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WICKED

Michelle Lauren

TEMPTATION EVE

NOCTURNAL CRAVINGS, BOOK 1



Nocturnal Cravings 1:

Temptation Eve

By

Michelle Lauren

Temptation Eve by Michelle Lauren

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Temptation Eve

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Dedication

To Minx Malone and D. Daisy: Thanks for all your love and support.
You both rock!

To the "Red Queen": You're my favorite cheerleader.
Thanks for sticking with me.

Chapter One

Sex with an incubus definitely wreaked havoc on a woman's wardrobe.

Eve Templin glared at the run in her black lace thigh highs before she turned and scowled over her shoulder at her lover.

"You are costing me a fortune in lingerie. This is the third pair this month!"

Said incubus, Alonso D'Agostino, grinned. Lush, midnight black curls fell across his forehead as he studied her. Hunger darkened his normally pale gray eyes to pewter. His finger trailed up her thigh, causing the muscles to jump.

"Let me make it up to you, *bellissima*."

Eve gasped as his callused hands palmed her butt and then spread her cheeks. She bit her bottom lip to muffle a moan. No matter how many times they met, this part—the anticipation—never got stale.

"Do you have any idea how hot you look right now?"

She could imagine. Kneeling on the floor, hands bound behind her with his red silk tie, her thick curls swinging around her waist and naked except for those thigh highs, she probably looked like a pagan offering to the gods.

Warm breath ghosted over her entrance, followed by the cool glide of Alonso's tongue thrusting inside her heat. Eve's head dropped on a moan—only to jerk upright as laughter, loud, feminine and entirely too close for comfort, filtered through the door. Her pulse skyrocketed.

More laughter, accompanied by the clink of glasses and the crooning strain of a saxophone, reminded Eve why having sex in a closet during her law firm's annual Black and White Ball was a *really* bad idea. Right now, a flimsy door was the only barrier between her and two hundred of her coworkers and clients. Even worse, Alonso seemed oblivious to the danger.

What was it about him that made her natural sense of caution disappear? Six months ago, Eve would have blamed her reaction on his powers. Blessed with a touch that could take a woman from zero to orgasm in seconds, the thirty-four-year-old playboy never lacked for lovers.

Alonso was everything she wanted in a Dominant: exotic, intelligent and insatiable.

But their attraction went beyond physical chemistry. She enjoyed spending time with him. Beneath his aloof exterior was a man who—despite spending most of his adult life on the wrong side of the law—could win legal debates with his eyes closed, was surprisingly insightful, and had a biting sense of humor and a smile that made her forget why falling in love with him would never work.

Not only was he a commitment phobe, he was also a client. Make that her firm's *biggest* client. Wolkowich, Blythe & Templin was a Virginia-based law firm that catered to paranormal clientele. At age thirty-one, Eve was the youngest partner and the only female, a distinction she'd worked too hard to jeopardize.

Despite the preternatural nature of the firm's clients, Wolkowich, Blythe & Templin maintained a disappointingly conservative view on some matters, including lawyer-client fraternization. If her relationship with Alonso ever went public, she could kiss her professional credibility goodbye.

Eve opened her mouth to tell him to wait. At the same moment, his lips closed around her clit and sucked. All thoughts of stopping vanished.

His grip shifted to her hip, steadying her as he gently parted her labia and eased a finger inside her pussy.

"Please!"

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"Patience, *bella*." His lips followed the path of his finger. Her breathing hitched when his thumb, damp and slightly callused, grazed her clit. The lazy circles were in sharp contrast to his tongue's demanding pace.

Just when she thought it couldn't get any better, he started to hum.

Deep and penetrating, the sound gained volume. It danced over her skin until every nerve twitched in awareness. Her inner walls contracted as wetness flooded her pussy. The vibration stopped as Alonso withdrew to lap hungrily at her slick folds.

His palm splayed across her breast, and questing fingers sought her nipples. He plucked at the hardened nubs, teasing them until they stabbed at his palms, stiff and aching. Tension coiled in her belly. It spread, intensifying until her body shook with the need to orgasm.

"Too much! It's too much!" Her hips rocked forward to escape the dueling sensations. She overbalanced and would have fallen if not for Alonso's sudden, iron grip on her hips. His hands flexed against her skin with each flick of his tongue over her slit. Energy surged from his fingertips and sent heated pulses straight to her clit.

Cold air kissed her back as he abruptly shifted away from her. The withdrawal left her feeling disoriented and shaken. Had she done something wrong? Eve glanced over her shoulder and blinked, shocked to find Alonso crouched against the door seven feet away.

The look in his eyes would have melted steel. Dark and hungry, his gaze flicked over her. He swayed, panting, and the hands resting on his thighs clenched until the knuckles whitened. Yet he made no attempt to move closer.

"I almost lost control," he said, and suddenly she understood.

Incubi were all about control, in business and in bed, for good reason. He was sex incarnate, raw, consuming and utterly addictive. Few mortals could keep up with that stamina.

What would it take to break that restraint? To feel him clutch at her in helpless passion, to hear him scream her name as he came? Eve wanted—no, *needed*—to know.

"Careful what you wish for, *bella*. You're playing with fire."

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Warning glittered in his eyes. A lesser woman would have listened. Eve smiled.

"I'm not afraid of getting burned."

Between one blink and the next, Alonso was there, breath warm on her face, hands cradling her cheeks. "You really don't fear me at all?"

"The only thing I fear is you ending this." The confession slipped out, more truth than she wanted to reveal tonight. Maybe ever. Too late to take the words back now.

