



Loose Id

The
PRICE of
SUBMISSION

MICHELLE CARY

The Price of Submission

Michelle Cary



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About this Title

Genre: BDSM Erotic Contemporary

When the club Misty's working at closes, she's left with few employment options. That is, until her ex-boss offers her an alternative she would have never considered on her own. A friend of his is looking to hire a submissive to satisfy his sexual needs. It's not exactly conventional, but what the hell? Misty accepts the year-long contract. What's the worst that can happen? A lot of sex and money to start over?

Owner of a multi-national conglomerate, Garron Worthington works hard for his money and likes to play just as hard in his spare time. His fetish for bondage and dominance dictates his need for hiring women to satisfy him, since he doesn't have time to court them. Infatuated with Misty, Garron accepts her contract and begins her training. He doesn't intend to fall in love with her, but sometimes that's the price of a submissive.

Publisher's Note: This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable: Anal play/intercourse, BDSM theme and content (including/not limited to: spanking), ménage (m/f/m), same-sex sexual situations (f/f), voyeurism.

Prologue

This wasn't at all what she expected.

Then again, Misty Cochran wasn't sure what she had expected when her soon-to-be former boss, Travis Roland, had suggested she take a position as submissive with a friend of his.

As she and Travis toured the exclusive sex club, her mind reeled with information. When he'd suggested a tour of the club so she could get an idea of what would be expected of her, she'd thought it was a good idea. Now, she wasn't so sure.

Everywhere she turned, there were men and women bound to contraptions in various positions and poses. Still having trouble accepting the collar Travis insisted she wear, Misty wasn't at all sure how she'd handle being tied down, let alone being spanked...or worse.

As they passed yet another roped-off area, she stopped to watch the woman locked inside what appeared to be an old-fashioned stockade. A spider gag held her mouth open; drops of saliva fell from her lips to the floor below. Weighted clamps hung from her nipples, the metal balls swinging back and forth with her movements, while a beast of a man pounded into her pussy.

That alone would have been difficult for Misty's mind to wrap around, but seeing the line of men waiting for their turn to fuck the woman was nearly more than Misty could fathom.

A jerk on her collar made Misty turn. Travis was watching her. She closed

the distance between them, then whispered, "Is that what I'd be expected to do?"

Travis looked from Misty to the woman and smiled. "Not exactly. Garron does like to share his girls, but it would only be with people he trusted."

Misty turned her gaze back to the woman in time to see a man step in front of her face, line up his cock with her mouth, and shove deep. The woman's gaze drifted up to the face of the man, her eyes filled with a bliss Misty hadn't expected to see.

"Is she there of her own free will?"

"Yes," Travis answered. "She has a safe word she can use to stop whenever she wants."

"How can she do that with that man's dick in her mouth?"

"There are ways."

"Why is she there?"

"Well, since the stockade is usually used for punishments, I'd venture to guess she was bad and her master is punishing her."

"By the look on her face, it doesn't seem like much of a punishment, if you ask me."

Travis laughed as a new man stepped behind the woman, grabbed a bottle of lube off a close-by table, and covered his sheathed member. "She's enjoying it now, my dear, but after a few dozen men have had their way with her, she'll start to feel the effects. There's only so many times you can take a dick up the ass before it starts to get sore." Just as he finished his sentence, the man shoved home, and the woman let out a cry around the dick still fucking her mouth.

Curious, Misty stepped to the side and watched as the man from behind pumped in and out of the woman's ass, still intrigued and confused by the look of enjoyment on the woman's face as she took every inch of him.

"Wondering what it would feel like?" Travis whispered.

"Judging by the look on her face, it must not be too bad."

"I'm glad you think that way, because if you agree to the contract with Garron, he will want to fuck your ass."

A shiver shimmied up Misty's spine. In all the years she'd been having sex, she'd never allowed a man's parts near her rectum. To know she'd have to do so if she took the job was a bit unnerving. Still... She paused and looked back at the woman, whose eyes were closed, a look of pleasure on her face. It couldn't be all that bad.

"Come, Misty. There's more to see." With another tug on the leash, which made her more than a bit humiliated, she followed, knowing she was supposed to at least look like a submissive and obey.

They turned a corner into another room. A woman cried out. Misty startled at the sight before her. On all fours on top of what looked to be a small table, the woman was bound, her arms tied to her legs in a way that lifted her ass in the air. A rope attached from a nose clip went up through a pulley, then came down to fasten to the top of a metal hook, the other end buried in her ass. Both of her cheeks were bright pink, and her pussy shined as her master delivered yet another blow with a small flat paddle. The smacking sound filled the room, immediately followed by her cry.

"Another punishment?" Misty asked, hoping Garron would never want to subject her to that type of discipline.

"Not exactly. You see, this room is for pain sluts."

Misty's brow wrinkled. "Which is?"

"Women who get off using pain."

Misty's gaze tore back to the woman and zeroed in on the glistening pussy that was now on the receiving end of a fake dick. The woman's juices gleamed on the phallus pumping into her. It could be lube, Misty considered, until she heard the participants speak. The master, a tall, lanky man with long arms and a rounded jaw, spoke first. "Are you a dirty little slut, my pet?"

"Yes, Master," she panted.

"Do you like having this rubber cock inside your pussy?"

"Yes, Master."

"Do you want me to continue to pinken that pretty ass of yours?"

"Oh yes, Master."

Without another word, the man raised the paddle and struck, one, two, three blows to the woman's already bright pink ass. Each crack echoed in the room and was followed by a gasp from the receiver. After the fourth swat, she began to shake. "Master, please may I?"

"Yes, my pet. You may come now."

It was as if someone had flipped a light switch. The woman on the table writhed, pushing back on the fake cock, and screamed. Misty could see the woman's muscles flex and relax as her orgasm barreled through her system.

It was the most disturbing, most erotic thing Misty had ever seen.

Her own pussy clenched in response, and she was more than a bit shocked to realize that at some point she'd become aroused.

Maybe she could do this job.

Chapter One

Misty stood in front of the full-length mirror inspecting the fire red corset now threatening to cut off her air. With nothing else to use for a cover, and both her breasts and her nether region exposed, she almost didn't recognize her reflection. Her image alone was disturbing enough, but knowing what she was about to do caused second thoughts to race through her head. Why had she thought she could still pull this off, especially when she'd failed miserably just a few short days ago?

She shifted her attention from the mirror to the window, taking in the palatial spread outside the space she now considered her room. While she wouldn't deny the mansion and grounds were beautiful, she certainly hadn't agreed to this for the view. Why had she agreed? Her mind drifted back to the conversation she'd had with Travis when she'd discovered the strip club she waitressed at was closing. She'd been desperate not to end up on the street, destitute and starving.

She could have, of course, returned home to live with her drug-addicted, alcoholic mother, but death seemed a better option than subjecting herself to such hell again. It was bad enough she'd had to live with the woman while she'd been growing up, but to voluntarily go back there now wasn't an alternative.

With no discernable skills other than waiting tables in skimpy clothes, she didn't have many employment options. Desperate not to dip into the savings she'd so carefully been squirreling away, she'd agreed to at least listen to what his friend had to say.

Somehow, despite what the position entailed, she'd managed to talk herself into the job.

Here she was a week later, completely moved into the mansion of industrial tycoon Garron Worthington, preparing for her second—and hopefully more successful—encounter. Never having been a submissive before, Misty did what she could to learn about the lifestyle before her first rendezvous with Garron. Unfortunately, no amount of preparation could have given her the experience to handle what he would throw at her. Their first encounter ended miserably, with tears trickling down her cheeks and her gagging while he fucked her mouth. He hadn't come. While he hadn't punished her or even yelled, his frustration with her was obvious by the tone with which he delivered his lecture on the expectations he had for his submissives.

He'd assured her that first times for women who'd never been dominated were usually difficult, and many chose to leave, knowing they could never acclimate to the lifestyle. She considered doing the same, but knowing she'd walk away with next to nothing had her begging him for a second chance.

Teary-eyed, she promised she would do better during their next session if he would just give her a second chance. Now, her second chance was facing her in the mirror, causing butterflies in her stomach. Could she be the person he wanted her to be? Could she be the person she needed to be?

This wasn't simply about the money, though she had to admit, the pay he offered was what had ultimately swayed her. With the amount of money he was offering, plus free room and board for the next year, it would be enough for her to move across country and start fresh. Far away from her mother and the memories she harbored was something Misty had been working toward for years. All she had to do was be everything Garron Worthington wanted her to be for the next twelve months. Then she could also put this part of her life behind her.

"I think you are ready," Garron's housekeeper, Audrey, said, yanking Misty

out of her thoughts. From the first day Misty arrived at the mansion Garron referred to as Rosewood, she and Audrey had hit it off. Maybe her instant friendship with Audrey was nothing more than her own innate need for something familiar in a new home. After meeting the other submissive, Chloe, and finding she had the personality of a feral cat, Misty was even more thankful for Audrey's quick acceptance.

Turning left, then right, Misty inspected the outfit. "I hope you're right. This is my last chance to do well."

Audrey patted her hand. "Let go of any in-inhibitions, and you will do fine."

Misty blew out a nervous breath. "I'm not sure I can. Sex is hard for me as it is, and I don't know Garron well enough."

"Are you having second thoughts?"

Misty turned her gaze toward her friend. "I'd say that's a bit of an understatement. When I originally said yes, I thought I could separate the physical act of sex from the emotional aspects of it, but now I'm not so sure."

Audrey started to respond, but the sound of a door opening caused her to close her mouth without a peep. Misty's stomach rolled with nerves as she turned to face Garron. Dressed in black jeans and a simple black tee, Garron stood waiting in the doorway. His stance spoke of power, his voice stern, but there was an unmistakable look of compassion in his eyes. "Are you ready?"

Misty swallowed the lump in her throat and made a conscious effort to speak. "I...I need to put on my heels."

"Then do so."

Using the bed for support, she slowly slipped on each of the four-inch

silver-strapped heels, while she checked him out from beneath her lashes. Beneath the black tee, his muscular chest rippled and flexed, leaving Misty to wonder exactly when he had time to maintain a body like that. Boy, could the man fill out a pair of jeans. That same thought had stuck in her brain mere days earlier, before she'd embarrassed herself in front of him by wussing out.

Well, not this time, she decided. Swallowing the last of her fear, she stood to face him. This was an opportunity of a lifetime. Where else could she learn about all the naughty pleasures she'd been conditioned to avoid, without guilt? After all, if someone else was in charge, she was only following orders, right? "Sir, I am ready."

He pushed off the doorjamb and sauntered over to where she stood. That's when she noticed the black and red collar in his hand. He slipped the collar around her neck as if it were a cherished adornment, checking to make sure it wasn't too tight. Then he turned to Audrey and took the leash she held, clipping it in place. Humiliation streaked through Misty, and she bit down on her lip to keep from blurting that she wasn't a dog. Three days ago, she'd followed Audrey to the playroom where Garron waited. Yet today, he'd come to retrieve her. Maybe this was some sort of punishment for her previous behavior, or possibly it represented something more. She'd read that a collar could mean possession, a claiming of property of sorts.

When she was at the club with Travis, she'd accepted the collar as a necessary evil but hadn't considered the ramifications of what being collared long term would involve. Having her identity reduced to the level of a possession was difficult to acknowledge. Yet she had no one to blame for her feelings of humiliation and shame but herself. She'd agreed to the contract and all the stipulations involved. At this point that's exactly what she'd become—property for him to use as he saw fit. Disturbed by her last thought, she let her gaze drift to the floor while she followed him out of the bedroom, down the hallway, and back to the playroom. Had she really reduced her own value with the stroke of a pen?

As they entered the room Garron deemed the playroom , Misty fought to push the worrisome thoughts from her head. Regardless of how she'd reached this point, the fact was she had a job to do and a curiosity about the taboo. She was sure she'd endured situations much worse than what Garron would subject her to. If she were wrong, in a year, when her contract was up, she could forget any of this ever happened.

Digging deep for long-forgotten pride, she lifted her head to gaze at the room she knew held both her greatest pleasures and worst fears. Before, she'd been too nervous and stressed to take in much of her surroundings, but now she'd get a good look at what awaited her.

Starting to her left, Misty slowly scanned the area. The wall closest to her held a painting of a couple engaged in sex. Instead of being gratuitous like a porno movie, it was beautiful, depicting the love and desire between the man and woman in their most intimate of moments. Beneath the painting, two mauve-colored wingback chairs flanked a small pedestal table. The far wall contained an impressive fireplace with a mantel of granite. Lining the hearth on each side, the walls held various instruments of the trade, including different types of whips, paddles, and restraints.

A king-size, four-poster bed took up most of the third wall.

She'd noted the pole in the center of the room. Her gaze flicked upward, landing on what appeared to be a straight bar dangling on two chains from the ceiling, with restraints attached to either end of the bar. Her pussy flooded on the idea of all the naughty pleasures that had probably taken place in this room.

He turned to face her. "Three days ago never happened. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

He frowned, and immediately she realized her mistake. "I mean, yes,

Master.”

“Your initiation begins now. In order to be a good submissive, you will need stamina and patience. Let's see how much of both you have, my dear.” He led her beneath the bar. “Arms above your head, pet.”

Pet? That was the name the master at the club Travis had taken her to had used on his sub. So the collar really was what it appeared, a representation of his possession of her. Her stomach twisted, and she swallowed audibly as she slowly walked to where he stood. For some people, pets were treated as more than simply a possession. They were companions, and some people even cared for them like they would a child. Maybe, if she were truly lucky, he would come to see her as more than just property.

He'd restrained her on their first encounter. She'd found it terrifying. This time, while she was still nervous, the stark terror she'd felt before wasn't present. Maybe that was a good sign, one that she would hang on to if things got rough. She hesitated for only a second, then lifted her arms above her head.

He unclipped the leash and set it on a nearby table before turning back to face her. As he secured her wrists in the leather restraints, he spoke, “You have your safe word, and if you simply can't take any more, you may use it. However, if you do, I will nullify your contract, and you will leave immediately. Remember, pet, this is a test to see if you have it in you to become a good submissive. Not everyone can and not everyone will enjoy the lifestyle. Better to find out now than trap yourself in a binding agreement for the next year. Therefore, I must test your limits, and they must meet my criteria. Once you have completed your initiation to my satisfaction, from that point forward you will be free to use your safe word without fear of reprisal. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“What?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Good. Let's begin. I went easy on you the other day. Today I won't be as kind. This is your one and only chance to prove you want this position, pet. It is important for you to understand all aspects of what will be asked of you. Therefore, we will start with punishments.”

Her skin prickled with fear-induced adrenaline. One of the things she'd read about the Dominant/submissive relationship was the balance of penalty versus reward. If a sub misbehaved or upset the master, some sort of punishment would result. Could she handle the pain that would come with physical retribution? Would the humiliation that came hand in hand with castigation be more than she could handle?

With thoughts running wild inside her head, she stared wide-eyed up at him and tried to pay attention to what he was saying. “If you disobey my orders or fail to please me or my friends, you will be punished.” He lifted his hand, and Misty braced for the blow, surprised and confused when instead, he brushed a finger along her cheek. “However, pet, you strike me as a woman who could come to understand the concept of pleasure from pain. If you can find that balance, even in your punishments you can find pleasure. Have you ever participated in any type of bondage play, Misty?”

“No, Sir.”

He walked to the wall, paused, apparently considering his choice of instruments. Within seconds, he reached for a long steel spreader bar, then returned to her side. He placed the steel bar between her legs, cuffing an ankle in the restraint at each end. “Lovely,” he murmured as he stood and walked to the dresser positioned mere feet from the bed. “There are several erogenous zones on the body, pet. Some of the most sensitive are the breasts, more specifically the nipples. When highly sensitized, they can cause both great pain and great pleasure.”

He pulled something from the drawer she couldn't see, then turned back to her. "If you can get past the pain, you will feel the pleasure."

He opened his hand and lifted the first nipple clamp up for her inspection. "Nothing I do to you will leave permanent marks or residual pain. Do you trust me so show you the path to pleasure, pet?"

The idea of purposely inflicting pain made her squirm, yet that pesky curiosity that caused her to sign the contract a week ago now had her agreeing before she had time to change her mind. "Yes, Master."

He leaned forward, taking her first breast in his mouth. Warm, wet heat filled her senses and raced toward her pussy with a speed she couldn't imagine. His mouth was like a lightning rod, electrifying her senses. It had to be the fear of the moment, the anticipation of the unknown that brought on a desire she hadn't known she harbored. Slowly, he tongued her nub, then gently raked his teeth across it, causing it to pebble. Sufficiently satisfied with the result, he raised his hand and showed her the open clamp. "Last chance, pet. Do you want to back out?"

Yes! "No, Sir."

She held her head high and bit down on her tongue to keep from crying out as he placed the first clamp on her distended nipple. Dual sensations of pain and pleasure tore through her. God, how could something that hurt this bad also feel good?

Her gaze flicked downward in time to see him place the second clamp in place. A chain connected the clamps, creating a Y, leaving the third clamp hanging dangerously close to her clit. Before she'd had time to adjust to the pain radiating out from her second nipple or consider where the third clamp was going to go, he hung a small bell off the chain. "The idea is to keep the bell from ringing." He took a step back to survey his work. "Very nice, my pet. So far you're handling things very well. I'm almost done with the adornments."

She knew better than to ask what he was going to do next, and didn't have to wait long to find out.

He knelt in front of her, rubbing his thumb between her folds. What an odd sensation it was to feel fingers that weren't her own rubbing over her clit. That wasn't to say she'd never been with a man. There had been a handful over the course of the years, but none of her relationships lasted long. There was something erotic and thoroughly enjoyable about feeling his thick, warm fingers between her legs.

Thinking maybe this wouldn't be so bad after all, Misty gasped when he proceeded to shove a finger deep inside her pussy. God, did he feel good inside her. For a split second, she began to wonder what it would be like to have his cock there instead. A fresh deluge of juices flooded her core and slicked his fingers.

"Look at me," he ordered.

She opened her eyes and stared down at him, knowing she showed both embarrassment and desire on her face. His eyes narrowed as he pulled out, added a second finger, and shoved deep a second time.

Her mouth opened, allowing the breath she'd been holding to escape in awhoosh . "You're already wet."

She noted the change in the timbre in his voice and found a certain amount of satisfaction that her reaction could affect him so much. "As nervous as you may be, pet, you can't fake desire, and this"—he wiggled his fingers and brushed lightly over her G-spot—"this tells me you enjoy what I'm doing so far. That's a positive development. You do enjoy what I'm doing, don't you, pet?"

Misty started to nod, then thought about the bell. "Yes, Sir."

“Good, because I think by the time I'm finished with you today, you'll find pleasures you hadn't known existed.”

