



Beast Master's Slave

By

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Chapter One

Maura studied the mansion in the flickering light of the full moon, trying to dismiss the uneasiness creeping along her spine like invisible fingers. The place was clearly empty, she told herself for the dozenth time. She hadn't seen a sign of any movement of any sort beyond the shifting of the limbs of the mighty oaks that surrounded it and formed a natural tunnel along the long, winding drive that led from the gate through the park-like grounds that surrounded the place.

The drive disappeared behind the stone edifice on the southern side and ended in a carriage house cum garage in the back. She knew. She'd arrived before dark, parked her car in an unobtrusive tangle of honeysuckle vines, and walked the perimeter.

The high stone fence that surrounded the place was well maintained. She hadn't found a break or a single place where crumbling stone might offer an easy hand or toe hold.

The place reminded her of a mausoleum, she decided. That was what was creeping her out. The gothic style of the architecture looked like something straight out of Europe's distant past, not like anything that should be sitting next to a bayou in the U.S. of A.

And yet, it fit right in.

Did the owner fit in, as well, she wondered? Would she discover he was some modern day equivalent of Count Dracula?

It bothered her that she hadn't managed to get so much as a whiff of a description of the man of any kind—the beast master.

There was a weird moniker! Daegon, the beast master. That was all she had after weeks of digging. No last name, no history, no other aliases—Daegon, the beast master.

She hadn't even been able to discover why he was called that if, in fact, there was any reason behind it.

There usually was. She would've thought he'd be called the leather master, though, or maybe the pussy master considering the club he owned. Total freaks! Goths on steroids! She'd felt like she was dressing up for a Halloween costume contest when she'd donned the 'essentials' for getting past the barbarians at the gate, the behemoths that passed as bouncers.

She'd begun to entertain a lot of doubts about the case almost as soon as she began to delve into the dark world little Sheila had been a part of. As far as she could see, the woman had already had one foot in the grave the moment she embraced the lifestyle. She hadn't *seen* drugs, granted, but it seemed to go with the territory—the leather, bondage—and probably sadomasochistic—orgy-minded clientele of Noir.

If she'd been a betting woman, and she wasn't, *that* was the reason Sheila had decided to off herself—maybe not even intentionally. She certainly wouldn't be the first idiot that had accidentally hanged herself trying to get a sexual boost from autoerotic asphyxiation.

Her parents wouldn't hear of it, though. Sheila's parents. Her own parents, being

best friends with them, were convinced there was something dark going on at Noir and dragged her into it or she wouldn't be sitting in the dark now, staring at the creepy mausoleum the owner of Noir called home.

Well, there *was* a lot of 'dark'.

What she didn't understand was that the place had never been raided—not once. She'd checked. She still wouldn't have allowed her parents to rope her into investigating except for one tiny little detail. Sheila was the third young woman to frequent the place who'd supposedly committed suicide in the five years since the place opened.

It wasn't much to go on even though her gut reaction was aroused suspicion. She'd studied the files backwards and forwards, talked to the coroner that had performed the autopsies and thoroughly pissed him off, and she'd had to conclude that it *was* suicide, or accident. There just wasn't anything to indicate anything else.

She wouldn't even have been able to put the three together if she hadn't noticed something nobody else seemed to have noticed—the mark. All three of them had it on the inside of their upper thigh. She didn't know what it was, but it damned sure wasn't a tattoo.

It *was* the only link between the three young women and the club, though.

And it was probably nothing. She was going to get her ass booted off the force chasing ghosts!

Not tonight, though, she told herself. The owner wasn't home. She'd arrived well before dark. Even without any sign of movement either on the grounds or inside, if there'd been anybody home, a light would've come on long before the moon rose.

The longer she sat trying to think up excuses not to go in, though, the more chance there was that he would come home and catch her trespassing.

To go or not to go, she wondered, studying the house uneasily, feeling a warning prickling along her spine?

If she got caught, she was going to get her ass chewed out by the chief, at the very least. If she didn't at least find something to give her parents to give *their* friends she was going to have to endure accusing looks from her parents for months.

Shaking her head, she opened the car door and got out. After studying the narrow road leading back through the woods to the mansion for a few minutes, listening intently, and assuring herself there was no sound or sign of an approaching car, she moved briskly to the wrought iron gates of the drive and used the ornamental iron for the hand and footholds she needed to go over. She didn't like being so exposed, but she was pretty sure trying the stone wall would be an exercise in disappointment. The spikes at the top were a real bitch to get over without sticking herself, but she managed it, dropping to the ground on the other side.

She moved quickly then from the open drive to trees and shrubs that lined it. She was *positive* there was no one home, but she still didn't like the idea of boldly striding across such a wide expanse of lawn in plain sight. She hadn't gone far when she heard a low growl that didn't sound anything like any dog she'd ever heard. Unfortunately, even as she stiffened and glanced back toward the gate, she realized she was far enough from it that there was a good bit of doubt in her mind that she could reach it and climb fast enough to elude whatever it was that she discovered was staring at her from the brush no more than two yards from where she was.

* * * *

The hunger, never far, was already beginning to make itself known to him and yet Daegon resisted. Noir had seemed like the best solution to his needs when he'd started it, as perfect as anything could possibly be in such a world and considering his limitations. He could feed at will without arousing the sort of attention his overlord deplored—the sort that might inspire his overlord to summon him back to the underworld.

He hadn't been unleashed upon the mortal world to find satisfaction with his lot, after all, but rather as a sick punishment to begin with for displeasing the bastard. He wasn't *allowed* to feed as he pleased from them, to satisfy his cravings. Only to take what he needed to sustain him and to suffer the torments of the damned to be surrounded, always, by what he hungered for but could only sup from.

It almost seemed to him that it was worse when he'd nibbled at what he wanted to gobble, sucked the meager portion he was allowed. It seemed to make the hunger worse.

He should have known from the look of satisfaction in Trydan's eyes when he'd proposed the club as 'cover' that he was playing right into the bastard's hands, but he'd been too tormented with the pain to think clearly. He'd thought he could gather his slaves together and finally know true fulfillment, if only for a short space of time. He couldn't take all he needed from one of the puny mortals, but together they would make a fine meal.

Trydan hadn't been blinded by needs, though. He'd known immediately what Daegon had planned ... and it coincided nicely with his punishment. Daegon could draw his slaves into one place. It would attract far less attention, but he was still bound by the limitations set upon by the overlord. Only one every two to three days and only what they could give him without surrendering their souls.

He'd *still* thought it would be better, that he could hedge just a bit. They gathered for him. He didn't have to search, to wait for an opportune moment to feed discreetly. He could feed and the moment he was allowed to feed again, there would be one waiting.

It was almost worse, he discovered. No! It *was* worse! More torment to be surrounded by them constantly, to watch them feed upon each other and *know* that he wasn't allowed to touch!

He couldn't even bring himself to withdraw to a distance that made it more bearable at first. Night after night, he watched them, always hungry, always wanting, always waiting until he was allowed to nourish his needs.

He'd begun to fight it, however. It had almost been more agonizing at first, to know they were there and not go to watch at least, but he'd discovered when he persevered that he could tame the hunger with distance. Holed up in his mansion, so far from the smell and sight of them, he could bear the pain a little better. He still watched the clock, still waited impatiently, but the pain wasn't as searing. It was more bearable.

His thoughts gave him no peace. Dwelling on his circumstances only made it harder to control the hunger and he welcomed the distraction of his hawk with relief as it called to him and then lit on the balcony where he stood staring blindly at the lazy waters of the bayou that meandered along the rear of his domain.

The hawk tilted his head, fixing him with one beady eye. *Female.*

Daegon scowled at the hawk. "Why tell me?" he growled. "Go fuck her if you want to."

Human.

Daegon's anger vanished immediately. "A human female? *Here?*"

Snooping. Go 'round wall.

Disappointment flickered through him and his anger rose again. "That doesn't do me any bloody good! I can't entice her in! And I can't use a glamour on her if she's too far to reach!"

No go. Look see.

Daegon was tempted to ignore the hawk. In point of fact, it occurred to him to wonder if his overlord had sent the little bastard to torment him more, but the hawk had always been a loyal familiar.

On the other hand, there seemed little point in taking a look if she was beyond his reach. His retreat had become his prison. Trydan's stipulation for allowing him to create Noir was that *that* would be his hunting grounds forever more. He could feed on the mortals that came to him. He could no longer stalk prey beyond those walls, and his mansion was too remote even for the occasional prey to drop into his lap.

And he still couldn't resist. Nodding at the hawk, he cloaked himself and bounded over the railing. Landing in the yard two floors below, he glanced up at the hawk and then followed the bird as it led him around the mansion to the front.

Snooping, the hawk had said, he mused. A reporter? His mouth watered. Reporters—nosey fucking bastards, but pretty spineless for all that. Would her curiosity overcome her sense of self-preservation, he wondered? Lead her to him?

He could hope.

He discovered when he rounded the house that he hadn't needed the hawk to guide him. The cougar and the tiger were both perched in the trees near the gate to the driveway, staring at something beyond the walls with absolute focus. The cougar blinked as he approached them, sniffed the air, and went back to watching. *She's in the man box.*

Annoyance flickered through Daegon. He'd already caught her scent himself—and it was a delectable one. However, he curbed the urge to point out that, while his senses might not be quite as acute as the beasts that were his familiars, they were certainly far above mortal senses.

His familiars were useful to him. They guarded his back so that he had no need to guard himself. On occasion, they fetched for him and, even more rarely, they neatly disposed of troublesome mortals without him having to lay hands upon them himself and risk his overlord's wrath. They thrived as much upon his approval, though, as the care he gave them. They could feed themselves, if it came to that and often did. They were willing slaves, however, because they did thrive upon his approval and he made it a point never to chide them or punish them unless they actually stepped out of line.

Their conceit over their superior senses wasn't just cause for a reprimand only because he found their tendency to lump him with mortals annoying.

He spied her as soon as he reached the gate. She'd parked the car she drove, a light tan older model, in a thicket of vines that offered concealment.

His pulse leapt at that realization. She had a keen interest in him and she meant to do some serious snooping or she wouldn't have gone to those lengths.

Narrowing his eyes to pierce the cloaking shadows of dusk, he studied the woman, feeling his pulse leap a little higher when he saw that she was pleasing to his eyes. The scent alone had been enough to wet his appetite, but she was comely.

Not that it mattered. She was a mortal female. When all was said and done, there was very little difference in the sustenance he derived from them. In point of fact, he'd

found the less attractive females were not only very eager to please, but extremely receptive. And the plump ones—well, they had more staying power and that was always a bonus.

This one looked to be a little on the thin side although, to his irritation he discovered he couldn't see her well enough to tell for certain. Disappointment still mingled with his excitement. She wouldn't make much of a meal. She'd be too weak to give him anything at all long before he was satisfied.

She would be a bonus, though, he thought, a tidy little snack his overlord would know nothing about, something to slake the pain.

If she nerved herself to come to him.

The temptation arose to open the gates for her, to try to lure her inside, but she was cautious even if she was curious. Opening the gates, he decided, might very well scare her off.

After studying her hungrily for some time, he finally decided to return to the mansion and wait. If she breached his walls, she was fair game.

* * * *

Running, Maura realized, was probably the worst thing she could do. The thought had no sooner settled in her mind, however, when the owner of the pair of eyes in the brush moved closer. She took a step back automatically, but froze mid-step on the second when the beast stepped forward again, rattling the brush that had concealed it, parting the leaves just enough that she realized the pattern of light and shadow *wasn't* light and shadow. It was the pattern of the beast's coat—a full grown tiger.

Her heart instantly began to surge against her chest wall in sheer terror. Her mind went utterly blank, struggling to discount the possibility that what her eyes beheld was actually real. The foot poised on one toe settled to complete the step she'd begun. Fighting the instinctive urge to whirl and flee, she commanded her other leg to take another step back. Even as she finally managed it, she heard another growl that froze her.

She stared hard at the tiger, trying to convince herself that it was he that had growled at her. The sound hadn't come from behind her, but the hair on the back of her neck said otherwise. It rose, prickling all the way up to the crown of her head.

Slowly, she inched her head around until she could check behind her.

A cougar was crouched between her and the gate.

The urge to scream for help or just scream clogged in her throat with the fear that it would be enough to make them charge her. She couldn't seem to command herself to move in any direction. She had a tiger in front of her and a cougar behind. She had far less chance of reaching the mansion than the gate, she realized, in any case, but it wouldn't help her to race for the gate with the cougar crouched there.

The tiger studied her for several moments and then began to move slowly to her side and then around her until he was between her and the nearest part of the wall. Without even realizing she'd done so, Maura discovered she'd rotated with the cat's movements until her back was to the house.

Cut off from the gate and the nearest segment of wall, she studied the two cats for several moments and nerved herself to flick a look around in search of another possible avenue of escape.

She discovered when she did that there were wolves—not dogs, *wolves*—ranged along the wall, guarding it as the cougar and tiger seemed to be, at least three that she

could see.

They weren't going to let her out again, she thought. One step in any direction except backwards, she discovered, was enough to elicit another threatening growl. Trying to convince herself that they'd been trained to chase trespassers to their owner, she began to back slowly and carefully toward the mansion, hoping against hope that she could find a way inside if she did manage to reach it.

* * * *

That's it, Daegon thought, exhilarated, containing his impatience with an effort, enjoying the sense of anticipation. *Bring her to me.*

Discarding his cloaking, he abandoned his watch post when she was halfway across the lawn, strode briskly down the stairs to the entrance of the mansion and opened the door wide, watching as his minions stalked her slowly closer and closer.

The hunger added to his pleasure—now. He didn't have to fight it, didn't feel a need to ignore the gnawing at his vitals.

She was coming. He could feed. He could take as much as he wanted, he told himself as it dawned on him abruptly that she wouldn't have told anyone where she was going. No one would miss her and, even if they did, they wouldn't know where to look for her.

For a few moments he savored the thought while he watched her, but then his greed shifted focus. If he was a little more careful, he told himself, he might keep her a while.

Take all he wanted, now, knowing he could at least appease his hunger completely, for once? Or husband his new resource? Use her to supplement the meager feedings he was allowed at Noir?

He was torn. He would still be miserable, he reminded himself, but wasn't a little more better?

There was no ending the torment. Until Trydan decided he'd been punished enough, he had to suffer the fire eating at him, to remain imprisoned and surrounded by temptation he couldn't have.

She wasn't likely to last long regardless, his inner beast reminded him. Why drag it out when he might at least have one completely fulfilling night? Even if he took the chance, mastered his hunger enough to prevent himself from sucking her dry, his overlord might discover her and take her away from him.

He wrestled back and forth with his dilemma until she reached the stairs leading up to the stoop. Dismissing the internal battle, he strode swiftly through the door and wrapped her in an enchantment.

He'd feed a while, he decided, see if he could appease the pain and wait until she recovered enough that he could feed again.

Chapter Two

Awareness came slowly and even as it began to blossom and expand, the sense that she was asleep, persisted, confusing Maura. There was an awareness of fear in the back of her mind, but she felt detached from it, as if it was nothing more than lingering echoes from a nightmare she could no longer remember. The urge to shake off the lingering dregs of sleep swept through her, but her mind and body refused to respond. She was still paralyzed in sleep, unable to expand her senses beyond her awakening mind.

She puzzled over it, wondering how she could feel awake and at the same time still frozen beyond the rim of true consciousness. Slowly, the thought began to form in her mind that she wasn't asleep at all. She couldn't move. She couldn't open her eyes, but when she realized she could command her vocal chords, she simply couldn't move her mouth, she became more certain she was awake and expanded her senses internally since she couldn't command them to offer anything else.

There was something over her head, she realized after a few moments, something tight enough she could feel the pressure of it, realized she couldn't see or speak because something outside of herself was preventing it.

Panic flickered through her until she realized she could breathe without difficulty—correction, much effort. Her nose wasn't blocked, but the moment she tried to expand her lungs to take in a really deep breath, she felt another restriction.

She was bound, she realized, struggling for several moments with the urge to give in to panic, fighting it to allow her mind to tell her just how much trouble she was in.

The moment she managed to focus, she realized she could feel something rope-like biting into her all over. That threw her for several moments. She could understand a binding on her wrists, even her ankles, but all over?

She hadn't been mistaken, though. When she focused, she realized she was not only bound up completely, she'd been bound long enough that she could feel her blood pulsing all over, everywhere that her flesh poked through the binding. It brought to mind a fishnet, except she could feel knots at each intersection.

Her legs were bound tightly together all the way to her ankles, but she could wiggle her feet—a little, up and down, not in and out. Her legs were bound too tightly together to allow that.

Her arms had been bound to her sides and slightly behind her, even her hands, but she managed to wiggle her fingers enough test the rope and determine that it *was* rope.

There was something against her back. The realization disoriented her for several moments. If she was lying on her back, why did she feel as if her blood was pooling at the front of her body? That suggested she was lying face down.

Unable to unravel that strange circumstance, she dismissed it for the moment, her mind leapt to her fingers again and she brushed the tips back and forth against her buttocks.

She was naked!

That discovery threw her into disorder, not the least because she finally understood why her genitals and her buttocks were throbbing so painfully. The ropes binding her didn't just encase her. There were cords between her legs, as well, spreading her buttocks uncomfortably wide and pinching the fleshy outer lips of her sex tightly to her body so that her clitoris was fully exposed—worse than exposed—bound by the ropes on either side to make the blood pool in it until it felt swollen enough to burst.

She was still trying to assimilate that circumstance and grasp the design behind it when she felt something hot and wet close over one of her nipples. Any lingering doubts that she'd correctly assessed her condition instantly vanished. It took her several minutes, in point of fact to catch her breath.