A strange smile tilted his lips. "It's far too late for either of us to walk away. Besides..." Amusement tempered the intensity of his gaze. "You still haven't come for me."

Just like that, Eve was on the edge. His fingers slid inside her vagina and rotated until they grazed a sensitive spot. White lights exploded behind her lids.

"That's right, kitten. Purr for me." Satisfaction deepened his voice. Alonso ruthlessly manipulated the gland even as he slid a third finger into her clenching channel, preparing her for a deeper penetration. "Tell me."

She toyed with the idea of denying him. His fingers flexed. She caved. Pride was overrated anyway.

"Make me come, Alonso. I need you."

The fingers disappeared. Eve had a second to mourn their loss before the thick head of his cock pressed into her, not stopping until his groin lay flat against her butt. "Mine," Alonso growled. He slung an arm around her waist and lifted her hips into each thrust, grunting as his cock slammed into her pussy repeatedly, stretching her with each stroke.

His lips brushed her temple, then her shoulder as he drove into her, whispering in Italian. Hot, dirty words translated by the slap of his groin against hers. He thrust harder, his rhythm more erratic as her cries grew louder.

The humming resumed, the sound caressing her senses like phantom fingers. Soft at first, the sound steadily increased until each pulse nudged her closer to orgasm. Her thighs trembled, the first sign of approaching climax. And then...

He stopped.

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Moving. Talking. *Humming!* Now that was just cruel.

Eve glared at her lover. "Are you *trying* to torture me?"

"Lower your voice, *bella*. As much as I appreciate hearing your pleasure, imagine what your colleagues would say if they heard us."

They would never let me forget it. None of her colleagues would believe that Eve—known as Ice Queen in the courtroom—not only enjoyed sexual submission, she craved it.

Alonso hummed again, and the sharp, intense burst of sound triggered her climax. Her inner walls spasmed around his cock, milking him as she trembled. Groaning, he continued to slam into her, drawing out the sensations, demanding more. Tension coiled inside her as a second orgasm built. As it crested, her lashes fluttered.

The doorknob jiggled.

The sound hit her like a bucket of ice water. Panicking, Eve scrambled to sit up. Her foot snagged in a nearby bucket, and she tumbled face first into a pile of cleaning supplies. Alonso attempted to steady her and yelped when a mop whopped him on the head.

"Merda!"

He batted the mop away, and its handle swept across one of the shelves. Sponges, aluminum dust pans and other cleaning supplies rained from above. A scrub brush nailed Alonso in the foot, and Eve ducked to avoid getting clocked by a bottle of bleach.

They both froze as the doorknob rattled. From outside, someone cursed.

"This stupid hotel key doesn't work!"

"Well duh! That's because this isn't our room, silly!" slurred a female voice, obviously drunk. "It's the *janitor's* closet."

"Ohh..."

The voices faded as the couple moved away. Eve sent up a silent prayer of thanks. Getting caught with her pants down was *definitely* not on her agenda for tonight. A pained grunt drew her gaze to Alonso in time to see him grimace.

"What's wrong?"

"I have a mop handle molesting my ass."

“Ooh. Kinky.”

Laughing, she ducked his half-hearted swat. A moment later, his laughter joined hers. Still smiling, he helped untangle her from the chaos and pulled her to settle against his chest. When his cock twitched against her stomach, she frowned.

“You didn’t come? Even after...”

“Stamina, *bella*. It’s a gift and a curse.”

“Okay, new rule: No more closets. Agreed?”

“Agreed.”

“Good. Now we can focus on more important things.”

“Like what?”

She flashed a wicked grin. “Making you scream my name.” Bowing her head, she licked a stripe up the length of his cock. She dared a glance at his face and almost choked.

With his head thrown back, neck tendons corded and etched in relief as he strained to stifle groans of pleasure, Alonso looked every inch a sex god.

And here, tonight, he was all hers.

Angling her head, Eve sucked him deeper into her mouth, not stopping until the head of his cock bumped her throat. His strangled cry was nirvana.

Too soon, his hands urged her away, and he pulled her into a kiss. He tasted good, like chocolate and cherry licorice. After one final lick, Alonso released her mouth and rested their foreheads together.

“Are you *certain* you aren’t a succubus? You’re far too tempting for a mere mortal.”

His awe-tinged tone warmed her. She decided to let him off the hook for the “mere mortal” comment. “Why did you stop me?”

“I want to do something different. Do you trust me?”

“Of course.”

“Then close your eyes, Eve.”

She obeyed with only slight hesitance. Fabric rustled nearby, and she smiled. “Are we playing hide and seek now?”

“Open your eyes.”

She blanched at the strip of red silk Alonso extended to her. A blindfold?

"No." His brow furrowed in confusion. She didn't blame him. This probably seemed like a crazy request to deny, especially considering they'd played kinkier sex games. Still, she refused to budge. "I told you before I won't wear one of those."

"You also never told me why." His tone softened, urging her to confess. *Trust me*, his eyes seemed to say. If only things were that simple.

"Does it matter?"

"Yes."

Tears pricked Eve's eyes. She opened her mouth to speak, but the words stalled in her throat. She turned away, hating the shame that accompanied her memories.

The first and only Dominant she'd let blindfold her had betrayed her trust. He'd been a partner at her former law firm: older, very wealthy and very connected. He recorded them playing some very kinky sex games. When she ended the relationship, he tried to blackmail her with the tape.

