen before dawn after a long, restless night and paced for what had seemed like hours. Brooding, debating, trying to figure out if he was going about this wrong.

But he really didn't see many options. In the back of his mind, he could hear a clock ticking away the minutes, hours, days. In less than six weeks, Pam James was going to marry Ethan's sorry-ass business partner. Leaning back in his chair, he opened a drawer and pulled out a folded piece of paper. It had a heavy feel to it and that fine linen appearance, like most wedding invitations. It was simple—a metallic peach design embossed on the front and the font inside the invitation was done in a matching color.

When he'd opened the thing last week, he'd almost torn it into tiny shreds. That had been his first inclination. Instead, he had laid it carefully on the desk in his home office and then helped himself to the better part of a bottle of Jack Daniels. The resulting hangover had almost been worth it because he'd been too busy listening to the pounding in his head to think about the wedding invitation.

But eventually the headache had faded and he hadn't had much choice but to think about the wedding.

From the first time he had seen Pam, he'd wanted her. Even after he'd found out she was already taken, he'd wanted her. Shawn wasn't exactly what Ethan would call a

friend so he hadn't had any qualms about making a move on Pam but the lady just hadn't been interested.

Hell, she had seemed scared to death of him.

"What you're doing isn't going to help," he muttered under his breath.

If it wasn't for the sound of that clock ticking away in the back of his head, he might just continue to brood for another week or two. But the longer he waited, the harder it would get.

Resolute, he tucked the invitation back into the drawer and left his office. He needed to take a shower. It wouldn't be too long before he saw Shawn and when he did, he was going to get this done.

* * * * *

When it came to discussing plans for the weekend, this just had to be a first. It had to.

"You want me to *what*?"

She hadn't heard him right. There was no way in hell. But as Pamela Lynn James stared at her fiancé, she knew that she had heard him right.

Shaking her head, she whispered, "You can't be serious."

Shawn Cooper looked away, his elbows resting on his knees and his gaze on the floor. "We don't have a choice, Pam."

"The hell we don't. He can't...he doesn't—" she sputtered off, unable to even finish the sentence. She turned away and rested a hand on her belly. It took three tries before she finally managed to ask the question. "Why the hell does he think he can get away with this?"

Shawn was quiet. Finally, she looked at him but he wouldn't meet her eyes. "I...I sort of owe him money."

Oh, this was just perfect. "You owe him money but I'm expected to whore for him?"

He flinched. "It's not like that, Pam. It's just one night. He just wants you to go to the Midnight Madness Bash with him."

The Bash. Damn it. Somebody had finally invited her to one of the most expensive, most elaborate, most romantic parties in town but it hadn't been her fiancé. "One night. And exactly what am I supposed to do with him on this one night, besides the Bash?" she asked scathingly.

A dull flush stained Shawn's face red. Heaven help her, he was serious. Dead serious. "He didn't elaborate much but he did say he didn't expect you to sleep with him." Then he sneered. "But he sure as hell wants you to."

Pam arched a brow. "And what do you want, Shawn?" She was almost afraid to ask. Almost. But the need to know was strong, almost obscene.

Averting his eyes, Shawn said, "I don't have the money, Pam. I can't pay him right now and he isn't going to give me any time to get the money, either."

Quietly, Pam said, "That's not much of an answer." She stared at him, waited for him to say something else, *anything* else. But he didn't—he just stood there looking miserable. The bastard. He wasn't the one who had just been betrayed, *was* he?

There was no way. "Forget it, Shawn. Go tell that bastard he's going to have to collect his money some other way."

"I can't." Shawn's voice got hard. "I can't do that, Pam." He finally looked at her and his brown eyes seemed nearly black. "He's got the deed on the club. If I don't pay up—either the two hundred fifty K that I owe him or you do this—he's taking the club."

She jerked as if he'd stabbed her in the belly with a hot poker. "He *can't*. Damn it, that's my club."

Shawn shook his head. "It's ours. Both of our names are on the deed, Pam."

"But you don't do a damn thing," she said, her voice shaking. "You fronted me and that's *it*." This wasn't happening. It wasn't. It just...how could... Pam turned away and covered her face with her hands. This wasn't happening.

"It's still in my name," Shawn said, his voice soft.

They'd bought *Venture* three years ago and managed to turn the hole-in-the-wall into a successful club. Shawn had fronted the money for the club outright, even though Pam had been nervous about it. She had known he had the money and it wasn't as if he was giving it to a total stranger or anything. They had been talking about getting married even then and a few months after the club had reopened, he'd proposed.

Things were going well. She was engaged to an attractive, successful guy, she owned her own club and she had even managed to drop close to twenty pounds as their wedding moved nearer. Her gut churned as she stood in the middle of the dance floor, staring at the floor as though it held the answers to the universe. No answers, though. It was quiet, hours before opening time and normally, this was the time of day she really loved, when she could walk through the quiet club and know it was hers.

All hers. Yes, Shawn's name was on the deed but he didn't run it. He didn't put money into it and other than the monthly payments she made to him for the loan, he didn't get any money out of it.

But unless she did something, it wasn't going to be hers much longer.

Shawn was a successful stockbroker. Two hundred fifty thousand dollars seemed like a lot of money to her but she knew it was practically pocket change for him. So why had he needed to borrow money from somebody like Ethan Parker? Why *Ethan*? And why had he needed the money?

"Why did he need to loan you money?" she asked softly, staring at her club and trying really hard not to think. If she thought, she was going to start screaming or crying or both.

Shawn said softly, "Please don't ask."

Spinning on her heel, she snarled, "I damn well will ask."

Shawn averted his face. "I needed it for my kid brother. He got in over his head and..."

Oh, shit. Shawn's little brother Luke was ten different kinds of trouble. He ran with drug dealers, had been in rehab, even did an eighteen-month sentence for breaking and entering. Chances were, whatever kind of trouble Luke was in, it was the illegal kind, involving big guys, big guns and huge amounts of money. "And you couldn't have used your money?" she asked, her voice husky. "Or just let him get himself out of trouble this time?"

"They were going to kill him, Pam." He looked down at his hands, spread them wide, then closed them into fists. "I didn't really have a choice."

"You have your own money, Shawn."

He shot up out of his chair, furious. "Not the kind of money they needed. He owed them five hundred thousand and he had less than a week to produce it. I was able to get half of it together but I couldn't come up with the other half."

Voice hollow, she murmured, "So you went to Ethan."

Ethan Parker was Shawn's business partner and one of the spookiest men she'd ever met.

Not because of the way he looked, though. He definitely wasn't the kind of guy who would make a woman walk the other way down the street at night. If Shawn was attractive, then Ethan was in the drop-dead-gorgeous realm—six feet tall, long lean limbs and hands that looked like they'd know just how to touch a woman. He had thick black hair that he wore a little too long, skin that was a mellow-gold hue and she suspected it was that smooth gold tone all over. His eyes were golden too, dark gold, like Irish whiskey. He had a mouth that could turn a woman to mush and a man to ice.

On a physical level, he just oozed appeal.

But there was something about him that made her damn nervous.

She couldn't quite define it. It wasn't his temper, his personality or the way he looked at all. Or maybe it was exactly that—all of that. A combination of the temper, the physical package, the way he carried himself, the way he moved, his confidence, his...arrogance.

Over the past few years, she'd caught glimpses of his temper. It was wicked. The man had a way of looking at a person that made that person feel transparent. Pam really didn't intimidate all that easily but Ethan could intimidate her into silence with just a look. He was quick with his fists and she'd always pegged him as being a little too pushy, but this?

This was unbelievable.

Pam didn't like him—at all. When he looked at her, she had the weirdest feeling he was mentally stripping her naked and that in itself was unnerving. She didn't trust him either. She smiled bitterly and realized that apparently she couldn't really trust Shawn either. "You bastard," she said softly, shaking her head.

"Pam—"

She shook her head. "No. I don't want to hear it." Stalking out of the main room of the club, she headed for the offices upstairs. Her low-heeled boots made a dull thudding sound on the steps and behind her, she heard Shawn's feet as he followed her.

Her instincts screamed at her, told her to turn around and hit him. Square in the nose. He deserved it—she knew that much. But still, she fought the urge. She really, really wanted to hit him. But instead, Pam kept walking until she got to her office.

In stark contrast to the public rooms of the club, her office was done in shades of white with blue and green accents. The carpet, the walls, the furniture were all a soft ivory, splashes of color found in throw pillows, in the rug in front of her desk and the framed art prints on the wall. Her desk was a huge affair that took up the back half of the wall, a soft, mellow gold that matched the series of file cabinets marching down one side of the wall and the one lone bookcase by the door.

The computer was her latest baby. When last year had turned a huge profit, she'd invested in a state-of-the-art computer with all the bells and whistles that she had dreamed about but never been able to afford. Her hands clenched into fists as she realized that she could lose this office that she had put so much time and love into, lose the club that she had devoted the past three years to.

I won't lose this place, Pam thought as her temper spiked hot and strong and she once more had to fight the urge to commit some serious violent act. *I won't*. She crossed to her desk, desperate to get some distance between her and Shawn. She could feel him at her back, feel the brush of his breath on her nape and her skin crawled.

Pam paused by the edge of her desk and ran her fingers down the smooth, glossy surface of the wood. The desk was secondhand, something she'd bought at an estate auction. She'd spent hours scraping off the old paint, sanding it smooth and adding the glossy, golden stain. A lot of the furnishings in her office were secondhand items that she had searched out, fixed up and made her own.

Just like this club. She'd found it, fixed it and it was hers. Settling down behind her desk, she turned on the computer, letting it boot up in silence. She stared out the huge, one-way mirror that made up one of the walls. It faced out over the main part of the club. She'd spent hours there, watching the people dance, laugh, have a good time...or a lousy one. She'd seen fights, breakups and engagements happen down on that floor. She'd seen people fall in love and out of it.