She'd realized the binding had caused the blood to pool in every unrestricted area, but wasn't until something clamped tightly on one nipple that she realized her breasts were bound in such a way as to force the blood directly to the nipples. She almost blacked out with the first hard tug. Pleasure more closely akin to pain exploded through her, made her belly clench so hard it cramped.

She sucked in a sharp breath, felt the scream that rose to her lips trapped by whatever had been used to muzzle her and only managed a whimper. It wasn't merely a tug, however. Whatever it was, it continued to pull steadily sending one jolt after another through her so that darkness began to gather in her mind.

She tried instinctively to evade whatever it was after the first hard jolt and discovered she couldn't seem to move at all. The effort only sucked what little energy she seemed to have from her.

Gritting her teeth, she tried to endure since there didn't seem to be anything else she could do, but it was torture like nothing she'd ever experienced—pleasure so intense it was nearly unbearable.

It was unbearable! She struggled to drag enough air in her lungs to stave off unconsciousness. She'd just fought the darkness to bay when the suction on her left breast ceased.

She dragged in a shaky breath as she felt her nipple cool almost instantly. She hadn't managed to complete the act, however, when the mouth—it was a mouth, she realized—clamped onto her other nipple, sucking so vigorously that she fell into darkness—briefly. It was too brief to give her any respite. The sensation pierced her mind's determination to shut down.

She groaned, straining against the bindings mindlessly while the tugging continued, trying to close her mind to the sensation pouring through her like acid. The urge to weep assailed her. She fought it with the sudden realization that tears would clog her nose and make breathing completely impossible.

Her mind had begun to feel fevered by the time he released the nipple he'd been tormenting and she felt the soothing chill of the air. She struggled to orient herself, to force her lungs to cease the labored struggle and calm her pulse because each frantic pounding of her heart forced more blood into her nipples and her clit and created more pain.

She discovered why the protective outer lips of her sex had been peeled away to expose her clit. He latched on to it with the same enthusiasm that he had her nipples. The pleasure was a lot closer to pain that time, pitching her toward darkness for a split second before the next tug brought her back. She strained against her bindings again,

tried to arch her hips to evade the torment and went limp when she discovered it was impossible. The tug became beguiling, in any case, within moments. Her body surged upward and exploded in a climax that threatened to rip her apart. For a few moments, she gloried in it and then, very quickly, even the climax became torture as he continued to pull at her clit, sending one shockwave after another through her—endlessly. She couldn't stop convulsing. It seemed to her that he pulled at her clit with more and more determination until the spasms began to weaken in spite of his efforts.

She was only dimly aware of the moment it finally stopped, too near unconsciousness to feel more than a flicker of relief before the darkness completely swallowed her.

Dread began to fill her mind even as she surfaced toward awareness. She wasn't certain why until she realized that her awareness instantly focused on the pulsing of blood in her nipples and her clit and the more aware she became, the more discomfort she felt until pain began to swallow her.

The mouth that clamped onto one nipple seemed hungrier than before, more demanding. The pain that surged through her was so blinding that it was several moments before she realized that pleasure lanced it like a knife. She hadn't even begun to acclimate herself to it as before, though, when he ceased to pull at that nipple and moved to the other. Even expecting it that time wasn't enough for her to brace herself.

She felt the edge of his teeth, banishing any doubts that it actually was a mouth tormenting her. She uttered a muffled scream against the thing covering her mouth, straining mindlessly to escape until he released it.

Her heart clenched. She knew what was coming next and she was still unprepared. Almost the moment he clamped down on her clit, she came. If that was his objective, though, to make her come, he wasn't any more easily satisfied than before. He pulled and sucked on her clit until she thought she would lose her mind, that her heart would stop. He refused to allow her to slip into unconsciousness even when her body began to shut down, sucking at her more determinedly, it seemed, dragging out her climax until she began to hope for death.

She whimpered when her mind dragged her toward awareness again and then cursed herself for alerting him. He didn't touch her until she was fully conscious, however, and she wondered dully if she *had* given herself away or if he could tell just by looking at her.

It didn't seem to matter. Even when she cautioned herself to be quiet, when she struggled to maintain the same breathing pattern, he seemed to know and he was waiting.

In time, in spite of her body's seeming willingness to respond, it grew sluggish. She'd come so many times she'd lost count. She'd climaxed so endlessly while he forced her body into spasms and then held her there until tears leaked from her eyes in spite of all she could do to contain the weakness.

He stopped. She could sense his frustration that he had to work harder to make her come.

She began to feel hopeful that the torture was over—at least for a while. The feel of a blunt object piercing her rectum didn't just send pain through her, it completely disoriented her. She'd been convinced she was lying on her back on something. She found she couldn't spare a lot of focus to figuring it out, however. The stinging pain eased after a few moments, but the sensation of being penetrated didn't. She felt

whatever it was drive deeper and deeper until fear began to take hold of her. Relief flickered through her, briefly, when she felt it stop and begin to retreat. She'd barely felt the flicker of it, though, when she felt something clamp onto both nipples and her clit almost instantaneously and begin to gnaw her with a ravening hunger that blew her mind. It was several moments, in fact, before she realized that whatever had penetrated her rectum was being slammed in and out of her so hard that it was jarring her all over.

The realization had barely registered when she came. It seemed to inspire him—them—to great vigor. The rod driving into her began to work piston-like, feverishly driving faster and deeper. The mouths alternated between gnawing at her nipples and clit with the sharp bite of teeth and sucking harder. She couldn't assess what was happening. Her body was so racked with spasms, she couldn't think at all.

Blissful unconsciousness enveloped her after a few minutes.

It didn't last long. Her body was still ping-pong all over from the aftermath of her last climax when she came around. It made it that much more tortuous when he—they—started again.

She struggled with that concept, trying to figure out why it had only seemed to be one before and now seemed like four, at least. She couldn't hear anything beyond the pounding of her own blood in her ears, though. She had no way to grasp who or how many surrounded her—or even if it was 'he'.

She knew it must be, but the how and why eluded her.

She discovered she was too tired to care. It took all she could do to endure and continue to breathe.

* * * *

Daegon was enjoying himself so much that it was a while before he realized that his slave was taking longer and longer to regain consciousness and it was growing harder and harder to make her come so that he could feed off of her. Reluctance to stop arose even when it dawned on him that he'd fed off of her until she was growing weak. He hadn't felt so gloriously fulfilled in longer than he could remember. Just a little more, he thought, and he would be completely satisfied—for once, for a little while.

He studied his slave hungrily at the thought, waiting for her to wake up. She'd been surprisingly responsive—surprisingly resilient.

The last time he'd fed so much on a mortal, the damned female had stopped breathing.

He frowned at the thought, feeling his anticipation wane a little, recalling he'd thought before that he should take care of his little pet so that he could feed on her again.

He'd have to let her go, though, and that thought instantly made him reluctant. He couldn't keep her locked away in his lair. Someone, eventually, might come to look for her and, if they did, his overlord would realize he had her.

He felt himself wavering between the urge to finish and take all he wanted and the reluctant sense of caution.

She was a prize. He didn't want to give her up.

If he sucked the life from her, though, he would still be giving her up. She would be useless to him.

He could have more if he let her go. Mayhap, she would even grow more accustomed over time and be able to give him a little more and a little more until he was completely satisfied?

If he was careful with her as he'd considered before.

It hadn't worked with the others he'd tried, he reminded himself, but then again they hadn't been able to give him nearly as much to start with. They hadn't had her passion.

It was worth a try, he decided with some lingering reluctance. She was his for the taking, after all. If he discovered she wasn't nearly as satisfying the next time he needed her, he could just take what she had and discard her.

Shrugging inwardly, he removed the binding spell and replaced it with the enchantment. Lifting her limp legs, he pushed them wide and lowered his mouth to skin above the thick vein that ran between her thighs and marked her as his own. He studied the mark for a long moment when he lifted his head and then his gaze flickered to her sex. It was still rosy with the blood that had pooled there for him and his throat went dry with the urge to drink a little more of her nectar before he sent her on her way.

Sighing, he dismissed it. No sense in being greedy. She was his now. She'd be back and, with any luck at all, he could feed longer on her.

Quality not quantity, he told himself! He could keep her in a state of climax longer than any mortal woman he'd ever had, feeding upon the energy her body released. She was too rare a find to be treated without consideration for the prize she was.

When he'd settled her in her car and carefully arranged her for comfort, he leaned close to her ear. "Come back to me tomorrow, slave," he whispered. "I want more of you."

* * * *

Maura awoke with the sense that she'd been beaten half to death—maybe more than half. For several moments, she struggled to retreat into unconsciousness again, but the light against her eyelids evoked a sense of 'wrongness' that she couldn't ignore. Shock went through her when she finally, reluctantly, opened her eyes and discovered she was lying in the front seat of her car. Feeling perfectly blank, she stared at the console for several moments, trying to figure out how she'd gotten in her car and why she was there. When her mind failed to produce an answer, she finally struggled to sit up and look around.

She felt more blank when she saw she was in the woods. "What in the hell am I doing in the woods?" she muttered. The question triggered a flicker of memory, but it vanished too quickly to grasp it.

The only thing that was immediately clear was that she felt completely dehydrated and her bladder felt as if it was about to burst. She wasn't going to make it back to town, she realized irritably. Pulling on the door lever, she got out. She nearly passed out when she stood up and had to lean against the car for several moments until the darkness passed. She saw the mansion as soon as she opened her eyes again, however, and the instant she recognized it, memories began to flood her mind.

She'd fallen asleep on a stakeout? Good god! She hadn't done anything like that when she'd been a rookie!

Dismissing it for the moment, she found the privacy to relieve herself. The relief was almost orgasmic.

Oddly enough, that thought triggered another flicker of impossible to catch memory. Giving up on the elusive 'something' after a moment, she headed back to her car and got in, trying to shrug off the heaviness that clung to her. A brief search turned

up a thermos with a little cold coffee at the bottom. She shuddered as she downed it, but it at least wet her mouth and throat, taking the edge off of her thirst.

She felt like hell! It was hard to blame it entirely on sleeping in the car, but she couldn't think of any other explanation. She honestly wasn't sure she was in any shape to drive herself back to her apartment, but she didn't think she would get to feeling any better if she stayed where she was. With that thought to spur her, she started her car and backed out of the brush in a tight turn. She glanced at the closed gates as she put the car into drive and spotted a sign she hadn't noticed the night before.

Trespassers will be violated. Survivors may be eaten.

She stared at it, feeling that strange flicker in the back of her mind again, like a memory trying to fight its way through her subconscious, but it remained maddeningly elusive.

"Very funny!" she said dryly, focusing on the road and heading back to town.

She made it to her apartment, but she was in doubt that she was going to actually make it inside for a while. She felt so drained when she got out of the car that it was all she could do to put one foot in front of the other and keep chugging. She headed straight to the kitchen once she was inside and drank water, juice, and the last of the tea she had in her fridge, until she thought she was going to throw up or explode.

Struggling with the queasy slosh of her stomach, she headed into her bedroom and sprawled across her bed without undressing. Despite the nausea, she was asleep within a few moments.

She didn't feel a hell of a lot better when she woke up. She debated briefly and finally yielded to the inevitable and called in sick. She'd barely hung up when her partner called back demanding to know what the hell was wrong with her. "I don't know, but I feel like I was rode hard and put up wet," she muttered in an attempt at humor.

"Well, if you don't think you can make it back tomorrow, try calling before your shift's over, how 'bout it?"

Maura frowned. "What time is it?"

"Oh, you are out of it! It's six o'clock."

"Morning or night?" Maura asked blankly.

"Shit! I was kidding. You *must* be sick as a dog. Evening, or afternoon. Why don't I just put you in for a couple of day's sick leave?"

Maura studied over the suggestion. Her gut reaction was to tell Bill hell no, but, considering the way she felt, she wasn't at all sure she was going to be in any shape to work the next day. On the other hand, two days out for sick was the limit unless she had a doctor's excuse. She compromised. "Day after tomorrow. I'm sure I'll be better."

She was tempted to climb back in bed and sleep more, but she decided she needed food before she collapsed from weakness. The bowl of soup and crackers were just what she needed to tuck her into her bed again. The second time she woke, she felt considerably better, however, thoroughly rested.

It sucked that it was nine o'clock at night! It was too late to go in to work, too late to try another stakeout, and too early to go to bed.

The chicken soup she'd had earlier seemed to have stoked the fires, though, and she headed into her kitchen to search for food. After considering and discarding half a dozen different options, she finally settled for a pan of scrambled eggs and sat down at her kitchen table to think while she ate.

It bothered her that she'd slept through her stakeout instead of executing the B&E she'd planned to see what she could discover about the owner of Noir. It worried her more that she'd spent most of the day in bed, asleep, and had felt like she was coming down with something horrible and now felt as fit as if she'd never been sick at all. What kind of ailment would have that kind of symptoms?

Her health was excellent. She rarely even caught cold. The only thing she'd ever experienced that even seemed to come close was when she'd been young and stupid and had gotten seriously stewed. Not only had she not been drinking, though, but there'd been one unmistakable side effect of getting drunk that she hadn't experienced with this—the dizziness that said she still had too much alcohol in her system. She'd felt lightheaded, but in the sense of weakness, not high.

It was baffling and more than a little disturbing that she couldn't account for it.

She pushed it to the back of her mind after a few minutes and tried to decide what she wanted to do when she'd finished eating. The moment she allowed her thoughts to travel that road, she began to feel antsy to do something. She'd wasted most of the day. She hadn't earned her keep or made any headway in the unofficial investigation she'd agreed to do for the friends of her parents.

Try the mansion again? As soon as the thought popped into her mind she felt both an odd sense of dread and anticipation. The urge to go was so strong, regardless of the strange sense of dread that she got up without finishing and headed in the bathroom to bathe.

She made a discovery once she'd undressed and climbed into the shower that was as baffling as the illness that had gripped her all day. Her nipples were so tender she could barely stand to touch them.

Premenstrual tenderness? She wasn't convinced even before she bathed her genitals and discovered that her clit and her rectum were also extremely sensitive. Ruffies instantly leapt into her mind and sent her reeling with speculation.

Chapter Three

Consternation washed over Maura along with cold dread. Foremost in her mind was the fact that she'd already washed off any evidence there might have been—unless there was evidence on her clothes?

Shutting the water off, Maura climbed from the shower, grabbed a towel and wrapped it around herself sarong-style, and moved jerkily to the clothing she'd discarded. No matter how she held her panties to the light, though, she couldn't detect any sign of semen, not on her panties or, in fact, on any of the clothing she'd been wearing.

Dropping the clothes in the hamper again, she headed into her bedroom, drying off as she went, and moved to stand in front of the larger mirror on her dresser. With the aid of a lamp, she found a tracery of strange, crisscrossing bruises in several places but they were barely visible and it was impossible to tell what had made them.

Frowning, she dug clothing from the dresser, moved to the bed, and then sat down without putting anything on. She couldn't think of anything to account for the bruises, but then again, they were faint enough she thought whatever had made them couldn't have caused her much pain. Pain was hard to forget. She couldn't even be certain they had anything to do with the unaccountable soreness.

In any case, she realized fairly quickly that it was unlikely that anyone could've spiked anything she'd drunk with the date rape drug. Sure, that would account for the fact that she didn't remember a hell of a lot about the night before but so would sleep, and she'd awakened in her car.

She hadn't had anything to drink, however, from the time she'd left her apartment to stakeout the 'Beast Master's' mansion but coffee from the thermos she'd made herself. The only time she'd left the car was when she'd walked the perimeter of the estate, looking for a way over the wall, and she didn't think she'd drank any of the coffee after she returned to the car, to say nothing of the fact that she'd locked the car when she left and it had been locked when she'd returned.

That didn't preclude the possibility that someone could've gotten into the car and spiked her thermos, but she still couldn't remember drinking from it until she'd woken that morning.

It was the case, she decided with a touch of disgust when she'd examined the 'facts'. It was just plain weird and she'd let her imagination run away with her, she decided. She didn't remember her breasts ever being quite as tender before a cycle, but that didn't mean they hadn't been. As for her nether regions—well, she'd had to relieve herself in the woods and that wasn't something she was used to doing. She might have gotten against something that irritated her. She could be chaffed for a number of reasons, including having spent so many hours bound up by her clothes in an awkward sleeping position.

Shaking the unnerving suspicions after a few moments, she put her bra and panties on then hesitated over the jeans and t-shirt she'd pulled out. The urge to head back out to the mansion hit her again, stronger than before. She didn't like the idea of

trying to go in when she hadn't been watching the place long enough to be sure Daegon Buckmaster—the beast master—had left, but there would be some sign of his presence if he was there, she was sure.

She wrestled with the ... almost compulsion to go for a little while and finally decided she was just antsy from being so inactive for so long. She needed to do something and she wanted to do something that felt productive, not just veg out in front of the TV. Coming to a decision, she tossed her first selection of clothing aside and headed for her closet.

The leather outfit she'd bought to cruise Noir was so radical she cringed inwardly at the thought of anybody she knew spotting her in it, but she'd been assured she wouldn't get past the bouncers at the door without it. It was nearly midnight by the time she'd wrestled the tight leather shorts, corset, and thigh high boots on. Between the way she looked in the ultra short shorts, boots, and corset and the lateness of the hour, she was tempted to just drag them off again and stay put. If anything, though, the compulsion to do something was stronger than before and, after tossing a light coat over her getup, she headed out.