At the time, Eve was fresh out of law school and eager to prove herself. As a girl playing in an old boys' club, she walked a fine line. The same indiscretions overlooked in her male colleagues could end her career before it started.

Thanks to some creative thinking, she had recovered the tape without incident and effectively scared off the blackmailer. But the damage to her psyche remained. She would never forget the betrayal.

"Eve? You're trembling."

Warm hands caressed her cheeks. Eve blinked in surprise. She was cradled in Alonso's arms, both palms resting on his chest. When did he untie her hands?

"Tell me what happened, *tesoro*. I can't protect you if I don't know what I'm fighting."

His eyes glittered with emotion. She tried to place it. Concern? No, more like...love?

She savagely squelched the surge of hope. Impossible! Men with

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Alonso's social connection and wealth screwed women like her. They *married* women from old money: stick thin, vapid creatures with names like Bunny or Tiffy who had degrees from Vassar.

Worse, they wanted a submissive woman in *and* out of the bedroom, something Eve could never provide. She had fought too hard for her career and independence to toss either aside for trophy wife status.

"Eve?"

So, happily ever after was out for her and Alonso. For tonight at least, he belonged to her. And she refused to waste another minute with regrets. She kissed him gently, silencing his questions.

"Never mind, sugar. I was just dreaming. Where were we?"

Chapter Two

"Where were we?"

Alonso's heart skipped several beats at the invitation in Eve's tone. Hunger, raw and primal, sparked inside him. Not for the first time, he struggled to keep his emotions in check.

He needed control, *fast*. Closing his eyes, he counted to ten. Then twenty. He inhaled a shaky breath—only to groan as the scent of her arousal, honey sweet and thick with anticipation, flooded his nostrils.

So much for concentration. Only Eve could push him this close to the edge, this often. Her palm cupped his cheek.

"Do you feel all right? Your skin is warm, more than usual."

The concern in her voice tugged at his heart. Slowly, Alonso opened his eyes and drank her in. Beautiful didn't begin to describe Eve. She was temptation personified, lush curves wrapped in smooth skin dark as chocolate.

Not to mention her ass! Full and round, it demanded worship. Even now, he couldn't keep his hands off it. Unable to resist, he gave her bottom a light slap. Her head fell back on a moan as she arched into the caress.

Alonso grinned. He swatted her ass again, harder this time. Eve rocked her hips, gasping each time his open palm connected with her skin. Another burst of heat wet his stomach as she ground her pussy against his clenched muscles. Without warning, Alonso altered his rhythm and delivered a series of quick, sharp blows interspersed with soft, teasing

ones that tore breathless sighs from her lips.

Eve reached between their bodies and grasped his straining erection. She pumped him once, swiping her thumb over the wet, swollen head of his cock. If not for his quick reflexes, the buck of his hips would have thrown her across the room. She grinned.

"Now that I have your attention, I want you to come for me. Don't hold back." She jerked him off slowly, murmuring encouragement against his lips. Alonso let his head fall back against the floor as he lost himself in the pleasure of her touch. He jumped as her damp fingers traced his balls and then dipped lower to stroke his perineum.

The unexpected touch sent a dark thrill through him. The air in the room thickened, shifting and flexing like a living thing. Eve circled his anus with one finger before slowly and deliberately pressing the slick digit inside and crooking it.

"Eve!"

Alonso muffled his scream against her neck and came in thick, creamy pulses that coated her still-stroking hand. Instead of fading, the orgasm stretched. His skin flushed, darkening with the energy trapped inside him.

"Let it go, baby. Trust me with this. You won't hurt me."

Clutching Eve to his chest, Alonso thrust once more and stiffened. A primal roar left his throat as wave after wave of kinetic pleasure engulfed the room. Vaguely, he heard an electronic buzzing, followed by a series of *pops*.

When the buzzing in his ears stopped, Alonso said the first thing that crossed his mind. "Wow."

Eve chuckled and nuzzled his throat. "Wow yourself."

"Why are we in the dark?"

"The lights are out."

"I can see that, *bella*."

"No. I mean they're *out*."

"As in the entire hotel?" So much for their activities going unnoticed. He groaned.

"Probably." Her voice shook. It took him a moment to realize she

was laughing.

"This isn't funny!"

"Sorry. It's a fair guess that the blackout is building-wide, though. I heard some people mention circuit breakers a few minutes ago."

Alonso kicked dejectedly at a nearby bucket. "Any chance the guests will believe this was a normal power surge?"

"As opposed to an orgasm-induced one?"

He pinched her butt and grinned when she tweaked his nipple in retaliation. "You know, this is as much your fault as mine."

"How do you figure that?"

"It's never this intense with anyone else."

"Oh."

An awkward silence descended. He wished he could see her expression. Would her eyes reflect disbelief? Horror? Or maybe happiness? The last was likely wishful thinking. Finally, Eve sighed.

"You probably say that to all the girls."

The dismissal stung. "No. I don't." His mood soured, and he shifted away from her to glare at the ceiling. Part of him understood her assumption. After all, he and monogamy weren't exactly well-acquainted. Still, she must have noticed the changes in his behavior lately.

He hadn't landed on the cover of *Tattler* in over two months—a personal record. Plus, he had given up casual sex, not that he broadcasted that. After all, he still had a reputation to maintain. Now he only "dated" business associates, independently wealthy women discreet enough not to publicize the platonic nature of their outings.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Don't give me that. I can feel you pouting."