Tearing her attention away from the empty dance floor, she faced the computer and quickly pounded out a letter. Shawn stood behind her silently and she knew he was reading as she wrote.

She hit the print key and grabbed the phone, calling the head bartender, Sam, into the office. It took him a few minutes and Shawn used that time to try to touch her but she evaded his hands. When he persisted, she stood up and moved away from the desk, away from him.

Sam came inside with an irritated look on his face. He'd been doing inventory and being the anal-retentive type, he did hate having somebody pull him away from a task before he finished it. He was detail oriented, quick and usually fairly easygoing.

He was also as trustworthy as the day was long and he knew how to keep his mouth shut. That was exactly why she'd had him come up instead of one of the others who were down there getting the club ready for the day's business. "Yeah?"

"I need you to witness something," she said. She took the page from the printer and read over it.

"We need to talk this through, Pam." Shawn slid Sam a dark look. "I'm not—"

"Yes," she said coolly. "You are. Because if you don't, you're shit out of luck. You can call Ethan, tell him I said 'hell no', and then you can deal with the consequences yourself."

Shawn laughed. "You wouldn't do that. This is *your* club."

With an icy smile, she said, "Not yet, it's not. Not completely. And you apparently must be pretty damn desperate to even agree to this. So you either agree to sign the club over to me completely or you deal with it on your own."

He looked at the letter and shook his head. "This wouldn't be legally binding, Pam. You know that."

She smirked. "It doesn't have to be legally binding. But imagine what some of your clients would think if they knew about this mess. If you try to renege, I'll tell them all." With a sweet smile, she murmured, "You know, you've used my computer several times to send out some of your little hot tip bulletins. I've got all those email addresses and it wouldn't take much time at all to let every single one of them know about this. All of it."

Shawn's eyes narrowed and she knew she'd hit a nerve that time. Shawn took only a few things in life very seriously—primarily his brother and his career. Once, she'd thought herself to be on that list but apparently she was wrong. As he scrawled his name on the letter and handed it over to Sam to witness, she twisted the ring off of her finger. Yeah, she'd been majorly wrong but there was no way she was going to compound her stupidity by marrying him.

Sam glanced at her, a dark frown on his face. He glanced from her face to Shawn's and then back. Behind the lenses of his glasses, his hazel eyes were more than a little curious but he wouldn't ask any questions. At least not yet. She took the letter from him and folded it up, slid it into an envelope and taped it shut. Then she turned it back over

to Sam. "I need you to take a break and take this over to Dani's office." Danica Lawson, Dani to her friends, was one of Pam's closest friends. She was also a lawyer—Pam's lawyer. She had nothing to do with the club because when they'd gotten the club up and going, Shawn had convinced Pam that they needed somebody who specialized in businesses.

"You got it, boss," he drawled. He gave Shawn one last look and then he left, closing the door behind him.

Once Sam was gone, Pam faced Shawn. She held out her hand, offering him the ring back. Shawn looked at it, startled. Then he looked back at her as though his brain wasn't working right. "What...what's that for?"

Pam continued to stand there, holding it out and fighting to control the fury and heartache welling inside. "Take it, damn you."

Shaking his head, he said, "Damn it, Pam. This is just one fucking night. I already told you that he wasn't going to make you sleep with him or anything."

"But he expects me to," she said, her voice bitter. He still hadn't taken the ring so she tossed it at his feet. "And you apparently don't care that much."

He shouted, "You think I want to think about you fucking him?" His tanned face flushed red, and for once, she caught something in his eyes besides that damn selfishness. He was jealous, damn jealous.

For some reason, that actually made her feel a little bit better. She smirked a little and said, "Don't worry, sweetheart. If it happens, I'll close my eyes and try really hard to think about you." Then, in a cold voice, she said, "Get the hell out. I've got a club to run."

Chapter Two

She'd said yes.

Staring out the window of his condo, Ethan tuned out everything but what Shawn had just said.

Pamela James was finally going to be his.

"Ethan."

He glanced back over his shoulder at Shawn. The man looked terrible and Ethan wasn't that surprised. He'd known that Shawn wouldn't have the balls to stand up to him and while part of him felt as though he should be appalled at what he was doing, he wasn't.

She deserved better than Shawn. Outside of business, Shawn was spineless. He didn't have the guts or the wisdom to know he needed to shake loose of his brother and he didn't have the balls to stand up to Ethan about the ultimatum he'd issued. Because of Shawn's cowardice, Ethan was going to get what he'd been dying to have for the past four years.

Pam.

Soft, sexy Pam with the smile of Mona Lisa and the body of Venus. Voluptuous curves, dark green eyes and a southern drawl that had haunted him since he'd met her. Shawn had brought her to a business function shortly after he and Ethan had gone into business together but the first time Ethan had seen her, he hadn't realized she was with Shawn. All he'd seen was a soft, sexy woman with a sweet smile and he'd wanted her instantly.

She had stood out in the crowd, her pale skin glowing like a pearl against the black velvet of her dress. She'd looked like heaven to him—all soft, warm and round, her big breasts rising in smooth curves above the rounded neckline of her dress and her plump

ass and round hips looked as though they had been designed for nothing other to fill a man's hands. And she would fill them. He knew she hated those generous curves. For the past four years, he'd done his damndest to learn everything about her, from the size of clothes she wore, to the gym where she worked out, to the place where she'd bought her wedding dress.

Her wedding dress...

Shawn had asked Ethan to stand up with him at the wedding but Ethan had refused. Not that he intended to let the wedding happen but even thinking about her walking down the aisle to marry Shawn made him sick.

He was taking a risk here, he knew. There was a possibility she'd hate him after this but at least she would have a better idea about what kind of man she planned to marry.

"Damn it, are you going to listen to me or just ignore me?"

Ethan gave Shawn a bland look, jerking himself out of his reverie. "Do you have anything important to say or are you going to stand there and bitch about the mess you've gotten yourself into?"

"If it was just my mess, I wouldn't be bitching so much," Shawn growled.

Ethan cocked a brow. "It *is* your mess, my friend. You're the one who pulled Pam into this when you put up the club as collateral. Next time you get into this situation maybe you should discuss it with your business partner first." He leaned back in his chair and gave Shawn a shark's smile. "Of course, if you ever pulled something like this with me, I'd slice your balls off." Then he shrugged. "Don't worry so much. I'll take good care of your fiancée."

Shawn looked down at something he held in his hand, something so small that Ethan couldn't even see it. "Yeah," Shawn muttered. "I bet you will."

* * * * *

Three days later, Pam entered her office to find a huge crystal vase on her desk. There were easily two dozen roses in it—pale, pale roses that seemed white from a

distance but as she got closer, she saw that they were actually the palest, creamiest shade of pink.

The petals felt satiny against her fingers when she touched them. She scowled a little. Shawn wasn't prone to romantic gestures, even when he was in the wrong, so it was going to really suck throwing these out.

It was the principal of the thing, though. It had been three days since she'd given back his ring and he'd been calling regularly. Pam had ignored the calls but it wasn't going to be so easy to ignore the roses. She found the card and opened it, already formulating the message she'd have somebody pass on to Shawn the next time he called.

But it wasn't from Shawn.

Wear the dress.

Tonight at 7 a car will pick you up at the club.

Ethan

Her first instinct was to tear the card into two thousand microscopic pieces. Her second was to take the roses and hurl them, crystal vase and all, against the wall. And her third instinct was...*what dress?*

The Bash, she realized. It was already time for the Bash...and this damn '*date*'. Damn it. Pam hadn't wanted to think about the Bash and for the past three days she'd done a damn fine job of doing just that. She'd made arrangements for tonight though. She might be burying her head in the sand about the actual event but she'd made the preparations to have the night off.

She had a dress at home she planned on wearing and once she got her work done here, she'd leave the club in the capable hands of Sam and Maya, the club's manager. Time enough to take a bath, get dressed...

The dress.

“What dress?” she muttered as she glanced around automatically and that was when she saw the box on her desk. It was so damn big that she wondered how she could have missed it. She recognized the name on the lid and blinked, a little startled. It was from a designer boutique that sold dresses worth more than her entire wardrobe.

At home, she had laid out a black velvet dress that she had bought for the few formal things she attended. Simple, basic, elegant—it was pretty much the only thing she owned for this sort of thing and she’d be damned if she went and splurged on something for this...this...blackmail.

Probably something pink. Or red. She hated red, made her skin look a little too rosy and pink. She really, really didn’t like pink. Already irritated, she started to work the lid off. She had no qualms with others wearing it and chances were there would be a dozen other women, at least, wearing some shade of pink tonight but she just wasn’t—

Damn! When she first caught sight of the dress, she gasped. Her eyes widened at the green silk dress and unwittingly, she reached out and touched it.

One thing she had worked on really hard over the past three days was to *not* think about Ethan. In any way. At all. But now, she couldn’t help it. This was really going to happen.

Her belly pitched and she sagged against her desk, staring at the dress. Then she looked up and stared around the club. Was she really going to do this?

Part of her shouted, *No. You can’t do this.*

The other part kept remembering Shawn’s face as he’d said, *It’s not like you have to sleep with him or anything.*

She couldn’t get rid of the feeling that that was exactly what Shawn wanted her to do. He wanted her to do whatever Ethan asked of her so the man would wipe Shawn’s debt clean. Shawn was good with money but he was also greedy. A night that would erase a quarter-million-dollar debt...