Highly aroused by both his ministrations and words, she wanted to whimper when he pulled away, leaving her anxious and empty. Shock quickly followed when he secured the third clamp to her clit. Pain! Yes, there was definitely pain, but there was something else she couldn't quite recognize.

“Breathe, pet. I don't want you passing out on me.”

Struggling to identify and handle the sensations overtaking her system, she panted through her teeth. Oh God! Why did she feel as though she could come at any second?

Tears stung her eyes, and Misty fought to stand still. Never had she been subject to such extreme treatment.

“Gorgeous, pet. You are absolutely gorgeous, and you're doing well.” He turned and walked toward the wall, taking his time in choosing his implement of punishment. “I will now give you a taste of what punishments from me will be like when you disobey orders or fail to please me.” Walking back toward her with a long black flogger, he smiled. “If you take the punishment like a good girl, I will also show you your reward.”

On that word, the leather tendrils of the flogger bit into the flesh on her buttocks. The shock of pain pulled a cry from Misty that she couldn't stop.

“Now, now, pet. I don't like my girls being vocal. Since you didn't know, I'll let you off with a warning, but from here on out, each time you scream, you gain an additional hit. Let's try this again.”

This time, she heard the whoosh of leather cutting through the air before the sting registered. She bit down on her tongue to keep the sob from escaping. Flames licked her backside, inflaming her buttocks and legs until

she thought she'd simply combust. Again, that dual sensation of pain and something not quite identifiable as of yet flooded over her. As much as she wanted to end the torture by using her safe word, she couldn't quite bring herself to speak. What was happening to her was definitely painful, but strangely erotic on a level she'd never before achieved.

Again and again, Garron struck her, taking his time, pinkening each cheek thoroughly. By the time he dropped the flogger, she could barely catch her breath. Tears blurred her vision, and her pussy clenched emptily, slicking the inside of her thighs with her cream. Never in her life could she remember being this wet, this aroused. If he touched her, she was sure she'd come on the spot.

Garron smiled. "You did excellent in accepting the punishment. Now, pet, you shall receive your reward." He removed her arms from the restraints but left the spreader bar between her legs. "I want you on all fours, my dear. Bend your knees while I help you down."

The bell jingled as she changed positions, and new sensations of pain twisted through her system. This was supposed to be her reward?

Garron reached down and gently removed the clips on her nipples. The sudden rush of blood back to the deprived tissue caused another kind of pain, and Misty sucked in a quick breath to control her response. How was it possible she could be so excited when she hurt so much? Before she could consider that thought, he removed the third clamp from her pussy, sending a new shot of pain through her already overloaded system. Despite the fuzzy buzz in her head, she still managed to detect the low drone of a vibrator.

"You are not allowed to come without permission, and you must tell me when you are getting close. Do you understand?" Garron's desire-laden voice wrapped around her like a warm blanket, draping her in a feeling of power she hadn't experienced on such a heightened level. He was turned on by not only what he was doing to her but her reactions to his

ministrations.

“Yes, Master,” she choked out right before he pressed the ball-headed vibrator against her nether lips. Almost instantly the need to come was on her, threatening to explode on a level she'd yet to experience.

Barely remembering his order to ask permission to come, Misty worked to find her voice. “Please, Master, may I come?”

“Are you close already, my pet?”

“Yes, Master. Please.”

“No, pet. Not yet.” On those words he abandoned her, and Misty wanted to cry.

Much to her surprise, he released her legs from the spreader bar and guided her to the edge of the bed. “Bend over and spread your legs.”

She did as he ordered. Cool air passed over her wet, inflamed tissue, causing her to shudder. The sound of a zipper had her wanting to lift her head and look. One thing she had liked about their previous encounter was finding out how well endowed the man was. He had a cock any woman would be thrilled to have between her legs. Said body part brushed against her folds, and she nearly sighed with joy.

“Now you may come.” In one hard, fluid thrust, Garron buried himself deep inside her willing body. The sudden invasion of his monster pushed her right over the edge of sanity. Somewhere deep in her belly, the coil snapped, unfurling at lightning speed, sending convulsions of pleasure tearing through her system. Her pussy clenched on his massive girth, sucking him deeper as she came. “Garron!” she managed in a hoarse cry as her eyes rolled back in her head.

“That's it, baby, come on my cock. Feel what I alone can give you.” His

words came in short, quick bursts, matching the stroking motion of his dick. "God, Misty," he ground out right before he slammed home and held there, while her orgasm barreled over them both. As her climax subsided, she felt him pull out. "Turn and take me," he growled.

More quickly than she thought possible, she turned, dropped to her knees, and opened her mouth just in time to receive his release. He plunged between her parted lips. The unique combination of his cum and hers peppered her tongue. Pleased at the fact it wasn't as repugnant as she'd imagined, she began to bob her head, licking him up and down.

Garron laced his fingers through her hair, pulling it tight and stopping her motions. "Open your mouth wider and breathe through your nose," he ordered in shaky, uneven breaths.

She followed his direction, only to have her gag reflex kick in as he began thrusting into her mouth the same way he'd fucked her pussy. For a split second, she panicked, fearing a repeat of her previous mistake. Then she remembered his instruction and switched her breathing from her mouth to her nose. Within seconds, his thrusts grew jerky and uneven. With one last hard thrust, he came. Her mouth flooded with the salty concoction. No choice but to swallow, she downed every last drop. Suddenly very pleased with herself, she slowly licked him clean. He remained seated between her parted lips, his gaze lowering to meet hers. "You passed."

Chapter Two

Later, Misty stood under the hot spray of water from the shower, trying to scrub away the guilt and demons plaguing her thoughts. While she couldn't help but wonder with curious excitement what else Garron had in store for her, remorse for what she'd done ate at her from the inside out.

An image of her mother on her knees, servicing one of the many nameless, faceless men who had passed through their home haunted her. She'd spent most of her childhood living with a broken and desperate woman, watching her swap sex for drugs or money. Misty had sworn then to never prostitute herself in that manner, even if meant going hungry. Yet she'd just done the very thing she'd sworn never to do, and for what? Money? A sick curiosity?

Had she thought this would somehow be different than what her mother had done all those years ago?

Maybe if he'd kissed her or shown some sort of emotion toward her, she could more easily justify the situation. He hadn't kissed her, though, or even made an attempt to, which left her feeling used.

Still, despite her issues, no kissing was a rule probably best enforced. The touching of lips ranked right up there with the act of actually sleeping with another person on the intimacy scale. It simply wasn't done, if you wanted to keep your heart protected. Garron Worthington was a man of power and stature, refined and cultured, who happened to like kink in his sex life. He wasn't the type of man to fall for a girl who came from the wrong side of town and had sold herself for a buck.

She swiped at the sudden rush of tears on her cheeks. There was only one word that fit her situation, and that word made her no better than a

common streetwalker. The only differences between her and the girls walking the dark sidewalks of West End Boulevard were a nice house and the fact that instead of multiple men, she'd service only one.

A sob escaped her throat, and she covered her mouth with her hands. Get a grip, girly! Feeling sorry for herself wouldn't do any good. She'd had the opportunity to walk away, and instead she'd chosen to take the position. She had no one to blame but herself.

One year, she reminded herself. This time next year she would be somewhere on the West Coast away from everything that had brought her to this point, and she would start anew. Maybe, if she were really lucky, she'd find a man and settle down.

Choosing to dream about her future instead of thinking about the present, she rinsed off, letting the warm water filter through her hair and cascade over her breasts before she turned to shut off the taps. Towel wrapped around her, she stepped from the tub onto the bath mat. Garron was right about one thing. Everything he'd done to her, with the exception of a few pink lines still streaked across her ass, had disappeared without leaving any visible marks. Would her mental scars heal as easily?

She dabbed at her hair with the towel, soaking up the excess moisture. Delicious food, a luxurious bedroom, a good friend, and if she were being honest, the most amazing sex she'd ever experienced. Maybe staying here wouldn't be so bad after all.

With that thought on her mind, she turned to walk to the sink only to have her feet slide out from under her. Arms flailing, she reached for something to break her fall, but with everything covered in dampness from her shower, her hand slipped off the porcelain, knocking a glass sitting atop it to the floor. It shattered, sending clear shards flying in all directions even as she fell backward. Pain struck hard in her lower back, pulling a cry from her as she contacted the side of the tub mere seconds before she landed on one hip on the tiled floor.

Too shocked to move, she fought to regulate her breathing.

"Misty?" Audrey's voice carried around the door. "I was walking by your room when I heard a crash. Are you okay?"

Ignoring the throbbing pain in her lower back, Misty sat up. "I think so."

Careful to avoid the pieces of glass peppering the floor, Audrey hurried to her side. "What happened?"

"I slipped on something." Misty saw a bottle of open bubble bath lying on its side, the contents dripping onto the floor. "How in the hell did that happen? I didn't even use bubble bath."

"Maybe when you reached for something else, you knocked it over."

Misty considered Audrey's explanation. She hadn't taken anything from the shelf where the bubble bath sat, but that didn't mean she couldn't have knocked the bottle over by accident. "I suppose."

Garron appeared in the doorway with a scowl on his face. "What in the hell happened?"

"Misty slipped on some spilled bubble bath."

His frown deepened, and he, too, hurried toward her. "Are you all right?"

"I think so."

"Let me see." Garron helped her to her feet.

She turned to allow him to check her for injuries. "I've never even used that bottle of bubble bath. I don't know why the lid was loose, and I don't understand how it fell over."

"The whys don't matter. What I am concerned with are any underlying injuries it may have caused." He tugged her toward the door. "Let's get you dressed, and then I want some ice applied to your back. If it's still sore in the morning, you'll go see a doctor."

Misty eased down onto the bed and looked up at Garron. "If my back hurts as bad tomorrow as it does right now, I certainly won't argue with that suggestion."

"Are you okay to get dressed on your own?"

The idea of having him dress her seemed silly and slightly embarrassing. "I'll manage."

"Fine. Don't worry about the bathroom. Audrey will clean up the mess. Just get yourself dressed and downstairs so we can put some ice on your back."

An hour later, Misty lay on the sofa in the den, leaning back on a pillow holding the ice pack against her lower back. Doing her best to ignore the lingering pain, she watched an old Bogart movie.

"How are you feeling?"

Misty looked up to find Garron standing in the doorway holding a highball glass containing an amber-colored drink on ice. A flicker of nervousness dribbled through her system. She hadn't been around him in a nonsexual situation and wasn't exactly sure what was expected of her. Maybe she wasn't supposed to interact with him outside the playroom. After all, her whole reason for being here was to provide him pleasure.

Depression gripped her for a second time. If she thought a man of his stature would want to associate with the hired help, she was deluding herself. "I'm okay." She started to push up from the couch. "I'll just go back to my room so you can have the television." When her shoulder met with

his strong hand, she slowly flicked her gaze upward.

His dark, foreboding eyes stared down at her with the same compassion she'd seen when he'd come to retrieve her from the bedroom. "You don't have to get up, Misty."

"But I have a television in my room. I can easily lie in bed and watch the rest of this."

His attention drifted to the screen and held there for a brief moment before returning to her. "You could, but why move if you don't need to? I happen to love this movie, and I certainly wouldn't mind the company."

"Okay." Against her better judgment, she eased back against the pillow. If he wanted company, who was she to argue? Nervous and unsure how to act, she searched her mind for something to talk about. "You don't strike me as an old-movie buff."

"Neither do you." Garron eased down next to her. "There are a lot of things we don't know about each other. In my opinion, that's part of the fun of getting to know a new sub."

She cocked her head to the side and eyed him. "I've never been in a serious relationship before, not even one with rules and limitations like this one."

"Does that cause you fear?"

"I don't know."

He gently skimmed a knuckle along her biceps. "Yes you do."

"All right, maybe I am a bit afraid."

"Is it the submissive part you're having problems with, or the knowledge

that if you stay here long enough, I just might break through some of those barriers you've erected?"

"I don't have any barriers."

"Sure you do, sweetheart. No woman can be what I'm asking you to become without erecting some walls to protect her emotions."

Her gaze lifted to his. While she studied his eyes, the truth of his words stared back at her. Danger signals sounded in her head, sending her heart into a defensive retreat. The man was too damn wise for his own good and hers. So what if she threw up a few barriers? Knowing it could be a major mind fuck, she could have chosen not to do this job. Instead, she'd stepped into the eye of the storm with the intent of surviving to see the sun shine when it was over. If that meant doing what was necessary to protect her heart and head, then so be it.

Besides, if he knew half the issues running amok inside her brain, he'd be ready to commit her to an asylum within a week. As if to reinforce her thoughts, her stomach began to ache. Ignoring the pain in her back, Misty shot to her feet. "I...I have to go."

She'd barely taken a step when his warm hand closed around her arm. "Misty?"

She shook her head, blinking back the sudden onslaught of tears. No way could he possibly see what she kept so carefully hidden away. With his hand now preventing her from leaving, she stared straight ahead, willing her way out the door.

"Misty, I'm sorry if I hit a nerve, but if you think you're doing a good job of keeping your troubles hidden, I'm afraid you're mistaken."

Drawing in a deep breath, she closed her eyes and fought back the all-too-familiar pain building in her chest. Her issues were her own and none of his

concern. "If you are worried that my troubles, as you say, will interfere with my duties to you, I assure you they won't."

"After our session earlier, I don't doubt your ability to fulfill your commitment to me. What does bother me is your duty to yourself."

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean."

"I'm talking about happiness, Misty, and your ability to find joy within yourself. Even in the short time we've spent together, I can see that whatever baggage you're lugging around is preventing you from truly enjoying life and all its pleasures. When it comes to my employees, I'm not just a boss, or in this case, your master. I know how hard it can be to rid yourself of demons and find a comfortable balance in life. If you'll allow me, I want to help you rid yourself of whatever it is that's haunting you."

If only he could make her problems go away. Short of building a time machine and reversing her past, there was little he could really do. No use in crying on his shoulder like some baby over what couldn't be fixed. "While I appreciate your concern, I can assure you, Master, there is nothing haunting me. It's been a long and eventful day for me, so if you don't mind, I'd very much like to return to my room."

For several heartbeats, she held his gaze, refusing to back down, even though she knew as his sub she should. She could and would endure whatever physical punishment he conjured, but what lay in her heart and in her mind was off-limits, even to him.

"I'm letting you go now because I choose to do so. Don't think, even for one second, that I will let this go, pet. Whether you choose to believe it or not, your happiness is important to me. I won't stand to see any of my girls hurting."

"Good night, Master."

"Garron."

She froze, a confused look claiming her features. "But I thought—"

"Inside the playroom and in front of guests, I am Master. All other times, I am Garron."

"Good night, Garron."

"Good night, Misty."

* * * * *

Why couldn't he sleep? That one thought ran through Garron's mind over and over as he lay awake staring up at the ceiling and seeing very little of it in the dark. As much as he tried to put Misty out of his mind, her reaction to his challenge earlier had his head spinning. Who or what had wounded her so badly that she thought so little of herself?

He should have had his private investigator do a background check on her before he signed the contract, but hiring her was an impulse aided by his trust in Travis. It wasn't too late to order his PI to run a check, but for some reason, that thought didn't sit very well with him. It shouldn't, since every person who worked for Worthington Industries—and even his personal staff—all underwent background checks.

He shook his head. Spending time with her was clouding his judgment, and that simply wouldn't do. It was important he didn't treat her any differently than his other employees. What, he wondered, would he do with the information? As long as there wasn't anything criminal in her past, as long as she performed her duties to him, her private life was none of his business.

Rolling over, he punched the pillow. If she wanted to spend her life being miserable, what right did he have to interfere? He certainly wasn't going to

beg her to share her memories. Besides, he had enough on his plate as it was without adding Misty and her personal baggage to the list.

As much as he hated to admit it, Chloe was becoming a problem. Four years ago, he'd hired her as a submissive, and she'd performed admirably, though her stubborn streak and snippy attitude tended to garner her some trouble. Seeing the potential to better herself, she'd taken up his offer of schooling and obtained her degree in design with a minor in business. Then he'd surprised them both by funding her fledgling dress boutique and releasing her from her duties as a sub.

Only she hadn't left as he'd expected, asking to stay at the house and even remain available to him sexually on an as-needed basis.

It was obvious she enjoyed her role as a submissive, so who was he to deny what she would so willingly give? He was, after all, a man with needs.

The problem, he discovered, with having a business partner who was also a submissive was that the lines between business and pleasure had slowly blurred with time. A college graduate with tons of life experience at the age of thirty, Chloe was beginning to come into her own. Her willingness to follow instructions had waned in recent memory, with her becoming defiant and argumentative, not only with him but with Audrey, and Caroline before she left.

At first he wondered if something had happened in her personal life that caused the change in attitude, but as time passed, he'd dismissed that notion.

With the loan he'd provided nearly paid in full, he hoped she would finally move on. Not that he had anything against the woman. After all, he'd spent some of his most personal moments with her. His affection for Chloe ran deep, thus the reason for her still living under his roof.

Deciding that sleep was a lost cause, he threw the covers off, groped

around in the dark for his sleep pants, and headed downstairs to his home office. Immersed in a big buyout of a multinational conglomerate, he had enough to keep him busy day and night. Might as well get some work done if he wasn't going to get any rest.

He stopped in the kitchen, poured himself a glass of water, then walked toward his office, only to pause at the sound of the television playing in the den. Had someone forgot to turn it off or was one of the girls up?

The answer to his question sat curled in a blanket into the corner of the couch. Her sleepy eyes stared blankly at the flickering screen, while some infomercial about some new kitchen gadget played. Even in the darkness of the room he could see the puffiness around her eyes and the hint of red to her nose. His stomach clenched. Had he caused her to shed those tears?

"Misty?"

He'd barely spoken above a whisper, yet her entire body jerked at the sound of her name, her face twisting with embarrassment and shock. "Garron!"

"Are you all right?" He took one slow, calculated step into the room.

A quick wipe to her eyes confirmed his suspicions. "I'm fine. I just couldn't sleep. I apologize if I woke you." She pushed off the couch, throwing the blanket off her in the process.

"Sit down, Misty." His order came out slightly harsher than he would have liked, but damn if he was going to let her get away without telling him what was bothering her to the point of tears. "What's bothering you?"

"Nothing. I just couldn't sleep."

He strode into the room and eased down onto the couch, setting his glass of water on the table. "Don't lie to me, sweetheart. It's obvious you've been

crying, and I'd like to know what you're so upset about. Is it something I've done?"

She shook her head, her gaze dropping to the forest green blanket still covering her. "It's personal."

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Not unless you can turn back time."

"What exactly would that accomplish?"

Her gaze rose to meet his. "It would give me a chance to try and change things, to take care of my family the way I should have before..." The end of her sentence went unspoken as she shook her head. "Never mind. I'm just feeling sorry for myself right now. It will pass. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll head back to my room now and let you work."