"I don't pout." Except he was. And how did she know him so well? Alonso glared in her direction. "I'm fine."

Eve sighed. Her warm hand caressed his cheek. "Listen, I shouldn't have said that. If you really meant what you said, then I'm flattered. Really. I've seen your exes. We aren't in the same league looks-wise."

"No argument there." He stopped her when she would have pulled

away. "None of those women can measure up to you."

The kiss shouldn't have surprised him, but it did. Soft and gentle, the touch disappeared too soon for his liking. He fought the urge to pull her close again.

"Flattery will get you everywhere," Eve breathed against his mouth. This time, he anticipated the kiss. His lips parted to welcome the glide of her tongue against his. She kissed him slowly, as if memorizing his taste. Her hand flattened against his chest as she pressed against him, seeking more contact.

The kiss grew bolder. Her tongue flicked at the seam of his lips and then delved deeper, tasting him with slow, penetrating thrusts. The intimate exploration left him shaking. After too short a time, she pulled away. The sound of their panting filled the air.

"Forgive me?"

He pretended to think. "Not quite."

"You'll make a humble woman out of me yet," she whispered against his lips. This time, he took control of the kiss with drugging thrusts that tore whimpers from her throat. His palm cradled her neck, drawing her closer as his tongue slid along the roof of her mouth, licking hungrily. He would never get enough of her taste.

His palms gripped her butt and pulled her to straddle his lap. Both hands slid up her spine, cataloguing which spots made her gasp. Alonso located a ticklish spot under her ribs and exploited it. She tugged out of his embrace and licked a trail of wet, open-mouthed kisses down to his throat, where she paused to suck his Adam's apple.

"So good. Don't stop!"

"I won't. You haven't forgiven me yet." Her teeth scraped his Adam's apple and he shivered. Squeezing her butt, he urged her to rock against him.

"*Bella*, if this is how you apologize, I can't wait until our next fight." She nipped him, hard. Alonso chuckled. "Forgiven. You know I can't stay mad at you."

"Lucky me." Her mouth returned to his throat. His head tilted back to accommodate her questing lips.

“Trying to mark your territory?”

Eve glanced up at him. She was so close that, despite the darkness, he easily saw her expression. Her eyes glittered with an emotion he couldn't place. “Do I need to?” An electric hum filled the air, preventing his reply. She stiffened. “Did you hear that?”

“Yes. It's probably just the backup generators.”

Seconds later, his theory proved true. The remaining overhead light buzzed and then flickered on, bathing the closet in dingy yellow light. For the first time that evening Alonso noticed, *really* noticed, the condition of the space.

Faded wallpaper, stained and ripped in places, covered the walls. Sagging metal shelves bracketed the walls, stopping inches from a cracked, drop ceiling. Assorted cleaning products crowded the rest of the space. Guilt assaulted him, and he winced.

Eve deserved better than this. She deserved candlelight and roses; chocolate-dipped strawberries and champagne; and after that, hours relaxing in his hot tub followed by a night spent making love atop a sea of rose petals in his king-size bed. His mind flooded with images of her spread out across his red silk sheets, her head tipped in ecstasy while his tongue mapped her curves.

The idea appealed to his primal side. What would Eve look like after a night spent in his bed? He imagined watching her wake, her form bathed in early morning glow. The fantasy gained steam as he imagined whispering poetry in her ear while he made love to her again, slowly. His cock twitched.

Eve glanced at his lap and smirked. “You really are insatiable.”

“Is that a complaint?”

“No. I'm just trying to keep pace.”

Alonso grinned. He sat up and winced as the muscles in his back protested. He glanced at Eve and choked. The offer to help her stand died on his tongue as his gaze focused on her breasts.

Thick, white streaks of come decorated her nipples, giving the dark peaks the look of cream-topped Hershey's™ Kisses. Eve followed his gaze and gasped. Her hands lifted to cover her breasts, only to pause when he

captured her wrists.

"No. Let me." Lowering his head, he drew each nipple into his mouth and sucked. She shivered and cradled his scalp, urging his mouth harder against her chest. Her fingers carded through his hair, the treatment gentle and foreign.

Women touched him all the time but never like this. Never as if he—not his money, name or powers—were precious. A surge of affection, a sense he'd never associated with his lovers before, filled him. Giving Eve's nipple a last, leisurely suck, Alonso settled beside her.

"Do you think it's safe to go back to the party?"

The apparent non sequitur threw him. Alonso blinked in confusion. "How would I know?"

"You're the one with the enhanced senses. Put them to good use."

He arched a brow at the challenge in her voice. "Fine. I will."

Closing his eyes, he extended his senses. He picked up snatches of conversation from the party, mostly society gossip, along with some mentions of the hotel manager calling an electrician on site.

Thankfully, no one seemed to have noticed his or Eve's absence yet, or put two and two together. He relaxed as he identified the orchestra's song of choice, Beethoven's Symphony Number 7. He knew the musical road markers by heart. Symphony Number 7 meant they had at least thirty minutes until the speeches began.

"Let's stay here until the excitement dies down."

The thought of spending time with the society leeches, all after his money, turned his stomach. Making small talk annoyed him. Making small talk while worrying if everyone knew about his power surge-inducing orgasm sounded like hell.

Eve hitched up on one elbow and studied him from beneath her lashes. "Okay."

"Wait. You agree with me? What, no protest about abandoning my responsibilities?" Alonso made a show of feeling her forehead as if trying to ascertain her temperature. "Who are you, and what happened to the Eve Templin I know?"