There was a line of freaks winding away from the door of the club when she arrived and parked. She studied them for a few moments, but it was actually a relief to see she wasn't going to stand out as a weirdo. Shrugging off the coat, she got out of her car and headed for the line, discovering once she reached it that she didn't fit in nearly as well as she'd hoped she would, despite the leather. There didn't seem to be anybody within view that wasn't tattooed over fifty percent of their body and studded with piercings.

The young woman directly in front of her glanced at her several times and finally spoke. "This your first time?"

Maura debated, but the woman had clearly deduced it was or she wouldn't have commented. "That obvious, huh?"

She grinned, giggling exuberantly. Either she was high as a kite or she was younger than she looked, Maura decided.

"You'll love it! It's like nothing else!"

"So I've heard," Maura said, hoping she would elaborate.

The woman glanced at the people in the line and moved a little closer to Maura. "Wait till you get a look at the beast master!" she said in a low voice throbbing with excitement.

Maura lifted her brows questioningly. "Good looking, huh? Who's the beast master?"

The woman looked shocked that she hadn't heard. "He owns the club. *God*, I hope he's here tonight!"

Disappointed when the woman didn't elaborate, Maura decided to give her a little push. "Why do they call him 'beast master'?"

The woman grinned secretively. "If he's here, you'll see."

Irritation flickered through Maura. "I won't if he isn't here," she pointed out.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you. You'll have to see it for yourself," the woman murmured. She seemed to wrestle with herself for several moments. "Some people say he's an Incubus. I'm sort of leaning toward vampire myself."

Maura felt her pulse quicken, but she looked at the woman a little harder,

wondering if she was just plain nuts rather than high. “He drinks blood?” she whispered back.

The woman giggled again. “Not blood, sexual energy.”

Alrighty then! She was nuts! Maybe high, too, but definitely nuts. “I’m not even going to ask how he manages that,” she murmured dryly.

The woman looked vaguely offended, but she shrugged. “I would’ve thought you would’ve heard something about it or you wouldn’t be here.”

So maybe she wasn’t quite as off her rocker as she’d thought? Maura shrugged easily. “I heard it was a BDSM club. Never tried it, but I’m curious.”

“Ahh!” the woman said, nodding wisely. “I’m not sure this is the place for you if you haven’t tried it. It’s pretty hardcore.” She thought it over. “Actually, it’s seriously hardcore. I’d played around with BDSM a good bit before I came and I was still shocked.”

Maura hesitated, but the woman seemed completely unsuspecting and she’d been a font of information already. “I hope to hell they don’t get raided while I’m here.”

“Oh! You don’t have to worry about that! Cops can’t get in the door. I told you the owner’s an Incubus, or maybe a vampire.”

“Meaning magical?” Maura asked skeptically. “He’s got some kind of spell over the place?”

The woman shrugged again. “Supernatural. Something like that, I guess. I’ve heard they’ve never been raided.”

Maura was more inclined to put it down to greased palms in the right quarters, but she kept that to herself. Unfortunately, the line had moved them to the door and she didn’t get another chance to pump the woman for information. The bouncer looked her and the woman over and apparently decided they were together—a stroke of luck since the woman was clearly a regular!

She’d just breathed a sigh of relief when they stepped through the doors and she got the jolt of her life. There was a Bengal tiger sprawled between the door they’d entered and the door that led into the inner sanctum where all the noise was coming from. Despite the jolt it gave her, she was inclined, for a split second, to dismiss it as a very good reproduction—until it turned its head and looked directly at her.

Her heart leapt into her throat, but after staring at her hard for several moments, the tiger glanced at the woman taking money and blinked, slowly.

Maura followed the look and saw, to her surprise, that the woman almost seemed to be taking her cues from the beast. She turned to Maura and held out her hand. Still unnerved, it took Maura a moment to figure out what the woman was waiting for.

“Twenty bucks.”

Steep! Remembering she’d stuck her money in the top of her right boot along with her ID, Maura fished both out, peeled a twenty off and handed it to the woman. She barely glanced at the ID.

Trying not to feel insulted about it, Maura folded the ID in what was left of her cash and pushed it into the top of the boot again.

The woman she’d been chatting with had disappeared by the time she stepped through the inner door and halted to survey a scene that looked like something out of Sodom and Gomorrah. Maura was inclined to think that there wasn’t much that could shock her after nearly ten years on the force, but she almost felt like she’d stepped on to

the set of a porno. There was the usual nearly deafening music blaring from speakers around the place and in the center a large dance floor where men and women were gyrating wildly and rubbing all over each other, but that was where the similarity between Noir and any other club left off.

The place had the look almost of a coliseum—roman-style. It was tiered with what looked like stone benches that rose from the enormous dance floor at the bottom, which formed a pit, to about mid-way the height of the outer walls, which were four tiers higher than the entrance where she stood. Enormous columns studded the huge building and seemed to support the roof above. The ceiling was painted, but not just coated with paint. There was a mural painted on it where men, women, fanciful creatures from mythology and even animals cavorted in explicit sexual poses.

As Maura gaped up at the ceiling, trying to ignore the threesome engaged in sex not a yard from where she was standing, a hawk dove from the top of one of the columns with a high-pitched screech, swooped close enough to her that she could've identified what type of hawk he was even in the dimness if she'd known a damned thing about hawks, and then up again. Caught by the movement as much as her surprise at seeing it, Maura watched it glide above the uppermost tier and then alight on the back of a chair—throne—directly across from her.

The figure seated in the huge, stone throne was clearly a man, despite the fact that he had long blond hair that flowed loosely about his bare chest and shoulders and hung down almost to his waist. Even from where she stood, he looked massive—like a bodybuilder on steroids. He was sprawled negligently in the chair, his long, muscular legs clad in tight, black leather. He lifted his head and glanced at the hawk as it settled on the back of the throne with another high-pitched screech. Even as she watched, his entire demeanor changed from bored indifference to a tenseness that made her think for several moments that he would stand and stride down the stairs that led up from the dance floor to his throne. Instead, he merely turned from the hawk after a brief glance and looked directly at her.

Maura felt as if the breath had been punched from her lungs as she met his gaze across the wide expanse.

* * * *

Daegon was still in a towering rage when he arrived at Noir. He'd watched the road leading up to his lair for hours, most of the day, waiting in anticipation he could hardly contain for his slave to show herself. By the time dusk fell, doubts had begun to plague him that she would come at all. He dismissed it, pacing, waiting. He'd marked her. He'd planted his desires in her mind before he released her. She would come because she had to.

She didn't come.

When Daegon finally had to accept that she'd, somehow, eluded him, he unleashed the rage that had been building in him for hours. He might have completely destroyed his lair if it hadn't abruptly dawned on him that his overlord was bound to notice if he allowed himself to vent his frustration and fury as he wanted to. And, if he noticed, then he would begin to ask uncomfortable questions Daegon had no desire to answer. It took an effort to rein his temper in and contain it, but he managed.

The temper tantrum had still cost him. He'd expended far more energy than he could really afford. He had no choice but to seek the meager sustenance allowed him at

Noir, although he was still so furious he knew he didn't dare seek even that until he'd gained a better control over himself. He would be far too tempted, in his current state, to vent on whatever hapless mortal caught his eye and that would certainly draw unwanted attention from his overlord.

Above all, he had to keep his overlord from learning of his newest slave. He didn't know how she'd managed to thwart him, but she was his, and he would know how and why before he was done with her. Damn her! She was going to regret fighting him—deeply! She would regret displeasing him!

Mayhap the next time he wouldn't be as easy on her! Mayhap he'd just take all he wanted and throw the useless husk to his beasts when he was done with her!

He was still brooding over it, trying to decide which of the slaves that had dutifully presented themselves that he would feed on, when his hawk alerted him.

Female here.

There are females everywhere! Daegon retorted angrily.

New slave!

Stunned, Daegon turned and saw her standing directly across from him, poised like a startled deer. He narrowed his eyes, struggling with the surge of anticipation and rage that went through him. What the *fuck* was she doing here, he wondered furiously?

It hadn't been any part of his plan to feed on her *here*, where his overlord tallied every morsel he fed on!

Without even an acknowledgement that she knew he was her lord and master, she looked away after a brief moment and continued her descent to the dance floor. Baffled rage dogged her steps as Daegon wrestled with that stunning circumstance.

He was almost more inclined to think he'd somehow *forgotten* to mark her. That was incomprehensible, though, and beyond that he *knew* he'd marked her. He'd spent most of the day relishing that moment, congratulating himself on his restraint. As much as it had gone against his nature, he'd spared his little milk cow so that he could drink from her again and again. She was his secret weapon against his fucking overlord! She would end most of his torment, make his existence bearable.

He wrestled with himself as he watched her hungrily, trying to decide whether it would be safe to approach her or not, knowing if he did it was liable to draw his overlord's attention.

It wouldn't be safe, he finally decided. He was too hungry. He couldn't trust that he'd be able to refrain from feeding on her. Reluctantly, he dragged his gaze from her, noticing as he did so that he wasn't the only male in the room that was watching her hungrily.

It sent a fresh wave of rage through him. His cougar, he saw, was watching her, as well. He reached down to stroke his cougar's head. *Guard her for me.*

Obediently, the cougar rose and trotted down the stairs, pushing through the dancers and following her to the bar where she'd settled. Waiting until he saw the mortal males had gotten the not so subtle hint, he summoned his lead wolf. *Bring me the red head over there.*

The wolf stared at him. *One cougar watch?*

Daegon's lips tightened in annoyance. *Her hair's auburn, not red! And, as you pointed out, cougar's guarding her. The plump red head there.*

The wolf followed the direction of his gaze and stood up.

And, after her, the dark one on the fourth tier there.

* * * *

Maura was unsettled, to say the very least, when she'd gotten her mixed drink and turned to survey the club, or more specifically, the owner of the club, as casually as she could and discovered a cougar had sprawled on the stone floor not three feet from her. As if sensing her gaze, its head swiveled in her direction. It met her gaze for a long, long moment and then turned to study the other patrons of the club.

Without much surprise, Maura saw that everyone, regardless of how drunk, was giving the huge cat a wide berth. A tiger at the door, a cougar and a hawk inside, and none of the three leashed. She'd been certain the tiger must be, but the cougar sure as hell hadn't been there when she'd headed for the bar and she didn't see any sign of a collar let alone a leash.

She hadn't seen one on the tiger either, she realized abruptly. She'd just assumed
....

The stranger at the door had said she would see why the owner was called the beast master.

Trained pets? It still seemed inconceivable that the lunatic would allow wild animals to wander at will among his patrons, to say nothing of the patrons themselves! She could see, though, that while everyone seemed well aware of their presence and kept their distance, they didn't seem surprised or alarmed.

Maybe, given the fact that she'd seen no less than three couples fucking and two threesomes between the door and the bar, they were too drunk or too stoned to feel the alarm they should have?

She stared keenly at the people closest to her for some time, but she couldn't see anything that indicated they were either drunk or stoned beyond their wanton behavior and that didn't necessarily indicate drugs. Certainly not with people who clearly didn't have a lot of inhibitions to begin with.

When she glanced toward Daegon again, she discovered a large wolf had come to stand beside his throne where the cougar had been when she'd first noticed it. Daegon looked at it. The wolf met his gaze and then the wolf trotted down the stairs as if the two of them had actually exchanged words! Puzzled, she watched the wolf until he stopped behind a woman with long, unnaturally red hair and pushed his snout between the exposed cheeks of her ass.

Not surprisingly, it got the woman's attention instantly. Instead of turning and swatting at the wolf, though, she lifted her head, looked directly at Daegon and then an expression of eagerness lit her features and she made her way to the stairs, ascending them. Maura's belly tightened. She couldn't entirely decipher the emotion that rolled through her, but it wasn't uneasiness regarding the woman or her obvious intent.

The woman knelt in front of Daegon when she reached the top step, staring up at him worshipfully. Daegon's expression was harder to read as he surveyed the woman, but not only was his intention clear enough, Maura abruptly knew what the dark, churning was inside of her.

Jealousy.

She tried to dismiss it as ludicrous but it was hard to ignore when it only became more pronounced the longer she watched. Instead of rising and leaving, the woman turned and lay down on the step. Daegon rose from the throne without any appearance of

the eagerness the woman had displayed and dropped to his knees between the woman's splayed thighs. Expecting any moment to see him unfasten his breeches and pull his cock from his pants, Maura watched in breathless anticipation despite the urge to look away. Instead, he merely leaned over the woman, bracing himself on his arms and staring down at her.

Almost immediately, the woman arched her head back, began to moan and gasp.

Not that Maura could actually hear her over the noise in the club, but her expression of ecstasy was eloquent. She writhed as if she was in the throes of sexual rapture. Her mouth dropped open.

Maura felt her own blood heat, felt it begin to pulse in her breasts and her sex. Confusion wafted through her, as well. She hadn't seen Daegon touch the woman at all. He hadn't kissed her. He remained braced on his arms and stiff above her. He wasn't even dry humping the woman!

She gave every appearance, regardless, of coming and it seemed to go on and on until Maura found herself squirming in her chair. Ecstasy, she wondered? It didn't make sense. He hadn't touched her. No matter how sensitive the drug might make her, she couldn't feel anything if he didn't *touch* her!

It was hard to argue with the fact that the woman came repeatedly while he hovered over her and could barely regain her feet when he finally sat back and motioned her dismissal with his head. She *crawled* weakly down two steps and lay down again as if she was too weak to move further. When she moved, another woman took her place.

As tempted as Maura was to move closer to see if she could see better from another vantage point, when a third woman assumed the position, she fought the urge to watch and turned around to face the bar.

She was aroused, she discovered, just from watching, so much that her hand shook when she tried to lift her drink to her lips. The burn of the alcohol didn't soothe her a hell of a lot either.

She didn't understand the arousal any more than she understood the sense of ... betrayal she felt, jealousy, resentment. None of it made any sense to her at all, but she decided she'd seen enough.

Emptying her glass, she set it down on the bar and turned to leave. A jolt went through her when she discovered Daegon was standing directly behind her. She stared at him in stunned disbelief as he leaned toward her, bracing a palm on either side of her against the bar.

At such close range, she saw he had a hell of a lot more going for him than a physique sexy enough to make pretty much any woman that looked at him wet. He was so handsome it took her breath—literally. Without a word, he lifted his right hand from the bar, settled it on her bare thigh, and slid it upward until his thumb was resting on the pulse at the top of her thigh. Lightly, he brushed the pad of his thumb back and forth.

Maura's nipples tightened painfully. Her kegels began to spasm so wildly she thought for several moments she would come. Disappointment jolted through her almost painfully when he withdrew his hand and straightened.

Anger glittered in his strange golden eyes. "It's useless to try to resist," he murmured. "I always get what I want."

Chapter Four

Maura was still thoroughly rattled when she got back to her apartment, her hands shaking so badly it was all she could do to ring the damned keyhole with her key. Relief flooded her when she'd gotten inside and locked the door behind her, but it was minor.

Her body felt as if it was on fire. It had since he'd touched her.

She was almost inclined to think she'd had some sort of bizarre hallucination. She didn't *know* him! Tonight was the first time she'd ever set eyes on him. She'd never so much as spoken to him! She found it hard to believe that he'd even spotted her in such a crowd. Why would he walk up to her as if he knew her? Touch her as if he had every right? As if she ... *belonged* to him?

And what had he said? *It's useless to try to resist. I always get what I want.*

Her response had been a gut reaction, not the product of thought, unfortunately.

News flash, buddy! Nobody gets everything they want ... no matter how pretty they are!

She squeezed her eyes closed, wondering if she'd actually said that or only thought it. She was pretty sure she'd said it. Rage had glittered in his eyes, but something else, as well. Curiosity, she thought, surprise, maybe.

And she didn't doubt he was! Not only did she think he was the most gorgeous man she'd ever lain eyes on, but it was clear all of the women who frequented the club looked upon him as if he was a ... movie star ... or a god!

She could hardly congratulate herself when the words had merely popped into her mind and fallen out her mouth! It hadn't been any part of her plan to insult or antagonize the guy! She hadn't really expected to get the chance to get close enough to him to pump him for answers, but she certainly hadn't had it in mind to totally blow the opportunity if it arose!

"Shit!" she spat in disgust, shoving away from the door and heading to her bedroom.

She was seriously burning, she discovered in dismay when she'd peeled the leather off and flung it across the room. Was this what the drug X felt like, she wondered? And, if it was, how had she gotten it?

Her drink?

She'd watched the bartender mix it. She didn't believe he'd had an opportunity to slip anything in to it.

What about when Daegon had touched her, she wondered? She didn't think X could be absorbed through the skin, though. Of course, a lot of drugs could, but as far as she knew nobody simply rubbed it into their skin. They didn't want to take a chance that it might not work!

She didn't feel drugged, she decided—not that she messed with that shit! All of it was too damned dangerous, especially in her line of work. Anybody stupid enough to put themselves on the streets in less than tiptop condition was a fool that didn't last long.

Why, then, did she feel like her skin was too sensitive to touch?

Trying to shake the suspicion, she went to take a shower, hoping that that would ease her discomfort. She couldn't tell that it did. Worse, her mind kept replaying the images she'd seen in the club—mostly the image of Daegon and the women he'd She actually didn't know what he'd done beyond bringing them to climax.

She hadn't seen him actually touch them. Of course, she could've missed it. She'd been across the room and even though he'd been virtually on display, the room had been dim. He could've been rubbing himself on them, she told herself.

Except she hadn't seen him move.

Maybe the women had done all the rubbing?

She'd thought *they* must be on X from the way they were gyrating under him, moaning and shaking.

It wasn't helping her to allow herself to go over it in her mind.

Drying off, she discarded the idea of putting anything on and climbed into her bed naked. Almost as soon as she settled, the urge hit her to get up again, dress, and head out to the mansion.