Her gut knotted as she realized the ramifications of that. Yeah, Ethan had a lot of money. He was good with it. Everything he touched turned to gold. But he was willing to write off that loan for a night with her. *Her*. Pam was short, on the plump side and while she wasn't unattractive, she'd never be much more than cute. She wore her blonde hair long because keeping it short required more trips to the salon that she cared to make. She burned in the sun so she was always pale. Her skin seemed to blush pink with even the slightest emotion and her green eyes always looked a little surprised, in her opinion.

Nothing special.

So why the hell was Ethan Parker willing to let go of that kind of money for a night with her?

"Oh, shit." She pressed a hand against her belly to still the nerves dancing around in there and then she looked at the clock. Three hours.

Her hands shook a little as she lifted the dress out and held it against her. Slowly she turned and stared at the mirror that hung over the couch on the opposite side of her office. The green seemed to glow against her skin and she looked even paler than usual. Of course, that could be because she was scared to death.

"You really are going to do this," she whispered.

Part of her wanted to insist it was because she didn't have much of a choice.

Part of her wanted to insist she was doing this because she didn't want to lose the club.

But deep inside, she knew that wasn't the only reason. She wanted to know exactly why the hell Ethan Parker wanted a night with her, of all people.

Chapter Three

The dress and the flowers weren't the only surprises waiting for her. Under the dress, she'd found all the lingerie needed for a dress like this, all in a matching shade of green. There were even shoes and when she slid the thin-strapped sexy emerald-green heels onto her feet, she found they fit perfectly.

Too perfectly.

Now, two and a half hours later, she stood inside her small personal bathroom off the back of her office and stared at her reflection. The dress had a sweetheart neckline, fitting to her breasts as though it had been made for her. Under her breasts, it fell in graceful folds to her knees and when she studied her appearance, she saw that the way it fit made the most of her curves. At the same time, it managed to hide the flaws she hated, her belly and her thighs.

Her skin glowed against the vivid green. Slowly, she reached up and trailed her fingers across her collarbone then along the swell of her breasts. The reflection in the mirror moved accordingly – yes, it was definitely her.

But she looked, well, pretty damn good. Pam had no illusions about her physical appearance but the woman staring back at her was more than cute. She was...well, actually kind of beautiful.

Combing a shaky hand through her hair, she watched the golden strands float back down to frame her face. It didn't look right, though, hanging past her shoulders, not with the dress. She left the bathroom and searched through her desk until she found a clip for her hair. Standing back under the bright bathroom lights, she combed through the thick locks again, smoothing her hair up and away from her face, twisting it into a loose knot and securing it with the clip.

There was a spare makeup kit in the bathroom since she had a habit of forgetting to put it on. With a light hand, she applied it, taking care with her eyes. She couldn't help but notice that the dress seemed to make her green eyes look even greener and she wondered if he'd done that on purpose. She dismissed the thought, though. That would imply that Ethan knew what color her eyes were, that he gave a damn.

If he didn't give a damn, he wouldn't want you for a night.

She shut off that sly little whisper. "For all I know, he's just doing this to piss off Shawn." It wasn't completely out of the question, she guessed. Ethan had the money to throw away on a gorgeous dress and sometimes she suspected he had a mean streak. Or maybe it wasn't a mean streak. Maybe it was just ruthlessness that she sensed inside him.

He wasn't cruel. She knew that. Over the past few years, she knew of things he'd done that a cruel man wouldn't do. Little considerations that cruel people weren't capable of, such as helping one of Pam's managers carry in supplies, or stopping his work to walk his assistant outside because he didn't want her walking alone to her car in the dark. Little things, yes, but little things often told detailed stories.

There was something inside him that Pam didn't trust. He liked to piss Shawn off—that was one thing she'd seen him do entirely too often—and then smile because of it.

Because of that, she couldn't totally rule out the possibility, though it didn't seem to jibe.

"Stop thinking about it," she muttered as she leaned forward to put on eyeliner. She took a little more time with it than usual. When she was finally done, Pam straightened and studied her reflection, turning this way and that so she could see the back of the dress.

It was cut a little lower than she liked. She tended to cover up a little more than this, though she wasn't exactly modest. Sexy clothes just seemed to be made for the under-size-ten set, not for size sixteen.

At least usually.

She had to admit she felt very sexy right then. The lingerie she wore was made with every bit as much attention to detail as the dress. The strapless bra had a sparkly rhinestone heart right between her breasts and the skimpy thong panties had a matching heart that nestled right atop the crevice of her bottom. The garter belt was made of the same green silk as the bra and panties, holding up flesh-colored stockings. The swirling length of the skirt floated around her legs, caressing her mostly bare curves and she flushed as she thought about meeting Ethan somewhere wearing this dress. He'd know what she had on under it.

Or to be more precise, he'd know just how little she had on under it. Had he picked out the underwear?

"Don't be stupid," she muttered. The man was rich. He could have some personal shopper take care of details like that. Picking out lingerie was something a man did for a lover, not a one-night date.

Or whatever the hell this was. Was it really a date? Technically, it seemed that way but dates usually involved one party asking the other out, not one party blackmailing the other.

"I can't believe I'm doing this."

Turning on her heel, she left the bathroom. The cool air caressed her bare arms and chilled, she rubbed her hands up and down them. Goose bumps broke out over her flesh and under the silk of her bra and dress, her nipples went stiff.

That was how Ethan walked in and found her, pacing the floor of her office, nibbling on her lower lip and walking around with a wide-eyed, worried look on her pretty face.

"You look beautiful."

Startled, she spun around to face him. He stood in the open doorway, his hands in his pockets to keep from reaching out to touch her. The green silk looked even better on her ripe curves than he'd imagined. Now he wanted to peel the dress away and see how

she looked under it, to see if she was wearing the lingerie he'd picked out and then he wanted to peel her out of that and...

Getting ahead of yourself, Parker, he thought, frustrated.

He wasn't sure exactly what Shawn had told his fiancée and he wasn't about to ask. However, he had told Shawn that he wasn't going to make Pam sleep with him. He had no intention of forcing anything from her beyond this date. If he was able to seduce her into sleeping with him, Ethan knew he wasn't altruistic enough to pass up the opportunity but it would happen only if Pam wanted it to.

And shit, he seriously hoped she wanted it.

Under the fine wool pants of his suit, he could feel his body reacting and he almost shifted away. He'd been hiding his physical reaction to her for damn near four years now and it was second habit.

But even if she hadn't figured it out, by the end of the night, she was going to know how much he wanted her. Hiding from her now seemed pointless. So instead of shifting away, he closed the distance between them and caught one long curl in his hand. She'd scooped up most of her hair and twisted it on top of her head but a few wispy curls had escaped to frame her face and cascade in soft spirals down her neck. She tensed but didn't pull away.

Ethan watched her eyes widen and then she slid her tongue out, licking her lips. At some point, she'd put lipstick on. He could still see the faint rose color on her lips but it was fading fast. If he thought he could get by with it without scaring her off completely, Ethan would have kissed the rest of her lipstick away.

But she watched him with wide, worried eyes and Ethan felt his heart twist in his chest. "Don't look so worried," he murmured, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

At that, a ghost of a smile appeared on her lips but it wasn't a happy one. "I'm basically being blackmailed into spending a night with you and I'm not supposed to look worried? Sorry but they didn't teach the etiquette of whoring at UMass."

Ethan curved a hand over her neck and used his thumb to force her gaze up to his. His voice was a little harder than he intended when he said, "Don't. You're not a whore." He couldn't help it though—the fury that flooded him was so strong, he wanted to tear something apart with his bare hands.

No, he really hadn't wanted to discuss this and he really didn't feel like getting into this conversation. But it looked like he didn't have a choice. "Exactly what did Shawn tell you?"

She grimaced. "He owes you a hell of a lot of money and you want it. Either I sleep with you or you call in the loan." She sighed and glanced around the office, her gaze lingering on the one-way glass window that looked out over the club. It was early yet but it was already hopping. The music was vibrating through her office. She could hear and feel the deep, throbbing rhythm.

"Is that what he told you? Exactly?"

Her green eyes met his and then danced away. "Not word for word." Blowing out a breath, she admitted, "Okay, he said that you didn't plan on making me sleep with you but he seemed to think you were going to ask. And the feeling I got from him was that I need to do whatever will make you happy so you won't call in that loan."

"I told him I wasn't going to make you sleep with me," Ethan said softly. "I was pretty damn clear on that."

Pam was so damn nervous, she thought she might get sick. It took a minute before his words actually made sense in her head and then she blinked, staring at his face. "So you're going to forget about that kind of money just because you want the pleasure of my company for a few hours?" she said, her voice dry. Yeah, so Shawn hadn't exactly said she had to sleep with him but the implication had been there.

He slid a hand around her shoulder, down her back and pulled her up close to him. Under that sexy suit of his, his body was hard and Pam gasped as he aligned their bodies. "I've wanted the pleasure of your company for the past four years," he

murmured, dipping his head to press a kiss to her shoulder. "But the few times I tried to get you to go out with me, you wouldn't give me the time of day."

Her mind whirled and she gaped at him as she finally remembered what he was talking about. He *had* asked her out a couple of times but it had been in an almost off-hand manner, as though he hadn't meant it. And she'd been dating Shawn. Besides, Ethan made her damn nervous. Swallowing the knot in her throat, she eased away from him. "I don't think a date with me is worth two hundred fifty thousand dollars," she said flatly. "I don't think sex with me would be worth that."

He traced a finger along the neckline of her dress and she trembled. Her nipples, already stiff, started to throb and she went hot as his gaze lowered, fastening on the bodice of her dress. "Oh, I think you're wrong," he said, his voice hoarse. He cleared his throat.

Cupping her chin in his hand, he held her gaze as he continued. "I want to sleep with you. More than you could ever begin to understand." His thumb rubbed over her lower lip and Pam shivered. Man, he stared at her like she was the only person in his entire universe, she thought, a little dazed. "And if I think I can convince you to spend the entire night with me, I'm going to." Dipping his head, he licked her lower lip and then murmured against her lips, "I could take you places you've only dreamed about, pretty lady, and you'd love every second of it."