She chuckled. "She's taking a vacation. So now that you've gotten

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me to play hooky a while longer, how do you propose we spend the time?"

"Good question." Alonso pretended to think. His finger circled her nipple, and he flashed a feral grin at her gasp. "Well, counselor, I'm sure we can think of something."

Chapter Three

"Okay. I'm ready."

"Are you sure, *bella*?"

"Yes. Don't make me wait any longer!"

"Fine." Pause. "Is it an animal?"

"No."

"Vegetable?"

"Nope."

"So then it's a mineral."

"Not even close. Give up yet?"

Alonso gritted his teeth against the triumph in Eve's voice. He *hated* losing. Why had he agreed to play this game again? His psychiatrist would attribute it to his inability to refuse a challenge. But the real reason had nothing to do with his competitive streak and everything to do with the woman currently snuggling closer, her head propped in his lap and her fingers tracing idle patterns on his stomach.

He sat with his back against the least crowded closet wall, legs crossed at the ankles, head pillowed on his arms. Sighing, he nudged Eve until she glanced up at him.

"It must be one of those three!"

Her eyes sparkled with delight. "Sorry, but it really isn't. So, do you give up?"

"D'Agostinos never quit." Another pause. Deep sigh. "Fine. Tell me."

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"What's the magic word?"

"Now." She jabbed him in the rib. "Ow! Fine. *Please* tell me what you picked?"

"Was that so hard? It's the color gray." Eve giggled at his scowl. "What? You said I could choose what game we play to pass the time."

"Yes, but I had something more intimate in mind, *bella*." Alonso nuzzled her neck. "Mmm. You smell nice. New perfume?"

"No. What does it smell like?"

"Lemons. I like it."

Eve sniffed then wrinkled her nose. "I think it's Eau de Pine-Sol™. Some must have spilled on me earlier."

"Kinky," Alonso teased. He laughed when she tickled his side and then sprawled bonelessly across his chest. His grin widened at the novelty of cuddling with Eve.

It wasn't a craving he often indulged. His past lovers preferred not to linger in his bed. Considering most of them were fortune-hunting socialites who wouldn't know the difference between jurisprudence and jurisdiction if it bit them on their butts, he hadn't minded. Yet with Eve, cuddling felt natural. Comfortable.

"At the risk of sounding like a broken record, we need to return to the party soon."

His mood soured. At least Eve sounded as unhappy as he felt. His arms tightened around her. He grimaced at the thought of dodging his father's matchmaking and pretending Eve was nothing more than an employee.

"Let's skip the party."

"Don't tempt me. Despite our actions tonight, we aren't teenagers. We both have responsibilities. I have clients to schmooze and a speech to give. Besides, your father expects you to make an appearance."

She sat up and started hunting for her clothes. She plucked a pair of black lace panties from the handle of a mop and slipped them on before locating her dress. The tailored designer garment said "sophisticated but professional."

Alonso hated it.

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"Do you have something against wearing color? I've never seen you wear anything other than black."

"What? I like black."

"It's boring."

Eve favored him with a look of indulgence. "No, it's classic. Think Audrey Hepburn, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*."

"With your skin, you should only wear red silk." *And nothing else.* His cock twitched at the thought. "Think Dorothy Dandridge in *Carmen Jones*."

"Black is more slimming."

"You don't need slimming," Alonso snapped. He cupped her lush breasts before caressing her hips. "Stay with me tonight."

Capturing his hands, Eve turned in his embrace. She searched his eyes. "You're serious."

"Completely. We can go to the penthouse." Four years ago, Alonso had purchased the sprawling, five thousand square foot space that overlooked the Chesapeake Bay as a getaway from the noise and stress of the city with its ever-present paparazzi.

"We could have a late night, followed by a champagne breakfast. We could spend Sunday in bed."

"That might be a bit awkward."

He paused, turning the statement over in his mind. "Meaning?"

"Meaning, shouldn't you run this by your other girlfriend first?" Anger glinted in Eve's eyes.

Wait, *what*? "Other girlfriend?"

"Yes. You know, the one *Tattler* photographed entering your penthouse at 2 a.m. this morning!"

He froze in confusion. Realization followed by dread churned in his stomach. Suddenly, Eve's odd mood made sense. The expression must have shown in his face.

"I should have known!" She shoved against his chest, but he refused to release his grip. "Let go of me!"

"Not until you listen. I can explain everything. Trust me. It's not what you think."

"Really? So a half-naked, drunken socialite *didn't* spend the night with you?" Eve glared at him, the look filled with such venom that Alonso flinched. Big mistake. "You jerk! Whatever. I shouldn't have said anything. After all, it's not like either of us agreed to be exclusive." The dismissive tone didn't match the hurt in her eyes.

"Just let me... Wait a minute. You're dating someone else?" Pain knotted inside his chest. A surge of possessiveness swiftly followed. Someone else had seen her this way, had touched her. A growl erupted from Alonso's throat. "Tell me his name."

Eve pursed her lips and stared over his shoulder. Despite his irritation, her continued resistance thrilled him. Lowering his lips to her throat, he traced the flutter of her pulse with his tongue. He sucked the skin into his mouth, hard enough to leave a mark.

I want everyone to know that she belongs to me. My lover. My mate. For the first time, Alonso didn't deny the instincts he'd fought since meeting Eve.

She was his. And he'd be damned if he let another man take her.