He snagged her by the arm. She turned to look at him.

"Talk to me," he prompted, hoping like hell she'd trust him enough to share her pain.

Her face twisted with emotion, and he gave her a gentle tug. She went to him, collapsing on his shoulder while tears rolled down her cheeks. "I'm sorry," she murmured against him. "My life has been difficult for such a long time, and I'm just so tired of trying to be strong."

"Then don't be," he replied while rubbing gentle circles over her back. "Share your heartache with me."

For several long minutes, she continued to cry, until finally she pulled away. Garron eased back down to the couch, bringing her down onto his lap in the process. "Now talk."

She looked up at him. The pain in her eyes tore at his very soul. "I don't know where to start."

"How about at the beginning?"

She blew out a long breath and nodded. "When I was eight, my father got up one Sunday morning and went out to buy a newspaper. He never came back, just disappeared without a trace. My mother was devastated and cried a lot in those early days, but she had me and my brother to think of, so she tried to pull herself together using prescription antidepressants."

Her attention drifted to the television screen, where some person was demonstrating the chopping ability of the kitchen gadget in question. He wanted to prompt her but thought better of it. She would continue when she was ready.

A few more seconds passed before she spoke again, her voice now laced with a hint of detachment. "For a while, everything was fine. Then I began noticing her slow spiral downward. Strange men began coming and going at all hours of the day and night. She started sleeping at odd hours, calling in to work sick, and forgetting to feed me and Michael."

"How old was your brother?"

"Five." She shook her head. "How can you forget to feed your five-year-old?" She paused, and Garron felt the battle going on inside her. The war she was waging against her anger.

"When I realized things weren't going to change anytime soon, I started taking on the chores. I cleaned the house and fed Michael, made sure he had his bath, and I crawled into bed with him at night when he'd have a bad dream. I'd read him stories and sing him lullabies in an attempt to mask the moans and grunts that drifted out from behind her bedroom door."

She pulled away from him, stood, and began pacing the room. He noted the change in her temperament from sorrow to anger but remained silent. If there was one thing he knew the value of, it was purging your demons.

"I guess I was twelve or thirteen when I finally got curious about the goings on in her room. So one night, when I knew she would be bringing a guy back to our place, I hid in her closet and watched through the slats while she sucked the guy off."

Garron's eyes went wide. "You actually watched them?"

"Well, yeah. I wanted to know what she was doing. At first, it kinda grossed me out, but deep down I found the whole thing quite fascinating, so I started making a habit of it. I guess you could say I got a firsthand view of sex education."

"I can't imagine watching my parents have sex." A full-body shudder rippled through Garron. "Especially at such an impressionable age."

"I'm not saying it didn't freak me out a little to see my mother naked and tangled up with strange men, but I always found the situation so interesting. What I saw was pleasure broken down to its simplest element. Then one of the men she brought home beat the shit out of her, and she called the police. Once they were inside the house and realized the conditions we were living under, they removed me and Michael from the home and shoved us into foster care."

"Tell me they kept you and your brother together."

She gave him a sad smile. "They did for a while, but whenever our foster parents would try to discipline Michael for something, I'd interfere. My grades began to drop, and I started getting in trouble in school. One day after school there was a social worker waiting for me on the front step with a suitcase next to her. They'd packed up my belongings and relinquished me back to the system."

“But they kept your brother?”

Misty nodded. “As far as they were concerned I was trouble, and they were right. I spent a year in juvenile hall before I was placed in an all-girls' orphanage. The people who ran that place didn't care what we did, so I took full advantage, running with the bad crowd in school, getting into trouble as often as possible.

“Somehow, I managed to graduate high school and keep myself out of jail, but one day during that summer after graduation, I woke up and realized I was on my own. My grades weren't even close to being good enough to get me into college, and most jobs I could score paid minimum wage and ended with me asking, 'Do you want fries with that?'

“For three years I barely scraped by, bumming places to sleep from friends and going hungry when necessary. Then, when I turned twenty-one, a friend got me a job schlepping drinks at a local bar. It didn't take long for me to realize that the skimpier I dressed, the better the tips. When I landed the job bartending at Carnal Desires, I thought I'd hit the jackpot. The tips were nearly as good as what the dancers pulled down, and I didn't even have to take my clothes off.”

“I'm sure you could have gone to beauty school or acquired some trade that would have kept you out of that lifestyle.”

“You're right, I probably could have, but I never thought I could make the same kind of money working a 'real job.'” She hooked her fingers, putting air quotes around the words real job . “When Travis told me the owner was closing down the club and moving it, I panicked.”

“So when I offered you this position, you pounced on it without considering the consequences.”

She shot him a sheepish glance. “I'd heard about BDSM but didn't really

know that much about the lifestyle. Honestly, I find myself wondering if I'm in over my head here."

"I can understand how you might feel that way, but I can promise you that we'll take things slow until you've acclimated."

"I'm not sure I can." She tucked her feet up under her and hugged her knees. "From a very young age, my mother began lecturing me on the evils of sex. She'd tell me over and over how only bad girls do those kinds of things."

"But your mother didn't practice what she preached."

"No." She shook her head. "Which only served to confuse me more. I couldn't understand how something that gave two people so much pleasure could be wrong, but then I'd see my mother trade her body for drugs or money. She was always sad or, worse yet, angry and yelling."

She shivered, and on instinct he wrapped an arm around her, pulling Misty into his protective embrace. He felt her brief hesitation. Then she came willingly, relaxing against his shoulder. "I began to understand that sex wasn't the beautiful natural act I'd read about in her paperback romances, but a tool used for selfish gain. It wasn't that she wanted to give those men pleasure. She simply did it because they were willing to give her something she wanted in return."

"You know, sweetheart, not all sex is like that. Sometimes it can be very beautiful, special even."

She shrugged. "Maybe, but the day that man beat her bloody was the day I vowed never to follow in her footsteps." She wiped at an errant tear. "So much for that vow, huh? I guess you can say that everybody has a price."

"Now wait a minute." He pushed her to arm's length and turned her to face him. "You're not your mother, Misty. Yes, we have an agreement, and yes,

you're receiving a salary, but I would hope that somewhere in all this, you'd find at least a little pleasure. I know for a fact you enjoyed some of what I did to you earlier."

"I did, but it also made me feel off balance and disoriented. I didn't—and still don't—quite understand why I reacted the way I did. I was at your mercy, and it turned me on." She covered her face in her hands. "Oh God, what's wrong with me?"

"Nothing is wrong with you. You're young and healthy, and you should enjoy sex without feeling guilty."

She seemed to consider his statement for a moment before she spoke again. "Would it be too much to ask for a little patience until I adjust?"

"Not at all." Glad that she hadn't asked to leave instead, he smiled. Realistically, if she wanted out of her contract, there was little he could do but release her. Dragging her into court to make her fulfill her agreement certainly wouldn't bode well for a man of his stature in the community. Besides, what went on in his private life was just that—private. "If you don't mind my asking, whatever happened to Michael?"

Her eyes clouded over, and she hung her head. "After spending several years bouncing from home to home, he ended up running away and was eventually found dead from a drug overdose."

Feeling helpless for the first time in years, Garron gathered her tiny, shaking frame against his. He was a CEO of a major company, with the wealth and power to fix nearly any situation. While he couldn't change her past, he could do something to help her, though even that would have to wait until morning. Right now, the best he could do was hold her until she cried herself out. "And you blame yourself?"

"I keep thinking there had to be something I could have done differently."

He pulled back and cupped her face with his palms. "You were a child. Nobody could expect you to know the right thing to do in a situation like that. No matter how much you want to take the blame for how your brother ended up, you can't do that to yourself, Misty."

Tears once again streamed down her cheeks, and he lifted a hand, brushing them away with his thumb. "I know you'd do anything to change the past, but you can't, so stop beating yourself up over what happened. All you'll accomplish is making yourself sick."

"I know"—she sucked in a ragged breath—"but I've lived with the guilt for so long, I don't know how to stop it."

"Then I'll help you."

"How?"

"Starting Monday, you're going to start seeing a therapist, but for now, you're going to let me put you to bed."

Before she could protest, he hooked an arm beneath her legs and lifted her against him. "Put your head on my shoulder and let me take care of you." Feeling more empathy for her than he probably should, he slowly made the trek up to her bedroom, wondering the entire way how he had allowed himself to feel this connected to her this quickly.

Chapter Three

Misty glanced up from her journal and looked at the calendar hanging above the desk in her room. Even now, it seemed hard to believe that four months had already passed since her confessional with Garron. The therapist he'd arranged for her to see was top-notch. Overall, she was feeling much better.

While she worked through the issues with her past, she continued to service Garron in the present, learning not only how he liked his submissives to behave but all the ways he enjoyed to be pleased. It wasn't an easy process. She had suffered missteps and setbacks, resulting in bouts of depression and guilt. Keeping her employment at the mansion a secret while she worked through her personal issues was more than a little difficult. It was only when the therapist confided to her that he knew about Garron's lifestyle and her purpose at Rosewood that she finally was able to make some serious progress.

As he promised, Garron offered patience and encouragement. The fact was, she did find a certain amount of enjoyment from playing the part of submissive, and even now tended to be shocked by her body's reaction to some of the things he subjected her to.

She wrote the date on the top of the page and closed the book. Another day of thoughts immortalized on paper for only her eyes to see. When the therapist first suggested journalizing her feelings, she never thought it would serve any real purpose other than to occupy her time. She couldn't have been more wrong.

Every day, she'd faithfully written in her book and, on those rare occasions

when she felt brave, would travel back through the book. What she saw shocked her. Fear, anger, and hurt amassed on the pages, a visual representation of the jumbled mess that was her emotions.

The early pages seemed to be a repetition of the same thoughts, the same feelings, that had plagued her for years, but as the days passed and the entries grew, so did her ability to quantify her feelings. While she still yearned for what she'd lost in her later years of childhood, she no longer harbored the guilt and frustration of a young girl trapped in a situation not of her own making.

She set the book aside, stood, and walked to the closet. She was making progress, and she had Garron to thank for it. He was handsome, intelligent, and compassionate: how easy would it be for her to fall for him? Get your head out of dreamland . Love was for suckers. People who fell in love only ended up hurt and miserable in the end. Why in the world would she want to give her heart away, only to have it handed back to her in pieces? Nope. She had a plan, and loving Garron Worthington wasn't part of it.

Looking for her favorite nightgown, she stumbled across a small box she'd brought with her and hidden away. Beneath the lid was an assortment of sex toys she'd amassed over the years. Funny how none of her issues with sex included masturbation, but then no one other than she benefited or suffered from a good bout of self-gratification, so there wasn't any harm, right? Her favorite toy, a small pink vibrator with a clit-stimulator attachment, sat on top. Unable to resist the temptation, she picked it up and closed the drawer.

What would it hurt if she took the edge off before bed? After all, it had been over a week since her last encounter with Garron, and she was feeling more than a little needy. Slowly, she stripped and climbed onto the covers.

Lying back, she let her knees fall open. Cool air washed over her pussy, sending delicious goose bumps along her skin. Even thinking of Garron got her all hot and bothered. She should have been concerned by her lust over

the man. After all, physical attraction many times led to emotional ties. Despite what her heart wanted, falling in love with a man like Garron would only lead her down the path to devastation.

Closing her eyes, she pictured him in his too-tight black shirt and jeans. Still, wasn't it wrong to deny her body what it craved? There was little chance she'd fall in love with a sex toy. Easing her hand over her stomach, she closed her eyes.

"Just what do you think you're doing?"

The powerful tone in Garron's voice pulled Misty from her thoughts. She shot off the bed with a start and scrambled to grab something to cover her. "I...I didn't hear you knock."

"I don't knock on doors in my own house, and you haven't answered my question. What were you doing?"

"I..." Unsure how to answer, she left her sentence unfinished.

"Looks to me as if you were about to pleasure yourself. As you may very well remember from the contract terms, under no circumstances are you to masturbate and come without me present."

"I...I'm sorry, Master." She lowered her lashes, embarrassed by the admission she was about to make. "It's just I was thinking it has been a while since we were together, and well, I couldn't help myself."

"Does thinking of me arouse you?"

Heat flooded her cheeks. "Yes, Sir." At least that admission wasn't a lie. For the last few weeks, she'd been in a near-perpetual state of arousal, all because of him.

"Well, then"—he closed the door behind him—"why don't you show me

how much I turn you on?"

Her eyes widened when the understanding of what he was commanding her to do settled in. "Master, I..."

His eyes leveled on her. "Do it, Misty, or I'll be forced to punish you for disobeying me."

She swallowed audibly. How in the world had she gotten herself into this situation? Better yet, why wouldn't Garron simply help her out and end her suffering by fucking her brains out?

Heart pounding, Misty set the vibrator down, then readjusted the pillows, piling them against the headboard, before turning over and stretching back against the soft pile of down. Lounging with her back against the pillows, she let her knees fall open to reveal her pink, swollen lips.

He leaned back against the closed door and adjusted himself through his jeans. "Let's see it, baby."

With somewhat shaky hands, she picked up the vibrator. Why she was having so much trouble with the idea of him watching, she'd never know. After all, she'd spent several years of her life putting on a public display for strange men. Who was she kidding? This was different. This time, she had feelings for the man watching her. The fact was, she didn't want to screw up the good thing she had. By God, if he wanted her to give him a show, she would do exactly that. Not because he was her master and he commanded it, but because she cared deeply for him and would do whatever it took to please him.

Slowly, she lifted the vibrator to her lips and flicked her tongue over the end before encircling the tip with her lips. One slow stroke, and she swallowed the entire thing to its base.

His eyes never left her mouth. Even from where she lay across the room,

she could see his neck muscles cord with tension and his nostrils flare. "Enough." His voice was low and coarse as he pushed off the door and strode toward her. "Fuck yourself with that thing and stop teasing me."

His direct and guttural command had her pulling the vibrator from her mouth and dropping it between her legs. She rubbed it over her slit, slicking it with her own juices before she eased it inward. Buried as deep as allowed, the tiny prongs of the clit stimulator sat nestled against her nub.

"Turn it on."

Her eyes locked with his, and she flicked the switch, bringing the toy to life. Her mouth parted on a sigh at the near-instant satisfaction that came from the humming device. As good as it felt, she would have given just about anything to have the real thing filling her, fucking her until she couldn't come anymore. Instead, she'd enjoy what she could get. With one hand on the vibrator, she moved the other one up to her breasts and began to pluck and pinch her nipples. The sharp bite of pain only served to enhance the sensations between her legs. Her head lolled back, the pace increasing as her hips raised.

The ache started deep in her belly and spread, growing stronger until she couldn't hang on anymore. Her eyes closed, and she let loose a scream that would put a banshee to shame. She'd never been a screamer, but this time she did and let go of the vibrator. Still humming, it fell away and landed on the bed.

When her breathing regulated and she finally managed to open her eyes, he stood beside the bed stroking his cock with one hand and holding a flogger in the other. "That was beautiful, but you must still be punished for your intent to pleasure yourself without permission.

* * * * *

Watching Misty masturbate had to be the hottest thing Garron had seen in

years. He'd already been hard when he went in search of her, but finding her preparing for self-gratification made his cock swell. His balls ached from the rush of blood filling them, and he'd barely resisted the urge to stroke himself. He couldn't help but wonder why he hadn't thought to have any of his girls masturbate for him before now.

He took her hand and tugged her to him. "Go stand in front of the mirror in the corner."

Despite the sated expression on her glowing face, her eyes simmered with heat and anticipation.

Wordlessly, she stalked toward the full-length mirror, her movements sensual and fluid as she went. His threat of punishment hadn't produced the anxiety from her he'd seen in the past. No, this time he could tell, she wanted it, was even looking forward to it. Unbelievably, that caused his cock to swell even more. Slowly, over the past few months, he'd seen the improvement in her mental health; watching her now confirmed what he suspected: she was indeed getting better. His heart lightened with that thought, and he nearly smiled before reality quickly smacked him in the face.

Damn. He was letting her get under his skin again, and that would never do.

He tightened his grip on the flogger. So what if nearly every minute of his day was occupied with thoughts of her? It didn't mean anything other than they shared a love for old Bogart movies and a taste for fine wine. And was it really significant that no matter what situation he put her in, she handled herself with professionalism and grace?

Now wasn't the time to think about how perfect she was. Not when the ultimate satisfaction was only moments away. He widened his stance and dragged the ends of the flogger over his hand. "You've been a bad girl, Misty. Are you ready for your punishment?"

“Yes, Master.”

The desire in her tone caught him by surprise, delivering a sucker punch to his gut. “Then walk to the mirror, spread your legs, and place your hands on the glass,” he ordered, barely managing to stay in control.

She did exactly as his instructed, only when she looked at him in the reflective glass, he felt as though he'd been hit with a brick. Need, strong and heady, radiated from her eyes, inflaming his lust. There was a trust between them, one they had managed to build in a short time, one he didn't take lightly.

While ultimately she held the power to end things whenever she wanted, she did a fine job of providing him with the illusion of influence. He loved her ability to totally submerge herself in the submissive role, yet remain in control. Most of the girls he'd had over the years could never find that balance.

He stood behind her, his eyes locked with hers through the mirror. There were no words for his feelings at that moment. He only knew something about tonight would change their relationship, deepen it more than even he and Caroline had shared. A smart man would walk away and release her from her contract. Most of the time, he was that smart man, but with his libido raging, now wouldn't be one of those times.

“Why am I punishing you, pet?”

“I broke a rule.”

“Right. And you understand for that you must be punished. Do you want me to punish you?” He'd always wanted the experience to be pleasurable for his girls, but for reasons he didn't want to identify, it mattered more to him this time that she enjoy what she was about to receive.

His gaze locked with hers in the mirror, and his heart made a tiny jolt when she said, "Yes." The look in her eyes left little doubt that she was telling the truth. With a quick flick of his wrist, the leather tresses quickly splayed across her skin; the sound of leather meeting skin caused his balls to tighten. She didn't flinch, but he saw the flare of pain and pleasure in her eyes.

He snapped the flogger a second time. It wrapped around her thigh, then fell away, leaving a trail of faint pink lines in its wake. "Like I've told you before, pet, pleasure comes from various sources, and sometimes, it even comes from pain." He slid a knuckle through her wet folds, then brought it to his mouth, where he licked away her juices while he watched her watching him. "You're so wet. What do you want more, pet, another taste of the flogger, or me fucking your sweet pussy until you come?"

She groaned and arched her back. "I want you fucking my pussy, Master."

"Sometimes what you want is worth waiting for," he replied as he released the flogger once again. It cracked, striking the skin on her ass in yet another random pattern that left new pink lines in her skin. He couldn't resist touching where he'd marked her, and felt the heat rise against his hand. Sometimes, no matter how much one wanted to wait and extend the pleasure, it was necessary to move forward and complete the task. His own needs—to feel her heat wrapped around his cock—swamped him with a fever he knew only she could cure. He tossed the flogger aside, quickly undressed, positioned himself at her swollen folds, and thrust.