Slowly, he lifted his head, holding her gaze as he added, "But it's your choice."

Then he let go and stepped back, slipping his hands into his pockets.

"Regardless, all I expect from you is a few hours with you where you don't leave the second I look at you, where you actually talk to me. And I don't lie—end of the night, no matter how it goes, I'll give Shawn back the deed to the club and you two can get back to wedding plans."

Wedding plans? Her mouth twisted. She still hadn't come to grips with what had changed in her life over the past seventy-two hours but she did know there was no wedding in her near future. Her assistant had been on the phone half the day cancelling

the rentals of the church, the reception hall and talking with the travel agent about getting back the deposit they'd put down on their honeymoon.

"There isn't going to be a wedding," she said shortly, shrugging as though she'd changed her plans for the night instead of the rest of her life.

Turning away to get her purse, she missed seeing Ethan's eyes widen. He rocked back on his heels and hoped like hell she couldn't read him very well. She looked absolutely miserable so probably wouldn't appreciate him rubbing his hands together with glee.

"Called it off, did he?" he asked mildly.

She shot him a look that would have emasculated a lesser man. "Hell no. *I* called it off."

"Over this?" He gestured to the club.

Her lip curled in disgust. "No. Because of this." She gestured to him. "I don't know how the hell you came up with this harebrained idea and I don't care. I don't know what the hell you said to Shawn about this, and right now, I don't care. I just want to keep my club—*my* club. I still own half of it, regardless of what Shawn used as collateral. My name is on the deed and I run this place. Am I pissed over the money deal? Hell yes. But that's not why I called it off." She *was* pissed. The thought of losing her club made her sick inside. But by tomorrow she'd own all of it and Shawn would be out of the picture. It still twisted her heart though, thinking of what Shawn had been willing to do just so he wouldn't have to pay Ethan the money he owed him.

Her voice was husky as she added, "I called it off because I'm not going to marry a man who thinks the way of solving his problems is to slut out his fiancée."

Ethan's eyes narrowed then went icy. A chill raced down her back and she almost took a step back as he closed the distance between them. His hand came up again, cupping her chin and this time he squeezed lightly. He didn't hurt her but it was clear that he wasn't going to let her go either. "Don't do that again, Pam," he whispered softly. "What happens at the end of the night is your choice."

Refusing to let him intimidate her, she snapped, "Call it whatever you like. He basically sold me for one night. One helluva a price tag, though. Maybe I should be flattered. You actually think I'm worth a quarter of a million dollars? It's almost mind boggling."

"I don't give a damn about the money," Ethan said as he skimmed his fingers along her jaw and then cupped his hand over the back of her neck. "It has nothing to do with the club, with money or with Shawn. It has to do with the fact that my dick gets hard every time I see you and I'm going crazy with it."

He dipped his head, nuzzled her neck. His breath was warm along her flesh as he murmured in her ear, "I tried getting your attention the nice way but all you ever do is ignore me. One night with you, Pam. That's all I'm asking and if you don't want to have sex with me, it changes nothing. I don't blackmail a woman into my bed."

He kissed her then and Pam could have sworn her hair was singed by the heat of it. There was no denying that heat as he forced her mouth open and kissed her deeply, roughly and thoroughly. He slid his hands around her body and jerked her flat against him. One palm opened at the base of her spine, forcing her lower body up against his. Ethan buried his other hand in her hair, dislodging the clip so that it fell unnoticed to the floor.

Through the layers of silk and wool, she felt every detail of his body—a wide, muscled chest, a hard-planed abdomen and the thick length of his cock pressing against her belly and moving in a rhythm that left no doubt in her mind of just what he wanted. Her—naked and spread out underneath him. His tongue rubbed against hers and despite herself, Pam moaned, arching into him as she slid her hands up over his shoulders to clutch him close.

He pulled back slowly and Pam had to consciously make herself let go of him. She didn't want to—she wanted to be pressed back against him and reveling in his obvious hunger. He slid his finger under her chin and Pam swallowed as she looked up and met his golden eyes. They gleamed against the soft mellow tan of his skin and his black hair

fell into his eyes. Without realizing what she was doing, she reached and pushed his hair back out of his face. He caught her hand and pressed a kiss to the inside of her wrist. "You're not whoring yourself, Pam. Don't say anything like that again. I don't like it. What happens at the end of the night is totally your call."

Chapter Four

She hadn't thought it would be possible to relax. Not around Ethan and definitely not under these circumstances. He'd always made her so damn edgy, with the way he watched her, how intense he was.

This almost seemed another side of him. He was charming, he made her laugh and he showed her more romance during dinner than Shawn ever had.

Ethan opened and held the door for her. When she needed to go to the ladies room, he rose from his chair and when he saw her returning, again, he stood.

It wasn't just the impeccable manners, though they'd taken her by surprise. It was also the attentive way he watched her, the way he listened to her as though nothing else in the world existed.

The waiter appeared silently to refill her wine glass and, as he disappeared, she glanced up to see Ethan watching her with that focused, intent stare that always so unnerved her.

She recognized something in that gaze though, that she hadn't seen before. Need. Maybe it was the wine or maybe it was nerves but she didn't think so. There was something in that gaze she never would have expected to see. Not from him...and not directed at her. Unable to keep quiet, she said, "I don't understand any of this, Ethan. I don't understand it at all."

He cocked a brow at her over the rim of his glass. He took a small drink and then set it down. "Come over here," he murmured, his voice a low, sexy rumble that seemed to caress her bare skin as though he'd touched her.

Nervous, she slid across the booth toward him. It was a small booth in a small, dark restaurant, lit only by candles on the table and flickering flames in wall sconces. She

stopped a few inches away and he closed the rest of the distance between them, a small, erotic smile on his lips. "Give me your hand," he murmured.

Her hand was shaking as she laid it in his but she refused to acknowledge it. His fingers, strong and warm, closed around her wrist and he placed her hand, palm flat, against his thigh. "Have you ever seen something you wanted so bad it haunted your days and nights? Something you wanted but couldn't have? That kind of thing turns into an obsession real fast, Pam and I've had an obsession for you since the night I saw you dancing with Shawn."

As he spoke, he eased her hand higher up on his thigh and she felt the muscles under her hand, the heat of his skin. She gulped, mouth gone dry but he didn't move her hand any higher. He left it there, his fingers idly stroking her wrist, almost lazily. "I asked you to dance with me. Do you remember?"

Nerves jangled inside her. Yes, she remembered. It was the first time she'd ever spoken to him. He'd been so amazingly sexy and so confident that she couldn't understand why he'd asked her to dance. The only thing that had made sense was that small, arrogant smile on his lips and as he'd asked, his smile had widened just a little. Almost as though the idea of dancing with her had amused him. When she'd refused, that smile hadn't changed at all and it wasn't until he was a good ten feet away that she'd breathed easier.

"I remember," she murmured.

"Why did you tell me no?"

She shrugged. "I don't know." Then she frowned a little, glancing at him. "That's not true. You made me nervous."

"Why?"

It had to have been the wine behind her reply, "Because I don't know how to handle men like you."

He shifted under her hand, slumping back just a little in the seat. His lids drooped low over his eyes as he said softly, "The same way you handle any other man, Pam."

"The same way," she replied. Then she shook her head. He was too different from what she was used to. She gravitated toward easygoing guys, the kind who made her laugh, who made her feel comfortable. Although she was a lot more comfortable with Ethan tonight than she'd expected. If Shawn had been here with her...oh, now that was the totally wrong thing to think about.

She might have been too nervous even with three glasses of wine in her system but add her outrage with Shawn into the mix and that was enough to give her a burst of courage she never would have had under normal circumstances. She slid her fingers the rest of the way up his thigh, watching his face from beneath her lashes. When she closed her fingers around his cock and massaged him through his clothes, his head fell back and he hissed out a harsh breath between his teeth.

His hand closed over her wrist and she thought for a second that he might pull her hand away but instead, he straightened in the seat and pressed her palm tighter against him. His heavy-lidded gaze remained on her face even as the waiter approached. When Pam would have jerked her hand away, he kept his grip tight on her wrist and wouldn't let her.

"Will there be anything else, Mr. Parker?"

A slow, sensual smile curved his lips and he never once looked away from her face as he murmured, "Not here."

* * * * *

She hadn't just done that, Pam thought, mortified as Ethan guided her outside.

As though he seemed to understand how nervous she was, Ethan made no mention of that little incident as he led her to the long black limo waiting at the curb.

They slid into the car and as she settled on the plush leather, Ethan asked, "Have you ever been to the Bash before?"

Pam shook her head. "I'd asked..." her voice trailed off and she glanced at Ethan. Any time she mentioned Shawn's name, the man's face took on an icy cast. It was sexy,

but at the same time, a little unsettling. It also had a very weird effect on her, the kind of effect that made her want to say Shawn's name often, just to see what he'd do, just to see his eyes go chilly with anger...and possessiveness.

After finding out her fiancé was okay with her going out on a date with an *uber*-sexy guy like Ethan, seeing somebody get a little possessive felt kind of good. Although she still didn't quite understand it, not coming from Ethan. She also didn't understand the bratty streak he caused inside her. Pam wasn't much for pulling the tiger's tail, or so she'd thought.

It was confusing enough to make her a little nervous about answering him. Hesitating a little, she finally added, "I asked Shawn once or twice about going but he never wanted to."

Which really didn't make much sense. The man was a bit of a cheapskate but he could afford the ticket price. It was steep—tickets to the Midnight Madness Bash cost a thousand bucks a couple. But it all went to a home for battered women and children. A good cause and this was one of those places to be seen. Shawn did like being seen.