"Does he kiss you this way, *mia cara*? Do your nipples harden for him? Do they beg for his touch like they do mine?" He cupped her breast and lifted it to his mouth to suck at the distended flesh until she collapsed against him, moaning his name.

His palm glided over her quivering stomach muscles and cupped the damp heat between her thighs. "Does your pussy melt for him?" He ground the heel of his palm against her clit and swallowed her whimper of need. "Do you moan for *him* this way?"

Alonso didn't recognize his voice. Instead of his usual, carefully modulated tones, his voice sounded octaves deeper. Gravelly. Primal. "Tell me."

"No! Are you happy now? I'm only like this with you." Eve lifted a trembling hand to stroke his cheek. "Only for you."

"Remember that, *bella*. I don't share."

"Neither do I."

This time when Eve pushed against his chest, he let her go. She retrieved her dress and stepped into it, then began winding her thick,

black curls into a chignon. "Did you know that your eyes changed color before? They turned amber."

Alonso fidgeted. "I didn't mean to scare you."

"You didn't."

"It doesn't happen often, only when I lose control of my emotions."

She slanted him a look he couldn't define. "Hmm. It sounds like the power is back on."

"You don't need to leave yet, *amore mio*."

"Don't call me that!"

Alonso frowned. "Why?"

Eve paused at the door, her back facing him. Her fingers tightened on the knob. "Because you don't mean it. You don't love me. You couldn't."

He wanted to put his fist through something. One day, she *would* tell him who hurt her. And that man would pay for making her doubt Alonso.

"Will you at least save me a dance?"

The question surprised a laugh out of her. "I don't partner well."

He had a feeling they were discussing more than dancing. "I can teach you."

"Really?" She stared at him, uncertainty in her eyes. He hated seeing that look. Carefully, he brushed his thumbs across the tear tracks on her cheeks.

"I have never lied to you, Eve."

She nodded. After one more searching look, she left.

Chapter Four

The Grand Ballroom of the Mystic Hotel was a sight to behold. Neo-Baroque chandeliers, eight in all, dangled from the dome ceiling which contained a mural of naked Bacchae frolicking with mortals—a very appropriate piece for tonight’s guests. Waiters outfitted in black gloves and tuxedos circulated a crowd that boasted the upper echelon of Virginia society. Onstage, the orchestra performed the final strains of Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*.

If Eve weren’t so busy having a panic attack, she would have enjoyed it.

Her fingers flexed around the stem of a crystal champagne flute as she cast a quick look at the oak double doors leading into the hall. Twenty minutes had passed since she and Alonso parted ways. She’d stopped in the restroom to freshen up her appearance before she headed into the party. Since then, she had seen neither hide nor hair of Alonso.

Maybe he decided to ditch the party after all.

“Eve!”

She turned, a bland smile already in place; it increased in wattage when she recognized the speaker, Max Wolkowich. Of all the partners at her firm, Eve liked Max best. He was accompanied by Greta Van Hauser.

On the surface, they looked like the quintessential odd couple. Max was a soft-spoken man of diminutive stature with wild gray hair. Greta, on the other hand, was a buxom blonde in her sixties who, through business acumen and the luck to marry well and often, owned most of the

diamond mines in South Africa. However, the affection between them was both genuine and obvious. Eve couldn't help envying their easy interaction.

Eve tensed when she realized the couple wasn't alone. Trailing behind them was twenty-four-year-old Delilah McCain, the firm's newest defense attorney. While not a classic beauty, Delilah was definitely striking with shoulder-length ginger curls, hazel eyes and honey-colored skin that reflected a mixed heritage. More than that, she was a phenomenal lawyer. Her cherubic features belied a ruthlessness in the courtroom that won Delilah the partners' respect and the envy of her colleagues.

Eve didn't like her.

She wasn't jealous. In truth, she pitied the younger woman. Between the redhead's looks and legal acumen, her reputation rivaled Eve's for Most Hated Lawyer.

Still, there was something...off about Delilah, something that set Eve's nerves on edge. She just couldn't figure out *what*. Shaking off the unease, Eve focused on Max as he stopped inches from her.

"Eve, where have you been all night? We looked all over for you!"

"Sorry. I got tied up. You two look great."

Max beamed. Like the other men at tonight's Ball, he wore a black dress coat with silk grosgrain facings overtop of a white shirt and vest. Greta wore a backless, sequined white gown that complemented her figure. Platinum blonde hair cut in a bob softened the lines of her face, making her appear much younger than her age. Delilah, on the other hand, had donned a cream silk and chiffon halter gown with a surprisingly modest cut.

Max waved off the praise. "You clean up well yourself. Doesn't she look good, my dear?"

"Stunning," agreed Greta.

Eve flushed at the compliment. "Thank you. Are you all having fun?"

"Not as much as I'd like." Greta slanted a hungry look at Max. To Eve's surprise, he turned pink and tugged on his bowtie.

"Now none of that, my dear. Mixed company and all."

Greta snorted. "At my age, subtlety is a waste of time. Besides, I'm sure Ms. Templin understands." Her gaze shifted to Eve's throat. No, to the *hickey* on her throat. The one she hadn't found enough concealer to disguise.

Could tonight *get* more embarrassing? "Umm..."

"No need to be shy. I was young once, too." Greta winked and then tugged on Max's sleeve. "I suppose we should go circulate." With a final wave, the couple left, quickly disappearing in the crowd. Eve watched them go with equal parts fondness and relief.

Delilah cleared her throat. "Ms. Templin, may I speak frankly for a moment?"