She cried out something unintelligible as she braced her hands against the mirror. Her perfect lips form a silent O and her head fell back.

"God!" Swamped in a flurry of emotions, he gripped her hips and held still until he could steady himself. How was it that he was already on the verge of the biggest orgasm he'd had in recent memory?

"Garron, please."

Her begging only served to excite him more. He couldn't hold back. He pulled out and slammed into her with a force strong enough to nearly knock her off balance. Wrapping an arm around her waist, he leaned over her back and began drilling into her warm, tight core.

Even as she cried out his name, he felt her resulting orgasm take hold. Clenching his cock, her walls contracted and released until he, too, was coming.

“Now, Misty.”

He pulled out. In an instant, she turned and dropped to her knees. With her mouth open wide and her eyes focused on his face, she accepted his cum. He shuddered and jerked as he flooded her mouth with his seed.

Nearly perfect. He sighed and took several steps back to the edge of the bed while he regained his strength. She crawled on all fours toward him, positioned herself between his legs, and proceeded to lick him clean. Yes, nearly perfect, he thought to himself. The only way it could have been better was if he'd come inside her pussy. Instantly, his chest tightened in panic. Never in all his years of dealing with women had he ever had the urge to come inside one without a condom.

The fact that Misty caused that reaction bothered him.

Was it that he was losing his desire to maintain the lifestyle he'd held for the last fifteen years? He raked a hand through his hair. If he faced facts, he'd have to admit that he spent more time with Misty than he had his previous girls. Only a couple of times over the past months had he engaged Chloe for trysts, choosing instead to wait until he could be with Misty. Worse yet, when he was with Chloe, it was Misty's face he saw and Misty's body he pictured.

Hell!

"Enough." He stood and walked to the side of the bed where his clothes lay and began to re-dress. When he turned, he spotted her still on her knees at the foot of the bed. The confusion and pain in her eyes bore right into his soul. He left his pants and shirt unbuttoned and went to her. "Rise, pet."

She did. "Did I do something wrong?"

The sweet sound of her crying out his name as she came still echoed in his ears. He wanted to hear it more often, to know it would forever be his name on her lips. His chest tightened as the reality of the moment struck him hard. Somehow, despite his best efforts to stop it, she'd begun to worm her way into his heart. That would simply not do. Garron Worthington didn't get attached to his employees, and he certainly didn't fall in love. "No, pet," he choked out. "You did everything perfectly." He leaned over to press a kiss to her forehead. "I have to go now. You have sweet dreams."

Before she could question him further, he rushed from the room. One thing was very clear. He needed a little time to get control of his feelings before he did something stupid, like give his heart away.

Chapter Four

Tonight Garron was throwing a dinner party, inviting several of his closest friends to not only break bread with him, but to enjoy in the pleasures that Misty and most likely Chloe would provide.

Misty wrinkled her nose at the thought of having to share Garron with Chloe. So what if the girl had been here first? The one thing she'd learned in her short time here was that when Garron requested Chloe's presence in the playroom, she did a damn good job in the position of submissive. However, her superior attitude outside the playroom made it impossible for Misty to like the woman.

Misty pulled the white corset from the closet and snagged a pair of silver high heels from the shoe rack before turning to the dresser for stockings. Chloe was a temperamental bitch, Misty decided, all sweet and caring in Garron's presence, but totally nasty when out of his hearing. Her deplorable treatment of Audrey made Misty burn with anger. Audrey had been nothing but nice to Misty since she'd arrived. She considered the woman a friend, and knowing Chloe's attitude toward Audrey pissed Misty off to no end.

She shucked her sweatpants and T-shirt and began dressing. If Garron wanted her and Chloe to work together tonight, she'd damn well do her best to make that happen without incident. She only hoped Chloe would take the same attitude and keep her personal feelings tucked away tonight. Already she and Chloe had been punished more than once for arguing, and while her body may have come to enjoy Garron's punishments, she wasn't all that interested in creating a scene in front of his guests.

With the bodice in place, she turned her attention to the stockings even as

her mind continued to wander through the past. Over the past few months, strange occurrences had continued to plague her. Coming home from a party to find her windows open and most of the room soaked from the pouring rain had been only one of the strange incidences that left her with more questions than answers.

Audrey swore the room was haunted and urged Misty to move to a different bedroom in the house. She'd flat-out refused, citing to Audrey that there were no such things as ghosts. After finding the brown recluse spider crawling on her while she slept, Misty was nearly convinced that someone was trying to freak her out. With Chloe's nasty attitude toward her and Audrey, Misty was sure she was the one behind the pranks. Probably in Chloe's mind, she thought Misty would get fed up and want to leave, once again giving her Garron's full attention. Only she had no intention of leaving, and she refused to be intimidated by the likes of someone like Chloe.

Misty checked her hair in the mirror one last time, then headed downstairs.

She entered the kitchen to find Audrey toiling away over the stove. "Hey."

"Hi, Misty. Wow, you look good. I am sure Garron will be pleased."

"I hope so." Misty clapped her hands together. "So, what can I do to help?"

"You can take the hors d-d'oeuvres tray out."

"You got it." Misty picked up the tray, set her shoulders, lifted her head, and carried the tray into the dining room, where Garron's guests stood around talking with each other.

She'd just set the tray on the table when the sound of shattering glass had her gaze rocketing back toward the kitchen. She exchanged a quick glance with Garron, noting the flare of anger in his eyes, before racing back to the kitchen and skidding to a stop when she spotted Chloe leaning against the

counter.

"God, Audrey, you're such an idiot sometimes," Chloe chided.

Already on her knees cleaning up the broken glass, Audrey glanced up at Chloe. "I said I was sorry. I-I did not know you were behind me."

With a look of complete disinterest, Chloe inspected her nails and shook her head. "Honestly, I don't understand why Garron insists on keeping your stupid ass around."

Misty's fingers curled into fists. "That's enough, Chloe."

Chloe turned her gaze to Misty, arching a delicate brow. "Just who do you think you're talking to?"

Preparing to fight, Misty took a step forward. "I think I'm talking to you."

"You, my dear, are the bottom of the food chain around here, and I think it might do you well to remember that."

"I don't give a damn about that or you. What I care about is your nasty treatment of Audrey. If we're talking rank here, she's been here longer."

Chloe's lips tipped up into a snarl. "There is no way I'm going to stand here and listen to threats from some two-bit little street whore."

"Then maybe you'll listen to me instead." All three women turned to see Garron walk into the kitchen from the parlor entrance. His gaze shifted from Misty to Chloe to Audrey, who now sat frozen in place on the floor, eyes wide with fear. "Audrey, what happened?"

She swallowed audibly. "Sir, I, um, I was gathering the glasses for the wine, turned, and tripped over Chloe's foot."

"Chloe, what are you doing in here when you should be in the other room entertaining my guests?" He leveled a look at her.

She smiled sweetly. "I was simply offering Audrey my help with the food. I know how overwhelmed she can get when we have a lot of dinner guests."

"You're such a liar," Misty cut in. "You don't give a shit about Audrey. You were hiding out in here hoping that by dumping all the work on my shoulders I'd somehow screw up."

"Nobody asked for your opinion," Chloe ground out, shooting Misty a killer look.

"Chloe, Misty, that's enough!"

Vibrating with anger, Misty ignored Garron's order and took one final step forward, placing herself directly in front of Chloe. "You may not have asked for my opinion, but you're sure as hell going to get it anyway." Misty turned her attention to Garron. "I walked in to her calling Audrey a stupid idiot."

Garron's gaze rocketed past Misty to Chloe, then down to Audrey. "Did Chloe call you names, Audrey?"

Obviously fearful of the situation, Audrey cast a nervous glance between Chloe and Misty. "I really do not want any trouble."

Garron crouched and took Audrey's hands in his. "Sweetheart, you're not in trouble, but I do expect you to answer my question."

Audrey's gaze flicked up to Chloe before she averted her eyes and nodded her head.

Garron stiffened. "Now is not the time for the three of you to start going after each other. I expect obedience and perfection, and I'm not seeing either right now. Chloe, you openly defied me by not coming out to greet

the guests. Then you shame me by picking on a fellow subordinate. I've had enough of your attitude. Head back to your room, as you are relieved of all duties tonight."

Chloe's eyes went wide, and she opened her mouth to protest. Before she uttered a word, Garron's look had her backing down. Misty had never seen him so angry. He turned his back on Chloe. "Audrey, love, get this mess cleaned up; then please serve my guests their wine. Take your time, and make sure you don't cut yourself." He turned his attention to Misty. "Misty, my pet, it appears the burden of entertaining my guests has fallen on your shoulders. Do you think you can handle it?"

Misty squared her shoulders and nodded. "I won't let you down."

The anger in Garron's eyes faded as a smile tipped his lips up at the corners. "I know you won't."

* * * * *

Much to Misty's relief, the only guests who stayed for dessert were Travis and a man named Ryan, who she knew had a voyeurism fetish and rarely participated in activities. Garron had invited Travis several times before but had always been turned down, until tonight.

Surprised by her own eagerness to service a man she'd known for years but had never considered more than a friend, she smiled up at Travis as she knelt in front of him while he sat in one of the two wingback chairs in the play room.

"Why don't you greet our friend properly, pet?"

Misty glanced over her shoulder at Garron, who stood mere feet away. "Yes, Master." Somehow, she'd always imagined her position of submissive would make her feel embarrassed in front of Travis. It didn't.

Without waiting for further instruction, Misty knelt forward, undid Travis's belt, and opened his trousers. So he was a boxer man too. Careful of his already engorged cock, she eased the elastic waistband over the crown and down. Helping her out, Travis raised his hips, and she pulled both the boxers and trousers down to his knees.

Precisely in proportion to his body, Travis's prick was thick and full, pointing upward from within a ring of curly blond hair. His cockhead, a ruddy pink shade, slick with precum, shone in the light of the room. Misty's mouth watered. While he wasn't as large as Garron, there was definitely enough of the man to make her more than satisfied—if they made it that far.

She wrapped her fingers around the base, impressed by the fact that they barely touched. Squeezing lightly, she worked her hand up and down the length. She'd always wondered what Travis would look and feel like. Now she knew. Long. Thick. Firm. Anticipation resulted in a feeling of butterflies in her stomach as she rose to her knees. Would Travis like what she did to him? Would Garron approve? She flicked her gaze to Travis's face and eased the blunt crown past her lips. His mouth opened on a sigh, and a slight smile appeared. Taking his reaction as a good sign, she paused briefly to lick a circle around the rim before tonguing the vertical slit.

"Damn." He settled a hand on the back of her head, a silent urge to take him deeper. Wanting nothing more than to satisfy, she did just that and swallowed as much of him as she could.

His other hand flew to her head, holding her steady while he fucked her mouth.

Being a submissive was about knowing when to move forward without prompting and when not to. Taking her lead from him, she allowed Travis to take command. Her hands fell away from his cock and landed on his thighs for support. As his thrusts increased in urgency, she let her fingers wander around to his ass and enjoyed the feel of his muscles tightening

and relaxing with each thrust.

In an attempt to allow him better access, she tilted her head back. He slid deeper into her throat. "Oh yeah," Travis growled before his gaze met hers. "That's it, baby. Take me deep."

Over the months, she'd been with several men within Garron's inner circle, but Travis was by far Garron's closest friend. She couldn't help but wonder what Garron thought of her performance with Travis. Without thinking, she started to turn her head to see if he was indeed watching, but Travis snagged her chin, preventing her from moving. "Focus, Misty. Garron gets you whenever he wants. Right now, that heavenly mouth is all mine." He curled a finger beneath her jaw, tipping her chin upward. The angle allowed him to slide even deeper, until she had little choice but to breathe through her nose.

She flicked her gaze upward and met his stare as she surrendered all control. "Absolutely gorgeous," he whispered. "Do you have any idea how long I've spent imagining those perfect lips wrapped around my dick?" He pulled back with a hiss. His cockhead slid over her tongue in an erotic dance that had her inner walls clenching with desire.

He touched her face, his knuckles glancing over her cheek. "As good as this feels, I want to know what it's like to have that sweet pussy clenching around my cock." His hands came down and tucked beneath her arms, pulling her to her feet. "On the bed, Misty."

Giddy eagerness slid through her body, pooling at her cunt. Despite her loyalty to Garron, she couldn't wait to feel the hard length of Travis's dick lodged deep within her pussy.

It thrilled her to find Garron already naked and spread out on the bed. The look in his eye caused her to pause. Intent, heated with desire, and laced with something close to what? It couldn't be jealousy. After all, the party was his idea. Yet she couldn't ever remember him participating in this

manner before.

Her attention drifted from his face to the hand he had wrapped around the base of his cock. "Tonight, I'm not content with watching you service my guest. You're going to take us both."

She froze, and her jaw nearly fell open in shock. Travis had warned her when they'd toured the club that Garron had an affinity for anal sex, but up to this point Garron had never mentioned it. While the idea sent a tickle of anticipation dancing across her skin, there was also trepidation. Anal sex was the one thing she'd never allowed any of her previous boyfriends to attempt, but this wasn't a situation she could protest. Under the contract agreement, if Garron wanted her ass, she had to give it.

"You've never had anal sex, have you, Misty?"

She swallowed audibly and somehow managed to shake her head.

"Then we'll take this slow and easy. I promise, pet, by the time I'm finished with you, you'll wonder why you waited this long."

Garron slid up beside her, urging her onto her side so that she faced Travis. Garron's hand cupped her ass, parting it so he could easily slide into her pussy. The change of angle allowed his cock to strike new places. Thrusting hard, he lifted her leg high, and her pussy opened to him in a way she hadn't expected. "In a minute," he ground out against her ear, "Travis is going to fuck your fabulous pussy while I take your ass. Nobody gets to play in your back door but me, pet."

He pulled out, and she nearly protested at the loss of him until she felt his fingers. Dripping wet, she easily coated his digits, which he then spread over the tight ring of her anus. A quick shock caused her to jerk in surprise when he dipped inward.

"Easy, pet. I'm rather large, and I want to make sure you're properly

stretched and lubricated before I take you. The last thing I want is for you to be in pain because I didn't take the time to do things right."

Before she worked her mind into some sort of coherent reply, he once again positioned his cock at her pussy, driving in to cover his erection with her fluids. Then he withdrew, moved over, and gently prodded her anus. Her first reaction was to stiffen at the invasion.

"Don't fight it, Misty. Take a deep breath and bear down against me."

Desperate to follow his orders, she drew in a long, deep breath and did as he instructed.

Much to her surprise, she opened to him with little resistance. Oh, there was some pressure, delightful in nature, teasing her into taking more. Only for a moment did she cry out from the pain, but before she could tell him to stop, it disappeared as her body submitted yet again to his demands.

She'd barely had time to adjust to the feeling of Garron filling her ass when she felt Travis's probing member. She already felt as though she'd split in two. Exactly how did they expect her to handle them both at the same time?

As if he knew her thoughts, Garron cupped her breast, tweaking her nipple between his thumb and finger while he slid in and out of her ass in deep, slow thrusts. "Pay attention to me," he whispered. As if to emphasize his point, he slid in balls-deep, then stopped. "How do you feel with me fucking your ass, pet? Are you turned on? Can you feel how much you excite me?"

Misty zoned in on Garron's erotic words and only noticed Travis completely sheathed inside her slick walls when Garron began to withdraw. The delicious friction created between the two cocks pulled a ragged moan from her throat. "Oh God," she managed to whimper when Garron shoved back in while Travis pulled out.

Garron pulled at her hair until she once again turned her head toward him. She only managed to lock gazes with him for a moment before he captured her mouth in a savage kiss. Fucked by both men, each one with a hand on a breast, she'd never felt more wanted than she did at that moment. Her tongue continued to tangle with Garron's, teeth clashed, and in a moment of weakness, she nearly gave him her heart.

The two men quickly settled into an easy rhythm, Garron's cock working in and out of her ass, while Travis drilled into her pussy. Still, it wasn't enough. Garron nudged her thighs wider apart, hooking her knee over his lean leg, giving her exactly what she needed. Sandwiched between them, she began to spiral up toward the brass ring.

The men grunted and growled while she panted between them. Her ass jiggled and swayed with the rocking motion the men instilled. The steady slap of skin on skin filled the room.

Travis's hand slid to grip her waist, his fingers digging into her skin as he began to thrust with abandon into her body. Garron's hands remained at her breasts, pulling and tugging on her nipples even as his speed also increased.

Closing her eyes, Misty let go, giving everything over to the moment. Then it hit her in an all-encompassing wave that drove her where she'd never gone before. She cried out, part in pleasure, part in pain. Garron's name passed over her lips in a plea, for what she wasn't sure. Her body convulsed around the men's cocks with bone-splintering intensity, until she was sure she'd faint from the sensations bombarding her.

"That's it, baby," Garron growled on as he came, furthering her own orgasm beyond anything she'd experienced. Travis quickly followed, his cry muffled by the kiss he took even as he gave. Exhausted and more sated than she'd ever been in her life, Misty simply collapsed against the pillow.

Garron was the first to pull away, ever so gently easing himself out of her

abused ass. Travis soon followed, and for a moment, Misty felt uncomfortably empty. It was a feeling she'd have to analyze later, when she'd recovered enough from this encounter to have some sort of coherent thought. Right now, it was too much effort to think. Hell, it was almost too much effort to draw her next breath.

Several long moments passed, during which she heard the men moving around her. The sound of water running came from the direction of the playroom's private bathroom, but she couldn't force herself to open her eyes to see what they were up to. She jumped, letting loose a tiny squeal when a warm cloth touched her tender bottom.

"Shhh, pet. It's just me. Now lie still and let me tend to you."

Stunned by his open act of tenderness, she opened her eyes to see Travis standing next to the bed, glass in hand. "When he's through, I thought you might like a cool drink of water."

Words failed her as she lay staring at the men. Their impromptu thoughtfulness threw her for a loop. Once Garron finished, he hooked his hands beneath her arms and hauled her farther up the bed to the pillows Travis had plumped. He covered her with the blanket and dropped a single kiss on her forehead.

"You did wonderfully. Sleep now, pet."

Chapter Five

Enjoying the last of what summer had to offer, Misty wandered along the path through Audrey's garden. Between being last night's entertainment, including Garron's statement about having a talk, which as of yet hadn't happened, and today finding a letter from her mother in the mail, her head was spinning.

There wasn't any doubt in her mind that she belonged at Rosewood with Garron, yet the idea of having other men touch her no longer held the appeal it once did, except for Travis. There was something about the man, something sweet and giving that tended to enrich the experience as a whole. An added asset was, when Travis was there, it seemed Garron's reactions held more meaning.