But this whole gala was a romantic, extravagant one and Shawn just wasn't one for romantic gestures. "Shawn's not much of a romantic type," she added with a frown. In her hand, she held a rose that Ethan had bought from a lady inside the restaurant. The woman had walked around with a basket full of them and when Ethan had stopped her, Pam's heart had skipped a beat.

She really did love flowers. He'd picked out a perfect red rose and when he had given it to her, Pam had felt her heart melt a little.

His hand appeared in her field of vision, gently taking the rose from her. "Women need a little bit of romance in their lives," he said, turning the rose around and trailing the petals down her cheek.

The satiny-soft, light touch had the same effect as if he'd leaned over and kissed her. Pam shivered. "Lean back," he murmured, sliding a little closer. "Close your eyes."

Common sense screeched that listening to him was a bad idea. But common sense lost. She'd listened to her common sense most of her life and look where it had landed her. Resting back against the buttery soft leather seat, she closed her eyes and held her breath. The rose slid down her neck, stroked across the swell of her breasts, over one nipple, then the other. "I love seeing that look on a woman's face," Ethan whispered.

She jumped, not realizing he'd slid so close. Opening her eyes, she stared at his face and asked, "What look?"

He smiled and stroked the rose petals across her lips. "Surprise and desire. You want me. But you're also not so sure it would be a good idea," he murmured, trailing the rose down her neck again. "I'm moving faster than you like. Part of you wants that but the other part of you is nervous. So tell me which part I should listen to."

Once more, the petals of the rose brushed against her nipples—one, then the other—then down, lower...lower... "Should I stop? Should I keep going and just see what happens?"

Pam held still, almost afraid to breathe. *Damn you*, she thought darkly. He saw far too clearly and it was damn unfair considering she really couldn't read much of anything about him. She wanted him to keep going but at the same time, she was a little horrified, a little embarrassed that she was letting him touch her like that. Letting him touch her at all.

What she wanted to do was just lean back and tell him to do whatever he wanted. She could still hear that sexy promise he'd made earlier. *I could take you places you've only dreamed about, pretty lady, and you'd love every second of it.* She believed every word and more, she wanted to let him do just that.

But instead, she reached up and closed a hand over his wrist. She didn't try to tug his hand away, she just stilled it with her own.

Pam said nothing but she didn't need to. That faint, mocking smile curled his lips and he pulled his hand back, laying the rose gently in her lap and then leaning back

against the leather seat. "I understand caution," he said conversationally, "but right now, I wish neither of us were the cautious type."

At that, Pam had to laugh. "You're not the cautious type."

Her laugh died in her throat as he caught her hand in his and lifted it, pressing a kiss to the inside of her wrist. "Oh, but I am. Caution is the only thing that kept me from kidnapping you, taking you someplace quiet and isolated and fucking you, making love to you, until you forgot any other man ever existed." His tongue circled around the pulse point in her wrist. His breath brushed warmly across her skin as he added, "So you see, this is actually extreme caution on my part."

She thought he was kidding. Ethan could tell by the look on her face as she turned to gaze out the window. The lady didn't know him at all, a depressing thought considering how he'd spent the past couple of years learning everything he could about her.

He hadn't been joking about the kidnapping thing. He'd been tempted more than once and every time she'd looked at him with those wide, nervous eyes and he'd gotten a glimpse of a desire she worked hard to hide, that temptation had gotten harder and harder to resist.

Ethan wanted her with a need that was quickly starting to override his common sense. Touching her as he had, telling her some of things he'd told her, could make a sane woman run screaming for her safety and her virtue.

Yet Pam hadn't done that. Didn't mean she wouldn't but he hoped that somewhere inside, she understood that he wouldn't ever hurt her. That he couldn't.

* * * * *

Other than the charity dinner that night four years ago when she'd met Ethan, Pam hadn't been to a formal deal since college and that night had ended with two thirds of the attendees getting shit-faced drunk and some frat boy had ended up puking on her

dress. It hadn't left the best impression but it also hadn't made her swear off extravagant events either.

Pam just hadn't had the opportunity until now.

Standing in the doorway, her arm looped through Ethan's, she stared at the glimmer of candlelight, flashy jewelry, brilliant dresses of silks and satins interspersed with the dark tuxes worn by most of the men. Some of the dresses were so gaudy that she had to wince in sympathy. Others were so racy that she half expected to see the women's boobs fall out. And yet others were so damn pretty that their wearers looked so beautiful, it almost didn't seem real.

The music played at just the right level—not too loud for those wanting to talk and perfect for those who crowded onto the dance floor. Swathes of silk and strands of white lights glowed overhead and huge bouquets of roses and baby's breath adorned each table.

Rough, calloused fingers trailed over her shoulder and she looked up, meeting Ethan's gaze.

"We'll have more fun if we actually go all the way inside," he teased gently.

Forgetting for a minute that she was here only because he'd forced her into it, she smiled back at him. "Give me a minute to wallow. I don't get to indulge my girly side like this too much."

He dipped his head, brushed his lips over her shoulder, following the trail his fingers had taken so he could whisper into her ear, "I could give you moments like this, all you wanted." He nuzzled her neck and Pam shivered a little, melting inside. "Come on, I want to dance with you."

Following him onto the dance floor, she let him pull her into his arms and there she snuggled in against him and rested her head on his chest. His arms looped around her, one hand resting low on her back and holding her close, so close she could feel the hard strength of his body through her dress and his tux. In very vivid detail she could feel the length of his cock, thickening, expanding, throbbing against her belly.

Her body's instinctive response would have had her squirming in embarrassment if she could think past it. "If I'd known dancing with you would be like this, I would have made you dance with me that first night," Ethan murmured against her ear.

"Made me how?" she teased, turning her head to look at him and ending up with her mouth just a breath away from his.

"Using whatever means necessary." The hand on her back tightened, brought her lower body in even closer and his fingers stroked over the skin left bare by her dress. "You did bad things to my control, pretty lady. Really bad."

He wasn't too good on her control either, though she wasn't so certain she wanted to admit that yet. But she had a feeling he knew. He closed the distance between their mouths, pressing his lips to hers and kissing her with a skill and thoroughness that left her head swimming. Unconsciously, she started to rock against him, echoing the movement of his tongue in her mouth. When he would have pulled back, she slid a hand around his neck and took charge of the kiss, exploring his mouth, the shape of his lips, feasting on the sexy male taste of him.

His body tensed and he pulled back despite the way her hands clung to him. Unconsciously, she made a disappointed little whimper and he smiled, easing her head down to rest on his shoulder. "You keep this up and I'll forget that I promised myself to try not to rush you."

"Did you promise yourself that?" she asked.

He only paused a second before he answered ruefully, "No. If you're willing to let me rush you, I'll have you upstairs and checked into a suite before you can even catch your breath."

Okay. The word sprung to her lips and she only barely managed to bite it back. If Pam listened to her body, she knew she was already more than willing to do just that—check into a hotel room and see if he could make good on the promise. *I could take you places you've only dreamed about.*

Damn, remembering *that* and the husky, sexy drawl of his voice, the way his eyes had roamed over her body as though he wanted to strip her naked and feast, was enough to have her shuddering with want.

But instead of teasing him just a little more, instead of telling him, "Fine, let's get a room," she leaned back into him and let him guide her around the dance floor. The night was moving too fast as it was. She needed a chance to get her head level again.

It didn't happen though.

Three hours passed and they spent most of the time swaying back and forth on the dance floor, leaving it to sit down for a few minutes here and there or to get a drink from the cash bar. She kept herself to two glasses of wine and water after that but still, by the time midnight rolled around, her head was spinning and she was so aroused that it was almost torture just to look at him.

Aroused enough that when he led her outside for a breath of air, she realized she couldn't focus on anything beyond his mouth and how it felt pressed against hers. His fingers tightened on her arm and she shook herself back to awareness, staring up at him.

"You're asking for trouble, Pam," he murmured, cupping her chin in his hand and angling her face upward.

"Hmmm." She turned her head just a little and kissed his fingers. "What kind of trouble?"

He swore roughly. "The kind that's going to end with the two of us naked if you don't cut it out. I'm trying to be a decent guy here. I don't want to push you into anything you're going to regret in the morning."

Unable to help it, she laughed. "A decent guy who blackmailed me into a date?"

"A decent guy who was grasping at straws before it was too late," he growled. The hand on her chin tightened and that was the only warning she had before his mouth came crushing down on hers, forcing her to open, to accept him. He'd been sweetly seductive, he'd been tender and teasing but this kiss was none of those things.

It was a claiming, plain and simple. By the time he lifted his head, they were both panting and she was so turned on, she had to lock her knees just to keep from melting against him.

His pupils flared and he stared down at her. She could see the intent in his eyes and she braced herself for it. Braced herself for him to pull her closer and she wanted it, wanted it with a passion that made her forget where they were and how they'd come to be there.

But instead, he pulled away. His face went blank and he murmured, "It's getting late, Pam." Then he slid his hand down her arm, curled his fingers around her elbow and led her back inside. Back through the crush of bodies. Somebody must have been waiting and had called Ethan's driver because by the time they got out front, the long black limo was at the curb. He gestured to the driver waiting by the car and said, "You can get inside, Tom. I'll help the lady in."

She licked her dry lips as Ethan opened the door and she slid a quick look at his face, her gaze widening at the look she found there. His pupils were so huge only a thin rim of gold was visible around them. "Get in the car, Pam," he said, his voice sounding tight and rusty.

"Damn it, I said get in," he repeated and this time his voice was a rough growl that sent shivers down her spine.

She lingered there and he grabbed her, whirling them around so that she had the car pressed against her back and Ethan pressed against her front. "Tell me to let you go," he whispered roughly. "Do it and I'll let you go."