It was almost as if she could *feel* him pulling her, *hear* him commanding her to go to him in her mind.

She struggled with it until it occurred to her that she'd left him at the club. She knew positively he wasn't at the mansion. Flinging the covers off, she got up, dressed, and headed out of her apartment.

If there was any sign that he'd returned when she got there, she promised herself, she'd just turn around and go back to her apartment.

The mansion, she saw when she pulled up and parked, looked every bit as creepy as it had the night before, just as dark, and just as deserted. She stared at it a long moment, wrestling with the urge to go in and finally got out of the car.

She was more than halfway across the lawn when she abruptly spied one of his wolves. She froze, staring at the animal for a long moment, and then slowly turned with the intention of racing back to the gate she'd climbed as fast as she could. When she turned, however, she saw the tiger and the cougar between her and the gate.

Swallowing convulsively, she slowly turned to study the house again.

Daegon was standing on the stoop, watching her. He lifted a hand in a summoning gesture.

Maura felt her belly tighten, but her feet began to move without her volition and she found herself staring up at him. An expression of satisfaction flickered over his handsome features. "I find your spirit ... intriguing, almost refreshing," he growled. "But I'm not particularly pleased with you at the moment. You'll have to be punished, of course. I never allow my slave's rebellion to go unpunished. And you are mine, aren't you, my precious?"

Maura's throat closed as if a hand had closed around it.

His expression tightened. "Say it."

Maura's mouth felt desert dry, but it flickered through her mind abruptly that acknowledging his demand was the last thing she should do. "No," she said in a hoarse whisper.

His gaze flickered over her. "And yet you're here. I see I'll have to convince you," he murmured lifting one hand and making a brushing gesture in front of her face.

* * * *

Dread flickered through Maura before awareness was much more than a faint budding. A strange sense of déjà vu followed as her awareness expanded and she became aware that she couldn't open her eyes because there was a tight band around her head. She couldn't move because she was bound with something net-like from her shoulders to her ankles.

Warm air brushed her neck, making a shiver skate down her along with the realization that she was completely naked. Her nipples throbbed painfully from the blood pooled at the tips and her sex countered that refrain.

"I see no reason to deprive myself merely because you deserve to be punished for your rebelliousness so we'll play this little game until I tire of it. You aren't allowed to come until I give you permission."

She recognized the voice immediately and instinctively strained against her bonds.

"You should conserve your energy. You'll need it."

Fear made her heart pound. "I'm a cop. You'll never get away with this."

He chuckled. "Ah! That explains it."

She discarded the question that immediately rose to her mind as to what he was referring to. "I'm Detective Maura Downy. If you don't believe me, search my clothes for my badge."

"Maura," he murmured, almost as if he was tasting the name. "It doesn't matter to me what you were ... only what you are."

Maura swallowed convulsively. "What do you mean?"

"Mine."

Before she could demand to know what the hell he meant by that, she felt his mouth clamp down over one nipple. It sent such a hard shaft of pleasure and pain through her that she nearly blacked out. It fried her brain and made her belly clench so hard it cramped. She struggled to muffle the whimper clawing its way up her throat and was only partially successful as he sucked and pulled at her nipple as if he meant to gnaw it off. She couldn't speak. She couldn't think. She was barely conscious when he finally ceased, but before she could even drag in a breath of relief, he caught her other nipple in his mouth. She came as close to passing out as she'd ever come in her life without actually achieving that avenue of escape.

There *was* no escape. Strain though she did, she couldn't pull away from him, couldn't move at all. She couldn't do anything but endure the tortuous pull of his mouth and try to catch her breath. He would suck and gnaw at one with the edge of his teeth while the pressure built in the other and then, when the blood had begun to pound painfully, abruptly seize it and torture it as he had the other, back and forth, on and on until she began to pray that she'd pass out.

When he finally stopped long enough she managed to drag in a breath, she searched her mind frantically for something to say to make him stop. "I'm sorry!" she gasped.

"Not yet, but you will be," he responded.

She nearly lost her mind when he caught her clit as he had her nipples, stripped it with the edge of his teeth, and then sucked it into his mouth. The muscles along her sex seized. Her heart hammered with incipient climax, and then ... nothing. Disappointment didn't begin to describe how she felt. Mindless was closer. She felt her body straining

toward release and yet it continued to elude her until she was fighting tears.

She ceased trying to grasp her release when she couldn't stand it anymore and began trying to divert her mind from what he was doing, but she discovered it was useless. He seemed to know her body better than she did. He pulled until the sharp sensations gentled and then he moved to one of her nipples, which had had just enough time to reach the point where the pressure of the blood made it sheer torture for him to touch her, let alone to pull at her flesh so vigorously. It took every ounce of determination she could muster to keep from crying out each time, and it didn't get any better.

Hours, or so it seemed, passed. She didn't know. It seemed to her after a very few minutes that she'd been tortured forever, and yet as fevered as her skin was, despite the painful quakes that traveled through her, she couldn't achieve release.

She felt like crying when he finally stopped and allowed her to catch her breath, allowed her heart to stop its frantic pounding, but even she wasn't certain if it was from relief or disappointment. Her body throbbed all over. Her breasts and her sex throbbed far worse, however.

She'd begun to entertain some hope that he'd finished with her, despite the fact that he hadn't made any attempt to loosen her bindings, when he began again. She was barely conscious when he stopped the second time, but, again, the hope rose that he was done tormenting her and, again, he dashed it.

She didn't make the mistake of thinking he was done the third time. She knew he wasn't. She tried to brace herself for the next assault and she still wasn't prepared. A mouth clamped down on both breasts and her clit at the same time. She should have exploded in climax. Instead, it seemed to be her mind that exploded. She couldn't catch her breath for several moments. She certainly couldn't grasp what was happening, although her mind scrambled in an effort to try.

She'd thought she was alone with him. How?

It flickered through her mind that she couldn't possibly be alone with him, but she was in too much pleasurable agony to think past that. The pulling stopped as abruptly as it had begun and it finally dawned on her that he wasn't stopping to rest or even to give her the false notion that he was done with her. He was waiting for the bindings to force the blood to pool again to achieve maximum sensation.

Her determination to endure in silence didn't last past the second three way assault. Nor did it occur to her to beg him to stop or release her. She began to beg him to let her come.

He didn't respond—not verbally. Instead, he continued the three-way assault until she thought she'd completely lose her mind and had begun weeping and begging and shaking all over.

She didn't feel movement, but she wasn't certain if it was because her senses had all been fried and gone haywire or if he didn't actually change her position. She didn't actually feel the bindings loosen, and yet she felt the pull of his hands on her legs, spreading them wide where before they'd been clamped tightly together. She whimpered when she felt his fingers stroke her cleft and then felt the pull of fingers on either side, spreading her cleft. Something enormous probed the mouth of her sex and a second probed her rectum at the same time, speared into her with little warning. Hands clasped her hips, driving her down onto the twin shafts, stretching her flesh until she whimpered

again with a mixture of fear and anticipation, pain and pleasure, driving so deep she began to fear she'd be mortally impaled.

"You belong to the beast master," he murmured in a husky voice near her ear.

The words wafted over her, through her, made her shiver. She searched her beleaguered mind, trying to decide if there was a demand in the statement.

"You're still not certain?" he purred.

"Yes!" she gasped. "Please!"

He seemed to consider it for so long that she began to be more afraid he'd stop what he'd offered—what she thought he'd offered.

She thought he'd decided to punish her more when she felt his mouth clamp on her nipples and then her clit. Her mind went wild with the attempt to figure out how he could do that when she'd thought she was impaled on his cock, but then she had two huge rods in her and he certainly couldn't have two.

She ceased trying to understand or figure it out when she felt herself lifted and slammed down again, driving the rods deeply into her. The muscles along her sex quaked painfully, but again release was denied. The shafts began to move faster and faster, driving almost painfully deep each time, pistoning in and out of her until she couldn't catch her breath. And all the while she felt the unrelenting tug on her nipples and her clit.

She couldn't stand it! She was going to die, she thought weakly.

"Say it!" he growled.

She couldn't think. "I'm yours," she gasped.

"You're my slave, Maura."

"I'm your slave," she groaned.

"And you'll come to me each night."

"I'll come."

The thrusting increased. The tug on her nipples and her clit began to feel more like pain than a mixture of pleasure and pain. "Come for me, Maura."

The convulsion that hit her dragged a choked cry from her. She jerked as the spasms tore at her, flinging her toward unconsciousness and then snatching her back over and over until she was screaming hoarsely.

A profound relief swept over her just before she passed out.

She came to with a groan of despair, knowing it wasn't over, praying it was.

It wasn't and the climaxes began to be as much torture as withholding release from her had been. She came over and over, on and on, until she was hoarse and finally sank into an oblivion so deep her last thought was that she wouldn't ever wake up again.

* * * *

It was the sunlight beating against her closed eyes that finally roused Maura enough to open them. She stared blankly at the console of her car, struggling with a strange sense of déjà vu. Groaning, she pushed herself upright and looked around.

Her car was parked in the brush outside the walls of the mansion as it had been the last time she'd awakened in her car.

Frowning, Maura struggled to shake memories loose, but the only thing she could remember with any clarity was the decision to head out to Daegon's mansion to see if she could snoop while he was gone. She couldn't even remember parking the car when she'd arrived.

“What the hell?”

Her throat felt as if it had been scoured with sandpaper. Her mouth and throat were beyond dry, painfully parched. A brief search of the car revealed that she hadn't even brought coffee with her.

Shaking the sluggishness with an effort, she started the car, turned it around and headed into town. She felt worse, if possible, after spending her second night in the car.

Too weary to try to make any sense of what had happened, she drank until she'd managed to banish the 'dried husk' feel and collapsed in her bed. She was so sore she could hardly move when she woke up. Groaning, too needy for food to ignore it in favor of pampering her sore muscles, she went to the kitchen and wolfed down a sandwich.

She discovered when she got back to her bedroom that it was nine o'clock. A glance out the window was all it took to assure her that she'd slept all day.

Something wasn't adding up, but she was damned if she could figure it out. It was bad enough that she kept falling asleep in her car, but to turn around and sleep all day?

The thirst and hunger, she supposed, was understandable. She couldn't recall that she'd had anything to eat or drink after the scrambled eggs she'd had before she'd gone to the club Noir. She didn't understand the weariness when she'd slept so long. She certainly didn't understand the soreness.

She supposed sleeping in her car wasn't the most comfortable place and, maybe, that accounted for some of it. But every muscle ached as if she'd had a thorough workout and she certainly hadn't.

It bothered her even more that she remembered so little about what had happened and what she'd done. The visit to Club Noir seemed pretty clear in her mind—almost too clear. She also remembered she'd felt like she was on X when she got home, so wound up her bedpost looked good to her.

She'd still felt that way when she'd headed out to Daegon's mansion, and yet she didn't now.

Actually, almost as soon as she began to think about it, she began to feel warm and as soon as she began to feel warm, she began to feel the urge to head out to his mansion again.

She shook her head at herself. Two nights she couldn't account for and she was thinking about going back?

She'd lost her marbles!

Trying to shake it, she dressed and headed to the kitchen for a snack and a tall glass of water when she saw she'd drunk everything else in the house. Turning the TV on, she flopped on her couch and tried to focus on the screen. It didn't help. The longer she sat staring blankly at the tube, the stronger the urge became. Feeling a mixture of dread and determination, she got up after a little while, turned the TV off and headed out of her apartment.

She was almost relieved when she pulled in to what was rapidly becoming 'her' parking space and saw that the gates to the mansion were open and there was a light on in one of the rooms on the second floor.

Daegon was home. She certainly couldn't go in.

She turned off the car anyway and sat staring at the house. The sense began to settle in her that he was waiting for her, that he knew she'd come.

She had no idea where the notion had come from, but she couldn't shake it. The certainty became more pronounced and, from it, sprouted the compulsion to get out of her car and see if she was right.

Maybe she would just walk boldly up to the front door and ring the bell, she thought? She wasn't getting anywhere. Beyond that brief encounter at Noir that she'd found so disconcerting, she hadn't even managed to get near the guy. She wasn't going to learn anything sleeping in her car outside his gate.

Coming to a decision abruptly, she got out of the car and started toward the gate, more than half expecting it to close before she reached it since it had always been closed before. It didn't. The hair on the back of her neck prickled as she passed through. She glanced around the darkened grounds a little uneasily, but she didn't see any sign of the 'beast masters' pets roaming the yard.

The front door opened as she reached the steps to the stoop and Maura felt a jolt go through her as she looked up and met Daegon's gaze.

"Good girl," he murmured. "You're late, but you're learning."

Dread settled in Maura's belly. "Late?" she echoed shakily.

"Mmm." His eyes gleamed. "I begin to think you enjoy being punished for your rebelliousness. Do you, my pet?"

Maura's throat went dry as a collage of fragmented memories collided in her mind. She glanced back toward the gates uneasily. "I don't think so."

"No?"

She looked at him again. "No," she said more firmly.

He made a tsking noise, but his voice was a low growl when he spoke again. "You should try to be on time tomorrow, then. If you aren't ... well, I may have to get more inventive. If you'd learned your lesson last night, you would've known better than to keep me waiting. I don't have a lot of patience when I'm hungry."

Chapter Five

Maura realized as soon as she surfaced that something was different. She'd experienced 'the waking' before. It wasn't like waking from sleep. It was more like reviving from a faint, and yet even as dread and anticipation mingled inside of her, she realized it wasn't the same before she even tried to open her eyes and discovered she could.

The room was shadowy, but there was enough light to see it looked like some sort of medieval torture chamber—not a cheesy mockup but real. It sent her mind into chaos. It wasn't until she tried to move and discovered she couldn't that she looked down at herself.

She was naked except for the intricately tied, knotted rope that bound her, forming diamond-like patterns across her bare flesh, but even that was different. Her legs had been bound together before. Now her knees were drawn up, doubled up and slightly to either side of her hips, spread far enough she began to feel the discomfort even before she looked down at herself. Her arms were behind her back as before, but tighter, drawn upward so that her back was arched, her chest thrust forward.

Her breasts had been bound tightly into pointy cones and her nipples were already tightly distended with the blood pounding in the tips. She couldn't see her genitals, but she could feel that the ropes running between her legs pulled the flesh to either side, leaving her cleft fully bared and worse, tightly bound enough the blood was pulsing there, as well.

A jolt went through her when she looked up and discovered Daegon was standing in front of her, watching her, his eyes narrowed. He lifted a hand, skating it lightly along her inner thigh until he reached the juncture of thigh and hip. He skimmed the pad of his thumb lightly back and forth along the artery and Maura felt heat rise inside of her, felt her kegels spasm.

She licked her dried lips. "You don't have to do this."

Amusement gleamed in his golden eyes when he met her gaze. "I know I don't. This little mark makes you mine and I can do whatever I like ... and I enjoy it ever so much more this way."

The mention of the mark, to say nothing of the brushing motion of his thumb that was driving her crazy, abruptly made a memory surface. "They were yours, too," she said abruptly.

Something flickered in his eyes, but it wasn't wariness. His amusement deepened. "It that what brought you to me, my precious? The others?"

"Their deaths."

Surprise flickered in his eyes, but it was gone so quickly she might almost have imagined it. He shrugged. "Mortals. Unfortunately, as sweet as the meat is, it's tender."

"And you're not?"

He lifted a brow questioningly and finally lifted his hand, to her temporary relief. It was short lived. He 'tested' her nipples, watching her face as he pinched them. Maura

swallowed with an effort. "Not mortal?" she said shakily.

He smiled. It sent a shiver along her spine. "You haven't guessed yet?" He studied her thoughtfully. "You aren't easily frightened. Would you like to see?"

Maura wasn't certain she did. He didn't wait for an answer. He waved a hand in front of his face and carried it downward. Her gaze automatically followed the movement.

One moment, he was fully clothed, the next instant naked—and not merely naked. Maura found herself staring at genitals like she'd never seen before. Two thick, long, obscenely huge cocks stood out from his lower belly. His flesh was an angry red, darker than her own blood-flushed sex and it went beyond his genitals. She followed the trail of knotted muscles up his belly to his face and sucked in a sharp breath.

Something flickered in his eyes. "You prefer the glamour?"

Maura swallowed with an effort, blinked, and when her eyes focused again, she saw Daegon as she'd come to know him. He leaned close, nuzzling her cheek and then licking a trail from her jaw to her ear. "I am the demon, Daegon, an Incubus to be precise."

The statement pitched Maura into complete turmoil. Her body responded to his touch by catching fire, and yet fear and disbelief, dread and reluctance chased one another around and around in her head. "An Incubus? You killed them?"

He lifted his head. "I released them. They bored me. As tempting as they were, they failed to appease me. You won't, will you, my precious?"

She didn't know, but she was afraid it wasn't possible, not if he was, in truth, an Incubus. She was still trying to decide if there was any hope of escape when he caught her hips and impaled her on the double shaft protruding spear-like from his lower belly. Despite the heat he'd already aroused in her, despite the moisture coating her sex, his enormous cocks stretched her as he pushed her inexorably down over them until she felt the burn of being stretched beyond her limits. She gasped, tensed and then struggled to relax when she realized she couldn't evade him and she was only causing herself more pain in trying. She was panting for breath and so dizzy when he finally stopped that darkness invaded her sight when she opened her eyes.

"It hurts?"

She didn't know what answer he wanted, but she felt as if she'd been impaled on two posts. Almost the moment he spoke, however, the pain began to recede and pleasure began to take its place. His eyes were gleaming knowingly when she met his gaze. "That's part of the punishment," he murmured. "You haven't forgotten you displeased me?"