From what she could tell, his gaze never left her, boring into her like a warm ray of sun as she provided the ultimate in pleasure to his friends. Even with Chloe standing naked and bound in the middle of the room, all eyes had been focused on Misty instead. She could remember when that kind of attention would have made her feel like a queen. Not now. Now all she needed was Garron to look at her to gain that feeling.

There was a certain amount of significance in that realization, but what exactly did it mean? Fearful of the answer she might find, she instead turned her attention back to the flowers and tried to let go of her jumbled emotions.

A whimper pulled Misty from her thoughts, and she turned her attention to the potting shed standing toward the back of the garden. She spotted the mass of black fur inching out from behind the back corner of the building almost immediately. Two wide black eyes filled with wariness and hope

looked up at her.

She inched closer, careful not to frighten the pup. "It's okay, baby. I won't hurt you." She lowered to her knees and slowly held out her hand, allowing the scared puppy to sniff her fingers. After a few intense minutes of coercion, the puppy finally edged close enough for her to scoop him into her arms.

He immediately buried his nose against her neck and whimpered.

Her already fractured heart broke just a little more, allowing the floodgates of love to spill out. "Where's your mommy?"

She scanned the area, searching around the shed and along the fence looking for any signs of the mother or more puppies. Finding neither, she glanced down at the pup in her arms. "I can't very well leave you out here to fend for yourself. I only hope Garron won't mind having a dog around."

Decision made, she turned and headed back to the house while sheltering the dog from the winds beginning to blow. Even if Garron wouldn't allow her to keep the pup, she refused to leave it outside alone to weather the storm now moving in.

"Audrey," Misty called as she opened the kitchen door. "Audrey, are you around?"

Audrey appeared in the doorway leading to the laundry room. "Yes, Misty?"

Misty held up the pup. "Look what I found."

"Oh my." Audrey's eyes widened. "He's so sweet. Where did he come from?"

"He was hiding in the back of the gardens, behind the potting shed. Audrey, look at him. He's starving to death."

"I can fix that." Audrey turned and headed for the refrigerator. After a couple of minutes of digging, she emerged with a sealed container. "This is chicken from last night. Garron hates leftovers, but I cannot stand to throw good food away, so I usually eat it. I will shred it up and warm it for..." She paused. "What are we going to call him?"

Misty shrugged. "I don't know." She cast a quick glance toward the door. "Do you think Garron will allow us to keep the pup?"

Audrey shook her head. "Garron has never owned a pet in the five years I have been here. I do not think he likes animals."

Misty held the tiny puppy out for inspection. "But he's all alone and hungry. Surely Garron wouldn't be so cruel as to turn him out."

Audrey shredded the chicken onto a paper plate and popped it into the microwave. "Garron is not cruel, but he is not a pushover either. He will probably take the pup to the pound."

Misty's eyes went wide as the horror of Audrey's words sank in. "They'll kill him."

With a sullen look, Audrey turned back and placed the plate on the floor. "I know, but at least it is painless. Starving to death in the wild would be a horrible way to die."

As Misty sat him on the floor, the pup wiggled, then raced to the plate of food, where he greedily tore into the chicken. "But he's so sweet. Maybe we can find a home for him before Garron finds out he's here."

Audrey shook her head. "Are you crazy? We cannot keep the dog hidden from Garron. Do you know what our punishments would be if he found out?"

"I'm willing to risk it, if it means saving this poor baby's life."

"Oh you are, are you?" Garron's deep tenor filled the room and sent goose bumps shimmying up Misty's arms.

She exchanged a panicked glance with Audrey, then, steeling her nerves, turned to face Garron. If she backed down now, she'd look like a coward. No way would she live with that designation hanging over her head. "I would," she repeated, straightening her shoulders.

"Audrey." Garron stared at Misty as he spoke. "Finish feeding the pup, then secure him in the mudroom. Make sure he has a warm, soft place to sleep and that there are newspapers on the floor for him to use, since I doubt he's housebroken."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll decide what to do with the dog later. Right now Misty needs a reminder on who is in charge around here. Misty, take yourself upstairs, strip, and wait for me."

"Yes, sir," she replied, then turned and walked out of the kitchen. Whatever punishment he delivered would be well warranted, considering she was willing to openly defy his rules. She would accept her sentence without argument or tears. She had a good ride going here and to so willingly risk it all for a dog seemed stupid. It was just a dog, after all.

Misty shook her head as she entered the playroom. No, that was wrong. For whatever reason, it wasn't just a dog to her. The pup had managed to snag her heart in a matter of seconds.

She didn't have to wait long before Garron entered the room. The large wooden door closed behind him with a resounding thud . There would be no escaping her punishment, not that she really wanted to anyway. With Garron's punishment always came a reward, and that reward was well

worth whatever she'd have to endure.

He stalked toward her, the anger evident in his eyes. "Why did you think it would be necessary to hide the puppy from me?"

"Au-Audrey said you wouldn't allow us to keep it, and that you'd probably take it to the pound. With him in need of extra care, I was afraid they'd want to put him down."

"And you readily accepted what Audrey said as the truth?"

When she didn't answer right away, he asked again. "Well?"

"I...um... Yes, I suppose I did."

"Why?"

"Because she's been here for five years, and I've only been here five months."

"So you assumed she knew me, right?"

"Yes."

"What do you think I would have said, if you'd come to me with him?"

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

"Yes, you do, Misty. What would I have said?"

"You would have let us keep him until we could find him a good home."

"And why do you think I would have agreed to let the dog stay?"

"Because you're not as cold and heartless as Audrey believes you to be."

"That's right, pet. It's true that Audrey has been here much longer, but her time here doesn't mean she knows me. There's something about Audrey that you need to understand. Because of her previous dominant, she's been conditioned to be fearful of all men. And as much as I've tried to erase that fear, she's still blind to the man I truly am."

He lifted a hand and stroked a knuckle along her cheek. "You're not afraid to speak your mind, or even openly defy me if you believe the cause is just. You'll face the consequences for your actions with your head held high. Yet you can submit willingly to me without fear, when the moment calls for it. That's what sets you apart from both Audrey and Chloe."

"May I ask a question, Master?"

"You may."

"If Audrey doesn't measure up as a submissive, why do you keep her?"

"Because she's a fantastic cook, she keeps a meticulous house, she's good at following orders, and most importantly, she wants to stay. The difference between you and Audrey is simple. Audrey may excel at following orders, but you, pet"—he curled a finger beneath Misty's chin and lifted her face so she looked at him—"you connect with me on an entirely different level. Intellectually, you challenge me. Your need to please me goes beyond your own pleasure, though deep down I believe you greatly enjoy the feeling of giving to others, not to mention that you're fantastic in bed. Plus, you can anticipate my needs before even I know what they are. You, Misty, touch me where no woman has ever touched me before."

She wasn't quite sure what to say in response. Was he simply saying that she was excellent at her job, or did it mean something more? If she were to guess, she'd say it was more, but how much and in what fashion? He wasn't exactly declaring his love for her, but at the same time, he was saying something along those lines, wasn't he?"

"However, pet, I cannot allow you to openly defy me in front of the other girls without reprisal." He turned and walked to the wall, where he removed a flat paddle, then crossed back over and took a seat on the bench. "Bend over my lap, and put your hands on the floor."

His first hit was hard and made her jerk in surprise. Unlike so many of the other times she'd received punishments from him, this time he didn't soothe the sting with a cool touch of his hand but instead delivered a second blow to the same area. The biting sting was nearly more than she could take, yet even as she sat on the brink of too much, her pussy clenched emptily, begging for yet another blow that would deliver that familiar tingle of arousal to her core.

Another and yet another blow landed on her backside until she was sure he'd make her bleed. He turned his attention to the other cheek, pinkening it to match the first.

On the edge of tears, Misty gasped for air as she tried to keep hold of her control. Her ass burned as if someone had set her on fire. Yet her pussy flooded with cream, in anticipation of accepting his thick cock.

"I think that will do," he finally said, blessedly ending her torture. "Kneel in front of me."

Careful to ease her battered bottom down against her heels, Misty knelt in front of Garron and stared up at him, awaiting the next stage of her punishment. She clung to the hope that he wouldn't turn the dog out, while at the same time fighting to ignore her arousal.

"I have a couple of questions, and I want you to answer them honestly. First, why were you willing to risk everything for that scrawny dog?"

"I"—she shook her head—"I don't know exactly. There was just something about him that, from the moment I picked him up, I felt a connection. It

was almost as if I was meant to find and protect him. He's so tiny and helpless. He needed me. I haven't had anyone need me since I..." Realizing what she was about to say, Misty bit her lip and let her gaze fall away from his.

"Go on, pet. Since you what?"

Knowing she'd gone too far to wiggle her way out of it, Misty conceded defeat. "Since I was little, when I took care of my baby brother." She hadn't realized until that moment how much she missed having someone to love and who would love her back. When her brother had been lost to the system and then later, well, she thought she'd been able to lock away the part of her who cared about others. Apparently, she'd been wrong.

"Misty, look at me."

She raised her gaze to meet his.

"Do you want to keep the pup?"

The sudden pain in her heart, one greater than any physical punishment he could inflict, forced a sob to spill from her lips. Why the dog meant so much to her, she might never truly know. She only knew he did. Unable to speak, for fear of dissolving into a blubbering mass in front of Garron, she nodded.

"Then you may keep him."

She couldn't believe her ears. "I can?" she whispered, almost afraid to say the words at all, for fear she'd heard him wrong.

His lips tipped up into a slow smile. "Yes, you can. However, he will come with conditions. You will be responsible for his actions. If he does something wrong, you'll be punished. You will also be in charge of housebreaking him. If you can recruit the girls to help you, fine. Ultimately, he's still your responsibility, so when he screws up, you pay the price.

Agreed?"

Dumbfounded, Misty nodded as unchecked tears streamed down her cheeks. Could Garron possibly understand just how much this gesture meant to her? "Yes," she finally managed to murmur.

"What?"

"Yes, Sir. Thank you so very much."

"You're welcome, pet. Now"—he stood and unzipped his pants—"why don't you show me how grateful you are?"

Chapter Six

Misty sat in the passenger seat of Garron's car, staring aimlessly out the window into the darkness beyond while she contemplated how the evening had passed. Every time she thought she had a good grip on what was expected from her, Garron would throw something at her completely unexpected, thus knocking her off balance once again.

Tonight represented yet another example of that trend. He'd told her it was a business dinner, yet she hadn't actually expected it to be just that. Never having stepped foot into a five-star restaurant, she'd been more than a little overwhelmed by the decor and formality of it all. The entire situation reminded her of Julia Roberts's character in *Pretty Woman* when she went to dinner with Richard Gere and promptly flicked the snail shell with her fork. Thankfully, Misty hadn't embarrassed herself in that—or any other—manner.

"Penny for your thoughts." Garron's voice cut through her thoughts, pulling her attention back inside the vehicle.

She smiled as she glanced over at him. "I was just thinking that every time I think I know what's expected of me, you go and change the rules."

He cupped her knee and squeezed, sending a warm ripple of pleasure racing directly to her core. "You did well tonight."

Studiously ignoring the way her body heated under his touch, she cleared her throat. "Thank you, but I have to admit I felt totally out of my element. I mean, here I am sitting among all these high-powered men discussing mergers and stocks and not really understanding any of it."

"You're only job tonight was to sit there and look beautiful, and you, my dear, excelled in that task." She should have been offended by his comment, since it meant her entire existence tonight had been about him showing her off as his trophy, yet wasn't it her job to be used as he saw fit? And not that she'd ever admit it to him, but she'd actually come to enjoy her position with him.

Being his submissive wasn't nearly as difficult as she'd expected it to be, at least it wasn't once she'd accepted that she actually enjoyed the punishments as much as she enjoyed the sex. Hell, that had been a major admission on her part, especially knowing her past. Still, she wasn't her mother, and Garron wasn't just some guy.

The arrangement they had was certainly unconventional. Some might even think it was flat-out wrong, but it worked for them, and that was all that mattered. In fact, she was hoping he'd reward her for her good behavior when they got home.

Hoping to curb her growing libido, she decided it was time to change the subject. "Can I ask you something?"

"Absolutely."

"Are you really worth billions of dollars?"

His lips tipped into a grin. "Actually, Worthington Industries is worth billions of dollars. I'm only worth a few million."

She nearly choked on that admission, finally shaking her head in disbelief. "I'm servicing a millionaire. Well, that's not something every girl can say she's done."

He chuckled. "That's one way to look at it."

She tipped her head to the side, studying him with a critical eye. "You don't act like a millionaire."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, for one, you tend to drive yourself places instead of being driven."

He nodded. "Point taken, but the explanation is pretty simple. While I have a driver on staff, I enjoy the feel of being behind the wheel."

"I half expected you to say something like it keeps you in touch with us regular people."

His gaze drifted from the road to her and held there for several seconds, once again heating her to her toes. "I've never been a regular person, Misty."

At least he wasn't some pompous ass who tried to pass himself off as knowing what went on in the "real world."

"No, growing up rich, I don't suppose you have."

An awkward silence filled the air between them as she considered his status. While she had to admit money had been a big factor in her decision to take the position, her situation was as different from his as night and day. Growing up poor, her family needed money, worried over it. She was sure he hadn't wanted for anything. Did being raised with money make him crave the wealth? What had growing up a Worthington been like? "Was it lonely?" she finally asked, cringing at the question as soon as it cleared her lips. Now why had she gone and asked something like that?

"Was what lonely?"

Well, she'd already thrown the question out, and there was no going back now. "Growing up a single child of rich parents. Wasn't it a bit lonely not

having a sibling to play with? Were you allowed to have friends like regular kids?”

“I did have some friends, but they were only children of people my parents were friends with.”

“I'm guessing you didn't get to go to the movies with those friends or go outside and play football in the snow with your friends, huh?”

He shook his head. “I had expectations placed on me before I was even born. As the only son of Andre Worthington, I spent my time learning how to become a successful businessman. Such frivolous things such as sports, except for golf, were off-limits. Mother said she couldn't stand the idea of me getting injured playing some mindless game.”

“I feel sorry for you.”

He pulled into the driveway, pushed the button for the automatic garage door, and waited, turning his attention to her while the door opened. “Why do you say that?”

“Because you never got to experience life as a normal kid, to know what it was like to go camping and stay up all night telling ghost stories and eating s'mores until you wanted to puke. Or just go outside and play a game with the local kids.”

He eased the car into the garage, put it in park, and shut off the engine. “No offense, honey, but considering the upbringing you had, I think I had the better end of the deal.”

His words stung, and she struggled to shrug off the comment. “I'll be the first to admit that my life was far from perfect, but not every average child grows up with a junkie or alcoholic as a parent.”

“True, but not every child that grows up with money is some love-deprived

kid who doesn't know what the 'real world' is like either."

"I never said your parents didn't love you, Garron."

He sucked in a breath, obviously trying to keep his temper under control. "I know, sweetheart. I'm sorry for snapping at you. I just hate it when people try to stereotype me. My mother and father had no problem showering me with their affections, even if they did prevent me from doing some things you'd deem normal."

"I'm sorry. It was wrong of me to assume things about you."

"Yes, it was, but I did a little assuming of my own, so I guess we're even." He kissed her softly. "Ready to call it a night?"

Knowing she'd just blown her chance for any satisfaction, and realizing just how tired she really was, Misty nodded. "I think so."

As soon as they opened the door into the mudroom, she could hear the noise and cringed. Garron might have allowed her to keep the dog, but that didn't mean he was happy about it. The barking grew louder as they entered the kitchen. Misty glanced at Garron and winced when she saw his scowl. "I'll get him to quiet down," she offered as she stripped out of her heels, then holding them in one hand, rushed toward the stairs. What in the world could be wrong with the pup?

She raced up the hallway, only to come skidding to a stop when Chloe stepped in front of her path. "It's about damn time you got home," she snarled. "That mutt of yours has been barking for over an hour now."

Misty glanced from Chloe to her closed bedroom door and back. "Where's Audrey? She was supposed to be keeping an eye on him for me."

"Audrey went to some botany lecture at the college." Her snarl tipped into a grin. "Guess you got your wires crossed, which means you're in deep shit,

huh?" She turned and walked into her room without looking back.

There were times, Misty thought as she drew in a deep, calming breath, when she really didn't like Chloe at all. The woman was more than a little eager to see Misty on the receiving end of Garron's punishments. Hopefully, if she could find out what was wrong with the dog, she could avoid one tonight.

The closer she got to her room, the louder and more urgent the barking sounded. She opened the door, expecting to find Bandit secure in his crate. Instead, the pup stood at the end of her bed, paws set as he growled and snarled at something beneath the frame.

"Bandit!" She dropped her shoes in the chair next to the door and hurried over to the pup. "What in the world is wrong with you?"

The pup squirmed in her arms and continued growling as she lifted him to her chest. "Bandit, stop."

Doing her best to soothe the pup, Misty glanced back at the open door. If she didn't get the dog to quiet down, Garron would be up here in a minute to no doubt punish her for Bandit's misbehavior. Before she could get him under control, the dog squirmed out of her arms and once again took up residence at the end of the bed.

What in the hell is under that bed? For a second time, she returned to the dog, only this time instead of picking up the pup, she knelt down to peer beneath the bed. Two beady eyes met her gaze only seconds before the hissing sound registered in her ears.

Fear froze her in place as she watched the agitated snake continue to coil. Her brain told her to run away, but her legs refused to follow orders. Before she had time to think, the snake lashed out. At the last second, a mass of dark fur invaded her vision, followed by a high-pitched yelp. The sound pulled Misty from her stupor. In a heartbeat, she grabbed the dog and

scrambled up onto the bed.

“What's going on in here?”

* * * * *

Garron stood in the doorway, still agitated about their conversation in the car and now fuming about the incessant barking. He knew he shouldn't have let her keep that damn dog, but she'd caught him in a moment of weakness. Unfortunately for her, he wasn't feeling generous any longer. He took a step into the room only to see her shake her head at him. The panicked look on her face caused adrenaline to chase away the anger he'd felt mere seconds ago. “Stop, don't come in here,” she begged, holding one hand out in front of her while she cradled the dog with the other.

He felt his frown deepen along with his concern. “It's my house, Misty. I can go wherever the hell I want.” He took another step forward.

“No, you don't understand. Please, Garron, wait.”

The terror in her voice gripped him like a vise. Something was terribly wrong with this situation. “Why? What's going on? Why are you on the bed, and why do you look so petrified?”

“There's a snake under the bed.”

Her words blindsided him, and he raised a brow, knowing he couldn't have possibly heard her correctly. “A what?”

“A snake,” she replied in shaky voice. “It just bit Bandit.”

There was a snake loose? In his house? “You're sure it was a snake?”