Instead, she lifted her face to his. She wanted him to kiss her again. When he kissed her, he made her understand what it was like to be craved. Desired to the point of obsession—*her*.

It wasn't an overwhelming possession this time, it was a slow and subtle taking. His lips bussed hers, light and gentle. He slid his tongue along the edge of her lips, tracing the contour and taking his time before he pushed inside her mouth. By the time

he did, she was shaking, her fingers clutching at the lapels of his suit. She was pretty certain her knees were going to collapse before he was done and sure enough, as his hands closed around her waist, she swayed against him. She held on to him and locked her knees to try to stay upright. He groaned against her lips and pushed his knee between hers. The thin layers of her skirt and his pants might as well have not even existed as he rubbed his knee against her. She'd been in a state of semi-arousal half the night and that light touch was enough to set fire to whatever control she had left.

Pam clenched her thighs around him, rocking against him, riding the muscled length of his leg and whimpering low in her throat. "Shit," Ethan muttered, tearing his mouth away from hers and easing back. He pressed his brow against hers and slowly the roaring in her ears faded and she realized it wasn't just the pulse of blood in her ears she heard.

She also heard somebody clapping and a low, long wolf whistle. She stiffened against him and shoved against his chest. Ethan slid soothing hands down her arms and murmured, "Shhh. Don't worry about them."

Them were a couple of punk kids, the kind with more balls than sense. Ethan lifted his head and though he said nothing, she watched as the teens fell instantly silent. One averted his eyes, the other kicked at the concrete for a minute and then they turned and headed down the street, rounding the corner to be lost from sight.

"Get in the car, Pam," Ethan murmured, dipping his head and kissing her shoulder. "Get in now before I forget we're in public."

Too embarrassed and flustered to argue, she ducked into the car and sat down, sliding along the long leather seat until she was as far from the door as she could get. Ethan didn't try to follow her. He settled onto the seat close to the door and remained there, watching her through heavy-lidded eyes. "I'll take you on home now," he murmured.

"No."

Oh, shit. Had she just said that?

Ethan didn't move at all but everything about his demeanor changed. His body stiffened, his pupils flared and when he spoke, his voice was a low, sexy growl. "No?"

She swallowed. Blinked. Swallowed again. Then she glanced toward the front of the car. He followed her gaze and then leaned forward, pushing a button that had a window sliding up right behind the driver's seat. That didn't make it much easier but Pam knew she wasn't going to change her mind.

The past four years, this man had unnerved her to the point that she avoided him as often as possible. He made her uncomfortable, made her nervous, and she was starting to realize, he made her damn hot too. She was willing to admit that he pretty much always had. If he wanted her this much, then she was going to go for it.

Shawn had all but tossed her aside or at least it felt that way. Maybe he hadn't expected to get his ring back but Pam had expected him to be so protective of her, so possessive that Ethan's demand would have sent Shawn through the roof. Ethan would kill a man who asked from him what he had asked from Shawn. He was the kind of man who would never share what was his.

He said he was obsessed with her. Right now, that was exactly what she needed. Pam needed to be the focus of somebody's entire world. No, not somebody. *His* world. She licked her lips and she slid across the leather toward him. She took his hand and bent her head, pressing her lips to his palm. "No," she repeated.

"How much of this has to do with Shawn?"

But then he shook his head. "No. Don't answer that. Just tell me this has nothing to do with the club. I already told you—"

She leaned forward and pressed her lips to his. "I know. It doesn't have anything to do with the club."

And honestly, as he looked down at her with all the naked hunger in his eyes, she had to ask herself how much of it had to do with anything other than Ethan but the answer to that question was almost too disturbing to think about.

At least right now.

* * * * *

The entire drive back to his condo, Ethan didn't touch her. He didn't trust himself. When Tom parked the car, Ethan let the driver help her out. When he touched her, Ethan had a feeling he wasn't going to be able to stop.

Maybe he should have told her that. Because when she turned to look at him in the elevator, she gave him a nervous smile and then swayed forward, pressing her lips to his throat. Ethan's control snapped. He grabbed her and spun her around, pushing her back against the glass wall. "Open your mouth," he ordered and he didn't bother waiting for her to do it, crushing his mouth to hers, pushing his tongue deep inside her mouth as he slid his hands underneath her skirt, dragging the emerald silk up as he slid his palms along the plump, satiny curves of her thighs until he could palm her ass. He grabbed the scrap of underwear and jerked it out of the way, pushing two fingers deep inside her.

Fuck. She was soft as satin, slickly wet and the scent of her flooded his system. He pushed her skirt to her waist and she squeaked. "Ethan, we're on an elevator." She shoved against his chest and he caught her wrists in one hand, stretching her arms high overhead.

"Private elevator," he muttered. "Goes straight to the penthouse. Wrap your arms around my neck." He let go of her hands and when she tentatively, slowly wrapped her soft arms around his neck, Ethan groaned. He fisted his hands in the silk to keep the skirt out of his way as he freed his cock from his pants. He pulled a condom from inside his tuxedo and let go of her skirt long enough to tear it open and roll it down his aching length then he grabbed her skirt again, pushing it to her waist and staring down at the exposed, pale curves of her lower body.

She glanced from his face to look around the elevator. It might be a private elevator for his exclusive use but it still had glass walls and she bit her lip nervously. "Tell me to stop and I will," Ethan rasped against her lips. "It just might kill me..."

Instead of telling him to stop, she tugged him closer and pressed her lips to his neck. Ethan boosted her hips up in his hands. Her eyes widened. “Ethan, don’t...” then her lids fluttered closed as he pushed inside her. Her legs, soft and strong, wrapped around his hips, pulling him deep, deep, deeper until his aching cock was buried hilt deep in her pussy.

“Fuck,” he muttered against her mouth. “I knew you’d be this sweet.”

“Ethan...” She arched into him and he rotated his hips against her, groaning as she clenched down tight around him. So tight, so sweet. He gritted his teeth as hot little chills raced up and down his spine, a warning that his climax was moving in on him hard and fast. He had known he wouldn’t last too long—not the first time with her—but he hadn’t thought it would hit like this.

One thing was certain—he wasn’t going alone. When he came, she was going to be right there with him.

He palmed her ass, easing his upper body away to watch her face. She shivered as he trailed his fingers between the cheeks of her ass, her pupils flaring. He touched her there again, his touch more deliberate. She whimpered. Following the little cues, he stroked and teased and caressed her until she seemed every bit as hot and needy as he was. Then he changed the angle of his thrusts until he was riding against the tight little nub of her clit.

She cried out his name, the sound echoing in the small confines of the elevator. Ethan, savagely pleased, rode her through her climax and waited until she was bucking and trembling in his arms before he let himself come.

His knees almost buckled with the force of his orgasm. He shouted her name and for one sweet, perfect moment, he closed his eyes and let himself pretend that she might care about him, even a little.

When Ethan could walk again, he pushed away from her soft, sweet body, adjusted his pants and then pulled her against him. He jabbed in the code that opened the elevator and then he lifted her into his arms. She argued and squirmed and he just

tightened his arms and smothered her protests with his lips. As she fell silent, he carried her into his penthouse and down the dimly lit hall to his room.

He'd had dreams about seeing her and all those sweet, round curves in his bed. He was already probably damned to hell for what he'd done to get her here so he was going to make the most of it.

Chapter Five

She awoke to feel hot, hard hands on her hips and a firm, knowing mouth pressed between her thighs, doing the most sinful things. Pam's eyes flew open and she flushed to the roots of her hair as she met Ethan's eyes over the expanse of her body. Automatically, she tried to cover herself and he caught her wrists, pinning them to the bed by her hips.

"Didn't anybody ever tell you not to interrupt a hungry man's feast?" he whispered against her. His tongue rimmed the entrance of her pussy and she whimpered, rocking against him. She dug her nails into her palms, tugging against his gentle, restraining hold. Oddly enough, that simple act of holding her hands so that she couldn't touch him was almost as exciting as the feel of him pushing his tongue inside her.

She whimpered his name when he let go of one wrist so he could push two fingers inside her sheath. Quick, shallow, then deep and slow, over and over until she was rocking upward, panting his name and pleading with him. She fisted her free hand in his hair, clutched him closer and moved against his mouth with an abandon unlike anything she'd ever felt before.

Ethan lifted his head and stared at her, his mouth wet from her and his eyes gone black with hunger. He stared at her, watched her, as he pulled his fingers out of her pussy then slid them between his lips. As he licked them clean, he stared at her and as he pushed them back inside, he stared. It was as though he was fascinated by the sight of her and had to keep staring at her just to believe she was real.

Her lashes fluttered down. She sagged back against the bed as he pushed his fingers back inside her and pressed against a spot buried deep within her pussy. Damn, the man had magic hands. He touched her like he'd been born knowing how to make her react, how to make her moan and whimper and come.

The orgasm slammed into her with brutal force, blinding her. She came hard and fast, screaming out his name and rocking her hips up to meet him. By the time her vision cleared, he had shifted up so that he knelt between her thighs and she watched from beneath heavy lids as he quickly rolled a rubber down the length of his cock.

"Watch," he muttered and she did, staring downward as he slowly fed his length into her, one inch at a time. She cried out and before he had even half of his cock inside her, she was shivering and clenching down tight around him, just this close to coming. "Don't close your eyes, Pam...watch...see how we fit together. Fuck, I knew it would be like this with you. Knew it."

He fisted a hand in her hair and jerked her head back, exposing the length of her neck. His teeth scraped against her flesh and then he rasped into her ear, "I knew you'd be sweet, baby girl. But I had no idea you'd be this addictive. Come for me, Pam. Let me feel it again."