She realized abruptly what was coming and a mixture of dread and excitement began to pound through her. "You didn't say what time I was supposed to come."

"Didn't I?"

She blinked at him, but she didn't remember him telling her to come to him at all. In fact, until she'd woken bound, she hadn't remembered any of this.

But he was a demon. As hard as that was to grasp, she either had to accept what she'd seen with her own eyes or assume she'd lost her mind. And demons deceived, didn't they?

"You know what comes next, my sweet little mortal?"

Maura swallowed, tried to shake her head and finally answered when she realized

she couldn't. "No."

He smiled. It was almost a sweet smile, but the demon gleamed in his golden eyes. "You're not allowed to come until I allow it."

"Oh god!"

He chuckled. "There is no god here—only you and me."

She tried to brace herself when he lowered his head to her breast, but she might've saved herself the effort. Acid boiled through her when he raked his teeth along the tender captive and lava flowed behind it when he closed his lips around it and sucked. She closed her eyes, trying to shut out the sensations pouring through her but realized almost immediately that it was a mistake. Closing her eyes only focused her entire being on the tortuous tugging of his mouth. She opened her eyes again, staring down at him and felt him bite her other nipple.

Confusion tore through her with the pain and pleasure. He hadn't touched her there. She could see he wasn't even touching her with his hand.

And then she felt a tug on her clit that nearly made her black out. Unfortunately, it didn't. She bit her lip until she tasted blood, fighting the urge to scream. Nothing she could ever have imagined could have felt so exquisitely wonderful and torturous at the same time. Her kegels clenched madly around the cock he'd driven deeply inside of her. Her sphincter tightened spastically around the cock in her rectum. Her body gathered itself to find release and hovered there, endlessly.

He fed on her flesh until she felt as if she was being eaten alive, pulling so hungrily at her that a constant war raged between pleasure and pain. She almost felt like weeping when he finally stopped, partly with relief, and partly because he hadn't assuaged the need pounding through her for release.

He waited until her body had begun to calm itself and started over. She'd given up trying to hold her cries inside by the time he stopped again.

"You won't disappoint me again?"

Maura couldn't even grasp the question for several moments. When he started again, though, it jogged her mind. "I won't! I swear I won't!"

Either she was too slow to answer or he hadn't intended to stop regardless of how she answered. He continued as if he hadn't heard her. The cocks began to move, as well, knocking the breath from her as they were withdrawn and slammed deeply again, faster and deeper until he was ramming into her steadily and she felt like she would go up in flames.

"Do you adore me, my slave?" he murmured when he finally released her breast.

"Yes!" she gasped immediately and discovered as soon she said it that she *felt* it, adoration, need.

"Come for me, baby."

She screamed when her climax tore through her and kept screaming until he finally allowed her to stop coming.

She'd barely managed to catch her breath when he began again. She groaned, feeling the familiar mixture of dread and anticipation, wondering if she would survive.

She was nearly comatose when he finally decided he was satisfied.

* * * *

Daegon didn't particularly want to stop, but he felt the encroachment of dawn and knew he had to send her home. A strange sort of uneasiness flickered through him when

he studied her limp form. He frowned, trying to determine the source of it and finally realized it was her near lifelessness that had caused it. He'd gotten carried away, he realized with annoyance, wondering uneasily if he'd broken his favorite toy. It didn't make him feel any better when he discovered how weak her pulse was.

It did occur to him rather forcefully, though, the moment he realized how wonderfully satisfied he felt, that he'd been incautious. He'd gotten too wrapped up in his pretty little slave. He hadn't even gone to Noir the night before as he should have.

His overlord was going to grow suspicious and put her beyond his reach if he wasn't careful.

He studied her face thoughtfully, reluctantly, and finally decided it would be better all the way around if he steered clear of her for a few days. She would have time to recover, he was sure, and he could manage on the meager feedings allowed him at Noir.

He would have to, he told himself, else he ran the risk of losing her entirely and as reluctant as he was to give her up for a day or two, giving her up altogether didn't bear thinking on.

Two days, he wondered? Three? More?

He couldn't stand more, he decided. He was reluctant to give her up for three, but he didn't want to risk discovery and Trydan would certainly become suspicious if he seemed too satisfied.

"Three days, Maura," he murmured in her ear when he had settled her in her car. "Three days, no more. Come to me. I will be hungry then. I can't contain the hunger longer or guarantee that I could stop if you disappoint me again.

* * * *

"You look like death warmed over, Downy," Thompson growled.

Maura struggled and finally managed to shoot him a bird. "Bite me."

"Looks like something already did. Why didn't you just call in sick again?"

"Because I didn't feel like dragging my ass out of bed to see a doctor. I figured if I had to get up anyway, I might as well get paid."

"You get sick pay," Thompson said pointedly.

"Whatever. I was planning on adding my sick days to my vacation time."

"Well, maybe you ought to consider taking a vacation. I'm serious. You look like hell."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome. Why don't I head back to the station, you grab the paperwork, and I'll take you home?"

"I need my car," Maura said pointedly.

Thompson looked her over doubtfully. "I'll get a patrolman to drop it off."

"Fine!" Maura said, too sick to care. She was glad her partner had been so insistent by the time she got home again. She'd filled out the papers on the trip and handed them to Thompson as she got out.

"I'll give you a call tomorrow and see how you're doing."

Maura turned to look at her partner in surprise. "I look that bad, huh?"

He shrugged. "Take it easy. The city won't fall apart without you—it's pretty quiet anyway."

It was. That was the only reason she'd allowed her parents to badger her in to

investigating Cheryl Malone's suicide on the side.

Not that she was in any shape at the moment even to consider it!

She was asleep almost before she hit the mattress. She didn't feel a whole lot better when she woke up, but thirst and hunger drove her from the bed. Discovering she had next to nothing in the apartment, she jogged her mind, trying to remember the last time she'd shopped for groceries. Giving up after a few minutes, she settled for a can of soup and as much water as she could hold and went back to bed. It was morning when she woke the next time and she almost felt normal.

Well, until she got up. Dizziness assailed her the minute she stood up and she thought for several moments that she was going to faint. Thankfully, it passed after a moment and she headed into her bathroom to attend her needs and bathe.

There was barely enough coffee in the jar for a weak half cup. When she'd downed it, she felt like she might be able to make it to the grocer, however. Her car was parked at the curb when she went out. She studied it for a moment. Ordinarily, she would've walked, but she discovered she didn't feel like it. Besides, she was out of everything. Walking with one or two bags was one thing. Trying to carry three or four didn't appeal to her at all.

The shopping itself was an exercise in endurance. By the time she had the buggy half full, she was ready to collapse. Gritting her teeth, she finished up as quickly as she could and headed home again.

There was a wolf crouched by the shrub near her steps when she got out. It sent a jolt through her. After staring at it for several moments, trying to convince herself it was just a big dog, Maura finally turned away and reached back inside the car for her bags. When she straightened again, the wolf had disappeared.

Frowning, she glanced up and down the street, but there was no sign of it. Wondering if she should add hallucinations to her repertoire of symptoms, she dragged herself upstairs to her apartment, dropped the groceries on the table and headed into her room for a nap.

Her cold stuff was room temperature when she woke, but the nap had refreshed her considerably. Settling at the table in the kitchen, she searched the bags until she found the ready to eat items she'd bought and munched chips and swigged juice from the bottle until she felt like getting up. Promising herself a real meal next time, she stowed the groceries and headed into her living room to flake out on the couch.

It dawned on her as she lay the couch staring out the window instead of watching what was on the TV that she'd seen that wolf before—the one she'd thought was a hallucination. She'd seen him at Noir the night she went.

She'd seen him before that at Daegon's mansion—or since.

Closing her eyes, she struggled to summon the memory and finally produced it.

The wolf was one of the animals that had herded her to Daegon's door.

The beast master.

The incubus.

She swallowed convulsively several times, but once the memories began to filter into her mind, they quickly became an avalanche. She rubbed her eyes, clamping her hands around her head as if that would stop the flow of images. It didn't, but she discovered that fog seemed to enshroud them, making them fuzzy and indistinct around the edges—almost like remnants of a dream.

Was she remembering some bizarre dream, or dreams?

What would make her dream that she'd been bound and fucked half to death by a demon?

Discovering she had a blinding headache in a matter of moments, she got up to search for a painkiller. After popping a couple of ibuprofen and chasing the pills with juice, she returned to the living room and turned off the TV.

It was hard to accept what she thought she could remember as reality, far easier, she discovered, to think it was dreams.

It almost made sense that way. She'd been struggling to find out what she could about Cheryl Malone, turned up nothing, and her dreams had attempted to fill in the blanks.

Except she could remember things she rarely remembered from dreams. She could remember being bound so tightly she couldn't move a muscle. She remembered feeling pleasure and pain so keenly her body responded to the memory, remembered feeling it in a tortuous mixture that made her feel like she was dying.

A super wet dream slash nightmare?

There was no denying there was a dream-like quality to the memories, but wouldn't that explain, at least in part, why she felt so drained when she woke up? Not just tired, but as if she'd had the life nearly sucked out of her.

It would if Daegon was a demon, an Incubus.

Frowning, she got and grabbed her lap top. When she'd connected, she did a search for information about the Incubus. She supposed it shouldn't have come as a surprise, much less a shock, to discover they fed on sexual pleasure. He'd told her he was hungry, she remembered abruptly, that he wasn't patient when he was hungry.

He'd also told her that he hadn't had anything to do with the death of those women. He'd discarded them when he was done with them.

Her belly tightened and a wave of nausea rolled through her.

She shied away from the reasons behind it, trying to focus and remember what else he'd said. She discovered she couldn't actually remember a hell of a lot. She could remember his voice. A shiver skated through her even at the memory.

Unfortunately, she couldn't convince herself that it was a shiver of fear or revulsion. It was hard to deny the way her kegels clapped at the memory.

What the hell had he done to her? Besides screwing her brains out until she nearly expired?

He'd touched her between her legs. He'd told her that was his mark and she belonged to him.

And maybe that explained the wolf at her door?

That time the shiver was definitely from nerves. She didn't have to look at the mark. She knew it was the same, strange mark she'd found on the women who'd committed suicide, but she undressed and examined it anyway. It didn't make her feel any better when she'd confirmed it. It was the same strange symbol, darker than she remembered, almost blood red, but definitely in the same place and definitely the same mark.

What the hell had she gotten herself in to?

How was she supposed to get rid of a demon, assuming she wasn't crazy as a loon?

Wait until he got tired of her, her mind told her.

The sick feeling that washed through her that time was harder to ignore. She struggled with it for a moment and finally met it head on.

She wasn't afraid that he wouldn't let her go, she realized. She was afraid that he would discard her ... just like he had the others.

"Jesus!" she muttered, curling into a ball and holding her head in her hands. Maybe she *did* need her head examined?

She shook that thought. As long as she was still sane enough to question her sanity, she was sane. She'd heard that somewhere and it gave her some comfort.

Beyond that, and as unbelievable as it seemed to her when she'd always had her feet planted firmly in reality and never believed hocus-pocus, she had *seen* him transform himself into demon form. She didn't remember anything very clearly but the two cocks, but she sure as hell remembered them! She remembered what they felt like when he worked them inside of her, when he'd been thrusting into her frenziedly.

A shudder rippled through her—of remembered delight. She'd enjoyed it. As much as she hated to admit it even to herself, she'd enjoyed it even when she thought he was going to rip her in two. She'd enjoyed the pain, not for itself, but for the possession and with the absolute certainty that he would give her pleasure that matched or surpassed it.

He'd teased her about wanting to be punished. She hadn't even realized at the time that that was what he was doing—not threatening her, *promising* he'd give her what she wanted.

She wasn't crazy. She was a sick puppy! How could she have endured it let alone enjoyed it?

But she had. She knew she had, even when she'd always thought the BDSM crowd was off their rockers, had sneered at the idea of wanting to be treated that way!

He'd done something to her, she decided, knowing even as the thought came to her that she was grasping at straws because she didn't want to know that side of herself existed.

And when all was said and done did it really matter how it had come about? She couldn't deny she enjoyed it any more than she could refuse him.

He owned her. She was the beast master's slave until he decided to set her free.

Chapter Six

Maura was torn the moment she remembered that Daegon had commanded her to present herself to him in three days—instantly torn. The first impulse that hit her was dismay that she had to wait three days. Hard on the heels of that, so close behind that she barely had time even to acknowledge the longing she'd begun to nurture, alarm went through her for the same reason. Three days wasn't much time to think of a solution to her problem, especially when she'd slept through the first!

She was reasonably satisfied that she'd solved the mystery that had thrown her in his path to begin with. No one was going to like it, but she felt that it was the truth.

Cheryl Malone, and the others, had simply become dependent upon Daegon in a very big way when he'd taken them as his slaves and when he'd discarded them they'd caved in. In some ways, it didn't make any more sense than any other suicide which, unfortunately, didn't preclude the possibility in and of itself, especially since the investigators and the coroner were satisfied in their findings. They hadn't been able to cope and that had seemed like a solution to them.

There were plenty of people, men and women, who sought suicide as a solution to various problems they couldn't deal with and dependency on a person who'd dumped them was one of those, maybe one of the biggest causes.

Although she was beginning to understand far better than she likely would have if she hadn't been caught in the same net, she certainly couldn't tell her parents, or Cheryl's, why it made sense to her. Daegon wasn't just any man—or even a man at all. Cheryl might have become just as attached if he had been, but Maura doubted it.

In any case, that particular part didn't matter. The bottom line was that Daegon had no reason to lie about it that she could see. He was a demon. He wasn't worried in the least that she was a detective when he'd taken her because he had no reason to worry about their laws.

That train of thought finally led her to something that had been nagging at her.

If Daegon wasn't constrained by human laws, was he constrained in some way by his own? She thought he must be. From what she'd read—and granted it was debatable just how much of it was reliable—as an Incubus it was in his nature to feed until he was satisfied and that usually resulted in death for the mortal unfortunate enough to catch his interest.

She couldn't be certain, of course, but she was fairly sure that *something* had stopped him from doing that with the women who'd ended up committing suicide. Something had prevented him from doing it to her. Considering how dehydrated she'd been after these sessions, she was pretty sure the coroner would have detected signs that Daegon had at least contributed to their deaths if he had.

Whatever had constrained him, it certainly wasn't love or any kind of affection as mortals thought of it. As unhappy as it made her to consider it, she realized she actually fell in the category of food, not companion or lover.

Of course she did love her favorite donuts, but not in the same way she held

people in affection. Daegon wasn't human and couldn't have human emotions so his motives would be different than human motivations—at least to an extent.

Noir must be his primary feeding grounds, she realized abruptly. Maybe he was only allowed to feed there? Well, she supposed he must be allowed to take 'food' home since she knew that was where she'd been, but if she accepted that he was a demon, then she also had to accept that he wasn't even restrained by the *physical* laws of her world, let alone the manmade laws.

It seemed like a sound deduction. As far as she knew he was never seen outside of those two places so it seemed reasonable to assume he wasn't allowed to hunt outside those areas. Otherwise, surely he would've? It must chaff him not to be able to hunt at will, to be prevented from roaming as he pleased, possibly even restrained from feeding as he pleased.

So another demon, stronger than him, or at least more powerful in some way, was holding the reigns?

If she was right, did that mean that she could escape him simply by avoiding those two places?

That was why he had the beasts, she realized abruptly! That must be it! *He* couldn't breach the boundaries and he sent them when he couldn't!

Did she dare test the theory, though?

Did she want to?

By the end of her second day, she realized she had a serious problem. She'd begun to feel like an addict that needed a fix.

On the level of reason, she didn't want to go back. She wanted to test the chain and see if she could break it and have her life back the way it was. She should've felt that even more strongly on an emotional level. She *should* hate him. He hadn't used drugs to take her will to resist or refuse, but he'd used magic and that was pretty much the same thing in the end.

She couldn't get around the fact that she didn't feel violated, however. It should have been her first reaction as soon as she'd finally remembered, but it hadn't been. She would've liked to put it down to shock, but she wasn't much for self-deception. On some levels she *was* angry. He'd shown her a side of herself she hadn't known existed and hadn't *wanted* to know was there.

But she didn't feel violated.

She toyed with the idea that, maybe, he'd used some kind of magic to make her feel like she liked it and wanted it when she really didn't, but she had to discard it. No amount of soul searching unearthed anything but her unhappiness at discovering she enjoyed being dominated and used almost beyond what she could bear physically or emotionally.

He was an evil bastard, she was sure. He was a demon after all, but she didn't loathe him.

Truth be told, she discovered she actually pitied him in a way. He couldn't help what he was. However he'd come into being, he'd come as an Incubus and he was as bound by that as any mortal was bound to being human. He was a sentient being, which meant he could make choices, good or bad, but to eat or not to eat wasn't actually a choice. What one fed on, might be. Whether one was a glutton or conservative might be, depending on one's nature, of course—that was hard to fight, too.

The one thing that really stood out in her mind, though, was his hunger—and hunger translated to suffering.

Maybe she was crazy to think like that, but once that understanding settled in her, she began to see him in an entirely different light. She began to think that, just possibly, he was being punished for something.

And maybe he deserved it. Maybe she would never know why and maybe if she did know she would agree that he deserved to suffer.

All she did know was that she didn't hate him for being what he was and that she couldn't help but view him as a lover even knowing he viewed her as food.

And that brought her to the physical level—a growing addiction that was something she should be worried about. By rights, she should be sexually satisfied enough to last her a life time. She might not clearly remember all of it, but she remembered enough that she knew she'd climaxed more in the time she'd been with him than her entire life previously. Beyond that, they hadn't been 'simple' releases. He didn't just know how to prevent her from coming until he was ready. He knew how to hold her at her peak and keep her convulsing with waves of pleasure until she thought she would die.