She nodded.

“Do you know what kind?”

Glancing down at Bandit, she shook her head. “No, I don't, but I hope it's not poisonous. God, Garron, what are we going to do?”

She was visibly shaken, and rightly so, but her fear made his own worse, and he had to fight to keep a grip on the situation. He was in charge. She was relying on him. Now wasn't the time to fall apart. But what if whatever is under that bed went after her? Would he be able to stop its attack in time? No! He gave his thoughts a mental shake. He wouldn't allow negativity to cloud his judgment.

He pulled his cell phone from his belt loop. “We're not going to panic. Stay on the bed and keep hold of the dog. I'm calling for help.”

Twenty minutes later, Misty still sat at the head of the bed with the dog, now quiet but keenly aware of the people in the room, watching while animal-control experts and Garron's chief of security worked to capture the snake. Chloe stood in the hallway behind Garron, her eyes still wide with horror while Garron's attention continually shifted from Misty to the men and back. Several times while they waited, he'd felt the need to talk to her from the doorway, uttering words of encouragement and reassurance, though he wasn't sure if they were more for her or himself. He'd felt like a coward leaving her in such a dangerous situation, but common sense had kept him rooted in place. It wouldn't have done either of them any good if he'd raced into the room all gung ho and gotten bit, especially if the snake was poisonous.

Finally, after several intense minutes of waiting, the angry snake was pulled from under the bed and dropped into a thick canvas bag.

Immediately, Garron raced into the room and gathered Misty against him. Now that the worst was over, words escaped him as he tried to think of something to say. She shook against him, as if she'd spent too long outside in the cold, but he knew it was her system shedding the fear it had held

tight during the ordeal.

His own fear still held a tight grip on his heart as he turned his head to look at the men talking. Questions bumped against each other in his mind, all begging for answers. What if the snake had been venomous? What if it had bitten Misty instead of the dog? The dog! "What kind of snake was it?" he asked, still holding her tight to him.

"At first we thought it was a cottonmouth moccasin, but after getting a good look at it, we've determined it to be nothing more than a black racer," one of the two control officers replied.

"Venomous?"

The man shook his head. "Nah, just really big and scary to someone who doesn't know the difference."

Misty pulled away from Garron and looked up at him. "It was going to bite me, and Bandit stepped in its way. He got bit protecting me."

Garron's opinion of the dog rose considerably with that revelation. He pulled the dog from her arms and inspected its paw. "It looks as though I underestimated you, little guy."

The pup whimpered, then tentatively licked Garron's face, making him smile. "We'll get him checked out just to make sure he's okay." He handed the dog back to Misty, then turned once again to face the men, his control and anger returning. "I want to know how a snake not only ended up in my house but curled under Misty's bed."

The head of Garron's security team visibly paled. "Yes, sir. We'll start an investigation straightaway and get you the answers you're looking for."

Two hours later, Garron lay in his bed, staring through the dark at the ceiling. Audrey had assured him she'd checked on the pup before she'd left for class, and he was sleeping in his cage. She hadn't seen any signs of a snake. Chloe had admitted that, not caring for Misty, she'd ignored the dog's barking, choosing instead to wait for Misty to get in trouble when they arrived home.

Her admission had pissed Garron off even more, but he was forced to admit that if she had checked on the dog, she could have also been bit. His security team had done a complete sweep of both Misty's room and the entire house and found nothing out of order. How the snake had made it under Misty's bed would for now remain a mystery.

What if the snake had been venomous? He sighed and threw an arm over his eyes, blocking his view. What if it had bitten Misty before he'd been able to help her? The grip on his heart tightened at the thought of losing her, bothering him even more.

When his parents had been killed, he'd grieved long and hard over the loss. Though he'd been an adult at the time, he'd also suddenly found himself with no one to rely on, no one to help him through his pain. A considerable amount of time passed before he'd even managed to function normally again, but his heart had never really recovered, until now.

He let out a sigh and turned onto his side as he let that thought sink in. Was he really falling for the sable-haired beauty? He shook his head. No, it was simply the drama of the situation causing his emotions to run hot. Once he'd calmed down, he'd realize that even Misty couldn't penetrate the wall he'd erected. He simply couldn't risk feeling that kind of pain again.

Garron's gut clenched as he pulled his arm away and gazed at the empty pillow next to him. He'd offered to let Misty stay in his room, only to have her turn him down. He would have ordered her, except for her explanation.

"If I don't sleep in my own room tonight and prove to myself that it's safe,

I'll never want to stay in here again. Please try and understand that it's something I need to do."

If nothing else, he had to honor her wishes. She had a strong constitution, and he respected that about her. If it had been Caroline or Chloe facing that snake, they both would have wanted to move into a different room. Still, the issue of how the snake made it into the house in the first place gnawed at him. No way could everything that had happened to her over the past few months be nothing more than a series of eerie coincidences. Of course, if it wasn't happenstance, it had to be intentional. Was it possible that somebody was out to harm her?

As much as that thought made him sick to his stomach, he could no longer ignore it either. Only who would want to cause Misty, his Misty , harm? His fingers curled into a fist. Whoever it was better hope he didn't get his hands on them.

Chapter Seven

“So where is this place we're going?”

Garron shot her a brief glance before shifting his gaze back to the road. “Exhilaration is a fetish club, much like the one you visited with Travis before you signed with me. Only this one is exclusive, erotic, and very pricey. Twice a year, they throw parties like the one we're going to tonight.”

“How...? Um, well, what I'm wondering is...” She bit her lip as she tried to form a coherent sentence.

He smiled. “Relax, pet. No one is allowed to touch you in any way without my permission, and just like at home, you have the right to say no.”

“What happens if I choose to say no to something?”

“Other than disappointing me, nothing.”

Yeah, no pressure there! Misty turned her head and gazed out the window of the sports car and watched the telephone poles pass by, the lights above growing bright and dark with the movement of the car.

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Absolutely.”

“How did you figure out that you liked this kind of lifestyle?”

Garron leveled a long, intimidating look at her while he waited for a red

light to change, and for a split second she almost regretted asking the question. "I have my parents to thank."

"Your parents?" She shook her head. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"It's quite simple, really. While I spent most of the year at boarding schools, I would come home during the summer. My parents like to vacation with another couple every July and would be gone for a week. Since it was adults only, I stayed behind with the cook and the butler. Every night after dinner, they would head off to the media room to watch a movie or into one of their bedrooms to play cards, so I was left to my own devices.

"Anyway, one summer when I was about sixteen, I discovered that my parents had left the basement door unlocked, so when nobody was looking, I headed downstairs. What I found was a dungeon full of sex toys and a small media area complete with fetish movies."

"You must have been horrified."

"I have to admit that the idea of my parents partaking in what I saw on the television screen was a bit disturbing, but on a baser level, I found it fascinating and so damn erotic, I just knew I had to try it. As you can imagine, I spent much of that week hidden away, whacking off to those movies."

"What happened when your parents came home?"

"Nothing. I never said a word, and after they died in the plane crash when I was twenty-two, I disassembled the room and turned the basement into storage. I could never use that room for my own purposes, knowing what had taken place down there. So I created my own room on the top floor instead."

"Have you ever had a normal relationship?"

"I had a few back in high school and college, but I always gravitated toward the kinky. Some girls liked it a little rough and enjoyed a good spanking session, but none of them really submitted very well. When I decided I wanted to get serious about the lifestyle, I figured it was best to hire women to fulfill my desires. If they were my employees, there would always be a bit of that boss/employee relationship evident that would help to keep them in their role."

"And that's worked for you?"

"Up until you came along."

Her gaze darted to his face as his words rattled around inside her head like a pinball machine. What exactly had he meant by that comment? Did she dare hope that his feelings for her might be more than that of a boss/employee relationship?

He pulled into the parking lot and put the car in park, leaving her no more time to ponder his words. "You ready, pet?"

"As I'll ever be."

Once inside, Garron stripped her of the cape he'd instructed her to wear, leaving Misty revealed to the entire crowd. Vulnerable was not a feeling she liked much, but with her mons, ass, and tits on display for all to see, she couldn't help but be slightly self-conscious. This wasn't like the strip club, where she'd been behind the bar, in charge of the situation. No, here she would be expected to act like a good submissive and do whatever Garron willed of her. He reached into the backseat, retrieved the god-awful leash she despised so much, and clipped it in place.

Pushing away that all-too-familiar feeling of shame she felt whenever she wore the collar and leash, she squared her shoulders, thrusting her ample C-cups forward. By God, she would be the best, most beautiful submissive

here tonight, and she damn well wasn't going to let Garron down.

Garron tugged on her leash, forcing her to close the distance until she was only a step behind him. "I know you're trying to show your respect, pet, but I don't want someone to accidentally pull your lead out of my hands. With this many people here, it would be easy to get lost in the crowd. For you, that could be a bad deal."

She shivered at his words. Just what would some stranger do to her if she and Garron were separated? Would that person be willing to adhere to her safe word or even care that she belonged to another? Before she had time to ponder on the eerie images his words conjured, Garron stopped and took up a conversation with a gorgeous redhead.

The stirring of something dark and brutal burrowed deep into her stomach and threatened to grow ugly as she regarded the woman with a critical eye. Just who was this auburn beauty to Garron?

"Misty, this is my good friend Sorcha."

Barely remembering her role, Misty bowed her head. "Good to meet you, madam."

Sorcha's gaze washed over Misty, taking in all of her. "Gorgeous, Garron. You've really outdone yourself this time. Is she as obedient as she is beautiful?"

"She is. Would you like a demonstration?"

"Please."

Garron tugged on Misty's leash, and the three of them strode toward the back of the building, entering another room. Somewhat secluded from the rest of the building, this area held all the devices of bondage and play.

Without missing a step, he led Misty into a circle where a steel bar hung from chains hooked to the ceiling. At each end of the steel hung leather cuffs. Anticipating what Garron wanted, Misty stepped into the circle beneath the bar and lifted her hands above her head. He smiled at Sorcha, then turned to quickly secure Misty inside the cuffs and remove her leash before moving to a close-by table to set down the leash and choose his implement. She planted her feet as firmly on the ground as she could wearing four-inch heels, then drew in several centering breaths while she waited. She didn't have to wait long, and she nearly cried out when the cat-o'-nine-tails made contact with her lower back. Biting her tongue to prevent a sound from escaping, she forced down the squeal, just in time to endure the second strike. She fought to keep still and not evade the blows. Garron was proving a point with her, and Misty was damn well going to make him proud. Never before had he given her more than she could handle or hurt her in any lasting way. She trusted this time would be no different.

Holding her head high, Misty stared out over the small crowd of people who'd gathered to watch. Her lips drew into a tight line, and she kept her breathing steady and deep, even as the cattail struck her again and again.

Then, as abruptly as the punishment began, it stopped. Garron reached up and unhooked her wrists from their restraints. "You did spectacularly," he whispered before clipping the lead back on her collar.

Glowing with the confidence of a queen, Misty flipped her long black ponytail back and followed Garron back to where Sorcha stood.

"Impressive, Garron. You've trained her well, but tell me, does she eat pussy?"

Misty's heart jumped at the other woman's question. In all the time she'd been with Garron, she'd only provided pleasure to men. Not only was she unsure if she would enjoy going down on another woman, but she wasn't all that sure how.

Garron shook his head. "I've never included any of my female friends in our play. However"—he paused and quirked a brow at Misty—"it would be a good experience for her to learn. What do you say, Misty? Are you up for a little experimenting?"

While he may have asked her the question, Misty knew she truly had only one answer she could give. Garron was a big fan of honesty, so at the very least, while he'd expect her to say yes, she knew she could at least express her concerns without fear of reprisal. "Master, of course I will do whatever you wish; however, I feel I must express my concern."

Garron knit his brow. "Go on?"

"Well, Sir, while I am here to please you, I fear that my lack of experience will cause me to fall short, and Miss Sorcha will be less than pleased with my performance."

With a thumb and forefinger, Garron rubbed his chin in consideration. "Yes. I see where you have reason to be concerned."

Misty nearly let out a relieved breath until he spoke again. "Misty, my pet, I fear I have failed to properly train you, and that must be rectified straightaway." He turned to Sorcha. "My pet is woefully inexperienced when it comes to women. I wonder if you, being the good friend you are, might be willing to help me rectify that problem?"

Oh God! He meant for her to have sex with another woman. Misty bit down on her lip and prayed the other woman would say no.

Sorcha looked from Misty to Garron and back, a slow smile enveloping her features. "Why, Garron, I would be happy to help." She pulled a key from her pocket. "I've secured a room upstairs for the night. Why don't we head up there now and get started?"

Ignoring the leash in Garron's hand, Sorcha snagged the chain hanging

from Misty's nipple clamps. "Follow me, dear, and I'll show you how to properly lick pussy."

Hungry piranhas nibbled at Misty's insides as she walked behind Sorchia and Garron to the elevators. They stepped into the elevator, her stomach plummeting as the carriage began to move. She really wasn't all that interested in learning how to pleasure a woman, but disappointing Garron wasn't an option.

His warm breath wafted across her neck. "I know you're nervous, pet. There's no need to be. I will not only be there with you the entire time, just like back at Rosewood...I'll show you what you need to know."

Before she could think of a reply, the elevator doors opened, and they ambled their way down the hall, finally stopping in front of Sorchia's rented room.

She could do this. As long as Garron was with her, she could do anything.

Once inside, Sorchia made quick work of her clothing before sinking into the nearest chair and promptly spreading her thighs, hanging a leg over each chair arm. Garron knelt before Sorchia and, using the lead still attached to Misty's collar, tugged her down to her knees. "Now pay attention, my pet, and I will show you the proper way to make a woman come."

Garron turned his attention to Sorchia and in one motion stroked his tongue from back to front through her folds. The hiss that escaped between Sorchia's teeth led Misty to believe she liked what Garron was doing.

"Notice how I started from the back of the pussy and stroked through the folds, up and over her clit?"

Misty nodded, even as he spoke she grew wetter with each word. How could she possibly be getting turned on at the idea of being with another

woman? Then it dawned on her. It wasn't being with Sorchia that excited Misty. It was knowing that being with Sorchia would please and excite Garron. The simple fact was, she'd do anything to make him proud of her.

"Now your turn, baby. That's right, just scoot in between her legs and do what I did." Garron guided Misty's hands up, placing one on the tender flesh at the apex of Sorchia's thighs.

Her nostrils filled with the heady scent of desire. In an attempt to mimic what he had done, Misty dragged her tongue over the other woman's cunt, up through her folds, and over the tiny, quivering nub.

"Again," Sorchia ordered.

Once again Misty started at the back, near Sorchia's quivering pucker, and stroked her tongue upward.

"Now, take two fingers, wet them in your mouth, and spear her center."

Misty did what Garron instructed. Sorchia moaned, and her eyelids closed. "Good. Very good, my pet. Stroke her as if your fingers were a penis and, using your tongue, lick across her bud."

Misty followed his instruction and marveled in the wonderfully foreign feeling of the other woman's silky walls gripping against her intrusion. So this was what Garron felt when he played between her thighs. The woman's clit, now peeking out from under its hood, had turned a marvelous shade of crimson, as had her nether lips. Sorchia's entire region was now slicked in her own cream, yet the tissue continued to expand, filling with blood much the same way Misty had seen Garron's cock engorge.

"That's it," Sorchia panted, her hips undulating in the chair while she worked to meet Misty's fingers thrust for thrust. "Oh fuck, I'm going to come."

"Finish her off, pet," Garron whispered in Misty's ear. "Lean forward and suck her clit."

The moment Misty's tongue came in contact with the quivering bud, Sorcha stiffened and let out a wail. Her sex throbbed against Misty's tongue, sending pulses of need through her own oversensitive body. God, how she wanted Garron to take her and end her suffering.

When the pulsing finally stopped, Misty sat back on her heels and looked up at Garron. His smile was wide as he stroked his cock. "That was perfect, pet. Now climb onto the bed onto all fours to receive your reward."

Misty scrambled up onto the covers, spread her legs, and nearly cried out her thank-you when Garron finally claimed her. He snagged her hair, threading it through his fingers until the biting sting forced her to lift her head. Yes! was all she could think as he rode her hard, slamming his entire length deep into her willing core. Her entire body seized as her climax struck like thunder during a summer storm. Pleasure abound, Garron's command managed to permeate the orgasm-induced haze. On the last ebb and flow of her release, she pulled away, then turned to face him.

For a second time, his hands threaded through her hair and held there as she took his cock between her parted lips, swallowing not only her moan of pleasure but the evidence of his release.

Chapter Eight

Misty walked through the door at Rosewood with her head held high. Over and over on the way home, Garron had told her how proud he was of her performance tonight. That she'd by far been the best submissive he'd ever taken to the club. Take that, Chloe!

She stopped outside her bedroom door and turned into his touch. "Thank you for taking me with you tonight."

"You're welcome, Misty." He leaned down to place a kiss on her forehead. "Get some sleep. You've certainly earned it."

"Thank you. Good night, Garron."

"Good night, sweetheart."

Misty watched Garron disappear into his master suite before she opened the door to her own room and entered. While she hadn't necessarily enjoyed her encounter with Sorcha tonight, she was thankful for the experience and damn proud of herself for going through with it. And she also knew that if it pleased Garron, she would do it again.

Intent on dropping into bed, she stripped off her shoes, turned, and stopped in her tracks at the sight of Bandit's empty cage. "Bandit?" She raced to the cage and stared in disbelief down at the open door. Oh God! The pup was loose. Misty dropped to her knees and began searching under furniture. "Bandit! Come out, baby." She whistled and called to the dog as she made a methodic scan of the room. He wasn't there.

A giant shiver raced up her spine when she considered where the pup might be. Garron was furious the first time the dog had gotten loose and chewed his favorite Italian loafers. She could only hope Audrey had taken the dog into her room for company. Otherwise Misty would be a goner.

Misty flung open her bedroom door and rushed down the hallway toward Audrey's room. She felt bad disturbing her friend this late, but fear for Bandit's well-being pushed her forward. If Audrey did have the dog, Misty would make up the disturbance to her.

She knocked lightly, in hopes of not disturbing Garron, whose room was a few short feet away. "Audrey, it's Misty. Can I come in?"

A muffled "yes" filtered through the door.

Misty opened the door. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but is Bandit with you?"

Audrey's eyes widened. "No. I took him out about two hours ago to do his business. Then I put him back in his crate and came to my room."

Misty's heart lodged in her throat. "The crate is empty, and he's nowhere in my room. Are you sure you got the door on the crate closed all the way?"

Audrey swung her legs off the bed and stood. Brows knit and lips pulled tight with worry, she shook her head. "Even if I had not, I know I closed your door. There is no way he could leave your room."