Ethan seemed to have a control over her body that was unreal. Just a few sexy words rumbled into her ear as he slid his hands under her butt, canted her hips up and slid back and forth across her clit, were all it took and she came, moaning harshly, convulsing in his arms.

She felt him come, his cock jerking in a hard, pulsing rhythm as he erupted inside the latex glove of the condom. Then he collapsed against her, his head pillowed between her breasts. He cupped one in his hand and under his breath, he murmured her name.

Something sweet and tender moved through her and she wrapped her arms around his neck, hugging him close. Satisfied and still sleepy, she closed her eyes.

Pam was nearly asleep when a hard, cold voice cut across the room, jerking her into wakefulness. "Well, I guess I know why you haven't been answering your damn phone," Shawn snarled from the doorway.

She opened her eyes as Ethan rolled out of the bed to face Shawn, completely naked and completely unaffected by that fact. "Get the fuck out of here, Shawn," Ethan said, his voice flat.

Shawn's face twisted into an ugly sneer. "Not without my fiancée, buddy. I said one night and the night's up."

Up until that second, she'd been a little embarrassed, a little uncomfortable. Okay, *very* uncomfortable. Falling into bed with a guy after one date, even one as sexy as Ethan, just wasn't her style. But as Shawn's words penetrated the sleepy fog of lust, surprise, embarrassment and fury burned hot and low in her belly.

Oh, she hadn't just heard him say that, had she? Pushing up onto her elbow, she gaped at him. "Your *fiancée*? I gave your ring back, sugar. Remember?"

He barely glanced at her, too busy glaring at Ethan as if he wanted to strangle him. Pam didn't get it—*now* he looked possessive? Damn it, he'd all but told her she had to sleep with Ethan to wipe out the money issue. So what if he hadn't said it outright? She knew the man, knew how his mind worked, knew how greedy he was.

Of course, maybe he hadn't expected Pam to give the ring back. Maybe he'd thought she could go selflessly into Ethan's bed and endure—*endure*—not enjoy. Now she wasn't so certain that was possible. Ethan was the kind of man who seemed as though he had been born with the knowledge of how to please a woman.

"Come on, Pam. We're leaving."

Pam arched her brows. Sitting up in the bed, the sheet clutched to her breasts, she shook her head. "No. I'm not going any damn place with you."

Finally he looked at her and the look in his eyes made her flinch. Disgust. It only took a second for her pain to change into rage. He had the nerve to look at her like that...after he'd practically sold her? Yeah, she'd let it happen. Shawn couldn't have physically made her go out with Ethan but the financial burden of the club had seen to it that she wouldn't have much choice. Still, she hadn't even tried other options. She

wouldn't dump all of this on his head but she'd be damned if she let him look at her like that.

"You've got a lot of nerve," she murmured, shaking her head. Sliding from the bed, she wrapped the sheet around her body before she turned to glare at him. "You don't do a damn thing with the club. *Nothing*. But you had no problem signing the entire thing over to Ethan without consulting me, all to help out that no-good brother of yours."

Shawn's eyes narrowed. "You leave my brother out of this. You don't know him."

"I know enough to realize that he's a crook, that he doesn't care who he hurts," Pam replied.

"He's my kid brother, Pam," Shawn said, his voice edgy. "I love him. I had to protect him."

She smiled and it felt bitter on her face. "Yeah, I know that. Protect him to the point that you sell me out just to make it easier for you." Her smile softened as she glanced at Ethan. "Fortunately for me, Ethan's a better man than you are."

Sneering, Shawn said, "I dunno about that. He thinks he can buy whatever he wants. He sure as hell bought your ass, didn't he?"

Up until that point, Ethan had been quiet, his arms crossed over his chest, standing in the middle of the room, unabashedly naked. But now, his face went hard and cold, his body tensing like a snake ready to strike. "Watch what you say to her, Shawn. Now would actually be a good time for you to leave."

"Not without Pam."

Ethan slid Pam an unreadable glance. "Do you want to leave with him?"

She scowled at Shawn and sat down on the edge of the bed. Shawn stared at her as though he didn't even recognize her. "Hell no."

Ethan smiled. It was a mean, nasty smile and if it had been directed at Pam, she would have done whatever the hell he wanted. Instead, it was directed at Shawn and

she couldn't help smirking a little and wondering just what Ethan might do if Shawn didn't listen. "You can leave," Ethan said, his voice soft, but the subtle threat was undeniable. "Or I'll kick your sorry ass out of here. You don't want me to do that, do you?"

Shawn gave Pam an ugly look. "And there you went, acting all wounded over what happened. You little whore. You've probably been waiting for some excuse to fuck him."

Pam's jaw dropped. Oh, no. He didn't just say that. She had no chance to demand he say it again because Ethan closed the distance between them and delivered a quick, powerful jab to Shawn's jaw. Shawn went crashing backward onto his ass.

"If you're still here in another minute, Shawn, there won't be enough left of you to bury."

Chapter Six

Late that night, Pam wandered around the small rental house that she'd been living in for the past three years. It was nice enough, in a quiet, clean neighborhood and she had a decent yard, decent neighbors and up until all of this had happened, she'd thought she had a decent life.

Most of her life, she'd tried to use common sense. Before making the choice about opening her own business, she'd taken college courses, she'd read every book she could find on starting up a business and she'd gone into it with her eyes wide open. Prepared for anything.

Though she'd been going out with Shawn for years, she'd moved slowly with him, taken her time, hadn't committed until she thought they were both ready. The wise, practical approach to a relationship.

But look where her common sense and practical approaches had landed her – with a fiancé she really didn't know and several thousands of dollars poorer since there were some wedding costs that required money up front – money she couldn't get back.

That wasn't the killer part though.

What was bothering her – again – was Ethan.

Hell. In the past it had seemed as though he was always there. Always. He had either dropped by the club for no obvious reason or shown up at her house to give Shawn papers that could have easily waited until the next day at work.

He'd brought her home shortly after Shawn – his mouth bleeding – had vacated the premises. Ethan, as attentive as he'd been the night before, had walked her to her door and kissed her gently but when she'd tried to invite him in, he'd refused.

Politely. Almost as if they hadn't spent the past twelve hours on top of each other. She'd tried to hide it but that had hurt. He'd walked away but when he reached his car,

he'd looked back at her. Was it her imagination or had she really seen that stark, almost naked hunger in his eyes? That kind of hunger – what did it mean?

She really wasn't sure and eleven hours later, she was still trying to figure out what her next step should be. Damn it, she was so confused. A few days ago, it had seemed as though her life was set. She'd been content, satisfied.

Content. Satisfied.

Scowling, she came to a stop in front of the mirror hanging over the console table in the hallway. "Content?" she said to her reflection. "Satisfied?"

Was that how she was supposed to be when she was getting ready to get married? Was she supposed to be *content*? Shouldn't she be more like, spinning around and laughing-like-a-loon happy?

Actually, she'd almost felt that happy – earlier. With Ethan. Last night...with Ethan. How many times had a goofy smile spread across her lips during dinner? How many times had he made her laugh until her sides hurt and how many times had he done something so simply sweet and romantic that her eyes had misted over?

"Gggggrrrr. Damn it, I fricking hate being confused." And she was more confused at that moment than she'd been in a long, long while. Not about Shawn. She had no regrets about giving his ring back. None.

Although he was the man she had planned to marry in just a few weeks, she wasn't even all that bent out of shape over the canceled wedding. She should have been. Five years together – she should have tears or something for him, right?

They'd been together a long time, yet she realized she hadn't really known him at all. Or maybe she hadn't really let herself see him.

But instead of brooding and pouting about her canceled wedding, she couldn't quit thinking about Ethan. The way he'd smiled at her. The way he touched her, even when they weren't trying to get so close they all but disappeared inside the each other. But the way he'd held her hand. The way he'd kept touching her throughout dinner and the Bash, as if he couldn't *not* touch her. The way he'd made her smile. The way he'd

grinned at her when she told him about some of the crazy things that had happened in the club and the way he'd held her hand when she told him about her mother dying the year before she met Shawn. The way he had brushed her hair back from her face and stared at her as though nobody else existed.

And other things, such as how nervous she'd always been around him, even from the beginning. The way he'd always seemed to be watching her. He'd always seemed to be around, even when he really didn't have any reason to be. Calling to talk to Shawn when, logically, Ethan should have known he wouldn't find Shawn at the club all that often.

She shouldn't have been so torn up inside over one night but she couldn't stop thinking about Ethan.

Have you ever seen something you wanted so bad it haunted your days and nights? Something you wanted but couldn't have? That kind of thing turns into an obsession real fast, Pam, and I've had an obsession for you since the night I saw you dancing with Shawn.

Obsession. She closed her eyes and wished she could block out his voice that easily. Just cover her ears and pretend his words weren't still echoing through her head. She couldn't though.

Obsession.

What if... She swallowed, remembering the way he'd looked at her right before he drove off and left her alone. What if it wasn't some kind of physical thing but something deeper?

It was unnerving and unsettling and she knew, even as the thought formed, that she was probably wrong but still – still – she found herself wandering into her bedroom and unearthing the dress bag that held the black velvet dress she'd been wearing that night she had met Ethan for the first time.

Clear as day, she could remember it. Getting dressed for what she'd thought would be a romantic evening of wining, dining and dancing. But Shawn had been there more to circulate and shop for new client prospects than to romance his girlfriend. Instead of

spending the evening on the dance floor, she'd spent half the night just walking around or sitting at a small table by the dance floor while Shawn made connections and talked shop.

Oh, she'd danced a few times with him. Had been asked to dance by a few other guys but she'd refused them all. Including the offer from Ethan. She had been standing at the edge of the dance floor, waiting for Shawn to come back from the bar when Ethan approached her. She'd noticed him from twenty feet away, but she hadn't made eye contact.