Eve forced a smile and tried not to let her irritation show. "Of course. What's on your mind, Ms. McCain?"

Hazel eyes studied her with cool interest. "Are you sure that you feel okay?"

"I'm fine," Eve snapped. She flushed as several people turned to stare.

Delilah arched a brow. "That's funny. 'Fine' looks a lot like 'on the verge of a breakdown' to me."

"You do realize that I'm technically your boss, right?"

To her credit, Delilah didn't flinch from the implied threat. "You don't strike me as the petty type."

Guilt made Eve blush. She massaged her temple and sighed. "No, I'm not. I apologize. I'm not in the best mood tonight, but I shouldn't take that out on you."

"Listen..." Delilah hesitated, and an uncertain expression flickered across her expression before she plunged on. "I know that you don't really like me. Heck, most days you barely tolerate me, but if you ever need to talk I'm a good listener."

Eve blinked, too shocked to reply. That Delilah would make that offer in spite of Eve's rudeness shamed her. This time, her smile was genuine.

"Thank you, Delilah. Maybe I'll take you up on that sometime."

The younger woman seemed stunned but quickly recovered. She grinned. "Okay. Well, I guess I'll go mingle. Take care of yourself."

Eve watched the other woman go with a rising sense of frustration. If Delilah had noticed her mood, everyone else must have, too. *So much for my legendary reserve.*

Blindly, Eve gulped down the last of her champagne, then snagged a passing waiter and exchanged the empty glass for a full one. The cool liquid did nothing to ease her nerves or the sense of anxiety building in her chest. Alonso still hadn't arrived.

Maybe he decided the party wasn't worth the trouble—that *she* wasn't worth the trouble. Or maybe he was at his penthouse relaxing with someone else.

"In need of liquid courage?" a deep voice growled in her ear. Jumping, Eve spun around. Shock gave way to pleasure as she looked up into familiar gray eyes.

"Luigi! You scared me. You shouldn't sneak up on people like that."

Even at sixty-five, Luigi D'Agostino was a sexually dynamic man. Thick, blue-black hair and piercing gray eyes complemented skin that maintained a permanent tan thanks to his frequent vacationing in his homeland of Venice, Italy. Other than his son, he was Virginia's most sought after bachelor.

"I called your name twice," he disagreed, studying her intently. "Perhaps your thoughts were elsewhere?"

Yeah, with your son. Eve wisely swallowed the retort. "Did you need me for something?"

"I just wanted to know if you were ready for the awards section of tonight's program." His eyes twinkled. "I hear you have the honor of introducing me."

The speech! She'd forgotten about it that quickly. "Sure. You know me. Always prepared."

Luigi frowned. "Do you feel all right, *piccolina*? You look as if you've lost your best friend."

"No. Just a bit too much champagne." A throat cleared nearby, and

Eve turned. For the first time, she noticed the woman beside Luigi. Tall and rail thin, the brunette had the look of perpetual hunger Eve instantly associated with modeling.

“Hello. We haven’t met.”

Luigi glanced at the woman attached to his arm in seeming surprise. “How rude of me! Eve, allow me to introduce Tiggie Waldorf.”

The name sounded vaguely familiar. Eve smiled. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“You’re a lawyer?” Skepticism colored Tiggie’s tone. Her pale brown eyes took Eve’s measure. “Really?”

“Yes. I practice contract law. I’ve looked after the interests of the D’Agostino family for the past eight years.”

“Even his son?”

She didn’t imagine the sudden venom in Tiggie’s tone, nor the hint of jealousy in those pale brown eyes. Eve sighed. *Lord save me from jealous exes.* Aware of Luigi’s observant gaze, she decided to tread carefully.

“In a professional capacity, yes. So Twiggy—”

“Tiggie.”

“My mistake. What line of work do you do?”

“Modeling. I used to do runway shows in Milan and Paris for all the top designers: Yves St. Laurent, Dolce & Gabbana, Gaultier. Do you *know* Gaultier?”

Eve bared her teeth. “Not personally. I enjoyed his spring collection, though. I found his use of geometric patterns quite innovative. Would I have seen you in that show?”

Tiggie glanced quickly at Luigi. “No.”

“Oh. What about his winter 2007 collection? I believe he called it Greta Garbo in Sepia. While iconic, I have to admit that it doesn’t hold a candle to his 1999 Autumn in Tokyo pieces.”

Ruthless satisfaction filled Eve at the confusion spreading across the brunette’s face. Surprised you, didn’t I, Twiggy? Just because I can’t fit into any of those clothes doesn’t mean I’m ignorant.

Tiggie flushed. “Actually, I haven’t worked with Jean-Paul for a while.”

Luigi visibly bit back a smile as he extracted his arm from the floundering brunette's. "My dear, would you mind getting me something from the bar? A martini, dry, with two olives. There's a good girl." Tiggie pouted but didn't argue. Once she was gone, he sighed.

"That was very naughty."

Eve shrugged. "She started it. Let me guess. New girlfriend?"

Gray eyes twinkled. "Come now, *piccolina*. I am many things, but a cradle robber is not one of them. She is the daughter of an old friend. I might flirt with the *bambinos*, but the women I take to my bed are more mature and..." Luigi's tone dropped to a purr as his gaze drifted over her body, lingering on her butt. "...generous."

Eve laughed. His easygoing manner made it hard to take offense, no matter how outrageous his flirting. Another trait he shared with Alonso. However, as with his son, Luigi's easygoing nature could turn to steel in the blink of an eye if tested.

"A woman of your beauty should smile more often."