Her heart inched higher in her throat, threatening to cut off her air. "He's not there, Audrey. I've been down on my hands and knees for the last ten minutes, looking under my furniture and in my closets."

"Then he has to be loose in the house somewhere."

Forty-five minutes later, Misty lifted a reluctant hand and knocked on Chloe's door. She doubted the woman would have bothered with Bandit,

especially since she appeared to take great pleasure in seeing Misty punished for the pup's missteps. But she was running out of options.

The door swung open, and a sleepy-eyed Chloe scowled. "Oh, it's you."

"Chloe, I'm sorry to bother you, but you haven't seen Bandit, have you?"

Chloe's frown deepened. "Why would I bother with that mutt? He's your problem, not mine."

"I didn't think you would have. Thanks anyway."

"Did that mongrel get out again?"

"He's not a mongrel." And yes, he's pulled another Houdini.

Chloe leaned against the door frame. "Garron's going to kill you if that dog chews up any more of his stuff."

Didn't she know that already? "Good night, Chloe."

"I don't know why you would want to put your ass on the line for that dog."

"Go back to bed, Chloe. I'm sorry I disturbed you." She really was as she walked away from Chloe's room and back down the hallway.

With little choice but to face Garron with the news that the dog had again escaped, Misty steeled her nerves, raised a hand, and knocked.

"Come." Garron's rich tenor resonated through the wood.

Misty opened the door and took a hesitant step inside. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but I have something I need to tell you."

“What is it?”

“Bandit is gone.”

Garron looked up from the book he was reading. “What do you mean 'gone'?”

“I...I mean he's not in his crate, or my room, or as it appears, anywhere in the house.”

“That's ridiculous.” He closed the book and set it aside. “Pets don't simply disappear into thin air. If he's not in his crate or in your room, he must be somewhere in the house.”

Misty shook her head and swallowed down the lump in her throat while she blinked away threatening tears. “He's not. Audrey and I have spent the last hour scouring the entire house for him. He's not here.”

He stood and crossed to where she waited, taking her hands in his, his face now a mask of concern and compassion. “Then somebody must have let him out, because dogs don't just open doors on their own.”

Misty had already come to that conclusion, and it sickened her at her core.

“Misty, look at me.”

She raised her gaze to meet his eyes.

“We'll find Bandit, even if it takes all night and I have to call out a special search team. Once he's safe, we'll figure out who let him out.”

* * * * *

Hours passed while they scoured the house from top to bottom, checked behind and under every piece of furniture, in every cabinet, and any other

place a small Labrador pup could possibly hide. Beyond the point of caring who saw her cry, Misty sat at the kitchen table, head in her hands, and wept. Audrey sat next to her, her head resting on Misty's shoulder while she, too, cried.

Garron had woken his entire security team to aid in the search, yet even they had turned up nothing. Hope was something Misty was smart enough to let go of when necessary. Unfortunately, now was one of those times.

Garron stood behind her, kneading small circles along her shoulders. "Don't cry, pet. We'll find him."

Misty shook her head. "It's been four hours, and even your security team couldn't find him. He's gone, and I need to accept that fact."

Chloe barreled through the door leading in from the garage. "I need keys to the Lexus."

"Why?"

"I think the dog might be in the trunk."

"What?" In an instant, Misty was on her feet and heading for the door, even as Garron snared the keys from their designated hook next to the door. She followed Chloe to the car at the far end of the four-car garage and waited for Garron to pop the trunk. When the latch released, she pushed it open. There, lying in the middle of the trunk with his snout and paws duct-taped, was Bandit.

"Oh, God!" Misty reached into the trunk and gently plucked the whimpering pup from his prison. She turned to Garron, her eyes filled with rage. "Who would do this to a puppy?"

Garron shook his head. "I don't know, pet, but we're going to find out." He stepped closer to inspect the tape. "I know you'll want to get this off of

him, but I need to make a couple of phone calls first.”

“Calls? We can't just leave him like this.”

He took her head in his hands and gently kissed her forehead. “Please try to calm down. You can sit with him in your lap, if you want, but I need a detective and a vet here before we take that tape off.”

Two hours later, Garron followed the detective to the door and shook his hand. “I appreciate you taking this on for me. I'm not sure why, but it's obvious to me that someone is targeting Misty.

Detective Fern nodded. “From everything you've told me tonight, I think you're right. Since it's obviously somebody on the 'inside,' she needs to watch her back.”

Garron glanced over his shoulder to where she sat, still holding Bandit in her lap. “I've got that covered.”

“Good, because this may very well escalate before we identify who it is.”

With Detective Fern's words ringing in his ears, Garron pivoted and stomped back toward the kitchen. Nobody was going to harm Misty and think they could get away with it.

Crazed to know who would so openly defy his wishes and threaten Misty, Garron stepped into the kitchen. “I have an announcement to make. It's obvious to me that there is a coward among us, and since that person insisted on creating this situation, I'm left with no choice but to take action to protect the innocent. Come Monday, the security team will begin installing cameras in all the common areas. In order to maintain some privacy, the cameras will not come into the bedrooms, bathrooms, or the playroom.”

He turned his gaze toward Misty. "In addition, Misty and Bandit will move into my bedroom, effective immediately."

Misty's head rocketed up, shock reflecting in her eyes. "Garron?"

Ignoring the roomful of people, he knelt beside her and stroked a soft hand over the puppy's head. "It's not safe for you or Bandit in your room right now. Until we uncover the culprit, you will sleep with me."

Chapter Nine

Misty slid the silky, cream-colored gown over her head and adjusted it before turning off the bathroom light. With a twinge of nervousness, she walked into the master suite that represented Garron's personal space. Last night he'd settled her into his room, then disappeared downstairs into his office. After much tossing and turning, she'd finally drifted off, only to find the bed empty the next morning.

Tonight, however, he was already in bed, waiting for her to emerge from the bathroom and join him. It was one thing to provide pleasure under the guise of service. This was totally different. At least within the confines of the playroom, she knew her role and understood what was expected of her. Sharing a bed, curling beneath the covers with him, gave the illusion of something stable, something representing a normal relationship. That idea alone was enough to terrify her, but throw in her growing feelings for the man who'd helped her face her ultimate pain, and oh boy, was she in trouble.

Garron's gaze slid from the book he read to her, his deep blue eyes growing even darker as he drank in her image. "Just when I think you can't get any more beautiful, you go and prove me wrong."

The lump in her throat grew with his compliment, and she barely managed to swallow it to speak. "You humble me with your compliment, Master." She bent down and checked the latch on Bandit's crate. Satisfied it was secure, she placed the blanket over the top, shading him from her sight, then turned to face Garron. The desire in his eyes mere moments ago had been replaced with a cold, hard stare that made Misty shiver.

"I've told you before. While I expect you to follow my rules all the time, you will only refer to me as Master in the playroom and at the club."

"I assumed that rule would also apply for your bedroom, since submissives are generally not allowed in here."

"Never assume." He rolled over on his side to face the wall, away from her. "Good night, Misty."

She slowly crawled into bed, confusion running amok in her head. She couldn't have mistaken the look he'd just given her, but now he was simply going to roll over and go to sleep?

Without another word, she curled onto her side, away from him, and pulled the covers up to her chin while she forced her mind to think about subjects other than Garron.

Deep into the dark recesses of night, she shifted, turning into the new warmth that made her feel safe and secure. She snuggled closer and swore she felt hands grazing along her side, along her back.

As the fog of sleep finally lifted, the reality of the moment settled in. Her eyes went wide on the knowledge that she was indeed kissing Garron. His lips tangled with hers, revealing a hunger she hadn't known existed until now.

How could she possibly deny him when his lips moved over hers with a yearning that spoke of years of neglect? If this type of intimacy was what he desired, she would give him everything she had to offer, even if it cost her heart in the process.

"Remove my shorts," he whispered against her ear.

She smiled and allowed her hands to roam over his hardened chest on

their way to his waist. "Are you teasing me?" His voice was gruff and laced with lust.

"Only if you like it," she replied, feeling bolder than she ever had with him.

"Oh I like it all right," he whispered, then nipped at her ear.

She tugged at the waistband of his shorts, pulling them down around his hips, but her arms were only so long. She made it as far as his knees, then twisted and groped, trying to draw them down the rest of the way. With an impatient sigh, he reached down and yanked them off, letting them fall away to the floor.

"Raise your arms."

She did, and in a painfully slow motion, he returned the favor. Tediously slow, he drew her nightgown up. She was sure the cupping of her breasts and tweaking of her nipples wasn't an accident. How was it the slightest touch from him could create such a maddening need inside her? Finally, after several long and agonizing seconds, he pulled the gown over her head. It fell unceremoniously to the floor next to his shorts.

"Beautiful," he murmured as he lowered himself to her. The press of his body against hers sent a shiver of anticipation shimmying up her spine.

"Reach between us and stroke me."

She didn't wait to be told twice. Her fingers wrapped around his cock with a gentle firmness only she could apply. One stroke up from root to tip had him growling in her ear. "I hope you're ready for me, sweetheart, because I don't have the patience to wait. Guide me." She barely had time to position him before he thrust forward. Slick and ready, she accepted him with ease.

Her back arched, and her head rocked against the pillow as her lips parted on a silent cry. He held still for a moment. She knew he was giving her time

to adjust to his massive girth. She thought she was ready, but she soon realized she never was. He pulled out, leaving only his cockhead seated inside her before he drove forward and filled her completely. She felt impossibly stretched, but then he always made her feel that way.

He lowered to her until, skin to skin, they touched. She lifted her legs, wrapped them around his waist, and gave to him all she was. Vanilla sex. That's what people in the know would say about what she and Garron were doing. She knew better. No whips. No sex toys. No use of outside stimulation to intensify the moment. What she and Garron were sharing had everything to do with emotions and nothing to do with physical needs.

She'd never experienced a more powerful moment in her life than when he drove deep inside her while still looking into her eyes. When, she wondered, was the last time a man looked lovingly into her eyes while he shared such pleasures? Garron wasn't any ordinary man, and this wasn't simply about him taking the gratification she offered. She blinked back threatening tears. Now wasn't the time for her to cry over the heart she'd just lost to him forever. No matter where she went from here, who she met after her stint with Garron was over, she wouldn't ever feel this way about any other man.

He laced his fingers through hers. Each of his thrusts was more powerful than the last, until she knew there wasn't any way either of them would hang on. In the playroom, he would always come on her back or in her mouth. Would he stay inside this time? Would he give her his seed? Her desire to feel him explode deep in her core was overwhelming.

His fingers dug into her hips. "I'm close, sweetheart. I want you to come with me."

She'd come with him, anywhere and everywhere he wished.

Instead of speaking her thoughts and risking ruining the moment, she clung to his shoulders and rode the building wave of pleasure. Her release slammed her with the force of a volcanic eruption. She cried out, only to

have Garron silence her with a deep, penetrating kiss. He swallowed her cry, then gave her his groan as he shoved deep and held there.

Warm jets of semen slicked her inner walls as he climaxed hard, his entire body shuddering with each spasm. When the last of his shudders subsided, he slowly pulled away and gazed down at her. She imagined that the look of utter shock and awe he wore must have mirrored her own stunned expression.

What had they just done?

After several long seconds he moved, his softening member sliding out of her with a wet squelch. She shifted to his side and drew the covers up over them both. His eyes never left hers. "That was..."

"I know," she managed to whisper.

"I...I've never stayed in without a condom."

"Then why did you?"

He stroked a finger along her cheek. "You made me want to."

Chapter Ten

With Travis's hand on her lower back, she slowly walked toward the playroom, all the while working to ignore the rumbling in her stomach. Now certainly wasn't the time for dinner to not be sitting well. "It's been a while since you've joined us, Travis."

"I've been very busy with my own club," he remarked even as he skimmed a finger along her spine. "Finding girls who meet my standards isn't an easy task."

"Maybe your standards are too high?"

"Maybe, but then it's hard to find women as beautiful as you."

Heat rose in her cheeks at his compliment, even as self-indulgent pride took hold. She'd enjoyed working for Travis and had to admit she'd been a damn good bartender and waitress. Still, she liked her new arrangement. Garron was a caring and considerate man, a gentle lover. Intelligent, dignified, kinky, and handsome to boot, he was everything she'd ever wanted in a man and more.

Even though she'd only been at Rosewood for six months, she couldn't imagine her life without Garron in it. Her need to please him went beyond that of a Dominant/submissive relationship. As much as she didn't want to admit it, she'd fallen in love with the man who'd shown her the ultimate in pleasure and pain.

A quick stab of pain caused her to place a hand against her breastbone. Love? What was she doing thinking about love? Remember your credo,

girly! Love was for suckers. Despite what the movies and paperback novels touted, love didn't conquer all. Nothing lasts forever, and giving her heart to anyone would only lead her down the path to a pain more severe than any physical punishment she could receive. She couldn't possibly be in love, could she? Yes, her affection for him was strong, but love? Was this what it felt like to be in love?

One look at Garron as she entered the playroom confirmed all her nagging suspicions. The look in his eyes, the pride, the caring, and the desire she saw staring back at her, sealed the fact that her heart did indeed belong to him.

There wasn't any doubt in her mind that the feelings she harbored for him were entirely one-sided. He was a man who wielded wealth and power to attain his utmost desires. Even now, she remembered back to a time when he'd stated his aversion to marriage, to love as a whole. Like her, Garron was a cynic when it came to the idea of soul mates and happily ever after.

Her stomach grumbled again, leaving her to wonder if the queasy feeling she harbored had more to do with this revelation than something she ate. If she were honest with herself, she'd have to admit this moment had been coming for a while. The puppy, the move into his bedroom and making love in his bed had all combined to bring her to this point.

Remembering her duty, she tamped down the sudden sadness tugging at her heart and moved farther into the room. Her affection for him would remain unspoken for as long as he allowed her to stay at Rosewood, and when the time came to move on, she would go, thankful for the time she'd had with him.

Travis eased down into one of the mauve wingback chairs. Garron quickly followed, taking up residence in the second chair. He turned on his hip to face her. "Since Travis is my guest, I offer your services to him first."

Fighting against the pitch and roll of her stomach, Misty nodded and knelt

in front of Travis. Whatever was affecting her stomach would pass if she just ignored it. She had a job to do, and no way would she disappoint Garron or Travis. Forcing a smile, she reached for Travis's jeans. Her hands trembled terribly. For a moment, she watched her fingers shake and felt the nervous tingle racing through her body. Why am I shaking?

Bile rose in her throat. "I'm sorry," she managed to mutter as she scrambled to her feet and on suddenly unsteady legs stumbled to the adjoining half bath.

"Misty?" Garron's voice carried from the playroom through the open door, barely registering over her retching. Within seconds, he stood in the doorway. "What's wrong?"

Suddenly flush, she rocked back on her heels and swiped a hand over her forehead. "I don't know. My stomach's been a little queasy, but all of a sudden—" Before she could finish her sentence, the need to vomit overwhelmed her, and she hugged the porcelain.

"Audrey!" Garron yelled as he moved in behind Misty, gathering her hair up and out of the way. "Audrey!"

"Yes, Mr. Worthington?"

"Do we have anything we can give Misty for her sickness?"

Audrey's eyes widened, and she skirted around Garron to place a gentle hand on Misty's back. "No, sir. Misty, what's wrong?"

"I... My stomach." She grabbed her midsection, doubling over in pain. If she hadn't known better, she would have sworn someone was stabbing her to death. Sweat beaded on her face as she cried out. She'd never hurt this badly. Ignoring the slight tug from where Garron still held her hair, she leaned over and placed her face against the tiled floor, relishing the cool feel of the marble against her heated cheek.

She couldn't possibly have anything left in her stomach, yet the pain came again, stabbing, twisting until she could do little more than groan. Before she realized it, she was rising, then moving out of the tiny bathroom back to the bed, but it wasn't under her own power. Even the feel of Garron's strong embrace made her shudder in pain. All her nerve endings seemed to be working overtime, to where lights, sounds, even the slightest touch, made her want to cry out in misery.

She noted the grave looks on Garron's and Travis's faces but barely had time to interpret them before the room took a long, slow spin. Their voices melded together into a drone that blended with the swirling colors of the room until Misty was wishing for the sweet darkness to take her. When the pain came again, she curled into a ball and cried out, unable to stop her scream.

* * * * *

Garron grabbed the bowl of cool water from Audrey and set it on the nightstand, then smoothed the wet cloth over Misty's face. "Easy, sweetheart, I know it hurts, but try and breathe." Even as he spoke, he worked to keep his own fear from spinning out of control. He glanced over his shoulder at Travis. "What do you think? The flu, maybe?"

Travis shook his head. "In the middle of summer?"

"Well, what else could it be?"

Travis's concerned expression landed on Misty, and he moved to her bedside. "Misty?" He placed a gentle hand on her back. Garron watched the concern on his friend's face darken as he shifted closer. "She's shivering terribly." Even as he said the words, his hand continued to slide along her back, holding in one place for several seconds before moving on to another. "Her breathing is becoming erratic and labored. I don't like this, Garron. It's too sudden, too violent for the flu."

“What are you thinking?”

“There's something else going on here, something nefarious that warrants medical attention.”

As much as he didn't want to believe his friend, his gut was telling him the same thing. Grasping at anything that would help make sense of the situation, he turned to face Audrey. “Are you sure there wasn't anything out of the ordinary served at dinner tonight? Maybe something with shellfish in it?”

Standing at the end of the bed, her face void of color as she watched Misty writhe in pain, Audrey managed to shake her head. “No, sir. I know Misty has seafood allergies. But...” She paused, causing Garron's senses to heighten.

“But what?”

“Well, before Chloe went out, she helped me with the salads. She said she had picked up some fancy, rare mushrooms to add to the meal. I reminded her that you do not like mushrooms, but she thought maybe Misty might enjoy them.”

Nerves already on edge, Garron pulled his gaze from Misty to Audrey. “A rare mushroom? What kind of mushroom?”

“I do not know. I am sorry. As cook, I should have asked, but Chloe has helped with dinner before, so I did not think anything of it. I think I still have some in the kitchen.”

“Good.” He ripped the cell phone from his pocket and with shaky fingers managed to punch in 9-1-1. “Get me those mushrooms.” He turned back to Misty and ran a gentle hand along her cheek. “Hang on, baby. Help is coming.”

Chapter Eleven

It was well into the morning when Garron rested his elbows on his knees and looked up at the bed, where Misty lay in a drug-induced coma. The sound of the heart monitor and respirator kept him company, his only indication that she was indeed still alive. Rays of sunshine filtered through the slatted blinds, bathing the room in a hopeful glow.

He scrubbed a hand over his tired face, noting the stubble now prickling his chin. Answers . He needed answers as to why she'd suddenly stopped breathing on her own only moments after they'd arrived in the emergency room.