Playing with Daegon the Incubus was as bad or worse than playing with fire. It wasn't safe to indulge her sexual fantasies with him even though, physically, she'd already developed a strong craving to do so. *Particularly* because she had.

Strong enough that as soon as she'd recovered she'd begun to feel the pull to go back for more.

She might not have any choice in the matter. She might have to wait until he got tired of her and discarded her as he had the women before her, but her rational mind was warning her that she had to try. There was a real danger for her even if he was prevented from feeding on her until he sucked her dry.

Her understanding of and empathy for him was part of the problem. She would've been better off if she'd been able to simply view him as a beast. There wouldn't have been a danger then that she might become emotionally entangled as well as physically dependent. *That* was dangerous enough in and of itself.

She was pretty sure he'd already ruined her for mortal men, though. The best—mortal—dom in the world wasn't going to be able to do for her what Daegon could as easily as breathing.

She could live with it, she told herself firmly. It wasn't as if she hadn't already had disappointments in her life. As bad as her dependency was already, though, she would be worlds better off to cut the cord herself, as quickly as possible. She'd learned what she'd set out to discover. She needed to put the incident behind her as quickly as possible.

She went to bed the second night with that firmly implanted in her mind and woke up the following morning feeling energized. She wouldn't go back. She would ignore the pull. No doubt, like any addiction, it would be hard at first, but she was confident she could do it.

Too antsy to stay cooped up, Maura decided to take care of errands she'd been neglecting. Her first stop was her parents' house. She explained to them that, as far as she'd been able to determine, Cheryl Malone had gotten deeply into the BDSM crowd and had become involved with a man. When he'd broken it off, she had become so

depressed, she'd killed herself.

They weren't satisfied. She wasn't surprised. Nobody wanted a simple answer when they weren't willing to accept the truth to begin with and she imagined Cheryl's parents would be even less willing to accept. She refused to give them the name of the man Cheryl had been involved with, though. It would lead them straight to Daegon and that might well end in tragedy for Cheryl's parents. They were just going to have to accept that their daughter had become dependent to an unhealthy degree and couldn't handle the rejection.

She was almost sorry she'd made that her first stop, but it had always been her habit to take care of the most unpleasant tasks first. Putting them off didn't make them go away. It only allowed one to become increasingly reluctant to take care of it at all.

Her other errands weren't particularly 'uplifting' if it came to that. She dropped her car off to be serviced and walked to the cleaners to drop off clothes and then returned to pace until the car was ready. The service set her back enough to depress her and then there were the bills.

Discovering when her head began to pound that she'd missed lunch, she decided to treat herself before she headed home again—nothing like spending *more* money to perk one up after paying bills!

It *did* lift her spirits, however, until she caught a glimpse of the wolf. Her heart instantly went into overdrive. As before, he vanished the moment she was distracted and took her eyes off of him, but it didn't matter. She'd seen him. It didn't even do any good to try to convince herself it was pure imagination. *Thinking* she'd spotted him was enough to focus her mind in a direction she'd been working hard to prevent.

And it couldn't have come at a worse time! It was late in the afternoon by then. She'd finished her errands and had nothing to do but return to her apartment and think and pace.

Naturally enough, as soon as she began to dwell on it, she began to feel the pull. It made it worse that she abruptly remembered Daegon's warning—'Don't test me. I'll be hungry and I don't have much patience when I'm hungry'.

"Shit!" Maura ground out angrily, feeling her belly knot with a mixture of dread and, loathe though she was to admit it, excitement.

In all her plan making, she'd carefully avoided considering that her determination to break the hold he had on her might incite Daegon's wrath. She thought that was because she'd convinced herself that, as long as she avoided him, he couldn't get to her.

It resurrected another memory, though, reminded her that Daegon had speculated that she enjoyed the 'punishment'. She might. She didn't think she'd deliberately provoked him before, though. The spell, or whatever, that he put over her to control her had also seemed to have the effect of locking the memories in her subconscious.

Maybe subconsciously, she wanted to provoke him so that he would punish her?

She hated to think so, but she couldn't discount it. Was that what she was feeling now, though?

Or was she using it as an excuse to convince herself to go to him because she wanted to anyway? I *have* to go, otherwise it could be worse?

Maybe, but she also wanted control of her life back. She also thought he was very bad for her and she was concerned that she would only become more deeply dependent on him if she continued to put herself in harm's way.

If he truly was suffering as she thought, she empathized, but it wasn't her job to make it better. He'd managed just fine before she came along. He would manage if she left.

Of course, that might lead him to snatch another 'slave' and then another woman might lose her life, but she couldn't do anything about that. Daegon hadn't done anything 'illegal' beyond forcibly seducing her, and *she* sure as hell wasn't pressing charges! As far as she knew or had been able to discover, Cheryl and the others had presented themselves for use, just like all the other women she'd met at Noir.

If the stranger she'd spoken to was any indication, and she thought she probably was, every woman that entered Noir *hoped* to catch his eye and become his love slave. And they didn't seem to be laboring under any deception. The woman had told her right off that everyone thought he was either an Incubus or a vampire.

None of that helped her at the moment. She either had to present herself as ordered or risk the consequences if he did manage to get to her. Which, she wondered, was more risky to her? Going and hoping he'd get tired and let her go before she was really ruined? Or taking the chance that she was right and he couldn't do anything as long as she stayed clear of his domain?

And did she actually have a choice?

She'd seen the wolf twice. She had a feeling that he'd deliberately shown himself so that she would know she was being watched by Daegon's minions, or familiars, or whatever they were called. They'd herded her to him before, though, because she'd placed herself in a position where they could. She didn't think they had magic of their own, which meant all that they could do was scare her—or possibly eat her.

She paced her apartment for hours, wrestling with her thoughts and the need that blossomed and steadily grew stronger until she couldn't ignore it anymore. When she reached that point, however, she discovered to her horror that it was nearly ten o'clock at night. She'd missed her call. She'd missed her chance to present herself as ordered, at dusk, and Daegon was probably already pissed off.

That unnerved her enough that she had to fight the urge to dash off to his mansion immediately, but when she managed to calm herself a little, she realized that it might be a good thing. The die had been cast. All she had to do was stick it out, refuse to go, and, hopefully, eventually, she would cease to feel the pull. Hopefully, he would turn to someone else and she could have her life back.

It was the shakiest resolution she'd ever made. Nothing she tried served to cool her blood or shake the growing anxiety about angering Daegon. It wasn't much of a relief that he didn't appear in her apartment and vent his rage on her. She could *imagine* it reaching the boiling point and spilling over. She was just glad her imagination failed her when she tried to envision the extent of Daegon's wrath. She was sure it must be terrible.

* * * *

It had been far harder to wait the three days he had convinced himself he needed to than Daegon had thought it would be and that unnerved him. He did his best not to think about that aspect of his situation, but it was hard to ignore the uneasiness that twisted his belly when he considered what he might feel like if he didn't have Maura to look forward to.

It almost seemed to him that it was *more* tortuous knowing he had her waiting at

the end of his self-imposed fast than it had been when there had been nothing to look forward to.

Not that that mattered, he assured himself. He *did* have Maura and she appeased him as no other mortal he'd found before. He'd been as close to complete satisfaction as he'd ever come before in his entire existence when he'd, very reluctantly, sent her on her way to 'plump up' for him.

He was so complacent, in point of fact, that it was nearly his undoing. He had realized it was necessary to give Maura time to recover. She was mortal, after all, and there was a limit to the energy she could expend and still recover. If he was careful with her, she could be almost an endless source to him to stave off the endless gnawing within him. It was hard to be practical about it, but he'd accepted that it was his best option.

Unfortunately, he'd not only been thoroughly sated when he'd finally let her go to rest for him, he'd been looking forward to her return and that had been enough to tamp his appetite sufficiently that it had caught his overlord's attention. He'd recovered his mistake. He thought he had, by feeding wildly enough the second night that his overlord had banished him to the mansion, but he couldn't shake the fear that he'd aroused his overlord's suspicions and not completely appeased them.

He would have to be more careful, he cautioned himself.

That worked right up until dusk settled on the third day and Maura didn't come. Struggling with his anger, disappointment, and the gnawing hunger, he'd questioned his beasts. He'd set them the task of guarding her and protecting her if necessary from would be poachers and the like. She was mortal after all. They were so fragile there was never any telling what might snatch their souls from their bodies and leave them useless.

That reassured him, briefly. She was fine. She seemed strong and healthy, fully recovered. She'd been up and about, running around the city performing 'man tasks'.

That had reminded Daegon that mortals had regular tasks they had to perform to provide for themselves and he'd begun to think that, maybe, her work was interfering with his needs. Not that that was an excuse! She was his. She didn't have to do those things. If she had needs, he could take care of them. All she had to do was tell him.

She hadn't, though. He'd been too busy feeding on her to consider any of that and he hadn't spared the time to question her.

He should do that, he told himself. Not that he meant to excuse her on those grounds, but it wouldn't inconvenience him again if he took care of it.

After questioning his beasts carefully, though, he discovered that wolf had overheard the man in the 'man box' mention 'vacation' and Maura seemed to be completely free to come and go as she pleased.

He knew that word. It meant they weren't required to work for a time. It was rather along the lines of what he'd done—given her free time to recover.

It thoroughly pissed him off the minute he realized she didn't even have the excuse of being tied up with mortal concerns.

She'd defied him! Again!

His rage boiled over. He expended it on his 'prison'. The beasts, wisely, made themselves scarce. By the time he'd demolished everything he could—which included everything inside the mansion, everything except the mansion itself—there was nothing but rubble around him and he'd weakened himself to an alarming degree. That only made his hunger worse and brought his anger to a boil again.

“She will regret it!” he stormed. “She will suffer as I have before I am done with her—*more* than I’ve suffered, damn her! She has no inkling of the lengths that I can make her suffer and *still* prevent her from slipping away from me in death!”

The echo of his own voice through the cavernous mansion unnerved him, brought him crashing back to reality with a vengeance. He froze, more than half expecting his overlord to appear, triumphant that he’d given himself away.

Relaxing fractionally when he didn’t, he glared at the shambles he’d created for a while and finally decided that it might be best to put it back together. Chances were, his overlord would only view it as a tantrum he’d thrown because he’d been barred from Noir and gloat over it, but he didn’t want to take the risk, not when Trydan had already become suspicious. He could only hide just so much from the bastard!

Maura would come back—eventually. He was confident she would. She was amazingly strong willed for a mortal, but she couldn’t fight him forever. He’d marked her. She could resist—she had—but the pull would only become stronger the longer she fought it.

He was going to *enjoy* teaching her a lesson she would never forget! She was going to be *begging* him to give her release before he did! And maybe he’d leave her clinging to a thread of her soul and maybe he wouldn’t!

Chapter Seven

Maura wasn't sure whether it was fear of Daegon that kept her tossing and turning most of the night or if it was the growing need, but by mid-afternoon the following day she no longer had doubts. She needed him and not even the fear of what he would do to punish her for trying to elude him was enough to prevent her from getting in her car and driving out to the mansion.

She was so anxious, in fact, that she left well before dusk only to discover that she was barred from entering. She felt perfectly blank when she discovered that not only were the gates not standing open for her, but she couldn't scale the gate.

A different sort of fear gripped her then. What if he'd gotten so furious he'd discarded her?

She couldn't believe he had and she couldn't convince herself he hadn't. Giving up finally, she tried to sit patiently in the car and wait for dusk. When she found she couldn't, she got out again and paced.

To her vast relief, as dusk fell, the gates opened. With relief, anxiety, and need churning in her until she felt sick with it, she braced herself and went in. Daegon met her on the stoop and one look at his face was enough to assure her that he was more than a little pissed off. There wasn't a trace of gentleness or amusement in his expression. He was seething, so furious he didn't even speak.

Her knees turned to water. If she could've mastered any coordination, she thought she would've tried to run regardless of his beasts, despite the very real possibility of angering him more.

He narrowed his eyes at her. "Don't even consider it, woman!" he growled.

It was almost as if the words unfroze her. Maura managed to whirl away from him, but she hadn't taken two steps when the darkness engulfed her.

* * * *

Maura wasn't certain if it was the discomfort of rough fingers pulling at the tender flesh of her cleft and genitals that roused her toward awareness or if he'd lifted the veil to be certain she was aware, but it didn't take her mind long to grasp what was happening, regardless. He pried his flesh into hers with a ruthless determination that she knew was intentionally hurtful. It was her instinct to deprive him of pleasure in knowing that made her try to contain the sounds of her distress, but she discovered fairly quickly that she didn't actually have an option. Her entire head, with the exception of her nose, was encased in something as it had been the first time.

"I made these especially for you," he muttered in a purring growl near her ear, "a perfect fit for your body to be certain I caused no harm."

Disbelief instantly flickered through her mind. It hurt. If he was trying to say he was tender, he was way off the mark and she wasn't buying it. Relief filled her, though, when he finally achieved full penetration and stopped. The instant he did, the burning pain began to ease and her body warmed with gratitude at the cessation of pain.

"I could have made them thicker, longer—big enough to cause real pain, injured

you—killed you outright or allowed you a slow death. The energy is the same to me, whether its pain or pleasure for you.”

He *did* think he was reminding her that he had been careful with her, she realized, outraged!

“Your life means nothing to me, mortal! *Nothing!* You infest this world like annoying insects. There are millions more just like you! I *chose* to give you pleasure, more than any mortal will ever give you, and you repaid my kindness with betrayal, rebellion ... torment.”

Anger had swept through her at the beginning of his speech. The last word gave her pause, however. *She* had tormented herself by refusing to answer his call. It had been a hellish two days—more actually, because as soon as she'd recovered the heat had begun to eat at her and it had grown worse by leaps and bounds the longer she refused to acknowledge her 'addiction'.

Had it been as bad for him? Worse?

It was hard to grasp that it might have been even though she'd acknowledged that he was a creature that drew his sustenance from the energy mortal bodies expended in the throes of passion, that it was as necessary to him as water and food were to her. She might accuse him of being a self-centered bastard, but she certainly hadn't given any thought to his suffering when she'd been fighting returning to him. She knew she hadn't and, worse for her, *he* knew she hadn't.

It flickered through her mind that that was the root of his anger. Maybe he was trying to convince himself as much as her that she was insignificant to him in any way, but she'd already deduced that she *was* at least in the sense that she was his primary source for his needs.

He didn't allow her to dwell on it long. Once he began the assault to her senses, her thoughts refused to make connections in her mind, scattered and rolled in drunken circles like beads tossed carelessly on the floor. It was almost more than she could endure, the exquisite torture of unrelieved pleasure, endless. The brief moments of respite weren't for her benefit, she knew, but to allow her to cool enough so that he could start again with optimum effect. It seemed to go on for hours and hours, but she had no concept of time encased as she was in the hood of darkness.

The time came, regardless, when she began to anticipate release. Before, when he'd punished her, he'd given until she thought she couldn't stand it anymore, withholding release until she thought she would lose her mind. In time, though, he'd given her release, allowed her climax. That had been as much torture in its own way because he hadn't simply allowed it. He'd made her convulse with pleasure until she'd thought she would die from that.

She dreaded it in a sense, but she began to look forward to it with desperation.

He didn't give it to her. Instead, after arousing her over and over until she couldn't keep tears of weakness and frustration from seeping from her eyes and rolling down her cheeks, he simply stopped and left her.

She was in too much agony at first to realize she was no longer bound—not as she had been, at any rate. She'd been curled into a fetal position for some time before it dawned on her that she'd been allowed the instinctive urge to curl into herself.

She was still naked, still blinded by whatever covered her eyes, but the heat radiating off of her skin began to cool by degrees until she was shivering. Discovering

she could move her arms, her hands moved to the thing covering her eyes of their own accord. If it was a blindfold, however, she couldn't find a knot or pull it off. Giving up after a while, she lay panting, trying to regain her strength and then explored the surface where she lay. She thought it was a bed. The tightness around her throat was a collar studded with wicked points that pricked her fingers. A heavy chain led from it across the bed.

She was so thirsty she felt like her tongue was swollen. It was the demands of her body that finally led to the notion that he'd allowed her the freedom to take care of them and that thought drove her to explore further. The heavy chain struck stone as she wiggled to the edge of the mattress, the sound startlingly loud. She froze for several moments and then pushed her legs over the side and pushed herself into a sitting position, waving her arms in front of her blindly.

Nothing met her fingers. Dizziness and an acute sense of disorientation swept through her when she struggled to stand on her feet. The muscles in her legs quivered, threatened to give out, but once she'd stood for a few moments, the feeling passed. Moving slowly, sliding her feet along the cold stone floor, she explored the limits of the chain and found a narrow door. The certainty leapt into her mind that it was a bathroom for her needs and she felt her way inside and discovered she'd guessed right.

She relieved herself and then scooped water from the lavatory and drank it until her tongue and throat didn't feel as swollen with thirst, bitterly grateful that he'd at least uncovered her mouth. Using the chain to guide her, she found her way back to the bed and discovered the other end embedded in the wall. A few tugs were enough to convince her she couldn't pull free. When she dropped the chain in defeat, it clanged dully against wood before it hit the floor. An exploration with her hands produced the information that it was a table, or maybe a low chest beside the bed. She found a plate of food and a mug.

Her belly tightened. He had no intention of releasing her—certainly not any time soon if he'd provided for her needs, she realized. It was small comfort that he clearly didn't intend for her to starve or die of thirst.