"Now I know where your son gets his silver tongue." Memories of how well Alonso used said tongue made her womb contract. She clenched her thighs together. With any luck her libido would take the hint and cool it.

"Speaking of my son, have you seen him tonight?"

Eve choked on a mouthful of champagne. Unwilling to tell an outright lie to the man she respected almost like a father, she shrugged. "I'm not exactly his confidante."

"I wish you would try to get along better. You have more in common than you think."

You have no idea. Unwilling to get into that discussion, Eve engaged Luigi in small talk about a case she was lead counsel on. He was being sued by a former employee for non-payment.

She assured Luigi they were in the right since the plaintiff had already committed breach of contract by failing to complete the agreed upon work. However, what should have been an open and shut case was turning into an all out battle with the opposing counsel. As the conversation turned to small talk, Eve fought to keep her mind from

drifting to the absent Alonso.

“...I still think he is a fool to marry Tiggy.”

Eve felt as if someone had doused her with ice water. “I’m sorry. What did you say?”

Luigi favored her with a look of concern. “I said I don’t know what my son sees in that girl. She has terrible judgment. Her appearance on the cover of yesterday’s issue of *Tattler* proves it. But love, as they say, is blind. She must have some redeeming qualities, or he wouldn’t have proposed to her. Is something wrong, my dear?”

The question sounded muffled over the rush of air in her ears. No wonder Tiggy’s name sounded so familiar! Eve felt sick. She swayed, and Luigi cupped her elbow.

She wanted to reassure him that she was fine, but her tongue refused to cooperate. Her mind stuck on one word: *engaged*. Alonso was engaged to someone else.

Everything about tonight—the heated looks, his kisses, the declaration of love—was a lie. Or maybe this was his idea of one last fling before he settled down with someone else, someone his peers would consider more suitable.

Suddenly, Eve needed to escape. She muttered an excuse to Luigi and turned to leave, only to find her escape route blocked by the one man she *didn’t* want to see. A murmur went through the crowd as Alonso strolled across the ballroom and headed straight for them. Dressed in a tailored black suit, he looked like he’d just stepped off the cover of *GQ*. Not at all like he had spent the past hour screwing Eve senseless.

And breaking my heart in the process.

“Ahh. The prodigal son returns,” Luigi boomed when Alonso arrived. “For a while, I worried you wouldn’t show up.”

“I always keep my promises.” Alonso held Eve’s gaze as he spoke. “*Ciao bella.*”

Screw propriety. Spinning on her heel, Eve forced through the crowd. Halfway to the door, she nearly collided with a waiter. She ignored his offended gasp, snagged two glasses of wine from his tray and continued walking. She downed one and had started on another by the

time Alonso caught up to her. He grabbed her elbow.

“Eve! Has something happened? Tell me what’s wrong, *amore mio*.”

She fully intended to ignore him. She planned to walk calmly to her car, drive home, crawl into bed with a bottle of wine and pretend tonight never happened. Instead, she spun around and tossed the remainder of her drink in Alonso’s face.

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe I’m upset because I just discovered that you have a *fiancée*?”

“Lower your voice. People are staring.”

“I don’t care! You lied to me.” To her horror, Eve felt tears pricking her eyes. “I should have known you were just playing mind games earlier. If you want to spend your life banging that toothpick, fine. But making me think you loved me back is low, even for you. I—”

The rest of her rant dissolved as Alonso kissed her. Their tongues dueled for a moment before she finally yielded. Growling deep in his throat, he grabbed her ass and yanked her against him, grinding his cock against her belly. When they parted, the room was silent. Finally, Alonso spoke.

“Tiggie is engaged to my younger brother, Vincenzo. You haven’t met him because he has been in Italy finishing college.”

“Your brother?” Eve parroted, too stunned to feel embarrassed.

“Yes, *bella*. She came over last night to vent about him after they had a fight. I slept on the couch. Nothing happened.”

“So you aren’t engaged? *Ohh*.” Eve wet her lips and shivered as his gaze dropped to follow the motion. She tried to reconstruct her normal aloof facade. “I guess I overreacted. You can, of course, send me the dry cleaning bill for your jacket.”

Alonso laughed. The genuine sound caused several more heads to turn. Dipping his head, he nipped Eve’s lips and then soothed the sting with his tongue. “Screw the suit! Will you marry me?”

Her knees buckled, and Eve would have fallen if not for his grip. “That’s...moving kind of fast.”

“Hmm. You’re right. You deserve to be courted. Let me try this again.” Alonso took a deep breath and stared down into her eyes. “Will

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you dance with me?"

The hint of vulnerability in his voice pierced the haze of shock surrounding Eve. One look in Alonso's eyes convinced her. Beneath the cocky arrogance, he felt as vulnerable as her. A sense of calm filled her. Slowly, she laced their fingers together and smiled.

"Yes. I would love to."

The End

Author Bio

As a child, Michelle Lauren fell in love with fairy tales and comic books featuring intelligent, strong heroines and jaded heroes with hearts of gold—all elements she enjoys incorporating into her stories.

Over the years, Michelle has worked as a freelance copyeditor, a book reviewer and an editor. Currently, she is a columnist and regular contributor to *Romance Writers Report*, the monthly magazine for Romance Writers of America™. In 2009, her debut multicultural urban fantasy *How to Tame a Harpy* became a *Romantic Times* magazine American Title V finalist, and her sci-fi romance *Starstruck: Hunter* is available from Liquid Silver Books.

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