Guys like Ethan didn't go out of their way to find women like her—women a little on the plump side and more in the way of cute than sexy and gorgeous. But instead of seeking out some long, willowy brunette, he'd stopped in front of her and held out a hand.

"Dance with me?" It was all he'd said, yet it had been more tempting than any line she'd heard in her whole life. Her heart had leaped into her throat and she'd almost put her hand in his.

But common sense, damn it, had pervaded and she had smiled politely and refused.

What if she'd said yes? She couldn't help but wonder about that now.

Over the years, she'd run into Ethan on a regular basis and she had thought she'd get used to that calm, confident arrogance but she never had. He was as unsettling to her now as he had been that first time. The watchful way he stared at her? She figured he watched all women like that and that sexy, faint grin was just his normal expression.

But now she started to wonder.

Wonder...yeah, she wondered all right. The answer to her unasked question lurked in the back of her head but she was too nervous to give voice to it. Too scared. Too uncertain. Slowly, she reached out a hand and trailed her fingers down the black velvet and remembered.

Remembered how Ethan had looked at her that night. How he always seemed to be there, always seemed to watch her.

She was probably wrong.

She knew that.

But still, that didn't stop her from carrying the dress into the bathroom to let the steam take out some of the wrinkles as she showered. She didn't let it stop her as she pulled the velvet on over her naked body and she didn't let it stop her as she wrapped her hair into a loose knot and secured it in place with two jeweled sticks. She didn't let it stop her as she left her house a little before midnight and she didn't let it stop her when she arrived at his condo.

It wasn't until she rang that buzzer that she stopped to think that maybe this wasn't a good idea. Hell, he might not even be home. It was Friday night. Ethan was a ridiculously good-looking, single guy. He probably –

“Pam?”

She swallowed and tried to smile at the little security camera but she knew it fell flat. “Hey.”

What was she doing here?

Ethan didn't want to think about it too hard as he rode the elevator down. Maybe she'd forgotten something. Maybe she had a change of heart over what had happened and she wanted to tell him to stay away from her.

Maybe she – The doors slid open and Pam stood there in a circle of light, the sensuous gleam of black velvet cradling her soft curves. She had a black lace choker around her soft, pale neck and long jet earrings that nearly fell to her shoulders. He picked his jaw up off the floor and managed a somewhat normal tone as he asked, “Did you...uh...damn, Pam.”

She smiled at him – that quick, nervous smile that was so damn endearing. “Can I come up?”

You can come wherever you want as long as I'm the one inside you, he thought inanely. Not trusting himself to speak, he stepped to the side and gestured her into the elevator.

"You were wearing that dress the first night I saw you," he murmured as he jabbed the button to send the elevator back to his floor.

She glanced at him over her shoulder. "I know." She turned to face him, leaning back against the glass walls of the elevator, her hands pressed flat to the wall behind her. "Not too many guys would remember something like that. It's been four years."

Four years, three months and almost three weeks, Ethan thought. *But who's counting?*

He skimmed his fingers across the slopes of her breasts, watching from beneath his lashes as her eyes widened and a slow smile curved her lips. "Why do you remember, Ethan?"

Not much point in hiding it anymore, Ethan thought. She'd dumped Shawn. The guy was out of her life, at least for now, and Ethan planned on keeping it that way if he could help it. It might take a body bag and shovels if Pam started showing a little more interest in forgiving her ex-fiancé but Ethan could manage that.

"Because there's very little I don't remember about you," he said, his voice harsh and gritty. "Obsession, remember? I remember you wore a pearl necklace that night. You wore black panty hose, or stockings, I couldn't tell, but I remember that I spent a good thirty minutes trying to decide which one. I asked you to dance and you said no. Figured you had a boyfriend but I never guessed it was Shawn."

His voice dropped and he reached up, cupping her cheek in his hand as he murmured, "I knew the minute he introduced you to me that he didn't deserve you. He spent half the night ignoring you and talking business. I would have spent the night on the dance floor with you in my arms and then I would have taken you home and made love to you until dawn."

Stroking his thumb across her satiny skin, he whispered, "I remember things about you that you probably didn't realize anybody knew." Then, before he could pull her

against him and demand things she probably wasn't ready to give, he let his hand fall away and fisted it at his side.

Slowly, Pam straightened away from the wall, staring at him as she took one small step closer. Licking her lips, she asked, "Is this the kind of obsession where you're going to start stalking me, going through my underwear drawer and my trash cans and calling me at two a.m.? Or a different kind?"

He grinned despite himself. "If I was going to start stalking you, I would have started already." Then, unable to help himself, he slid his gaze over her sweet, soft curves, lingered on her hips. "But I wouldn't mind going through your panty drawer. I've spent a lot of nights wondering what kind of underwear you like. Lace...thongs...nothing..."

"All of the above," she said, grinning impishly. Then, holding his gaze, she reached behind her. He heard the zipper as loudly as if it were a gunshot and his breath lodged somewhere in the vicinity of his throat as she slowly dragged the zipper down. "What are you doing?" he asked, his voice tight and rusty.

Pam smiled at him. "What's it look like?"

There was a part of him that wouldn't ever forgive what he was getting ready to do. But Ethan wasn't going to sleep with her again, not unless it meant something. Something to her, at least. She didn't know it but last night had simultaneously been the best night and the worst night of Ethan's entire life. He swallowed the knot in his throat, a knot that felt the size of a soccer ball, as he caught her dress before it could fall to her waist. "This isn't a good idea," he said hoarsely.

She crooked a brow at him. "Why not?"

"Because..." he closed his eyes and pressed his forehead to hers. "Because what I feel for you goes a little beyond obsession, Pam, and I don't know if I can take being a rebound guy. Not for you."

She smiled at him, pushing up onto her toes so she could lick his lips. Fire licked along the base of his spine and Ethan wondered if he might come in his pants, just from that. "That's not what this is about, Ethan."

He lifted his head and smiled. If his smile felt a little bitter, even to himself, could anybody blame him? "Isn't it?" Gently, he eased her dress back up and reminded himself that he cared about her. A lot. She had to be hurting about Shawn and that was normal. She might need a friendly shoulder and he could maybe do that but he wasn't having comfort sex. Not with her.

But before he could reach around her and tug the zipper back up, Pam caught one wrist and brought his hand up so she could press it to her chest. Through the warmth of the velvet and the soft satin of her skin, he felt that mad beat of her heart. "My heart did that the first time I saw you. And every time since. I always thought it was because I was afraid of you but now I have to wonder because I don't feel afraid when I look at you anymore."

Reaching up, she pulled two jeweled sticks from her hair and Ethan groaned as the thick, gleaming mass fell to her shoulders. Naked, smooth, soft shoulders. "If it's not fear, Ethan, then there aren't too many things left it could be. And I don't know about you but I'd really like to know for sure what it is."

Holding his gaze, she slid his hand inside the strapless top of her gown. "I can't say that I'm obsessed with you, Ethan. But I do think I've got feelings for you." She shimmied and squirmed a little and Ethan almost swallowed his tongue as the dress fell down, catching on her full hips for a moment and then falling to the floor in a puddle of black velvet. "And I've got a feeling they *could* quickly grow into the obsessive kind."

He slid his eyes over her, from the top of her sexily mussed hair to the bottom of her naked feet, tucked inside a pair of sexy black heels. Hell. He wanted to be a decent guy but he sure as hell wasn't a saint. Especially not with her.

He reached out and cupped his hands around her hips, pulling her against him. Her breasts—big and round and plump—were topped with erect, pink nipples and

they crushed against his chest as she rose onto her toes and wrapped her arms around his neck. The softly rounded curve of her belly pillowed his cock as he pressed against her. "I can't believe Shawn was that big a fool," he muttered, bending low so he could press a kiss to her neck. "But I'm damn glad he was."

She laughed—a low, sexy sound that went straight to his cock. "Me too." Then she reached between them and popped the button of his jeans. A smug, feline smile curved her lips as she sank to her knees in front of him, wearing nothing but that black lace choker and her black heels.

As she took his cock inside her mouth, Ethan buried his hands in the silk of her hair and groaned, staring down at her as she took him deep, deep, deep. When the head of his cock bumped the back of her throat, she swallowed. The sensation was almost more than he could handle and he swore, desperately tugging on her hair, pulling her back before he shot off in her mouth like a teenage boy.

She did it again and again and again until he was hovering on the brink of orgasm, desperate to be inside her. "Damn it, Pam, you're killing me," he muttered hoarsely. "Come here."

Pulling away just for a second, she gave him a wicked grin and murmured, "Not until you come..." Then she went back to work, suckling, licking and deep-throating him until he couldn't fight it any more and exploded into her mouth, his hands fisted in her hair, holding her head steady as he fucked his cock back and forth between her lips.

When he finally let her go, she straightened, gazed up at him and smiled. Tenderness moved through his heart as he stared at her. His legs were still a little watery but he had to touch her. Had to. Reaching out, he hooked an arm around her neck and pulled her against him.

Ethan, his shoulders braced against the glass wall of the elevator, closed his eyes and tried to catch his breath.

Some obsessions weren't good, he knew.

But this one? This one had been worth every miserable second he'd spent alone over the past four years.

About the Author

They always say to tell a little about yourself! I was born in Kentucky and have been reading avidly since I was six. At twelve, I discovered how much fun it was to write when I took a book that didn't end the way it should have ended, and I rewrote it. I've been writing since then.

About me now...hmm... I've been married since I was 19 to my high school sweetheart and we live in the midwest. Recently I made the plunge and turned to writing full-time and am looking for a part-time job so I can devote more time to my family—three adorable children who are growing way too fast, and my husband who doesn't see enough of me...

Shiloh welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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