She wasn't hungry. She was too thirsty to feel any hunger, but it certainly wasn't in her best interests to allow herself to grow any weaker. She ate what she could of the bread and cheese and drank the juice in the mug, wishing it was something alcoholic instead so that she could drink herself into a stupor.

Truthfully, she was as near a stupor, she supposed, as she needed to be—except her flesh still felt as if ants were crawling over her, stinging her. She lay down again after a few minutes, searched the surface until she found a thin sheet to cover herself with and curled into a tight ball. Torn between the coolness of the room and the heat still radiating from her body, she lay still, trying to control the shivers, trying to empty her mind.

It wasn't as difficult to empty her mind as it should have been. She couldn't seem to manage much besides disjointed thoughts. Dread permeated her, though, the certainty that she'd so enraged Daegon that he might well have decided to torment her until she died or went completely insane.

She thought she'd slept for a time. The sluggishness of being awakened before she'd completely rested gripped her when she awoke to awareness again and found herself bound for his torment. She groaned aloud when she felt his thick flesh invading her. The sound startled her, but it also made her aware that, this time, he wanted to *hear*

her—maybe wanted to wring pleas from her.

She didn't know and she couldn't gather her wits enough to figure it out. Determination settled in her to deny him the satisfaction, however. That sustained her for hours, or what seemed like hours, but she reached a point where she ceased to care whether her complete surrender brought him satisfaction or not.

When that settled inside her, it took hold of her mind that that was what he was waiting for, surrender, complete and utter defeat and she stopped fighting it. She was defeated. All she wanted was surcease and he could give it to her.

She began to plead with him then to bring her to climax and give her release. Her pleas fell on deaf ears, however. She begged until she finally realized that no amount of pleading was going to do any good. He wasn't tired of tormenting her. He hadn't appeased his anger, and he wasn't going to give her what she desperately wanted until he'd reached that point.

She ceased begging, but resentment took its place and then anger—weak, but sustaining. She began cursing him then, called him every foul name that came to mind.

“Give it to me!” she screamed at him. “You low down son-of-a-bitch! I hate you! Hate you! Hate you! Hate you!”

He stopped so abruptly when she screamed at him that surprise and fear jolted through her.

“Do you think I *care* if you hate me, mortal?” he growled after a long pause. “The only thing that matters to me is your passion and, either way, love or hate, I have that!”

He was lying. She knew it instantly. Why would he roar at her as if she'd stabbed him if it didn't matter?

A jolt went through her when she felt his mouth settle over hers. He didn't have to force her lips apart. They went slack with stunned surprise. She was completely unprepared for the invasion of his tongue, the conquest. His essence flowed into her like a potent drug, sending her reeling. Even as he swept her meager defenses aside, she felt the pull of his mouth on her breasts and her clit as before and he began to drive his cocks into her almost frenziedly. Her climax hit her like an atom bomb, shattering her, splitting her atoms. She flew apart with the searing heat, jerking in nearly unbearable spasms on and on until she lost herself to the darkness.

She was shivering when she came to and she was alone. Too thoroughly confused to assimilate where she was or how she'd gotten there, she lay perfectly still for a while, staring blankly at the ornate armoire across from the bed where she lay. As memories trickled into her mind, she roused enough to search for the collar and chain and found they were gone.

Pushing herself up with an effort, she shoved her hair from her face and looked around the shadowy room. Moonlight, she saw, was spilling through a huge window big enough to be a door, limning much of the room in its gentle light, enough that she could see the room where she lay looked like something from an old world palace.

Her heart jerked painfully in her chest when Daegon stepped from the shadows and not merely because she hadn't realized he was there. He'd dropped his glamour. It was the beast that approached the bed.

“Why?” he demanded, baffled fury eloquent in the single word.

Maura blinked at him, searching her mind for the answer to the question. Try

though she might, though, she couldn't figure out what he was asking. He launched himself at her, pinning her beneath his weight. "Explain to me, woman!"

Maura swallowed with an effort, but he'd caught her completely off-guard and she couldn't seem to command her thought processes. "I don't understand."

He growled in frustration. "I have wrung pleasure from your body as no mortal ever has, damn you! I gave you more than I have ever given any mortal! The others adored me, begged for more, wept when I withheld it. Why do you hate me when I have adored you as no other?"

Doubt flickered through her, but Maura felt her heart squeeze with compassion—and something else she didn't even want to consider. "I didn't seek this," she said angrily. "I didn't want it! I don't want to be enslaved by you and I certainly don't want to be enslaved by my desires. You showed me a part of myself that I hate! You *made* me a monster!"

Something flickered in his eyes. "I made you for me!" he growled. "No pale, weak mortal can ever please you like I do!"

Maura felt her throat close. It was all too true and it made her angrier to acknowledge it. He kissed her before she could respond, fiercely, as if to drive home the fact that it no longer mattered whether he donned a glamour to seduce her or not.

And it didn't. His taste and scent were as powerful a narcotic as before, drawing heat from her.

"Touching!"

Daegon broke the kiss at the intrusion, his head jerking upward as if he'd been scalded. Before Maura could even search out the source of the beastly voice, Daegon was lifted and hurled across the room as if an invisible hand had slapped him. She sat up with a jolt of horror.

The demon standing beside the bed was horrible to behold, sent such a wave of stark terror through Maura that her mind seemed to shut down. Uttering a roar, Daegon flew back across the room, slammed into the other demon and drove him into the wall, crumbling plaster and furniture.

Maura screamed, leapt from the bed and scurried to the far side of the room without any awareness of moving.

"I ... release ... you!" Daegon roared without even turning his head in her direction, every muscle on his body straining as he struggled to keep the other demon pinned against the wall. "Leave!"

Maura gaped at the two demons, unable to assimilate that Daegon meant the words for her.

"Get out, Maura! Go!"

Feeling almost like a puppet, as if something was controlling her from outside her body, Maura jerked upright, glanced wildly around for an exit, and raced to the door. It flew open before she reached it. She raced through the opening as it began to slam closed again. The edge of the door struck her, nearly sending her sprawling. Instead, she stumbled into the wall on the other side.

Righting herself, she glanced around with no notion of where to run. The cougar bounded into view, butted her with his head to get her moving and then chased her down the hall, down the stairs and across the foyer to the front door. She grabbed the handle, wrestling with it, nearly pulling her shoulders from the socket in her effort to pull it open.

Abruptly it gave inward. She stumbled back, managed to catch herself and charged outside.

Daegon's beasts, she finally realized, weren't chasing her. They were fleeing the battle inside the mansion just as she was. Beyond the cougar nipping at her heels to make her run faster, none of them seemed interested in her. The gate at the drive banged open just before she reached it. In the dim recesses of her mind, she realized the demons were battling for possession of the barriers between her and safety and also that safety lay beyond the estate.

It spurred her to more speed. She managed to squeeze through before the gates banged shut again, but she kept running until she reached her car, wrenched the door open, and dove inside. The cougar tried to get in with her. She hit him on the snout with her fist. He reared back with a feline yelp, lost his balance, and rolled on the ground. She slammed the door shut before he could regain his footing and locked it for good measure.

She heard the great cat bound onto the roof of the car as she grabbed the key and turned it, but she was still running on automatic. Her instinct for self-preservation had her firmly in its grip and thought wasn't part of the process, merely action, reaction, and habit. When she jerked the car into reverse and twisted around to see what was behind her, she saw the ass end of Daegon's beasts—both cats and two or three wolves—as they disappeared into the woods.

It was a good thing for her that heading to the 'stable' was an automatic response. She hadn't recovered her wits when she parked in her usual spot and leapt out. It was probably fortunate. She didn't realize until she'd raced into her apartment and slammed and locked the door that she didn't have a stitch of clothes on.

She looked down at herself blankly when that dawned on her. Shivering uncontrollably, she headed into her bedroom, climbed into the middle of her bed, and pulled her covers around her. For a while, all she could do was stare blankly into space, shivering until her teeth rattled in her head, listening for any sound that might be a threat.

Slowly, the shock began to ease its hold on her. Every creak and groan of the building sent an electric jolt of fear through her, though, and it wasn't until the first fingers of dawn began to lighten the sky that weariness finally overcame all other considerations and she passed out.

She awoke with the sort of jolt a nightmare produced, her heart hammering uncomfortably in her chest. Her familiar surroundings produced a sense of safeness that began to calm her almost immediately, however.

Relaxing fractionally, she searched her mind for the nightmare that had awakened her. There was little comfort when she found what she was seeking, though, and realized it wasn't a nightmare at all that had awakened her.

Shuddering when her mind produced an image of the demon that had attacked Daegon, Maura tried to banish the image. Her confusion demanded answers, however, and her mind began working at an understanding that she wasn't sure she wanted.

It occurred to her after a while that she'd suspected Daegon was controlled by something, some force that made him as much of a prisoner as he had made her. The demon had found him out, she realized. He'd given himself away, maybe, or the demon had simply stumbled upon his secret—her.

She didn't know which, but the certainty settled in her that that was what she'd

witnessed—maybe Daegon's battle for his life.

Her belly clenched at the thought. In spite of all she could do to ignore it, the fear began to grow in her that Daegon might well have lost that battle. She tried to convince herself that she was glad if that was the case, but it was useless. Even the certainty that he'd weakened himself just to punish her for defying him didn't give her any satisfaction. It filled her with remorse—and guilt.

She'd punished *him* first by refusing to acknowledge her need for him.

It wasn't logical, at all, for her to feel that she'd hurt him, that *she* had tormented him until he'd grown incautious and the other demon had discovered what he was up to.

It began to play back through her mind, though, the hours he'd spent 'punishing' her, his anger when she'd told him she hated him, his baffled anger when he'd demanded to know why.

He was a beast, she realized. He truly didn't understand and his confusion wasn't only because he was a demon and couldn't grasp human emotions. Every female he'd dealt with was 'in' to BDSM. They *wanted* him to treat them that way, relished it, adored him for mastering their bodies and their minds.

At least three that she knew of had been so despondent when he'd discarded them that they'd killed themselves.

As twisted as it seemed to her, she began to think that, in his mind, he truly had worshipped her.

It made her feel much, much worse. It made her feel as if *she* was in the wrong, that she'd been so stupid as to play with a dangerous animal and then stabbed it when it behaved according to its nature.

Driven from her bed by her needs after a while, she showered and dressed and searched for food. She couldn't manage much of an appetite for all that. It kept running through her mind that she'd been the instrument of Daegon's destruction.

Not that he'd seemed weak to her mind, but how weak had he been compared to his 'normal' self when he'd expended hours tormenting her instead of feeding? Weaker than the other demon, she was sure.

It dawned on her after a while that he'd been holding the demon off to allow her to flee. The entire battle, she realized abruptly, had been to save her from the other demon's wrath!

Chapter Eight

Despite the guilt and anxiety for Daegon that rattled around in her mind, relief was uppermost when Maura finally realized that a full day had passed and not only had neither Daegon or the other demon come after her, but she didn't feel the heat that she'd come to dread. As soon as that occurred to her, though, confusion followed.

Daegon had marked her as his slave. She'd tried to fight it and failed. Why didn't she feel that nearly painful pull to go to him?

After a brief search for a hand mirror, she stripped and examined the mark Daegon had left on her thigh. A jolt went through her when she saw that it was different, paler, almost invisible—like the marks she'd found on the dead women.

He'd released her. Her heart seemed to stutter at that realization. She waited in vain for a feeling of freedom, release, gladness. Instead, she flung the mirror across the room where it shattered against the wall, threw herself onto her bed, and wept like she'd never cried before.

"I'm so happy!" she wailed. "So relieved! I'm free!"

She wasn't! She'd never been so miserable in her life!

He'd let her go to save her from the other demon. She knew it.

Maybe it was in the hope that she would come back to him, though?

That thought dried her tears. He was a demon, she told herself, deceptive, manipulative. He was playing with her mind!

He no longer had control of her, though. He'd removed the mark, knowing that the mark was all that had brought her to him before and then only reluctantly.

For two days, she struggled to pick up her life, to convince herself that she was fiercely glad if Daegon *had* been destroyed. On the third day, she acknowledged that it wasn't working.

She just wanted to know, she told herself as she drove out to Daegon's mansion and parked near dusk. After staring at the mansion for a while, she got out and approached the gate. There was no sign of his beasts within the grounds, but then she'd never seen them before until she climbed over the gate.

It didn't stand open in welcome, but then it hadn't before.

She encountered a wall at the top. Disbelieving at first, she felt the invisible barrier with her hand and discovered it seemed to go on forever, as far as she could reach. Disconcerted, she climbed down, planted her hands on her hips and studied the gate. Maybe it was just the gate?

It took her nearly an hour to find and move a limb that she could climb. She discovered when she'd wedged it against the wall and scaled it, though, that the same invisible wall barred her from the premises. Anger and disappointment began to nag at her. Instead of stalking back to her car and leaving, though, she pulled the car closer to the stone wall in another spot, climbed on the hood, and tried again. She couldn't even get up on the top of the wall to walk along it and search for an opening. It was as if a glass bowl had been turned down over the entire estate.

Thwarted, angry and disappointed if the truth were told, she finally gave up and headed back into town.

She'd been discarded—just like the others.

He was done with her. The gates to 'heaven' were closed and the key had been taken from her.

Maura was still pissed off when she got back to her apartment. She paced for a while, resisting the urge to dash off to club Noir, but she finally decided she needed to vent.

How dare the bastard just toss her away!

She was horny, god damn it and it was all his damned fault!

More than half expecting to discover she'd been barred from the club as well, Maura felt a vast sense of relief when she discovered that wasn't the case. It didn't tamp her resentment, however. That boiled over into real anger when she got inside and discovered that Daegon was sprawled in his throne, none the worse for his battle that she could see.

She'd spent *days* worrying about the son-of-a-bitch, crying her eyes out thinking he'd been destroyed and it was her fault!

Ignoring the people around her, she descended the steps, stalked across the dance floor and began to climb the stairs determinedly. She managed to get all the way to the top before she encountered the 'wall'. She met Daegon's angry gaze. For several moments, she was so angry herself she was blinded by it. As his gaze moved over her hungrily, however, it pierced her self-absorption and by the time he met her gaze again, she realized Daegon wasn't the source of the wall. It was clear as a bell that he would've grabbed her right then and thrown her to the floor if he could've reached her.

Misery flickered in his eyes and disappeared so quickly she knew she would've missed it if she hadn't been staring straight at him.

"I freed you," he growled.

Maura swallowed with an effort. "I know."

His face twisted. "Go!" he snarled. "I cannot bear the sight of you."

It hurt, stabbed her to the core, and yet she didn't see loathing in his eyes. She saw hunger. She saw suffering and pain.

She stared at him for a long moment. "I didn't mean it—what I said to you."

Something flickered in his eyes and then he looked away. "It doesn't matter to me one way or the other, mortal."

She studied his handsome face—his façade. "It does," she whispered.

He flicked a quick look at her. "It doesn't!" he roared. "Go!"

Maura didn't bother to look around. His vehemence was enough to convince her he was being watched. There was almost a thread of panic in his voice that she took as a warning. Nodding stiffly, she turned on her heel and stalked out the way she'd come.

She was shaking all over long before she reached her car. She almost felt too weak to unlock the door and get in.

* * * *

"I understand that you're as close to an authority on demonology as there is around here," Maura said to the elderly man hunched over the book on his desk.

He lifted his head after studiously ignoring her approach and stared at her speculatively through his thick glasses. He looked completely ordinary, she saw with a

touch of surprise—nondescript even.

“You are Dr. Claus, correct?”

His gaze flickered over her. “I am. And you are?”

“Detective Maura Downy.”

The speculative look intensified. “This is a police matter?”

Maura debated. “No. Personal.”

He gestured toward the chair on the other side of the desk. Maura was too tense to feel like sitting down, but she did anyway.

“What would you like to know?”

“How to free a demon from another demon.”

The wave of shock that rolled over the man seemed almost physical. He rocked back in his seat. “I beg your pardon?”

Maura didn't especially feel like beating around the bush. She'd wrestled with this for days and finally concluded that, however insane it was, she wasn't going to be able to simply forget Daegon and go on with her life. It had taken nearly another week to track down Dr. Claus. Desperate didn't begin to describe the way she'd begun to feel. “Theoretically, suppose a demon, an Incubus, was ... being controlled by another. How would one go about ... destroying the demon and setting him free?”

He grasped that and she felt her face heat slightly at the speculation in his eyes. “You don't. There is no such spell.” He shook his head. “I'm not even going to ask why you might want to do something like that, but humans—mortals—are far better off leaving the demon world to deal with its own issues. If this theoretical situation existed, it would mean that the Incubus is constrained by his master, or overlord, and that demon is more powerful than you can imagine. An Incubus has unimaginable powers in their own right. Any demon powerful enough to control one”

Maura felt almost sick with disappointment. “You're saying it couldn't be done?”

He shrugged. “If the Incubus isn't strong enough to free himself—no. A mortal couldn't, not with the most powerful spell. I'd have to think the Incubus must be weakened, to speak plainly, before he could even be controlled by another—overlord or not. You do know *how* an Incubus derives his power, I assume?”

Maura felt a flash of heat that wasn't just from discomfort. “I understand that part. What you're suggesting, then, is that he would have to ... uh ... feed to gain the strength?”

The man blushed faintly. “Yes.”

“What if the other demon, this overlord, was preventing him from feeding as he needed to?”

“Then he could retain control.”

Maura frowned, feeling defeat settle over her. “There isn't a ... back door? There isn't a spell of some kind that could ... allow a mortal to slip past, feed the Incubus to give him strength?”

The man looked startled, but he settled to pondering it and Maura waited hopefully. “I don't honestly know the answer to that. I suppose a summoning might work,” he said doubtfully.