Watching her lay silent and still, hooked to machines for survival, was taking a toll on his soul. Deep down, he always knew his affection for the raven-haired beauty was more than the sum of its parts, but seeing her in so much pain—and then for a short time not knowing if she was going to live or die—had him reassessing his priorities.

Not that he would ever actually consider marriage. He looked down at the band on his finger, then cast his gaze toward the one she now wore. Knowing how the medical world worked, he'd raced to his bedroom, pulled his parents' rings from their coveted place in his dresser drawer, and praying they'd fit, slid them one on her finger and the other on his before the paramedics arrived. He was smart enough to know that even his money wouldn't circumvent the HIPAA laws.

No way would he allow the doctors to force him into the position of spectator, relegated to the distant and dreary waiting room while only God knew what was happening to her. Now, as he stared down at his mother's diamond resting neatly on Misty's finger, his heart thudded with love. It

looked right there, as if it had been meant specifically for her.

Marriage was a complication he didn't want nor need, but every time he thought about what happened to her tonight, his heart threatened to explode. It wasn't just guilt eating at him, though there was plenty of that. After all, if it hadn't been for his "lifestyle," Misty and Chloe wouldn't have met, and Misty wouldn't be here now.

The door to the private room he'd arranged for her creaked, and Garron turned in time to see Chloe and Audrey walk into the room. Setting his gaze on Chloe, he was barely able to hold his fury as he rose. "What in the hell are you doing here?"

Chloe's eyes went wide. "Audrey told me what happened." She took a tentative step forward. "I wanted to come, to see if I could do anything to help."

"I think you've done quite enough already."

Her gaze shifted from him to Misty and back. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, you don't, huh? Well, let me spell it out for you, Chloe. You poisoned Misty with the mushrooms you put in her salad."

Chloe's mouth gaped open as she began shaking her head. "I didn't."

"No use in denying it, Chloe. The lab is running tests on the mushrooms as we speak."

"I didn't poison Misty. I may not be all that fond of the girl, but damn it, Garron, I wouldn't do something so vicious."

"Don't lie."

"I'm not lying. Audrey, tell him I'm not..." Chloe turned and let the rest of her sentence trail off. "Where did she go?"

Too focused on arguing with Chloe, Garron hadn't noticed Audrey slip from the room. He stalked to the door, glanced both directions down the corridor, and scowled before he turned back to Chloe. "She's gone. Probably didn't want to hear us arguing. I'll deal with her later. Right now, I don't want you leaving my sight until the police arrive."

"Police? Garron, please listen to reason. I didn't poison Misty with any mushrooms."

"She's right."

Garron turned to see the same doctor who'd worked on Misty in the ER. "What do you mean 'she's right'?"

"Well, she's sort of right. The mushrooms you provided are generally not toxic, except when combined with alcohol. You said Mrs. Worthington had a glass of wine with dinner. Actually, in this case, you can consider the mushrooms a good thing, since they caused her to vomit out most of the real poison."

"And what would the real poison be?"

"Wild hemlock."

Garron couldn't quite believe his ears. "As in what killed Socrates?"

"That's what the legend says." The doctor placed a hand on Garron's shoulder. "In Mrs. Worthington's case, the adverse reaction to the mushroom caused her to vomit, though enough poison did remain in her system to cause respiratory failure. Based on the test results, we'll keep her on the respirator for another day or two until we're sure all the effects of the poison are gone, and she's able to once again breathe on her own. It's

going to be a long process, but barring any complications, she should make a full recovery."

Weak-kneed, Garron sank into the nearest chair. "Thank you, Dr. Height. Can you please pass your findings on to Detective Fern?"

"You're very welcome, Mr. Worthington, and I will."

When the door closed, Garron looked up at Chloe. "I guess I owe you an apology. I thought you'd given Misty poison mushrooms."

Chloe crouched in front of him, taking Garron's hand in hers. "What made you think I would do such a thing?"

"Audrey said..." His eyes widened as realization struck. "Audrey."

Chloe's brows quirked. "What about Audrey?"

"She's been taking college classes in botany."

"So? You said yourself that she wanted to open up a flower shop someday."

"Yes, but do you know what kind of plants she's growing in the gardens?"

Chloe shrugged. "I'm not much of a plant person. I know she has lots of flowers."

"Did you happen to notice any plants that had small white flowers on them?"

Chloe sat back on her heels. "I think there are a couple of plants like that back by the fish pond, but why would Audrey—" Her eyes widened in horror. "Oh God, Garron. Do you think Audrey poisoned Misty?"

"I don't know, but I intend to find out. If she did, you may be next. Travis is down in the cafeteria getting some breakfast and will be back up shortly. I want you to stay here with him and Misty."

His mind spun as he raced out to his car. Please God, let me be wrong about Audrey. He slipped into the driver's seat, started the car, and sped toward home. More than anything he wanted to believe that the hemlock was a mistake, but lab tests didn't lie. Still, what would Audrey have to gain by poisoning Misty? They were supposed to have been friends.

Ten minutes later, Garron pulled into the driveway at Rosewood and cut the engine. He stared up at the mansion he called home and fought back the string of curses dancing on the tip of his tongue. Here, in this haven protected by guards and safe from curious eyes, he'd created his ultimate fantasy, only to see it turn into his worst nightmare.

Careful not to make too much noise, Garron closed the car door with a soft click and let himself in through the side door in the garage. He'd notified Detective Fern of his suspicions on the way back to the house, but he wasn't willing to wait for uniformed officers to arrive. No. He wanted answers from Audrey before they read her rights and carted her off to jail.

His stomach clenched with dread even as he quietly walked through the house and up the stairs. He had to be wrong about Audrey. She'd always been such a sweet girl and had come from such horrible circumstances. No way did she have it in her to harm another person.

He slunk down the hall, noting how her bedroom door sat ajar. The sounds of movement, frantic and hurried, carried out into the hall. With two fingers, he pressed on the door, giving it the slightest of nudges. It swung open, revealing a flush and slightly harried Audrey tossing clothing into a suitcase.

"Going somewhere?"

Her head rocketed up in his direction, her eyes wild with fear. "Garron! I, um"—she swiped a shaky hand through her hair—"I thought you would still be at the hospital with Misty."

"You thought wrong." He took a step forward. "I asked you a question, Audrey. Why are you packing?"

"I...I was going to use the personal time you gave me to go see my cousin."

"Why now?"

"Because"—she blew out a breath—"it is not safe here."

"But you said Chloe was the one who poisoned Misty, and she's in custody as we speak," he lied.

"Oh. Really?"

"Yes, really. So there's no reason for you to be afraid. Unless"—he stepped closer—"you have some other reason to leave."

"I-I do not know what you are talking about."

"Oh, I think you do. I think you thought you could kill Misty, blame it on Chloe, and get off without taking any of the blame."

"M-Misty is my friend. Why would I want to kill her?"

"That's my question too. Why, Audrey? What reason could you possibly have for doing something so heinous?"

In an instant, the fear in Audrey's eyes changed to rage. "It is your fault," she spat. "All you had to do was let me love you, but no"—she waved a dismissive hand at him—"you had to bring home that slut."

Infuriated, Garron ran a hand through his hair while he tried to keep a tight grip on his emotions. "I have been over this with you. Knowing your past, I couldn't in good conscience keep you on as a submissive. You said you understood."

She stalked to the far side of her room and stood in front of the small desk. "I understand that you think I am some half-brained twit."

"That's not true. I know you're very intelligent and that you've been given a bum deal in life. I gave you a roof over your head and money to spend, and this is how you repay me?"

"I love you. All I wanted was for you to love me back."

"So you tried to murder Misty to eliminate the competition." He paused as the full impact of the moment settled over him. "It was you all along. Her slip in the shower and the snake in her room were both you. You're the one who kidnapped Bandit. How could you, Audrey? You cried with Misty over the pup."

"All I wanted was for her to go away like Caroline did. I knew if you could just see past her, you would notice me." Her gaze shifted to the doorway, where uniformed officers now stood, and she sank to the floor in a blubbering mass of emotion. "I did not want to kill her. I just wanted you to love me."

"You better hope she doesn't die," he mumbled before motioning to the officers. "Get her out of my sight."

* * * * *

Garron checked on Bandit before he locked up the house, thankful that the pup was exactly where he'd left him. At least that was one less thing to worry over. Misty loved that pup, and the idea of having to face her with

more bad news would be too much.

He pulled the car into the parking lot, killed the engine, and leaned forward to rest his forehead on his hands. How in the hell had he missed Audrey's obsession with him? How could he have thought Chloe to be a murderer without proof? God, his head hurt.

Gathering what little energy he had left, he opened the door and pushed out of the car. The late August sun was slowly rising high in the sky. Near exhaustion, he trudged his way into the building, hoping to catch a couple of z's in the oversize chair in Misty's room and praying everything was exactly as it had been several hours ago.

He'd left Travis to watch over Chloe and Misty and knew if her condition changed, he would have called. Yet he found no comfort in the fact that his phone remained silent.

Making a quick detour into the cafeteria, Garron purchased a large coffee, black, before continuing on his way up to the third floor. Damn it, he was too old to be pulling all-nighters anymore. Shouldering the door while he chugged the steaming java, he entered Misty's room and found everything exactly as he left it, only Travis was curled up in the reclining chair sound asleep, while Chloe sat in the stiff chair staring out the window.

She turned to look at him, then rose from the chair. "Well?"

"Audrey confessed to trying to kill Misty and then pinning it on you."

Chloe lifted a hand to cover her mouth as she sank back into the chair. "I can't believe it. She's always been the sweet, quiet one."

"Yeah, well, believe it." He walked to Misty's bed and laced his fingers through hers. "Any change while I was gone?"

Chloe shook her head. "A nurse was just in a few minutes ago. She said

Misty's holding her own." She rose from her seat and joined him. "You're in love with her, aren't you?"

His gaze never shifted from Misty's face. "Yeah."

"Despite what you might think, I am happy for you."

He turned to look at her. "You are?"

Chloe smiled. "Of course I am. I know I'm not the most personable creature to be around, but deep down, I really do care about you, Garron."

"I care about you too, just like I cared for Audrey. It's not just about the sex, you know."

She nodded. "I know. It's hard to live with a person, share your body with them day in and day out, and not get just a little attached."

"Exactly. Because of that, I was worried a little that you both might be jealous. Guess I was right about Audrey."

"I guess you were. I can't say that I wasn't when Misty first came, but you and I both know that there will never be more between us than what we have now."

"I never meant for there to be anything more than the status quo between Misty and me, but something happened along the way, and before I knew it, I was head over heels."

"I saw it. You two connected on a level that Audrey and I didn't—couldn't, maybe. While I don't necessarily subscribe to that whole love-at-first-sight principle, I do believe in the theory of everyone having a soul mate. I think you're one of the lucky ones, Garron. You've found yours."

He looked from Chloe to Misty and shook his head. "I've never in all my life

felt so useless.” He raked a hand through his hair. He'd thought he had a tight hold over the situation. To see it spiral completely out control tore at him. “I don't know what's going to happen, Chloe, and it scares the hell out of me.”

She put her hand over his holding Misty's. “It should. Love is terrifying, and rightly so. Want to know what I think is going to happen?”

“What?”

“First, she is going to wake up from this. Then you're going to take her home, where you're going to dote over her even after she's well. Eventually, you're going to get down on one knee and beg her to spend the rest of her life growing old with you. And finally, I'm going to move out.”

His gaze snapped to hers. “Why now, when—”

She placed a finger over his lips, silencing him. “We both know that love complicates a situation. If I stay, there's bound to be jealousy issues, and I wouldn't want to ruin your happiness. She can give you everything you need, Garron, everything you've spent years looking for in me, in Caroline, and all the others, and never found.”

“What are you going to do?”

Chloe smiled. “Travis expressed interest in trying the whole Dominant/submissive thing.”

For the first time in hours, Garron returned her smile. “I'll be sure to put in a good word for you.”

Chapter Twelve

Just as Chloe predicted, a week later, Garron gently eased Misty down into his bed and moved to cover her with the blankets.

She smiled and sank into the pillows. "It's good to be home."

Her statement only served to stretch his already taught nerves. "You can't know how happy I am that you're feeling better."

She eyed him warily and, sensing impending doom, felt the beginning of a lump form in her throat. "But?"

He paced the length of the room and back. "I've thought about this a lot over the past few days, and I feel it's only right for me to release you from your contract."

"What?" Despite still feeling weak, she pushed up onto her elbows and prepared to argue. "You can't be serious."

"I'm completely serious. As soon as you're well enough, you're free to leave whenever you want."

The lump in Misty's throat tightened. He was letting her go? No way could she just walk away, not after she'd finally realized just how much she loved him. "Garron..."

He shook his head and held up a hand to stop her. "Please don't try and talk me out of this, Misty. I've made up my mind. After everything you've been through, it's only fair of me to release you from the rest of your

commitments.”

“Just like that?” She snapped her fingers as a sudden anger welled in her chest. Couldn't the man realize how much she loved him? Didn't he see that she would walk through fire for him if he asked? “I get sick, and now you suddenly want out?”

“You didn't get sick, sweetheart. You were poisoned by one of my employees. Don't you see that being here nearly cost you your life?”

It was those words, that brought the fuzzy picture in front of her to light. He didn't want her to go. At least she didn't believe he wanted her to go, since he hadn't actually said those words. No, his releasing her from the contract was nothing more than a way to appease his guilt.

She slipped from the bed and, on wobbly legs, stood. In an instant, he was by her side. “What are you doing? You shouldn't be out of bed yet.”

She yanked her arm from his grasp and barely contained the urge to snarl. “You're so quick to nullify the contract, so why are you so concerned about my being out of bed?”

“I nullified your contract because it was the right thing to do. I want you back in bed because you're not well enough to be up and moving around, and I'm...” The abrupt end to his sentence had her turning her head to face him.

“And you're what?”

“Nothing.” He stroked a knuckle along her cheek. “You're still so pale, and you can barely stand. Please get back into bed.”

“No.” She pushed his hand away and, despite her shaking legs, dared to stand on her own. “I want to know what you were going to say.”

“Why?”

“Because it's important to me.” She took a step back and grabbed the bedpost to steady herself. “I don't want to leave, but I won't stay when there can't be an honest and open dialogue between us.”

Doing her best to keep her dignity, she pushed away from the bed and began to stumble toward the dresser.

“What are you doing?” he growled from behind her.

“I'm getting dressed, and then I'm leaving.”

“You're not well enough to leave yet.”

“Maybe I'm not, but I won't stay where I'm not wanted,” she spat, feeling every last bit of the sting from not hearing him say the words she longed for.

His rough hands grabbed her by the arm and spun her so fast, she lost her balance and fell into him. When she finally managed to look up, she saw the anger and frustration in his eyes. And for the first time since she'd arrived at Rosewood, she saw the love she'd been longing for. “Nobody said you weren't wanted here,” he replied in a tone far more soothing than his eyes showed.

“You dissolved my contract and can't give me a good reason for it. What else am I supposed to think except that you don't want me here?”

“I dissolved your contract because, after what happened, I don't want you feeling as if you're trapped here. That doesn't mean I want you to leave.”

“Then what does it mean, Garron? Honestly, I'm still too weak to play these kinds of games with you.”

"Oh, this definitely isn't a game, sweetheart. I was never more terrified in my life than when I was sitting next to your hospital bed, knowing I'd fallen in love with you and wondering if you'd live long enough for me to tell you."

She stopped fighting and looked up. "What did you just say?"

A slow grin spread across his face. "I said I love you."

Tears formed, and Misty didn't bother trying to stem their flow. Deep down, she hadn't expected to actually hear the words from him. Now that she had, she couldn't quite believe her ears. "Tell me again."

"I love you, Misty. My life will mean nothing if you walk out that door."

She smiled. "Let me get this straight. You dissolve my contract so I'm free to leave, even though you don't really want me to go."

"That's about right."

"I suppose I could stay." Her grin widened as she turned and walked a bit unsteadily back to the bed. "But I'll have to get a job, because I won't live off you, Garron."

"You will if you're my wife."

Thankful to be within sitting distance of the bed, she eased onto the mattress and slowly shifted her gaze to meet his. "You want to marry me?"

He stopped in front of her and knelt. "I do. If it makes you feel better, we can call it a lifelong contract."

She had to laugh at his attempt to play down the significance of it all. Questions raced through her still-somewhat-drug-lethargic mind. How would marriage play into his lifestyle? Would he want children? If he did, how would they keep this part of their lives secret from their kids? Would

he want to take on another submissive, and if so, could she allow another woman to service him and not be jealous?

"You're thinking way too hard about this."

"Maybe. I'm trying to work it out in my head."

"I love you, and I think you love me. What's to work out?"

"Well, for one, what about your lifestyle? You know, that whole Dominant/submissive thing you like to do?"

"What about it?"

"Usually marriage is followed by children. Do you even want to have children? And if so, how does your fetish play into that?"

He stroked a knuckle along her cheek before dropping his hand to her currently flat stomach. "I'd love nothing more than to see you carrying my child, baby. As for how the kink would play in, well...my parents made it work, so I think we can too."

"What about your desire for more than one submissive?"

"You're the only submissive I need, sweetheart." He leaned forward and pressed a chaste kiss to her forehead. "In fact, you're the perfect submissive."

"You're not going to want to bring somebody else into our sex life?" She wasn't sure how she felt about that. After so many occasions of sharing him with Chloe or him sharing her with his friends, she wondered what it would be like not to be one of many but the only one.

"Somebody else, yes. Another submissive, no," he answered as he continued to kiss her softly on the forehead, then each cheek. "Sweetheart,

I'll be the first one to admit that I'm a kinky bastard, and watching you with my friends totally turns me on, but that's just sex. What's in here"—he pressed his palm against her heart—"is what matters to me. At the end of the night, when the kink is over, I want to be able to crawl into bed and make sweet love to you as man and wife, or spoon up next to you and know it's me alone you love."

"So you're not going to replace Chloe or Audrey?"

"Oh, I'm absolutely replacing Audrey. With a real cook and a real housekeeper."

Her lips twitched at the corners, and she couldn't resist the smile begging to be set free. "I've never had anybody love me before."

"Not soon enough, if you ask me." He pulled her close, wrapping his arms around her like a blanket. His lips brushed over her neck before pausing at her ear. "I love you, Misty."

Closing her eyes, she sank into his caress and let go of every worry she still held. As long as she had Garron, she could face whatever the future held. "I love you too."

❧ THE END ❧

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So you really want to know about me? Well, actually there's not much to tell. Am I a mom? Yes, to two beautiful kids. Am I married? Yes, to one very happy husband (at least he was the last time I checked.) How long have I been writing? A long time, only recently did I decide to get serious and put my imagination to work. I love everything romance. I'm also a firm believer that no one should be afraid to explore their forbidden desires, a belief my husband is happy I embrace.