“A summoning?”

“A dangerous undertaking,” the man said warningly. “Worshippers throughout the ages have tried it. It works—after a fashion.”

“Meaning?”

“They aren’t easy to control,” he said dryly. “That’s the objective of the summoning, to pull a demon from the underworld and harness his powers. It generally ends badly for the human even if they succeed—*especially* if they succeed. They’re tricksters. The spell does bring them forth if done properly and it does exert a hold on them, but they aren’t pleased at being enslaved by mortals ... and their wrath is ... terrible when they break free.”

“You mean if?” Maura asked uneasily.

“I mean when.”

Maura considered that for several moments, but she couldn’t *unconvince* herself. She’d grown more and more certain that, regardless of how it had begun, despite the fact that Daegon was a demon, he *felt* something for her. If he was angry that she’d summoned him, she reasoned, she could just let him go back. She had to know, though. Not knowing, feeling as if he wanted and needed her, was driving her nuts, especially when she felt like it was her fault he was suffering.

Particularly when she’d had to face the fact that she cared that he was. “Where would I find the spell to summon?” she asked firmly.

The man blinked at her. “Have you heard anything I’ve said?”

“I heard it. There’s a risk, but it’s my risk.”

“We aren’t talking theory.”

It wasn’t a question and she didn’t bother to answer it. “Can you tell me? Or do I need to keep looking?” she asked tightly.

He looked angry. “I’m almost tempted to tell you to keep looking!” he said angrily. “But I can see you’re determined and it would be worse if you stumbled upon some dabbler in the black arts and tried one of their sloppy spells!”

She waited impatiently.

He shook his head at her. “You can’t summon one particular demon! You do realize that? You can only open the gateway. Without his name, any demon could come through that happened to be snagged by the spell.”

“I know his name.”

“You think you do!” he snapped. “They won’t give a mortal their name! It gives the mortal power over them, and they never do that.”

Doubt flickered through her, but she dismissed it. “I suppose I’ll need a spell to send one back, too, then.”

He spent an hour trying to convince her that she didn’t want to do what she’d already made up her mind she was going to do and finally gave up. Opening up his laptop, he printed out the two spells—one to summon, one to banish and carefully explained the procedure.

It sounded like a lot of ritualistic mumbo jumbo to her, but she listened carefully and repeated it back to him. When he seemed at least satisfied that she knew how to repeat the ritual he’d explained, he gave her the copies of the spell and told her to destroy them when she was finished playing with fire—if she was still able to.

Folding the papers, she left him to search for the things she needed to perform the ritual—or rituals. Fortunately, he’d given her directions to a shop that catered to followers of the black arts where she found everything she needed.

She was shaking with a mixture of sheer terror and hopefulness when she got

back to her apartment. Doubts began to surface as soon as she began to set up. Over and over in her mind, she heard Dr. Claus' warning that she needed the demon's name to summon him, reminding her that they were deceivers, they never gave a mortal their true name.

Did she really want to take a chance that she might summon some other demon?
If his name wasn't Daegon, what was it?

She settled crossed legged in the center of the pentagram she'd drawn on her floor when she'd finished setting up, staring at nothing in particular, wrestling with fear and hopefulness.

It was insane to feel anything but disgust, fear, revulsion! Daegon had never done anything to deserve the feelings she had for him! He'd tortured her with pleasure, withholding release until he'd broken her, she told herself. He'd bent her mind!

She managed to cling to those thoughts briefly, and then an image of him as she'd last seen him formed in her mind. Maybe he didn't feel as a mortal would. Maybe he couldn't, but she mattered to him—enough that he'd sent her away to protect her. She knew she wasn't wrong about that.

Dragging in a deep breath, she let it out slowly, focusing, and finally opened her eyes to stare at the spells she'd laid on the floor.

Daegon. It wasn't his name. It was the name he used at Noir. Even if he'd trusted her enough to give her his true name, he certainly wouldn't have allowed everyone that came to the club to know.

Noir. Black. Dark. She considered that for several moments.

Daegon---Day gone.

Abruptly, she knew what his name was, with a certainty that gave her the confidence to begin the ritual. Contrary to what she'd more than half believed, she felt the power of the spell immediately, and it grew the longer she chanted the words. She *felt* the gateway open.

Doubt shook her. Was the spell the same if they were already on the Earthly plain?

Had she guessed the name wrong?

She moved the summoning spell aside to reveal the banishing spell and continued the chant. "Nite!" she said when she knew the gates had opened wide. "Come to me! I command you!"

The crackle of flames and the smell of sulfur sent a shudder through her.

"Who summons ...!"

Maura's eyes flew open at the roar of their own accord. Her heart nearly beat its way out of her chest before recognition struck her. Daegon was staring at her in blank disbelief. He blinked even as she met his gaze, his face contorting in a ferocious scowl as he looked around.

A shiver clawed its way up her spine when he slid a speculative gaze at her. "You summoned me," he growled. "What do you want, mortal?"

A little damned appreciation, Maura thought angrily.

He was a beast, she reminded herself. It wasn't even logical to expect him to behave like a mortal would. It relieved her, though, when she saw his gaze flicker over her hungrily. She unfolded her legs and planted her feet on the floor, making no attempt to block his view of her sex. She'd 'dressed' herself in her own concept of bondage—a

black leather camisole that bracketed her breasts, leaving them bare, and ended mid-hip, and nothing else.

Her throat closed at the look in his eyes. "I want you to feed upon me, Incubus, until I tell you to stop. Punish me until I beg for release and then give me release."

She heard him swallow. He looked doubtful, suspicious, but he dropped to his knees, his expression slack with hunger. "Feed?"

"Yes."

He moved toward her almost as if he was fighting the urge, jerkily. Her eyes rolled back in her head when he covered the tip of one breast with his mouth and began to suckle her ravenously. She had the sense that he expected her to shove him away at any moment and he was desperate to feed as much as he could before she did.

She settled back, enjoying the torture as he moved from one breast to the other and down to her clit. "Tongue fuck me," she demanded abruptly. "But don't let me come."

His head jerked upward at the demand. He stared at her a moment and dropped lower. It was sheer delightful torture to feel his tongue trusting inside of her. "The clit, too," she gasped. "And my nipples."

She thought she was going to die. It took everything she could do to hold still for him, to fight off the urge to demand release, but she fought it for all she was worth as long as she could bear it.

"Make me come!" she gasped when she couldn't stand it anymore.

He surged over her as if he'd only been waiting for the command, spearing his double cock into her almost violently and driving deeply. He'd barely sunk to the root when he began to pump into her feverishly. She climaxed. He held her there, convulsing in rapture until she was gasping for breath and then allowed her to relax for a moment and brought her to her peak again and then again.

She had to keep reminding herself it wasn't only her needs that she'd meant to appease. She'd summoned him to give him what he needed. She fought the urge to command him to stop until she realized she'd reached a dangerous level of weakness. It took an effort to find the strength to tell him to stop, to banish him until she summoned him again.

She felt his heated gaze on her for a long moment and then his weight vanished and she fell into a deep, dark pit. She had no idea how long she lay comatose on the floor, but it was long enough she felt pain when she finally surfaced toward awareness and the numbness of poor circulation. It took all she could do to get up. Bathing was out of the question and, in any case, she didn't particularly want to wash his scent from her. She relieved herself, drank as much juice as she could to chase the dehydration and collapsed on her bed.

She was still so weak when she woke again that it unnerved her. Selflessness was one thing! Allowing him to feed until he'd nearly sucked the life out of her was just plain stupid!

Nearly two days passed before she even began to feel close to normal, but she decided she'd recovered long enough. He couldn't go long without suffering and it hadn't been any part of her plan to punish him.

He looked more sullen than angry when she summoned him, but eagerness glittered in his eyes for all that. She patted the mattress beside her. "Come. Lay with me

a moment, Nite.”

He scowled at her, but he climbed onto the bed, staring hungrily at her.

“You know how much you can take without harming me?” she asked tentatively.

Surprise flickered in his eyes when he jerked his head up to stare at her. “I know,” he said a little hoarsely.

“Then I give you leave to take what you want as long as you stop before you become a danger to my life.”

Confusion flickered in his eyes. “Is that a command?” he growled.

“It is. Feed. You must stop before you harm me. And then you must go until I summon you again.”

She wasn't at all sure he'd grasped the command or had any inkling how much was too much. He ravaged her until she lost consciousness.

It took her the better part of three days to recover enough to summon him again. He was definitely sulky when he appeared. “I displeased you, mistress?” he demanded angrily.

Maura sighed testily. “You took too much!” she said testily. “I'm mortal!”

He studied her thoughtfully. She had no idea what was going through his mind, but once she gave him permission to feed on her she didn't have room or enough mind to spare for figuring it out.

Chapter Nine

Daegon startled Maura when he settled beside her on the bed and sought her lips. Except for that last time in his mansion when she'd been his slave, he'd never shown any inclination toward having interest in anything but pure, raw, animal sex. His mouth was ravening, demanding, and yet it gave her the sense that he was making love to her—whether he intended it that way or not.

"I can give you my essence," he murmured raggedly when he broke the kiss. "Only a little, my precious, and it will give you more strength for me."

"Your essence?" Maura gasped dizzily, confused.

"Demon seed."

Maura's heart lurched in her chest. "Your baby?" she gasped.

Daegon jerked away from her as if she'd punched him. His eyes narrowed with suspicion. "Why would you want my spawn, mortal?" he growled.

Maura stared up at him blankly. "Because I love you, you idiot!" she snapped angrily.

It sent a shockwave through him. She felt it, but aside from momentarily leaving him slack faced with stunned surprise, the statement clearly did nothing to assuage his suspicions. If anything, they grew more pronounced. Anger glittered in his eyes. "I am not such a fool as to believe that, mortal!" he snarled.

The depths of Maura's disappointment only added fuel to her own anger. "I didn't ask, damn it! You offered!"

"Not my spawn," he growled. "My seed."

"Shove it up your ass!" she snarled back at him. "You can keep your damned precious seed! Just take what you need and go the fuck away!"

He took her at her word. Despite the roughness of his caresses, it was a while before Maura began to get an inkling that she was in trouble. Even then, she dismissed it. It was always as much torture as pleasure when he fed on her, draining her until she thought she barely had the strength to breathe. As she began to sink toward oblivion, though, it crossed her mind that he'd taken far more than she could afford to give.

"Command me to stop, Maura!" Daegon growled as if the words were forced from him.

The urgency in his voice roused her slightly, but it confused her. Hadn't she told him that he was to stop before he took too much?

He gripped her arms painfully and shook her. "You will die!"

She didn't care, she realized abruptly. She was beyond caring. "Better," she whispered, realizing that she didn't want to live like she had been. She'd never wanted to enslave him, but that was what she'd done. "I release you."

"No! Command me to give you my essence, damn you! Don't send me away!"

She discovered he was coiled tightly around her as if he thought he'd be sucked away if he didn't hold on to her.

"Please, baby! Please!"

It sounded more like a demand than supplication and she still couldn't resist the urge to comfort him. "Give"

He uttered a choked sound and she felt heat fill her belly. Her body tingled all over. For a handful of moments, pleasure filled her and then she drifted away.

The ringing of her phone penetrated Maura's consciousness but by the time she'd roused enough to figure out what the hell the noise was, it had stopped. Exhaustion dragged at her. She was tempted to roll over and go back to sleep, but something nagged at her mind and made her struggle out of the bed instead.

The phone rang again as she left the bathroom. "Jesus fucking Christ, Downy! What the hell is up with you?"

Maura glanced at the clock in dismay. "Shit!"

"Shit is right! You're going to get fired if you keep this shit up!"

"I'll be ready in fifteen minutes. Can you pick me up?"

"I'm at the curb," her partner growled.

"I'll be down in fifteen, then."

It was hellish getting through the work day and it had nothing to do with the case load. She chugged juice a while and coffee a while to try to pump some life into herself. She was more relieved than she could ever recall when her partner dropped her off after shift.

The relief lasted right until she went to her apartment and found Daegon. She halted on the threshold, staring at him blankly. Finally, remembering she was still standing in the doorway, she stepped inside and closed the door behind her. "Did I ... summon you?" she asked a little weakly, knowing she hadn't.

His eyes narrowed but he didn't make any effort to hide the satisfaction that flickered across his features. "You released me."

"Oh ... uh oh."

He cocked his head, studying her almost thoughtfully for several moments and then, in the blink of an eye, he was no longer standing at her window but directly in front of her. "Who was that mortal?" he growled.

Maura blinked at him. "My partner. We work together," she stammered.

"Not anymore," he said, tossing the veil over her so that she slid into darkness with the words still echoing in her mind.

She woke to find herself in the room where Daegon had battled his overlord. Daegon was lying on his side on the bed beside her, studying her. She stared at him for a long moment and then scanned the room. There was no sign that there'd ever been a battle in the room and confusion settled in her.

"This is the room," Daegon answered the question in her eyes.

Maura frowned. "Your overlord?"

His grin was feral. "I don't have one. I crushed the bastard."

Maura felt a wave of weakness. "So you're ... uh ... free?"

His gaze flickered over her. It was warm in a way that wasn't entirely desire and it made her heart flutter uncomfortably. "Yes."

"So ... we're even?"

His eyes shuttered. "Was that your objective? To repay what you thought was kindness? I'm a demon. I don't 'do' kind."

Maura swallowed with an effort. "I know what you are. I did it because I love

you.”

He frowned. She had the sense that she'd thrown him. “You're mine,” he growled.

“Because I want to be,” she countered.

“You enslaved me—*me!* Daegon!” he growled angrily.

“To free you from your overlord. It was the only way I knew to do it and I didn't know that it would work.”

“Why?” he demanded, clearly baffled.

“Because I love you and I couldn't bear to think of you suffering.”

“You did it because you wanted me to fuck you! Because no one else can do the things to you that I do!”

Maura couldn't help but smile. “True. I guess you want to punish me for summoning you?”

He surged toward her, pushing her to her back and manacled her wrists to the bed on either side of her head. “There is nothing to stop me from sucking you dry, woman!”

A flicker of fear went through her, but she'd known the risk she was taking. She was gambling that a beast that had no concept of human emotions would feel something. “No. Nothing.”

She thought for a while that she'd lost the bet. Even as she felt herself sinking, slipping away, however, he drove deeply inside of her and stilled. Uttering a choked, pained sound, he spilled his seed into her, gave her his essence. Warmth and reviving strength flowed into her.

He was watching her when she woke. She had the feeling that he'd been watching her for a while, waiting for her to wake up. It almost surprised her to discover that she felt like she'd woken from a restful sleep.

“Why would you be willing to bear my spawn?” he asked curiously.

She was a little startled that he'd brought it up when it seemed to have made him so furious before. “Because I love you.”

He frowned. “Why?”

It was her turn to feel confusion. “I don't honestly know.”

His look was knowing. “It's because I give you pleasure.”

She reached up and touched his face. “That's part of it,” she agreed.

He caught her hand. For a moment, she thought he would thrust it away. Instead, he stared at it a long moment and lifted it to his mouth, nibbling at her palm. Emboldened by the caress, she wiggled closer and tilted her head up to nibble kisses along his throat. He went perfectly still. He searched her gaze when she lifted her head. “You like this glamour.”

It was a statement, not a question. She thought it was also a test. “I know what you look like. I know this is just a human-like façade you wear.”

He banished it and she found herself staring at the beast he truly was. Holding his gaze, she lowered her lips to his and kissed him lightly. Uttering a growl, he rolled with her and tortured her for the better part of an hour before he finally gave her release. To her surprise, he rolled away when she'd spent herself.

When she'd caught her breath, she rolled over and began to caress his chest, first with her hands and then her mouth. He stiffened at her first touch, lay tensely while she explored him, but he neither objected nor encouraged her. She paused when she reached

his genitals, wondering if she was giving him any pleasure at all, wondering if she should do what she was thinking about doing.

Shrugging inwardly, she captured one thick member and covered it with her mouth, stroking the other with her hand. It gave her pleasure, his taste and the feel of him in her mouth. She had no idea whether it pleased him or annoyed him.

He burrowed his fingers in her hair after a few moments, stilling her movements briefly and then applying enough pressure to let her know he wanted more. Feeling more confident, she complied eagerly, stroking him and sucking at his flesh more hungrily as she felt her excitement rise. She hesitated when she felt his cock jerk and then pulled at him with more determination until he groaned and his seed spilled into her mouth.

It was like nothing she'd ever tasted. Surprise flickered through her. Swallowing, she sucked harder and finally desisted with a touch of disappointment when she couldn't draw more from him.

There was a mixture of amusement and satisfaction in his eyes when she righted herself and met his gaze. "Why did you do that?"

The question burst her bubble. "It didn't ... give you any pleasure?" she asked doubtfully.

He captured her head between his hands and dragged her closer, kissing her with a hunger that set her blood to pounding in her veins. "Everything about you gives me pleasure," he murmured when he broke the kiss. "Even giving you my essence."

She studied his face curiously. "It makes me stronger," she tentatively.

"It will make you into a demon."

Surprise flickered through her and a mixture of reluctance and doubt. "Will it?"

He tilted his head, studying her. "Part demon ... I don't want to change you."

"If you think it will, then don't."

He nibbled on her throat. "I must before I give you my spawn else you'll never survive its birth."

Maura's heart tripped over itself. "You'd ... be willing to do that?"

"There's very little I wouldn't be willing to give you, my precious," he murmured lazily. "I will give you a houseful of the infernal things if you want."

Maura couldn't help but chuckle. "That's a terrible thing to say about your children!"

He grunted. "Wait till you see the first before you judge," he muttered wryly.

The End